# 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*

# SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

## THE PRECEPTS OF THE GURUS - FOURTH SEMINAR

**[Study based on the Chapter entitled:
'The Supreme Path, The Rosary of Precious Gems'
found in
"A BUDDHIST BIBLE", edited by Dwight Goddard,
1970 edition, Beacon Press, Boston, USA.
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Held at: Padmaloka

Date: 23-24 February 1980

Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Clive Pomfret (now Kevala), Susiddhi, Will Spens (now Satyaraja), Mike Keogh (now Indrabhuti), Devaraja, Brian Duff (now Dharmavira), Tony Bowall (now Silabhadra), Andy Friends (now Subhadra), Derek Goodman (now Sasanaratna), Alan Morrow (now Chakkhupala), Steve Webster (now Dharmabandhu), Roger Jones (now Vajradipa)

[Tape 1, side 1] Session 1

S: We're going to be going through some of the Precepts of the Gurus. We've got here copies of three chapters, that is to say chapter XI - starting from chapter XI, then chapter XII, chapter XIII. We may or we may not be able to get through all three chapters. I'd be rather surprised if we were able. Usually, in the
course of a weekend, we get through one chapter or one section, because we prefer to go quite thoroughly into each precept and look at it from as many different points of view as possible without being afraid even of the odd digression. So maybe we could go round the circle reading a precept at a time, and then going into it as deeply as we can.

XI. The Ten Resemblances Wherein One May Err.

[2]
(1) Desire may be mistaken for faith.

S: Perhaps I should just mention, before we go into that, that we are starting on XI because the previous ten sections have been dealt with in the course of other seminars, so this is a sort of collective effort, going through this particular text with different sections being done in different seminars with different groups of people.

So 'Desire may be mistaken for faith'. Here we are concerned, as the chapter heading says, with 'Resemblances wherein one may err'; in other words, it's very easy to mistake one thing for another just because it looks like it when superficially considered or superficially examined. So there are ten resemblances wherein one may err, particularly, and the first one is 'Desire may be mistaken for faith'. But how is that? How can desire be mistaken for faith? What is desire? What is faith? These are the sort of questions that are raised here.

Has anyone got any idea, to begin with, how desire may be mistaken for faith? Perhaps we should look at it, first of all, by asking in what way is desire similar to faith? In what way does desire resemble faith, actually?

Roger: They're quite strong feelings.

S: They're quite strong feelings. Well, desire is always a strong feeling, or usually a strong feeling. Faith ideally is a strong feeling. Only too often it's rather weak, admittedly, but it should be strong. Yes, desire and faith are both strong feelings. Any other resemblance?

Mike: They're both a belief in something.

S: They're both a belief in something - is desire a belief in something?

Mike: You have to believe in it to desire it.

S: Necessarily? For instance if by belief one means that one has got a sort of clearly defined idea of the object of the desire? Desire can be as it were instinctual can't it with a not very clear idea of its appropriate object - can be quite blind? In fact, desire sometimes is notoriously blind, one could say. A desire with regard to which you have a clear idea of what it is that you desire is what we might call rational desire. There is such a thing. But also there is such a thing as irrational desire, which just goes blundering along with no very clear idea of its object at all. So one couldn't speak of desire in general and faith in general as resembling each other inasmuch as they have clear ideas of their respective objects always.

So any other resemblance?

Roger: They do pertain to oneself.

S: They pertain to oneself, what, in the sense that they originate from oneself?

Roger: Mm, and they seem to be each very much concerned with oneself.

S: Mm, one's desire or one's faith is very personal to oneself, as it were; is that what you're saying? Well, yes, one could say, in some cases. In certain respects desire, if one is especially thinking in terms of the more irrational desire, is common to many people. In fact, one could say that the less rational the more common. But it's personal in the sense of being subjective.

[3]
Roger: That is more what I was trying to say, yes.

S: But what does that suggest by way of a resemblance, in a very general way?

Steve: You think that both of them are going to make you happy.

S: You think that both are going to make you happy. You may think, in the case of desire, if you get around to thinking at all - which you may not necessarily do - you may just assume ... I'm trying to get to what seems to be the biggest resemblance of all, in a way.

Devaraja: Is it a feeling of wanting to make something outside of yourself or something other than yourself part of yourself?

S: Possibly; possibly. Though very often one doesn't actually have that idea, when you go after something which you desire. You don't necessarily have the idea of making it part of yourself. You may sort of act in that way, but if you were asked, and if you were to think, to the extent that you could think, you wouldn't necessarily say that you were trying to make it part of yourself.

Roger: Because they are strong, they are really very overpowering.

S: We're getting there: they're strong, they're overpowering, but they are strong what?

Tony: Emotions.

S: Emotions, yes! They're emotions. So this is probably the greatest resemblance that they have: that desire and faith are both emotions, or both feelings, and this is the reason, of course, why they are so strong: it's because the emotions generally are strong, especially basic ones of this sort.

So all right, they resemble each other in being emotions. So that would suggest that it's on account of their both being emotions and actually generally resembling each other in that respect - it's on that account that one can be mistaken for the other. So that raises the question of what is the difference, what makes the difference, between desire, which is an emotion, and faith, which is an emotion? How do they differ?

Devaraja: In faith there's an element of confidence. There's a feeling of confidence that arises out of it. With desire it doesn't seem to have that basis.

S: Not necessarily. I would say in both cases it depends upon the extent of your previous acquaintance, or on the extent of your previous experience. In the case of faith - yes, faith can be, or can develop into, confidence, but only as a result of experience. For instance, you have faith in a person, so until you really know them, until you have some real experience of them, your faith is blind faith, virtually - blind in the sense of not being confirmed by your experience of them. You may, for instance, enter into some kind of business dealings with somebody; you may have faith that they are going to act honestly. But that, until you actually know them and have experience of them, is pure faith, based perhaps upon superficial impressions, their reputation, their appearance. But if you deal with them regularly for years together, and you find that they are always honest, always reliable, then your faith becomes confidence.

In the same way with desire: you may have a desire for a certain [4] thing, but to begin with your desire may be a blind desire because you don't know whether any particular given object is going to satisfy your desire or not. But with experience you learn, or you come to learn, what actually does satisfy your desire, at least for the time being. So the question of confidence arising out of experience or acquaintance arises in both cases; so that cannot be taken as a differentiating factor.

Roger: Faith does seem to be much more outward-looking, whereas desire is just purely ...

subjective, and there's real quite a difference in feel to it, isn't there?

S: Yes. Yes. So in the case of faith, in a sense it's more than a sort of outwardgoingness. It's not even an outwardgoingness, it's having an outward reference, because desire is also outwardgoing, towards the object of desire, but the ultimate reference is to the subject. Because the outwardgoingness is for the sake of the satisfaction of the desire of the subject, but in the case of faith it doesn't quite happen like that, doesn't quite work like that; there's an outwardgoingness for the sake of the object. It's almost as though you give yourself to the object. Whereas in the case of desire you give the object to yourself.

So you could say that desire represents a sort of appropriating outwardgoingness or outwardgoingness for the sake of appropriation, whereas faith, to the extent that one speaks of outwardgoingness at all, represents an outwardgoingness for the sake of the object in order to place yourself at the service of the object, or at the disposal of the object, or under the influence of the object. So you begin to approach some sense of the difference between the two things.

So how may desire be mistaken for faith? You may think that you believe in something and want to give yourself to something when you only want to appropriate something and use it for yourself. This is how it comes in. In that way desire may be mistaken for faith. But can you give any practical examples of that?

Susiddhi: I remember something that was on one of your tapes, when you said that people read a lot about Buddhism, they understand it, and therefore they appropriated it. Is that the sort of thing you mean?

S: Yes, you could say they appropriate Buddhism, or rather a concept of Buddhism, rather than giving themselves to Buddhism; in other words, they don't develop any faith in it. And here it's the intellect, or you could say the alienated reason, which is the instrument of that appropriation. You appropriate information instead of surrendering yourself to inspiration. Yes, so this is an example: we do it with our reading.

So we think that we are surrendering ourselves to inspiration when we are in fact perhaps just appropriating information through the rational mind. We try to as it were incorporate Buddhism into us, which really means incorporating a concept of Buddhism - because we can't really incorporate Buddhism itself - rather than trying to incorporate ourselves into Buddhism, which is more akin to faith.

So it's as though, when you encounter Buddhism, there's a sort of conflict, a sort of struggle. As it were, Buddhism tries to swallow you and you try to swallow Buddhism, when you ought really to be allowing Buddhism to swallow you, and to assimilate you, and to - what shall I say? - to restore you, transformed; instead of which you try to appropriate Buddhism and assimilate Buddhism to your own conditioned nature.

[5]
Susiddhi: I think that's a very common human thing, to try and understand something so that you can put it in its place.

S: Yes. This is why it's so important to recognize that there is so much that we don't

understand, whereas only too often people think they've only got to read a few books about Buddhism and they know all about it. And they will quite confidently tell you what it's all about.

So you could say that desire is mistaken for faith when a strong desire for something is mistaken for a strong faith in something.

Derek: Seems to be a parallel here between the difference between metta and pema.

S: Yes, you could say that in the case of pema, in the case of affection, as it's usually translated, you are trying to appropriate another person for the sake of your own emotional satisfaction; but in the case of metta or friendliness you are trying to give yourself to, devote yourself to, even, another person for the sake of their happiness. So just in the same way as desire may be mistaken for faith, so pema may be mistaken for metta; the same sort of difference between the subjective orientation and the objective orientation.

But in terms of actual examples, say within the context of the Friends, what would be perhaps the outstanding example of desire being mistaken for faith, in a quite practical way?

Derek: Someone jumping to some clerical position or other, perhaps for the wrong reasons?

S: Yes - but I'm not quite thinking of that, though it's of the same kind of nature. I'm thinking of something which is a very strong example of that, as it were. What sort of question does this come up in connection with? You desire something.

___: Going for Refuge.

S: Going for Refuge, yes, right, yes. So you could say that desire for ordination could be mistaken for faith in the Three Jewels as a result of which you want to commit yourself. So what is happening here? How do the two differ? How does desire for ordination, or desire to be ordained, or desire to belong to the Order, say, differ from a faith in the Three Jewels and a willingness to commit oneself?

Susiddhi: It hinges on whether you are giving yourself to the object or trying to give the object to yourself.

S: Yes, or rather to take from the object for the sake of yourself as you at present are, so that you may remain as you at present are, and that usually boils down to something like security. And that means, as we've often said, that in that case the Order is seen not so much as a spiritual community but as a sort of group which offers security and approval and membership of a group, and you want to be a member of that group. That is your desire, in fact, whereas you think that you've got faith in the Three Jewels. Of course, it all may be very mixed. It isn't usually that it's definitely the one or definitely the other; very often it is very mixed - maybe mixed in equal proportions - and you just have to sort out the desire from the faith, and at least have a definite preponderance of faith.

But it almost amounts to the possibility of mistaking going round and round in circles for growth and development. This is also where the mistake lies. You think you are going forward, but actually you are just going round in a familiar circle. When I was [6] -

somewhere else, not in England - in one particular place, somebody came to me and was saying that they really wanted to be ordained very much, and they clearly were under the impression that if they could convince me that they really wanted it, well, that was tantamount to their actually being ready and being willing to commit themselves; that they wanted it so much. But they could not see the difference. But if you want something you think of it as a 'thing out there' to be appropriated, not as a step that you yourself must take in such a way that it can be then recognized and acknowledged by others; not that anybody is giving you anything, no. Despite the phraseology we use about giving ordination - in a way, that's quite wrong, nobody gives you anything. It's simply a recognition or awareness of something that you have done yourself. It's as though other people say, 'Oh, yes, yes, he's committed himself'. They see that and they recognize it. Not that they give you something which previously you didn't have. Though of course they may have encouraged you to commit yourself in that way, that's different. Even then they haven't given you anything, they've simply encouraged you.

And then again, of course, the question arises in that when people, mistaking desire for faith in this way, don't get what they wanted, as it appears to them, then of course they also ... again and think maybe they're being rejected or they're not good enough or people are being exclusive, etc., etc., etc. It leads to all sorts of further complications - all because desire has been mistaken for faith.

So it's a quite important point, a quite important principle too. It's quite important to distinguish between desire on the one hand and faith on the other, because they can be confused; partly because they are emotions, partly because they are both outwardgoing, they are both very strong, and in this particular case they both have to do, either rightly or wrongly, with the spiritual community.

Mike: Can desire become faith? Is it an initial something that maybe you pass through?

S: I think in a way, to begin with, faith almost has to be desire, in the sense that you don't start off as an individual - that is, not on the whole. So when you approach the spiritual community or when you come into contact with the spiritual community initially, you cannot but see it as a group. So your attitude towards it cannot but be that of someone who would like to be a member of the group. But gradually, as you yourself become more of an individual, you are able to recognize individuality in others to a greater extent. Then you see that people that you had thought of before as members of a group are in fact individuals who - you see, we don't have the proper terms, even, in English - belong to a spiritual community; and that therefore it is not a question of becoming a member of that group, but of becoming an individual like those individuals so that you will be able to relate to them as an individual among individuals, and form with them not a group but a spiritual community.

So you start off on the assumption that you are a group member or potential group member, and that is a group and they are group members. You start off with desire, or your approach is in terms of desire initially. But as you become more of an individual, and see them more as individuals, then your desire becomes transmuted into something more like faith, in the case of the spiritual community.

Mike: I was thinking that - obviously there is a difference between desire and faith, but in some respects desire is not necessarily like a bad thing.

[7]
S: No, because you can obviously be a group member in a quite healthy, positive way, and it isn't a bad thing, again, that there should be what I call the positive group. But the positive group, however positive and however desirable, is not to be mistaken as a spiritual community. The spiritual community is much more likely to grow out of the positive group than to grow out of just any old group. It's as though the positive group is a necessary intermediate stage. And so in the same way in the case of the individual it's as though he has to be a happy, healthy, positive group member before he can be an individual. That's the basis for development that he needs.

But so far we've talked about desire and faith only in relation to the spiritual community; so the question could arise, in what way could they be confused with regard to 1) the Buddha and 2) the Dharma? What would one have to say about that? How could one have, say, desire for the Buddha rather than faith in the Buddha?

___: You want what the Buddha's got.

S: You want what the Buddha has got. But what does it seem to you that he's got?

___: Potency.

S: Potency is one thing, yes, power - to put it more crudely. Or perhaps less crudely. Power, prestige, influence, success. You could see the Buddha in these sort of terms. And desire to be like that rather than to have faith in the Buddha more to grow genuinely into what the Buddha really is. Do you think that actually does happen very much? - that desire for the Buddha, so to speak, is mistaken for faith in the Buddha in this way?

Voices: Yes.

S: Yes. Maybe not so much connected with the historical Buddha but with the ideal of Enlightenment - that you'll be someone really powerful, really successful and influential, and perhaps with a big following and all the rest of it, and certainly very impressive and important.

But one cannot but see the Buddha in this way to begin with. There is, you must know, a comparison between the Buddha and the cakravartiraja - you know about this? The cakravartiraja is the wheel-turning king, the universal monarch, and he has, as the Buddha has, the different marks and signs. But just as the positive group stands in relation to the spiritual community you could say, so, individual for individual, does the cakravartiraja stand in relation to the Buddha. He looks exactly like the Buddha. He has got all the marks and signs. But there is just one big difference: he isn't Enlightened. [Laughter] Do you see what I mean? But you can't see that unless you are Enlightened, you can't see that difference unless you are Enlightened. So therefore the Diamond Sutra says that the Buddha is not to be recognized by his marks, in this technical sense of signs and the marks, because the cakravartiraja also has these signs and these marks. The Buddha is to be recognized by something quite different, which can only be described as his Enlightenment, and you can only recognize that if you've got something of Enlightenment in yourself.

So if you haven't got that, you cannot but see the Buddha as cakravartiraja; in other words,

you can see him as possessed of all sorts of positive qualities, wielding influence, but you'll not be able to distinguish between those positive qualities in their mundane sense and those positive qualities in their Transcendental sense, because they don't differ outwardly in any [8] recognizable way. For instance, someone may be very kind, may be very helpful; but whether he is doing that out of mundane, conditioned positivity, or out of Transcendental Insight, you have no means of knowing, if you don't have that Transcendental Insight yourself, because the actions to you appear exactly the same. So you cannot but see a Buddha as a cakravartiraja, you cannot but see the spiritual person, in the sense of a Transcendental person, simply as a very positive person. Unless you have some sort of Transcendental Insight yourself, you are unable to recognize any difference, unless you are perhaps - if you are very sensitive and open and aware - unless you are perhaps conscious that there is something in that apparently just positive person that you can't quite make out. You might recognize that there's something that you can't put your finger on - that you come up against a sort of blank, there's something there but you have no idea what it is. That might in fact be the position.

But so long as you see the Buddha, so to speak, as a cakravartiraja, you will think of Buddhahood as a sort of position to be appropriated. So to the extent that you think of Buddhahood as a position to be appropriated, in however refined a way, you have desire for Buddhahood, not faith in Buddhahood, not faith in Enlightenment.

And what about the Dharma? How could you have desire for the Dharma rather than faith in the Dharma?

Mike: You could want to learn about the Dharma to teach others without ever relating it to yourself.

S: Or just want to know a lot about it, just appropriate it. And that as it were intellectual understanding, whether you wanted just to have it or whether you wanted to pass it on to others. There are many examples of well-known scholars in Buddhism who know it really well, but in some cases it doesn't seem to have occurred to them that it is anything to be practised. Desire for the Dharma, desire for knowledge about the Dharma, or desire for the Dharma as intellectual system, desire to appropriate that, but no faith in it at all. On the other hand, someone can have very little knowledge of the Dharma, but whatever knowledge he does have he has got complete faith in.

So 'Desire may be mistaken for faith.' So one can see that the implications of this precept are quite far-reaching. In a more ordinary way, you could think or you could say that very often you think that you like something when you merely want it!

Roger: The whole area is rife with examples, if one is aware enough of just what one is doing, you can actually feel them, become very much in touch with actually how one is.

S: It's as though for whose sake is one going out? For whose sake is one's outwardness - is it for your sake? Or is it for the sake of the object? Clearly, there's usually a mixture, and it's a question of sorting out and clarifying. Which means that in principle you must be able to distinguish between the two, and actually recognize this is one, this is the other.

Roger: It is the mixture which is the confusion.

S: The confusion is due partly to the fact that in certain respects there are actual resemblances. But one is able to see the resemblances but not able to see the differences also. Because you've got a very strong, warm feeling you think, 'Oh, it must be faith'. It doesn't occur to you that it's probably desire, desire for rather than faith in. You've got this strong, warm glow of feeling, it must be the right thing.

[9]
Tony: Another example of that would be the people that take on the culture of other countries, like Tibetans coming over here with their culture, and people attaching to that.

S: Yes, indeed.

Tony: - and not really thinking so much about what's involved...

S: You're attracted by the culture. You think you're committing yourself to that particular spiritual tradition.

Anything more that can be said on this precept, 'Desire may be mistaken for faith'?

Clive: Have we been saying that you can't help but mistake faith for desire, or desire for faith at first?

S: You can't help mistaking desire for faith at first, to the extent that you are not an individual and in fact only have desire. To begin with, faith is only a concept for you, but it's only as you actually become an individual yourself that you begin to have a little experience of what faith is, and can really differentiate it from desire. Until then you've just got the abstract idea of what faith is, which you're trying very hard to understand, just as you have the abstract idea of what is a spiritual community, and you find it very difficult to understand that at first and very difficult to see the spiritual community as a spiritual community and not as simply a better or more positive or more agreeable group.

Mike: I was thinking along sort of desire and faith in terms of like the will to Enlightenment, in terms of the Bodhicitta, whether like initial stages in everything. Before you are like in touch with something, something's pulling you up, sort of willing it, so in a sense you're desiring it, you're forcing it. But then, as a result of doing it, as a result of getting that sort of energy moving, something naturally grows, it converts itself into faith.

S: It should be, if you are a healthy sort of person and if you have the right sort of support, also; that is to say, if you are in contact with people who, though you might take them for as it were group members to begin with, are in fact individuals and who can help you make that sort of transition, and at least give you, to begin with, a theoretical idea of what it's all about as a sort of guideline. But if you're in contact with people who don't have any sort of Insight themselves and aren't individuals themselves, that development won't take place. It'll all remain just within the group.

Clive: So faith is the transformation of desire?

S: You could look on faith as the transformation of desire, if desire provides, so to speak, the raw material. There is a sort of continuity of development, the desire becomes more refined,

more genuinely outward-going. It, or you, starts giving more to the object instead of just taking from it.

___: That seems to be what happens in the Puja... beginning ... the Puja sometimes I get a strong feeling, but it seems to be more just desire. I've been satisfied, I've felt good from it, just by practising perhaps.

S: Yes, and also in connection with that, if people aren't careful - though perhaps this is unavoidable at first - they think of doing the Puja as a sort of therapeutic measure which does them good. But not that it is an act or a process in the course of which they are as it were giving themselves to something. It's just good for you. One gets this even in connection, say, with the prostration practice, which is a very concrete way of actually committing [10] yourself and Going for Refuge, but in some Buddhist circles in the United States they've got something going which they call prostration therapy! [Laughter] You do the prostrations as a means of making yourself feel good. But of course the paradox of the situation is, yes, you can feel good by doing it, but only if you really give yourself to it and not just try to do it as a therapy for your benefit.

I've even had people come to me and say 'Could I do the prostration practice? I feel a bit depressed these days. I think it would do me good.' And they may not even have made up their minds - some are just ordinary Friends - they may not even have made up their minds whether they want to be involved with Buddhism or the spiritual life as such at all; but they've heard that the prostration practice gives you a pick-me-up, it's a sort of tonic, [Laughter] so they think 'That sounds like a therapy for me.' They don't want to commit themselves to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they don't really care about Padmasambhava, he's just a Tibetan figure, but they've heard that prostration therapy does you good.

Roger: Helps your stomach muscles.

S: Yes, it tones you up, it gets your energies flowing, and you can lead a happier, healthy life. So this is again desire being mistaken for faith.

Susiddhi: One feeling I usually get in a Puja is it reminds me that something bigger than just myself or the concept. It certainly does change an atmosphere, if you have a study class and then a Puja afterwards. I've had a feeling that most people have got that same sort of feeling as me. They say that they come out of the study class - it's been all concepts, and quite a lot of energy going and they enjoyed the study class. After the Puja it's sort of more peaceful.

S: But it could be also that in the course of the discussion group you've had a good discussion, and ...

[end of side 1 side 2]

- maybe you've got rid of some of your aggressive energies, so you're all sort of calm and serene for the Puja. (Break.)

Susiddhi: ... Puja itself transforms it into a different content.

S: You weren't in a fit state for the Puja ...

Steve: It comes down to dana, basically. It's either desire, it's either wanting, wanting Enlightenment for yourself, or it comes down to giving yourself to Enlightenment.

S: Yes, because if you want Enlightenment for yourself it means you don't want to change, whereas Enlightenment ideally represents the culmination of the whole process of change, so you cannot have Enlightenment for yourself. In a sense, 'you' cannot be Enlightened, because when 'you' are Enlightened, 'you' are no longer there, in a manner of speaking, to be Enlightened.

Susiddhi: There's a slight difference between waking up in the morning and saying 'What have you got for me today?' or 'What have you got in store for me today?'

S: These different attitudes can be reflected in other approaches to situations. 'What can I get out of it?' or 'What can I put into it? What can I contribute to it?' All right let's go on then to precept two.

[11]
"(2) Attachment may be mistaken for benevolence and compassion."

S: This is what someone mentioned a little while ago. Attachment is more like pema. Benevolence and compassion are clearly metta and karuna. Do you think benevolence is a good English equivalent for metta?

Roger: It's not too bad.

S: It's not too bad. It's literally 'good will'. But unfortunately we sometimes talk in terms of benevolent old ladies or benevolent old gentlemen in a Dickensian sort of way, which gives the wrong associations. I think perhaps the biggest drawback with all these English equivalents is that they're just not strong enough. In English it's as though if an emotional term is strong, or rather an emotional term can be strong only by being as it were violent. It can't be strong and positive and peaceful. But metta is like that. For instance, 'friendliness' is probably the best equivalent because you've got metta from mitta, or maitri from mitra, 'friendliness' from 'friend'; but 'friend' in English is very weak, so therefore 'friendliness' in English is very weak. But in Pali and in Sanskrit they're not weak, they're very strong.

Devaraja: You mean weak in the sound of the word, or the actual... ?

S: The emotion which is suggested is weak. For instance, if you say in English, 'He's my friend', it could mean anything from a casual acquaintance to someone that you were at school with and have kept in fairly regular touch with. It doesn't usually mean anything very important or central. So 'friendliness', 'friendship', these are comparatively tepid emotions. So therefore, to that extent, they aren't very adequate equivalents for metta or for maitri. We have the English word 'love', which is much stronger, that is very ambiguous. Dr Conze says there are at least nine different senses in which it can be used, which means it really is ambiguous.

Devaraja: I was thinking, in English 'friend' sounds quite a weak word, but in German it sounds really strong. 'Freund' has got a really strong feel to it.

S: But do you think that means that in Germany friends are more truly friends?

Devaraja: I don't know ...

S: Or is it that the language has got that rather harsh, guttural sound, which gives an impression of strength?

Steve: I get a feeling Germans are stronger - stronger emotions. I think that's what it's trying to say - whereas English - we haven't got very strong emotions. (Some giggles.) That's what I feel. We're not allowed to show, we're not allowed to show them.

S: We have to be a little careful about these generalizations, because when we say 'English' we very often mean the south-eastern quarter of England, which is not quite fair to our friends in the Midlands and the North, who wouldn't agree, perhaps, that they were tepid in their emotions, in the way in which people are in the south and the south-east especially. These sort of generalizations certainly doesn't apply to the Scots, of course, and probably not to the Irish, or to the Welsh.

But anyway, the general point is clear, that our English words are rather too weak to represent the full value of the Pali and Sanskrit words, and that 'benevolence' and 'compassion', though [12] positive, are [not] very strong. We seem to have difficulty in making that association between strength and positivity of emotion. If an emotion is strong, it tends to assume almost the character of violence, but it cannot be strong and completely non-violent, completely peaceful. We seem to have difficulty in envisaging that sort of emotion. So we think of peace as something rather weak and colourless, flavourless; not as anything strong or vibrant or potent. So that's probably the first thing to be made clear.

So attachment is the kind of attachment that is mixed up with affection, and that's covered by the Pali word pema, the Sanskrit equivalent of which is prema. So 'attachment' may be mistaken for benevolence and compassion. So what is the distinctive mark of this benevolence or of metta? How is it defined? You can define it as a desire, if you like, because we have to operate in these more basic terms, but what sort of desire is it? It's quite simple and straightforward, actually.

Roger: It's very open.

S: All right, but desire for - what object is involved? Another person. So a desire for that person's - ?

Clive: Well-being?

S: Well-being and happiness. This is the essential mark or note or characteristic of metta, that it is a sincere and a clear-sighted desire or wish or aspiration for the happiness, the well-being, the growth, the development, the prosperity, of the other person. We'll come to compassion in a minute.

So how does that metta differ from attachment? First of all, see where the resemblances are. In what way are attachment and benevolence, or attachment and metta, or pema and metta related? In what way are they similar to each other? In both cases, you are drawn towards something or someone, aren't you? There's an attraction, you could say. But in the case of the attachment, pema, for whose sake is that?

___: Yours.

S: It's for yours. And in the case of the metta, the benevolence, for whose sake is that? For the sake of the other person. Clearly, again, you won't get, usually, a clear-cut distinction, that your feeling is either this or that. Usually it is very mixed. You have to sort it out, you have to purify it. But attachment is when you come into contact with somebody, and on the whole it's for your sake, for the sake of some satisfaction on your part, that ... of some sort of security perhaps on your part, rather than for the sake of anything that you can do for the other person.

But in the case of metta, your approach to, your attraction towards, the other person is for the sake of making some contribution to their happiness, their well-being, their progress and so on. But that suggests another difference between these two, the attachment and the benevolence, and what is that in relation to the other person involved and the way you see the other person? What would be a difference here, as between attachment and benevolence?

Susiddhi: Their feelings towards you, or the way they act towards you.

S: Yes, but I wasn't thinking of that. There is a very important distinction.

Roger: One is rather exclusive, isn't it?

[13]
S: Yes, there's that, certainly. But again I wasn't thinking of that.

Will: You feel love for the other person's well-being regardless of what that person can do for you.

S: That's true. This is where the metta is very exceptional, completely disinterested, yes. Completely unselfish, as we say.

Well, an important difference is that we've said that in the case of metta you approach another person or you are attracted to another person for their sake rather than for yours, or at least - this not being an ideal world - for their sake as much as for yours, let us say, and generally for not just a quid pro quo of satisfaction and gratification. So that means that you see the other person clearly to some extent; because how can you make any contribution to their well-being, their happiness, until you can see them clearly and see what they need? So a certain clearsightedness is implied. So is that clearsightedness necessarily present in the case of attachment, when you approach somebody simply for the sake of whatever is in it for you? No, you may not see that person at all. Far from not seeing them, you may actually see them in a completely different way from what they actually are. You may, in common psychological parlance, just project something on to them, and be attracted, be drawn, by what you've projected rather than by the person themselves.

But, to come back to one or two points we've touched upon, there was this question of a completely disinterested approach; that is to say, you approach somebody or you are attracted to somebody simply and solely and purely so that you can make some contribution to their happiness, progress etc. Do you think this is possible? Or do you think, if it is possible, even that it is a good thing? Now - what do you think about that?

Roger: It's a bit suspicious, in a sense, isn't it? Because unless you really know yourself, what actually is good for you - completely - there isn't much hope of wishing anyone else well.

S: But could you not approach somebody just with the idea of helping them to be happy, without there being necessarily anything in it for you at all - without there being any question of reciprocity?

Roger: To the extent that one is really very aware of what's going on, aware what that actual person needs, it's really quite clear. You'll have the real smack of wisdom, and have to be coeval, mustn't it, to do that?

S: I wasn't thinking so much of that. What I was thinking of was whether it was a good thing to allow anybody else to be in the position of only receiving from you, and never in a sense being expected to do anything for you. Is that necessarily a very positive human situation? It could be that your metta is then - if not actually given but taken in almost - what shall I say? = a mother-like sort of way.

___: Like a child.

S: Yes, when you are put in the position of being a child, you're just on the receiving end, somebody is just devoting their time and energy to making you happy. So that is all right where those concerned are actually children, that is right and proper, but if the other person is an adult, you could say, yes, certainly you must have metta towards them, certainly do what you can for their happiness, but in another way or from another point of view it is in their interest that they should develop that sort of metta towards you. Metta, though we emphasize that metta is disinterested and it isn't attachment, it mustn't in fact be [14] one-sided. Metta should spark off metta. You mustn't encourage the other person to be in effect simply a passive recipient of your metta, because then you put them in a childlike position.

Roger: I was thinking it's rather a hypothetical case in a sense because to the extent that you're really helping somebody you are helping that person to develop metta. It's hypothetical in the sense that if you're really helping, the person must be aware that he is really helped.

S: Right. So if you were to be virtually treating the other person as a child, and doing everything for them and trying to make them happy, the chances are that this wouldn't even be metta. The thing would be a form of attachment, because you had that need maybe for some child to look after, etc., etc. Or the need to be a Lady Bountiful, or whatever it might be.

So even though one person might be a little ahead of the other, or contributing more than the other, metta should actually be mutual, should be reciprocal - where adults are concerned. But you don't expect a return from children, not until they begin to grow up. You expect that it's going to be one-sided; being a parent is a one-sided business - as some of you know.

So 'attachment can be mistaken for benevolence and compassion.' ... 'benevolence and compassion' - what is the difference between this benevolence and compassion, metta and karuna? Is there any real difference? Is there any essential difference?

Derek: With compassion you've got enough awareness and ability to have the energy to really be outgoing towards somebody. It's much more independent, more self-sustaining.

S: Mm. Any other suggestions?

Mike: One seems just like a weak word for the other.

Roger: I was thinking that compassion is really rather difficult to handle. When you're ... benevolent, open, and then you begin to see that there are things going on which are not very beneficial to anybody, and you begin to become aware of those, and it's really quite difficult to handle. Though you can be very open about it, you can be quite overwhelmed, in rather subtle emotional ways.

S: Yes. This begins to get a bit near to it, because it's said in Buddhist tradition, basically, that as regards the emotion itself there's really no difference between metta and karuna. You start off as it were with the metta. That is as it were the basic positive emotion, and that is a desire or an aspiration, if you like, for the happiness and well-being of others. But supposing you become aware of the fact that others, far from being happy as you would like them to be, are suffering. Then your metta is transformed, so to speak, into karuna. So karuna is not an independent emotion. It is, so to speak, the colouring that your metta receives when it comes into contact with suffering on the part of those whom you would wish to be well and happy. And karuna is difficult to handle, one could say, only to the extent that it isn't real karuna, only to the extent that it causes distress to yourself; which, if it is pure karuna, it doesn't do because in a way you're not concerned with yourself. Whatever feeling you have, even painful feeling, is for the sake of those people. So that in a sense you even welcome the painful feeling because it keeps you constantly aware that other people are suffering and that something needs to be done about it. It's not something that you want to get rid of so that you should feel less uncomfortable. This is very often the spirit in which people contribute money to [15] famine relief appeals and things of that sort. No doubt the contribution does good objectively, but a large part of the motivation is very often that they feel uncomfortable not giving, or feel obliged to give so as to get rid of that uncomfortable feeling, and then they can forget all about it.

But in a way the truly compassionate person wants to go on feeling that pain and suffering, so long as the pain and suffering exists for the other person. So there isn't really, therefore, a separate emotion of karuna. Karuna is what happens to the emotion of metta when it comes up against human suffering.

And in the same way, to bring in the other positive emotion, the other Brahma vihara, the third one, mudita, sympathetic joy, is what happens to the metta when you become aware that other people are happy, that they're getting on well, that they're progressing. You feel happy and joyful. It's not a separate emotion. It's just a response of your metta to that situation. And in the same way the upeksa is when you become aware that you have the same metta equally towards all. It's not an absence of positive emotion, it's the complete equalization of the positive emotion.

So 'attachment may be mistaken for benevolence and compassion'. And one can think of lots of different ways in which that is done, lots of different ways in which the one is mistaken for the other. Any examples? We've had one or two already. [Pause]

Clive: The way parents treat their children?

S: Yes, sometimes parents may think they are being really kind to their children, but they are only attached. There was a little boy interviewed on the radio yesterday. Apparently - how did this come up? - oh yes, it was something to do with reduction of parents' incomes - yes, I think strikers that were, according to the interviewer (though this was a bit of misunderstanding on her part), possibly in the future going to have $10 less if they were on strike. Actually, that wouldn't be the case because the unions would be expected to make it up. But anyway, the question was asked on that basis - what would parents do if they had less money? Oh yes, another point came into it: I didn't know about this before, but apparently football teams have special gears or kits. Well, I knew that different football teams had different colours, but apparently the cut changes every few years, the fashion changes; they style them differently. That means that their supporters, especially small boys, have to buy a completely new set. And according one manufacturer who was interviewed, some little boys collected these kits and even went to sleep in them at night. And some had kits of all the well-known football teams, all 10 or 12 or 14 or 15, and they're quite expensive, they're about $15 each. So the question arose, with all these financial difficulties for parents and these new kits coming out with little boys who insisted on having them, what would the wretched parents do? [Laughter] So some of these wretched parents were interviewed.

One poor mother ... they hold the purse-strings - one mother said her little boy would have to wait either for his birthday or Christmas, and another mother said, 'I'm ready to give half if he works and earns the other half himself.' Another mother said, 'I guess he'll just have to have it anyway, just to keep him quiet.' Then a little boy was interviewed. So he was asked what he thought about this, he said, 'Oh, I'm an only child. I've only got to ask for something, I always get it.' [Laughter] So you can guess the sort of parents that he had.

So sometimes parents just give things to the children, not out of [16] genuine metta, but either to keep them quiet, shut them up, or out of guilt or a wrong feeling of responsibility, or because other parents have given their children such-and-such things, or just out of attachment; they just can't bear to disappoint the child, they can't bear that the child should be a little bit displeased or upset. They think only in terms of gratifying the immediate desires of the child. They don't think in terms of what is really good for the child in the long run, because clearly it's very difficult to follow a middle way. Because the parent might say what is good for him in the long run is that he's going to grow up and be a really individual sort of person, so not give him any toys and make him study hard and do lots of homework; but the intention might be good, but it wouldn't necessarily work out in the way that the parent had hoped. So they have to follow a middle way, strike a balance between the immediate desires of the child and the long-term interests of the child. You can't deny the one or sacrifice the other.

But only too many parents think that they fulfil their duties by just giving a child whatever he wants when he wants it, and leaving it at that. Sometimes, in fact, of course, it may work out quite well in the end; in other cases not. He might grow up to be a criminal because he's always been used to getting what he wants instantly. So yes, you could say that in the case of parents, very often, attachment is mistaken for benevolence and compassion. Very often, in the case of the parents as in the case of other people, the two are mixed. It isn't that you've got either the one or the other, you've got a mixture, and you have to not only sort out the child's requirements but sort out your own attitudes towards those requirements, very often.

And then again with regard to animals, we think we're being very kind to the animals, but

very often we're only being attached. We think, oh, doggie really loves those tins of stuff you give him, or he's really happy when you give him one, all right, give him two, give him three; so he gets fatter and fatter and he just waddles along, and in the end his belly's dragging on the ground and he can hardly move. [Laughter] All this is out of kindness to doggie. You can see people doing this sort of thing. This is not kindness, it's almost cruelty. It's attachment, certainly.

Let's stop there for our tea or coffee. (Break.)

(3) Cessation of thought-processes may be mistaken for the quiescence of infinite mind, which is the true goal.

