General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

THE VENERABLE SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

PRECEPTS OF THE GURUS: III

Sections VI-IX (1979)

Day 1

Tape 1, Side 1

('Voice-print' not sufficient for most voices to be identifiable)

Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Vajramati, Uttara, Adrian (Shantiprabha), Viramati, Chris (Tejamitra), Andrew Fuller (Tejamati), Vajradaka, Ashvajit, Joss, Ratnavira, Ross, John Toomey (Lalitaratna), Dipankara, Alaya, Sona, John Roach (Jayamati), Ray Bisson (Jnanottara).

Sangharakshita: All right, we're going to be going through as much as we can in the course of these seven days of the Precepts of the Gurus. We are not starting at the beginning, because various sections have been done on other study retreats. We are going to come on to Number VI, "The Ten Things One must Know", and I don't know whether we'll be able to finish the whole work: I very much doubt it, actually, because experience shows there is quite a lot to discuss. First of all, there's the elucidation of the Precepts themselves, and then they have a way of giving rise to consideration of all sorts of topics and sparking off all sorts of discussions. Anyway, let's see how we get on this morning. We're going to stop halfway through for a cup of coffee so as not to tire you too much. Anyway, let's see how it goes.

Shall we start reading round - just read one precept at a time, and then we'll stop and discuss that, and each time we come to a new precept we'll have a new person reading it. So nice and loud and clear, please.

(1) One must know that all visible phenomena, being illusory, are unreal.

S: This at once plunges us into the midst of a very important topic: the topic of the unreality of visible phenomena, in fact of all visible phenomena. It's very important to know here what exactly is meant by 'unreal', even what is meant by 'illusory'. There is quite a bit of misunderstanding about this, as I hardly need tell you. I think the best way that we can approach the topic, the best way we can start going into it, is by means of the analogy of magic, of the magical [2] illusion, for which the term usually is maya. I'm going to be saying something about this in a couple of weeks' time in the first, probably, of my talks on the Vimalakirti Nirdesa, but it is also very applicable and very relevant here. Magic, or the magical phenomenon, or the magical illusion, is used as an illustration for the irreality or, strictly speaking, the relative reality, of the world. What is said is this: suppose there's a magician. The magician conjures up an illusion which you actually perceive. He might, for instance, conjure up an illusory elephant. So you perceive that elephant; maybe you can hear it trumpeting, or maybe, if it was to seize hold of you, you would actually feel it doing that. But it isn't a real elephant, it's an elephant specially conjured up by the magician. So it is not a real elephant - that is to say, it is not an absolutely real elephant - inasmuch as it is conjured up by the magician, but can you say that it is a completely unreal elephant in the sense that it

does not exist? Can you say that?

Asvajit: Not really, no. It exists inasmuch as it has an effect.

S: It exists inasmuch as it has an effect; it exists inasmuch as it is perceived, but you cannot attribute to it an absolute existence. So the magical illusion of the elephant, or whatever, occupies as it were a middle way, you could say, a middle position, between absolute reality and absolute non-reality in the sense of non-existence. So the Buddhist teaching, especially Mahayana teaching, says that all visual phenomena are like this. Inasmuch as they have a cause, inasmuch as they arise in dependence on causes and conditions, they cannot be said to be absolutely real, but inasmuch as they are actually perceived and experienced, they cannot be dismissed as non-existent or as unreal in the sense of being non-existent.

So here, when this Precept says 'One must know that all visible phenomena, being illusory, are unreal', it isn't meant to deny that you actually perceive them; it's only meant to prevent you from attributing absolute reality to them. Because, inasmuch as they arise in dependence on causes and conditions, they are not absolutely real; they belong to relative or contingent reality.

So Buddhism denies their reality, in the sense of denying their metaphysical status as such, but it certainly doesn't deny their tangibility. It doesn't deny the fact that you perceive them. What it rejects is your wrong interpretation of things absolutely existing; things with an absolute reality of their own, things with a svabhava, in the technical sense; things with an own-being, something fixed, permanent, unchanging.

So 'One must know that all visible phenomena, being illusory, are unreal'. The illusoriness and the unreality are really the same thing. You have a vivid perception of them, but you do not interpret your perception in terms of anything absolutely existing in its own right.

One can go further than this, because one can say - well, this particular Precept speaks of visible phenomena, but one can say that phenomena in general, including visible phenomena, are of two kinds, as it were, they fall into two groups: there are visible phenomena which we regard as constituting, or belonging [3] to, the object or an object; and visible phenomena which we regard as belonging to, or constituting, the subject. So if you regard the visible phenomena constituting the object as real, then you have a real, absolute, unchanging object, out there. But if you regard the visible phenomena which constitute, or which belong to, the subject as being real, then you have a real, absolute, unchanging subject - in other words, ego. So, in other words, you are not to interpret your perception, you are not to interpret your experience, in terms of the interaction of an absolute, real object with an absolute, real subject. This is the dualistic illusion, as it were - or delusion; not just illusion, delusion. This Precept raises all sorts of questions.

Asvajit: What you've just said amounts to materialism, actually, doesn't it? If one was to suppose an absolutely existing object and an absolutely existing subject, it would result in a mechanistic universe.

S: Well, it would result in materialism, but it might result in idealism, if you think that that absolute, unchanging object is of a mental, not of a material, nature: yes? So this is against idealism in the ordinary sense, as much as against materialism in the ordinary sense. Because

whether you believe that your unchanging ego is material, which is unlikely, or that it is some kind of spirit or mind, doesn't really make any difference. In fact, you are much more likely to regard your unchanging self as a spirit, as a mind, than you are to regard it as something material. So materialism certainly, in the ordinary sense, isn't really much of a danger.

So, from a more practical point of view, what is important is to experience things, to have an experience of existence, which is quite real and vivid, pleasant, blissful, but not to interpret that experience dualistically, not to try to discriminate within it an object as existing absolutely in its own right and unchanging, or a subject as existing absolutely in its own right and unchanging. All that you have is phenomena which are interrelated in various ways and which are constantly changing.

Or if one is to put it in more general terms, it means just as it were allowing oneself to experience reality or to experience life as constantly changing, as flowing, even; and not try to pin it down, as it were, in any fixed or final form. Because if you do that, then you will start clinging to, becoming attached to, those fixed and final forms: you won't be willing to let them go, as it were.

Uttara: Would this seen reality, seen existence, would this be Stream Entry, where you get the vision of something flowing, so - ?

S: Well, it depends how far, how deeply, the vision goes. It has to go far enough, deep enough, actually to cut off to some extent your tendency to cling to things and to become attached to them, and if from one's actual behaviour it becomes clear that [4] this has happened, then one can infer a measure of Insight, possibly even approaching Stream Entry. But obviously one has to examine oneself or look at oneself over quite a period, and be quite sure that the attachment and the clinging have really been cut, and cut for good, at least to some extent; because everybody has their ups and downs - there are good days on which you just don't feel any attachment or clinging at all, you feel so happy and content; but the very next day you are greedily grasping, and there's a complete change. So one has to be able to see this change taking place over quite a period of time before you can conclude that real Insight has been achieved and a real transformation, and possibly an approach made to Stream Entry. It isn't enough just to refuse a second cup of tea on one particular day.

Sona: There is a great danger, isn't there, in seeing all visible phenomena as being illusory, and not at the same time experiencing it, and not enjoying life? I'm just thinking that no enjoyment can be got from life because your experience isn't real.

S: Yes. But actually your experience - the word 'unreal' here is quite unfortunate, the English word, because when you no longer see things in terms of fixed, unchanging subjects and objects, when your whole experience of life becomes much more relaxed and loose, as it were, when there is less attachment, you are much more likely to enjoy life. Otherwise, quite often, people are in such a state of mind that even when it's really a lovely day and they could be enjoying just the fine weather so much, they don't because they are so preoccupied with all sorts of cares and worries and attachments. So those possibilities of enjoyment are actually excluded; they don't even notice what the weather is like, for instance; don't notice that the sun is shining.

So when you start seeing things in this way, you actually enjoy life more. In the Western

context, probably, this language of unreality is not at all helpful. We will probably have to find some other way of putting it. It's more like seeing not so much the unreality of things as the purity of things; seeing things in their purity, not contaminated by the notions of fixed, unchanging subjects and objects; seeing them in a much more fluid way. We'll probably have to use that sort of language more.

Another comparison that is given, very closely allied to the comparison of the magician's illusion, is the rainbow. It's there, but in a sense it's not there: it arises in dependence on causes and conditions, i.e. the sun and the rain; but it is not a solid thing that you can cut and handle and grasp. As you go towards it, it disappears. As you walk into it, it just dissolves. So it's as though reality (to use that word) is really like that; you can see it, you can admire it, it's so beautiful. [But] you can't really grasp it, it isn't actually solid in the sense of being something fixed and unchanging. You just have to accept it as a rainbow, not try to treat it as [5] though it was a bridge. You can't drive your truck over it, you see? But you can admire it, enjoy it, as a beautiful rainbow. It's rather like that.

Sona: In a text I was studying last night on Padmasambhava - well, from the Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava, there was a mention of when you see things in this way the six senses come forth. I assumed it to mean from that that when you see phenomena as illusory your senses become much stronger in a way. Like you do really start experiencing that sunny day.

S: Yes, right, they become more refined. This is something we went into on another of the seminars: it's not that the senses do any mischief; there's nothing wrong with the senses at all. It's the mind behind them - not the ordinary mind, which is in Buddhism included with the six senses, but what is called the klistomanovijnana, the soiled mind-consciousness, which distorts - not distorts our perception, but it misinterprets our perception. The senses merely perceive, they are simply aware, but it is the mind which misinterprets and distorts what is perceived. So the senses - and this is the point that I was making on that seminar - the senses are innocent, you see? It is the mind which is the guilty party, that is to say the klistomanovijnana, the mind which is soiled with the consciousness of duality.

Vajradaka : Is this as aspect of one's mind which is conditioned during one's lifetime, or could one say it's much more existential than that?

S: Well, it's certainly being conditioned all during one's life; the process is going on. We actually see it happening, we do tend to interpret things in terms of a fixed, unchanging object out there, and a fixed, unchanging subject in here. But sometimes we find we do just have pure experience. Well, sometimes when we wake up in the morning it's like that: you are simply conscious, you are simply aware; you're aware of sensations of warmth, light, sound, but it's as though the mind hasn't yet started functioning. I don't mean to say that you're in a sleepy state, I'm not referring to that, but you can be in a perfectly awake, bright, clear state, but the mind has not yet started functioning. Sometimes you can wake up in that way, and just for a few instants - if you're lucky, for a minute or two - the functioning of the mind will remain suspended; and if, at that moment, you were asked, say, who you were or where you were, without that mind being able to start functioning, you would not be able to say, because you would not even be able to think, because thinking had not started. You would have to start thinking to be able to answer that question. Do you see what I mean? So it's as though at that time you've got the senses functioning, because you hear sounds, you see light and

colour, you feel sensations of warmth etc., and you are aware of - I won't say of yourself, but you are just aware. You are aware, for instance, that the senses are functioning in that way, that they are all functioning. This is the mind-consciousness, which is not the soiled mind-consciousness. But it's only when the [6] soiled mind-consciousness, as it were, starts functioning, that you can start thinking and you know who you are and where you are. It's something like that - not exactly so, but something like that.

Sona: What is the mind-consciousness in Sanskrit?

S: It's the manovijnana, and then the soiled mind-consciousness is the klistomanovijnana. It's that the mind-consciousness sort of co-ordinates the activity of the five senses; the mind-consciousness can be aware at one and the same time that all these five senses are functioning. The eye is only aware of the visual object, the ear is only aware of the auditory object. But the mind is aware of the functioning of all these five, so it is in that sense - the 'common' sense, in the old original way, the sense which is common to all five senses, the co-ordinating sense. At the same time, it has a certain independent activity of its own. Because it can form ideas of sense: for instance, it can have an idea of a tree, derived from the eye's perception of a tree. The mind-consciousness can form the idea of a tree, can think of a tree, even when the appropriate sense is not perceiving a tree. Do you see what I mean? So this is also part of this function.

: That's the manovijnana?

S: This is the manovijnana.

Asvajit: Is that where the samskaras occur, in the manovijnana?

S: Er - well, it isn't in a sense quite correct to speak of the samskaras occurring in the mind or in fact anywhere, but one could say that the samskaras arise in connection with the klistomanovijnana, because the samskaras represent those forces, those volitions if you like, which implement the wrong way in which we see things. So you discriminate a subject and an object, and then you move towards the object thinking that it is a real, separate, unchanging object, and that moving towards, that volition as it were, is represented by the samskaras.

Dipankara: What does it mean by 'phenomena'?

S: Visible phenomena? It probably means here simply rupa. But rupa is very often taken as standing for all five skandhas, as perceived. So it really means objects of perception. 'One must know that all objects of perception, being illusory, are unreal' - 'illusory' meaning arising in dependence on causes and conditions.

Dipankara: These are objects perceived by the five senses?

S: Well, actually by the six senses, if you don't take the 'visible' too literally.

Dipankara: So a phenomenon can be a mental object?

[7]
S: Oh yes, these are included, because in Buddhism tradition always speaks of six senses, that

is the five physical senses and the manovijnana. So in exactly the same way that, say, the eye perceives visible phenomena, rupa, forms, the manovijnana perceives what is called in this context dhammas or dharmas, or mental objects. So these mental objects also arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, as in fact we shall see in the next couple of Precepts.

Asvajit: Would it be true to say that the will is a product of the klistomanovijnana?

S: Well, Buddhism doesn't really speak in terms of a will at all. But if one is thinking in terms of that impulsion, as it were, of a subject which believes itself to be real towards an object which it believes to be real, then clearly, yes, 'will', like the samskaras, is bound up with the klistomanovijnana. But the energy, of course, which the samskaras embody, and the energy which the will embodies, is not necessarily bound up with the klistomanovijnana, though it usually is, of course. It is usually as it were trapped in that way, in that mechanism, almost.

Vajradaka: If the samskaras are tied in with the klistomanovijnana, is it a sort of delusive perception itself which is creating this ... ?

S: Well, perception itself is not delusive - perception doesn't deceive you, unless there is some physical defect. Perception doesn't mislead you; it's the mind's interpreting of what is perceived.

Vajradaka: Yes, that's what I meant. I was wondering whether it would be that, the interpretive aspect of the mind, or some emotional aspect of ...

S: Well, the two go together. If there is as it were an intellectual distortion, there is also an emotional distortion. The intellectual distortion is covered by what is called the term pineyavarna (?), the veil of the cognizables; and the emotional by the klesavarna, the veil, so to speak, or covering of the klesas, the defilements, which are the emotions to the extent that they are associated with the klistomanovijnana, or to the extent that they are distorted by the klistomanovijnana.

Asvajit: Almost like a sort of tic, a sort of quirk that might have, which at the same time is disturbing the flow of the intellect, if one can speak in those terms, distorts one's perception. Or momentarily blocks one's perception.

S: But the important general thing to understand here is

(End of Side)

(Tape 1, Side 2)

[8]
that one has got, on the one hand, the universe as perceived - put it that way - and, on the other hand, the universe as interpreted; and we don't understand, or we don't realize the extent to which what we think of as there is in fact only interpretation.

Uttara: We don't perceive the universe, we only ...

S: Well, even this whole idea of perceiving the universe is wrong. There is not 'a universe'

apart from our perception. One of the mistakes we make is to set up something as it were behind the perception, which the perception is supposed to be a perception of. But actually there is as it were only perception, which we read as a perception of this or that by this or that of a fixed, unchanging nature.

Another illustration I saw in a book some weeks ago is of a picture - or, say, if you have a human being, and you take an ordinary photograph of him, you get one sort of picture. You can also take an X-ray; that gives you another sort of picture. There is also another kind of picture you can get where - I don't remember the term, but it's where it just comes out in patches of different colours, I think actually reds and greens.

Uttara: Infra-red.

S: That's right, that's what it is, yes, infra-red photography. So which is the right one? Do you see what I mean? It just depends almost literally on the wavelength on which you are operating. There are all these sort of possibilities.

Alaya: They are all there at the same time, even though one photograph might show the heat, say, ...

S: But what do you mean, they are all there? They are not there as things, they are there as possibilities of perception.

Alaya: They are just wavelengths, some of which we see and some of which we don't.

S: Well, even to say that we see - well, we don't see wavelengths, do we, actually? This is just a way of explaining to ourselves in as it were scientific terms, the fact that these different pictures arise, or these different sort of pictures are perceived.

Alaya: Wouldn't it be incorrect to say that if you take a photograph of someone, though it's not the same as an X-ray, you know that the bones are there?

S: Yes, but that's not the point. The point is that you attach the label 'real' to one picture and not to others.

Alaya: I see.

S: You see: this is the point of the illustration. You say: [9] this represents the real man, this picture. For instance, you say that the photograph is more real than, for instance, the X-ray or the infra-red photography picture; because the photograph more nearly - or the apparatus which has produced the photograph more nearly resembles the apparatus, i.e. your own organ of sight etc., which gives you the picture of the man that you can perceive. So you shouldn't so much say that it's more real, but only that one picture resembles another more closely.

So this is what we do with all these possibilities of perception, but we pick out one or another, saying, 'This is the real one'; and we accept that as the real one and label reality as such, and then orient ourselves towards it in the light of that interpretation.

: So is that related to the elephant story, and the blind men? Is it the same thing being shown,

in a way?

S: Well, it's a perception which is interpreted absolutely, instead of it being realized that it has arisen in dependence on particular causes and conditions; and if those causes and conditions are not there, then you will not perceive in that particular way. But there is no absoluteness about any of it. It is not something absolutely fixed and given and definite. Say, conditions A and B have arisen, therefore in dependence upon those arises phenomenon, i.e. perception, C. But if there were other conditions arising there would be other perceptions, other phenomena.

: There is no absolute way of perceiving?

S: There is no absolute way of perceiving to which you can attach the label 'absolutely real'.

Uttara: Why - I don't know whether this has anything to do with it - why, then, is human birth so ... a thing? You've said to be born a human being is quite a ...

S: Well, you could say that it's to be born a human being that enables you to recognize the relativity of your perceptions; partly because the scope of them is so varied, and you can compare one with another, whereas, if you accept this mythological way of putting it, the perceptions of the gods are relatively unchanging, the perceptions of the people in hell are relatively unchanging, and so on. But in the case of human beings, they can have perceptions like those of the gods, perceptions like those of the beings in hell, perceptions like those of the pretas, perceptions like those of the asuras; so they are in a better position to appreciate the relativity of these different kinds of perceptions and experience.

: Relativity seems quite a good word, because it assumes that there are two viewpoints, or two points, and as soon as you have two perceptions, two viewpoints or perceptions, it can't be absolute, can it? So it seems a good word.

[10]
S: Right, yes. This is why sunyata is sometimes, at least in certain respects, rendered as 'relativity'. The visible phenomena are relativity: the pratitya-samutpada, the dependent co-production or dependent origination, is relativity.

Asvajit: I was wondering whether that had any connection with the Einsteinian universe of relativity, but I don't know sufficient about the theory to know.

S: Well, probably there is nobody in the world who knows enough at the same time about relativity and about Buddhism to be able to compare the two. Various people have dabbled, but their Buddhism doesn't satisfy those who know anything about Buddhism, and I gather that their relativity doesn't satisfy those who have devoted their lives to the study of that subject.

Dipankara: One word that still troubles me is 'know'. Perception is so relative. How do we understand this word 'know'? Is it just something to reflect on?

S: Which word 'know'? Oh, 'the ten things that one must know.' Well, one must 'know' that all visible phenomena, being illusory, are unreal, for instance. One mustn't, of course, take literally this fact that it is said that 'one must know'. It's not that there is a real person who has

to do the knowing, or a real thing as an absolute object which is to be known.

Dipankara: So would you accept these Precepts as to be taken as principles, accepted as principles, or something different?

S: Well, no, not even accepted as principles, in a sense.

: Would it not be better to say, almost, that one must experience that all visible phenomena are unreal?

S: That only really changes the word, it doesn't really in a sense help, unless one just happens to find the word 'experience' more acceptable than the word 'knowing'.

: Except that 'knowing' tends to relate a bit more to objects, doesn't it?

S: Yes, yes. Well, one can speak of 'a knowing', or even, for instance, Gampopa speaks of the Dharmakaya as 'a pure non-dual shine', or non-dual radiance, you could say: that is to say, a light which has no source and no object. So we can speak of that as a knowing, without there being any one who knows or any thing that is known. It's the same here: the knowledge with which you know that 'all visible phenomena, being illusory, are unreal' is not, so to speak, anybody's knowledge: there is just knowledge, just as I mentioned when you wake up in the morning it's as though there is awareness without anybody's awareness. You see what I mean? That only comes later, when the awareness bends round back upon itself, and you say Oh, well, you remember who you are and how you came to be in that particular bed. This is quite a good sort of thing to notice - I won't say to do, but to [11] notice, when you are travelling around from place to place. And you can actually follow the stages in the process. First of all, you wake up and you experience, as I said, the warmth of the bed, the light of the bed; and then, the next stage is there's a slight sort of unease. That's the next stage. Then the stage after that, you ask - it's all happening in a flash, of course - where am I? And then, of course, the answer comes: Oh, I'm in such-and-such place. It may be, though, that you search just for an instant or two, and you can be conscious of yourself searching, trying to remember how you came to be where you are, because it seems something not quite right. And then, of course, very quickly, you account for it, you remember, Oh, you came to this particular place yesterday, you came by train, and you're here, you're at Heruka... you came from Aryatara, and so on. You can follow all these stages through if you are very perceptive. But they start off with your uninterpreted experience, your experience which is not overlaid with any interpretation. Of course, for practical purposes, so to speak, you may have to interpret and act on the basis of those interpretations, but as you become more, so to speak, enlightened, you can do that without losing contact with that original uninterpreted and undistorted experience, and you realize that the constructs, as it were, are only provisional; you don't attach absolute reality to them, even when you are apparently functioning in accordance with them.

Asvajit: You get that experience, too, when you're watching a good film, that you become very absorbed in. You for the time being accept that that is the reality, and then gradually you come back again and realize that actually you are sitting in a cinema seat.

S: Though of course it is a bit different because it's as though you pass from one ego to another; but here it is more like a question of passing from at least to some extent an

experience of non-ego to an experience of ego. Because from the experience of the film you come back to the experience of yourself sitting in the cinema. But the more basic experience I'm talking about is in a sense not an experience of yourself at all, but the experience which as it were underlies your experience of a self, in the ordinary sense of the term: the unlabelled or un-named 'self', inverted commas, which is a sort of non-self. So you come back from being, say, Romeo in the film to being Asvajit in the cinema.
Asvajit: I'm not sure I quite ...

S: Or King Kong, or whoever it is; you don't know. Well, be whoever you please. Mickey Mouse. Or even Gollum. You come back from whoever it is - or Snow White, if she pleases - you come back to being Asvajit, or whoever it happens to be. But this experience which you have when you wake up is an experience upon which the recognition, if it is that, of any particular individuality has not been superimposed. And you can have this experience after you've been meditating, because if you go at all deeply into meditation it isn't as it were anybody's experience. It is certainly not as it were Asvajit's experience. In a sense, [12] it is not Asvajit meditating, because that whole collocation of samskaras and activities of various kinds which is usually regarded as Asvajit is in abeyance during that deeper meditation experience, so it would be inappropriate to call it by that term. But as that deeper experience subsides, it's as though Asvajit comes back into operation again. But if you - I say 'you', but only in a manner of speaking - if there was to be a sort of pause as the meditation experience was subsiding, and before Asvajit started coming into operation again, which would include before the discursive mental activities associated with Asvajit started coming into operation again - if there was to be a pause, and the question was to be put 'Who am I?', it might not be possible immediately to say. You see what I mean?

Alaya: You can experience this leading retreats or classes as well, I find.

S: Why particularly when you're leading retreats or classes?

Alaya: I'm asking you, I suppose.

S: You're asking?

Alaya: Yes, because it's as if, when you're maybe talking about the Dharma or inspiring someone, but it isn't actually you speaking, it's some force coming. I don't quite know ...

S: That's true, yes. That's putting as it were in more dynamic terms. Yes, from a common-sense practical point of view, yes, it's you speaking because it's a particular voice which is the voice of a particular body, and that particular body is part of those five skandhas which are labelled in a particular way with a particular name. But that is not actually necessarily one's experience that it is in fact such-and-such person talking. It is as if what is said is coming from a deeper level of experience which is not included in whatever is covered by that particular personal name. And this can happen, of course, in varying degrees. So it's as though, in one's experience, one has to separate out the personal and the impersonal, so to speak. Otherwise we are
completely identified with the personal much of the time.

You can have the same sort of impersonal experience in connection with the metta bhavana. If you've gone through the five stages and there is a quite strong experience of metta, a point

comes when it isn't directed towards anybody, and it isn't as it were being produced by anybody; there is simply the metta there, almost like an impersonal experience. But it's an experience nonetheless; in fact, all the more so for not being so as it were personalised, not so much anybody's experience directed towards anybody; it's as though there's just a cloud of metta there, which is only attached to a particular subject and a particular object in the most tenuous way.

[13]
: In the sense you are using the word 'personal', then, it's almost impossible to have personal experience, isn't it?

S: One could even say that, that personal experience is a contradiction in terms. One could almost go as far as that, yes. You get in the way of your own experience - well, we know this, don't we, even in the ordinary way? It is not that awareness is to be allowed to fall into abeyance; no, awareness becomes in fact heightened.

So we've really come quite a long way from knowing simply that things are unreal in the ordinary sense. In a way, it would be better to say that one should see things not as unreal but as real, or see them in their purity, so to speak; because 'unreal' suggests to most people that they're not actually there, that nothing is in fact perceived. But as in fact things are perceived more vividly and clearly than ever.

Vajradaka: Is there a particular aspect of the Dharma which emphasizes this purity of perception, or particularly develops practices - ?

S: Well, this is mentioned in the Mahayana in connection with I think it's the eighth bhumi of the Bodhisattva. I think I've mentioned this in the Survey, in the last chapter. This is one of the ways in which the Bodhisattva starts to see things. He sees things as pure, as fundamentally pure, even as pure from the beginning. But one has to be very careful that this is not just a concept: that it is an actual, as you like, perception or an actual experience.

Asvajit: I imagine it to be a sort of transforming attitude.

S: There is also the fact that people do see things as unreal, but that is a quite different sort of experience. That is when they are alienated from their actual perceptions. Do you see what I mean? Or let's say alienated from their experience; everything feels unreal. Just because there isn't sufficient life, so to speak, in their experience of things. Their perceptions are so inhibited by their minds, by their klistomanovijnana, they are alienated, they are cut off; and so everything seems unreal in the ordinary sense of the term. So when one says, usually, that according to Buddhism everything is unreal, many people would take it as meaning that that sort of experience represents an experience of Reality. And this is certainly the sort of thing that I encountered when I came back to England in 1964: there were a lot of people who, through a sort of pseudo-meditation practice, had got themselves into this state of alienation in which they really felt everything unreal, and they thought that they were the closer, therefore, to Reality.

On the other hand, there is an experience of disillusion, when your illusions - things to which you were formerly very attached - start dissolving, and you really feel as though there is [14] nothing there, nothing worth living for, nothing very real; because you are detached from your

old illusions - or delusions - you are beginning to shed them. But you haven't yet recaptured your experience in its pristine quality, as it were; you are sort of in between. So that again is a third kind of experience.

Asvajit: In that case, there is a sort of emotional content; there is a sort of real experience, but it's of a rather negative or neutral ...

S: It's a sort of in-between experience. It's transitional.
So when one uses language like 'unreal' in the Western context, one has to be very careful to make sure that what you are really trying to say, what you are really trying to put across, is actually being communicated to the other person. It's one of the commonest things that you can hear: 'Buddhism says everything is unreal'. So this almost suggests a sort of alienated experience, when actually the experience of a Buddhist who sees that things are all like a magical display as it were should be more vivid, real, concrete, than anybody else's.

Viramati: In visualization you're working to make a mental image that much more real.

S: Yes. And eventually you perceive everything with the same vividness that you can perceive the image that you visualize in meditation. This is one of the qualities of mystical experience, for want of a better term, as reported from within all the major spiritual traditions and even reported by people not within a particular spiritual tradition: that everything appears more vivid, brighter, more shining, more jewel-like as it were - which represents a heightening of the quality of perception. It is not that the sky has become bluer: it's just that you see it more vividly than before, you really do see it. You allow yourself to see it. It is not that the grass is greener, etc.

Alaya: Isn't there a sieve-like effect with the mind, because of all the senses we have, there'd be so many perceptions it would be overwhelming, that the mind filters ...

S: Well, this is one of the things that is said. This is a point of view that Aldous Huxley made popular in "The Doors of Perception". But then the question arises: what is being overwhelmed?

Alaya: Aldous Huxley, I should think.

Uttara: If you move into that sort of thing you would be afraid of losing yourself, knowing you'd get overwhelmed, and that's the - you're afraid of losing, being taken over.

S: Well, perhaps you can only allow yourself to be overwhelmed bit by bit; because you don't want awareness to be submerged, as it were. You want to retain the awareness and have the vivid perception, on the one hand, the vivid, colourful perception or [15] experience; on the other, the very clear pure awareness of it all. Whereas the overwhelming would seem to relate to an obscuration of the possibility of awareness itself. It's as though there was the danger of your awareness itself being blotted out. It is as though there are two possible extremes: where you can be so aware that you don't experience anything - this is what I've called alienated awareness - or you can have so much experience that your awareness is dissipated and lost. This is of course the experience of quite a lot of people in their ordinary lives. So what you need to do is to as it were bring the two together. You've got a very vivid, joyful experience of things, full of life and energy, but on the other hand that is fully imbued with the light of

awareness and mindfulness.

Vajradaka: Something there I'd like to go into a bit. Recently, I've begun to feel that awareness is a kind of experience, and experience is a kind of awareness: that experience of yourself, for example, is awareness as it were permeating certain qualities.

S: Well, I have said in the past that it is not that awareness is just standing outside and looking at something. Awareness, when it is fully integrated with the experience, doesn't stand outside the experience watching it, but it permeates it: the experience is imbued with awareness. This is the sort of language I have used to suggest that the two are really brought together, not just harmonized but really integrated. Experience is there, awareness is there, you can distinguish them, but they are in fact actually completely united.

: I don't quite understand this word awareness, in the sense that you are talking about it.

S: Well, consciousness, if you like.

(End of Side)

Tape 2, Side 1

Sona: Wouldn't you have to be conscious of something to be aware, to experience it? When you say you can experience ...

S: I don't say that you have to be conscious of it to experience it. It's as though there are these two different things, these two different poles: on the one hand, there is let's say the feeling - let's drop the word 'experience', let's say there is feeling - and there is awareness. And experience, let us say, comprises these two. So you can have experience in which awareness predominates and not much feeling, and you can have experience in which feeling predominates and not much awareness. But the aim is to have a heightened feeling and a heightened awareness brought together, and therefore a heightened and integrated experience.

[16]
So actually this is what the Precept means when it says that 'one must know that all visible phenomena, being illusory, are unreal.' This is what it is actually saying, but we have now in the course of discussion, step by step, translated it into terms which come across more effectively, which mean something so far as we are concerned and are not liable to misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

Let's go on to the next two Precepts. Let's take the next two together, because they are very closely related.

(2) One must know that the mind, being without independent existence [apart from the One Mind], is impermanent.

(3) One must know that ideas arise from a concatenation of causes.

S: The bit within square brackets is inserted by the editor and translator; I think that can be

ignored. It only confuses the issue. Let's start - the logical sequence is really from 3 to 2, so let's start off with 3: 'One must know that ideas arise from a concatenation of causes'. This word 'ideas' is very ambiguous. What do you think is meant by 'idea' here?

Asvajit: It suggests to me something reactive: ideas, as if one is not simply perceiving but interpreting. Not even interpreting, but just ...

S: It's a notion. It's not an idea in the sense of what used to be called 'an idea of sense'. 'Idea' is used sometimes to translate dhamma, as the object of the sixth sense, that is to say mind. The eye perceives forms; the mind perceives dhammas, ideas. So 'idea' is a mental object, but that is not what is meant here, it seems. 'Idea' here seems to be a sort of notion, and a notion involves a logical process, as ... 'this is because of that', or 'this is of such-and-such a nature'. It is not simply the apprehension of an idea: it is coming to a conclusion about it, forming a judgement upon it. This is what is meant by an idea. So 'one must know that ideas arise from a concatenation of causes'. Perhaps in a very ordinary sense one could translate 'ideas' here as 'thoughts'; not just thoughts of but thoughts about. So 'one must know that ideas arise from a concatenation of causes': one has ideas, one has thoughts, one has notions, but they arise from a concatenation of causes. Have you ever noticed this? Or can you give a concrete example?

Asvajit: Well, the idea of a self. You can start thinking about the self, and instead of simply observing it as a process of one kind or another, you start thinking, 'Where has it come from?' and immediately you start thinking 'Where has it come from?' something else is introduced. You have an idea; you think, 'God', or 'Creator' or -

[17]
S: Yes, one can certainly say that, but I was thinking of something more simple to begin with, to build up as it were. Supposing - just an idea in the ordinary sense: an idea about something, a thought, maybe a conviction?

Sona: I suppose an obvious one is that you feel or think that something is nice. A certain situation has built up to give you a pleasant experience ...

S: Yes. So you label it as nice, as though the term 'nice' represented a description of it as it was in itself, not as it was in relation to you at a particular moment of your experience. But perhaps we could get a bit closer to it by changing ideas not only into thoughts but, say, opinions.

: It seems like just a straight mathematical equation: there are certain factors which equal something. That's the idea I seem to get.

S: But just, say, look at opinions - opinions which often you take for granted. It's obvious, it's self-evident. Just produce a common or standard opinion that you might have, for instance, just as an example.

: England is dull.

S: England is dull. Did you say dull? Yes, well. 'One must know that ideas arise from a concatenation of causes.' Now, you have arrived at that idea, say, 'England is dull', as a result of a whole series of causes: that is to say, a whole series of experiences one after another

which have gradually consolidated into this idea or notion that England is a dull place. So this is what is happening all the time: that all our ideas, our notions, our thoughts, our opinions, including the rather advanced and abstruse one that Asvajit mentioned - the notion about ourselves and who and what we are - are the results of, or arise from, a whole concatenation of causes. So in other words, instead of fixed opinions - instead of things called thoughts or ideas arising of their own accord or just being there as though they were something fixed or ultimate, we've got things which are the product of a whole series of causes, and which are therefore conditioned; and they make up us. They make up even the mind, because, as the first Precept says: 'One must know that the mind, being
without independent existence, is impermanent.'

So it's as though everything within us, all our mental activities, all our ideas, our thoughts, our opinions, including that which says 'I am such-and-such person of such-and-such nature', these have no absolute validity; they have only a relative validity at most, and we are not to think, we are not to absolutize, any of them, and think 'I really am this' or 'I really am that'; or even that there is an 'I' in the absolute sense at all. Because which of all these was the 'I'? Where are you going to stop? At which point in the process? Usually you stop at the latest one, the current one, and you say 'This is [18] me', but the process is going on. In ten years' time 'you' may be completely different.

Alaya: Is the analogy of the whirling firebrand useful here?

S: Yes, because that's also a visual analogy, isn't it?

Alaya: - continuous circle, whereas in fact it isn't like that at all.

Sona: What actually - the manovijnana minds - ?

S: Mm?

Sona: The word 'mind' here, is it referring specifically to the manovijnana or more - ?

S: I don't think it refers - no, it refers, surely, to the klistomanovijnana. It thinks that it is permanent: that is one of the things that make it klisto, defiled; but actually it isn't, that klistomanovijnana itself has been built up, as it were, in a manner of speaking, as a result of a series of experiences of various kinds. It isn't actually the fixed point that it thinks it is. It is relative and produced, not absolute and unproduced.

Chris: Couldn't you say that the exception to that would be something that comes from the mind of an Enlightened being? That would be an unconditioned suggestion to a conditioned being; like, say, 'It's a good idea for you to study the Dharma.'

S: Well, in the case of the Enlightened person, there has been a transformation of the vijnanas into jnanas, so instead of having six senses plus klistomanovijnana plus the ordinary alaya, you've got the five Buddha Wisdoms. So that suggestion would come from one or another of those Wisdoms, and the perspective behind it would be a completely different one, it would be a non-dual one. And, in a sense, it would not be a suggestion addressed from a particular Buddha to you, as though they were in fact two different things, two different persons; no, that is the way that you, in your unEnlightened state for the time being, couldn't but - I won't

say perceive, but certainly interpret - that particular experience. But actually what would be happening would be something quite different from what actually one thought, so to speak.

Uttara: Yes, because didn't the Buddha say he hadn't said ...

S: Yes, the Lankavatara Sutra says that from the night of the Enlightenment to the night of the Parinirvana, he had said
nothing.

So this sounds in a way a bit abstract, but there is a very practical bearing, because if we think of ourselves as something fixed and final, settled for good, if we think of our present standpoint as absolute, our present experience as absolute, [19] there's going to be no change and no development. There's going to be no growth. We think - this is our ... - 'This is me. There's no way of getting behind this or getting beyond this, or getting over this; this is me. I am this sort of person, such-and-such type of person. I have such-and-such opinions, such-and-such beliefs, convictions, habits - experience, even.' So that is your horizon, and everything takes place within that, and you don't really think it possible to go beyond that; not really, in your heart of hearts. Until you actually, due to your faith in your good friends and your modest amount of spiritual practice and so on, begin actually to see, to experience that, yes, change is possible. Perhaps you see it in other people too. But until that moment, whatever the lip service you may pay to the idea of individual development, there's a part of you, so to speak, that just is not convinced. There's a sort of hard core that is determined not to change, which - well, it's not that it is determined not to, it doesn't even bother to be determined not to, because it's quite convinced it's impossible.

: ... that, in order to have an identity, we have to accrue these various things, say like membership of a political party.

S: Yes, yes; all these things add up to your identity.

: So that it's as though we believe that we only have an identity by having these ...

S: Yes. Well, even the notion of needing an identity at all is questioned in the context of Buddhism. If there is any identity, if that concept is valid at all, it's only the continuity of the process of growth and development itself. It's not a cross-section of that. It's not just as far as you've got so far: that doesn't constitute - or where you are at now, that's not your identity. Your identity, if you have one at all, or want to use that expression at all, is just the continuity of that particular process.

: Is that what we usually call a personality,...?

S: That's what we usually call a personality, or individuality. You can use the term in that relative sense: after all, we have to use terms ... that. So an individual is one particular individualized process of development. But not a fixed or final thing.

: Seems to be a relationship there between that idea and Order Members' names; it seems a really good symbol of that, because that has a lot of future to it, in the name, as well as an identity now.

S: Yes, as well as some roots in the present. But it certainly points beyond what is actually existing now.

: Why do you think it is that people generally feel the need to have this identity that is fixed, that is permanent?

[20]
S: Well, why do people themselves think this? They should know, surely. Why does anybody think? Why ask me? - because this is everybody's experience, as it were, so everybody should be in a position to say.

Asvajit: They want some sense of security.

S: But who wants this sense of security? It's as though you posit a self to create a sense of security for the self that you have posited. Well, it's the point about the chicken and the egg: you can't really say which comes first. You know they are both there, they are both interdependent, and you have to get rid of them both together. Perhaps you can't really posit a cause, because you yourself searching for the answer to this question are part of that process. It is really difficult to get outside it; well, you can get outside it, but then you no longer ask that sort of question. But clearly, it has got quite a lot to do with security, and the two increase or decrease together; the more insecure you are, the more concerned you are about your identity in the narrow sense. And the less insecure you are, the less you bother. You often find that people are very concerned that you should know who they are. Have you ever come across this? Especially in the more ordinary workaday world, people are very concerned that you should know exactly who they are, which usually means exactly what they do, what their position in a particular hierarchy or set-up is, that you should recognize and acknowledge that.

Alaya: You can see it in yourself when you're hitching, and the information you give to the drivers, in what order you ...

S: Yes. Though I think, in many cases, people are aware in those circumstances of the need of a certain skilful means: that you shouldn't shock him or her too much.

Sona: Or that you should shock them.

S: Yes, or that you should. But sometimes it's difficult to say, not what you are in the sense of what place you occupy in a particular hierarchical set-up, but to say more directly who you are: well, express what you actually feel about yourself at that particular time, just because the other person is expecting you to categorize yourself, and this is just what you don't want to do. So it's very difficult to find a common medium. You can perhaps list some of the things that you do, but you cannot really say what you are, and very often they don't ask who you are, but what you are or what you do, which for them amounts to the same thing. Sometimes I've referred to the fact, say, that in India, certainly in the old days under the British Raj and still now, perhaps now even more so, people's official positions followed them into social life - do you see what I mean? Their position in the local governmental hierarchy accompanied them wherever they went; even if they went to a purely social function - a tea party, or a wedding reception - they would still be treated as the head of such-and-such department or the inspector of [21] such-and-such, and so on, and accorded

respect in accordance with that.

: I'm sure it's very much the same here in the West.

S: I think not nearly so much the same here, not nearly so much.

Sona: It is in academic circles, often. It's done a little more subtly.

: It's a bit more furtive, yes, but I think it still exists.

: Yes, also a number of recent American Presidents apparently, after their present term of presidency has ended, people have continued to address them 'Mr President'.

S: Well, if it's something like the President of America, no doubt it's rather difficult to get away from the fact that, when you go to a tea party, you are after all the President. But, for instance, in India, it's even on a very low level, like for instance the postmaster: he appears everywhere as the postmaster, and he has a certain position according to his grade, and he will be given a little more respect than someone occupying a slightly lower trade; and this sort of thing would be observed everywhere he went in that particular area. So - well, it's linked with the caste system.` In India, this is the form in which it crystallizes: you're not seen as an individual but as a member of a caste, and that is how you introduce and identify yourself. So we don't have that now; there is no longer the class system in the old sense. Formerly, you could announce your identity by the way in which you dressed; that is no longer the case. Even before the First World War, the gentlemen dressed in one way and somebody who wasn't a gentleman would dress in a quite different way, and the two were quite distinct and recognizable. But now it depends more upon your job and your income, which of course is linked with
your job. Your identity is located there.

So if you are to express what you are, here and now, in terms other than those of income, marital status and occupation, it's very difficult. Even if someone says, 'Are you married or single?', sometimes it's difficult to give a straight reply to that question within the context of the Friends, isn't it? The range of possibilities is rather richer than that (Laughter)- if you see what I mean. Then again, 'What do you do? Do you work?' Well, it's not quite even ... Suppose you're in a co-op, or supposing you're an Order Member supported by his Centre: you can't really say that you work. On the other hand, you can't say that you don't work. You don't fall into those categories. So how are you to communicate, apart from relating your whole life story and ...contact with the Friends. Some people do that, and what the Friends is all about, and what an individual is, and what growth is and development and Enlightenment; some people, in the course of a two hour hitch-hike, a two hour lift, will manage to get all this in, leaving the driver who has given the [22] lift, unsuspecting, absolutely flabbergasted; sometimes quite sympathetic,
sometimes... So it isn't easy.

But even that, even when you are able successfully to communicate what you are here and now, that doesn't really say what you are in an absolute, fixed sense; because that same driver may give you a lift, say, in five years' time, and you might then say something completely different. You would not have to stick to the story that you told him the first time. You could have changed during the interval.

: Doesn't this need for some sort of security, it just happens because of there being other people? If you were alone, you would ...

S: Oh yes. Other people need their security, perhaps you don't need ...

: You wouldn't need to think of yourself, if you were alone, as some fixed thing.

S: But there is a danger there that, if you are not as it were questioned by others and not as it were forced to communicate by others, you might just sink into a feeling without an awareness. At least the fact that you are questioned, not to say cross-examined, by others makes you more aware of your own position; which is a good thing. Otherwise it's like living in the country: you can have maybe lots of feeling, but you become less and less aware, you become more slothful, very often; whereas in the city, where you meet so many people, maybe your awareness is heightened but perhaps, because of the rapidity of everything, you lose contact with your feeling.

So it really boils down to not ever having a fixed idea of who or what you are. It's so easy to fall into this. Who are you? What are you? I'm a plumber. So, of course, people have got all sorts of ideas about plumbers. So they at once think that they know who or what you are, or who/what you are, the two go together. I was reading a little article recently, written by somebody, called 'Bricklayers I have known' (laughter) - that was quite revealing about bricklayers. I must confess it left me with a definite stereotype about bricklayers, of a not particularly pleasant nature. But anyway, if I do happen to meet someone who describes himself to me as a bricklayer, I shall just have to resist the temptation to apply that stereotype to him, though probably the temptation will be quite strong.

Dipankara: I think, in writing that, I did tend to come to that conclusion: that bricklayers were of a certain type.

S: A certain breed. Well, it could be, relatively speaking, because it could be that only a person of a particular type would tend to take up that sort of work. You could say that. There could be a natural correlation, as it were.

[23]
Asvajit: I did meet a bricklayer, though, a few years ago, who started talking to me about Nietzsche.

S: Well, Ben Johnson was known to have been a bricklayer at one stage of his career.

: And Brendan Behan.

S: Or Winston Churchill, as a hobby.

: It's interesting how sometimes this personal confrontation of your identity can be really sort of smashing, in a way. I phoned a friend up recently at his office, and for some reason I got through to his superior, who was extremely annoyed that I was phoning. And so she picked the phone up, and said, 'Who do you want?' So I said who I wanted, so she asked my name, so I gave her my name; and then she said, 'Well, who are you?' I just - I couldn't say anything for about two minutes, I just ... There was nothing I could say. Ridiculous question.

S: Well, when people ask 'Who are you?' under those circumstances, what do you think they really mean? What are they really asking?

: They just want a bit of just something they can relate to, really.

S: A clue, they want you to identify yourself.

: Director of EMI.

S: Or through relationships: 'I'm So-and-so's husband', or 'I'm So-and-so's wife' or 'So-and-so's son' in some societies.

: It's because you represent a threat, don't you? Because you could be anybody. They don't want to give you any information.

S: Right, you could be from Scotland Yard.

: Yeah, right, VAT.

S: But when I was in Kalimpong, a lot of young Nepalese used to come along to see me, so I used to ask, 'Who are you?' seeing some new face. They'd nearly always identify themselves by saying that they were the son of So-and-so, especially if I knew their father, they would always identify themselves in this way, that 'I'm So-and-so's son', even if they were grown up themselves. That was supposed to be sufficient, as it were; you then knew them, because you knew that they belonged to that particular family. Or perhaps they'd say, 'I'm So-and-so's brother'. In that case, again, you would have been able to properly identify them.

[24]
: It seems to come down to the fact that one should communicate and not relate.

S: On the other hand, of course, it may be a fact that you do belong to a particular group. You may be from Scotland Yard, or you may be from the VAT, and that is also to some extent a fact about you, the fact that you belong to that group and are engaged in that particular work. But it certainly wouldn't, we hope, exhaust what was to be said about you ... totally merged in that particular group or that particular activity. In a few cases, of course, you might be, or almost be, or seem
to be, at least; but hopefully not always, or not totally.
So if you were to say to someone: 'I belong to the FWBO', that would not really be enough to identify you, in fact on the basis of the principles of the FWBO you could not identify yourself in that way, really.

: In some ways it may seem a good idea to just avoid the subject, in a sense, give a really short answer, to people who ask those kind of questions, because they don't really want to know anything anyway. So you can just get rid of it all, and get on to something else that you possibly can communicate.

Sona: I think often there's more scope for using the situation in a skilful way by - I know whenever I've hitched and people asked me what I did for a living, I normally start by telling them I'm an engineer; then a little while later I say, 'I also teach yoga, and I sometimes teach

meditation.'

S: Say you work part-time.

Sona: Yeah, and they say, 'Are you married?' and I say, 'Well, yes, but I don't live with my wife!' After a while, you can just introduce the whole of your ethics. It's quite a lot of fun. But sometimes I think you can just cut off, and think, 'They're not interested. I'm not going to tell them anything', and that's that, and you lose an opportunity, in a way, of communicating. In a way, you have to play their game a little bit, but if you're aware of what you're doing you can ...

S: End up playing your game. There's no harm in starting off communicating on, say, anybody else's level, so to speak. The only thing is, you shouldn't allow it to remain there.

Alaya: Is this process, then - say at birth and at death, you couldn't really say it starts then or stops, could you? I mean what dies, and what's born?

S: Well, you need not really go into that at all, in a sense, because when you appear as a baby you don't think that you have a name or that you belong to any particular family. All those ideas develop later. If you tell the baby that its name is George, it will say, 'Yes, my name is George'; or if you tell the baby its name is Mary, well, it will say its name is Mary. And if you say, 'That's daddy', it'll say, 'Yes, that's daddy'.

[25]
But you could point to any man and say 'That's daddy', and the baby will believe you and say 'That's daddy', and so on.

Alaya: I've been noticing that babies, very young babies, definitely do have very different temperaments already, even at a few weeks old, they are very different.

S: Well, this is as it were a quality of the energy, of a particular type of energy. And one can still be quite careful how one allows that to attach itself to particular identities. It seems as though, for purposes of social functioning, there has to be an attachment to a particular identity, but as consciousness and awareness develop, one should be able to begin to see the limitations of that, and not allow that to cramp one's possibilities, so to speak.

Asvajit: I've noticed, when people ask me what's my name and what does it mean, the different way in which I've explained it, and how my own understanding of it, or non-understanding of it, has developed. I tend to explain it in a much less fixed way now, a more roundabout way, a more indirect way. It doesn't sort of concretize it too quickly. Also, including perhaps some elements which people can relate to, without making it too abstract.

S: Well, you have to surely give them something to which they can relate, otherwise no communication is possible at all. I think it's a mistake to expect or to look for a completely open, honest, absolute communication right from the word go; I think that's a completely unrealistic expectation - even, sometimes, with one's best friends. There has to be a certain amount of tuning in, and establishing of a medium of communication first. And you shouldn't get impatient just because the other person, who is after all perhaps just a man off the street or off the road, hasn't got at his fingertips the medium of communication that you've built up

within the Friends over a period of years.

Alaya: It can be very frustrating to meet someone, an 'all-is-One-er', and you ask them quite simple questions and they give you very roundabout universal answers, when that really isn't what's going on at the time, when they are just being arrogant.

S: Well, they're just playing an intellectual game, as it were.

Viramati: You really must have no expectations at the time.

S: Well, no fixed expectations, yes. You may, in the course of your hitch-hiking, if that is the situation, encounter people who are very open; but even with those sort of people you need to take time and to have patience and to build up the communication step by step, not expect them to know what you're talking about if you suddenly introduce the term 'single-sex community', or even 'meditation'. They may not know, even if they've heard the word meditation, what you mean by that, and you have to take that into account, and not be impatient with people because they don't [26] speak your language, as it were: give them time to learn it, so to speak, just a few terms, so that you can then communicate more. And one always has to go from the known to the unknown. By all means start off by saying that, yes, you're a carpenter, you're a plumber or you're an engineer; because, in a sense, you are, in the sense that that particular skill is at your disposal, and then you can make it clear, 'This is not just what I do, I'm not completely identified with this, I've got other interests.' And you can start the ball rolling in that way. You don't have to present yourself as something bizarre or dropped from another planet, immediately. [Laughter]

: When we were at Glastonbury this bloke came up to the stand where I was serving, and he said, 'Hey man, where are you from?' ... 'Oh, we're from up there.' 'Yeah, I knew that!' ...

S: As though he wanted to know which planet you were from.

: Oh, I don't think that was really - He started showing me these weird pictures he'd done.

S: Anyway, I think the general message that emerges from these first three Precepts is pretty clear, isn't it? - that one must be much less rigid, much less fixed in one's attitude towards an interpretation of life, including oneself, than one usually is, and it's only in that way that one's experience will expand and one will grow oneself as an individual. Let's leave it there for a few minutes, and have a break for a coffee or whatever.

- - - - ...

(4) One must know that the body and speech, being compounded of the four elements, are transitory.

S: The previous two Precepts have referred to the mind and to ideas, so inasmuch as according to Buddhism, or at least from one point of view, one speaks of the total being as consisting of body, speech and mind, body and speech haven't been mentioned, so they are mentioned now. 'One must know that the body and speech, being compounded of the four elements, are transitory.' This, one would have assumed, was pretty obvious. But why do you think there is this emphasis on the transitoriness of the body and the speech? One is dealing

with much the same area: one says that the mind is impermanent, ideas arise from a concatenation of causes, body and speech are transitory.

There are really two aspects here. One is the aspect of change, which is obvious, but the other is the aspect of transformation. Inasmuch as everything is transitory, yes, one should not be attached; it would be foolish to be attached, things are constantly changing. So in a way that is a slightly almost, inverted commas, 'pessimistic' attitude. But that isn't the last word that is to be said on the subject. Things are not only changing. Because they are changing, they can be changed in a particular way. They can be transformed. So change, the [27] possibility of change, is at the same time the possibility of progress, the possibility of development. If body, speech and mind were not changing all the time, there would not be the possibility of anyone growing, anyone developing.

So I think again, just as we must be careful how we use this word 'illusion' or 'illusory', in the same way we have to be very careful, in the Western context, how we speak about things as impermanent or transient. It isn't enough simply to say that they are impermanent, and that because they are impermanent you shouldn't be attached to them, if you're not attached to them you'll be more happy. That isn't quite enough. You have also to emphasize the fact that because things are constantly changing there is the possibility of transformation and growth and development and evolution, higher evolution. That is a much more positive emphasis, and it opens up a much more as it were optimistic perspective.

Uttara: Rather than - I think that rather than saying that life ..., Buddhists say all life is suffering.

S: Well, it's impermanent, nothing's going to last, therefore everything is worthless, it's not worth going after. So, so far as most people are concerned or would be concerned, you are just left with nothing. Whereas if you speak in terms of growth and development, that is very much more positive and inspiring, in fact; and also truer, because it's a more complete picture. It's as though, in the Buddha's day, the possibility of spiritual development, of Enlightenment, was so much taken for granted, it didn't need emphasizing.

(End of Side)

Tape 2, Side 2

But it isn't taken for granted in that way in the modern West, so it has to be brought out and fully, explicitly stated.

Asvajit: Surely it wasn't so much the idea of Enlightenment as such, but the idea of development in general? It was the Buddha that added that particular teaching, the teaching of Enlightenment specifically for Buddhists.

S: Well, yes, it's as though the Buddha added as it were a higher dimension to that process, or carried it a stage further. We see this very clearly in the case of the story of his sojourn with the two teachers in his early wandering days. They were able to take him a certain distance, but not far enough, he felt. He wanted to go beyond even that. So the idea of growth, the idea of development in the sense of going from higher to ever higher stage of consciousness, that was there. But the idea of the highest as it were stage of consciousness of all, the as it were

nirvanic, the Transcendental, that did not as far as we can see exist in the Buddha's time. So he carried the whole process even further; though, in a sense, in the same direction, at least in the same direction in the sense of being away from the [28] world - that is to say, away from the ordinarily experienced and interpreted, or as ordinarily interpreted.

So these four Precepts are very much concerned with breaking up of our fixed ideas about things, and therefore opening up the possibility of growth and development. But perhaps that fourth Precept doesn't need much dwelling upon; it's pretty obvious. Let's pass on to the fifth one.

(5) One must know that the effects of past actions, whence cometh all sorrow, are inevitable.

S: This raises quite a few interesting, not to say controversial, questions. The first thing that needs clearing up is about the inevitability of past actions. It's often stated, in a very general way, that according to Buddhism, according to the Buddha's teaching, every single willed action, however tiny, however long ago committed, will produce definite tangible results in one or another life. This is what one has been given to understand, isn't it? But is this really correct? Is this actually the Buddha's teaching? For instance, some writers speak about the iron law of karma, and that even if you have indulged in the slightest unskilful action, even after millions of years and millions of lives, you will have to suffer the consequences. But is this actually the Buddha's teaching?

: There wouldn't really be any hope if it was like that.

S: There wouldn't actually be any hope, because it would mean that karma constituted a closed system from which there could never be any escape. But actually that is not the Buddha's teaching. If you look into the Abhidharma, you find that the different classes of karma are very clearly distinguished. The karmas of which the results are inevitable are those which are termed heavy or weighty, like deliberate taking of human life, on the negative side, and meditation, in the sense of dhyana experience, on the positive side. But there is a certain class of karmas which represent actions which, though definitely karmas, definitely willed actions, have to have their results accruing within a certain limited period, and if they do not accrue within that limited period, the karmas lose their force, their force is expended, they are jostled out of existence by more powerful karmas as it were, and you do not in fact ever experience the results of those karmas. This is the Abhidharma teaching. So it is a much less rigid and more flexible teaching than one is usually given to understand.

Alaya: This is more, isn't it, what the Hindus think, to make you more ...?

S: Yes, it is more what the Hindus think. And then there is also this further question: 'One must know that the effects of past actions, whence cometh all sorrow' - presumably the word is dukkha - does all suffering come from the effects of one's own past actions as an individual in one or another life?

[29]
Voices: No.

S: In what way is that not so?

: Well, that is just one type of karma, but ...

S: Well, it is one particular type of cause-effect relationship. Karma is - your sufferings can come from other sources. Again, this is according to the Abhidharma teaching, though this verse appears to go beyond that. But very often Buddhist - I won't say teachers, but Buddhist preachers do go beyond it, almost to try to threaten people a little bit. Do you see what I mean?

Personally, I think that this is quite undesirable, because when you are as it were trying to threaten people, or when you are actually threatening them, what are you in fact doing?

Voices: Frightening them.

S: Yes, well, what ...

: Inducing guilt.

S: Yes, you're doing that, no doubt - in the West, anyway.

: Manipulating them.

S: Manipulating, yes, you're getting closer to it now.

: Certainly not opening them up, are you?

S: You're not opening them up.

: Using power.

S: You're using power, you're coercing them. So in the spiritual life proper can there be any coercion? Can you in fact force anybody to lead the spiritual life? That is self-contradictory. You can force people to lead a moral life in the purely social, not to say civic, sense, by promise of rewards and threats of punishment, the good old stick-and-carrot technique. But you cannot transpose that to the spiritual life. If you do that, or appear to be doing that, you are in fact not within the context of the spiritual life at all but, at best, within the context of purely social morality, where it may be justified. I am not saying that it may not be justified within that context of social morality, but that would not constitute anything of a spiritual nature.

Sona: Would that be related to the Manu, the first function - the Manu as you described it ...?

S: You could say that, to the extent that the Manu laid down a whole system, a whole scheme, of social life, with appropriate rewards and punishments. But it certainly does not represent the spiritual life, and this is the point I am trying to make here. [30] So I think there is as it were a great temptation to try to get people, to induce people, to lead a spiritual life by using methods or adopting attitudes which are appropriate only within the context of social life, or within the group, and the context of social morality or civic morality.

: Isn't that a process of almost inducement involved with some forms of skilful means?

There's a story, if I remember right, about the Buddha and somebody who is in love: he showed him a whole realm of beautiful women or something.

S: Yes, right. This was Nanda, yes, Sundarananda. Yes, skilful means is a rather different thing, because here it's a question of motivation. You yourself are quite clear as to what actually is spiritual life, and you are trying to lead a person as it were from one level to another; but you yourself are not under any illusions as to what is spiritual life. But on the other hand you can have a situation in which someone genuinely thinks that someone can be as it were coerced into leading a spiritual life. This is just not possible. I think we shouldn't take the story of Nanda as constituting that sort of precedent. It may seem to be a bit like that, but actually it cannot be. That would not be the spiritual life at all.

Asvajit: Nanda already had within him the seeds to take him beyond...

S: Also a lot depends upon the relationship between two people as to what actually is going on. You can't look at it in the abstract, because Sundarananda was a relation of the Buddha; it seems he knew him, he had contact with him. He knew, presumably, what his potentialities were, etc. etc. But I think one must be very cautious about going any further than that. I would even go so far as to say that, generally speaking, when you start promising rewards or threatening punishments, you are almost certain to be outside the context of the spiritual life already. Therefore I don't think that there can be or should be any as it were supernatural sanctions for what I call civic morality - though these have been used in the past. But I think this is really to confuse the two things, the moral and the spiritual.

Asvajit: Supposing someone asked you - I have had this question asked on a number of occasions when I've been hitching - people say, 'What can meditation do for me?' I feel instinctively that I shouldn't say anything, because I don't honestly know what it may do for them or what it may not. I don't see that it's possible to give any very concrete answers. But at the same time one wants to encourage people.

S: Well, you can make a hypothetical answer: you can say: 'What can meditation do for you? If you are the sort of person who really is looking for peace of mind' - you can say 'I don't know whether you are because I don't know you well enough. But if you are the sort of person who is genuinely looking for peace of mind, who really would like to develop as a human being, then very likely meditation would help. You can only try it.' You [31] can say: 'I've certainly found it helps. Many of my friends have. The chances are it would help you too.' You can say that quite honestly without pretending to be able to see what that person is really like.

But even the law of karma, I feel, or certain formulations of the law of karma, even within Buddhism, certainly within Western Buddhism, has sometimes been misused, especially when one has this expression 'the iron law of karma' which one reads in some books about Buddhism in English. It is certainly not an Eastern Buddhist expression. So when someone speaks of this 'iron law of karma', what sort of impression do you get? What sort of person do you feel is behind this kind of expression?

Voices: A judge. (Laughter.)

S: It's more than a judge, it's more like an executioner, isn't it? But then this does raise all

sorts of problems or questions at least, because until very recently, and perhaps even now to some extent, to a great extent, the sanction even of what I call civic morality was supernatural. Do you see what I mean?

: In the sense of a theistic ...

: That there would be some sort of retribution.

S: That there would be some sort of retribution after death; and it has even been, by some people, explicitly stated that if there was not a supernatural religion behind the social order to give a supernatural sanction to morality, the result would be chaos. That may be true, so far as some people are concerned. It's very comforting to think that, no, morality would sustain itself on thin air, so to speak. But would it really sustain itself on thin air? One can't be so sure. So the question arises: if you aren't going to enforce morality by sanctions, penal sanctions, especially supernatural sanctions, how are you going to ensure the observance of morality, social morality, for the sake of the social order? So what is the answer to that one?

: Through awareness and through metta.

S: Well, this means that you have got to be able to induce a sufficiently large number of people - in fact practically everybody, because even a very few people could upset the boat - to cultivate self-awareness and to practise metta.

: That would seem to be impossible.

S: Yes. So it would seem that, within the framework of the social order as such, coercion is always necessary, or will always be necessary within the foreseeable future, anyway. But the point that I want to make very strongly is that the need for force for the sake of the maintenance of morality within the social order should not be transposed to the spiritual plane, as it were, where it is completely out of place, where it has no place at all.

[32]
: I was talking to a Muslim the other day, and he was saying that when they cut people's hands off for stealing and things like this, the reason they do it is so that they won't suffer so much when they die; they suffer a certain amount in this life, and they're going to suffer because they stole, and that saves them suffering when they die. And he said it was OK to do it to a Muslim, but it wouldn't do any good if you did it to a non-Moslem because they wouldn't understand.

S: So it's a question of understanding, then, not of objective retribution? Well, retribution is retribution - whether it takes the form of cutting off the hand or any other form, the principle remains the same, and it would seem that some kind of retribution is necessary within the social order. But, as I said, we mustn't transfer that to the spiritual plane, the spiritual order. You cannot get people to evolve in this way.

Alaya: Did you hear the judge last night talking on the radio?

S: No, I didn't; I saw in the Radio Times that he was going to talk, but I wasn't sufficiently stimulated to want to listen to him. Was it interesting?

Alaya: It was interesting. I don't think I could paraphrase what he said. It was about retribution, the judge representing retribution rather than something else.

S: Well, I think this is true, that the judge, inasmuch as he awards the punishment appropriate to the offence according to the law of the land, does stand for retribution, but he doesn't stand for God, so to speak; or rather, yes, he does stand for God, because God is that sort of figure, but he certainly couldn't stand for the Buddha; because, so far as the Buddha is concerned, as an Enlightened being and one functioning on the spiritual plane in a purely spiritual way, the question of retribution just cannot arise.

Alaya: ... that you're doing not what is best for the individual being tried, but what is best for society. It's society's retribution on that individual.

S: Well, I think that can be argued, I think that is a quite reasonable point of view. Because, in a sense, by not behaving morally, in a way, the person concerned has almost forfeited his right to be treated as an individual.

Ray: Does this mean that a Buddhist can have two sets of values, as it were? - one on the social and one on the spiritual [plane]?

S: Yes, in a sense, yes. This is the traditional point of view: to such an extent in the East that if you wish to have nothing to do with retribution, let's say, you become a monk. Otherwise, yes, your life, to a great extent, is governed by what one could call a double standard. This is presumably the reason why the Buddha did not wish to be a wheel-turning king, even though he [33] would be a righteous king. To be righteous was not enough; that confines one to the social order. He wanted to be a Buddha. So he saw that the two were incompatible.

But, of course, nowadays it's not nearly so straightforward, is it? - because at certain times you may find yourself being a member - well, you are a member of the group in one or another way. As a member of the group, you possess a certain amount of power, even in a limited way, and therefore you will exercise that power. One cannot say that this is wrong, but it is not necessarily incompatible with one's membership of a spiritual community, or incompatible with one's being an individual; but you must be quite clear what you are doing at any given moment, and not function as a member of the group when you are functioning within the spiritual community. In other words, not function as a group member when you 'should' (inverted commas, because even the word 'should' is out of place here) be functioning as an individual. You cannot always function completely as an individual, but you will be aware of that fact, and not confuse your functioning as a member of the group within the group, not confuse that with your functioning as an individual either with other individuals within the spiritual community or even in relation to the group.

Sometimes you can succeed in functioning as an individual in relation to the group; but sometimes you may be confronted by a choice, and you may have [to do] within the context of the group, or you may choose to do within the context of the group, something which is not really the action of an individual. So to that extent you will not be fully an individual, or at least you will not be fully functioning as an individual. You may in the end decide you wish to opt out of that particular group for that reason.

So for us in, say, Britain in 1979, it really means ensuring that on balance you are functioning,

on the whole, more as an individual than as a group member. You cannot, I think, withdraw from all existing groups completely. You might pretend, but you can't. For instance, there is your vote. Your vote represents a certain quantum of power: you might think it absolutely infinitesimal, microscopic, but it does represent a modicum of power. All right, when you use that vote, you exercise that power. You not only exercise that power for somebody, you exercise that power against somebody - not that you necessarily really harm them, but in a sense you are exercising it against them. Even if you do not exercise that, if you do not use that vote, you are still exercising power by default. You see what I mean? So you can't escape, because you cannot declare yourself, as far as I know, citizenless; you cannot - unless you are prepared to be a sort of martyr, which some people are - you cannot refuse, say, to pay your taxes; you cannot avoid paying any tax at all, because as soon as you buy something, say, on which VAT is charged you are paying tax. So you cannot altogether extricate yourself from the group. You remain a member of the group - but when I say 'the group' I mean this congeries of hundreds of different kinds of groups that add up [34] to this one big group that we call the corporate state, which is Great Britain - you cannot extricate yourself from that situation completely. You therefore are exercising power, in the sense of the force belonging to the group, within the group; you are therefore coercing some people in some directions. What you have to ensure is that the greater part of your life is lived as it were outside the group, within the spiritual community, and that you are predominantly an individual. And one of the reasons why you want to change the structure of the group is so that it may be possible to function within the group in a manner which is more and more compatible with the needs of the individual to develop.

But I don't think we can fool ourselves, because we do exist within the group. We have a sort of membership of the group, which means in practical terms membership of a number of different groups; we cannot escape from that. We must try to act as positively as we can within that context, as much as we can as an individual within that context, but sometimes we shall be almost forced - well, not forced absolutely, because we could take a stand, and that would make life very difficult for us and perhaps get in the way of our individual development to an even greater extent. But we have to be quite clear in our own minds what pertains to the group and what pertains to the spiritual community, and when we are acting as a member of the group and when we are acting as individuals, and not confuse the two and not humbug ourselves or deceive ourselves.

Sona: Isn't there a problem there ... with the blueprint for a new society, that if you accept that you have to use some forms of coercion as a group but there's none of these forms in the blueprint, then I can't quite see how the blueprint could ever really work.

S: Say that again. I'm not quite sure what you're saying.

Sona: If you accept that coercion is needed within the group at large to maintain moral order and avoid chaos, within our 'blueprint for a new society' we stress that coercion shouldn't be used within - for the growth of the individual, which is what we base our blueprint on; therefore to transpose that blueprint, actually put it into operation, get it to work within society at large, it lacks this one element of coercion which we've already said is necessary to maintain moral order.

S: Ah. You need to have, primarily, to have a positive group at all, you need to have a spiritual community - that is the primary consideration - and a spiritual community cannot

come into existence except by spiritual means, except as created by individuals. So if without being individuals you try to put society to rights, including using force, in order to make a positive society, a new society, that would just not succeed. You just have to have your spiritual community first, at least on a small scale, and exerting its influence over a small area, before you can even think about a new society in the sense of a positive group. But until that comes about, unless the positive [35] group can be sustained by the ideals of the spiritual community, force will be needed; but to the extent that you here and now use force, you are precluded from building up that spiritual community which alone can be the basis of the new society.

Sona: I suppose actually in a way, though, we do to some extent use a certain amount of coercion: say, in a Friends community outside the Order, if you have so many people living there who are refusing to get up and meditate, you can say, 'Well, if you don't do this you'll have to leave.' In a sense, you're not really forcing them, you're giving them a choice.

S: That's different. The fact that certain people behave in a certain way means that they themselves exclude themselves from, let us say, the spiritual community. But apart from that one must accept the fact that there may well be, say, communes, let us call them, attached to the Friends, which are not spiritual communities, and which should not be called spiritual communities, within which force, so to speak (I don't mean actual physical violence but force in the sense that people are obliged to do certain things they don't want to do), is appropriate. You can't call those spiritual communities. At best they are positive groups. Whereas a spiritual community is a community within which the question of force, coercion, does not arise at all and cannot arise. It is not that you don't use it, but that you cannot use it.

Uttara: Isn't this the different emphasis would always be that you'd always be encouraging rather than forcing ... ?

S: Yes. Well, certainly one should try encouragement as much as possible, even with people who are not individuals. But if they refuse to be encouraged, and they are getting in the way of other people, one can only fall back upon force; which might mean obliging them to leave.

: But it's them that's doing it, in a sense.

S: It's them that's doing it, really, yes.

Uttara: Yes, because all the time they have the choice.

S: Well, they have the opportunity. I think it's very important you don't use even the language of coercion, within the spiritual context, and not threaten people with some kind of supernatural punishment or punishment after death, to make them - to encourage them to evolve. This is entirely out of place. So not paint the very vivid picture of the hells, for instance - as is sometimes done in Buddhist sources to almost scare people into the spiritual life. If they themselves reflect in this way, that is different: they scare themselves, so to speak. That is different, it is their own individual, independent thought and reflection. They really see that, yes, that could be the consequence. But if you in a heavy sort of way try to almost bully them into the spiritual life, this is completely inappropriate. Or if you try to play upon their feelings of [36] guilt, that's inappropriate. So I'm not too happy with this sort of statement that 'One must know that the effects of past actions, whence cometh all sorrow, are

inevitable.'

: I don't really see how this helps, because you'd almost just give up.

S: Also there is the point that a lot of your sufferings just come from the general fact that you have a psycho-physical organism, to begin with. Well, in a general way that is due to your past karma, according to traditional teaching, because your past karma has been of such a nature that you are now embodied in this particular way. But it is not that for every specific suffering there was a specific action in the past; it should not be exaggerated in that way. Otherwise you get a very rigid bookkeeping type of conception of karma, that somebody happens to borrow a book from you and not return it, so this means that, say, ten million lives ago you borrowed somebody's book and didn't return it and now it's been done to you. This is really quite childish and trivial. But it is very important to understand that as soon as one enters on the really spiritual path, which means really the Transcendental path, this almost law - well, this profit and loss way of looking at things - becomes completely superseded, this reward and punishment way of looking at things becomes completely superseded.

: What's it replaced by, do you think?

S: Well, replaced by spontaneity and replaced by joy and Insight and clear vision into just what needs to be done, and one is happy to do it. So many, the majority of people, even within the allegedly spiritual context, are only moved and motivated by quite crude considerations belonging to the reward and punishment order - though perhaps a bit more subtle than usual. One has to be very careful with oneself, otherwise you start rewarding yourself for being good. You think, 'I got up and meditated early every morning last week; I deserve a lie-in this morning. I'll reward myself with it.'

Sona: That again is seeing everything as very fixed, isn't it, because it's not looking at what's appropriate to that very moment.

S: Yes, right. Or you say, 'I'll allow myself to backslide a bit today. I'll make up for it by making an extra effort next week.' It's a sort of artificial feeling of 'ought' rather than a feeling of really wanting.

Alaya: So what's the healthy approach to lying in, then?

S: ... healthy approach would be that, looking at it as it were quite objectively, to maintain yourself in reasonably good condition, it's needed. So if you need it, you don't need to make any apology for needing it, or to think of it as a crime that you have to make up for having committed at some time in the future. If you need it, you need it. The question is, do you [37] need it, or are you being lazy and not facing up to that fact? If you need it, have it with a clear conscience. If you're just being lazy, well, shake yourself out of the laziness without trying to rationalize it. Again it's an aspect of what I was talking about before: know what you are doing. Are you a group member functioning as a group member in this situation, or are you an individual in a spiritual community, functioning as an individual? Are you someone who needs a bit more rest or are you just lazy? It means just facing the situation as it is and seeing it as it is, without any prevarication. But this is so difficult, very often, to do: to face up to what is actually happening and what you are actually doing or not doing, without attempting to deceive even yourself, not to speak of others.

Alaya: If you were acting a lot from this reward basis, wouldn't it be better, say, to go on a solitary and just really do nothing and see what your real motivations were, rather than artificial motivation?

S: You may not be able to see what your real motivations are. I think very often people can't, without the help of spiritual friends; because sometimes people can see not only more clearly than you but much more easily what is really motivating you. It's very difficult to deceive other people. Other people are usually not such fools as we think. Usually we find it more easy to deceive ourselves than other people. They are not taken in, they can see what is happening. They are laughing about it, and we think that we've taken them in. But that is only just part of the way in which we take ourselves in. We want to feel that they've been taken in, but after all, as I said, people are not fools. They may not be intelligent enough to understand themselves, but they're intelligent enough to understand you. (Laughter) And that applies to you as well as to them, you see. So it's not necessarily the best idea to go off into solitary retreat and to try and work out what one's own motives are. No, I think probably it's best just to ask your spiritual friends what they think, and to take into serious consideration what they say. And you may well come back from solitary retreat none the wiser; you may have avoided the issue.

But this whole idea of compulsion as applied to the spiritual life is totally inapplicable. I think in the West, with our Christian background and with God looming over us, the shadow of God looming over us still, long and black and cold, it's very difficult to get away from this feeling of the spiritual life being something as it were compulsory. Almost like compulsory games at school: it's good for you, but you don't particularly enjoy it.

So certain things within the group may be of this nature, and quite properly so, but nothing within the spiritual life really can be of this nature.

Vajradaka: I think one of the most unpleasant flavours or memories I have left in my mouth or my memory was when someone said to me that I ought to do something, 'ought' to do something, [38] at a time when I was just trying to follow what I felt was right, rather than just suggesting what they thought would be good for me. It still feels so wrong.

S: Though, of course, it must also be said the word 'ought' can be used ambiguously. 'Ought' can mean what is obligatory, in the sense that we have been talking about, the coercive sense, or it can mean what is indicated by the objective needs of the situation. So one has to be careful not to quarrel with the word 'ought'.

Vajradaka: I think the word 'should' was also used, which made it a little less unambiguous.

S: But there is, if you just look at a certain situation, there is a possibility within that situation which is, let's say, the best; so that could be pointed to as the desirable one, therefore; and one might, if one wasn't very careful, use the word ought or should in relation to that. Perhaps it would be difficult not to. A lot would depend then on the tone of voice, the whole mode of communication. You can say 'You should do it', or you can just say, 'You should do it' [gently]. It makes quite a big difference. So it's not just a question of the words but the whole attitude. And I'm sure you can always feel when you're trying to force somebody, compel somebody, rather than just point out possibilities, even though in a very positive and enthusiastic way; it doesn't mean that when you indicate the spiritual possibilities you just

have to be very weak as it were; no, not at all. But even though you are enthusiastic and encouraging, you're not coercing; you're not just pushing someone in that direction.

Sona: It's almost as though sometimes you have experience of people telling you you 'ought' to do something, whereas in fact they are really telling themselves that that's what they ought to be doing. And you really get the definite feeling that they don't actually see you for what you are, or consider you.

S: Well, they are just as it were making a general statement or general announcement that such-and-such things ought to be done, because they feel perhaps that they are not doing them.

Sona: If you've got a genuine concern for someone, you're not too worried about whether they do it or not; I mean from the compassion [point of view] if they don't do it, but it doesn't really affect you one way or the other.

S: No, you're not personally concerned in that almost projective way. Because one reason why you want to get other people to do things is so that you can have a feeling of solidarity, which means security, because you're all doing things together, so you want to get people to do things the way that you're doing them, just to increase the feeling of solidarity and security. So you try as it were to bully the person ... So you're concerned in that way. But if you're just trying to see what is good for the other person, you're just concerned for their sake, and you may [39] feel sorry that they are not able to follow. You may even see, or you can know quite clearly, that they are doing the wrong thing for themselves, but you do not feel personally threatened by the fact that they have disregarded your advice and are going in a different direction.

(End of side)

Tape 3, Side 1

S: That also brings up another point, which is that within the spiritual community there is a feeling, there is a sense, there is an experience, of freedom in relation to other people; whereas in the group, only too often, there is a feeling of coercion, of being obliged to do things, even when you recognize it's quite reasonable, but it's not what you really want to do, and therefore you do it out of a sense of obligation or in a sense being forced to do it, and you recognize that and make the best of a bad job, so to speak. But, within the context of the spiritual community, you feel a complete freedom. Because, even supposing someone tells you that you 'ought', inverted commas, say, to do something, that a certain line of action is the best for you, even though he tells you quite strongly and positively, with a great deal of feeling, you do not experience that as a coercion. You still feel completely free to follow that or not to follow that; so there's a totally different experience. You feel that you really do have a choice, the onus is on you. The initiative still rests with you despite what anybody else, despite what everybody else, has said. You consider all that very seriously, but you still feel quite free to do whatever you think, what you feel, is best for yourself.

Ray: Can't this feeling of being obliged to do something just be of a reactive nature.

S: It can be, it can be.

Ray: And you have to try and recognize it?

S: Yes. And of course you can react in that way to the advice of somebody who is not trying to force you to do anything. If you are, so to speak, a quite weak character, you can take the mildest suggestion as, well, almost an order; at once your back is up and you react. A person of that sort is in quite a difficult position, because he excludes himself from the possibility of being given, let's say, suggestions from others who are in fact functioning as individuals. He is not able to see them as individuals. He sees them as members of the group, so to speak. He can't see the spiritual community as a spiritual community. He feels it as something threatening. I really noticed this when I was in New Zealand, that there were some of our Friends there - people connected with the Centre - who could just not see the Order as a spiritual community at all. They saw it definitely as a group, and as a group which was to be as it were manipulated, or the individual members of which were to be manipulated, if one was to get what one wanted out of them. [40] There was no feeling, on the part of a few people, of their being individuals and of it being a spiritual community. This was very noticeable. Even though very strong efforts had been made to explain what it was all about, but they had just not got across to them, in some cases.

Vajradaka: Do you think an actual example, rather than explaining, ...

S: Well, the explanation was attempted when the example failed, if you see what I mean. They just didn't see what was happening. So certain Order Members just tried to put it across, but no, it just didn't get across. Some people seemed quite closed to that sort of possibility.

Ratnavira: It almost seems like it's only when those people themselves grow out of their own projections that there will be any real change in their attitude. There's not very much that one, functioning as a member of a spiritual community, can do...

S: Yes, right. There's very little sometimes that the member of a spiritual community can do. Certainly not just within a short period. The other person has to be very open. If they insist on seeing the spiritual community, that is to say the Order, as a group, and the Order Member as a representative of that group and as wielding the power and authority of that group, they just won't very easily get over it, and you won't be able to do very much about it, however much you may like to.

Vajradaka: Do you think there is any place at all for influence over people when they don't know what's best for themselves - when they're working within the context of the spiritual community? People might to some degree trust you, but they're relatively new into the Movement or into a community or co-op, and there might be some negative aspects in their relationship to you, they might see you a bit as a kind of an authority figure, but they do at the same time trust you a bit and they're quite prepared to do what you say, and you use that.

S: Well, then you're not coercing them, if they trust you. But the sort of situation in which you may have to coerce in a positive way, still within the group but possibly even with a remote spiritual intent, is within the family, when you're responsible for bringing up small children. You have to go against them sometimes, I believe; you have to as it were coerce them sometimes, in other words prevent them from doing things that they want and in a sense almost compel them to do things they don't particularly want to do; but your overall attitude is a positive one, surely. But within the group as such you can't avoid that responsibility,

especially if you're a parent. You can't let the children run as it were completely wild.

Sona: The very same thing, it seems, happens in co-operatives. You can't always let people do what they want to do, it would just create chaos, and if you're responsible, if the object of [41] the co-operative is to make money and provide Right Livelihood, you have to run it efficiently and not chaotically.

S: This has been discussed quite a bit recently, discussed on the last study retreat here, for instance. I think, in order to make things clear and to avoid misunderstanding, I think one of the things that should be emphasized is that a co-op is a spiritual community. I think - we've talked, for instance, of communities and co-ops. This has rather obscured the fact that the co-op itself is a kind of spiritual community, and that the co-op will not function as a co-op unless those who are in it have the attitude of it being a spiritual community; because, if it isn't a spiritual community, how can you expect those who are members of it to allow all the profits to go to the nearest FWBO Centre? The fact that they are making that gift, that dana, of the results of their labours suggests that there is a strong spiritual motivation and commitment and that therefore they are individuals and that therefore the co-op is a spiritual community. You can't just enlist labour to tide you over, as it were, and it remain a co-op, it remain a spiritual community. That is impossible. So I think there has to be a greater realization of the fact that every co-op is in fact a spiritual community, otherwise it won't function properly. Unless the people who are members of the co-op are spiritually committed, it will not function properly, it will not function efficiently, and therefore it will not make a profit. Because usually people won't make a profit unless there is something in it for them. They can only work quite altruistically if there's a definite spiritual ideal to inspire them, and that means that they are committed, that means it's a spiritual community. So you cannot really run a co-op, in our sense, on any other basis except as a spiritual community.

Sona: I still wonder whether it's realistic to expect co-ops to really make any money.

S: Well, if the co-op is not a spiritual community, it will not make money, because if people are not motivated by a spiritual ideal, they can only be motivated by the familiar combination of stick and carrot. So if you are neither willing to use stick and carrot, and there is no ideal, the result will be just that everything grinds to a halt. So you must make it clear: are you running your co-op on the principle of stick and carrot, or are you running it as an ideal? If you are running it with an ideal, then it is a spiritual community, and it is a co-op in the full FWBO sense. Otherwise it is only a sort of disguised ordinary group-type business set-up, and everyone will expect his share of the cake for himself to eat by himself: his own little carrot to munch in his own ... of the stall.

So again you've got to be quite clear in your mind what is it that you are running? Are you running something on the basis of an ideal, or on the basis, however modest it is, of sharing of profits?

[41]
Vajradaka: This seems to fit very well, this idea of having an ideal rather than stick-and-carrot, within a co-operative which is already set up. But when you are starting a co-operative and most of the people coming into the situation have only just begun to discover whether they have got spiritual commitment or not, then it seems to be rather different.

S: Well, you must decide, you must know what you're doing. If you want a co-op in the full sense you should invite and admit only spiritually committed people. If you are admitting those who are not spiritually committed, realize that you will be functioning under a handicap, and that the duty or responsibility of those who are committed is to infuse their enthusiasm and commitment into the non-committed. If there isn't a reasonable chance of them being able to do that within a reasonable period, you'd make a big mistake to take those people in, because you'll be permanently handicapping yourselves.

The same with communities. When somebody joins a community, you don't expect him to display full commitment immediately, though it would be very nice to bring together, say, six or eight already fully committed people; that would ensure that there was a spiritual community. But if you've got people who are just trying to feel out their own commitment, yes, they can be invited in by all means, but know what you are doing, and only admit them if there seems to be a reasonable chance that, over a reasonable period, they will likewise be able to function really as members of a spiritual community. But otherwise, if it's clear that even after four or five years they are not going to be members of a spiritual community, they are not going to be individuals to that extent, it's pointless to invite them to join the community. You're wasting your time, and you're handicapping your community and holding it back, and in a sense spoiling things for everybody.

: But in a way you might be justified in taking on somebody from the outside to keep your business together.

S: I think that is extremely dangerous. I think that could be the beginning of the end, if you were not extremely careful.

Sona: What I'd do at first (?), if you wanted to make money to give to Centres, you could look at it like making money by setting up a normal business, because you do get profits even though you pay your workers a normal wage, and those profits would be used.

S: Certainly you could do that, but don't call it a co-op, because it will not be a co-op. It's a business in which everybody gets a rake-off, including the Friends. The Friends get the biggest rake-off, but others get a smaller rake-off. So it is not a co-op. So don't insensibly transform your co-op into something of that sort, still calling it a co-op, because that would indicate confusion of mind, confusion of thinking on your part.

[43]
Sona: But do you think it's dangerous to operate a business like that within the Friends? ...

