

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

From "Some Sayings of the Buddha" - Woodward.

THE STABILITY OF SOCIETIES

CONDITIONS OF COMMUNAL STABILITY

Now at that time the venerable Ananda was Standing behind the Exalted One and fanning him. And the Exalted One said to the venerable Ananda:

'How now, Ananda? Have you ever heard that the Vajjians repeatedly assemble together and in large numbers?'

'I have heard so, Lord.'

'Well, Ananda, so long as the Vajjians shall assemble repeatedly and in large numbers, just so long may the prosperity of the Vajjians be looked for and not their decay.

... So long, Ananda, as the Vajjians assemble in harmony and disperse in harmony: so long as they do their business in harmony: so long as they introduce no revolutionary ordinance, or break up no established ordinance, but abide by the old-time Vajjian Norm, as ordained: So long as they honour, reverence, esteem, and worship the elders among the Vajjians, and deem them worthy of listening to: so long as the women and maidens of the families dwell without being forced or abducted: so long as they honour, revere, esteem, and worship the Vajjian shrines, both the inner and the outer: so long as they allow not the customary offerings, given and performed, to be neglected; so long as the customary watch and ward over the Arhants that are among them is well kept, so that they may have free access to the realm and having entered may dwell pleasantly therein: just so long as they do these things, Ananda, may the prosperity of the Vajjians be looked for and not their decay.

[2]

S: Perhaps first of all we should say a few words about the background of this section. The episode seems to belong to the later years if not the last years of the Buddha's life, the Buddha's earthly career, and I think I have mentioned before that from a political point of view, especially during the later part of the Buddha's career, the whole of north-eastern India perhaps even the greater part of the whole of northern India itself is over shadowed by the conflict that was developing between the Kingdom of Nagada on the one hand and the Kingdom of Kosila on the other. The Kingdom of Nagada corresponding at that time to what is now roughly what is now Bihar and the Kingdom of Kosila to roughly to what is now Uttarpradesh. In other words north-eastern India on the one hand and northern India on the other or north-central India even. And these two great Kingdoms were in the process of, as it were, mopping up all the small formerly independent Kingdoms and republics and so on, and Nagada especially was expanding rapidly and absorbing and assimilating a number of other states and tribes and people. One of these peoples or rather group of people was known as the Vajjians. The Vajjians were a sort of confederacy, a confederation of tribes living in north-eastern India and bordering the Nagadian Kingdom, the Nagadian Empire as it became afterwards, and the king of those days, the King of Nagada of those days who was Javasakra who succeeded his father Bimbisara whom he put out of the way, this is also partly how we know that it is towards the end of the Buddha's lifetime was expanding and he wanted to know whether he had any chance of overcoming the Vajjian. So he sent his minister to the Buddha to ask what the Buddha thought his chances were, rather a surprising sort of thing to do. So when the minister who was sent, Putareka, Ananda was standing behind the Buddha fanning him over the beginning of this section, So the Buddha didn't answer the question directly, telling the King that he would not be able to overcome the Vajjians, but he said to

Ananda but not replying even directly to the minister, that so long as the Vajjians observe these conditions as it were of communal stability they will prosper, they will flourish, they will not decay. In other words the suggestion is that so long as they live in that particular way no external power will be able to overthrow them. Unfortunately sometime later they were overthrown presumably because they were not heeding that advice which the Buddha also says he informally given them, were not observing these conditions, so that is the background. And of course subsequently in the next section the Buddha applies these to the Sangha itself.

Any query or comment on what the Buddha says, so far as it pertains to the Vajjians so far as it were as it pertains to a mundane society as it were, not a spiritual society? Or any question even about this whole business of the mundane society as it were to some extent at least reflecting the spiritual society on its own level. because the Buddha in a sense, clearly regarded them as corresponding in some way, because he gives the conditions of communal stability for the Vajjians the social, political and cultural stability and then he goes on to apply that to the Sangha in a purely spiritual sense or at least in a more spiritual sense. So there is a sort of vertical parallelism you could say between the two.

[2]

Chintamani: It is a question of orientation isn't it? If you are orientating in a certain direction you make it easier for people to learn to dedicate themselves.

S: This is true, and this is why for instance the Buddha set forth the aims. "So long as the customary watch and ward over the Arhants that are among them is well kept, so that they may have free access to the realm and having entered may dwell pleasantly therein: just so long as they do these things, Ananda, may the prosperity of the Vajjians be looked for and not their decay", This is quite important. I rather think that Arhants here, is not to be taken in the later technical sense of those who have realized Nirvana. Arhant literally means a worthy-one, a spiritually worthy person, someone leading a spiritual life. Someone worthy of respect and devotion, So in the early years of Buddhism this term was used in a very general sense. Before the time of the Buddha Arhants were viewed in a rather secular sense, as I think Mrs Rhys Davids has pointed out in a sense rather like that of "our worship" or even "His worship!" It was applied to Aryan people, Local Worthies who were respected by the particular village or tribe. And then of course it was taken over and given a more purely, a more specifically spiritual meaning. So it came to mean a spiritually worthy person. So probably the Buddha here uses it in the sense simply of the people living a full time spiritual life, especially, the wanderers and particularly perhaps his own disciples. So it is rather interesting that the Buddha lay this down as a condition of welfare, a condition of stability, even of a secular society, that it gives free scope to the exercise of the spiritual life. The Buddha is not even saying that you should believe what the Arhants teach or even that you should follow that teaching, but at least you should look after those who are lead a spiritual life and not hinder them, permit them to come and go freely, Presumably also support them with food and clothing and so on. So in a sense the Buddha is saying that I have left a society, less even a secular community, at least recognizes the existence, the importance of spiritual values, then it is not going to be a stable society. He is not even saying that it should be a sort of theocratic state, that everybody should be dragooned into leading a spiritual life, but at least there must be the freedom for those who do want to lead a spiritual life to do that. A secular society, a secular community should cooperate with them, with those who want to lead a spiritual life.

Sumedha: Does this mean a secular society which does not even tolerate or permit spiritual

people will be unstable because what immediately comes to my mind, is the example of Communist China. Now perhaps the propaganda is biased, they do not seem to encourage people to enter monasteries or to lead a religious life, but they seem to be remarkably stable morally and socially. How would you explain this?