S: What is this cessation of thought-processes, or is there such a thing as cessation of thought-processes? What is it referring to?

Will: Is it referring to something that happens to you in meditation.

S: Yes?

Susiddhi: Isn't it mistaking dhyana states for Wisdom?

S: Yes. In some ways, in a more general way, it represents a misunderstanding about the nature of meditation, let's say. This last week or so I was editing for Nagabodhi the lecture which I gave in New Zealand on 'What Meditation Really Is'. Some of you might have seen the rough transcript of that. And one of the things I dealt with in that lecture is the different popular misunderstandings about meditation, what meditation is. And one such misunderstanding is that meditation means making the mind a blank. This is what some people think - that meditation means sitting down and making the mind a blank, wiping out all thoughts, and presumably going into a sort of unconscious state.

[17]
So this particular precept has some connection with that. There is, of course, such a thing as cessation of thought-processes, which does occur in the course of meditation, but one has to be quite careful as to what one means by that expression. So in what sense is there a cessation of thought-processes?

Devaraja: It comes when you are really concentrating on the breath or visualization practice. It means that discursive thought-process.

S: It really is a sign of the transition from the first dhyana, as it's called, to the second. In the case of the first dhyana you are concentrated, your energies are flowing more or less together, you are in an emotionally positive state, you are as it were balanced, you are as it were calm. But there's a certain amount of mental activity. You may even just be thinking about the meditation practice itself; you may say to yourself, 'Oh, it's going all right now', or 'Oh, I'm a bit concentrated now', but that is mental activity, that is discursive mental activity. But eventually, with practice, that discursive mental activity, which is called vitaka-vicara in Pali, subsides, and as it subsides you pass as it were from the first dhyana to the second. This is the mark of the distinction between them: that as from, in fact, the second dhyana onwards there are no discursive mental activities; you are not thinking about anything. All the energy of the

psyche is fully absorbed by the practice or the level of experience or whatever. There's no energy, so to speak, left over for discursive mental activity.

So this is a stage, but it's only a stage. And of course the important thing to bear in mind is that it isn't a blank state. Because you are not mentally active, because there's no discursive mental activity, it doesn't mean that you pass into a state of unconsciousness. So the assumption that you do, when thought processes cease, means what? Well, it means that thought processes are identified with consciousness; that consciousness is identified with thought processes; that you cannot envisage a mental state in which there are no thought processes, but in which you remain conscious. That goes beyond the experience of the ordinary person. So he thinks when thought processes cease, when you're not thinking about anything, the mind just becomes a blank; you become as it were unconscious. But in fact that is not what happens. Thought processes cease, but you remain fully conscious, fully aware; if anything, more so than ever.

But even that is still only a stage. So 'cessation of thought processes may be mistaken for the quiescence of infinite mind, which is the true goal'. Even one shouldn't take this expression 'infinite mind' too literally. In a sense, you could say there's then not a mind there at all. An infinite mind, so far as we are concerned, is a contradiction in terms, because we are acquainted only with finite mind - with my mind and your mind, and so on, not with infinite mind.

But it is important not to identify thought processes with consciousness, consciousness with thought processes, and not to identify even the conscious thought-free mental state with anything of a higher, Transcendental nature. It's only a stage on the way, even when one has reached that thought-free state or state free from thought processes, in which thought processes have ceased; because Insight has yet to arise.

This might be the proper place just to inquire into the relation between the samatha process and the vipassana process, because this is quite important. Do you understand the meaning of these terms, samatha and vipassana or vipasyana? - samatha is usually translated as 'calm', vipassana meaning Insight or clarity. So [18] samatha refers to the experience of the dhyana states, because it's the pacification of all unskilful mental states and, in the long run, of thought processes. They are pacified, they become quiescent. So one has a state of mind - though it's more than a state of mind, you could say it's a state of being - in which all the energies are concentrated, they all flow together, they're all refined. You're in a state of emotional positivity, and in a state of awareness. So this is what is meant by samatha, and this can go as far as the arupa dhyanas.

But vipassana is Insight into existence itself, or you could say Reality itself. It's an understanding of the conditioned. It's not just an experience of the conditioned in a highly refined state, it's an actual understanding or realization of or Insight into, its true nature. So this comes as a result of, or in consequence of, a certain kind of mental activity. A certain kind of mental activity becomes the basis or the support of your Insight. It needs a conceptual support. But at the same time no mental activity is possible beyond the first dhyana, so what does that mean?

Steve: It means you've got to get to quite a high state and then perhaps just let yourself come back and ...

S: Yes, right, you let yourself come back. Because vipassana, inasmuch as it is based upon - or has for its basis, let's say, its support - a certain kind of conceptual activity, and inasmuch as that conceptual activity is incompatible with any of the dhyana states beyond the first, after experiencing those higher dhyana states you have to as it were allow yourself to come back into the first dhyana state, and start up deliberately that skilful conceptual activity which can function as the basis for the development of your vipassana.

So what happens in practice, or what then is the function of that samatha experience beyond the first dhyana? Well, its function is, one might say, the transformation of the conditioned being, the making of it more and more positive and more and more refined, and therefore more and more amenable to the transforming influence of the Insight. So what happens is, supposing you're meditating, you get very very deeply concentrated. First of all there's a certain amount of mental activity, but after a while there's no mental activity, and for a while you stay in that state of no mental activity. Maybe you get more and more deeply into it. That only lasts for a while. There's a sort of gravitational pull that brings you back or that brings you down. But once you've been as it were through those higher dhyana states, there's a certain effect on your whole being. Your whole being is more rested, as it were; it's as though you've had a really good sleep - in a sense, though of course you're fully aware and fully conscious. You're as it were completely rested, you're refreshed, your emotions are all straightened out, your energies are all straightened out, you're very calm, you're very aware.

And then, in the midst of that, you can start up mental activity in a completely deliberate, free way, a very positive way, and you can reflect, you can generate certain reflections, about the nature of existence which then become the basis for actual Insight. You actually see the import of the thoughts which you are then having. But you have only those thoughts - because you are so concentrated, as the result of your immersion in the samatha experience, you are so concentrated, so balanced - that you have only the thoughts that you want to have. For instance, you might take up a certain line of thought about sunyata, based, of course, on your study of the texts - that sunyata is like this, that it's like that. But since you are now in a highly balanced, positive, skilful, aware state of mind, though at the level of the first dhyana, when you start up the mental activities, the conceptual activities, with [19] regard, say, to the subject of sunyata, on the basis of that activity there can develop an actual Insight. And that Insight will have a further transforming effect on your whole being. In fact, if the Insight is sufficiently intense and sufficiently powerful, you'll have a permanently modifying effect on your whole being which in the end will mean that you've entered the Stream.

So this is the classic pattern, as it were: that is to say, the concentration, the immersion in the thought-free state, and then the return to deliberate conceptual activity, and on the basis of that the development of Insight.

So the cessation of thought processes which comes about as you pass from the first to the second dhyana, and which is a characteristic of all the dhyanas other than the first, cannot be mistaken or must not be mistaken for what this text calls the 'quiescence of the infinite mind itself', which presumably, as it's said to be the true goal, is Reality itself.

One could say that - there is a possibility of misunderstanding here - that mental activity is not incompatible with the experience of Reality. One mustn't think that in the Enlightened person there's no mental activity, for the Buddha clearly was mentally active, otherwise how did he think, how did he speak? But it's a different sort of mental activity. Mental activity is

made use of as an instrument, so to speak. It is not compulsive. When there's no need for it, it just stops. You can't imagine the Buddha, when everybody had gone home and the bhikkhus had all gone to bed or gone off to meditate, that the Buddha's mind was ticking over as a result of what he'd been saying while they were no longer there, unless he ...

[End of tape one tape two]

- chose to follow up some particular line of thought, mental activity ceased, and he just enjoyed a state free from mental activity in a completely natural manner.

So it is not to say that mental activity is excluded from the experience of Enlightenment, but it is a mental activity which is as it were [break in recording] ... When that necessity is no longer there, the thought itself is no longer there, the thought process itself is no longer there.

So this is a question of using thought. At the same time, it is not the ordinary mind that is using thought. The ordinary mind is used by thought, in fact it is thought. But it's a question of thought as it were arising out of your potentiality for thought in response to certain conditions, certain needs, you've no interest in thinking, you don't particularly want to think, but when occasion arises you can do so.

So 'Cessation of thought processes may be mistaken for the quiescence of infinite mind, which is the true goal.'

Roger: Something that has just struck me about that is that because it is there, there's obviously some extraordinarily powerful difference of experience when that occurs, and as you sort of outlined it is just actually moving from the first dhyana to the second dhyana, and all that which we've come to understand and realize that experience is reached quite phenomenally different, and it's almost then to return to the first dhyana to obtain Insight, for want of anything better to say, does give a feeling of really what actually has to be done. The sheer possibility of what can occur, and also the sheer level of experience one must be going through.

S: One can say with regard to that that thought processes are of [20] three different kinds. There are the thought processes that we usually experience, that is to say rather distracted, broken, fragmentary, confused thought processes connected with sense experience, connected with mental experience, connected with memories, connected with dreams, connected with desires; there are thought processes in that sense; the sort of thought processes which persist in a subtle form even into the first dhyana, at least with reference to the concentration practice itself, but which disappear by the time we reach the second dhyana or the disappearance of which constitutes entry into the second dhyana. These thought processes are very rapid, very confused, and so on. So this is what we mean by thought processes in the first sense.

Then there are thought processes in the sense of those thought processes which we deliberately develop after emergence from the experience of the higher dhyanas, and which are completely directed and as it were under our own control, and which function as a basis for the development of non-conceptual Insight. In this state, owing to our suffusion by the higher dhyana states, we are so concentrated, so emotionally positive, we've no need to think; there's no question of all that confused mental activity that we had before. We can choose to think, we can choose what to think about, and we choose to think about Reality, we choose to

think about the Truth, we choose to try to understand certain things and to that end follow a certain line of thought in a very meditative, reflective way, getting deeper and deeper into it. In this way, we use thought processes as a support for the development of Insight. So this is thought processes in the second sense.

And then, Insight having been developed, or even some measure of Enlightenment gained or even Enlightenment itself gained, the thought processes can be set up, so to speak, as a means of communication of the Insight or the Enlightenment experience to other people who do not have that experience.

So there's in the first place thought processes as a hindrance; [secondly], thought processes as a support for the development of Insight; and, thirdly, thought processes in the sense of those thought processes which are related to means of expression of Insight or Enlightenment of a conceptual nature.

So supposing you're thinking, 'What am I going to do tomorrow, and will I have enough money?' That's thought processes of the first type. Or if you're even thinking, 'My meditation's going quite well now' - that's still a thought process of the first type. But if, having deeply meditated and being free from thoughts arising, you think, 'What does sunyata really mean?', that is a thought process of the second kind. And if, being Enlightened, say, as a Buddha, you speak with regard to something you actually experience, using thoughts and words, then that is a thought process of the third kind. So the merely distractive - thought processes as distractions - thought processes as supports, and thought processes as a medium of communication, that is to say of the Enlightened mind itself.

So one mustn't think of infinite mind as quiescent in a literal way, for there's no compulsive mental activity, no confused mental activity, not even any thought processes of a supportive kind; but it's not as though there is no activity, so to speak, on that level.

Susiddhi: If someone is having a decent meditation, they just for a minute or two have a sort of thing where they're concentrated and enjoy it, maybe they don't - is that a sort of taste of the second dhyana?

S: It depends to what degree their energies are integrated and [21] what degree of emotional positivity there is there; but it could be as it were tending in that direction, if there's a suspension of thought processes. Because the classic definition is that 1) there must be one-pointedness, all the energies must be brought together, there must be a sort of integration of the energies; 2) then there must be emotional positivity; so these two things are quite important. So you can be sort of slightly integrated and sort of slightly emotionally positive - well, that isn't enough to carry you into a dhyana state, even though it's tending in the right direction.

Susiddhi: I mean does it give you a sort of taste of what it's like that might spur you on?

S: Well, it would need to be sufficiently strong to do that, not just the sort of mild pleasant state you experience maybe when you just go for a stroll in the garden. It would have to be something more than that. And I think for most people that happens only in the context of meditation or at least the context of a retreat. You don't usually get it outside of that. You may get something quite strong, but often it's a bit disturbed or a bit mixed.

But one can see from all this that meditation is clearly far from being a matter of just making the mind a blank. In fact, actually, you can't do that; you have to become a stone or something of that sort.

Steve: It's a lot more dynamic.

S: It's more dynamic, and it's also more truly calm. And there's also the point here that you can't really have much of a concept of the true goal. Just as we said earlier on that if you're not an individual you can't really recognize another individual, and you can't really distinguish between the positive group and the spiritual community. So, so long as one is in an ordinary unenlightened state of mind, you can't really have much of an idea about Enlightenment. It's really impossible. You can perhaps have some idea of what it is not, or that it is the cessation of whatever you experience now - you can get as far as that. What it might be in itself is probably quite beyond your comprehension. So one shouldn't be too positive about what it's like or what it's going to be like when you get there, as it were; otherwise that would be appropriation, as we were saying. We shouldn't be too positive about what Enlightenment's going to be like when you actually experience it, otherwise you might be limiting your own experience in advance.

You can have a provisional idea, but it shouldn't be anything more than that - because it can't really be anything more than that. You can just think you get more and more positive, more and more happy, more and more clear - that's fair enough; but what absolute happiness or absolute clarity might be like, you really can form no conception, not in any meaningful way.

Steve: ... you are holding on to an idea. You've got the idea of ...

S: You're holding on to an idea, and trying to fulfil the idea instead of being open to the actual experience when it comes. Because sometimes you can be taken unawares, as when you're meditating, a quite unforeseen experience might arise; an experience which you might not only have not expected but which might be actually contrary to your ideas of what was to be expected.

So 'Cessation of thought processes may be mistaken for the quiescence of infinite mind, which is the true goal.' The true goal [22] in a sense, from this point of view, is that thoughts shouldn't stick to the mind, not that thoughts are forever banished, and if you are Enlightened you're not allowed to think. It isn't like that, but thoughts don't stick. You use them as long as they're needed and then you just let them go. Most people can stop actually physically talking when they wish, at least for a while, but very few people can stop thinking when they want to, when there's no need for thinking; but a Buddha can do that. In fact, it isn't really correct to say he can do it; it happens quite naturally. When there's no need for him to think, he doesn't think.

Steve: It's the other way round, isn't it? ...

Tony: Can I just clear up a definition on the first dhyana? It's said there is some discursive thought. Then we talk about going into the higher states, and then coming back to the first dhyana, and then this thought would be more controlled; could that still be classified as discursive thought?

S: Oh yes, it is, the technical terms are the same in Pali - vitaka vicara. But it's of a different nature, because it is controlled, as it were.

Tony: Could you give a definition of discursive?

S: Well, there are two traditional descriptions, rather than definitions, to explain the distinction between vitaka and vicara. Vitaka is the apprehension of a object, and the vicara means the subjecting of that object to examination, in the sense of thinking about it, though not in a very concentrated way, because that isn't possible at that stage. And the comparison which is given is this: that, for instance, you seize hold of a dirty pot with one hand, and you scour it all around with the other. The first is the vitaka, the apprehension of the object, and the second is the mental activity which looks at that mental object from different points of view, all round it as it were. So in the first sense you are hanging on to an object, motivated of course by some kind of unskilful mental state, some kind of desire or craving; and in the other you are examining it, trying to fathom it or find out about it, or look at it from that particular limited point of view or in the interests of that particular desire, craving etc. But when you come back, as it were, the quality of the vitaka vicara is changed.

Any further point about that precept? [Break.]

Susiddhi: We've had time to think up some questions. Is this what Gautama rediscovered - the cessation of thought processes, as opposed to...

S: Well, according to the standard account or accounts, before his Enlightenment the Buddha studied with two teachers in particular, who are mentioned by name, from one of whom he learned how to meditate in such a way as to experience the dhyanas up to the third arupa dhyana, and then from the second, the dhyanas up to the fourth arupa dhyana, but no further. In other words, in traditional terms, he acquired the technique, so to speak, or the experience, of the dhyana states or samatha. But there was no experience of vipassana, of Insight into Reality itself, and that was his, so to speak, original contribution. He wasn't satisfied with the teaching that he had received, because it comprised only the samatha type of experience. Without really being able to formulate it, he felt that there was still something missing; he was dissatisfied.

And though they maintained in each case that he had learned all that there was to learn, he felt that there was something more to learn because he was still dissatisfied, even though according to [23] them he should have been satisfied, because he had gone as far as there was to go. It wasn't as though they said, 'No, you haven't fully learned everything that we have to teach.' No, they acknowledged that he had learned, he had practised, he had experienced, whatever they had - the teachers both acknowledged that - and that there was nothing further. Because this was their conviction, that they had got so far, there was no place further to go. He had got so far, so in his case too there was no place further to go, he was there. They invited him to share in the leadership of their movement, but he said 'No. There is, I feel, something more, something further.' And he went off on his own, and eventually developed or discovered the path of vipassana, and this led to Enlightenment in the Buddhistic sense, which consisted not only in the experience of these highly positive superconscious states but also in the experience of a certain clarity and illumination in conjunction with those higher states of consciousness, which was called Insight or Enlightenment or whatever.

This whole question of samatha and vipassana and the relationship between them, this was gone into some years ago when we went through Dhyana for Beginners, some of you may know that. That text deals to a great extent with that. This has never been edited, but there are a few copies of it unedited in circulation.

Will: Is it possible to experience vipassana without a strong basis of samatha?

S: This is a question that has been much discussed, I suspect not so much by people who actually meditate. But there is a movement in some parts of the Theravada world today, or has been, which maintains that there is such a thing as what is called dry vipassana, that is to say vipassana which arises on a purely conceptual basis, that conceptual basis not having the support of a prior samatha experience. Some teachers, though, disagree about this. Some of those who uphold the possibility of the dry vipassana maintain that the samadhi experience that precedes it, which they admit must be there to some extent, is instantaneous. But the broader, or even the older, tradition, I think, does not uphold that, because the essence of the matter is that the samatha experience so pervades your being that it is straightened out, as I said, it's made more positive, it is made more refined, and this is the work of much more than an instant.

Because what usually happens is you have different sessions, as it were - as you know - so it isn't so much that you have one great big samatha experience and then on the basis of that, one great big vipassana experience, and that's that. Usually you're working away on both of them, and samatha alternates with vipassana. This is the traditional method; not necessarily in the same session or the same sitting, but over a period of time, that in order to strengthen your vipassana, your Insight, you repeatedly plunge yourself into the samatha experience, and then on the basis of that you can strengthen whatever vipassana you were able to develop before. Because you develop maybe some vipassana, the experience of the samatha becomes more easy, because the distractions which prevent you from enjoying the samatha experience begin to be cut off or at least to be weakened, so the stronger becomes your samatha the stronger your vipassana, the stronger your vipassana the stronger your samatha. And the aim is in the end to get them both coinciding as it were at their peak. You've got the fullest possible experience of samatha, and on the basis of that you put the finishing touches, so to speak, to your experience of vipassana; in that way the vipassana experience itself also becomes complete. And then, of course, you can enjoy or not enjoy the samatha experiences at will. It's not so necessary to enjoy the samatha [24] experiences then as before. But at least it's pleasant, so to speak, and you might as well have a pleasant experience as not.

But the vipassana experience itself is inseparable from a certain amount of samatha by its very nature, just because some of the unskilful mental states have been permanently cut off. In a sense, you're in a meditative state all the time then, though you may not be actually sitting cross-legged with your eyes closed.

But this whole idea of dry vipassana seems to me highly suspect. I really doubt whether such a thing is possible, and I think that what has happened is that some people have confused the recollection with their ordinary wandering mind, of certain doctrinal categories - they have confused that with the deliberate construction of the conceptual basis for vipassana after a period of immersion in the samatha experience. So thinking about the Dharma prior to samatha experience is rather different, in fact very different, to thinking about the Dharma after you have immersed yourself in the samatha experience. It's that immersion in the

samatha experience that makes all the difference.

But there are in the East many scholarly monks who know their texts very well, and who don't meditate, and they seem in some cases to have confused vipassana with simply the recollection of the things that they have learned and the turning of those things over in the mind and understanding them just intellectually. I think this is what has happened.

Will: Do you think you might get an intellectual understanding without an emotional - ?

S: Oh yes, without there being any sort of emotional correlate of that understanding, without it being supported by positive emotional states. It can be then quite alienated.

Roger: It is quite confusing, isn't it, because what ... been saying as far as being able to conceptually understand anything, there has to be some correlation with one's emotions, so even if one's - you're talking about monks - his intellect is really very on the ball, so to speak, they understand - to really be able to understand that they must have some very definite emotional positivity.

S: Well, I would say that in that case, in most cases, they don't even really understand it on that level, just because there is the absence of that emotional element. That is not understanding in the real sense. You really sense this when you read some of the Eastern Buddhist magazines and you read some of the articles on Buddhism. Some of them are almost as if they were written by machines, they're such scholarly, dry articles. It's as though Buddhism, whatever the ... or whatever aspect of Dharma, means nothing to them personally. They might just as well have written some statistical study or written about earthworms or written about degrees of stress in metals, or something like that. There's no more feeling to it than that.

But I think, just to give some sort of - what shall I say? - adumbration, if you like, of this sort of thing that we've been talking about in ordinary experience, you might find one day that you're quite naturally, quite spontaneously, in a very - what shall I say? - deep mood, you know what I mean? - you might feel quite calm, but not in a negative way; your thoughts are all very still, it may be just in the evening time, and you feel naturally very calm and very still, and it's as though your thoughts, except you don't have any thoughts particularly, are just going deeper and deeper. It's as though you yourself are becoming deeper and deeper. And then you might just start thinking about something that interests you, not in a hasty, compulsive way, but just calmly and quietly, just going into it. And then you think, 'Ah yes! I [25] understand that now. That's what it was all about.' So the samatha-vipassana experience, on a very much higher level, is rather like that. There's that period of calm and depth, preceding the actual Insight or understanding, in a way preparing the ground for it or leading into it.

Steve: Bhante, I just missed something. Vitaka and vicara - vitaka is the appropriation of the object when you're in a dhyanic state? Would it be or before you get to - ?

S: No, no, vitaka vicara are general mental activities, which are there all the time, even in the first dhyana in a subtle form, at least with regard to the concentration object, but they are no longer there from the second dhyana onwards; but reappear when you emerge from one or another of those higher dhyanas, reappear as it were in a positive way, to provide a foundation

or a basis for your development of Insight.

All right let's go on to four then.

(4) Sense perceptions (or phenomena) may be mistaken for revelations (or glimpses) of Reality.

S: What sort of sense perceptions could be mistaken for revelations or glimpses of Reality? What is the precept referring to, exactly?

Steve: Visions?

S: Things like visions, probably. But can a vision not be a revelation or a glimpse of Reality?

Steve: On one quite high level, perhaps it is, but it's not Reality itself.

S: So what is the distinction between that experience which is simply a sense-perception, and that experience which is in fact a glimpse of Reality, or that visionary experience which is in fact a sense-perception, and that visionary experience which is in fact a glimpse of Reality?

Will: One is, say, what you see as not being part of yourself and the other as being part of yourself.

S: Hm, you could say that, yes.

Roger: It's rather like interpreting something in a particular way. And the only way that you know, of course, is that you are rather used to it, ...

Devaraja: ...could be rather like some visionary experiences which you can appropriate to yourself would be the mistaken ones, but the ones that you can't, you just don't know where appropriate ...

S: If you couldn't appropriate it at all, it would be the experience of Reality itself, because you can appropriate really any experience, can't you? - right up to Nirvana itself, or you can even try to appropriate what you think of as Nirvana. So to the extent that, or as long as, there is any sort of vestige of the ego sense, for want of a better term, the possibility of appropriation exists. And unless you fully realize Nirvana, unless you're fully Enlightened, there is some vestige of ego-sense, and therefore some vestige of the possibility of appropriation. So unless you're fully Enlightened you're always in danger of appropriating any experience. If you're a Bodhisattva, however highly advanced, you're still in danger of appropriating Enlightenment etc.

I think the basis of the distinction here is a little different. For [26] instance, you can have a visionary experience on the basis just of a recollection of something actually seen. For instance, you might be thumbing or leafing through one of those beautiful illustrated books of Tibetan Buddhist art. You might see a beautiful Tara picture or a beautiful Manjughosa, and you really like that; and it could be that in a dream, or even in the course of your meditation, you just see that. But it is just the impression made on your quite ordinary mind or fairly ordinary mind, when you were looking at that book, which is re-emerging. It isn't really a

glimpse of a higher world at all, it isn't a glimpse of Reality; it is just the emergence of a recollection, an imprint if you like, of something in the material world. So you could not then claim that you'd had a vision in the true sense, but you could think that you had or that you'd really seen Tara or Manjughosa or whatever.

So you could say that, in the same way that there were mental processes of three kinds, there are visions of three kinds. There are those visions which are reminiscences of sense experiences. There are those visions which have nothing to do with sense experiences but which are transformations or - yes, transformations, I suppose one could say, or which are moulded out of one's higher dhyanic experience. Because some people's minds work more in that sort of way. And then there are those visions which actually embody an aspect of Reality which you actually see, so to speak, or in a manner of speaking.

So there are those visions corresponding to mental processes in the ordinary sense, and those visions corresponding to mental processes in the higher senses. So when you experience a vision, 1) it could mean that you're just remembering something you've seen, or 2) it could mean that your dhyanic experience had taken a particular form, or 3) it could mean that you had a glimpse of Reality, not in a conceptual form but in a visionary form or through a visionary medium. So the one is not to be mistaken for the other. Here, the possibility is that the lowest will be mistaken for the highest, but of course the one in the middle can be mistaken for the highest too.

Devaraja: It seems, then - rather my own experience to some extent is that those images that just seem to be memories don't have the degree of luminosity or ...

S: You could call the second sort of archetypal visions. Because if one is having a samatha-like experience, well, yes, there is a high degree of emotional positivity, and therefore a degree of as it were, for want of a better term, luminosity. So the visions experienced on those levels will be invested with that greater emotional intensity, greater luminosity, and so on.

Roger: It does seem to be saying that revelations of Reality aren't in any way interpreted within the sense at all, doesn't it?

S: What do you mean by 'interpreted' here?

Roger: Well, 'sense perceptions or phenomena', which is presumably to do with all the six senses, consciousness of being, are not to be 'mistaken for revelations or glimpses of Reality'.

S: '(Or phenomena)' is the editor's insertion; I don't think the precept means by 'sense perceptions' just any kind of sense perception, because one would be unlikely to mistake that for a glimpse or revelation of Reality in this sense. If you saw, say, a tree or a flower there's nothing extraordinary about that, but if just floating in the middle of the heavens you saw a figure of Tara or Manjughosa, you might think that that was a revelation of Reality; but then you'd have to apply to that experience the criteria I have mentioned.

[27]
In another, in a higher sense, of course, all experience is seen as a revelation of Reality, including sense perceptions. But that is a different thing. It's not sense perceptions in that

sense which are being talked about here, because sense perceptions in that sense are revelations of Reality, but the sense perceptions which are not revelations of Reality in this sense are the as it were pseudo-visionary experiences which are simply based upon recollection of things seen - pictures, for instance - with the physical eyes.

Derek: It might seem that luminosity didn't actually - visualization practices - does that mean that there's a degree of samatha in visualization but there's also the possibility for vipassana?

S: To the extent that one cannot visualize unless one is highly concentrated, or to that extent the visualization practice is bound up with the samatha experience, but to the extent that one can also reflect upon the significance of what is visualized, to that extent the vipassana element also comes in. That's why you can't do the visualization practice in the full sense just as a concentration exercise, because its significance is not merely of the samatha order but also of the vipassana order, and you cannot begin to develop vipassana unless you believe in a higher Transcendental Reality, and really believe in it, have faith in that higher Transcendental Reality; which means, to put it crudely, unless you are a Buddhist. If you're just a humanist or materialist you might be able to concentrate quite successfully, but you couldn't develop vipassana because you'd be closed to the possibility of the existence, even, of that very Transcendental Reality which it is the purpose of vipassana to disclose to you. So this is one of the reasons why usually we restrict the practice of the visualization meditations - we shouldn't say 'visualization exercises', we should say 'visualization practices' or 'visualization meditations' - to those who have committed themselves, those who are members of the Order, because they do have faith in something Transcendental. So to try to use a visualization practice just as a concentration exercise is a bit like using the Going for Refuge practice as a therapy.

And that's all an aspect of trying - well, it really represents, it's really - all these things are really examples of desire being mistaken for faith. Those things which are intended to help you develop faith you are using to try to help you to satisfy desires. Those desires, from the human point of view, may be quite acceptable - quite valid at least - but they are certainly not to be confused with faith. If you can be restored, say, to physical health, that's a good thing, and your desire to be healthy is a quite valid desire, but it isn't the purpose of Buddhism in the sense of the Transcendental Path just to make you healthy. There's no objection to your being healthy; in a way it presupposes that you're healthy, but its own specific purpose and function is not just to make you healthy or to contribute to your healthiness in that sense.

So if you're using Buddhism just to help you be healthy, you're misusing it. You can't help misusing it a bit, at first, of course. All right, go on to precept 5 and we'll close with that. It's following much the same line of thought.

(5) A mere glimpse of Reality may be mistaken for complete realization.

S: Well, we saw an example of that in the case of the Buddha's two early teachers. They had - well, they didn't even have a glimpse of Reality, they just had an extensive experience of samatha, and they thought that that was all there was. But one can even have a glimpse of Reality, that is to say a measure of [28] vipassana experience, and just not want, or not feel any need, to carry it further. You may be so overwhelmed by, so entranced by, your limited experience of Reality, that you may just want to settle down with that, and not go any further. This is in a way the great Buddhist criticism of Christian mysticism: that the Christian mystic

has an experience of God, as he thinks, and is so overwhelmed by this that he just doesn't want to go any further or even to ask the question of whether there is any further state to go into, any further experience to be undergone. But in Zen especially a constant refrain is 'Go further, question your own experience, don't be satisfied with it.' You have a wonderful meditation experience and you go rushing to tell the Zen master all about it; he just says, 'So what? Lust go back and carry on.' That is the Buddhist attitude - not 'Oh, how wonderful, isn't that great', and 'Oh yes, what a wonderful person you are. We've got a mystic.' You're floating round with a halo round your head. The Zen master soon takes your halo off and throws it in the dustbin, so to speak.

[end of side 1, side 2]

... to Buddhism, especially, as I said, in the Zen form, though in principle in all forms of Buddhism, has this very iconoclastic attitude towards even spiritual experience. No spiritual experience is to be set up as ultimate, not even the experience of so-called Enlightenment. Just go on questioning it. If it can no longer be questioned, or it stands up against all questioning, even the Zen master's questioning, everybody's questioning, then maybe it is Enlightenment - maybe! [Laughter] It could be that there isn't a big enough master around to ... - you see. So don't be too sure even then, just have an open mind about it: 'Maybe I am Enlightened, but maybe not.' So no tendency to settle down in any experience, even though it is an experience of Reality, as though that were the last word on the subject, and as though you're really there. Buddhism from the very beginning - in the light of the Buddha's own experience with his own two teachers - has adopted this attitude of questioning everything. Not questioning in advance, but questioning afterwards. Just have the experience, yes, go thoroughly into it, but when you've had it, so to speak, or even when you're in the midst of it, say 'Is this all? Is this the last word? Or is there not something further, something beyond still, something which I still have to do?'

Because there is this natural human tendency to settle down in every situation with regard to every experience, and you can't safeguard yourself against that by adopting a particular form of practice, a particular way of life. You can't. You can settle down in anything. You can settle down even on your bed of nails in the long run, just as easily as you can settle down on your beautiful soft comfortable mattress at home.

Clive: I was thinking about this recently. There is a need for a time of consolidation, of integration of an experience or something like that, isn't there? Settling down can be described maybe as, I don't know, the near or far enemy to consolidation.

S: Yes, certainly experiences need to be consolidated. First of all, the experience must become as it were regular. It's not something that you just have once in a while or you've just had once or twice, and that's that as it were, and you've no means, so to speak, of having it again. You sort of consolidate that experience, or just a certain area or certain attitude, when it becomes integrated into your overall attitude or overall experience. But you don't settle down in that in the sense that you don't think that once you've consolidated that, well there you are. You've got to break up what you've consolidated by going a step or a stage further, and then consolidating again. But in between, yes, you need to consolidate experiences which are as [29] yet just, say, occasional experiences. There's no point in - it's not meant that as soon as you get a little bit of success in meditation you think, 'Oh, I mustn't settle down in this', and give up meditating. No, you need to consolidate that.

But generally speaking, yes, one needs to resist all the time the tendency to settle down in one's present level of development. I think the great danger for many people coming into the Movement is that when they come in with problems and difficulties, they sort out those problems or difficulties, and they're so overjoyed at being healthy, happy and human at last - good heavens, they can actually enjoy life! - they think that's it; they're so entranced by that they just don't want to go any further. I think that's the danger. Or they find life within the Friends so pleasant, in spite of the work and all that [Laughter], so pleasant compared with life outside that they're just happy to be there and not make much of an effort. But actually, the sad truth is that you can't really do that, because if you settle down in that way and give up making an effort to go forward, you'll start slipping back, actually, just because you are settling down, you're sort of hardened in your settling down. So though you may remain in the same place and doing essential things, actually you'll be going back. So if you don't actually go forward, you're going back, you can take it - until such time as you enter the higher Transcendental Path.

So you can take it you are either going forward or going backward. If you can't be sure that you're going forward, take it that you're going backward. Unless you're very sure that you're going forward, you're definitely going backward.

I think in the case of the average person within the Friends, some progress should be discernible, say, every two or three months; some little change for the better. It may be quite small, but certainly discernible or noticeable. You're a bit less hot-tempered, or a bit less impatient, or you get up in the mornings a little more eagerly, a little more readily, a little more promptly, a little less resentfully. You may meditate a little longer and a little more happily, etc.

But this danger of mistaking the part for the whole, or a stage for the goal, this is a mistake that it's very easy to fall into. You sometimes may just not care. You may think, 'OK, there are stages ahead, but I'm quite happy and satisfied with this one.' Sometimes one can adopt that attitude. 'Who wants to be a Bodhisattva? I'm quite happy being an arhant!' - in a manner of speaking; don't take me too literally.

Steve: I just had an experience a few weeks back of feeling quite good, feeling as though I was going forth, and I just said to Mara (in a sense, you know): 'Right, Mara. I wanna grow, I wanna go to the utmost. I'm opening myself up to everything you can give me.' So - did I go through it! [Laughter] Now I'm a bit dubious about ... I'm just wondering whether that's good, to open yourself up to the obstacles.

S: Well, if there are any. Don't be so sure that they're going to come along in that highly dramatic fashion. They may be much more subtle and insidious. Mara isn't always going to tell you when he's going to launch an all-out frontal attack. He might sneak in round the back via something that you're quite pleased with or which is quite good. He isn't necessarily going to dangle all three daughters in front of your eyes at once. He might sort of sneak in in a much more indirect way, you might start getting very attached to a particular image in the shrine or a particular book. It might take that sort of form.

Steve: I'm just wondering if by doing that I am opening myself [30] up to perhaps negative emotions instead of ...

S: I don't think one should have even so much to do with, say, negative emotions or negative thoughts or negative forces as even to think too much in terms of resisting them or not succumbing to them. Because when you're thinking about them you're in contact with them to some extent, and even that isn't desirable. Or even to think that you're not thinking about them is not desirable, really. I don't think one should bother oneself with them at all.

For instance, say in the case of metta, the thing to do is develop metta, not think 'Whatever provocations there may be, people may kick me, they may beat me, those kinds of things - I'm not going to give way to anger.' No. The thought - at least, the possibility - of anger is there. You'd be much better occupied just developing a bit more metta; then you'd be more sure of being able to resist if those temptations were to arise.

Steve: It's like getting caught up again in a psychological ...

S: Almost, yes. One can be sure, anyway, that some sort of temptation or trial will come along sooner or later. You have to be ready for it - not to speak of telling Mara that you're ready, you've no choice! It's not as though you've got a choice, in a sense, at least as regards his attack. You've got a choice about resisting or not. But he's not going to take your bravado too seriously, as it were; he's going to wait until you're off your guard, or you've forgotten all about him, then he's going to sneak in. Or, of course, he might take you at your word; if he felt that your bravado was entirely without foundation, or that you might be in quite a difficult state. But I think there's no need to occupy yourself with Mara and his forces unless they actually come along.

Any further point about precept 5? Most people will be quite lucky or could consider themselves quite lucky even if they got a mere glimpse of Reality.

Tony: One story I heard, I think it was this week, about an Order member - in another country, I think - somebody thought he was Enlightened, and went around for a couple of days quite happy with this state. And then he started feeling bored. He thought: 'If I'm Enlightened, would I feel bored with this state?' and just came back again. [Pause] [Laughter]

S: Hm. A bored Buddha seems a contradiction in terms.

All right, let's leave it there, then, for this morning, and maybe finish the other five in the afternoon.

Session 2

(6) Those who outwardly profess, but do not practise, religion may be mistaken for true devotees.

S: Perhaps you shouldn't take the word religion in English too literally. It should be, of course, the translation of the Tibetan word for Dharma. But from this precept we see a change, as it were. So far we've been dealing, so to speak, with principles - desire being mistaken for faith, attachment being mistaken for benevolence and compassion, and so on. But from now onwards it seems we are dealing with people: one sort of person being mistaken for another sort of person in the same kind of way. So here it is 'Those who outwardly profess, but do not practise, religion (Dharma) may be mistaken for true devotees.'

[31]
So what do you think is meant by 'outwardly professing' as distinct from actually practising? How can one outwardly profess without actually practising? What sort of thing do you think the precept has in mind?

Mike: You can go through all the motions.

S: You can go through all the motions - what sort of motions?