S: I would say that that would require very careful consideration. I wouldn't exclude it completely, but it is a concession to the group. That would not be a co-op, and would not be a spiritual community. I would prefer to leave that as the sort of private enterprise of certain people. Just as someone might get a job in the outside world, and might be earning a good income and be very generous out of that to the Friends, well, let a group of people do the same thing. It need not come as it were officially under the banner of the Friends.

Chris: But wouldn't this, if you had that sort of system where you could pay people who were working in a co-op business, wouldn't that open up more possibilities for people to come in?

S: But we don't pay anybody, if you see what I mean. If people are looking for wages, that's not the co-op approach. You join a co-op just expecting your needs to be met, not to be paid a wage.

Chris: Yes, but I'm saying when the co-op business is set up, you've got this structure there which could then be capable of using someone else's labour and paying them in the normal way. What I'm suggesting is that that could be a way of interesting that person in the Movement.

S: Well, that could be, but again, yes, you must be quite clear what you are doing, and he must be quite clear that he is not part of the co-op as such. The co-op must understand that, and he must understand that. Then that's OK. There's two tiers of membership, as it were, and two tiers of responsibility. That is all right. And to function as a co-op, only those who are committed to it as a co-op should have any say in the running of it. Those who are not committed to it but who are just as it were workers employed should not have any say in the running of it; otherwise, to the extent that they have a say, being motivated the way that they are, it will cease to be a co-op and cease to be a spiritual community.

So the general message seems to be just clearer thinking, being quite a bit more clear as to what it is one is actually doing.

John Roach: We are having this problem in Norwich at the moment, trying to convert "Oranges" from being a very loose business activity, not based on Right Livelihood or co-op, trying to convert that into a co-op situation, and it's very ...

S: Yes, it's very difficult, it's more difficult sometimes to change something in that way than to start up something completely new.

John R.: So I've come up with an idea to overcome this: form a co-op for the outside catering separately, and leave "Oranges" as it is, and only let certain people, say, get involved in the [44] outside catering, also new restaurant; that will come under the co-op. And when the co-op is big enough and strong enough, then it can take over "Oranges", rather than - "Oranges" is ...

Vajradaka: There's not enough committed people around.

S: Well, I think this is the important thing, just to replace uncommitted people by committed people; no need to go into details, because it would not be of interest to everybody, but since you have mentioned "Oranges" specifically I did come to know, or at least come to hear recently that some people were a bit surprised at the way in which some of the workers worked, in relation, say, to the customers; and, from what they told me, it seemed that this was quite inappropriate for anyone who was connected with the Friends to work. And I followed the matter up and just talked about it to one or two people; I got the impression that those working there were just not sufficiently imbued - I don't say all of them, but some of them - with the attitudes and ideals of the Friends, and so therefore to that extent the restaurant was not acting as a medium of communication for what the Friends was all about. I think this really needs to be looked into and something done about. But you are thinking about it already. Because it's quite a pity when something which is as it were under the banner of the Friends or associated with the Friends falls below a certain level and is not

communicating what the Friends is all about. I don't mean things like cheerfulness of service, but just general efficiency in everything.

: We need a kind of spiritual franchise.

S: What do you mean by that?

: Things coming up to a certain standard.

S: Standards, yes. This is something I've been talking about recently, and I've been saying, well, you see in the world, due to the manipulation of stick and carrot, people manage to keep up in certain ways a pretty good standard. If you cannot keep up at least the same standard when you're doing it for the sake of an ideal, what is your commitment to that ideal worth? It's as though people use the fact that they're doing it for Buddhism or for the Dharma or for the Friends as an excuse for doing it in a sloppy, inefficient way. If anything, they should be doing it even better than people do it for the sake of their carrot.

So if people aren't functioning in that way, clearly they are not into whatever they are into as a spiritual movement, spiritual community, co-op in the real sense, or whatever, and they should be out, in that sense; in contact, yes, in their own way, but not under any false pretences. There's a Bengali proverb:
'Better no cow than a bad cow'.

Sometimes you can improve the situation in a community or a co-op or whatever by just getting rid of the people who shouldn't be there, by emptying the stable and feeding as it were all the (to [45] continue the comparison) corn and hay to good cows who give lots of milk.

John R: I'm impressed, Bhante, by that comment you passed a while ago about - to really start making real money you've just got to get the ideal going. That's like the economic ...

S: If you're going to do it via the co-op structure, I don't think, from what I've observed and what I've heard, you can get a co-op efficiently functioning, which means the profit motive for the individual is lacking, you can't get it efficiently functioning unless the people in the co-op are strongly impregnated with the ideal. Otherwise why should they work? Their membership of the co-op will be purely nominal, and in their heart of hearts they will be expecting wages in one form or another, or at best they will be expecting an easy life, and resent it when things become a bit difficult, because they are not imbued with the ideal, and therefore are not in a position to work for it. So you must really beware of people who come into a co-op, or want to join the co-op, for no better reason than that they want to work in a reasonably easy way under reasonably comfortable conditions and do as little work as possible. This is why they come to you for part-time work. I think you should be deeply suspicious of such people, unless they do it with a deeply Buddhist motivation, out of reasons of wanting to follow Right Livelihood. If they come along to you not being particularly connected with Buddhism, and just want simply to be able to work two or three days a week, I don't think that exactly is raw material for your co-op as a spiritual community.

Uttara: Yes, it should be on the basis that limitless giving is expected of them.

S: Yes. Because they want as much as possible for as little as possible, which is the average

worker's attitude in Britain today; ... that they want to do as little work as is compatible with earning the sort of money that they would like to earn. That sort of person, who has not got much connection with the spiritual life or the ideals of the Friends, is not a very good recruit, to say the least, for your co-op. And probably the sort of people who've been tending to come along and help out at "Oranges", some of them at least fall into this category.

: Ninety per cent of them!

S: That's quite unfortunate, and in a way I'd be surprised you haven't had more problems than you have, unless it's simply that I haven't heard about them.

Viramati: I think if you have a good strong co-op the people, if they're going to stick they'll stick, otherwise they won't stay the pace as it were.

[46]
S: But there has to be a pace, which either you conform to or you have no alternative but to drop out. But if you just get by, by just crawling along because there isn't a very definite pace, then you will keep those people, they won't tend to drop out.

John R: If someone has declared a standard at the outset,...
S: You have to be prepared - those who are more determined to set the standard - you have to be prepared to lose people at the beginning and have to function for a while without them, which may mean that you may have to do double for a bit. But you may have to accept that, until you can set the standard and start attracting the right sort of people.

Chris: It's quite a drain on your resources.

S: It's a drain on your resources. And you yourself in the end will start feeling resentful, because not only are you having to do more work because they are doing less, but they are preventing you from doing what you can, giving of your best, and doing the best. This applies within a community as well as within a co-op, but in any situation of that sort. I remember that a couple of years ago, when Sukhavati work was going on, there was a tendency, I noticed in some quarters, to think the more people the more work was done; if you doubled the number of people you doubled the amount of work. Not a bit of it! I could have told them that in advance on a purely as it were mathematical basis. But people do think that. So that when you lose half your people it doesn't necessarily mean that only half the work - the chances are you lose half the people, and without making much of an extra effort you find that at least nine-tenths of the work is being done. And this is quite revealing. Because you're no longer having to counteract their lack of enthusiasm; you're doing it all together, and it goes with more of a swing, and you're enjoying it more. It becomes less difficult, so more work is done without it being noticed, almost.

John R: This was certainly the case on the Fairs this year issue, it went from 20 down to 6, and it was much easier with 6, and much more fun and much more efficient.

S: What a moral there!

: Incredible.

S: More and more of less and less.

Viramati: We had the same, building the new cafe, we had six people and then it went down to three committed people, and we were getting more work and a better level of work done.

S: That seems to logically follow, I would say. I'm not in the least surprised.

Asvajit: When ... it ends like Shabda, operating ... one-man band. Apart from the actual ... It can be a bit -

[47]
S: Well, there is an optimum at either end, if you see what I mean. You mustn't be too logical, otherwise you can cut your community down and down, and logically the most intense community should be a community of one, but that wouldn't be a community at all. For a community it is usually agreed that five is the minimum; possibly four, but even four becomes a bit difficult - but five means a definite spiritual community is possible. If it goes up to, say, 20 it becomes much more difficult to have one single as it were fully integrated spiritual community. So one mustn't - well, it's difficult to determine the exact figure; but just as it doesn't mean that the more people you have the more work is done (you can have more work done with fewer people), but it doesn't necessarily follow from that, even, that you can go on reducing the number of people indefinitely, and the amount of work done will continue to increase indefinitely. You reach a point where the law of diminishing returns begins to operate.

: But you also need to train people and that slows you down, just teaching them.

S: No, that is different, because if you have got people who are definitely there to learn, and they are learning, they want to learn. you don't mind being slowed down for that purpose.

: And that will still slow you down. Say, at Sukhavati ...

S: Well, yes, that's OK, because your aim is not simply to finish things in the shortest possible time. That's not your aim.

Alaya: No, right. If it was, then you could be almost callous, but that's not. So speed isn't sometimes ...

S: Speed is not the only consideration, no.

Viramati: You're not just being swamped by it. The basis is stronger than the uncommitted element. If the uncommitted element is stronger, you can get swamped by it.

S: Yes. I think, within any spiritual community or equivalent, you must see to it that the committed element is definitely predominating and definitely setting the pace, and that it is not possible for the non-committed element to stay within the situation unless it makes an actual effort to become more committed, and is seen to be doing that. Otherwise, the sooner the non-committed element drops off the better for all concerned.

Uttara: Subhuti was saying this last week in a talk. It was a co-operative evening, talking

about 'Living within the Pure Land': to experience Amitabha's Pure Land you have to want to be there and also want to grow and develop, otherwise you won't experience it.

[48]
S: Otherwise you won't experience it as the Pure Land: it will be if not hell, certainly purgatory.

Vajradaka: When you said that five at least is a minimum for a spiritual community, were you talking about a residential spiritual community?

S: Yes.

Vajradaka: This relates to starting Centres, in a way, doesn't it? If you've got to have a strong number of people it won't be swamped, because ultimately when you start a community new people are going to come in who won't have these ideals, and so in a way the old ideal of five people as a nucleus still makes theoretical sense.

S: Well, it depends how many new people you take in. If you have five committed people, you can afford to take in one non-committed but potentially committed person, perhaps two; but
you couldn't take in five or six. You'd be very unwise to.

Perhaps it isn't a good idea to have just one non-committed person, otherwise the non-committed person can get a bit discouraged. Perhaps he needs someone to relate to a bit on his own level. So perhaps, if you have five committed persons, two non-committed but potentially committed would be quite a good idea.

Vajradaka: I'm thinking ahead of actual practical possibilities - if you had just three committed people and two relatively potential ...

S: It would be quite difficult, and you'd have to be really certain about the two non-committed people being very definitely potentially committed; and perhaps not admit them both at the same time.

Viramati: Are you talking about Order Members and Mitras, or Order Members and people totally outside the communities?

Vajradaka: I was thinking of a completely new situation, where you have Order Members and Friends.

S: Well, I think you would have to make them Mitras before admitting them into the community.

Anyway, we've covered quite a bit of ground, so it's time to start winding up. This has all arisen out of 'One must know that the effects of past actions, whence cometh all sorrow, are inevitable', and this is surely illustrated by our experience with communities and co-ops: the results of your own past actions as a community or as a co-op are, I'm afraid, inevitable.

Anyway, any further point about the material we've just covered? Any final point? Maybe we

can close with a reference - it's a reference I've made sometimes before - to Confucius. Confucius [49] was once asked - I'm sure I've mentioned this in some old lecture or other - what was the first thing to be done if the state was to be reformed, and he said 'The first thing to be done is the rectification of terms': in other words, calling things by their proper names. So when you say 'spiritual community' you must really mean spiritual community. When you say 'co-op', a co-operative, you must really mean co-operative, and not some other sort of set-up. You see what I mean? If it's not a co-op, do not call it a co-op; find some other term for it. If it's not a spiritual community, do not call it a spiritual community. And so on. Because, unless you rectify your terms in this way, a lot of confusion will be created and perpetuated.

Vajradaka: Does not this sort of clarity about terms, though, come from your own awareness, so in a sense you have to be developed as an individual to a certain degree to be able to do that?

S: Oh yes, of course. You don't find this sort of clarity within the group, let's say, only within the spiritual community. Or only on the part of the individual. OK, let's leave it there for today.

Voices: Thank you.

Tape 3, Side 1 (continued)

Day 2

S: ... the Ten Things One must Know. We come on to Precept 6.

(6) One must know that sorrow, being the means of convincing one of the need of the religious life, is a guru.

S: Hm. Well, what do you think of this Precept? I think probably 'sorrow' here means suffering, because it's not sorrow that teaches you, if one is taught, it's some painful experience. So what do you think of the part played by painful experiences in one's - well, the text says 'religious life', but let's say spiritual development, life as an individual? Does the experience of suffering help you to grow? This is the great point. If so, to what extent, in what say? Is suffering indispensable? Can you grow without suffering? Can individual development ever be anything but a painful process? Could it be enjoyable?

Dipankara: From what we were saying yesterday, it's quite the opposite. It must be enjoyable.

S: It must be enjoyable - but what about getting started? What about that initial jolt that gets you out of the rut? Is that not possibly sometimes painful? What sort of sorrow ...

Uttara: Giving up attachments that could be -

[50]
S: But it isn't just a question of giving up the attachments, is it? That's the way it's seen, yes.

: You need to be dissatisfied.

S: You need to be dissatisfied.

Alaya: It could be that you have nowhere else to go but to evolve.

S: Yes, on the last retreat we talked about that quite a bit: that you see there's nothing else that you can do. And sometimes you accept that situation rather reluctantly; it's almost as though you wish there was something else you could do, but you just see that there isn't. You look around for some little avenue of escape, but then you see, well, there isn't one, so you think, 'I suppose I've no alternative. I'll just have to evolve, whether I like it or not. There's just nothing else really that I can do.' So that isn't exactly sorrow or suffering, is it? I think the author of the Precepts must have had in mind some definite painful personal experience, like bereavement or loss of all your property, or something of that sort. So what sort of part do you think that experience plays in the spiritual life?

Chris : It can show you what results from having attachment.

S: Right, yes. Or it can show you the consequences, the inevitable consequences, of a certain line of action.

Vajradaka: I think it can also give you space, just to see things a bit more clearly, and to feel yourself, experience yourself, without those things. I mean if you've lost something - all your building or whatever was burned to the ground - then in a sense it's taken it away from you and you've got the space to experience yourself without it.

Sona: Could you say that this sort of experience of sorrow is just like experiencing a crucial situation? It's the only thing that really does - ... you have to look for things to give up sometimes to find a bit of sorrow ...

Ratnavira: I think that to gain from sorrow, in a sense, demands a certain positivity anyway. So I feel that it plays a kind of - it's a prerequisite to the usefulness of sorrow, and that's inspiration anyway; so you need some positive aspect to lead you into the situation before sorrow can really be useful.

S: Yes, lots of people experience sorrow, lots of people have painful experiences, but for them those experiences are not a guru, they never get into the religious life at all. So sorrow (to use this term) is not necessarily a guru, certainly not a guru for all people. It's as if you must have already a sort of immediately available capacity to respond to the sorrowful or painful experience in a certain way; but otherwise it's lost on you, it's wasted on you. And you notice - I don't know what weight is to be attached to this - but the text does say: 'is [51] a guru', as if to say that other gurus are possible; that sorrow is not the only guru. So perhaps we can say that sorrow is a guru only for certain types of people, under certain rather special circumstances. Sometimes sorrow, sometimes painful experiences can be very discouraging and dispiriting, and people can just gradually sink under them.

: But a guru implies something you can rely on as well, doesn't it?

S: Well, a guru in the sense of a teacher, just someone or something that opens one's eyes. There's a popular Indian etymology of the term guru which makes it mean (this is not a scientific etymology, but it's a popular one) the one who brings light; the light-bringer or

light-bearer. So in that sense, yes, one who opens one's eyes or enables one to see things. And sometimes, of course, sorrow or other painful experience does just that. You feel what a fool you've been; you hadn't realized it before. You can see it now, you're suffering, perhaps, the consequences of your foolishness.

Do we ever find that a joyful experience convinces us of the need of the religious life? What is there special about this sorrowful or painful experience?

Uttara: Probably you're more aware of those moments.

S: There is that. That's a quite interesting thing - that you are more aware when there is pain, usually, than when there is joy. Joy tends to make you unmindful. Ordinary worldly joy, even the sort of joy you experience in meditation, sometimes, tends to make you unmindful, but pain or suffering tends to make you more mindful. This is why at least some spiritual teachers have held that, in that sense to that extent, there is no spiritual development without suffering; which does not mean that the more suffering you impose the more development takes place automatically. No: but they have pointed out that suffering intensifies your self-awareness and causes you to remember. You tend to remember better something which is associated with a painful experience.

(End of Side)
Tape 3, Side 2

So that there is this to it as well: that a painful experience just enhances your awareness, your general self-consciousness, consciousness of yourself, consciousness of life, consciousness of existence. Whereas a pleasant experience, possibly even a joyful one, tends to make you rather self-forgetful. You notice that when you are very happy, if you're not careful you can be carried away by that and become very unmindful, but you're not likely to be very unmindful if the experience is painful, unless of course you are completely overpowered by the pain and become a bit crazy, as it were. But you notice this. When people are happy - you notice it on retreats - when they start getting happy, they start getting unmindful. It seems very difficult to [52] ... the two, to combine the two. So it is as though perhaps a modicum of pain, some painful experience, is almost necessary just to maintain our awareness. But on the other hand, we are not to think that if you want to evolve you must just make things more difficult and painful for yourself: it doesn't work like that. Or have somebody else making things more difficult and painful for you, which is supposed to be the function of a certain type of Zen guru. It doesn't work that way either.

But from time to time it seems as though you do need a sharp reminder, at least from time to time. It may not be a great traumatic experience, but just a little jolt. It may be not much more than a prick. You're just made aware that you've forgotten something, or you'd been going on in slightly the wrong way. It may be just a mild disappointment; maybe just a sharp word that somebody says to you, or you've rubbed somebody up the wrong way and he reacts, then you realize that you've been acting or speaking in not quite the right way. It can be perhaps no more than this, but it's as though the experience of pain, as it amounts to in a degree, is almost necessary to keep you on your toes and keep you evolving.

But, yes, on the whole, of course, the whole process is very positive and enjoyable; and in a way you don't mind that slightly painful experience, because you see its function. You can see

that it is benefiting you, is keeping you awake and alive and evolving.

: Apart from this [drunk] joy that you were talking about earlier, there is also something else, isn't there? There's also a purer kind of joy that seems to be mindful; doesn't seem ...

S: Yes, there is. I would say that you tend to experience this purer kind of joy when you are on your own - and, of course, in connection with meditation. But the sort of happiness and joy that you experience with other people, even on retreat, does seem, if you're not very careful, to tend in the direction of unmindfulness. You just get, as we say, carried away. But, yes, you can develop, you can maintain, a purer sort of joy if you are on your own, especially. But being on your own also has its dangers - that phase of pure joy may pass and you may find yourself going to the other extreme of dullness and apathy and a bit of boredom, not knowing quite what to do, and so on.
We notice on retreats especially - at least we used to notice in the old days - that people swung between a rather unmindful energy and happiness and a rather, what shall I say? a rather over-selfconscious and tight mindfulness, a rather inhibiting mindfulness; you know the sort of thing I mean? But to have both together, to have energy and joy and mindfulness is quite difficult. Probably it's more easy to have the joy and the mindfulness, or a sort of what you called pure joy with mindfulness, than to have those with energy too. It's when you've got energy also bubbling up that you can become quite unmindful.

[53]
Sona: Do you think that's a particular trait with the English, perhaps, this swinging between joy and tight mindfulness?

S: Oh, it's quite difficult to say.

Sona: The retreats at Broomhouse I really experienced that. People do get very unmindful when they sort of, like with joy, but if you reprimand them as it were, they can go all tight and mindful.

S: I think it's difficult to say, because there's only, I think, the possibility of becoming as it were over-mindful when you've started making a fairly intense effort to develop, and it could be that the people you are referring to just haven't reached that point yet. Indians can certainly get carried away very easily, they are very unmindful people on the whole; probably in many ways more so than the English. They also don't go to that extreme of over-mindfulness; I think that's quite unknown to them, as far as my observation goes. But they are very, very scattered and forgetful and unmindful, undisciplined. Lokamitra was experiencing great difficulty in getting them to observe silence on the retreats that we had. They thought that when Lokamitra said that you were to observe silence, it didn't include talking in the kitchen or when you went for a walk, or if you just felt like talking! (Laughter) They took it to mean that you should be a bit quiet, and not be too noisy and loud - even though he spelled it out so carefully that it meant you were not to speak at all. The message just didn't seem to get across. They just forgot. He could see them forgetting sometimes; they just couldn't remember.

But I think, operating in the context that we do, what we have |to be careful of is not to take it that this Precept means that, unless you've got a whole series of very traumatic experiences and life becomes painful and difficult, you're not likely to evolve; it isn't really quite like that. But certainly we do need this slightly sharp reminder from time to time, which can come in

all sorts of ordinary ways; it may not be some big traumatic experience.

All right, let's go on to 7, then.

(7) One must know that attachment to worldly things maketh material prosperity inimical to spiritual progress.

S: This is to be read in relation to the Precept in the previous section, No. 4, 'affluence, being the manure and water for spiritual growth, is not to be avoided'. But, on the other hand, 'one must know that attachment to worldly things maketh material prosperity inimical to spiritual progress'. So, taking these two together, what do you get?

Alaya: You get: 'money is useful used skilfully'.

S: It says 'material prosperity' - it's not just money, it's one's whole maybe standard of living and all that.

[54]
Vajradaka: It's almost as if worldly ambition is the thing to be avoided, like making you feel that you really can make something of a go in the world and be really successful in the world, as it were separate from your growth and your development.

S: How can you know if you're attached - this is the great question? It's quite easy to say, 'Well, I could give up my car, I could give up my television set, I could leave my wife any time. I'm not attached.' It's easy to say that, but how does one know?

: Do it.

S: Yes, that's true, but then that would mean that there would in fact be no such thing as enjoying affluence and material prosperity. You'd have to be giving them up all the time to make sure that you weren't attached to them.

Sona: Do it occasionally. (Laughter)

S: But if it was only occasional it wouldn't work. If you give them up, knowing that you're going to go back to them after a while, is that really a test?

Uttara: Maybe giving other people things, too. You could do it that way.

S: Hm. Well, yes, it's a question of proportion, because you might have 100 records - well, all right, supposing you do give one to somebody as a present; but does that really show that you're not attached to your 100? You could only be sure that you weren't attached to your 100 records by giving them all away, actually. So can one know, or how does one know, that one isn't attached to the material things that one has? Is it possible to really know that one isn't attached, without actually giving them up? Because if it isn't, it would seem that you have to give them up and that therefore there is no such thing possible as the enjoyment of affluence and material prosperity for somebody who is committed to the spiritual path.

Sona: If, say, in the case of your 100 records, perhaps you'd get some indication if one of your

favourite records was damaged and if you felt great sorrow at that, that would give you some indication ...

S: Even so - yes, that would give you some indication, but would even that be enough? Because you could console yourself for the fact that one record was damaged by the fact that you had possession of all the others intact.

: It seems you have to know yourself very well.

S: You have to know yourself very well. So how can you know yourself very well, how do you get to know yourself very well? Is it possible? Is it very easy, in this way?

[55]
Viramati: It shows quite a level of integration, you would have to be quite developed, I suppose, before you could tell.

Uttara: You probably [would need] quite a period of time without these things.

S: But then we still go back to what I said before.

Ross: A good barometer, perhaps, is just applying the question of giving: you can test how attached you are by how prepared you are just to give all the time.

S: Yes; yes.

Sona: I think the other sort of criterion is looking at it from your spiritual progress, that if there is something stopping you from progressing spiritually, you can start looking at the things you are attached to: maybe it's OK if you're a little bit attached to your 100 records, but it's not going to stop you that much from progressing.

S: It is perhaps more a matter of the general question - not, 'Are you attached to everything that you've got?' It's more a question of keeping a close eye on your actual spiritual development, with the help of your spiritual friends, and being prepared to give up anything that is actually seen as standing in the way. For instance, to take this example of the 100 records, it may be that you are attached - it may be, in a general way; but, on the other hand, it may be that your attachment to your 100 records is not getting in the way very directly or specifically of your spiritual development, so in a sense you need not bother about it. But if you do find that there is some definite thing which is holding you back, or your attachment to which is holding you back, the test comes when you are prepared to give up that thing for that reason. And also, as Ross said, there is this general question of being ready to give; because it may not be a question of giving the very thing that you are attached to, but if giving seems to be an integral part of your life and your attitude, the assumption is that you are not all that much attached to any of the things that you have, and would be prepared to give them up if it was seen that they were actually getting in the way of your spiritual development.

Alaya: Also, in spiritual communities, it is possible that the community owns things together, you don't actually own anything, so that you could give that stuff up without it going out of circulation, so to speak.

Asvajit: It still could be a rationalization there.

Sona: That seems only to work if you've got real spiritual communities, i.e. where you've got people who look after the things. For instance, if you've got 100 records and you give them to most of the communities in the Friends, you find that after a short while some of them are scratched, some of them are [56] starting to disappear, and before you know where you are you have [about] 25 records. But it does seem to work better if one person owns them, and he looks after them and lets other people borrow them, and they have a certain respect.

Alaya: It's different looking after something to actually owning it, I find.

S: Well, yes, the majority of people, it seems, are unable to look after something unless they own it. The only way, it seems, of getting people to look after things is allowing them to own those things. Communal property seems to be property which everybody is able to use, but which nobody is actually responsible for caring for: this seems to be what happens in 99% of the cases, unfortunately.

Alaya: Is that because the pride comes out with the attachment to that thing? Someone is attached to it, therefore they have pride in other things ...

S: It would seem to be something like that, yes. Or also taking for granted that somebody else is going to do the looking after, not you. I think a community in which certain things were held in common and in which those things were looked after properly, even though they were held in common, would be a spiritual community of quite a high order. I think this is a very difficult thing to achieve. Very few people, it would seem, are prepared to look after something for the sake of preserving that thing for the use of everybody; usually the incentive has to be preserving it for their own use and benefit, possibly allowing somebody else to use it occasionally. Well, you know how careless people are, even one individual person borrows, say, a book from somebody else: you know from your own experience, sometimes, how difficult it is to get it back, or how careless they are with it, or how easily they let it go out of their hands or allow it to be defaced.

Asvajit: You can even remind them a number of times, in quite a pleasant way, but still it doesn't come back. You think, what sort of attitude have they got? It's as if just by lending it to them it's become theirs.

S: Well, no; no, not at all, because - no, I would say it's worse than that, because if by lending it it had become theirs, that would be all right, because they would then look after it, at least. But they take possession of it, but without necessarily assuming responsibility for looking after it. But anyway, this is rather an unpleasant subject, so let's not dwell on it too much; but everybody knows the sort of thing I mean.

Alaya: The problem about giving things away is that they become someone else's problem. I was on retreat, and I wanted to come back and give most of my things away, and I thought: 'Who can I give them to [so that] they won't just become another problem for them?' It's just giving some of my clutter and making it someone else's clutter, and just cluttering them up.

[57]
S: It depends if they feel that those things are useful. If it's just junk ...

Alaya: Say, 100 LPs, though, to almost anybody in the world 100 LPs is just a lot of clutter and a headache, really.

Uttara: You could sell the LPs and then give the money away.

Alaya: It's almost like giving someone your junk.

Uttara: Well, Friends Trading's ... (Laughter)

S: Give him your business card!

Sona: It was set up especially for that purpose.

S: I think a person's tendency or willingness to give dana is quite a good index of their degree of attachment, regardless of what possessions they have or don't have. You can see someone, perhaps, with quite a bit in the way of material possessions, but at the same time he may be very open-handed and willing to give, and you may feel, 'He's not all that much attached'. But somebody else might have far less but perhaps give away nothing at all, and you might feel that they were very strongly attached to the little that they did have, and would be unlikely to be very willing to give any part of it up.

Ross: It seems as though you can overcome the attachment not only by just mindfulness of it, just kind of seeing it, but also by just applying the energy of dana anyway. It seems to overcome it, in a way.

S: Because why is one attached to material possessions? There is that reason too. We speak of attachment and greed, but that doesn't really explain the situation; it doesn't really make clear what is happening. Why do you hang on to these things which, as Alaya says, are a lot of clutter; why do you hang on to them?

Alaya: Secure clutter.

S: Mm. Leaving aside things you actually need, say for your work or your life or your practice in one way or another: but why do you hang on to things? It usually is that they represent some kind of security.

: This thing we were talking about yesterday about identity. You have an identity there, in your possessions.

S: But what makes us feel insecure without possessions, and what makes us invest our identity in our possessions? It's all right to say that one feels insecure, but what is that insecurity? What is your actual experience, when you are said to be insecure?

: It's a basic fear, isn't it?

[58]
S: Yes, it manifests as a basic fear, but I don't think it's just fear in itself. I think one must go deeper than that.

: It's existential angst?

S: Well, that's again the manifestation: why the ache?

Uttara: Is that angst to do with identification?

S: Yes, but why do you identify? Again, one hasn't really gone deep enough. Well, it's as though you feel a sort of inner poverty. You feel no richness within. You don't feel that you are anything. Well, perhaps you're not. You don't really experience yourself as anything. But this is, I think, the basic point, the basic issue. You are not as it were complete in yourself and do not experience yourself as complete. I don't mean complete in the absolute metaphysical sense, but in a reasonable human and healthy sense. You feel you need all these things to supplement you, to prop you up. You really ought to be getting everything from yourself, from your own healthy sense of your own being; but you don't. So therefore you become attached to things, whether it might be your castle in Spain, or your record collection, or your new car, or whatever; or even your talents.

So I think attachment is just a symptom of something; it ought not to be treated as just a straightforward matter of 'If people are attached, they shouldn't be attached, because if they're attached they won't evolve'. It isn't really quite as simple as that.

: So you have to replace it, you can't just abandon it, can you?

S: You can't just abandon it. The remedy is not even simply to by main force overcome your attachment and forcibly give those things away; no, that won't work. It may help a little, but it doesn't really solve the question, which is your experience of your own inner poverty. The only way in which giving away things can help is that then you are left with your experience of your own inner poverty, and have to face up to it; that this is what you actually feel, this is the sort of person you are, or are not. The possessions to which you are attached have disguised that fact, they have made you feel a bit comfortable, as though you were rich. But when you give them away, or when they are taken away from you, perhaps - and this is where the painful experience can come in useful - you are brought up against the fact of your own actual poverty as a person, as an individual; that you are just nothing. And you can think of quite a lot of people - take away their possessions, take away their wealth, take away their position in society, take away their talents, what have you got? It's like Carlyle's remark about, I think it must have been King Louis XVI: he said, 'Take away the robes and take away the crown, and take away the periwig, and what have you got? A poor, forked radish, fantastically carved.' It's something like that, isn't it?

[59]
Alaya: So therefore, if you had this inner poverty, and you had a lot of possessions, you would still be very miserable?

S: Even after giving them up - well, that would be good. Even if you had them, you wouldn't feel completely happy, completely comfortable; and you might think that that was just because you didn't have enough, or you didn't have the right things; you could still not be really putting your finger on it.

Alaya: It's a bit similar to a relationship.

S: Oh yes, indeed, because when you just go into relationships, as we say, out of inner emptiness and inner poverty, you are just treating people as things. You are not relating to them; you're simply collecting them, or buying them.

Alaya: So eventually you would almost grow to hate those objects, because they imprison you.

S: Yes; yes. You might not actually hate them, but you wouldn't be completely happy with them, anyway. Or you might even actually hate them, without being able to give them up. You wouldn't be any the less attached to them because you hated them, because you wouldn't be able to give them up, and you wouldn't even know what the real cause, the real source of all the trouble was. You might think that it was their fault, it was the way that they were behaving. Because, in the case of inanimate objects, you can't blame them for behaving as they do, but in the case of people whom you collect for your particular purpose, you can blame them - 'If only he, or only she, behaved differently, how much better it would be; it's their fault.' And that can prevent one from confronting the fact of one's own inner poverty, out of which one has become attached to all these things which one has collected and with which one has surrounded oneself to disguise the fact of one's inner poverty.

Sona: Is it preferable, then, to get really in touch with your inner poverty and then - maybe you discover that you are actually not as poor as you thought you were?

S: Well, I am taking a rather extreme example, an almost preta-like example. There are people who may have quite a bit in the way of possessions, be surrounded by all sorts of things, but they haven't accumulated them in that way for that reason; they can have done it in a relatively healthy way, maybe just because that was the thing to do, or they hadn't much else to occupy their time and energy with; so they've got all these things, but they're not all that bothered by them, they are not actually using them altogether in that way.

Sona: With the experience of a case of a preta-like person, is it necessary for them to really see that they are poor?

S: It probably is, and this is where, in the case of such people, the traumatic experience which they have when they are suddenly bereft of all these things, can be extremely useful. [60] They are unlikely to give up of their own accord, such people. Those who are, let's say, only moderately attached, who are reasonably healthy, if for instance they are told possessions do get in the way - they see that; they think, 'OK, I'll give up quite a lot of things', they don't find that very difficult. But it's the preta-like person who usually has to be stripped of his possessions by circumstances before he can really experience his own inner emptiness and poverty. Sometimes a temporary separation will just open his eyes.

Asvajit: Isn't that inner poverty really a result of really reflecting on or actually seeing the real nature of the things that are involved, it's just accepting them in a rather passive way? You may be surrounded, for instance, by a beautiful library of books, but you've never really thought about them, you've never really reflected upon them. You may find yourself in an art gallery, you may be very rich and have your own collection, but you've never really seen them for what they are.

S: When, especially in the case, say, of works of art or even nature, when we never really see

them for what they are, it usually means that they are just tokens for us, tokens of possession, and that's the only real value they do have for us. It may be the same with people, sometimes.

Sona: Maybe you can look at it also from the more positive point of view that - I think some people have the experience when they've been on solitary retreat, for instance, and they have felt beforehand that they've needed quite a lot of people, and then to experience that they don't really need those people, that they aren't completely poor inside, that there is a certain amount of richness there, and that can be a tremendous source of inspiration and energy.

Asvajit: It seems to be a very definite experience, this of richness: you suddenly wake up to the fact, quite suddenly, that you are rich, there's tremendous wealth, tremendous resources, that you're in touch with, tremendous colour and vitality.

S: But, to come back to the previous Precept, is there any way of as it were waking up to this without being jolted into it indirectly by some painful experience?

Alaya: Maybe by reading inspirational scriptures.

: Well, art, surely, does that. That is what art is.

S: Art, yes. Art in the more ideal sense, say.

: Yes. It's a process of inspiration. It doesn't really involve any pain, I don't think.

S: But on the other hand, one mustn't become a sort of aesthetic parasite, if you see what I mean, just feeding on what other people have produced. Yes. using it to stimulate oneself, but in the end being able to rely on stimulation and for stimulation [61] on oneself, otherwise you become like the man in Tennyson's "The Palace of Art", who just fed on all these aesthetic experiences without really being himself galvanized into anything creative.

Ross: What about your own aesthetic appreciation of your own creation? Where does that lie?

S: Well, not everybody is capable of creative work in the narrow sense. In the broader sense, yes, I think everybody is, and maybe that is an aspect of one's realization of one's own inner richness which involves, surely, one's own inner creativity. You may not be able to be creative in terms of producing poems and plays and music, but you are having an influence, you are having an effect on your surroundings all the time, and in fact you are reorganizing your surroundings in accordance with certain deep feelings, or even, one might say, certain patterns within oneself; and this is essentially a creative activity. For instance, as when you settle into a room and you arrange it; you even arrange the objects in it. You see, this is happening all the time; you rearrange the chairs, you put the table in a different place. So this is all in a way creative, it is your arranging, rearranging, manipulating, organizing, in the best sense, your environment, and this is creative. So one should not simply sit quite passively, absorbing, say, works of art; this can be very stultifying and wearisome in the long run if you do it in too one-sided a way. There has to be a balance between your taking in the inspiration and being affected positively by other people's creativity, and expressing your own creativity; you need both of these. Otherwise - some people probably know that you can spend perhaps a few days, a few weeks, absorbed in literature, poetry and so on, but after a while you do become tired of it, however much you may love it and however good it may be, because

there's something within you also which needs active expression; because you also have that at least broader creative ability. So you cannot be on the receiving end, healthily, all the time.

One could even go so far as to say that a really creative person is unlikely to be attached. If you can imagine some sort of really miserly, Scrooge-like person - well, of course, by very definition he is unlikely to be the sort of person who gives; but can you imagine that sort of person being a creative artist? It's really quite unthinkable, isn't it?

Alaya: Maybe a minimalist art.

S: What is a minimalist?

Alaya: Like abstraction to very basic line, almost to nothing. A white canvas. But certainly not creative in a colourful or ...

S: - an exuberant way.

Asvajit: But some people don't seem to appreciate exuberance; they feel put down by it all. They feel that it's going to overwhelm them.

[62]
S: So perhaps - well, the Precept does say, 'One must know that attachment to worldly things maketh material prosperity inimical to spiritual progress', but perhaps one's discussion shouldn't revolve too exclusively about attachment as such; one is to probe a little deeper, and also have a more positive emphasis; the emphasis on growth, the emphasis on generosity, the emphasis on the realization of oneself - if necessary, initially, realization of one's own inner poverty. And also emphasis on one's own personal creativity. Then I think the problem of attachment will look after itself.

: You said earlier - you just mentioned it briefly - about attachment to - you did use the word talent or skill. Would an artist be particularly attached to his skills, or the means to that creation? His brushes or his paints - or his actual talent, if he had to give that up?

S: I'm not thinking so much of attachment in the strict sense; more of identification. To look at it in a way the other way round, that sometimes people are a bit troubled that they don't have any talents, especially people who've got friends who've got talents. They think maybe they're deficient in some way, they don't know how to write poems, they don't know how to paint pictures, they don't play any instrument, and don't feel like doing any of these things; so they start thinking sometimes as though almost there was something wrong with them, as though they were deficient in some way. But I think this line of thought can arise only if people have got a very narrow conception of creativity, because you can be creative in your relations with other people, you can be creative in relation to your whole environment, you can be creative in relation, say, to society as a whole. Your creativity doesn't necessarily have to express itself in this narrower way. But there are people who do have, let's say, talents without any great creativity, and the exercise of their talent can in fact mask the fact that they are not really very creative people. And in this way, because their talents enable them to mask the fact that they are not really very creative people, they are attached to these talents, in much the same way that people can be attached to their wealth, because the wealth masks the inner poverty.

: Is it possible, then, to say that creativity and attachment certainly to artistic talents, anyway, are mutually exclusive?

S: Genuine creativity is incompatible with attachment to a talent, because if you were genuinely creative you would have no need to be attached to a talent. This is why sometimes very creative people, in the eyes of some other people, misuse their talents; they don't care so much about them. I remember when I was a boy - this is a very ordinary example - there was the well-known case of Gracie Fields. You're too young, probably, to remember her, but ... But Gracie Fields was supposed to have a really marvellous natural voice; but, according to musicologists she shamefully misused it because she used to have fun singing music-hall songs and things like that, when she ought [63] to have been in grand opera. But she just didn't care; she just mucked about with her voice and enjoyed doing that, and the purists were really quite horrified, because she should just not be doing those sort of things. But apparently - I don't know, but I assume - she was quite a creative person in herself, as a person, and therefore just didn't bother to use the talent overmuch; she didn't attach, it seems, too much importance to it, except perhaps as a means of earning a living.

: Picasso said that at the age of 15 he could paint and draw like Raphael, and spent the rest of his life trying to paint like a child. It's the same sort of thing.

S: You see, to the non-creative person a talent is very important. To the creative person it's not so important; it's only important as a means of expressing the creativity. It's not important for its own sake.

Alaya: Talent seems to have become over-important now, doesn't it?

S: I think we tend to confuse talent with creativity. There are lots of quite non-creative people, as far as one can see, who go to art colleges. It's as though if you go to art college you are almost automatically put in the creative bracket, so that gives you a certain satisfaction.

Alaya: There are a lot of very talented painters, but they are not all creative.

Asvajit: The whole idea of creativity seems to suggest a high degree of flexibility, working in different media and changing from one medium to another quite spontaneously.

S: You could perhaps say that creativity is really nothing but the exuberance of the human being. Doesn't Blake say something like that? - exuberance is beauty, isn't it? Or is it beauty is exuberance?

So perhaps one should be more concerned with the cultivation of that type of human being, the human being who is naturally exuberant out of great inner richness and creativity, than simply emphasizing the giving up of attachments. This is really, I think, the point. Just ask yourself not, Am I attached to this? Am I attached to that? but, Am I a real human being? Am I a creative individual? Am I exuberant?

(End of side)

Tape 4, Side 1

Just look around your friends and ask yourself how many of them could be described as exuberant, in any sense of the term. How often is one exuberant oneself? Is exuberance the first term that people would think of if asked to describe you?

[64]
Asvajit: I find this a real problem, Bhante. I feel ...

S: Don't be exuberant (laughter)

Asvajit: - because I feel that there is a part of me which should be much more exuberant, but yet if I am I find that the response is so flat, so damp, that I think ...

S: Well, I think there are two things to be considered here, you see. First of all, obviously if one is very exuberant and people are responding in that way, well, why? The second, of course, is: is one being genuinely exuberant? Because sometimes people can put on a bit of an act, and think they are being exuberant when they are merely being irritating. That is a quite different thing. There is the genuine article, exuberance, and there are various imitations on the market. (Laughter)... not necessarily exuberant because they are just loud and just spreading themselves around the place, so to speak. They might be treading on other people's toes.

: You can't win, can you?

S: But do you really think that there are people who respond negatively to genuine exuberance? Would you think so?

: Yes.

S: Yes, I tend to agree with you, unfortunately. (Laughter)

: It can be a threat, can't it? It's very ...

S: It can indeed, yes.

Uttara: The moment you even show a bit of energy, some people start ...

S: Yes - show a bit of commitment.

: 'Go away, can't you see I'm miserable?!'

S: Anyway, so emphasis on the cultivation or development of the positive, creative, spontaneous, exuberant human individuality rather than just non-attachment to worldly things. All right, let's go on to the next Precept.

This is much akin to the previous one.

(8) One must know that misfortune, being the means of leading one to the Doctrine, is also a guru.

S: Well, does this always happen? Does it ever happen that misfortune leads one to the Doctrine and is therefore also a guru?

Alaya: Often it just leads to more misfortune.

[65]
: It just seems, again and again, that there needs to be a prerequisite there before these things are useful. It is the basis ...

S: Yes. It must happen to the right people.

Viramati: The Doctrine needs to be there. Unless the Path is available, none of these things ...

S: One must have also some capacity for the Doctrine already, it seems. What do you think is meant by 'misfortune' in this connection? It seems to be a bit different from 'sorrow', though no doubt bound up with it.

Asvajit: Just bad luck.

S: Yes, what would you usually call bad luck? It's as though misfortune doesn't necessarily and inevitably lead one to the Doctrine. It may, if the ground has in a sense been prepared.

Alaya: Isn't it a bit like the saying that misfortune is a guru because it leads you to practise, say, patience? And it's only then that you ...

S: But then you don't necessarily practise patience because of your misfortune.

Alaya: No, not necessarily, but if you are following the Dharma it would give you a chance to practise forbearance and patience.

S: But again, if you were following the Dharma, so it would bring you to the Dharma only if you were already following the Dharma. This is really what it amounts to saying.

Alaya: And it would give you an opportunity to practise, say, patience or forbearance and would therefore be your guru.

Ross: It seems as though, to some extent, the bringing into existence [of] this realm of misfortune anyway doesn't seem very healthy. To create it as a guru doesn't feel right, somehow. It doesn't feel very positive.

S: It gives you the wrong idea about the guru: the guru is the man who comes along with a big stick and makes you ... whether you want to or not. It gives you that sort of image, or that sort of picture, doesn't it, rather than someone who encourages you and stimulates you and inspires you?

: Maybe you'll be looking for misfortune.

S: Yes. Sometimes one finds that misfortune will just embitter somebody; it won't lead them to the Doctrine. So it's as though, as I said, misfortune has to happen to the right sort of

person, maybe someone who already has some feeling for the Dharma which the misfortune possibly intensifies.

[66]
Asvajit: I was reminded of Mrs Rhys Davids, who - I seem to remember you mentioning that she lost her son, and you felt that this might have deepened her interest in Buddhism.

S: Ah, she was of course already a great Pali scholar. Well, no, I didn't say that it deepened her interest, but it certainly led her thoughts in a certain direction, especially in connection with Buddhism's teaching about life after death. Her son's death led her to take an interest in spiritualism - this is what I said - and she then started linking up her belief in spiritualism with her studies of Buddhism.

Anything further to be said about this? Misfortune doesn't seem to be very popular, does it?

Sona: It seems on the whole that people are quite fortunate - in the Friends. There's been no (apart from in India) there's been no deaths, really, just the odd case.

S: Well, there has been an ex-Order Member die, but there's been no Order Member die as an Order Member since the Friends were started, and that is in a way quite strange, you might say. Possibly because there are so many young people in the Movement. We have had one or two Mitras die, one in India, and then there was I think a woman Mitra who died out in India, but that's all. Even accidents seem fairly rare. I don't know whether it's because people are more mindful; there have been one or two motorbike accidents, even one or two car accidents, but not serious ones. And nobody's really been very ill; there have been one or two cases just recently, but these are comparatively rare. So if our development is to depend upon suffering misfortunes, we are not very favourably placed, are we? But there is also the fact that if you really are evolving in a positive way, you don't feel misfortunes as misfortunes. Other people might see them as misfortunes, but you don't. For some people [if] you lose your job, it's terrible, but the average person in the Friends won't think that a misfortune at all. (Laughter) I would even go so far as to say that some of them, I know, wouldn't consider it as a misfortune to lose their parents, even; whereas people outside the Movement might well think it was a misfortune.

Vajradaka: About two years ago I nearly did lose my life, the closest I ever came to it. And it was really helpful, it was much more ...

S: Yes, but you didn't actually lose it, you see, so the misfortune didn't actually happen, if you see what I mean. Several people nearly lost their lives, I believe, in mountaineering accidents; I think at least two of them.

Vajradaka: Can't you call the accident itself that nearly made you lose your life was -

[67]
S: Well, it isn't strictly speaking a misfortune, but at least you get near enough to it for it to shake you up quite a bit, possibly.

Uttara: It was a missed misfortune ...

S: Well, they say a miss is as good as a mile, so if it doesn't actually happen you can in many cases forget about it quite easily and quite quickly.

Ross: But this idea of not treating misfortune as misfortune seems quite crucial.

S: Yes. You could even say that so long as a misfortune is a misfortune, you are not evolving.

Sona: Something else that occurred to me - I think in the "Door of Liberation", one of the Precepts , the Kadampa precepts (Atisha) said that if you give up everything and practise the Dharma it's almost like you're looked after in a sense, that almost as though as you develop you get the things that are necessary for your life and what you want, and so there aren't so many great misfortunes.

S: Well, there are very few things which are actually necessary. But if you simplify your life, there are very few misfortunes that can actually happen to you. Loss of job, loss of money; probably the most serious misfortune would be really incapacitating illness. That could be quite a misfortune, in the real sense, though even that might give you pause for reflection and so on. If you were already definitely committed to the spiritual life. But I think misfortunes in the ordinary sense usually remind us just how dependent we are on external things for our general sense of wellbeing.

: Is it not possible for an Enlightened person to suffer misfortune?

S: Well, he could suffer what would conventionally be regarded as a misfortune, but presumably he wouldn't feel it as a misfortune. It wouldn't subjectively affect him in that way.

Asvajit: Presumably it's just another element in the whole stream of his life, which he treats creatively.

S: So in a sense, the more evolved you are, the less is the chance of any misfortune, so far as you are concerned, befalling you.

What do you think are the really subtle misfortunes? There are gross ones like, say, losing your money, losing your job, but what about subtle misfortunes which could affect perhaps even the quite evolved person, at least to some extent?

: Establishing a kind of reputation for yourself.

[68]
S: Ah. reputation. There's a quite good illustration of that in the life of Hakuin - have I mentioned this story before? Hakuin, one of the great Zen masters of Japan. Apparently he had been a Zen master for quite a while, and had a great reputation for sanctity and so on, and was widely revered. But what happened was there was a young girl coming along to the temple where he lived, a very attractive young girl, and one day it was discovered that she was pregnant, and she gave birth to a child; and she was of course asked whose it was, because she was unmarried. And after a lot of questioning, she said that it was Hakuin's child. So people were very annoyed, very angry with him, and he lost the greater part of his reputation; only a very few faithful disciples believed in him any more. And the child was taken to him and he was told: 'It's your child; you'd better look after it.' So he said: 'Is that so?'

and he took the child in, and he looked after it very carefully, very faithfully, for a number of years. But after quite a few years, the girl started feeling remorse because she had told a lie, and she told that lie to cover up the young man who was the father of the child, of whom she was very fond. So she confessed all and said, 'It wasn't Hakuin's child, I slandered him.' So she went and asked Hakuin's forgiveness, and said: 'I'm very sorry that I slandered you. It isn't your child.' And he said: 'Is that so?' (Laughter) and allowed her to take the child away. This story is told to illustrate that Hakuin was not even attached to reputation, and this showed what a really great master he was, because after all the master's reputation is so to speak, from a worldly point of view, his stock in trade. No reputation, no master; no reputation, no pupils, etc. So if you can not bother even about your reputation, even that kind of misfortune - the loss of reputation - cannot affect you; and this is a misfortune which can befall even the so-called spiritual person. So if you can overcome this one, you really are very free indeed. So Hakuin seems to be one of those people. That people speak well of you gives you a certain feeling of security, even when they justifiably speak well of you; and when they unjustifiably speak ill of you, and you don't mind at all, you don't experience it as a misfortune but it means that your confidence really is established within yourself and not in external things. So this is a quite subtle sort of attachment, the attachment to reputation, much more difficult to overcome than attachment to ordinary material things.

All right, 9 and 10: they go very much together.

(9) One must know that no existing thing has an independent existence.

(10) One must know that all things are interdependent.

S: So why do you think these Precepts are enunciated? Are they just a matter of abstract philosophy, or have they some practical bearing? - that things are not independent, they are all interdependent. What bearing does this have on life, as it were, on the spiritual life?

[69]
Asvajit: Perhaps that everything you do has an effect on other people, even though you may think you're doing it privately and it has no connections.

S: Yes, there's that, yes indeed. That whatever you do, for good or for ill, affects in a way the rest of the universe, or certainly the particular circle of people to which you belong. The fact that you go and meditate in the morning doesn't just concern you: it concerns all of those with whom you might come in contact in the course of the day, who would be positively affected by you if you were in a more positive state of mind due to the fact that you'd meditated in the morning, and so on. This is quite apart from any overt action that you might perform.

Viramati: You certainly have a ... feeling of selflessness to it, just acting for yourself all the time. (?)

S: Whether one realizes it or not, one cannot in fact act for oneself alone, in the sense of act without it affecting other people. The only choice you have is whether you affect other people for the better or other people for the worse, but you cannot choose not to affect people at all. It might happen that in extreme cases you touched the point of absolute neutrality, but what sort of person would you be if you touched that point too often? If you think of the people that you come in contact with, how many people really affect you in a completely neutral

way, neither positively nor negatively? You either have a slightly more positive impression or a slightly more negative impression, but there are very few who don't affect you definitely either way, and you might even feel that you haven't as it were really noticed those people, they won't have been really there so far as you were concerned, even though perhaps they've said various things. They haven't said anything that really registered with you.

: Even that's a negative impression, isn't it?

S: Well, what you're really saying is that to be neutral is to be negative. That may be so, yes. But you ought to be there, you ought to be making an impact. So that's one way of looking at this - that 'one must know that no existing thing has an independent existence. One must know that all things are interdependent.' This has its bearings on the Bodhisattva ideal. You can't really be an arhant - this is what this is saying if you take it to the logical conclusion - you can't really save yourself totally ignoring the plight of other people. That must affect you, because all living things - all things, in fact - are interdependent. So you can't act for yourself alone: your action must affect others, but you are able to choose whether your actions are to affect yourself and others positively or yourself and others negatively. That's the choice that you really have.

Viramati: According to this, the ideal of the arhant would be literally an impossibility.

[70]
S: Yes; if you take the arhant ideal literally, in a narrow sense, it's an impossibility. The arhant, the person who is trying to be an arhant, is striving after an illusory ideal, really, in that sense. At the best it can be just a question of emphasis, that you are as it were working on yourself, but you are quite aware that your working on yourself will have repercussions for other people too, but you don't really think that there is a separate nirvana in which you can shut yourself off and which you can enjoy regardless of what is happening to other people: you don't really think that.

Ross: Heaven seems a bit like that, doesn't it, the Christian heaven?

S: Yes. Well, it seems much worse than that, because some Christian writers have even said that part of the enjoyment, part of the entertainment, if you like, in heaven will be when you look down and see people suffering in hell and you enjoy the spectacle. It seems incredible, but this is what people like St. Augustine have actually written. He says: 'How will I laugh and how will I rejoice when I see these people all burning in hell, all these foolish people who rejected Christianity, etc. etc. I shall really rejoice in triumph over them', he says. It makes you realize that Christianity has led into a really - well, it's worse than negative, almost diabolical state of mind sometimes.

Viramati: Would the Enlightened mind, then, or Enlightened person always be having an effect on the world, in a sense?

S: Well, yes; yes, by virtue of the fact that he exists at all, he would be having an effect. But one must be careful how one thinks of this. In the case of the Enlightened mind, one could say - and this takes us back to what we were talking about yesterday - the sort of effect is quite different from, say, a material effect. Even an Enlightened person can't lead you on the spiritual path against your will. It's not as though he's bombarding you with his spirituality

and you cannot but succumb in the long run: no, it is not like that. He represents a permanently available opportunity which he may keep constantly before you, and the fact that he is there keeping before you constantly that opportunity might irritate you, but he cannot force you; his influence does not represent any kind of force. You may experience it as such because you feel it to be threatening, etc., but he himself is not in fact exerting any force, and you can go on resisting indefinitely, as long as you wish: it's up to you. So one mustn't think of the Enlightened person as exerting this gradual, irresistible effect so that you have just no choice - not in terms that you see that there is no choice, but the fact that no choice is allowed you, as it were - not that.

Uttara: This is why you say the world does definitely need Bodhisattvas around to make the ideals known, to make ...

S: Oh yes, certainly, yes. Because the majority of people will not be able to think of them for themselves, or will not think [71] of them for themselves. So one needs Bodhisattvas around, in the sense that one needs people around who will bring these matters to the attention of others, who may well be able to appreciate them when they are brought to their attention, but who perhaps could not have thought of them, or thought about them, if just left to their own unaided devices.

Sona: Can you say that an Enlightened being, after his Parinirvana, still has an effect? Is the effect different, or is it - ?

S: Well, this depends on whether the Enlightened person can be described as existing, or not existing, or both, or neither; so one could say of the effect - one cannot say that there is no effect, or that there is an effect, or both, or neither. It's as subtle as that, so to speak.

Sona: I was just thinking, in the verses in the Puja of Entreaty and Supplication, ...ing the Buddhas ...

S: But then again it is said that the Buddha during his lifetime cannot be described as existent or non-existent or both or neither; so after death. But during his lifetime, even though he is neither existent nor non-existent nor both nor neither, there is an effect for those who open themselves to it; so one can say, in the same way, the fact that after his death the Buddha is neither existent nor non-existent nor both nor neither does not preclude there being a tangible effect. But it is not the tangible effect of someone who is existent, as distinct from being non-existent, or both existent and non-existent, or neither existent nor non-existent; nonetheless there is an effect.

Asvajit: But can that be said of any being - that he is existent, or not, or both, or neither?

S: It could, but nonetheless there is an effect.

: Sounds like you're getting something not only for nothing but for not-nothing. (Laughter)

S: Well, no: nor both, nor neither. Well, that goes back again to what we were talking about yesterday, that you cannot fix anything as definitely this or definitely that. Perhaps one can only really speak in terms of energies, not in terms of existent things which don't change.

Ray: In the commentary to this book, Mr ... has said that he believed the reason for the decline in Buddhism, particularly in the Theravadin countries, was that there weren't any developed people. It seems to indicate what you said.

S: Well, yes, I'd go so far as to say you couldn't even say that the reason for the decline was that there were no developed beings. If there are no developed beings, that is decline. It might not have started manifesting itself yet, but that is decline. You may have the scriptures, you may have the temples, [72] you may have lots of people in yellow robes; but if there aren't any really developed people Buddhism is in a state of decline. And sometimes that is covered up - this again comes back to what we talking about earlier on about the external prosperity and the inner poverty, as it were. You might have a Buddhist country, say, in which there were magnificent temples, masterpieces of architecture; in which there might be lavish editions of the Buddhist scriptures; in which you might have armies of monks in yellow robes, and in which the whole thing was kept going by the government; but this could conceal from you the fact that there were no developed people. So here also the external richness would obscure the inner poverty. You might think, 'Oh, Buddhism is really well established in this country', but it might not in a real sense be present there at all; only present culturally speaking. It would be a cultural presence, not a spiritual one. And this is in fact the position in quite a few parts of the Buddhist world. It's the same story in Christian countries, but that, of course, is another matter, because perhaps Christians haven't got quite the same sort of ideal to live up to anyway.

: So do you think there aren't many developed people in Thailand? Sounds like you were talking about Thailand.

S: I didn't have Thailand particularly in mind; and, of course, there are quite a few Buddhist countries of which what I have just said does hold good, or would hold good, except that the situation has changed completely in the course of the last few years due to purely political reasons. But one shouldn't allow the external wealth, so to speak, in the sense of culture, to blind one to what is, relatively speaking, the inner poverty in a more spiritual sense.

Let's pause there and have our morning coffee, and we can go on afterwards to the Ten Things to be Practised.

- - - - ...

Section VII

(1) One should acquire practical knowledge of the Path by treading it and not be as are the multitude [who profess, but do not practise, religion].

S: The words in brackets seem to have been added by the editor. What sort of distinction is really being made here?

Asvajit: The conventional and real...

S: Yes; or between the spiritual, in the stricter sense, and the merely cultural. We have talked about this quite a lot within the context of the Friends in connection with the Going for Refuge, which in most Buddhist countries is so to speak a purely cultural phenomenon,

something that people just recite on certain special occasions in connection with certain festivals, but which they don't really take seriously; they don't think of it as their individual Going for Refuge, their own individual [73] commitment to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. It's just a social custom that on occasions like Wesak you all recite the words of the Refuges and Precepts together, and they don't give it a further thought. So this is the sort of thing that happens all the time: that one conforms to the culture of the group. Well, that may be quite a good, even quite a positive and necessary thing, but it is to be sharply distinguished from individual spiritual commitment. The danger arises, in a sense, when what should be a matter of individual spiritual commitment has become a matter of cultural conformity. Because Buddhism, strictly speaking, should not be simply the culture of the group: it should be simply the individual's spiritual commitment. But in the Buddhist countries of the East, where Buddhism has prevailed for hundreds of years, it has become, to use that language, the culture of the group, and is regarded by people as such, so that most people in fact are not [74] Buddhists in the sense of being individuals committed to their own individual spiritual development, but simply people who conform to and participate in the cultural manifestations of Buddhism, and they are quite unable to distinguish that from actually trying to develop as individuals. The fact that there is Buddhist culture does not mean necessarily that there is Buddhism. There may be, but it doesn't necessarily follow. That has to be looked for, as it were, separately. Very often what certain people from the East are trying to bring to the West is Buddhist culture rather than Buddhism, rather than the Dharma proper. So it's very necessary to draw this distinction.

So 'One should acquire practical knowledge of the Path by treading it, and not be as are the multitude (who profess, but do not practise, religion).' Well, so far as Buddhism is concerned, you can't really profess it but not practise it. That possibility doesn't exist in the case of Buddhism. I believe, in Christianity, in the Catholic Church, you can be a Catholic even though a non-practising one, because you can't ever leave the church; but you can't be a non-practising Buddhist - that is a contradiction in terms. If you are not trying to evolve as an individual, then you cease to be a member of the Sangha, of the spiritual community, even if you were one before by virtue of the fact that you were trying to evolve as an individual. There's no such thing as a nominal Buddhist or an honorary member of the Sangha.

Sona: Probably the word 'practical' is brought in here to counteract any tendency towards just theoretical - if you spend all your time studying the Path and not actually treading it.

S: Right, yes. Presumably the knowledge of the path that you acquire as a result of your actually trying to tread that path, to practise that path. I must say that I've been frequently horrified by the extent to which, with some Eastern Buddhists, a purely nominal membership of Buddhism (to use that expression at all) is just mistaken for the real thing. People really think that they are Buddhists, and that they are engaged in Buddhist activities when you can see quite clearly they are not doing anything of that sort at all; that they in fact are not Buddhists. They are not involved with Buddhism. They may be very active and very busy and buzzing about from here to there, but their activity does not amount to any activity on behalf of Buddhism. It has a purely social, cultural and political significance. It has no spiritual significance at all.

Sona: Were you thinking of India particularly?

S: No, I wasn't.

Asvajit: I got the impression when you were talking about Malaysian Buddhism that it fell into that category.

S: I was only there for a few days, but I certainly did get the impression, especially in Penang - in fact, I was told this by some of our young Buddhist contacts - that much of the Chinese-type Buddhism in Penang was of simply cultural and ethnic significance.

Sona: What definitions would you apply as the difference between a practising and a non-practising Buddhist?

S: Well, with the proviso that a non-practising Buddhist is a contradiction in terms, it's a question of group activities. Buddhism is regarded as something contributing to group solidarity, in this case to the solidarity of the Chinese community - especially to that of the more well-to-do section of the Chinese community, the business section of the community, the respectable section of the community, and so on. They are the people who are involved with the running of the temples and with their activities, and so on. The so-called religious activities are part of an attempt to maintain the status quo.

Alaya: There's a woman who brings bean sprouts to "Oranges", and she's actually from Taiwan, I think; and I was talking to her, and she thought we couldn't be Buddhists as we weren't brought up in a Buddhist country, and yet she was a Buddhist because she was brought as a Buddhist. And once a year she made offerings to the family - to her parents and ... the family that had died; and she was a Buddhist. And she didn't really see how we could be.

S: It's interesting also that that's the one thing they did: made offerings to the ancestors, the deceased relations. It shows to what extent it is bound up with the group. But with Chinese Buddhists, generally Buddhism has become, it seems, mainly a matter of funeral ceremonies, which are held on a very grand scale so as to reflect the prestige and wealth and so on of the family concerned.

Vajradaka: In some areas of Kyoto in Japan you get parks filled with these toas(?), which are like kind of gates(?), and it's just one after another as you walk along the path, and they're all kind of monuments to people. And in some cases that's seen [75] as people's main religious practice, at least as far as I could gather - getting the money together to put them up in the Shinto temple grounds.

S: Well, Shinto is an ethnic religion, so one can't quarrel with that so far as Shinto is concerned. The same with Hinduism. But Buddhism professes to be a universal religion: that is to say, a religion which is concerned with the development of the individual as an individual. So if Buddhism becomes exclusively preoccupied with purely group and ethnic concerns, then it represents a degeneration.

: Ethnic religion is concerned with what?

S: It's concerned essentially with the preservation of the group. Well, in a way there is nothing wrong with the preservation of the group - certainly the group needs to be preserved - but, as we were saying yesterday, the point is to be clear in one's thinking and not to confuse group values with individual values. It's not that the group, or the group values, are wrong on their

own level, but when individual values are degraded to the level of group values and confused with group values, then that is wrong.

(End of Side)

Tape 4, Side 2

When you, for instance, think that you are a Buddhist because you were born in a Buddhist country and make offerings to your ancestors once a year, that represents a degeneration. But there is a place for that sort of thing, certainly, making offerings to one's ancestors; but that is part of the group activities, part of the ethnic cult. It does not necessarily conduce to individual development, and it is that with which a spiritual teaching like Buddhism is primarily concerned. So you are not necessarily being a good Buddhist just because you are keeping the family going, or keeping the group going, or keeping society going, or helping maintain the status quo, etc. The temples and the monks, very often, are just there to service the group, if you see what I mean, rather than to devote themselves to their own development as individuals. They cater to the group requirements of those who call themselves Buddhists, or who say that they are born Buddhists. So one must sharply distinguish this sort of thing from the actual practical knowledge of the Path, which one acquires by treading it.

In a way, it's a great mistake - in fact, it's a misfortune, in the strict sense, that there's been a tendency in some areas for what I've called universal religions to take over the functions of ethnic religions and then to become identified with them. It would be much better if the universal religion were to remain quite distinct and separate from the ethnic religion, which seems also to be needed. Do you see what I mean? As it was, say, in ancient Greece and in the days of the Roman Empire. You had your local cults and celebrations and festivals, which was essentially [76] a group activity and recognized to be such. That had its place, a positive place; but you also had, say, the mysteries and your philosophical teachings, which were definitely for the individual, and which were not mixed up with the popular cults. So that is all what I regard as part of paganism, in a positive sense: your paganism should be kept separate from your spiritual teachings, separate in the sense of being distinguished from them, not necessarily isolated from them. For instance, Christianity, which is in a way a universal religion, in England today functions almost entirely as an ethnic cult. Someone once said that the Church of England was simply the Conservative Party at prayer. That is the sort of thing I mean. One of the main duties of the clergy is to get everybody to fight when there's a war by telling them it is God's war, and things like that. They are concerned with national self-preservation. So national self-preservation may be a very a admirable thing, a very necessary thing, but it's got nothing to do with the spiritual development of the individual.

So I think a great deal of confusion is created by the fact that in many areas, including Buddhist ones, the universal religion has sunk, as it were, to the level of an ethnic religion. In the case of Christianity it's partly because Christianity itself, rather foolishly, has stamped out the ethnic religion. Buddhism has never done that, but in the case of Buddhism it's been rather the opposite sort of thing that has happened: Buddhism has been, very often, over tolerant of the ethnic cults, and they have eventually overgrown Buddhism itself.

Asvajit: It seems to have happened in Ceylon.

S: Yes. Buddhism has got nothing against the worship of devas, it only says: This doesn't

contribute to your individual development. If you want to worship devas, if it contributes to the wellbeing of the community, if it's part of your community's cultural activities, fair enough, as long as it doesn't, for instance, involve violence to other living beings, as when, say, you perform animal sacrifices. With that exception, Buddhism has no objection to ethnic cults and pagan religions, as it were. But it just points out that individual spiritual development is quite another thing.

: Do you think that that point of view, Bhante, will in a way ... advantage in the West because we've got less of a ... Buddhism in a way quite fresh, well, we haven't got to extricate it from group cultures so much as might be necessary in the East?

S: That's true in a way, but we are still faced by the problem of group culture, because we don't have in England, say, any group culture - any, say, ethnic tradition uncontaminated by Christianity. We don't have any paganism. And it's as though something of that sort is necessary as a sort of healthy basis for the development of the spiritual life. We've only got a maimed and distorted ethnic tradition; maimed and distorted because, to some extent, it represents a survival from [77] pre-Christian times, but what has survived has very often been distorted or fragmented, or warped, one might say; or else one has got something in the guise of Christianity but which is actually ethnic. So the position isn't very easy or straightforward. One hasn't got a straightforward healthy paganism to provide a basis corresponding in the group to the happy, healthy and human individual, to provide a basis for the development of Buddhism.

Ross: I'm still not quite clear about this. Can you give some examples of this actual healthy paganism?

S: Ah: well, you see, you've got to maybe go back to the Greeks. It's to a great extent to do with nature and the forces of nature. For instance, you go in many countries, say, especially in India, you find all sorts of little shrines to nature spirits. It's as though people are very aware of the forces of nature and feel some definite relation with them, and it's as though they feel they've got to adopt a definite attitude towards them. So we don't have anything of that sort in Britain - not as it were officially; only as archaeological remains. But in countries which have got this strong ethnic tradition, they do have this. So in Catholic countries they've got something like that, but it's only - it's Christianity, which supposedly is a universal religion, functioning as an ethnic religion. You've got crucifixes all over the place, which is quite out of place, so to speak. You see what I mean? You don't have little wayside shrines to, say, the god of the grove or the nymph of the spring; you don't have those sort of things. And all this is bound up with a different attitude towards nature itself, towards man himself even, on the part of Christianity, a quite negative attitude.

I think we've got so much out of touch with this, we hardly realize what it is that isn't there. Supposing in, say, the village there were shrines to local spirits and things like that - which perhaps people didn't take all that seriously, but they did represent a certain feeling for the place, for nature, and even for human life. We just don't have all that. It represents a certain kind of consciousness of nature itself, a sort of positive attitude towards it, and a positive attitude towards ourselves, especially, say, our own physical bodies as a part of nature. Well, Christianity has spoiled all that, as it were, and instead of the comparatively innocent shrines has given one these ghastly crucifixes which one sees set up all over the place along the roadside in some of the Catholic countries.

: Why did they have the crucifixes set up? Is it a sort of carry-on from the previous pagan religions?

S: It must be. They have deliberately set out to replace pagan shrines and memorials by Christian ones, yes.

John R.: Is that co-opting the paganism, sort of thing.

[78]
S: Well, no, it hasn't actually co-opted it, because in co-opting it they've ruined it. It ceases to be paganism. You could hardly describe those crucifixes as pagan. They are neither pagan nor really spiritual, from a Buddhist point of view.

Asvajit: They seem to bear no relation to the actual spirit of the place at all.

S: Right, yes. Ethnic religion is very local.

: In Tibet, weren't there lots of chortens and prayer wheels set up?

S: This true, yes. In some ways, in Tibet they almost went to the opposite extreme: there was the indigenous Bön cult, which was reformed in accordance with Buddhism - well, they eliminated things like animal sacrifice. But perhaps in Tibet, I feel, Buddhism functions too much on the ethnic level, but on the other hand, yes, there was a lot of activity on the purely spiritual level, so there wasn't too much of an imbalance. But in some other parts of the Buddhist world the imbalance became very great indeed, and Buddhism seems to have functioned almost entirely as an ethnic religion. Though not in principle; in principle it was a spiritual teaching, and the possibility was always there that somebody who wanted to follow it as a spiritual teaching could do so.

: It's quite interesting what you've just said about how perhaps there's a correlation between where the paganism was at its height and the spiritual development was at its height, whereas perhaps where there's been decline in the spiritual there was also quite a sparse paganism anyway, wasn't there?

S: Well, you see, I think the extreme example is Protestantism, which is not really a spiritual tradition at all, and which on the other hand has eliminated the pagan elements even more completely than Catholicism. So this is why Protestant countries in the West are impoverished and sterile in a quite remarkable degree, and why also human nature, in a way, has been forced to take a completely different direction, and developed in the direction of secularism. And also the development of, let's say, the secular arts, that is to say arts not directly related to any spiritual tradition. You see in the Protestant West especially, the arts gradually emancipating themselves completely from any spiritual tradition, so that we get the drama, secular poetry, the novel, music and so on - well, in the case of music you can see, you can trace quite clearly the process of it becoming emancipated - if emancipated is the word - from any kind of spiritual or religious connection.

Vajradaka: Can you just say a little bit more about why Protestantism isn't a spiritual tradition, or how it ceased to be, or how it never became a spiritual tradition? - when it cut out, or what its -

[79]
S: Well, the name itself, though it was only attached to it later, tells you part of the story. It's 'protestant', it protests; it is as it were negative, it started off as a protest against the abuses of the Catholic Church, and it tried to get back to the Gospels but in most cases it didn't take them very seriously and went back more to the Old Testament, and the rather savage type of religion represented there; emphasized morality in a very narrow sense. Also, because it was anti-Catholic and was against the corruptions of the Catholic Church, quite rightly, it often threw away the baby with the bathwater. For instance, it rejected monasticism, so it was left only with the family life, which wasn't a very favourable environment for the development of anything of a spiritual nature. And Protestants generally seem to have been very literal-minded people, even more so than the Catholics were, so they got rid of quite a few of the colourful elements in Catholicism, even one might say the warmer, more devotional elements. It certainly got rid of monasticism in any form, and that meant that they weren't really left with very much. They were left with morality, especially social morality, and they were left with the Bible; they repudiated tradition, and the Bible they interpreted rather literally; so one got a really narrow, impoverished version of Christianity with almost no pagan elements associated with it at all. But if you go to, say, Italy, or even France, I think, you find a somewhat different type of attitude to religion generally: it is a more colourful and warmer affair, even though it may not be very spiritual.

I think one can very easily tell the difference, just by going into churches of different denominations. I remember when I went to Holland for the first time, went to Delft and saw what's called the Nieuwekerk there, the 'new church' which was built in the sixteenth century: it was built just before the Reformation, but at the time of the Reformation it was turned from a Catholic church into a Protestant church. It's an enormous place, like a cathedral, and you got the impression that it had been gutted, quite literally gutted, eviscerated: the altar, of course, and all the ornaments and decorations and images, had been taken out, so it was just a shell, a sort of whitewashed shell; but where the altar was originally, there was an enormous black marble tomb to one of the rulers of the Netherlands, and it was almost as though - the impression I got was as though Protestantism worshipped death. In the place of the altar and in the place of the sacraments, let's say, they had just in that very place erected this great big black marble tomb to this departed ruler. It was as though they were worshipping a corpse, in fact: they put this corpse where the altar used to be. And then, halfway down the nave to one side there was a preacher's pulpit with chairs around it, as though just talking, just preaching had taken the place of anything more vital and more colourful. That was the impression that one got. And I remember Vajrakumara happened to be with me, and Vajrayogini was showing us around: Vajrakumara, after a few minutes, started feeling quite ill, and had actually to leave, he just couldn't stay in the building. And Vajrayogini was quite puzzled by this, so I was trying to explain to her how it felt to us. It was quite different from [80] a Church of England church, which stands a bit midway between, say, Catholicism and the extreme Protestantism. Dutch Protestantism is, of course, Calvinistic, which is the bleakest form of Protestantism. But it was really quite an extraordinary experience. It's as though Christianity itself, which originally was some kind of spiritual tradition, had been really reduced to something very, very attenuated, and completely divorced from any of these as it were more pagan ethnic elements.

So this is what religion means in Protestant countries, usually: social morality, biblical fundamentalism, puritanism perhaps, or at least a touch of it, and all the rest of it. So no wonder people are at sea. No wonder they've got a rather unfavourable impression of religion,

and don't even really know what a spiritual tradition is.

So the situation for us is not simply one of being careful not to confuse the universal religion, in the sense of what is to be practised by the individual as such for the sake of his individual development; it's not just that we should avoid the danger of confusing that with group values and group conformity and paganism. For us the situation is much more complex than that. It's very difficult for us to form a picture, certainly from indigenous material, of what a spiritual life and spiritual tradition is, and we've got no real experience of paganism at all. That just doesn't exist in England, and probably doesn't exist in the West. It exists to some extent in India and other places, but certainly not in the West. And all this going off to Stonehenge and these pseudo-Druids having their processions is just laughable: it's just a mockery of the real thing, nothing to do with the real thing.

Here and there, of course, in England, in the villages, there are a few pagan survivors, but they are very peripheral, and they've only got a sort of folksy value, not anything more than that.

So, on the one hand, we don't know how to be pagans, and of course on the other we don't know how to be individuals. Do you see what I mean? So we are in rather a mess, aren't we? The strange thing is that one of the things we will have to do after becoming aware of the possibility of spiritual life, and after trying to become an individual, is at the same time to try to recreate for ourselves the foundation of paganism from which it ought to have been possible for us to have started. It's like when someone grows up and is trying to develop himself as a human being, and he discovers that when he was born he was a wretched little abortion, and not a real human being at all, and has got to as it were go back and work on himself from that point of view, in that sort of way. He realizes he isn't a normal human being, he's deformed, and he's got to undo that at the same time that he's trying to develop further. That's the sort of psychical, or psychological-cum-spiritual, position that we are in. Some of us escaped better than others, but some have not escaped at all. So you've got to work as it were at both ends: on the one end you've got to work at trying to be more and more of an individual, imbued with spiritual values, and on the other [81] end you've got to work at being a happy and healthy pagan. It isn't easy, is it, to have to work in that double way? I do see, among the very much younger generation as it were, those who are probably under 20, that they are beginning to emerge as little pagans to some extent, so that's quite hopeful; but I think for anybody much over 20, there's not much hope of paganism for them except in a slightly artificial way. Though maybe those who are in their early 20s aren't nearly so badly off as, say, those who are in their middle 30s or middle 40s. For them there is just no hope! Not as pagans; as Buddhists, yes, but paganism is quite a good foundation for being a Buddhist.

Uttara: I feel it's like nourishment.

S: Yes, it's like manure. (Laughter)

Anyway, any further comments on that? 'One should acquire practical knowledge of the path by treading it, not be as are the multitude (who profess, but do not practise, religion).'

Of course, we have another phenomenon in the West - you have them in the East, too, though he's more under control there - that is to say the intellectual who knows all about Buddhism,

knows all about the path, because he has read the appropriate literature, but doesn't actually try to tread it. That sort of person also must really be distinguished from the one who is actually practising the Dharma.

Dipankara: People who attend the Buddhist Society are like that. I remember at the opening of Sukhavati, when other Buddhists came along, there were quite a few people from the Buddhist Society, who were quite scornful in their attitude that our knowledge of the Dharma wasn't - we didn't go and study it literally and know the texts - that someone without those qualifications should conduct meditation classes.

S: Well, it's as though you are not entitled to conduct meditation classes, or even meditate, unless you know the whole history of Buddhism and the teachings of all the schools. But what about the Buddha's own disciples? What did they do? In their day there was no history of Buddhism to know anyway, there was no Abhidharma, there was no Madhyamika, there was no Yogachara, there was no Zen. So how did they get on? They just meditated; in other words, they did just what you are doing, as it were. But they don't see that. But it's as though the study of Buddhism has become the screen, not to say the camouflage, for the fact that you are not practising Buddhism. This is the great danger here. I saw much of that when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, and having quite a close contact with the Buddhist Society and in fact taking classes there. This is very much the sort of thing that I found. Perhaps it was even more so then. It was extraordinary, the dry intellectual - well, it wasn't real intellectuality, not that they had powerful minds, powerful intellects and really thought about things: no, it was just sort of academic and scholastic. They just read a lot of [82] books and worried over them, [they didn't] actually practise. It was worrying over what they read, it wasn't really thinking about it. If they'd really thought about it they would have seen at once that Buddhism was primarily something to be practised. They seemed actually not to see that, it's really strange. It seemed not to dawn upon them. It did in a way, because they could give lectures about it - that Buddhism was something to be practised; but they never actually got around to practising it. That was the extraordinary thing. But they could give lectures about Buddhism being a very practical religion, not like Christianity, and that you had to practise it, but they confined themselves to reading the books about it and to giving lectures upon it. But they could not see that they themselves were not practising it; because, as the idiom goes, they were so much 'in their heads', that is to say they identified themselves so much with their thinking that they thought that when they were thinking something they were doing it. There are quite a lot of people like this in the West, especially, say, in these sort of circles: they really cannot see the difference between thinking of doing something and actually doing it. They are so much identified with their thinking. They really think that when they are thinking of doing something they are doing it; they cannot see that that is not in fact the case.

Ross: It's almost even worse than thinking, in a way, because if they had to base their lives on logic you've got some kind of comeback at them, you can work your way round it; but they won't even accept that, a lot of them.

S: No, you can't very easily have a discussion - it isn't a question of bringing logic into play. They don't have, very often, sufficiently active minds for that to be possible.

Viramati: I remember on opening day at LBC I actually heard a woman from the Buddhist Society saying to someone else that 'The difference between us and the FWBO is that they put it into practice, and we don't practise it.' She actually said that.

S: Oh, good. Well, there is one woman coming along now from the Buddhist Society, so it might have been that same one. But it's true. Except that their talking about it, even, isn't always accurate.

Vajradaka: One man on that same day said to Nagabodhi: 'Well, I really do try and practise the five Noble Truths'! (Laughter)

S: That shows that their study isn't always ...

Vajradaka: Nagabodhi kept a straight face.

S: I told him not to put that in the Newsletter.

So it isn't easy, really, to practise the Dharma in the West, and this is one of the reasons why I feel that one needs to create that total environment within which to practise it. You need [83] also to create not only a spiritual community; you need to create a positive group, so that you as the individual exist, first of all, within the spiritual community - that is to say, if you are trying to develop as an individual - and then that spiritual community exists within a positive group, and that positive group exists within the society at large, the group in the ordinary sense. But if you were just a naked, unprotected individual in the midst of the group as it is, you don't really stand much of a chance.

Sona: Do you think that Buddhism could flourish in a more primitive society, say like the Polynesian Islands, where there may be a high degree of ethnic ... maybe the odd island where Christian missionaries haven't made much impact?

S: I think it would be very difficult to find such an island. But I'm not convinced that it would necessarily be easier there, because - well, paganism has its limitations, and I think it would be rather doubtful whether any of those people, even if they were pagan rather than Christian, would be able to rise to the level of individuality. That is the impression I get. In New Zealand there are quite a lot of Maoris, but I think we hardly have had a Maori along to the FWBO, and they have the reputation, the majority of them, of being interested just in beer and women, and that's all - there's not much in the way of cultural activity going on among them. That's the impression that one gets. They've been superficially Christianised. They've got some pagan attitudes still of a more positive nature, but there doesn't seem to be any sort of spiritual superstructure, as it were, and Christianity hasn't been able to provide anything of that sort; it's only introduced Christianity in quite a superficial form, a highly, even intensely, Westernized form, and has tended to discourage paganism, though not with complete success. Whether the FWBO will be able to build upon what remains of that indigenous pagan tradition, I don't know. That remains to be seen.

Sona: It seems as though it's perhaps easier to ... grow as individuals within more evolved civilizations that have even been crippled by Christianity, than in civilizations that are still primitive.

S: It would seem to be so. Not that there are very many of those civilizations left; they've been more or less crushed, like the Red Indians in America.

Sona: It's surprising also that there's very few Africans, given that Africa is quite varied

anyway; but there's very few Africans who when they come to this country show any interest at all.

S: Well, those who do get involved in any religious activities seem to go in for the Pentecostal cults, and Buddhism it seems is a bit tame for them. In India, of course, you do get quite a bit of ethnic religious activity, but it's also bound up very much with the caste system.

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Sona: What about somewhere like Egypt? Do you think that ...

S: Well, I think there's very little - Egypt first of all was Christianised, and then Islamized; I don't think there's much left of the ancient Egyptian traditions in any form. Yes, there are a few survivors in the villages; people wear amulets, etc. But nothing really very meaningful or healthy. As for the modern Greeks, I think probably in some ways the less said about them the better.

Ray: There are a lot of African tribes and Red Indian tribes that, from what I've read ..., seem to be very group-conscious, and not individual-conscious. Their feelings seem to be directed towards the group.

S: Yes, this is what happens on the level of what I call ethnic religion and paganism. This is quite a healthy thing, and it's healthy from the point of view of the growing individual, in the sense that if you've grown up in that sort of environment, a positive, healthy group, you do grow up with a feeling of security and confidence and positivity, and that is a very good preparation, a very good foundation, for your development as an individual. You've grown up, say, in touch with nature, you've grown up in touch with your own physical body, and so on.

Sona: There seems to still be something lacking, doesn't there, the aspiration towards individuality?

S: Right, yes. So the best combination would seem to be a combination of a genuine ethnic culture, let us say, with a genuine spiritual tradition; the ethnic culture being open-ended, so to speak, in relation to the spiritual tradition, so that the individual could pass freely from the one to the other when he was ready to do so.

Vajradaka: That seems to be very important: the open-endedness.

S: Yes, but it's as though there are the ethnic cults in many parts of the world still, despite Christianity and Islam, but they are not usually open-ended. This was the great advantage in the case of the ancient Greeks and the Romans, with the mystery religions, especially those of Greece, and what were called the philosophies, the philosophical teachings, which were in many ways spiritual paths. The two existed side by side in perfect peace and harmony; they didn't get in the way of each other, because it was well understood that they performed different functions. But Christianity and Islam have always wanted to wipe out the pagan cults, and they have largely succeeded in doing it, and have replaced them with a spurious ethnic cult which was in fact a degenerated form of Christianity. Buddhism has not tried to wipe out the ethnic cults, but has unfortunately often become indistinguishable from them,

and has lost its own individuality, its own identity, as a Buddhist spiritual teaching and spiritual tradition in many areas.

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Sona: Would it be possible to speed up the process of development, say, in a fairly pagan society that hadn't reached the point of producing people that had some degree of spirituality or aspired towards it? Or is it just a process that is a bit dependent almost on nature?

S: Well, it would be possible to speed up the process by the introduction of people who were already individuals, and if they started interacting in a positive way with those healthy people, let's say, they could certainly be stimulated, and be enabled to develop as individuals themselves in some cases. But one would have to be very careful how one went about it, so that there was a sort of natural growth and transition, and that one didn't present the spiritual as something which was opposed to the natural, in the way that Christianity has done.

Sona: So it would take quite a long time, several generations.

S: It would, possibly. Though maybe in even one generation you could have an effect on at least a few people, and produce at least a few individuals.

Viramati: I suppose the ethnic religion would need to be infused with the spiritual tradition so people don't just get stuck in that and can't see beyond it?