S: But how long have they been stable, if they are stable? You could say; I would be inclined to look at it like this that in each and every human being there is a spiritual potential. Obviously it is going to be more active and more developed in some than in others but if you persistently sit upon that, if you regulate people too much, if you don't allow anybody to lead a spiritual life, well what happens? That will ferment that will become a disrupting factor. People will want to upset your stability because they are not being given the scope for their own creativity for the leading of the spiritual life. So if they feel the urge to lead the spiritual life or just to be different strongly enough and you are not permitting them [3] to do that, the system which does not permit them to do it, eventually they will become enemies of the system. So that it isn't a very stable situation if some of your best people feel that the existing set up, even though it may be stable the time being, is threatening them and their best interest.

Sumedha: They feel spiritually frustrated, as it were!

S: Yes. In other words a society which frustrates people spiritually in the long run, actively frustrates them spiritually, they are not permitting them to lead a spiritual life or making it very difficult, in the long run is not going to be a very stable society.

Sumedha: Even if it is a very moral society?

S: People don't have an urge to be moral they have an urge to be spiritual.

Sumedha: You mean that spiritual is individual, where as moral is more sort of collective social.

S: You could say that. There is according to Buddhism an aspect of the individual spiritual life which is ethical and moral but it is certainly not the whole of it. I think the spiritual urge as distinct from, at least or a develop out of the moral urge is very much stronger. People are much more likely to die for a spiritual principle than for a moral principle I think.

Sumedha: Mere sort of rectitude is rather dry, it can be rather dry, but the spiritual is not dry and it goes beyond the merely moral.

S: Right.

Lokamitra: There is a point here that seems important for us and it sometimes it seems to me that we are not so much trying to make the Dharma available to people as to try and create the conditions for them, for them to practise it.

S: Right. This is why from the very beginning there has been in the Movement an emphasis on Right Livelihood. This is also why currently, I am trying to suggest different ways in which the Movement can be self-sufficient. [4] Recently it occurred to me that as a movement we have four great things to offer. First of all there is a definite path of spiritual development through meditation, Puja, communication and so on - a means of individual spiritual

development. Secondly, we have a spiritual community, an Order, which in Buddhist form, at least, is not available elsewhere in this country, maybe not in Europe, certainly not to the depth and with the thoroughness that we have. Thirdly, we have to offer a philosophy of life. This is not simply the traditional Buddhist philosophy, in its untranslated and uninterpreted form. We have in addition an exposition of this in more contemporary terms as the whole teaching about the path of the Higher Evolution So that if we want to express our basic philosophy to someone who isn't going to respond to the traditional Buddhist approach, or who is going to be put off by the traditional Buddhist Pali and Sanskrit terms, we can explain the whole thing to him simply in terms of the Higher Evolution without even mentioning Buddhism. Fourthly and lastly we have to offer a sort of blue print, though this is still in the very early stages - of a whole new culture, civilization and society, remodelled, as it were, in accordance with our basic principles, as so to make it possible, or at least much more easy, for people to develop themselves spiritually. Otherwise everything is against you. You are trying to live in a way which is contradicted by most of the people around you, by circumstances, by conditions. Nothing is made easy; everything is made more difficult. We realize the truth of this when we go on retreats. In fact we've known this from the very beginning. It's as though on retreat there is nothing working against you, except your own mental conditioning, your own weaknesses, your own imperfections; but your circumstances, your environment, are cooperating. So I feel that if we are going to have a very large number of people, if we want a very large number of people devoting themselves to individual spiritual development, we have just to make it easier for them. It's too difficult for the average person at present. Circumstances are too much against him. In other words if any considerable number of people are to be involved in the process of spiritual development, which is the only, the truly human way to live, then vast changes in society, civilization and culture are necessary.

Chintamani: It occurs to me that the actual creating of those conditions is in itself a practice.

S: Indeed it is. Right. I saw this very clearly in New Zealand, because New Zealand is first of all a country a bit bigger than Britain as I mentioned in the talk, over three million people, they haven't got as nearly as much weight of convention as we have here. They are not so cluttered-up with cultural bric-a-brac, which is not longer really very useful. They are not much influenced by cultural and intellectual fashion or spiritual fashions. They are psychologically pretty healthy and they are quite open minded and I think it is a wonderful thing and I am quite convinced that it is possible for the movement there to spread to such an extent and so easily that the whole of New Zealand could be effected and influenced of the good by this. But here it is going to be very very much more difficult, about a hundred times more difficult and probably in Finland two hundred times more difficult. I began to see very clearly in New Zealand the way in which a whole society could be remodelled. So you could have an almost ideal society and it is possible. It is not just a sort of pipe dream.

Lokamitra: So there are two aspects to this question, one is an outward going a converting of the gods, as it were, like Padmasambhava did in Tibet.

[5]

S: Yes.

Lokamitra: And one is a more inward thing of working on it ourselves to create the situation for ourselves and that is the most important you see for us to do at the moment or at least to concentrate on.

S: We started with number one, this seems in a way quite natural and quite right. We started with meditation classes once a week at Sakura. We started with individual development. Then the Order came into existence where a number of people were devoting themselves in this way, committing themselves in this way. And then as a medium of communication with people who weren't taking very happily or readily to traditional modes of expression the philosophy came into existence, the restatement of the ancient teachings, but then we find that we are getting bigger, we are getting stronger, we're getting more confidence and we begin to feel ready to start taking on the world, as it were. Because we see so many of our fellow members suffer and are just not able to do what we could have otherwise could have done, at least to a greater extent, there is just so little cooperation from the environment, even active opposition, not from unsympathetic individuals who are unsympathetic as individuals, but just from the existing set-up and the way things have come about maybe through nobody's fault

Sumedha: Just inevitably?

S: Just inevitably as it were, though not very likely to have. Here the Buddha is, as it were, making clear, that even in the case of a secular society, as it were, though of his society which was not completely secular, the Vajjians society because they have got their shrines and their offerings. It's sort of ethnic you could say that it's an ethnic religion going on, well all right using that term secular society, even if you. are going to have a secular society, the secular society itself must respect spiritual values or allow free scope to the exercise of those values or the application of those values by those who want to. Otherwise you would be sowing the seeds of discontent

Jitari: In this secular society that we have referred to here, to the Vajjians, what is the reference to the shrines both inner and outer?