Mike: Getting up for morning meditation while not really doing it.

S: Well, does that really matter? Because if you get up, you get up. You're not going through the motions of getting up, you're getting up.

Tony: I think more like what we were talking about earlier on. It's sort of wearing the costumes and clothing and assuming the cultural trappings ...

S: Ah, yes. I think in the historical context, it is more like that. The precept probably has in mind - or whoever formulated the precept had in mind - those who wore the dress and all that sort of thing, the dress of the true devotee, but actually didn't practise the Dharma very much.

But what does that suggest? - that you can wear the clothes, as it were; that there are clothes which are considered to be those of the true devotee, appropriate for the true devotee. What does that suggest?

Steve: Provisional Going for Refuge.

S: Er, yes, but I wasn't thinking of that. What sort of, in a way, social structure, what sort of convention does that presuppose - that you can be recognized as a devotee by the way in which you dress?

Tony: Group membership? A form of group membership, wearing a uniform.

S: Yes, but why should there be a uniform for that sort of thing?

Devaraja: Sort of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, something like that, some sort of corporate body or priestly caste.

S: Yes; but why should even that be indicated by a certain kind of dress? What does that tell you about society as a whole?

Clive: It takes superficial signs as - superficial manifestations as being ...

S: Yes. Though, in a way, are they necessarily superficial?

Roger: But it's rather like taking upon Dharma as something which is really quite separate, not integral with ...

S: But in a sense it is separate, it's separate in the sense that it is different, it is distinct, at

least.

Will: Just that society recognizes things by its outward appearances.

S: Well, in a sense society has to.

___: If you're dependent on the society for your food and stuff you need to be recognized.

[32]
S: Yes, you need to be recognized, in a way.

Susiddhi: Everyone doesn't think of themselves as being on a spiritual path, they leave it to certain members.

S: But anyway, it wasn't that that I had in mind. The fact that you can be mistaken for a true devotee even though you don't practise, because you outwardly profess, because you wear a certain dress - that assumes a society in which everybody dresses according to his particular way of life, vocation, profession; and this is what many traditional societies are like. You can tell what a man is, so to speak, by the way in which he dresses. I think perhaps we've forgotten this, to a great extent, because in modern secular society this isn't the case. But in the last century, in this country, you could at once tell a gentleman from a worker by the way in which he dressed - even right until the first World War, and even a bit afterwards. A gentleman dressed like a gentleman. He wore a suit, he might wear a frock coat, he wore a top hat. A worker didn't dress like that. Just look at old photographs of workers, groups of working men, how they dress, even during their time off. They're totally different, they're dressed in a completely different way, and can at once be recognized. But nowadays, you can't recognize the manager from the factory worker, not in their time off, anyway.

But in former times, there was a distinctive dress for almost every occupation, and there are some survivals of that in the more conservative professions. For instance, why do judges wear wigs and robes? Where do their wigs come from ? Why do judges wear wigs?

Clive: Trying to get in touch with their feminine side. (Laughter.)

S: At the time when wigs were worn everybody wore wigs, men and women wore wigs. There was nothing feminine, there was nothing masculine, about them. Just look at ancient portraits - they're all wearing wigs. Dr Johnson wore a wig, Mrs Siddons wore a wig, King George III wore a wig, the butler wore a wig. They all wore wigs. So it suggested a certain kind of position in society. Very ordinary people didn't, because they had to do heavy, difficult work - the wigs would have fallen off or got in the way. So in the same way, judges on formal occasions wear other items of eighteenth-century dress. But in those days you could recognize somebody as belonging to a certain profession by the way in which he dressed. A tanner dressed in a certain way, a weaver dressed in a certain way, and earlier there were even laws regulating the sort of materials that different classes of people could use for their dress. People who were not members of the aristocracy or the landed gentry could not wear silk, for instance, or velvet or certain kinds of furs. This was called sumptuary legislation.

So therefore you had a society in which everybody dressed the part, as it were. You did get and you still get something of this sort in India in a more simple way - it was simple because

there they don't need so much in the way of dress, so it wasn't elaborated. But very often, in India today, a brahmin dresses in a somewhat different way in some parts of India from the non-brahmin, especially from the lower-caste person. Or different castes wear their dress in slightly different ways, so that that difference is reflected in the way that they dress.

So the reason why people who practise - people who outwardly profess religion can be mistaken for true devotees by the way in which they dress - the reason for that is that following religion has come to be looked upon as a sort of profession or occupation, like other professions and occupations, with its own [33] distinctive dress. So that, for instance, if a man dressed like a judge, he must be a judge, otherwise he wouldn't dress as a judge. If a man was a weaver, he must be a weaver because he's dressed like one, if he's a carpenter he must be a carpenter because he dresses like one. Who else would dress like one? So if he's a devotee, if he outwardly professes, if he wears the dress of a devotee, he must be one because he's dressed as one.

But obviously you can't treat religion in that way. When you start treating religion or the practice of religion in this way, it's become a cultural avocation; it's become ecclesiastical rather than spiritual. So this is where the whole misunderstanding originates: that following a religious path is a sort of way of life or even lifestyle among so many others on much the same sort of level. Because, clearly, you cannot reason from someone wearing the correct dress outwardly professing, and therefore being a true devotee.

Now in ancient India it was true, say, in the Buddha's time and afterwards, when, say, monks were subsisting on alms, you perhaps needed to wear a special dress so that people could recognize that that's the sort of life you were leading and they would know that you needed help, you needed support, you needed food. But that wasn't quite like being a devotee. You were a religious mendicant and people hoped that you were leading some sort of spiritual life. In India nowadays they usually help the wandering sadhus who go about wearing a sort of saffron robe, but no one is under any illusions as to what they might be. It's well known that lots of sadhus are rogues. But people think, well, never mind; even rogues have got to live, and they give them some food - they don't bother too much. And they think, if that's the price we have to pay for supporting a few genuine people, never mind. So they accept that, they don't have any illusions about it; or they may not always support the sadhus, even in India.

But anyway, this is a simple example of the way in which those who outwardly profess but do not practise religion can be mistaken for true devotees: you can dress for the part. But it shouldn't really be possible for you to dress for the part. It shouldn't be possible for you just to don a certain kind of clothing which is so accepted as the dress of a true devotee that you pass for one immediately without further question. That shouldn't be possible, because it suggests that being a devotee can be a sort of profession, identifiable in that sort of way, like being a doctor or being a carpenter, or whatever. And in any case, of course, that type of society is fast disappearing anyway. In the West, even, nowadays, clergymen don't always wear their clerical dress in public as they used to. Nuns, even, don't always wear their habits in practice as they used to, though the present pope is trying to tighten up a bit in this respect. This is the modern trend. It's part of the egalitarian trend, but maybe in a more positive way, because if you tend to identify someone with his profession, you tend not to treat him as an individual, just as in India people want to know what your caste is so that they can treat you as a member of that caste and not as an individual. In the same way in the West people want to know what you do. Nowadays they have to ask what you do. In the past it would have been obvious from

your dress what you did, but it isn't obvious any longer, so they have to ask what you do. That enables them to categorize you.

So maybe that's all right as a provisional measure, a provisional step, so that they know a little bit about you, but if at once they think that that is what you are and don't pursue the matter further, don't treat you as an individual - you are an architect, or you are a doctor, or you are a bricklayer, and that's that - if they absolutely identify you with that, of course that's wrong, because [34] they're not able then to get to know you as an individual.

But here, in a way one could say, via one's dress at least it shouldn't be possible to outwardly profess to be a true devotee, because that is something which can be known about you, not from the way in which you dress but from personal contact and personal communication, individual to individual.

But what are other ways in which one can be mistaken for a true devotee without actually being one, apart from dressing the part as it were - which perhaps a lot of people wouldn't find all that convincing anyway nowadays?

Will: Those people who've read about the Dharma in books.

S: Right, yes. This is a sort of outward profession that 'I know about it'. But presumably the profession is the profession to practise. You profess to be something, which implies that you profess to practise something, but you don't. How could you do that? How could you, apart from dressing the part, outwardly profess but not actually be a true devotee, and why should you want to do that anyway? Why do you think people want to do this, anyway? Why do they want to profess to be true devotees when they're not?

Derek: They know just a little bit about to know enough, there is some sort of evolution there, and then feel a bit respected ...

S: Yes, I think it's more to do with social approval. For some reason or other, being a true devotee or being religious has come to be regarded as respectable in your group. So because you want to be regarded as respectable by the group, to be accepted by the group, you outwardly profess. A lot of this happened in this country in the last century, when churchgoing, for instance, was very respectable. I think it is in the States in many areas still. It labelled you as belonging to the respectable middle classes - depending, of course, on which particular church you went to. The higher up the social scale you were, broadly speaking, the more likely you were to go along to an Anglican church. But, yes, here people wanted to - the people outwardly professed to be true devotees in the Christian sense because an aura of social respectability was associated with that, and people who wanted to pass for very respectable had family prayers, and certainly went to church on Sundays and publicly adopted a very moral stance, as it were; without that necessarily corresponding to the facts. And this, of course, accounts for what we regard as Victorian hypocrisy - perhaps a little unkindly; perhaps we are hypocritical in other ways.

So people outwardly profess without being true devotees, I think, usually when some degree of social respectability or group acceptance is attached to being religious. And this is, of course, when the religion concerned has come to be very much a part of what we now would call the establishment. If true devotees were generally disliked, maybe, and stoned when they

appeared in public, very few people would outwardly profess who did not actually follow it. But when there are rewards and accolades attached to the outward profession of devotion, lots of people who aren't really devoted start outwardly professing.

Roger: It doesn't seem to be something that's happening very much in the last 20 or 30 years in this country, does it? In fact, it's rather the reverse.

S: That's true. But go to India and you find there a very different situation. If you are a 'religious person', inverted commas, you do get a certain amount of respect, very definitely, even if you aren't a monk or a priest or anything of that sort. [35] And very often people like to be able to pass as being very religious. It's part of being a respectable member of society. Even politicians like to go to the temple occasionally, or something of that sort, to show that they are very religious-minded people. It's reassuring to the masses of the voters - as it used to be in this country in the last century.

So here it is, I think, a question of confusion between the spiritual community and the group, basically. Or, you could say, between following a spiritual path and simply doing the things that secure group acceptance or group approval. So the person who outwardly professes but does not practise religion, so as to be mistaken for a true devotee, is the sort of person who lives in a society where religion commands a certain degree of social acceptance and approval, and who wants that social acceptance and approval rather than actually to follow the religion itself, the spiritual path itself.

You could get the same sort of thing, say, in a communist country. Someone doesn't believe, perhaps, in communism, might have serious doubts about Marxist philosophy, but he joins the party because that's the way to worldly success in that particular country.

So when a religion, to use that term, becomes successful and prosperous, then is the time to beware, because people will want to join it and be involved, not for what you really stand for but for the sake of the prestige or the prosperity that may be involved. In India this is supposed to have happened in the reign of Ashoka, when Buddhism became very widespread and very popular and enjoyed great support, especially the support of the king. It's said that the brahmins flocked to join the Sangha, flocked to become Buddhist monks, because that was an easy way to get supported. But they came, it is said in some cases, even without taking off their sacred threads. They wanted to be brahmin bhikkhus, they didn't even give up their caste prejudices, they just wanted to get into the Buddhist yellow robes and enjoy the support that Buddhism was then being given.

But all of that is possible because there are certain external insignia. But in a way, that is unavoidable because when you follow a spiritual path, even if you don't put on a special dress you certainly behave in a particular way - let's say you give up eating meat - and the ways in which you behave because you are following the spiritual path, as a natural expression of your following the spiritual path, are ways that can be imitated by somebody who merely wants to conform, for certain extraneous reasons, rather than actually to follow that path. He can do all the things that you do, but without actually doing them. He can go and sit in the shrine room, sit there straight - he can even meditate, up to a point - or he can fast on Fridays or Mondays or whatever it is. He can do all the things that you do, but without his heart being in it at all, just for the sake of social approval.

So you cannot avoid there being these sort of people who outwardly profess without being true devotees. The only way in which you can avoid it is by your religion or whatever you are doing being so very unpopular and out of favour with society and the public that no one would want to follow it just for the sake of the approval of society or the public. That's the only way in which you can avoid it.

Steve: And even then you might get people who might want to do it because of that - to be a rebel. Perhaps not so many, but ...

S: Well, it would be more than being a rebel, not just a tolerated rebel, but someone who is actually oppressed, perhaps, [36] and persecuted. Well, you might get the odd masochist. [Laughter]

But you can see where the sort of people who outwardly profess do go wrong. They are simply conforming for reasons which have got nothing to do with the actual following of the spiritual path. So 'those who outwardly profess but do not practise religion may be mistaken for true devotees'. It may be quite difficult to see that certain people are only outwardly professing.

What do you think would be the best way of finding out - an almost infallible way? Quite simple, actually.

Devaraja: Trial by fire? [Laughter]

S: What would be the fire?

Tony: If their life was at stake.

S: Oh, much more simple than that. Well, just living with them in a community. You'd soon find out, wouldn't you? It's very difficult, really, to put on an act living in a community. If you just see someone from time to time, he may be able to put on an act and convince you, fool you; but if you are actually living with him, side by side in a community, it being understood that within a community you insist on communication, openness of communication, as soon as you entered into or began to enter into real communication with him it would become obvious. You'd soon find out that his heart wasn't in it, even though he was going through all the right motions, doing all the right things. You'd soon find out, wouldn't you? Assuming that you yourself were making a genuine effort.

Clive: Where does the thing about doing the right things for the wrong reasons come into it, in the hope that those reasons will transform themselves into the right reasons?

S: Well, this is doing things as a discipline. You're not fooling yourself. You know quite well that your motives are mixed, there's a lot of conflict. But at the same time you are convinced that if you can, so to speak, go through the motions sufficiently and it isn't simply going through the motions but because you go through the motions because in the end you want to do more than just go through the motions, that will work, in many cases. You may not feel like meditating, but all right, you go and sit there. Well, very often it may happen that after a while you do feel like meditating. A little block seems just to dissolve, OK, then you meditate. But if you never go and sit, well of course then you're unlikely to have that sort of

experience.

Therefore I think one should be quite careful about the attitude - I have heard this sometimes from people, though not recently - that you shouldn't do anything unless you really want to do it - say, including meditation - because if you do something and you don't want to do it that would be a sort of hypocrisy. But it wouldn't be if you were consciously doing it as a discipline, so that in the end you could both do it and want to do it. You've got to have both, in the end - to do it and want to do it. So it doesn't matter, in a way, which you start with; you can want to do it and then do it, or you can do it and then want to do it, because in the end you've got to have both. And you can't always start off with both. Well, if you could there's no problem, the question doesn't arise, but the problem is that you haven't got both, you can't do it and want to do it. So you start off with whichever it is - you want to do it and then you do it, or you do it and then you want to do it.

I think it is a bit of a micchaditthi to say that because you want [37] to be sincere you shouldn't do something until you really want to do it. This assumes that you're a completely integrated person, and that you should only do something in a completely integrated way, which just isn't possible ... You have to do things in a disintegrated way in the sense that part of you does whatever it is, the rest of you catches up later. Just as you understand something long before you can practise it.

But does that mean that you should refuse to understand it, because you can't immediately put into practice what you understand? This is usually what happens. First of all, we understand, and then we either develop a corresponding feeling and then out of the feeling we do, or we do something because we understand it is the right thing to do, and later on our feeling catches up. But one shouldn't really say 'I'm not going to get up and meditate in the morning because I don't feel like it, and I want to be completely honest and act in accordance with my feelings.' It isn't really quite like that. It's more that I have to be fully involved, and I cannot be fully involved all at once, because that would assume a very high degree of integration in myself. So I involve myself as much as I can. At least I'll be physically there; that will be a good start. And then I hope that sooner or later I will be emotionally and mentally there as well.

Susiddhi: Just in a state of meditation that's one of the most valuable things, I think - just to discover just how seldom you're emotionally and mentally there when you do it. If you're not doing anything else, at least you're sitting looking at yourself not being there!

S: Yes, right. You can at least say to yourself, 'Well how extraordinary this is - I'm supposed to be thinking in terms of my spiritual development, I'm supposed to want to evolve, I'm supposed to want to grow. And of course I'm convinced that meditation is the quick and easy way to grow. But the strange thing is I don't want to meditate. I find it difficult to meditate. I can't even concentrate. I can't even drag myself into the shrine very easily. I don't even want to get up in the morning. Isn't it astonishing, how paradoxical, how contradictory human nature is!' [Laughter] So at least you can reflect in that way. 'Here I am convinced that meditation is the royal road to Enlightenment, I want to be Enlightened, but I don't want to meditate; why is this?'

[End of tape 2, tape 3]

There's this tremendous gap between understanding and emotion, for want of a better term. But we have to involve ourselves at some point and gain a foothold, and then gradually pull the rest of ourselves up on to that same level, as it were.

In our society nowadays, people don't even outwardly profess very much, do they? Even the clergy are apologetic about being clergy, very often. I encountered a really dreadful example of this on the radio some weeks ago, in connection with Dr Coggan, who is the present, but soon to retire, Archbishop of Canterbury. He is being replaced by a gentleman called Dr Runcie. Anyway, the occasion was that the Convocation - the Convocation being the sort of parliament of the Church of England, in case you aren't very well posted as regards these matters; the Church of England has its own parliament, but I think it's got no power - which is called Convocation. So this was the last Convocation that the Archbishop of Canterbury would be attending before his retirement, so of course there was a little presentation, and of course he gave a little speech of thanks. So he said something to this effect at the end: '[I am] very grateful for the envelope which I suspect contains a nice little cheque,' and he said - what was it? - 'and of course the little lady up in the gallery will know how to [38] spend it!' The little lady up in the gallery, of course, being Mrs Archbishop. And then he went on to say: 'Of course, she's a much better person than I am.' And it sounded really so awful! - as if to say if an Archbishop of Canterbury, first of all, he's the head of the Church, he's the head of - he's the leading spiritual figure in the nation - well, first of all he's married - well, that's a little questionable, though I suppose, well, that could just about pass; but that he is openly admitting or professing to admit that his poor little wife, who has no official connection with the Church at all and might just as well be an atheist, is a better person than he is [Laughter] - what a shameful admission! He ought, as Archbishop of Canterbury, surely, to be a much better person than she is, but this coy reference to 'the little lady up in the gallery', [Laughter] like some of our own friends, who go to the little lady round the corner. [Laughter] It seems so utterly out of keeping. It would have been better if he'd done as they did in the middle ages and had a concubine! [Laughter]

But a wife beaming from the gallery while her little archbishop is making a speech and receiving the little envelope with a little cheque which she's going to spend, apparently, on roses because that's what she's fond of ... plant some roses. Nowadays it's as though you have to apologise for even professing to follow a spiritual path, and play it down as much as possible. But if you actually were following it, but were playing it down, that wouldn't be so bad, but apparently you play down the fact that you are following a spiritual path without even actually following a spiritual path! [Laughter] You pretend to be following it so you can pretend to be playing down the fact that you are following it! Which is an awful state of affairs. But it seems that that is what they've got themselves into - what with married bishops and archbishops, and Christianity being identified with the - well I don't know with what - somebody said in the last century that the Church of England was the Tory party at prayer. [Laughter] That is the sort of impression one gets.
But anyway, that's by the way. So in a sense, this precept is a little out of place, because there are so few rewards in the form of prestige, social prestige and all that, attaching to being a true devotee nowadays that very few people just outwardly profess; apart from the fact that in some churches being a clergyman is a respectable - well, sort of respectable - occupation. Certainly respectable, I think nowadays, in a very narrow sense indeed.

This was one of the things that struck me soon after I returned from India - I've mentioned it before - that a clergyman was regarded as a figure of fun. I went to see a film shortly after my

return, it was a historical film I wanted to see, but just before that there was a cartoon, and one of the figures in the cartoon was a clergyman, and I noticed as soon as this figure of a clergyman appeared on the screen, everybody started laughing. He didn't even have to say anything. And this really struck me, as though a clergyman was automatically a figure of fun. And I thought this quite significant.

Susiddhi: Isn't it connected with what we were speaking about, because it's a sort of theatrical figure? People that are acting that part - and it's become ...

S: But acting what part? Have people got a clear idea of what he is supposed to be? And is it that they are laughing at him because he's not really living up to what he's supposed to be - do you think it's that?

Devaraja: There's also a certain element of - if your son wasn't good for much of anything you put him either into the army or the church. And I think that people got this association particularly through theatrical and cinematic comedy, of the clergyman being just a twit.

[39]
S: Yes, right, one really gets that impression - even from some classic novels like Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, there's Mr Collins, for instance. It goes back as far as that.

Devaraja: I think for most people life emulates art... you find that that is the case.

S: I used to see the local curate when I was at Muswell Hill. He was always popping up and down the hill with his pipe in his hand, and he really looked - he really looked, well, 'twit' is the word [Laughter] It was really strange. You wondered 'What is this man doing in the church?' He seemed to be just popping up and down the hill and round the corner the whole day, aimlessly; he was popping in to see old ladies, I suppose - with his pipe in his hand and - he just looked so unintelligent.

Susiddhi: Isn't what he's doing is acting out what society expects of him, rather than being an individual development.

S: That's all right. If you are quite frankly just doing what society expects of you, fair enough. You are doing your job, in a way, quite sincerely. But what is being got at here is professing but not actually practising religion in the sense of Dharma. So is there anything of a higher spiritual nature which people are expecting the clergy to follow but which in fact they are not following? - I am thinking more especially in the case, say, of the Church of England. The Catholic Church is a rather different question.

Devaraja: I think quite a lot of it goes back several hundred years really, to the puritan period.

S: That would only apply to the more free churches, anyway, wouldn't it - the dissenting churches?

Devaraja: But even the dissenting churches, I think, that applies to some extent to, because ...

S: No, I mean any attitude on the part of the Church of England clergymen could not be traced back to the puritans, because they don't trace back to the puritans.

Devaraja: No, but they were considered by - the picture I get from the history of the time was that the Anglican church was just really the tool of the gentry, the landed interest.

S: Yes, there wasn't any doubt about that.

Devaraja: And that the spiritual inspiration of the time seemed to really exist in the puritan churches and the anti-Episcopalians.

S: I don't know whether one would call it spiritual, but something that at any rate the Church of England didn't have.

Devaraja: A certain degree of integrity of some kind.

S: Yes, one could say that. This reminds me of something I read just a few weeks ago in a magazine, which was that there had been a survey of religion in Britain - did you read about this? I've mentioned it before - and they found that the least Christian part of Britain was - Bethnal Green! [Laughter] Yes! And it's nothing to do with the presence of Buddhists or Jews or Muslims. It didn't offer any explanation, but they believed in Bethnal Green say less in God and went less to church than any other part of the kingdom. And it occurred to me that the reason for this was that it was such a definitely working-class area, and that working-class people very often, traditionally, regard the church, especially the Church of England, as identified with the interests of the gentry and the landed, the propertied, classes; the middle [40] classes, the upper classes; and they don't want anything to do with it. It's not the church of working people, it's the church of those who are not working people.

I think also they go a bit further than that. There is a bit of influence of secularism and so on, connected with the Labour Party and so on, and Bethnal Green is a Labour Party stronghold, going back to the last century. There is an association of the Church of England with Christianity itself, and [of] Christianity with these establishmentarian attitudes, and therefore a feeling of estrangement from the church and a feeling of not wanting to have anything much to do with the church or believing in what the church believes.

But I think a lot of people do not in fact tend to see the clergyman as having a spiritual vocation which he is only pretending to fulfil. I don't think most people see it like that. They see the Church of England clergyman as having a social function - christenings, weddings, burials - which he fulfils, but at the same time he is regarded, and his function is regarded, as very marginal to society, and as a sort of survival, and he's just got into that because he is probably not really capable of coping with the real world and doing a man's work, as it were. So - yes, he belongs to the middle classes, and he's sort of respected, but at the same time he is faintly despised as well. I think this is the way in which most people regard the clergy.

And as regards a bishop, no one really seriously thinks of a bishop, even an archbishop, as a spiritual person. He's just someone who's done particularly well in his profession and draws more money. It's as simple as that, I think. And when, say, bishops and archbishops issue these moral appeals, appeals for more moral fibre and more backbone in the nation, people just take it, well, they can't be serious, it's the sort of thing they are expected to say, the sort of thing they are paid to say. No one takes it very seriously.

Things have reached such a state, I think, with Christianity in this country, mainly, I think,

with the Church of England and the more respectable free or dissenting churches, that people don't regard the clergy, the ministers, as people who are outwardly professing but not practising religion. They don't mistake them for true devotees. They think of them in purely social and even economic terms, I think, more often than not.

I think in the case of Catholic priests it's a bit different, because there's one big discernible difference between them and the Church of England clergymen and the free church ministers, which is they are not married. So at least people think they've given up something. They are a bit different from ordinary people. And therefore I think very often they have a slightly different attitude towards them, and possibly more respect.

Susiddhi: I must say I think people still have that feeling of a minister or a priest or a vicar, whatever it is, representing something higher. They give them the prestige, but - they don't make fun of him to his face. He may be a figure of fun, but there is a certain mysterious feeling that he represents something.

S: I think it's that people might have this feeling in the case of the Catholic priest. I doubt very much if they have it with regard to the ordinary clergyman or minister, especially as he lives so much like everybody else with a wife, family, job as it were. He may represent something, yes, he represents the Church, but I think more often than not people don't see the church as a spiritual body; they see it as something powerful and important and of some historical significance, but they tend, I think, not to regard the church as embodying spiritual values - if, in fact, they [41] themselves think in terms of spiritual values at all, which I think very often they don't.

Devaraja: I was wondering if there can be inherited dislikes and I think there's an element of resentment as well, which dates back to the church courts and the system of tithing and fining people for immorality and so on.

S: There are still church courts, though - of course, much less busy than they used to be.

Devaraja: Yes, but I mean they can't prosecute...

S: They are very minor indeed. [Pause] I think while people don't respect the clergy, I think, usually, I think there is probably a taboo attaching to them. A lot of people, say, wouldn't swear in front of a clergyman. It's more - not that they really regard him as representing anything spiritual, but there's just this taboo that has come down. Because very often nowadays a modern clergyman might even swear himself, just to show he's just one of the lads, sort of thing, and all that. That's another thing that they do.

So, as I said, this precept doesn't really quite apply to us, in modern times, especially in the West. It still applies to a great extent in India and in the Buddhist countries of the East.

In a more general way, it's as though one goes through the motions of what is acceptable, not because you really believe in what you are doing but because you want to be accepted. You are doing something not because it is right and you believe in it but because it is acceptable to the people within your group and whose opinion as a group counts, so far as you are concerned. You could even say that nowadays there are some people who outwardly profess to be more wicked than they are, because there's a premium on wickedness nowadays rather

than on goodness.

All right let's go on to the next one - seven.

(7) Slaves of passion may be mistaken for masters of yoga who have liberated themselves from all conventional laws.

S: I think everybody understands what a slave of passion is? But what about conventional laws? What do you think is being referred to here?

Susiddhi: Someone who is prepared to be unconventional for the sake of things he desires from them.

S: Yes. It's as though there is a difference between disregarding conventional laws because you've transcended the plane of conventionality altogether, and disregarding conventional laws because you want something so badly that you're even prepared to risk social disapproval for the sake of that thing.

This also suggests that there are such things as 'masters of yoga who have liberated themselves from all conventional laws'. It is recognized in some traditions, and certainly, for instance, recognized in the Vajrayana tradition in Buddhism, that the master of yoga can disregard conventional laws, he is liberated from conventional laws; conventional laws are good and positive so far as the ordinary person is concerned - he needs to observe those - but the master of yoga does not necessarily. So someone who is in fact just a slave, just a victim, of his own passions may want to pass himself off as a master of yoga simply so that he can disregard the conventional laws and so satisfy his passions, you might say.

[42]
But what is the place of these conventional laws, one might say, in the life of the group and in the life of the individual, the developing individual?

Susiddhi: They set the norms - the group; they indicate at least the norms.

S: What sort of laws do you think the precept has in mind? An example which is often given in Tantric literature is the conventional law - if in fact it is conventional - against the taking of life. There are many stories about Tantric yogis who are seen to kill somebody, and then when exception was taken to that they just brought the person back to life, to show they really had liberated themselves from those sort of conventional laws, life and death were the same to them. They could not only kill, they could bring back to life, they had that power, which the ordinary person doesn't have. This is the sort of example that is usually cited, but I think one is unlikely to encounter that. In our society one is unlikely to have people say they are justified in killing people because they've transcended those laws. They might do that sort of thing, but we would tend to regard them as pathological, as having sunk below the level of the conventional laws, not risen above.

But what other examples do you think there might be of conventional laws with regard to which this sort of question might realistically arise?

Devaraja: It could apply to all the precepts, really, to the basic precepts.

S: Yes, right, it could apply to all the precepts.

Can you be liberated from conventional laws? Is that possible - to be genuinely liberated from conventional laws? And what is meant by 'conventional'? This is not very clear.

Devaraja: Does it mean the precepts, do you think, the basic precepts?

S: Well, there is a question of translation here, but traditionally Buddhism does speak in terms of natural morality and conventional morality, but I think this goes rather beyond that. For instance, conventional morality is morality with regard to things like how you dress, how you behave in society - manners, customs - how you use your knife and fork, how you speak. These are all matters of conventional morality. But natural morality concerns things which are actually skilful or unskilful.

So clearly there might be something to be said for observing conventional morality just to be able to get along with people more easily and more smoothly. But if the conventional morality was not in accordance with your needs as a developing individual, then you would be quite justified in disregarding it. Or if the conventional morality was even opposed to natural morality, then of course you would be obliged to disregard it. So that is quite clear.

But I don't think that this is what is being got at here. I think this is a more Tantric context. I think here the meaning is that, in the case of a master of yoga, the Tantric view is that he can do, or appear to do, things which are actually regarded as unskilful. The example I gave was taking life: the taking of life is unskilful... because the Tantric position is, rightly or wrongly, that inasmuch as the yogi has transcended the skilful and the unskilful he can behave either in a skilful or as it might appear in an unskilful way, and not be involved in the way that the ordinary person would be involved. Now do you think that that [43] is a valid position?

Roger: It's something you have to take on trust. It sounds all right.

S: Hm, it sounds all right, yes. But how could one actually ever check out on it?

Roger: It is mentioned here, like slaves of passion, which we - some of us - might actually begin to appreciate, perhaps not many of us. But then ...

S: How could you be sure that someone was actually a master of yoga and not a slave of passion?

Roger: Same as - live with them.

S: Live with them, yes. You presumably would - you would find out sooner or later, because if you found that someone was systematically breaking all the precepts and claiming to have transcended the level of skilful and unskilful, you'd be very doubtful if you couldn't see the reason for it. If you could see a reason or some sense in what was being done then perhaps you could accept it, otherwise not.

Devaraja: I was thinking of a story I heard about a certain American poet in some Zen society. It seems like Zen circles are really susceptible to this sort of thing.

S: Ah! Yes, we don't seem to encounter it in Britain. I was reading - this is slightly connected - I was reading the teachings of an American master, and told someone this story, and she at once wanted to know the name of the American master; I refused to give it to her. [Laughter] In the teachings which I was reading he was assuring his disciples that they really would gain Enlightenment, they really would experience Reality, he said, all of them, even the most backward, even those who were celibate! [Laughter] So this told me a lot about these spiritual circles in the States. Even those who were celibate were assured of Enlightenment!

But again, this precept draws attention to a very important point, and maybe this is the most important point that emerges here. At every step you must ask yourself, with regard to the allegedly skilful or unskilful, is this actually helping me? You see? And if you find that something isn't helping you, and you are really genuinely trying it, if you find that something isn't helping you, you must have the courage of your own convictions and say, 'This isn't helping me' - regardless of what tradition says about it, or the fact that it might have helped hundreds of other people, 'It is not helping me.'

Or, on the other hand, you could say, 'This is generally disapproved of, it's generally regarded as unskilful, but I am not finding it so, in all honesty. Either I am not finding it unskilful, or I am actually finding it skilful.' So one must be prepared to take one's stand on one's own experience, provided it really is experience, in the long run.

So it isn't as though you can just go by the book and be quite sure that you are on the right path. That isn't really possible. You may have to go against the advice of in some cases even your good friends. You have to think very, very carefully before you do that, but you may in the last resort have to disregard somebody's advice, because your experience is not in accordance with that. So it isn't as though you can ever be sure that you are quite safe, just by doing all the right things, because you have to keep your eye all the time on what your own individual [44] experience is and how you are getting on.

So there is a possibility that somebody is not in fact a slave of passion. He may not be liberated from all conventional laws, but the conventional laws may not work in quite the same way for him as they work for everybody else, or at least most other people, and you have to be true to, you have to adhere to, what is your experience and what is right for you - without being unnecessarily subjective or reactive or anything of that sort, and also giving things a good try first, and really going by your own experience, not just by your own little ideas, if you see what I mean.

So you may have to be prepared to take the risk of being accused of being a slave of your passions, when in fact actually things are working differently for you from what they do in the case of most other people. And this may be also one of the ways in which you can be sure you are not just relying on group approval. You are prepared to differ even from other individuals, if necessary, what to speak of the group, because you have sufficient confidence in what is good for you, you know from your own experience; and you're not making that just an excuse for doing things in your own way, in a subjective, self-indulgent way.

So the tradition here assumes someone who professes to have transcended good and transcended evil, transcended good, transcended bad - it's all the same to him because he's so highly developed. It doesn't matter whether he steals or helps himself to other people's money, it doesn't matter if he runs off with other people's wives, it doesn't matter if he is apparently

unkind or cruel or apparently thoughtless or apparently greedy, like the man that Aldous Huxley encountered in the train, you may remember, in one of his essays. He was a very holy man, and there he was in the same compartment as Aldous Huxley. At every station thousands of people came flocking to prostrate themselves and make offerings, and in between these stops he just preoccupied himself with counting all the money he had been offered. And Aldous Huxley commented: 'When you are as holy as that you evidently didn't need to keep up appearances.' [Laughter] So it's a bit like that. So this is the background, that someone who is disregarding all these conventional laws and is just professing to be above it all, when in fact he isn't.

But on the other hand, none the less, the final decision has to rest with you as to whether the conventional laws are skilful and positive in your case or not, and you have to be prepared to take that responsibility and make your own decisions, and even disagree with other people if that is unavoidable. You can't play safe by just always following the conventional laws. However good, however positive those laws may be, that doesn't absolve you from personal responsibility. And that may, on occasion, for some people, involve apparently breaking the conventional laws.

Devaraja: Do you think there's almost like a maxim in some skills and crafts and things like that, that first of all you learn to do it by the rules; then, when you have, then you can - having absorbed the spirit of the rules - you can throw the rules aside. Do you think - does that to some extent apply to this?

S: Yes, I think it does, but again one has to be careful. I think the resemblance only goes so far. You could, for instance, say 'I practise metta bhavana according to the rules. I really am full of metta, so it doesn't matter how I behave. I can even hurt people, because I am full of metta.' That wouldn't quite work, it wouldn't quite work out like that, would it? But on the other hand, your metta would not be a sentimental metta, you wouldn't bother too much if it looks like metta or not, because you would know when the real metta was there or not.

[45]
Roger: We did almost start coming off about thinking. Was it ever possible to be really liberated at all from laws?

S: I think one could say, probably, that one can be liberated from conventional laws inwardly, because you recognize them as means to an end and you use them as means to an end. I think the real question arises - the extent to which you are prepared to, or find it necessary to, put that into practice in social life. It's as though one shouldn't affront people unnecessarily. You are quite prepared to affront them if it is a matter of principle, but I think it probably isn't necessary to affront them in such a way that it's more difficult for you to put across to them what you are trying to put across. It's difficult enough already. You are going to upset them in all sorts of very basic, fundamental ways, in any case; why make things more difficult by upsetting them in comparatively superficial ways, when you could well afford just to, as it were, give way to them?

Devaraja: It's a bit like if you really have transcended passion and conventional morality, then you've no need to run off with your neighbour's wife or whatever.

S: That's right, yes - unless it's for her good. Or his. [Laughter] Well, you could be the slave

of passion, or even the master of yoga could argue like that - well, it might be really necessary, it might be the right thing, to run off with that man's wife. I can see quite clearly the best possible thing that could happen to him would be to lose his wife, and the best possible thing for her would be just to run away from home with somebody. So you might say, all right, let me do it. There could be a situation in which you could act quite disinterestedly like that. It's not - one should be very careful about making any such claim - but the possibility cannot be ruled out altogether. Some people could do this, the odd person at least could do this. But it would be very easy for a slave of passion in this sort of situation to be mistaken for a master of yoga, or someone to deceive himself, even think himself that he was acting as a master of yoga when in fact he was acting as a slave of passion.

And again it's - 'attachment may be mistaken for benevolence and compassion'; there's a connection there too, isn't it? You think you're acting out of kindness to this man and his wife, but actually you're acting out of your own attachment. None the less, the possibility of a disinterested action of this sort cannot be altogether ruled out; otherwise you are sticking by the conventional laws much too strictly and rigidly. But you can see the way is full of pitfalls, and you just have to genuinely and honestly ask yourself at any given moment: what is the best thing to do, what are my motives? Is this skilful? Is this not skilful? And very often even the best of your good friends can't help you - at least, they can't make your decision for you, they can only advise, say what they think. You have to take the decision, because the responsibility is yours; if anything goes wrong you will suffer, and maybe others too. That's an additional bit of responsibility.

Roger: That presumably cuts quite quickly.

S: Yes, perhaps; perhaps not. You have to take that risk, too.