S: Yes, or at least open-ended, and this is certainly something that one finds in India, that the ethnic cults are very strong - Hinduism is very strong - but people on the whole are quite open with regard to the possibility of a higher spiritual development, even if they don't feel that it is for them.

Viramati: I recently came in contact with a woman, she'd been involved in, I'm not sure what it is, 'EST' or something like that, and she said she seemed to have got fairly healthy and happy but she couldn't see that there was anything beyond that, that was as far as horizons went. It seemed that you could get that far, but unless you had the ideal, even at that level, they just got stuck there and it wouldn't go any further.

S: You find with some of the encounter groups and psychotherapies - yes, they seem able to able to help some people at least to become happy, healthy and human. But then there's nothing beyond that. And sometimes it's almost as though there needs to be a spiritual ideal beyond, even for you to be able to be happy, healthy and human once you've reached a certain level of selfconsciousness. Otherwise you might say, 'Why should I be happy, healthy and human?' - assuming that you're not already. It's as though you need a reason for it. But if you can see the happy, healthy and human as a stepping stone to the spiritual ideal, you have as it were a reason to be happy, healthy and human. It's a stage in your overall development. It's as though you need to be convinced first of all of the possibility, and even the necessity, of that overall development, which would include the happy, healthy and human.

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Ross: It seems to be quite a problem with a lot of people, because they've got this feeling towards that kind of healthiness, but because they've got no basis underneath it they sort of wallow about in it. It seems quite common that people feel they ought to be sort of like that,

but nothing more.

S: You see, in the normal way, previously one would have just grown up happy, healthy and human because one belonged to a positive group and a strong ethnic culture, so to speak; and by the time selfconsciousness, or the beginnings of self-consciousness, had dawned, one would already be in enjoyment of that happy, healthy and human nature. But now, you see, selfconsciousness dawns, for one reason or another, in one way or another, and when it dawns one thing that we become aware of is that we are not happy, healthy and human; so this is why, from that position of selfconsciousness, perhaps a rather precarious self-consciousness, we have to develop as it were up spiritually and down ethnically, pagan-ly, at the same time.

Vajradaka: Maybe that's the reason why so many gestalt therapists have broadened out gestalt therapy, so that they try not to limit it to just being therapy, but at the same time they can't really see a distinction between the psychological and the spiritual. They see the need for both, in a way. It's a bit confusing talking to them about it, when they don't have that distinction.

S: So it makes the situation for us in the West, especially the Protestant West, perhaps, quite difficult, in that when we become self-conscious we not only wake up to the need to develop spiritually, but wake up to the fact that we ought to have developed humanly, but have in fact not done that; so we have to work on both at once to provide the spiritual development with a really adequate foundation.

Sona: It seems as though it would be easier in Westernized countries, where in a way the countryside itself is not so highly cultivated, and it's left much more natural, because [with] that sort of element, being in touch with nature, it'd be much easier to develop.

S: Well, it's as though in countries like England and, say, Holland,

(End of Side)

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Tape 5, Side 1

nature is domesticated and man himself is domesticated. When I say man I mean the male of the species is very much domesticated. He's become just a house-trained animal. Well, yes, quite literally; I knew a family in which the wife did not allow her husband ever to sit in the sitting-room, because when he sat in the sitting-room, on the settee, he disarranged the cushions, and she just couldn't have that. On very special occasions, a wedding reception or something, he was allowed to sit in the sitting-room, but she used to spread a sheet of newspaper on the settee or on the armchair, so that he shouldn't dirty it with his trousers. It's really to be domesticated like a dog, isn't it?

Sona: Sometimes you get the feeling also it's like there's no room to be a man. If you've got a bit of wild countryside, it would be at least like an aspect of exploration and so on.

S: Yes. All you've got is this cosy little nest, where you have to be careful where you sit down.

Sona: Careful which roads you walk down; not allowed to walk in the fields, the countryside.

S: So I think the as it were domestication of the countryside reflects the domestication of man himself. Your life is like that.

Sona: Do you think it's that way round, actually?

S: Well, they both probably went along together. If there's no wild countryside, there's nowhere where you can get away to, so nowhere where you can be wild, as it were; you are always under constraint, you're always domesticated, you're always having to wipe your feet on the mat before entering the house, you're always having to think about things like that, you're always having not to raise your voice, always having not to make a noise, always having not to be dirty, always having not to be wild. Well, what a life for a man! That's your life, if you're not careful.

Ray: Don't you have to strike a balance, though, between that ...

S: ... they sort of compensate. They go on to rock concerts, and they just watch these people on the stage or whatever it is being a wild ...

Uttara: Smashing up their guitars ...

S: Right. So then they go home, wiping their feet on the carpet.

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Ray: Don't you have to strike a balance between that and what we were saying earlier about having some consideration for your ... things and other people's things? There has to be some sort of balance.

S: Well, you see, if there are so many other people around, and there are so many things which these so many people have, and if you have to be so careful in so many ways about all these things, well, then, the element of freedom and spontaneity is completely excluded.

Sona: You see it in football fans, just ... opportunity to be ...

S: They're just like over-reacting to ..., yes. It's in a way understandable, in a way it's almost healthy, or at least it shows the possibility of healthiness is there.

Uttara: Maybe that is most people's substitute for paganism, football.

S: Well, it's not exactly a substitute; it isn't - after all, football is largely a spectator sport, and one of the characteristics of paganism is that you join in things yourself, everybody joins in.

Viramati: Vandalism ...

S: There aren't any spectators.

John R.: But paganism itself wasn't anti-social, was it?

S: No, it wasn't anti-social, no.

John R.: So you can't equate it to vandalism?

S: No, because it was an expression of society as a whole.

: Right, ... very much into...

S: There's no possibility of vandalism in a tribal culture, it doesn't exist. There's no need for it, you could say.

Sona: Vandalism is just a reaction.

Alaya: Apparently they've found that vandalism is normal, healthy behaviour for young boys. It's not abnormal.

S: Rubbish! I'd say that's rubbish. It's only healthy in a completely unhealthy situation.

Alaya: In cities, that's - All boys, a whole cross-section, are vandals, it's not just the oppressed and ...

S: Yes, it doesn't represent social deprivation or lack of educational opportunity.

[89]
: It does represent oppression, though.

Alaya: Oh yes, from the environment.

S: Well, it represents lack of a certain kind of opportunity, a certain kind of training, a certain kind of human contact, a certain kind of tradition, a certain kind of culture. It represents the lack of all those things.

Chris: Is this confined mainly to the male of the species?

S: Vandalism? It seems to be - that most vandals, like most criminals, are male rather than female.

Chris: Because I was thinking that this domestication about the house seems very much the woman's realm, coming to ...

S: Yes, it seems to be more - well, seems to be, as far as one can tell, more natural to women, or to most women, than to men.

Uttara: I think it was Danavira read recently, a book on this subject, how man - how we became domesticated animals, the man was definitely the hunter, he was out getting food and that, whereas the woman would stay at home and she - it was something like the man put forward the theory that she wanted utensils to keep - first of all it started with putting the stuff in the ground to keep it fresh and other things like that, and so she asked for other utensils and the man built them, and more and more it just expanded into that you had fridges and other

things, and then houses, until the man who was out more as a hunter became less and less, it was staying more and more building homes and having everything surrounding them.

Sona: You mean she was making him make all these things to stop him going out hunting?

Uttara: Right, so he just became another domesticated person along with ...

S: You could also say that the more domesticated a man becomes, the less of a man he becomes, the more like a woman he becomes. And you do find that, you find some men becoming like fussy old women, even without there being actually any woman around, they take over all those sort of functions and are just as particular about their carpets and antimacassars as any woman. And they really are as it were not really men, you could say.

Uttara: Yes, there was a film ... I've seen quite recently, I was quite impressed ... by what actually happened. You have on one hand Steve McQueen trying to all the time to get away from, escape from this island, he was determined, no matter what; and you had Dustin Hoffman ... after a while he was struggling to get away a couple of times because there may have been an opportunity. But in the end he ended up pottering around his garden, and he still had the ideals of getting away, but he went [90] 'See my carrots'; but Steve McQueen was always determined to get away, in the end he got away.

S: He didn't care about the carrots.

Viramati: On the other hand, you couldn't have a jungle-type Centre; you've got to have a level of co-operation, keeping things clean etc.

S: Well, could you not have a jungle-type Centre? What about the little settlements of what we now call monks in the forest, in the Buddha's day? They kept them reasonably clean and tidy, but did they really bother about little carpets and things? Actually, if you look at the Vinaya, you see there was a tendency, apparently, in the early days, on the part of the monks, to become more and more domesticated; and you get the Buddha - by this time of course now it's just a ... to the Buddha - these developments must have taken place after the death of the Buddha - for instance, you find the Buddha in the Vinaya or the figure of the Buddha, prohibiting one after another kind of carpet. He prohibited - well, carpets were allowed, but then they started introducing carpets with fringes, so carpets with fringes were prohibited. So they had long tassels instead, so long tassels were prohibited. And then fur edgings were introduced, so fur edgings were prohibited. So there was this fight between the Buddha and his monks, with the monks trying to become more and more domesticated, and the Buddha trying to prevent it. This is the sort of impression you get.

I remember that when I was in Kalimpong I paid a visit at different times to the place where the local Roman Catholic Fathers lived, and the place where the nuns lived further down the hill. It was very interesting to see the difference. The Fathers and the monks lived quite rough and ready, but quite well. There was no tablecloth on the table, but they had plenty of good food on it; there were no curtains in the windows, and things weren't very homely; they were just sort of rough and reasonably comfortable. But when I went down to see the nuns, it was completely different. Everything, all the windows had curtains, in fact there were lots of little curtains everywhere, and little bows, little potted plants and antimacassars and lace mats and everything just so; it was very noticeable. And one of the Fathers told me that the nuns were

very disapproving where the Fathers were concerned, even though technically the Fathers were their superiors, but the nuns were very disapproving and thought that the Fathers were not very good Christians, not to say very good priests; and, horror of horrors, they actually played football with the students, and the nuns were always tut-tutting about this; they'd never think of playing netball with their girls, for instance. Oh no, the nuns were always very prim and proper. So you could see the difference, even within the context of a supposedly religious life. The nuns were so much more domesticated than the monks were, than the Fathers were.

[91]
Sona: At the same time there does seem to have to be a balance between domesticity and just having things aesthetically pleasing.

S: Yes, right; and convenient. Domesticity goes beyond aesthetic considerations and convenience. Yes, you want things convenient for living; for living in a particular way; but domesticity happens when the ends are either not the ends of an individual, they are the ends of the group - purely reproduction, everything is geared to that - or when that type of security becomes an end in itself, it ceases to fulfil any real biological or social or human function.

Sona: But it's quite pleasant, sometimes, having a bit of a ritual where you do get out the tablecloth and best china, and lay the table ...

S: Yes. But you see domesticity is when the wife is so afraid of her best tablecloth being spoiled that she will never actually allow anyone to use it, it's just folded up and kept in the drawer, you see. This is domesticity. Or when she brings it out and lays it on the table and it's actually used, she makes such a fuss about it and is so constantly reminding people not to spill anything that she spoils the enjoyment of the whole occasion. That's what I mean by domesticity. The house is so well looked after that you're not allowed to live in it, which happens with some wives, you see. I have known wives who drive their husbands out into the potting shed, and they believe that a man is just a nuisance about the house, he will only spoil things and make a mess; so if he is at home at all, he is to be driven out into the potting shed. I actually knew a woman, she was a mext-door neighbour of mine in my younger days, who used to drive her husband out of the house even in the rain to go and sit with the dog outside the kennel. I've actually heard her say, as she slammed the door: 'You go and sit there with the dog! That's all that you're fit for!' And actually he'd go and sit there with the dog, and the old dog would wag its tail. (Laughter) I've actually seen this. I can remember, because he was a policeman. (Roar of laughter.) ...and she was a little short, plump, brisk woman. She used to lay into him with a broom. We often heard her drive him out and say: 'You go and sit with the dog. That's all you're fit for', and the door would slam and he'd be locked out sometimes for hours on end. This is domestication with a vengeance, you could say. And these things do happen. These are the sort of facts of life that one sometimes has to face, at least ... in a general sociological way. Some of you may even have experienced these things, I don't know.

Anyway, let's pass on to Precept 2.

(2) By quitting one's own country and dwelling in foreign lands, one should acquire practical knowledge of non-attachment.

[92]
S: This is quite important. I think it's more than a question of non-attachment. What do you

think it is - this 'quitting one's own country and dwelling in foreign lands'?

: Objectivity.

S: Objectivity, yes.

: Maybe non-conditionedness.

S: Non-conditionedness, yes. You realize your own limitations; you look at things in a particular way, or do things in a particular way, not for any sound reason but just because you were born and brought up in a particular locality and have got into the way of doing things like that; for no other reason. So therefore the quitting of your own country and dwelling in foreign lands can be really a part, not just of someone's education, but the whole process of their becoming an individual; which means emancipating oneself from the purely local and the group. But again, of course, it means that when you go from country to country you really do go in an open-minded way, and don't just deliberately cling on to your old conditionings, your old way of doing things, regardless of where you happen to be.

Alaya: Do you think it's useful to learn another language, for the same reasons?

S: Very much so. It has been said that when you learn a new language you acquire a new soul; because every language reflects the way of looking at things of the particular people that created that language. There are some things you can say better in one language than another: some things that you can say in one language, in fact, which you cannot say in another language.

When I went to Finland, I learned that in Finnish there is no word either for 'please' or for 'thank you'; and those Finns who had been, say, to England or learned English, some of them, at least, who know that in English there are words like 'please' and 'thank you', are rather amused. They think it shows lack of manliness and straightforwardness. I remember the first time I went with Vajrabodhi into a tea shop in Helsinki, I noticed the way he spoke: it seemed very sharp, when he gave his order. So I spoke to him about this afterwards, and he said, 'They think it's very strange that the English say "Oh, two cups of tea, please". They just march in and say: "Two teas!" They never add "please" and they never say "thank you".'

Sona: They do say 'thank you' - kitos(?).

: Yes, kitos is 'thank you'.

S: Anyway, that what Vajrabodhi said... a real Finn. It's the English influence creeping in, who knows? The Indians, again - they don't say 'please' or 'thank you', for quite different reasons. But they have also got a word now, which was artificially introduced via the films, which a lot of people - [93] well, most people - still don't know. They say, instead of 'please', sukriya(?). But this is only a word that they use on films, and a few young people have taken it on. But they also don't say 'please'. They say that if they ask you to do something, if they have to request you to do it, it suggests that you are not willing to do it, which is a sort of reflection upon you which they don't want to make. And similarly they have got words for 'thank you' ... in the vocabulary, in the dictionary, but they don't actually use them, generally, because they say that that would suggest you wanted something in return for doing whatever

you did; you wanted thanks, so they don't thank you.
That's their way of looking at it.

But as you go from one country to another, you learn these things; you see these differences. And then you are just aware of your own limitations, and the limitations of your own upbringing.

Sona: It's quite strange when you meet someone who is trying to say something to you in your language, and they know what they want to say, but they can't express it, and they turn round to somebody else and they talk for a while in their own language, and they turn round and say: 'We can't say it, there isn't a word.' It's really strange.

S: It's sometimes a very fine shade of meaning, that you can only reproduce in another language if you know that other language really well; and even then it isn't a very direct translation. You have to explain, so that the other person can tell what you mean, even though it hasn't actually been literally translated.

Sona: It didn't happen in the case of one Order Member who wanted to express herself. She had to do it in her own language and then get somebody to translate. I think on some occasions he had to give two alternatives.

S: Well, this happened when somebody sent to me from Holland a translation of something that somebody else had written, and he had given alternative translations in brackets in several places, which rather affected the meaning; but actually it could be put either way.

So one can see how useful it is just to go from one country to another. If you are open to the possibility that your way of doing things, the way that you have learned in your country, isn't just the one and only right way; if you are open to the possibility that it isn't so, then travelling can be really useful to you in the process of your own individual development.
Chris: Couldn't it also be productive in getting away from your old environment, where you used to act in a certain way?

S: This is true, that's very true. Everybody knows that when you go home, to your relations and your old friends, there's always the danger that you slip into being the way that you were [94] before, and behave in the way that you were before; and they tend to encourage that, because they see you as you were before. They expect the old reactions, which aren't always forthcoming on your part. Sometimes they are, when you re-enter that environment. So a new environment very often does provide you with the opportunity of being yourself as you are now, rather than yourself as you were some time ago. But people that one has known in the past sometimes find it very difficult to accept the fact that you have changed. They won't take the change seriously. They may even think, they may even say that 'At heart you must be the same person still', and they refuse to accept the fact that you have changed, in extreme cases. I think this is especially so of relations and people that you have grown up with many years earlier.

Asvajit: It does seem that people, for instance, Order Members, who go to India and come back again undergo quite a radical change. It's quite remarkable to see them come back, how they've changed. Often - well, I can't say whether it's for the better or not, but they've changed.

S: Well, One could even say that any change is a change for the better, in a sense. At least they have shown that they can change; so if you can change, you can change for the better. I wouldn't say that anybody has actually changed for the worse.

: No, neither would I.

S: But it may in some cases be difficult to tell in what way the change for the better has taken place, in what way it was a change for the better.

Anyway, anything else to observe about this?

Uttara: 'One should acquire practical knowledge of non-attachment' from it.

S: Yes, it's more than a 'practical knowledge of non-attachment': it is, of course, non-attachment to the old scene, the old situation, the old way of doing things; but basically, to your old self. This is really the crux of the matter: by 'quitting your own country and dwelling in foreign lands', you do in fact become less attached to your old self.

Asvajit: Also, on the positive side, it's the acquisition of the new, being adaptable.

S: Well, there's the new on two levels: the new as it were on the horizontal, and the new as it were vertically. But, yes, even if you just adapt to the new on the same plane, so to speak, even that is good, as indicating a degree of adaptability and possibility of expansion. But if you can develop as a new person, a new individual in the vertical sense as a result of the stimulation you've received, so much the better. But that doesn't necessarily happen. But it's even good, within the context of the FWBO, to go from one Centre to another, to see the [95] way in which things are done at different Centres, and not to think necessarily that the way in which they are done at your Centre is the only way, or the best way; of course, in some cases it may be, but then you've got to see it objectively, not just think that because it's your Centre, or your community. Some Centres and some communities may be doing things in a better way in certain respects than some others. One has to be open to that possibility. But don't take it for granted.

English people, of course, are notorious for their insularity, and of course their capacity for carrying their insularity with them wherever they go in the world. One has perhaps to rather watch that.

Vajradaka: Sitting in the jungle with dry gin, sort of thing.

Viramati: It's funny, though, I've noticed down in Croydon you seem to get quite a lot of foreign students, and especially on the buses groups of them, and it's like a little bit of France or a little bit of Germany; they've got all these barriers up, just - it's quite strange, in a way, you just feel it, they're not opening themselves up at all; they are really closed in, to protect themselves.

S: Yes; it's like trying to create a little home from home, even if only temporarily.

: I think Australians do that when they travel round ..., they seem to go round and get drunk, very often.

S: Well, there are certain parts of London - well, parts of every big city - which are inhabited by particular people. It's said that Earls Court is a little Australia, isn't it? And you get other parts of London, say, where, in the past at least, the French have always lived, there's 'Little France' in Soho; others, for instance, Armenian Street and Greek Street, so named because they tended to be inhabited entirely by Armenians or by Greeks. And then the Jews congregated in Whitechapel, and so on. So there is this sort of tendency. But if one wants to develop as an individual one has to resist this tendency in oneself.

Sona: I hate hearing English people speak when I'm abroad. I just wish I could speak a foreign language, and not talk to them, because they will come and try and talk to you.

S: Well, perhaps they are more friendly abroad than they are at home.

Sona: It's a great pity that the English have forced their language on, especially, the rest of Europe and quite large parts of the world, because you can get by so easily without speaking the language, there's no real incentive to learn. For instance, in Amsterdam sometimes you can forget that you're in Holland; you just walk in any restaurant and say, 'Two teas, please', and they bring two teas.

[96]
S: Well, I think we ought to close there for the morning, unless there is any final point.

Tape 5, Side 1 (continued)

Day 3

(3) Having chosen a religious preceptor, separate thyself from egotism and follow his teachings implicitly.

S: Several questions arise here. First of all, there is the choosing of a religious preceptor, and then the separating of oneself from egotism and following the teachings implicitly. There are quite a few things that can be said here. On the previous retreat we did talk quite a bit about this question of choosing - choosing a religious preceptor - and the question arose whether in fact one can choose, whether it is even appropriate to speak or to think in terms of choosing. Can you choose, or are you in a position to choose? What is meant by choice? What happens when you are said to choose? etc. It's almost as though, here are all these religious preceptors - well, just as they are on such occasions as the Festival of Mind, Body and Spirit; here they all are with their stalls and their literature and their tape recorders and their coloured lights and their advertising, and you just shop around and choose one: 'I like the look of this one.' ... an article as it were, so you go in and buy him. So does it really happen like that, or can it happen like that, in the purely spiritual context? If not, what does in fact happen?

Asvajit: Maybe you think you choose, at first.

S: Well, if you choose, perhaps you do think that you choose.

Uttara: It's more of an unconscious thing.

S: Yes, this is what generally happens, it is more of an unconscious sort of thing; but by that

do you mean it's an unaware process? - in which case that would seem to mean that it doesn't really take place within a very spiritual context, or hasn't much of a spiritual significance.

Ross: Well, a spiritual relationship is based on spiritual communication.

S: Ah, yes.

Ross: So, when that happens, that happens beyond your control, really. But it's not unaware ...

S: Yes, the keynote really of the whole Precept is communication. What actually happens is you have to get into communication. At the beginning, you are just not in a position to know whether someone is a religious preceptor for you or not, you just can't know that. How could you possibly know it? Because, if you could know it, that would suggest that you were [97] in a position to assess that particular person as a religious preceptor for you; but if you were in a position to do that, you would know him so thoroughly that, in a sense, you'd have to be bigger than him, so it would mean that he was not in the position of being a religious preceptor for you. If you could choose him, he wouldn't be a religious preceptor, and if he was a religious preceptor you couldn't choose him in that way. So what you have to do, in fact what happens or what should happen is you just get into communication with somebody. You meet somebody. There's no question really of looking for a religious preceptor, to use that expression. There's no question really of hunting the guru. Somebody wrote a book about hunting the guru in India, and you got the impression of these unfortunate gurus fleeing in front of the person who is hunting them, trying to hunt them down. But this isn't really what happens at all. If you do in fact choose, if there is actually a question of choice, it means you probably haven't chosen a religious preceptor in the real sense; there is some other process. You are attaching yourself to the leader of a particular group, in other words you are attaching yourself to a particular group, and because you are attaching yourself to that group you recognize the leader of that particular group. That is quite a different thing from choosing, so to speak, a religious preceptor.

So, in the case of as it were choosing a religious preceptor, what really happens is you just come into contact, you make some sort of contact, and that deepens into communication. You have to be open; this is where the 'separating yourself from egotism' comes in. You have to be open. The other person also has to be open, and if there is that sort of mutual openness, if there is genuine communication, if there is genuine exchange, it may in due course dawn upon you that you are as it were more at the receiving end of the exchange than is the other person. You then recognize that you, in a manner of speaking, have more to gain from the other person than he has from you; that he, in a manner of speaking (and we have to be very careful how we choose our language here) is superior to you, or even more evolved than you or more developed than you; and therefore he is, as it were, in the position of being the religious preceptor and you are in the position of being the pupil or the disciple or the follower.

This sort of feeling, this sort of relationship, this sort of understanding, can only arise really within the context of some kind of meaningful human personal communication. It is not ... this going around looking for someone and then choose him as a religious preceptor: this sort of thing will only happen within a very formalized religious structure which is not necessarily identical with a natural organic spiritual structure.

'And follow his teachings implicitly'. What do you think that means, in the light of what has just been said?

Asvajit: If he is a spiritual preceptor, he will be presumably, especially at first, very careful in giving any direct advice. Therefore one has to be quite intuitive as to what in fact is implied by your communication, rather than what is directly [98] instructed. A religious preceptor would not, probably, be the sort of person who, at least at first, would say 'You do this, you do that.'

S: But that's not the emphasis to the Precept. It says 'and follow his teachings implicitly.' Is it being suggested you should just as it were blindly follow whatever he tells you, whether it's a hint or whether it's a direct instruction? Does that mean that you should follow it blindly? It says 'implicitly' - does that mean without any questioning, without any hesitation? What does that mean?

: Does it mean you should just rely on that communication that you have already established, and trust in that, and rely on that implicitly rather than perhaps ...

S: But there is a distinction between the communication on the one hand and the teaching on the other, so to speak. The teaching is something which arises within or which is given within the context of the communication. So, yes, you trust the communication. But is not that a distinct thing from as it were trusting the teaching, or trusting what is communicated? And following that implicitly - what does that mean? Putting it another way, when you have, say, a communication with someone, you trust someone, that person says something, and you follow it implicitly.

Asvajit: With all the intelligence and faith, if you like, of which you're capable, bringing all your own intelligence to bear on the situation, and not relying on everything to come from outside, but realizing that communication is something that involves two people. It involves you giving to the situation ...

S: Yes, that is all correct. At the same time, there is this emphasis on 'implicitly'. What is it? Well, usually, if you just follow someone implicitly you follow them blindly, and clearly this is not desirable, anyway within a Buddhist context. So what is the difference of meaning here? What does the use of this word tell us about the nature of the communication? Even though, say, the teaching and the following implicitly is different from the communication ... providing the context as it were, what does this word 'implicitly' suggest about the nature of the communication?

Viramati: Something more is implied.

: An ideal.

: There's a certain amount of faith involved.

: Wholeheartedly.

S: But it says 'implicitly', which suggests without any questioning, without any mistrust, without any doubt, without any conditions (?) -

[99]
: That should come later. Unless you give it a go, and then you won't know.

S: That's true. But what does it tell you?

Ray: Does it mean you don't choose a preceptor, that you feel you can do? (?)

S: In that sense, you don't even choose.

Uttara: You don't really know, in the beginning, ...

S: There is that element too, yes; there is something unfathomable, as it were, in the communication, therefore in the teaching, so that you are not in a position to do anything other than just follow implicitly. It's as though all the - what shall I say? - the doubts or hesitations or reservations have been ironed out in the process of the communication itself, so that whatever arises, whatever is as it were said in instruction within the context of that communication is something, it's as though it has been arrived at between you. It's no longer a question of him telling you to do this, but the communication has become so close that it's as though the separate identities of the two people concerned are transcended, they are completely in tune with each other, there's been a separation from egotism. So the teaching that arises within that situation is not, say, A telling B what to do, when they both see it, as it were, when the teaching, to call it that, arises within the context of that communication, when each as it were sees it simultaneously and acknowledges it as representing something to be done on the part of the disciple, as one may call him. And so the disciple simply follows that implicitly. There is no question of any discussion; that is out of place when the teaching has arisen in that way, within the context of that sort of communication. Do you see what I mean?

Uttara: So hence the ... that the Buddhas just point the way. Has that got anything to do with it?

S: Well, yes and no. It isn't that there are you standing all passive and he'll tell you what to do, and he says, 'All right: off in that direction.' Well, yes, that is possible, but it isn't in a deeper sense like that at all. For instance, supposing that - one mustn't think that the religious preceptor has as it were all the answers worked out in advance, all cut and dried ready to produce as soon as you have popped your question. Do you see what I mean? You talk it over together, you communicate about it, and as a result of your communication with someone with a wider experience or deeper insight than you, the whole thing becomes clearer and clearer to both ...

(End of Side)

Tape 5, Side 2

[100]
... and you just both see what is to be done. Maybe the teacher actually formulates it in words, because perhaps he is more skilled at that sort of thing, and he can perhaps even see the issue more clearly, but as soon as he has pointed it out you see that, yes, that is what is to be done, and you follow it implicitly, not because you are accepting his authority or you are just being obedient, but it is as obvious to you, when the communication has taken place in that way, as

it is to him, or very nearly so. If, of course, a point is reached where he can see something which you don't see, but you see that he sees it, even though you don't see it, then also you are prepared to follow, and that can be regarded as following whatever teaching he gives in that situation implicitly.

But this Precept doesn't mean quite what one might think it would mean within the formally religious context. It isn't that you just hear about so many religious preceptors, so many gurus, and you think: 'That one seems the best, the most enlightened or maybe the most easy-going; he is the one for me', so just go along, humble yourself: 'Please tell me what to do', and you just follow it out very obediently. It isn't really like that at all. It's something much more real, something much more intense, one can say, and something much more human.

: It suggests that there is no individual responsibility.

S: Yes, if you read the Precept in that more straightforward, even more superficial, manner, yes.

Vajradaka: But in fact there is responsibility.

S: Surely.

Vajradaka: In a sense it is taken by both people.

John R: It seems that the communication between the disciple and his preceptor recreates the teaching.

S: Yes, one could say that. The teaching isn't something, as I said, ready-made, cut and dried, just to be handed over on the spot. The Precept might suggest this, if one didn't go into it more deeply, where it says 'Separate thyself from egotism and follow his teachings implicitly'; as though he's got certain things labelled 'teachings' ready there for you to accept and follow, before he even appears on the scene. But it isn't really like that. There may be certain general principles, or what can be formulated as general principles, but they are to be applied in detail within the context of the living situation. And sometimes it may be very clear to everybody, not only to the teacher, to the disciple also, what are the general principles involved. The general principles are simple: non-violence and metta and all the rest of it, and individual development; everybody knows that, the disciple doesn't need to come to you to ask about those things. What he wants to know is how to apply those principles upon which you are all agreed to a specific [101] situation. This is where the difficulty comes in. It's that he wants to talk over and clarify; not to simply have these general principles enunciated to him. He's had those already.
Ray: Does this precept also apply, say, within a kalyana mitra situation?

S: Yes, one could certainly say this - that two people as it were gravitate towards each other, they get on well, and then one begins to recognize in the other a bit more than he is able to find in himself, and he thinks 'This person can be a good spiritual friend of mine, a kalyana mitra in the more technical sense.' So perhaps he approaches him and asks him, and if it is agreed by all concerned that, yes, this is in fact the situation, it is a situation of kalyana mitrata, there is the possibility of those two people getting together from time to time and working out certain things that the person who has this kalyana mitra, or kalyana mitras as it

is, may not be quite clear or sure about. It's not so much a question of teaching; it's a question of clarifying, or as John said, recreating, the teaching, when between you you manage to clarify the issues it's pretty clear to all concerned what has to be done. So the keynote is clarification. If in the course of your communication you sincerely and clearly and really clarify something, there's no need for somebody to say 'That's what you ought to do.' The situation is so clear, it's obvious to yourself, usually, what it is that you ought to do.

Ray: I get the impression from slight acquaintance with Tibetan gurus and Tibetan writers that they seem to say that you can only receive teaching from someone who is quite highly developed.

S: I'd be rather inclined to be a bit paradoxical and say you can't receive teachings from someone who is quite highly developed. You are probably only able to receive them from people who are just a little more developed than you are. If the gap is too great, it's very difficult to bridge it. I think also people sometimes like to flatter themselves that they've got the most enlightened guru and the greatest guru, because it flatters them. Among Tibetans themselves I've seen this so clearly: it's a bit of a feather in your cap that you've got the most renowned guru as your guru, and that you perhaps are one of the leading disciples. You can see here a sort of group mentality and a group attitude developing very easily. Maybe you have the faith that your particular teacher is more enlightened than others, but you can't make that a matter of group recognition, as it were.
In reading texts like this, we have to be really careful, we have to ask ourselves 'What do these Precepts mean?' Because it's almost as though we have to retranslate them; it's not enough to translate the words from Tibetan to English, even if we can do that successfully, but to translate the whole idiom, and recreate them, in fact; this is what we need to do. Translation is not enough; interpretation is not enough. It's recreation that is needed. And this applies not only to Precepts of this

sort but to all the Buddhist scriptures. Unless you recreate the [102] teachings, you can't follow them.

John R.: Why is it easier to get a teacher who is someone just a little bit more advanced? I know it is, but why is it? It seems one of the cornerstones of the Friends ..., this principle is at work.

S: Well, why is it? If that is one's own experience, one ought to be able to say.

: Because there's common ground, there's much more common ground to start with.

: The language ...

S: It's as though, for communication to be possible, you need quite a bit of common ground; you need there to be interests that you have in common, things you can talk over. But you could almost say that a person who was fully Enlightened would have very little in common with you, because he is only interested in Enlightenment, and whatever follows from that - the implications of Enlightenment. That's all he's interested in. He wouldn't be very interested in talking with you about the latest football results, or anything of that sort. Well, he might unbend a little and ... those results, and he might ask you what was happening, but ..., he wasn't really interested. Whereas someone less evolved, less Enlightened, might be able to

put on quite a good imitation of ... deceive you. So it's as though there does have to be a ... feel, feel a certain amount of common ground, not feel that that person is impossibly remote from you, or represents something that you cannot possibly attain. That is rather discouraging.

Ray: I think you notice this when you first come along to meditation classes: there are lots of things you don't understand, but as time goes by you suddenly think, 'When he said that a few months ago, I didn't understand it, but now I understand it.' It's as though you need to become familiar with terms and with the experience of the more evolved people in order to understand people.

S: There is also the point, from the point of view of teaching generally: it's not very stimulating for someone, say, who knows any subject very well, to teach it - I won't say to absolute beginners, but to people who don't know it sufficiently well for it to be possible for him to give full scope as it were to what he actually knows. So if you are being taught by someone who knows just a bit more than you, he's kept on his toes, because he also has much to learn, and sometimes he can learn in the process of teaching; and for your part you don't feel that this person knows so much about the subject that he's just wasting his time teaching you.

But to go back to what I said about learning in the process of teaching, I think this is very important, and this is why I think you can't always, or shouldn't always, make too strictly this [103] distinction between the one who teaches and the one who learns. If you really want to learn a subject, if you want to know it thoroughly, the best way of doing that really is to start teaching it. It's only when you start teaching something, and when you have to make it clear to other people, that you begin to realize how little actually you know of that subject; because, when you have to try to explain it to other people, the gaps in your own knowledge and understanding become only too obvious. So I think 'teaching', inverted commas, is a very good way of learning. So very often you get a situation in which one person may be, say, technically the teacher and the other the pupil, but both can be learning. It's not necessarily that the teacher is learning from the pupil, in the sense that the pupil is directly teaching him, but nonetheless the teacher learns within the teaching situation. And, yes, between two people, say, who aren't all that different in level or in calibre or temperament, you can get a change about in the situation, in the mutual relations between them taking place. You might find this in the course of an ordinary discussion or good communication: at one time you are on the receiving end, and at another time the other person is on the receiving end. It changes, and one must be sensitive to these subtle changes and allow them to take place; not always insist on being oneself either always on the receiving end or always on the giving end. There must be a certain flexibility. And this is where also the separation from egotism comes in; it suggests an openness on both sides.

I'm sure people who take classes at Centres find that their grasp of the Dharma or whatever it may be that they are teaching improves, their own grasp improves considerably after they've had to teach and to put things across to other people. Have any of you actually found this?

Voices: Yes.

: Giving talks is ...

S: You really have to clarify your own ideas. You learn a lot from preparing a talk or writing

an article.

: But it also occurs a bit more generally as well, anyway, because as soon as you are communicating with someone you are in a sense giving to them, in the same way that you do in teaching; so just the act of communication with someone, rather than just a formal teaching situation, is really the same thing, isn't it?

S: Well, one could say that teaching, to be real, must take place within a context of personal communication. Maybe also that is why you can't really teach more than a certain number of people at the same time. For instance, you can't really teach, say, 10,000 people. You might have your loudspeakers all over the place - this has been my personal experience in speaking to up to 100,000, even - and you can certainly lecture, you can certainly impart information and create enthusiasm, and all the rest of it; but you can't really teach. That's a different sort [104] of experience. Because, when there are too many people and the group is too large, you can no longer see them all as individuals, and therefore individual communication cannot take place. You can't really communicate with a mass of people.

Sona: This thing of learning when you're teaching can be incredibly stimulating For instance, someone asks you a question which you are a bit unclear on, and then it comes clear suddenly to you.

S: Well, by their questions and by their being dissatisfied with your rather provisional and hazy answers, you may be forced to clarify more and more, and as you do that things become clearer to you than they were before, and perhaps you don't always realize that before they were not as clear as you had thought. You had only assumed that they were clear; they had not really been clear. Now you are being forced to clarify.

So this is one of the good things about being in an active teaching situation, say, connected with a Centre. You can't work out everything on your own by going away on solitary retreat and meditating. Well, some people can, but they are very few. Most people will work things out and will attain a greater degree of clarity by discussion and teaching.

Sona: It's almost as though you're taking ideas half-baked and in that process you actually bake them, and digest them.

S: Right. Well, sometimes you take them in quite raw, you sort of swallow them, you accept them implicitly. That's all right; some people function in that way. But I really think that, as I said a while ago, communication is the key to the whole Precept, the key to the whole teaching situation. I think this is emphasized in Buddhist circles and several spiritual circles far too little. If you look after the communication, the teaching will look after itself; assuming, of course, that at least one of the parties to the communication has in fact something to communicate. So you shouldn't be too eager to find out whether somebody knows more than you, or is more advanced spiritually than you; just enter into communication; and as the communication deepens, it will become pretty obvious to both parties who, so to speak, is helping whom, or who is teaching whom.

All right, let's go on to Precept 4.

(4) Having acquired mental discipline by hearing and meditating upon religious teachings,

boast not of thine attainment, but apply it to the realization of Truth.

You remember there are these three stages: there is hearing, there is meditating upon in the sense of reflecting upon; and then there is the actual realizing of the truth of that

particular teaching. Now what do you think is meant here by [105] 'mental discipline'? Discipline is not a very popular word nowadays, is it? So what is meant by 'mental discipline'?

Asvajit: Directing one's mind.

S: Directing one's mind, yes. What is the distinction, what is the difference, say, between someone who is mentally disciplined and someone who is mentally undisciplined, really?

: Integration.

S: Yes, it is basically integration, I suppose. It's also a question of the use of energy. The mentally undisciplined person wastes mental energy, whereas the mentally disciplined person does not waste energy because he uses only the amount of energy which is required for the particular purpose. He doesn't waste energy in, for instance, worrying. He doesn't waste energy in unnecessary thinking.

Alaya: Boasting would seem to be a waste of energy, wouldn't it?

S: Boasting, yes.

Alaya: If he was boasting, he [wouldn't have] really acquired the mental discipline.

S: Do you think 'mental discipline' is a very satisfactory term?

Asvajit: Although the idea of discipline is not very popular, 'mental discipline', I feel, comes quite close to it: the sort of feeling of it.

S: But could you not say that there are two kinds of discipline - say, discipline in the positive sense and discipline in the more negative sense, which need to be distinguished? What would you say, for instance, was discipline in the negative sense?

Alaya: Alienation.

Asvajit: Punishment, retribution, all this sort of thing.

Vajradaka: In terms of oneself, it would be the forcing of one particular faculty over another faculty, reason over emotion for example.

S: Yes. So there would be a split, to begin with, and this is where perhaps the alienation would come in; and the discipline would represent simply the triumph of one aspect of oneself over another - very often the alienatedly rational over the alienatedly emotional. So mental discipline, in that sense of the word discipline, would not be desirable.

S:But what would positive discipline be, discipline in the [106] positive sense?

Vajradaka: I think it would have to include aspiration - emotional wanting, even.

S: Yes. It couldn't be just a holding down. There would have to be a galvanizing and integrating of the whole being, or of the mind in this context, in the light of, or on account of, a higher ideal. So the discipline would have to be as it were organic and natural, not anything imposed. It would have to be a natural unification of mental energies, in the light of a common guiding and directing ideal, or inspiring ideal. That would be the real discipline. So discipline in this sense cannot be enforced, though it can be encouraged, one might say.

Asvajit: Is it possible to see any difference between discipline in the sense you have just described, and harmonization - say, of one's more rational and one's more emotional faculties?

S: Yes, one would say that discipline in the positive sense, natural organic discipline, would represent, yes, a harmonization of faculties. But perhaps one should add 'in the light of some kind of higher ideal', to which they were all geared, and for the sake of which they all worked together in harmony. Because they were all working together in harmony, they could be said to be disciplined, not undisciplined, not unruly.

: When you become involved with this aspiration, to some extent anyway, is it possible to apply that negative discipline to that aspiration? In striving to keep contact with the aspiration, it seems it could be possible to do that in a forced way. Is that possible? - I'm not sure.

S: I think it would be very difficult. I think I know what you mean. Sometimes you may have to exert a provisional discipline, in the slightly heavier sense; first of all, just knowing what you are doing and doing it only for a limited purpose, to a limited extent, and knowing what you were doing, and realizing that it wasn't the best way of doing things but the only one that really was possible in the circumstances, and doing it in such a way that it eventually led on to discipline in the more positive organic sense.

: So in that sense it might be useful to some degree, that kind of ...

S: It might be, in some degree, but I think one should be very careful about that. Not so much in imposing that sort of discipline on oneself, but in trying to impose it upon others.

: I am thinking perhaps of Blake and his striving, his 'not ceasing from mental fight', that sort of thing.

S: Well, by 'mental fight' Blake doesn't mean anything forced, [107] as it were. He means the spiritual struggle itself, the struggle for the ideal.

Sona: In a way, it seems to me that the whole time one is forcing, but at the same time having to allow oneself space for the harmonization to take place, so you have to force yourself on to a higher and higher space of being, but then, because you are forcing, if you don't allow yourself enough space a reaction sets in and you slide back again. It almost seems like harmonization, the gap gets smaller and smaller ...

S: Yes, right. One has to bear in mind all the time what it is that the discipline, in the sense of forcing, is based on. It is based upon a split. So your basic task is to heal that split, so that that sort of discipline becomes unnecessary. But the practical question is: how are you to do that? And it may be that, in order to advance towards healing that split between those two forces within your two aspects within you, you may as a provisional measure - to give you as it were space to give you the possibility of healing that split - you may have to impose disciplinary measures upon yourself in the more forcible sense. But again, you have to be careful not to do it so strongly that there is a reaction and you as far away as ever from healing that split.

For instance, supposing you do decide that meditation is going to help you to grow, to develop, to overcome that split within yourself, say between reason and emotion, but you may not feel like meditating one morning, you may have to force yourself, so to speak, to go and meditate; so that is not an ideal situation. Ideally, you should want to meditate and should be happy to meditate and go and meditate quite spontaneously; but that isn't always possible at the beginning. You have to force yourself, at least use some pressure, and do what you or part of you doesn't want to do. But you do that only as a provisional measure, because you are convinced that one should get into the meditation and you need to meditate regularly, willingly or unwillingly, in order to be able to get into it; you are convinced that once you get into it that split within yourself will begin to be healed. And then, to the extent that that is healed, the forcible discipline will no longer be necessary and the natural discipline will be not imposed, it will just emerge. You will just function like that.

Sona: Could you equate the total healing of that split with a spiritual attainment, or would it be at the level of a normal healthy human being or a spiritual ...

S: Well, this is what I call just the horizontal integration, well, that is more the level of a healthy and happy human being. But as it becomes what I call vertical integration, and you start calling up, so to speak, deeper and deeper energies, integrating them with your conscious attitude, and start experiencing dhyana states, so to speak, that represents a vertical process of ascension. And that goes beyond the healthy, happy and human.

[108]
Sona: Do both those processes at first take place simultaneously? - well, not absolutely at the same time, but is it possible for someone who is not normally a happy, healthy human being to get into dhyanic states?

S: Yes, it is possible. But usually they can't stay, they can't remain there for very long. The pressures on other levels of their being are too strong.

Vajradaka: It seems that the synthesis between the split - say, for example, the intellect, clarity of mind, and one's emotions - the synthesis has to be done over a really long period, where you emphasize one aspect and then perhaps another aspect in a kind of cycle. You sometimes have to force yourself to emphasize one aspect which isn't natural to your character. Do you think that's a good thing? Say, for example, you are a particularly emotional person, but you need to develop your clarity of mind, you really have to make the effort to sort out your thinking and maybe do a bit more reading, for a period.

S: I think probably what is most helpful is that you just have an interaction with people who think more clearly than you do, and are forced to recognize your own woolliness and

vagueness and lack of clarity. I don't think it's - well, perhaps not at all possible for you to sort that sort of thing out by yourself.

Asvajit: Also the reverse seems sometimes necessary. One can have such a clear idea, such a cut-and-dried idea of how to proceed, that one blocks off the emotional content of the experience of communication.

S: That is not perhaps so much a clear idea as a fixed idea. Something might seem very clear so long as you don't try to put it into practice. (Laughter) It's only when you try to put it into practice that you realize that you weren't so clear as you thought. So there's quite a difference between trying to put a clear idea into practice and trying to put a fixed idea into practice, because if the idea is fixed it will not be flexible, not be adaptable, and you will be forcing and imposing discipline on yourself and perhaps on others too.

Viramati: So another form of negative discipline would be repression.

S: Well, yes, that is an extreme form, you could say, of discipline in the negative sense; though as a psychological, or psychoanalytical term, repression, strictly speaking, is an unconscious process. You don't know what you're doing, you don't know that it is going on.

Viramati: But then you have suppression, which could be more positive.

S: Suppression is a more conscious process, and can, therefore, be either positive or negative. One could say that repression is always negative; at least, to the extent that it is [109] unconscious. I think one very rarely finds people whose clarity and whose energy are brought together in such an integrated, harmonious way that they can in a sense almost do whatever they want to do, or feel like doing, without harm. But that is really what one should be aiming at, for instance.

Vajradaka: It's the very lack of being able to do that that causes a kind of dissatisfaction that makes you bring effort into trying to heal it.

S: Well, you could even be a bit paradoxical, but only a bit, and say that so long as you are having to make an effort to evolve you're not really evolving at all. Real individual development starts when it is no longer an effort. I don't mean not an effort in the sense that you're no longer putting energy into it; well, yes, in a sense I do mean that - you're no longer having to put energy into it, the energy is already spontaneously there. You don't bother about the energy.

Sona: Wouldn't that be the point of no return?

S: Yes, you could say that, carried to the logical extreme, as it were. But you could reach that state at least temporarily before you reached the point of no return. And sometimes people do, they feel that all their energies are there, there is no question about it. They know that what they are doing is right, but they can't sustain that state - maybe just for a few minutes or for a few hours or for a whole afternoon, or even a whole day, but it rarely if ever lasts beyond that. If you have two or three days in succession like that, you really are lucky - well, I won't say lucky, no: you have clearly put in quite a lot of work.

Chris: Would taking vows fit into the category of negative discipline which could be ...

S: Oh no, it certainly - if it did, it wouldn't be really a vow, because a vow, by very definition, must be an act, or if you like a promise, on the part of the whole person. This is something we've been talking about recently: that only a relatively integrated person could make a vow at all. Because, when you make a vow, the very fact that it is a vow means that there is no possibility of breaking it. The possibility of breaking it arises only when the 'vow', inverted commas, has been made or taken just by one part of yourself, against the wishes, so to speak, of the other parts or another part; and the vow is broken when they stage a revolt, and win. So if you're not a very integrated person, you should just make a strong resolution, as it were: a vow is a different matter. That's why I have said a vow cannot be broken.

Sona: In a way, though, if you haven't got other parts of you that are kicking back, there would never be a need to take a vow in the first place, would there? It's only really to bring those other parts into line -

[110]
S: Well, no, a vow is more to help you go forwards, not to preserve the status quo.

Sona: Well, I was thinking of that, of going forward by in a sense disciplining those sides of you which are trying to go in a different direction, integrate them in a way.

S: It's more than just - In the case of the vow, the ideal comes in. It's as though you see the ideal very vividly, and to the extent that you see it more vividly your energies are more highly organized, or become more highly organized for the realization of that ideal. It's more like that. So you then give expression to that, in the form of the vow, to as it were 'fix' it, inverted commas. To objectify it, in a way.

Uttara: You would be simplifying the matter.

S: Yes. It is very important to have this idea of working towards a unification of one's being, of one's faculties, and not think of the spiritual life or the religious life as we've been accustomed to thinking of it in the West, of one part of you - the better, nobler part - holding down all the worse, the more ignoble parts, more or less forcibly, until they either die or until you die, then you're permanently delivered from them. Or perhaps, if you can only hold them down long enough, Jesus will come along and just dispatch them for you. This is not really the Buddhist view, though sometimes the language used by Eastern Buddhist texts seems to support that sort of view. But it isn't really.

Uttara: It's a battle between heaven and hell still; whereas Blake says it's a marriage.

S: Yes, a marriage of heaven and hell.

S: So if you think of it in terms of a conflict between heaven and hell, you of course are on the side of heaven; or, at least, you sometimes feel like that. Sometimes you feel more on the side of hell. But, whichever it is, sometimes hell wins, sometimes heaven wins, and the battle just goes on; the conflict is never resolved. But Blake makes the point that there's got to be a marriage: not between good and evil - that is a special little conflict on its own account - but between what he calls reason and energy; and energy, he further says, is eternal delight. Your

reason must be completely unified with your energy. The clarity and the turbulence must come together, so that the clarity contributes light and the turbulence contributes richness and energy. There's not much point in being clear if the light of that clarity is cold and clear, it's just empty and sterile, just like the cold, clear white light of the moon, the dead planet as D.H. Lawrence called it.

On the other hand, there's not much point in having all this turbulent energy which is just swirling around and spilling over and completely out of control. You need both together, as two aspects of essentially the same thing, or same person, which is [111] you. So you have your moments of clarity, and you have your moments of turbulence, but it's very rarely that they both come completely together and fuse, so you're completely aware, clear, bright, radiant, with a clear understanding, clear vision; at the same time your energies are all there, not under control - that's the wrong term - but integrated into your clarity, and enriching your clarity, and implementing your clarity, implementing your vision; without any effort, it's completely effortless, completely spontaneous. It's as though you, so to speak, if there is a 'you' at that stage, are just being carried forward, you don't have to do anything. Your energies, which are you, are doing it all for you. Sometimes you can feel a little bit like that when you are working, in the best sense of the term.

Anyway, we haven't really finished with the Precept, by any means. 'Having acquired mental discipline by hearing and meditating upon religious teachings, boast not of thine attainment but apply it to the realization of Truth.' All right; perhaps, by hearing the teaching, by being open, by being receptive, by meditating upon it, reflecting upon it, assimilating it, you have closed that gap as it were within yourself; your reason and your emotions have come closer together, they are now more unified, you become more developed as an individual, you become more spiritually developed, as we say: then 'boast not of thine attainment, but apply it to the realization of Truth.'

So what do you think is happening when we start boasting about attainments? Why do we boast of our attainments, and why should we not do this?

: We'd be seeking approval from the group, for one.

S: Yes; but what does it tell us about our actual experience if we start boasting about it?

Asvajit: It suggests that it is actually an insecurity, ego boosting experience.

S: Yes.

: It's finished to some extent, too.

S: It's finished to some extent, yes; and what does that imply, what does that suggest?

: It's not integrated.

S: It's not integrated, so what is it? We are thinking of our attainments in a certain way.

Viramati: Something that can be grabbed. Our attainment.

S: Our attainment. We are thinking of it as an acquisition, a sort of property, rather than as representing ourselves, in a [112] sense. It is regarded as something external to us, like a species of property; not something which we are, and which is only as it were conceptually abstracted from us. So one thinks of the spiritual life as oneself remaining as one is, but one adds to oneself as one is various pieces of spiritual property

(End of Side)

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which one is in process of acquiring, rather than join up to and into some higher level, some higher degree of personal development. Do you see what I mean? This actually is happening all the time. So when you start boasting of your attainment, it means that actually you are taking it as an attainment, something acquired by you, which means you haven't changed, you haven't grown up into anything higher at all; you've merely tried to grab it, and perhaps are under the impression you have succeeded in grabbing it. So that reinforces your ego, so to speak; your ego starts feeling puffed up, and so you start boasting: 'Look at this piece of spiritual property which I have now acquired.' It means your whole attitude was wrong; that you haven't in fact, in a real sense, attained anything. You've just maybe learned the knack of something, and that's about all. If you can boast about your success in meditation, you really haven't been meditating. You might have just been performing certain concentration exercises reasonably successfully, but you haven't been meditating, because meditation implies a transformation of being. And how can you boast about that? Who can boast about that? The person who could have boasted, so to speak, is no longer there.

Uttara: That usually happens, even in meditation, if you are sitting and you feel you are getting on well, then you suddenly bring in the idea of 'Oh, aren't I doing well!' - then [snaps fingers] you lose it.

S: Even if only because discursive thought enters in, which of course spoils the concentration. So 'boast not of thine attainment but apply it to the realization of Truth.' If it is a real attainment, not just an acquisition but a higher degree of actual personal development, then you can apply it to the realization of Truth; that is to say you can make it the starting point for a fresh approach, a further phase of development. But as soon as you start boasting about it, it means you are treating your so-called attainment as a species of personal property, added to yourself as you are. You preclude the possibility of further development. You are establishing yourself at a certain level.

Right, go on to Precept 5, then.

[113]
(5) Spiritual knowledge having dawned in oneself, neglect it not through slothfulness, but cultivate it with ceaseless vigilance.

S: This slothfulness is a strange thing. 'Spiritual knowledge having dawned in oneself, neglect it not through slothfulness.' One could say 'neglect it not through inertia'. So in what way does this sort of thing happen? Can one give an example?

Asvajit: Well, an obvious one is just allowing oneself to drift into a sleepy state when you

perhaps should be reflecting clearly on something; like you've had a good meal and you sit down in an armchair after lunch and instead of reflecting on what is to be done you think, 'Oh, this is marvellous', and before you know where you are you're fast asleep.

Vajradaka: I'd put it in a slightly different way, maybe a reflection of it. That is that you see that when you're mindful, there is actual movement and progress and change, and when you're unmindful there is a regression. But at a certain point you choose to ignore that and just not make the effort.

: It's a reaction, isn't it? It's from the parts of you that aren't integrated into that idea.

S: Well, they are the inertia. I think especially of what happens during and after, say, a retreat of any kind. You might be on the retreat for a week or for two weeks or even a month, so you do develop a certain clarity, even a certain harmony and integration, you develop a certain vision. But then of course you go back to wherever you came from: it might be you go back among other things to a regular job, and then you very quickly lose whatever you gained in the course of the retreat. But it's as though you don't have to lose it, not completely; you lose it through carelessness, you lose it through slothfulness. You know very well when you come off the retreat that if you're not careful, if you don't remain mindful, if you don't, say, keep up the necessary contact, you will lose that vision; you know it very well. But at the same time, you don't bother. This is one of the things that has surprised me again and again: when you see people, say, after, let's say meditation or sometimes even after what appears to be a good meditation, they seem almost to want to undo the results of that, and the same after a retreat. It is sometimes worse than slothfulness, it's almost like an active carelessness - do you see what I mean? But yes, slothfulness, inertia, the gravitational pull: it's also at work, very often.

Sona: It's almost as though sometimes you put energy in to compensate for that clarity, just to keep the status quo.

Asvajit: Also it does require a certain continuous effort to keep that vision alive.

S: Sometimes it's as though after a meditation or after a retreat people feel, 'Oh, I've done my bit; now I can just stop [114] making an effort for a while.' But that is really fatal. I would say that the end of the retreat or the end of the meditation, when you come out of the meditation, is the time to be really careful, and just try to keep up the continuity of whatever you've experienced, either in the meditation or in the course of the retreat. But it's as though, as soon as they come out of the shrine room or as soon as they leave the retreat centre, people throw away whatever they've 'gained', inverted commas, through sheer carelessness, or perhaps through slothfulness, instead of, as the text says, cultivating it with ceaseless vigilance, ceaseless mindfulness.

Sona: Sometimes it happens, as we were saying the other day, you can feel very joyful, and you start losing your awareness. You are in a quite happy, positive, healthy state, but ...

Vajradaka: But if it was real spiritual knowledge, would you actually be able to lose it?

S: Well, it's a question of definition. If it is actual Insight, of course there is no question of losing it. But clearly it is not that sort of knowledge that is being referred to here. But you do have moments of clarity which are definitely moments of clarity, you really do see things very

clearly. But you can lose them. We were talking about this again on the last retreat - how people could get completely out of touch with certain things that they had experienced, or with themselves as they had experienced themselves in the course of the retreat; and I mentioned that there had been a few instances recently of people who hadn't had a retreat for a long time, and had then had a retreat and then they admitted that they'd completely forgotten what it was like to be on retreat; and because they had forgotten what it was like to be on retreat, even, there had been a certain amount of resistance to coming on retreat. They said they had not been on a retreat for so long they'd forgotten how good it was. So you can see to what extent you can get out of touch. You can even forget what sort of experience you had on retreat. So that when someone says, 'What about going on a retreat?' you don't think of that experience and think, 'How good it would be to be able to recreate that' - no, that's a blank, that doesn't mean anything to you any more. You just think of going somewhere rather dull and having a quiet time in a rather secluded place, with maybe a bunch of people you don't particularly want to associate with - that's what a retreat now means to you because you are so much out of touch, you've forgotten what a really good and inspiring time you had last time you went on retreat; it was so long ago. In some cases, only six or eight months, but that's enough time for you to forget. You've got so much out of [touch] - and to some extent, no doubt, out of slothfulness, because you haven't kept up.

Sona: The whole process seems to be that like in meditation, that you reach a level of clarity, and then after the meditation even a fast or a slow over a longer period of time, it gradually disappears, so you have to continually renew. You'd perhaps say the same about retreats; you've just got to continue the [115] experience of the retreat situation. So eventually they link up, and there's a continuity right the way through; it doesn't matter whether you're on retreat or not.

: The continuity in your experience, when your clarity - the difference between being on retreat and not being on retreat is exactly the same, because there's no dipping down, you don't reach a high point of clarity and then you dip down and lose it, but it's - you bring the cycles so close together that you're continually going on retreat, and eventually the dips are so small that it's almost like continuity.

S: I remember in the early days, when we had retreats, people used to experience quite dramatic highs on retreats. I think that was at least partly because the retreat experience represented such a contrast with their ordinary experience, which was usually, in those days, a full-time job, wife and family and all the rest of it. But when people started taking the principle of Right Livelihood more seriously and, say, moving out into a spiritual community, working part-time and then later on joining a co-op, and having a good positive community life, regular meditation; well, then the difference between being on retreat and not on retreat wasn't so great, so you tended not to get these dramatic highs on retreats, and corresponding, perhaps, reactions afterwards. In those days we sometimes noticed that people would have really very dramatic experiences on retreat, but you could still lose them afterwards and they could just not be seen again for months and months, perhaps never seen again. But that sort of thing doesn't seem to happen now.

Asvajit: It's as if the whole Movement is much more regular.

S: More regular, yes; more even, so to speak. You also had, on this last retreat, someone left before the end - I don't remember whether it was before the end of the retreat or before the

end of the period for which he had intended to stay - he had really taken in enough, he couldn't as it were stand any more. And some of the younger Order Members were quite interested in this phenomenon, because they said they'd heard of this sort of thing happening in the old days but they'd never actually encountered it. So I said, 'Yes, it used to happen quite a lot, that after two or three days of retreat you'd get people breaking down, sometimes several of them, and be unable to stay on any longer and having to go home; and you'd get people leaving suddenly without any warning - they just couldn't stand any more. It tended to happen, very often, after a session of communication exercises; they just fled, literally. But we tend not to have that sort of thing at all nowadays, therefore this particular incident was so interesting to our younger Order Members, because they'd only heard about these things before and hadn't actually witnessed them.

Sona: That happened in a case in Sweden this Summer. It was slightly different there; the person concerned was so conditioned over 50 years that it was - you could see it day by day, building up into such a tension ... broken through it.

[116]
S: Well, we even had cases of people arriving on the retreat and disliking the situation, the set-up, so much they just left at once. There was one woman arrived with her husband, and she was really shocked to find that her husband would be staying in a dormitory with four or five other men, and she in a dormitory with four or five other women, and she said she wouldn't stay unless they could stay in the same room throughout the retreat, just the two of them. That wasn't possible to arrange, so she left, taking her husband with her. She said she wasn't going to take any chances.

But it's really strange, in a way, the sort of things that people do to themselves. It's as though they get into a really positive frame of mind, and then they do their best to undo that. They don't conserve it or try to, in a positive way, safeguard it.

: I'm sure we've all experienced that after a retreat, doing that sort of thing.

S: Well, it may be sometimes that what one might almost call a natural reaction sets in, because you have made perhaps an exceptional effort, and the situation has been exceptional; and you know objectively you cannot keep that up indefinitely. Perhaps you were able to keep it up, perhaps you are able to keep it up for a week or two weeks, but not indefinitely, so you know even objectively you just have to relax a bit. But then even recognizing that, you should relax mindfully, and just let yourself down rather gently, not rush off straight from the retreat to the nearest pub - which you sometimes see people doing, but that is not really quite the thing to do. Relax by all means, but relax gently and quietly, and with a good book rather than with a good pint. Sometimes people almost seem to celebrate the end of the retreat. It's not really quite the thing to do. Mara must really be chuckling and rubbing his hands when he sees you all doing that.

Though again, I must say it's not so much what you do but it's the way that you do it.

: It's as though people fell secure in what they know of themselves, even if they feel it's negative and not conducive to their development. At least they know it, and so ...

S: Yes, it's familiar, they feel at home, they feel safe, secure.

All right, Precept 6.

[117]
(6) Once having experienced spiritual illumination, commune with it in solitude, relinquishing the worldly activities of the multitude.

S: So what do you think this is all about? What is this spiritual illumination? Do you think it means full Enlightenment?

Asvajit: The development of Insight? The dawning of Insight?

S: It seems to suggest Insight: something more than spiritual knowledge, but something less than actual Enlightenment. So 'Once having experienced spiritual illumination, commune with it in solitude'. Why should you commune with in solitude?

Asvajit: Because it's very easily disturbed by the presence of others at first.

S: It's not that you might lose it, but it could become obscured, or that it could develop more or attain a greater degree of intensity, but it needs your wholehearted attention for that to be possible.

Viramati: Keep it clear and bright.

S: Keep it clear and bright, yes.

: It's got to be nurtured.

: It's very fragile.

: They wouldn't really need to tell you what to do if you were Enlightened, would they?

S: Well, perhaps even that shouldn't be taken for granted. So 'relinquishing the worldly activities of the multitude'; what does that signify, do you think, 'relinquishing the worldly activities of the multitude'?

Asvajit: The worldly activities of the multitude are not conducive to spiritual illumination.

: Moving out of the group.

S: It means moving out of the group, yes. And that might mean a physical moving out, at least for a time. This Precept, of course, introduces the whole question of the solitary retreat. What do you think the attitude of most people is of solitary retreats? Solitary retreats are quite popular nowadays, it seems, but why do you think most people go on them? I mean the real solitary retreat, not what has been called the 'solitary retreat a deux'. Apparently there is something called the solitary retreat for two (Laughter); we're not talking about that.

: That's a honeymoon.

[118]

S: The real solitary retreat. What do you think people's motives are: what do you think they get out of them?

Vajradaka: It seems so different, in a way. I think some people go to learn more about themselves, just to get in touch with some aspect of their conditioning, to see it more clearly, see how they react when they don't have their everyday life around them.

S: Do you think you can see your reactions more clearly when away from other people?

Vajradaka: Well at least you can feel - Yes, I think you can.

S: With all reactions, would you say?

Alaya: No, not all reactions.

: Not reactions to other people.

S: Right, yes. So what is it that emerges more clearly in that way on solitary retreat or in solitude than it does when you are with other people?

Asvajit: You are in a natural, actually unconditioned state, I think, because - or rather your non-reactive state. I think that most of us, when we are in contact with other people, are to some extent reacting, and that creates a tension and an anxiety, which removes us from our more confident and more natural and assured sense of wellbeing.

S: But don't you think it would be a rather odd state of affairs in which we lost our confidence when we were with other people, but we felt confident when we were on our own? In a sense, that doesn't sound very positive, does it?

Uttara: It could well be selfconsciousness ...

S: Selfconsciousness?

Uttara: You lose it, maybe, to some extent.

S: Yes, that is true, but that could be both positive and negative. No, what I was thinking of was the projective type of relationship or reaction. When you're on your own, you have an opportunity of studying that, and you realize that it is something that belongs to or pertains to you. It is not actually something that is to do with other people; certainly not the people with whom you are in contact at the time. For instance, supposing you are on solitary retreat and you just feel really angry with somebody; with anyone, not with any particular person, you just feel angry, but you feel that you want to direct that anger towards somebody. It's as though you want to be angry with somebody, and then perhaps you perhaps realize that this is your normal state, except that usually you do get angry with somebody and say that he makes you angry, it's his fault; if only he wasn't around, or if only these people weren't around, [119] you wouldn't become angry. But then you find, to your surprise and dismay, perhaps, that on solitary retreat you feel just the same; in fact you'd rather like there to be somebody around so that you could get angry with them. So then you recognize that it isn't that they are making you angry - that anger is inherent within you. So this you can certainly learn on solitary retreat

which you would find it perhaps difficult to learn if you were actually in contact with other people. And similarly with other emotions.

Sona: ... from this Precept that the best time to go on solitary retreat is perhaps after an ordinary retreat, where you've got into a - Because I think afterwards we tend to think of going away on solitary retreats as like running away from a situation, have a bit of space for ourself and so on. Well, maybe that's got its uses, but ideally one would go away when one was in a very healthy, clear state.

S: I've been saying, in fact, recently that people shouldn't go away on solitary retreat when they feel very tired and dispirited and down, as it were. Sometimes they need a holiday or change of scene rather than a solitary retreat. You should go away for a solitary retreat when you, well, to some extent at least, feel really good. Then you can make positive use of your solitary retreat. Certainly not when you are exhausted. Some people - say you go away for a solitary retreat for a month: right, they spend the first two weeks recovering and getting back their normal health and strength. So you shouldn't go on a solitary retreat to do that. That shouldn't be the main function of the solitary retreat. You should be in reasonably good condition when you go on solitary retreat so that you can take full advantage of it.

But yes, you do - to get back to what we were saying a little while ago - you do experience yourself on solitary retreat in a way that you don't always experience yourself in contact with other people.

Vajradaka: There's another aspect or motivation for people going on solitary retreat, which is not necessarily that they have completely exhausted all those more psychological possibilities of knowing themselves, but that an added element comes in of inspiration; that being on the retreat you really can get in touch with inspiration rather than just getting to know yourself better. And it seems to happen generally once people have been on retreat two or three times; it almost seems to be like a higher stage.

S: Because when you're in contact with people, however positively, much of the time you are expending energy - well, you're expending energy in talking, so if you're on solitary retreat the fact that you're solitary means you're not talking; the mere fact that you're not talking means you're conserving energy. So as you conserve more and more energy, it builds up and leads to a sort of joy which perhaps normally you don't experience, and you experience yourself then in a rather [120] different way: not only energyful but joyful, very clear, very aware, very bright. And in that way you intensify the experience of yourself. So perhaps it isn't such a good thing to think of going on solitary retreat in order to get away from it all, and get away from other people - that sounds a bit negative - but that in order to have that more intensified experience of oneself. So that one can go back then in contact with other people, and communicate with them and interact with them, in a more intense way, a more genuine way: being more truly and more fully yourself. Try to take the self which you experience on solitary retreat back with you into the world, back into your community and into your relations and communications with other people.

Vajradaka: Can we talk a bit about the length of time of solitary retreats? I'm wondering now whether solitary retreats, to gain this kind of exhilaration and enjoyment that you just mentioned, would have to be as long as the one month or even six weeks, if people are to ...

S: Well, clearly it depends on the person; for some people a few hours or a day or two might be sufficient. Others might not manage to make that sort of contact, even within a month. One can't really generalize. But it would be good if people could ensure themselves a sufficiently long period so that they could experience something of that sort, and really go back after the solitary retreat inspired, not just rested and refreshed but inspired.

Asvajit: If you are in a really positive state, even if you are in the town, just a couple of hours' walk in the countryside can bring about that state.

S: Indeed, yes; or even just to go for a walk in the park. I think one should be quite careful - I made the little remark about the solitary retreat à deux, but it's more than that, actually. I think it's more a question of knowing what you are doing and calling things by their right names. If you are just going away for a quiet couple of weeks' holiday, well, say so; say, 'I'm just going away for a couple of quiet weeks', don't say 'I'm going away on solitary retreat.' It's as though you feel a need to make it official, to provide yourself and others with a completely foolproof legitimate excuse to go away. Because who could possibly object to your going away on solitary retreat? After all, you're going to be meditating most of the time and reading good books etc. So you may not actually really subconsciously be wanting to do that; you may just want virtually a holiday. So you call it a solitary retreat, because everyone would find that acceptable; but you know quite well you're going to do your meditation in the morning and, yes, probably in the evening too, because you'd do that anyway; but you're not going to be doing very much, and you know, or at least you half know, that you're just going to potter around and maybe wash a shirt in the morning and do a bit of cooking, and maybe stroll along to the shops, or maybe you're going to go for a nice little gentle walk, and have a nice early night and read in bed, [121] and it's not really a solitary retreat, is it? But if you need that, well, fine; there's no reason why you shouldn't have it. But I think I detect a tendency in the Movement generally to use this term solitary retreat rather too loosely; because clearly it's a highly respectable activity. (Laughter) So people can really cover all sorts of things.

Vajradaka: I think I can actually trace when that started, Bhante. It was 1973, when you were away, and two people, two Order Members, I think, went away together; and you heard about it, and you sent a kind of missive into London saying 'There's no holiday in the spiritual life.'

S: I don't remember that. I was thinking of something much more recent.

Vajradaka: It came across really heavy to those people, and it's those people now, those particular people, who are saying 'We're going on a solitary retreat.' And really they did need a holiday, and ...

S: Well, as I said, fair enough, if people need a holiday, it's quite all right to have a holiday. You just make your needs known quite frankly and openly and honestly. But what happens is, I suspect, that people feel guilty about having a holiday; well, they feel guilty about enjoying themselves, you see - this is the root of it. So they don't feel quite happy about announcing, 'I want to go away on holiday.' Well, perhaps they wouldn't be allowed to, they think; or they may be told rather sternly that 'There are no holidays in the spiritual life.' But there is certainly room for a solitary retreat, no one could object to something like that; so they say, 'We're going away on a solitary retreat', and perhaps their chairman, they feel, will accept that without a murmur - going on solitary retreat, who could object? So that's the way they put it. Maybe it's not that they are consciously practising any deception, I'm quite sure of that; but

they just don't allow themselves to think too clearly about it. But it's not that they've got this definite intention of having a real solitary retreat and really getting in contact with themselves and experiencing real inner clarity and luminosity; that is not what they really have in mind. They just want a bit of a change and a bit of a rest and an easy time. And just being on their own is the price that they have to pay for that, as it were; they actually perhaps, in some cases, would rather not be on their own, but they know that they can't stretch the point as far as that, to make it officially a solitary retreat if they're not on their own - they realize that, in most cases. So, OK, they accept that as part of the deal. But they think that, so long as they are on their own, that counts as a solitary retreat, regardless of what they actually do during those two or three weeks or four weeks. Do you see what I mean? Well, sometimes it might be even quite difficult to tell whether it's a solitary retreat in the strict sense or just a little holiday.

[122]
One mustn't perhaps always try to make it too rigid. But when people definitely feel the need for a rest and a change, they should say so, not say that they are going on solitary retreat.

Ray: What is a solitary retreat in the strict sense?

S: Well, it's what we've been talking about: when you go away to experience yourself more intensively.

Ray: Does that necessarily take place within a format, like we have a format to our day?

S: Well, it may. I suggest, in the case of most people, that they start off the solitary retreat with a definite format, unless they feel a need just to rest for a day or two; but, broadly speaking, start off with a definite format. And I suggest, for instance, six sessions of meditation during the day. But if, after a week or two, they feel that they can sustain the necessary level of mindfulness and emotional positivity and devotion and so on without that regular format, they shouldn't hesitate to drop it. But I think the main difference between the solitary retreat proper and the other forms of going away by yourself is that on the solitary retreat, whether spontaneously or by means of a definite programme or with the help of a definite programme, you are primarily concerned with experiencing yourself with a higher degree of intensity and clarity and emotional positivity than you usually do, and that the whole retreat is geared to that.

Ratnavira: So up to a point it is a case of not being just what you do but the way that you do it. You could easily have a solitary retreat where you didn't do a lot of meditation but you were getting in touch with yourself quite deeply.

S: Yes. For instance, somebody might have a very regular programme and follow it faithfully, but in a dull, uninspired way out of a sense of duty, and that that was the thing to do. He might remain on a very dull, pedestrian level even though he'd been faithfully doing all these things and following a definite programme every day. One has to see what is actually happening.

Alaya: I found I started off with no programme, and was surprised how healthy a programme I developed naturally. In the end it seemed the only thing to do was to meditate and do yoga; nothing else was really important. But it just seemed to come quite naturally over a few days.

S: Sometimes you have to give yourself a few days just to feel your way into things. One can't lay down any hard and fast rules, but just say that the main function of the solitary retreat is to enable one to experience oneself in that more intensified manner.

Vajradaka: Do you think that the surroundings are very important with regard to that - for example, whether the countryside is beautiful, whether it's mountains or - ?

[123]
S: I wouldn't say it's all that important. I think different people attach different degrees of importance to it. Devamitra was saying that he really found Manjuvajra's caravan a good place for solitary retreats, even though technically it wasn't all that solitary, it was quite near a whole lot of houses. But he said the surroundings were so open, and there were various other atmospheric factors; he felt he really was on his own. He felt it was a solitary retreat, even though there were houses and people so near. Do you see what I mean? And the scenery wasn't anything very special; I've also been there, it isn't very special, but it seems to have a good effect nonetheless and to be suitable for solitary retreats.

But to come back to the broader issues of what I was talking about, it's a matter of calling things by the right names - do you see what I mean? - and not indulging in euphemisms. That really implies being honest with oneself, in the first place, and also with others.

Anyway, I think that brings us to a natural break.

- - - - ...

S: There are still one or two things that could be said about Precepts 5 and 6. You notice in Precept 5 there's the expression 'spiritual knowledge having dawned in oneself'. I don't know how literal this translation is, whether the English does reproduce a Tibetan idiom, but this expression 'dawned in oneself' is really very appropriate if you just recollect what the dawn is like, or how the dawn comes. Dawn is different from sunrise, isn't it?

Voices: Yes.

Sona: Before the sunrise.

S: Yes. So when the dawn comes, it's as though you see the reflection of the light of the sun in the sky. You don't yet see the sun or the sunlight directly, but the sky just lights up. So it is as though spiritual knowledge really is like that, and the Insight is like the first rays of the sun when the sun is just about to appear above the horizon; and illumination, you can say, is when the sun itself starts to appear. And, of course, full illumination, if you can continue the metaphor, is when the sun has not only risen but perhaps when it's risen to its full height. Of course, there the metaphor breaks down because the sun should also be expanding all the time, which it doesn't actually do in fact. But ...

: Although it radiates all the time.

S: Although it radiates all the time. But this expression 'spiritual knowledge dawning' is quite an expressive one, especially as sometimes you're not even sure whether the dawn has begun or not. It's so faint, it's so delicate, so indistinct. [124] I noticed this especially when I was in

New Zealand; I remember one particular morning when I was out in the bush, you couldn't be sure whether the dawn had actually begun. So it's like that with spiritual knowledge: you're not quite sure sometimes, maybe not for quite a time, whether it is actually a spiritual knowledge that has dawned or whether it is still just your intellectual understanding. It's very difficult to tell sometimes, a very intense degree of intellectual understanding and the first beginnings of the spiritual knowledge. It only becomes clear sometimes a bit later on, when the spiritual knowledge has in fact intensified.

John R.: Because it's only a glimmer, it emphasizes the importance of its cultivation.

S: Yes, because dawn comes, so to speak, automatically, but the spiritual knowledge is something which needs to be cultivated. It could die away if you were careless, and you wouldn't be sure whether it was just an intensified intellectual understanding or whether it was a real spiritual knowledge that could have been cultivated and developed into something more.

John R.: It reminded me of the awakening of the Bodhicitta, the same sort of feeling.

S: Yes, indeed. One speaks of the arising of the Bodhicitta, and it's the same expression in English as in Sanskrit, for the arising of the sun.

Viramati: It seems quite different from the view of Insight as something breaking through.

S: That's true, though of course again sometimes it does. But on the other hand sometimes it sort of steals imperceptibly upon you.

Ratnavira: Sometimes it almost seems like you could change without being fully aware of it. Meditating, going on solitary retreats, sometimes I've had the experience I've probably changed, if I'm busy working it's like my mind's in lots of other different areas, I'm not really very aware. If you go away by yourself you experience yourself ...

S: Not only that, if you're keeping up an effort all the time the change may be very gradual, a little at a time, and since you are after all with yourself all the time you may not notice, just as you may not notice very much changes taking place in the people with whom you are actually living all the time.

(End of Side)

[125]
Tape 6, Side 2

But if you just see certain people periodically, and perhaps they are quite perceptive, they see you at intervals of months, well, then they may notice quite a striking change in you which you may not have noticed in yourself.

John R.: This brings up the question of not being result-oriented, inasmuch as you can't ... gauge your success all the time; you trust the process to work.

S: It's like youngsters when they're growing: what do they do? They're always measuring

themselves up against the bathroom door to see how tall they've grown. It's like that with the spiritual adolescents, so to speak. Always measuring themselves - or as I said a little while ago, always measuring their spiritual biceps. Sometimes it's a bit like that. You just have to keep on: keep on growing without bothering too much how much you've grown, as against any possible objective standard.

Vajradaka: It does give you a bit of confidence, though, sometimes, when you can see that there has been a certain growth in your spiritual ...

S: But it's better if you feel that you are growing. Even though you couldn't measure it or give any account of that growth in terms of any objective standard: 'I just feel I'm growing. But whether I am any nearer to Stream Entry? I just don't know, but I know that I'm growing, that I have been growing, I feel it within me.' That's probably the more healthy feeling.

Then again, there's an interesting expression here: again I'm not sure to what extent the English idiom reproduces the Tibetan one in Precept 6: 'communing with it'. Communing with one's spiritual illumination. What does this suggest - communing with it?

: Getting to know it, really.

S: Getting to know it. Yes, getting to know it. It's like communing - communing, you could say, in some respects is not a very satisfactory word, if you bear in mind its connotations, but just taking it in itself it's a very good word. It's as though communion is what occurs when the process of communication reaches a certain pitch of intensity. You're not just communicating with somebody, you're communing with them. So what does that suggest? You're very close to them indeed. There's a sort of mutual knowledge, even a mutual sharing of being, you could say. You're in touch not just with what the other person thinks, not just with what the other person feels; you are in touch with what they are, and they are in touch with what you are, and there's a mutual appreciation of being, a mutual acknowledgement of being, which is something much deeper than even the best communication. So here it is said that you commune with your spiritual illumination in solitude. Yes, it's a solitary retreat à [126] deux - this is ... solitary retreat à deux. You are communing with your spiritual illumination. You are as it were communing with that better part of yourself, you are getting to know it better, getting to know it more deeply. So that it isn't just an experience which has happened to you and which stands in a sense a bit apart from you, because you can't always live up to that level; it becomes more and more - well, not a part of you - that's not quite the right expression; it wouldn't also be quite right to say you become part of it, though that would be more correct; but because you commune you get to know each other better - you and your spiritual illumination. You draw closer and closer together and you become integrated. I am reminded of the Tantric symbolism of the Heruka and his consort, his female counterpart. It's rather like that. For instance, the illumination, say, the spiritual illumination representing your spiritual counterpart, and you are communing with that in solitude, you are getting to know that better. It's not enough to be acquainted with it. When it just happens in a flash, perhaps, it's like a sudden visit; you don't get to know it properly. But you have to live with it, as it were, go away on solitary retreat with it, get to know it, commune with it, so that in the end it's - I was going to say fully absorbed, but that is not quite right. The two mutually absorb each other, you and it, so to speak, you and that spiritual illumination, this is what happens.

: Could it be called the dakini?

S: Yes, well, dakini is another term for the spiritual counterpart. You could certainly call it that. But you see the sort of process that goes on.

John R.: It is like a spiritual honeymoon, in a sense, isn't it?

S: You could say that, yes; a spiritual honeymoon of you with your spiritual illumination. Assuming, of course, that you had got some contact with it to begin with, or at least it emerges in the course of the solitary retreat. When you go away on the solitary retreat, you may feel very much on your own, in an almost negative sense. Well, OK, that's good, because that may be the usual situation, but you're just not aware of it. So you're alone in the sense of being cut off. So what do you cut off from? Well, you're cut off first of all from maybe the more emotional side of yourself; you are cut off perhaps from the more spiritual side of yourself, the more illumined side of yourself. So the first thing you have to do is to allow that to emerge, and it emerges, hopefully, as a result of your being on your own, a result of your meditation, a result of your reflections, even your readings. And then it's there, something other. So you don't feel on your own, in that previous, old, bleak way, because you've got the company of what Blake would call your Emanation with a capital 'E'. And so, once that Emanation, so to speak, has emerged, you can spend the rest of the solitary retreat quite happily getting to know her better, communing with her. I hope that I am not treading on dangerous ground in using this sort of imagery; just please take the [127] spirit of it. So I would even go so far as to say, paradoxically, the best kind of solitary retreat is the one which you do not spend on your own. But let me not be quoted out of context here, please! You see what I mean. When you do feel on your own, in a cold, negative, bleak, alienated way, it is because you are much too much identified with your head, for want of a better word; with the more intellectual side of yourself. You've lost contact with the warmer, deeper, more emotional side of yourself, and that is perhaps one of the first things you have to do when you go on solitary retreat: if you've lost that, to regain contact with it. You don't have to have lost it, if you are going on solitary retreat; you may have kept very much in contact with that through your work and devotion, and in other ways - meditation. In that case, when you go away on solitary retreat, you take your dakini, so to speak, with you. And you spend the solitary retreat just enjoying a more intensive experience of that side of yourself and in integrating the two. And, of course, that other side of yourself is the other side, or another side, of you. So you're getting to know yourself better, too, at the same time.

Alaya: Is this where the symbolism of Padmasambhava and the burning grounds - ?

S: One could be regarded as being, at least from one point of view, that. It does seem that - yes, he did actually sometimes have a spiritual companion who was his disciple, a young lady, and worldly people misunderstood, even though they were living together like brother and sister, worldly people misunderstood; but again, yes, one could regard it, especially when it speaks of many dakinis, of Padmasambhava using that opportunity, using that solitary place to get in contact with all those different forces of inspiration within himself. And those forces of inspiration are in many ways bearers of illumination, as it were. There's no illumination, I think, before they start coming into play, because your whole being is too one-sided to be able to support that higher, more integrated experience. So you need to go to the burning ground and then to start calling up the dakinis, or allow time for the dakinis to start congregating about you; and then the higher, more spiritual illuminations may take place.

And of course there will be no question of relinquishing the worldly activities ... - you just

won't be interested in them, you wouldn't think about them then. You only start thinking about them and being tempted by them when you are out of touch with your Emanation, so to speak: then you want fun, then you want distraction, then you want pleasure from something outside of yourself. Then your mind starts wandering. But if you are in contact with what I've called the Emanation, following Blake's term, with that happier, more joyful, more emotional side of yourself, there'll be much less tendency for you to be distracted.

Asvajit: I found this when I got back to Glasgow from my solitary retreat a couple of months ago. Glasgow didn't seem at [128] all attractive, though perhaps there was some of the architecture which was beautiful, could be said to be beautiful. But the usual things that interest me in a city held no interest at all. But I noticed later, of course, that that changed rather on my more recent visits to London. I started looking around: 'What can I go to? What can I visit?'

All right, let's go on to Precept 7.

(7) Having acquired practical knowledge of spiritual things and made the Great Renunciation, permit not the body, speech or mind to become unruly, but observe the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

S: 'Having acquired practical knowledge of spiritual things and made the Great Renunciation' - what do you think this Great Renunciation is? It seems to be something special, as it is put in initial capitals.

: Going for Refuge.

: Going Forth.

S: It's the Going Forth, actually. I think it is intended to translate the maha-abhiniskramana(?), which is usually translated the Great Renunciation, that is to say the Buddha's own Great Renunciation in Going Forth from the palace, as we say - his father's house, at least - into the forest. So that it corresponds with the pabhajja(?), the Going Forth into homelessness; or it corresponds also, you could say, with the Going for Refuge inasmuch as it is, or it represents, the act of the individual in departing from the group before he has actually arrived at the spiritual community, or been accepted into the spiritual community.

So 'Having acquired practical knowledge of spiritual things' and as a result of that having actually made the Great Renunciation, having started acting as an individual and to that extent having at least dissociated oneself from the group, 'permit not the body, speech or mind to become unruly'. So in what way do they become unruly? What do you think is meant by unruliness here?

: Clamouring.

Vajradaka: Not acting in accordance with the insights.

S: Unruliness suggests unintegrated energy, doesn't it, as we were talking about before.

John R.: Lack of discipline.

S: Yes, lack of discipline. ' - but observe the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience': what do you think of these three vows? Don't they have a familiar ring?

: Mm, Christian.

[129]
S: Yes, I'm afraid they are. You don't get obedience in Buddhism as a virtue at all, and you don't get this triad of poverty, chastity and obedience. This is the Christian monastic triad. I suspect that that is a translator's enlargement. The three vows would be the precepts governing actually body, speech and mind; in other words the Ten Silas. Do you see what I mean? Because there are three silas, or three vows if you like - using the word vows here loosely, of course - for the body, four for speech and three for mind. There is poverty in Buddhism, there is chastity in Buddhism, but there certainly isn't obedience.