S: I am not sure what is meant by both inner and outer here it may be public and private. Public meaning those that are kept up by the whole tribe. Private meaning the individual house hold shrine, house hold gods and divinities: and that only my guess. I am not quite sure. The word for shrine is Tithia incidentally or Tactia in Sanskrit. Shrine is probably the nearest. We have many of these sort of things in India today. If you get there a stone covered with Bougainvillea at the foot of a tree and it is sometimes adorned with flowers, and is given some sort of reverence and you believe maybe a god lives in the tree, a tree spirit - well that's the shrine, a Tithia. This is 'Hope' religion with the tribe and its disciplinary culture [6] and is quite important on its own level, it helps bind the two tribes together. Needless to say in industrialized countries most of this sort of thing has been simply destroyed. They even made what or hadn't been destroyed before, long ago perhaps by the church.

Chintamani: There are still a few remnants of that left in the British Isles particularly in Scotland.

Khema: There is a lot of that in Ireland, lots of little shrines dotted everywhere a bit like ... without a figure of any sort or maybe just a alcove.

S: Or maybe sort of nominally Christian, but the feeling of them is as it were...

Khema: Is connected with folklore, you really fed it.

Sumedha: it's a focus for the tribe's aspiration and because it is not general, that specifically it has more power when things become more general and diffuse the individual cannot respond to them any more.

S: They are perhaps a way of relating to the powers of nature.

Sumedha: The people want to feel if they live in an agricultural community where they depend on the crops that nature is responsive and their way of feeling that nature is responsive is that the gods are there who will respond to them. Whereas modern man doesn't feel that so much.

S: Also, recent researches have tended to show that there is a sort of as it were psychic connection between man on the one hand and the vegetable kingdom on the other. There isn't just myths, there isn't just sort of a up-moded superstition there is something in it as it were on a psychical level and finds expression in the sort of copious.

Sumedha: Even on a purely materialistic outlook one would say that; that's quite logical because we have come out of nature so we cannot be totally unconnected with it.

S: We transcend nature, but at the same time there is a large part of us which belongs to nature. Do you want to go through these and study them in detail as applied to "the secular"

Khema: I am interested in the one about women and maidens in the family because it seems to be very positive and you don't often get that.

S: Where is that ?

Khema: P.102 'as long as the women and maidens of the families dwell without being forced or abducted" It's like giving space for the family which is possibly more positive than you often get on these writings.

S: Forced presumably not forced into any marriage they don't want, not just made off with. In other words treated as individuals and not as pieces of human property.

Sumedha; Wasn't abduction quite common and it is said the Sakyas the warrior caste would often abduct their brides rather than go through a marriage ceremony.

S: Well this was of course common in many primitive societies, like the famous instance in Roman history of the rape of the Sabine women.

Chintamani: This whole area seems like The Buddha is taking a basic chaos and making a very important pattern of it, where at the centre there is the respect for the gods.

S: P102,, "Assemble in harmony and disperse in harmony", this is pretty obvious. "Do their business in harmony; so long as they introduce no revolutionary ordinance or break up no established ordinance, but abide by the old time Vajjian Norm, Dharma." This might be considered a bit [7] controversial. Does it give it expression to pure conservatism.

Sumedha: Were the Vajjians a republican society?

S: Yes

Sumedha: And Nagada was a Kingdom trying to incorporate the republican and destroy the republicans,

S: What is the Vajjian Dharma? It probably presumably means the principle upon which that whole way of life was based. Not that any particular rule should ever be changed. Presumably they could remain faithful to the ideal presumably it means that. Otherwise it sounds quite conservative in the modern sense.

Vangisa: You can equate conservatism with Capitalism.

S: "...Break up no established ordinances". The assumption being that the established ordinances are really grounded on the Vajjian Dharma. It is almost as though the Buddha is conceiving of the Vajjian Confederacy of group or tribe, this republican form of government as being more or less ideal so that any departure would only be degeneration or a disruption. They have achieved a really balanced, stable, healthy and ethical way of life collectively. So any departure could only be in the nature of a breaking away or a breaking down.

Sumedha: I remember reading a very interesting book called "The Buddha" By Trevor Ling several years ago and he suggested that the Sangha, the community of monks was modelled on the kind of democratic republican set up that you had in these small states. The Buddha was very strongly influenced by the idea of democratic republicanism and he was against the idea of monarchy.

S: Well, yes and no, First of all I am not very happy about talking of the Buddha being influenced. Even if there hadn't been any republics around the Buddha may well have given the Sangha as it were a republican constitution because that would have been the best from a spiritual point of view.

Sumedha: There is no easier way to make a prejudice respectable than to say a saint entertained it. Perhaps that is why they did it. The Buddha was recognized as an extremely developed spiritual person and if he himself endorsed the view it was respectable, it was valid.

S: Let's try as it were to paraphrase what the Buddha said are the conditions of community stability in an, as it were a secular society, not secular in the sense of past industrious, but as not completely at least dedicated a universal religion were it all comes... it's ideal. First of all the Buddha says that there must be harmony. This pretty obvious anywhere and secondly that it should be Conservative in the best sense. Remaining faithful to the original ideals of the community and not falling away from those ideals. It being assumed as it were that the ideals which forms the basis of the society were positive ideals healthy ideals and desirable ideals. And then ... we haven't discussed this revering the elders. "So long as they honour, reverence, esteem and worship the elders among the Vajjians and deem them worthy of listening to". Well that sounds a bit I was going to say reactionary doesn't it, old fashioned, again conservative in a narrow sense. But why do you think the Buddha said this? Obviously in those days when there were no books, you depended much more for your information upon older people and their memories. So older people at least from a cultural point of view in those days were obviously more important than they are now but would you therefore say that

this no longer holds good if it does hold good well what does it mean?

Lokamitra: They are closer in touch with the spirit because of being nearer the source in time.

S: One could say that.

[8]

Jitari: These older people need to be noticed because of the simple fact that they've existed longer.