I think the lesson that really emerges from here is that, if you are following something because it is skilful or trying to do it because it is skilful, you must constantly check up that that skilful principle is actually working in a skilful way for you, so far as you are concerned. Supposing somebody says, 'If you meditate regularly three times a day this will ensure your spiritual progress', and if you do that, you must check up is that actually happening? Is it having that effect - giving yourself a sufficient [46] period of time? Or if you find, say, fasting once a week, someone recommends it, it's very good, OK, but in your case does it have that positive effect that it seems to have for him? Don't just assume that because you're doing it it must be having some positive effect, you can't quite see what; though occasionally you may have to adopt that attitude. But broadly speaking you should try to see in every case whether what is traditionally regarded as skilful is actually working in that way for you.

All right. Carry on then.

(8) Actions performed in the interest of self may be mistakenly regarded as being altruistic.

S: How do you think that could happen? Do you think it could happen very easily? 'Actions performed in the interest of self may be mistakenly regarded as being altruistic' - by oneself, or by other people, or both?

Roger: Both.

S: Both, Hm.

Roger: It seems to lead off from what we were talking about previously, doesn't it?

S: Is it so easy to separate self-interest from altruism?

Roger: Perhaps that's why it's one of the ten resemblances.

Steve: It's a little bit similar to the first one, isn't it? Desire and faith.

S: Yes - yes. But doesn't it also depend on what is meant by interest? Aren't you justified in doing what is in the interest of self? Isn't there such a thing as enlightened self-interest?

Mike: Maybe it's you regarding an act that you're doing as for other people's benefit when really it's only for your benefit, but you won't admit that to yourself.

S: Right, yes, Hm.

Mike: There's actually nothing wrong with doing an act which will develop you, which is for your benefit. It's like this attitude of 'I must make it appear as if I'm doing it for the benefit of everybody', and since you are, if you're doing it properly you're doing it for the benefit of all beings, ...

S: One could say that there are actions which are supposedly altruistic but which are not altruistic, which are actually for your own benefit, but there are also actions which you are really doing for your own benefit but actually they are also benefiting other people at the same time, and no doubt one can carry it further. If you profess altruism, where actually there's no question of your action being altruistic, just as a cloak for doing the things which are in your own interest, that is the worst of all, one could say. What you're doing is anti-altruistic, for you're professing that it is altruistic just so that you can get done something that you want to get done.

For instance, to give an extreme example, you may go out collecting funds, let us say, for old-age pensioners, so you're apparently very altruistic, but actually you've no intention of handing it over to the old-age pensioners at all, you're going to blue it all on a holiday for yourself. So this would be an extreme example of doing something apparently altruistic just on account of your own self-interest.

[47]
On the other hand, you might go and collect money for old-age pensioners and actually hand it over to them, but the self-interest might come in in the sense that you were doing it primarily for the sake of the self-satisfaction or even repute that you got out of it. But none the less, objectively, altruistic action would have been done, so that wouldn't be so bad. And there might be a third case in which you say, 'I'm doing this for the old people, partly because it helps me to develop by making me more unselfish, and partly because, yes, I want to help them too.' That seems to be the most honest and perhaps the best of all, for the very ordinary person.

Roger: But the great thing about action - it seems to have been happening in all the things this

afternoon - is that they really demand to be sure one's real awareness. You have to be really superly aware of when you're breaking conventional laws, because it sounds like a good thing but when you actually do and you know that you're doing, it almost like demands a double dose of awareness.

S: There is a saying in one of the apocryphal Christian gospels - it hasn't got into the four gospels - there is a saying that - or there is an incident - Christ is supposed to have seen some people doing something on the sabbath day that they were not supposed to do, I think it was plucking some ears of corn, and he said to them, 'If you know what you are doing, then blessed are you. If you do not know what you are doing, then accursed are you.' They were breaking the conventional Jewish law with regard to the sabbath, so if they knew what they were doing, that was all right; but if they did it out of ignorance or greed or blindness, that wasn't good enough.

[end of side 1, side 2]

There are some people who, say, would cheerfully lie to the police, let us say, because they are quite convinced that ... [break in recording] They may be mistaken in that, but some people genuinely believe that - that therefore the moral law, so to speak, is abrogated in their dealings with the police. That the police can't by their very nature do any good, so you are justified in not co-operating with them in any way, even if you have to tell them lies. Some people believe this.

Roger: But that doesn't seem to really help the situation ..., does it?

S: Well, the rights and wrongs of it would no doubt have to be argued out with those who believed that. But perhaps we have a tendency to follow the laws, as it were, to do things by the book, whatever the book happens to be.

I think this whole question of self-interest and altruism is quite important, because we have this experience of self, we have this experience of others, and even though that may be relative and limited, this is our experience, and we have to practise and be as skilful as we can within that situation, so the Buddhistic, especially the Mahayanistic, formulation is that you help others and help yourself as well; you help all beings, including yourself. You don't sacrifice yourself to others, you don't sacrifice others to yourself; you do your best for everybody, you are not ashamed of helping yourself, neither are you reluctant to help others. So the one doesn't really come in the way of the other, necessarily.

Sometimes, of course, there is a direct conflict, and then you just have to try objectively to do what is best in the situation.

I think, with regard to other people, it doesn't matter all that much whether they know whether an action which you perform [48] which seems altruistic is really altruistic or not. I think we don't need to go too much into people's motives. For instance, supposing somebody is genuinely helping certain people, I don't think we need, as it were from the outside, to go too much into whether he is doing that out of genuinely altruistic motives. There is this tendency of constantly questioning other people's motives; I think it's much more important that we question our own motives. If somebody asks us what we think of their motivation, well, we can say, but if someone appears to be doing what seems to be an altruistic action, an

action genuinely recognized as altruistic, I think we need not take the matter further than that. I have talked about this quite a bit in a general way in the form of taking what people say at its face value, initially at least, and not at once bringing in the question of their motivation, and trying to throw doubt on the validity of what they are saying just by questioning their motivation, because motivations can always be questioned.

So in the same way, if you just see someone doing something which is apparently quite unselfish, take it that he is doing something unselfish. You don't need to question his motives. But question one's own motives, of course, all the time. I think this questioning of other people's motives does tend to come up in discussion quite a bit, and I think it's quite undesirable.

Roger: It's almost become pathological in society. You come to be rather clever when you work out somebody's motives. When you have their motives you have some kind of power over them.

S: And also you don't need to take seriously what they are trying to say or what they are saying. One notices that, listening to people on the radio, speaking from the standpoint of a particular political party and criticizing something that somebody else has said; they always try to throw doubts on the motives. Well, not doubt; they just state what the motives are, as though that completely invalidates whatever is said or done, the alleged motives. There are various popular phrases. One of the most popular is that 'they're going all out for confrontation', or 'hell-bent on confrontation' is a favourite phrase. So X or Y or Z takes a certain action, so the opponent, instead of saying 'This is not reasonable for such-and-such reason', you just describe their alleged motives - 'Oh, they've said this because they are bent on confrontation.' And you're exempt from any rational consideration of what in fact has been said or done.

Or another favourite one lately is 'It's an all-out attack upon the working classes' - that's a very favourite one. You don't examine the actual measures that are proposed, but you at once attribute certain motives.

Mike: We get it within the Friends as well, though, don't we?

S: I'm sure we do, but we shouldn't.

So, yes, initially deal with what someone actually says on a rational basis. Otherwise you just get a situation in which people are mutually questioning one another's motives, and are questioning one another's motives for questioning one another's motives, and getting nowhere. Questioning of motives, if it has to be done at all, should only be done privately just between two people, and as it were by mutual agreement.

Roger: It's rather wicked, because whatever you do say it is likely to be correct. When it's said it's sort of brought out for both of you, and one can feel very guilty about it and one can feel rather smug about it, so it doesn't really lead to anything at all. [Pause]

S: Anyway, it's time for a cup of tea.

(Break.)

Devaraja: ... and there are choices between three systems none of which one feels any sympathy for.

S: It's not really systems, it's all one system, it's different parties operating within one and the same system. I think it may well be impossible to accept either the party programme of the Tories or the Labour Party or the Liberals, and there really is nobody else. So I think in that case you have to just consider the individual candidates. Among the various people who are standing for election, vote for, if you vote at all, the individual who seems to you the best and sincerest and most likely to do what he thinks is right even though he will be, of course, severely restricted by having to toe the party line.

Roger: Which is really going back to how I suppose democracy was meant originally to work - an individual who represented or was like the very best, who would actually represent the good; it was quite clear ...

S: Yes, the party system is a sort of superimposition upon that. It's a number of people getting together, pooling their resources and adopting a common platform so that more of them can get elected.

Mike: But it's more than just - not opting out is more than just voting or even looking at those who are voting; it's also, I've always felt, making sure you know what's going on. It's not just saying 'Oh, that's politics, I'll leave it alone' - in a sense even though - well, I think most people are absolute fools - I turn on Parliament and I just can't believe what's happening on the radio, I'm quite shocked by it, but I think it's quite important that I know what's happening.

S: I think also there is another thing, which is that politics isn't all national politics; there is local politics. And I think there maybe the issues are much more clear cut, and one can perhaps vote in local elections - I mean elections to the local council, not to Parliament - with a more definite sense of being able to do something and influence people.

George Bernard Shaw, I remember, involved himself in local government politics at one stage. He felt that this was the only sort of politics which was worth getting involved in, certainly at that time, and there seems to be quite a bit of sense in that. For instance, one might have a situation - supposing there were lots of Buddhists in Bethnal Green, you might even be able to put up a Buddhist councillor from a ward. If you could do that, you should do so, I think, so that in the council there is at least one person speaking up for a certain point of view, or even able to press for the implementation of a certain point of view. It is very unlikely that we'd be able to do it on the national level at this stage, but certainly, I think, in those areas where we are strong, like, say, east London or Norwich, I think we could well operate on the local council level; and I think on that sort of level there wouldn't be the same danger of your getting away from your basic principles.

For instance, supposing the question arose at a meeting whether to keep a certain school open or not - that's the sort of question that can arise. You would perhaps - well, hopefully - be able to consider it quite objectively. You might, for instance, see that, say, one party proposed the closure of the school for quite practical, sensible reasons; and you might see that the other

party was opposing just because it wanted to oppose. Then you would throw your weight in on the side of the party that you felt was being reasonable about it, because you just wanted to do whatever was in the best interests of the public.

[50]
So I don't think one can abdicate power. One has power, so even if you abdicate your power that is a political act, so you cannot really avoid political acts. You may not exercise your power directly - not vote - but you shouldn't think that because of that you are therefore not exercising political power; you are exercising it negatively. You are creating a vacuum which somebody else will fill.

Susiddhi: It's hard to exercise the power positively without identifying yourself with a particular group.

S: That is very very difficult, almost impossible. I think it's impossible at the national level at the moment. For instance, you might feel like supporting a certain party because that party, as part of its platform, is putting forward a certain proposal, but you might find in the course of a few months, after that particular party had come to power, that in order to placate certain interests they just scrap that proposal, that you joined them because they were supporting; and where does that leave you? This sort of thing can very easily happen.

Derek: Also there could be the case where you'd deliberately not vote for something, as being quite a responsible political action, because you'd feel that a vote to neither side is just ...

S: Oh yes, the fact that you reject what one party wants to do doesn't mean that you necessarily are in agreement with what the other party wants to do. Unfortunately, they can all be wrong, and usually they do manage all to be wrong these days, it seems, in one way or another.

Anyway, let's go on to the ninth precept, which is a little relevant here.

(9) Deceptive methods may be mistakenly regarded as being prudent.

S: Ah. What does that mean? What is 'prudent'? In principle, what is 'prudence'?

Mike: It's using just sufficient energy to do a job.

S: But not only sufficient energy. Prudence really means using the means appropriate to the end that you wish to achieve. This is what prudence is. It's one of the four moral virtues in Western tradition, originally coming from the Greeks and taken over by Christian theology in the middle ages. What are these four moral virtues, do you know? There's justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude; these are the four moral virtues. So prudence is usually defined as an understanding of the means to be adopted to reach a given end.

So that is surely sensible, to be prudent. But how is it that 'deceptive methods can be mistakenly regarded as being prudent'? What do you think is being got at here?

Roger: Well, for someone that doesn't really quite understand what prudent is, it does seem that when someone is being prudent he seems to be doing things rather elegantly, very

simply; doing things in a way which seem to be against what actually is going to be the outcome. It can really be mistaken for someone just making deceptions.

S: I think the sort of thing that one could regard this as illustrating is, for instance, if you're involved in a business - supposing it's a Buddhist business, supposing it's a co-op business - well, you should be applying ethical principles there. But somebody might say, 'You're making the money for a good [51] cause', and they might think it's justifiable to bend the rules a bit, to not be quite ethical or quite straight, because after all it's all for a good purpose, a good cause. They might call that being prudent, they might call that just being businesslike, or being realistic, or even being sensible or practical. But actually it would be a question of using deceptive methods which were really against your basic principles. I think this is the sort of thing that is being got at: you're not really being prudent, you're just being worldly wise - which means that, from a spiritual point of view, you're not being wise at all.

I think nowadays people wouldn't speak in terms of being prudent, I think they'd be more likely to speak in terms of being realistic, making a realistic profit - not cheating the customer, making a realistic profit, they would say.

Susiddhi: Taking short cuts.

Clive: But one can only do that in dependence upon one's ability to understand - you understand to a certain degree, can be prudent to that degree.

S: Well, there's nothing wrong with prudence, actually. But you can take the name of prudence just to cover what this text calls deceptive methods. You're not really being prudent. You're in fact just being deceptive.

Clive: What I was saying was that you could be prudent to the point that you understand something, and beyond your understanding then you may be doing the wrong thing, ...

S: Yes, after that it's only perhaps guesswork. But that will still be different from deliberately deceiving people, because if you were deliberately deceiving people you would be knowing what was going to happen, only too well.

Roger: I think modern business is a very bad example, because over the years people have been so terribly deceptive, there are so many laws and things introduced, that if you want to run a business prudently you'll have to deceive somebody somewhere along the line - just in a small company.

S: Do you think that's inevitable in all businesses, do you really think? If it's very small, at least?

Clive: I think also there is a place for trust and if you can convince other people that you are trustworthy and can do something then ...

S: For instance, you could deceive people about your profit margin. Someone might say to you, 'This price seems rather high', and you could spin them some tale about your costs for this and your costs for that, and say, 'Actually we are only making 5% profit' - but that could be quite false. So one should not do that. You should say, 'Yes, we are making 50% profit.'

And then say, 'We need to make that so that the business is viable and we plough back something into our charity, etc. That is why we are making a 50% profit and need to.' Then you are honest. You are not deceiving people in that situation. So I think if we run businesses ourselves we should be honest in that way, and be prepared to be quite open with people and say, 'Yes, we are making a 50% profit, but this why it is necessary for us to do that.' But not try to pretend you're only making a 5% profit to make them feel that you're not overcharging them. You could convince them that, even though you are making a 50% profit, you're still not overcharging them.

But I think this is quite a danger in the field of the businesses, [52] and I think it will become a danger more and more, especially as the businesses grow, to depart from the ethical principles, or even to say that ethical principles just can't be maintained. Well, perhaps they can't in certain fields, but I think probably we would just have to abandon those particular fields, if actually we found it wasn't possible to operate honestly. But I am sure that there are certain fields in which one can operate honestly, and I am sure there are some business firms and some business people who do try very hard to operate honestly; I'm sure there are such people still. I don't believe that everybody is consciously trying to cheat the customer - though some are, undoubtedly.

Roger: But it isn't necessarily just the customer, or a client. It brings in the whole realm of authority and laws which are brought in to do them, things like sanitary arrangements, to fire precautions - you know. That's what I meant, that somewhere along the line you actually are not deceiving somebody, you aren't doing something which you know you should be doing.

S: Well, we shouldn't. If the law is there we have to comply with it. For instance, as far as I know, in our businesses we do comply with health regulations and all these sort of things. I think actually we don't have much choice. I see minutes about these things sometimes; I'm surprised, actually, how strict the inspectors are, or at least how strict they've been with us. I'm sure they're not equally strict with all, say, the eating establishments that there are around, I'm sure they're not. I agree that we should comply with their requirements; I just wonder why they've been so strict with us, because I'm quite sure - well, I'm convinced - they're not strict with so many establishments, from the very best (allegedly) to maybe the very worst.

Tony: I think to an extent it's because we are honest, and a lot of people aren't.

S: I think you've only got to walk into some establishments to see that they're not hygienic, but they seem to get away with it. I just wonder why. I've no objection to the law being enforced, to let it be enforced on us, and clearly it's in the interests of the public, but you wonder why it's not generally enforced. It doesn't seem to be generally enforced by any means. They seem to pay a quite disproportionate amount of attention to us, I would say, and again I just wonder why.

Will: You don't have any idea why that should be?

S: Only perhaps - and I'm being quite speculative here - that we're a bit unusual. First of all, we're Buddhists and we're doing things in a different way, and so therefore they may feel quite unjustifiably we need special investigation. It may be something of that sort. Not because there's any actual danger, say, from a hygiene point of view, more that people don't usually do things in the way that we do, or people like us don't usually do those sort of things.

We're a sort of easy target for them, as it were.

Mike: I think it's also because we just seem to come clean just from the start, instead of - just say exactly what's what.

S: Then they should, in a way, pay less attention to us, knowing that we are honest. But they seem to be paying - I do go around the country a bit and I go into some restaurants and cafes, and some to my eye would clearly seem to require the attention of the health inspectors; they don't seem to be getting it, though.

Mike: In a sense, more fool them, for not doing it.

S: I just wonder why they don't, when they are quite capable of taking an active interest in us, so why isn't it more general? I don't like to think they might be bribed, and probably not. [53]

Susiddhi: I think it's the way inspectors are. They can only act on as much as they know, and I get the feeling, as Tony says, that we tell them. Some people, I should think, regard them as 'the enemy' straight away and let them know as little as possible. I think we probably take more the opposite view.

S: Say you go into a restaurant or a cafe, it's only too easy to see whether it's dirty and greasy. All sorts of - it isn't kept clean, very often looking, you don't need any information.

Susiddhi: But an inspector has to prove anything, if he wants any action. They either discuss it with him and then carry out his advice, which I would hope we would do; otherwise he has to prove everything that he wants done. He's got to prove things that are wrong.

S: I would have thought in many cases that was quite easy. Perhaps it isn't.

Susiddhi: It's probably quite a long process, ...

S: Perhaps they just find us pleasanter to deal with.

Susiddhi: It's also, I think, something to do with the fact that our businesses are new. Because if you set something up new, you've got to be investigated, and he sees it right from the start, whereas if you've been going for 50 years he doesn't actually get in on the ground floor.

S: But there are lots of little eating houses springing up, and again they don't seem to be investigated very much. I wonder why. I do get the impression that we've been the object of special attention, even bearing in mind that we are new and so on.

Devaraja: Where - do you mean Croydon, or Bethnal Green as well?

S: Well, Bethnal Green and Croydon.

Devaraja: As it stands at the moment, the wholefood business is not up to scratch ...

S: Well, fair enough, if it's not up to scratch it should be made up to scratch. But I'm sure there are so many other businesses which are not up to scratch, which are not being brought

up to scratch; this is what I'm getting at. Therefore, I wonder why what I feel is special attention is being paid to us.

Tony: It could be that they want to know what our motive is.

S: Hm, could be. Maybe they find it difficult to believe in idealistic motives.

Tony: They hear about co-operatives and working for nothing, perhaps.

Will: We could be in a way just their dream customers - that we're very easy for them to put their system on to. Whereas it's more difficult ...

S: Yes, we make it easy for them, or more pleasant at least. They'd rather come round and inspect us than somebody else who can be rather unpleasant and difficult.

Roger: We give them a cup of tea. (Voices.)

Devaraja: 'They're nice, let's go round and torment them'! [Laughter] It's quite funny, I wonder if there's a difference in [54] approach with Golgonooza, because there are great clouds not only of dust but I'm sure actual deception ... blown up ...

S: I think maybe if things are really bad they leave you alone, they just don't want to get involved, they know there'll be no end to it.

But anyway, I think we have to be quite clear about not allowing our worldly-wiseness and our practicality and our realism to slide over into actual dishonesty and deception. I think that is the main point. Be realistic in the true sense, be prudent, but don't use that as an excuse just for being dishonest or for cheating.

Roger: This doesn't just apply, of course, to our businesses, does it?

S: What do you mean?

Roger: I was thinking perhaps connected with our Centres. It applies to everything you do.

S: Oh yes, yes, right. But I think that the businesses are perhaps especially exposed to temptation in this respect. You could use deceptive methods for advertising meditation classes. Some groups and organizations do: they promise you Enlightenment in a weekend. We don't do that sort of thing. We don't make any promises, as far as I know, even though a reasonable not exactly promise but expectation would perhaps be justified, but we don't even do that.

Derek: It would be very questionable as to whether you're deceiving someone or not. Especially if you're dealing with institutions. How do you relate to the institution?

S: Yes. I think in a way this is a quite grey area, because some people do feel that there's nothing wrong in deceiving - that it's wrong to deceive an individual but there's nothing wrong in deceiving an institution, in a manner of speaking; because strictly speaking you can't deceive an institution, you can only deceive an individual. But when you're deceiving or

thinking that you're deceiving an institution, you're not deceiving any individual as such, because you're not in communication with any individual, and I think that makes a difference. So, for instance, you know - this is something that we were studying some weeks ago - you know that in traditional Buddhist ethics one of the most serious of offences is actually to kill your mother or your father; to kill, to murder your mother or your father is a more serious offence than to kill or murder some other person. So why do you think that is? It's going off at a bit of a tangent, but we'll come back to the subject a bit later.

Mike: Your mental state must be very bad to kill someone who's done so much for you.

S: Yes. Not only who's done so much for you but with whom you have a natural tie. So it must indicate a severe degree of disturbance, almost, in you to go to such an extreme that you violate that natural tie. Well, there's a tie between human beings anyway, it's not good to violate that by the act of murder. But to murder your parents represents an even greater violation of that natural human tie. That's why it is worse. So therefore, where there is a question of direct personal relationship and communication there are greater possibilities of skilfulness and of unskilfulness. And to the extent that you move away from the personal, the individual, relationship and communication, to that extent you move away from possibilities of skilful and unskilful. So, for instance, if you, say, steal from your mother - let's shift it from murder to stealing to make it more realistic - that's bad, [55] because it violates a personal relationship. You have to tell a lie to cover it. If you steal from your best friend, surely that is worse than stealing from an acquaintance. If you steal from someone whom you don't know, though that is an offence it isn't so bad as stealing from someone whom you do know, because there is less of a violation of the individual, the personal, relationship.

So therefore to steal from an impersonal organization, though it is still an offence it is less so than to steal from an individual. So I think there are degrees here, and I think the great difficulty, the great problem even, in modern life is that we are involved in so many as it were non-individual relationships. So therefore we cease to think in very ethical terms. That is understandable so far as it applies to relationships which aren't relationships with individuals directly or very directly, but unfortunately that way of behaving rubs off on to, very often, the way in which we behave with the actual individuals with whom we are in contact.

For instance, to defraud the Exchequer is not such a serious matter as defrauding another individual with whom you are in close personal contact, because there is less of a violation, less of a disruption, of the relationship or communication with another individual. It is still unskilful, I would say, but less so. There are degrees of skilfulness and unskilfulness.

I think this also gives us a criterion - that we should be more careful, as it were, more particular, with regard to those actions of ours which actually directly involve other individuals. We have to be more and more careful the closer we approach other individuals, or the more directly we approach other individuals.

Devaraja: I sometimes feel that institutions like the Inland Revenue and so on are just perpetuating a vast legalized fraud on - well, the rest of us.

S: Well, is it fraud?

Devaraja: Yes, it seems to me that they're just organizations whose sole intention is to

perpetuate themselves and expand. And ...

S: You don't think that's an overstatement? Their sole ...

Devaraja: It seems - perhaps that is an overstatement - but it does seem that the whole taxation system anyway - it just seems like it's - well, just legalized robbery, most of the time; the bulk of what is taken in tax.

S: But it is robbery with consent, because it is all under legislation, etc.

Devaraja: But what consent do you have, what consent do you give? You don't really give consent. You vote a government into power, it says these are its policies, and you know every two or three months these policies are going to be reversed.

S: But by remaining as it were within the system you as it were acquiesce in the system.

Devaraja: So do you see a possible way out of that, of remaining within that financial system?

S: I think that the possibilities are actually limited. One is you acquiesce in the system; you acquiesce in certain things [with] which you personally disagree, which even may affect you uncomfortably, because you believe in or you accept the overall desirability of the system on balance. Say, in this country you can live the sort of life you want to live, you can be a Buddhist if you want to be; you're not actually persecuted, you aren't required to [56] serve in the army, you're not under the surveillance of secret police. So on the whole it's not too bad; so you accept the whole system, as it were, even in those respects which you personally find disagreeable or even immoral. You just accept there can't be a perfect system and this one isn't too bad, especially as compared with certain other systems. So that's one possibility.

The second possibility is that you disagree with certain features of the existing system and refuse to go along with them because you feel very strongly about those things. You refuse to go along with them quite openly, and you suffer the consequences. For instance, you think that it's wrong to pay taxes because that would mean that your money would be used for purposes of which you disapproved; so you refuse to pay your taxes on conscientious grounds and you suffer the consequences. And there are other things that you could do likewise. As in time of war, some people are conscientious objectors and suffer the consequences, when there are consequences. Or as, say, in Russia, Andrei Sakharov - he adopts his individual stance and he suffers the consequences, and he's prepared to suffer the consequences. He doesn't want to remain an underground worker as it were, underground opponent, he opposes openly. So that's one possibility, that was Mahatma Gandhi's stand in India.

And then another possibility is that, for one reason or another - this can be ethical or unethical, selfish or altruistic - you disagree with the existing system or with certain features of the existing system, and you regard yourself as a sort of outlaw. You as it were make war upon the system, but without openly declaring war. For instance, instead of, say, openly refusing to pay your taxes you just cheat, you make false returns, you make false statements. Maybe you rob a bank, you think you are justified in robbing the bank because that money's been stolen from you, or your class anyway, by the capitalist robbers; you regard yourself as morally justified. But you don't say so. In fact, not only do you try not to get caught, but wherever you can you invoke the protection of the system, the protection of the law, etc. This

is the position of the, you could say, anti-social person, whether he is anti-social with some semblance of justification or not. This could also include the criminal, quite clearly.

It seems to me there are really only these three possibilities. I don't know whether anyone can suggest a fourth? So it's as though one has to make up one's mind between them. I think from a moral point of view, from a Buddhist point of view, the objection to the second is that you have to tell lies. Now of course some people would say you are justified in telling lies where the state is involved, because the state is so powerful and you are so weak you just haven't a chance; some people would believe that. Therefore you are justified in telling lies. But other people would say you are not justified in telling lies because that would have its effect on you. And in fighting for something ethical you would in fact be denying the ethical, so you would have to be truthful and suffer the consequences if you were to adopt any ethical stance at all; because if you were to try to oppose the state or the system by cheating and lying you would be involved in so much cheating and so much lying I think there could be no possibility of an ethical life for you, even if you didn't actually rob and steal and murder.

Mike: Because you're actually using and doing the thing that you're fighting against. Like you're trying to use - it is a very dangerous thing in trying to use the poison to kill the disease.

S: Of course if you don't have an ethical stance, that's different. Some people of more political persuasions don't have an ethical stance. They believe - they don't look at things ethically in this [57] way - they believe that they have as it were a right to lie and to cheat and to even rob banks and even to murder people because the whole system is so wrong; so that stance is hardly possible for a Buddhist, ...

[end of tape 3, tape 4]

- clearly, for obvious reasons.

But I think it is very dangerous for any state and for any government to let things come to such a point where reasonable citizens feel that they have got no reasonable way of getting anything put right. I think this is very dangerous, allowing things to come to a point where the ordinary citizen feels powerless, for good or for evil. And this often does happen nowadays.

Roger: Seems to be a thing which has been rattling down through history. When you begin to feel powerless enough, you can decide to ...

S: And then there is a violent upsurge, and this is where you get things like urban terrorism and so on. Though I don't agree with it, I can certainly understand it. Because it you're not restrained by ethical considerations or spiritual considerations, and you feel that the dice are really loaded against you, what can you do? You feel quite justified in having resort to violence and even in robbing to sustain your campaign, and so on.

There are some people who have an ideology which does not believe in non-violence, one must remember that too - who feel that violence is ethically justified. They don't feel that violence is unethical but they will indulge in it none the less, they feel that violence is ethical in certain situations. The Palestine Liberation Organization people believe that; various other guerrilla groups believe that violence is morally justified. The Christian churches have believed this down the ages - that violence is morally justified. Most people have believed it.

So can you be surprised if some of the urban terrorists also believe that violence is morally justified under certain circumstances? Every so-called civilized state believes it, every so-called civilized state has an army and is ready to go to war if necessary. So they are only taking a leaf out of your collective book - except with a somewhat different attitude or motives.

Roger: That's why it seems, when the situations do arise and you're powerless, it's not as if it's just the government that is culpable, it's all of us for allowing the situation to arise like that. And luckily in our development there's a time when you can do something about it; although you seem to be powerless that actually isn't the case ...

S: I think in this country it very often happens that people can do something if they want to. If you take something quite simple and ordinary like food in restaurants, it's well known that the English people just don't like to make a fuss, but you can make a fuss; what is there to stop you? Nothing. What is there to stop you just complaining? Nothing, except your own inhibitions. So even at that level we can do so much more, but we don't, usually.

Roger: The cry from all politicians, anyone involved in anything, why things aren't happening, is just from apathy. People just aren't saying anything. They're with their arms open for people to come up with suggestions for things to do, ways of approaching things and hearing what people really want. It isn't as if there's a conspiracy to stop people doing what they want.

S: There's nothing to stop you writing to your MP. There's [58] nothing to stop you organizing 100 letters to your MP. There's nothing to stop you telephoning your MP every day until he gets tired of you. There's nothing to stop you going and standing on his doorstep and insisting on seeing him, and not going away until you have seen him; but we just don't like to give trouble.

Roger: Being British.

S: Right, yes.

Mike: But then it all comes out in more under-the-belt type of thing, behind people's back. Criticism, sort of carping criticism rather than direct face to face ...

S: Yes, grumbling.

Mike: Sort of Private Eye thing, really.

S: Well, for all the money they've put into Private Eye, all the energy, all the ink that they've spilt - they could have launched some really positive, constructive campaign, presumably. They probably wouldn't have got so much fun out of it, though.

Susiddhi: I was thinking while you were speaking that we're not in a monolithic situation here, where you might be in Russia, for instance, where as soon as you knock against something you bang your head. I think more what people feel they're knocking against is the complexity of the whole thing. You could go and see, badger, your MP, but it would be just one little splinter. You'd have to feel strongly to deal with that.

S: Yes. But still, if the MP starts feeling that votes may be lost over this issue, he will start doing something about it. Maybe he is in a very marginal seat. Maybe a few hundred votes this way or that would make a big difference, make every difference. So he's going to be a bit careful, then, about the views even of very small numbers of people in his constituency. If he's got a majority of 10, 15, 20,000 - the chances are he's not going to bother much, so perhaps then you might feel it's not worth bothering. But if his seat is very marginal, yes, he might take quite a lot of notice of what you say, even do what he can if it is a comparatively local matter. There's all sorts of allegations at present about Trotskyite elements taking over Labour party constituency parties; well, yes, this is because the majority are apathetic and the extreme minority are able to take over, quite democratically. They don't have to bother to do things in an undemocratic way, because the democratic process itself allows them to take over. And they quite rightly say, 'If you don't like us, turn up and vote. We can't be blamed if you don't turn up and vote. We did. We took the trouble to come and vote, and you couldn't bother. And then you grumble that the whole thing has gone to the Trotskyites.'

Roger: And it's probably just a handful of people, if that.

Devaraja: It's really probably one man [Laughter]

Roger: Tariq Ali some time ago was big news; you thought the world was going to be taken over, and it was three men in a grubby Greek Street office, with two telephones and an old typewriter. That's all they were. Revolutionary force.

S: But to function in that way - this is where the rub comes - I think you have to be a bit neurotic.

Roger: Very true.

S: This is a point I made some time ago at the very beginning of the Friends - that most religious organizations, including Buddhist organizations, function on neurotic energy, and this was one of [59] the things that we were not going to do. Because, for instance, if someone came along and seemed very high-powered and efficient - that was fair enough, he was secretary straight away; that was the attitude outside the Friends. But in our case if someone came along high-powered and efficient we thought, OK, we can put all that into cold storage for the time being - how are you psychologically? How are you spiritually? Are you going to be committed? That will all be gone into first, and if he got through and became an Order member, maybe he would be given responsibility and be able to put his talents to good use. But no one was going to be put into a position of responsibility just because he had the drive to do the work; because that drive, more often than not, I've found from my own experience with people in religious and Buddhist organizations, was neurotic. So it's a question of a combination, usually, of the apathy of the majority and the neurotic drive of the minority.

So one has to replace neurotic drive by positive skilful energy, and that's not so easy. People who get to the top in politics and will be interested in politics seem for the most part to be people with tremendous neurotic drives. You can tell it from the sound of their voices, sometimes. All right, ten.

(10) Charlatans may be mistaken for Sages.

S: Yes. This is continuing the same line of thought, isn't it, especially the same line of thought as ... No. 7, the slaves of passion and the masters of yoga. Do you think there is some difference as regards this precept?

Susiddhi: 'Charlatans' definitely gives the impression of deliberate deception. The other one was to do with desire, wasn't it?

S: Yes. Well, there could be a deliberate deception. You could deliberately pretend to be a master of yoga in order to create opportunities to satisfy your own desires. But charlatans? One doesn't now what the original Tibetan word was. A 'sage' - that's pretty clear, isn't it? A wise man or woman, one who really does understand.

It's very easy, perhaps, to obfuscate some people with a display of knowledge which is not really knowledge. I've really seen this in India with certain people. People will tell you with bated breath, 'He's a very learned man' - but you know he's just got a smattering of knowledge on the subject. But ordinary people can be very very impressed, especially if he uses a lot of Sanskrit words, all that sort of thing.

One feels, in a way, the relevance of this particular precept at the present day when there are so many of these globe-trotting gurus, some of whom may be very worthy people and the real thing, the genuine article, but there are others, no doubt, other people who see that somebody is on to a good thing, and they want to get on to it as well, without the necessary qualifications, so to speak. Religion is big business, in some ways, nowadays, especially oriental religion, in a way that it wasn't, say, 15 or 20 years ago.

Roger: Religion always has been rather like that, hasn't it - from the old pardoners to the big belt in North America.

S: Yes, one hears of quite extraordinary things going on.

Susiddhi: I just think it's interesting how many times this afternoon we've discussed how difficult it is to tell the difference between a charlatan and ...

S: I think it isn't difficult if you get close enough, if you can [60] enter into personal communication, and are yourself something of an individual. Usually the charlatan, in the sense of the typical globe-trotting pseudo-guru, is the leader of a group. His function and significance is very much of that sort. People are looking for security, they want to belong to something, belong to a group, they want a father figure. He provides that. It's not in a way altogether a bad thing that that should be provided. What is bad is that it purports to have something to do with spiritual life, and to lead to Enlightenment, as it were - the word Enlightenment seems to be used here in quite the wrong sort of way. He even promises salvation, sometimes, if people will only believe in him; sometimes says this quite explicitly. It's a moot point, the extent to which they believe what they say and the extent to which they don't believe it and are in fact saying it with their tongue in their cheek. My guess is that if enough people believe in them and they are surrounded only by these people, they end up believing it themselves.

Roger: Then you are lost.

S: Then you are lost, as an individual, though you may be a perfectly good and effective group leader.

But here again, there's the question of the individual contact, the individual communication, which is so important. But that seems to be ruled out in these sort of groups, in these sort of movements. Very often you can't even approach the guru or the pseudo-guru very nearly; you can just see from a great distance, and make your offering or your bow or whatever.

This is why there can't be a mass spiritual movement. There can be a number of little groups or little spiritual communities linked up together, but you can't have a monolithic, big spiritual movement. That's a contradiction in terms. That's one of the reasons why in the FWBO every Centre is autonomous: because you can't have, as I said, a spiritual movement which is so to speak monolithic. It just isn't possible, it is a contradiction in terms. Because an essential part of it is the spiritual community, and an essential part of that is communication between the members of the spiritual community, and you can't have communication between more than a certain number of people at one and the same time. It's difficult enough even to have it with a limited number of people, what to speak of a very large number of people. Can you really be in communication with 100,000 people? Or even 10,000? Or even 1,000? You could possibly keep up personal communication with 100 or so people, to some degree, but even that would be difficult. And intensive communication you couldn't keep up, perhaps, with more than 10 or 12 people at the most, maybe not more than four or five, depending on how much time you had. But at least, if there are these circles of people in communication with one another, and they all overlap to some extent, then they could all add up to a fairly large spiritual movement; but not because they were functioning as a monolithic group, but because they were a loose association of overlapping spiritual circles, as it were.

So if the sage seems to be deliberately kept at a distance from you, you can start being suspicious. If, practical considerations apart, one is not encouraged to enter into personal communication, not permitted to enter into personal communication, if he just appears on the platform periodically and then you never see him, and he has some sort of private life immured somewhere, then you can be a bit suspicious.

With regard to Rajneesh, I heard that he has a separate villa in Poona adjacent to the ashram, and it's only 100 yards or so distant but he's driven over in a Mercedes every morning to give his talk; the gates are opened and in he drives in his Mercedes, [61] giving his blessing through the window, and walks just a few yards up to his chair and then gives his talk, and then he's driven back in his Mercedes. And the people who frequent the ashram don't have any personal contact with him it seems, not any longer. He has personal contact only with those who actually run the organization, mainly some rather brisk American women, who are very efficient.

So I think in a way it's natural that there should be these big group movements. I think the only unfortunate thing is that they are all labelled as, or supposedly are, spiritual; because they have nothing to do with the development of the individual. They give a certain amount of group security - which is all right, that is needed by some people, but they don't really give much more than that, if anything more than that. And very often they do encourage neurotic attitudes, a neurotic emotional dependence. It's not even always a question of a healthy group, a healthy group membership.