But anyway, what about poverty? Poverty is a more Christian term; it means non-possession or non-grasping, apaligraha would be the more Buddhistic term.

: How is that usually translated?

S: Non-possession. To what extent is poverty necessary to individual spiritual development?

Asvajit: Well, inasmuch as it is non-attachment, it is essential.

S: Well, we did talk about this the other day, didn't we?

Viramati: It seems to have a rather puritanical feel to it, the word.

S: Yes. It's as though poverty is an unpleasant, even painful, state to be in, and because it's unpleasant and painful it's almost certain to do you good. That is the suggestion, the connotation. Though you do sometimes find a different attitude, as with St Francis, who seems to have regarded poverty as just leaving you space in which to be yourself; this seems to have been his attitude, but it wasn't a very typical one, so far as Christianity was concerned.

John R.: Since your remarks about Padmasambhava and converting the demons, and money and all that, I've been thinking about this poverty thing. It seems to me more that one's relationship to money or possessions - if you can get it outside of the personal arena, and wanting it, or even not wanting it, from your own point of view, then you can see it like a creative medium; and it then becomes a fun thing to play with, to use.

S: Well, you can play with money like you play with paints.

John R.: So you can still be poor personally and not get attached to the money, but it doesn't mean that you keep it out there away from you, at all.

S: Right. So the measure of the poverty is the absence of attachment. It's well known that you can have people very poor who are very attached to the little that they have.

John R.: Right. That's often why they're poor.

[130]
S: All right, what about chastity? There is such a thing as chastity in Buddhism, the brahmacarya, which is not quite the same as the Christian celibacy. So what about the part of this in the spiritual life? Is it something absolute, is it something that you definitely observe or definitely don't observe, or are there degrees, and what is the value, what is the significance, what is the relevance? What have people got to say about this?
: What does it actually mean, to be chaste?

S: Well, chastity is not strictly speaking quite the same thing as celibacy. Perhaps I ought to distinguish the two English terms, and then go back to the Sanskrit-Pali term, which is brahmacarya, and maybe that will be a basis for a bit of sorting out.

Celibacy strictly means the single state. Apparently it comes from a word meaning a column which stands alone. So celibacy is the single state, the state of not as it were being officially married, with official responsibility for wife and family. This often implies abstention from sexual activity. So very often the term celibacy is used as a synonym for chastity, though it isn't really strictly such. Chastity definitely means abstention from any form of sexual activity. Celibacy means living singly; but inasmuch as if you live singly you will more often than not, perhaps, be chaste, celibacy becomes synonymous with chastity. But celibacy really refers more to the almost legal state of being unmarried, by yourself; but chastity definitely excludes all sexual activity. That's the difference.

So, strictly speaking, we should use the word chastity as the translation for brahmacarya, not celibacy. So brahmacarya: this is a quite interesting term. Brahma and carya. Brahma means great, eminent, noble, sublime; and in Buddhism we have the brahmalokas. The brahmalokas are the as it were objective counterparts, the objective correlates, of the rupa dhyanas - not all the rupa dhyanas, the higher rupa dhyanas - and the arupa dhyanas. So the beings reborn in these higher spheres, the subjective counterpart of which are certain higher meditative states, these are called brahmas. So brahmacarya means living like a brahma. Carya means walking, or it means faring, or it means living or practising. So brahmacarya means living or faring like one of the brahmas. But what is one of the characteristics of these brahmalokas - the brahmalokas are also higher devalokas, you may say - one of the characteristics is there is no [131] distinction of gender.

: Androgyny.

S: You could say that, yes. You could say also gender is transcended. In the kamaloka, the world or plane of sensuous desire, including the lower heaven worlds like those of Indra, but not including the rupalokas with their devas, there is no distinction of gender. So among the brahmas there is no

distinction of gender; which means that the sort of polarization which is represented both biologically and psychologically by the distinction of sex, is not there.

Vajradaka: In the rupalokas?

S: In the higher - yes, in the rupa and arupalokas. So the brahmas are, in a manner of speaking, spiritually androgynous. So where there is not even the distinction of gender, how can there be sexual activity? That is to say, sexual activity as the expression of a distinction of

gender. So therefore it is said that in the brahma worlds, there is no distinction of gender, therefore no sexual activity; so if you are faring like a brahmacarya, you are living like the brahmas because you have attained those higher as it were meditative states of consciousness, you have integrated different aspects of your nature, then there is no sexual activity in the sense of activity expressive of that polarized consciousness. So in that sense you are chaste, you live the life of chastity. So this is what is meant by brahmacarya. But this is as it were the natural spontaneous brahmacarya, not the enforced disciplinary chastity or celibacy. Not that you have got this strong polarized tendency but check it; no, brahmacarya is not strictly speaking this. It's something much more organic, much more natural, much more the expression of a sort of total experience on your part. It's like when you are enjoying the company of the dakini, so to speak, you don't compulsively look without for other enjoyments and pleasures.

: So brahmacarya implies quite a high degree of integration?

S: Yes. But that doesn't necessarily mean that if you do happen to be equipped with a body of a particular gender you are incapable of sexual activity through or on the basis of that body, but it is not then the expression of a one-sidedness of psychological and spiritual approach. It does not express a polarization. You have to be careful, because there are intermediate degrees, and you may hardly know sometimes which side of the fence you fall on.

: What is it an expression of, then?

S: Well, it could be an expression of simple biological functioning.

: Traditionally the Buddha is incapable of sexual intercourse, so ...

S: I would take it to mean not that someone who was Enlightened was incapable of functioning biologically, but I would take it that that biological function would not be at the service of a one-sided, polarized and in a sense compulsive mentality or experience.

[132]
Alaya: Isn't that nature's whole purpose with polarization?

S: Well, nature - it is a reproductive mechanism, so far as nature is concerned, yes.

Alaya: As regards polarization, we know that nature does take the race almost as won.

S: Yes. Huh? What are you trying to say?

Alaya: I was wondering - there's no point apart from the polarization: with no polarization there is no need for sexual activity.

S: No, in a sense there is no need for sexual activity.

Alaya: Because sexual activity only happens because nature has polarized.

S: Yes, but, on the other hand, nature has taken steps to ensure that the reproduction of the species takes place by making the sexual urge or sexual instinct, for want of a better term,

quite a strong one on its own level. It's in a way like the instinct of hunger, if one can use the language of instinct at all. So you could say that the Enlightened person will go on eating, because he needs to maintain life, and because those particular organs are there - the organs of eating, digestion, excretion and so on - and it is more in a sense pleasurable to use them than to not use them; not using them could become positively uncomfortable. So you could extend this analogy to the sexual organs themselves. Nature has provided them, as it were on their own level, with a certain amount of energy, in fact with quite a lot of energy, and you might find that they as it were function autonomously in a healthy person without being the expression of a polarized mental consciousness. I think the fact that you no longer wish to reproduce would not necessarily make the organs themselves cease to function. Do you see what I mean?

Alaya: They on their own could go on and reproduce.

S: Yes. Though the fact that you were an integrated person psychologically would not inhibit the sexual functioning on its own level, as distinct from its being an expression of any one-sidedness of function. The sexual function is not simply an expression of psychological one-sidedness. You remain physically one-sided, and so the sexual function could continue as the expression of your physical one-sidedness; but it would not any longer be an expression of psychological and spiritual one-sidedness.

Ray: Playing devil's advocate for a moment, wouldn't perhaps a Theravadin say you were producing a rationalization?

S: Well, a Theravadin might well say that, (Laughter) it's quite possible, yes. Indeed. But everybody would have to decide for himself or herself whether they were actually providing a [133] rationalization or not. You have to take that risk, and sometimes you may not be quite sure which side of the fence you fall.

Alaya: I thought that there was a lot of ego there: the spiritual life was a changing of that energy which was in the sexual ...

S: Well, this is true, but on the other hand you do not necessarily get more energy for the spiritual life just because you stop having sex. It isn't quantitative and mechanical. In the case of some people, they might get so disturbed and upset, for one reason or another, because they were leading lives of, say, enforced celibacy, that their energies would be either blocked or would be just very disturbed. So people have just to make up their own minds where they actually stand, and act accordingly. You can't lay down any hard and fast rule which will cover all individual cases. But certainly, as one becomes more integrated emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and so on, the compulsiveness which is an expression of extreme polarization, that compulsiveness which is behind sex and which isn't just biological, will be greatly reduced, and so the whole nature of the sexual interest and involvement will become quite different - if it continues at all.

I think most people don't realize the extent to which the sexual urge is psychological rather than just biological. It is at least, probably, nine-tenths, in modern Western man, psychological rather than biological.

Uttara: What was it you said there - somebody who was governed by their sex drive isn't an

individual?

S: Yes, because it's a group thing. It's meant for the perpetuation of the species. But I emphasize the word 'dominated'.

: So that biologically it's at its peak, say, in the late teens? Would it become more psychological as you got older, and less biological - ?

S: Not necessarily. It might just become weaker. It isn't necessarily less one-sided just because it has become weaker. As you get older everything becomes weaker, that included; but that is not tantamount to development as an individual. You just have less energy as you get older, unless you take definite steps to tap other sources of energy. But physically, and even mentally in some respects, you just get weaker. But you don't necessarily become more spiritual just because of that.

Alaya: On a practical level, the biological side again leads to children, which could complicate your following the spiritual life - which is another ...

S: Oh yes. Well, that is a decision to be independently taken.

[134]
Vajradaka: When you say that the motivation is in Western man mainly psychological rather than biological, do you mean that because Western man, having got an integration, will synthesize elements of themselves horizontally and vertically?

S: I'm speaking more horizontally at the moment. But certainly this over-emphasis that is placed on sex is because of a certain inner inadequacy and one-sidedness. But I've noticed this, say, in India when I was living in Kalimpong; I have especially noticed it with the Nepalese. There is far, far less emphasis upon sex, or even, one might say, in a sense, less interest in it, because people were leading such balanced, healthy, wholesome, relatively integrated lives. They weren't integrated on a very high level, I must say that, but they were integrated on their own level, and therefore they didn't experience these strong compulsions. They didn't experience the inadequacy that people seem to experience in the West, and therefore the need to supplement that inadequacy with something from outside.

Asvajit: It was quite striking seeing the faces of some of the people that Padmapani photographed in northern India. They look so different from ...

Vajradaka: I've been thinking about this with regard to the Finns, who don't seem to have very much sexual activity or interest, but they don't seem at the same time to have that kind of integration that the Nepalese have, as you've mentioned. I was wondering if it's just repression.

S: I think the Finns are very repressed, personally. And I think also that more goes on than meets the eye.

But anyway, you get the general point which emerges from this discussion? - that brahmacarya, chastity in the true sense, is not just a deprivation of something that you would really like to have; it's not just disciplinary in the narrow sense. It represents a state of

integration and harmony and equilibrium which depends less and less on outside satisfactions, especially the sexual.

Viramati: The positive counterpart to that precept is contentment.

S: Contentment, yes indeed.

Asvajit: And it's contentment with an inner richness.

S: Right, yes. Which does not exclude relating with other people, but you relate from that position of inner richness, not from that position of inner poverty. You relate to others for an enhancement of your existing richness, not as a supplement to your existing poverty, you see.

Anyway, I hope I'm not supplying anyone with any rationalizations. In that particular field rationalizations are usually very welcome.

[135]
Ray: It seems to go back again to what you repeated, that to see everything in its right situation and think clearly about ...

S: Yes, to think clearly and to give things their proper names, and know what one is really doing. And not try to make out that one is practising Tantric Buddhism when one is merely having a good time. (Laughter) I rather suspect that this sort of thing tends to happen in the United States, in Buddhist or pseudo-Buddhist circles; I'm not quite sure what Manjuvajra and Vajradaka are going to find when they go there.

Vajradaka: We might have to do it as a skilful means! (Laughter)

S: Practise celibacy as a skilful means.

: ... Tantric Buddhism ...

S: No, perhaps you'd better be strict Theravadins over there, as a skilful means.

But to go on from chastity to obedience: this is of course quite out of place in a Buddhist context. Or do you think it has any place at all? Can the word obedience be used in a meaningful, positive way in a spiritual context, do you think?

Asvajit: I think it can. Obedience to the promptings of your what you may provisionally, at least, consider to be your higher mind.

S: Do you think though obedience is quite the right word?

Voices: No.

S: Doesn't it suggest a super-ego operating rather than a higher self? Or couldn't it?

: It seems quite an oppressive word, doesn't it, really? I don't think there's any getting away from it.

: Is super-ego the same as alter ego?

S: No. Super-ego is supposed to be your introjected parental image, telling you what to do. You think it's coming from within you, but actually it was instilled into you when you were very young, and the thoughts and the ideals, so to speak, of your parents have been so deeply implanted within you that you mistake them for your own, and they are all the time telling you what to do. They constitute, so to speak, your super-ego, and your little ego just knuckles under. Sometimes the super-ego is in fact the so-called conscience. So you can be obedient to the super-ego, but that would not be a very healthy thing. So the point at issue is really whether the word obedience could be usefully used in connection with the promptings of the higher self, as Asvajit called them.

Viramati: It's a very submissive word, isn't it?

[136]
S: What about the word submissive itself? Are these words so full of unpleasant connotations for us that there is no possibility at all of our using them? Are they so saturated with authoritarian connotations, or can something be salvaged? Can we think of obedience in a positive way, or submission in a positive way?

: We need a new language.

Uttara: Humbling or receptive.

S: Receptive is all right, but that's quite different from being obedient, isn't it? People don't seem to mind being receptive, but they don't like being obedient; or rather, the whole idea of being obedient is not very ...

: It removes the individual, doesn't it, really?

Vajradaka: If we are using the language of individuality, it seems to ...

S: Yes, it's a question of consistency of language. If you are using the language of individuality, freedom, initiative, it seems rather difficult at the same time to use the language of obedience and submission.

Alaya: Because obedience comes from when some one person owns somebody, I suppose.

S: Well, obedience suggests power.

: 'Your obedient servant'.

S: Ah, well, then in a sense you are arguing against yourself by quoting that example, because 'your obedient servant' is well known to be a complete euphemism, when used by government departments and so on.

Chris: What might have been the Tibetan word that he's translating, then?

S: I don't think he is actually translating it at all. I think he's filling in here, really, because the

fact that obedience is included makes it quite definitely not a translation... poverty, chastity and obedience, the very well-known Christian triad, must be interpolated here. He thinks 'There are three vows', so it doesn't occur to him that these three vows are in fact the Ten Silas, so he takes them as meaning poverty, chastity and obedience, which is clearly quite wrong. So chastity is all right in the sense I've explained; even poverty, if you think of it in terms of non-attachment. But obedience, I think, seems quite out.

Ray: When you were in Kalimpong, what was the ordinary people's attitude towards the Precepts? Did they see them as more or less rules of obedience?

[137]
S: No, I think ordinary people, that is to say 'born Buddhists' - ... Nepalese and Tibetan - saw it as a matter of custom. I felt among these people, maybe more the Hindus than the Buddhists, custom had completely replaced any sense of right and wrong in the more Western sense. In fact, they couldn't understand it. Something was the custom, and of course you conformed because if you didn't people would be annoyed with you. But some things they thought, well, they were customary but they didn't care about them too much; you could get away with it, and they weren't too bothered about breaking certain customs or customary rules.

(End of Side)

Tape 7, Side 1

But, yes, they thought of the Precepts as customs, so if they broke them they didn't feel guilty. They merely felt that they'd done something that people didn't like. They didn't feel wrong or bad within themselves; they merely felt that they were being disapproved of for having broken or disobeyed that custom, which wasn't very pleasant, but they didn't feel on bad terms with themselves because of that - you see the difference? They didn't feel bad, or didn't feel guilty. They knew that they'd done wrong, in a sense, but they didn't feel bad about doing wrong because they thought simply they'd broken the custom. They didn't think of it in moral terms at all.

Asvajit: It seems much more like the attitude of a healthy child.

S: Yes, that's right, yes. For instance, where it used to come up was in relations of young men with young women, and it was definitely not the custom to have any sexual connection with a woman to whom you weren't married, but sometimes it did happen, and the young men who had indulged in this sort of thing didn't themselves think that they'd done anything wrong, in the moral sense; they'd merely gone against the custom. And some of them even disclaimed to me any responsibility; they said, 'Parents know that young men are like this, it's not our fault that we're made like this. If they don't want their daughters to be seduced, they should keep them locked up.' They didn't feel to blame at all. They accepted that it was the custom that you didn't seduce unmarried girls and people got very angry with you if you did, but if you did it wasn't really your fault, because you had a natural tendency to do that sort of thing, and they knew it very well; why didn't they take better care of their unmarried girls? It was their fault. So, even though they recognized that there was this custom, and quite a strong one, they didn't feel guilty about having broken it. And that was their attitude - well, they didn't have any moral conceptions as such. This is, I would say, the pagan primitive level. They didn't

think in terms of individual development, obviously. But that is a more healthy foundation, I think, than the Christian one.

[138]
Ray: Was that done with the proviso of not doing harm to anyone, or was that - ?

S: I don't think they thought about it, in this particular context. I think if they were asked about doing harm to others in a general way, they would say, 'Of course you shouldn't do harm to others; you don't want others to do any harm to you.'
They would accept that.

And usually, in primitive societies, when customs have been broken, there are ways of making that good. In, for instance, this particular case that I've mentioned, if you've seduced somebody's daughter, there's quite a hoo-ha for a while, and people are very displeased with you, you just kept out of the way of your elders for a bit, because you would know that they would be very disapproving; so you kept out of their way and you only consorted with your own age group, who usually would look at things in a very different way; and eventually the elders would start talking, having tut-tutted and been angry enough; and some sort of marriage would be patched up, and you'd be told it wouldn't be a real, proper wedding because you'd been wicked and you'd disobeyed the customs. But, anyway, you'd have to marry this girl, and there would be a wedding, and they'd curtail the ceremonies a bit, just to punish you as it were, but it would all go through and sooner or later everyone would have forgotten all about it, and no one would remember it any more, certainly not bring it up - once you were married, it would be considered - it wasn't the custom to bring these things up again. But you certainly didn't feel that you were a young sinner or anything of that sort. At least, I could never detect that any of them had the least consciousness of having done anything actually wrong, but merely having gone against the custom. Their attitude to this sort of matter was rather like the attitude of some young people, say, in Britain to cannabis: well, it is prohibited, and it's illegal to smoke it, but they don't feel that they're doing anything morally wrong. They're just going against the law. So these young Nepalese and Tibetans seem to regard precepts very much in that way, just as almost arbitrary laws or customs which you kept as much as you could for the sake of group approval; and they thought that broadly they were a good thing for society at large, but in their own case they were prepared to admit of many exceptions. That was on the whole the attitude. But as I say they didn't at that level think in terms of individual development.

Ray: Presumably the morality of Western society started from those ...

S: It must have done originally, yes; but of course that was all overlaid by Christianity, with its conception of absolute good and absolute bad, and with a supernatural sanction. For instance, say, the Nepalese or the Tibetans would be aware that, say, in some countries it's the custom to have one wife, in other countries it's the custom that you can have two or three, etc. So they won't regard one arrangement as right and the other as wrong: one is the custom of one country and the other is the [139] custom of another country. Whereas in the West, and under Christian influence, we tend to regard one particular kind of social arrangement as right, and the other as wrong, and one even as right and the other as sinful.

But I remember hearing a Christian missionary saying - she was rather annoyed about it - she was saying: 'There's this Nepalese Christian that we've got; I've tried really hard to explain to

him that he mustn't go and stay with that woman because he's not married to her, but I can't get him to realize that he is committing a sin.' And they used to complain in that way: 'We can't get these Nepalese to realize that it's sin.' But sometimes they did, and then you'd see a change almost in the expression of that person. He would develop what I call a hangdog look, and you could tell a real Christian in that way. The pagan, say, Hindu or Buddhist Nepalese, never had that sort of expression; they never looked guilty, whatever they'd done. In some cases, even when they'd committed a murder, they didn't look guilty. They had a quite different attitude towards things.

Vajradaka: So where does natural conscience come in, then, with regard to ...

S: I think natural conscience - this is my personal opinion - is the product of sensitivity: that you are sensitive yourself and you become aware that others are similarly sensitive: that you would not like certain things done to you, because you are sensitive, and therefore that others would not like certain things done to them because they are sensitive, in the same way that you are, so there's an empathy, a fellow-feeling. And you give to others the same consideration that you would like to receive in a natural way; not because you are told that you ought to, or that it's wrong that you shouldn't, but because of your natural human empathy. This is what I would regard as natural conscience. You don't need to be told.

: This must be a natural response of any reasonably healthy human individual to ...

S: Yes, assuming that you included sensitivity and awareness in your definition. I must say I found these young quite pagan Nepalese and Tibetans quite human in that way; they were quite sensitive, where other people were concerned, and quite considerate. But this was quite a separate thing from the dastur, as they called it, observing custom or not observing custom. It was an independent thing.

Asvajit: Why is it that that - what do you call it? - natural conscience doesn't continue to grow naturally? What stops it?

S: I don't think it's a question of it being stopped; it's just distorted by our early training. Because, for instance, there is a passage in the Pali scriptures where the Buddha finds a group of small boys tormenting a crow, and he stops and he says: 'Would you like to be treated in that way?' and they say, 'No we wouldn't'. And then he says: 'Well, the crow doesn't like it [140] either. Why should you do to the crow what you wouldn't like done to you?' But then we aren't trained in that way, very often, or at least we weren't in the past. If children were doing something of which the parent disapproved, or the parents thought it shouldn't do - 'You mustn't do that. It's wicked. If you do that, mummy will not love you any more.' You see, emotional blackmail. Or 'God will not love you any more', or 'God will be angry', or 'Mummy will go and get the policeman.' You see? You see the different approach, the different method? So our natural moral sense, which grows with our awareness and sensitivity, is not encouraged, because quite different techniques of control are applied, mostly of a coercive nature. Maybe, where children are concerned, you need the power of coercion as a last resort, but only as a last resort. I think a lot can be done without it. Or else you just try to bribe the children into so-called goodness. You could say that, in your old days, education was based on the stick, but now it's based on the carrot; now it's all bribery, you try to bribe the children into being good by giving them everything that they want. But the result is that they don't keep their part of the bargain, so to speak.

Ray: How does the attitude of the Nepalese differ, say, from the Western concept of the psychopath who doesn't know whether the act he is committing is wrong or harmful?

S: I think in a sense it doesn't differ; not in principle. I think what has happened is that in the case of the Nepalese and in the case of the Tibetans, they live, they function, within what is broadly speaking a quite healthy social and cultural tradition, and the customs on the whole are sensible customs which broadly hold good for a healthy society. They are not artificial; they have some correspondence with the needs of human nature and the actual objective situation. I think therefore that they are in fact more healthy, just because the customs themselves, in a way, are more sensible and more in touch with the facts of human nature.

A psychopath, you could also say, is not simply one who is disobedient to what he sees as arbitrary laws, but who has no natural human awareness and sensitivity on which to fall back. A psychopath, I would say, is not so much somebody who doesn't know what he is doing; he's someone who doesn't feel what he is doing. A psychopath, I understand, say, someone who commits a terrible crime, doesn't feel very much when he is doing it; not that he is doing it out of anger or for revenge - the Nepalese would do it in that way - but he just does it, and he doesn't realize what he has done, he doesn't feel that he has done anything in particular. A psychopathic child, well, he's just hung little Johnny up in the bathroom and strangled him - that's all he's done; if he's hung his teddy bear up he doesn't feel any difference at all. Do you see what I mean? The psychopath is the one who lacks feeling, not so much one who doesn't know, objectively, that what he is doing is considered to be wrong. He doesn't have that natural human awareness and sensitivity. He is alienated from normal human feeling, which the pagan person [141] very definitely has. Though of course in the pagan person it includes things like anger and so on, which may find expression on occasion.

Ratnavira: What was the basis of Western pagan morality, Bhante, before Christianity?

S: We don't really know all that much about it, do we, because Christianity destroyed it so thoroughly. It must have been custom; and custom was based on what had been found broadly to work, and to correspond to certain basic human needs in a particular situation. Even in, say, modern English we've got the conception of 'the done thing', and sometimes your obedience to the done thing can be quite slavish and quite independent of any actual professed ethical standards. The done thing nowadays relates more to matters of social behaviour, good manners and all that sort of thing; but if you can imagine all society just being governed by what the done thing is, and what is not the done thing. If you don't do what is the done thing you don't feel morally bad within yourself, you just feel that society will be mildly disapproving, or look down their noses a bit at you; but you won't feel within yourself that you are a despicable sinner. That's the difference. Or will you?

Asvajit: Just being a bit of a lout.

S: A bit of a lout, perhaps, if you wore the wrong kind of dinner jacket (Laughter) or wore brown shoes with a dark suit; something unforgivable like that.

Vajradaka: In Finland, whereas they don't mind if you don't wear a tie in a good restaurant, you must never wear wellington boots. (Laughter)

Ray: Do you think change is possible in an individual who has no feeling?

S: I think change is possible, but he has then to understand purely rationally that feeling is necessary to development, and he needs to implement that on a basis of rational conviction, and take steps to get back in touch with his feelings because he has understood that there will be no progress in fact without doing that. I think that is possible.

Anyway, all that arose out of a consideration of obedience. There seemed to be a consensus that obedience just wasn't on. And, of course, one can say a bit more than that: if obedience has no significance, neither has disobedience. If you are still concerned to be disobedient, you are still a slave to obedience. So if you are not obedient, in order to be fully not-obedient you should also not be disobedient.

: Or not feel disobedient.

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S: And not feel disobedient. If you are feeling that you're really disobedient, a really naughty boy, well, you're still a good boy, actually, whether you like it or not.

: The situation of the individualist.

S: Yes. A bad boy is simply a good boy turning his back on you, if you see what I mean.

: So what does the boy do, then? It's Catch-22, isn't it?

S: No, not at all; no, there's no catch at all.

Uttara: He's free to do what he wants. Free to ...

S: In a sense, yes.

: ... consider the possibility of being disobedient all his life ...

: - he might actually have to act in a disobedient manner.

S: Oh, that's another matter; he might act in a way which others might consider obedient or disobedient, but he does not feel within himself either that he is being obedient or disobedient. If he feels that he is being disobedient and takes pleasure in that, and that he is not obedient, in a perverted way he is being obedient.

Alaya: He's just being reactive, isn't he?

S: He's just being reactive.

John R.: It's like someone working against your conditioning, you feel almost like you set up your conditioning by working against it.

Asvajit: So you dissolve your conditioning by becoming integrated and not by setting up a contrary conditioning.

S: Yes, you shouldn't think in terms of being disobedient because you don't want to be

obedient; you should think in terms of being an autonomous person for whom the concepts of obedience and disobedience have no meaning.

Uttara: It's like the rankers(?), who you said yesterday strip off and run about and things like that; it wasn't the answer. That would just be a reaction to ...

S: Yes, to the extent that it was just a reaction, it was not the answer. It could be that they were in fact doing those things quite spontaneously and naturally; one rather doubts that. But one mustn't exclude the possibility. One mustn't too quickly jump to the conclusion that people are in fact being [143] reactive. Perhaps they are just being themselves; one must be open to that possibility, too.

Vajradaka: It seemed almost for them to be a kind of blasphemy; blasphemy was very tied in with their behaviour, anyway, defying God.

S: Well, that means 'I am the source of authority for myself. I am autonomous. I tell myself what to do, whereas formerly God was telling me what to do, but now I tell myself what to do, therefore I am God.' This is what it meant, in practical terms: 'I am my own father.' But so long as you are rebelling against your father, or God for that matter, you are still not free, completely. So long as you are disobedient, you are still obedient. So long as you are a good boy, you are still a bad boy. There's a real Catch-22 for you. You can't escape from being a good boy just by being a naughty boy.

Chris: Going back to feeling guilty, do you think actually performing an unskilful act - do you think that the bad karma might be doubled, or even the most part might be feeling guilty if you were prone to that? Or the act itself is weighty karma?
S: There is a difference between recognizing that you have done something unskilful and feeling quite bad about that, in the sense of really sincerely regretting it and blaming yourself - between that and feeling guilty in the Christian sense. Because guilt suggests the loss of the love of those on whom you are emotionally dependent, and it suggests a general worthlessness on your part, as distinct from the undesirability of a particular action that you have performed.

Chris: So do you think that feeling that guilt, that Christian guilt, is that bad karma as well?

S: Well, yes, it is not the result of bad karma, it is itself bad karma in this way.

: Yes.

S: Yes, it is an unskilful mental state, and therefore cannot be productive of anything good. And it is a technique of control - to make people feel guilty. Of course, you must also be careful, again, not to run to the opposite extreme. Sometimes I've heard people say, 'You shouldn't say that to him, it'll make him feel guilty.' Well, if it makes him feel guilty, that is actually ultimately his responsibility. Even if you are just saying something quite objective and quite true; you may be pointing out unskilful behaviour on his part, not with the intention of making him feel guilty. Clearly you should point out that yourself as skilfully as you can, but the fact that it makes him feel guilty is no argument against your pointing it out. Because sometimes it almost seems to be suggested that you shouldn't under any circumstances say anything even unintentionally which would make somebody feel guilty; so he has got the

perfect cop-out then, because it makes him feel guilty [144] therefore you shouldn't say it. You can't draw his attention to any unskilfulness of behaviour because he might start feeling guilty and, of course, everybody agrees it's a bad thing to feel guilty.

Asvajit: You could never even make any suggestion to anybody then, for fear that they might not do it and then feel guilty at not having done it.

S: Exactly, yes.

: You come across people like that sometimes who won't say anything to anybody about anything. They just refuse to comment on anything anybody ever does, because - I don't know, they don't think it's their business or something.

S: Very often they're not concerned enough, also, about other people. I think sometimes it's an expression of indifference. They don't want to be bothered. Maybe it's an expression of lack of self-confidence, they don't have the confidence to express what they think or feel. Perhaps they don't even have the confidence to think or feel anything in particular, which is a quite terrible state to be in. They go all sort of fuzzy when you ask them. It's probably also bound up with lack of commitment and lack of willingness to accept any responsibility, including responsibility for yourself and your own thoughts and feelings.

Ray: So you don't think it really matters if the person you're talking to doesn't understand what motives you're working from, then, as long as you understand the motives yourself?

S: Well, no, because if, for instance, you're trying to point out to someone that he is doing something unskilful, your purpose is that he should be able to see that what he is doing is unskilful, and make the necessary alterations in his behaviour. You don't want to make him feel guilty, so you don't just point out that he is doing something unskilful in a careless way that might make him feel guilty, and think, 'Well, if he does, that's his responsibility.' You will take every care that you possibly can to say what you have to say in a way that will not, so far as you can help it, make him feel guilty, because you just want him to see the point that you are trying to make. But if he does incidentally feel a bit guilty, your words make him feel a bit guilty, that then is his responsibility and you shouldn't refrain from pointing out what is unskilful, just because he is going to feel like that. But you will try to minimize the damage which he does to himself as much as you possibly can; at least you won't add to it by an unskilful choice of words, for instance, or an unskilful choice of time.

Anyway, any final point on what we've done so far this morning, before we close? OK, then, it's nearly lunchtime.

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Tape 7, Side 1 (continued)

Day 4

(8) Having resolved to attain the Highest Goal, abandon selfishness and devote thyself to the service of others.

S: So what is this Highest Goal?

: Nirvana?

S: No, I was afraid you might say that. It's in a way a technical expression, it's not just the highest goal in a very general sense. What is the context?

: Bodhisattva.

S: It's the Bodhisattva, yes, it's the Bodhisattva ideal. It's the highest goal, in Sanskrit samyaksambodhi, that is to say not the bodhi of the arhant, not even the bodhi of the pratyekabuddha, but the bodhi of the samyaksambuddha, the highest goal of all; or, in more general terms, just the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. So 'Having resolved to attain the Highest Goal', having resolved to practise the Bodhisattva Ideal, 'abandon selfishness and devote thyself to the service of others'.

This raises quite a few questions. This question of devoting yourself to the service of others is quite a big one, because it does seem to me that nowadays quite a lot of people don't like to devote themselves to the service of others. So can we talk about this a bit, devoting oneself to the service of others as an aspect of the spiritual path? Clearly, unless you are prepared to abandon selfishness and devote yourself to the service of others, the Bodhisattva Ideal has no meaning whatever. There's a little anecdote I sometimes tell in this connection. If you've heard it before, don't stop me. It goes back to when I was giving my series of talks on the 'Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal', and I gave one evening at Centre House what on reflection I think was probably quite a good lecture; anyway, people found it quite inspiring and they were apparently quite carried away by the Bodhisattva Ideal, and quite moved by it. So we had a cup of tea afterwards, and we had a nice Puja and all the rest of it, and we had a really very positive and inspiring evening. But at the end, one of our lady members stood up and said could she have just one or two volunteers to help with the washing up of the cups and saucers? And not a single person stirred. Some people did say afterwards that they felt shy, they didn't want to push themselves forward, etc., but there did seem to me to be a lack of Bodhisattva spirit, even in a very elementary form.

So it isn't so easy; it is quite easy to accept the Bodhisattva Ideal theoretically, but actually to abandon selfishness and devote yourself to the service of others is quite a difficult thing.

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There is also the question of whether one even ought to think in those terms at the very beginning of one's, I was going to say spiritual career, but perhaps it isn't even that: when one is just beginning to try to be an individual. Perhaps the real question is, at what point can you meaningfully think of giving service to others? And clearly, I am referring to service to others within the spiritual context, not just social service, which might be a very worthy thing - a noble profession and all that, but not be really part of anybody's individual development.

So has anybody got any ideas or comments on this? 'Having resolved to attain the Highest Goal, abandon selfishness and devote thyself to the service of others.' It also raises the question of what is selfishness. We might be able to go into that.

Sona: Perhaps you can only really devote yourself to the service of others and abandon selfishness when the Bodhicitta has arisen. But perhaps in lesser degrees, one can begin to abandon selfishness.

S: But what makes people selfish? What is selfishness? This is quite a basic issue.

Uttara: Separateness.

: Maybe it's an exalted idea of their status.

S: Separateness. Their status; right, their own importance. Could you say that there was such a thing as healthy selfishness?

Adrian: Isn't selfishness something to the detriment of other people?

S: Yes; yes.

Adrian: A healthy selfishness could be where you are just concentrating on your own merits, not necessarily to the detriment of other people.

S: Yes. Well, the arhant ideal, as viewed by the Mahayana at least, amounts to that sort of thing. The arhant, or would-be arhant, would certainly not harm other people, in fact he would carefully avoid that; but on the other hand, he is devoting himself to his own personal improvement: accumulation of merits - not only merits but even Insight - for the benefit of himself alone, without thinking too much about other people.

Sona: But viewed from the Hinayana point of view he does that only to develop himself to the point where he is capable of actually helping others.

S: Well, yes and no; because it is true that if you take the historical record those who were regarded as arhants, yes, did help others; they certainly did teach. Sariputra taught, Ananda taught, and so on. But on the other hand, the idea or the aspect [147] of helping others isn't made at all explicit in that ideal. Certainly it doesn't receive any emphasis, even from the Hinayana point of view.

Sona: But if it is possible to become an individual and become an arhant, you must have an influence on other people because of the interrelatedness of things. And therefore you can't help but help other people.

S: This is true, but then already one is adopting a quasi-Mahayana standpoint. Actually, I would agree because I think that the distinction between the arhant ideal and the Bodhisattva ideal, though maybe a useful one to begin with, cannot really be sustained ultimately, mainly because of the interrelatedness of all forms of life - that you cannot in fact help yourself spiritually without helping others. Also you cannot really help yourself spiritually without helping others. So the question really is, at what point in your spiritual life you start to take seriously, or start acting upon, the fact that you cannot in fact help yourself more than up to a certain point without consciously and, in a sense, deliberately, helping others also. But it isn't a question of helping others in the sense of 'Here am I completely separate, and there are those people completely separate, but I'm going to help them'. The helping isn't of that artificial nature. It's a more natural and spontaneous thing. You may at the beginning have to help people as a result of a sort of discipline, but eventually the helping should be natural and spontaneous, simply the natural outcome of a fellow-feeling, on a higher spiritual level.

Adrian: It's almost associated with the development of metta.

S: Yes; yes, it's certainly associated with that. It's not a sort of cold performance of duty.

But anyway, what I was thinking of, what is at the back of my mind is this: that people certainly do resist having to do things for other people. One notices this all the time. There is a strong resistance to doing things for other people, to helping other people, to being of service to other people. So why do you think this is? - apart from, if there is any factor apart from, ordinary natural, in a sense, healthy self-centredness?

Uttara: They feel they're going to miss out in a way, maybe.

: It's a feeling of deficiency, isn't it, really?

S: Yes, it's a feeling of deficiency. In what way, or how could this have arisen?

Asvajit: Over-emphasis on the equality, perhaps, of people, so that it becomes inconceivable that - or, if people are equal, then one person can't as it were put himself at the service of another.

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S: Yes, that is certainly an aspect of the matter. But what I'm actually thinking of is that sometimes selfishness and a reluctance to devote yourself to the service of others is a reaction - maybe even a re-action - against as it were being forced to devote yourself to the service of others, and feeling that you had no time, no energy as it were left for yourself. So what sort of situation, do you think, could lead to this feeling?

Asvajit: It's a sort of martyr syndrome, it's a one-sidedness in the sense that one's own self is unimportant. Whereas, in fact, both are important: others are important, oneself is important. Both have to be developed, both have to be given due attention.

S: That is true, but again I wasn't quite thinking of that. I was thinking of a situation where there's an over-emphasis, to begin with, an unhealthy emphasis, due to someone's false sense of duty, on being of service to others to the neglect of oneself. It's as though, when one has been obliged or compelled to neglect oneself and devote oneself to the service of others instead, then you have a reaction. Also, of course, it can be the outcome simply of weakness: you feel that in serving others you just lose something for yourself: that you lose your own identity, as it were. So very often I think this reluctance to do anything for other people - sometimes you almost literally hear people digging their heels in, when they are asked to do something for other people - is just due to a very weak, fragile sense of self-identity. People are not strong enough to do things for others. You could even say, paradoxically, that they are not selfish enough to be able to do things for other people.

Vajradaka: I don't know whether this is a red herring, but I was talking to a sociologist a couple of weeks ago, and she was saying that she had noticed that Chinese people generally have remarkably little empathy for others outside of their own particular circle. They can see a car crash and they won't even go and help; they just stand around and watch. And she had been thinking why that was so generally that they just couldn't do anything if it wasn't their own immediate family. And a conclusion that we came to in discussion was that there was a

very strong filial piety and patriarchy in Chinese families, where in a sense until even you were 30 years old you did what your father said, and you had to look after your younger brothers, sisters, mother, grandmother, and there was no sense of you being able to look after yourself or do anything for yourself, but having just all the time to look to the others.

S: It doesn't seem to quite fit, because this would be an instance of doing things for other people.

: Or being forced to.

S: One would have thought that that person had been trained to do things for other people, and therefore would naturally go to the assistance of somebody.

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Vajradaka: Well, I thought that that could be because it was just seen as doing things for your people.

S: Yes. You get this not only with the Chinese but the Italians, if you read that well-known book called The Italians - what is it, by Borghini I think it is. I've got it upstairs. He makes this point very strongly, that the Italian is very family centred, and that

(End of Side)

Tape 7, Side 2

his family - the extended family, in a sense - is his castle and stronghold, and he is quite indifferent, almost, to what happens outside. In fact, he will certainly sacrifice the interests of society, even, to the interests of his family. But I don't think this attitude can even be confined to the Chinese and the Italians, because I remember there was an episode - I forget what it was, it was a film but I think it was a documentary - which showed a man having a heart attack in a busy New York street, and you saw him just lying on the pavement and these hundreds of pairs of legs all walking past; nobody stopped, everybody was too busy. So one can cite these instances, but what they mean in any given instance is probably quite difficult to see.

But what I'm getting at, or trying to get at, here, in our own more immediate context is, I think, the fact that a lot of people are selfish out of individual weakness. They almost feel that devoting themselves to others in any way will result in a loss of their own identity, even their own strength.

Tejamati: I think people probably feel that they just won't get this energy back if they try to help other people, that it's just a one-sided thing, they are afraid they won't get anything back.

S: It's a sort of miserly attitude, that your energy is a certain given quantity that you've got to hang on to. In the case of that instance I mentioned, I really thought about this. These seemed to be reasonably healthy people, but I suppose they couldn't have been. There was this fear of doing things for other people, even when one had made all possible deductions - that some of them maybe wanted to catch a particular train: all right, fair enough, they didn't want to be delayed. Maybe a few others were shy: all right, deduct those. But, even so, out of about 70

people present, they couldn't all have had trains to catch, they couldn't all have just been feeling shy and not wanting to give themselves undue prominence or seem to be better than the next man or woman. Maybe a few were inhibited by British self-effacement, but deduct all those, and you've got in a way quite a problem. How is it that even two people could not step forward and say, 'I will give a hand'? So I came to the general conclusion [that] it must be out of weakness: that they don't feel that they have the strength to give. Perhaps they feel this quite wrongly. They feel that their individuality is something to be protected, and one of the ways in which you [150] protect it is not doing anything for anybody; everything has to be done for you. They don't see helping others or doing things for others as a joy or an expression of themselves: it's almost as though they are being robbed of themselves, torn away from themselves, if they have to do anything for other people.

Alaya: Do you think this is because of work, and of people doing things for reward, for pay, for others? And when they're not working, ...

S: You mean they're unwilling to do anything unless they're paid for it?

: Yes.

: They're frightened of being exploited.

: Like a reaction to the class system.

: When you work, you're getting paid for ...

S: On the other hand, one doesn't find this, because the experience I've related was in the context of the Friends. If sometimes one goes outside that context, one can find people who are working for a wage in ordinary life, but they don't always have that reluctance to do things for other people, by any means. They don't.

Alaya: But if you (?) generally reinforce that way of thinking, even - your time from work is your time for yourself, and that doing things for others is somehow unpleasant, so it's made up...

S: Well, this is what I am saying: it's a sort of robbery, you don't want to do anything for anybody else because you feel that you lose something in doing things for other people.

: Do you think there's a sense of the belief in God at the basis of that? - in the sense that you can recognize, to an extent, your own individual weakness and expect that something outside to supplement you.

S: Yes, I think there's a lot in that. Because - recall the actual context - all these people had just been listening to a lecture on the Bodhisattva Ideal, and they quite enjoyed that. They'd liked the idea of the Bodhisattva, but they took it entirely one-sidedly: they enjoyed the idea of the Bodhisattva doing things for other people, but they didn't take it that they were to be like the Bodhisattva, but that they were to be like the people for whom the Bodhisattva did things. Perhaps that was what they really liked about it, the idea of there being somebody who was just prepared to do everything for you.

So this is certainly a misunderstanding about the Bodhisattva ideal that has arisen in the East also: people admire the Bodhisattva, worship the Bodhisattva, and ask to be saved by the Bodhisattva - which of course isn't possible, I hardly need to [151] remind you - instead of actually practising the Bodhisattva ideal. So the admiring contemplation of the Bodhisattva ideal, as it were from a position of weakness, is certainly not the same thing as being inspired by the Bodhisattva ideal. When you are inspired by the Bodhisattva ideal it makes you feel that you would like to be a Bodhisattva. But I used to feel in the old days at Archway quite strongly that people, broadly speaking, had been almost conditioned into thinking and feeling that they couldn't do anything for themselves, that everything should be done for them - in fact, that it was right that everything should be done for them - and that even when they came along to a spiritual centre, very often they expected everything to be done for them; they expected everything to be laid on. They expected the lecture to be laid on; they expected the Puja to be laid on; they expected the tea to be laid on; and when they were asked to do anything, it came as a sort of rude jolt, it was as though the harmony of the whole evening had been disrupted.

So when is it that you feel not only that you can't do anything, but you shouldn't do anything? - that everything should be done for you? It's only really a very weak person, someone who is almost a baby, who feels like that. So if you are even a reasonably mature and responsible human adult, even apart from any question of spiritual development, you should be able to look after your own needs but also to accept some responsibility and show some concern for the needs of others too. And if you really are capable of caring for yourself, in an intelligent and objective way, you will also be able to care for others in an intelligent and objective way.

So I would say the two things always go together. If you're not willing to serve others, the chances are that you are not only not willing to, but not able to, serve yourself. And if you are able to look after yourself, the chances are you will also be able and willing to look after others, so that you can't really separate the arhant and Bodhisattva ideals; and you will see more and more that the two things hang together - that when you help yourself you are helping others, when you are helping others you are helping yourself. They are not two separate things. So you don't have to fight off the prospect of helping others so as to be able to do something for yourself.

Uttara: Did you say that incident happened in America, the one with the heart attack?

S: Yes; or at least the film I saw was a film which purported to be taken in New York.

Uttara: Because there you see they have the consumer mentality: that everything is packed for them, everything is put into a tin...

S: We have it in this country -

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Uttara: Right, so it could be the consumer mentality. More and more things are done for us, so that we just need to press buttons and it comes ... It encourages that attitude.

Ray : I think it's something to do with mothers, as well.

S: I'm sure it is.(Laughter) But some people don't quite like it if you always blame mother.

After all, one is supposed to grow up and be able to ... things for oneself.

: So is the Bodhisattva ideal an almost essential element in the spiritual community?

S: Well, I would say that the Bodhisattva ideal is an aspect of spiritual life in general. In the Buddhist scriptures, in the Mahayana scriptures, the Bodhisattva ideal is presented in what we can only feel is an exaggerated way, if you see what I mean. For instance, the Bodhisattva says that he is willing to suffer in hell for millions of ages if that will only help one living being even for one minute; the Indian mind does tend to exaggerate in this way. So one shouldn't take all that too literally. But one can say that there cannot be a successful spiritual community unless these two aspects are present; unless there is the concern of each person for his or her individual spiritual development, but also a concern on the part of each individual for the other individuals in the community. It isn't a question of having just separate compartments within the same building, as it were, and just not getting in one another's way, and separately devoting yourselves to even your individual development; because interaction with others is also part of your individual development. But I think there cannot be a successful spiritual community unless all the members of the community are concerned for one another, and when they are quite willing and happy to do things for one another, when there aren't these long arguments as to whose turn it is to do the washing up, and 'I did it the week before last twice', and somebody says, 'Well, I did it the week before that three times', and it ends up with an unpleasant argument as to who has done it how many times, and each person is really trying to get out of it and producing some sort of justification. Well, in a not so good community this is the sort of situation that develops: everyone is trying to do as little as possible. It is not a question of doing as much as possible, but of doing what needs to be done and not trying to work out too carefully how much you have already done and whether you can reasonably be called upon to do this particular piece of work, and so on. You are quite happy to give yourself to the situation. Sometimes people seem to be quite unwilling to do things within the context of the community, even though perhaps at that time they've got nothing else in particular to do, but they've got this abstract idea that they've already done their share.

Ray : There also seems to be another side of the coin, where if you start taking on a lot of things people just let you and -

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S: Well, that's true, but that's why, within a spiritual community, it's not a question of just you taking it on: everybody has got to have the same willing attitude, otherwise it's not a spiritual community. But if each person is afraid to do anything in case the others will start leaving it to them, and that they will be left with too much to do, there's not going to be the possibility of a spiritual community. Someone's got to start and show willing. If everybody is afraid and everybody is drawing back because they are afraid of being exploited by the others, it's not a very good foundation for that spiritual community. But there is a lot of this, I know. And it's really quite unhealthy and based on weakness. And so you get a situation in which people go into spiritual communities - I'm calling them that for the sake of convenience - just for their personal convenience. They think it will be an easy and pleasant way to live; but they don't really commit themselves to living in a spiritual community and accept that there must be mutual caring on the part of the members of that community.

So the precept says: 'Having resolved to attain the Highest Goal, abandon selfishness and

devote thyself to the service of others.' Well, in a sense you don't abandon selfishness when you devote yourself to the service of others, because it's one of the best things you could possibly do for yourself. It isn't a question of ceasing to care for yourself and doing things for others instead; one shouldn't, one in fact can't, really make that sort of rigid separation. And unless one has got some glimmer of the Bodhisattva ideal, not only can there not be a spiritual community but there can't be a team also, on any sort of spiritual basis. When I say spiritual basis, I mean a team based on an ideal and not a team based on expectation of much the same sort of carrot to everybody at the end of the road.

And also there is involved here this whole question of unwillingness to give oneself; that has a lot to do with this holding back oneself, not just things, not even just one's time and energy, but oneself; wanting to keep oneself apart and separate. Again, this is a symptom of weakness.

So if you read the Mahayana scriptures, if you read the descriptions of the Bodhisattva, you don't get the impression of a weak person who is being exploited by others and who has no identity of his own. The impression that you get is of precisely the opposite nature: that the Bodhisattva is a very strong, powerful, enterprising, vigorous person who is capable of taking a lot of initiative and responsibility, etc.

Asvajit: What about somebody like Mr Chen, then, who spent so much of his time in a hermitage? The way you speak about him, he seems to have had something very much of the Bodhisattva ideal. And yet he spent most of his time by himself, it seems.

S: Well, yes and no. If one takes quite literally what Mr Chen says, what he in fact used to say to me, he was visited at frequent intervals during the day by all sorts of non-human beings. And, of course, he did see people in the evening, and [154] then he gave them in a very concentrated form, as I know from my own experience, the benefits of his meditation during the day. And he certainly thought of other people, there's no doubt about that. And he wrote a lot of little booklets for the benefit of other people. So one should be careful about identifying the Bodhisattva's helpfulness or being of service to others with any particular pattern of behaviour or way of living. You can sometimes do more good to people in that way by shutting yourself up for the whole of the day and meditating, and just seeing them for half an hour in the evening and speaking just a few words: you can sometimes do more for them in that way. Well, depending on who you are and what you've experienced during the day.

So I think that it is very few people who can think really meaningfully in terms of the Bodhisattva ideal. I think the majority of people need as it were to strengthen themselves to begin with - I am talking now about people within the context of the Friends, the Movement. They need to strengthen themselves, to do more for themselves and more for others at the same time.

But have you not noticed it yourselves, this lack of willingness, lack of readiness to come forward? If you haven't noticed it in yourselves, at least you must have noticed it in other people. It does sometimes happen, doesn't it? And one can't help wondering why it does. People seem to accept the ideals and to be inspired by them, so they say, but there is this reluctance and this hanging back. Sometimes what people seem to think or to feel is: if I were to actually do what I am asked to do, after a few minutes I might think of something I wanted to do, and then I wouldn't be able to do it. It's as though they want to leave themselves free in

a quite negative way just in case something might turn up that they might like to do better. So this also suggests a sort of inner poverty, doesn't it?

: It seems to be a bit related to a precious attitude to your mental states. I suppose that's what you were saying about people being weak; it's a bit like if you're feeling positive it's in a quite fragile way, you feel you can't really go out of your way to help others because it would destroy what...

S: I don't think it's even, very often, as positive as that. Very often it seems you don't even have a fragile positivity to safeguard. Though sometimes what you say may well be the case.

Adrian: I was thinking of one possible positive aspect of the situation you've been describing of a community which isn't really a community: that, in a sense, if you're part of that, it does maybe show you exactly where you are, that if you start feeling resentment towards other members, obviously you're not maybe all that developed yourself, you've got a lot of room to develop.

S: Right. It's also a question, as I said yesterday and the day before, of calling things by their right names, and not assuming that you've got a spiritual community just because you call it such. Perhaps the most that you can say is that you are trying [155] to create a spiritual community by just sharing the living space. You've given yourselves an opportunity of doing that, but you don't automatically have a spiritual community because you all move in together and you all in a sense are on the same kind of spiritual path. A spiritual community requires a lot of work, a lot of effort, including mutual helpfulness. If everybody is just going his own way without too much regard for the other people in the community, there's really no spiritual community. On the other hand, the spiritual community is not just a group. It doesn't mean just because you're all very pally and doing everything together all the time, that you're necessarily a spiritual community. You have to follow a very positive, even creative, middle way here. There is room for the individual, but not in a precious and self-protective way. It's free, happy, energetic, caring individuals relating to one another - and, from time to time, even, also all doing things together. But as individuals; not as submerging in the group. Some people are so anxious to preserve a pseudo-individuality that they lose sight of the spiritual community altogether. And some people, again, are so anxious to have a spiritual community that what they end up with is a group. So you have to follow a middle way, which is not easy.

But this is really something which is quite interesting to observe in people; I have certainly observed it in communities sometimes - I don't mention any names - that people seem to devote more energy to avoiding doing things than to actually doing them, which is one of the things that one used to notice in the army. It's surprising that one notices it within the spiritual community, because presumably the spiritual community is something that you've joined quite voluntarily; you haven't been conscripted into it. So if you don't want to give of yourself, or feel you are unable to do so, it's better to keep clear of spiritual communities for the time being, and go your own quite honestly 'selfish', inverted commas, way. I say 'inverted commas', because you aren't really being selfish because you are not really acting in your own true interests, just being a bit blind and a bit reactive.

Ray: What about the sort of person that does a lot of things but he's always telling you that he's doing a lot of things, making you aware of it? That indicates to me a ...

S: Well, he probably doesn't really feel himself that he is doing those things. Some people can't really feel that they are doing something unless there are other people there to see them doing them, or at least to hear about them doing them or know about them doing them. Perhaps this has got something to do with exhibitionism: you don't experience yourself except to the extent that others experience you, and this is of course a great weakness, again, because it suggests a degree of alienation from yourself, that you're not experiencing yourself. Or it may be, of course, that you are the sort of person who needs approval from other people; you may not be convinced of the rightness of what you are doing, you need assurance, perhaps, from other people that what you are doing is right. But in any case, if you [156] are insisting too much upon what you have done or are doing, that is a definite weakness in one way or another.

On the other hand, if somebody does something, it's only right, it's only natural that others should appreciate it. Very often one feels there's a lack of appreciation: very often it is not that people especially want to be thanked or that they especially want a great display of appreciation, but it is rather surprising, if you are doing something in a positive way, in a positive spirit, as it were for other people, that they don't seem to appreciate it. It is very good, in a purely human way, to get a positive appreciative feedback; because it means that there is more of communication. It is not simply that you are doing something for other people, but they are aware of you doing it, they are aware of you, and if they show their awareness, it means that there is a better and intensified communication between you. So if you ignore what somebody else is doing, especially when he is doing it for you, it indicates a great insensitivity on your part, or blockage of communication on your part.

Sona: Sometimes I think we also need to tell people what's been going on, what you've been doing, because you just feel that they are totally unaware, and there's that institutionalized feeling. All these things suddenly appear and they don't know where they've all come from. And you have to make them aware that a lot of effort has gone in, often, ...

S: Well, you could take it then more as a reporting in, as it were, just keeping others informed.

Vajradaka: Could we just briefly go back to where we started on this thing about people having the weakness of not doing things for other people because of a reaction against having been forced to do things for other people? Do you think that this is a general kind of conditioning in our society?

S: I'm not so sure about that. I see much more of people having, howsoever they acquired it, a conditioning of expecting things to be done for them. I don't really see particularly people being forced to do things for other people. You could say there was a lot of that in the Victorian period in family life and social life. I don't really see much of it now, not in the people that I actually encounter, anyway.

Vajradaka: So where does that reaction come from, if it doesn't come from family life?

Uttara: Does this not maybe tie up with Enlightenment as experience and non-experience? Always expecting things to come from outside you, especially a God is going to give you this experience - it's the same sort of attitude, you're expecting things always to come from - to be given something.

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S: I think perhaps, just going back a bit - I'm a little tentative here - I think it's got something to do with the way in which we've been brought up. I think in many cases we've not been brought up to enjoy doing things for other people. I think that the way in which we've been brought up, speaking of the younger generation as it were, has been self-centred, or we've been encouraged to be self-centred in an unhealthy way. For instance, nowadays I gather that if children, say, don't want to do things, say, for their parents or within the house, they are allowed to get away with it. It's as though educational theory has gone to the other extreme. Say, in the old days, let's assume for the sake of argument - though maybe this does involve a bit of over-generalization - you were made to do things because it was good for you to do them whether you liked it or not. But it seems as though nowadays, in the case of children - and I have observed a few children in my recent tours - they are not made to do anything. It's as though it's gone to the other extreme. Not that they need be made to do anything, but I've also seen this: it is possible to encourage children, even train them, to enjoy doing things for other people. So it seems that this sort of training is lacking. It's as though the parents assume that the best thing for the child is to be allowed to be completely selfish in a negative way, and to become accustomed to the parents doing everything for it and taking total responsibility, and then of course the school, and then of course society. But one isn't given, it seems, any longer, in many cases, the sort of training which will enable one to experience for oneself the fact that you can have fun doing things for other people. It's as though the assumption is that you can't have fun doing things for other people, and therefore children are not trained to have fun doing things for other people.

Fairly often - one mustn't generalize too much - but I think there is quite a bit of this, and I think some of the people who come to us in the Friends are suffering from the after-effects, in some cases, of this sort of bringing up. They've never had the experience, or it's never been suggested to them, that doing things for others could be a very positive experience. Perhaps in some schools they have been encouraged to have this sort of experience, at least maybe collect things for Oxfam and things like that, and they've enjoyed it; but I think in only too many cases, within the family, the ideology has been that the child shouldn't be made to do anything that he doesn't like, and that has excluded training him to help people in an enjoyable and positive way.

Ross: It seems also it's been, in some cases, anyway, projected slightly, inasmuch as they don't even enjoy doing things for themselves. They expect other people to do things for them. So not only are they not doing things for other people, they expect other people to do things for them. It's really quite negative.

Asvajit: Living alone is really a very good antidote to all this, I think, because you really see what your own conditioning is in that respect. You see how much at first you detest all the little tasks about the house that have to be done, and you [158] realize you've got to change your attitude. And after a while you actually begin to enjoy doing them for yourself. And then, amazing though it may seem, you actually begin to enjoy doing them for others.

S: Yes. And maybe, in the end, you start feeling it isn't a question of doing it for myself or for others; it's just a question of doing that particular thing, and you can enjoy doing it. That it's for you or that it's for others is just a tag that you attach to it. It doesn't really have very much meaning. You enjoy meditating: does it really matter whether it benefits you or benefits others? ... either. You enjoy doing the washing up; does it really matter whether it's a cup that

you've made dirty or somebody else has made dirty? You just enjoy doing it. But perhaps this is an example of the way in which we superimpose these unreal categories upon basic experience. The job to be done, say, is the washing up: who is responsible for the big piles of dirty dishes, that is not all that important. The more you enjoy it, the less importance you attach to those sort of distinctions.

I don't often quote the Bible, but there is a little saying in the Bible which is quite true as far as it goes: that 'He who loses his life shall save it, and he who saves his life shall lose it.' If you're over-concerned to protect your own individuality, you will lose it, because it will become such a fragile, over-protected thing that the first blast of actual experience will shatter it. You mustn't be a little hothouse plant of an individuality; that's no better than a little sheltered, cloistered, over-protected ego.

: There's an extreme case of that in "Oranges", because when I first got these aprons - we got a dozen brown aprons - people wouldn't wear them because they said it took away their individuality. There was a big ongoing argument for ages. One bloke actually wouldn't wear them - well, he started wearing them about six months later, when we'd forgotten about it, so that of his own accord his could start wearing them.

S: It must be a very weak individuality that could be taken away by the wearing of an apron.

: Yes, this was all coming up, but some people were still refusing to wear them.

S: It's quite interesting, yes. Well, well.

Chris: Talking about doing things for others, have you also said in the past that it's a particularly bad thing to subdue the urge or the impulse to do something good?

S: Yes, indeed.

Chris: That's the potential Bodhisattva in yourself that you're stamping upon, if you think about doing something and say, 'Ah, I'm not going to do that.'

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S: Well, sometimes people do have - this is rarer, but sometimes people do have a genuine urge to do something for others, but are a bit hesitant because they are not quite sure how it's going to be taken; because perhaps in that particular social environment it's not usual to do things for other people in that way. It shouldn't be, but actually it is, so if you did something for someone in that situation it would be a bit noticeable; it would make you a bit prominent, so you might hesitate for that sort of reason, even though you had a genuine urge to do something for someone else. But you should have the courage of your - not convictions, exactly, but your own positive feelings, and just go ahead. And people would have to adjust. They would, in fact, eventually, fall in quite happily once they got over the initial shock.

Asvajit: A bit like putting on the sandwich boards, collecting for Dhardo Rimpoche. People show a bit of reluctance at first, think 'This is a bit odd, putting myself out front', but after a while they begin to enjoy it. Some of them are very good at it.

S: Right. All right, perhaps that's enough about resolving 'to attain the Highest Goal, abandon

selfishness and devote thyself to the service of others'. We just mustn't make too much of an antithesis here [between] selfishness and devoting yourself to the service of others.

Ray: Can you explain one other point? I have heard it said that the spreading of the Dharma is the highest point of unselfishness.

S: Ah, you're referring to the saying that the gift of the Dharma is the highest form of giving. Which doesn't, of course, mean the Dharma in the abstract. It means the Dharma as understood and realized by you. You could even paraphrase it and say that the deepest, the profoundest form of communication is the communication of the Dharma; though you can't separate the Dharma as a thing to be communicated from the actual communication itself, because to some extent at least a communication is the Dharma, because the communication is you, and if you've realized the Dharma to any extent, to that extent you are the Dharma. So in communicating the Dharma you communicate yourself, and in communicating yourself you communicate the Dharma. If you are imbued with the Dharma you don't have to bother too much about communicating the Dharma; you just communicate, you communicate yourself, and yourself is imbued with the Dharma. So if you really are imbued with the Dharma you can forget all about communicating the Dharma: just communicate, that's all you need to do. If the Dharma is there, it'll come through sooner or later, in one way or another. You don't even have to think about it.

Ray: So if you are communicating the Dharma within your working situation [to] people that aren't ... the Dharma, that's perhaps more important than running a class?

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S: I don't find it necessary to make that sort of comparison, in a way. To the extent that you have imbued the Dharma, to that extent you will communicate it, in whatever situation you are. If you very much want to communicate the Dharma, that is to say to the extent that you [are imbued with] it, if you very much want to communicate yourself, you will of course naturally gravitate to those situations in which you are able to communicate the Dharma, able to communicate yourself. So you may be more inclined, say, to take classes because that's a more specialized, more intensive situation, more conducive to the communication of the Dharma. But some degree of communication, I think, is always possible, whatever the situation. And to the extent that you've imbued the Dharma and to the extent that others are able to accept your communication, to that extent you will be able to communicate the Dharma, by communicating yourself or in the process of communicating yourself.

So it's not so much that the Dharma is a thing that we talk about; it's more like the flavour that accompanies everything you do, everything you say, it's there in the background, so to speak, all the time. You don't have to drag it forward into the limelight in a very explicit way, necessarily, on every occasion. On the other hand, you shouldn't be shy of doing that when it seems necessary.

All right, precept 9.

(9) Having entered upon the mystic Mantrayanic pathway, permit not the body, the speech or the mind to remain unsanctified, but practise the threefold mandala.

So what does this mean? This is a bit technical, isn't it? 'Having entered upon the mystic

Mantrayanic pathway, permit not the body, the speech or the mind to remain unsanctified, but practise the threefold mandala.' Well, the context here of course clearly is the Triyana, the three yanas, which are the Hinayana, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana, the Vajrayana representing the higher reaches, so to speak, of the Mantrayana. So 'permit not the body,

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the speech or the mind to remain unsanctified.' The keynote is sanctification, which is not a very good word in English as regards its connotation. I'm not sure what Tibetan word is being translated here, but I suspect it would be better rendered by 'integrated', not 'sanctified' but 'integrated'. Sanctified suggests that body, speech [162] and mind are in some way unholy, that they have to be sanctified, they have to be purified, there's something wrong or something bad about them. But it isn't really quite like that from the Buddhist point of view. Basically, the Mantrayana or the Vajrayana or the Tantrayana is concerned with the integration of the body, speech and mind of the individual with the body, speech and mind of the Tathagata, and with the transformation of the body, speech and mind of the individual into the three kayas, the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya of the Buddha. So one is concerned with integration and transformation rather than with sanctification. It's rather interesting that this expression, 'sanctification', or rather 'unsanctified', is used; I think this is a bit of Christian terminology creeping in.

There is a sort of link with the Tibetan Book of the Dead, because there are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas associated with the head centre, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas associated, or rather - well, yes, let's say so as not to make it too confusing, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas associated with the throat centre, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas associated with the heart centre. So, in the Vajrayana, the talk is always of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and figures and images, not of abstract principles; and these mandalas, the threefold mandala, is the mandala or the three mandalas of the divinities of body, the divinities of speech and the divinities of mind. This is quite technical; it's really not possible to go into it in a general way, but one thing that can be gone into is this fact that, in the Vajrayana, everything is seen in terms of divinities, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; everything is seen in as it were personal terms. One doesn't, say, envisage abstract qualities or principles: it's all in terms of images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Why do you think that is?

: It's easier to relate to.

S: Easier to relate to, yes. There's more of a communication.

Vajradaka: It's more a hook for positive projection.

S: Yes, it's more a hook for positive projection. And there's a greater possibility of that dialogue with oneself that I spoke of yesterday, this sort of extended dialogue. A dialogue with all these different as it were concealed, hidden, esoteric aspects of oneself. By having that not only consciousness of them but dialogue with them, you gradually integrate them into your own body, speech and mind, which is to say your body, speech [162] and mind are transformed. So therefore it's integration and transformation in this way which is the keynote

of the Vajrayana, one could say.

Alaya: Could you mention some of these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that are associated with each of the body, speech and mind?

S: Ah, these you can just look up in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. It gives you the complete list, the five families first of all, the peaceful divinities; the five Buddhas with their five consorts, and the ten Bodhisattvas and so on.

You also notice that in a way these last three precepts pertain to the three yanas: do you see that? No. 7: 'Having acquired practical knowledge of spiritual things and made the Great Renunciation, permit not the body, speech or mind to become unruly, but observe the three vows', which really amount to the Ten Precepts; that's the Hinayana. Then: 'Having resolved to attain the Highest Goal, abandon selfishness and devote thyself to the service of others'; that's the Mahayana. Then: 'Having entered upon the mystic Mantrayana pathway, permit not the body, the speech or the mind to remain unsanctified, but practise the threefold mandala'; that's the Vajrayana. So you can say that the keynote of the Hinayana is renunciation, the keynote of the Mahayana is unselfishness, and the keynote of the Vajrayana is transformation. So it's as though, if one wanted to summarize those three yanas, one could say renunciation, unselfishness - or altruism, that's a better word - renunciation, altruism and transformation: these are the three great main stages of the spiritual path, in terms of the three yanas.

Uttara: Good title for a lecture, 'Renunciation, Altruism and Transformation'.

S: Renunciation in the sense of Going Forth; going forth from the world, going forth from the group. And altruism not in the sense that one really sees a distinction between self and others, but whether one acts altruistically, or acts in a way that appears to others to be altruistic, because for oneself the distinction between self and others has lost at least something of its significance. And then transformation because one sees it isn't a question of disowning anything or separating oneself from anything, but simply of transforming one's natural energies of body, speech and mind into more and more refined forms. So renunciation, altruism and transformation. This is really the essence of it. But not sanctification; because sanctification suggests they remain virtually as they were, you just sprinkle them with a few drops of holy water and that makes them all right.

Uttara: Do you not practise with the three foundation yogas, practise the Vajrasattva ... ?

S: Yes, if one practises the Vajrayana systematically, yes, you start off with the four foundations, the four mula yogas. [163]

Asvajit: This triad that you've just given us of renunciation, altruism and transformation - would you say that's exactly parallel to ceasing to do evil, learning to do good, purifying the heart? It amounts to the same thing?

S: You could - well, I wouldn't say it amounted to the same thing because that particular verse, which is from the Dhammapada, is a bit as it were, I won't say Hinayanistic, because it is a verse coming from the days of archaic Buddhism, but you would need to interpret it pretty freely. But you could do that, no doubt, with some justification. So interpret renunciation as 'cease to do evil'; instead of altruism, 'learn to do good' - kusalassa

upasampada, the acceptance in the sense of the accumulation of the skilful. And then sacitta pariyodapanam, the purification of the mind - well, it's not purifying it in the dualistic sense, but refining and transforming. So you could interpret in that way, yes, with a little ingenuity. That's another point for the lecture. Why, have you got to give a lecture next week?

Uttara: No, I just thought it was a good title: 'Renunciation, Altruism, Transformation', food for thought.

S: You find a similar triad in Tsongkhapa. Tsongkhapa speaks of renunciation, bodhicitta and wisdom. But already you could say wisdom is included in the case of the Bodhisattva ideal, or altruism, because it isn't that you, believing that you are a separate individual, do things for others believing that they are separate individuals; your sense of duality is already diminished, and it's because of that that it's possible for you to be what others call altruistic. So that means that there is a degree, an element of wisdom there already, otherwise you couldn't be a Bodhisattva or be altruistic at all. So, instead of the third stage being wisdom, as Tsongkhapa says, you could say that the third stage was transformation. And then that would give you your parallelism with the three yanas.

Uttara: It's all right knowing, it's the doing. I know ... the only way is to help others, the only way is the Bodhisattva ideal, but to actually put it into practice ...

S: Also another point is, to go back to this question of doing things for others, which I feel we haven't exhausted by any means - if people actually make a practice of doing things for others, say deliberately - and if people, say, give things to others deliberately, they will find, perhaps to their surprise, that their sense of their own identity is enhanced rather than diminished. What people are afraid of, when they are afraid of doing things for others or giving to others, is a sort of diminution of their own individuality, their own sense of identity. But actually they will find that the opposite happens.

Adrian: Is that because we tend to see things, giving, in terms of giving material objects, and we see material objects as in some way part of ourselves? [164]

S: It could be, in some cases. But then, why not give oneself? Also, giving and doing things for others are actions, and you do experience yourself in a way, at least the ordinary person, the relatively undeveloped person, experiences himself more in action than in thought. So it would seem to be natural that when you do something for others, when you give somebody something - something, say, concrete, something material - by virtue simply of the fact that those are actions you can in any case expect to experience yourself. Perhaps then you experience yourself more; your sense of personal identity is enhanced rather than diminished.

: Why do you think that is?

S: Well, first of all, as I said, you do experience yourself usually more in action. Though perhaps I shouldn't say 'in action' - in act, if you see the point of the distinction; experience yourself more in act. Because there is energy there, so again you experience yourself more. And there is purpose, so again you experience yourself more.

For instance, if somebody asks you to do something - that's assuming he asks you nicely and that you've no real grounds for reacting - if somebody asks you to do something, sometimes

you are more concerned with the fact that he is asking you to do it, which you might even sometimes interpret quite wrongly as a telling of you to do it, than you are concerned with the actual thing to be done. When someone says, 'Would you mind doing so-and-so?' it's really a directing of your attention to the thing that is to be done, so your eye ought as it were immediately to go to that thing. But instead of going to the thing to be done, you go to him, asking you to do it or telling you to do it, and you start reacting against that. It is not that he is just drawing your attention to some objective fact or situation which you then see for yourself, and because you see it for yourself you can see that it's to be done and you're the one to do it, so you go and do it. No, you don't allow your attention to be directed to the objective situation in that way: you fasten on the fact that he is asking you to do it, and why should he be asking you to do it, and why doesn't he do it himself, etc. etc? So you personalize the whole situation in entirely the wrong way.

Sona: It really can depend on how somebody asks you to do something.

S: That's why I mentioned that to begin with.

Sona: Because it does have a big effect.

S: Right. So when you ask somebody, you must be quite careful you are just asking them.

Sona: Like almost be objective.

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S: You are just directing their attention to the needs of the situation.

John R: Does that mean you can't have the outcome in mind, that you actually mention it, that you don't necessarily want to steer the action. Asking somebody, and allowing them to say no.

S: Well, yes, if they're saying no, as conceivably they might quite legitimately, it's not just a reaction against you but a drawing of your attention to a further aspect of the situation that you had overlooked when you asked them to do it. You just hadn't known about it, or couldn't have known about it, perhaps. So that everybody just sees the whole situation more objectively. It isn't a question of anybody reacting against anybody.

John R: It becomes a dialogue.

S: Right. Supposing you say, 'Would you mind doing the washing up?' and somebody says, 'Well, no, sorry, I've got to go and take a yoga class at that time' - well, fair enough, no one's reacting against anybody; you're just exchanging information. So the first person might say, 'Oh, well, OK, I'll do it, then. I'll manage to do it.' But again no one is reacting against anybody. But if you bring in the idea 'Why should I do it? Why should I be the one asked? Surely I've got a right to my own time? Why shouldn't I be able to do what I like? Why should I have to do something just because other people tell me? Why should he be in charge? Why should he be the boss?' - all these sort of considerations that enter in - well, just nothing happens.

Sona: Another thing that happens, similar aspects, is when you make personal criticism. If you point something out to somebody that something's wrong in their life they ought to

change, you often get the reaction that they immediately say, 'Well, you're no saint', and they start ... They're not interested in what you're saying about them.

S: Well, this is something I've been really a bit hard on in recent months, because I have seen the need of being hard on it. Again, I'm talking within the context of the Movement at large. An objective point is made, and instead of considering that objective point, certain persons present turn at once to the examination of the motives of the person making that statement. So this one should never do. If someone makes an objective statement, or what purports to be such, take it at its face value and examine it as an objective statement. If you feel that his motive in making that statement was in any way wrong, you should not raise the matter on the spot. Take him aside afterwards for a quiet, friendly talk, and try to point it out to him; but not immediately ignore any objective validity in what he said and at once turn to his motive. That seems absolutely crazy to me, and to preclude any real discussion or communication. Because he can then turn round and question your motives in questioning his motive, and there's no end to it.

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So when a statement is made which purports to be an objective statement, treat it as an objective statement even if you suspect that it isn't. Do you see what I mean? Otherwise, if you go into motives, there's no end. If it is an objective situation that you're dealing with, you're concerned with objective facts anyway more than you are with subjective motives. They can be dealt with separately.

John R: What is this fascination with motives? It's something that I'm very prone to, so I'm interested in what you're saying, particularly.

S: Well, I think very broadly speaking it is an outcome of our Freudian, or neo-Freudian, or pseudo-Freudian bringing up. Do you see what I mean? It first of all started with regard to sexuality; it seems to have spread to practically everything else. But, no, when you're dealing with let's say the real world, just to use that phrase provisionally, you have to consider objective facts. For instance, supposing we say, 'Let's have our lunch out on the lawn today' - supposing. Then somebody says, 'Well, supposing it rains?' and somebody else says, 'What's your motive for suggesting that it might rain?' You're not trying to weigh up whether it is actually going to rain or not, because it's that which will determine whether you actually go and have your lunch out on the lawn. You get sidetracked from that and you start discussing somebody's motives for making that objective statement. So a statement which purports to be objective, if it is to be challenged at all, is to be challenged on objective grounds, not on subjective grounds of motive. That is a separate question, to be examined separately if necessary. I'm not saying it shouldn't be examined, but I'm saying that the fact that a motivation is suspect doesn't necessarily invalidate the objectivity, factually speaking, of a statement. Someone may have the worst possible motives for saying something, but nonetheless what he says may be correct. And you mustn't use your suspicion of the correctness of his motive as a reason for rejecting the objective value of what he says - quite apart from the fact that, if you are going to examine people's motives instead of just the objective value of what they said (I'm referring here to what they say about objective situations), then you're just going to be lost in an endless roundabout of discussion which just doesn't get anywhere.

: There seems to be an area of guilt here as well, because I sometimes find myself expecting

people - say you can't do something and you tell them you can't do something for a particular reason, you almost expect them to be annoyed with you, to question your motives.

S: Oh, that is sometimes because you are not honest. For instance, you say, 'I can't do it' - this is another favourite little micchaditthi of mine, which I've been getting at - very often it is not that people cannot do something but that they choose not to do it. But they don't say, 'I do not wish to do it', they say, 'I cannot do it'. So it's a false statement, so it can be challenged; because when people question your saying [167] that you can't do it, they are not necessarily questioning your motives, they are saying you're telling a lie. You can do it. So that if your reason for not doing it was that you could not do it, you have been shown to be making a false statement, because you could do it, and therefore the whole discussion remains within the limits of objectivity. So you should be honest and say, 'I don't want to do it'.

For instance - I experience this again and again with people, this is why I'm rather strong on it - people say, 'Oh, I can't do this. I've got to go to the cinema this evening'. You see: they present as external compulsion and unavoidable necessity what is actually their own choice. So instead of saying, 'I can't do it because I've got to do such-and-such', [say,] 'I don't wish to do it because I've chosen to do such-and-such instead' - you see what I mean?

Ross: Yes, but I don't seem to be able to see it quite as clearly as that, because - you could almost say that about any action anyway, couldn't you, in a sense? You've always got a choice, haven't you? For instance, you could drop the yoga class and do the washing up; it would mean that everybody who wanted to do yoga would be in trouble, but - So in a sense you always wish to do the right thing, but it's almost as though you never 'can't' do it.

S: No, you can never not do the right thing if you really want to do the right thing and are completely honest. That's true. So I am saying that people should accept statements of an objective nature at their face value, without at that time going into motives, but if someone says that he cannot do something, you can question that without questioning his motives, because it is a factual question whether he can or whether he can't; and very often people present as inability to do something what is actually unwillingness to do something. Because they feel guilty; they don't dare to say, 'I don't want to do that', so they say, 'I can't do it, it's impossible, because I've got to do something else.' But it is not that they've got to do that something else, it is that they want to do it; but they don't dare to say that, so they present it in the guise of unavoidable necessity. So that can be nailed, in the interests of objectivity. And then they're brought up against - very often one even thinks to oneself, 'I've got to do this, I've got to do that, I've got to do the other'; but you haven't, you're choosing to do it. So to the extent that you say that you've got to do it, and to the extent that you present it in these pseudo-objective terms, you're really not recognizing your own feelings; you're not recognizing that in fact you're doing it because you want to do it, and that you're choosing to do it. You're refusing to accept responsibility for your own actions. This may be the basic error here: you're refusing to accept that you are responsible. You say, 'I'm not responsible, I can't help it, I've got to do it'; and that is not the position, the position is: 'I am responsible, and I am choosing to do it.' But you are trying to disguise that fact from yourself and not face up to it. You say, 'I've got to go on that trip to America. [168] I can't get out of it, I've just got to.' But actually, you're choosing, it's what you want to do, but you dare not admit and own up to the fact, because that would mean you'd have to account for it, and maybe justify it.

: You become vulnerable, so if you say that it's like protecting yourself. If you have that

excuse it's like outside you, you lay yourself open.

S: Yes, right. It's outside your control, as it were, you are forcibly prevented as it were from doing something maybe that you promised to do. So you say, 'I couldn't help it, I had to do something else.' But you know you chose to do something else; you preferred to do that thing, but you don't like to admit it.

Anyway, challenging a person on that score is quite a different thing from going into their motivations when you should be just examining the objective validity of what they've said. If you examine an objective statement in an objective way, if there is any discrepancy between that and the actual motive, or between the innate(?) motive and the real motive, it will come out in due course and be pretty obvious to everybody. So you don't need, really, to tackle it directly.

: It can be quite difficult if somebody asks you to do something with a lot of emotion, and then the question is not objective. Devamitra sometimes does this to me, and I just see red and I can't answer him. I get angry with him because I know he's not being objective. And I don't know what to say.

S: Well, in a way it doesn't matter if they're not being truly objective; you just seize hold of what they have actually said, and proceed on that basis.

: I find that quite difficult sometimes; I have...

S: A lot depends on how well you know the other person, how well they trust you. And also if their motivation is such that it makes them really blind to the objective situation, so that their objective statement is hardly worth considering; that is rather an extreme case, and it is very difficult then to take it seriously. But one should at least try to, or at least take it seriously initially, until the absurdity of the whole situation just becomes obvious to everybody, including the person who has made the statement originally.

Asvajit: You might have to be very patient, though, very self-controlled for that situation to ...

S: Well, for instance, take the case of Devamitra. Devamitra might say: 'We've got to have this great big Centre in Norwich. It's got to be five storeys high and it's got to have 60 rooms and be twice as big as Sukhavati.' You can see that that is (this is purely hypothetical) completely unreasonable. You might say, 'You're being carried away by a wrong motivation' - but don't say that; [say] 'Oh yes, that's a good idea, now how much [169] would it cost?' Take out your ready reckoner: 'I think we could do it for about $2 million' (laughter). Devamitra would say: '$2 million? We couldn't raise $2 million.' ... You see? You don't go challenging his motivations straight away; you just show the objective consequences of the proposition that he has made in such a way that he himself starts seeing the absurdity of his own original statement. I think it's more like that.

But I have seen myself so many instances of discussion going round and round in circles because of this mutual attribution of motives. And you have to be really on quite firm ground before you start questioning another person's motives: it suggests that you've got very keen insight and that you know that other person very well, and it's a very personal matter. And in a way it isn't fair in a large or comparatively large meeting to start challenging someone's

motives; it's almost inviting him to react. So it's much better, if you have to do that at all, if you sincerely feel that someone's motive for making a certain statement isn't all that it purports to be, you should just quietly take him aside, under very positive conditions, and just try to explore this with him, rather than just attack him on the spot - which as I said will often just invite a reaction, and you're just as much to blame then if the situation becomes more embroiled.

John R: It's often the case that one just wants the motivation clarified, not that one wants to attack him or question him. One's unclear and perhaps suspicious of it.

S: Yes. But if the motivation is not relevant to the actual objective validity of the statement, there's no point in going into it then. I'm thinking of occasions like, say, Order meetings and council meetings, committee meetings, and so on.

Ross: It seems to relate to not relating to people on the basis
of their neurosis. Is that ... ?

S: Yes. We also make them accountable for what they say. If they make a statement, all right, take the statement at its face value; take it that they are quite responsible and mature people who have examined their own motives and then are making that statement.

Ray: The trouble [is] it seems like an unfair contest, because some people are much more adept at being able to see objective situations, while other people tend to get clouded by ...

S: If you start going into motives, which are still more difficult to see, it only clouds the issue still more. Sometimes, perhaps, people who feel incompetent to deal with the objective situation take refuge from that weakness in just questioning somebody's motives. They can't meet his argument so they start questioning his motives. I think that is a quite unskilful thing to do. It's better then to say, 'Look, I don't really feel quite happy with what you say. I can't actually find [170] any fault with it, but I'm just not happy with it', and leave it there; not at once start challenging that person's motives. It seems a very easy way out. It very often just means that it is a means of avoiding presenting one's real reasons, perhaps; when you challenge somebody's motives for making a certain statement, it is your way of concealing your motives, your real motives, for wishing to oppose what has been said. Because if you started opposing on logical grounds, maybe your own unskilful motivation would become only too obvious, so you start attacking the other person's motivation instead. Or perhaps the statement made is so reasonable, objectively considered, even though emotionally you are against it for purely subjective reasons, you are unable to produce any objective reasons against it, but you don't want to accept it because of your own conditioning, let's say, and your own wrong motivation, so you attack the other person's motivations in order to invalidate the truth of what he has said.

Asvajit: It does seem to be a sort of personality that does actively seek out situations like that.

S: What do you mean?

Asvajit: Well, one wishes to find people to oppose.

S: That is true, yes.

Asvajit: And you are delighted when someone gives you an opportunity to oppose them. I notice that in myself to some extent, though it's becoming less now, since I've become aware of it. I don't know where it comes from.

S: Well, it's just the aggressiveness of the human animal. Anyway, I think it's time we had a cup of tea, or coffee rather.

- - - - ...

I want to go back to Precept 9 and talk a bit about this word 'unsanctified'. I think we could explore the implications of that word, and the whole attitude of mind which it represents, a bit more before we go on to Precept 10.

I can give you some idea of my mind and thought by citing a particular instance, something that occurred two or three years ago. There was one of our Friends who wanted to get married to another of our Friends, and she was very insistent on having a Buddhist wedding ceremony on a really grand scale, with Bhante actually conducting the ceremony in person, and practically the whole Movement there to witness the occasion. But I wasn't at all happy, I'm afraid, in this case, with the motives here; so I thought about it quite a bit, and I came to the conclusion that this particular Friend of ours wanted this Buddhist wedding ceremony as a sort of sanctification: it was as though, deep down in her own mind, though she was superficially quite a liberated young woman, she felt that there was something wrong about that particular relationship or about sex in general, perhaps, and that it wasn't all right unless it had been [171] 'sanctified' and regularised by the proper religious authority. So this was my main reason, or at least one of my reasons, for just refusing to accede to her request; certainly so far as my own involvement was concerned.

So this is the sort of thing that I mean: that you have a feeling that something is wrong. You don't really try to change it on its own level; you bring in some extraneous factor which you superimpose upon the original thing, which then makes that original thing all right, and it's usually in the form of some sort of official sanction - you see what I mean? This is what I mean by sanctification. It's a sort of pseudo-sacramentalism, let's say.

Vajradaka: You get this in the scientific field, as well, can't you?

S: In what sort of way?

Vajradaka: I was thinking of those experiments in the States where they had the actor behind the screen who was done up with electrodes and they brought people in from the street to give this person a certain dosage of electricity, whatever, and the person was saying 'Oh, it's OK, just keep going, it's all right'; and even though people went way beyond what their conscience thought right, till the person appeared dead, they got some kind of sanctification to kill this person ...