Sumedha: This means old in the secular rather than in tile spiritual sense.

S: Oh yes.

Khema: I feel that this applies especially in this age and country when you think of the numbers of old people in homes just left on their own

S: It doesn't say you should look after them.

Khema: No but they say a total lack of respect for their state of being.

S: Yes.

Sumedha: The assumption: they have nothing to tell us at all.

S: Yes that's right. In certain respects they haven't because so much has happened in between when they were young and now when you are young. But that surely doesn't mean that they are totally irrelevant or there is nothing to be learnt from them. No doubt they have gathered certain lessons in that experience of life which could be heeded and listened to.

Sumedha: I think that the trouble is also that in a society like this that was an agricultural society you would have to learn from the elders as you say there were no books, consequently they were the repositories of knowledge. But in our society the structure of society, industry and science exist independently of any people and consequently the elders have nothing to teach us. The machines and the factories are there even if they are not.

S: Perhaps the Buddha also means that there must be a sort of sense of victory. Because after all the elders in a non-literate society are living history. They are embodied history . Where do you get it except from their memories? So it is also a respect for tradition in a sense of cultural tradition.

Vangisa: There is a very big difference between this attitude and any attitude we may have or may not have to old people because in this kind of society things are not changing all that quickly. The memories of the old people are continually relevant. Similarly the old people have had an opportunity during their lives to observe to reflect. They haven't spent their lives in this (made scrap court?) alleviated by television, record players and things like that . So our experience of old age pensioners, who are completely not just kept out of sight but who have in fact nothing whatever to offer us from themselves irrespective of their situation, state, repository of history or anything like that have nothing left in themselves even and are largely

shoved out of sight largely just because of that.

Sumedha: They have been gutted by the changes that are going on all the time.

S: If you were a bright young thing in your twenties you can hardly expect to be the same in the seventies. If your approach to life is sort of as it were superficial then and you were caught up in just the latest thing&. Then just by becoming old or grey old you don't become as it were a repository of wisdom without having been reflective.

Khema: Well you cannot become a repository of wisdom.

S: Well you could have become if you had lived more responsively even from the time that you were quite young.

Khema: Does that deny a sort of change after a certain age then?

S: Not necessarily. One thing a lot of your are in the position of having lived in a superficial shallow way and not perhaps even worthy [9] of respect in the way that at least some old people were in the past. They merely feel bitter and disillusioned or regretful. There is that too.

Sumedha; Mind you if you consider the political and economic circumstances in the twenties and thirties and forties., I don't think we should be too uncharitable because then who were young could not stand aside and be reflective they had to work hard to earn a living.

S: Those who were the bright young things in those days were those who had the leisure and the money to be reflective.

Sumedha; They are now bright old things because they still have the money and leisure.

S: What I am saying is something different. What I am saying is that in modern times you cannot even be a young person in the way you were a young thing in former ages. Those bright young things in the twenties didn't have any respect for their elders in those days. They did not have the aptitude for learning they were often silly and superficial. So they started off as it were on the wrong foot. So you have got to expect that they should mellow in and over the decades into mature and wise people. Maybe some of them did, maybe some of them did change a bit but a lot of them just kept up in that sort of way. Our old people are no longer, old real old people we could say because as young people they didn't start off by being really young people. We don't have old people in the traditional sense any longer partly because we no longer have young people in the traditional sense.

Sumedha: Another paradox is that one of the major ideas nowadays is the idea of evolution which is always looking towards the future, but in these societies they were much more historically minded. They regarded the past not as something that was finished but something that was continuous with theme We seem to have lost this sense of continuity with the past. Man is always thinking of the future and then forges that he has come out of the past.

S: Well it is both. I mean he is coming out of the past and he is heading towards the future. You could say that ancient man certainly, man of this period didn't have any historical sense.

He tended to regard the tribe, the group as something fixed. he is always there and he will always be there.

Sumedha; I didn't mean historical in the sense of development but in the sense of being aware there was a past which was valuable because it taught you how to behave.

S: But it wasn't a sort of a past on our sense a historical past. It was a sort of legendary past and a legendary past wasn't necessarily sort of continuous with the historical present but existing on another on a higher plane. Whereas in the case of the Greeks they believed that a few generations back they all descended from the gods.

But anyway to get back to our text it suggests respect for the past respect for your own roots, your own sources your own origins. Not just respect for individual old people though that is of course relevant too.

Jitari: This is a form of redressing ones own merit almost.

S: So you got therefore the importance of harmony, the importance of tradition in the true sense of remaining faithful to your original collective ideals. Respect for tradition especially as embodied in old people respect for your own sources and then consideration for women, not forcing or abducting, allowing freedom to them, treating them as individuals. And then keeping up ones hope religion, ones culture. And then recognizing spiritual ideals even if you are not [10] actually following them and giving people free scope to follow those ideals, those people who want to. So these are very important really aren't they?

Sumedha: Of course when it says that one should not force of abduct women, I suppose in contemporary terms that would mean that women should not be forced into a kind of role that is subservient as in the traditional roles but they should be encouraged to become individuals. But if they are pressured into a role in that sense, they are being forced and abducted because their own individualities are not being allowed.

S: I think that that is a bit too wide, because you could say that of everybody, you cannot force anyone in that case. But specifically women are mentioned, So it is more than just a sexual forcing or a sexual expectation. In other words it is violence as applied to them. Another thing: "So long as the customary watch and ward over the Arhants that are among them is well kept". Not that you are simply tolerant and allow them, you help them, you look after them, even to the extent of supplying them with food and clothing and shelter and medicine. This seems to apply particularly to the wanderers, the parivrajakas. They used, to allow them to come and go freely, look after them and allow them to follow their chosen way of life. I think that is pretty clear so let us pass on to the way which conditions of community stability are applied to a purely spiritual community.

P 103.

CONDITIONS FOR THE STABILITY OF THE ORDER

Then the Exalted One addressed the brethren, saying:

"I will teach you, brethren, seven things that prevent decay. Do ye listen to it carefully. Apply your minds, and I will speak."