So 'Charlatans are mistaken for sages'; charlatans are mistaken for Buddhists; micchaditthis are mistaken for the Dharma, and groups are mistaken for the spiritual community. And what misleads is that they use the same sort of terminology as we use. This is one of the awful things we discovered at the Festival of Mind and Body, the first one, and then the Festival of Body, Mind and Spirit. But everybody else, all these New Age groups as they were called, were using words like growth, development, individual, Enlightenment - the whole lot - creativity - just like we do - meditation. But they had a completely different - in their usage the words had a very different meaning. But no one coming along and listening to us superficially or reading a bit of our literature could have told the difference; we're all into meditation, we're all into growth, we're all into Enlightenment, etc. We're all into being individuals. There was no way of distinguishing, unless you yourself are something of an individual and get into personal contact, and then come to know that these people are using that language in a rather different way. But it's unfortunate that we've landed up with the same language; it almost says something for using the Pali and Sanskrit terms or Buddhist expressions - talk in terms of Going for Refuge rather than commitment; say Nirvana, say Buddhahood, rather than Enlightenment. Then people say, 'Do you mean Enlightenment?' 'Oh no, no, good lord, it's quite different.' [Laughter]

Someone was asking me whether there was a Sanskrit or Pali word for individual, and I said there was purusa or pudgala - but it would be rather difficult to popularize those, perhaps. And also pudgala - there were the Pudgalavadins in India, so if you use the word pudgala, from a Buddhist point of view, it would identify you with a particular Buddhist school, usually considered heretical - wrongly so in my opinion, but none the less usually considered heretical.

Clive: How does it differ from 'individual'? Is there anything more in that which is ...

S: I think many people nowadays use the word 'individual' when they mean simply an individualist. That distinction is not made. If you're a bit obstreperous and a bit difficult and a bit reactive, then you're being an individual. That's what some people think. Whereas we take 'individual' to mean someone with greater awareness, a higher degree of emotional positivity, greater sense of responsibility, and so on. Whereas in current usage 'individual' is usually someone who just asserts himself rather more strongly than people usually do.

Devaraja: Can you say anything about the Pudgalavadins? Why -?

[62]
S: Well, Dr Conze has written about them. They are regarded as heretical by some schools because it is said that their pudgala is only really a disguised atman, but they deny that, and it seems to me that their denial is well founded. But Dr Conze has a quite good chapter on them in his Buddhist Thought in India, if anyone is interested in looking there. The pudgala is said to be neither the same as nor different from, nor both nor neither, with regard to the five skandhas; whereas the atman is only a sort of fictional or fictitious label applied to the five-skandha combination; but that is not said of the pudgala. And there are, of course, texts which are in the Pali scriptures which the Pudgalavadins do quote. The Buddha refers in one case to the burden and the bearer of the burden. The burden is the five skandhas, so the Pudgalavadins say that here the five skandhas are quite clearly distinguished from the bearer of the five skandhas, that is the pudgala. And then also in the Salutation to the Sangha there is the reference to the eight pairs of pudgalas, who are the true purusas, and they are the Stream

Entrants and so on, which seems to suggest that individuality in that sense pertains to Reality, so to speak.

The Theravadins argue, with regard to the first quotation, that it is in fact the five skandhas that are the bearers of the five skandhas; that it is the skandhas in their prior phase which are the bearers of the skandhas in their subsequent phase, in the sense that one arises in dependence upon the other.

Roger: Could go on for ever.

S: But anyway, the Pudgalavadins are a quite interesting school and a quite strong school in India, right down through medieval times. So therefore, if we started using pudgala instead of individual, Buddhists in the East would regard us as having aligned ourselves with the Pudgalavadins. So it's difficult to use that sort of word. That's all that I was in fact saying. Sometimes I use the word individual with a capital I, Enlightened Individual, just to show there is some difference. But there is this general difficulty, that one is trying to communicate, and if one communicates in words one has to take those words from current speech. And if you are communicating something new, or something which is not familiar to the people using that speech, you have to use the existing terms in a somewhat different way, or coin a completely new term. Teilhard de Chardin coined all sorts of new terms for his ideas, but they don't on the whole seem to have caught on. I think occasionally people refer to the biosphere; they might even refer to the noösphere, or even the Omega point, but they haven't really generally caught on, and there are lots of other terms that haven't caught on at all.

Clive: Maybe the phrase 'co-operative individual' would distinguish ...

S: But then 'co-operative individual' - it wouldn't really convey what we intend to say, would it? 'Co-operative spiritual individual'. Even 'spiritual' can be misunderstood, so you can only really know or understand what someone is trying to say in the context of personal communication, when on-the-spot clarification is possible, and when you can really see yourself whether the other person has understood what you are trying to say. You can't really rely upon the automatic effect of certain words. Or you can't fall back on the accepted meaning of words any more than you can fall back upon the conventional laws. You have to ask yourself 'Are these words which I am using really conveying the meaning that I want to convey?' You can't take it for granted that they will, even if you are using what you think are the right words. You have to check up all the time: is your meaning getting across? Is it being communicated? Is the other person understanding? Are your minds in contact, or not? And you can [63] usually tell when you are in personal communication, you can see the understanding lighting up in the other person's eyes, or that look of blank incomprehension.

Roger: And even within people who speak the same language, use the same words, it's even more tricky and subtle there, because you might actually pretend that you're understanding, you might even feel you are understanding, whereas what the person is actually saying is something quite different.

S: I think also - just to go a little further into this whole question of the charlatans and the sages - and the charlatan as group leader or having a certain position: very often it's as though you are expected to accept someone as a sage just because a lot of other people say he is. In a sense, that is reasonable, but then sometimes you get the impression that the sage, or whoever

he is, is being projected by his particular group, not because they really believe and know that he is a sage and want you to benefit from whatever he has to offer, whatever he has to say, but because they want to overwhelm you and sort of overwhelm you with (...) and conscript you into their group as another subject-group member. So you are not allowed to question, well, 'He is that - he's God, even, you'll be - ' and you've got to accept it, or you're supposed to accept it. 'Oh, he's very, very Enlightened, there's no one more Enlightened than he is.' And you're supposed at once to grovel and accept him simply on their word, without any possibility of coming to know or to feel this yourself in any way, however distant.

Here are you, you've rejected Christianity, perhaps, and you no longer regard Christ as the saviour, and you're expected to accept somebody else who's trotted along on those sort of terms, without further inquiry. It seems really absurd. Someone's got an interest in your doing this - someone.

So it is a great pity that this quite genuine, in a way, upsurge of interest in Eastern spiritual teaching seems to become corrupted almost from the start, very, very quickly, in this way. Not that we haven't got some such people in Christianity: there's Billy Graham. It was quite good to know that there'd been an anti-Billy Graham campaign when he appeared in Cambridge and Oxford; a sort of anti-brainwashing association or something like that organized itself. Or campaign against mass indoctrination, or something like that, they called themselves. That was good. But otherwise only too many people seem to be saying 'Please indoctrinate me, please brainwash me.'

Roger: That seems to be where most of the corruption probably comes from. People want it easy and straightforward and simple, and want to be seen to be doing the right thing. It's hard work trotting from one to the other, too; ...

Devaraja: Are you familiar with the Bhagavan Swaham posters?

S: No, I've not seen them.

Devaraja: There's these huge posters - they're about ...

S: Oh, oh yes, I know the ones, the astrologer. Yes ...

Devaraja: ...gap. He's now got (...) on the top, and Swaham Saranam gacchami.

S: He's not so bad in a way, because you only see the posters. He never appears, to cash in on it all, so he appears as a sort of astrologer, so maybe that's not so bad, and it seems to be something about peace.

Devaraja: Penance and prayers for world peace, 92 Almond [64] Road! [Laughter]
S: At least he hasn't got any followers, or maybe he's got one follower with a lot of money who pays for these ads.

Devaraja: Somebody told me that they once Sudatta there.

S: I wouldn't be surprised. I hope he's not paying for the ads. [Laughter] Anyway, perhaps we'll leave it there for today.

Session 3

S: All right then this morning we come on to The Ten Things Wherein One Erreth Not.

(1) In being free from attachment to all objects, and being ordained a bhikshu into the Holy Order, forsaking home and entering upon the homeless state, one doth not err.

S: I expect everybody knows what it means in traditional terms to become, or to be ordained, a bhikshu into the Arya Sangha or simply into the Sangha, 'forsaking home', as the precept says, 'and entering upon the homeless state'.

In the Buddha's day there was already the practice or custom or tradition of Going Forth, that is to say going forth from home into the homeless state, quite literally. You left your home, left your family, left your friends, left your village; you just wandered from place to place, usually wearing a yellow 'robe', as we call it nowadays, just a yellow dress, you could say, a recognizable yellow dress, shaven-headed, and carrying a begging bowl because you subsisted upon alms. So the Buddha himself followed this tradition; many of his followers followed this tradition or this practice or custom; and it was from amongst those who had Gone Forth in this way, mainly, that the Buddha created what we call the bhikshu Sangha or the spiritual community of the full-timers, which eventually became rather sharply differentiated from those of his followers who remained at home with their families and friends and following their ordinary occupations.

So the question that arises is, in this connection, or in connection with this precept: what is it that one really Goes Forth from, and to what extent that is bound up with or even inseparable from, a literal forsaking of home and entering upon the homeless state?

You notice that the precept opens by saying: 'In being free from attachment to all objects and being ordained a bhikshu', etc. 'one doth not err'. So what do you think this precept essentially is all about? What is it saying? Is it really talking about becoming a bhikshu? Is it really talking about bhikshu ordination, going forth into homelessness in the literal sense? What is the principle involved, so to speak, of which that is the particular application?

Will: Non-attachment.

S: No attachment, yes. But more specifically than that?

Brian: Going for Refuge.

S: Going for Refuge, yes, that is certainly involved. Though don't forget, originally, when one went forth, that is to say before the time of the Buddha or in the (...). there was no question of Going for Refuge, you merely went forth. The refuge didn't exist then. So the Going Forth is to some extent synonymous with the Going for Refuge only within the context of Buddhism itself. But essentially what does one Go Forth from?

[65]
Steve: The group.

S: One Goes Forth from the group. This is essentially what it is all about. So therefore what

does one Go Forth as, hopefully?

Steve: An aspiring individual.

S: An aspiring individual. So essentially the Going Forth is the individual's, or aspiring individual's, first movement of separation from the group. This is what it really means. So in the absence of a spiritual community, let's say, when you Go Forth from the group what do you go forth to?

Steve: Enlightenment.

Roger: A new way of life.

S: But let's put ourselves back into the days before the Buddha, or the Buddha's own days. What do you Go Forth to, really?

Will: The unknown.

S: The unknown. You don't Go Forth to anything. You are in the position of giving up the old without knowing whether there is anything new to commit yourself to. All that you know is that you are pretty fed up with the old, you want to detach yourself from the group. And in a sense that is everybody's position, in the sense that even though the spiritual community exists, and even though you are an aspiring individual, you can't really see the spiritual community very well or very clearly. You can only do that when you really are an individual and can recognize other individuals.

So to begin with you are very much groping in the dark. You are dissatisfied within the group. You feel restricted, you feel constricted by the group, you want to leave it, you want to shake it off, you want to separate yourself from it, you want to Go Forth, you don't want to have very much to do with the group. But to begin with, probably, that's about all that you are very clear about. But that has to come first. I think one might almost say that when one Goes Forth one goes forth into the wilderness, and that's an essential stage, because what you mustn't do really is to Go Forth from one group to another, from a group in a more obvious, gross sense to a group in a more refined sense. And I think, therefore, that it is important that you have that period of wandering in the wilderness, as it were, which you will have or ought to have, even if you do come into contact with the spiritual community, because you won't all at once be able to appreciate it as the spiritual community. You won't be able to recognize it at all, perhaps.

So clearly, the being free from attachment to all objects, which is referred to here in this context, is more those objects which make up, or which have to do with, the group. In a deeper or more metaphysical sense it's conditioned existence itself, but in practical terms conditioned existence is embodied in the group and all its ways. So that's your first step, to Go Forth from the group.

But what does one mean by Going Forth? Well, clearly a sort of mental detachment and mental separation is indicated, but to what extent is it necessary to Go Forth, or to what extent is it possible to Go Forth literally? What about that? In the case of the bhikshu in the old days, he went forth literally. But to what extent is that necessary generally, to what extent even is it

inevitable - or possible?

[End of side 1, side 2]

[66]
Can you give any concrete examples of actual Going Forth, at least to some extent?

Steve: But we do Go Forth when we leave our families and friends and we go into the spiritual community.

S: Wait a minute, you're rushing on ahead a bit - going into the spiritual community. What do you get out of, first, in a literal sense?

___: Family.

S: Family. Probably that's the first thing, especially parents, and brothers and sisters. And to what extent do you think a physical separation is necessary? Do you think that physical separation is necessary, or you can actually break away or Go Forth while just staying comfortably at home? Do you think it is possible?

Susiddhi: I think you need to do it temporarily, just to assess your position.

S: Yes, that's the point, because you don't know whether in fact you have Gone Forth. You can say - it's very easy to say, and even to be sincerely convinced - that you have Gone Forth in your own mind, you're not attached to your family, you're not attached to your parents. It's only too easy to think that. But you don't actually know until you do it, until you actually take the step. So probably it is necessary to Go Forth in that way, as a young man, that is to say, or even as a boy: you don't have to wait till you're 25 or 30, necessarily, before going forth from the parental roof. In some ways the sooner you go the better; go when you're 15 or 16 - that's also good. And as it were to go out into the wilderness, in a sense. So, yes, leaving aside being an individual, or an aspiring individual, even if you want to be a positively functioning human being, just in the ordinary social sense, you need to go forth from the parental group just to develop your own sense of independence and your own capacities, your own self-reliance and so on.

But is even the literal Going Forth from the group confined to that, just going forth from one's parents and one's brothers and sisters? Does the group not exist in other forms? So is not a further going forth, in the literal sense, necessary? If so, in what way? What other groups do you belong to, for instance?

Derek: Old friends?

S: Old friends, yes.

Susiddhi: The national group.

S: The national group - so how would you go forth from the national group? Could you, in fact, literally, or to what extent could you literally? Are you permitted to, even? You can try. Well, first of all look at in a way the legal position. In the modern world you either belong to

a state, you are either a citizen of a state, or you are stateless. If you are stateless, what is your position? Is it easy to travel, for instance?

Devaraja: No, it's not.

S: It isn't, no, it isn't. So you're almost obliged to be a citizen of a state, which means to some extent that you are identified with that state, whether you like it or not. If you want to travel you have to carry the passport of that state, and in many ways you are under the control of that state. So it's very difficult in the modern world to be stateless, isn't it? - to go forth from the state. Some people do try; there is a World Citizens' movement, and [67] they renounce their statehood, their renounce their citizenship. The organization itself gives them a passport, it's called the World Citizens' passport. I think there are about 500 or so of these people in existence. And this passport is recognized in some ways by some states, but other states, of course, the majority of states, just won't recognize it at all, so it doesn't help you very much. So you are limited if you want to travel.

This brings us up against the fact that we are very severely restricted in many ways. You are compelled, virtually, to be a member of a state whether you like it or not. In former times it wasn't possible - this wasn't the case. Nationality and citizenship and all that sort of thing was much more fluid, and even the carrying of passports when we travel abroad has been a universal requirement only really within this century. Right down to the time of the first World War it wasn't very necessary; you could travel over the greater part of the world without bothering much about a passport. But in more recent decades states have got into the habit, so to speak, of not admitting anybody who isn't carrying a proper passport. In some countries you need an identity card within your state, and you have to produce it whenever called upon to do so by the proper authority, and in this way a close check is kept on you.

This is nothing new. The Chinese, for instance, had it all through the period of Imperial Chinese history. You couldn't even move from one district to another without an internal passport and without reporting to the police, so it's nothing new, but it has become widespread or it's become worldwide, this sort of requirement, only in comparatively recent times. So we are restricted.

So therefore the question arises: In what way can we go forth from the national group, let us say, literally? Is that possible? Or to what extent? In what way?

Mike: You don't have to necessarily go physically ... just in your own attitude.

S: Yes, there is the question of your attitude. But it would seem that there is a limitation with regard to going forth from the national group, there's a limitation as regards to what extent you can express your attitudes in actual concrete behaviour. You could, for instance, declare yourself stateless if you felt sufficiently strongly about it, but you could well find yourself in prison. But you might think this is what you want to do; you want to carry your principle as far as that. You won't pay taxes, you won't allow yourself to be conscripted, etc., etc. That could happen. You could insist on being a World Citizen; some people do feel very strongly about this. But it would be quite difficult, it would make things quite difficult for you.

But in what way could you go forth from national attitudes?

Susiddhi: I think it's a good idea, in this context as well, to get away from that group, so that you can see it from a distance, and also so that you can experience just how conditioned you are. Because you go into another country, and people can tell by looking at you or just listening to you, 'You're such-and-such', and they put you right back in that group.

S: Yes, so one can, even though one can't give up your citizenship so easily, you can go forth from the national group by simply leaving your country for a while and travelling abroad or living abroad; even though you have to still carry your passport, but still living abroad or travelling abroad does enable you to go forth from your national group to some extent, even literally. You can sometimes even forget about your passport, you forget that [68] you are carrying it, and you are quite surprised when someone addresses you as or starts treating you as an Englishman or whatever the case may be.

So if one wants to Go Forth literally from the national group, the best way, and maybe the only viable way, is to travel abroad. I don't mean just a holiday in a place where you go and have fish and chips every day at the local English-style restaurant, and meet lots of other English people; but get right off the beaten track, as one can, say, in India, where you are completely surrounded by the people of that country.

Has anyone actually had this sort of experience? Not including those who have come from Scotland to England - that's not a big enough break, let's say. What about language? If you have to hear and listen to, speak, another language, it makes a difference, doesn't it?

Susiddhi: The more different the culture, the better. The better it is if you're doing it to get away from your group, the group you've been brought up in.

S: So what do you think would be the most different culture for someone born and brought up in England or Scotland?

Will: Amazon rain forest?

S: The Amazon rain forest. I think probably China, actually. India isn't all that different: in some ways, strange to say. It's quite easy to understand the Indians. It's not so easy to understand the Chinese or the Burmese or the Thais or Tibetans, in other words the as it were Mongolian type of people. They are in many ways very different from Western people and from Indians.

So one can go forth from the group in the sense of the nation state by travelling abroad or even living abroad for some time. But what are the other groups that one might identify oneself with and from which you might have to go forth? One has been touched upon, in a way indirectly, in connection with the nation state: what group is that? They are usually bound up together.

___: Racial group.

Susiddhi: Language.

S: Ah, language, I was thinking of, the linguistic group. Because actually your whole thinking is conditioned by the language that you use, and it is quite a good thing therefore to learn to

speak at least a second language and not only to live abroad but to live abroad learning and speaking the local language. And, in a way, beginning to think a little differently, just because you are using that different language.

There's a saying which I sometimes quote - I forget who originally said it - 'To acquire a new language is like acquiring a new soul' - because there are certain things that can be expressed in one language that can't be expressed in another, and you don't realize the extent to which you are dependent on your own language, the extent to which your thoughts, your feelings, your outlook, is moulded by your own language.

I think English people generally, certainly people within the Friends, seem very reluctant to learn languages. They think perhaps, for instance, in terms maybe of going abroad - maybe going to France, maybe going to Italy, going to Holland, going to Sweden, working for the Movement - but the idea of learning the local languages doesn't seem to be taken very seriously. They tend to think well they'll probably get by with English; and they'll [69] pick up a few words of the local language [Laughter], and that's about that. But the idea of becoming actually fluent in those languages and being able to speak them as well or nearly as well as they speak English seems to be beyond their wildest dreams. Leaving aside the fact that some people don't even speak or write English itself particularly well; certainly not write it particularly well, if you see what I mean.

But there is this reluctance to go forth from the group; this is what it really means. In this case, reluctance to go forth from your own linguistic group. It should be such an interesting experience, acquiring another language.

Susiddhi: There's another facet of the language group is you can go - if you go to another country that speaks the same language in a different dialect, different accent, they can place you very very closely to where you come from.

S: In some cases you can almost tell the town or the suburb somebody comes from.

What about other groups?

Mike: Political or ideological or religious groups.

S: Yes, religious groups as groups; religions shouldn't be groups, but actually they are. Probably that isn't all that difficult to go forth from, let us say institutionally; you can say 'I no longer belong to the Church of England', or 'I'm an ex-Catholic', or 'I was a Methodist, I'm not any longer'. So it's not very difficult to just stop going to church, etc., but what about the mental attitudes that have been inculcated - especially, it seems, if you've been brought up as a good Catholic? Is it all that easy to go forth from them? Is it? Well, it probably varies, but a lot of people find it quite difficult.

This is one of the things that came up on the women's study retreat: we got talking about blasphemy, and when I wrote about blasphemy in my booklet I discussed it mainly in terms of God, or as having reference to God. But it transpired that those women who had been brought up as Catholics - and there seemed quite a few of them in that particular study group - were not really concerned with God very much. The figure with which they were concerned or had been made to concern themselves, was the Virgin Mary. She was their bete noire, because she

had been apparently held up to them in their days at convent school as the ideal, as the model; that they ought to model themselves upon the Virgin Mary. So the virginity of the Virgin Mary was being constantly inculcated in a way that didn't altogether appeal to them. And some of them made the point that even in those days the last thing that they wanted to be was a virgin. But it had been hammered into them that this is what they ought to be, that the Virgin Mary was the ideal for all women; and they had found it very difficult to get over this attitude, and it had left them in a state of conflict, because they felt they ought to be like the Virgin Mary, but at the same time felt that they couldn't possibly be like the Virgin Mary and didn't want to be even though they ought to be.

So this left them feeling quite guilty, they said, and in a state of conflict that it took them years to recover from. So the Virgin Mary seems, in the case of women who've been brought up as Catholics, to do even a better job of it, as it were, than God himself.

So it isn't easy to get over these sort of conditionings. It isn't easy to go forth from them. It's quite easy to go forth from membership of the church - except that the church doesn't [70] recognize that. That is interesting. From the point of view of the church, the Catholic church at least, you can never leave the church, they do not recognize your having left it. They do not acknowledge that you have that freedom. Once you are baptized you belong to the church, and nothing that you can do can undo that, even though you were baptized as an infant.

Susiddhi: Even if you become a Buddhist?

S: Oh no, they don't recognize that. You're still, in their eyes, a member of [the church]. Just as if you are ordained as a Catholic priest they say the mark of priesthood is indelible, you remain a Catholic priest. Even if you change your religion, in their eyes you are a Catholic priest and still in fact amenable to their discipline. And if, of course - for instance, a Catholic priest cannot marry if he ceases to regard himself as a priest, so in a state where the Catholic Church receives the support of the law a priest - or an ex-priest - cannot legally be married. And, of course, in the middle ages you were not allowed to leave the church, even physically, or to leave the priesthood or to leave your monastic order. You could be imprisoned if you tried to do so.

Devaraja: You could get yourself excommunicated.

S: Yes, you can get yourself excommunicated, but that doesn't exempt you from the discipline of the church in this life. You are still amenable to the discipline of the church, but it means that after death you have no hope of salvation. And usually in the middle ages persons who were excommunicated could be dealt with - that is to say, executed - by the secular authorities.

So there was still this aura, as it were, about Christianity, that you can't get away from it. They make it as difficult as possible for you to get away, psychologically also. And in fact people do find it very difficult to go forth from their Christian attitudes, especially as not only were they brought up to have those attitudes but those attitudes still surround us, at least indirectly, and they even influence people who don't regard themselves as Christians. So it isn't easy to go forth from attitudes of this sort in this way.

Even when you use the English language you're using a language which has been influenced

by or moulded by Christianity for centuries. When you want a word for Dharma you haven't got it; you want a word for Buddha you haven't got it. Even if you want a word for metta you haven't got it, want a word for meditation you haven't got it. You are constantly having to use words which do not actually conform to your own thought. So it is very difficult to go forth.

What about other groups that you could go forth from? - ideally both literally and psychologically.

Steve: Class?

S: Class; that's a difficult one to get away from. Let's think of it in terms of caste first of all, just to get a more distant view, and then come back to class. In India, it's impossible to get away from caste. That's what you're born as; you're born the son of a brahmin, you're born the son of a sudra, etc. And that marks you for life, especially in your natal village. Under modern conditions, people can get away from their caste and pass as some other caste - of course, a higher caste - in the big city, where their origins are not known, but that's quite difficult, because in some cases the people of a certain caste speak the local language in a particular way or use certain words that are not used by members of other castes, or they dress slightly differently. Or they even [71] have a slightly different bearing, and it's very easy for those who are experienced to smell out what caste the other man belongs to, so it's not easy to get away from it.

You can't get away from it even by changing your religion and ceasing to be a Hindu. I remember an incident when I was travelling, quite a few years ago, in the Aurangabad district, which is in Maharashtra where all the ex-Untouchables are, the followers of Dr Ambedkar who have now become Buddhists. I was travelling with an ex-Untouchable Buddhist who was a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra State, that's local government. He was taking me from village to village, and we were going by bus. And because he was an MLA, he had a free pass for the bus. So what happened was this. We were sitting in the bus, the conductor came along, so this friend of mine paid my fare and showed his pass for himself. So that was OK. But, of course, Indians are very curious. All the other passengers were quite curious to know why he had this pass. So he said, 'I've got it because I'm an MLA', which was quite understandable and quite acceptable. But, of course, in the Legislative Assembly you're elected on the basis of party, so then the next question was 'Which party do you represent?' He said, 'The Republican Party.' That means, of course, the Buddhist party, because this was started by Dr Ambedkar. So then somebody said, 'Oh, you're an Untouchable, then!' So he said, 'No, I'm not an Untouchable, I'm a Buddhist.' And then one old man, an old brahmin who was in the bus, got really angry and said, 'You call yourself a Buddhist, you can call yourself a Republican Party man, but so far as we are concerned you're just an Untouchable!' So this MLA friend of mine just shrugged his shoulders to me and said, 'What can you do with these sort of people?'

So they don't care that you've changed your religion. No, you were born as an Untouchable, and an Untouchable you remain for life. You can't change it. So there may be, in the big cities, here and there, just small circles of people, Westernized people, where caste isn't regarded much, but apart from that caste really counts, in every sphere of life in India.

So all right come back here to class. I must say I changed my views about class somewhat after coming back to this country from India. In India, when I was criticizing the caste system,

some of my Hindu friends would say, 'But you've got the same sort of thing in England, you've got the class system.' So I said, 'Well, the class system isn't nearly as bad as the caste system, because you can change your class, and it doesn't have the sanction of religion in the way that the caste system does.' One of their favourite questions would be, 'Can an ordinary man in England go to Buckingham Palace and have tea with the Queen?' Because in India different - high castes and low castes - can't eat and drink together. So I'd say, 'If the Queen invites him, yes, he can go. There's no religious objection. The Queen can invite anyone she pleases', whereas a high-caste Hindu cannot invite a low-caste Hindu to come and eat or drink with him without being outcaste, thrown out of his own caste. But, I said, that isn't so in England.

But after coming back to this country and being around for a few years, I started coming to the conclusion that the class system might not be so gross or crude, or cruel, even, in its manifestations, but it's no less deep-rooted and difficult to get away from, in its own way, than the caste system is. And I think people in Europe, many of them, feel that Britain is still a very class-ridden society, and that is one of the things that gets in the way of our social and economic and even political life. There is some class system in some of these other countries, but it's nothing like what it is in Britain.

I remember, for instance, the first time I went to Holland, and I [72] went to stay with Vajrayogini. So Vajrayogini's Dutch name is Petronella Nel In't Veld. So she said she didn't - that's only the first part of it, I've forgotten the second part - anyway, she said she didn't normally use the second part, and she preferred that not to be used when people were writing to her, if they didn't use Vajrayogini. So I said, 'Why is that?' So she said, in a slightly - not exactly shamefaced way but as though to say it wasn't a very nice thing to have to say, 'Actually, my family comes from the aristocracy. But nowadays the Dutch people really hate the aristocracy, so we don't usually use our aristocratic names.' So that seems very different from Britain, where even though the aristocracy doesn't have the same place that it used to have, you certainly don't find people with aristocratic names ashamed of using them in this country, or preferring not to use them, because the aristocracy, or ex-aristocracy, is so much looked down upon. But in Holland, apparently, it is like that.

So it does seem that we have got a very strong class system here, and it isn't easy to get away from. Would you agree with that, or do you think the class system is quite fluid and people are quite mobile in class terms?

Steve: I think you can move from the working class to the middle class if you've got the ...

___: It's not that easy, it's values, you see, it's more than just ...

Steve: Yeah, but you can move up into the middle class if you want to accept, adopt those values.

Clive: I don't think you can, not really. Not without cutting off your roots. (Voices.)

Devaraja: Then you'd be leaving your class group anyway.

Clive: Yeah, but I think what happens is that people from the working class do rise, but they create another class. They don't actually rise into the middle class. They create a kind of - it's

a risen working-class class.

Devaraja: I think it depends very much more on areas of work, actually, because my experience in my area of work is that there's not that much consciousness of class in that sense.

Roger: No, people who are working class, wouldn't say it was a rise if they went to the middle class, that'd be a fall!

Devaraja: You'd be earning less!

S: One says 'middle class', but that is a very broad term. Sociologists say there is lower middle class, middle middle class and upper middle class. It probably isn't too difficult to rise, if that is the term, or fall, from the working class to the lower middle class, but it's probably not so easy really to pass from the working class, say, to the upper middle class. Because upper middle-class people usually have had a certain kind of education and a certain educational background or have been to a certain type of school, and have even got certain manners and certain ways of speaking, which you as a working-class or ex-working-class person wouldn't have, or would acquire with difficulty. And it would be known that you had a different educational and social background. And people might be very nice to you and even work with you very amicably, but it would be known and felt that you had a different background.

Clive: I had something on what Devaraja said. I didn't think it really applies to work so much. It's definitely attitudes and values. [73] The work situation doesn't - I think it's a bit confusing...

S: It applies more on the level of your social life, because you wouldn't necessarily, say, invite to a party someone with whom you worked. You'd invite, presumably, to a party or a wedding, people that you regarded as your social peers. You might not invite anybody from your work place, because you might consider them as not belonging to your particular peer social group.

So can you go forth, or to what extent can you go forth, from your class? Or what do you go forth to? Do you find yourself in a classless limbo? What do you go forth to?

Susiddhi: I think in terms of this you don't so much physically move as go from ignorance into knowledge, of knowing which class you come from, what the good points are about it, what the bad points are. And you usually do that by relating to people from other classes.

S: Yes. You can't as a matter of fact deny your roots. That is impossible, even if you try. But what is important is, as in the case of the group in other forms, is that you don't identify yourself with the group. You don't say in an aggressive way, 'I'm working-class and proud of it.' A middle-class person wouldn't say that - 'I'm middle-class and proud of it.' They'd tend to be a bit more subtle. And an aristocrat would certainly never claim to belong to the aristocracy. It's one of the signs of the aristocracy that you play down that sort of thing: 'Aristocracy? No, my family's not a very old one, doesn't go back beyond the seventeenth century. [Laughter] Got a few acres down in Wiltshire and the old place is falling down. No, you can't say that we belong to the aristocracy, of course not.'[Laughter] ... anyway ... An

aristocrat would talk more like that and would disclaim being.

So you've got these subtle, sometimes indirect, ways in which class is actually asserted. So it isn't so easy to go forth from it, but certainly one can change one's attitudes. You can go forth from it to some extent by marrying out of it, because then you have one leg in your class of origin and the other leg in the class into which you have married, which sometimes produces its own difficulties. There have been sociological studies in hypergamy, as it's called, especially of working-class successful men marrying into middle-class or even aristocratic families. But there are strains and tensions, because it's very difficult to bring together the two families then. The two sets of in-laws, for instance, it could produce quite an embarrassing situation.

What about other groups that one could go forth from?

Mike: Occupation, profession - which I suppose is linked in some ways.

S: Yes, the professions are, though less so now than formerly, linked with certain social groups or classes, aren't they? But apart from that, you could go forth from your job, presumably, just by giving it up, and not identifying yourself with those attitudes any more, if there are any specific attitudes attached to that particular job.

Mike: I was thinking also in terms of, say, people like policemen and doctors and things like that who find it very hard to relate to people, even in their social life, not as a policeman and a doctor.

S: This again is something that you find in India - I think they've inherited it from the British - which cuts across the caste system to some extent, and to some extent reinforces it. A government official is never off duty. If he attends a party, all the government officials at a party are graded according to their rank, and the [74] person who is of the highest official rank will be given the place of honour, the one with the next rank the place next to him, and so on. Even in social life, people will follow their rank in government service, which seems quite extraordinary to us, but it's still followed in India.

Devaraja: I wonder if that's not a hangover from - I can remember in Africa that in a way your family was in that situation because of its work, and where your only roots with other white people were really through work.

S: You were an isolated community.

Devaraja: So almost automatically ...

S: Your social life was an extension of your political life. In India it was said that, among the British in the old days, they had their own four castes: they had the ICS, that is the Indian Civil Service people, who corresponded to the brahmins; the military people, that is to say the officers, especially high-ranking officers, who corresponded to the ksatriyas; what they derisively called the box-wallahs, that is to say the merchants, who corresponded to the vaisyas, and the Anglo-Indians, who corresponded to the sudras. So they reproduced the Hindu pattern in this way, and certainly sense of class distinction among the British in India is very very strong indeed.

Susiddhi: I must say my experience of working was that class took a very small part in it. You knew what class a person was, but that had a very small bearing on what you thought of them as a colleague. It was whether they were a good person to work with, whether they were trustworthy.

S: But presumably the people with whom you were working were drawn from a particular social spectrum?

Susiddhi: That's why I'm saying that, because I don't think they were. Some of them were naturally middle class, and others were from quite rough working-class background. It was obvious from the way they spoke, but it just didn't seem to matter, because I think the other things did matter; you needed them to be doing the work properly, to be able to rely on them.

S: But one is still aware of the difference of class and social background. It isn't relevant, or it doesn't come into that working situation, but it is there in the background all the time.

Clive: It's almost as if you can't avoid it. People seem to be prepared to disregard it, to let people show up on their own merits, but it comes through.

S: So in what way do people identify with, say, a particular class as a particular kind of group in a way that is deleterious to the development of the individual as such?

Derek: A lot of it is subconscious attitudes. For example, I remember once a couple of people had applied to get street sellers' licences, It had been suggested different ways of getting money quite easily, it had been suggested perhaps selling candles or some sort of wholefoods in the streets, I just pictured myself doing that. And my background's been kind of lower middle-class but still quite a lot of middle class values have got through it, so when I first started out I felt a revulsion against doing that kind of thing.

S: Maybe that is one way in which one can go forth from one's class - do the sort of things that someone of one's own particular class background wouldn't do. If you are from a rather [75] respectable middle-class family, all right, go and sell things in the street in the way that a street hawker of definitely working-class background does. Just as you can go forth from your national conditioning by going and living in another country you can perhaps do the sort of things that normally wouldn't be done by a person of your class by birth.

Roger: Actually the mind boggles at the possibilities of what can actually happen, people ...

Will: I think the Friends' building teams are a quite good example of that.

S: I think one thing that is interesting in a general way, one thing that has emerged, is the extent to which - though admittedly on a small scale, because we are still within the Friends, as it were - people of a sort of as it were middle-class background with a rather academic education - they might have been teachers, or certainly brain-workers - have felt the need to engage in manual work after some time; as though their whole upbringing had oriented them in a particular direction in a quite one-sided and quite undesirable way, and they eventually felt the need, in the interest of their own individual development, to correct that imbalance and to learn to work more with their hands and with their bodies.

Susiddhi: There's quite a conflict there inside the Friends, because you do naturally get people who've been trained and expected to do, say, secretarial and other brain work, and just to come into a Centre and do that is just in efficiency terms the most efficient thing they can do for their Centre, but it's not what they need; they need to get away from that.

S: Yes. One thing has to be weighed against another, and it's true that in the Movement various talents are needed, but in the interests of the individual concerned you can't always give a person the sort of work within the Friends that they were accustomed to doing outside. In some cases you can; it depends on their degree of individual development. But in some cases they just need the opportunity to de-identify themselves with that kind of work and the attitudes that might go with it. They've got to be an individual, really Go Forth and forget about their talents and their qualifications for a few years. Maybe later on - and this also has happened in some cases - when they really are established as individuals, and maybe when their particular talents are needed, they can then as it were go back and use those talents or those qualifications within the context of the Movement, but for a few years perhaps they have to forget all about them and just concentrate on being an individual.

Any other groups, or any other forms of the group, from which one can Go Forth?

Roger: Sex?

S: Sex, sexual group - literally? (Laughter) One can't literally go forth from one's anatomical sex, unless by way of trans-sexuality, as I think it's called, that is to say by way of a sex change operation. And that doesn't necessarily mean that you go forth from your gender identity. In fact, some people have these sex change operations to reinforce or underline their sense of gender identity. They feel, for instance, that they are a man or a woman, but their feeling doesn't correspond with their anatomical sex, so they get their anatomical sex brought into line with what they feel to be their actual gender.

Mike: It's getting away from sex roles, which is why single-sex communities are so important, I think, from that point of view.

[76]
S: But the question arises, is sex differentiation ...

[End of tape 4, tape 5]

___: think it's partly a role.

S: But not wholly a role?

___: No.

Brian: There's very basic differences in the energies.

S: So to what extent does one's, say, membership of or identification with this sex or that sex possibly get in the way of one's being an individual?

Derek: Maybe somewhere there's certain social conditioning differences that get in the way.

S: What sort of social conditioning differences?

Derek: Well - like - men - are trying to be kind of aggressive and playing down that more feminine side that's softer, affectionate, and other kind of softer emotional.