S: No, not sanctification, sanction. This is exactly the opposite thing: that you feel that something is wrong, but you want it made all right so that you can go on enjoying it with a clear conscience; not that you feel that something is right already, and then you need a sort of sanction for doing what is wrong - not that. No, I wouldn't say that was a parallel; or rather it relates to a quite different field. I'm thinking more in the field of morality and religion, that -

I'm thinking of the Catholic sacramental system, where it's as though if something is, as I sometimes say, sprinkled with holy water, it becomes all right. It's got a divine blessing upon it. So you're not actually concerned with the quality of what you are doing, but how it is viewed in certain quarters. In a way, yes, that does connect within that particular scientific field, but it isn't really quite an exact parallel.

Asvajit: So it relates to the group and not to individuality.

S: One could say that also, because very often it is the sanction of the group. You find this in time of war: normally you wouldn't fight and kill other people, but war is sanctified by the religious authority. The bishops tell you it's right, the archbishops tell you it's right, you're urged to go and fight, you've got God's blessing. So war is sanctified. Perhaps a better parallel than the one you cited, but of that sort, would be the Inquisition. They tortured people, they racked people, they burned people, but that was all sanctified. They didn't in a way even feel the need of sanctification; they were so [172] convinced that they'd got it, that they were doing God's will. But in modern times we are not so self-confident, so we vaguely feel that something is wrong, and instead of putting it right, if it is wrong, or if it isn't wrong ceasing to feel that it's wrong, we try to get some sort of external sanction which will sanctify it - not only make it all right [but] make it holy as it were. I think this is the main difference between what I'm getting at and the instance you cited: you positively want it to be made holy, so that you can say, say in the case of matrimony, in the case of getting married, 'It's a holy thing, it's a sacred thing'; that it is saturated with sanctity, as it were, it is a sacrament.

: Do you think there are any positive aspects of sanctification?

S: Not if you take it literally. Not if you actually feel that something is wrong without that, without that sort of blessing coming from outside - that it needs to be sanctified. But there are certain things, I would say, that don't need to be sanctified because they aren't unholy, they don't come in that category at all one way or the other.

John R: It seems to tie in with the whole Christian thinking about the fall of man, and how he is pretty much of a wretch anyway, and his only chance is to get some sort of sanctification placed on him.

S: It is really a placing on you; that's why it is distinct from real transformation, which can only be undertaken by you. You are passive in the operation.

Viramati: It can be taken away.

S: Presumably it can, yes.

Viramati: The sanctity of the church can be ... excommunicated.

Vajradaka: Where does the word come from?

S: Well, it's from the word which we usually translate as holy, sanctus, to make holy. So if you have holy you have unholy. You feel that something is unholy, you ought not to be doing it, you want to do it ...

(End of Side)

Tape 8, Side 2

but you can only do it under the proper auspices, as it were. So it does very much come down to a question of religious authority.

Asvajit: So does the question of holiness have any part at all in Buddhism?

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S: In this sense, it would seem not: not in the case of sanctification by some power outside yourself. This is the real root of the issue here, that you cannot transform something, you have to have it transformed for you; which means it isn't transformed at all.

: It's an abdication of responsibility, too.

S: It's an abdication of responsibility, yes.

Vajradaka: Perhaps it's for this reason there's no priestcraft within Buddhism, presumably, because it's the priest class that...

S: They're the professional sanctifiers. Anything which is done without that sanctification, which is supposed to have that sanctification, is wrong.

Ross: Don't you tend to get that in Tibet to some extent, with lamas and things?

S: In what way?

Ross: I don't know. Just meet with ordinary people's customs and things. I saw a programme about it once, and it seemed as though they were constantly being brought in, these lamas, to perform things that ordinary people didn't understand, and when they went away it would be all right.

S: You did get quite a bit of this in Tibetan Buddhism at the popular level. I wouldn't say that it was sanctification, though. It was magic; sanctification is pseudo-religion, but magic - from a scientific point of view you can say that there's nothing in it, but magic is, what shall we say?, a sort of manipulation of the subtle forces of nature, forces not recognized by science, in the interests of man. For instance, the peasants would get the lamas in to bless the crops; they would feel that the lamas had a magic power, as it were, and that they were able to use that for the benefit of the harvest. Strictly speaking, this is nothing to do with Buddhism, though the lamas used to do it; but no one would believe that you yourself required sanctification, or anything that you did needed sanctification in order to make it all right; no. But there's a certain superficial similarity with some aspects of popular Tibetan Buddhism.

I think with their Western Christian background, some Westerners who get involved with Tibetan Buddhism take it in this way when they get, say, a Tantric initiation; they take it as a sanctification, that it's all right then to do the things that they want to do, they've been sanctified and this is why they like to think in terms of, say, the Tantra as sex, that when they're, say, just indulging in sex it isn't just indulging in sex, they're practising the Tantra.

You see, they look at it like this because they feel it needs some sort of justification; it needs some sort of excuse. They're not able to say, 'I'm just enjoying sex'; 'Oh, no, I'm practising the Tantra. That's my [174] path, that's my discipline.' So clearly the way is open to all sorts of rationalizations and dishonesty.

: ... popular gurus jump into that gap.

S: Well, if you want to enjoy sex there's no reason why you shouldn't, if you think it's a skilful thing to do, or at least not an unskilful thing to do; but why drag the Tantra in? It suggests that you feel the need of some sort of justification, in other words you're not really quite easy in your own mind about what you are doing. You require some sanction, some authority, as it were.

Asvajit: I'd have thought it would be likely to lessen your enjoyment of sex rather than the other way around, if you required some sort of sanctification, [or] you felt that it was in some way unsatisfactory. Trying to add something.

S: But anyway, you see in a general way what I mean by this idea of sanctification? It's a cheap and easy way of making things all right when you don't feel that they really are all right. You ought to be changing yourself, you ought to be transforming yourself, but you make do with this superficial sanctification. You don't want to give anything up, but at the same time you want the fruits of giving up. Sometimes people feel that if they want to lead a spiritual life they ought to give up sex - whether that's right or wrong, they sometimes feel that. But they are unable to give up sex, so they want to get the fruits of the spiritual life without giving it up, so they do it as a Tantric discipline, you see? So they have the best of both worlds. But that isn't quite honest in their case. Well, perhaps you can have the best of both worlds, but not quite in that way, or not at all in that way.

Viramati: Can 'Mantrayanic' here be directly translated as 'Vajrayanic'?

S: Mantrayana comes in as a general term; mantrayana originally was a distinction within the Mahayana. Within the Mahayana there was a distinction between the paramitayana, the yana of the practice of the paramitas, and the mantrayana, the yana of the recitation of mantras. But gradually, so to speak, the mantrayana detached itself from the Mahayana, and went through various stages of development of its own, the concluding stage being that of the Vajrayana. So then eventually the Vajrayana became so important that it was reckoned as a separate yana, distinct from the Mahayana. So then you got Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana.

Ray: When it speaks of - writes of kundalini in the footnote, is that the same kundalini of meaning as the Rajneesh movement?

[175]
S: Well, I've deliberately ignored all that. I thought it rather beside the point, rather irrelevant. He does drag in sometimes in the footnotes things which really haven't got much to do with the text. Kundalini, in any case, is a Hindu term, so it's best not to consider things in that sense.

John R: To effect a bit of sanctity, you need a bit of God, don't you? It's part and parcel of the same thing?

S: Well, yes, I'd say sanctity was different from sanctification. Genuine sanctity would mean that you yourself became actually genuinely holy; but sanctification is a form of silavratta paramarsa, that is to say you go through certain external motions, or are subject to certain external motions, instead of doing something yourself, and you take the external ceremony as a substitute for the inner personal transformation.

: Well, this is dependence on rites and ceremonies, the third fetter.

S: Yes, this is silavratta paramarsa. Sanctification suggests silavratta paramarsa. If you mean, for instance, the brahminical belief that if you bathed in the waters of the Ganges you washed away your sins, this was sanctification. This is not to say you cannot be helped by external ceremonies, but only to the extent that they help you to develop a certain mental attitude, or to do certain things out of that attitude; not that they can ever be substitutes for that. Sometimes, however much you say this, it comes to that in the end for many people, just as, say, with reciting the Going for Refuge; this should be an expression of your actual Going for Refuge, but in the Buddhist countries it has become just a ceremony; they just recite it, it means very little indeed. And they think that because they recite it they are Buddhists and have gone for Refuge, when they are not even thinking about how to put it into practice. They think the mere recitation is enough. So this also, you could say, is a sort of - well, it is certainly silavratta paramarsa, and possibly a sort of low-level sanctification. They think that makes them Buddhists. It certainly doesn't make them Buddhists in any meaningful spiritual sense; at best, a sort of cultural sense which has meaning only within the context of the group, not the spiritual community.

Anyway, let's go on to no. 10; we will probably have quite a bit to say about that.

(10) During the period of youth, frequent not those who cannot direct thee spiritually, but acquire practical knowledge painstakingly at the feet of a learned and pious guru.

S: I think the emphasis here is 'the period of youth'; because the Indian, especially brahminical, belief was that you should leave things like religion - to use that term, spiritual development - until you were old; that when you were young you should enjoy yourself and have a wife and raise a family, and [176] have a job, a career, and when you were old - some said when you were 70, some said when you were 80, others said when you were 90 - you should take up the spiritual life. But the Buddhist view was completely contrary to that. The Buddhist view was that when you were young you had energy, you had life, you had enthusiasm, and it was then that you should commit yourself to the spiritual life. So what do you have to say about this? Do you automatically take it that the Buddhist view was right, or have you any reservations about it, or do you think the truth might lie somewhere between?

Asvajit: I did have a few reservations about it, possibly because my own attitude when I became involved in the Friends was quite ascetic: I felt that perhaps, for personal reasons, what I needed was renunciation. And therefore I think that it is important to point out, as you did recently in an article in the Newsletter the importance of enjoyment in the spiritual life. But really it's a balanced attitude that needs to be inculcated; one that doesn't stress renunciation at the expense of a proper appreciation of the value and enjoyment of life.

S: Though the discussion isn't in terms of renunciation. It doesn't say 'the period of youth is the time to renounce'. You see, maybe it's interesting you've given it that little turn, as it were.

It's almost as though it is saying that youth is the time, really, to enjoy yourself, when you have the capacity for enjoyment, and what better way can you enjoy yourself than by practising the Dharma? So it is a bit interesting, without going into motives, that you deflected the discussion in the direction of renunciation. It mentions being directed spiritually and acquiring practical knowledge.

Dipankara: It seems to point almost to the emergency of the situation and the shortness of life: get on with it now while you're living.

S: There's also, perhaps, as compared with the brahminical view, a spiral rather than a cyclical attitude. The brahminical view suggests that you should just go through the natural course of life, you should just follow the natural phases of life, but the Buddhist view suggests that you can do better than that. The brahminical view suggests that you should just in a sense almost passively follow the course of natural development, almost like an animal. Well, when you're young you study, and when you reach a certain age you get married, and then you raise a family, and then, of course, as your physical strength ebbs you gradually are put out to grass and you retire from the world. But the Buddhist view suggests that at that time of youthful energy and vigour you can make that a springboard for a higher as it were more spiral type of development.

Sona: The period of youth is so important, because the longer you leave it you are working against yourself in two ways: first of all, you are acquiring more conditioning, and secondly you are losing your strength, because it's not easy at first anyway to try the spiritual life, so it gets harder and harder and you have [177] less and less strength. So the earlier you start on the spiritual life, the easier it is and the more strength you have.

S: I think actually, though, the question of conditioning is more important than the question of strength; because you don't necessarily lose your strength as you get older, certainly not until you've reached quite an advanced age. But you always get more and more conditioned, and then that strength goes into reinforcing the conditioning. That is the great difficulty, I think. So if you encounter, say, a spiritual movement and start thinking in terms of individual development, say when you are 55 or 60, you may well have quite a lot of energy and strength but that is all trapped in your conditioning, in your reactive mind, and it's very difficult to break out of it; you may be very difficult to handle by other people for that reason, because you're a very limited, a very conditioned but also quite a strong character, quite set in your ways, with quite a lot of energy and vigour within those limitations.

But is there perhaps a genuine, objective danger that the brahminical tradition is aware of and is trying to guard against? Could one say that?

Sona: The discontinuing of the group.

S: Er, no, I don't think it's that.

John R: Well, it is possible to alienate people from their natural energy flow and muscles and where they're going to express themselves, quite naturally, by incarcerating them in a kind of heavy strict religious discipline.

S: But that would suggest a wrong conception of spiritual life altogether.

John R: Yes, right. Well, I think yes; Every religion rather than Buddhism could do that.

Alaya: What about the support of the family, in the Indian sense? All the young men rushing off into the spiritual life, it would break up the family system of support.

S: Yes? But it doesn't say anything about leaving the family. You are also deflecting the discussion. It says during the period of youth, being directed spiritually and acquiring practical knowledge painstakingly at the feet of a learned and pious guru. It doesn't say anything about giving up the family. It doesn't suggest that you have to do that.

Alaya: No, but I assume that you might do that, and not have loads of children, support the family and keep the whole thing going.

S: Well, you might, but you wouldn't necessarily have to do that.

[178]
Uttara: Maybe the emphasis is on the tradition of learning, just practical things, heavy trades and all sorts of things like that, and you'd be ...

S: I think the important point really is that never at any stage should you settle down in such a way that the possibility of further development is precluded. I think this is the real point. It might at some stage along the way include, possibly, a family; one can't say. It's very difficult to lay down any hard and fast rules. But probably the chances are that for a lot of people, the majority of young men who did take the spiritual life and personal development very seriously, it would not include a family; but I don't think there is any actual danger of society being left without able-bodied men to support their families, because I don't think people or the young men are going to take to the spiritual life in such numbers as that. Even if it's in tens of thousands it still wouldn't make an appreciable difference; even hundreds of thousands, perhaps, it wouldn't make an appreciable difference. So it isn't anything we really have to worry about. We are much more likely to have to worry about not getting enough, even for the sake of society, rather than getting too many.

Ray: Alaya, wasn't your point that in a brahminical sense, ...

S: In India?

Ray: Yes, in India, that's why they ...

S: It seems to have never, at any historical period, been an actual danger. In fact, the dangers were always the other way round - of overpopulation, too many children and not enough support for them; as it is today, even.

Alaya: Surely the brahmin way, in effect they were putting off spiritual life for good, because very few would even have got to ...

S: Yes, in effect they were. When they suggest putting it off to 80 or even 90, you begin to feel a bit suspicious, don't you?

Alaya: It's like saying 'I'll wait till another lifetime.'

S: Right. As, I'm afraid, some Buddhists do.

Vajradaka: Some Thais have the same attitude as that brahminical view, don't they?

S: Yes. They say, 'I'll be just a good upasaka in this life, and maybe in my next life I can be a bhikkhu' - the assumption being that only the bhikkhu is seriously leading a spiritual life. It is just a way of indefinitely postponing and not ...

Alaya: The thing to do would be the other way round, then, be bhikkhus up until they're 30, say, and then take a wife.

[179]
S: Well, the bhikkhu life has become just a sort of student period, that's all. When I was in Poona, Lokamitra told me that there were more than 30 Thai bhikkhus studying at the Poona University, and that hardly more than one or two of them had any actual interest in Buddhism at all. They were just there for the sake of their studies, and to become a bhikkhu is an easy way of studying. The one who was most serious, in the sense that he was most interested in Buddhism and made contact with Lokamitra, has now gone back to Bangkok, and he has disrobed because he feels that he can't do any real work for the Dharma remaining as a bhikkhu, and he has asked Lokamitra to write to him and keep him supplied with FWBO literature, and so on. It's a real pity when that sort of situation develops.

But anyway, that's by the way. But when you are young, yes, you have this superabundance of energy and vigour, but the great danger is that it will just go in the wrong direction as it were, you'll just waste it. I don't want to be too strict with young men: of course they have to play around to some extent, and you can't channel all their energies into one narrow path, let's say. But nonetheless, when one is young, that is the time to think seriously what one is going to do with one's life and to make the best possible use of it, and to develop as a human being and to set oneself on that path.

Sona: What sort of period of youth, if you had to give figures of age, of when you could actually start on the spiritual path, - ?

S: I'd say as soon as you were capable of selfconsciousness and self-awareness, which I think is about 14 or 15. At 16 your intelligence is pretty well developed, probably about as much as it's ever going to be developed, in the case of a man, but you go on developing physically. I'm not suggesting a woman's intelligence goes on developing - it feels like it (?).

: What, beyond 16?

S: No, I was not suggesting, when I said that a man's intelligence doesn't develop beyond 16, and when there was a little laugh, I wasn't implying that the woman's intelligence did go on developing. I wasn't necessarily implying, also, that it stopped before 16. I wasn't making any statement about it.

: I thought you were making a distinction.

: You weren't making any?

S: No, the distinction was between the mental development of the male and the physical development, because the physical development, in the case of men, goes on till about 25. But at 16 you are mentally as alert and bright and intelligent as you ever will be, in most cases, unless you take definite steps to develop your intelligence.

[180]
Sona: So if you don't develop spiritually after the age of 25 in the case of a male, it's sort of downhill for you?

S: Yes; or at least, well, mentally you may just maintain your ground, but physically, of course, you are going downhill. But what does increase after the age of, say, 16 is your experience and your power of judgement, but not your natural intelligence; that remains pretty constant, or at least it doesn't really develop. It's not that you never develop beyond the age of 16, but at the age of 16, in many ways, mentally you are an adult, and are quite able to be responsible for your own actions. But you lack in experience and judgement. Those can go on increasing all the time, beyond even 25, ...

Sona: Do you think that at around the age of 25 there's another change in the male, of being more responsible for others? Up until that point it's more a case of being responsible for the self, but after that there's more of an ability to be responsible for others as well.

S: I think that ability grows all the time, but perhaps by the age roughly of 25 it has developed sufficiently for you actually to be able to take on some responsibility for several other people. But it may well develop before that, and you can also see men who, even at 30 or 35, are not able to take on any responsibility for anybody else, and should not be having families. They are children themselves. But some are able to take on responsibility at quite an early age, long before they are 25. But why do you think it is, usually, that people, say young men, let's say, don't take up let's say the spiritual life, for want of a better term, though it isn't a very satisfactory one, when they are young and best able to do that?

Asvajit: They're surrounded by such a lot of cynicism.

S: Cynicism, yes?

Vajradaka: Ambition.

Asvajit: No, I don't think ambition is - I mean ambition can be redirected. If somebody is really ambitious, you can point out what is the best thing that you should turn your ambition to.

S: Because ambition is relatively positive, but it's as though cynicism doesn't even have a positive counterpart.

: They ... Christianity. They associate the spiritual life with Christianity.

S: Right, this is true, they react against it accordingly.

Viramati: There are so many misconceptions.

Alaya: So when you're almost on the peak of life, it seems like death.

[181]
Uttara: Yes, spiritual life is for old men and old women.

S: I think for the average young man very often he doesn't feel that he has any choice. I think - maybe I'm not very much in touch with young men, say, outside the Movement, but my impression is that the majority of them tend to feel, almost like the young men in India, though in a less intensive way, that they don't really have a choice; that they go to school and then they get a job. You don't want to stay on at home indefinitely, so OK, you meet a nice girl and you've got a sexual need anyway, so you get married; marriage usually means children. It also means a house, it means a car, it means mortgage and that means earning more money. And in that way it's as though your whole life is looked after, and as though there isn't any viable alternative. You see?

Asvajit: That's exactly how I felt during my first marriage. I thought about it quite a bit, and although I'd read a little bit about mysticism and religion I hadn't got any real contact at that time. And I thought, marriage - that's all there is, actually.

Adrian: I get the impression also that young people to an extent do question exactly what life is about at that age, and usually the answer comes back that it's just because you're changing sexually, in that sense, that's creating all these problems; it's [not] a new, deeper vision, it's a sort of bodily change.

Viramati: And 'You'll settle down. You'll grow out of it.'

: 'You get a good girl friend and you'll be all right.'

S: 'Get a good job, you'll be all right.'

: Boring.

S: Well, I had a friend - one of my most - as everybody knows, I was in India for 20 years, so I missed out on all sorts of developments in Britain, and 1964 I arrived back in Britain in a way very innocent; some people might say ignorant. I had never seen a washing machine, I'd never seen a launderette or a supermarket. These had all developed while I was away. So I had to learn about quite a lot of things at second-hand from various friends I made. And one thing I hadn't done, of course, during my 20 years in India was to get married; so I missed out on all that. I remember one of the friends I made soon after coming back told me how he had come to get married, and I think he must have been pretty representative. It was a real eye-opener to me. Apparently he had got married when he was 21, and he was the only son of his parents, who were quite conventional lower middle-class people; and he had been good at drawing so he had got into a drawing office of some kind, and then he worked his way into advertising and had a reasonably good job. And his parents were always urging him to get married; in fact, he [182] wanted to get married, he was very keen on getting married. And he said his idea about marriage was that when you got married you were in a state of absolute bliss; that life was then heaven, and you lived in a paradisiacal state with your partner, and you were so happy that there was nothing to even look for after that, you didn't need to look for anything after that, when you were married. This is what happened; it was just bliss, it was

just heaven. And he sincerely believed this. So he got married; he married a girl from a quite wealthy family, because he was a quite presentable young man with a good job by this time, and prospects in advertising, and her father gave them three houses in north-west London as a wedding present, and they had a magnificent wedding with hundreds of people at the reception. But within a few weeks of marriage, he started feeling terribly let down. There was no bliss; it wasn't just heaven, it wasn't paradise. And this affected him very seriously, he was quite a sensitive person; and by the time I came to know him he and his wife were getting divorced, and he felt it as a very traumatic, complete let-down, that he'd been led, almost - though also partly his own fault, one must admit - to expect this of marriage, and then he was disappointed. He seemed to me incredibly naive, but I think that it's not only a question of women seeing marriage in this way but it seems that young men do sometimes, too. And the reality is so disappointing.

Ross: I went to a wedding very recently of a school friend of mine I hadn't seen for some years, and just before we went there was a traditional stag night, and I went along to it; and I was talking to him, and I hadn't spoken to him for two years. And after we'd been talking for a while - he kept saying to me when I asked him about marriage: 'Well, I know what it means.' And those were his words, and he kept using them again and again, about every other sentence 'I know what it means.' And it became more and more obvious that he hadn't got a clue what it meant at all, not a clue; and it was just a whole false situation. There was just nothing there. To try to fill a space with something that ...

S: I remember, in the case of this same friend, in despair after the failure of his marriage he started going to evening classes and studying philosophy and things like that. This is what set him looking for something else. And he started going along to these School of Meditation meetings and School of Philosophy meetings, and School of Economics meetings, and he had that same naive faith; it was very strange or touching, that these people would give him what he hadn't been able to find in his marriage. But there also he was disappointed. And his parents couldn't understand it. He told me that his mother used to say to him: 'I can't understand why you feel the need of going to these classes and bothering about philosophy. If you want a bit of a change from your work, you can come and help your dad on Saturday afternoons in his greenhouse.' And she seriously thought that this would be adequate, this would be the solution of his problems. She really could not understand it - and she told me this herself, because I met her afterwards - that he could not find total satisfaction in that. And that he should waste his [183] time with philosophy, she could just not see it, she thought he was being obstinate and perverse and difficult; there was the simple solution lying right to hand, to come every Saturday afternoon and just spend the time happily with his dad in the greenhouse, just helping him. He wouldn't need any philosophy then, she thought... she was convinced of this.

Asvajit: That seems to represent an absolutely tyrannical attitude on her part.

S: Well, yes. And then you won't be surprised to learn the sad end of the story, that a few years later he committed suicide; he'd been so badly damaged, you see, in this way. So this really gave me food for thought - these experiences - I knew several people in this way, and what happened to them and how they'd suffered. But basically they'd been misled, you could say, by society, and it wasn't anybody's individual fault; it wasn't even his parents' fault, they'd also been misled, maybe. I met his father too; his father seemed to have some suspicion that something was wrong. His mother had no suspicion at all, and she was completely convinced

that he was just being obstinate and difficult, and could live a very happy life if he wanted to, but he just didn't choose to; this was how she saw it. He was deliberately letting them down, she couldn't understand why. And she was most of all concerned with what the neighbours would say, and she used to tell me it was very difficult for him to go home, because even five years after he separated from his wife there were even then close relations that she hadn't told about it, because she felt it would be such a disgrace. So if auntie So-and-so was expected to tea that afternoon when he went home for the weekend, she'd say, 'Don't say anything about not being with your wife; she doesn't know' - that is, the auntie didn't know. So there was a totally false situation with all the relations either not knowing or pretending that they didn't know that my friend wasn't still living with his wife. And so, if they asked: 'Oh, and how is Gillian? How is she getting on, is she all right?' he would say, 'Yes, oh yes, she's fine, thank you', as though he was still living with her; and he hadn't been living with her for five years. So I really got a horrific insight into certain aspects of family life, and this wasn't the only friend that I had in this sort of situation. They didn't all end up committing suicide, but it was pretty awful.

So again I don't blame any individual; it's the lack of the proper institutions - because the average person is just channelled in accordance with institutions. So it's all the more important that there should be the right positive institutions. The average young person is just not in a position to think it all out and work it all out for himself and create it all for himself; he just isn't able to do that, any more than he is able to write the works of Shakespeare himself, though he can enjoy them if he is given access to them. So he can't create for himself the institutions that he needs; they have to be created for him, and other viable, even more viable, alternatives created. And this is where things like the spiritual communities, especially men's communities, come in and why it's [184] so necessary to have them available so that people know that there is an alternative way of life, that it isn't inevitable that when you leave school you get an ordinary wage-earning job and then you get married and then you have children and then you get a mortgage and - you just then look forward straight along this narrow path, ending with, as I say, redundancy and death.

Ross: It seems, at the core of that whole problem is always just a sheer lack of imagination, in terms of - Some people have even some vague vision of escaping to a desert island, even; at least that's some kind of imagination of the situation.

S: Well, in the old days a young man could join the army, but it's very difficult to do that now. Though they have said that, since the fighting started in Northern Ireland, they've had no difficulty with recruitment into the British Army, which is quite significant, isn't it? Oh yes, they don't need to bother with much advertising; they get all the men that they need since the fighting started in Northern Ireland. The average youngster who joins up at 18, if anything, he rather likes the prospect of going to Northern Ireland; it's a bit of excitement. So what does that say about our present-day society? It doesn't provide the youngster, the young man, with anything really exciting; unless he has got maybe very good advisers - some young men do: sensible fathers or sensible uncles who can direct him into a line of work which is reasonably stimulating and creative. That still sometimes is possible. It does sometimes happen. But not maybe for the average youngster of, let's say for want of a better term, more working-class origin; it doesn't usually happen. There aren't the institutions.

: I noticed when I went back home last time - I lived near Colchester with my parents - I went to this pub and there were half a dozen young soldiers there, all about 18. And they were just

so young and bright, and they were about the liveliest people in the pub. They were soldiers, they stood out because of their haircut. But I remember a few years ago, when I was that age, soldiers then seemed (about 10 years ago) quite like just - they were different people.

S: Just like animals.

: They were like animals, but these were just young bright blokes. It was terrible to think that they'd been - the information they'd been filled up with.

S: Or at least terrible that there had been no more positive alternative for them than that. Clearly, they didn't want an ordinary job, at least; they weren't thinking of that. At least the army represented some sort of alternative.

Alaya: Strange that people who've come out of families, say, out of marriages, go back into them.

S: You [carry on], I'll just nip outside.

[185]
John R: What, on the rebound, you mean?

Alaya: Well, we've all experienced marriage from being children in families, and then go back into it again; it's obviously, well, you experience it as so humdrum and boring.

(Confused voices. Chat.)

Asvajit: I think your question hasn't really been answered, has it? Why do people return to marriage?

S: I'd say, in a sense, they don't return. You mentioned people seeing their parents' marriages; well, they don't see their parents' marriages, in a way. There are big aspects of it that they just don't see at all, because they are hidden from them. But even as you get older you don't connect what you can see as the dull, staid set-up of your own parents with that blissful, thrilling situation that you are looking forward to yourself with your own particular girlfriend, you see? You just don't connect the two; you think they were just unlucky, ours is just not going to be like that. You are in a completely different state, you're floating on air, I believe. So you think it's going to be different in your case, you feel convinced of this. You can't really believe that they must have felt like that once upon a time. You just can't believe that. Probably they did.

Ross: Sometimes it's possibly a projection of the unhappiness that was in your parents' marriage; for instance, I knew somebody who got married very quickly, I think because his parents had an unhappy marriage, there seemed to be some kind of trying to fulfil what wasn't working before.

S: They wanted the happy family situation, and if it wasn't provided they just tried to - well, not create it but more like to patch it together for themselves.

Viramati: Even if people are happy, they don't seem to go much beyond the first week or so of

the marriage.

Asvajit: But it remains an ideal, doesn't it, the happy family?

S: Well, society encourages this, for obvious reasons which are quite in a way correct on their own level, but the individual as such should not allow himself to be duped by this propaganda, which is what it really amounts to.

Vajradaka: What you said about your friend's view of marriage - it doesn't relate very much to my experience at school, for example, when I was 16, when we used to talk a lot in the playground about marriage and our attitudes to marriage. And a view at that time - that was middle 60s - that was prevalent was a lot of us thought that it would be a good thing to have a trial, living with the person for two years ...

(End of tape)

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And this actually became quite important for a lot of us, I think: that we had the freedom to do that, we didn't have the restraints now that previous generations had.

S: Of course, you are a slightly younger generation than this friend of mine.

Ray: I don't think it's even in terms of generations, but in terms of years, because when I got married it wasn't respectable to live with somebody...

S: It still isn't, in some quarters.

Vajradaka: So if you didn't manage that you lived with someone for the full two years, you never actually got married.

S: Even the fact that you are thinking of a trial period suggests you've got some sort of ideal of marriage in mind, except that you are a little more cautious and a bit more sceptical about the possibility of actually achieving that. But you hope to achieve it after, say, possibly two or three trials. If you are very lucky, even the first time. But you are still looking, perhaps, essentially for the same thing, though in a slightly different way.

But this friend of mine was perhaps exceptionally naive - though a very intelligent chap; but, as I said, he really did think quite literally that marriage meant unmitigated bliss, just being together all the time with the one person that you loved and most wanted to be with - well, it just didn't work out like that at all.

Alaya: ... what ... marriage was that ... is a terrible thing, ... a shame thing to do, to get married - it was like 'pass the parcel', you get left with a terrible parcel. (Laughter)

S: There was a play in London during the war, called 'Damaged Goods' ...

Viramati: I think that whole period was a fallacy. I've had lots - well, I had a friend who - they

lived together with someone for quite a while, and then in the end they got married, and it's broken up after that, very quickly, as if they'd just got married to try and save the relationship, something's gone out of it and they think, 'We'll get married and it will bring it back in again.' It just doesn't...

Vajradaka: It's the idea of marriage itself which is the fallacy, then,not the actual trial.

S: I don't think it's a question of marriage, because I think marriage can be viewed quite realistically, and even be a quite practicable proposition when viewed realistically. I think the [187] whole thing is distorted by people falling in love, and then confusing marriage with that, and thinking that by getting legally married you sort of fix the love, as it were: fix in a chemical sense, you can make it permanent. Because they so much want this particular person with whom they have fallen in love - and falling in love means projection and all the rest of it - that particular person is so necessary to them that they want to be with that person all the time; they want to ensure that, to guarantee that. So marriage appeared to them as the best and safest and surest way of doing that. I think that's where the mistake comes in. Whereas if, for instance, they made up their minds that they want - supposing a young man made up his mind, quite objectively, that marriage would be the best thing for him, if he wanted to pursue his career, he wanted regular sexual satisfaction without having to hunt around for it every Friday night, (Laughter) he just wanted a home base where his meals would be ready on time and where his shirts would be washed and ironed and all the rest of it, and he looked round for a sensible young woman, who also was looking for that sort of security, not in a neurotic way but because she had decided she would like to have a family; and if they met and liked each other and felt they could get on well and have a working partnership, you could say that would be a quite sensible basis for marriage. But when two people who are totally unsuited to each other unfortunately become mutually infatuated and they want to perpetuate this through marriage, that is the recipe for disaster. You can hardly blame marriage, as a working arrangement; it's the way in which this falling in love and being in love has been associated with marriage, or marriage has been associated with it. I think that's where the mistake has come in. Young people who fall in love should be told that it's OK to be in love but it's got very little to do with getting married. But this is what people ..., all because of the sanctification. You can't have sex until it's all sanctified: orange blossom, wedding bells, the holy words from the book spoken over it, and then it's all right. And women especially are more susceptible to this. Some of you seem to know very well what I mean.

Uttara: The woman wears the white.

S: It's supposed to indicate immaculate virginity. One doubts whether it does these days. Again, it's a form of silavratta paramarsa, you see: she wears white and that makes her virginal for the occasion. It's really strange. Whereas, in former times, a woman who wore white at her wedding who was known not to be a virgin was pelted by the mob for pretending to be what she wasn't. That's maybe a bit extreme, but then we've gone to the other extreme: she becomes an honorary virgin for the occasion...

: I've been to a number of weddings where the bride's worn a faintly pink ...

: ...someone being married in white who has actually had a swelling in her tummy.

[188]

S: Well, we won't go into all that. You even sometimes have women being married in white for maybe the second time, with their children by their first marriage as bridesmaids and pages.

: ... marriage where there is a child on the way.

S: We are going into a bit of sociological detail, aren't we? But this question of falling in love came up because it's that which shunts you on to the rail of marriage, as it were. You don't decide upon marriage, which is, one could say from a general social point of view, quite a viable option; but you don't go into it because you have objectively considered the situation and you take that as the best viable option for you; you're just shunted along those rails, just like a train with no will of your own, just because the points as it were have been switched in a particular way through your falling in love.

Alaya: I was just thinking, boys of 15, say, go around together as gangs of boys. As they gradually start going out with girls you'd be left alone if there's no other healthy group which you can get involved with.

S: But again it works the other way round, because it's going round with girls that separates you from the group; assuming the group to have been a healthy one and not just a gang of hooligans.

Ray: I've heard you say that marriage seems to work better in India. Is that because it's seen more as an arrangement?

S: Yes, I'm sure of this. On the whole marriages are quite positive, and they work quite well. And they don't take, for instance, the man away from his men friends: he continues to go out with them after marriage just as much as before, if not more so. Whereas in this country, more often than not your wife becomes your best friend, or your pal or whatever, and you give up your other friends, or you see very little of them. And certainly not if she takes a dislike to any of them. It's as though you've no right to see them then. So she's in a position of controlling your social life completely. And this is often accepted as the normal thing. It's an aspect of falling in love: it's just the one other person means everything to you.

John R: You talked about setting up the right positive institutions to replace these decrepit ones. That made a lot of sense to me, particularly in terms of justifying the existence of Centres. On one hand you get people looking for alternative ways but without institutions to relate to, so you get the dropout hippie thing which has not worked. Somehow you've got to formalize what we have to offer.

S: Yes, I think this is most important. I think, from the point of view of larger numbers of people, the creation of positive institutions is the most important thing that we have to do. At present we've got three kinds of institutions, you can say, [189] though one is hardly an institution - that's the Centre - because people can come along to that without necessarily making a break with their old way of life or existing institutions. But then there's the co-op, as a spiritual community, and also the residential spiritual community, especially the men's community and women's community. I think it's there that the institutions have to be created and enlarged and extended. Otherwise you have no practical alternative to offer. It's all right making people dissatisfied with what they've got and saying 'Don't get shunted on to the same

old track of a job and marriage'; but it's almost not fair to say that to people if you're not in a position to offer them an alternative, not even anything better, necessarily, but at least an alternative - apart from dropping out, a sort of hippie no-man's land, dropping out into dope. Dope might be all right but not just as something to drop out into because there's nothing else.

John R: So the more institutions (in the best sense of the word) that come up the better that's going to be. I'm thinking in expansion(?) terms of schools and orchestras, whatever: functions that pull people together.

S: Yes, indeed. I think actually the spiritual communities, especially the men's spiritual communities - at present, at least, in our present stage of development - are the key institutions, I would say.

John R: Could you say a bit more?

S: It's as though the initiative rests with the young men more. If they set the pace other changes will follow. I think women tend to follow the lead given by men.

Vajradaka: There is so much a tendency with young men nowadays, though, to feel that as soon as they have overcome the primary stages of adolescence they've got to go into sexual exploration, and might feel, or probably will feel to some degree, that men's communities would be a repression of that newly-found ...

S: Well, it depends at what age you joined the men's community. [Depending] how widely you wanted to explore.

Asvajit: I'd have thought that most young men nowadays, by the time they've reached 20, had had quite enough sexual exploration.

S: Well, some of our friends seem to have done quite a lot much earlier than that. We have to draw the line somewhere, presumably. Even if you're a member of a men's community - the men's community is your base, it doesn't prevent you from ranging outside sometimes if you want to. But it means that your sexual relationship doesn't determine your whole pattern of life. And where you enter into that relationship isn't the geographical centre of your existence, it's a bit peripheral. I think if you have sex outside the community, it's quite good in a way from a symbolical point of view: it's clearly peripheral, not central. You don't have your sexual relationship and build everything up [190] around it, you see. Your life is here, in the men's community; that's your centre, with all the spiritual and other activities that go on. And you have a sexual relationship, maybe, out here on the periphery, as it were. Do you see what I mean? So that has a symbolical value, the fact that it is peripheral; it is not excluded but it is seen to be clearly peripheral; not the central thing in your life around which everything else is built. I mean the glamorised, sanctified sexual relationship especially. The whole of your world isn't built up round your double bed. Well, ... most people is the double bed at the centre, or maybe a cradle on a ..., and everything else is built up round that in concentric circles.

Ray: I was laughing because I used to see it like that.

S: I'm sure you're not the only one, by a long chalk.

: Your life is full already.

S: Yes. If you're a young man with healthy appetites, let it have its place by all means, but in your actual practical arrangements reflect or symbolize the fact that it is a peripheral thing, and be honest about that; don't feel it's really central and be thinking about it all the time, but just be living in a men's community just for the sake of certain other practical conveniences. It must be an honest thing. Well, some people say it's more fun like that anyway.

Anyway, I think the main point that emerges from this discussion of this particular precept: 'During the period of youth frequent not those who cannot direct thee spiritually, but acquire practical knowledge painstakingly at the feet of a learned and pious guru' - the main point that emerges, the basic assumption, is that you should be free to have a choice. There should be alternatives open to you, which is really, in the absence of the relevant institutions, not the case at present. The possibility of development as an individual should be a viable option for you when you are young. And the institutions which foster that and make that possible should be available to you, open to you.

Also, a propos what I was saying earlier, I think that if you have a men's community that is really a men's spiritual community, it is better not to have women on the premises, especially overnight. If one is going to pass the night with one's girlfriend or lady friend or whatever you choose to call her, it's best that you should go away from the spiritual community rather than bring that element into the spiritual community where it cannot but be a diluting factor, if you see what I mean.

Asvajit: Supposing you had a guest room, or something like that, ...turning up ... ?

S: It's all too artificial, anywhere, I think. And also it's such an exclusive sort of thing, such an exclusive relationship unfortunately.

[191]
Asvajit: What I meant was, if someone said: 'So-and-so is coming from a very distant place and I'd like to see her occasionally. Maybe she could stay in a guest room.' And then, in a way, in that sort of situation, he can see what's actually going on.

S: Well, maybe a very peripheral guest room. I think leave it to her. I'm sure you can leave it safely in her hands to make all the necessary arrangements. You needn't bother.

Alaya: The thing with young boys at the moment often - the only organized things they have are the Boy Scouts or those military-based groups.

S: That's true.

Alaya: Like the Air Service ...

S: Yes, it's either military or semi-military or with some military touch. It's a pity that a more positive organization isn't possible, without that military ...

Alaya: Or the Scripture Union.

John R: We've just had an incident whereby we just managed to fail to talk a young man out of joining the RAF: it was touch and go for many weeks. And I spoke to Kovida about this, and he said something which made me sit up. He said he thought at the moment we had nothing to offer young men that would excite them in the same way that signing up to the RAF for nine years would.

S: I think this is true. For instance, I had a letter not so long ago from Udaya in New Zealand, and he wrote that the course he is currently leading, the course in Buddhism, is proving very successful, but he can't understand why the vast majority of those coming are women; there are only two, possibly three, men. We hear much the same story from Helsinki: that we've got a predominance of women. I think it is for the same reason, as regards these two places: that we haven't got anything particularly exciting to offer the men. Centre activities appear to the outsider only too often as a mild cultural enterprise for people, especially women, to go along to in the afternoons and evenings, but there's nothing very exciting or demanding or challenging for men who have a lot of energy, and maybe a lot of ability. Do you see what I mean? It's too much like the sort of things that women can do or get interested in in their spare time. This is especially so, say, in Helsinki where we've only got the Centre and no community and no co-op; and even in Auckland, to a degree. And when you bear in mind that the Finnish men are very much into hunting and shooting, and the New Zealand men are very much into surfing and yachting and all that sort of thing, you haven't anything very exciting to offer them. Maybe meditation is exciting, but it's not evidently exciting; and apart from that, you've just got a bit of quiet, gentle study and pleasant chat over a cup of tea. There's not much in that for the average healthy, active man. Do you see what I mean? [192] And you got to cater for that element too. So in a way it's not surprising.

Even this aspect of seeing other places, other countries - I think this is one of the things which, rightly or wrongly, is going to bring young men especially into the Movement: that the Movement is a bit widespread and they get a chance of travelling around. It's not purely spiritual, but you can see it will play its part. Join the FWBO and see the world!

Sona: The formation of hostels would be, although ... financially lucrative, would be the formation of a right sort of institution, conceivably.

John R: Travel around the world and stay at them?

Sona: It's a bit like maybe the YMCA, for instance. You know you can go and stay somewhere fairly cheap - well, it's not so cheap now, but it used to be reasonably, and you went and stayed in that sort of place, and the people that run it have some influence over you. Hopefully, if they are positive, healthy individuals running these hostels, and then the young men who join the association - you don't necessarily have to call it a Buddhist association, though you could do ...

S: Friends Hostel Association.

Sona: - would have some sort of worldwide reputation and have people travelling all over the place. It might not(?) make a lot of money, but you'd come into contact with an awful lot of young men ...

Alaya: Or sports clubs.

S: This is something we've talked about ...

Alaya: Boys in the East End only join boxing clubs and football clubs.

S: Karate, yes. We were talking about the importance of physical culture, sports and so on, on one of the seminars we
recently had.

So, if you think of it, we don't in some ways have much to offer the average young healthy extravert, even if he has got an interest in individual development. Do you see what I mean? It's more for the maybe not quite so healthy young introvert, with a bit of interest in the arts. So naturally you tend to get a lot of women, especially in the more outlying Centres that don't have co-ops and don't have men's communities.

Sona: Another idea that just came to me is that as we develop more Centres abroad it would be possible to have something like Friends International Work Camps, which [would be] a voluntary overseas work organization.

[193]
S: We had Friends who have been on work camps in Greece and Italy and very much enjoyed the experience.

Anyway, we've got off the track a little bit, but maybe in a sense we didn't get off the track. So what it really means is that there should be the possibility of a viable option for a young man which represents the possibility of further individual development, instead of him being compelled, because he sees no alternative, to follow the existing routine. Especially one needs to discourage this association between being in love and getting married - marriage as it were giving the stamp of society's approval on your relationship, not to say its sanctification by the church, even. One needs to discourage people from thinking of their current sexual relationship as constituting the very centre of their existence. It has its place, if you have it at all, but not quite at the heart and centre of things. If somebody feels like that about his current sexual relationship - as I've called it, perhaps slightly cynically - perhaps it tells you quite a lot about him; if he is really literally building everything around that as the centre of his life. It means his security is invested there, and it's not a good thing to invest your security in that type of relationship.

Uttara: ... always talking about integration ... integrate those things so you could see it as the centre. It's like you have your mandala and this is your area of integration, so that's why it's given such an important position.

S: Anyway, anything more about that? We haven't discussed the precept itself in any great detail, but perhaps it isn't necessary. 'Frequent not those who cannot direct thee spiritually' means avoid those who can't be good spiritual friends; 'but acquire practical knowledge painstakingly at the feet of a learned and pious guru.' Well, in a way we've dealt with that when we dealt with precept 3: 'Having chosen a religious preceptor': we saw that it isn't quite such a literal thing as that.

Ray: It reminds me of a guy we had sometimes at our classes. He seemed very intellectually intense, and read lots of books on religion; as soon as he got to learning meditation it was too

much for him. He couldn't actually put his knowledge into practice.

: You can become blinded by ...

S: Indeed, yes. But, just to conclude: I really do feel that if we are to operate on a larger scale, as I hope we will, the creation of alternative positive institutions is the primary need. There must be communities especially for people to move into, when they reach the point of decision, or when they decide they just don't want to do the conventional thing; they want to do as it were better than that. But it's a bit too much to expect them to get it all together themselves. In the case of the Friends, the whole Movement, we've only been able to get it [194] together - as far as we have been able to get it together - as a result of quite a concerted effort over quite a few years now. And also it behoves those who already are within the institutions, especially within the Centres and the co-ops and the communities, to make sure that they really are running them as Centres, co-ops and communities, and not just gradually settling down into a sort of distorted version of what they are supposed to have left behind. That's why I am a bit suspicious about that 'spare room' - or, no, 'guest room' you called it. 'Guest' is a little euphemism, isn't it?

Asvajit: It certainly wasn't something that I actually thought myself was advisable. My instinct goes against it.

S: Good, then you've nothing to fear. I'm sure you've had it suggested by ... some time or other.

All right, leave it there; it's nearly lunchtime.

Day 5

S: Just before we start on 'The Ten Things to be Persevered in', a few general reflections on the subject of perseverance itself. We haven't gone into this so far, but one could consider each of these blocks of precepts in general terms: for instance, one's got things to know, things to be practised; so clearly knowing in general is important, practice in general is important, and so on. But particularly in the case of the ten things to be persevered in, one could say that perseverance is important; there is something to be discussed here in a general way. Because one finds that perseverance, though not generally mentioned as a virtue or a spiritual quality, is a very necessary thing. Perhaps it is included in, or presupposed by, virya, but nonetheless one can well consider it by itself. This is one of the things quite often one finds people lacking in: perseverance. So what does one generally understand by perseverance?

Asvajit: Willingness to go on trying.

S: Willingness to go on trying; yes?

: Suggests the going might be tough at times, and that ... keep going.

S: Yes, right. Also it suggests pressing on despite distractions; because perseverance suggests a sort of concentrating on one particular thing, persisting in one particular thing, and just not allowing oneself to be deflected or discouraged. Very often people give up persevering

because they are discouraged, and perhaps that again suggests they need a bit of constant inspiration.

So perseverance is really, in a general way, a very important quality. One should be able to persevere. So people who are not able to persevere are people who easily give up; people who are [195] either easily discouraged or people who are easily distracted. People who are fainthearted, perhaps. Also, of course, for one to be able to persevere a certain degree of integration is necessary, obviously. Have you noticed this, that people start something and they give up? They either ... lose interest or they become discouraged, or they become distracted. They are lacking in perseverance. So if one wants to develop personally, the quality of perseverance is...

So what should one persevere in? This is what these precepts tell us, so would someone like to read the first one?

Section VIII

(1) Novices should persevere in listening to, and meditating upon, religious teachings.

S: Hm. Here we have, it seems, the first two of the three kinds of Wisdom; I'm sure everyone remembers those - the Wisdom that comes by hearing, the Wisdom that comes by reflecting on, and the Wisdom that comes by meditating upon. I think the translator is using 'meditating' here not in the sense of contemplation but more in the sense of reflecting; but clearly the first thing is persevering in listening to. There's much to say about listening to, the importance of listening to; that novices should listen to. What do you think are meant by novices? It doesn't necessarily mean novice monks, does it? Those who are new to the spiritual life, those who have just started trying to develop as individuals.

It almost suggests that the first thing that the new person should do is just to listen. And what does listening imply?

: Openness.

S: Openness, receptivity, all those sort of qualities. 'And should persevere in listening to' - it's as though some people hear a little, and they think they've got it all, they know it all, and there's no need for them to listen or to learn any more. But the precept says: 'Novices should persevere in listening to, and meditating upon, religious teachings.' It's not enough even to listen or to persevere in listening; one should also meditate upon, reflect upon, turn over in one's mind, try to assimilate mentally as well and persevere in that. And it says 'religious teachings': it suggests that one is receiving those teachings personally, and that in turn suggests a certain degree or level of communication between you and your good friend, your kalyana mitra. So it's as though the precept is saying 'Be in contact with your kalyana mitra', have a genuine communication, really listen to what he has to say, persevere in listening, reflect upon what you hear, try to assimilate what you hear, turn it over in your mind; because, as we saw a few days ago, the Dharma is as it were the content of that genuine communication between you and someone more experienced and more spiritually developed than you are yourself.

[196]

: Do you think ... perseverance also implies that it's worth listening to the same teaching over and over again? A lot of people have the tendency to - say, hearing a taped lecture ..., 'I heard this one six months ago, I'm not really bothered'.

S: Well, yes, because first of all you don't hear the same thing again; even supposing, in the case you mentioned, you hear the tape six months later, you're a different person; you are in a position to get something different, something more, out of it. Also there is the point that, if you had only heard it once, it is very unlikely that you would have taken in everything, or even that you are able to remember everything, and that there would be all sorts of things that when you heard the tape or read the book a second time you would just not remember noticing before; either because you weren't ready for those things, or you weren't interested, or whatever, or just you were mentally distracted at that particular time and missed it.

So one should really beware of thinking 'I've heard it all before, I've read it all before, I know it already.' One should be very careful of that.

So 'Novices should persevere in listening to, and meditating upon, religious teachings.' Also it suggests that one shouldn't be afraid to consider oneself as a novice.

Vajradaka: Even though you might have had a lot of experience, there might be some parts of you which are quite undeveloped, and ...

S: Yes. Well, people don't develop evenly; they don't develop all the way along the line, so to speak, across the whole breadth of their nature, to an equal extent. And of course especially one finds that this is the case, usually, in respect of the relative degree of intellectual development on the one hand and emotional development on the other. People who are well developed intellectually are quite childish where their emotions are concerned.

: Doesn't Zen also talk about a beginner's mind?

S: It certainly does, yes. We have talked about that within the context of the Friends quite a number of times; and sometimes we have said that you need to do everything, whether it's the meditation or the Puja or whatever, as though for the first time. It's not even 'as though' for the first time, as though to suggest 'Pretend it's the first time, even though you know very well it isn't'; actually it is the first time, in the sense that the situation is different from what it was last time. You are doing the whole thing in a slightly different mood, you're doing it perhaps in a different place, you're doing it with different people. You're doing it with the experience of a different, another day behind you, or week behind you, or month behind you, so you are not doing it again; this is one of our prime illusions, one of our prime micchaditthis, that we are doing the [197] same thing again. And this is one reason why we get bored and why we start searching for distraction: we think it's the same old job, it's the same old meditation, the same old Puja, and that's why sometimes people try to vary things a bit, just to make it more interesting for themselves. But that isn't necessary, it's already been varied, but you can't see that, you can't appreciate that.

There is a Christian hymn which begins 'New every morning'. I won't give you the rest of it, because it's too Christian. 'New every morning': everything is new every morning. The sun is new every morning. The sky is new every morning. The earth is new every morning. You are new every morning. So everything you do is really new. You are doing it for the first time.

You will never be able to do that thing again. It's just for once. It's unrepeatable.

: So in a sense we are always novices.

S: In a sense, always novices, yes. Nothing is more distressing in some ways than the spectacle of the person who has been, say, in a particular way of spiritual or at least 'religious',inverted commas, life over 20, 30 years and he has just become tired and cynical. He has seen it all before and he's done it all before, and he just doesn't communicate a feeling of freshness or inspiration or anything of that sort at all. It's all old hat. Sometimes you meet even people in their late teens who profess to have this attitude that they've done it all before and seen it all before and it's old hat. Occasionally I am told they come along to meditation classes, come along to the Centre: 'Oh, we've done it all before, it's all old hat', they say. 'I went though that phase when I was 16.' There they are at 19 already, or at least professedly, hard-boiled, worldly wise and cynical.

Vajradaka: Having 'done' Buddhism.

S: Having 'done' Buddhism. They certainly don't seem to consider themselves as novices.

Adrian: To consider oneself other than a novice is egotistical, in a way, isn't it? It's saying: 'I've progressed a certain amount', whereas you should always be looking for further progress.

S: Yes. Well, if you momentarily stand aside and look at yourself, yes: you can see perhaps that in the course of the last year you have progressed, but that shouldn't be more than a sort of momentary glance. You should quickly get back into line, as it were, and just concentrate on the next thing to be done. It should be more like, for instance, when somebody sits down to write, as we might say, another novel or another poem: he doesn't - or at least he shouldn't - think 'Here I am sitting down writing another novel', because it's a completely new [198] experience, it's a completely new story, it's a completely new set of characters; he feels in a completely different mood, he's got something completely different to say; it is only formally and technically the writing of an-other novel.

(End of Side)

Tape 9, Side 2

So we ought to look at every day of our lives, or at least every week of our lives, or at the very least every month of our lives in this way. Otherwise people stress the similar factors and overlook the factors which are completely different. 'Another day; same old three meals a day, same old walk, same old newspaper or whatever it is. Same old meditation. Nothing different. Same old dull round.' That's a completely wrong attitude. You start becoming jaded, as they say.

So one should realize much more the newness of everything, the fact that everything is a fresh opportunity, a fresh opening up and opening out. So don't think that you know it all; don't think that you've learned it all. Just persevere in listening to and, in this case, meditating upon, religious teachings. And, obviously, by 'religious teachings' isn't meant religious teachings in the formal sense; not something labelled religious and labelled a teaching. It's a question of being open to, being receptive to and reflecting upon, anything that you might feel

might help you in your individual development. It might just be an odd word which you overhear in passing, but it strikes you as something very significant and very relevant. It might not have been intended for you as a religious teaching; it's just something you chance to hear or to overhear. But you find it really is applicable to your own state, your own condition, your own life, so you take it in.

Let's go on to precept 2.

(2) Having had spiritual experience, persevere in meditation and mental concentration.

S: What do you think is meant by 'spiritual experience' here? Or what is spiritual experience?

: Dhyanas.

S: Yes, one could say dhyanas.

Asvajit: Something that is definitely conducive to your development; something that's inspiring; illuminating in some sense.

S: The suggestion seems to be that it occurs in the context of meditation, but that of course isn't necessarily so.

[199]
Sona: Perhaps you could say it's just a certain amount of inspiration, ... inspired by something, and then one has to persevere ...

S: One could say that a spiritual experience is a sort of anticipation, a sort of momentary anticipation, of what you will actually be as it were permanently when you are more highly developed. It's as though you have made a tremendous leap, you've leaped up to that new higher level, but you've just not been able to stay there; you fall back again. So this is what we speak of as a spiritual experience. So you've had a taste of it, you've had a foretaste of it, you know what it is like; then you have to persevere in meditation and mental concentration so that you can reach up to that new state of being and consciousness in such a way that you are as it were permanently on that level, you really become that, you actually achieve and consolidate on that level. So by 'spiritual experience' is meant a sort of anticipation on the vertical plane. Not just something interesting and titillating on the level of being and consciousness on which you already are. It's like, in a way, a sort of experience of the Path of Vision, which comes before the Path of Transformation, and the perseverance in meditation and mental concentration represents the Path of Transformation. So this could be the dhyanas, because you could have a sort of momentary experience of the dhyanas, or it could be an actual experience of Vision or Insight. But the fact that the precept exhorts people to persevere in meditation and mental concentration when they have had the spiritual experience suggests that they may not do that; they may as it were treat the spiritual experience carelessly. Do you know what I mean by this? It is quite strange, in a way, that people sometimes are quite careless with regard to their own experience. They waste it, they misuse it. I think we talked about this a few days ago, especially in connection with retreats, I think, or what happens after retreats.

So 'Having had spiritual experience, persevere in meditation and mental concentration.' I don't

think we should take this 'meditation and mental concentration' in too narrow a sense. It surely refers to all one's different spiritual practices and exercises, all the things that one is trying to do in order to evolve.

John R: There's also the temptation, perhaps, to try to elongate the experience, to sustain it beyond its natural time. And in so doing you become quite intoxicated with the experience, and of course it won't last.

S: Yes. Well, you try probably to appropriate it.

John R: Appropriate it, yes. Rather than just get on with practice, looking to recreate the experience all the time.

S: Well, this is one of the reasons why, after an initial successful practice of meditation, people start finding that they are not getting on so well, because they might have had a [200] reasonably positive experience but, instead of getting on with their concentration exercise, let's say, they start anticipating and trying to recreate the experience which comes as the result of the practice, the one-pointed practice, without thinking of results, of that concentration exercise. I think everybody probably has experienced this at some time or other. The beginner doesn't know what's going to happen. He's got a very vague general idea, so he just goes on counting his breaths or whatever; so something does gradually dawn, so to speak. But if you've had a few successful meditations, and perhaps if you've experienced something quite blissful, instead of really getting on with the counting of the breaths which will eventually ensure so to speak that blissful experience, you just keep stopping and wondering when you are going to get that blissful experience; it doesn't seem to be coming quite so quickly as it did last time. In that way, you prevent it from coming, you preclude that possibility altogether. Then you think: 'Maybe I'm not doing it right', and 'What's going on?' and Maybe meditation isn't for you, and so on.

So anyway the first thing that you should do, in a way, when you sit down to meditate in the sense of going through the concentration exercise, is just to forget whatever experiences you might have had before, and treat it as a completely new experience; just do the exercise.

Adrian: If you try to repeat an experience, it's almost as if you are trying to progress by going backwards.

S: Yes. Well, we do this sometimes with people. For instance, we have a very pleasant experience in a particular place with a particular person, and then some time later, for one reason or another, we think: 'How nice it would be to go back to that place with that person.' You might even be able to arrange that; you go back to the very same place, you stay maybe in the very same hotel or you pitch your tent in the very same field, but it's all completely different from what it was on the previous occasion, and you are very disappointed. That seems to have rung a few [bells].

Well, you can do the same thing with a book: there might be a book that you've read, say, when you were in your teens, and you got such a lot out of it, it was such a wonderful book; and then 10 or 15 years later you go back to it, hoping to recreate that experience, perhaps, and you just wonder how on earth you could have got anything from that book. You find it perhaps even quite ridiculous and foolish now. You are unable to recreate the experience,

because you are such a different person now.

[201]
All right, on to precept 3.

(3) Persevere in solitude until the mind hath been yogically disciplined.

S: What do you think is meant by this being yogically disciplined, or what is in fact meant by being yogically undisciplined? And how does perseverance in solitude help?

Asvajit: It establishes a discipline which you yourself have brought about, so that you can be sure that it's not a group thing...

S: Yogic discipline, one could say, is discipline which is self-imposed for positive, healthy reasons, not one which is simply imposed by the will, so to speak, of the group. In what would that true yogic discipline consist?

Asvajit: A harmonization of one's emotional and more intellectual ...s.

S: ... that among other things, yes. What is the need for persevering in solitude?

Viramati: Lack of distractions.

S: Lack of distractions, yes. One has to really concentrate on the yogic process; one has to pay attention to one's ordinary everyday experience, that when you're not in solitude, let's say, you are brought into contact with all sorts of things, you have all sorts of reactions; and some of those reactions are unskilful. If you'd not been brought into contact with those things you would not have had that unskilful reaction, even though the potentiality would have been there. So that if you find that it is possible for you not to experience those unskilful reactions only when you actually withdraw yourself physically from the objects which give rise to those unskilful reactions, you should go away into solitude; you should separate yourself from those objects until such time as you do not experience that unskilful reaction even in the presence of those objects. So you go away into solitude, you persevere in solitude until your mind has been yogically disciplined in the sense that, even when confronted by those objects, there will not be those unskilful reactions. Then you may safely go back into the midst of those objects. You see? This is what the precept is getting at. You know the sort of thing I mean, the sort of objects you encounter and the sort of unskilful reactions you experience, say, when you are in the big city, when you've got all these advertisements around you and all the pretty girls passing by, etc. etc. Well, it's better for you, if you cannot control your unskilful reactions, to go away into solitude and persevere there until such time as you are able to control them better.

Uttara: Isn't there the story of the yogi who goes off into the cave and spends 20 years up there meditating, and then he decides he's done his bit and can go back down into the village; and so [202] he goes down, and within a couple of weeks he's right back where he started from, he's right in amongst the - I think that's more stressing the need for Insight than [whether it matters] how long he's away, but ...

S: Well, he was a Hindu yogi. (Laughter) So one wonders what he had been doing those 20

years, if that is a true story, because even if you'd been meditating in the sense of seducing(?) yourself with samatha, even without developing actual Insight, that samatha should have been sufficiently strong after 20 years for you not to fall a prey to your unskilful reactions in the way that we are told that yogi did.

Adrian: I do get a sense of almost like running away here.

S: Oh yes, indeed, I think that's the best thing that one can do sometimes. One shouldn't be ashamed to run away, oh dear no. Again, this is one of our current micchaditthis: people say 'You shouldn't run away'. Why do they put it 'run away', that very phrase, as though it's something despicable, and something no man would want to do - run away. But if you see a great danger in front of you, the sensible thing to do is to run away, if you are not strong enough to confront it.
"He who fights and runs away Lives to fight another day."
You [may not have been] strong enough to fight at all to begin with. But you don't blame people if they run away from a raging forest fire or they run away from any other disaster of that sort. You say that's the sensible thing to do. It's just the same in the spiritual life. If you are not strong enough to stay within a certain situation without succumbing and cannot do anything but succumb, of course remove yourself from that situation: run away. It's not cowardice, it's prudence. Do you see what I mean? This is connected with the old micchaditthi about Buddhism, religion, spiritual life, being escapism. But why shouldn't you escape? What is wrong in escaping if the situation is a dangerous and deleterious one? Perhaps you ought to be strong enough to be able to withstand it, but you aren't. Perhaps you ought to be strong enough to lift a two hundred pound weight, but you aren't; you've just got to get into training until you are strong enough. So that's the sensible thing to do. And if you remain in the situation, you will just destroy yourself and there will be no possibility of any training anyway. So by far the more sensible thing is just to - let's not say run away, but to walk away, to prudently withdraw from the situation. When you find people using these rather snide expressions like 'running away', you must be not just on your guard, you must become a bit aggressive, perhaps. To withdraw from a situation which is in fact insupportable is the correct thing to do. It may not be very heroic in appearance, it may not strike any grand gesture, but you just can't help that.

It's the same principle at work when we go on retreat. In a sense a retreat is a strategic withdrawal, so that we can return into the world charged with a bit more energy and be less susceptible to all the distractions that we will probably encounter there, all the negative forces and influences.

[203]
: The spirit of Dunkirk.

S: Yes, indeed.

Asvajit: I think people in the Movement do actually admire people who go on - not exactly admire, but they realize that solitary retreats and things like that are really worth while.

S: Yes, indeed. That realization seems to be spreading. Someone pointed out in the discussion we had down in London recently that the general tendency among Order Members nowadays seems to be not to go on retreat in the ordinary sense but to go on solitary retreat. If they had

two or three weeks to spare, people said in many cases they preferred to go on solitary retreat rather than on to an ordinary retreat with other people. That does seem a growing tendency.

But when you withdraw, say, into retreat, you withdraw to 'persevere in solitude until the mind hath been yogically disciplined.' You are as it were fighting with your mind all the time. You might draw a parallel: I heard on the radio some weeks ago an interview with someone who had become quite a famous and highly esteemed singer. When she was quite young apparently she had had a really great success in a certain operatic part, but after that she had refused to sing for two or three years. It wasn't that she was running away from the operatic stage, but she wanted to withdraw, as it were, she realized to some extent what she could do, but she realized she had to improve a whole lot more, so she withdrew. But if you wanted to be unsympathetic or critical you would say she ran away from the operatic stage. But no, she withdrew to perfect her technique and her performance, and when she felt she was ready she reappeared and was an even greater success. So, in the same way, in that sort of spirit, you just withdraw and go into solitary retreat. You go away on retreat with other people, or you withdraw each day for a period into your own personal practice.

But one aspect of that is that, as a result of that, you will be able to function more effectively, more positively and at less cost to yourself when you do go back among other people and have contact with them.

Viramati: What exactly is meant by 'yogically'?

S: Yogically in the more general sense of what one does with the mind. One's inhibiting of the so to speak natural unskilful reactions of the mind, and substituting for those - skilful reactions. It's this essentially that one is concerned with in this context. Because when you are living in solitude, the number of objects with which you are in contact is limited; there is a certain narrow range. You can watch your reaction to those things more carefully. You can see the way in which unskilful reactions arise and you can see how they are to be checked. For instance, you might be living quite on your own, you might have been on your own for several weeks and meditating quite successfully, and then one day you go for a little walk in [204] a quite meditative mood, and perhaps you see a tree, and you say 'It's a fruit tree; oh, there are some plums on that tree.' And suddenly the thought comes, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have some plum jam with my tea today.' At once there's a craving for that plum jam, and you can see that. You can see the whole process, exactly how it happens. And you ask yourself: 'How did that particular reaction arise? Where did it come from?' And you go digging around in the depths of your own mind, and you can study the whole thing. Also it's relatively isolated, because you've been meditating; one single incident, one single train of reactions which you can follow through. Whereas when you are in a place like London, say - or even in a place like Croydon, I would imagine, in Purley - you are bombarded by all sorts of objects with all sorts of impressions, and you get all sorts of reactions, skilful and unskilful, all the time. So it's very difficult to follow up any individual process. Whereas on solitary retreat you have more the opportunity to do this, and it's just you; you can't blame anybody else for anything that happens. If, as I mentioned a few days ago, the feeling of anger arises in your mind, even if you felt angry with someone, ... you cannot be angry with anybody, not in the present, because there is nobody there; it is your anger, your responsibility, with which you have to deal. It might come welling up more and more powerfully, it might even quite overwhelm you for a few minutes, but you know it's got nothing to do with anybody else, so then you have to handle that situation there and then.

So this is what is meant by becoming yogically disciplined: disciplined in relation to your own reactions to the objects which you encounter in the course of your day-to-day life and experience. So to be yogically disciplined really means to gradually as it were weed out the reactive mind, and to replace it by the creative mind. And the experience of solitude enables one to do that. It doesn't make sure that you do it; you still have to persevere, so therefore it says 'persevere in solitude until the mind hath been yogically disciplined.' This is one of the reasons for you to just withdraw in that way, so you can study the mind, study its reactions, and bring the unskilful reactions under control, eliminate them and encourage the skilful reactions all the time, or skilful responses, let's say. The solitary retreat is like going away into a psychological workshop or laboratory, working on the mind and experimenting with it and watching it and seeing how it reacts, seeing how it behaves. You don't get that sort of opportunity usually when you are living your ordinary life; you are too busy, there are too many reactions, too many objects, too many impressions.

: ... simplify ... watch your mind working.

S: Yes, indeed. Well, not when you can't make the effort on occasions - you should be making an effort all the time, but sometimes there are so many impressions and they come flooding in upon one, it's very difficult.

Sona: Presumably, after a period in silence, watching and experimenting, you know what to apply to remedy that process, and then when you are back in the world you do it automatically without ...

S: Yes, because you've trained your mind, your mind has become yogically disciplined. That's also included.

Anyway, precept 4 continues that line of thought.

(4) Should thought-processes be difficult to control, persevere in thine efforts to dominate them.

S: The thought processes in particular that are referred to, presumably, are the reactive ones whereby unskilful reactions take place in dependence upon external objects. So even though you've gone away into solitude, the thought processes, the unskilful reactions, may still not be at all easy to control; they may be in fact very difficult to control, but one should persevere none the less. Sometimes the reactions may become more and more violent the more you try to control them, so clearly you shouldn't try to control them in a really suppressive, much less still repressive, way, but skilfully or tactfully, diplomatically.

: Why might they be even more difficult to control when you're on a solitary?

S: Well, it's partly because they aren't getting any satisfaction. Usually you keep your senses, let's say, and your more reactive mental processes, reasonably satisfied. They get a certain amount of nourishment almost without your noticing it. But when you go on solitary retreat they are deprived of that nourishment. I have mentioned this hackneyed old example of the advertisements. As you go around and you see these, whether you like it or not or appreciate it or not, you are still getting a certain subtle satisfaction out of seeing some of these all the time, aren't you? There is that slight unskilful reaction, and it is as it were indulged in, you

don't really do anything about it. But when you go away on solitary retreat, first of all those objects aren't there, so any reaction which arises is seen much more clearly; it's a reaction which arises as a result of some lingering impression from the past, and it's dealt with. But then that unskilful reaction itself has very deep roots within your own mind, so when those roots, so to speak, start feeling themselves not getting their usual nourishment, in fact they are being trimmed or cut back rather sharply, they start resisting. They might start demanding their nourishment. And then a real battle may be on.

In fact, I think usually we don't realize the extent to which we satisfy, not to say pander to, our own unskilful reactions or unskilful mental states. Actually in small subtle ways they are being pandered to all the time, and this is why we keep in a reasonably good mood. But when we go away into solitary retreat, there is very much less of that sort of thing. You can see it [206] with regard to things like food. You can see it with regard to things like members of the opposite sex. So when you are away on solitary retreat, so many of these sort of objects are just removed. You are just left with the bare unskilful reaction carried over from your contacts with those particular objects in the past, and you've no other work to do except to deal with those. So the situation is a much more acute one.

: Does that not presuppose a certain degree of emotional positivity and integration for going on a solitary, otherwise the trauma of the situation might be too much - like you might be confronted with all these desires and so on and be unable to deal with them?

S: I think most of the people who decide to go away on a solitary retreat will have achieved already, or experienced already, some degree of integration, otherwise I think they wouldn't even think of going away on solitary retreat. But even so, if they haven't been away on solitary retreat before, they should definitely not go away on a very long solitary retreat. I usually suggest just a week, to begin with, and if that goes well consider later on going away for two or three weeks and possibly even a month after that. But not to plunge straight into a long solitary retreat if you haven't done one before. If someone isn't very sure of themselves, well, just go away for a weekend.

But it is a very good thing just to experience the strength of one's own unskilful reactions. One can do that much more easily and much more successfully in the course of a solitary retreat.

Do you see, then, the way in which usually we are feeding our unskilful tendencies? It may not be anything big or dramatic, it's lots of little things. For instance, just to take a very ordinary one, say contact with members of the opposite sex: maybe we don't have any relationship with members of the opposite sex at all. You don't have a relationship, let's say, you don't have a wife, you don't have a girl friend, etc. But there are women around all the time, you're in constant contact with them, you see them, you talk to them, you hear their voices, hear their voices on the radio, see their pictures on various things you look at. So that sort of unskilful tendency within you, to the extent that it is unskilful, is being constantly fed and nourished in all these little ways which keep you satisfied to some extent. But when you go away on solitary retreat, that's all cut off. You might hear just the voice of a milkmaid in the distance, and that's all. Maybe not even that.

So that sort of situation enables you to study your own mind and your own mental reactions, skilful and unskilful, in much greater detail, much more thoroughly, and to do something

about them.

Sona: You could say then it's really the hero that runs away.

S: You could say that, yes, you could say it's the hero who runs away.

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Sona: It's the majority of people who are running away from the ...

S: Yes, if you really want to turn the tables on people, say 'You're running away. You're the escapists. Spend a whole evening watching telly and then talk to other people about escapism? Who are the escapists?' Maybe one should be a bit aggressive here rather than apologetic. Say you're not running away. They've just got their sense of direction all wrong. Actually you're running to confront the enemy. It's they who are running away, they've got their backs to the enemy, so they don't realize that they're running away. They can't even see the enemy.

I think, again, to come back to this question of the satisfaction of say, unskilful mental states - I've given one particular, rather prominent, example, but don't let that mislead you; there are lots of other examples, and the same sort of thing is happening in lots of other ways. And we remain in what we think is a reasonably skilful, happy, good-tempered frame of mind, not because we have any real positivity in the sense of really skilful mental states within us - states of metta, karuna, mudita and upekkha, for instance - but just because we are getting all these little satisfactions most of the time. Take those little satisfactions away, it would be a very different story, you shall be in a very different mental state. And again, going away on solitary retreat helps us to realize that. It's the good regular meals, the friendly gregarious contact with other people, the constant titillation of the senses in various ways - it's this that keeps us happy much of the time, not our spiritual ideals.

Asvajit: I have heard it said that the brahma viharas - metta, mudita and so on - are not Transcendental states. But from what you've been saying suggests that they are something at least very much higher than the conditioned states that we usually find ourselves in.

S: They are conditioned in the strict sense, but, yes, they are much higher. In technical terms they belong not to the kamaloka but to the rupaloka. They are much more refined states and experiences. But it's not those that keep us happy much of the time, it's our kamaloka experience. Someone might have the reputation of being good-natured, friendly, not losing his temper, always being pleasant; but it may not be because of any really positive inner experiences, it's just because of his inner state usually of general sense satisfaction. That is a quite different sort of thing.

And again, going away into solitude and persevering in solitude enables us to appreciate and realize this fact.

Asvajit: It doesn't necessarily mean, though, does it, that one should deliberately deprive oneself of sense satisfaction?

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S: Well, as an experiment, yes, because this is what you do in respect of certain sense

satisfactions when you go away on solitary retreat - at least, so that you can experiment, because what is the essence of experiment? It is to control the situation. It is the essence of the scientific experiment, which is carried out in the laboratory. You carry it out in the laboratory because you can control the situation, you can determine what factors are to be there and what are not to be there, so that you can work out what is causing what. Because if there is an unlimited number of factors you can't work that out. So it's just the same when you go on solitary retreat: you eliminate a certain number of factors, quite a large number of factors, so you can just deal with a limited number of factors and find out how they work, what is causing what. Is it other people who are making you angry? All right, eliminate them. So if it's other people who are making you angry all the time, if they are responsible for your anger well, once you've eliminated them there should be no anger left at all. But actually you find anger is there so you realized, well, it isn't due to other people because they've been eliminated. The source of the anger is in my own mind. So one can look upon the solitary retreat situation as being a sort of psychological cum spiritual laboratory. You go away to carry out various experiments so that you can get a better working knowledge of your own mind and your own mental reactions.

And most people I think notice in the course of a solitary retreat that they go through various phases and it's quite interesting to follow this and to try to understand what is happening and why it is happening. There might be an initial phase of boredom, and then a phase of just feeling very refreshed, and then maybe a phase of wanting to sleep a lot, and then a phase of having very good meditations, and then a phase of feeling violent emotions of anger and all that sort of thing, and then maybe another phase of, say, restlessness, and after that a phase of good positive states and good meditations. And in this way one can follow, one can trace one's own successive experiences.

Sona: It's satisfying in itself watching the processes take place. You do actually watch these reactive processes, it's a source of satisfaction.

Asvajit: In a way it's a sort satisfaction finding that you don't have to react to them or respond to them.

Sona: You're capable of controlling them.

S: Or even if you are not capable of controlling it, and that sometimes may happen, at least you've got the satisfaction of knowing it's your reaction, and it's you and your responsibility, and it's not anybody else's, it's not anybody's fault; it's entirely yours.

Vajradaka: There's no reason to be bored any more, because there you've got something to do. Get on with it.

[209]
S: All right: precept 5.

(5) Should there be great drowsiness, persevere in thine efforts to invigorate the intellect (or to control the mind).

S: It's very often said that there are two great enemies, two great distractions in a way as regards meditation, especially when you go away into solitude.

Tape 10, Side 1

The first is, of course, drowsiness, and the second is not just distraction but mental restlessness and disturbance and over-abundance of thoughts, or rather hectic, feverish thinking; hectic, feverish mental activity. But here this precept is concerned with drowsiness: 'Should there be great drowsiness, persevere in thine efforts to invigorate the intellect.'

Well, first of all, what is drowsiness, especially 'great drowsiness'? Drowsiness is a sort of inclination to sleep; but why? Why should you get sleepy? Has anyone actually had this experience on solitary retreats?

Voices: Mm.

Asvajit: Yes, very much, for the first few days. You just feel dragged down into an almost subterranean state. It's really difficult just to remain awake.

S: But what is this? What is happening? To what extent is it positive, to what extent is it not so positive?

Asvajit: It seems to be positive in the sense that you are trying to contact some deeper source of energy. It seems to represent a - well, what seemed to be happening was that my consciousness would be sort of sucked out into the environment. That's what it felt like. And it was an effort to remain really clear and bright, and just have sufficient energy to keep myself as a separate identity.

: Could it be that your mind normally works in the way that it's responding to outside stimulus all the time, and when you get in that situation there's no outside stimulus to keep it like going, so ...

S: So no mind.

Sona: It's before the creative mind.

S: So it's almost as though, in that case, there was no individuality. It's the purely reactive individuality that one has built up in the course of one's dealings, with one's transactions, with other people. And when they were no longer there, when the stimulation of contact with them was no longer there, there was nothing to sustain that false identity, that [210] false personality, in existence. So you just feel tired because the task of keeping it in existence is entirely on your side, and it becomes an impossible job; and you feel less and less bright, as it were, because that is fading.

Sona: Is that the same sort of drowsiness as some people experience - I experience it - at certain times of the day? In the afternoon, for instance.

S: This is said to be due to purely physiological, metabolic, reasons. The Ayurvedic people say that in the early part of the day, up to midday, the energies within the body are ascending, and then you feel bright and lively. But they start descending in, say, the middle of the afternoon, and then you feel drowsy and not very energetic. Whether this is an explanation or just a description in other terms, it is difficult to say. But that does seem to ..., it does seem to

have physiological reasons.

But, coming back to this drowsiness in connection with meditation, especially the solitary retreat, I think what happens with some people when they go away on solitary retreat, [is that] they contact a level of tiredness within themselves that they have not until then allowed themselves to be conscious of. But actually they are quite tired and were quite tired but were working hard and had things to do and they ignored the fact that they were tired and just went on working, so that when they get away on to solitary retreat and when that need for working is no longer there and when they can afford to allow themselves to feel tired well they do allow themselves to feel tired and they feel tired. So I think this is quite a common experience when people have been working very hard and have been very busy right up to the time of going on solitary retreat. Sometime they work extra hard because they've got things to get finished before they can go on the solitary retreat. So then I think the drowsiness that you might experience then for the first two or three days is a quite natural and quite healthy reaction. It means you've got to give yourself a bit of time to recuperate, even physically. Maybe you've got to allow yourself for a few days to have extra sleep. This is one of the manifestations of it. You might find for the first two or three days you just sleep for 10 hours every night, you might be rather surprised: 'Well, here I am away on solitary retreat and I'm sleeping so long - and even when I was working I didn't need so much sleep.' But actually you did but you were forcing yourself before to take less sleep, perhaps. But now your natural bodily, even mental, needs are reasserting themselves.

So this is one particular phenomenon. If this occurs, and if you know that you have been working very hard and you really do need, or have needed, a bit more sleep than you've been getting, well, don't try to deal with this sort of drowsiness as though it's some kind of unskilful reaction. That just requires time and a few good nights' rest and you'll be all right, you won't feel drowsy in that way.

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But there is another kind of drowsiness which just comes from a sort of reluctance of the whole being, especially those unskilful tendencies within you, to make any sort of real effort. They just resist. Almost as though there's a conflict going on within you: part of you wants to do something, part of you doesn't want to do something. Part of you wants to grow, part of you doesn't want to grow. There's a great conflict. And one of the greatest sources of drainage of energy is internal conflict, because the energy is going into the conflict, so the energy is divided: one energy is cancelling out the other. It's like when you put the two hands - (gesturing?) - it's just pulling in the other direction. It's just like that. And so, of course, your energy is used up in that way, you feel drowsy. That is sometimes what is happening. Or you just don't - for instance, if something is going on that you're not very happy with, and there's a lot of unconscious resistance on your part, you sort of solve the problem by just going to sleep, by refusing to face it. You sometimes notice this in lectures; occasionally you see people going off to sleep while you're talking. It isn't due to actual physical tiredness; it may be that they find it difficult to face what you're saying, and that is a way of escaping from it, to go to sleep. So sometimes you go to sleep not out of real drowsiness, say, on solitary retreat, [but] to escape the retreat situation, because you are unwilling to face up to the fact that here you are with your own self, with your own little reactive mind, and you've got to do something about it. The time has come! - you see? You find it very difficult to face up to that situation, so you escape from it by just going off to sleep.

Alaya: I found in that series of the Golden Light lectures, always for the first quarter of an hour or so I've been almost totally asleep, and just a slight awareness fighting; and then suddenly, like a shock, I'd wake up and feel very bright for the rest of the lecture. That happened every week, even though I tried various ways of getting round it. Always. It was like going through thick syrup, and then suddenly being very clear and bright.

S: Sometimes people find it difficult to make a transition, if you've been engaged in one kind of work and then you have to switch as it were on to quite a different wavelength; it sometimes isn't easy, and you go through a fuzzy, dazed phase before you make the readjustment. It could be that sort of thing. Though I do remember - no names mentioned - one particular person who was sleeping quite a lot during those lectures. I don't know whether it was because he was tired or whether it was because he was putting up some kind of mental resistance.

John R: I think there was an objective factor at work in those lectures. Quite simply, you were talking in front of a white wall with white light ...

S: Ah!

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John R: - I had to go those lectures with sunglasses! ... because it just tires the eyes very ... It was very hard to look at the speaker. I found it very hard to stay awake.

S: Ah, that's interesting. I don't know how it's going to be at this hall that we are going to be using this autumn, but maybe someone will have a look at that.

: We'll have a look. Because a simple thing like that ...

S: Yes, if there's a white wall behind the speaker, we'll just hang up a coloured cloth, or something of that sort.

: Or colour the light, even, put a gel on the light. Very simply put it right.

Sona: Just going back to that other sort of tiredness you get when you've been ignoring a natural - not giving yourself enough sleep: it seems to me a quite dangerous state to get into, because you notice a lot of people when they come on retreats, for instance, get ill, right at the beginning of the retreat. I'm sure a lot of this is due - I've experienced it, in my own case, say I'm away on retreat, I get quite ill at first. It's like when you've let up and you've relaxed and you've run yourself down, haven't really taken enough care of yourself, if there are bugs around and things, you can pick them up quite easily.

S: It is surprising. I've noticed this; I noticed it on the last retreat, the August, the summer retreat, how many people seemed to be going down sick for a few days. It seemed quite surprising. But perhaps it was due to some such factor - in some cases.

Sona: When they go down sick towards the end of the retreat, it made me be suspicious! ... more like a conflict ...

: ... at work, isn't it?

S: Sometimes I think it would be a good idea if people took a day or two off before coming on the retreat. This is why this time I was emphasizing people at least getting here at the beginning of the retreat in time to go to bed early, so to speak. Because on previous study retreats that I have had, people have turned up very late the previous evening, been very pleased to meet all their old friends, talked until 2 or 3 in the morning, been unable to get up for the meditation, just about made breakfast, and been very tired, not to say sleepy, during the actual study. And this has seemed quite undesirable. So therefore I was emphasizing people turning up not later than 9 o'clock so that they could get to bed, say, by 10.30 and be up bright and early in the morning after a good night's sleep. This was the theory, anyway.

But anyway, it did seem to work reasonably well this time.

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Vajradaka: It says here: 'persevere in thine efforts to invigorate the intellect' - as if, if you invigorate the intellect, the intellect will actually stimulate you.

S: I shouldn't personally take this phrase too literally. I would place more emphasis on the invigoration than on the intellect. Perhaps we can go into that a bit later on, but let's for the moment just stay with the invigoration. Obviously the opposite of a state of drowsiness is a state of vigour, so the question arises: how do you invigorate yourself? Leaving aside the possibility that you may be drowsy just due to lack of rest, lack of proper sleep - clearly you should ... try to invigorate yourself then - but leaving aside that, how do you invigorate yourself when you are feeling drowsy?

: You can do something - go for a walk in the brisk air. Open the windows.

S: Yes, there are all sorts of practical measures that you can take. You can make sure that you are getting enough oxygen. It may be that you are on solitary retreat in the winter, and there you are in that tiny caravan with that little stove burning, with all the windows closed to keep out the draughts; it's not surprising if you feel drowsy at the end of the evening, is it? So you take simple, practical steps to deal with the situation. Or, yes, you can go for a brisk walk, you can chop some wood.

One thing that is mentioned traditionally as something that will counteract drowsiness is looking at a bright light. Which doesn't necessarily mean staring at a bright light, but having a bright environment. It is sometimes surprising to me that quite a lot of people seem to like a dim light for the evening Puja, whereas it seems to me that it would be much better to have more of light and more of illumination, though without glare, because this is actually stimulating, and perhaps you need that sort of stimulation at the end of the day when you are likely to feel a bit drowsy. But I also think that some people have still got this sort of Christian association of the 'dim religious light': if you lower the light you somehow make it more religious and mysterious. Because all our old cathedrals are like that, they are dark and gloomy, with a bit of light filtering through the stained glass windows, and all that sort of thing. And for us that means that it's something religious, it's got religious associations. But I think we should get away from that, because it is certainly not an association in the East, anyway. You've got bright light streaming into the temples, and big open windows, and sometimes not even open windows: not to speak of no windows, there are no walls, just a roof as it were, in some countries, supported on pillars, and the light streams in on all sides. There's no dim religious light there at all. So I think we can make more use of light, and also

colour; bright colour is very stimulating and counteracts drowsiness.

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Sona: When you look around shrine rooms, everyone is doing Puja with their eyes closed - not everyone, but the majority of people seem to. It's interesting whether people resist having bright lights because they like to close their eyes, or they don't have bright lights because they have their eyes closed.

S: Or don't want to waste electricity. But if you have a shrine, an image and beautiful flowers, it's presumably meant to be looked at because it's a focus of devotion. Do you see what I mean? If you're all going to do Puja with your eyes closed, there seems to be no point in having it, you don't need the shrine and the flowers and the candles at all.