"Even so, Lord", replied those brethren to the exalted One, who then said:

"So long, brethren, as the brethren shall assemble repeatedly and in large numbers, the prosperity of the brethren may be looked for and not their decay. So long as the brethren assemble in harmony and disperse in harmony, so long as they do the business of the Order in harmony. So long as they introduce no revolutionary ordinance, break up no established ordinance, but live in accordance with the appointed charges,-

So long as the elder brethren, men of many days and long ordained, fathers of the Order, men of standing in the Order,- so long as these are honoured, revered, esteemed, and deferred to,-

So long as brethren do not fall subject to that craving which arises and leads back to rebirth,-

So long as there shall be brethren who are fond of the forest life and lodging,-

So long as brethren shall establish themselves in mindfulness, with this thought "Let goodly co-mates in the righteous life come hither in the future, and let those that have already come live happily,-"

So long, brethren, as these seven things that prevent decay shall stand fast among the brethren, so long as the brethren shall be instructed therein,- ' just so long may the prosperity of the brethren be looked for, and not their decay."

S: Yes there is an interesting point here: "that prevents decay". That is suggesting that things are all right now, but that gravitational pull is always at work. So your concern would be to prevent decay, to prevent deterioration.

[11]

'Brethren, I will teach you seven other conditions that prevent decay. Do ye listen to it. Apply your minds carefully. I will speak,'

'Even so, Lord,' replied those brethren to the Exalted One, The Exalted One said:

'So long as the brethren do not delight in (worldly) activities, are not busybodies nor devoted to activities,-

So long as the brethren are not gossipers, not delighting in gossip, not devoted to gossip,-

So long as the brethren are not sluggish, not delighting in sleep ,not given to somnolence,-

So long as the brethren are not given to company, not delighting in company, not devoted to company,-

So long as the brethren are not slaves of evil desires,-

So long as the brethren are not the friends, comrades, and associates of men of evil ways,-

So long as the brethren shall not come to a stop upon the Way by the attainment of lesser excellence,-

Just so long, brethren, as these seven conditions that prevent decay shall be established and the brethren are instructed in them,- so long may the prosperity of the brethren be looked for, not their decay,'

S: Right so let's go through these one by one. When you have an existing flourishing spiritual community, when you have managed to achieve that as the Buddha had achieved in his lifetime with his disciples then it is a question simply of preventing decay. So first of all it says : "So long as the brethren shall assemble repeatedly and in large numbers". Now if you start assembling infrequently and only in very small numbers until in the end there are no meetings at all. Then you will decay, then there won't be a Sangha, there won't be a spiritual community. There will just be a lot of individualists out of contact. So this is very very important: the regular contact and abundant contact. We have certainly seen this in our own

experience. People who don't keep up regular contact with other Order Members sooner or later they just tend to fall away.

Lokamitra: Could you say something about how the movement is at the moment? In terms of the Order.

S: Well there certainly does seem to be more regular and frequent meetings than ever before. I still think though that there are a few who well there are a few not in regular touch I think they must really be looked into and looked after and every effort made, If people don't come along I don't think the situation should be just accepted, that they are not coming along and well shrug our shoulders - as it were. But they should be actively sought out and if they are going through anything for any reason that they are unable or are unwilling to come along people should keep up contact with by going along to them meeting and talking to them.

[Discussion about individuals (presumably named) not recorded]

Sumedha: If an individual Order Member resigns, it may not be because they disagree with any aspect of the Teachings but simply because they don't have regular association. Do you think that is possible? I mean we've only had one or two Order members that have resigned and they've been people who don't seem to have any association with us at all, except very, very irregularly. And I think that if one doesn't associate regularly, one's faith, in the really positive sense, is bound to diminish.

S: Also you get out of step. If you do again have a bit of contact you feel out of touch with people or it may well be they've gone [12] a bit further along the way than you have. You may not actually feel it like this or think of it in those terms, but often in fact this is what has happened. You feel very much out of touch you may even feel that they're out of touch with you, they don't understand etc, etc. You might even feel a bit resentful.

Lokamitra: When I asked that question, I was thinking of the talks about the prosperity of the Brethren, so it's the Sangha as a whole, it's one of the Three Jewels.

S: Yes, right

Lokamitra: So it's not often we think "Well I don't want to go to an Order meeting; I don't feel like it." It's not just a personal give and take situation. If you give to the Order, if you commit yourself to the Order, then when you take yourself out, you're creating a hole there.

S: Yes, right.

Lokamitra: So once you've committed yourself in that you don't commit yourself after that, then you're taking power, you're causing a leak of energy from the Order then.

S: Yes

Lokamitra: It's occurred to me further that we should regard Order meetings, especially monthly Order Friday nights and days in the same way as Full Moon Night was regarded in India. it would be impracticable for us to follow the full moon system to that extent, but we can adapt it for this reason.

S: Yes in other words you're saying that the non-attendance of an Order member is quite different from the absence of someone who is not an Order member. But if you have made that commitment and you are an Order member and then you can't turn up, it's not really that you are losing in that you are not turning up, but that the Order itself is losing.

Sumedha: If you're absent, your chair is an empty place

Lokamitra; It seems to me quite a selfish attitude, not to come to order Meetings if one can. Obviously one cannot always.

Vangisa; Very frequently one dramatises (?) people, some people don't have()attitude to Order meetings. In other words, the reasons for non-attendance are sometimes almost frivolous.

S: For instance I was told something once - this was a remark addressed to me personally and not anything at second or third hand. I forget who it was, fortunately. But I said "Well, why don't you come along" It was an Order meeting in the old days. And someone said "Well what's the point of coming along to the Order meeting? Nothing particular is going to happen. We'll only be chanting the Puja and meditating together. There's nothing special, nothing special on." This was actually said to me by an Order member. I made the point: "Well look, you'll be with other Order members. What could be better or greater than that?" But he certainly did not see it or feel it in that way.

Lokamitra: But it's still not being felt entirely in that there are seven of us here today, when there could be sixteen.

Khema: That might be something to do with the lack of organization

Lokamitra: Oh no it's not, because I've talked to a lot of people and ...

S: Again, of course I must say this rather in mitigation, that [13] a lot is happening. So much is happening and so many demands that sometimes people just feel they must have a bit of a break, from it all.