S: I think one should be careful to get away from, or not get caught up in, ideological stereotypes. One has the idea, quite rightly, that the individual must develop in a balanced way. There are certain what we call more masculine qualities or certain what we call more feminine qualities to be developed in an integrated way, but I think we have to be careful not to assume that certain qualities are actually more characteristic of men and certain qualities more characteristic of women. I think this is at least open to debate in many cases.

For instance, I've mentioned in the past that women are supposed to be more receptive than men. I doubt this very much. I won't go into it this morning, because I've gone into it in some other study group, but we must be careful of stereotypes in this sense. So if we say that we need to develop our feminine qualities and masculine qualities, that's OK, but we have to be careful how we connect those sets of qualities with the actual sexes. They may be only conventionally connected with one sex rather than another.

Susiddhi: I think little boys are definitely encouraged to experience their aggression - as cowboys or playing football. I always think little girls are encouraged to feel weak. They are brought up to be weaker.

S: I'm not so sure about that. Not from the little boys and girls that I've observed. I've studied some little boys and girls - children of my own friends - and in some cases I've found them behaving in what some people would regard as a stereotyped little-boy and little-girl way, without really having been influenced by their parents at all. If anything, their parents tried to bring them up in the same way and encouraged common attitudes. For instance, I remember in one case a little boy - they didn't have a television set in their house, lived in an isolated part of the country in a small village, they'd never given him toy guns and had never encouraged his little sister, or big sister actually, slightly bigger, to be especially interested in feminine things. The little girl's mother wasn't especially interested in feminine things. But I remember the little girl had an absolute craze for jewellery and dressing herself up and looking in the mirror. She hadn't been encouraged to do any of those things. The little boy, never having seen a gun, the first time he was taken into a toy shop, when he was about four, made a beeline for the guns and absolutely insisted on having them. As far as his parents knew, [77] he'd never seen one before. I don't know how you explain that.

But the standard educational view is that small children are conditioned into stereotype sex-role differences. I don't think that can be sustained beyond a certain point. It is as though the trend, or the fashion, has been to attribute rather more to cultural conditioning than is really the case. There is a greater innate difference, I think, than many people have taken into account. But there is actually some psychological difference between males and females, between men and women. But the impression one is sometimes given, or which one is sought to be given, is that there are the bare anatomical differences, admittedly, but apart from that there are really hardly any psychological differences between men and women. This seems very doubtful, to say the least.

So the question arises: to what extent can one go forth from the sex to which you belong, or if

you can what does it mean to go forth from that sex? You can't go forth from it anatomically, so what does it mean?

Susiddhi: Once again, isn't it the important thing to know the strengths and weaknesses? - to know where you are, your strengths and weaknesses.

S: To know where you are, to know what you are first. Not to say 'I'm an individual. The fact that I am male or female is purely incidental, it just doesn't matter, just doesn't count' - that is really to deceive oneself. But one has to recognize what one's actual starting point is, where you stand now; then you might be able to move forward from it. For instance, you might see that 'Because I'm a man and brought up as a man, there are certain things I don't know about which concern or affect women, and I tend to overlook those things, and therefore I am not very thoughtful when it comes to dealing with women.' You could recognize that. And that would be a sort of going forth from that sort of conditioning. Not that you ceased to be a man, but that you were more aware of any limitation of outlook that being a man happens to bring about in you, and were careful to avoid that. And vice versa if you happen to be a woman.

Steve: I wonder how much we are? - how much within our own community. But I think people aren't trying as much as they could to be aware of the other sex, its difficulties and mentality.

S: But on another level, of course, sure, yes, one needs as an individual to develop both the so-called masculine and the so-called feminine qualities, and achieve a balance and harmony and integration. But I think you don't go forth from any limitations that you may have as a man or as a woman by denying that there is any real difference between the two sexes; this is the point I'm getting at here.

Devaraja: You need to really develop more fully as a man to really acquire positive male qualities and to refine and develop those.

S: Yes, one hears quite a few people talking in terms of developing their feminine side. I sometimes say they ought to really develop their masculine side first. They assume that their masculine side is fully developed, just because they are anatomically male, but that is not necessarily the case. I don't think you can afford to develop your feminine qualities before developing your masculine ones, because unless they've got a basis in as it were masculinity they'll just be weaknesses. You'll just be some weak, eunuchoid type of figure rather than a real individual.

[78]
Anyway, we're still Going Forth, but anyway it's a very important topic. Just let's remind ourselves of the precept: 'In being free from attachment to all objects, and being ordained a bhikshu into the Holy Order, forsaking home and entering upon the homeless state, one doth not err.' So it's very clear that what is being talked about here is very far from being something you just do at one particular moment in time. It really means - it represents an effort that you're making on all sorts of levels, in all sorts of ways, all the time to go forth from group attitudes and group conditionings, and even in some cases literally from particular groups to which you belong. That is an essential part all the time, continually, of your spiritual life. It isn't just a question of one day putting on a bright yellow robe, shaving your head and goodbye mum, goodbye dad, off you go, as they could do in the old days. It's not as

simple as that any more, if it even was as simple as that then.

And then, as I said, for a while you're in the wilderness. You've left the group or you've left as many groups as you can in as many ways as you can, and you're sort of groping about for something you don't know what; because your only experience has been of groups, your only experience has been of being a group member. What it is to be an individual, what it's like to relate as an individual to other individuals you don't really know. You have to find that out bit by bit. It isn't a straightforward matter of going straight from the group straight into the spiritual community. It isn't like that at all because, as I said, you may to begin with see the spiritual community itself as a group and treat it as a group, and be going in effect from one group to another; just from a less pleasant group to a more pleasant group.

But the principle is very, very important - the principle of transition from the state of identification with the group to, let's say, alignment with the spiritual community. And even within the spiritual community it isn't as though the spiritual community is necessarily functioning as a spiritual community all the time. The spiritual community has its ups and downs. Sometimes it may be quite group-like, at another time it may in fact be functioning really as a spiritual community, depending upon how the individuals who compose it are behaving.

Mike: It's also quite important to - I was thinking about this in terms of our Movement - to not stay in the same place for too long, whereas like you can fall back into relating to it in a sort of groupy - you can build up a culture around [it].

S: You settle down. You make a little nest. It's very easy to do that. So two or three years in one community is probably a good idea, but I think after that, unless there's some special reason for staying on, one should consider moving at least to another spiritual community, another kind of situation. Not as it were automatically, that after two years everybody has to be transferred - no, you have to see the needs of the individual. In some cases it may not be the best thing for the individual to move to another spiritual community; there may not perhaps be another spiritual community which meets his needs. One has to take those factors into account too. Some people are only too willing to move from one community to another, they're just restless; they need ten years in one place.

Steve: That's my own case - I've just been restless. I've been moving all my life, basically, since I was 16, and just staying in one place is what I need.

S: You've probably been moving from place to place since you were 16, or appearing to move from place to place, but really just staying in the same place all the time.

[79]
Tony: Then again, when you're in, say, a spiritual community for a certain number of years it's good to go round and see other communities to keep renewing your perspective, to see what else there is and if you are settling in. By going somewhere else you'll see it straight away.

S: Yes. You may not in fact have settled down; it may be definitely a spiritual community where you are all definitely evolving as individuals, but if you go and see something of other spiritual communities, then you can appreciate all the more clearly what you are actually doing in your as it were own spiritual community.

Any further point about this precept, or have we gone into it enough? I think the general principle is clear.

(2) In revering one's spiritual preceptor one doth not err.

S: So several questions arise here, or at least two. First of all, who is one's spiritual preceptor; and, two, what does one mean by revering, what does mean by reverence? What do you think is meant by 'spiritual preceptor'? Who is one's spiritual preceptor? First of all, say, traditionally and secondly maybe in principle, as it were.

You notice this precept comes immediately after the previous one; the previous one speaks of 'being ordained a bhikshu' so perhaps one's spiritual preceptor here means the person under whose auspices one is ordained as a bhikshu, that is your spiritual preceptor. But in a broader sense, what does one mean by the spiritual preceptor or a spiritual preceptor?

Steve: Spiritual friend.

Will: Teacher.

S: Spiritual Friend, teacher, but what is the essential function here, or essential quality?

Susiddhi: Anyone who you recognize as a bit more spiritually evolved than yourself.

S: It's someone from whom one learns or whom one finds inspiring. But is that even as cut and dried as might appear? Is it that there are certain people who are labelled as spiritual preceptors and from whom you learn, and certain other people who are not so labelled?

Derek: You can learn from people more horizontally as well.

S: Well, yes and no, because the relationship of learning presupposes that the relationship is vertical, at least for that particular purpose. Because when you learn from somebody within the context of that situation you are learning from him; he is teaching you, so to speak, so he is your spiritual preceptor, so the relationship is vertical. It can't be horizontal. But is that horizontal relationship, as it were, so fixed, necessarily?

Mike: At one time and in one area somebody may be teaching you, but those roles may be reversed.

S: Yes, right. What I generally say in this connection is the important thing is communication. What one must do is to keep the channels of communication open. It is not a question of, say, in advance labelling one member of the spiritual community as the spiritual preceptor and the other as the pupil, so to speak. What is important is that within the spiritual community everybody should be open to everybody else, that communication [80] should be free; and within certain situations you may feel that you are receiving something from another person with whom you are in communication. You may feel that they are more experienced than you, that they know more than you, and your appropriate attitude to them will be one of reverence; the reverence suggesting that you are open to them, receptive to them, that you value what you receive from them, and to the extent that they are more experienced or even more developed than you you look up to them.

At the same time, you also recognize, in a wider context, that - it's not so much role, I dislike this word role - but the function may change, because I mentioned that within the spiritual community the spiritual community itself has its ups and downs; sometimes it functions in a quite group-like way, unfortunately. Sometimes it functions really like a spiritual community. So in the same way with individuals: sometimes you may be just like a group member, sometimes you may be a real individual.

So any two members, say, of a spiritual community may one day be relating to each other as, say, group member, as an individual; the other day, the other way round. The one who was the group member is now on the up, as it were, he functions more as an individual, but the one who was an individual, say, yesterday, is today experiencing a rather sticky patch, so the functions - I won't say roles, but the functions - are reversed.

But at the same time you may find that there are certain people who, the channels of communication being kept open, normally you find that you're on the receiving end and that normally your attitude is one of receiving, and that they do by and large, on the whole, not just on particular occasions, know more than you, are more experienced than you, and therefore you develop, from your own experience of your communication with them, a consistently reverential attitude. It isn't just always a one-off occasion, especially if you have contact with them over a long period. You may find that you are virtually always in the position of being on the receiving end, and so on. But that is not to be insisted on, so to speak, to begin with or in advance. That one cannot claim to be a spiritual preceptor - say, 'Look here, I'm a spiritual preceptor, you just listen to me. I know what is best.' No, both parties have to keep the channels of communication open, and then who has more to give will become evident quite naturally and spontaneously. By the very nature of the relationship, by the very nature of the spiritual life itself, it is not something to be insisted upon - that 'I'm the one who is to give and you are the one who is to receive'.

So 'In revering one's spiritual preceptor, one does not err' - that really needs to be enlarged. In being genuinely communicative one does not err; in being open one does not err; and then when, within that context of communication and openness and receptivity, one is actually receiving something from another person, then you do not err in feeling the appropriate reverence, often gratitude and so on, for what you are receiving.

Clive: How would you describe deep reverence, then?

S: Well, first of all reverence is an emotion. You could say that the basis of reverence is metta. You are in, to begin with, a positive emotional state. You enter into communication with somebody. Metta or friendliness is an essential element in that communication; your communication can hardly start up unless you feel metta towards the other person. All right, we mentioned that metta, when it encountered suffering - we mentioned this yesterday - became transformed into ...

___: Compassion.

[81]
S: Compassion. Metta, when it encounters happiness, becomes transformed into ...

___: Sympathetic joy.

S: Sympathetic joy. So metta, when it encounters something spiritually superior, becomes transformed into ...

___: Reverence.

S: Reverence, or faith. So you start off emotionally positive, and you start off with an attitude of friendliness and metta. That makes it possible for you to communicate. In the course of your communication you are open, you receive, and you acknowledge that you are receiving or it's possible for you to receive from the person with whom you are in communication, because he is as it were superior to you, more developed than you, more experienced than you. So your metta becomes at least tinged with reverence or with faith and gratitude and so on.

So you could define reverence as metta which is transformed by your consciousness of the fact that you are receiving something from somebody who is more highly developed than you are yourself. This is reverence. So clearly it is a natural thing, not something that can be required or compelled. And also it presupposes that you are to begin with an emotionally positive person, a friendly person, a person full of metta, otherwise you can't feel reverence any more than you can feel compassion or sympathetic joy.

This is one of the reasons, perhaps the main reason, why people take part in the Sevenfold Puja and they say they don't feel anything, they don't feel any reverence. Well, it's not a question of developing reverence; you've got to go back to an earlier stage and develop a positive emotional state and develop metta, and then, when you're confronted by, say, the ideal of the Buddha, perhaps as embodied in a particular figure or image, and become conscious of what he or it represents, then you can start developing or feeling on the basis of your metta something like reverence or something like faith or sraddha. But you can't just straight away develop sraddha; that's just forcing yourself to believe, which is quite a different thing. So metta is the foundation.

One could say that metta is the foundation of all the positive emotions, so if you find you are defective in any particular positive emotion, probably you just need to go back and develop more metta. So it isn't a question of trying to become more kind or trying to become more devoted, it's a question of developing your basic emotional positivity, and then that will naturally and spontaneously be transformed into kindliness or sympathetic joy or reverence, according to the kind of situation that you encounter. All right let's stop there and have a drink.

[Coffee break]

One thing that I was going to say, going back to precept 1 - just one thing that one should remember, perhaps, which is that one is not necessarily going forth from the group, let us say, when one is merely reacting against it. So long as you are merely reacting against it, you are still really belonging to it. What I was thinking of was in terms of class, for instance, people react. You notice that people who have been brought up in a rather middle-class family react against that, and in a reactive sort of way they do the very thing which they know that their parents would disapprove of. For instance, they put their knife into their mouth, or things like this, that they know their mother would dislike; but they're still tied really, they're still rebelling against their parents, they're [82] not free from them. So to react against the group or

against group attitudes in this way does not amount to an actual going forth from the group or from group attitudes. And you see quite a few people among the Friends who are still in the stage of reactivity. Perhaps it's a necessary stage to go through, I'm not so sure about that, but in any case you haven't really gone forth if you're still just reacting.

There are some people I've seen who react against a middle-class upbringing by not washing, or being dirty and untidy, and wearing big dirty boots and not combing their hair; and sitting down to meals with dirty hands, and all that sort of thing. You can see them reacting against their mother, it's obvious. It's almost as though she was sitting there and they were saying 'Yah boo!' to her.

Tony: Like the idea of by reacting to something they'll be able to relate to it, instead of going away from it.

S: Yes, they're not free from it.

Andy: I suppose it's because the individual is head and shoulders above the group, so that someone in the group might just appeal to a group member. Might not be able to distinguish from a group member.

S: Well, yes, unless the individual is behaving in a definitely different way, there is no way of telling. You might think that someone is just like you, just another group member. Probably it's not necessary for the individual, in the midst of the group, to flaunt his individuality; that would be a bit suspect. But if someone who was a group member was to enter into communication with someone who appeared to be a group member but wasn't, because he was an individual, he'd soon come up against something he couldn't quite understand. He might think, 'This person looks like one of us, he dresses the same, he talks the same. But there's something a bit odd about him, something I can't quite put my finger on. He doesn't really seem to belong.'

Steve: He's happy!

S: He's got a nice house and a car and a television set, he doesn't seem all that bothered about them, he doesn't even actually watch his TV every evening. But if they entered into communication with him they'd soon come up against something that they felt was quite odd or different; I don't think you could disguise then the fact that you were an individual, there'd be something puzzling about you that people couldn't quite understand. But so long as they didn't try to enter into actual communication with you, you might seem just like they were. Because it isn't as though the individual is physically different, it isn't as though he grows an extra limb or an extra eye or anything like that, not even a third eye - not literally.

Steve: Lobsang Rampa did!

S: But he apparently didn't go on living in Plymouth. [Laughter] [Pause] Just imagine someone walking around in Plymouth with a third eye - people would be wondering what on earth it was.

Roger: Where could they buy it?

S: All right precept three.

(3) In thoroughly studying the Doctrine, hearing discourses thereon, and reflecting and meditating upon it, one doth not err.

[83]
S: This is a well-known threefold division, or threefold path if you like - three stages of the path, usually mentioned in connection with Wisdom or as being different forms or stages of Wisdom - that is to say, the wisdom that comes by hearing, the wisdom that comes by reflecting and which comes by meditating upon what one hears - are you familiar with these? They are called in Pali savanamaya panna, cintamaya panna, and bhavanamaya panna, the wisdom that comes by hearing, savana, from which we get sravaka, the hearer, the listener, the disciple; the wisdom which comes by cinta, reflecting, reflection; and then bhavanamaya panna, that which comes by meditation. Are you familiar with this list? This is a quite important one. I've gone into it several times before. I'll just briefly mention what it is, or rather what the three stages represent.

First of all, you have to hear the Dharma. It is said 'hear' because originally the Dharma was an oral tradition, you couldn't just read. But to begin with you have to know about the Dharma. The Dharma as it were comes to you from the outside, so you have to be receptive to it, you have to really listen. You have to take it in, not try to interpret it on the spot but just learn it. You get people very often who - they don't want to just hear, they don't want just to listen and learn; the minute you're trying to explain something they're trying to interpret it or discuss it or argue about it before you've even finished explaining and before they've even understood. So it's very important that first of all you just learn, you just study, you just take in, you understand what is said, you understand what the tradition is, you understand what the teaching is. That's the first stage.

Then, having learned it in this way, as faithfully, as objectively as you can, you then start reflecting upon it in your mind to understand what it really means, what it signifies; to go a little deeper than the literal meaning, to go a little deeper than the words, to try to get some grasp of the principles involved, and to genuinely understand them for yourself as a result of your own power of understanding. This is cintamaya panna.

And then, going even deeper, you gather together all your energies, you concentrate, you unify your attention, and you actually meditate upon the principles which you've understood by virtue of your own independent reflection, and you try to make them a part of your being by having actual insight into them, and this is what is called bhavanamaya panna, the wisdom that comes - and this wisdom corresponds to Insight, vipassana - the wisdom that comes about as a result of meditating upon the principles of the Dharma that you've understood and actually realizing for yourself the truth of those principles by virtue of your own personal Insight.

Steve: Is this vipassana?

S: Yes, it's equivalent to vipassana. But vipassana doesn't just arise by itself, it arises in this way. You first hear the Dharma, then you reflect upon it, and then you meditate upon it. So 'in thoroughly studying the Doctrine,' that is to say 'hearing discourses thereon, and reflecting and meditating upon it, one doth not err.'

So you see the nature of the process. First of all you take in. Then you chew over. And then you digest and assimilate. So it's important that one goes through all these three stages: first you really learn the Dharma thoroughly, then you really think about it, and then you really meditate on it.

Hearing the Dharma or studying the Dharma, reading books about the Dharma, doesn't necessarily mean that you read a lot of books, but it means that what you read you really know quite [84] thoroughly, quite well, quite systematically. You don't just skip things, don't just have a hasty study. All right let's go on to precept four then.

(4) In nourishing lofty aspirations and a lowly demeanour one doth not err.

S: Ah. So why do you think this precept is given? What does it seem intended to counteract?

Devaraja: The ego appropriating...

S: One could say that usually it's the other way round, or only too often the other way round. You have lowly aspirations and a lofty demeanour. It's saying that the fact that you have, or that you nourish, lofty aspirations doesn't mean that you should have a correspondingly lofty attitude. In other words, you shouldn't appropriate, so to speak, your lofty aspiration itself in an egoistic sort of way. Supposing you have taken the Bodhisattva vow, you don't go round sticking out your chest and bragging and saying 'I'm a Bodhisattva. Everybody else is just aiming at Nirvana. I'm superior to all that, I'm a Bodhisattva.' You don't adopt that sort of attitude.

But what about this 'lowly demeanour'? What do you think is meant by that? Do you think there is anything to be careful of here?

Clive: I think it could be misinterpreted as humility.

S: What's wrong with humility?

Clive: Nothing, if it's the right kind of humility, but if it's sort of Christian - you know what I mean, that kind of thing.

S: So what would be the wrong sort of humility or the wrong sort of lowly demeanour? What would it consist in?

Steve: Degrading yourself, thinking less of yourself.

S: It could be that, yes. What else could it be?

Derek: Holding a fixed notion of yourself somehow.

Devaraja: Miserable sinner-type attitude towards oneself.

S: Yes. It could also mean going through the motions of having a lowly demeanour, and saying, 'I'm not very important, I'm not very developed', but actually you don't really think that. You think that's just the proper thing to say, the expected thing. You expect to be all

humble, so you proceed to be all humble, but you don't actually feel humble. It's just a sort of almost good manners on your part, or even more than that, almost a sort of pretence, it's the right thing to do, the accepted thing - that you're apologetic about yourself. You might actually feel, yes, you might feel it quite wrongly, that you are pretty developed, but you have to pretend that you think that you aren't; because, after all, humility is a virtue, so you've got to practise humility.

Tony: Wouldn't that show a lack of confidence in what you're trying to do?

S: Well, it would depend, because if you were genuinely convinced that you were a pretty superior person, but only adopted a lowly demeanour to show how humble you were because that's also the quality of a superior person, you wouldn't exactly show a lack of self-confidence; it would show more as basic egotism and a certain amount of micchaditthi.

[85]
Devaraja: Would it be better to say something like 'In nourishing lofty aspirations and developing an attitude of reverence'?

S: Well, yes, though as we saw a little while ago you can't as it were directly develop an attitude of reverence. The basic thing is metta, emotional positivity, and openness, so that if you do encounter something which is higher then as it were spontaneously, naturally, your attitude becomes one of reverence, because you recognize the higher as higher, and you are sufficiently emotionally positive to be able to respond with that feeling of reverence.

I think actually, in a deliberate way, one shouldn't bother about having a lowly demeanour or not having a lowly demeanour. I don't think you can adopt a certain attitude in this sort of way, a certain demeanour in this sort of way - taking the English word quite literally. You can be mindful, you can be careful, you can be considerate, but can you actually, even sincerely, genuinely adopt a lowly demeanour? Can you? It makes you sound like a sort of creep, a sort of freak, doesn't it? A sort of Uriah Heep figure. [Laughter]

So I don't think you can really directly 'nourish a lowly demeanour'. I think all that you can do is to try to see yourself as you actually are, and to act honestly in accordance with what you are without any pretence either of being better than you are or of being worse than you are. It's a question of a realistic assessment of oneself and behaving in a straightforward manner in accordance with that realistic assessment of oneself. I don't think it is really a question of adopting a particular demeanour, even a lowly one.

That's why humility which is deliberately practised ceases to be humility. There's the story which I mention - when Mahatma Gandhi founded his ashram, he drew up a list of rules, and one rule was that one of the things that everyone had to practise, was humility. And someone pointed out to him that you couldn't practise humility deliberately, so he crossed it out and he put underneath that all the rules were to be practised in a spirit of humility. But even that isn't really good enough, because can you actually cultivate a spirit of humility? Not ...

[End of side 1, side 2]

Roger: Until you come to do it.

S: Until you come to look at it, first, or to try to do it.

Brian: I suppose in the case of most people if they were quite aware then they wouldn't be feeling (inhumility?)

Susiddhi: I get the feeling that the phrase 'lowly demeanour' means receptive rather than puffed up. If you're puffed up, you're not really ...

S: Yes, you could take it in the sense of being receptive, but I don't know whether the words really have that connotation - 'a lowly demeanour'. You can certainly try very hard to be receptive, or should try to be receptive, but literally can one or should one try to be lowly, humble? Keeping your head down?

Steve: You're not being yourself then, are you? You're trying to be something else.

S: Well, you could apply that to anything, because you could say you shouldn't even try to be mindful because then you're not being yourself; because 'yourself' is to be unmindful. No, I think first of all it's a question of a realistic assessment of what you [86] actually are; an effort to be as skilful and mindful and emotionally positive as you can, and straightforwardly acting in accordance with that, without any pretence. And if you encounter someone who is superior to you, OK, be receptive enough to be able to recognize that. If you encounter someone who doesn't seem as developed as you, be sufficiently aware to recognize that and act accordingly, considering their needs and so on. But not to adopt a deliberate stance of being a humble or lowly person.

Anyway, it doesn't mean having a fixed idea about oneself, because you are lowly only in relation to what is higher, but that changes: sometimes you might encounter people who are more highly developed, otherwise not. Of course, someone who advocated lowliness might say, 'It's right and proper to consider yourself as the humblest of all, to consider yourself lower than everybody else. That is a virtue, that should be your attitude.' But can you honestly believe that? Or is it even objectively true? Some, say, Christian teachers would advise this, that you deliberately consider yourself to be the humblest and lowest, or even the worst, of all, to get rid of your ego. But can you get rid of your ego on that unrealistic basis that you don't actually believe? It would seem to be better, more realistic, if one wants to get rid of one's ego, in a manner of speaking, just to do it by seeing yourself as you are, and neither making yourself out to be more than you are or less than you are. Rather than go through a big act of being lowly and inferior and humble and all the rest of it. Because, deep down, you may not believe it. You may believe 'I'm a pretty good chap, actually I'm quite a saint. But what is the proof? I think I'm lowly and humble and worse than everybody else. But that's how I'm going to get saved, because Jesus says "the last shall be first". That's the way to be first - to be last.' So it's a sneaking sort of technique, crawling into heaven by the back gate. Actually the front gate, because the back gate is really the front gate. [Laughter] You're clever enough to understand that, the other people are not. That suggests a really nasty, unpleasant, sneaky person that doesn't seem very much in consonance with the Buddhist spiritual ideal.

But be straightforward; don't bother about being lowly, be straightforward. I think this is the real message, so to speak. So 'In nourishing lofty aspirations', yes.

Perhaps to get more at the spirit of the whole precept, (pause for closing window) - It's as

though the fact, say, that you take the Bodhisattva Vow, that your aspirations are very lofty, it means that you shouldn't try to be anything special in your ordinary life. Just go on behaving like an ordinary person, except to the extent that you actually express or embody the Bodhisattva ideal in your ordinary everyday life. Don't put on a special Bodhisattva robe, or sit on a special Bodhisattva throne, or anything like that. I think this is what it is getting at. The fact that you are nourishing lofty aspirations doesn't have to be reflected in an almost social superiority in ordinary life. Of course, one does find this in some countries, even in Buddhist countries, where someone who is officially an incarnate Bodhisattva has a sort of social position. One can understand that in a way, but if it's taken too far it undermines the whole idea of a Bodhisattva.

Roger: It seems rather strange, doesn't it? - because in Tibet from what I can gather it doesn't seem - that sort of aspiration doesn't seem to be engendered by the whole ecclesiastical hierarchy - seats and cups and robes and - it's quite interesting.

S: It's as though the spiritual receptivity has been replaced by just social respect, as it were. Though with, yes, some spiritual overtones, admittedly, in some cases, but sometimes not. [Pause]

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So it suggests that the extraordinariness of one's spiritual aspirations shouldn't be as it were reflected, in a way embodied in, an extraordinariness of social position or behaviour. If the Bodhisattva ideal breaks through in a genuine way in your actual behaviour towards other people, well yes, that's fair enough; that is to be expected, that is right and proper. But the fact that you as it were have adopted a higher aspiration doesn't mean that you should expect to be treated in a higher way socially. If people do, coming to know your lofty aspirations, feel a genuine reverence for you, that is not still anything that can be claimed or anything that can receive a conventional social embodiment and become almost institutionalized. I think one must guard against that constantly.

Tony: You could see it again as the idea of just continually setting high standards and not settling in again - lofty aspirations. You can always keep pushing things upwards, going a bit higher. [Pause]

S: All right, go on to five then.

(5) In entertaining liberal views (as to religion) and yet being firm in observing (formal religious) vows one doth not err.

S: There is a corresponding difference here. What do you think is being got at? What does it mean to entertain liberal views as to religion - using the word religion here?

Susiddhi: To see the essence behind the observance. To see the meaning behind observances and practices.

S: I think it means something more than that.

Roger: It seems that there [are] so many different ways of doing things which one actually does begin to acknowledge, but a time has to come when you do one of them.

S: Yes, entertaining liberal views means having a certain breadth of outlook and recognizing that people are of many different kinds, with many different attitudes, and that therefore they may need to do things apparently in different ways, and that is not necessarily your way - that your way is not necessarily their way. For instance, the better one knows people, one sees that they really are all very different, and they may agree on certain general principles but their ways of putting those principles into operation, their ways of living, behaving, working, studying, even meditating, or at least their patterns of doing those things, may differ quite a lot. So you have a broad outlook, you entertain liberal views, if you recognize that. But sometimes what happens is people have this breadth of view, they have these liberal views, and they think there are so many different ways of doing these things, so many ..., it doesn't really matter. It makes them, so to speak, lax.

For instance, let's take the question of meditation. You can recognize that some people meditate better in the morning, some people meditate better in the evening; that some people make better progress, say, having two regular sessions of meditation every day without fail throughout the month, throughout the year. But others might do better just with intensive periods of, say, doing not much except meditation for, say, weeks on end, and then maybe not being so strict about the daily practice. That is a possible pattern. So, because you see that there are these possibilities for different people, you sort of conclude 'Oh, it doesn't matter whether you meditate or not regularly or otherwise.' You let it slip.

So you've got the liberal views, but you're not firm in your own [88] actual practice. The fact that you're liberal in your views undermines your own observance. And it's because you've lost sight of the fact, well, what is good for you and that you've got to do that. That, in a way, you're also part of the overall pattern; your liberal views have a relaxing effect in an undesirable way. You think there are so many ways of doing these things, it probably doesn't matter whether you don't do them at all.

So this is what you find: in the world at large, people who've got very liberal views, who are very tolerant, very often don't practise anything, and those who do practise quite intensively have got very narrow views, very dogmatic and intolerant. But here what is being said is you've got to combine both, you've got to have that breadth of view, that breadth of vision, and see and acknowledge that there are so many different types of people, so many different ways of doing things, so many different ways of evolving and developing, but at the same time you stick very firmly and sincerely to what is the path for you, without quarrelling with other people for doing things in a different way. So you usually get the two extremes: that the people who are tolerant don't bother about their own observance, and the people who do bother about their own observance are not at all tolerant and want to make everybody do what they are doing, which is a manifestation of the group attitude. It seems to be very difficult to have an attitude of allowing others to do things in their way quite strictly but also doing things in your way quite strictly.

Clive: It implies a quite strong degree of individuality, which is ...

S: Right, yes, So therefore it says, 'In entertaining liberal views as to religion and yet being firm in observing formal religious vows, one doth not err.'

Roger: Sometimes there's a feeling that unless you do formally observe your vows, you are unable to have liberal views.

S: Yes, that is true, really, otherwise one doesn't really have liberal views; one merely has woolly views, [Laughter] which is quite another matter.

One finds usually Christians, especially Catholics and extreme Protestant Christians, are certainly following their own particular practices, they keep that up quite well, but with this intolerant attitude towards everybody else, even members of other Christian denominations. On the other hand, you do find people who don't bother much about religion, they are pretty tolerant, they don't mind whether you're a Christian or a Buddhist or an atheist or a humanist, but they don't have any particular spiritual path which they themselves follow, any particular method or practice.

Devaraja: To some extent, do you think that sort of liberal view is almost like a not-caring about the higher development of the other person?

S: Yes. That's the near enemy, as it were, yes: that you can afford to be liberal because you don't really care, you're indifferent. So it's quite difficult to have this connotation of breadth and depth; or comprehensiveness and intensity. To have a comprehensive view but a quite intense practice. It suggests that most people's intensity of practice has a certain neurotic character. You feel this with some of the more extreme Christian sects, don't you? - like Jehovah's Witnesses and people like that.

Roger: But I wonder if what they do actually is a religious practice?

S: One can doubt that, yes. In Buddhist terms.

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Roger: What actually do - it's so rare for any of us to come across people who are actually doing a very systematic religious practice. When you reach, say, a Benedictine monk, who is regularly doing his offices, there is a certain feeling from him which you don't get from, say, a Jehovah's Witness.

S: Right, yes. In the Buddhist fold, of course, you could encounter, say, a Theravadin who - in fact, meditated, practised the mindfulness of breathing and was quite strict about the precepts, but thought, for instance, that the Mahayana just wasn't Buddhism. So his views would not be at all liberal even though he was quite firm in observing his formal religious vows. [Pause]

Will: Does this mean that the Theravadins don't recognize the importance of the emotions?

S: Put it this way: what I've found is, very often, they don't officially recognize the importance of the emotions. The importance of the emotions is not something that figures in their actual teaching. But of course the emotions are important for them, but because they are not officially recognized they are sort of smuggled in, in illegitimate ways.

This is something I went into some years ago, when I was in India. I came to know that in Ceylon there was quite a discussion, even a controversy, going on about Devalias(?) - I don't know if you know what a devalia is, it's a temple of a god, a Hindu god. In Ceylon there are many Hindus as well as Buddhists, though the Buddhists are in the majority. So the controversy was about this: there was a great wave of building devalias in Ceylon - this was about 20 years ago - to gods of various kinds, very often local gods and not very important

gods, not necessarily gods that were worshipped in Hindu India, sometimes gods which were peculiar to Hindu Ceylon. So the question which arose was, could a Buddhist, or should a Buddhist, build a devalia? So there were two schools of thought, it seemed, among Buddhists in Ceylon: one school held that devas are clearly mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures and from a Buddhist point of view there is nothing wrong in worshipping the devas, because we only worship the devas for material things, for the sake of material prosperity. We don't worship them to give us Enlightenment because that is quite impossible; devas cannot give Enlightenment, but they can give material benefits. As Buddhists we worship the Buddha as the spiritual teacher, so there's nothing wrong with a Buddhist founding a devalia or building a devalia.

The other school of thought said it is true that devas have their place in Buddhism and there is nothing un-Buddhistic in worshipping the devas, but if you are a Buddhist you should pay much more attention to the Buddha; you should pay much more attention to the Path of Enlightenment rather than be concerned with material blessings. So a Buddhist, if he is a Buddhist at all, should worship the Buddha rather than the devas. It isn't that the devas can't give material blessings if you worship them, but that Buddhists should be more concerned with the Buddha and more concerned with following a spiritual path. And in any case resources are limited and it would be better to spend the money for propagating the Dharma if you were a Buddhist rather than for building devalias.

So this was the controversy, which was never really resolved. But I looked at it like this: why were so many of these Buddhists wanting to worship devas? I don't think it was just that they expected the material blessings. It seems to me that there was some emotion of theirs which was not being satisfied by Theravada Buddhism, official Theravada Buddhism; because in Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism you've got the Buddha, yes; you don't have any Bodhisattvas, so it's as though in the Mahayana [90] those sort of emotions which are split off in the case of the Ceylon Buddhists and directed towards the devas as it were outside Buddhism, in the case of the Mahayana are kept within Buddhism and integrated by being directed towards the beautiful figures of the Bodhisattvas. Now the Theravadins will have nothing to do with those Bodhisattvas, except to some extent with Maitreya, but nothing to do with Avalokitesvara, nothing to do with Manjusri and so on. So for the ordinary Buddhist, Buddhism is a little arid, a little dry. It's as though the Buddha isn't enough, or rather the Buddha is too much. He's too transcendent, too overwhelming, they need something more accessible, which in the case of the Mahayana is provided by the Bodhisattvas.

So in Ceylon Buddhism you haven't got Bodhisattvas, you've got the emotional need for something other than the Buddha figure, so you go outside Buddhism altogether and you have the devas and the devalias. So therefore it was as though there were certain emotional needs of the Theravada Buddhists and so on which were not officially recognized. So you've got two things. You've got the official Theravada Buddhism, which is rather sterile and dry and scholastic, but side by side you've got a certain amount of popular practice which gives a more emotional outlet but which is not integrated with the main Buddhist tradition. Whereas in the case of the Mahayana you've got all those elements but really well integrated and all functioning in the same way. But in Ceylon you can pass from being a Buddhist to being almost a Hindu, because you virtually forget about the Buddha and you are only worshipping Hindu gods. You get your emotional satisfaction. So intellectually you are a Buddhist, emotionally you're a Hindu. This is the situation. Whereas in the case of the Mahayana, you're intellectually and emotionally a Buddhist, and the great unifying factor is the Bodhisattva

Ideal.

So actually you find that Sinhalese Buddhists, including the monks, are often better than the official doctrine. If you just read their books, you might think they are very dry, scholastic, cold; but actually when you meet them very often they're not, they're very warm and very friendly, emotionally very positive. But that is not officially recognized within Theravada Buddhism. Officially the emphasis is on scholarship and understanding and intellectual analysis and Abhidharma and all the rest of it - a bit of meditation for those who care for that sort of thing - and that's about all. But devotion is played down all the time. So devotion tends to flow to the Hindu gods.

Some Ceylon bhikkhus, say travelling abroad and preaching, try to say 'Devotion? That's only for the ignorant unenlightened lay people. Bhikkhus aren't supposed to be devoted. We just understand Buddhism. We are beyond all that.' This is the official attitude, as it were. The devotion is supposed to be for the miserable, grovelling layman who doesn't know any better.

Will: But they do do Pujas, don't they?