Asvajit: There seems to be something Christian, I suspect: I look around me sometimes and I think there is something in their attitude which is as if people are praying to God or something like that. I do wonder sometimes what's going on in their minds.
: I don't think that's what it is, it's because when you're concentrated it's easier to have your eyes closed, because you're concentrating on a point.

Asvajit: I don't find that, actually. I find it just as easy to concentrate with my eyes open.

S: It depends on what you're concentrating on. If you're trying to concentrate on your breath or the development of metta, clearly it's easier when you have the eyes closed. But if the concentration is as it were more devotional, on a more devotional object, it may well be that keeping your eyes open and just looking at the shrine and the lights and so on can help you. This is why one has the shrine at all. If it doesn't help, one should consider not having it. If it doesn't help anybody and no one ever looks at it, one should consider doing away with it, because the function of it is a purely practical one. The Buddha doesn't particularly want it, or need it - well, he might want it if you want it, but he doesn't need it himself. The Buddha is not like, say, the Christian God who seems to need, according to the Old Testament, to inhale the pleasant fumes of the burnt offerings, so to speak. God, it seems, we're given to understand, likes to look down from heaven and see all these people praying and grovelling there, [gives him a certain] satisfaction. The Buddha isn't like that, so don't think if you take it all away the Buddha will be hurt or the Buddha will be upset. Not a bit of it. He wouldn't mind at all.

But this brings me back to a cultural point. I don't remember who made the point, but the point was made in ancient times, commenting upon the difference of manners between the Greeks and the Persians. The Greeks always worshipped their gods standing upright; the Greeks did not bow down or prostrate themselves even before their gods, they stood upright and poured out their offerings, and said 'I give this' or 'I give that', and that was it. No bowing down for the Greeks; not only because they thought it very shameful for one man to bow to another - you only did that if you were a slave or if you were conquered in battle, [215] but a free man never bowed to another free man. They thought it really shameful that the Persians not only bowed before the images of their gods but bowed to their kings, and in fact prostrated themselves on the ground before their kings. This really outraged the Greeks; they thought this quite shameful and quite unbefitting for a man to do. Then you may remember that when Alexander the Great conquered Persia, conquered King Darius, and started assuming the trappings of an emperor, one thing that he did which outraged his companions

was to insist on them treating him as the Persian emperors were accustomed to be treated, and they didn't like this at all and they resisted it. They didn't like being asked to prostrate themselves, it was not the custom of free-born Greeks to do that sort of thing.

Also I believe in the early days of Christianity the monks used to pray standing upright, with their arms outstretched like this; and kneeling in prayer with folding the hands and bowing the head came in only later. So I think that's a quite interesting point, isn't it? - the difference in cultural attitudes as between, originally, the Greeks, the Hellenes, and the Persians; and the Greeks disliked not only the Persian Empire politically, but they disliked many of the cultural attitudes of the Persians, and especially this sort of thing.

Asvajit: It seems to suggest a certain kind of attitude towards a certain concept, perhaps, of power: that before power one has to submit, one bows.

Sona: Do you think that it's such a good thing that we bow?

S: I only put it as a point for consideration, because one should be careful, obviously, of just carrying on one's Christian conditioning with just a Buddhist colouring. I certainly think there is something of this in this question of the lowered lights, the 'dim religious light', as Milton says.

'In storied windows richly dight
Casting a dim religious light.'

Alaya: I find it more so, it seems, in the mornings. People who just light a couple of little candles on the shrine, it's so dull and gloomy. I think in the morning it should be very bright, lots of candles.

S: Well, there should be sunshine streaming through the windows. But, in the absence of sunshine you just have to light a few more candles.

Sona: It doesn't seem to be so necessary if you are meditating, because you do close your eyes, and in some ways if you've got less light then ...

S: Yes. I was speaking of it with reference to Puja especially, and anything devotional - that there should be a rich, colourful, brilliant display, if you're going to have a devotional expression in any case.

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John R: I was just thinking: do you think it's got anything to do with privacy in the Pujas - about closing your eyes and - There seems to be a kind of a lack of corporate activity, sometimes.

S: Some people seem to associate the closing of the eyes with a certain intensity of feeling; it may be connected with that.

John R: I asked, because sometimes I do open my eyes, which is very rare in a Puja, and look across: I ... feel intrusive, like I shouldn't intrude on that person's privacy ...

S: Yes, well, maybe this connects up with certain other attitudes of ours, maybe not necessarily Christian, because you notice in the East, whether in Buddhist temples or Hindu temples, that people seem to feel no need for privacy in performing their devotions. They don't seem shy or self-conscious in the least. If you go, say, with a Tibetan into a temple, as soon as he enters he's down on his knees and doing his full-length prostrations three times with complete unselfconsciousness. But it seems as though, for us, anything devotional has become almost self-conscious, even a shamefaced sort of thing. So it's almost as though out of politeness you don't look at people when they are doing something which maybe they feel isn't quite nice. They are being devoted and all that, but they are not quite comfortable with it, so you don't embarrass them still further by actually looking at them. But a Tibetan or a Sinhalese or a Burmese or a Thai just would not feel anything like that, because they've got a much more wholehearted faith, you could say, in what they are doing. Even if they only have faith in it as a good custom - it may be no more than that, ... But they have no hesitation about it, it's done with full social approval, at least that. But with us we are thinking at the back of our minds, 'Am I making a bit of a fool of myself in doing this?' So I think this is one reason why we don't look at other people, just to spare them a bit of extra embarrassment.

Asvajit: I have had it suggested to me that there is something sort of unfair or indecent almost to look at other people while they are meditating ... I really can't understand that.

S: It's part of our ethos in the West of not looking at other people, certainly not staring at other people. I remember being told as a child by my mother: 'Don't look, don't look.' If you look at other people, especially if you look too much, it's not quite right. But certainly in India they have nothing of that. If they think you are an object of interest, they just look at you, they just look you up and down... they have not the slightest hesitation in doing that.

Vajradaka: It would be quite disconcerting.

S: Yes, but we find that sort of thing very disconcerting. We consider it impolite, we consider it rude. It's rude to look at other people. This is what one is told - I was certainly told as a child. I don't know if others were.

Uttara: I was for ever getting into trouble for looking at other people - into fights, time and time again.

S: Well, there's looking and looking. (Laughter) If you glare ... it is asking for trouble. Indians don't do that.

Uttara: In general, you said that it's always: 'What are you looking at?' Maybe somebody else just ...

S: Yes, because ... uncomfortable, they feel them looking at as a sort of threat, and they think a threat is intended, they react accordingly.

Adrian: People seem to be easily embarrassed even in a shrine room. I think particularly on beginners' nights, all the people coming along to help in the very beginning the enter the shrine room and they just find somewhere to sit down. On a regulars' night they sort of bow as they enter the shrine room. It seems like it's a feeling against showing anything on beginners' nights.

: It might be skilful means.

: Yes, I think it is. It might be.

S: You mean they might be doing it because it's the sort of done thing and they'd better be on their best behaviour in front of the new people?

: What, that it might not do to bow too much in front of beginners because if they're just doing meditation it might put them off, they might ...

S: You think they do bow when beginners are there or they don't?

: Very seldom, it seems to me.

S: Very seldom?

: They might get Christian reactions themselves.

S: That could be, that could be.

: Sort of like the Greeks, aren't they?

S: But perhaps not for the same healthy reasons.

: I think it's for their sakes rather than being embarrassed.

Viramati: A beginners' class is usually a meditation class, not so much a Buddhism class.

S: I know some people are quite, you know, not to say embarrassed but they don't feel quite comfortable if anybody does more than a sort of bow. A few people like to go down on their [218] knees and do it properly, but a few people again feel a bit uncomfortable if anybody does this. That again is interesting. No doubt we are reacting, in a way quite justifiably, against our Christian conditioning, but without being capable of the natural dignity of the Greeks, let us say. Really Christianity has a lot to answer for.

Ray: ... some people that would be quite interested in Buddhism and in a course, but they were reluctant to bow before the shrine.

S: I've pointed out that there is no need to insist upon this, because the Buddha didn't. I've referred to passages in the Pali scriptures where the Buddha is described as being seated and ready to talk with people and give an address, and various people have turned up, and some are described as saluting him by bowing with folded hands, others are described as actually prostrating themselves on the ground in front of him; others are described as simply announcing their names and sitting down. Others are described as simply coming and sitting down and neither saying nor doing anything. And the Buddha does not make any comment; it's as though he accepts that all these different people have got different ways of behaving, and he doesn't say that the proper thing to do is to bow or the proper thing to do is to prostrate; he doesn't say anything at all. So the assumption is that the Buddha didn't consider it particularly important, certainly not in that initial situation, where he was just dealing so to

speak not just with his own committed followers but with members of the public. So there seems to be no reason why we shouldn't follow that example; if people feel like bowing, let them bow. If they don't feel like bowing they need not.

Alaya: In Sukhavati when the Nichiren monks were there we used to get ... didn't quite know how to react when you came and they threw themselves on the floor. Uncomfortable.

S: Well in India practically everybody you meet throws themselves on the floor. They're throwing themselves on the floor in front of Lokamitra and he's got quite used to it. At first it bothered him a little bit but it doesn't bother him any more now because it's such a natural thing for those people to do. It's so much a part of their social life and social customs. And then you see children especially really enjoy doing it. That's quite interesting to see and enjoy doing it properly, just showing that they know how to do it properly. They really quite like this. Again that's a good way of countering a certain kind of cultural conditioning.

Alaya: I reckon that this drowsiness is prostrations..

S: That's true. The actual prostration and going for refuge practice. But invigorates the intellect - we have to come on to that. Mental activity is one of the signs of the fact that one is vigorous, that one is invigorating. The opposite extreme as I mentioned to drowsiness is this sort of hectic feverish mental activity, compulsive mental activity where you're not able to [219] stop and your mind is running away with itself. The middle position is when there is actual creative mental activity, creative thought, creative thinking, is an antidote for drowsiness. Not that you can make yourself think but if you become interested in something and start thinking about it in a positive, creative sort of way you are much less likely to become drowsy.

Asvajit: I find that writing verse is always a very good antidote. It sort of made you observe very clearly both externally and internally and to adopt a creative attitude to what was going on.

S: I think for most people the quickest and the easiest antidote to drowsiness is some kind of physical activity. It might be a walk, it might be some little task that has to be done or it might be the going for refuge and prostration practice. It might be some yoga or something of that sort. Anyway let's stop there and have our morning coffee.

Someone like to read precept 6.

(6) Persevere in meditation until thou attainest the imperturbable mental tranquillity of samadhi.

S: So again perseverance is the keynote but perseverance in what, in meditation until thou attainest the imperturbable mental tranquillity of samadhi. So what do you think is meant here by samadhi? What kind of samadhi, what kind of mental state, even what kind of dhyana?

Asvajit: I was going to say the first dhyana but in the first dhyana you're capable of discursive, of thought but it's non-reactive, it's creative.

S: Not necessarily. It suggests that it is, well in terms of the dhyanas it will be at least the

second dhyana, but possibly because it is mental tranquillity which could mean equanimity and possibly even the fourth dhyana. So the suggestion is that one should persevere in meditation until you attain quite a high degree of dhyana experience in which you experience the state of mental tranquillity, experience the equanimity perhaps as being unshakeable, which is quite a tall order one might say. You shouldn't be satisfied with just a little bit of concentration. But when it says persevere in meditation does it necessarily mean just go on meditating and meditating and meditating until you attain that state. Does it necessarily mean that?

Asvajit I don't think so because if you just sit continually in meditation sort of gritting you teeth you many not get into a higher state at all. I think it just means that you've persevered in your daily practice.

S: Right, yes in the hope that your daily practice if kept up will just become deeper and deeper. But what will that suggest. What must you make sure of. What must you guard against even to [220] make sure that when you sit to meditate again, in a sense though you sit as we said before with a new mind, in a sense, in effect you sort of carry on if not where you left off last time but pretty much where you left off what must you do in between?

Asvajit: Practise mindfulness.

S: Yes, practice mindfulness and keep up the continuity of practice in one form or another. This is all implied by the word persevere.

Asvajit: Is equanimity then correlated with the third and fourth dhyanas and not with the others? I sort of pick up from what you said that there need not be any equanimity in the first dhyana.

S; Well the definition of the fourth dhyana is the mental one-pointedness together with equanimity. So as I've pointed out somewhere there is a process of progressive ...ication and integration and it's because of that higher level of integration therefore there is the less possibility of the mind being disturbed or shaken. It's perhaps not coincidental that the most stable of all three dimensional geometrical forms is the pyramid which goes from a broad base to a point, the apex. So in the case of the mind it's like that. The more integrated the mind, the more unshakeable it is, the less easy it can be overthrown.

So this is one of signs in a way that some degree of mental tranquillity has been attained in meditation that when you come out of the meditation and you're moving about there is a certain permanence of effect. It isn't all dissipated immediately you leave the shrine room and you should be careful to see that it isn't. But maybe quite difficult, especially to begin with.

: This seems to be quite a common experience ... someone's been meditating over a period of years that it's not so much their sort of individual practices don't become more blissful or whatever, the general sort of level of consciousness between the meditations is raised.

S: The general level of positivity, the general level of integration, the general level of clarity and purposefulness, yes.

John R: This raises a whole question of actually building into the gaps between the

meditation, let's say with daily lives, the thing about co-ops and all the sort things we were talking about yesterday so that these states haven't had a chance to operate or at least favourable conditions in which...

S: ...fall below a certain level even in the course of the day during those periods when you're not actually technically meditating, at least you should be functioning in a way that ensures that you can guarantee a reasonable degree of positivity and concentration and integration and joy.

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Right, on to precept 7.

(7) Having attained this state of samadhi, persevere in prolonging its duration and in causing its recurrence at will.

S: There is a possibility of misunderstanding here, and it's connected with this phrase 'at will'. What do you think that misunderstanding could be?

Viramati: Willed effort.

S: Willed effort, yes. So it means that the state of samadhi cannot be a matter of willed effort, for obvious reasons, so what do you think is meant?

: ... any time...

: Whenever you sit down to meditate.

Asvajit: That suggests that samadhi is restricted to formal sitting in meditation, which it isn't necessarily.

S: Well, certainly to begin with it will be, so I think what is being said is not that samadhi is a state that you can will yourself into, or will yourself to enter, but you know from experience that when certain conditions are set up, when certain conditions are available, you quite spontaneously and naturally will be able to go into a state of samadhi. You know, for instance, from experience that if you do get away for a month on your own in the country, in solitude, after a couple of days, yes, under those favourable conditions you will have a samadhi experience; you will enter upon samadhi; you know that. So the 'at will' relates more to the setting up of the conditions, not to the entering upon the samadhi experience directly. You know that when it is possible for you to set up those conditions, then the samadhi experience will arise quite naturally. You know that from your own experience. It's not a question of switching the samadhi state on and then switching it off 'at will'.

Vajradaka: That would intimate that it was a sort of mental creation, in the sense

(End of Side)

Tape 10, Side 2

of a thought process.

S: Yes. Because 'samadhi' suggests unification, and so inasmuch as the entire mental contents are being unified and brought into a state of harmony and integration, there isn't that sort of dichotomy within the psyches that the word 'will', the use of the word 'will' suggests because it isn't that there's a will [222] separate from the samadhi experience. If there was a will separate from the samadhi experience there could not be the samadhi experience.

Uttara: There just is the samadhi experience.

S: Well it arises as it were naturally and spontaneously when the right conditions are present. So after a while you have that sort of assurance, you have that sort of knowledge within yourself or of yourself that if you were to go away, if particular conditions were to be set up that that would be what would happen.

Asvajit: Is it not possible to have that sort of assurance with regard to sitting in formal meditation?

S: This is what I am speaking of, yes.

Asvajit: I thought you were referring to going away on solitary retreat.

S: Well, this is what I am speaking of, yes.

Asvajit: Ah.

S: Going away, and presumably on solitary retreat you would sit and meditate. And when you did, and all those right conditions are set up, you go away into the solitary situation, you are rested, you set up your shrine, you light your candles, you light your incense, you sit down and you meditate: well, yes, all the right conditions are being set up; you know from your previous experience that you will be able to experience the samadhi state, and this is the situation that I am envisaging. But it could be that if you became even more developed you would know that, as soon as you went away into the country and you were just moving about, even, in your cottage or caravan, even without formal sitting, you would be able to go into a samadhi experience; but that is a stage much further on, which perhaps we need not consider at present.

Viramati: The eradication of the five hindrances; wouldn't you be in a state of meditation if you - ?

S: Yes. Well, you'd be certainly very near it. You'd experience access concentration at least, if those five hindrances weren't actually present.

That raises another point. The five hindrances aren't mentioned here, but this is something as it were specific to work upon, without mentioning these broader contexts, that one should as it were check oneself before beginning formal meditation in the sense of taking up one's concentration object: check that the five hindrances are actually not present, that there is no sensuous craving, that there is no image of a sense impression and craving directed towards that. Nor is there a feeling of anger or hatred or impatience or irritation or annoyance. Nor [223] is there a feeling of sloth, torpor, dullness, drowsiness. Nor is there a feeling of restlessness, hurry, flurry, worry, anxiety. Nor is there a feeling of doubt or indecision about

the practice itself, or the spiritual life itself. You check up on those five things first; make sure those five hindrances have had time to subside, as it were, and then you take up the meditation practice, take up the concentration object. So the cessation of the five hindrances is a quite important stage. I've gone into this at some length elsewhere.

: What should one do if they are present?

S: Well, then you take steps to eliminate them.

: I mean you don't go and meditate then?

S: Well you can remain seated but direct your attention normally,...especially if you've been meditating regularly, as soon as you become aware that those mental hindrances are present, maybe one or another, maybe all of them then the tendency will be for them to survive, because at the time of meditation, that is to say the time that you sit for meditation, then if there is nothing in the immediate environment to stimulate them. But there may be residues, there may be impressions left from previous experiences. You might have had a rather unpleasant argument with somebody just shortly before coming to sit for meditation so there may be irritation and disturbance in your mind.

So just don't sort of rush into the practice without sort of checking what your mental state is. If you check it and become conscious that there is irritation or anger, just sort of reflect on it, deal with it and say look this is stupid, why am I feeling so angry, it was only a discussion and even if we did disagree well... Perhaps there was something in what he said after all. Just sort of deal with the situation that way. Give the feeling of irritation and annoyance time to subside and then just collect yourself quite mindfully and then start of the practice. Otherwise you'll be doing the practice sort of half consciously, which means mechanically, and not really realizing what your mental state is and not even realizing that there's a hindrance there and of course you won't get very far with that sort of practice. It's almost like doing it in your sleep.

Vajradaka: You mentioned access concentration. After that comes neighbourhood concentration.

S: Access is sometimes called neighbourhood concentration. It's upachara samadhi, sometimes called access, upachara is sometimes translated as 'access', sometimes translated as neighbourhood.

: What is that then?

S: It's a stage of one might say integration as it were half way between one's usual distracted, uncollected state and the first dhyana. Supposing you sort of settle down, you are seated cross- [224] legged, your eyes are closed, you are quite collected, you have no wandering thoughts in particular, the five hindrances have subsided, you are reasonably collected and integrated and you have got for instance your concentration object before you in a gross form, then you are said to be in a state of upachara samadhi. You haven't entered upon the first dhyana but if you persevere and you practice from that state then you stand a good chance of being able to enter upon the first dhyana. This is called neighbourhood concentration because it neighbours on the first dhyana or access concentration because it is from that state that you have access to the dhyanas.

Some people can be in this sort of state much of the time. You can I think be in this sort of state when you are working concentratedly, even doing physical things or even when you are producing you are creating something - you can be in a state of certainly upachara samadhi. Possibly even when you're typing, provided you are not thinking too much about what you are typing. It's nice to think of all these copy typists being in a state of upachara samadhi. It's... maybe a bit more mindful.

Viramati: Is it possible to carry the higher states of consciousness into your everyday life to the extent that you'd be able to experience them?

S: Yes and no. Because normal functioning in the world requires mental activity. It may be mental activity not associated with any unskilful state but nonetheless mental activity. And of course mental activity is not present in any of the dhyanas above the first. So this would suggest that under normal circumstances you wouldn't experience any dhyana above the first dhyana in the course of one's ordinary activities, because of that element of mental activity usually present even though it's not associated with any unskilful state. You can have a quite sort of objective natural activity where you have to think of what to do next and that is mental activity, it is inimical to the dhyanas from the second dhyana onwards. So clearly there is a measure of concentration present. There is even a dhyana state present. One could be in the first dhyana and carry on with ordinary everyday activities even though they did involve mental activity, provided that the mental activities concerned were not necessarily associated with any unskilful mental state.

Sona: One point that has come up a number of times in discussion is whether one can actually listen to music in the higher dhyanic states above the first. Can you be in a state of dhyana and still be listening to a piece of music.

S: Well first of all there would be the question of mental activity. If you were listening to the music and thinking 'ah this is Beethoven's Fourth, he wrote it before his ... Concerto, such and such critic says such and such things about them' well that would be a mental activity and clearly here access to the second dhyana would be precluded even if you were already in the first. I think it is mainly a question of the nature of the emotional experience communicated. Some music very [225] definitely belongs to the kamaloka, it is sensuous, the emotion which is communicated is sensuous. So this could certainly not be conducive to a dhyanic state. Nor could you listen to it if you were in a dhyanic state except in a very odd alienated sort of way you would hear the sounds but you would not feel any sort of empathy. They would just be sounds. It wouldn't really be music. So it depends entirely on whether the music was able to express emotions which corresponded with those of the dhyanic states. There is also the question of movement. You see most music especially, let's say for the sake of illustration, baroque and classical music, the element of movement or rhythm is very strong because formerly these kinds of music originated in many cases in certain kinds of dance. So one of the elements, one of the attractions of say baroque and classical music is this sort of dance element. So even when you listen there was a sort of subtle movement of the whole body, the whole system which is quite positive, pleasant and healthy but I suspect that that would be quite inimical to the dhyana experience. If you were in the dhyana experience and completely calm and still you would find even that subtle positive joyous movement rather distracting, even unpleasant and uncomfortable.

I think therefore that the only kind of music that you could enjoy in a really deep dhyana state

would be the kind of music which not only communicated a highly positive emotional experience but which was not as it were of this dancing kind, in which the notes were more prolonged and the rhythm was altogether slower, and in fact perhaps in which there was not any marked rhythm in that sort of dance beat sense. Perhaps something a little bit like certain parts of the Monteverdi Vespers - maybe music of that sort is a bit analogous to the dhyana experience, but certainly not a bright and breezy Bach Cantata. It is Bach and it's very good music but that very strongly marked rhythm and those dance rhythm qualities are a bit inimical to the stillness as it were of the dhyana experience. So I think you wouldn't be able to listen to those, much as you normally enjoy them, if you were in a dhyana state, having a dhyana experience. They'd be slightly disturbing.

Asvajit: What about some passages from Holst's "The Planets"? I wasn't thinking of things like Mars but...

S: I feel that just in retrospect and this is just as it were off the cuff, I think that that music belongs more to the kamaloka, that's what I personally feel. I'm not using the word kamaloka at all derogatorily.

Asvajit: I find it really difficult to get a very clear impression of what you mean by sensuous experience.

S: We all know what is meant by sensuous emotion I think, or don't we? It's emotion which is closely linked to sensuous feeling, pleasurable sense feeling, or pleasurable sense experience. For instance if you take something like some of the music of Debussy or some of the music of Wagner, it seems very close to sense experiences, quite cloying, a bit sort of heavy. [226] It reminds you of hot Summer days things of that sort, it's not very ethereal, not for want of a better term, very spiritual.

Sona: Even Brahms is a bit...

S: Oh yes Brahms is at times positively trickly. Very robust and vigorous and grand sometimes, very dignified, splendid but there's something quite heavy at the same time, rather decadent. One of the elements of the dhyana experience is a certain freedom and lightness. Brahms hasn't got wings, he's got sort of rudimentary wings which he flaps vigorously (Laughter) but he never really rises above the ground. In the case of Beethoven one could say well yes the wings are there, you actually see them growing in a few places, but it's been quite difficult for him to grow those wings. They weren't very natural to him - he developed them with a lot of effort and sometimes he flaps about. Admittedly he is above the ground but he flaps about sometimes rather heavily. He doesn't offer soar very freely. He does sometimes but not very often..

Vajradaka: More the Pterodactyl than the skylark!

S: In a way yes.

Viramati: I do get the feeling sometimes in the Mozart piano concertos in the slow movements, really very light and uplifting.

S: It's very significant that one feels this with the slow movement because you don't get that

rapid beat, that fast rhythm which seems to be linked with bodily movement, which is of course incompatible with the dhyana experience. It's as though the slower rhythms of the slow movements just are not compatible. They're more contemplative, more reflective.

Ray: I notice in "Crossing the Stream" you've got a small piece in it about spaces in Mozart.

S: That's right, yes. I quote the fact that Mozart was supposedly asked what was the most important part of his music. He just said the pauses. I really noticed this, to digress a little, listening the other day to the Symphony Number 25 - I don't know anything technical about music so I can't described actually what happens technically but there's a marked pause. It's as though you're waiting for something and then it comes. It's the sort of rising up of a particular theme which seems to express Mozart's joyous experience of his own powers as a musician or even his own youth you could say because he was only 18 when he wrote it. According to the programme notes on the record sleeve which I studied carefully this is his first real great symphony, the first real Mozart symphony in which he puts or he pours, as the note says, his own feelings and his own emotions. I ( ) that this represents a breakthrough for Mozart, the real Mozart breaks through. I get the impression as though it's the young Mozart who realizes perhaps for the first time that he's a genius and he's better than anybody else and there's a sort of triumph and exaltation in the music and it [227] sort of comes up after this pause as though he's not quite sure as it were. There's just an instance of hesitation but only an instance and then ... he soars straight up into the sky just like that, whereas these other musicians are sort of painfully flapping around... He knows he's much better than anybody else, he knows he's a genius and he really delights in that. Not in an egoistic way, he delights in the exercise of his genius, the experience of his physical genius. So you really do get that and it's quite interesting to see an example of some spiritual breakthrough in purely musical terms. So it's all going on within Mozart and the breakthrough is manifested, is expressed in that particular symphony. It was quite perceptive of whoever wrote that note on the record sleeve to put it in that way. He uses the word 'breakthrough' and he says what is all the more remarkable is that Mozart's personal breakthrough came when he was only 18 and that was his 25th Symphony. He must have written 24 symphonies therefore already by the time he was 18. Because those of you who have read "Peace is a Fire" know he wrote the first one when he was 8 and it's quite a pleasant little symphony to listen to.

Anyway all that's something of a digression. So 'having attained this state of samadhi, persevere in prolonging its duration and causing its recurrence at will'. That isn't quite to be taken literally of course.

All right next precept

(8) Should various misfortunes assail thee, persevere in patience of body, speech and mind.

S: What sort of misfortunes do you think are meant here?

: Illness?

: Temporary setbacks.

S: It suggests I would say things that you really can't do anything about. I don't think it means to suggest that if you fall ill that's a misfortune, you've just got to be patient and put up with it

and shouldn't take any sort of treatment, I don't think it means to suggest that. But there are some misfortunes about which you just can't do anything. So you should persevere in patience of body, speech and mind. Sometimes it's very difficult not to be impatient, especially when it seems as though the misfortune is so unjust and it falls you just when you're getting on well with your spiritual practice. It really means that it isn't that spiritual practice becomes impossible, it just has to take another form, it has to take the form of patience. You can always practice patience.

Asvajit: It seems almost inevitable that sooner or later in one's development this sort of situation will arise.

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S: It... human life, of the nature that it is, you're going to suffer some misfortune sooner or later even if it's only a bad cold when you least want a bad cold, that is say maybe when you're on solitary retreat or you've got the opportunity of doing meditation. Or you suddenly fall and break your leg when there's something important to be done.

So if various misfortunes do assail thee and they're very likely to, just persevere in patience of body, speech and mind. If you can do that you'll turn the situation to advantage.

: It can be very difficult especially with the physical element.

S: Yes indeed.

Alaya: It feels so frustrating.

S: Why do you feel frustrated? Because you can't get on with your spiritual development, but then if you can really practice patience you will be getting on with your spiritual development.

: Change your outlook.

S: Change your outlook or change your method of operation, change your point of attack.

Asvajit: In fact one's experiences subsequent to something of that sort can be extremely rewarding and blissful because you've put so much more effort into self control, self denial.

Sona: It can sometimes be a fortune to have an ailment. It gives you a bit of time.

S: Real misfortunes are meant, not just blessings in disguise. Though you can see that every misfortune is a blessing in disguise.

Alaya: What's the difference between forbearance and patience?
Often when we hear of weather and natural calamities and think of practising forbearance rather than patience.

S: What do you think is the difference when we use these two words?

: Patience seems a bit more active somehow. Forbearance just seems like putting up with.

S: If you forbear what would be the natural reaction? The natural reaction say would be to get angry but you practise forbearance which means you forbear getting angry, you don't get angry but patience does suggest perhaps something more positive?

Vajradaka: Certainly if it's ksanti.

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S: Yes. The word patience itself in English is rather ambiguous. It can mean just putting up with everything like Patient Griselda.

: Ksanti is usually translated as forbearance isn't it.

S: I don't usually translate it as forbearance. I usually translate it as patience but that isn't really very adequate. There are also other associated shades of meaning now. Tolerance - even receptivity, acceptance.

Asvajit: Ksanti does seem to suggest something vigorous and dynamic. Not totally passive.

S: Positive.

John R.: Patience sounds a bit more creative in a way. You can start working on it.

S: Yes patience is more of a state whereas forbearance is simply an action.

Alaya: In the Bodhicarya[vatara] it talks about someone who tries your patience is being your guru because if your patience isn't being tried and you won't be able to perfect it. You won't have a chance to practise it.

S: I'm sure most of us get plenty of opportunities for practising patience in the course of our contacts with other people. Patience of body, speech and mind as the text says.

: The greatest austerity.

S: Yes indeed. It's not a particularly popular virtue nowadays is it, patience. It's almost as though you have the right to hit back, almost the moral duty to hit back rather than to be patient.

Asvajit: Maybe there's also a suggestion of the idea that if one's patient nothing gets done, nothing happens.

Vajradaka: Perhaps that's because patience is interpreted as inactivity.

Viramati: As a weakness.

S: Or just patience is often just putting up with.

Alaya: Putting up with sloppiness, shoddiness.

S: That's true, yes.

Sona: I would have thought actually that in society it was very popular - patience in that respect.

S: Yes putting up with sloppiness.

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: There seems to be a lack almost of aggression. It's just apathy, it's not patience.

S: Yes, indifference even. Even hopelessness, despair.

Asvajit: It's associated with... people talk about the East and the religions of the East, that they just conduce to this sort of state of patient acceptance which people in the West are very sort of against. They regard it as backward.

S: I think that normally people put up with quite a lot. I personally think that they put up with far too much. In Britain I think that is certainly the case. The British are notorious for it. They're almost a laughing stock. Just to give you an example. Bad food in restaurants. Do the British, that is the English ever complain? No they don't usually dare to do they? I was in a restaurant not so long ago with Kovida and Kovida noticed that the plate was slightly dirty and sent it back and the waiter didn't particularly like that, but that is the sort of thing that one normally doesn't do. But because one's pseudo-patience means a sort of acceptance of low standards, of course standards remain low. So I think here one should not practise this pseudo-patience and should complain if things are not as they should be. I cite this example of people not complaining when they get bad food in restaurants because it's maybe one of the most conspicuous examples but I think in this country people don't complain nearly enough.

Sona; I remember an interview I heard on the radio - a discussion about shoppers and the person who ran this store, something like Selfridges, said that the shop assistants much preferred serving men than women - maybe you said it!!

S: I read it!!

Sona: ...because the women tended to complain much more than the men did. The men just meekly accept.

S: No, no. I think what was said was that women didn't simply complain but they were difficult to please and didn't really know what they wanted and just went on looking at things and so on, passing their time and wasting the shop assistants time. Whereas a man came in just to buy say something for his wife, he knew he was inexperienced in that particular field and just took the advice from the assistant and was therefore more easily satisfied. So this was not so much that they complained more it was more like that women were more disgruntled than men are, more difficult to satisfy.

Alaya: You're always made to feel an awful nuisance if you complain. The English are so apologetic anyway. I'm terribly sorry but this rat on my plate is undercooked! (Laughter).

S: If anyone has to do any apologizing it's the restaurant management. Another difficulty is - a restaurant is a very simple, obvious example but more often than not there's no one [231] to complain to. Because of the vast web of bureaucracy. Everybody disclaims responsibility and

even if you try to plunge to the source you actually cannot find anybody who is responsible and I think this is one of the worst features of modern life, that responsibility cannot be pinned down and therefore complaints cannot be made and very often therefore that things cannot be put right.

: It's quite an interesting case. Like in Croydon at the moment we've a lot of so-called gypsies, they're not real gypsies, they're just people who live in caravans and they've actually been issued with eviction orders to leave places because they're doing an incredible amount of damage and setting light to places and stealing things and policemen go down there and they well if you touch us we'll kill you. So all the policemen go away and then that's it! Just nobody takes responsibility for it at all so they just live totally without the law. It's quite striking that it exists in such a strong manner.

S: Well presumably somebody is responsible. The local authority actually is responsible but presumably they don't exercise that responsibility and the local ratepayers ought to be keeping the local authority or the elected members of the authority up to scratch but they don't fulfil their duty.

: Well the police actually openly admit they won't have anything to do with them. They say they won't arrest them for anything.

S: It really seems extraordinary.

: It's quite extraordinary. It's quite surprising to see it.

Alaya: It might be good in the long run because they might have to do something rather than just move them out of their boundaries into the next council patch and they have to go through the whole thing again.

S: But if they are essentially moving well what else can one do except ask them to move on? If they won't settle anywhere or be settled, if they want to lead that life all that you can do is to provide them with somewhere to park centrally and then ask them to move on when it seems they've been there long enough.

It's also tied up with people's general unwillingness to take responsibility or to stick their neck out, all that sort of thing. It's everybody's responsibility therefore it's nobody's responsibility. They don't very often... I was describing how in Tibetan monasteries it's always very definitely known who is responsible for what and every year when the responsibilities are distributed or redistributed they re-elect people like the abbot, the assistant abbot, the treasurer and so on. When the new people take over, the people from whom they are taking over have to give a full account of all the things within their field of responsibility and everything is checked against an inventory [232] and a new person will not take over unless everything is in order and if anything is missing the person who is handing over has either to do an account of that or to make it good himself before the new person will take over and carry on the responsibility. This they have found is the only system that actually works. Everybody has personal responsibility for something or other. So somebody has responsibility for all the abbot's teacups for instance. So they know exactly how many there are and what they're like so you hand them all over at the end of your term of office and if there's one missing you have to account for that and if it's your fault that it's missing you have to make it

good out of your own resources. Only then will the next man take over from you.

But it's very difficult in any society where there are quite important things happening, things that affect your life in one way or another and you cannot actually get to the authority who is actually responsible. You find it's a very vast amorphous impersonal body and that there's no individual who you can approach or with whom you can... Sometimes the responsibility seems to be distributed over a number of authorities, a number of bodies that perhaps are not on speaking terms with one another and then what can you do?

Uttara: I've had this experience recently with the tax. We've been trying to chase up a rebate for a long time but each place refuses to take responsibility for it. They said that my information has just gone missing. They don't know where it's gone to.

S: So what are you supposed to do in that sort of situation because they're very quick to take action because it's quite clear ( ) responsibility but not when it comes to making any sort of restitution or rectifying anything that went wrong. If anything your only recourse is the Ombudsman. If it is a result of an injustice due to administrative delay or something of that sort you can go to the Ombudsman. There aren't many Ombudsmen about and not many cases get to them. Those they aren't able to deal with of course. But it is a possibility.

Adrian: The trouble is it also creates an atmosphere in any bureaucracy whereby people can say that's another's responsibility and you can exist in the bureaucracy.

Viramati: You can't find an office with a sign on the table saying "The buck stops here".

S: That was supposed to be the sign that was on Harry Truman's desk but it's significant that it was on the desk of only person in the whole United States and even he was remarkable for putting it there because previous presidents apparently had found ways of passing the buck even presidentially. But if authorities want to avoid responsibility they can do so very easily and I personally spent two years in Local Government so I know a little bit about what I'm talking about, and it's well known that in bureaucracies the usual thing is to avoid responsibility, to take [233] action in such a way that you cannot be held responsible for anything and there is a technical term for this as I learnt in my early days. It's called putting up an umbrella. The first thing that you must do if you're in any sort of position where you might have to make decisions or take decisions and be held accountable for them is to put up an umbrella. Putting up an umbrella means to form a committee. I suspect that these notorious quangos are something of this sort. You form a committee because then you can put it on to the committee that the committee holds the ultimate responsibility, but then of course the committee meets very rarely and of course people on the committee are usually quite scattered and it's quite ( ) to get at them, so this is your umbrella. If you're held accountable for something you say well I was just carrying out instructions of the committee. Though actually of course the committee just sort of gives the go ahead to all the things you put in front of it at the six monthly meeting or whatever. So you say I'm very sorry, I'm just carrying out the instructions of the committee. 'Well why does the committee decide?' 'Well I'm very sorry I don't know, I'm just here to carry out the instructions. You'd better consult the committee, 'Where's the Chairman?' 'Well the Chairman lives'... You might have to give the address of a distant point in the country. (Laughter) If you manage to get in touch with him he doesn't remember what happened and says well I suppose it was a majority decision. In that way you are covered. This is the important point - that you are covered and this is a very

simple example.

So this was almost the first principle functioning as a Civil Servant, you put up an umbrella as quickly as possible. You could have lots of umbrellas for lots of different policies. So this was your first responsibility to yourself, that you could always shelve responsibility and not be held accountable for any decision that had been taken and this is a simple example. It's actually much more complicated than that.

Adrian: I always found the vocabulary ( ) as well. In my job you were not allowed to definite about anything. You had a phrase like 'it would appear that...' which appeared quite frequently.

S: Yes you don't even make a definite statement. And also I remember various procedures. You were told for instance I remember you must never give your name on the telephone. You were instructed not to give your name on the telephone
because you were speaking impersonally on behalf of that particular division, you were not speaking in your personal capacity. So no one could phone back and say: 'I was talking to Mr So-and-so about such-and-such.' That was supposed to be impossible. And letters never went out over anybody's personal signature, but only over the signature of the head of the department itself. Of course, it was no use ringing him up, because heads of sections had rubber stamps for his signature, and they only added their own initials; so the public had no means of getting at the man who had actually sent the letter, you see. At the best they would be in contact with that particular [234] section, not with any individual, and this was done quite deliberately, and one was instructed to follow these procedures.

Vajradaka: It still happens actually.

(End of side)

Tape 11, Side 1

S: It does, does it? This was during the war.

So I think this is one of the most distressing aspects of life in any modern society: the fact that one feels, again and again, up against impersonal forces which are controlling one's life, about which one can do nothing, and that one is never able to make contact with the individuals who are responsible. In fact, sometimes it would seem that the system had detached itself from individuals and was almost running itself. And this can be a very distressing and frustrating situation to find oneself in. You can never get to someone who is responsible and ask him to put it right, or to take action; and where in fact that situation does exist, that someone is responsible, he is doing his best to disguise that fact, so that you cannot ever meet him face to face or speak to him on the phone or write to him directly, knowing that he is in the position to do something about it. I think this builds up a general frustration and resentment in people which is quite dangerous. It is very difficult to be patient under these sort of misfortunes - and perhaps one shouldn't; that would be the wrong sort of patience, I think, because these things are avoidable, something could be done about them. They are not natural disasters; they are just due to human inefficiency and weakness, dilatoriness, laziness, sloth and torpor and all the rest of it.

But I think sometimes it is quite a good thing just make oneself quite unpleasant, as it were, if people are not fulfilling, not discharging, duties and functions which after all they are being paid to do.

John R: It can have quite an electrifying effect, to do some personal thing ...

S: Yes, the worm actually turns. Quite. Instead of allowing itself to be trodden on.

Chris: The question of taking responsibility, though, seems to be a very key point in people's development. Say, working in co-ops, if you are actually given some responsibility, you put that much more of yourself into it. I've seen that - in my own case, I was given responsibility for running a shop, and it just gave me no let-out; I had to do the work substantively, and I've seen it with other people.

S: It is quite frustrating, sometimes, not to have responsibility, not to be given responsibility for the doing of something that you are quite able to take responsibility for [235] doing, and have to depend upon somebody else and ask them. If you are given the responsibility and accept the responsibility, it can have a quite invigorating effect. So even if you realize that you have a responsibility that formerly you had not realized that you actually had, especially a responsibility to or for yourself, that can have an invigorating effect, too. You realize it isn't that 'I've got to do this' or 'I'm obliged to do that': [but] 'I'm choosing; it's up to me.' So this realization can have an invigorating effect. The fact that I'm feeling miserable and downcast is not something I have to put up with, it's something I can do something about. I'm responsible for it. I've put myself into this state; nobody else has. Circumstances have. It is my own doing. So I can undo it if I wish. I have that freedom.

Vajradaka: The key is there, really: that you've got responsibility and power to do it. In nearly all the situations we were talking about before, people have responsibility, say, in big bureaucratic institutions, but sometimes don't have any power.

S: This is sometimes the case, yes. Because sometimes they have the responsibility and the power but refuse to exercise it, for one reason or another. But, yes, sometimes they are not given the power to discharge their responsibilities. This happens too.

Vajradaka: I think we should be quite careful about that within our own spiritual communities and co-operatives: that when responsibility is given, to the degree [that] the responsibility is given people have power to use it.

S: That is very important. You can't give responsibility without giving power. It isn't fair to give responsibility without power. And one should never accept responsibility without power; if you can see that you're not being given the power that naturally goes with the responsibility, just don't accept that responsibility.

Vajradaka: In young or small Centres or co-ops, there seems to be a sort of point where the Order Members have to give, say, for example, Mitras, responsibility and power for the whole thing to grow and to develop; but because they want it to be a spiritual community they have to feel sure within themselves that those Mitras have a certain amount of commitment.

S: Well, in that context, unless you have the commitment you are not qualified to take on the

responsibility or to exercise the power. You cannot take on responsibility unless you are responsible. It seems pretty obvious, doesn't it?
Anyway, any further points about what we've done this morning, because time is just about up? It seems to have been rather practical and down to earth this morning, doesn't it? Anything more about patience whether of body, speech or mind? Sometimes, of course, you can demonstrate or practise patience just by [236] remaining silent; there is patience of speech, not answering back, not retorting, not flying off the handle verbally - if it's real patience, and not just resentfully keeping quiet.

Asvajit: Can be a result of repression, or a manifestation of repression, if you are not able to galvanize your own energies.

S: In that case it wouldn't actually be patience, it would be something else.

Adrian: Seems to incorporate a degree of metta.

S: Yes, indeed. But this is also something I have mentioned; It's in The Three Jewels, that kshanti implies love as well as tolerance and acceptance and receptivity.

Adrian: So this seems to also indicate a degree of spiritual growth. Initially, maybe it's good to let your feelings out, experience them, and then comes the patience, when you are really in touch with yourself.

S: Yes. Yes, you can't really practise patience if you aren't in touch with your actual feelings in the situation. So, in the case of the paramitas, we get dana, then we get sila, and then we get kshanti. Perhaps one shouldn't make too much of this, but it is suggestive to some extent that kshanti comes after dana and after sila.

Viramati: Interesting, it says: 'misfortunes assail' - you may not be able to help it, these things are just going to happen ...

S: Yes, it's as though life has got it in for you, as though you're put upon. Very often people's first reaction when there's an accident is: 'Why me? Why should it happen to me?' The only answer is: 'Why not?' because it could have happened to anybody - assuming it to be entirely an accident and not due to any fault of one's own.

Adrian: 'Accident' - the actual word seems to suggest there's no responsibility there. In something like a car accident, when invariably both parties have got responsibility there, we still refer to it as an accident.

S: Yes, that's right, yes. It's carelessness rather than an accident. It suggests therefore that it isn't anybody's fault, it's just something you've got to put up with, you can't really do very much about it: that accidents are bound to happen.

Asvajit: Perhaps they are. Take the ...

S: Well, accidents that are really accidents are bound to happen, but accidents, some sort of motor accidents, were not bound to happen at all. They are the direct result of people's gross carelessness.

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Asvajit: I was thinking of the example of a slate falling off a roof, or something like that.

S: Well, that could be the result of someone's gross carelessness in not fixing it properly.

Asvajit: ... too. Or it might be a split in the slate.

: Act of God! (Laughter)

Adrian: God's carelessness.

S: You'd just have to take God to task for it.

: A trial.

: Accidents are hidden ...

: He is hidden behind a bureaucratic smoke-screen, isn't he?

S: Not necessarily, it depends on the form of Christianity you believe in. Some forms of Christianity have direct access. Others you have to go through various priests and saints and so on who will intercede for you. Apparently you intercede with St. Joseph to intercede with the Virgin Mary who will intercede with Christ, who will then intercede with God for you: you have to go through the proper channels. If you are a Protestant, like Mr Paisley, you can go knocking on God's door directly and demand an explanation face to face.

: I should think God could hear Mr Paisley from here.

S: I think Mr Paisley is quite convinced that God can.

: I was going to say that he's right, but I'd better not.

S: Is that all, then? It seems rather a pity to end with Mr Paisley, after all we've gone through this morning. I think Mr Paisley should practise patience of body, speech and mind.

: People should practise patience as far as he is concerned.

: ...complain.

S: Yes, to go back to that question of complaining, why do you think the English are so backward in complaining when they ought to complain? I say the English, but perhaps I should have said the southern English, really, it's ... the south-east; I think maybe up in the north they are a bit more outspoken.

: It's related to being 'nice', isn't it?

[238]
S: Mm, yes, being nice; but why should you - Yes, that's quite interesting: I was talking down in London a few months ago with a Frenchwoman who was quite interested in the FWBO.

She had a few criticisms to make. This is one of the things she brought up: that the English never got into any really vigorous discussion because they were so concerned with being nice and not hurting anyone's feelings, or not treading on anyone's toes, so they never really came out with what they really thought and felt, and had a really vigorous discussion. They were afraid of disagreement, she said; and she felt that this was true of people in the FWBO. They were afraid of disagreeing with other people.

Asvajit: If you are outspoken in that way, you are accused of being 'in your head'. That's one thing that I've found, so ... (laughter) No, I really think it's ...

S: I really wonder about that, because, for instance, if you did complain about the dirty plate in a restaurant, would the waiter say that you were in your head? See what I mean? I am talking about something quite general.

Ray: They won't take the chance of being disliked.

S: This is it, that people are afraid to run the risk of incurring dislike. They know that if you complain about the food in a restaurant it is a reflection on the restaurant - as indeed it should be - and that's going to upset people. It's going to hurt their feelings, perhaps. So you don't complain. You shouldn't want to hurt their feelings, but they must not exploit your natural desire not to hurt anyone's feelings in order just to rip you off. It's as simple as that, and you shouldn't allow them to get away with it.

Ray: This must be a social thing, because my father's friend used to go for meals in restaurants and he was always complaining, and I hated him for it. So it was not a ...

S: Surely one should complain - well, maybe it's because it was a restaurant in England, if this was in England - was it?

Ray: Yes.

S: Well, perhaps he hadn't ... Surely one should complain reasonably and rationally, and only when there is need. And not shrink from that. One should really not feel any hesitation at all.

Alaya: The other side to complaining is commenting when things are good, isn't it? Praise.

S: Yes, indeed. Maybe you need to do both of those things, to keep up certain standards. There is a quite good story in this connection about, apparently, a prima ballerina - I think it was a prima ballerina, or else a prima donna, but one of the two. Anyway, she sounds like a sensible woman, because after one [239] particular performance someone said, 'You should really be pleased you got all those encores.' I think she got thirty curtain calls. So she said, 'No, I was a bit disappointed. Actually, I wasn't quite as good as usual tonight and shouldn't have got quite so many encores. I thought they had more discrimination than that.' So the artist of any kind appreciates that sort of appreciation, and even implied criticism. Because supposing she said, 'I only got 25 curtain calls, that's all I deserved.' Then she would know that when she deserved 30 and got 30, it was because they really appreciated what she had done. But the fact that she got 30 curtain calls even when she hadn't danced or sung as well as usual suggests that they were not really able to appreciate her at her best, and that was disappointing.

: I notice, in some performing artists anyway, they talk in terms of 'going down well', having done well, and that's it. It's no reflection of what they've done, just how people have reacted to them. And they might have done really badly, but if they went down well it doesn't really matter at all.

S: So it means that their standards are not primarily artistic. But I think it is the same with a really good chef: that if you praise the food - he knows he's done well, and you praise, it's not that you're just flattering him: you're appreciating his talents; you're in a position to appreciate it. It's not just indiscriminate praise, because he knows that if it wasn't quite up to scratch you would know it and would say so. So that when he does his best he knows that you are able to appreciate that and that your appreciation is genuine, not just out of good manners, so-called, or out of friendliness or sociability. So anyone who is in that field should appreciate these little nuances of applause or non-applause or appreciation or non-appreciation, and so on.

John R: It's a lot more common to receive compliments for food than if it's a bit dubious. It is actually quite common in Oranges or ...

S: It helps to create an agreeable, friendly atmosphere. But then it doesn't contribute to standards; it doesn't really give you any clue to what people actually like and what they would really want. They say, 'Oh, it's lovely food today' ... even when the food is really rotten, it's no encouragement to you at all, is it, actually?

John R: It's like talking about the weather.

S: They're so concerned with being nice.

Asvajit: Not everybody is like that. Some people are more intelligent ...

S: That's true, of course, yes. But I think on the whole it seems that English people, at least of a certain class or a certain part of England, don't like to incur dislike.

[240]
Vajradaka: But it might have something to do with the level, also, at which the food is distributed. Like you go into a greasy caff, and you say, 'These eggs are really abominable.' And they say, 'Well, what do you expect in a place like this?' ...

S: If it's advertised as a four-star restaurant, [you would be] justified in complaining that it falls below the standard for a four-star restaurant which is charging four-star restaurant prices.

Asvajit: I think people in England generally are afraid of the emotions. They don't seem to be very emotional people, generally; they've got no emotional strength, and therefore when their emotions are brought into play they feel frightened or scared.

S: This is true as well, with some people - we mustn't over-generalize, but it's certainly true with some people. I think perhaps some people feel so angry that they don't dare to let out any feeling at all, because they feel they might really end up smashing up the place (Laughter)... chairs...

Vajradaka: There's another side to it. If you criticize somebody else and that atmosphere

begins to get prominent(?), then people are more likely to criticize you as well, and pull you up ...

Viramati: Not a nice atmosphere.

S: Well, it's certainly not a nice atmosphere in which to eat a meal. If the food is too bad, I think the best thing to do is to refuse to eat it, and leave without paying the bill. Say, 'This is just not good enough.' Let them take what action they like, sort of thing.

Uttara: Indian restaurants - the ones I've been to - seem to be pretty reasonable, because quite often they come up and ask you...

S: They do, this is true. They seem to mean it.

John R: Yes, you get the charade at other restaurants that there's the wine waiter waiting for you to taste the first sip of wine, but if you were to make an issue, it's not expected to, it's not actually there for that purpose.

S: And there's nothing else to replace that wine with, perhaps, anyway.

John R: The same bottle goes round the kitchen again.

: With a different label.

: Hopefully.

[241]
S: So it's also a question of being more direct with people, more honest, and hoping that they will appreciate that or take it in a positive way.

Adrian: It did happen a bit on the Fairs this year. People were generally coming up to us and saying: 'That food is really nice.' And sometimes they come up and say, 'It's not quite so good as it was the other day.'

S: Ah, that's good, if they do that.

Adrian: And I found myself sometimes asking people, if I had slight doubts about the quality, if it was all right, and they've said, 'Yes, great.' People really seemed to notice.

S: That might mean that it was great, or they genuinely felt it was great, but then on the other hand they might have been in no position to judge.

Ray: There's also the fact that you can't please everybody.

S: That's true; take that into account.

(Chat about experiences in catering, to end of session.)

Day 6

Tape 11, side 1 (continued)

All right, we are still on the Ten Things to be Persevered in, and we come this morning to precept 9 in that section.

(9) Should there be great attachment, hankering, or mental weakness, persevere in a method to eradicate it as soon as it manifesteth itself.

S: One would have thought that this was pretty obvious, especially in the light of what has already been said, but do you think there is any special emphasis here, anything that needs particular taking note of?

: Speed.

S: Speed, yes. '...as soon as it manifesteth itself.' To begin with, one may not realize that there is a great attachment present, or that hankering is present, or mental weakness. And then something happens. A certain situation arises, and that particular factor manifests itself; you see that it is there. So you should thereupon take steps to eradicate it - not just allow it to continue or postpone it, or something of that sort. This seems to be the point that is being emphasized here. '...persevere in an effort to eradicate it as soon as it manifesteth itself.' Don't expect that as soon as you start making the effort that particular thing will disappear: no, you [242] may have to persevere in your effort to eradicate it. It may not be easy to eradicate it, even though it has manifested itself so recently.

Adrian: It does imply that you are quite in touch with yourself; that these things aren't cropping up at some time in the future.

S: Yes, it does suggest that. But usually what happens is that attachment or hankering, or whatever it is, manifests itself quite unmistakably, but people are reluctant to take steps to eradicate it, or are reluctant to make an effort to eradicate it, thinking that one can attend to that any time, as it were; it doesn't matter, it's not all that important. So in this way it gets postponed and postponed, even indefinitely.

What do you think is meant by 'mental weakness' here? - bearing in mind that it follows on attachment and hankering. Mental weakness.

: A giving in.

S: A giving in.

: Inconsistency.

S: Inconsistency, mm. Distractedness, ...

Sona: ... uses the word 'should there be great attachment' ... Perhaps you don't really need to take consideration of 'great'... apply that to all forms of attachment, if you think it's ... Stopping you from ...

S: You need to make all the more of an effort if the attachment is a great one. It doesn't mean

to say that you can allow the little attachments, etc., to slip through the net. That is not the suggestion, presumably.

The essence of the precept seems to be taking prompt action; and perhaps we shouldn't look at it just negatively. If you happen to notice in yourself the absence of a certain important positive quality, you should take immediate steps to develop that quality. I think promptitude is the essence of the matter here. You notice this: often people are lacking in promptitude. Why do you think that is?

: Laziness?

S: Yes, I suppose that's ... relation, yes.

: But sense of urgency, also.

S: Lack of sense of urgency. We'll be coming on to that in the next section. Yes, lack of a sense of urgency.

: It's a belief that one is immortal.

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S: Mm, that one has plenty of time.

: Mainly it's that although you see these things and take prompt action, you don't experience the positive stage until a long time after.

S: Though not necessarily. In some cases you will experience the positive result almost immediately. That could happen.

Alaya: And also lack of self love; having a good feeling for yourself.

Vajradaka: But if you did experience the results of your good action immediately, maybe in the beginning at least you would not recognize them as the fruits of your action, because you wouldn't have a very strong perception of cause and effect in that way.

S: But the real opposite of promptitude would appear to be indecision: shilly-shallying, dilly-dallying, and all the rest of it. So why is this? What is it that makes people unable to act with promptitude? What is this state of - ?

Alaya: There's no one there to act with.

S: There's no one there to act with. I have spoken about this before. I have mentioned, for instance, that if you go through the life story of the historical Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, this is one thing that strikes you about the Buddha immediately: his promptitude. As soon as he saw that something needed to be done, he just did it. And it struck me that this characteristic is shared with quite a number of - at least, several - other great men in history: promptitude in action. And this set me upon a further train of thought, because I noticed that this promptitude of action was characteristic of men of action - do you see what I mean? In history, promptitude of action seems to have characterized several of the great military

commanders and so on, and this led me to a train of thought: in terms of human character and temperament, leaving aside the Enlightenment factor, leaving aside all spiritual considerations, who was it in history that the Buddha, just as a person, as a human being, seemed most to resemble? Has anybody got any ideas about this?

: How easy.

S: Well, you keep quiet, then! Has anybody got any idea? Just leave aside the fact that the Buddha was the Buddha, just consider him as he was when he was still living at home, and when he was still struggling.

Ray: Alexander.

S: Alexander: that's interesting, yes. Anybody else got any suggestions? In temperament, who do you think he was like in history? Do you think he was like, say, Shakespeare, or do you think he was like St. Francis, or -

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Vajradaka: Or Shelley.

S: Shelley? He would have had to be a sort of super-Shelley, wouldn't he? In a way; in a way. But not in certain quite important respects.

: Napoleon?

S: Napoleon, hm. I think there was an unpleasant streak in Napoleon's character that the Buddha didn't have. Any other suggestions?

Uttara: Caesar.

: Caesar; that seems ... Yes, that was one that I thought of; the young Caesar especially. There was another one that occurred to me.

Viramati: Nelson.

S: Nelson, yes! Yes. These two. And one of the main points of resemblance was this promptitude of action. There was the ability to see what the situation required almost in a flash, and immediately to act upon that with one's full force. There were other characteristics in common as regards Caesar and Nelson which contributed to their success: they were intensely popular with their men, whether Roman soldiers or English seamen. They enjoyed intense personal popularity and seem to have had a sort of personal magnetism that strongly attracted people. And here again, of course, we know from the Pali texts that the Buddha had this sort of quality, apparently even before his Enlightenment. But I think the interesting thing here is that temperamentally the Buddha seems to resemble the great men of action of the best type rather than, say, the poets, musicians, philosophers and mystics. Do you see what I mean?

And this led me into a further train of thought, because according to Buddhist tradition, when Siddhartha was born, there were two possibilities, two courses of action, before him, either of

which he could have taken; and what were they?

Vajradaka: A universal monarch, or an Enlightened being.

S: Yes, you see? It wasn't that he could have been either a great poet or a Buddha, or he could have been either, say, a great mystic or a Buddha. It was a universal monarch, as they put it then, or a Buddha; as if to suggest that of all of the qualities of all the (let us say) un-Enlightened people, those that came nearest to those of a Buddha were those of a universal monarch. Again, the man of action, as it were, of the best type. So that is quite a thought, as it were. Because we tend, nowadays especially, to discount the man of action, we don't admire the man of action, especially the man of action in the field of, let's say, politics, for want of a better term, because that whole aspect of life has become so degraded. But if we look at people like Caesar or look at people like Nelson it's as [245] though they do come, at least as regards temperament, quite close to the temperament of the pre-Enlightenment Buddha, and those qualities of energy and promptitude and courage and directness and personal magnetism are very much akin to the sort of qualities which you require for very much higher spiritual development. So that's quite a thought, isn't it? That the active life can have certain very definite affinities with the spiritual life.

John R: It goes almost completely against the archetype of the spiritual being ... evolution [?revolutionary].

S: Doesn't it, yes? So it's quite interesting to reflect upon this, and quite useful to reflect upon this. Because, especially among the sort of people whom Friends were recruited from in the early days, action was almost a dirty word. Just as work was.

Alaya: Are there any of those people left?

S: Well, just examine your own consciences! I still discern traces here and there.

Viramati: Wasn't the Sakya clan the warrior class?

S: Yes. If one considers in terms of the caste system, which they did not altogether accept, they were so to speak a warrior community. They were known for their pride and arrogance, which suggests certain military qualities.

But you see in - I was going to say in the West, but perhaps I should just say the modern Protestant or ex-Protestant West - we have got such a strange idea of the spiritual life, in a way. Your ordinary person's idea of the spiritual life is something anaemic and rather meek, rather than something heroic or very active.

Anyway, this arises out of a consideration of this statement that 'Should there be great attachment, hankering, or mental weakness, persevere in an effort to eradicate it as soon as it manifesteth itself.' Take action promptly. This is a precept of very general significance and general applicability: don't delay, don't procrastinate, do it now, do it at once. This suggests, of course, that you see the situation clearly, and very often the seeing of the situation is not the problem: the problem is the mobilization of one's resources to meet the demands of that situation. People just so often procrastinate and put things off, so everything goes really, really slowly. You almost expect delay, you don't expect things to be done in time, you don't

expect things to be done as promised. You expect to hear excuses; and this is very terrible.

John R: Yes, we actually tend to look down on the go-getter, the man who makes a lot of money or gets a successful thing off the ground. This is someone that exploits everybody else per se, or something -

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S: It's true that in the go-getter there may well be a sort of, let's say, compulsive streak which isn't altogether healthy, but on the other hand it is possible to be active and enterprising and successful in a quite healthy way, and one shouldn't forget that fact. It's almost as though the weak and incapable have tried to set the general standard, as it were: that if you're incapable and inefficient it shows how spiritual you are, because your mind is wandering in a much better, more beautiful world, and you just can't cope with this one; and this is a sign - so it is sometimes suggested - of a sort of superiority, that you're more evolved and more developed.

Viramati: I suppose it's Christianity, isn't it - that 'the meek will inherit the world'?

S: Hm.

: Would you go so far as to say that a bad decision is better than no decision?

S: A bad decision is better than - no, I wouldn't altogether agree with that. I think there are circumstances in which the best thing to do is to postpone a decision. But that's only when the whole issue is so confused and it isn't clear what is the best thing to be done, and sometimes one is being pushed or pressed for a decision, when quite clearly one is not in a position to make one, and shouldn't. In those circumstances one should just dig one's heels in and just refuse to take any action, because you just don't know what the results of your action will be. Occasionally, of course, there is a situation when you cannot but do something, and even non-action does in fact produce consequences; and therefore you're not in the position of being able to choose to do nothing.

(End of Side)

Tape 11, Side 2

And then, of course, you could say in a manner of speaking that any action is better than not doing anything at all. But what is only too often lacking is promptitude, when it's quite clear, it's quite obvious what needs to be done. It's almost as though people procrastinate on principle, if you see what I mean. There is a sort of resistance to doing things now, whereas a healthy person should act promptly. Only too often there is a sort of blockage, creating a sort of hiatus, so that the action doesn't immediately follow the insight into what needs to be done, or seeing of what needs to be done.

Alaya: Do you think it's again a reaction against schooling, and things like this, when one's made to be prompt against any understanding of the reasons for the promptness? - just asserting

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S: I shouldn't think so. I remember going to school, and we had to be into our classrooms on

time and all that. I recollect no resentment whatever on anybody's part that that should be so. I don't think children really mind this.

Sona: There seems to be a strange reaction, often nowadays, against authoritarianism or being expected to be at places promptly. In the past, it was much more severe, in fact. If you worked, your employer expected you to be there, and if you weren't you were likely to be fired. Normally young men would be conscripted into the Army, so they had to go for a certain amount of discipline there without knowing what it was for; schooling themselves... Victorian families ... But nowadays it's rather strange that when things have got much slacker, slackness has allowed people to have reactions, or it's caused reactions.

S: Yes, there's more reaction against the slack discipline than there ever was against the strict discipline, it seems.

: I used to be late for school every day, just because - well, I thought at the time just because I didn't want to do what they said, in that sense. There was a pure reaction against having to be there on time for no reason. That's what I thought at the time.

Sona: It's almost as though because you can get away with it you're sort of encouraged to do it. If you knew you couldn't get away with it, if you actually were beaten if you weren't at school on time ...

S: Or expelled.

Sona: - or expelled, you would have got there; you wouldn't have been late.

: Yeah, I don't quite know what that means, really.

S: I remember, when I was at school, quite a lot of children were very eager to get to school, or would arrive early and play in the playground. They would stream in - in those days, they used to form you up in the playground in lines, each class lined up in two lines, and then you'd march in one by one and the children enjoyed this, as far as I remember. I didn't know anyone who reacted against it. I just sometimes wonder where all this reactivity comes from. It's almost as though it's become made a sort of virtue, it's a sort of excuse: reacting against something, as if that explains self-indulgent behaviour in the present.

: If you're somewhere on time, it's like you're giving something, but if you get there a bit late then you're just lending it; you're still somehow keeping your, you're not giving it freely.

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S: You're sort of inconveniencing somebody else. For instance, I have this experience every now and then that someone undertakes to come and see me, say, at 2 o'clock, and I've got somebody else coming at 2.30, and somebody else coming at 3, somebody else coming at 3.30; so that the person who was to come at 2 shows his independence by turning up at 25 minutes past 2, but he still expects, maybe, that I am able to see him for half an hour, and doesn't bother that, if that is to be possible, somebody else must be kept waiting for half an hour, who possibly would be made late for something else that they had to do, or miss their bus, or whatever. So every often this sort of attitude shows a lack of consideration for other people. You assert your pseudo-independence at the expense of other people. And it even

occasionally happens - it doesn't very often happen now, but occasionally - that someone doesn't bother to turn up, or he had something else that he 'had' to do, and he doesn't bother to inform you, and there you are waiting for him and he doesn't turn up; so you can't get on with something else because you're expecting him, but he doesn't come. This is what happens when people indulge their reactivity, as it were.

If they were to be asked about it, they would probably say they forgot or it didn't matter, or if you went into it at all deeply they might say they were reacting against having to be on time when they went to school. But then they are not at school, they are not children, they are responsible adults, and should honour their promises and honour their undertakings. This is one of the characteristics of the mature and responsible adult.

Adrian: It seems to come down to the lack of the heroic qualities of life. I got an impression when I was at school that everybody would secretly look up to somebody who was, say, late for a lesson when he stood to really get hammered for being late. But, on the other hand, if there's no discipline whereby anybody can turn up late, there's nobody to look at, there's nowhere to be. It seems to go right through the whole spectrum of life.

Alaya: ... the machine age, more. England's very good for timekeeping, really, compared with if you go to Ireland or, I suppose, India. But the slowness was a lack of feeling, was mechanical, and therefore by in a way going outside of time one would contact feeling, a more human quality.

S: I can't say that I've noticed that. People who ignore time and are late for appointments don't seem to be people who are more in touch with their feelings. If anything, they seem to be more out of touch with their feelings, and out of touch with your feelings, too. They seem usually sluggish and slothful, not particularly in touch with their feelings.

Alaya: They seem to be in your illustration, but the thing behind that, I suppose, in the late 60s, people dropping out and not getting out of as it were a mad rush and just going into debt(?) -

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S: I'm not so convinced that all of them were having madly to rush before they dropped out. Some of them I couldn't imagine ever having rushed, since they were born. It may be true in certain cases, people in certain very demanding professions, but the average person seemed not to have to rush at all, that I could make out. They seem to have been born a bit sleepy.

Chris: I think in my experience what might be a sort of resentment against doing things like that would be having experienced my father telling me to do things which I saw weren't the right way of going about it. In certain situations, I might have thought something out better than he had, but he would impose his will on me, and therefore carrying on through life there was that sort of idea of having to court this superego; I've got resentment against that. Even if I'm doing something superficially of my own free will. I remember this most outstandingly on one of the first retreats I did at Aryatara: I was slowly getting into meditation, quite enjoying it, but every now and then I was glowering with resentment about the situation generally I was putting myself into. It's just the idea of someone telling you to do something.

S: But here, in the context of the precept, there is not anybody telling you to do anything. You

see that something needs to be done; you yourself see. And then you should act promptly, in accordance with what you see. If you aren't able to act promptly, if you're lacking in promptitude, that is a weakness on your part, because you are unable to mobilize your energies behind your insight in such a way as to put your insight into actual practice. So your lack of promptitude may have come about in this way or it may have come about in that way, but if you discover within yourself lack of promptitude, that is something that you very definitely have to do something about, because it suggests a sort of cleavage, almost, in your whole being, and therefore it means, as I said, that those people who seem, without having strictly speaking been on the spiritual path, to resemble most someone like the Buddha who definitely was on the spiritual path, are people who among other things were remarkable for extreme promptitude, and who very often were able to mobilize not only their own energies but the energies of other people as well.

Sona: You do come across some people who are very prompt in action but they always take the wrong actions, and ...

S: Well, that's not promptitude in this sense. That is just recklessness, rushing in where angels fear to tread, and we know who it is that rush in where angels fear to tread... fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

John T: It's tremendously draining, putting off things. If you have a letter to write and you leave it for weeks, it nags on and on and on. I see it as a shortsightedness. But it's less effort to procrastinate initially.

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S: Yes. But if you don't want to do something, just make up your mind that you're not going to do it and forget all about it. But if you are going to do it, well, do it at once. That is the sign anyway of a much more integrated person. Or if you find it difficult to deal with something, just deal with it in a very quick, short way. Supposing you do have a letter to answer, and you really ought to write a long letter which you keep postponing; well, the best thing is to write just two or three lines on a postcard and send them off, and that's that; you've dealt with it, even though you haven't dealt with it as well as you might have done. But still it has been dealt with, and it is now out of the way. But don't keep putting things off indefinitely, otherwise you gradually feel a sort of not exactly blocking of energy but a sort of accumulation of energy behind a barrier, you can't use it, the energy isn't going into anything; at the same time you are conscious of lots of things to be done, but the energy doesn't seem to reach the things that need to be done, which you see need to be done and which in a sense you want to do.

John T: Like carrying weights around, isn't it?

S: Yes, indeed, yes. It can be very draining. So promptitude is really a quality to be developed. Do it now, if you're going to do it at all. But if you haven't got time to do it now, that's of course another matter. That doesn't mean that you are procrastinating. You just bear that particular thing in mind as something to be done when you do have the time. So that sort of situation isn't draining.

Asvajit: There seems to be something rather delightful about exercising that ability immediately. It's a pleasurable thing, isn't it?

S: Yes, because there's an element of spontaneity in it, there's an element of freedom in it. But also it implies self-confidence. It implies, in a way, a willingness to take not exactly risks but not to automatically play safe by delaying. Some people are so scared, as it were, that even though when they see that something needs to be done it's completely safe to do that thing, there's no possible risk, nonetheless they delay it just in case. They have this over-cautious, scary attitude to life, as it were.

Asvajit: In a way, the whole idea of someone asking to come and see you to speak to you is a bit suggestive of that attitude. Instead of just seeing you and saying what's on their mind immediately, they say, 'Can I have a talk with you?'

S: Well, fair enough, if they know that you're busy; it may not be convenient for you to talk to them on the spot. If you can, that's good, but it may not be convenient. You have to see the other person's convenience too. If there's more than one person wanting to have a talk on the spot, one can't deal with them all at the same time, so they have to be apportioned different times.

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Asvajit: During the course of a weekend or a seminar, or whatever, you spend quite a lot of your time just walking around, being available for people to speak to you.

S: You mean me personally?

Asvajit: You personally.

S: Not necessarily, because if I'm walking around it often means I'm turning over something in my mind, and I like to think while walking; not necessarily while sitting in my study. Like Aristotle, a peripatetic philosopher. When I seem to be doing nothing, don't assume that I'm doing nothing, please. I'm sometimes, at least, most busy then, turning something over in my mind. You can't win, can you? But yes, it implies a certain... Sometimes you can tell if someone, even though walking around, is deep in thought; you can tell that if you're sensitive. And if he isn't, if he's just walking around, you can tell that he is, because he's looking about him and looking at people and seems quite open to being accosted and talked to. But if he's walking around and his head is bent and he's clearly thinking, or maybe even deep in thought, clearly he isn't available, and one should be very careful about interrupting, whoever he is.

Sona: Also sometimes people just need a bit of a rest from talking.

S: That's also true, yes.

Sona: If they've been talking to someone for several hours ...

S: Yes, He might be just going out for a breath of fresh air and someone else darts forward and collars you. Or you've come out for a bit of fresh air after talking for a few hours.

Sona: ...end up having a roof garden where no one can get at you.

S: Anyway, one doesn't want to be too precious about that, but you do see what I mean. But otherwise, apart from special situations like that, by all means if one has something to say to

anybody the sooner you say it the better, undoubtedly, and if you can say it on the spot that's best of all. But again you have to consider the situation, and you may feel like taking up the matter immediately, but you have to consider whether that is the most suitable moment from the other person's point of view. He may not be in the right mood, and if it's something a little controversial you may make matters worse by taking it up with him immediately. Maybe you have to give him time to calm down a bit, or give him time for reflection, and then quietly and gently take it up.

But it is sometimes very pleasant, when one, say, puts forward a suggestion and within a short period you hear that people are actually acting upon that suggestion, instead of your having to [252] keep plugging away at it month after month and year after year; it's actually been taken up quite quickly, and people are already doing something about it. That is very pleasant, and that's a sign of great progress.

Anyway, perhaps that's enough about promptitude. Precept 10.

(10) Should benevolence and pity be weak within thee, persevere in directing the mind towards Perfection.

S: What sort of perfection do you think is meant here? What do you think is meant by perfection: What sort of word do you think it translates, probably?

: Compassion?

S: The word perfection? No, I don't think it translates compassion.

Several voices: Paramitas?

S: Well, it's singular, isn't it? And with a capital P.

Asvajit: It suggests the Ideal; the ideal man, the ideal person. The ideal quality.

S: Ah, that's getting a bit near. It seems to me to represent the word siddhi, because these are the Precepts of the Gurus, there is a sort of Tantric flavour to them, and siddhi is the specifically Tantric term for perfection in the spiritual sense; it literally means success, or ripeness, or maturity, perfection. So 'Should benevolence and pity be weak within thee, persevere in directing the mind towards Perfection' - siddhi. But why perfection? Why siddhi? What is in fact being said here? If benevolence and pity are weak within you, why not just cultivate benevolence and pity?

Asvajit: Your mind isn't actually in the right direction to do that.

: Perhaps benevolence and pity come from Perfection. They are something to be perfected ...

S: There's that too. But taking it that 'benevolence and pity' represent metta and karuna, it's as though you have to have a reason, a motive, for developing them, and you can develop them to any great extent, certainly, only in the light of a higher spiritual ideal. The text says 'Perfection', but one could say, for instance, in the light of the Bodhisattva Ideal. So it does suggest that, beyond a certain point, these positive emotional qualities can be fully energized

only by means of a definitely spiritual ideal. Do you see that?

Asvajit: A spiritual ideal in the sense of an ideal that is bent on limitless development?

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S: Yes, yes. An ideal which gives you, as it were, a philosophy, if you like, a rationale, of that limitless development; makes you see the possibility of it, the necessity of it inspires you. Otherwise what is there to make you develop benevolence and pity, metta and karuna, beyond a certain very limited point? - just maybe enough for ordinary social and psychological purposes?

: It would seem that any limitation placed on spiritual development at all would be incredibly cramping, even to somebody just starting. If you put right at the top there's even a limit, it wouldn't give anybody any room at all.

S: So it really means, in fact, in practical terms, that you have to commit yourself to get anywhere at all. Commitment means commitment to this higher spiritual goal, which has no limit, let us say. Unless you can do that, you can't begin, even, to make any real progress in any serious fashion. There sometimes has been this discussion in the past, in connection with classes, especially in connection with meditation classes, whether one should not present meditation first of all within a purely psychological framework, and then introduce the spiritual framework at a later stage. But it would seem that it might be all right just for the first two or three classes to present, say, meditation and mental development only within a psychological framework, but it's as though if you want people really to start taking meditation very seriously, even on that very elementary level, you have to introduce this higher spiritual ideal; even to mobilize sufficient energy for them to be able to make even a very limited amount of progress.

This perhaps links up with whether you conduct the beginners' classes in, say, a room, a shrine, with a Buddha image. Opinions differ about this. Some people feel that you should let people know what they are in for right from the beginning. Others seem to think that you should screen off the Buddha image, which means not reveal the Ideal fully at first, but just speak in psychological and therapeutic terms. Perhaps that's all right for two or three classes, but probably after that it begins to be a bit unrealistic. And very often people aren't looking just for a bit of therapy or a bit of improvement; they are looking for a whole new way of life and an Ideal.

: That's the thing; we're not that kind of movement, are we? We're a spiritual movement.

S: Yes, admittedly, but the point has been raised as to how do you get people involved? Some people say that if you present the Ideal fully and explicitly from the beginning, that would only scare some people off; so you present, say, meditation to begin with provisionally just in psychological terms, without bringing in the fact that the aim, traditionally, is what we call Enlightenment.

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Sona: I think there's too much emphasis on scaring people off. In a way, if you present the Ideal right from the beginning, you either attract people - if you put it in really clear terms, not just talk about it vaguely and woollily - if it's put in terms of individual growth, for instance,

then the sort of people you're going to scare off maybe it's just as well to scare them off. They'll get scared off anyway, later on.

S: I used to say some time ago, when we used to discuss this, that people are very concerned with not scaring off the weaker people, but you also had to be careful not to discourage the stronger people by giving them such innocuous stuff that they feel there's nothing in it for them, it's just not demanding enough. So they go away, you lose them. You're probably going to lose somebody anyway, so you might as well, if that is the case, lose the weaker people rather than the stronger ones.

Ray: It seems that if you start covering up things you are becoming dishonest about it.

S: It's a bit like karate; it has the reputation of being tough, so you go along expecting that. You attract those sort of people, who don't mind if it's a bit tough. Those who don't like the sort of reputation that karate has just don't go along; they go off somewhere else and play ping-pong or something of that sort. So if you have the reputation of being a bit tough and a bit demanding and all that, you are more likely to attract young heroes than if you have the reputation of giving everybody an easy time.

Chris: It seems quite a safe thing to do, in a line like meditation, doesn't it, to be quite hard-line with it almost, because people have got the general idea it's a pretty laid-back occupation.

Uttara: In the early days in Glasgow, some people were quite disappointed because there wasn't such a stiff line taken in meditation. I think sometimes Gotami used to pretend that she was the Zen master, sort of thing, occasionally whopping people in the back. I think I was ...; people enjoyed that sort of thing.

S: ... a degree of attention. It is interesting that these positive emotions cannot really be developed beyond a certain point without a definitely spiritual ideal being brought in to function as a reason for the development. That has, obviously, all sorts of implications.

But anyway, another important point that arises here is the general need for positive emotion. This is something that has been dwelt on many times before. Here only metta and karuna are mentioned, but one could also mention mudita and upeksa and saddha and so on. So you could say only a spiritual ideal could generate the energy that is required for the development of the positive emotions, beyond a certain point.

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All right, let's go on to the Ten Incentives, then.

Section IX

(1) By reflecting upon the difficulty of obtaining an endowed and free human body, mayest thou be incited to adopt the religious career.

S: Do you think this actually is an incentive for people nowadays - 'reflecting upon the difficulty of obtaining an endowed and free human body'?

: Not for me.

: I think the only time I really came across realizing it was when I was first presented with the idea of the Six Realms. It was only at that point I realized that there was obviously some advantage in the situation that I had at the moment. But before that, no, I didn't.

: It's not something that I really feel that I experience quite deeply. I might know ... in a way, because I don't really know that I've been born again. It doesn't seem like much of an incentive.

Uttara: Maybe when you've been ill and you recover from it - it isn't [that you think of] a religious career, but at least you very much appreciate being well again.

S: Well, this is part of what is meant by 'an endowed and free human body', endowed with certain qualities: that one is in full possession of one's health, strength and senses, has the means of livelihood, lives in a country where the Dharma is accessible, and so on.

: I've seen quite a lot of that in Andre Gide's work.

S: Mm: in what way?

: In the sense that a few of his books are about his personal illness, and the real experience that he gains, a contact with life, through the fact that he almost died.

S: He does make the point, I remember, at the beginning of one of his books that his upbringing was so puritanical that he had to learn to enjoy himself, and he had to devote as much effort to that, to enjoy even sense experiences, as other people had to give them up. It required an equal effort on his part. I think probably this precept can be best looked at in terms of the opportunity that one has. One need not see it necessarily in the context of rebirth as this or that form of life; maybe you can reflect that you are very lucky to have been born as you have been, not as an ant or a frog or a grasshopper or a bird - oh yes, that's true, but for most people it isn't a very meaningful reflection. But perhaps it is a meaningful reflection to consider that one has been born healthy, that one is fully endowed with all one's senses, that one doesn't find it too difficult to find a reasonably satisfactory means of livelihood, that one has got spare time, that one is not oppressed by the conditions of one's existence, that one is actually in contact with the means of individual spiritual development, and so on; and that one therefore should make the best possible use of all these opportunities. One has youth, time, energy, understanding, so why not make the best possible use, the fullest possible use, of them?

So 'religious career' here not in a narrow vocational sense, or professional sense, but in the sense of the actual process of one's own further development as an individual. You have the means of developing; what a pity it would be if you didn't use them.

One feels this sometimes with people who were in contact with the Friends, maybe five, six, seven, eight, nine years ago; one meets them from time to time occasionally. Someone was telling me only a few days ago that he met So-and-so who had dropped out from the Friends about six years ago, and he joined some other Buddhist group, but he dropped out of that apparently recently, and he is now just on his own. But he is just going round and round in

circles. It seems such a pity that someone had the opportunity but wasn't able to take it; couldn't see that he had an opportunity. But this happens very often in all sorts of ways. People sometimes don't see that being in a spiritual community is an opportunity that they shouldn't waste; being on retreat is an opportunity they shouldn't waste. Being a member of a co-op is an opportunity they shouldn't waste. Having kalyana mitras is an opportunity they shouldn't waste. And so on. Otherwise, if they're not careful, after 10, 15, 20 years they will be like the crane in the Dhammapada verse: they will be standing beside the pond from which all the fish have fled and mourning over the past. There are already a few people around that one can see becoming a bit like this, people who had these sort of contacts, these opportunities, as far as the FWBO was concerned, but just didn't follow them up, didn't value them sufficiently, and have not made any progress; have just at best been going round and round in circles.

So one day the pond dries up, the fish are no longer there, there's no longer any opportunity. It's too late. And that is quite a sad reflection for some people, that it's too late, they've missed the boat, they've wasted their opportunity.

John R: One can't assume that the opportunities will remain constant, simply because one changes oneself.

S: Not only that, but the world changes. Here we are, say, in the case of the FWBO, with these Centres reasonably well active, communities, co-ops; but it only requires some kind of major international conflict or disaster for us to be deprived of all those opportunities, perhaps, and to be thrown very much back on our own individual resources, even if we survive. We don't usually think of things in that way, but it may be that before [257] the end of the century there is some quite serious international upheaval, which will throw everybody's lives awry. At present we've got it as it were so easy; despite these economic difficulties and so on, we enjoy a reasonably good standard of living; most of us have got plenty of time to talk to ourselves; we have the opportunity of living in spiritual communities; we can get on with our work in the co-ops; we can go along to the Centre. No one interferes with us, no one tries to stop us, we are reasonably free. We don't have to worry about material things, we've got enough money, there's no danger whatever of starvation for us - we can't even think in those terms. There's a practical possibility for quite a few people in the world still. We have it so easy. And this is something that struck some of those who spent some time in India: when they came back they started saying that we don't realize in this country how easy we've got it; especially people within the Friends. They've got it all laid on. It's only up to them to take advantage of the opportunities that they have. But unfortunately, even under those conditions, some people can find nothing better to do than to grumble. And if you just see the way some of our Friends, say, in India, some of our FWBO Friends, live - people here live like princes in comparison, even those who live in very simple communities: their standard of living is much higher than that enjoyed by our Friends in India, much higher.

We have all sorts of advantages and conveniences that people there just don't have. And yet those people have managed to commit themselves very seriously, in some cases.

Things are getting a little bit difficult economically in this country, but not really difficult by world standards. This whole period since the end of the last war, in a way we've had it so easy in this country, it's a comfortable sort of life. We've been so cushioned, and things have been made progressively easier and easier for us until perhaps just very recently, when they've been

just a little bit more difficult. But still there's no question of any real difficulty at all, much less still any real hardship or any real suffering. Those are still quite out of the question for the vast, vast majority of people.

So we've got a wonderful opportunity. So if we don't take advantage of that opportunity it's just our own fault. So perhaps this is a more realistic way of looking at what this precept is saying. We've got all sorts of opportunities, and we should use them.

Let's go on to precept 2, then.

(2) By reflecting upon death and the impermanence of life, mayest thou be incited to live piously.

S: There's quite a bit in this translation of what one might call pseudo-religious language, pseudo-biblical language even. This 'mayest thou be incited' - well, I don't think this reflects in the Tibetan. I think the translator is just trying to make it sound more religious. And what about this 'living piously'? [258] Well, living in accordance with the Dharma, which has got quite a different ring, quite a different feel to it from this 'living piously'. Who wants to be pious? Nobody, I hope. But living in accordance with the Dharma is quite another matter.

So what about this reflecting upon death and the impermanence of life? Is this a good thing to do, or is there not a more positive way of doing it? Can one carry it to extremes, this sort of attitude?

Alaya: Probably end up in an extremely negative state ... Unless you had a good basis of positivity.

S: Yes. If one thinks in terms of making the best possible use of one's opportunities here and now, in a sense one need not reflect upon death and the impermanence of life. It doesn't matter whether death comes sooner or later. If you are making every day full use of all the opportunities that present themselves it doesn't matter when death comes.

Vajradaka: See death as another opportunity, another new experience.

S: Yes.

Alaya: ... think that if you did die the next day you'd have no regrets about wasting your opportunities.

(End of side 2)

Tape 12, Side 1

Sona: It's much more difficult for us to reflect upon death in this country. But maybe in the country you do sort of notice things that have more or less got ...

S: At least you find occasionally a dead mole on the lawn, or something like that, whereas perhaps in the city you don't even have that sort of experience. You find a little dead bird, or something of that sort. But in the city perhaps you might occasionally see a dead mouse that

the cat has brought in, but even then only if you keep a cat, obviously. You certainly don't see corpses being carried past your door with the face exposed on their way to the burning ground, as you do in India, almost any day of the week in a big town. Well, when I arrived in Poona one of the very first things I had to do was to conduct someone's prajnanirmodhana(?), i.e. after-death ceremony.