Jitari: It's possible that there is a sort of unhealthy non-contact In my own case, some time ago starting after I was ordained, I had a period when I didn't have any contact at all of the type that I am having now. And I remember someone came out to see one, the fact that it was an Order member was fantastic. And I felt the whole Order was there. You know it was a great Order meeting, in a sense I didn't feel guilty or anything like that, although I was aware that maybe it'd be said that "well we'll go and see what's happening". But there's two types of contacts there's a sort of unhealthy contact and a healthy contact.

S: It must be pointed out that the Buddha clearly is thinking here in terms of an actual physical coming together, clearly regarding that as the norm. I don't say there never will be any exception, but that the norm is a coming together on all levels , in body, speech and mind.

Jitari: This thing Lokamitra... (end of tape)

Lokamitra: ... I wouldn't dispute their commitment, but I would say that there are dangers of

micchaditthis growing. I talked to a lot of people who weren't going to come today, and it seemed to me that the main thing was the same as happened to Bhante 3/4 years ago. People didn't attach importance to it.

S: There wasn't anything special going on?

Lokamitra: There wasn't ... they'd planned other things. They had not really thought about it. They hadn't really attached any importance to it. When really it is the celebration of the Order. At the Convention we talked about what we should as Buddhists be trying to do, take days off work for festivals: this is one of the most important. We should set it aside, put it in our diaries. We shouldn't have to be told about it. People didn't know...

S: It was listed in Shabda a month ago

Lokamitra: "Why didn't anyone remind me what's going to happen?" "I'm going away ... I've just started working ... I've got something else to do " which seems to me a wrong attitude basically

S: Yes - it's almost "what is going to be laid on?"

Sumedha: That's rights "when is the entertainment coming on?"

Khema: I feel there is also and especially with you in this connection, the danger of bullying people who don't feel they are out of contact or people like Devendra who have lost that contacts of bullying them to such an extent that they don't want to know any more because they are in contact themselves and maybe the time is not right for them to be physically in contact.

Lokamitra: The only people I bully and I mean bully and I do bully them are people who I know well and who are clearly committed. I bully Padmaraja, I bully Nagabodhi.

Khema: But why?

Lokamitra: Wait a moment,, I use "bully" because you used it. I went and asked them why they weren't and I made my point clear. I said I thought they ought to be there from things they had said in the past and I think they are wrong In not coming. I was just direct with them. Now if it's with someone who is more out of con tact, then I would approach it in a completely different way, obviously.

[14]

S: Well the gravitational pull is very strong.

Khema; I still think that by going to people like Nagabodhi and Padmaraja and asking them why they are not coming has the danger of a lack of respect for their own individual decision,

Lokamitra: I disagree absolutely. The fact that I can go and talk to them directly shows that I have the utmost respect for them. People I talk directly to in the Order are people I am closest to. And this sort of thing has to be said and if it is not said then it just gets worse

Vangisa: There is an important point here, a point of principle. If a person not only has taken Refuge at his ordination and regards this Refuge taking as an integral part of his whole being and his life, he has abrogated certain human rights which would normally be protected, Of course he may have all kinds of reasons he may be working out all kinds of things but he is not entitled to say "I must have my feelings in certain matters respected." We may in fact respect his feelings as a general rule. I don't think anybody would complain if he is really serious about taking Refuge.

S: In a sense, you don't have any private life any more.

Sumedha: You don't compartmentalize your feelings:

Lokamitra: I think we are too sympathetic, we go too far that way, and we still do in many cases but less and less.

Vangisa: It seems to me that we are undoubtedly heading toward a more specific hierarchy in the Order; instead of just having Bhante making great allowances for all our inadequacies.

S: I suspect they are sometimes too great.

Lokamitra: There are two aspects I see here: one is Going for Refuge, if we really are going for Refuge, what is happening and we should be direct with each other. Two is that the Order is growing to such an extent and Bhante is not in such close physical contact with new people, So we must be so clear that the thing is as perfect as possible.,

S: Yes, because we are very new and if we start deteriorating in our eighth year well what can happen by our tenth or twentieth ?

Lokamitra: That seems to me to be one of the most important considerations,

Sumedha: I think that there is an old saying: "Familiarization Breeds contempt" and this can operate in spiritual circles. The danger is that familiarity not only breeds contempt, it can breed indifference. You know what I mean that people can take for example the order meeting for granted, they say to themselves well there is bound to be somebody there, it is going to happen whether I am there or not. It doesn't matter,"

S: Anyway this does emphasize again the importance of these large and frequent meetings. There is also something, I don't know whether the Buddha himself laid it down, But it certainly was laid down by the early community : that when a monk was about to go into a deep trance for want of a better term, a trance in which you are completely insensible to external stimuli, he had to go into it after making a resolution to the effect that he would rise from it if he received a summons from the Sangha.

[15]

This is a provision in the Vinaya: that a summons from the Sangha takes precedence over absolutely every other spiritual activity. That even if you were about to gain Nirvana at a summons from the Sangha you should leave your practice and obey the summons.

Vangisa; There is a story told by Buddhaghosa about a sramanera who did precisely that. He

was on the verge of attaining a direct insight when he was called by a senior monk. So he immediately decided never had a sramanera neglected this call and he was not going to do so now, So he stopped his meditation at once. In fact he was compensated by insight in fact transmitting his own impending enlightenment to the other man as well. Everybody lived happily ever after .

S: This is in the good old Theravada, we haven't reached the Maha yana yet.

Sumedha: Even in the Theravada ?

S: Yes this is according to the Theravada Vinaya. So you cannot really criticize the Theravada as having ... being so individualistic not in those days anyway.

_____ : That's got incredible implications.

Khema: You're not a separate being any more at all

Chintamani: It has been occurring to me that there may come a time when meditation will have to be sacrificed...

S: Well meditating frequently is sacrificed. There are quite a few active Order members who sometimes put aside their meditation to get on with something else. for the benefit of the movement as a whole. There are lots of people who would want to be on study retreats but who won't be because they are going from door to door raising money. This is certainly the spirit in which they should do it. On the other hand having steered clear of Scilla one must stay clear of Charybdes too: you are not into the fund-raising in a purely organizational, social work sort of way. You definitely have the ideal before you and you are simply implementing it in an another way,

Sumedha: It's like some people might say "form is voidness, so it doesn't matter what I do".