S: They do do. The bhikkhus take them in a very casual way. I remember in Calcutta, at the Maha Bodhi Society, there was a quite beautiful temple there, and on full-moon days crowds of lay people came along, very devotedly. And I'd sometimes be sitting with the Sinhalese bhikkhus in the sitting room waiting for things to begin, and they'd say, 'Oh, I suppose you've got to go and gratify these lay people by just doing a bit of chanting. Come on, chaps, come and do the chanting.' in a very cynical sort of way, and they'd be puffing their cigarettes and having their evening cups of tea, and maybe a bit of a biscuit. And that was their attitude towards it. 'Hope it doesn't last too long. Hope they don't want too many suttas this evening. OK, come on, let's go and do a bit of chanting. It's all in the day's work.' They don't really believe in it at all! Their attitude is - if you were to ask [91] them, they would say, 'Well it keeps up the faith of the laity, so it's good for us to do it, but we don't think it's important to feel devotion. What is important is to understand what the texts say, intellectually. But we need to keep up the devotion of the lay people because they support the Sangha. We are economically dependent upon them, so we go through all these rituals which we don't really believe in, just to keep them happy.' That's their attitude, and they will tell you that quite honestly. 'We don't believe in all these things, but the lay people like these things and we're dependent on the lay people, so we do them.' So along they go, they march in and they take off their smiles, and very solemnly they go in and sit down with great gravity and 'wmm-wmm- wmm-wmm' (imitating chanting) they are chanting, and the lay people are in the seventh heaven listening to it. And then the monks file out. They leave all the offerings and that to the lay people. That's not - the monks are not expected to do anything devotional like that, that's all left to the laity. The monks just come in and do a bit of chanting and receive the salutation of the laity and then they go out again. They get on with studying the Abhidharma, which is the real Buddhism.

So you get this split in Theravada, unfortunately, between reason and emotion, with the monks tending to be the intellectuals and the lay people tending to be the devotees, and the two never coming together in an integrated spiritual life, as you do get in the case of the Mahayana, and therefore you find a much bigger gap between the monks and the laity in the Theravada countries than you find in the Mahayana countries. In the Theravada countries they feel they are following two different paths - two very different paths, one of which leads to

Nirvana and the other just leads to a happy rebirth, either in heaven or on earth. But in the Mahayana countries everybody feels that they are following the same path, which is the Bodhisattva path to full Enlightenment for the benefit of all.

Steve: Do you feel that the monks are - those that become monks - are specifically intellectually motivated?

S: Not very. It's academic rather than intellectual. But in Ceylon, especially, they believe that the study and understanding of the scriptures is the real work of the monk. That's the real Buddhism, as it were. And very often it boils down to studying Pali, so sometimes the monk who is well versed in Pali is the real Buddhist, and this is a standard, to a great extent - that you know Pali, you can read the texts in the original, you are a learned monk. A learned monk is very highly esteemed. Though that is changing a little bit now, but broadly speaking it's the learned monk who is esteemed. A monk who is devoted is almost a contradiction in terms, he's a bit eccentric, the monk who seems to feel devotion. That's a bit unusual, that's usually left to the lay people.

Steve: Don't the monks feel an estrangement between the emotion - the bhikkhus - don't they feel out of touch with emotion?

S: No, I don't think they do, actually. In fact, in many cases I don't think they are. It's simply that it all remains on a rather worldly level. They are usually quite emotionally positive people, but their positive emotions don't have an officially recognized place, as it were. They are usually quite friendly people, quite helpful people. But if you ask them, they will say it's the intellectual study of the scriptures which is the real thing. They don't even value their own emotional positivity very much. Maybe they tend to take it a bit for granted, and not recognize the important part it can play in the spiritual life. Or they don't think very much in terms of the spiritual life nowadays any longer. It's more a question of being a good monk in the social sense, being respected by the lay people, learning Pali, having a good [92] knowledge of the Pali scriptures, and ideally getting a post as a lecturer or professor of Pali in a college or a university. And you go travelling abroad and preaching the Dharma on the basis of your intellectual knowledge of it. That's the path nowadays which is laid out for the respectable Sinhalese monk.

There have been some changes more recently. There are some young monks going into social work, but then again that's going almost to the other extreme. Just as you find here in England, say, young Christian priests, clergymen, going into social work because they are so confused spiritually, in the same way you find some young bhikkhus in Ceylon who are sort of confused intellectually and spiritually, going into social work. They don't particularly want to study Pali, they have no aptitude. They are not interested in meditation. Here they are, they find themselves as monks, they've been put into the Sangha by their parents, perhaps. What are they going to do? So social work has a sort of prestige in our day, so they tend to go into that. Some of them actually do good work - rural uplift and all that. Some get involved in politics. But they seem to have lost, spiritually speaking, their sense of direction, to a great extent.

But I think that the great defect of Theravada Buddhism as actually practised in Ceylon is the devaluation of emotion and the fact that the intellectual and the emotional sides of the spiritual life are just not sufficiently integrated. Even though there is devotion there,

especially in the lay people, but it's not really recognized sufficiently. It's devalued. All right, let's go on to precept six.

(6) In having greatness of intellect and smallness of pride, one doth not err.

S: So 'In having greatness of intellect and smallness of pride, one doth not err.' Why do you think these two are associated? What does the association suggest?

Clive: People often pride themselves on the greatness of their intellect.

S: Yes - if you have greatness of intellect, the chances are that you will be correspondingly proud. So therefore it says 'In having greatness of intellect and smallness of pride one does not err', it's not easy to have that combination.

But why do you think that greatness of intellect may be associated with pride, or tends to be associated with pride?

Derek: You've got a great ability to rationalize things.

S: But why should the ability to rationalize things be associated with pride?

Derek: It means you can justify yourself ...

S: Yes, but that suggests you're proud already. But in what way does greatness of intellect make you proud? Or in what sense is it pride, greatness of intellect?

Alan: Pride in the sense of an inflated sense of yourself, inflated sense of ego, that rests with the intellect, conceit rests with the intellect.

S: In what way?

Will: You feel that your intellect is greater than other people's.

Devaraja: Is it because it's related to hatred, and you can use it [93] to put down other people?

S: Yes, you can use the intellect as a weapon - but that suggests you are proud or egoistic already. It's as though the intellect is a sort of neutral thing. But is the intellect in fact so neutral? This is what I'm asking. Or is the intellect not in a way inherently proud? So in that case what would make it inherently proud, or how come that intellect - I'm taking the word more in its current sense, not in its more old-fashioned sense - why is it that it's inherently proud or inherently involves pride? That necessitates an understanding of what intellect here really means. How does it function?

Roger: It almost can act as making you feel quite comfortable, by knowing a lot of things. By enlarging one's understanding of oneself and other people. And it's almost synonymous when you know something other people do not know.

S: I think it's more than that. It's not so much a question of knowing something that other people don't know. It's more a question of knowing more than you are. I've touched upon this,

I think, very distantly, in a lecture some time ago. I think it's the one on 'Regular and Irregular Steps'.

For instance, intellectually, you can 'know' all about Nirvana. You can 'know' all about Enlightenment. Or at least the intellect may be convinced that it knows all about it. But what is your actual experience of that? It's nil. So your intellect is as it were alienated from your being. Because you know something, you tend to think that you are that. You tend to think that you are what you know, and it's there, or in that, that the pride consists. You take it for granted that that which you know in some sense you are. Because you know it, it means you've understood it, it's there, you've got it, you're that.

So in this sense, intellect, in so far as it functions in this sort of way, is inherently alienated, alienated from the being of the person having the intellect, and therefore inevitably conducive to pride, or even consisting in pride. But this means we know all sorts of things that we are not, but we - inasmuch as it is our knowledge - we think that we as it were have or are those things which we know. So therefore we pride ourselves on an unreal possession, and it's in that that the pride consists.

So, here, the smallness of pride consists in recognizing the limitations of one's own intellect, in recognizing the distinction between knowing something and being something, and realizing that just because you know something it doesn't mean that you are that. So in knowledge of that sort there is nothing on which you can pride yourself. You may know all about Nirvana, in the sense that you understand the statements that are being made about it, but you are absolutely remote from Nirvana yourself. There's nothing for you to pride yourself on there: you recognize that there's a complete gap between your being and what is represented by the word Nirvana. But there are some scholars, some academics, who don't seem able to see this. They think they really do know all about Nirvana, and that a Buddhist can't really try to practise Buddhism because ... doesn't really know anything about it at all, and has to be told by him, the scholar, because he's read all the books and he knows all the words in the original language.

Tony: This goes back to the third precept, really, because they're not reflecting and meditating, they're just taking it in.

S: Exactly, yes. They're not even taking it in, not even studying it, really, because they bring all sorts of presuppositions and assumptions along. They're not really open to what the Dharma has to say.

[94]
Steve: It's over-developed intellect and under-developed emotions, feeling.

S: Not necessarily. You could say that, but in a sense neither is developed. The intellect is not developed, it's only enlarged. And the emotions are not developed, either. It's not that they are undeveloped, they are merely gross. And this is why you often find a scholar with this exaggeratedly enlarged, I won't say developed but enlarged or disproportionate, intellect, with quite strong, crude emotions associated with that or juxtaposed with that. His emotions are on the same level as everybody else's, but he may be, say, a professor in a university, maybe the head of a department - but where are his emotions? They are tied up with things like promotion, career prospects, academic competitiveness, inter-departmental in-fighting. And

that's where his emotions are. Academics can get intensely worked up over these things.

Steve: Still with the group. Group emotions.

S: Oh yes, of course, of course. The academic doesn't go beyond the group. In fact, he is very much a member of his particular group. So you have people who are intellectually occupied with all sorts of sublime things, and writing books about them, but their emotional lives are on a very lowly level indeed, and there's no integration between the two things, the intellectual and the emotional. You've got this bloated intellect and these crude, often infantile, emotions, co-existing in the same person. It's not a developed intellect, it's a bloated intellect, a fat person, swollen up with all sorts of unhealthy fat and wind, someone flatulent. He's not developed, he's merely fat. He might even be suffering from elephantiasis. So the academic suffers from a sort of elephantiasis of the intellect. It's not that his intellect is over-developed. This is a wrong way of describing it. His intellect is not developed at all, it's merely bloated and swollen, which is a different thing altogether.

Clive: What is a developed intellect then. How does that upper - ?

S: Well, in the modern, debased sense of the word there's no place for the intellect at all. It is the name that is given to this bloated, swollen something. I think the positive word to use is intelligence, which suggests a certain capacity for abstract understanding, but conjoined with a certain degree of feeling and sensitivity to the situation. So I think we should talk more in terms of intelligence than in terms of intellect. Intellect was originally a good word in the middle ages, but it's been debased.

Reason is a good word; that's also been debased. Even 'understanding' has been debased. All these words have been debased, to some extent at least. Intelligence is still a reasonably positive word to use.

[End of tape 5, tape 6]

So, again, with regard to this question of smallness of pride, it's a question of knowing where one actually stands, where one actually is. I think this is one of our great weaknesses at present, but perhaps it's always been a weakness to some extent for human beings. One appropriates, or thinks that one appropriates, through the intellect. You think that because you know something therefore you've appropriated that thing. You've made it a part of you, it is you now because you understand it, as we say, intellectually. It's as though sometimes if you understand something intellectually you've finished with it. You need not concern yourself about it any more. You know all about meditation, so you don't need to meditate. You know all about [95] Nirvana, there's no need to bother about experiencing it for yourself because you know it already.

So this over-developed or let us say bloated, swollen intellect really gets in the way of personal development. It prevents you from realizing where you are and where you are not, and you tend to feed the already bloated intellect if you read and hear and study too much in the wrong sort of way. You just enlarge that alienated part of yourself, and you think that you've appropriated things which you haven't in fact appropriated, or you certainly haven't assimilated them; you've appropriated them, you've appropriated them perhaps in an alienated sort of way, appropriated them in terms of knowing but not in terms of being.

Clive: Is it important to have - to be one step ahead?

S: Oh yes, the very structure of the psyche is such that, well let us say consciousness is the growing point or provides the growing point. You always know more than you are. In fact, that is the only way in which you can develop. But the gap mustn't be too great, and you mustn't make the mistake of confusing what you merely as yet know with what you actually are; not think that because you know something you are that. Your knowing only discloses a possibility of being; that is its function, to disclose possibilities of being. It's like a torch which shows you in the darkness the next step ahead, but the fact that you are shining your torch on the next step ahead, or even the hundredth step ahead, if you've got a powerful torch, doesn't mean that you've actually got to that point yet.

But, yes, the intellect has that function of showing the path ahead before you actually reach it.

Mike: And if you shine the torch too far ahead you may miss the next step, and trip over that.

S: Miss the next step and trip over, yes, etc. Or even drop your torch and damage it. [Laughter]

Roger: Have the batteries only.

Steve: Did you have much difficulty with this, Bhante? - because I remember hearing that you had apparently read the Diamond Sutra at about 14, and you quite understood it intellectually.

S: I think I can say - I don't know that I understood it at all intellectually, but I had a very strong feeling for something which was there and which the text was mediating. I wouldn't say that I understood it intellectually. It's not to be understood intellectually. But I felt that there was some dimension revealed through that particular text, with which one could be in contact through that particular text. It was of that nature, it wasn't a question of intellectually understanding it, or thinking that one intellectually understood it.

So the intellect, to use that term, is always a step ahead and has to be a step ahead. That is the way that we evolve. But it mustn't be too far ahead. You mustn't stretch your lines of communication too much, so to speak. And one must never, never confuse knowing with being, or knowing in that sort of way with being.

Alan: I sometimes feel as if - I'm not sure if it is the right word to use - as if there is a very good, positive aspect to pride. But perhaps there's a better word. Pride as just the experience of your own being.

S: Pride, the term pride, is used in a positive sense in the [96] Vajrayana, and it has come to be used in a positive or somewhat positive sense in modern times. People talk about black pride and gay pride and so on, to suggest that you should value something that you've been taught formerly, let's say, to devalue. So, yes, one can use pride in this sort of way, but you have to be careful it doesn't slide over into a sense of superiority in a negative way. It's valuing what you actually are, if you have cause to value what you are.

Alan: I was thinking in terms of the way that we decided that humility was really beside the point if you knew where you stood. In the same sense pride is beside the point.

S: Yes, it's a question of knowing where you stand. But then you can be proud of where you stand in a negative way, even though you do actually stand there; like you can be proud of being working-class or proud of being something else of that sort. Proud of being an intellectual, or - Pride, yes, if you know where you stand, pride seems to be out of place, or unnecessary. The word used in modern times is more an assertion of your personal worth, to people who do not accept that personal worth in that way. It's as it were to counteract, it's to go to the other extreme. Say if you're black and you've been brought up to believe that black people are no good, you then counteract that by insisting on black pride, as it were, that, yes, you should be proud of being black, you don't have to be ashamed of it. As though you have to go a bit to the other extreme or in the other direction to restore the balance, and to be able just to be yourself, to be accepted as what you are, without over-valuation or undervaluation by anybody.

In a society in which there was no racial discrimination, there would be no need for black pride, or for any other sort of pride of that kind.

Devaraja: I sort of felt that in a way I felt bad about sort of Englishness that - it was almost like essential to put down the fact that one was English, culturally and so on, and that - I can see the pitfalls by trying to reassert that, but I felt that I've started to discover a - well get an enormous pleasure out of studying areas of English history and English literature, Shakespeare, Milton.

S: But pride doesn't exactly come in, does it?

Devaraja: Yes, but it has been - certainly in the circles that I've moved in - it's been a vogue almost not to breathe a word that one was English.

S: Oh. What sort of circles did you move in? [Laughter]

Devaraja: This is - I can remember from art college days, and ...

S: Most people were English, though presumably or ...

Devaraja: Yes, but English culture is seen as something really quite negative. That's true to quite an extent, but it - I felt that, er ...

S: It's a question of restoring a proper sense of values, or just knowing those things before one evaluates them. Had they read their Dickens or their Shakespeare or their Milton and so on? It's very doubtful, probably, if they had. Sometimes people try to assert superiority by degrading or devaluing things which they know other people do value. Everybody else looks up to Shakespeare, so you have to show how superior you are by looking down on Shakespeare, or trying to. It sounds a bit pathetic, actually, doesn't it?

Roger: But it happens so frequently. That's what's so disturbing [97] about it. People go into great details about how they dislike Buddhism and how awful it is. And you say, What do you know about it? And they know nothing. It's quite extraordinary.

S: I tend not to come up against that one. [Laughter] But sometimes people have been a bit put off the classics by the way in which they were taught when they were at school. That is

understandable, that is something one has to get over in due course. If you had Hamlet rammed down your throat at the age of eight, you can't really be expected to appreciate him; as you grow older you have to get over your reactions to the ramming down your throat. I can remember being taught Tennyson - I remember the actual poem, The Lady of Shalott - when I was at school. This was at what was then called Junior School, I must have been about 10 or 11, maybe even 12. And there was a very worthy woman teacher who was teaching The Lady of Shalott, and we had to learn - different pupils in the class - had to learn the same verse and chant it together. So about six or eight of you chanted your verse and then six or eight others chanted their verse, and I remember our verse was:
She left the web, she left the loom;
She made three paces through the room,

- and the teacher would say, 'Give it some expression! Do it with expression.' You had to say,

'She LEFT the web, she LEFT the loom;
She made - Three - paces - through the room!

You had to chant it like that. And this put me off Tennyson for years! [Laughter] I only got back to him when I was 16 or 17, rather dubiously, but discovered that he was quite enjoyable. But you can be put off the classics in this way by unintelligent teaching when you're young. But that is something different.

I think quite a lot of people within the Friends are discovering or rediscovering the classics, and realizing how much there is in them. I think people who run them down are just trying to show how fashionable or avant-garde or cultivated or superior they are. As I say, it really is pathetic. They shouldn't be allowed to get away with it. There is so much artificiality, pretence and sham in these so-called advanced, pseudo-cultural, pseudo-liberal circles. They really mustn't be allowed to get away with it.

Oh. Well, maybe that's it for this morning.

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Session 4

(7) In being wealthy in religious doctrines and diligent in meditating upon them one doth not err.

S: This is not unlike part of precept 3, because it seems to reproduce the second and third kinds of wisdom, that is to say the wisdom that comes by reflection and that comes by meditation. But there is a difference of emphasis, in fact there are one or two differences of emphasis. First of all, note the expression 'being wealthy in religious doctrines'. What does this suggest - 'being wealthy in religious doctrines'?

Steve: A thorough knowledge of the scriptures.

S: Yes, but the word wealthy, what does that suggest?

Susiddhi: Appreciating the value.

S: Appreciating that those doctrines are very precious, very valuable, and if you have them you are wealthy, as it were, spiritually wealthy.

So what is the main point, do you think, of this precept, the main emphasis? - the fact that on the one hand one is wealthy in religious doctrines and on the other one is diligent in meditating upon them?

Steve: In getting to the essence.

S: In getting to the essence, yes. But it's rather more than that. It means sort of transforming knowledge which is as it were objective, external, into something subjective, something which you actually experience, something which actually is a part of you. It also almost suggests there's not much point in knowing a lot about the Dharma, there's not much point in being wealthy in religious doctrines if you aren't all the time diligent in meditating upon them and transforming them into actual experience. Study shouldn't be an end in itself, however well motivated or however well directed. You have to be constantly reflecting or constantly meditating on what you read, what you learn, what you understand. So that from being something external to you, something objective, it becomes something which is part and parcel of your own being, which is so to speak subjective.

Susiddhi: It's quite a good wee precept, this. It gives the place of doctrines, of learning doctrines, and the place of meditation, and the relation between the two.

Derek: Do you think it's a good idea to actually sit down in the meditation posture and, say, meditate upon some thoughts or some ideas on the Dharma?

S: One can do this. I tend to think, in a way, not; I think you ought to be meditating upon religious doctrines all the time, if you see what I mean. In a sense you ought to be trying to understand all the time. You've got a certain amount of knowledge floating around in your head. You ought all the time to be reflecting on it and trying to understand it. You've heard about things like the Four Noble Truths; you've heard about things like Dharma, you've heard all sorts of things mentioned in the course of talks, so you've got a lot of knowledge, actually, in a disconnected, maybe fragmentary way, so you ought to be turning it all over in your mind.

Supposing I were to ask, what were the main points made by Mangala and Nagabodhi in their talks? You might have forgotten [99] already. Because if one isn't careful one regards things like lectures and even study as entertainment; so once the entertainment is over, once the show is over you just go and get on a bus and do something else. It's just like going to the music-hall, it's sort of highbrow entertainment or sort of spiritual entertainment. You have fun and you enjoy the jokes and the stories and you appreciate the points that are made, and the bit of drama and the slight maybe theatricality of the speaker, you relish all that, but as soon as it's all over, that's that, you forget all about it. This is very often what happens. But actually you should retain certain points. You can't expect to retain everything unless you make detailed notes, but retain certain points, those which are relevant to you, those which have some bearing on your own life; and then turn them over in your mind, reflect on them, meditate on them.

It shouldn't be a question of just solemnly going into the shrine room and sitting down

cross-legged and saying , 'Now what did the Buddha mean about the Four Noble Truths?' This process should be going on, as I said, in a sense, all the time, because you are interested in the question; not that you think, 'I am supposed to be a Buddhist and supposed to be leading a spiritual life; I suppose I ought to try to understand what the Four Noble Truths are.' It isn't like that. You should be so interested, and those particular teachings or doctrines should be so meaningful where you are concerned that you can't help thinking about them. You go back to them whenever you've got a few spare minutes. You just turn them over in your own mind.

A little while ago, somebody asked me when I prepared my lectures - whether I prepared them a few days before giving them, or on the day itself, or a week before. So I said, 'I'm preparing my lectures for years ahead.' Because it's not that when I know I'm going to be giving a lecture on such-and-such topic I then start thinking about it and gathering material. No, I've been thinking about it for years in most cases, because I'm interested in that particular topic. And then at some time the results of my reflections emerge in the form of a lecture, because basically, I'm interested in those particular questions, and I find them relevant. So this is what should be happening. One should be working on one's understanding of different aspects of the Dharma all the time, just because you find it all very deeply relevant to your own particular needs or where you are at or what you are interested in or the direction of your own higher thoughts, as it were. Not just because it's part of the Buddhist curriculum and you need to be able to pass the examination in Buddhist doctrine so that you can get ordained or whatever. It isn't like that - as it has become, of course, in some religions and even some Buddhist circles.

So you should be diligent in meditating upon your wealth of religious doctrines, that you've gathered from here and there, from your reading and listening and discussion and so on. But do any of you ever do that - when you have a few quiet minutes, turn something over in your mind? - assuming you do have a few quiet minutes occasionally?

Steve: I seem to get things like koans, I get certain things that are just going on all the time, something I've got to work through, and I'm questioning it and questioning other people and just trying to understand that; for quite some time I seem to have koans that - let's get through that one - and then another one comes up.

S: But that, in a way, is the only way in which one will understand certain things. Not that you think about them just for the few minutes that you're reading about them, or hearing about them, but you keep them in your mind, or at least certain [100] teachings, and you're thinking about them and reflecting upon them whenever you get the opportunity, just because you are interested. It is something that concerns you.

Susiddhi: I find the process of learning and assimilation often happens in practice as appreciating the implications of certain things.

S: Yes, it's following up the implications, seeing the ramifications of a teaching, how it works out in practice, etc. If you accept this, that follows, and then from that something else follows, and so on. And if you reflect upon issues, you find them - in the case of certain issues - ramifying out in all sorts of directions, into all sorts of spheres and fields of knowledge and so on. It's as though each important teaching is a sort of nexus, a meeting point where the lines, so to speak, of so many other doctrines and teachings cross one another and make a sort of

knot, and you can follow - start taking your starting point at the nexus or the knot, you can follow any one of these lines in any one of so many different directions.

But anyway, the main point here is that you should never allow yourself to get mental or intellectual indigestion. You should be constantly trying to assimilate what you know and transforming it from knowledge into actual experience. [Pause] And knowing the religious doctrines and meditating upon them in a way should be natural things, not so much things that you have to do or things for which you have to find time; you should be learning the religious doctrines (for want of a better term) just because you are interested, and meditating upon them just because you want to understand them better and transform them from being mere knowledge into being part of your own experience. It's not so much that 'now is my time for learning' and 'now is my time for meditating', etc.

All right, let's go on to precept eight then.

(8) In having profound religious learning, combined with knowledge of things spiritual and absence of pride, on doth not err.

S: This seems to hark back to some of the previous precepts. 'Having profound religious learning' - this seems to resemble 'being wealthy in religious doctrines' - 'combined with knowledge of things spiritual and absence of pride' - this harks back to the 'smallness of pride' - 'one doth not err'. In what way do you think knowledge of things spiritual is distinguished from profound religious learning? What do you think is referred to by 'knowledge of things spiritual'?

Susiddhi: These feelings of dhyana states?

S: Very likely, that is a possibility, yes. The first is the more scholarly, the profound religious learning, and the second, the knowledge of things spiritual, is the more yogic or more contemplative.

Derek: Do you think the word 'knowledge' may be a bad translation?

S: It's impossible to say. But the emphasis seems to be 'things spiritual', but since 'religious learning' has already been mentioned, the knowledge presumably is not just a book knowledge; a knowledge of spiritual things, i.e. spiritual states, i.e. meditative states, from actual experience. But still it's necessary that there should be no pride; neither the profound religious learning nor the knowledge of things spiritual should become a basis for the development of pride. So, providing you have these three things, the profound religious learning and knowledge of [101] things spiritual by direct acquaintance with dhyanic states, and also not to be proud, then one doesn't err, one is on the right path. If one doesn't pride oneself either upon one's religious learning or upon one's knowledge of spiritual things, then, yes, you're on the right path.

Roger: It does though it's rather a contradiction in terms. We've been talking about pride this morning - that it doesn't seem to quite fall in line. Say, if someone has some really spiritual experience no longer she should be proud - in the way we were talking about this morning. There's rather more to it than that here.

S: Certainly, in the context of the Mahayana, the word pride tends not to be used in a positive sense. It tends to be invariably associated with egotism. It's only within the Vajrayana context that pride is used in a, so to speak, positive sense. So pride here certainly means conceit or something of that sort, and therefore is regarded as an unskilful, in fact a highly unskilful, mental state.

There is a saying of the Buddha's in the Pali scriptures I sometimes refer to: the Buddha says that one should not compare oneself with others at all, that one should not think that one is superior or that one is equal or that one is inferior. One should not even think that one is equal, even then you are comparing. It is very difficult to assess the degree of equality. You are equal in one sense, not equal in another. So the Buddha says, so to speak, you shouldn't compare at all; don't think of yourself as superior to anyone, or as inferior to anyone, or as even equal to anyone. Just don't think in comparative terms at all. And that will mean an absence of pride, an absence of conceit. You are proud because you compare; no comparison, then no pride. By not comparing, you cut the ground from under the feet of pride, you make pride impossible, because it presupposes a comparison, to your advantage, between yourself and others.

But it's a human weakness to want to know where you stand with regard to others. Are you taller than somebody else? Yes, you can ascertain that. Are you older? Yes, you can ascertain that. Are you better qualified? Yes, you can even ascertain that. Can you run faster? Yes, you can ascertain that. Are you more truthful? That's a bit more difficult. Are you a better person? That's more difficult still. How will you assess? Well he might be more kind, but he might be more clear sighted; he might be more generous, but he might be better-tempered. So how do you strike an all-round balance, and just say well, on the whole he is better than he is? It is quite difficult, so perhaps one shouldn't ask. In that case, there won't be any basis for development of pride. Or if you do feel, if you are conscious of the fact, that you are better than another person in a certain respect, then just remind yourself that in certain other respects he may be better than you. So because you are better in one respect, it doesn't mean that you are a better person generally.

But if you know more than somebody else knows, just say 'I know more than somebody else.' Don't say that I'm better than somebody else. Or if you can run faster than somebody else, don't say that 'I'm better than somebody else'; don't even say 'I'm better at running.' Just say, 'I can run faster.' You are not necessarily saying that it's better or not. You might be a fool, because you might not be better, you might give yourself a heart attack.

The precept mentions 'profound religious learning'. There is the question of how much, from a purely spiritual point of view, from the point of view of your own individual development, how much you really need to know; how much of this profound religious [102] learning you really need to have. So what do you think of this? Do you think it varies with the individual? Or that a lot is necessary in any case? Then what is a lot? Or what is 'profound religious learning', anyway?

Will: It's only profound if it's been digested - assimilated.

S: Yes. I think the question of digestion and assimilation is separate, because it does speak of learning. I think learning is profound when it is thorough, when you make what is sometimes called a close study of the text. You don't just read it quickly and just understand the general

meaning; you understand it in detail too. You understand every word separately. You look up the meaning of every word in the dictionary, look up the etymology of the word. This is thorough study, profound study, as distinct from superficial reading. I think the question of digesting and assimilating is another one, it comes later. So how much of the profound religious learning does the average individual really need, for the sake of his own development? How much do you think?

Roger: Traditionally, there are in the Mahayana a number of sutras in which it is said that they are all you actually do need to study; contains all the approaches, all the doctrines.

S: I'm not so sure that that particular claim is made. Certainly it is said at the end of many of the Mahayana sutras that you should learn it and recite it and propagate it as much as you possibly can, and that great will be the merit thereof. And it gives a very vivid picture of the amount of merit, the enormous, incalculable amount of merit that will accrue. But I don't think at the end of the sutras you usually get the statement that 'this is all-sufficient'; though it has been said - I have said myself - that each of the major Mahayana sutras tends to be a whole world in itself, to be not just a sutra added on to the existing sutras but a recasting of the whole thing in a different form. That is true, in a sense, of much of the Buddha's teaching, much of the teaching of the sutras. It's as though the same thing, or the same few things, are being said over and over again to so many different people of different temperaments from so many different points of view, or shown in so many different lights. So it isn't really a question, in the case of Buddhism, of having one big holy book that you just go through with a [fine-]tooth comb, culling texts for use on suitable appropriate future occasions. It's more a question of just taking from the sum total of Buddhist scriptures - and there are quite a lot of them - what you actually need at that time for your own personal development and growth, and going into that particular text or group of texts really thoroughly.

So that the question arises: how much of this profound religious learning do you need? How many texts do you need to study? The tendency seems to be, even within the context of study groups, for people to be quite superficial in their study; rather than to go more deeply into something they've already studied - to study something new. That seems to be the tendency - and this is one reason why I've referred to hearing lectures or even taking part in study as being regarded as entertainment. Because, when a question of entertainment arises, you want something novel; you don't want to go over the same as it were old thing again and go more deeply into it, you want something new. So I think our general tendency, derived from our general cultural conditioning, is to read the scriptures and Buddhist texts much in the way that we read a newspaper or a novel, and when we've read one, not think in terms of reading it again [but] reading something else. Whereas most of these things may be so profound that they take us a lifetime to understand, but we think in terms of just reading them and passing on to the next thing.

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Roger: ... saying more and more about less and less.

S: Right, yes, going more and more deeply into fewer and fewer things. And nowadays you do find very few people knowing a particular area really thoroughly. Some of our Friends do have the habit of going over the same thing over and over again. Sagaramati just loves taking another study seminar on the Eleven Positive Mental Events; he jumps at the opportunity to take another seminar on that particular subject, because he likes it so much. He goes into it a

bit more deeply each time. But that's comparatively rare. Usually people like to go into something they've not done before, rather than go again into something that they have done, go more deeply and thoroughly into it - which at least they should sometimes do, and know at least a few things really thoroughly - so thoroughly that they can communicate them to other people.

Will: What's the exact significance of the Precepts of the Gurus?

S: Significance? The significance seems to be that one of the Kagyupa teachers extracted these precepts from the mass of literature, from the teachings of the gurus and their writings and arranged them in this way so that students could study them easily, maybe commit them to memory, and have something to reflect and meditate upon. That seems to be the function. Don't forget, a lot of Buddhist literature was never intended to be read in the way that we tend to read things. It was orally communicated, orally transmitted, and people just pondered on quite a few things, just a few verses, for instance, that they'd learned by heart. That was the practice in the old days.

In the days of the Buddha there wasn't a single book, so you just heard a few simple teachings from somebody - maybe from the Buddha, maybe from one of his disciples - and perhaps to help you remember they'd been versified, and you just repeated them to yourself every day and reflected on them, meditated on them, tried to put them into practice. You might even build up a little repertoire of these texts, if you had a good memory, and be able to recite for half an hour or so. After the Buddha's death the monks who had committed various teachings to heart got together and repeated what they knew and taught one another what they knew. In that way they created a common body of oral traditions which was afterwards elaborated and classified and even extended and added to, and then eventually written down. In that way you got the Buddhist scriptures.

But originally the idea was not to read a whole lot of books but to reflect and meditate upon something that you'd heard and which you had committed to memory - which you had had to commit to memory because there were no books. You yourself were the book, the living book. Even nowadays, in some of the Buddhist countries, there are monks who have committed enormous portions of the scriptures to memory.

[End of side 1, side 2]

People don't read all that much, but in terms of the proportion, or in terms of keeping a due proportion between what you read and what you really study thoroughly and reflect and meditate on, they probably still read too much. If you've read, say, 20 books on Buddhism and haven't really studied one, you've really read too much. So the thing to do is to say to your Chairman or other appropriate person, 'Could we go through that text again, please? We've only done it six times.' Or 'Could we listen to that lecture again, please?'

Often people say, listening to the tapes of lectures or even reading books, maybe for the second time - they notice how [104] much they missed the first time. They hear the thing but they just don't remember hearing it. They say 'I must have heard, I was there at the lecture. I don't remember hearing that. But it seems quite important.' They realize, with some surprise, that they must have missed it completely. Presumably their thoughts just wandered at that point.

Susiddhi: One thing about the lectures, people do tend to hear them over and over again.

S: That's true, yes. Or they did, but there seems to have a bit of a change recently. But perhaps some people still do. I think people often tend to prefer to borrow them and listen to them individually rather than listen to them at the Centre in groups.

Susiddhi: I have heard someone say that I remember we were on a retreat I said I'm coming to hear the ... (??) ... I was looking forward to it ...

S: I found when I was in Kalimpong, it was - in a way, I realized subsequently, an advantage to me that I didn't have many books with me - I mean books on Buddhism. There were other books, too. I didn't have many books: the main reason was I couldn't afford to buy them. But on reflection I thought that wasn't a bad thing, because my natural tendency was to read many, many books - as you can see. But, because I just had a few books - well, that meant, what? a couple of hundred - in Kalimpong, [Laughter] I just read through them over and over again, you see? What books I did have I knew quite thoroughly, but perhaps if I had had more money and the opportunity of buying more books on Buddhism, maybe I wouldn't have ...

Roger: You'd have to ... memorial(?) library ...

S: Right, I wouldn't have studied those books quite so thoroughly as I did. So that, for instance, when I came to write my Survey, I really knew my material quite thoroughly. So perhaps that was a bit of a blessing in disguise, being stranded, as far as access to books was concerned, in a place like Kalimpong, and only occasionally, when I was down in Calcutta and had a few rupees to spare, I could go along to a bookshop and find one of the latest publications on Buddhism and work out whether I had enough to buy that and whether it would mean walking back to the Maha Bodhi Society because I'd spent all my money and didn't have anything left for the tram or the rickshaw, etc. Sometimes I got a book because someone sent it to me for review. Review books were very precious in those days, and you agreed very eagerly to review a book because then you'd be able to read it, and maybe keep it afterwards. Authors sent you their books as some people did one felt very grateful for that.

But the net result was that one had just quite a few books and just one or later on two bookcases which one just went through again and again. And I think that was quite good. But perhaps people should aim at building up a little library - I should say in your case maybe 10 or 12 books; I don't think you probably need more than that - that you go through again and again, regardless of whatever else you may happen to read, but just have this small collection of 10 or 12 books that maybe you carry around with you all the time from Centre to Centre or community to community, and which you really do know well, which you perhaps could take a study group on if need be. Or if people were to ask you, 'What is that particular book or that particular chapter of the book all about?', you could explain to them clearly and succinctly, because you really knew what it was all about. And then you've got a basis. Otherwise you just tend to have a smattering of so much.

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Susiddhi: How many books is the Survey equivalent to in that? - it must be equivalent to two or three others!

S: No, no - no cheating! It counts as one. But what about the sutras? It would take quite a few

Surveys to equal a sutra. Depending on your particular needs, just make a standard collection. Include the White Lotus Sutra, a volume of selections from the Pali texts, a Life of the Buddha, a selection of the Songs of Milarepa, maybe the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Conze's Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom - according to your own taste, according to what you yourself feel valuable and helpful, what you want to go into more and more deeply and know better and better, more and more thoroughly, more and more profoundly. And then you would have some 'profound religious learning', even though the number of books that you've studied in that way was quite small.

I've mentioned, I think, in my Memoirs, that one of my own teachers with whom I studied in Benares knew some of the texts that I was studying with him off by heart, and if I asked him a question - I had the text in my hand, and asked him 'What exactly does this verse mean?' he would know - not only know that verse by heart, but he would know exactly what came before it and what came after it, and was able to explain, with reference to what came before and what came afterwards, without even bothering to look at the book. He knew it as thoroughly as that. That isn't easy.

It's as though someone were to ask you 'What does this verse mean - "In having profound religious learning?"' and you were then to explain it in detail and without looking at the book you refer back to precept 5 and precept 3, etc. You just know the whole thing so well. So there should be a few texts that you know as well as that. It would take you a few years to know them as well as that, but it's really worth it.

Then, as I said, you will have some profound religious learning. Then, of course, it has to be combined with 'knowledge of things spiritual', an actual acquaintance with dhyanic states, and 'absence of pride'. If you have those three things, then 'one doth not err'.

(9) By passing one's whole life in solitude and meditation, one doth not err.

S: That's rather a tall order, isn't it? Don't forget these precepts are precepts of the Kagyupa gurus. They did stress, as Milarepa stressed, the solitary life, the solitary life of meditation. So 'By passing one's whole life in solitude and meditation, one doth not err.' You notice the words 'and meditation' has been added by the translator. The actual precept says, 'By passing one's whole life in solitude'. Do you think that the translator was justified in adding 'and meditation'? Do you think that the original author of the precept meant meditation to be included in solitude, or he deliberately didn't mention it, and if so why not?

Susiddhi: I get the impression that the original person assumed that that was the reason why people went into solitude.