Viramati: So it's all behind shut doors in this country, you never see anything. Even if there's an accident, all the bodies are whisked away before you ...

: They put a blanket over them, don't they, so you don't actually see - ?

[259]
Sona: I sometimes think in road accidents it would be much better to leave the corpse exposed, as a warning ...

S: As a warning.

Sona: Because I know, when I was younger - I think I was about 20 - driving down to the coast, and I was driving quite recklessly - well, I wasn't driving recklessly, I was driving quite fast. I went past this accident, and it obviously must have been a youngster who had been knocked down, he was dead, because he had a blanket, it was quite a short body. And after that I was just driving so carefully, and so - it really shook me up.

S: I remember in my early days in Kalimpong, a European friend of mine died. She was an elderly woman who had been quite a friend of the Centre itself, and she knew many of my students, and she used to invite them to tea every now and then. She was a woman of about 52, 53. Anyway, she had an accident and died. She had known quite a few people in Kalimpong, including various local missionaries. So what happened was that we took the body from the mortuary and we brought it to the Centre, and it was laid out in the coffin on the table. So quite a few people collected at the Centre before the funeral procession, and amongst them were quite a few Christian missionaries who had known her. So, as the custom was in those parts, the lid of the coffin hadn't been screwed down and the face was exposed, and anybody who wanted to just come and have a last look at her were free to do that. So all my students, all these Nepalese and Tibetan boys who had known her were quite keen on having a last look, quite interested; they seemed to think nothing of it at all, just a last look at poor old Miss Barclay. So in they went and had a look at her - 'Oh, she looks all right, yes. She always did look a bit stern.' But anyway, (Laughter)... So I said, 'It would be nice just out of friendliness to invite her other friends, the Christian missionaries also to come and have a look at her.' So I went into the sitting room where they were all seated, and I said: 'Would you like to come and just have a last look at Miss Barclay?' So they said: 'Oh, oh no, no, no thank you.' ... their attitude. It's as though they were just scared. And they were missionaries, and in some cases ministers; both men and women missionaries. But not one of them wanted to go and have a look at her. They were quite clearly scared of death and scared of the idea of actually seeing a dead body, in a way that my Nepalese and Tibetan students weren't in the least. And that really struck me at that time: how sheltered they all must have been, those missionaries.

Here they were, preaching the gospel, but they were totally out of touch with a basic fact of human life of that sort. They were scared. So what did that say for their religious belief, or

their faith? I am going to write about that in my memoirs. But this was one of the incidents that really struck me at the time. They literally shook, and their voices trembled - 'Oh, oh no, no no no.' Not one of them went and looked. And this was completely contrasted with the attitude of my young Tibetan and [260] Nepalese friends, both Hindu and Buddhist.

: Did you ever approach any of them afterwards, to ask - ?

S: No, I didn't. They were very difficult to approach. They used to refer to me as 'the enemy of the Church' (Laughter). Some - well, one or two of the bolder spirits used to approach me. Very often, even if they knew you, usually they wouldn't greet you in the street. You would often meet these missionaries, they often would pass by in the Kalimpong high street, but if they saw me, I think almost without exception, they would clutch their bibles tighter under their arms (they always carried a bible, just in case), and they wouldn't look at you, wouldn't greet you. Yes. I must admit the Catholic Fathers were a bit better; they may have been no better from a religious point of view, but at least they had certain social manners, you may say. So two or three of the Catholic Fathers used to just say hello to me. But never the Protestants. Except there were two young girls came out - one tall and thin, believe it or not, the other short and fat - who came straight out from a missionary training college in Devonshire: two pleasant, homely sort of girls with pink cheeks and good intentions, and bibles under their arms. They came out to Kalimpong to convert the heathen, and the first person they saw was me. It gave them a real shock. But anyway, they (Laughter)... So they thought that nobody else had dared to tackle me but they would. So they came to see me one day. No, I think they arranged to come, so I invited them for tea. So I made a nice tea for them, with plenty of eggs and things, so along they came, clutching their bibles and almost hanging on to each other because I had a really strange reputation among the missionaries - because don't forget what their view of Buddhism was like. Their view of Buddhism was it was some terrible form of devil-worship and black magic, and here was I, this sinister young European, mixed up with all these things. So they felt really brave in even entering the vihara, the Centre. And I knew that missionaries used to say that 'One must be very careful about setting foot in his Centre.' It was as though they really thought I would cast a spell on them, or something like that, or they would be turned into an animal.
That was really their attitude.

So these girls clearly thought they were being very brave in coming along and actually setting foot there and meeting me, and talking to this very sinister, dangerous person who was actually a Buddhist himself and teaching Buddhism to others. So they came along, and we had quite an interesting conversation. I wasn't going to meet them directly on their own ground, but I tried the approach of subtly undermining them by adopting a universalist approach: that is to say, 'Yes, I fully accept what Christianity says, I've nothing against Christianity, but what about the other religions? There's Buddhism, there's Hinduism; there's good in those; how can we reject them? We have to recognize that there is some good in them. Do you really think that only Christians are going to be saved?' I was pressing this, and I could actually see that the tall thin one was being a bit affected by [261] what I said - not the short fat one; she wasn't affected at all, but the tall thin one was actually more thoughtful. And I could see, by the time they went away, that my words had had some effect on them. Anyway, they came once more, and I think I shook her a little more. After that they didn't come again. I think they thought it better not to. So I used to pass them in the high street sometimes, and they'd say (mincingly), 'Oh, good morning' - nothing more than that - and straight on they would go, they never stopped. They had given me up as a bad job. I think the

tall thin one got a bit of a fright: she felt her faith just ever so slightly shaken. But it was quite extraordinary, their attitude. And they really thought I was the devil in disguise, as it were - well, not so much in disguise.

It was really strange with Protestants especially: this was their attitude. Some of them used to eye me with horror and hasten past me in case they were influenced or contaminated.

Alaya: They used to hold their cross up to you?

S: Not Protestants, because they don't believe in the cross in that way. But then I remember I met these two girls at the house of a friend, years and years later; and anyway they were just having tea there, and they were in the midst of telling this friend of mine an extraordinary experience that they had had. They had said that they had ventured up to one of these Tibetan Pujas on a nearby hill - it was one, I think, being conducted by Dudjom Rimpoche - and they clearly thought that they were witnessing devil-worship and were being very brave in venturing up there. So she said: 'There were these lamas there, and they were chanting these things that they do, these ceremonies; and they were chanting out of some books. And it was a very windy day, and a leaf from one of these books blew away and came quite near me, so I thought "No harm if I just take it". I have a brother who collects these sort of curiosities, so I thought I'd just keep it and send it to my brother. But what do you think? That night I had a most extraordinary experience. I woke up in the middle of the night and there was some demon-like figure lying on top of me. It was most horrible. And I at once thought, and then I said "Jesus!" and it disappeared. It had something to do with that leaf of the book that I'd picked up and kept. What do you think of that? What do you say to that?'

So I said: 'Well, I don't know what I have to say to it, but I think I know what Mr Freud would have said to it.' (Loud laughter) So she went rather red in the face and changed the subject.

This was ... perhaps she felt in touch, you know, she had this leaf out of the devil-worshipping book, Puja, and therefore this had attracted some demon to her during the night. She had chased him away with the name of Jesus, you see. So I had many experiences with missionaries that I will go into in my memoirs - this is just a little rehearsal ... chapters of memoirs. But their attitude was really strange; it was so hostile and so negative.

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There were some missionaries staying at Ghoom, where Lama Govinda used to stay and where he met his teacher Tomo Geshe Rimpoche. There were some missionaries there; they had a little daughter, aged about five, and we came to know that she, or rather her parents in her name, had sent out a Christmas card to all her little friends in England. In fact, we saw a copy of this Christmas card: they had had it printed. And there were some greetings on it, and then it said: 'Please pray for all the heathen here who are doing Puja' - and then in brackets it said: '(devil-worship)'. They regarded Puja as devil-worship, that all the figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas - of course, some admittedly were in wrathful forms in that area - were just devils. And they believed that we were all involved, European Buddhists, along with the Eastern Buddhists, in some kind of horrible, weird devil-worship, a devil-worship cult. This is how they saw Buddhism. It really seemed so strange. And they were completely impervious to any sort of impression that one might try to make.

Anyway, how did we get into that?

: Looking at the dead, reflecting upon death.

Alaya: There is such an absence of bodies in England that people are almost ghoulish, aren't they, when there is an accident?

S: You certainly do see people gathering round, in a not very pleasant way.

: I witnessed a motorbike accident about a month ago, and there were some women in a car parked across the road. And one of them fainted and had to sit down, and another one was sick in a bush.

Uttara: Is it the nature of the deaths in this country, or do people die more natural deaths in India, or do they have really nasty accidents?

S: I don't think they have so many road accidents, because they don't have so many cars. They drive very carelessly in India, but I don't remember ever seeing a real accident. It's quite extraordinary. All the time I was in India - there were accidents happened in the hills: the Nepalese drivers were very reckless, and from Kalimpong down to Tistavij and Tistavij up to Kalimpong is a succession of hairpin bends, so there were frequently accidents. But I never actually saw an accident. But in the plains, one never heard of an accident; it was quite extraordinary.

Asvajit: Lokamitra actually got knocked off his bicycle.

S: He got knocked off his bicycle, that's true, but it was no worse than that. He thought it was quite bad enough, anyway; he did get knocked off his bicycle.

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: I was travelling in India with a van-load of Germans, and one of the Germans was driving through this village, and he was so spaced-out with driving through the village he didn't see a blind Indian, and he knocked him to the ground.

There was a terrible commotion after he did it.

S: Usually, when people drive through villages, they just sound their horn all the time. This is something, even in Bombay, the taxi-drivers, they sound their horn all the time, which is a bit nerve-racking if you're travelling in the taxi. But it seems to work; they do manage to scare people out of the way, usually people sauntering along in the middle of the road - this is a busy street, of course, busy main road. But no one ever seems to get knocked down, really. I've spent months in Bombay and travelled round quite a bit, but I've never seen an accident in any of these big cities. I suppose they do occur.

Alaya: Yes, you often see a little line at the bottom of the front page of a newspaper about, say, 100 people were killed in South India when a bus went over a ravine. It's usually a bus.
S: That's true, that sort of thing.

Alaya: - or going across a level crossing.

S: But anyway, there is this point that one is hardly in a position to reflect upon death if you

don't get any actual reminder, in the form of - well, say, the sight of a dead body at least occasionally, in the natural way of things. Somebody dies in hospital, they go at once to the undertaker's, they are sealed up in their coffins, and you just never see them actually dead. I think this is comparatively unusual.

: Somebody was telling me about more rural funerals - I think it was also a few years ago - and they were saying that they used to have a body in the front parlour for about - just in the same way as you were saying - and also the children were made to kiss the hand of the dead person, to develop some kind of ...

S: I think you still have this to a slight extent in Scotland? I think they still, at least in remote areas, have the wakes, don't they?

: Yes.

Alaya: Are we going to be able to have our own cremations in the Friends?

S: When you say 'own cremations', what do you mean?

Alaya: Get someone to light a fire in the back garden -

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S: No, you can't do that. That is against public health regulations. No, you would be prosecuted, or the police would stop you then if they knew of it. You would certainly be prosecuted afterwards.

: It would be a great opportunity, wouldn't it, when one of us died, to be able to ...

S: But there's no reason why one shouldn't be cremated. One won't actually see very much, because - I don't know if you've ever attended a cremation, but you know what happens? You don't really see anything at all, do you? You're really just incinerated in an oven, you're not really cremated in the Indian sense. But in India I have attended and participated in many cremations. I used to find it a quite inspiring experience. You take the corpse to the burning ground, and then you'd have to purchase the wood. There's usually somebody with a stall there on the spot selling logs of wood and so on, so you buy whatever is necessary on the spot, and then you make the pyre. You first of all dig a small shallow trench and you put big stones first, because it will give draught underneath. And then you lay big logs, a couple of layers; and then you put the corpse, and then on top of that you put at least one more layer of fairly thick logs and smaller sticks on top of that. And then you can sprinkle the whole thing - well, if you're well to do the proper thing is with ghee, clarified butter, otherwise nowadays you have to just use kerosene, they sprinkle it with kerosene. And you should leave a sort of hole at either end, so that the draught can go right through between these rows of big stones. And you put the torch here at one end - you see before you build it which way the wind is blowing - you put the torch in so that the wind blows the flame from the torch right through underneath the pyre, and it all catches fire pretty quickly. An ordinary-sized body takes about two hours to be more or less consumed. When that's happened, you leave it, and come back the next day and take the ashes if you wish.

: Someone bashes in the skull - ?

S: No, they don't do that.

Adrian: What is the significance of cremation, anyway? Is it something practical, or spiritual?

S: It's difficult to say. From very early times there have been several methods of disposing of a dead body. There's been cremation, of course, burial, and of course there's been exposure to wild animals. Burial seems to have been the earliest, and it could be that cremation is connected with certain definite religious beliefs. It might - this is only a hypothesis - be connected with the same sort of belief that you get connected with the making of burnt offerings: just in the same way that when you burn the burnt offering it goes up to heaven in the form of smoke, maybe the burning of the corpse represents the sending, so to speak, of that person or that person's soul or spirit to heaven. It could be something of this sort.

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: Cremation is the usual way of disposing of dead bodies among Buddhists in the East?

S: Yes, mainly because it is the dominant Indian tradition. And it's said to be more hygienic, in the sense that if someone has died of a disease it's better to dispose of the corpse in that way. Also you don't have to maintain a grave and a graveyard. This seems to me a great advantage: to just put the body in the earth and maintain a sort of grave seems to me just a little bit (maudlin/morbid?). So, in the case of cremation, especially if you just scatter the ashes, well, that's finished with.

Uttara: Attachment - ... the grave, ...

S: Otherwise if you think: 'There's my George, six foot underground' - and think he's actually there, sort of thing. People do, which is quite mistaken.

: Burial at sea is quite a good way of disposing of bodies.

S: Yes. Then the fishes get the body, if they're lucky.

: So what will we do here, because the crematoria are very Christian, aren't they? They have ...

S: No, they are not necessarily. This is something that people don't generally appreciate: that crematoria are not chapels.

: They are very like chapels.

S: They are fitted up something like that, so that people can turn them into chapels if they wish, but you have the perfect right to remove anything of a Christian nature and set up your own Buddhist or whatever paraphernalia in your own way.

Voices: Ah. Oh, good.

S: Oh, yes. Because the chapels attached to crematoria are not, strictly speaking, churches or chapels.

Viramati: Padmaraja went to one, took a rupa and sort of shrine ...

S: Yes, one has the legal right to do that.

Asvajit: Mangala and I conducted a little funeral ceremony down in Brighton for a woman who died and professed to be a Buddhist. A few of her relatives turned up; I don't know what they made of it all.

S: My usual experience has been that non-Buddhist relatives are very much impressed by the Buddhist funeral service, so to speak, and the whole attitude towards things on the part of Buddhists. There's quite a good opportunity of contacting people who [266] normally would not have any contact with Buddhism at all. At least it does create a definitely favourable impression; I found that invariably.

: Could you say in what way, what was different about it?

S: It's difficult to say. I think they appreciate the orderliness of it. They appreciate the simplicity of it. They also appreciate the shortness of it, and they are usually, on an occasion like that, even distant relatives, in a quite receptive mood. And if you can say a few simple words, just speak for five or ten minutes about wishing that person well, wherever they may be, sending out to them thoughts of metta, even having a short meditation of that sort, and then say: 'There's no point in being attached. We just have to remember whatever good qualities that person had, be grateful for them, try to develop them ourselves, and just remember them with metta and joy, and not be overcome by sorrow because death is natural, it is something that we all have to face one day. It should just make us think a bit more seriously about life.' If you just say something like this, people are very receptive to that, at that particular time, and really appreciate anything of that sort which may be said. And of course it may be that they came with expectations of something really bizarre, etc., and they find it isn't like that; they are pleasantly surprised. And several people, after cremations and Buddhist services (again, for want of a better term) - quite often I've been approached by relations who have said it was a really beautiful ceremony, they'd never experienced anything like it, they were very glad that they had come and it had really helped them. They often say things like that.

So I think one should never pass by an opportunity to just conduct a simple ceremony, for the benefit even of non-Buddhist relatives, if the deceased person has been a Buddhist; have it by all means. And encourage, if one is in a position to do so, the relations to come along. And usually, when I've had to conduct ceremonies of this sort, it's been people mostly that I've hardly known. They might have been Buddhists or considered themselves Buddhists, but have had no contact with me during their lifetimes, in nearly all cases. So I didn't know them, I didn't know their relations, but nonetheless the relations were all very receptive, even though they weren't Buddhists, I'd never met them before and would probably never meet them again. So I think one should not let slip these sort of opportunities. It does help create a more positive impression about Buddhism generally, and that can't be a bad thing.

Alaya: Do you think it does any good to the person who has died, or is it purely beneficial to the people who are left behind?

S: Well, that presupposes questions about the nature of the deceased person, the spirit

consciousness or whatnot. The Buddhist teaching or Buddhist belief certainly is that physical death is not the end, inasmuch as one is not simply to be [267] identified with the physical body - not that an immortal, unchanging soul goes on, but that there is something which is not identified with the physical body, and that as it were remains or becomes conscious and under certain circumstances may be conscious of what is happening, so to speak, on earth. This is the almost universal belief in one form or another. And so presumably, if that consciousness, or whatever one might like to call it - that person, in fact - is aware of what is happening on earth, is in contact, so to speak, with you even though you aren't conscious of it, any thoughts that you think will affect that person, and therefore the more positive the thoughts that you can think the better, the more helpful. Because it will be for that person at least a state of transition, an entering upon a new kind of experience, and no doubt it would help them to be sustained by your positive thoughts. I think that's the least that one can say.

Vajradaka: I really feel that to be true. I did a cremation ceremony once, and I actually saw - it was a young Chinese boy - I saw him, I unscrewed the coffin lid and looked at him and spent a bit of time with him. And I actually felt this kind of rapport developing. And then, when we screwed the lid back on, we did the ceremony, and I was saying virtually all these things that Bhante has said. It was for the people who were left, but it also felt at the same time it was like saying to him: 'Look, no point hanging around here, you've done your bit. Just remember the Dharma, remember the Buddha; keep in touch with those spiritual qualities.' And I actually felt, quite strongly, that I was in contact with him and communicating. It was quite weird. But good, I mean not weird in a nasty sense.

S: Yes. I had that same experience several times. I remember in one case in particular there was a woman in Brighton who used to run, with her husband, the then Brighton Buddhist Society. She was the secretary, I think, and her husband was the chairman: Carl and - what was her name? I'm afraid I've forgotten it; it might come to me. But, anyway - Violet, that's right, Violet her name was. So Violet was a woman of about 75 or 76, but quite healthy and active, and I used to go down once a month to Brighton. This is when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara and for the first year or so of the FWBO. I used to go down to Brighton once a week and take a meditation class for the Brighton Buddhist Society, meetings of which were held at Carl and Violet's house, and I used to stay overnight at their place. And in this way I became quite good friends with them, with Violet in particular, and I used to talk with her quite a bit when I went down.

One month I couldn't go down; I think I might have been unwell, or something of that sort, but I telephoned and said I couldn't go, and asked Violet to take the meditation class instead. So I afterwards learned that Violet took the class, which was downstairs on the ground floor of the house, and chatted to people for a few minutes, then went upstairs to their upstairs sitting-room, sat down on a chair, and Carl said: 'Shall I get you a cup of tea?' She said, 'Yes, get me a cup of tea, please.' [268] She was perfectly all right, mind you, no sign of any illness or anything like that; everything was quite normal. So he went into the upstairs kitchen, made the cup of tea, brought it back, and she was already dead, five minutes later. She was still sitting up in the chair but she'd gone. And he was quite taken aback, but he took it very calmly and philosophically.

A week later I went down to conduct the funeral. But the strange thing was I went upstairs and went into this upstairs sitting room. This was the usual procedure when I arrived; I had a key. When I arrived I would just go upstairs and sit in the upstairs sitting room, and Violet

would come in and say hello and then she would get me a cup of tea. So I went upstairs on that occasion and sat down, and sure enough in came Violet. It was really quite extraordinary; not that the physical body came in, but Violet came in and said hello and sat with me for two or three minutes, and then she went away again. That is the only way in which one can describe it. I've had several experiences like that under similar circumstances - I won't weary you with all the details. But it was definitely Violet sitting there on that chair and asking me how I was and so on. So I think one has to take a little seriously the sort of things that are said in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. And I think, if you ask around among your friends, I think you will find that quite a lot of people have had experiences of this sort; certainly in the East people have experiences of this sort constantly, because they remain closer to the facts of death. When the physical body is no longer there, after physical death, it is not as it were completely the end. In a strange sort of way, the person is still there, even though the body isn't there. It's not that there's a soul there which isn't changing, any more than there's an unchanging soul during life itself; the person is still there, changing - evolving, hopefully - and quite often one can - It's not just a feeling but it's a definite knowledge that one is in contact with that person. You don't just feel that they're around, or may be or could be; no, it's absolutely definite, just as definite and positive and unmistakable as though that person was there in the flesh. Quite definitely.

So that being as it were the situation, you can as it were speak to that person and say: 'This is what has happened. You're dead. There's no point in hanging around.' It is said that sometimes people don't know that they're dead. 'Thoughts of metta go towards you, we wish you well. But remember the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Try to fix your mind on them. That will be good for you, that will lead either to a higher state of existence or a better rebirth or at least to a good human rebirth', and so on. 'But in any case remember the teaching, and don't be afraid.'

Uttara: I was listening to a radio programme, it was after midnight, and there was a medium on. She was supposed to be the World or Britain's best medium. And they actually had a phone-in; people were phoning in, and she went: 'Oh, hold on a minute, I've got Such-and-such here, do you know Such-and-such who's got one leg amputated and died? No, it's not me. That [269] must be ... ' and she was actually finding, the people were phoning in and they might have known whether it was ...

S: Very difficult to say.

Uttara: ... 'George...' 'Yes, we've had a death in the family, yes, died ...' (Excited laughter.)

S: ... telephone operator ...

Uttara: She says, 'Oh god, I've got a backlog here... ' People were cracking up on the phone, saying all sorts of things. Very strange.

S: Maybe that's a suitable spot at which to stop for a spot of tea or coffee.

- - - - ...

S: All right, then, the third of the Ten Incentives.

(3) By reflecting upon the irrevocable nature of the results which inevitably arise from actions, mayest thou be incited to avoid impiety and evil.

S: This is essentially the question of responsibility. I think that responsibility, or sense of responsibility, is one of the characteristics of the true individual; the true individual is aware, especially self-aware, emotionally positive. And among other things he is also responsible. He realizes that actions do have consequences. This is something we don't always realize, and this is what the precept is basically talking about. Our own actions have consequences. Because very often people engage in certain activities in a really light-hearted way, as though they wouldn't have consequences; they don't think of the consequences, don't consider the consequences, whether for themselves or for other people. But it is, as I say, a characteristic of the true individual, or at least the more mature person, the more integrated person, that he realizes, he remembers that actions do have consequences.

Asvajit: I've heard it said quite recently, or suggested, that you shouldn't take yourself too seriously. That's a rather two-edged comment; it's not that you should be heavy, but that you should consider things. But I feel that it's sometimes directed as a kind of criticism towards really considering carefully, and taking a quite steady attitude towards what people are saying and what people are suggesting. As if to take oneself seriously one is a bit dull, or a bit lacking in humour, or ...

S: Well, perhaps you shouldn't take yourself seriously but you should take what you do seriously, inasmuch as it has consequences.

[270]
Alaya: Someone said to me: 'You aren't serious enough to be a Buddhist.'

S: What did they mean by that, do you think?

Alaya: I took it to mean - I replied in a way that they were thinking of religion in a Christian way, as something very dull and ...

S: Presumably they took you to be a serious sort of person, if that is what they said to you. Or hadn't they perhaps really thought about it?

Alaya: I don't know, I just assumed it was a Christian thing.

Vajradaka: I think it goes back to seeing the implications of what you do, that they were prepared perhaps to look at the implications; which is in a sense being serious.

Alaya: I think I said, 'Do you mean you're too frivolous to be a Buddhist?'

S: Frivolity does suggest that sort of thing - doing things which have consequences without sufficient consideration of those consequences, whether for oneself or for other people. But can you think of any examples? Give simple examples.

: With children.

S: With children, yes. Sometimes you have children in a light-hearted sort of way. I think

possibly it occurs most frequently and easily where verbal things are concerned. Somebody says, 'Will you do such-and-such?' 'Oh yes, I'll do it.' That is not promptitude, that is just frivolity; that is to say you do not consider seriously the implications of what you have said, and your saying it is a form of acting. You have said something, therefore you have committed yourself to something, and you have not considered with sufficient seriousness what it is you have undertaken, what it is you have promised, what it is you have taken on. And then later on, perhaps, you try to get out of it because you find it a bit too much.

(End of Side)

Tape 12, Side 2

There's a very good example of this ... in some minutes which I've had this morning from the Wanstead Centre. This is in connection with Mandarava. Probably everybody knows that Mandarava was leased from the owner of the property for a period of five years for use as a women's retreat centre, so the owner of the property wants it back now, wants to break the lease on the grounds that she is now pregnant. So this is the situation. Presumably she didn't think, when she allowed this situation to come about, sufficiently when she signed the lease, that agreement with the Wanstead FWBO, that an agreement was an [271] agreement, and that she was committing herself to allowing them to use that place for five years. So now she wants to break the agreement; not only that, apparently there has been quite a heavy meeting with her brother - she has brought her big brother into the picture - who has actually been threatening the women at Wanstead with legal proceedings and so on. And they are entirely in the right. It is really extraordinary.

But this is what happens when one does something irresponsibly, without full realization of the consequences of what you are doing. And certainly this is all the more the case when one enters into as it were legal and binding agreements. You should never enter into them with a mental reservation that 'If I want to I can wriggle out of it somehow later on', because you enter into the agreement, presumably, for the sake of a certain advantage; well, it's a question of quid pro quo. You should keep your part and others will keep their part too. But this is what happens, as I say, when we act irresponsibly and we fail to realize that actions have consequences.

So one is coming across actual practical instances of this sort of thing all the time. People do not realize that what they say, as well as what they do - and even what they think - has consequences. Maybe they say, 'All right, I'll do so-and-so' - they've promised - and then later on you say, 'Why haven't you done it?' and they say: 'Oh, I didn't realize that it would mean this and mean that, therefore I haven't done it.' And they consider that a sort of actual excuse, a reason for not doing it: that they had not realized what it would involve.

Sona: Can actual thoughts have consequences apart from the actions and the speech that follow on from them?

S: Well, they have consequences inasmuch as your thoughts are you, and if you go on having thoughts of a particular kind it will mean that you are modifying your personality, your individuality, in a particular way all the time. Those thoughts are doing things to you all the time, and sooner or later, yes, they will therefore express themselves verbally and in terms of action: inevitably. But even if they don't, there will be repercussions within your own

personality, so to speak, on the purely mental level.

Sona: It also seems as though - maybe not so much with thoughts but with feelings - have a direct effect on other people anyway.

S: There is that, too.

Sona: If you feel intense hatred or intense love towards someone it can have an effect on them.

S: Yes. One can even say that thoughts are never just thoughts, and feelings are never just feelings. With everybody, especially if you live in a community or if you live at home in a family: the mental state of the people or the person with whom you are living will sometimes cloud the whole atmosphere. It's a [272] tangible thing, almost like a cloud, sometimes, that one can perceive. You can almost finger it. I remember that once when someone was staying with me I could tell, through the wall, what his mental state was. I didn't even need to go and ask; I could feel it coming through the wall, quite literally. I think this happens if one has any sort of sensitivity. So thoughts have consequences too, both for yourself and for other people. But I think probably it's with regard to words that we have to be most careful about entering into agreements and giving promises. Some people give promises so lightly - I touched upon this before the break - people who say they will meet you at 2 o'clock and think that 2 o'clock doesn't mean 2 o'clock. If you don't intend, or if you are not able, to be there at 2 o'clock, say: 'I will see you some time in the afternoon.' Say something like that.

: Tibetans have a little saying, something like 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will tear my heart out.'

S: Hm, that's very good, because the English proverb says that words won't hurt you.

: In a situation like this with the agreement, I think the compassionate thing to do is to not keep them to the agreement which they might have taken in a ... way, not force them to ...

S: Yes, indeed, certainly. Though, again, on the other hand, there may be other people to be considered. Supposing - to take the example I just mentioned - what about people who had made arrangements on the strength of that agreement to do certain things, and who if that agreement is broken, or if you break it as the responsible party, will be inconvenienced as much as the person, or more than the person, who is asking for the agreement to be broken. One has to consider all sides of the question.

Alaya: But it will be unpleasant if we do have to start doing things in legal, lawyers and things.

S: Well, yes, indeed, but sometimes there's no option. If other people take that sort of action, what is one to do?

Sona: Often it can be quite a skilful thing anyway to hold people to their promises, because it teaches them a lesson; if they've actually made a promise they can't get out of it that easily.

: But they've decided to give back the place. Amaravati decided ...

S: Yes; not to get too much into the details of this particular matter, I only cited it as an instance, as an illustration. They clearly - just to make the matter clear - want to act Buddhistically, the women at Wanstead; there's no doubt about that. But there's no doubt also about the fact that the other [273] party involved has been acting quite irresponsibly, and it's that which I was citing as the example. But, yes, to act Buddhistically also doesn't necessarily mean that you act weakly. It may be the most Buddhistic thing, in the circumstances, to hold somebody to their agreement. It makes it clear that an agreement is a serious thing. We had a bit of a discussion about the ethics of this sort of thing in connection with Padmaloka Candles, because Padmaloka Candles decided to prosecute somebody for non-payment of bills. Because, when you order something and something is delivered to you, obviously you undertake to pay the bill for that thing, so somebody didn't pay, and reminders were sent a number of times and they were all ignored. So Kovida went to the Small Claims Court, and the money was got back in that way. But no harm is done to the party concerned; you just go through a legal procedure and they are obliged, or a little pressure is put on them - pressure that should have been put by their own consciences - to cough up, to pay what was due, plus costs; which is only right and proper.

So I think, when we function, say, within the context of the group, we mustn't shrink sometimes from taking a quite firm stand, especially where in any case no harm of any kind is being done to the other party. Unfortunately, people do not always realize their responsibilities or honour their word, and sometimes it may be skilful to keep them to that.

: I was thinking that they might just take advantage of the Buddhists. 'They're not going to do anything.'

S: Right, yes. This particular firm had not gone bankrupt due to no fault of their own - he was doing quite well. They were just being difficult, and they were just ignoring demands for payment and hoping, presumably, that you would just get tired of sending them. But anyway, this particular action was taken, and I felt at the time - I was consulted - that it was taken quite properly.

But still, for any question of legality you have to be quite careful, because it can get quite complicated, and sometimes it might be better to write off a bad debt than to waste a lot of your own time being involved in that matter. But this was something quite simple and straightforward. My personal feeling is to avoid legal complications wherever possible. But I think one shouldn't necessarily follow that feeling invariably or without consideration.

I think one has the right to expect of people, if one uses that expression 'right' at all, that they will follow their obligations and agreements which they have voluntarily entered into. Social life would be impossible without that. Community life would be impossible without that. Someone says, 'Oh, I'll do the cooking tonight'; well, suppose he doesn't honour that? So everybody turns up in the evening and there's no food to eat, no meal cooked. So, without the ability to trust one another and to accept one another's word at the face value of that word, there is no community life and no human life possible.

[274]
That is one thing that has rather surprised me - that people quite often, even within the context of the Friends, don't attach much importance to keeping their word. I did mention this before the break, but it is very important that you should keep your word.

Alaya: It is often because you want the group approval without having to put the energy into the action; the approval [for] saying you will.

S: Yes. So then, if you have kept to what you have promised to do, then of course you have to recognize and realize that you were acting originally in an irresponsible way; you weren't really willing to take on the responsibility for doing that job, you just wanted approval from the group.

Alaya: When you realize that, I suppose the honest thing to do is to - well, what? to try and get rid of it.

S: Well, no, because you having taken it on once, and said that you would, it might seriously inconvenience people now, when you understand yourself more clearly, you want to give it back. If anybody suffers, so to speak, it should be you, not others. No, you do the job nonetheless, and you realize that next time you must examine your motives more carefully.

Alaya: ... just a rash enthusiasm.

S: Not even enthusiasm, really, in cases like that. It is just desire for the approval of the group, which one should have outgrown as an individual. Well, just the desire to create an impression or to look a bit big, something like that: 'Oh, I'll take it on, I'll do it.' But you just want to enjoy the satisfaction of making that sort of gesture. That is a real weakness. So you shouldn't be let off the hook so easily. You should insist on treating people as adults, not as children. I think you have a right, in a manner of speaking, to expect adults to behave as adults.

Alaya: But often when you are taking something on, you really don't have any basis of knowing what exactly you are taking on; but you commit yourself. But you might find that the circumstances are that you're not up to it, or that it isn't ...

S: Well, then you can ask for help. But if you have committed the mistake, you must surely be the one that suffers the consequences. Why should anybody else suffer the consequences of your mistake? If it is a question of someone having to suffer the consequences.

: It can be very good, because it means you have to grow; you can't just stay the same and run away all the time, if you do commit yourself.

S: Sometimes it happens that there are unforeseen circumstances that could not have been foreseen that you are suddenly faced [275] with, and you are then not to blame for those. So, under those circumstances, you are justified, say, in seeking additional help and so on. But if the situation is such that you could, with a little thought, have realized what you were letting yourself in for, then it is definitely your responsibility. And if subsequently it means some trouble and inconvenience and suffering for you, well, you are the one that must take it on, not anybody else.

Ray: I think it's also a thing if one should give responsibility to someone, if you don't feel that they do appreciate that side of it.

S: Well, that's true also. If that is the situation, that you are in the position of giving

responsibility to somebody else - yes, you must certainly be careful that they are in fact in a position to take on that. Even if they want to, that doesn't mean that they really can. Sometimes you upset people in this way, because they say: 'Oh, you think I'm not capable. You think I can't do it.' They can get quite reactive. And actually you can see quite clearly that they are not in a position to take on that responsibility. But you upset them sometimes in telling them that and refusing to give them the responsibility. They think perhaps that they are fully qualified to discharge that responsibility; in fact they may not be.

Alaya: In a more general way, it does take quite a lot of experience and wisdom to see the consequences of that ...

S: That is true, yes.

Alaya: - beforehand. It often takes quite a bit of clarity to see the results afterwards.

S: That's true. But I was thinking more of quite ordinary instances, like that which I cited: just not keeping your appointment, say, at 2 o'clock. This is usually quite an easy thing to do, but people don't realize that they have given their word; they think it doesn't matter. Or they would just rather do something else; something else has turned up in the meantime which they consider more important, and they don't consider your convenience. Sometimes they don't even let you know that they won't be coming.

So responsibility is really a hallmark of the individual which implies seriousness but without any heaviness.

Vajradaka: Moving on from that area, another aspect of seeing the consequences, or the irrevocable nature of the result, is in practical jokes. I haven't seen it very many times, but sometimes I've seen people play practical jokes which really had a very heavy effect on people's lives.

S: Yes. Well, an even more terrible example of that kind of thing is reckless driving. I quite frequently, in the course of my own driving about or being driven about in England, even this [276] last few months, I've seen such terrible examples of reckless overtaking. It's been extraordinary that people could risk their lives and other people's lives in that way, but they do it all the time. So again, they are just acting irresponsibly; they just cannot imagine, apparently, the consequences or, if they can, they just don't care. And apparently, we are told that the majority of accidents are definitely avoidable; they are not, in a sense, accidents. They happen for quite definite reasons which could have been avoided.

Maybe it's a cold, wet day and you're going out for a walk, and you may be feeling a bit chilly, you just can't be bothered to go up and get your sweater. So you go out for a walk as you are; you are acting irresponsibly, you don't really realize what the consequences may be. So, of course, you catch cold. Just simply things like that ...

Vajradaka: Like you can't trust life just to look after you, without you taking some initiative in looking after yourself and others.

S: So the precept says: 'By reflecting upon the irrevocable nature of the results which inevitably arise from actions, mayest thou be incited to avoid impiety and evil.' One can

rephrase it more realistically, less pietistically than that. If you are aware of the irrevocable nature of the results of the actions in which you yourself engage, you can take much more seriously the whole question of your own individual Enlightenment.

John R: One can also sometimes feel an atmosphere beginning to build up, which will encourage recklessness. You can feel it coming on, a high exuberance and a kind of wild ...

S: There was a good example of this on the radio this morning. If you listen to the radio, you get all sorts of moral lessons. It was quite sad, the first item on the news this morning. Apparently a karate team went to Barcelona from Britain, and they were giving demonstrations of their skill at karate. But three of them apparently went to a disco and became very exuberant, and they were throwing bottles around; they were attacking waiters and molesting women. And eventually there was a sort of fight between them and a couple of men that they thought were the bouncers, but they turned out to be plain clothes police. And in the course of the affray, one of the three karate people in that disco was shot dead by one of these plain clothes policemen.
So that's the sort of situation. So you can just imagine it, can't you? It all flashed through my mind: they'd been giving these demonstrations, they'd probably got a bit arrogant as it were, here they are showing their prowess at karate and swaggering around a bit, and they go off to a disco, they get a bit drunk, and then they start acting a bit too big for their boots and throwing bottles around. And then they stir up more trouble than they expected, and one of the people, they found, is not just a bouncer, he is a plain clothes policeman, and he thinks things are getting seriously out of hand, and maybe [277] thinking his own life is in danger; he shoots one of these chaps in the chest and kills him. You see, this seems a quite good illustration, doesn't it?

Uttara: We came back from a karate competition down in London, quite a while ago, and I think we had won, so we were driving up and it was really careless driving. And I saw it coming, and I kept trying to tell them to slow down, but it was just so careless. In the end we did crash...

S: Yes, you can see it coming.

Uttara: Right. We were lucky to get out of it alive.

S: And the chap who was killed was 25 years of age and from the East End of London. Apparently a quite well-known karate ... I think it was one of the teachers ...

John R: It's quite difficult in that situation to put the brake on early, too.

S: Yes, you have to put it on very early.

: Nip it in the bud, as it were. You get accused of being a killjoy... experience, ... a bit.

S: Ah, yes. You see people getting a bit reckless and you see accidents are beginning to be likely to happen.

: I see it as an element of nastiness starts creeping in. That's what I smell. Like the caring goes out of the fun. If ... another day, it would be fine.

S: You get that element of cruelty, perhaps, that comes into the practical joking that Vajradaka was mentioning: the practical joking becomes a bit sadistic, and sometimes people end up getting killed.

Alaya: Then you have got a lifetime of remorse. Or if you've been driving recklessly and you've killed a child, you've many years to regret.

S: Sometimes people are really so, so careless. I remember someone was saying, not so long ago, noticing the way that sometimes mothers drive with their babies in the second seat of the car, next to the driver, and they don't even put the baby safely at the back strapped in somewhere, he is just next to them. And if there was an accident, there's not much chance for the baby. No doubt the mother is attached to the baby and would suffer terribly if anything happened to the baby; at the same time she is so unmindful and realizes possible consequences so little that she can't even take an elementary precaution of that sort. The attachment is really blind. It's not intelligent or rational.

[278]
: Like ... in a sense, isn't it? ... blind. It's self that ...

Alaya: How far can you go to stop that? I remember having a terrible row with my sister doing that, and in the end I took the keys out of the van and hid them, and I had about six people create. I was very unpopular. They wanted a lift somewhere, and in the end I had to back down and say 'Here are the keys'. I was so worried, I felt there was going to be an accident, and I was just sure of it. How far can you go?

S: Exactly. Especially where other people are concerned. Sometimes you just have to let them get on with it because you've got neither legal nor moral control over them.

Adrian: Continuing on with cars and vehicles, you have to acknowledge the responsibility of driving. If anything happens, you accept the responsibility. If you are driving a car, then the possibility is that a small child might dash in front of you and there's no way that you can avoid it, but you are still driving that car.

S: Well, there was a driving instructor I knew who used to say to all his pupils, the very first thing he said, was: 'When you get behind the wheel of a car, remember that you have a lethal instrument in your hands.' It's like having a machine gun or something like that. You've got in your hands an instrument that kills people, is capable of killing people. So you have to handle it extremely carefully, just as you would handle very carefully a loaded machine gun if you were carrying it around.
It's a bit like that.

It's also a question of realizing what you are doing. In this particular case, I am driving a car: what does that mean? What is the meaning of that? It means I am death in action, potentially. I can kill as I go around. I literally do have a lethal weapon in my hands when I've got my hands on the wheel of the car.

Sona: It can be quite difficult to justify driving around at all, because if you do drive you do kill things: quite often you see rats, rabbits and things - you don't notice it in your own car, but you see cars in front of you, they run out and go under the back wheel; there's nothing the

driver could have done to avoid it. But just by driving a car you actually are killing things, and - we have the question, should you be driving a car in the first place? Is it absolutely necessary to be driving a car? Well, when you walk you kill things, but you can't avoid that, you'd have to have something ...

S: It's a question of weighing up pros and cons and trying to strike a reasonable balance. It does seem to me really strange, sometimes - I don't know how many people are killed on the roads of Britain every year; I think it's some thousands, isn't it? And then you read, for instance, that in, say, ancient Mexico, I think it was, the Aztec civilization, they sacrificed so many [279] victims to their gods every year, and we are horrified by this. We think it a sign of a really degenerate, barbaric, primitive, cruel civilization. But our own slaughter of people on the roads every year we accept as a matter of course. It seems so extraordinary that we don't really realize what we are doing.

Sona: Another side of that is that you get the group taking over your responsibility, trying to make everything so safe that it seems to have a detrimental effect on people's psychological health. For instance, especially in Westernized countries, so much money is spent to stop people, say, driving recklessly - laws are passed, new instruments are brought out and certain types of traffic lights and so on. It takes away the responsibility, or most of it, from the individual.

S: Not only that, but it recognizes the fact that some people are irresponsible, and you are trying to protect others from the consequences of their irresponsibility. If the results of their irresponsibility were confined to themselves, you could perhaps leave them to get on with it, but unfortunately the results of their irresponsibility are not confined to themselves; they involve other people, they inflict suffering on other people.

Uttara: I've had the experience in hitching; you get into a car, and you experience that person isn't there... It's driving as if there's nothing really steering the thing, so you ...

S: Driving as though there's no other traffic on the roads.

Sona: I do feel that in society there's a lot of taking away responsibility from the individual. Not so much of hurting other people, but stopping them hurting themselves. For instance, where I work at the University, people aren't allowed to go up on to roofs without a safety harness on. And it's basically because people are not prepared to accept responsibility, and they pass it all down the line, so in the end they pass these silly rules that if you go up on a roof over 6 feet high you have to wear a safety harness, even though it may be perfectly safe to be on a flat roof without a safety harness. But it almost takes away responsibility from a person that's going out on the roof to be careful; as though if he's got a safety harness on he doesn't have to be careful any more. And throughout industry laws are being passed like this to stop people from harming themselves. The same with road laws; for instance, in a lot of European countries you aren't allowed to cross the road at traffic lights unless the little green man shows.

S: That's right. It's really strange in Finland, for instance, because you'd have maybe several dozen people waiting to cross the road, waiting for the little green man, and there's a great broad avenue, a couple of miles in either direction, with not a car in sight; and here they are patiently waiting. And as soon as the little green man appears with a beep-beep-beep-beep,

they all s... like soldiers.

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: I found that in Edinburgh, of all places: exactly the same thing. Nothing like the south at all.

S: It is as though in the south, especially in London, people do accept more responsibility for themselves. They use their intelligence more. Maybe sometimes they are a bit careless, but not on the whole, I think; even if the red light is against the pedestrian on the pedestrian crossing, people just cross, carefully. They don't just allow themselves to be regulated by the lights, which sometimes don't seem very sensible anyway.

Sona: It's almost as though if you start taking away too many of the dangers of life you start removing the need for people to be mindful.

S: Yes, you can go blundering around, and no harm will come to you anyway, because the authorities have all sorts of fences and fenders and things to protect you, just like a baby goes blundering away, it doesn't matter because you've put a fender in front of the fire, and all that sort of thing; all the knives are out of harm's reach. With babies that's all right, but not adults.

Alaya: People need this, and they won't - if you've worked in any company - people won't do the most simple things to make things safe for themselves. They won't put on a safety belt when any rational fool would tell you to, or use the - people are always taking the guards off machines and endangering losing their fingers. And you do seem to need laws, because people aren't responsible to look after their own safety.

Sona: I think ... for them to actually lose their fingers.
Alaya: If you really cared about someone, you wouldn't let them do that, I think.

S: On the other hand, maybe ...

Alaya: You wouldn't let a child crawl over an edge of ...

S: This means you have to treat people as children, and this is one of the greatest sins in what I call the pseudo-liberal dictionary: paternalism, they call it. So if people are children, yes, treat them as children. But should children have the vote? You've got to be consistent. So where are you going to stop? I agree that a lot of people are no better than children, but if you make that point and say that they should be treated as children, you are accused of paternalism. But it's true. They are children. They shouldn't be allowed to get married, they shouldn't be allowed to have children, they shouldn't be allowed to do all sorts of things, because they're not grown-up enough. They certainly shouldn't be allowed to exercise the vote; they hardly know what they are doing. Some of them are allowed to stand for Parliament.

Alaya: Some of them get in! (Laughter)

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S: You see, it's not so easy to say you should treat people as children and act for them, as it were. Maybe up to a point, but beyond that the 'children' themselves would start rebelling and complaining that you were treating them as children.

Alaya: The adults would have to clear up the mess.

Sona: Even with children sometimes you have to let them burn themselves to experience that they need to take a bit more care. Obviously, one won't allow them to fall in the fire or something. If you consistently tell them not to touch a cooker or a saucepan because it's hot, and they just go on ignoring you, sometimes you just have to let them do it to experience it.

S: Just make sure it's not going to do them any real harm, it's just going to give them a short, sharp, painful experience.

: Sort of start getting into ECT.

S: Well, life itself gives you your ECT, if you're not careful. You don't ... if you ...

Adrian: It's almost as if - the older generation's experienced things and expects the younger generation to necessarily know.

S: Yes, to be born with that experience.

Adrian: I was thinking this in terms of that social security system. It's like the social security system grew up, say, in the '30s, when conditions were bad, and people said, 'We don't want that again.' And now it's become a case whereby people must be maintained under any circumstances, almost.

S: Yes.

Ray: Without the original reasons why ...

Adrian: The assumption is that people will be back right down again.

S: But this is quite a question, to what extent you can take responsibility for other people, when it does appear in your eyes that they aren't really able to take responsibility for themselves. This is one of the explicit arguments of some of the let's call them dictatorships: they say that people aren't able to run their own affairs. So to what extent does one accept this?

Viramati: Re-educate people, don't you, really? Try and re-educate them.

S: Who is going to educate the educators? That is the question that Plato raised. And what is the criterion of maturity? Who is to decide?

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: It seems one of those questions that comes back to just basic things like positivity. You can get really caught up with those kind of ideas. Essentially, you just have to be positive, just bear that in mind, otherwise you can get really lost. I found myself getting really lost in these kind of arguments; they seem particularly rife in philosophy courses and things like that, with ridiculous hypothetical situations. There was a really good one about - if you didn't shoot somebody then 12 people got shot, so you had to take responsibility either way. It was such a ridiculous - and you can get really caught up in those kind of ideas.

Alaya: People often ask those things at classes about the Precepts. you know, say you were in this [situation], and this happened, and ...

S: Well, I usually say that there's no cut-and-dried answer that you can give in advance. You imbibe as best you can the principle of metta, of compassionate behaviour, and when you find yourself in a difficult situation like that you act in accordance with that degree of metta and also intelligence that you have been able to imbibe; and that cannot be predicted. There is no sort of definite solution to a definite problem, so it isn't a definite problem, in a way, because you are also involved, and your reaction is unpredictable. But to the extent that you have imbibed, say, metta and karuna and wisdom also, you will act in the best way that you can. And no one can predict how exactly you will act, but you will act in the best way that you can. There is no way in which you ought to act, in a situation like that. Or else, if people ask silly questions like that, you ought to give a silly answer. Say, 'Well, in that case I'd shoot the lot.' Or say, 'I'd shoot the person who put me in that situation.'

: Including those who asked the question.

S: Yes, indeed.

John R: You can send it up, and say you'd kiss the woman instead, or something; make it ridiculous.

S: Well, if the problem can be imposed on you against your will, you can impose the solution on the questioner against his will, as it were. 'If you don't like my solution, fine; I don't like your question.' (Laughter)

Sona: A lovely example of that once when Vajrayogini asked if you were on a desert island with only a rabbit there, would you kill the rabbit and eat it in order to survive? I think you turned round and said: 'Not only would I kill the rabbit but I'd also kill you and eat you.'

S: No, what I said was I considered the rabbit's life more valuable than my life [sic], so yes; though I am a vegetarian in principle I would certainly kill the rabbit and eat it. I said: 'If I was marooned on a desert island with you instead of [283] the rabbit, I would kill you and eat you because my life is more valuable than yours!' She said: 'You would have to catch me first.' I said, 'I think I could do that.' But this conversation took place at mealtime, and there were some people present on that retreat who found this discussion quite horrific. They were really not exactly upset by it, but they found it quite horrific and even more than horrific: macabre. And we quite enjoyed it, but they didn't enjoy it at all. They said afterwards it made them feel quite uncomfortable.

Alaya: They didn't think you were condoning cannibalism?

Vajradaka: There was a punchline to it. And she said: 'Well, I'll learn karate.' And you said: 'Well, I'll be far more optimistic: I'll learn cooking.' (All fall about.)

S: (Drowned out by lots of laughter)... remember that, and I said: 'I'm afraid this might even the best cook ... you'd fall into ... (?) Yes, it's a shame that people started thinking that ... enjoyed it ... what we called the Anglo-Dutch retreat, which was held at Mamaki's house in 1973.

: I thought this took place at Broomhouse Farm.

S: No, no, no. So I was quite clear in my own mind that I certainly considered my own life more valuable than that of a rabbit, so I would take responsibility for that action - yes, to the extent that killing even a rabbit is an unskilful action; yes, that would have been unskilful, but it would have been still more unskilful to allow my valuable life to be lost.

(End of Side)

Tape 13, Side 1

Probably, if it came to a question of killing Vajrayogini, I probably would. In fact, if I were quite sure that that was the only way in which I could survive, and if I could be quite sure that she wasn't too tough - ! So it means one just has to be prepared to accept responsibility. Otherwise, if you don't accept responsibility and you just go dithering along, you both die.

Ray: I think people are surprised, though, when you say that sort of thing, because they are perhaps confused by stories of the Buddha in his previous lives giving his life to animals.

S: Yes, right.

Ray: Those stories do give the impression that it's more selfless to give your life to anything rather than actually ...

S: Yes, but that is within a context of, say, knowing that you are a Bodhisattva and that you are practising dana paramita, and you've definitely got another life and another life and another life, and by virtue of your giving yourself in that way you are [284] progressing towards that particular goal. But if you don't know that for sure, what are you to do? Or if you are concerned that the context of the present life is very, very important, and it's more important that you should be alive and around in this life than in some future life, then you might take action not to give yourself to the tiger but to persuade the tiger to give himself to you.

Alaya: There are some horrible books that give that hypothetical thing... I was reading a magazine where he has to shoot some prisoners or else lose his own life... horrible ...

S: Well, sometimes those life situations do arise.

: Ghastly.

Uttara: It's to do with freedom, knowing you have the choice of - just for freedom, people with ...

S: One of the most excruciating situations is the situation in which you are forced to choose between two alternatives, each of which is really undesirable. So one thing you have to do is to be quite careful that you aren't put into a situation of that sort; and sometimes it is the result of your own actions. I won't say that it always is, but sometimes it is the result of your own actions that you are confronted by a situation of this sort, where the only choice that you have left yourself is a choice between two evils, and then it might even be difficult to see which is

the lesser. If you could see which is the lesser, well, of course you should choose that. But sometimes it is even difficult to see that. So you should never allow things to deteriorate to such an extent that you are left only with a choice between evils, and all that you can do is to try to decide which is the lesser of the two.

Sona: There's a little Zen story ... about a man hanging over a cliff. If you were a man hanging over a cliff and there was a tiger at the top of the cliff and a tiger at the bottom, what would you do? The answer apparently is that the Master says: 'I've never got myself into such a ridiculous situation.'

S: You'd have to be quite clever to get yourself into that sort of ...

Ray: There's another one as well, where a man is chased by a tiger over a cliff, and he's holding on to a grape vine or something; the tiger's up above him, and two mice come along and start biting the grape vine, and he can see that he's going to fall; and he can see a strawberry. So he plucks the strawberry and eats it, and says 'How delicious this strawberry is!'

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S: What irresponsibility.

Anyway, we are dealing with responsibility. If we are more responsible, in the sense of seeing more clearly that our own actions have consequences, there's a greater likelihood that those actions will be more skilful, so far as we ourselves are concerned and so far as others are concerned. And to that extent a sense of responsibility is a necessary quality for the individual.

We've practically used the time up, so perhaps we had better stay with the topic of responsibility. It is a quite important one, anyway.

Vajradaka: Something I used to say when I was in Glasgow was [that] if you have taken responsibility to do something, but for some reason you are not going to continue it, then at least let me know; rather than just slope off with the accounts or whatever for two months, or not doing anything, and people just think that it is being done.

S: Yes, right, yes.

Sona: You get this a lot with people who say they'd [like] to come to a study group or a class and they just don't turn up, you don't know where they are. It wouldn't be quite so bad, it would be ... to you, if they told you that they weren't coming. You don't know whether to start ...

S: It's terrible, sometimes, if you've been thinking that someone has been doing a particular job, say, month after month, because he hasn't said that he's not doing it and he has taken responsibility, and then you discover he hasn't been doing it and you have to find somebody else to do it, which involves making up all that backlog; or do it yourself.

Sometimes I think people don't realize that their actions have consequences because they don't really feel or experience themselves doing the action.

Alaya: The same when someone gets drunk and does something very unskilful: they say, 'Well, I was drunk', as if to say it's not their action that they actually were drunk, it's something that happened to them unfortunately.

S: Well, perhaps someone isn't responsible for what he does when he's drunk, but he is responsible for allowing himself to become drunk.

Vajradaka: I think one of the most spine-chilling examples of this that I came across was, I visited a Divine Light community, and they were all sitting around talking about how the guru was the pilot of "Spaceship Earth", and they could do anything, basically, because they had given themselves to him, and that he was in charge of their destinies. And the things that they were [286] doing were absolutely hideous. They had no morality at all, there was no personal responsibility for what they were doing, no sense of causality.

S: This is why the Buddha says, in the Pali texts, that if there is this belief that everything is the work of God, that God does everything, then there is no moral life and no moral responsibility and no spiritual life; and you find it in this particular form.

: Hence hypocrisy.

S: Well, it isn't hypocrisy; you can't even call it that. It's worse than that. It's worse, it's more serious, it's more deep rooted than hypocrisy.

: You often hear Christians talking about it being God's will: That becomes just like a joke, really, because they end up saying, 'If I do do something it's God's will, and if I don't do something it's God's will.' It ends up with ...

S: They end up just doing what they like, they end up doing what they please.

: Yes. And also, not only that, but they don't do things, or they don't get on with something, or they don't create things or make things happen, because it was God's will that he didn't want it done anyway.

S: Yes. Well, you find a lot of this, I'm afraid, in India amongst Hindus. They say, 'It's God's will, God is doing it all, God's looking after it, and why should we bother?' sort of thing. For instance, they may be seeing someone dying of starvation; well, it's God's will, we shouldn't interfere, it is his karma. They say that sort of thing. So in this way the belief that things happen because of the will of God, as the Buddha says quite clearly, stifles all initiative and therefore all moral life and all individual development.

If you take it seriously, you end up immobilising yourself. If you don't take it seriously, you just end up a hypocrite. You say that everything happens as a result of the will of God, but you make a hard enough effort to get the things that you want.

: Blake seemed the only person to be able to deal with the situation with any sort of reality at all, in the sense that he was integrating God - or Jesus.

S: Well, he certainly didn't integrate God in the ordinary Christian sense of the term, except to integrate him into his fourfold scheme as something quite unpleasant.

Sona: One of the few quotes I ever liked from the Bible when I first heard it was 'God help those who help themselves' [sic]. It didn't seem to matter what God did ...

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S: It's also interesting, perhaps, to consider the literal meaning of the word responsibility. Responsibility means, presumably (I haven't checked it up), the ability to respond: the ability to respond to a situation in a way that the situation actually requires.

Vajradaka: I think someone did look it up once, and said it was a dubious etymology, but it sounds good.

S: It's a good meaning.

: ... you find out what the situation requires as a result of taking up that responsibility and proceeding from this as you feel (?).

S: There's a line of Yeats comes into my mind in this connection: we might close with just a few reflections on this. Yeats says: 'In dreams begins responsibility.' Now what did he mean by that? - 'In dreams begins responsibility.'

: Was he referring by dreams in terms of vision?

S: I think he must have meant something like vision or inspiration.

: So obviously it's a kind of response to a vision, a way.

S: Yes. The dream or the vision represents the seeing of the situation clearly. That imposes as it were a certain line of action on you, a certain course of action which you are obliged to take, and that is the responsibility.

: What was the quote again?

S: 'In dreams begins responsibility.' It's from one of his poems, I don't remember which one, but it's a line just came into my mind.

Adrian: It does sound far more creative than the previous definition. The previous one sounded very reactive: there was a situation, and you react to it. Whereas this sounds as if you are creating something, you are taking something on.

S: But that isn't always the case, because sometimes you do need to see an actual situation. You can't help the fact that you are confronted by that, you don't choose to be, but that is the situation and your own sense of responsibility will dictate that you act in a particular way. Supposing, for instance, you happen to be out for a nice quiet walk and you see a child about to, say, walk into a car; you just intervene to stop the child doing that. You didn't ask to be confronted by that situation, and you don't particularly want to interrupt your walk, but on the other hand you just see the situation, the objective situation, and you act accordingly because of your sense of responsibility - that is, say, the responsibility of an adult to a child. So [288] sometimes, yes, there is that sort of responsibility, which is your response - I say response rather reaction - to a given situation. But, yes, there is again, one might say, even a higher

responsibility which is your responsibility to and for your own vision, that is as it were an obligation to you to put into operation what is the content of your own best and clearest vision. That is a higher responsibility still. That is a more creative responsibility. You also have the responsibility to see; because at least you have the responsibility to dream, the responsibility to see visions, because you are a human being, and as such you have a responsibility to be more than a human being.

Vajradaka: One of the nice meanings of taking responsibility in that way is the ability to respond... It isn't externally authoritarian, it's a potential that you can develop. It's a psychological kind of morality.

S: I think also - this is going slightly on a different tack, but I think it's relevant - it's one of the signs of maturity that you can take responsibility not only for yourself but for others. I think this is a quite important step in someone's development. Within the context of ordinary human life, this comes when you have children, because then you've got to take responsibility for other people as well as for yourself, namely your children. If you haven't got children, you develop this aspect of yourself, this form of responsibility, in other ways, by taking responsibility for those less experienced than oneself... But I think it is quite an important stage in one's development as an individual. It marks a certain definite level of maturity that you can actually take responsibility for others. Of course, you always take it provisionally, because your hope is that eventually, with your help, the other persons, whether children or not, will eventually be able to take responsibility for themselves, and that is your ultimate aim and object, to help them to do just that; not to keep them in that position of being dependent upon you.

So if it does happen that, say, you aren't married and you don't have children, you should maybe ask yourselves, after you've reached a certain level, 'Who am I responsible for?' It's as though you need to be responsible for others in order to develop, in order to grow yourself. In a small way, you can be responsible for others, or responsible for others to some extent, say, when you take a class; because they trust you. In a way, they don't know what it's all about; you do, to some extent. So you are responsible for them, you are responsible for their progress, in a way. You are responsible for them understanding, to practise properly. So when you lead a retreat, you take responsibility for other people, at least provisionally and to some extent.

Uttara: Yes, it comes to mind something along the lines of something that Subhuti said - remember that when you are taking responsibility for people something like we're not leading them over a cliff. We have to make sure that we see what's going on.

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S: If you agree to be somebody's kalyana mitra, you take a degree of responsibility for them, because you are in a position to influence their actions, and therefore the results of those actions. You are responsible for the results of those actions to some extent, because it was due to your influence, perhaps, that that particular person did those things, or acted in that particular way.

Sona: I think it's got something that, especially with the use of words, people overlook, as though they advise someone to do something without really carefully considering what they are saying. Because if that person follows their advice and it's not the right advice, they can be

into all sorts of problems.

S: Yes, you shouldn't give advice lightly. This is very irresponsible, very frivolous.

Sona: One can perhaps turn it - 'If I were you, this is what I would do'. That in a sense leaves the responsibilities to the other person. But to tell someone 'This is what you should do'...

S: Especially if they're the sort of person who accepts that very easily and readily, or even asks for it.

Vajradaka: I think it's OK not to accept the responsibility that people put on you, sometimes.

S: Oh yes, indeed.

Vajradaka: They might say, 'Give me some advice about this really important question. Should I have an abortion or not have an abortion?' and you might not have really thought it out or had very much experience. So perhaps it's much safer to say, 'Well, I'm not prepared to say anything.'

S: You can say, 'I'm quite happy to help you clarify the situation by talking it over with you, but the decision and the responsibility for the decision must remain with you.' Because sometimes, when people aren't in a position to take responsibility for themselves, by all means take it for them, but if they really can take the responsibility themselves you certainly shouldn't allow them to foist it on to you; just hand it straight back to them and point out that it is their responsibility and they are quite capable of bearing it.

: I've found that the people who are most keen to give you advice are often those who are least likely - well, they won't take responsibility. They are afraid of responsibility, but they are all too keen to give you advice.

Ross: It seems quite an easy distinction to make also from the other point of view, in other words if you feel that somebody is helping you, or taking to some extent some responsibility for you, for reasons such as they demand some kind of dependence from [290] you, that's really quite apparent. It's really quite obvious, and they're someone who's trying to put you on your own two feet, sort of thing. They really seem to succeed in doing that.

S: Well, sometimes people like to feel that others are dependent on them and they are responsible for others in a quite unhealthy way. Some people as it were like having responsibilities. Sometimes being responsible for others is an escape from being responsible for yourself, and you can't really be responsible for others unless you have succeeded in being responsible for yourself, so that must come first. Take responsibility for yourself, and then when you have become accustomed to that and are really able to do that, consider taking responsibility for other people, in the case of those other people who need that sort of help, and who will quite quickly, with your help, be able to dispense with it. Often, you see, you get people who want a voice, say, in what is being done, a voice in affairs, and expect to be listened to, but are not willing to take any responsibility; so you can't really expect to wield influence unless you are also prepared to take responsibility.

Asvajit: Taking responsibility may mean quite a lot of work, not just making a decision but

involving oneself.

S: Yes, indeed. So you shouldn't have one set of people taking all the decisions and another set of people doing all the work. That's not very healthy at all. And that's the essence, in a way, of the co-op situation: that you all take the decisions and you all do the work together. Anyway, that brings us back to what we were talking about, I think, on the first day. A sense of responsibility is absolutely necessary in a spiritual community, which includes, of course, co-ops.

Ray: Also sometimes people come to you for advice, wanting your rubber stamp as it were, but they already know what the ...

S: Yes, indeed, they just want approval and agreement. So they say, 'Oh, I'll ask So-and-so.' It's like the civil servants I spoke about yesterday, putting up their umbrella. They put up a private umbrella so they can always refer to you in case of criticism: if things go wrong, they can blame you. After all, they are only following your advice. One often feels this - that people are not really asking you what they should do. They know what they are going to do, they know what they want to do. But they just want to go ahead being able to say that that is what you advised them to do; so they are exculpated from any responsibility, especially if they feel it's something they maybe ought not to be doing; so they want your approval all the more.

: 'Bhante said.'

S: Well, anybody said; somebody said.

Viramati: I was just thinking, it seems like the whole thing of responsibility is quite important just at the sort of group level. I was thinking in terms of we talk about institutions; [291] it's positive institutions we could set up, and maybe responsibility [is] an open-ended situation by people. In a way responsibility is taken for them while they are in that situation, but it's open too for them to take responsibility if they want to.

S: Well, not only open to them: they'd be encouraged to take responsibility or to be able to take responsibility. One doesn't want people being indefinitely on one's hands, as it were.

Anyway, perhaps we'd better end on that note.

Day 7

Tape 13, Side 1 (continued)

(4) By reflecting upon the evils of life in the round of successive existences, mayest thou be incited to seek Emancipation.

S: Well, 'life in the round of successive existences' presumably implies life in all of the six realms of existence. What sort of emphasis does one see here?

Asvajit: The value of specifically human life.

S: No, I wasn't thinking of that. It's 'By reflecting upon the evils of life in the round of successive existences.'

: Cyclical.

S: ' - mayest thou be incited to seek Emancipation.'

: How painful.

S: In a general way the emphasis seems to be quite different from the sort of emphasis that we usually give.

: It's more on the negative.

S: It is more on the negative. So do you think that reflection does act as an incitement to people - I won't say people narrowly, but to oneself and to the sort of people one is likely to meet?

Asvajit: I don't think so very much myself, because people's weakness actually is in the emotional, not in the rational side, usually.

S: So what sort of emphasis is usually needed?

Asvajit: Aspiration.

S: Aspiration, growth, development. I think overmuch reflection on the evils of life would tend to make people a bit cynical. I think one must bear in mind that these precepts are delivered [292] against a strong background of traditional religious culture, one might say, in which spiritual values were taken for granted, even if people didn't actually follow them, or never actually questioned them. But that isn't the case nowadays, certainly.
Also, perhaps, in some respects, we have been rather cushioned against the evils of life - certainly in this realm of existence. We don't really come up against many of them: only, perhaps, in some cases, when it's too late. We might fall under the proverbial bus, but what can we do about it then? That is an evil of life, but it's overtaking you too late for you to do anything about it. So most people, if they reflected, either would not think that there were many evils in life, or they would - if they were very sensitive and looked at all the misery and suffering in the world - they would be rather overwhelmed by that, and perhaps would not be incited to seek something like spiritual emancipation.

So it does seem better as a procedure, as a method, to think and to speak of the spiritual life not in terms so much of emancipation from the evils of life so much as in terms of individual growth and development. That emphasis is there also, for instance, in the Pali texts, but it did subsequently become rather overlaid by the more negative emphasis.

John R: I got a peculiar letter once from a very good friend of mine, who once he found out that I was getting into Buddhism wrote me a letter stating that he too was interested in it once until he went to Ceylon and saw the suffering and starvation; and then decided that Buddhism was not a good religion. I didn't quite follow the logic of that, and still don't. It seems to be tied up with this one...

S: Perhaps he was thinking that, if they had been real Buddhists, they would have done a bit more to relieve the suffering around them. But then again, that is based perhaps on the rather naive expectation that when you have a whole people, a whole nation, describing themselves as Buddhists, in fact they would be real Buddhists. It's rather like expecting the population of Great Britain to strictly adhere to the Sermon on the Mount, because they all profess to be Christians. Well, it doesn't really work out like that, does it? But certainly if there were - there have been large numbers of genuine Buddhists in Ceylon, one would have expected that more would have been done to relieve the human suffering there. From that one concludes that the number of real Buddhists in Sri Lanka, in Ceylon, is quite limited and not sufficiently large for them to really make very much difference to life in Ceylon in this way. So the only reflection that one can draw from an experience like this is that the genuine followers of the Dharma are comparatively few; that those who really devote themselves to their own individual development, which includes concern for other people, are relatively few. One can't draw any conclusion about Buddhism. [293] If people don't practise Buddhism, of course Buddhism doesn't work. It only works when people practise it. It would be very naive to think otherwise. It's not like a sort of magic wand that is waved and everything becomes all right.

What your friend wrote, presumably, was understandable as a criticism of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, or as a criticism of those people in Sri Lanka who called themselves Buddhists; but it doesn't really tell us anything about Buddhism, except that fewer people were practising it, perhaps, than one had supposed.

But do you think anybody nowadays is incited to seek emancipation by reflecting upon the evils of life? Doesn't this happen perhaps to some extent?

Voices: Mm.

S: Doesn't it give us some incitement, when we reflect on the evils of life? What would you say these evils of life were?

Asvajit: To me the worst evil of life was the meaninglessness of it and the purposelessness of it.

S: Traditionally, by the evils of life one means birth, disease, old age and death. But do people usually reflect in this way - that, first of all, one has the suffering of being born, and then one has the suffering of becoming sick from time to time; then there's the suffering of old age, and finally the suffering of death? So the only way out of this perpetual round, the only way of preventing the whole thing from repeating itself, is just to seek emancipation? Do people actually think and feel, do they reflect upon this?

: I think it's rare.

: I think one of the biggest evils that I'm aware of is just dishonesty, lack of integrity. That's really quite inspiring, in a way ... gossip (?).

Sona: I get the impression that people go through a stage, maybe in their middle teens, when they reflect upon these things, and they do see a sort of purposelessness of life, but there's no alternative to just carrying on as their forefathers; so they sort of give up and almost have to

smother those thoughts as just indulgences, escapism.

S: It's not really just a question of an emancipation from evils, but rather of doing something positive, with a positive meaning: a reason for existence, a reason for living, which in the long run can only be to grow, to develop.

Sona: But most people don't actually experience evil, they have quite a nice comfortable life. Maybe a bit dull...

S: Mm, or the evils are more of a subtle nature. You begin to feel that the whole of society, the whole of one's life is just [294] a sort of web of hypocrisy and deceit. It's very difficult to speak the truth, for instance. For instance I was made to realize this in one particular way: those of you who have seen the new Newsletter will notice there's some account by Nagabodhi in an article about a book called Buddhism in Britain; so there was some account under, I think, the heading of Theravada Buddhism about the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. Now I know from my personal experience, and what I heard at the time about what was happening on that front in India, that that account has been completely falsified: I think not due to any fault of the author, who is quite a naive sort of person and was simply gathering information, but he was not given the correct information. For instance, the fact that I was myself in charge of the Hampstead Vihara for two years is completely omitted. And then, before me, another person was in charge, called Anandabodhi, also I think for more than two years: that is completely omitted. So four years of the history of the Vihara are passed over in complete silence. And certain things that happened before, and certain things that happened after, that four-year period, are completely distorted: distorted to the extent of, one might say, deliberate falsification - again, not on the part of the author but on the part of the people who supplied him with information.

And then, again, in case of the history of the Buddhist Society, which is taken from their published accounts, there are many things which are just falsified. So here we are, we are so near these events, they are so recent, they are really in the Buddhist movement, but to my certain knowledge this is not a faithful, fair or even truthful account. And one sees this sort of thing happening all the time. And whenever one is in a position to check up, only too often one finds falsification, even deliberate untruthfulness. And therefore one suspects other things where one is not perhaps in a position to check up in that way.

For instance, an obituary appeared in the pages of The Middle Way a couple of years ago of someone whom I had known in India quite well. It was almost completely false. There even quite definite factual misstatements, amounting to untruths that no one in this country, apparently, was in a position to check up or correct. But I knew what the facts were because I had been - certain things had happened under my nose, so to speak. So this is what one comes upon. I think it's this sort of thing which disillusions one and which one can account as a sort of evil, and one would like to get away from that, and would like to have nothing to do with that.

Sona: Unfortunately, it really leads to a feeling of indifference, doesn't it?

S: It doesn't make me feel indifferent, but it makes me make a mental note that at some time or other I will see to it that the real story is told.

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Sona: I was thinking when the whole of life is swamped with that, that just the thought of correcting one thing leads to - you don't know where to stop...

S: Also it means that one would like, in the interests of truth, to correct statements like that, but then again one has to spend one's own time - which could have been spent positively and constructively and creatively - in just putting the record straight in that way.

These are more evils of social life, so to speak, whereas traditional Buddhism reflects more upon more basic things that we perhaps don't have cause to reflect upon in quite the same way. And in any case we don't think so much in terms of 'emancipation from'. 'Emancipation from' doesn't seem much of a spiritual ideal to us. What seems more like a spiritual ideal is growth and development into.

There is a negative side to that: of course we have to shed all sorts of negative things on the way, all sorts of conditions, but that in itself does not seem to constitute a sufficient ideal for us. No doubt for the ancient Indian, the ancient Indian Buddhist, the positive side was implied, and implied so strongly, it didn't perhaps have to be explicitly mentioned; but we need it to be explicitly mentioned, and really brought out in all its fullness and richness, one may say.

John R: I find myself reacting against this kind of Christian thing, about the fall of man and the wretched human beings, and that kind of feeling. One word is emancipation rather than salvation. That gives something positive to work on. But it does reek of Christianity a bit, I must say. I feel my toes curling up.

S: You mean the 'vale of tears' thing?

Vajradaka: It's almost as if the evil here is synonymous with sin, in some...

S: I think 'evils' here is used in the sense of the sufferings of ... we experience suffering as evil, because we don't want to suffer.

We'll go on to precept 5.

(End of Side) 296]

Tape 13, Side 2

(5) By reflecting upon the miseries which all sentient beings suffer, mayest thou be incited to attain deliverance therefrom by enlightenment of mind.

S: What do you think is the difference between this precept and the one immediately preceding it?

Asvajit: The first one seems to be more subjective, as it were; the second more objective. You are reflecting about the miseries of others.

S: But even more than that?

Asvajit: Well, in the second it does have the supremely positive thing of Enlightenment of mind, doesn't it? That's a very large carrot. It is the ideal which seems(?) very attractive.

Uttara: It's more like the incentive of inspiration.

S: No, the real difference, surely, is that in precept 4 you are thinking about your own emancipation, which is the Hinayana argument, I feel, and in precept 5 one is thinking of the sufferings of others and the attainment of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, which is the Mahayana ideal, is the Bodhisattva ideal. 'Enlightenment of mind' here, presumably, is the Bodhicitta. These are the two aspects, as it were: the self-regarding and the other-regarding.

Asvajit: I don't quite see it that way. The second one still suggests to me something of the Hinayana, that the person attaining Enlightenment is as it were going to separate himself from all sentient beings; because it's still 'deliverance therefrom'. The sentient beings are out there, and here is oneself here, Enlightened.

S: Well, yes, one cannot but help expressing it in that way. But I also notice - if you look at precept 3 you will find: 'reflecting upon the irrevocable nature of the results which inevitably arise from actions, mayest thou be incited to avoid impiety and evil': well, here it's as though the path suggested is simply the path of a happy heavenly rebirth, or at least a happy rebirth ... In precept 4, the somewhat higher ideal of individual emancipation from suffering in Nirvana, and in precept 5 the still higher ideal of the Bodhisattva and salvation for all. But still there is not that positive emphasis on growth and development.

Go on to 6. [297]

(6) By reflecting upon the perversity and illusory nature of the mind of all sentient beings, mayest thou be incited to listen to and meditate upon the Doctrine.

S: So what is the significance of that, do you think?

: It seems to suggest to me the whole idea of there being no natural religion, so to speak: the normal round of existence isn't really worth very much.

Alaya: This is almost a paradox of a Bodhisattva: to save all sentient beings, at the same time realizing that there are no sentient beings to be saved.

Sona: A sort of much higher teaching, really.

S: Yes, it does seem to be a much higher teaching; yes.

Sona: If in sort of naivety you thought about 4 at the same time, you'd say there isn't really any evils of life, it's all an illusion.

S: So 'the perversity and illusory nature of the mind of all sentient beings': is this to be taken very literally? What is this 'mind of all sentient beings'?

: The reactive mind.

S: It's the reactive mind. It's perverse because the reactive mind, or the person exercising the reactive mind, is going against his own best interests. And also it's illusory, because it's so to speak ego-based. This reflects a sort of dissatisfaction with in a sense people as they are: just reactive, not real individuals, and not really developing.

John R: In that sense it's an invitation perhaps to go against the pull of the group.

S: Yes, one could look at it like that. 'Perversity' and 'illusory': these are rather strong words, aren't they? 'Perversity' one can understand, because people's minds certainly often do seem very perverse indeed; but 'illusory'? Illusory is surely rather strong.

Asvajit: It seems to be quite factual, actually. If you go into it and you do get into conversation with people, you do find that their ideas are completely erroneous; they have no basis.

S: Though of course, it goes further than that. He says not that their ideas are illusory but that their mind itself is illusory. So perhaps one could say that. Their mind is made up of all these illusory attitudes, all these illusory ideas, illusory ideals. So, 'reflecting upon the perversity and illusory nature of the mind of all sentient beings, mayest thou be incited to listen to and meditate upon the Doctrine', because it is only there that anything real, as it were, can be found. [298] You don't find anything real in people's ideas and their ideals or pseudo-ideals or their attitudes, or even in people themselves: those people who aren't making any effort to grow, aren't making any effort to develop. All that you can do then is to fall back upon the Dharma, and listen to it, meditate upon it, and try to grow, try to develop yourself. This presumably refers to a state of affairs in which there is no spiritual community. But I don't suppose really that anybody in fact is in this sort of position in the very present ... (?). But think what it would be like if one didn't have any contact with spiritual friends, if there was no spiritual community in any sense, but one had as it were one's present sensitivity and awareness: what would one do? Well, one could only fall back upon the Dharma if one had some access to that, even just in the form of a book, and study that and reflect upon that, meditate upon that.

As one has contact with people, one can really see not only how perverse their attitudes are and how illusory their ideas and ideals, but also how they suffer on that account, how they create suffering for themselves. And this can be an incitement to listen to and meditate upon the Doctrine: one does just not want to get embroiled and entangled in that way, due to those unreal and illusory ideas and attitudes and minds.

Viramati: It seems to also be pushing a point that most people aren't even aware that they are suffering, other people.

S: Yes. They might be under the impression that they were leading quite happy lives, but you can see their miserable basis. But do you think even this sort of reflection actually incites many people? Do you think it incites a few more people, maybe, than the last two do?

Ray: Yes, I feel it does... perhaps it is egotistically based, ... when I see people in the street I feel that they are wandering about quite aimlessly.

Sona: Seems to appeal more to your intellect, this precept, to get a certain amount of mental

activity, which gives you energy, and you get a certain amount of emotional involvement. The other ones seemed to be aimed at your emotions much more.

Vajradaka: Yes, in a way here there's much more to get hotted up about ... create quite a lot of creative energy, seeing and pointing out the perversity. But I think that people I've met who've got into the view that life was illusory haven't on the whole come to a very happy end, in fact they've come to a rather sticky end.

: They don't really believe it.

Vajradaka: I think they do, people who I've met do. But it's like a dead end. They don't see any other possibilities, any positive alternatives. [299]

S: Yes, all that you can do is just to make it as bearable as possible by having a good time.

Uttara: Would we be better talking in terms of disillusions rather than illusions?

S: Even disillusion isn't really very positive. Maybe it's best just to speak in terms of inspiration. Is it really a strong incitement to reflect that the minds of the people that you are in contact with actually are illusory? It does leave you rather on your own - well, of course, you may be on your own and it may be better that you realize this fact. But you certainly wouldn't feel like that, I think, if you were in genuine contact, genuine communication, with others who have similar aspirations to yourself, if there was in fact a spiritual community. It's as though this sort of reflection can occur only to somebody who is outside the spiritual community and outside almost the possibility of contact with the spiritual community. Because, if you take it in too extreme a way - that the minds of all those you come into contact with are illusory, even those who are members of the spiritual community, that your own mind is illusory - well, this may be a very profound reflection at an advanced stage of spiritual development, but if one reflects in this way in a purely intellectual manner too early on in one's spiritual career, so to speak, it may not act as an incitement - certainly not as an incitement to listening to and meditating on the Doctrine at all. It may have just a disillusioning effect in a quite negative sort of sense, ...how everything is rather unreal in just a purely psychological way.

So probably one should reflect in this way only when one is quite spiritually developed: it's only then that it can be a meaningful reflection, incite one to go further, when one has already reached quite a high level of development; when you can begin to see the whole of existence, the whole of conditioned existence, as a sort of magical display, as being not absolutely real, not real in the way that it is usually taken to be real, but at the same time not completely unreal in the sense of totally non-existent either.

John R: Like the elephant.

S: Yes, right. But until one can reflect in that way on that sort of level, probably this reflection, just as it were these words, so to speak, wouldn't be able to act as much of an incitement.

All right, go on to 7, then.

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(7) By reflecting upon the difficulty of eradicating erroneous concepts, mayest thou be incited to constant meditation (which overcometh them).

S: Erroneous concepts - what do you think is meant by that?

Voices: Micchaditthis.

S: Yes, micchaditthis as more formal statements of erroneous concepts, one might say.

: 'Erroneous concepts' just seems detached from spiritual experience; that's virtually what it seems to mean, in a sense. If there's any kind of spiritual experience, to the extent that exists there aren't any erroneous concepts.

S: So how do erroneous concepts arise? Why do people have erroneous concepts? What's the source of all these micchaditthis that one finds around in the world today - even creeping into the FWBO sometimes, spreading their slimy tentacles?

: Lack of Insight.

S: Lack of Insight, yes. I suppose it's inevitable where there is that lack of Insight.

Viramati: I think people need them to bolster them up, don't they? Bolster themselves up with their ideas - security.

S: Yes. It has seemed to me more and more that much of our thinking, certainly the current pseudo-liberal philosophy, is just a sort of web, a tissue, of micchaditthis.

: What sort of things are you thinking about?

S: The sort of things that we have been talking about from time to time, like for instance egalitarianism - that everybody is equal; things like that. We went into this rather thoroughly on the previous seminar. But there are lots of others. Can you think of any others?

Asvajit: That everybody should have a vote. The same sort of thing, really.

S: I wouldn't say that that was exactly a micchaditthi. It could be, but not necessarily.

Dipankara: ... at any one time there's just three or four micchaditthis that prevail, and a lot of wrong views are just variations on that.

S: I think that if you made a careful study, if you made a survey of all the micchaditthis current in our society, you could probably boil them all down to just two or three or four basic ones, from which all the others ...

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Alaya; What would they be?

S: I'm not sure. I haven't really made a systematic study of this yet, I deal with them as they

crop up. Micchaditthis are like hydra-headed monsters: you cut off one head and immediately another one sprouts forth.

Viramati: 'But it's all one.'

S: Well, yes, these are micchaditthis arising within the specifically Buddhist field. I wouldn't even say that 'all is one' is a micchaditthi, because there is a sense in which this ... can be true: because, in Buddhism itself, in the Mahayana, there is the samata jnana, the wisdom of the awareness of sameness or oneness. But that is just one aspect of the total realization or total spiritual experience which has other aspects too. So 'all is one' becomes a micchaditthi only when it is taken as the last word on the subject, and as expressing all aspects, all facets of the truth.

: The group is a micchaditthi, isn't it, really, in a sense? Your relationship to the group, in the neurotic sense, anyway.

S: Yes, that you essentially belong to the group and ought to belong to the group, and that the group has an absolute right over you: this is a micchaditthi. For instance, if you want to go forth and, say, leave your family, people say, 'How can you possibly leave your family?' or they may not even be as direct as that. They, for instance, say: 'If you take Buddhism seriously it would mean leaving your family.' So it's assumed that this is an irrefutable argument against Buddhism, because how could anybody in their right sense even think of leaving their family? It is taken that that is unquestionable, that is an absolute value, as it were: the family. So anything that in any way threatens that is automatically out.

A current quite popular micchaditthi is that men and women must do everything together. Or, in some quarters, that men must not be permitted to do things without women, though women are free to do things without men if they want to.

Sona: Another one comes in with socialism: that socialists believe they are fighting for the rights of individuals, though in actual fact they are fighting for the rights of society.

S: The corporate state.

: Completely dense(?).

Asvajit: On a slightly different tack, that the more technologically developed, say, a society is the more advanced it is.

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S: Yes! That's the micchaditthi of progress. Well, there is such a thing as progress, but progress does not necessarily reflect any growth in truly human values.

So this precept emphasizes the difficulty of eradicating erroneous concepts: the difficulty of eradicating micchaditthis. It is very difficult indeed not only to eradicate from other people's minds but from one's own mind, because one's whole thinking is based upon them; and what will you fall back upon when you're not able to fall back upon these micchaditthis?

Asvajit: A clear vision, a clear understanding. An understanding that isn't conditioned by

temporal concepts.

S: This is emphasized by the precept, which says: 'Mayest thou be incited to constant meditation', which really means a complete change of attitude, a complete change of mind. Not in the sense of just change of opinion, but a change in the quality of the mind, the level of mental functioning, and the attainment of a much higher degree of clarity. This is absolutely necessary. But even then you haven't solved the problem because you've got to create a new language, a new philosophy almost, a new system, to give expression to that more clear thinking. Do you see what I mean? Otherwise, if you're not careful, even though your thinking is clear, when you want to express yourself, when you want to express your clearer vision, you will just have to fall back upon the old terminology - with all the possibilities of misunderstanding that that entails.

Ray: Is the term 'meditation' here more in the sense of reflection?

S: I would say that 'meditation' here didn't mean simply the practice of meditation, but the actual development of a quite different sort of mind: not just a different mental attitude but a different mode, a higher mode, of consciousness and being, a higher level of awareness, which remains constant, which is able to see through all the micchaditthis, which is not affected by them, which could express itself in non-micchaditthi terms, let us say.

Ray: I was thinking, for most people, it wouldn't be possible for them to see all the micchaditthis without, say, coming into contact with something like the Friends.