S: No they might say "things like meditation didn't matter, what is important is to serve the people, to open a soup kitchen, why bother about meditation?" Well, that's the other extreme.

Khema: Meditation in action.

S: Yes if you can do it. But anyway at least action. And another point: I brought this out fairly strongly in this new lecture on "What Meditation really is" Meditation is a flow of skilful thoughts, skilful mental states, not necessarily associated with the sitting posture of a so-called meditation exercise, a concentration exercise.

Khema: Skilful mental states ?

S: That is to say those which are not connected with lobha, dvesa and moha i.e. craving, anger and ignorance but which are associate with contentment, with love and with understanding, with wisdom. This is what meditation really is. So in this sense you can, though you must be very honest about it, you can be going from door to door, with a collection box, but actually in this sense in as much as it were with a flow of skilful mental states, and be meditating. Not that at the same time you are trying to say "Om Mani Padme Hum", [16] no, or trying to keep

your mind on your breathing process, no that isn't necessary in a way. You do what you have to do with a positive mental attitude and if you keep this up and there is a whole uninterrupted flow of these skilful mental states alongside or with that activity, you are meditating. This is what samadhi really is. Of course it is difficult and you learn how to do it when you are sitting and meditating. But you have to carry it over eventually.

Khema: I know I have experienced that a lot myself at work on the days when I am feeling particularly positive and free flowing as such. At the end of the day, I've got just as much energy as when I started and I feel in a much more precise way of mind as I do after a meditation, in fact with more energy quite often. But any day that has a fragment of negativity in it by the end of the day you are drained, you cannot do much.

S: Yes, quite.

Sumedha: I find that sometimes I do my regular daily hour and if some friend comes unexpectedly, years ago I would have felt a clash but now there is no clash, no clash at all. There is just at one time one thing I am doing and at another time another, but there is no antagonism.

S: Anyway, you have been at it ten or twelve years. This is not to be recommended to the beginner otherwise it becomes an excuse or a rationalization.

Khema: Because you have to concretize it first.

Lokamitra: It seems to me that it is very important that those of us who are working keep up our meditation practice very regularly.

S: And contact with the Order. On the basis of the meditation and the Puja; Presumably if one is practising healthily and happily, one will want to keep in contact with the Order. You will feel a gap if you don't.

Khema: And you won't feel out of contact even if you are not there

Vangisa: The most important thing of contact is what one might call Emotional contact. That isn't the complete word. I don't like psychological, It's a feeling.

S: Let's say "emotive".

Vangisa: Now, this emotive contact can actually be helped by continual physical presence, but the important thing is the emotive contact, rather than just the physical presence. So on the other hand, one can cut off the physical presence for the time being, like going on retreat in an obvious example, and it's very much in contact in the emotive way. So it is really a question of recharging the emotive contact, keeping it alive all the time,

Khema: With the people we have mentioned already in particular you can immediately feel there is a lack of that emotive contact. it is just that, whereas someone you may not see for a long time, you still feel there is a contact there, because you know it is still alive in them.

S: I think we tend to forget that if you look at consciousness as it developed from the amoeba,

it is not knowing it is feeling and contact. And I think that that is a very important thing, that we tend to feel at times that the goal of the spiritual life is to acquire some kind of knowledge; that is true in a sense, but If the essence of consciousness is feeling and contact, then it means that the highest kind of consciousness is that which is most developed along the line of feeling and contact. Not in an indiscriminate sense so that knowing and feeling are eventually indistinguishable. [17] You don't say I know or I feel, it's just ... well you cannot put it into words.

Chintamani: In this context, I would like to mention something that occurred to me: somebody told me the other day "The disappearance of the True Dharma,,will begin when the false dharma takes its place, It's some sort of prophecy.

S: The Buddha did say somewhere that there will not be a disappearance of the true Dharma until-I forget the exact words until a false Dharma has arisen and taken its place, yes or unless it is ousted by a false Dharma, false teaching.

Chintamani: When I hear things like that I tend to take it in a very immediate way to apply it to the immediate situation and I wondered whether one can at any time be seduced by something which appeared to be True Dharma but in fact head you away from True Dharma and therefore lead you away from the Sangha too.

S: Well, I think we specially have to beware of fashions, especially in a place like London. After my stay in New Zealand, I have become aware of that, Because London is really a Centre of fashions, intellectual and cultural. And because we are here and because we have many friends in the outside world as it were we can very easily become caught up in this. And many of our friends are or have been They caught up in Arica because Arica is fashionable or Primal Therapy because Primal therapy is in and so on and some go from one to the other.

Sumedha: Like intellectual locusts.

Jitari: Was that the sort of thing you has in mind . Chintamani?

Chintamani: No it's more than that - I was thinking of a process I have experienced on occasions just not wanting to be with the Order of feeling it's a complete mixture of resentment, guilt, all the things you said feel quite right and I have experienced it on and then it changes suddenly and becomes positive again and this whole business of True Dharma and false...

Jitari: It becomes positive in the sense that you sort of switch from feeling negative towards the Order to feeling positive towards to the Order?

Chintamani: Yes it's a very subtle change. It's as if my previous if you like false Dharma has completely exploded and is completely fatuous and meaningless. And I thought it was real, but I then see it to be false,

S: The false Dharma is only as it were a sort of rationalization of something that is in you, in everybody. And of which the True. Dharma is of course the absolute enemy. So obviously just as the Path threatens the worlds the True Dharma threatens the false Dharma and after all for quite a long time, we are sort of amphibious: we are half in the world, half in the Path as it

were; so half of us is identified - I say half, but it may be a different proportion - half of us may be identified as it were with the True Dharma and half with false dharma. And there is a conflict here in use And sometimes the balance goes one way, sometimes the other.

Sumedha: Sometimes we get nostalgic for the half we have left behind or try to leave behind.

S: I've also felt over the past year especially that micchaditthis have to be nipped in the bud. This aspect of our work is very important.