S: Hm, possibly. But one can look at it in another way. Supposing you are living in solitude. Supposing you are living up in the mountains, in a cave or whatever, and you are there for years on end. You've got your small stock of dried foodstuffs, as the Tibetan yogis had, got a stock of firewood; all you have to do is to make some Tibetan tea and heat up a bit of food each day. How are you going to spend your time?

___: Not ...

S: Not ..., no, because you'd have enough sleep, because at first, to begin with, you'd slept half the day each day; you'd still have a lot of time on your hands. How would you be spending that?

Derek: You couldn't really do anything but meditate.

S: You couldn't really do anything but meditate. If you were leading a really solitary life, your thoughts would eventually become calmer and calmer. Or you'd come up against things within yourself which you had to face; it would be tantamount to meditation. So in a way meditation doesn't need to be specifically mentioned. Perhaps some yogis did go into solitude with the idea of meditating, but some other simple souls might just have heard well, Milarepa says that the solitary life is a good thing, I'll just go and lead a solitary life. But eventually, they'd find themselves meditating.

But do you find this? Some people must have gone away on solitary retreat, perhaps without the idea of actually doing any meditation; but do you not tend to find, when you are completely by yourself and with nothing to do, and no neurotic compulsion to do something for the sake of doing something - don't you find that you tend to become meditative, as it were?

Voices: Yes.

S: You see what I mean?

Susiddhi: It raises the question whether a person who is planning a solitary should go with a schedule or whether they should go and work into the retreat, and maybe not even adopt a schedule.

S: For some people, a schedule probably is a good thing. It's probably a good thing for those who might otherwise waste time. On the other hand, though, it might be a good thing just to see what happens. But probably the best thing is just to go on solitary retreat and just keep an open mind, because sometimes you can make a programme just to shield you against the impact of being on your own on solitary retreat: to keep yourself busy in an acceptable way. But, of course, if you think that in the place where you're going on solitary retreat there may be a lot of books, and even newspapers and magazines lying around, you may be tempted to read them and waste time - well, it might be better in that case, if you are so weak-minded, to draw up a programme. But otherwise, if you aren't weak-minded in that sort of way, it could well be a very positive thing to leave the situation completely open, and just make sure that you are solitary and uninterrupted and without distractions, and see what happens - whether you do tend naturally to get into a meditative state or to feel like meditating, feel like doing the metta bhavana or whatever, as distinct from going there with the set idea, as it were, of doing those things because you are convinced that they are good for you.

Solitude can be an experience of its own, because if you don't deliberately distract yourself or allow yourself to be distracted, you are just experiencing yourself - which is in a way what meditation is, except that the self that you are experiencing when you meditate is a positive self, not just your ordinary everyday self, unless of course your ordinary everyday self is a positive self.

But what about 'passing one's whole life in solitude'? Some of Milarepa's disciples did - well, Milarepa passed quite a good part of his life in solitude. Do you think it means literally solitude - never seeing anybody?

[107]
Steve: But he did, didn't he?

S: Well, there was the nearby village, sometimes people would trudge up through the snow to offer you food. Sometimes you even get visits from dakinis and fairies. You may get the odd huntsman passing by.

Will: Does it not just mean complete detachment?

S: No, I think it is meant to be taken literally. Well, nowadays it would be very difficult to find a place where you could live in solitude for your whole life. We find it difficult enough, don't we, to find a place for a week's or a month's solitary retreat? Even then there might be the odd interruption and distraction. But it does seem to me that inasmuch as people, especially people who live in cities, are so much in contact with other people, sometimes in a not very desirable way, especially those who don't live in communities, it's a quite good counterbalance just to go away and be on one's own completely for a while, even if it's only for a week, even if it's only for a month.

So it seems that that should be a regular part of people's lives, just being on their own - maybe for an hour or two each day, wherever they happen to live, or go away and be alone for a month, or a few weeks at least, at a time. Otherwise you can feel the pressure of people to such an extent that you never have a chance to experience yourself; you are always having to react to people or respond to them, and that can be quite wearing after a while. You may not realize that.

Of course, in solitude you can realize or you can come to know things about yourself that it's rather difficult to know when you're not in solitude. Maybe your dependence on other people; you're dependence upon distraction, amusement, entertainment, comfort, food, etc.

How many of you have been on solitary retreat? Taking it in a rather liberal sense. There was the odd book, or you did see the odd passer-by, but never mind, we'll count that as a solitary retreat. But not if you became friendly with the young lady in the next caravan [Laughter] - that doesn't count as a solitary retreat, or if you went along to the pub in the evening [Laughter]. That doesn't count as a solitary retreat.

Clive: Are you saying that ideally you wouldn't read at all on a solitary retreat?

S: There are degrees of solitude and there are degrees of distraction. I would say if you wanted a completely solitary retreat, in the sense of just throwing yourself entirely on your own resources and just experiencing yourself, then you should do only the absolute minimum of things needed; because when you're on solitary retreat - for instance, just to fill in the time and prevent yourself feeling bored or lonely, you can spend a lot of time cooking. You can make yourself nice little cakes and things. But if you really want just to have a full solitary, you would cut down on all that, just spend the minimum of time cooking and looking after yourself, and the rest of the time just being with yourself, as it were. Don't even read, if you

want to take it as far as that, because reading, in a sense, is a distraction. Even if you are reading the sutras, even if you're meditating upon them, even that, though it is a very positive thing, is a distraction from your being with yourself and being thrown back entirely on your own resources. So you can quite deliberately decide to have a solitary retreat in that sense, in which you will not do anything to distract yourself. You won't even preoccupy yourself with positive distractions, what to speak of negative ones, and just see what happens. Just be with yourself. Throw yourself, as I said, entirely [108] on your own resources, see how you feel.

Because you can fill in time or prevent yourself from feeling bored on solitary retreat by reading things which in other respects are really positive. Some people read poetry, which is fine; some people read the life of Shelley - that's all fine, it's all good inspiring stuff. But if you are thinking in terms of an uncompromisingly solitary retreat, then it would be good not to depend even on those things. You might learn quite a bit about yourself.

I'm not saying that all solitary retreats should be, or need to be, solitary retreats of that sort, but sometimes it might be a good idea to have a retreat of that sort.

Susiddhi: If one had a decent length of solitary - say, two months - you could maybe set aside a week for that sort of ...

S: Yes, or if you're just away for a week, say, just set aside a day, when you didn't as it were distract yourself. Just spend a whole day with your own wretched miserable self, and see how you get on with it.

Clive: Including meditation in that?

S: Well, you could take it to the length of not formally meditating, and just allowing - not saying, 'Now it's five o'clock, I should meditate', but just be with yourself - because, that's all that meditation is, in a sense. Except that in connection with meditation you are making an effort to be more with yourself and to have a more positive self to be with. But if you take the solitary retreat really strictly, in a way you don't need to meditate. Because if you've nothing to do and you're just sitting there you'll presumably be in a meditative state anyway. If you find you're not in a meditative state, well, just observe your mind and see what is happening. That, no doubt, could be quite useful; just observe what you're thinking of, what direction your thoughts go in. Do your thoughts go in the direction of cream cakes, or the radio, newspaper? Or something of that sort. Do you feel thoroughly miserable, or are you glad to be away from it all? Do you wish you could have a good talk with somebody? Do you wish you'd brought your dog? Or do you feel like writing a letter instead? Or do you feel like going to sleep? Just study your mind. See how it is functioning, how you are feeling. Do you feel really sorry for yourself? Do you wish you hadn't come? Thinking of what all your mates are doing back in the community, what a good time they must be having? Are they thinking about you, or have they already forgotten you? Are they glad that you're away? [Laughter] Or do you start wishing you had a few more thousand candles to make [Laughter] .

Steve: That is meditation - that's Just Sitting meditation, isn't it?

S: Yes, hm - or do you wish you had another wall to plaster? So there are degrees of solitude. Solitude really means absence of distraction, absence of external distraction; so that whatever distractions do arise you know just come from within, and you can't blame them on to

circumstances. So it's quite good to have the experience of solitude in whatsoever degree. It may be just what we've come to call a Dharma holiday - you just don't have anybody else with you; the retreat is solitary in that sense, but apart from that you take it pretty easily. That is to say, you may spend part of the day reading or going out for a walk or writing or meditating. That's more like a Dharma holiday. Or you may have a solitary meditation retreat, and apart from cooking your own meals not do anything except meditate. Or you may combine that with study - that is making it as it were a bit more easy, because you're enjoying a bit more variety, and are therefore less [109] likely to be brought right up against yourself. Or you could be a bit more as it were indulgent and permit yourself a few tapes of Mozart or Bach or Handel - no pop music, of course - on your little tape recorder. Or you may permit yourself to write letters or keep a diary. So these are all degrees of solitude. You may permit yourself to say hello to the milkman.

Devaraja: Do you think there's a value in people spending their whole lives in solitude?

S: Oh, yes! Well, one couldn't say that Milarepa had wasted his time, could one?

Devaraja: No, but I ...

S: He didn't spend his whole life in solitude, but he spent a good portion of it in solitude. I think it would be quite a good thing to have a few people living in solitude. It would be very inspiring to everybody else. And no doubt they'd be directing thoughts of metta towards other people - it would be a very nice feeling if there were some people scattered around the hills of Wales or the Highlands of Scotland, just meditating and getting on with it; maybe having their food brought to them, fresh stocks every year or something like that. The odd sack of rice or the odd sack of muesli. You could probably live on muesli - just wetting it every morning, and you need not bother about cooking. Just like the Tibetan yogis lived on tsampa - barley flour - and tea.

Roger: Was that all they had?

S: Yes, in many cases that's their staple diet - good, nourishing roast barley flour; rich, really good, strong, tasty Tibetan salted tea, without milk or sugar - with butter. Well, in the case of the odd yogi, it might be a lump of rancid butter just perching on top. [Pause] [Laughter]

___: ...

S: Well, yes, it would be an encouragement. But quite a few people find solitude a bit difficult, don't they? Not having someone to talk to; not even a book, so to speak. But certainly everybody should have the experience from time to time. If possible, try to spend a portion of each day by yourself, say, in your own room without talking or without maybe doing anything in particular, unless it's something quite quiet and peaceful, so to speak - and without getting bored.

I don't think many of you realize, very often, the extent to which we are with other people. As Wordsworth says:

'The world is too much with us; late and soon.'

'The world' means other people, really. I think it's Sartre says 'Hell is other people'. Maybe that's only part of the truth, but it's at least half of it. So it's good sometimes to get away from other people, and just experience one's own being, one's own aura, as it were, uninterfered with by other people; otherwise you're constantly acting in relation to other people, for other people, putting on a little act, not being yourself. Or behaving for the benefit of other people, whether you're being nice or whether you're being nasty, trying to please them and ingratiate yourself with them, or just trying to be unpleasant and aggressive. But you're not being yourself in a sense, because you're acting and behaving all the time with reference to other people, and hardly ever experiencing yourself as you are on your own. So therefore I'd say it is good to have that experience from time to time - maybe just for a week at a time.

Maybe also the precept intentionally goes against people's received ideas. Some people might think it quite wrong, quite [110] anti-social, to spend your whole life in solitude, so it's as though the precept is controverting that and saying 'By passing one's whole life in solitude, one does not err.' It's flying in the face of all our assumptions about social life and sociability and social responsibility and all that sort of thing; it's emphasizing that your primary duty is to yourself. You can't do anything for anybody else, really, unless you've done quite a lot for yourself. It really does represent a negation of everything that the group stands for. You say a permanent goodbye to the group.

Derek: All these precepts ending 'one doth not err' - do you think that might imply that these aren't necessarily examples of the best thing to do, but they are just sort of possibilities?

S: It seems to me it's more a question of their being deliberate understatements. Do you see what I mean?

A lot of people nowadays would think that if one was to pass one's whole life in solitude one would be very anti-social indeed, selfish, individualistic, escapist, all the rest of it. Someone once said that if all the politicians in the world stopped talking and didn't speak at all for a whole year, you'd probably solve all the world's problems. So you could say, if there were hundreds and thousands of people, especially certain people, going off into solitude, spending their whole lives in solitude, [Laughter] what a lot of problems that would solve. Send away all the politicians, all the trade union leaders, send them all off to just spend their life in solitude. Their experiences should be very interesting.

Roger: Yes, because it's strange, it is looked upon as being rather a punishment, isn't it? When you go to prison ...

S: Solitary confinement.

Roger: Solitary confinement - hell is what it is for most of them.

S: Whereas if a Buddhist by mistake got into prison, he'd be going up to the governor and saying, 'Please can I be put in solitary confinement?!' (Laughter.)

Roger: Easy on the bread. [Laughter]

Devaraja: 'Just an extra lump of butter in the tea, please.' I've often thought that, actually, ... the idea of prison ...

S: Have a solitary retreat at Her Majesty's expense. Find some sort of innocent offence that you could - if there are innocent offences - that you could get yourself put inside for.

Devaraja: Like blasphemy or something like that. (Loud laughter.)

S: Right! How many years would you get for blasphemy? Two, with luck? [Laughter]

Roger: If you ... fine! You'd go on for ever.

S: Well, if they assigned you to a nice comfortable cell in the prison with two or three other prisoners as they might, you could blaspheme in prison and then as a punishment you get put into solitary. [Laughter]

Devaraja: Prison slang would come into the Buddhist - 'How long was your solitary?' 'Oh, it was a pony'.

S: You might not want to leave - break down in tears when the governor came to tell you that your last day was up and you had to leave. But it is strange that people regard solitude as a [111] punishment. I remember a story told me by a Buddhist monk who was a friend of mine in India - he was Indian - and some years previously he'd gone to Germany to give some lectures and meet the Buddhists there. And he told me a strange experience he had. He said a German Buddhist lady, an elderly woman, had come to see him, and when she came to see him he was still in the middle of writing a letter to India, and he wanted to catch the post. So he said to this person, 'Would you just mind waiting in the waiting room, and I'll finish writing my letter. I want to catch the post. It'll only take me five or ten minutes.' So he was writing away; and after about ten minutes, he said the door burst open and this woman appeared, and she said, 'I can't stay in there any longer. I shall go mad. I've no one to talk to!' And he said, 'I thought then, what on earth are these Europeans like? They can't even stay quietly by themselves without someone to talk to for ten minutes.' It really shook him, this experience. And it started opening his eyes as to the sort of strains and stresses under which people lived in the West. This was before the last war, he was quite an elderly man when he told me this story. But she said she would go mad if she had to stay there any longer without somebody to talk to.

And I've known people who talked all day without stopping, even when they were on their own. If they had nobody to talk to - well, I've known people talk to the cat. On retreats, I noticed this. In the old days, when we used to go to Keffolds and Quartermaine, I several times noticed that people during the silence period got into the habit of talking to the cat! They'd say, 'We're on silence today, aren't we, pussy? Yes, it's a lovely retreat, isn't it, pussy? We're not supposed to be talking, are we, pussy?' (Laughter) They were talking and carrying on conversation. 'Oh, it's a lovely day, isn't it, pussy, yes.' Pussy would look up and go - mmm - and the odd 'miaow'. [Laughter] Yes! Do you remember this - people talking to the cat?

Devaraja: I can't remember that specifically. It wasn't me!

S: So it just goes to show that solitude and life in solitude isn't all that easy.

Roger: Children are like that. That's what I notice with my children. They are constantly talking.

S: One can understand it in the case of children, because they are developing their consciousness, as it were, and they develop it - I won't say their individualities, perhaps it's premature, but they're developing their consciousness by relating to other consciousnesses, and if there isn't a consciousness there for them to relate to, they just imagine it, and they have no difficulty in doing that. I think it's part of the way in which a child grows up and develops. They imagine all sorts of people there, imaginary playmates and so on. A child can imagine all these things quite easily. Almost see them, it seems, sometimes.

Anyway I think we'd better have our cup of tea now and then after that we'll finish off with the concluding precept.

[Tea break. End of tape 6, tape 7]

(10) In being unselfishly devoted to doing good to others, by means of wise methods, one doth not err.

S: What does one notice about this precept in comparison with the preceding one?

Clive: It suggests that one spends one's life among other people.

S: Yes - but what is that in relation to the previous precept?

[112]
Susiddhi: Much more extrovert ...

S: Yes, so it's the opposite. No. 9 says 'By passing one's whole life in solitude, one does not err'; the other says 'In being unselfishly devoted to doing to good to others by means of wise methods, one does not err.' So what does that really suggest? The fact that in both cases one does not err.

Mike: It's transcending those opposites.

S: Yes, it suggests that, but maybe on a lower level first.

Steve: It's saying that either is good, depending on what ...

S: Yes, in a sense it's not a question of choosing between them necessarily. They are both good. They both represent an implementation of the Ideal in different ways. It's an aspect, perhaps, of the precept about entertaining liberal views. You don't say that everybody should spend their whole life in solitude; you don't say that everybody should be devoted to doing good to others. You recognize that there are different ways of following the spiritual path. Some people might choose to follow one path, someone might; others might choose the follow the other way. But neither of them can be said to be mistaken, if they adopt that particular way sincerely, and realizing that that is the best thing for them to do.

But, yes, one could say that ultimately, whether one is in solitude or whether one is unselfishly devoted to doing good to others, one needs to transcend the distinction between self and others. Because you could be passing your whole life in solitude and be practising metta bhavana the whole time, and be directing your positive thoughts towards other people.

On the other hand, you could be devoted, apparently, to doing good to others and be devoted really sincerely and actually help others, but who are you helping most? You are helping yourself. So you can't really differentiate, too much at least, between following one path and following the other: helping yourself and living in solitude, and helping others and living among other people. Because, ultimately, whether you approach from one angle or the other, you are transcending that dichotomy. In a more provisional sense, you are helping yourself by helping others and helping others by helping yourself. In a higher sense there is no self and others as a sort of irreducible duality.

But there are several points to notice about this precept number ten. 'In being unselfishly devoted to doing good to others' - you don't have any self-interest in it, you are genuinely devoted to doing good to others, to them. You're in it for their benefit, not for yours, in a narrow, selfish, egoistic sense. You're not out for any personal advantage. You're not out to make money out of helping others, you're not out to gain name and fame out of helping others; you're doing it just to help them. And you're also doing it by means of wise methods - so what does this emphasize?

Susiddhi: Skilful means.

S: Skilful means. It's not easy to do good to others; we do have a whole category of persons that we refer to as 'do-gooders', the suggestion being that that is their occupation and their profession, almost, and they do it regardless of whether they are actually benefiting the objects, or the victims, of their activities or not. So 'by means of wise methods', skilful methods, really seeing others, really seeing, really understanding what is good for them and helping them to achieve that, not doing good to them against their wishes and by force, and perhaps doing them harm rather than good - not that.

[113]
So 'In being unselfishly devoted to doing good to others, by means of wise methods, one does not err.' One could say, paraphrasing a bit, social workers rush in where angels fear to tread. Or social workers rush in where Bodhisattvas fear to tread. You sometimes hear on the radio dreadful mistakes made by social workers, dreadful - it seems unbelievable, incredible, even making allowance for human error and all that sort of thing. And the mistakes which are made result in people dying, people being killed.

Devaraja: Particularly in that area of social work, it seems, the mistakes one reads about, it all seems to kind of come down to all those pseudo-liberalisms a lot of the time.

S: Yes. Sometimes it is a genuine mistake which apparently could not have been avoided, but very often it isn't a mistake of that sort. I was reading about a case only a few days ago, where it seems pretty certain that a certain - I think it was a mother - was going to kill her child if she was left alone with it, and this was known, but for some reason or other it wasn't possible to separate her from the child - some technicality or something - so within half an hour of the social worker leaving her, she'd killed the child. And the social worker said he knew she was going to kill it but he couldn't do anything about it. Apparently the rules didn't permit him doing anything about it.

I think one can say that one can't really do much good to others or for others unless one has achieved quite a measure of at least psychological stability and emotional positivity oneself.

Otherwise one becomes subjectively involved, you allow yourself to become part of the other person's problem, or even they become part of your problem, you become part of each other's problems, and you get into an even more problematical situation together.

Roger: It's only something which has been recently understood, because there were times when this was actively encouraged - you should take upon the burden of other people's problems, ... Engross yourself in their whole way of being.

S: Perhaps this is a left-over or hangover from one of the less pleasant aspects of Christianity - you should be a bit like Christ, as it were, take upon yourself the sufferings of the world.

Mike: You find this very much in the Centre, with some people who come down, like they seem to be sort of psychological cases and doctor's just given up and said, 'oh try meditation'. [Laughter]

S: Well, that is probably the most sensible thing he's said.

Mike: And they stay over and do communication exercises and you can feel yourself being drained. But beforehand, I used to sit there with a Christian attitude saying, 'Oh, you poor man,' just giving out - in the end I'd just feel really very drained and a little bit resentful as well, and not at all feeling as if I'd done any good. Subhuti just used to say, because he used to be a psychiatric nurse, 'You've just got to be very strong and not put yourself in that situation.'

S: After I came back from India I became involved with a lot of people, the sort of people who were coming along, say, to the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara in those days, and as it seemed to me at first people were coming along and wanting to be helped, but it dawned on me after a little while that, in the case of some of these people, they didn't want to be helped at all. This is what they said, but actually they wanted to continue having whatever problem it was that they did have; not only that, they wanted to draw you into their problem, just like a spider trying to draw you [114] into his web. So the way in which they would approach you and start involving you was, 'Please help me, I need your help.' So, with the best will in the world, you'd say, 'What is your problem? Tell me about it.' You tried to help. But it dawned on me after a while with some of these people that actually they wanted to hang on to their problem and didn't want their problem to be solved; that was the last thing they wanted, but that they were trying to involve you in their problem, and draw you in, drag you in.

So after a while I was very quickly able to detect this. And you either had to cut off contact with these people completely or be very blunt and confront them with it. And one of their techniques is to try to get you into a double-bind situation; they try to create a double-bind situation, and they're very cunning in doing this. For instance, there was one woman who would say - she came to see me again and again about this - that she just had to leave her husband, she just couldn't go on living with her husband; if she did, she'd go crazy. So I'd say, 'OK, leave your husband.' 'Oh no, I can't do that. No, if I left him, he'd have a breakdown. I couldn't be responsible for a thing like that. I couldn't have that on my conscience.' 'OK, stay with your husband.' 'Oh no, I can't stay with him, I'll go crazy. What shall I do?'

You see? You are supposed to solve that problem. Of course, you can't, it's impossible, nobody could solve it. But they present it to you as a problem ... 'Please help me, I want help.'

If you can't solve their problem, you're pretty useless. So you struggle to solve this insoluble problem, and they've got you just where they want you. They can have the luxury of revelling in the problem. If you try to say, 'Maybe you should think in terms of leaving your husband', then they can take the line 'Oh no, I couldn't possibly leave him, he depends upon me, he'd have a collapse, I'd be responsible'. So, all right, you try that for a while and that's the response. Then, of course, you shift and say, 'Maybe you should do the other thing' - 'Oh no, I couldn't do that either.' They've got you. So they make you shift from one to another, and you can spend a whole afternoon like this, or many afternoons, if you're not careful. And they've got you in that double-bind situation, at least that is what they try to create. So that they present you with an insoluble problem, and insist that you solve it. That's how they involve you.

So one should just either steer clear or say, 'Look, do you know what you're doing? Do you realize what you're doing? You don't want to solve this problem.' Or in this case, I said, 'I don't think your husband would have a breakdown if you left. He might welcome it.' 'Oh no, no, he wouldn't, he's absolutely dependent upon me, so I can't leave him.' 'All right, stay with him.' 'Oh, I can't possibly, I'd go mad.' 'Well, try meditating.' 'I've tried meditation, it doesn't work.'

Devaraja: What did you do in the end?

Roger: Formed the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.

S: Stopped trying, realized it was useless. So you just cannot allow yourself to be used in this way. Actually, sometimes these people - they're not weak; they say, 'I'm very weak, I'm in danger of a collapse.' They're as hard and tough as old boots, they're much tougher than you, they've got more energy than you, but it's taken a negative turn. And in a way they've got more strength than you, very often, you're not a match for them. So you shouldn't even try, keep well away. Let someone who is older and more experienced than you really call their bluff. If you send them out with a flea in their ear and they go away really angry and vowing they're not ever coming back again, well, that's pretty good, you've done pretty well.

[115]
Mike: The idea I had in the early days, before I sorted this one out, is that 'Oh, I'm putting them off the Dharma.' That's virtually sort of 'I'm putting them off God' sort of. But I don't usually fall into that any more.

S: They may just be trying to latch on to the Dharma in a way which is just not possible, and you're justified in throwing them back upon themselves. That's the only way they can ever approach the Dharma anyway. Sometimes, of course, you do get people who are genuinely in need of help and whom you can help, but I think you can sort them out pretty quickly.

Devaraja: Usually that sort of person wants to follow your advice anyway. They welcome it.

S: Yes, and there is advice that can be given and acted upon. One of the signs of the other people is they ask for advice, and you give it, but they immediately reject it, or for some reason or other they can't follow the advice. They want to keep the problem and have it solved too. What they tell you consciously is not what they really want at all, they don't want the problem solved, they want to keep the problem.

___: How do they get into that state in the first place - is it something that happens in childhood?

S: I did think about this quite a bit. The conclusion to which I came was that they were motivated by intense resentment, which they were for some reason or other unable or afraid, perhaps, to show; so they expressed their resentment by putting you into this impossible predicament. They'd got you then. Or sometimes they were people who just needed to be in control of the situation, and this was a means of controlling you. They had you at their mercy, as it were, because here they had you trying to solve this insoluble problem for them. They'd got you where they wanted you then. Or they were people who had come to think of themselves in a certain way and wanted to confirm themselves in that particular role, and they could do l rejected and they do everything they can to make you reject them by their behaviour, so that they can go on feeling that they are rejected, and that their feeling of being rejected was justified. But they actually provoke you to reject them.

So these are the sort of things that you may sometimes come up against, the sort of people you sometimes come up against. I think with a bit of practice you'll soon be able to spot them within a matter of minutes of talking to them. They need quite strong treatment, which it may be quite difficult to give them. I think an indirect approach is - not in terms of their problem. You can, say, ask them to do something; that's one good way, just get them doing something. Say, 'Would you mind just sweeping this up for us?' or something like that, get them doing something. Especially if they arrive early specially to buttonhole you. You say, 'I've got a lot to do. Come on, do you mind giving me a hand?' - put a dustpan and brush into their hands.

Any further point arise from this? - 'In being unselfishly devoted to doing good to others by means of wise methods, one does not err.'

One shouldn't take too much thought about doing good to others. The opportunities, the occasions, will present themselves easily enough, especially in the context of community living. It's not a question of being on the lookout for, or going in search of, some great big spectacular opportunity of doing good to others. There are lots of little ways in which you can help out - as I said, especially if you live in a community. Or if you live at home, in a family. You don't need to go searching for opportunities to do [116] good to others, you've got plenty of them as it is.

Clive: In a way it's a responsibility - doing good to others, for others. For instance, somebody might choose to do lots of little things for people, and someone else might choose to do one thing, with the intention of it being useful for other people.

S: Well, essentially, it's a question in a way not even of thinking of doing good to others, but of seeing the needs of the situation as a whole, and what needs to be done in relation to those needs. And not as it were thinking too much whether it's a big thing or a small thing or one thing or a number of things; sometimes one can't really distinguish, one thing passes over into another.

Clive: It's an attitude of mind.

S: Doing the washing up passes over into putting the cups and saucers away. Is it one thing or is it two things? So one should be able to look at a situation and say 'That needs doing', but

not thinking in terms of whether it's for you or for other people or whether somebody else hasn't done it or should have done it, etc. It needs doing, OK, I'll do it; just like that.

Susiddhi: It's quite a common situation, to do something, but you're thinking all the time about whether you should be doing it or who should have done it.

S: Yes. Well, one can even think in that way to a limited extent, because, especially within a community - all right, yes, you might with the best will in the world just do something because you see it needs to be done, but then eventually it might dawn on you that some people within the community are not, so to speak, pulling their weight, and therefore that itself is something that needs to be attended to within the context of the community; because if in a community there are some people who are pulling their weight or more than their weight and others who are not, it's not good for anybody. So therefore one is justified in saying, 'Look, such-and-such people are not pulling their weight', or to say to them, 'You are not pulling your weight', in the interests of the community as a whole, not because you individually resent having to do a bit more; though it might come to that if the situation continues for too long.

Susiddhi: It becomes an unhealthy situation, ...

S: Yes, it's an unhealthy situation.

Susiddhi: It can be quite complicated where people pull their weight in different ways. Some people are very regular in doing things, and others won't do things. They just don't see they need to be done. But then suddenly they'll go and spend half a day painting something or tidying up.

S: Because people don't always see eye to eye as to what is important. You might think it very important to have the floor swept; they might think it much more important to put a pretty picture up on the wall.

Susiddhi: That's right, yes. One chap would sweep the floor regularly, but it would never pass through his mind to put a picture up.

I've been thinking while we've been talking about this - the last couple of precepts: the just sort of foetal stage the Friends is in. I've just been thinking of people who would like to go away into the hills and meditate and other people who have the potentiality to be very good at other things; and obviously people - I have the feeling, anyway - that people are going to be much more [117] specialized, and get more of a chance to be much more specialized inside the Friends in years to come.

S: I think this will be the natural tendency as the whole Movement becomes bigger. Now we can accommodate, say, people with accounting skills or people who can paint. We couldn't earlier on, there wasn't room for them, we weren't big enough then. But now I think we could do with two or three accountants, actually, four or five. Even a lawyer, we'd like to have a lawyer, we'd like to have our own solicitor, have someone with legal qualifications.

Devaraja: A doctor.

S: We've got, or we are in process of getting, two or three doctors, including an acupuncturist. At one time we didn't even have our own yoga teachers, but now we've got eight or ten or twelve of them. I believe we're going to be having our own karate teacher some time. It wasn't you, was it Brian? It was somebody else perhaps.

Brian: I was going to do it, but I found out that I didn't really want to do it.

S: No, there was somebody else as well. You found karate incompatible?

Brian: Yes.

S: Beyond a certain point, as it were? What is the point? Brown belt, or black belt?

Brian: I think - yes - once you get very involved in it it would either have to be choosing to follow up karate or choosing to follow up meditation.

S: I did get the impression some years ago, when we did have the karate classes under the auspices of the Friends, that if you weren't careful it could take up all your time, all your spare time and all your energy, and you just had to get more and more into it. In fact, it was that pull from the people who were running the karate club that they wanted you to get into it and they wanted to build up their club and have a lot of instructors, which meant full-time people. But that was the tendency.

Anything apart from that, apart from the question of time?

Brian: Yes, also I think basically the energy is too crude that's used for karate. It tends to stimulate too much crude energy, if you are practising at quite a high standard. That's what I felt.

S: Of course that might not be bad for some people if their energy is as it were weak or too delicate; a bit of karate might do them good.

Brian: Yes, I think most people can benefit from karate, but after a certain level it's not got a lot to give you.

S: Anyway, how did we get on to that?

Susiddhi: Specialization.

S: Specialization.

Susiddhi: It brings its own problems.

Steve: Before that it was people don't see eye to eye what needs to be done.

[118]
S: Some people don't mind living in a completely untidy environment, even a dirty environment. Others are quite particular about that sort of thing. So within a community there has to be a general consensus about what needs to be done. Some people might think quite

genuinely that time spent in cooking and cleaning is just a waste of time, they just want to get on with their meditation. If you really do feel that way and you do get on with your meditation, maybe they've got a point; if they are taking their meditation as seriously as that. But I don't think many people do.

Susiddhi: Mind you, there's a difficulty there. Untidiness plus tidiness equals untidiness. Noise plus silence equals noise.

S: Yes right, there's no middle way. Yes, you can't, being a tidy person, live with an untidy person. You can't, being a quiet person, live with a noisy person. You can't have your silence and let him have his noise; that isn't possible, because his noise takes away your silence, so you have to agree.

Steve: To agree and raise both aspects of your own difference.

Susiddhi: Sometimes you don't actually get worked-out agreement, but I think you always get an influence; one always influences the other.

S: Ideally, you should either hammer out an agreement or certain people should leave the community; because, if there's too great a degree of disagreement you can't in fact create a spiritual community. If some members of the community want pop music on very loudly, while others just want a quieter, more peaceful, atmosphere, there is no basis for reconciliation, so somebody has to leave, if neither will give way - give way happily and positively.

Susiddhi: I've always thought I'd defeat before that, I can see how it could be a positive thing, just to agree to differ. The sort of community you thought was conducive to your practice and your growth simply wasn't the sort of community they were prepared to have.

S: Yes, right. You may have to acknowledge that different kinds of people need different kinds of community, which can be validly communities in all cases - though, of course, again, there may be degrees; that some spiritual communities are not really spiritual communities at all, they're not much more than communes. But maybe some people don't want to live in a real spiritual community, they just want to live in a sort of commune; well, all right, let them be clear about that, and not try to - if you want a spiritual community and they want a commune, you're really at loggerheads and you should split. Let them set up a commune and you set up a spiritual community. It's just a question of clear thinking.

Steve: And being open about what you feel, what you want.

S: Yes, right, not just suppressing it and feeling resentful when you hear the pop music blaring out at 2 o'clock in the morning.

Steve: More and more I find just to do the best for somebody is to be open about what you are thinking about them, or just being open, telling the truth.

S: And one must remember that even though people's needs may vary and though there may be quite legitimately different kinds of spiritual community, though there may be even different degrees of communities, the gravitational pull is always at work, and one must

always watch oneself for rationalizations and backslidings and semi-deliberate shortcomings and so on. And [119] one might say 'I just need a more relaxed sort of spiritual community. I want to be myself' - but what you really mean is 'I just want is to live in a commune. I don't want really want to live in a spiritual community at all.' So one needs to call things by their right names.

Anyway, we'd better finish in ten minutes' time, so we don't miss the meditation today. So just look back over what we've done these two days and see if there's anything that needs any bit of final comment or clarification. [Pause]

Do you get any general, overall impression from these two blocks of yogic precepts? How, for instance, do they differ, if they differ, from, say, two chapters of the Dhammapada? Have they any distinctive flavour? Is there any general characteristic?

Roger: The first thing - the whole Precepts of the Gurus that I can remember reading a long time ago and being very inspired and being very strong about them because they seemed to be immensely practical, and seem to show up how it's very easy to pretend you're doing one thing but in actual fact you aren't doing that. It seemed to be amazing that some people always considered that it was categorically stated as being necessary to be aware of continuously.

S: They also seem quite balanced and many-sided, don't they? They are constantly correcting any tendency to go to extremes. [Pause]

Roger: They do have a feeling of being well digested, well understood, they aren't things just brought out because you want to knock off ten precepts. It's a matter of something you've been doing for years, and ...

S: Yes, that's true. They've been digested or distilled from a whole tradition over generations of teachers and disciples.

Susiddhi: One thing we kept saying yesterday was that you can't know someone, whether someone's real or just putting on an act, unless you're actually in contact with him quite a lot.

S: Yes. This is just one aspect of the Precepts' general stressing of the importance of personal experience. All the Precepts seem to remain quite close to personal experience.

Devaraja: The thing I wanted to ask you yesterday was - when we were talking about things like passports and bureaucracy and all that - you burned or threw away your passport in India, didn't you? How did you find, what sort of effect did that have? Did you find it created more difficulties?

S: No, I didn't actually, but that was because I was moving around as a Buddhist monk and because it was India, and people are often very understanding, or just not bothering in the case of the so-called holy man, about things like that. But when I wanted to come back to England I had to take thought for things like that; but otherwise in India at that time they weren't really bothering about ...

They wanted to know that I was English, that was the great thing. For a while I just wouldn't say because I didn't want to identify myself as it were. In the end I had to. They wanted to

know that I was English, because English people were OK, they didn't have to register with the police, but Americans had to, because English people and holders of British passports weren't foreigners, whereas Americans, of course, were. So in the end I had to say 'I'm English', then they'd say, 'Oh, that's OK, then.' I wasn't bothered after that. But I regarded that actually as a [120] compromise. I couldn't adhere to my point of not identifying myself as any particular nationality.

Quite often I was for some reason or other regarded as being American, not English. I don't know quite why that was, but it did happen quite a lot.

Devaraja: When you were coming to England, did you - it must have been quite strange having to go and get a passport.

S: No, because I had to get it in India, which meant I had to get a copy of my birth certificate, and then get a form and fill it in and send it to the High Commission in New Delhi, who kindly sent me back a passport, and that was that. so, no, I can't say that it felt strange, but I did regret that I wasn't really able to stick to my point of not identifying myself with any particular nationality, which I thought was in a way an essential part of being a monk in the sense of Going Forth. I didn't want to think that I was English, or was anything of that sort, any more; but society insisted. So I wasn't really quite happy about it. In a way I'm still not very happy about it. I think there's far too much pressure on us in this way from the state, from society and so on.

It's strange in a general way how quickly one can get used to anything. You can get used to having a passport, you can get used to not having a passport. You can get used to living on your own, you can get used to living with other people. Habit is quite a great thing, in a way, so you can make it work your way or you can allow it to work against you. That's why it's so important to form positive habits to take the place of negative or at least neutral ones. We find it quite easy to get into the habit of eating three times a day; we may not find it so easy to get into the habit of meditating twice a day. It ought to be. In fact, it is easy if we form the habit; there will be a natural tendency just to go on doing that thing, because it's an integral part of our lives. So for a while we need to do that quite a lot and to build up all sorts of positive habits. Maybe when we've been ...

[End of side 1, side 2]

- not before we've built up positive habits and stuck to them over a period of, well, yes, 15 or 20 years, let's say. When you've been, say, meditating regularly every day for 15 or 20 years, then you can safely meditate when you feel like it.

Anyway, you'd better go and meditate, otherwise I'll have to go on talking for an hour! [Laughter] .

Voices: Thank you very much, Bhante.

END OF SEMINAR

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