S: Oh, I'm sure it wouldn't be. Even when you come into contact with something like the Friends it's very difficult. There have been micchaditthis within the Friends. I believe we've even had special micchaditthis of our own. Because these micchaditthis are expressions of just wrong thinking: wrong thinking persists, wrong mental attitudes, conditionings, persist, even after you've sort of so to speak joined the Friends.

Ray: This gives you an opportunity to come into -

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S: It does give you an opportunity to come into contact with the means whereby you will develop yourself, your mind will develop; hopefully your mind will become more clear and you will be able to see through these micchaditthis. But I think it is only in the course of the last couple of years that people within the Friends have become aware of the number of micchaditthis that there are around, including in their own minds. It was quite difficult for them to see this before. I'm not talking about common or garden micchaditthis like 'there is a God who has created everything' - these are quite obvious ones and people have rejected those. But I mean more subtle ones, usually or very often derived from what I call pseudo-liberal thinking. That seems to be the source of most of them at the moment.

John R: [It would be] quite good to read some nice healthy right-wing papers, ...

S: ... when you read those sort of things, the wrong, as it very often is, appears quite obvious. You are not taken in. But when you read the more left-wing literature, you can be more easily taken in. This means that the language, the terminology that is used, is more likely to be appealing. There's more of double talk, because it'll be 'freedom', 'liberation', 'openness', all

that. But actually if you probe deeper you'll find that they do not mean by those things what we mean. They might even mean something quite opposite.

: Thinking of things like "the Guardian."

S: It's some time since I've looked at "the Guardian", but sometimes in the Guardian you can find examples of pseudo-liberalism. But they are quite widespread, they are almost all-pervasive. For instance, supposing there's an instance where some feminist women burst into an all-men's club and force it to open its doors to women: this is described as triumph for toleration or a triumph for equality. And then, of course, a few pages further on you read about women setting up their own clubs where men will not be admitted, and this is another victory for tolerance and so on, you see. We have even one of our own Friends who was very indignant that in London there should be men's clubs and things like that, and she wrote me a delighted letter from some other city in Europe saying how wonderful it was to have shops, even, where men were not admitted. This is also associated with a sort of doublethink. The notorious example, of course, is that there are some people who criticize things which happen in, say, right-wing dictatorship states - quite rightly criticize - but whatever is done in a left-wing dictatorship state is always palliated and justified and glossed over, or even ignored. This is really dreadful. So it's clear that, when they use words like 'freedom' and 'toleration', they just don't mean what we mean by those terms.

John R: Of course, it's quite dangerous just to get blanket thinking about anything, so if you start adopting left-wing liberal views you've got to watch the blanket nature of that [304] approach. It was quite odd hearing that healthy union-bashing over the dinner table. It took a bit of adjusting to listen to that.

S: ... one just has to see what is being done, what is actually happening, what certain actions are entailing, and face up to that. But I am far from saying that we can regard ourselves, as a Movement, as having anything in common with any existing political or social movement. Supposing I do occasionally bash the unions a little bit, it doesn't mean that I have anything really in common with other people who may also be indulging in that particular activity. I would probably be just as inclined, if not even more inclined, to bash them as well, if you see what I mean! We are in a position, in a sense, of disagreeing with everybody in one way or another. They have much more in common with one another than they have in common with us, or than we have in common with them. I mean the extreme Left or the extreme Right - they've got more in common with each other than either of them have with us.

: You try and tell ...(?) that.

S: I wouldn't even attempt it.

Adrian: I did get the feeling, when John mentioned about reading right-wing literature, that reading such literature actually just reinforces one's own views. You read something which you see is wrong, but it doesn't really like change you, just reinforces what you think is right. It's not really that progressive. And also you've got to be reading something which is more extreme, in a sense, than where you're at, and then change your views accordingly.

S: I'm not quite sure what you mean.

Adrian: Er - I'm trying to get a sense of progression: that not being static you've got to be in contact with somebody more developed who is going to be inspiring you.

Sona: It's a bit like reading about the unions in a right-wing paper and then hearing Bhante's view coming in. Reading about them in a right-wing paper will just reinforce perhaps your own view; looked at from a much more radical point of view you start to see things in a slightly different way.

S: This is not a question of differing, as it were, horizontally. It's a question of differing vertically. But on the other hand, it is quite good to read quite extreme statements of views which differ completely from one's own, because first of all certain views are expressed unambiguously. I think this is one of the things that I don't like about a lot of this pseudo-liberal writing, as I call it: this sort of left-wing stuff. It isn't honest. It doesn't say what it really means. Whereas the more extreme right-wing writing usually means exactly what it says, though that may be quite unpleasant sometimes. So if someone is stating strongly what they believe, and if that is [305] quite different from what you believe, it enables you, by bringing the disagreement out into the open, to clarify, to make more clear, what it is you actually believe.

For instance, I would much rather read - if I were, say, to read a book about Christianity - I would much rather read a book which really went the whole way, as it were, which really believed in Christianity in the strict, almost dogmatic way and really gave you the works, gave the reader the works, without holding anything back. And then you can appreciate that particular point of view and you find your own all the more clearly in relation to it. But if the presentation of Christianity is woolly and making all sorts of concessions that perhaps the author doesn't really believe in, or if you feel that his own faith is wobbling a bit, that isn't very satisfactory, it isn't clear, it isn't definite; and it doesn't help you in defining your own ideas, your own views, more clearly.

But I feel so many of what I call these pseudo-liberal writers are just plain dishonest. They don't even use words consistently.

Asvajit: Even if one finds it difficult to disagree with the writings of right-wing or left-wing political thinkers, you just have to listen to some of them on television, for instance, and immediately they strike one as being very biased people. They don't seem to have a very compassionate approach to life; they seem to be really in it for what they can get out of it, they seem to be opportunists.

S: Well, one certainly gets that feeling, I certainly got that feeling listening to some of the, well, listening sometimes to Prime Minister's Question Time on the radio, both when Mr Callaghan was Prime Minister and now Mrs Thatcher is. You really do get the impression of opportunism in the questions, as though people aren't asking honest questions or expecting honest answers. They are just trying to score points for the Opposition, score debating points. These sort of things might be quite in place in a students' debating club or something of that sort but in a Parliament they seem to be utterly frivolous, and a betrayal of the electorate, one might say. It's so childish, a sort of yah-boo attitude on both sides; really terrible. Sometimes, yes, it's all right just to score the odd point in a clever sort of way, but very often the whole exchange consists of just that sort of thing. And then you can see, regardless of which government it is, if the Government adopts certain measures, takes a certain stand, the

Opposition will always put the worst possible construction upon what has been done, purely for the sake of party advantage, without in the least considering the situation objectively; in other words, without really thinking in terms of the good of the country, whether this measure is in fact good for the country, will it help, possibly - there's no objective attitude. It is done by the Government, it must be torn to pieces on principle. One could say that that is the function of the Opposition, but carried to the extremes that they do carry it, it amounts to [306] actual dishonesty, misrepresentation, falsification of the Government's position, and so on; and both parties do it. It is not the sin of only one side, they both do it, and probably do it quite equally. And then what is the public to make of all this? There is no honest debate; there is no fair debate. This is the impression that one gets.

Uttara: I got a lift with a councillor once hitching, and even - ... no, he wanted to help the area, he was doing it, he didn't want any money for it, but as soon as he got into The House... all that was going on he was disgusted and left. But he was quite genuinely wanting to help but he just was so disgusted with the backbiting and everything to and fro, nobody was willing to actually appreciate maybe ...

S: In India it's even worse; I won't even begin to tell you what goes on there. But then again, the language used is the language of public service and representing the people, and all that sort of thing. No doubt there are some people who do really try to do that, but that is not the general tone of politics in Britain today, I'm afraid.

: It's almost like it's not so much the fact that some politicians are playing games that's the bad thing but more the fact that they are sort of dressing up as something else.

S: And also you see the predominant consideration is power. In India this becomes nakedly apparent: parties divide and subdivide and factions are formed on a purely personal power basis, not even a pretence of a difference of opinion over anything, usually; not even a pretence of that. So Mr So-and-so, for instance, a powerful minister in, say, a state government, will start creating trouble for the Chief Minister because he wants more jobs for his henchmen, for his bully boys; he feels he's not getting his share of the spoils, so he creates trouble. He forms a faction and he has to be bought off. The front pages of Indian newspapers contain mainly reports of these sort of goings-on. And the factions and the cliques, they divide and subdivide and recombine and re-unite and divide again and split up, in a bewildering way. When I left there were three, perhaps four, different Congress parties; and one of my own friends in Bombay was the head of one of them, I could never quite make out which one he was head of, and several of his friends just couldn't give me a proper account of it. He didn't give me much of an account, either, himself. I ended up not really knowing, for instance, whether he was, say, with Mrs Gandhi or against her; it was quite impossible to find out, though he also was heading a particular faction of the Congress Party.

So this is what Indian politics is like: it's all for the sake of advantage. This is what you go into politics for, and you become a Minister, in a state government; when you became a Minister, maybe you had a few hundred rupees in the bank; two [307] years later, you've got millions. That's no exaggeration whatever. Millions. If you're a Chief Minister, you might have hundreds of millions. This is what goes on.

John R: Before the Friends, I used to find that really exasperating, that whole political scene.

S: I still find it exasperating. So one could say, yes, this is an example of reflecting upon the evils of life: these are the evils of life in a more concrete socio-political sense, and this doesn't incite me to emancipate myself from it all, it incites me to try to create a viable alternative in the form of a whole movement, a whole new society, within which people can live and function in a more decent way - to put it no more strongly than that - within which there will be the possibility of a more decent life, leave aside anything spiritual or even anything human! It's hardly the case in the world at large unless one is very, very careful indeed. It's really quite - I won't say it makes me feel disillusioned; it makes me just feel angry, that things do go on like this, and therefore all the more determined to create a better alternative.

One's ultimate conclusion is that that alternative can be created only on the basis of definite spiritual values espoused by the individual, and by individuals working together as individuals to create not just a new life as an individual but a whole new spiritual community, new society, beyond that. So certainly, those of us who do manage to live largely within the FWBO, we at least have a decent life; we even have a happy life; we even have a positive and creative life, a very good life and worthwhile, meaningful life, compared with the lives of a lot of people outside. And this is why we want to expand it so it becomes available to more and more people, because we just see how - we need not say how evil it is but just how rotten it is to live in the way that some people live; and in a sense have to live, because maybe as just individuals they are not very strong ones. They can't change things by themselves. But if they were to encounter something like the Friends, they would certainly be able to adopt it, so to speak, and benefit from it; there is no doubt about that. But they couldn't create it on their own.

Anyway, this all comes out of: 'By reflecting upon the difficulty of eradicating erroneous concepts, mayest thou be incited to constant meditation.' So one of the things that we have to do is not only to create the alternative institutions but also to present the alternative point of view, and that means, on the negative side, to

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eradicate, to demolish if necessary, current micchaditthis, which are the ideological underpinnings of the rotten society.
But we mustn't forget the conclusion of this precept: 'mayest [308] thou be incited to constant meditation.' It's no use criticizing micchaditthis on a purely intellectual basis: the criticism must be the expression of a genuine insight on our part of the inadequacies of those micchaditthis; must be an expression of our own greater clarity of mind, in which the micchaditthis just dissolve.

Asvajit: Clarity of mind suggests also a higher level of being and activity.

S: Indeed. I think it's quite a good exercise for us to read sometimes literature put out by bodies, by movements, with which we totally disagree. I think we should be quite careful not just to read - certainly not after we've been involved with things for a few years - not just to read merely the literature which, however positively and desirably, reinforces our own attitudes. It's very good for us to even to as it were scrutinize our own attitudes sometimes and just make sure that we haven't just settled down in a comfortable belief and really ceased

to think about it. And also it's good to know what is going on in the world, because that is what you have to counter sooner or later. Don't take it up too soon; don't take on Kant and Hegel and Marx, and try to put them right before you are really ready to do that sort of thing.

Ray: I think perhaps Enoch Powell is quite a good example.

S: In what sort of way?

Ray: Because he puts his views forward with ...

S: With maximum clarity.

Ray: With clarity.

S: And intransigence. With no compromise and no beating about the bush. So you know exactly what he thinks, so you're in a position to either agree or disagree quite strongly and definitely. Well, one knows where one stands with him, as one does in fact in the case of Mr Paisley. You know what he stands for, and that's some comfort at least.

: In a sense, you can trust him.

S: In a sense, you can trust him, yes. Just like someone that you know is a crook. In a way, you can trust him, because you know he's a crook, so you're not going to act with regard to him on any other basis than that he is a crook. So you know exactly where you are, you know where you stand, you know what you have to do, you know how you have to treat him.

: In a way that's quite admirable, isn't it, if somebody's quite clear about their position?

S: Well, not necessarily. But it is an advantage to you to have that sort of knowledge of them.

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: In fact, it can't be an advantage at all to them, can it?

S: No, it can't, it certainly can't.

: It can only be destructive.

S: A very good example in English literature of somebody who really saw micchaditthis as micchaditthis and opposed them was Blake, and that is only just now beginning to be appreciated. His critique of the whole 'scientific' attitude towards life, and over-intellectualism. His critique in many ways is the most radical that we've had in English, though there were other people giving critiques from certain other points of view; but to a more limited extent than Blake did, much less radically. I'm thinking of people like Carlyle and Ruskin.

This brings us, in a way, to the whole question of critique. I think critique is a very important thing - critique as distinct from criticism. Do you see the sort of difference I'm trying to get at?

Voices: No.

S: Critique, you could say, is the exposure of the limitations of a certain point of view in such a way as to suggest a wider perspective in a positive manner. It's the showing up of the limitations of something, but you show those limitations up in such a way that the recognition of those limitations, or the recognition of the fact that that particular point of view has those limitations, functions as a sort of liberating experience for you. It isn't just a theoretical interest.

: Would you include in that satire?

S: No, I wouldn't. I'd say satire was something more like criticism; though it could have, maybe, that kind of effect in a way. It would depend on what sort of satire it was: whether it was maybe good natured or whether it was malicious, and so on. But satire certainly gives one a sort of healthy sense of perspective, very often.

: Yes, I think that very much.

Vajradaka: Would Nietzsche be a good example of critique?

S: I think yes, he would be a very good example of that, in certain instances anyway.

Asvajit: Kant is the great exponent of that, isn't he? - the Critique of Pure Reason. It's a quite interesting title. In a way, it suggests its own limitations.

S: Well, there's not only a Critique of Pure Reason, but also of Practical Reason, and also of Judgement. But he used the word 'critique' - yes, there's also another more technical sense in [310] which one can speak of critique. He suggested a sort of antithesis, or at least contrast, between dogmatism and critique. Critique, you could say, very broadly paraphrasing, critique represents that sort of philosophy which philosophizes with awareness of its own limitations. So when you criticize, you criticize from certain assumptions, of which you yourself are not aware. So critique suggests an awareness of your own assumptions, and even of the limitations of those assumptions.

Alaya: Is it like the finger pointing at the moon?

S: You could put it more poetically like that, yes. But the finger knows that it is a finger and that it is not the moon. Dogmatism thinks the finger is the moon. Critique differs from criticism in not simply pitting one dogmatism against another.

So when, say, you argue with a Christian, you are not just pitting what the Buddhist scriptures say against what the Christian scriptures say. You're not merely quoting the Buddha against Jesus, in the same sort of way, in the same sort of spirit. So what are you doing, then, when you argue with a Christian? You can, of course, as a technique, quote the Buddha against Jesus, because that will bring the Christian into an awareness that there is another point of view, and that if he is justified in regarding the Bible as an absolute authority, you are equally justified in regarding the Tripitaka as an absolute authority. But supposing you don't do that, how do you conduct as it were, how do you present, so to speak, Buddhism, if you are discussing with a dogmatic Christian, not to present Buddhism as an alternative dogmatism?

Ross: You examine his premises, and you try and work on that basis. And try and see what they are founded on.

S: ...let you do that, of course. But you won't do that simply from a basis of unexamined assumptions of your own. You'll be quite willing, with him, to examine your assumptions too. This will certainly establish, if not common ground, at least a certain degree of communication.

So, for instance, you won't be so much you trying to prove him wrong - say, Christianity says this, it's wrong if Buddhism says that. It will be more like saying, 'You say this and I say that: well, what are the assumptions of your point of view? What are the assumptions of my point of view? Let's examine them together and see what sort of conclusion we can come to.' It's more like that. That is the more truly as it were Buddhistic approach. Otherwise he says the world was created, the universe was created by God; you say, No, it wasn't, it has no beginning in time. He says, Christ was the son of God; you say, the Buddha was the All-Enlightened One. It must be true because Jesus says it; it must be true because the Buddha says it, and he was Enlightened. That way there's no communication; you're just opposing one dogmatic view to another. But if you can mutually examine assumptions, then you may begin to get somewhere and some communication may be possible. It's quite difficult, I think, [311] to do that with Christians, because they're so deeply entrenched, usually, in their dogmatic position that usually you cannot do anything else except either peck away at them, which is sometimes quite difficult to do because they're not even aware of the possibility of such a thing, or just quite strongly pit as it were - almost present Buddhism as a dogmatism and let them feel the force of it; and that may at least cause them to realize, however dimly, that it is possible to see things in a slightly different way, quite genuinely, from the way in which they see them.

Alaya: It can be difficult, say, with Muslims too, because the main force of [Islam] seems to be dogmatism. It seems to be the main what is actually happening. It doesn't matter what kind of dogmatism, just strength of ...

S: Yes, indeed. For instance, I have found with Christians it's quite useful to stress the non-theistic attitude. Say, do you mean, Buddhism is non-theistic? For instance, they say, obviously Christianity believes in God. So you say, well, we appreciate this fact, but do you realize that Buddhism does not believe in God, and that for 2500 years hundreds of millions of people all over Asia have led ethical lives, have lived as good citizens, good parents, good friends, good employers, without that belief - have even made spiritual progress? We have had people who were very kind to their fellow men, very unselfish, very generous; so can you therefore maintain that a belief in God is so essential to religion, when so many people in the East have got on so well without it? So can you not say there is some possibility of leading a religious life without the belief in God? So is therefore even your own belief in God so essential? Is belief in God even so essential to Christianity? You can press them a bit like that. So sometimes you can make some impression.

: ... Christian sort of practice.

Viramati: We had some trouble with some Christians, and what they fell down on every time was that they were in touch with God and we weren't. You felt what would happen if there were two of them and they were both in touch with God, with different views.

S: Well, then there are two things one can say here. Well, all Christians profess to be in touch with God, but European history has been notorious for the wars between Christians, especially between Catholics and Protestants. They are still not on good terms. That when Catholics and Protestants even celebrate holy communion together, it's news. They are both Christians, and it's news that they can even side by side celebrate the chief ritual of their particular religion. They have been so seriously estranged for so long. So they all claim to be in touch with God and to speak with God, but they say just different things. And what about the Jews? According to the Old Testament they are in touch with God too, but look at the estrangement between the Jews and the Christians. What about the Muslims? They believe that they are in touch with God, or that Muhammad was; but what are [312] the relations between Christians on the one hand and Muslims on the other, Jews on the one hand, Muslims on the other? They all profess to be in touch with God and to be inspired by God; look at the way in which they get on together. All then you can say, well, we are in touch with Buddha. When we meditate, Buddha inspires us; just as you may get inspired by God when you pray, we get inspired by Buddha when we meditate. And the Buddha is the All-Knowing One, he knows Reality, he knows the Way to Reality. So we are quite sure of our position. And then you can even go on to criticize God - according to the Old Testament, God is revengeful and he has moods of anger and repentance; he changes his mind. Our Buddha is not like that. Our Buddha gained Enlightenment, he was full of love and compassion.

So even if you are in touch with God, look at the sort of God you are in touch with. 'Vengeance is mine', according to the Bible; so how can you have much reliance upon - how can we rely upon what you say, even if it is what God says? - he may change his mind. You see, you can argue in a slightly naive way, it's on their sort of wavelength.

If they say, well, the Bible says, you should be careful not to just deny that it is the Bible; they will just assert more firmly that it is. But try to get them to appreciate the relativity of their position. Yes, it's a dogmatism, it's absolutism, you do not realize the relativity of your position. Yes, it's a critique if you recognize the relativity of your own position, even when you are putting forward a positive point of view; because your whole attitude is instrumental, as it were. You are considering what contributes to the development of the individual. You are not thinking so much in terms of absolute truth and absolute untruth. You are asking yourself, does this help me to develop as an individual? Does it help others to develop as individuals?

Chris: One of the most exasperating things I came across was the argument that striving towards Enlightenment is just the same as striving towards unity with God.

S: Well, you can say, all right, let's agree for the sake of argument that it is. But the Bible itself says, Christ himself says in the gospels, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' And what have been the fruits of Christianity? You say, look at the religious wars. All right, if you look at the history of Buddhism, there aren't any religious wars. So it would seem that striving towards God is not the same thing as striving towards Enlightenment.

Alaya: They always came back and said, That's not Christianity really.

S: Well, you can say, Show me where is the real Christianity? We can only go by history, what is a matter of public record. It is not for us to say that certain people are not Christians; they say that they are Christians, we have to accept that.

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Otherwise you might say, well, some Christians would say that you aren't a Christian.

: That thing you just mentioned, that quote from the Bible: it is quite difficult to get Christians to understand even that, even though it's in the Bible, because it's an incredible umbrella, so to speak, of God, in which your actions are by no means conclusive. In other words, good actions or right actions really have no relevance to the situation at all.

S: Yes, it's faith that is important, yes.

: And if you believe in God, then everything's all right. So if you can get even that far, you ... You can't even get that.

S: Right, yes.

: - and it's in the Bible!

S: Well, they will say, the devil can quote scripture to his own purpose, they will say to you.

Alaya: Even that gets on difficult ground, because they say, well, do you think that we're not evolving, or do you think - you might just say

S: You say, well, no... For them to be brought up against people who actually don't think that they are evolving, in fact who don't think that they are on the right path, [I] think that that is a good positive psychological experience for them ... so self-satisfied ...

Alaya: You think Buddhism is the only way, and that's a non-question. Because a Buddhist will always say that the way that he's growing, that is Buddhism, so it's Catch-22 again, you can't get out of it. If you develop, then that is the Dharma.

S: Well, yes. You start that Buddhism is the Way, in the sense that Christianity is the way, except that it isn't Christianity, it's Buddhism; no, I mean there is such a thing as human growth and human development. And what we call Buddhism is the systematic statement of that sort of thing: what helps you to grow, what helps you to develop. Historically associated with a certain movement in India, 2500 years ago.

: ... it has the added advantage over the Christian that one understands in theory at any rate what he believes in, whereas a Christian very rarely understands what a Buddhist believes in.

S: Yes, a Christian, unfortunately, more often that not, is quite blind where other teachings, other religions are concerned, even where other churches are concerned. One of the things that Christians ask is: are you Enlightened? And you might say, quite modestly, well, no you're not Enlightened. And he will [314] say, well, I am saved. So ... Christianity is more effective because you, by your own confession, are not Enlightened; but I have been saved by Jesus, therefore Christianity works better than Buddhism. So what do you say to that?

: You say...

: Start blaspheming.

S: What would you say to that?

: Ask them what they're saved from.

S: Well, you just have to try to point out that in a way it is illusory, they've just got a sort of psychological relief, just by giving up individual responsibility. But that wouldn't be easy to do, because even to understand that sort of point of view requires a fair degree of objectivity and even sophistication, of which most of them are just not capable. They believe that they are saved. In other words, they believe that they are better than those who are not saved.

Asvajit: Would you say, then, that that belief can only be adopted by someone of relatively low intelligence?

S: It does seem to be like that, because you do find that those Christian churches which stress this sort of conviction that you are saved tend to be a bit evangelical and Pentecostal, and the more sort of let's say cultured or sophisticated churches, say the Church of England or even the Catholic Church, don't stress things in that sort of way.

: You can always come back to them and say: Oh, well, I'm saved, it's ... and you can just make a ridicule(?) out of it.

S: We're saved, too, but we regard that as just the beginning!

But it's very difficult to establish a dialogue, a communication, with a Christian, just because of this dogmatic attitude. The essence of dogmatism, as I said, is absolutism: the inability to see the relativity of any human point of view.

Alaya: I got trapped by a Muslim on the train, and he was all the time talking about these absolute theories, and I was all the time trying to bring it down to practical, just practical things that people could do which would help them. He was talking as if we were both enlightened sages, and I was saying this is so arrogant, so stupid, how puny we are sitting here, and you are talking about absolute truth, as if you were deeply in touch with it. Let's both talk about ways that we can evolve from where we are now, practical ways.

S: Well, it is sometimes said by people travelling in India that you get talking to someone in a railway carriage, and he'll ask you: 'Do you think that God is one, or many?' as though it was [315] a meaningful question to discuss or in any way hold any opinion about. But Indians love this sort of thing, and they never relate it to anything like individual development. They really love it. I used to sometimes tell them that Indians talked about religion in this sense much as English people talk about the weather, and it's got about as much significance. But they do. The Absolute, and whether the world is an illusion, and how it all originated, and whether God is one or many, etc., or whether the Absolute is one or many, whether Reality is one or many - they'll talk about these things at the drop of a hat. But anything practical is dull and uninteresting. So why do you think this is? Because there are a lot of people who love to talk about these highly abstract matters, which one would have thought were subject matter for discussion only between sages, but why do you think they like to talk about these things?

: You don't actually have to do anything. You can talk about them and carry on a discussion ...

S: But then why do you like to talk about them?

Ray: It's a sense experience.

: Well, because it's comfortable, you feel you're getting somewhere, you're doing something good, you're achieving something.

Vajradaka: You're even slightly superior to the thing which you're talking about.

S: Yes, yes. One thing which used to annoy me - it tends not to happen now - people whom I know, sometimes, outside the Friends, who have a vague idea of what I'm doing and who are themselves into some sort of spiritual movement, belong to it, they come along and they say to me: 'How are your Order Members getting on? Are they making spiritual progress? I hope they are!' ... themselves so superior to it all. And sometimes they try to make little - they don't criticize, but they make what they think are helpful suggestions, as if to say they look down upon Order Members from a very lofty spiritual height themselves. Their polite suggestion is that I'm also, of course, on that lofty spiritual height and so are they, but let's get together as it were and just talk about all these Order Members and others on this much lower spiritual level. And this quite annoys me sometimes, because they're quite clearly not on that level; they're not even on the level of a Mitra, not even on the level of a Friend. And here they are taking a sort of patronizing attitude towards Order Members and things. But it's the same sort of thing.

: Do you point this out to them?

S: I'm usually a bit stand-offish or a bit rude about it. I'll say, 'You just don't know what goes on within the Order.' ...I don't allow myself to enter into that sort of discussion with them - completely inappropriate and quite presumptuous on [316] their part. Some of them are not even Buddhists, but sort of vaguely universalist sort of people; or people who have had some sort of contact and broken off, thinking that the Friends wasn't spiritual enough for them. So from time to they like to contact me and just ask how these Order Members, these little beginners on the spiritual path, are getting on. Yes; they really feel that they are on the mountain peak.

Viramati: Isn't this the view that Majuvajra and Nagabodhi came up against at that convention? - the fact that the bhikshus were the only people that could do anything?

S: Yes; yes. In a way, yes. They were the officially spiritually superior ones. Also you get it sometimes with visiting bhikkhus themselves, unfortunately. They come along and they talk to you, even they will talk to, say, Order Members, on the assumption that they themselves, if not actually Enlightened, are pretty near it. And it's pure assumption; it's their official standing, and you are supposed to talk to them and relate to them on that sort of basis - which is extraordinary.

: ... got an American bhikkhu coming, calling himself Supermonk.

S: ... quite open-minded about it; if you do find that he is Supermonk, don't hesitate to say so, super-upasaka, and really tell him what you think.

: It's strange, because a lot of the time that doesn't exist in the East, does it? You get these lamas who in a sense aren't ordained or anything at all, are they, some of them, and they're still highly respected, aren't they?

S: Well, yes, but lama is a vague term. Usually, say, the incarnate lamas are also ordained as monks. But sometimes incarnate lama is a sort of official position. We don't always realize that in the West. There are incarnate lamas and incarnate lamas. There are some who have been recognized as such, but I have known some myself who have come to me quietly and said, 'Well, look, I'm not really an incarnate lama. People say I am, but I just don't feel I am, and I feel I'm just not up to it.' Some have come to me and said that. And there are many others that I myself have concluded are not really incarnate lamas; they may have that official position. So one must be really careful about these official positions and someone having a certain status; otherwise it's rather like a naive African Christian, newly converted, coming to England and expecting to find a bishop the model of Christian spirituality. Well, he's either just a good administrator or a fairly learned man, a good ecclesiastic, pretty safe from the standpoint of the establishment that appoints him, and probably no better a Christian than the next man, really. He might be a kindly soul, and might not have actually committed adultery or anything like that; but you can't really say very much more than that.

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So don't be over-impressed by anyone appearing in a robe however magnificent, or with titles however imposing. Just receive him politely with an open mind, and just try to enter into communication. If you find him not willing to enter into communication, only concerned to tell you how important he is or impress upon you his ecclesiastical or even spiritual rank, then be very suspicious. If he says: 'I've been a monk for 20 years', and expects you to fall flat on your face instantly, be a bit suspicious; or if he says, 'I am an incarnate lama' and obviously expects you to be bowled over by that statement, be suspicious. But if he just meets you in an ordinary human way, a friendly and truly Buddhistic way, then you can feel, whether he's got any title or not, he is a genuine person and there will be the possibility of human communication, and maybe spiritual communication, with him. But people who begin by announcing their positions, or whose disciples begin by announcing their positions, are to be suspected.

Alaya: Having a Buddhist name can be a bit difficult in that respect, sometimes, because it is announcing something.

S: It's announcing that you're a Buddhist.

Alaya: Yes. People immediately start asking lots of questions.

S: Well, that's good!

Alaya: But then it's like you have to say that you've been doing this for four or five years or you've been doing that for so many years, and it can sound ...

S: Well, if they ask you, if they say 'How many years have you been a Buddhist?' ... 'For five.' ... haven't made much progress. (laughter) ... five years.

: I remember hearing about a clergyman ... every time he sat down anywhere and mentioned

he was a clergyman, everyone started talking about God [He got] fed up. Immediately they'd (?)turn the subject.

Sona: I think if you were a Buddhist and anyone started talking about the Buddha, you wouldn't get fed up with it at all. If you were a Buddhist you'd enjoy talking about the Buddha.

S: I think clergymen nowadays get acutely embarrassed when God is mentioned... an old-fashioned believer and they have to really plug God ... you don't really believe and you can play the rather liberal-minded clergyman who has gone beyond all that, but doesn't know quite what to do.

Alaya: [They] start telling me all these boring Zen stories and things like this.

S: You give them a bit of Zen yourself... 'These stories are boring, I've heard them all before, I've read them all before. I don't want to hear them.'

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Alaya: That's what I did ...

S: Good.

: Not that it had as much to do with spiritual progress as Enid Blyton! (laughter).

S: ...(laughter) But you must give really short shrift to these sort of dabblers and tasters as it were, people who've read a little bit about Zen, retelling all the Zen stories and all that sort of thing. This used to be the staple diet and activity of the Buddhist Society; Mr Humphreys himself used to do this sort of thing, trot out a few Zen stories and a few innocuous comments upon them. One has been having this sort of thing for 30 years in Buddhism now. People just ought to be stopped from doing it.

Another thing is reeling you off long lists of Abhidharma terms - another kind of Buddhist - to show you how much they know about the Abhidharma. So don't put up with it.

Vajradaka: Some Western bhikkhus really use the fact that they have got a robe, and that you're an upasaka - or at least they wouldn't see it in our terms, being an upasaka ... I've actually had some Swedish bhikkhu said: 'Right, let's discuss Dharma, let's have a Dharma talk', and then proceed to lecture me. And when I proceeded actually to say something from my own experience, he was so completely shocked that he didn't want to have anything more to do with me.

S: Well, the reason for all that is that people don't see other people as individuals. They think in terms of position and role and status. They start off with 'I am a bhikkhu, I know all about it; you're an upasaka, you know very little about it. Therefore I shall tell you all about it.' All that is pure assumption. It's all unreal. This is exactly what is referred to in that precept we saw earlier on: 'By reflecting upon the perversity and illusory nature of the mind of all sentient beings'. They have an illusory mind with regard to you; they don't see you as you are.

Ray: Did you feel that individual development was the basis of Buddhism quite early on in

your study of Buddhism?

S: Yes, I think I did. I didn't put it quite in those terms, but it's quite clear in the Survey. When I read the proofs of the new edition recently, I saw, just from so many expressions, that I was seeing Buddhism in those terms almost right from the beginning. But I only brought it out and stated it more fully and clearly when I came back to the West, because that sort of statement was well needed. I even found, last year, looking through some old lecture notes, I even used the expression 'Higher Evolution' in 1950 and 1951 in lectures that I was giving in Kalimpong, which I had completely forgotten about. But I attach more and more importance, as I say, reading the Pali scriptures, to things like that statement which I often quote to [319] the effect that the Buddha after his Enlightenment looked out and saw human beings like lotus plants in different stages of development. That is very clear; that says a lot more than any purely conceptual analysis or conceptual presentation. That is how the Buddha saw humanity: as living, growing things in different stages of development. And those who were more developed were more likely to be able to understand and practise his teaching. And growth and development is emphasized in many places.

But, after all, there was not that sort of evolutionary background or scientific thinking that we have, derived from the last century, which gives us this sort of vocabulary and terminology, which is so helpful, I think, in the spiritual life or in talking about the spiritual life. The idea of evolution, the concept of evolution, however loosely understood, is very much in the air. People know what you're talking about, or at least they have a rough idea, and there are the various growth therapies. So one can talk in terms of growth and development, but just be careful that one doesn't confine it within a narrow context, as is usually done. Mrs Rhys Davids, as I've pointed out before, says somewhere that Buddhism didn't have a terminology ready to hand; that Buddhism needed words - there wasn't a proper word for 'will', there wasn't a proper word for 'development'. Buddhism had to make use of quite clumsy expressions, like 'making to become'. It is as though, if that language of evolution had been around in the Buddha's day, the Buddha would have seized upon it most gratefully; but it wasn't around. So we have to read a little bit between the lines of the Buddha's teaching. But not altogether, because there were some very explicit statements.

Well, the mere fact that the Path is put in the very forefront of the teaching: that is significant. It isn't quite the same thing as growth, but it certainly means progress and going forward; which has much the same sort of significance, much the same sort of connotation.

Anyway, how did we get into that?

Voices: Critique, criticism.

S: Yes, just seeing the individual person, this is very important. I think it isn't a question of pitting one impersonal view against another impersonal view. You must try to see that beneath the view there is a person, who holds that view for some reason or other, of which he is conscious or not conscious; and you have to get through to that person, and be in touch not just with the view which he is expressing but what in him has made him adopt that particular view, or hold that particular view; especially when he is holding it very strongly. You have to establish contact with him, and this is what Christians very often don't do because of their dogmatism - and very often what Buddhist 'representatives' don't do, because they identify themselves with a certain role within the Buddhist movement; and give you another

corresponding role.

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In India there are a few bhikkhus who are in contact with Lokamitra, and some of them think really that Lokamitra should defer to them automatically because he is only an anagarika and they are bhikkhus, and they make it quite clear they don't really know anything about the Dharma at all; in fact, they don't even claim to, they only claim to be bhikkhus. And they really believe that that entitles them to a certain standing, precedence, and to be listened to, and to take a lead in things, whether they are qualified to do so or not. So he just had to put them right. He has got, in a way, quite a good let-out in saying that he is only carrying out my instructions; and they can't quarrel with those, because if they think they are senior, well, I am much more senior to them if they want to come down to technicalities! But I've advised him not to do that, because that's in a sense only playing their game; but to challenge them directly on a more human, more genuine basis.

(End of Side)

Tape 14, Side 2

Anyway, anything more to be said on all that? 'By reflecting upon the difficulty of eradicating erroneous concepts, mayest thou be incited to constant meditation (which overcometh them).' It's very difficult to eradicate erroneous concepts, even in the case of people who call themselves Buddhists. It isn't easy to convince someone who thinks he's a bhikkhu and ought to be listened to simply for that reason, that it's a question in a way of communication between two individuals. It's very difficult to convince, so you wonder why he has become a bhikkhu, as though he became a bhikkhu to gain that status, that he was basically a very insecure person who wanted to bolster himself up.

: It was quite frightening with this guy in Sweden. I don't think I've seen anyone so alienated. And he later came to Sukhavati, apparently, and everyone thought that I'd told him to come and ... They couldn't get rid of him fast enough.

Uttara: ...

S: ... take them very seriously, representing Buddhism ... bhikkhu said it, this is what Buddhism is all about; goes along to inter-religious meetings, there he is on the platform representing Buddhism.

: Also one is considered incredibly arrogant, just from the outsider's point of view, if one is just a normal person, to criticize somebody in one's church, so to speak, ...

S: I'm afraid one just has to run the risk of incurring that charge of arrogance. I know many of these people, I've known them in the past: it's a really good and wholesome experience for them actually to be taken down a peg or two, in a friendly way, in this manner. It's extremely - it's one of the advantages, it's all part of their education in coming to the [321] West. Some of them come absolutely under the impression that they really know all about it, and they've only got to open their mouths and everyone is going to be converted to Buddhism and fall down on their noses instantly. It's amazing what they really think. They don't know really what they're dealing with or what the situation is like. They've got grossly exaggerated ideas about their

own importance and their own understanding of the Dharma. It's terrible. So the more balloons that can be pricked the better.

This is on the basis of Buddhism, just read the Dhammapada, what does the Buddha say? 'Who is a bhikkhu? Who is a brahmana?' The Buddha says, in one verse, 'He may be wearing silk and adorned with ornaments, but if in him there is truth (Dhamma), a truth, a satya, and righteousness Dhamma, he is a bhikkhu, he is a brahmana, he is a sramana.' It's there, if you want to quote it, in black and white as it were, the Buddha's own words. A bhikkhu isn't simply someone who's undergone certain ceremonies. It makes nonsense if you say that, it makes nonsense of the whole of the Buddha's teaching: put it as strongly as that. It's almost a reversion to the caste system. It's almost like, if you can be born a brahmana, you can be born a Buddhist, and if you can be made a bhikkhu and if the bhikkhu is the real Buddhist, you can be just made a Buddhist by purely external means. It's not a question of individual development attainment. It cuts the ground absolutely from under the feet of Buddhism.

So I regard this as very important. Otherwise you are back right in the midst of the group, and the purely group hierarchies, and the purely group roles and so on, with no spiritual community. So the worst thing, in a way, is someone with merely ecclesiastical position masquerading as someone of individual development; and confusing those two things. So he should not be allowed to get away with it, certainly not on FWBO premises.

Uttara: I had the impression in the old days, when people went to the East and became monks, that it was mostly middle-class people who went out to ...

S: They had the money for the trip, to begin with.

Uttara: I had very much that impression, so that they did become
S: Intellectual and arrogant.

Uttara: Right. - the bhikkhus and now they come back to the West and they still want to cut the same ...

S: To cut the same sort of figure. Anyway, let's have coffee, and after coffee we're going to come to a really big micchaditthi.

[322]
(8) By reflecting upon the predominance of evil propensities in this Kali-Yuga (or Age of Darkness), mayest thou be incited to seek their antidote in the Doctrine.

S: Go on to read 9, because that's also more or less the same.

(9) By reflecting upon the multiplicity of misfortunes in this Age of Darkness, mayest thou be incited to perseverance in the quest for Emancipation.

S: So here we have the concept of the Kali-Yuga, or Age of Darkness, and I think we have to tread a little carefully here because this can approach quite near to being a micchaditthi. It's a Hindu conception rather than a strictly Buddhist one, which has found its way into these Precepts, and we need to treat it with some caution. But what is the concept of an Age of Darkness? Does anybody know?

Alaya: In which there are no Buddhas.

S: Well, yes - well, no, actually not. It's a different conception. This is a yuga, and a yuga is within a Buddha-period.

Viramati: False teaching, isn't it? The time of the true teacher and the false teacher.

S: No, it isn't really that. It is originally a Hindu conception, as I said. It's an age in which everything is worse. It's an age in which people are worse; they are more corrupt, more immoral. But the suggestion is that this is inevitably so. This is where the micchaditthi comes in: that, regardless of anything which anybody may do or not do, the age is worse, the times are worse, people are worse. This is why it says: 'By reflecting upon the predominance of evil propensities in this Kali-Yuga, mayest thou be incited to seek for the antidote in the Doctrine.' So it's not only a period in which people are worse, but in which they cannot help being worse. So does that sound very Buddhistic? It doesn't really. The explanation sometimes is given that it is due to the stars, it's due to the planets, it's in accordance with some planetary configurations and the effect that they have upon people, and people are worse.

Ray: Does that correspond with the Piscean Age?

S: No, it doesn't really correspond, no.

: It could be said that things would be more difficult.

S: So it's not that it is more difficult to lead, say, the spiritual life, but that it is necessarily more difficult, and more difficult for everybody; as though the mere fact of being born in that age makes it more difficult even for you. Well, there may be a certain truth in this in the sense that if the external conditions are worse, yes, it is more difficult for you; [323] but the assumption is the external conditions are worse not on account of anything that the people themselves have done or not done, but just because it is the age and things are bound to be worse. In other words, that the Kali Yuga is inevitable. And this is where the micchaditthi comes in: it's a form in a way of historicism, isn't it?

Asvajit: Also of pessimism.

S: Also of pessimism, yes. Most people would not regard it as an incitement to lead the spiritual life, or an incitement to seek the antidote in the Doctrine, but rather as a discouragement. Things were difficult enough in any case, but if it's the Kali Yuga on top of it all, ... practically impossible, well, that's not much of an incitement to the average person.

: Kind of fatalism.

S: A kind of fatalism, yes.

Ray: How would this Hindu term have crept into a Tibetan [text]?

S: Well, I think it must have come in along with the Vajrayana. One can't say that the Vajrayana is in any way Hindu, but certainly there were certain modes of expression which were common, say, to Buddhists and Hindus in the latter days of the development of

Buddhism in India, when the Tantras arose. And there were border areas, as it were, with a certain amount of overlapping. But the conception of the Kali Yuga does belong to Hindu traditions; it comes in the Puranas: the four yugas, the Satyas, Dvapara, Tretras, Kali Yugas; which is not found, strictly speaking, in Buddhist literature.

Sona: They are pre-Buddhistic?

S: No, they are late, actually. These four ages figure mainly in the Puranas, as far as I remember, which are post-Vedic ...

Sona: Would there be any possibility of the Hindus having taken over the four yugas and using them in different ways from what they were originally by Buddhists?

S: I don't think that actually happened. I don't remember that there was a Buddhist teaching about the four yugas at all. It seems to have crept into Buddhism from Hindu sources ...

Alaya: Is there any idea in Buddhist cosmology of the world running down? That almost seems inevitable.

S: Oh yes, this is on the purely physical level. This is not as it were morally. And even when there is a moral running down, Buddhism does not regard that as inevitable, but only because people behave in a certain way, which they need not behave in.

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Asvajit: And not inevitable for the individual.

S: Not inevitable for the individual, in any case - for the individual as such.

: The life-spans shorten down to ten years.

S: Yes, well, this makes it more difficult, but it doesn't make it impossible for you to develop. You could say the whole time scale reduces - well, the period needed for you to get Enlightened reduces also; you could put it that way. But maybe what is more relevant to us today [is] people don't think in terms of a Kali-Yuga, but what do they think in terms of?

: A New Age.

S: A New Age; an age of Aquarius, which will sort of come, or has come, even, or is coming, automatically; and this is the great micchaditthi which we tend to be influenced by if we are not careful. That the age of Aquarius is here, as it were, for purely planetary, astrological reasons, quite independently of any effort that anybody is making individually. It's as though spiritual development then becomes a group thing, even a cosmic phenomenon, as it were, which is an impossibility.

Alaya: It seems to have died out, that thing.

S: Does it?

Alaya: It seemed to be part of the late 60s thing... age of pessimism.

Confused voices: No, no ...

S: All the different groups were supposed to be different manifestations of the Age of Aquarius; this was their common platform, and I think the organizers - admittedly they are older people think very definitely in terms of the Age of Aquarius.

Uttara: There was also a convention recently, with ...; a world symposium with all the New Age groups in it.

S: Where was that held?

: Wembley.

Vajradaka: They catered for something like 100,000, and only about 300 turned up! - something like that. Very, very few people.

Alaya: Popular culture, the whole Aquarian thing, the Age of Aquarius; I think it is very dead. It seems very antiquated ..., "Hair" and all that.

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S: Well, "Hair" seems very antiquated now, doesn't it? (Voices: Yes.) But you see the danger to be guarded against here? It's the idea that your development as an individual, or spiritual development, for want of a better term, doesn't depend upon your own personal efforts so much as upon the time that you happen to be born. It's true that conditions can be conducive to your development as an individual, or they can be inimical. But in the last analysis, it is your efforts as an individual that count.

Sona: You still see traces of this thing when people talk about astrology. If they have their birth chart done, they are told they've got certain traits and temperament, and they think they are stuck with all those things for the rest of their life.

Asvajit: But how does all this connect with, or what relevance does this have to, the idea that there are certain ages in which there is one Buddha, another kind of age in which there are several Buddhas?

S: If there are ages with several Buddhas it means that in those particular ages there have been more individuals than usual making that sort of effort. Lama Govinda points out that the appearance of Buddhas cannot happen with clock-like regularity, because it is not a manifestation of an inexorable law, any sort of law of regularity. This is what one would expect if it does depend upon individual effort, that they occur sporadically. Some ages don't have any, and others may have several, and others may have only one. This is indeed what one would expect. There's no predictable pattern. So Enlightenment is not predictable. Spiritual movements are not predictable. So anything which concerns the individual, anything which concerns the genius, is unpredictable. This is, I think, very important. If you listen, say, to a Mozart symphony, there is a point at which ... going on happily, tum-ti-tum-ti-tum-ti, ...other composers in the eighteenth century could have gone along in that way, maybe standard themes and ways of developing them; but suddenly he shoots off in a direction which you could not have anticipated from what had gone before, and that's the as it were characteristically Mozart touches. Nobody else could have done it. So it was unpredictable

from what went before; though you might have thought you were able to predict because the music was sort of chugging along in a quite conventional way, and you might imagine that you knew what was coming - but no, not with Mozart, you don't know; not with Haydn, not with Beethoven. You don't know what's coming next. Not with Bach, not with Handel. You never know what's coming next. And that is one of the manifestations, one of the hallmarks, you could say, of genius: unpredictability.

And it's the same in the spiritual life. You can't predict. Even if you say someone is going to become Enlightened, it's so vague, so abstract, so contentless, it doesn't really mean anything. He doesn't really tell you what sort of individual you are going to become. So the individual as such is unpredictable. The manifestations of the individual are unpredictable. This is [326] why it's said in some Hindu texts that the Enlightened person appears just like a ghost, as it were; you don't know where he's come from. Or, as the Buddha says in the Dhammapada, the track of the Enlightened Ones is like the path of the birds in the sky; they can't be traced, they can't be tracked. Perhaps putting it in a slightly different way; they can't be followed, but neither can they be anticipated, they can't be predicted.

So it's much the same with the spiritual community. You can't predict the appearance of a spiritual community from the fact that there's a certain set of social conditions. So, in the same way, an Aquarian Age, if it's a real Aquarian Age - in other words, if there are a lot of people occurring at the same time all with a high degree of Enlightenment - cannot be predicted. It's a contradiction in terms.

Vajradaka: It implies that Enlightenment is a group activity.

S: Well, that it is quantitative, and because it is quantitative it is predictable. It makes it almost something material.

: Cause and effect.

S: You see, in Marxism, what is called historicism - the belief that there are certain inevitable stages of historical development - occupies a quite important place, so the belief in the Age of Aquarius is a form of historicism: that certain developments are inevitable. According to Marx, society, having passed through the theocratic stage, must go on to the feudal; having passed through the feudal, it must go on to the capitalist; and having passed through the capitalist, it must go on to the communist stage. So this gives you tremendous conviction, in a way, that it's bound to happen, it is inevitable. But that is not the Buddhist view; the Buddhist view is it can happen, if you will take the necessary steps to bring it about. Even if you live under the most favourable conditions, there is no inevitability about your growing as an individual in a spiritual sense. You may, you may not.

Viramati: I'm still not sure; in the White Lotus Sutra again it says after the life of a Buddha there will be seven/certain? age of truth, and then the age of the false views, false teaching - I'm not quite sure what they're trying to get at there. Why is that there?

S: Well, even in the Pali scriptures - and in the Milinda-panha, the question is raised about how long the Dharma will endure, and the Buddha makes it clear that the Dharma will endure so long as the disciples practise the teaching. So there cannot really be an absolute prediction about how long the doctrine, the Doctrine, the Dharma will last. It is impossible. That would

be a species of historicism. It will last if people practise it; it will not last if they don't practise it. So there may be what appear to be statements to the contrary in some [327] texts, but I think they should be taken as colourful exaggerations, or just a general recognition of the fact that even the Dharma has its ups and downs; but not that those ups and downs are literally predictable, or that there is bound at any given moment to be either an up or a down. Looking back over the history of the Dharma, one sees, yes, it has had its ups and downs, in the sense that sometimes people practise it more, sometimes they practise it less. So it would be reasonable to suppose that it will continue like that; but you cannot predict even that. It could be that people continue to practise the Dharma indefinitely, and that there isn't a decline. That could happen. It's unlikely, but it could happen. And as far as individuals are concerned, at any given moment anybody can either practise the Dharma or not practise it, as they choose.

Sona: Technically, that would be what would happen when the world became a Pure Land.

S: Mm, there would be everybody practising the Dharma, yes.

Uttara: Not sitting on their own lotuses like ..., but actually sitting meditating.

S: Maybe just sitting on their lotus.

Uttara: Where would, say, the likes of Nostradamus come in, then, in terms of his - I don't know any of his predictions, but I just know that he made a lot of predictions about things which were to come?

S: Well, some people believe that they have come, others believe that they haven't come. It's very easy to be wise after the event. I wouldn't like to say anything about Nostradamus. One could say, to a certain extent, the person, let us say, is predetermined, and to that extent is predictable; but the individual as such, in the spiritual sense, is not predetermined, and not, in the ultimate analysis, predictable. You might be able to predict certain mass happenings, just because they were mass happenings, but you couldn't ever predict what an individual as such was going to do, except in a very general way. You might be able to predict that a certain genius was going to produce a great work of art, but that doesn't really amount to a prediction. Though you cannot be absolutely certain that he is going to do that, because he just may not. But what kind of work of art exactly he is going to produce, in what his greatness will consist, you are utterly unable to predict.

: What about Stream Entry, then? Isn't that a prediction, in a sense?

S: In what sense?

: I thought it was an irrevocable step.

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S: Yes. Well, it's an irrevocable step in the sense of an irreversible step. You've got so far on, you've got so far beyond the gravitational pull of the conditioned, that you can't fall back.

: That infers then, that you will succeed, doesn't it?

S: Not necessarily. You can succeed; you will not fall back. You can't really say that's a

prediction, because a prediction is about something actually in the future, whereas this refers to something which has happened, namely that you entered the stream, and the stream is of such a nature that you cannot fall back; but you can go on indefinitely being a Stream Entrant. There's no necessity, really, about your passing to the next stage. This is to be expected, and sometimes it is said, that you've got at the most seven more births, but even this cannot be taken literally. You can continue indefinitely as a Stream Entrant.

Ross: I would have thought that was synonymous with going back, in a sense - the fact that you were staying the same, if you see what I mean.

S: Well, yes, so in that sense it's up to you whether you go back or go forward. But even if you went back, you'd only go back to the extent that you were not going forward. You wouldn't really go back in the sense that you would go back to a point before the point of Stream Entry, which by definition is that point of no return.

Viramati: You get in the Lotus Sutra the various chapters predicting various Bodhisattvas to Enlightenment.

S: Yes. But this certainly can't be taken in the sense that there is any literal prediction, that it is inevitable. It can't be. You can only say it is the expression of the Buddha's confidence and it gives great encouragement to the disciples, but it doesn't mean that they are thereby about to be deprived of their freedom of choice. Otherwise how could they even develop, unless they had the choice of not developing?

Sona: It seems that all you can predict is that if you make an effort you will grow.

S: Yes. So all prediction is hypothetical, and there can be no absolute prediction. I am deliberately leaving aside the whole question, which is a very vast and different question, of the nature of time, and things like precognition and foreknowledge. This is something again quite different, which I think we need not go into now, but at some other time, perhaps. I have gone into it elsewhere, I think. But leaving that purely metaphysical dimension aside, on the ordinary practical level with which we are concerned, the individual is unpredictable.

[329]
But when you talk of prediction and non-prediction, you are assuming the reality of time. So, for the purpose of the discussion, I don't question that. If you were to question that, it puts a completely different appearance on everything. Well, it would be a different discussion then.

Alaya: So you went into it next year! (Laughter)

S: But I think it's important to retain a sense of the freedom, autonomy and responsibility, and capacity for initiative of the individual; and not feel that one is being swept along by vast historical forces. This is what it amounts to. Otherwise you just give in to a mass movement; and this is in fact what some people are doing. They think they are joining a spiritual movement, even perhaps they think in terms of spiritual development, but they are just going with the tide. Well, they say sometimes, 'Going with the flow'. Or they used to - that must be an out-of-date expression ... One doesn't hear it quite so often. But then I'm out of touch, because I usually only function within an FWBO context, but you might be hearing it outside still.

: The stars are saying yes to life, really ... isn't it?

S: We ought to say not 'Go with the flow' - 'Go against the flow'. Because the flow is essentially a group thing in this sense.

: Perhaps what you should say is no to life, rather than say yes to life.

S: Say no to nature, in a sense. As I've said before, a group is all right; there is such a thing as a healthy positive group. It's a positive, healthy thing to want to belong to a group. But you must never mistake belonging to a group with being part of a spiritual community. The two are radically different. So to be swept along in a sort of mass movement, even though it's labelled spiritual, has got nothing to do with the leading of the spiritual life. And this is what most of these religious movements are, in a way: they are mass movements, they profess to be, they wish to be. And they think that there can be such a thing as a spiritual mass movement, or a mass spiritual movement. They even speak in those terms. But they are self-contradictory terms.

Alaya: How does a mass movement become - I was thinking of the Untouchables - how does it get from that to being individuals?

S: Only by your dealing with individuals; you have to get individuals, one by one, sooner or later.

Alaya: The mass conversions of Untouchables to Buddhism, it's obvious that you can't, in a way, have mass conversions of thousands of people.

[330]
S: You can't, you can't.

: Well, what happens?

S: Quite a number of them may individually have made up their own minds, but the majority of them just joined in, as it were, because of their faith in Ambedkar - quite blind faith, in some cases. So they could not be said to have taken that step as individuals, and therefore not really to have Gone for Refuge, though they might have recited the formula. It was a formula of mass membership. But at least, now that they call themselves Buddhists, you've got a bridge over which you can approach some of them, and you can say: 'You're supposed to be Buddhists, this is what Buddhism means.' And many of them are very open to that, at least a substantial minority.

But the only way in which you can convert a mass movement into a truly spiritual movement is by approaching people individually. This is one reason why Lokamitra holds so many study groups and study classes, where there's an opportunity for individual contact and individual study of the Dharma, individual understanding of what the Dharma is all about, individual practice. This is what we constantly stress. And there are a lot of people who take to this very readily and who get the message very quickly; so the mass movement has certainly prepared the ground for the more truly spiritual movement, there is no doubt about that. But a mass movement in itself is not a spiritual movement and, even if it's labelled religious, it may be in fact quite anti-spiritual.

John R: Does that work something like the positive group might work in advance of the spiritual community, that kind of - ?

S: Yes, one could say that. And certainly the whole ex-Untouchable society, after the mass conversion, did become much more of a positive group. It shed certain quite undesirable features of the old ex-Untouchable society to quite an extent. A number of things were changed on the group level, very much for the better.

I think it's an aphorism in 'Peace is a Fire' that the group is always wrong; so, in much the same spirit, we could say that if you're going against the group you must be right - in a sense; in a manner of speaking. Provided you're not just reacting, provided you're not just a fragment of the group broken off, a tiny group of one reacting against the big group consisting of hundreds of thousands. That is possible, sometimes.

John R: A splinter group.

S: A splinter group, yes. You're not necessarily right, as another aphorism says, I think, just because you're in a minority of one. A minority of one doesn't amount to an individual; it's just a minority of one. You're not necessarily an individual just because nobody else thinks as you do.

[331]
Those of you who had any contact with the Festival of Body, Mind and Spirit - did you get any sort of feeling that some of those either attending or running the different stalls felt themselves to be part of a big mass movement, in which everybody was engulfed and by which everybody was being swept along willy-nilly, as it were? Or that they would like to think like that?

John R: I heard Sir George Trevelyan talk, not on that particular occasion, and I certainly got that impression from him.

S: A sort of outpouring of the spirit from other worlds which was sweeping us all along? That sort of thing?

John R: Yes. And the feeling he gave me was that it was time to rejoice that this magical phenomenon was happening to us.

: New Age, the ... New Age.

: He uses that phrase. That was the feeling.

: A bit like a sort of dream of empire, in a way.

Vajradaka: That view came most from people like the Findhorn ...

S: They are quite ancient, now, aren't they? They go back to the 60s, don't they? ...

: Some people, some Age of Aquarius ideas, are just a rationalization of being lazy... with the hippie ... basically quite lazy phenomenon. If you've got this idea that in 30 years' time

everything is going to turn out all right anyway, it means you don't have to put any effort ...

S: Yes.

Vajradaka: Then you have to make a distinction between individual effort and effort which you put into working with the group, because I think in Findhorn a lot of energy gets expended. People work very hard.

S: Well, as I pointed out in connection with Marxism, people can be galvanized into action by the thought that something is inevitable. It certainly doesn't seem to happen with the hippies, on the whole. Galvanized ...

Alaya: It's a nice idea, isn't it? It's intolerable that things are going to go on in the same old terrible way, that some change is happening, it is galvanizing. I don't think it was laziness at all.

: What, with the hippies?

Alaya: Mm.

[332]
S: No, that wasn't what was said: but that the idea that things were changing inevitably exempted you from having to do anything about it.

John R: All that you had to do was drop out, and you were actually taking part in something.

Alaya: You had, you'd dropped out.

John R: But it didn't require much effort.

Alaya: It did. It was harder to drop out than stay in.

S: You could say it's only a really lazy man who finds it took a lot of effort even to drop out. (?)

Uttara: ... new society ...

S: It depends to some extent on the initial temperament. There are people who are galvanized into activity by the thought that something is inevitable, like the Calvinists. They believed that they were saved, and therefore they lead their very strict religious lives. In the same way, people who believe that the coming of the communist state is inevitable will work very, very hard to bring it about, because they feel part of that inevitable historical process. So if you were of that sort of temperament, the fact that you believed that the New Age was inevitable and was dawning now could make you work all the harder to as it were bring it about. Maybe Sir George Trevelyan belongs to that group of people. But if you were a bit apathetic and slothful to begin with, the belief that the Age of Aquarius was inevitable and that it would come regardless of what anybody did or didn't do would tend to provide you with a convenient rationalization and convenient philosophy for your very laziness.

Alaya: [It seems] to me as if the idea of the Age of Aquarius was opposite to the idea of inevitability: it was all this inevitability that people tried to get away from. The inevitable dull life.

S: It should be, yes. But not, hopefully, with the idea of another inevitability. Because the way in which the Age of Aquarius was expounded, or the very origin of it, is an astrological thing. Maybe someone who knows a bit about astrology can explain how the Piscean age comes to an end and the age of Aquarius begins.

: It's written in letters from Venus, isn't it?

: It's supposed to start from 230 years, the Age of Aquarius.

S: Two hundred and thirty years?

: Yes, it actually starts.

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S: Some people believe it has actually come.

: Well, just come into the vibrations of ...

: The dawning.

: Cue for a song!

Asvajit: Does one say that there is something positive, to the extent that it turns people away from an essentially negative and pessimistic attitude?

S: One could say that, yes. Provided they don't think that this positive state of affairs is going to come about automatically without any effort or action on their part. If it's held up as an ideal, that's fine, but not if it's presented as a historical inevitability.

Vajradaka: There were number of movements at the Festival of Mind, Body and Spirit, like the Teachers of the World, for example, and there were others too, who 'received teachings' from spirits - not even - they were more like disembodied higher consciousnesses, divine almost or semi-divine forms. Usually these messages were given in automatic writing. And these messages were like edicts from higher consciousnesses which told you how to act your life out, so that you would be in tune with this process of ...

S: With the World Plan, or the cosmic plan. So here you get also bound up with this authoritarianism, because, all right, we do, for instance, let's agree for the sake of argument, that yes, there are these disembodied consciousnesses; this is not difficult to accept from a Buddhist point of view. All right, let us accept that it is possible for them to communicate with human beings, and to give instructions, and for those instructions to be recorded. Let us grant all that; this doesn't seem very difficult to accept, or very incredible. But then the question arises: what is the proof? The only proof there can really be is the nature of the content of the teaching. So really you should be convinced of the genuineness, the spiritual genuineness and helpfulness, the depth and profundity of that teaching first, and then infer

[that] it may well have come from some such source. But not believe that it has come from that source, therefore it must be profound and it must be this, that and the other. That is where authority comes in.

It's exactly the same as what we were talking about a little while ago in connection with the bhikkhus coming from the East: that someone is labelled a bhikkhu, he wears a yellow robe, so he must be where it's at, he must be highly evolved. But no, you have to look at the person, communicate with the person, and see whether he is highly evolved. In the same way, don't accept something on authority, so to speak - you're told that this emanates from some disembodied consciousness, it was discovered in this part of the universe, therefore it's got to be accepted. No, this is just falling back on authority; one might just as [334] well accept the Bible as to accept that, or the Book of Mormon, or the Koran. And this is why the Buddha says: do not accept anything on authority. Test it in your own experience and see whether it does actually help you to evolve. So, connected with the Age of Aquarius, maybe it's not surprising we get all these appeals to authority which emanated from such-and-such great master, therefore it must be true, therefore you've got to accept it. It emanates from such-and-such disembodied consciousness. And there are these grander and grander claims made. It comes, if not from God, from something even more colourful: the ruler of the whole planetary system, etc. etc.

Asvajit: Why should disembodied authority be any more authoritative than embodied authority?

S: Yes. So if you're caught up in all this excitement, Buddhism in a sense must seem very dull and pedestrian and plodding. Not nearly so colourful or attractive. In a way. Though of course, when you get down to it, it's much more exciting, because the excitement is real, the excitement of actual personal development.

Vajradaka: That's where one of the big confusions with the word 'spiritual' comes in. My friends who had these letters from disembodied consciousnesses considered that to be the spiritual life, because it has been so closely mixed up with the idea of spirit, and ...

S: Well, sometimes the idea is even that 'spiritual' means a sort of thinking or talking about these things.

(End of side)

Tape 15, Side 1

: Yes, spiritualists.

S: Well, that's a bit different, that's disembodied spirits passed on or passed over. They've gone to a better place, or to the Summerland, they call it.

: Summerland?

S: Summerland, because it's always summer there. They must be very English spiritualists.

: Billy Butlin's.

S: Well, it's a sort of mystic Billy Butlin's. (Laughter, voices inaudible.) But you see the way in which these concepts are all interlinked: the idea of inevitability, the mass movement, authority, the Age of Aquarius, all the rest of it.

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Uttara: I was just thinking if most of these groups could believe in God - I don't know how they see God, if he is just a peaceful ..., or if he still embodies the wrathful one, because by rights he should be still punishing us, the way the world has gone at the moment.

S: Well, perhaps he is.

Asvajit: All these ideas and movements seem to suggest inner poverty rather than inner richness.

S: There must be a reason for them. They are very predominant at present, and they certainly seem to mean something. There was a radio programme, wasn't there, some months ago, shortly before I went to India and New Zealand, about these movements, wasn't there?

: ...

: They dealt with the Hare Krishna movement, they dealt with the Moonies, they dealt with Divine Light, and I think Scientology. They didn't have anything Buddhistic, which was in a way quite interesting and significant, perhaps. But the person who produced that series I think ended up by saying that the people who went into these movements were in search essentially of security and wanting to belong to a group, wanting to be told what to do and in search of a father figure. So it seemed to be essentially a group phenomenon, rooted in personal insecurity. And the need of excitement, something happening, and all the rest of it.

Vajradaka: Do you think it's too far-fetched to expand that idea and say that within the depths of one's subconscious one feels very insecure, and so from one's subconscious produces these disembodied consciousnesses and spirits in the form of automatic writing?

S: One doesn't produce them, you see, because these ideas are to be found in religious literature, they are to be found in Buddhist literature; and it's as though you encounter these ideas, these concepts, and you respond to them or you make use of them in accordance with your own needs. You don't even need to produce them; they're there, ready to hand as it were.

Vajradaka: But people are producing them.

S: Well, they produce them, if they do produce them, on already existing models.

Vajradaka: I don't know. Maybe, but I've met quite a few people who did do automatic writing, and as far as they were concerned, at least, it wasn't a conscious -

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S: Oh, no; no, it wouldn't be a conscious thing. But it doesn't need to be, because, as I said, the patterns are already there. You just make use of them, or you manipulate them, in your own way. And you distort them, of course, in the process.

Uttara: If you look at the existing views that are around, there's nothing new in them.

S: Well, the way that people, say, use the idea of Enlightenment and think that they're talking about the same thing as the Buddha's Enlightenment - they just use that concept of Enlightenment entirely in their own way.

: What sprang to mind then was the difference between, say, how some modern Christians I've met talk about evolution, and how we talk about evolution; particularly I've read some of Rudolf Steiner's stuff, and he seems to see evolution as being an inevitable process, in much the same way, composed of various forces which man is subject to and participates in; rather than our view, where it's through our own efforts. It will take us so far; after that we can evolve but it's still our own effort. It's like using that conception of evolution in two totally different ways - which seems to betray the root of the situation.

S: Well, they make use of the word meditation or of the word transcendental; this is one of the things we noticed about that Festival, that everybody practically seemed to be using much the same sort of language, much the same sort of terminology that we use in the Friends, but in a completely different way. I pointed out - I think, was it on this seminar? it might have been on one of the previous ones - that this is just what happened in the Buddha's own day. The Buddha was having to use exactly the same terminology that everybody else was using: karma, brahmana, sramana, nibbana, jhana, and the rest; saddha, jnana, prajna, virya. The same words that everybody else was using. So, to begin with, to the people who were around in north-eastern India at that time, it did not seem that there was very much of a difference between the Buddha and his teaching and that of the other teachers of his time. He stood out much less than, say, Buddhism stands out today, and the Buddha even stands out today. Even the word Buddha was used in a very general way at that time, just for a wise man; and the word buddha would certainly apply to all sorts of people in the Buddha's day apart from the Buddha himself. The word jina was applied, too, in much the same way; even the word Tathagata wasn't completely distinctive in the way that it was later on in Buddhist history. And even the way in which the Buddha and his disciples lived was not very distinguishable from the way in which other people at that time lived. Others also wore orange robes and begged and wandered from place to place; stayed under trees and in caves during the rainy season. So the situation was much the same then, and only gradually did Buddhism develop its own distinctive terminology by insisting on using certain words in its own distinctive way, which gradually became accepted or recognized as the distinctively Buddhist usage, and also by developing its own [337] distinctive separate institutions, especially the Sangha. Otherwise, to outsiders the Buddha appeared to be just one of a number of leaders of little groups. The Buddha's group was called sangha; it was called gana; so were the others called sanghas and ganas. The Buddha was called a gananayaka, the leader of a group; the others also were leaders of a group. So there was much the same sort of situation then. It's inevitable, because individuals arise within the group, even the spiritual community arises within the group. You can't create your own language all at once - your language in the sense of ideas. You have to use the language that lies ready to hand, and make use of the ideas that lie ready to hand. But eventually you succeed in giving them your own distinctive colouring, or your own distinctive impress. And that comes to be gradually more and more recognized.

So, historically speaking, the FWBO is just one of the hundreds of hippie movements that arose in the 60s, and originally people took us for something like that; or, a bit later, as one of the dozens of Buddhist groups that arose in Britain in the 70s. But, at a later stage, they might

begin to see us as more like what we actually are. As we ourselves develop the implications of our attitudes, and develop our own ways of putting things, our own ways of doing things, more and more, then we shall more and more stand out as something distinctive and not be lumped with all the others. Just as happened with Buddhism originally in India. So we mustn't be surprised at what is happening currently, at what has happened.

All right, so much about Kali Yuga and about the Aquarian Age; let's go on to the last precept and see what that has to say.

(10) By reflecting upon the uselessness of aimlessly frittering away thy life, mayest thou be incited to diligence and the treading of the Path.

S: There are several concepts which are connected: uselessness, aimlessness, and meaninglessness. So you fritter away your life because you don't see a particular continuity in it in life, and you don't see any meaning in it, more often than not. So you can't really stop frittering your life away aimlessly, you can't really realize the uselessness of doing that, until you've got some conception or some understanding of the meaningfulness of life. You have to be convinced that life is meaningful before you can live usefully, and not fritter your life away aimlessly. Do you think a lot of people are doing this currently - let's say in Britain, frittering their lives away aimlessly?

Voices: Yes. Everyone.

S: Sometimes everyone, yes. They may appear not to be, they may have certain aims in a sense, but they are very limited aims.

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So you have to reflect on the uselessness of aimlessly frittering away your life. Do you think that that helps? What does it mean by being useless? Sometimes people think: what else is there to do? There's no alternative.

Asvajit: It may, if someone does have that estimate of some ability to penetrate into things, that he may come to some idea of a purpose, of a ...

S: Yes, to understand the meaningfulness of life, as viewed from a certain point of view.

: I think you've said on occasion if you feel you ought to be doing something and really want to do something and you are really confused about what to do next, the best thing to do is to sit down and wait till you know what's the next ...
S: Yes, well, what you feel.

: So in that context it's ...

S: Well, you can't really stop aimlessly frittering away your life until you've discovered some meaning and purpose in your life. Otherwise what else can you do? There is nothing that you can do. So most people allow themselves to be gripped by routine and just don't bother to think, don't even dare to think. They hardly ever ask themselves: 'Why am I living like this?' because they don't really think there's any alternative, possibly. We talked about this some days ago, didn't we? You see it as almost inevitable that you leave school, you get a job, you

get married, you enter into all the usual engagements, the usual obligations, and in that way you lead your life. Most people don't think that there is any real other possibility.

So, in a way, the fact that there is a routine to follow prevents us from thinking about the meaning and purpose of life, doesn't it? That routine, that following of the routine, becomes a substitute. Not even a substitute, it blinds us to the need, the necessity, for trying to see what is the meaning of life and acting accordingly. You're caught up in the machine before you've even time to think about it, before you've even time to think about it - you're not asked, it's not explained to you: 'Here is this machine, as it were: do you want to get on to it?' You are not asked, because the process starts so early. It starts as soon as you can toddle, as soon as you can talk, as soon as you are sent to playgroup, as soon as you are sent to kindergarten, and it carries on steadily step by step.

: There still is the same danger even in the Friends, of just getting into a routine, like having your nose to the grindstone and then not actually seeing where you're going.

S: But in a sense, looking at the Friends as a positive group, it wouldn't matter so much there as within the ordinary society, just because the Friends is, let's say, a positive group. But you certainly wouldn't be developing your potential, or realizing [339] your own potential, to the full; you wouldn't become an individual in that way, even within the context of the Friends, if you followed it in that way. You would soon come up against natural limits. You couldn't ever become an Order Member, which would definitely limit your possibilities and limit them in a very obvious way within the Friends.

Vajradaka: There seems to be an important stage in quite a lot of people's lives when they start one train of habitual routine, and it's almost like a watershed before the next, like leaving the army and something like that. This is a very crude example. But before they go into the next thing it seems really important, I think, that people then sometimes do try and reassess if there is any meaning.

S: Sometimes people get dissatisfied with their job, and they start wondering why. But then they usually think in terms of changing to some other kind of job. But the basic pattern, that is to say of home, family and job, doesn't change. There's only some degree of change or variation within that pattern. Of course, if they get very dissatisfied maybe not with just one job but with several jobs, they might start asking even more radical questions. But I think usually even that doesn't happen, because people don't really see any alternative. In the old days you could at least enter a monastery; theoretically you can still enter a monastery. But there aren't very many people now, even among, say, Roman Catholics who have monasteries - lots of churches don't have monasteries any more, strange as it may sound - even among them it isn't a very viable option unless you are an Irish peasant or something like that.

Sona: What quite a lot of people do nowadays in that situation is to drop out, to some extent anyway. They stop working and move out into the country. But they often find that's worse than routine.

S: Sometimes your routine at least keeps you a functioning but your sluggish life in the country means you don't even function as an ordinary human being.

Asvajit: A better distinction needs to be drawn between job and work: the job being the

stultifying slavery type of situation, and work being creative and developing.

S: The point I am making is [that] the fact that people are caught up in a definite routine before they even have a chance to think means that they don't ever become aware of the uselessness of the sort of life that they are leading, which is in fact simply an aimless frittering away of their lives until perhaps it's too late, and certainly they don't start thinking seriously about the meaning of life.

: This means that in our own work situation we have to be careful of not seeing it as a ... situation.

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S: Yes; also not seeing a definite career structure within the Friends, you see? Like you become a Friend, and you become a Mitra after a couple of years, and two or three years later you are ordained; you work steadily around a Centre for four, five, six years, and then you could become a Secretary or Chairman - you see, you mustn't see it like that. Though, of course, some people genuinely as individuals will follow that path, but one mustn't see it as something as it were inevitable and as the path for everybody.

Sona: We still seem to lack positive alternatives for people in, say, a family situation, with a job etc. The only alternative for, say, a man in a family situation would be to leave his family, move into a men's community and stop supporting them.

S: Well, that seems to be the alternative which at present most recommends itself to those in that position. It's up to them. There may be alternative possibilities, but it's up to those people who are in those positions to discover them.

Sona: It sometimes seems to be a lot to ask, somehow. Somebody's quite entrenched in that ...quite a radical change ...

S: Well, perhaps one is asking quite a lot.

Ray: What I find is people think it isn't directed in the way you directed it, but they ... think, ah, Friends is against families, which is true, but you can't ever get out of that family situation because there isn't the means to.

S: Yes, they think perhaps that the FWBO is just running its head against a brick wall, and that there are these few people who are just lucky enough to be in the sort of situation that they are - they put it down to luck - but that it can never become a viable way of life for large numbers of people.

Ray: But you also come across the charge that therefore that it is unrealistic to ...

S: Well, one can say that is just due to lack of imagination on people's parts, or to the fact that they are just so settled, so deeply settled, so rigidly settled in their own routines that they just can't imagine a different state of affairs; in a sense, almost don't want to, even. It would be too painful to think perhaps that they had missed an opportunity.

Also, so long as most people in the Friends, even Order Members, are quite young, they can

regard it as a phase, and think: 'Ah well, in a few years' time they'll all settle down. They'll all reconcile themselves to real life and just do what we've done.' It's disconcerting, of course, when older men start kicking over the traces; after maybe decades of fidelity and conformity, they start kicking over the traces. That's a bit disconcerting to people outside, much more so than if very young men are living [341] in that way. I'd really like to see men around 50 and 60 kicking over the traces, really shocking their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

John R: The Movement can provide a kind of raft or platform on which people can jump out of their routines, just have a look, can't it? That's almost why institutions are important. (?)

S: Right. Otherwise, formerly, one was having to ask you to jump overboard just into the raging ocean. At least now we have a few little boats around on to which they can climb and survive. Otherwise, it was virtually like almost asking them to commit suicide, at least social suicide, to people. But hopefully our boats eventually will be bigger and better even than the ones that they are already on.

This whole question of 'reflecting upon the uselessness of aimlessly frittering away thy life' - do you think this is a very good approach to try to point out to people how useless their lives are, or aimless their lives are? They should be searching for some kind of meaning?

: No, I think that you really have to decide that for yourself. If you point it out to other people ...

S: If they ask you, for instance, why you have given up living in this particular way.

: I think it's very good to give the reasons very clearly, not soft-pedal it, why you have given up.

S: Sometimes people try to soft-pedal by saying, 'It's just my personal preference.' They avoid criticizing, avoid any objective assessment or judgement.

Viramati: I often say, 'My old way of life had no meaning' to people, and it seems to quite strike them. I think a lot of people do find that, that's why they come along, because it has no meaning; I think it could be quite important.

: It's quite easy to get people to ...; just go over a normal life cycle, ...

S: Yes, say 'What have you done with your life, by the time you've reached the age of 40, 50, 60? What have you done with it? Can you look back on it with any degree of genuine satisfaction? Has it really meant anything to yourself or to anybody that you have lived? Has it added anything to the universe that you have been in it for 40 or 50 years? Are you an ornament on the universe, or are you just a little insignificant blot? - or a little wheel amongst millions of other wheels, just slowly turning round and infinitely replaceable?'

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John T: Bhante, are there ever any cases where it might not be good to disillusion somebody about their life? When you can see them not having the strength to then move on and having their life shattered by what you have told them?

S: I think there's a degree of tactfulness required. You just have to assess the situation. There might be people like that. But probably they'd be people who weren't really worth talking to very seriously anyway; you'd just leave them alone. On the other hand, you mustn't underestimate people's resources.

: Yes, I think that's true.

Sona: I find when you know saying something to someone is going to cause a certain amount of pain and upset, but even perhaps in the long run it's going to do them a world of good.

S: They might not even feel so much pain and upset as you think.
Viramati: It might be what they really want you to say.

S: Yes, it could be sometimes.

John R: Classes at Centres could have that kind of quality, the quality of not underestimating people; there's a dynamic revolution for - people respond to that. Each class has got a kind of urgency about it. As they come up the stairs, they are crossing a line, there's a whole new pulsating ...

S: Yes, right.

: We were standing outside the Norwich Centre watching people go up like lambs to the slaughter... It's the big one, they go up those stairs.

S: And find Devamitra waiting at the top, with his bloodstained knife.

Ray: There are people that deeply feel the meaninglessness of life, but they just haven't found somewhere to direct that, ... haven't found an answer to ...

S: Yes. I think there are quite a few more thoughtful men who do really feel that their lives are pretty meaningless, but they can't see any alternative, so they see no point - in a way, rightly - in dwelling on the meaninglessness of their lives. They think, 'Let's make the best of a bad job.'

: Rationalize. Time and time again, I think.

S: Yes, sometimes they don't even bother to rationalize, they just recognize or they agree that their lives are pretty meaningless, but maybe that's what life's all about, as it were: it hasn't got any meaning. So they don't bother, they just get through with the help of such amenities as are available -

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: Football ...

: Gin and tonic.

S: Gin and tonic, or a bit of a flutter on the horses. But very often, with people like that, if they do come into contact with something more serious and meaningful, they can afford as it

were to recognize the meaninglessness of their own lives more clearly because there is now an alternative.

: They are in a better position in a way than some people who project importance on to things that don't possess it.

S: Yes, indeed.

Ray: Do you think you can even do this for someone who isn't in the conventional sense very intelligent? - you know, say, at a late stage in their life, they have found meaninglessness for a number of years, but ...

S: I would say if they had found meaninglessness for a number of years that they were intelligent. They might not be ...

Ray: I meant in the conventional sense.

S: I would say that they were intelligent and that one could talk to them seriously. It's probably quite a great mistake to underestimate the intelligence of the average person. It's very doubtful whether the average person is less intelligent than you are.

Ray: I wasn't actually thinking that.

S: I don't mean you personally, but any average Friend as it were. It's very doubtful whether anybody you meet is less intelligent than you.

Uttara: I think I would put myself in that category. As far as schooling went, I was dumb. But ...

S: I'm not referring to schooling or education. But I certainly don't think it is the case that the people within the FWBO are markedly more intelligent than people outside. No: I think one could say that they are more emotionally positive, on the whole; I think one could certainly say that. And a little more aware. But I wouldn't say that they were more intelligent.

Ray: I was wondering about ways in which someone who has been conditioned, say, for 60 years and believing in God, how he can transfer that ... belief in God and still feel meaningless, how do you transfer that meaninglessness to having some sort of faith in the Dharma?

S: Well, you'd have to just take that person from where you found them. It's very difficult to generalize. You just have to establish some sort of communication, some sort of empathy, [344] and take it from there. Some people might even feel that someone of 60-odd just hadn't a chance, you'd be better spending your time with someone very much younger, with his life before him. But certainly if someone, however old, comes into contact with you, don't refuse the opportunity. If you feel that you have a mission to 60, 70-year-old people, fine. Some people might. I think it's very important for most people to feel that there is some sort of meaning to life and that their own lives have a meaning and a purpose. Otherwise I don't think they can really make very much of them, or be even very happy.

So perhaps this is something that could be dwelt upon sometimes, the question raised, whether people's lives, whether 'your lives', say, when you are speaking to people outside the Movement, have got any real meaning, and therefore whether it's possible for you to be real human beings, real individuals, or to be happy, even. Probably the 'meaninglessness of life', as an approach, will appeal to more people than 'the evils of existence' does.

Vajradaka: It's possible to have a more positive angle of the potential.

S: Yes, indeed.

Vajradaka: Just as a human being you have the potential to be and become,experience life in so many ways, why choose one which isn't really ... good for you or us?

S: Yes. But if you start speaking in terms of potential, that does suggest a whole philosophy; that does suggest that life has a certain meaning; that's the more theoretical side of it, because if you speak in terms of potential it implies the whole philosophy of evolution and individual development. But, yes - potential, if you speak in terms of people's potentiality it has a nice positive sort of sound. It implies that life has a meaning, and you may not state it explicitly, but more often than not people will respond very positively to even the suggestion that life has a meaning, and the idea of evolution and potentiality does really convey that. When you say that 'you have a potential', that implies a whole definite view of life. It implies that life has a definite meaning. So that is quite a good approach, to speak to people in terms of their potential, and from that to get on to other things. That they actually can do more than they think, more than they usually think. There are other options open to them which they are capable of taking.

John R: It's this thing about being a victim of circumstance ...

S: Yes! 'I've never had a chance, I didn't go to a good school' and all that sort of thing.

John R: The way the cookie crumbles, or ... But just that slight element of choice - you can actually improve your lot yourself, can get the whole ball rolling.

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: People are very afraid of that, as well, I think; ... people ...It's a real barrier, they suddenly realize that they might have to do something about it themselves.

S: And they can't blame anybody else for the way things are.

Viramati: They can get quite cynical as well, of the fact that there is something else.

Vajradaka: But some people also just get stronger when they see that. They see that they are victims of certain kind of things, like even nicotine, and want to break away from this, they don't want to become a victim.

S: They don't like the idea of being a victim. This is, in more positive terms, what the Precept really means: 'By reflecting upon the uselessness of aimlessly frittering away thy life, mayest thou be incited to diligence' - that is, virya. Once you see that life has a meaning, energy is released. No one was ever inspired by the thought that life has no meaning.

John R: What's that quote you mentioned before about learning to fly? A man only flies high if he doesn't ...

S: Oh, yes: "a man never flies so high as when he doesn't know where he is going." Said to be a saying of Cromwell's. It means you've just got that urge within you which you can't fully account for intellectually, but it's just carrying you further and further, higher and higher. Yes, a man never flies so high as when he does not know where he is going. This comes in the memoirs of the French writer who had it from someone who was I think Ambassador to England in Cromwell's time; Cromwell is supposed to have said to him in conversation, 'A man never flies so high as when he does not know where he is going.'

Asvajit: ... where Padmapani got his idea of the Greater Mandala of Uselessness from that. Well, he talks about - instead of saying the mandala of aesthetic appreciation, as you say, he says the Greater Mandala of Uselessness.

S: That's just what I said.

Asvajit: Oh, that's what you said as well?

S: Yes, that's where he got it from. The same seminar...

John R: He said something about ... used as decoration. A word like decoration he used, or adornment; something to be functional, just being there, and having to the feeling of it all.

S: Yes, you sometimes, say, if people can't be useful at least let them be ornamental. But if they are ornamental they are being useful, because ornamental things, as ornamental, do have a use. It's not only the narrowly utilitarian things that are useful, it's the beautiful things that are useful too, the [346] beautiful useless things. So if you can't be useful, just be a beautiful and useless thing.

John R: Sometimes people don't like to be told that they're beautiful.

S: Yes, it suggests they've got nothing else; they've got no brains, and so you therefore compliment them on their beauty.
Anyway, any final point before we close? Any point about anything we've done this morning, or on any morning?

Uttara: All the time you get a feeling of trying to activate your action, that's what I get from it. Get you to move, get you to ...

S: I think all through the week there's been quite an emphasis - no doubt a widening out of the Precepts - on individual responsibility and initiative and freedom, even; and this comes up again this morning in connection with the Age of Darkness and the New Age, the Age of Aquarius: that if you want to grow, if you want to develop as an individual, you cannot hand over your responsibility to anybody else or anything else. You have to accept it yourself. It's up to you. Even in the most favourable circumstances or most favourable conditions, even the fact that you are in the very midst of the spiritual community, can't really help you very much unless you are prepared to make an effort yourself. Otherwise even the most beautiful retreat will just pass straight over your head.

All right: time's not only up, we've gone over time, but never mind. So that's that.

Voices: Thank you very much.

S: We've done a fair amount, haven't we? How many sections have we done?

Voices: Three. Four.

S: Did we do the Ten Things One must Know? One, two, three, four. Only four? That's not bad: quite a few points have arisen.

END OF SEMINAR

Spellchecked and put into house style Shantavira December 1998