(End of outstanding transcription, rest of this tape is lost)

[18]

CONDITIONS OF THE STABILITY OF THE ORDER

(Extract from the 'The Stability of Societies'

Some Sayings of the Buddha - P. L. Woodward, p.69..)

'Brethren,.I will teach you seven other conditions that prevent decay. Do ye listen to it. Apply your minds carefully. I will speak.'

'Even so, Lord,' replied those brethren to the Exalted One. The Exalted One said:

'So long as the brethren do not delight in (worldly) activities, are not busybodies nor devoted to activities,

So long as the brethren are not gossipers, not delighting in gossip, not devoted to gossip, ...

So long as the brethren are not sluggish, not delighting in sleep, not given to somnolence, ...

so long as the brethren are not given to company, not delighting in company, not devoted to company, ...

So long as the brethren are not slaves of evil desires, ...

So long as the brethren are not the friends, comrades, and associates of men of evil ways,

So long as the brethren shall not come to a stop upon the Way by the attainment of lesser excellence, ...

Just so long, brethren, as these seven conditions that prevent decay shall be established and the brethren are instructed in them, - so long may the prosperity of the brethren be looked for,.not their decay.'

Digha-Nikaya, ii. 79-80

S: Let's go through these one at a time: 'So long as the brethren do not delight in worldly activities, are not busybodies, nor devoted to activities': in other words the Buddha is suggesting that all one's activities and energies [19] should be integrated, should be directed towards one single goal ... This is all pretty obvious.

What about the next category, gossip? What is gossip? Why do people gossip?

Uttara: Dissatisfaction with oneself ...

S: There is probably a big element of that. Apparently, the Buddha was quite hard on gossip. There is that long list of thirty-two topics of idle talk, in other words, gossip ... Gossip is simply talking in such a way as to fill up one's own inner emptiness, and that is why, if one engages in gossip for any length of time, one feels really exhausted.

Uttara: You are running away from experiencing yourself.

S: You are running away from experiencing yourself and the situation you are actually in. A lot of reading is a sort of gossiping. Entertainment is a sort of gossiping. And when you literally gossip, you provide your own neurotic entertainment.

Sumedha: At the same time, gossip seems to require only a minimum awareness of oneself. It is a rather impersonal activity.

S: It is sort of sub-personal.

Kamalasila: Gossip doesn't actually have to be voiced. There is quite often a sort of mental gossip.

S: Yes, mental chatter. The Buddha is suggesting that when you get together frequently, and in large numbers (which he has previously recommended) you should be careful that you don't simply engage in gossip. obviously, gossip is an aspect of wrong speech. It is sampapalapavacha.

'So long as the brethren are not sluggish, not delighting in sleep, not given to somnolence': if the energy is not stirred up, then the order as a whole will decay, will become lazy, slothful and complacent - especially when it becomes endowed with beautiful, big monasteries ... This reminds me of my very first visit to a Buddhist Vihara. (This incident, by the way, doesn't come into my memoirs. I must have forgotten it at the time of writing.) It was in Ceylon, just on the outskirts [20] of Colombo. I was taken along to this Vihara, and it seemed quite empty; as it was afternoon everyone was sleeping, I suppose. The Vihara was a very big sort of bungalow, with an enormous veranda. I noticed that all along the veranda there were these big - not exactly arm-Chairs, what do you call them, you get them in the tropics? They have those long arms on which you can put up your legs and feet ...

Sumedha: Gouty colonel chairs.

S: Right, with receptacles for glasses. There was a whole row of these easy-chairs - about twenty of them - with plenty of cushions. That was my first impression of a Buddhist Vihara, and it was perhaps not unrepresentative. Eventually, the monks were roused, and I met one or two of them. Sir Edwin Arnold, in his introduction to *The Light of Asia* speaks of the 'southern Church' as 'lazy and ceremonious'. This is what can happen when you have been established a long time, and are well endowed with material resources a bit like the old Church of England in this country.

Sumedha: It sounds as though the bhikkhus are more like caretakers and museum attendants.

S: 'So long as the brethren are not given to company, not delighting in company, not devoted to company': the important point here is that you should seek company for positive rather than negative reasons. You shouldn't seek company because you cannot be on your own ... Otherwise it becomes an occasion for mindless hilarity or for gloomy and unsocial soaking ...

You can't really live with other people unless you can live without them. If you're happy on your own, you can be happy with others. If you can't be happy on your own, you can't be

happy with others. You're with them not because you want to be with them, but because you don't want to be on your own. Your being with them isn't a real being with them. It isn't positive. It is only an escape from yourself.

Jitari: So there is a distinction between being alone and being lonely ...

S: There's a state of being really on your own, happily [21] on your own, and there's a state of being really with other people, happily with other people. But there's an uncomfortable in-between state in which you are neither with people, nor on your own - a state where you are physically with other people, but feeling isolated. Thus you miss out in both ways. So do one thing or the other. Either be with people, or be on your own.

Sumedha: The paradox is that sometimes, if you are physically alone, you almost feel that there is company ...

S: You do have company. It's your own self ... Just as you can feel in company when you are on your own, in the same way, you can feel on your own when you are in company.

So, what the Buddha is warning us against here is not to use association with other people as a means of getting away from oneself, as an escape. Some people have a craving for company. They want to be with other people, but they can't be with them.

Jitari: They go and see friends because they just don't like being on their own.

Lokamitra: As with gossip, it is very easy to fall into the situation: someone comes round, or you go round, or ...

S: At the same time, you don't want to encourage people to be strained and over-serious, and not able to relax. This could be equally bad, if not worse. It's quite a delicate razor's edge that you have to tread. Certainly relax and be sociable sometimes. You don't always have to be talking about Buddhism, always meditating together. But on the other hand, watch that it doesn't become mindless social activity.

Jitari: Sometimes there is a very real need for company.

S: I think one should distinguish between: 1) neurotic craving for company as a means of escape from your own inner emptiness; 2) a healthy human desire for human contact; 3) a wish, or aspiration, for spiritual fellowship. We should have nothing to do with the first stage, a modest place for the second, and develop the third as much as we can.

Subhuti: What is a healthy need for contact?

[22]

S: Leaving aside pure individuality, and any spiritual consideration, on a purely human level it's as though it's difficult to experience oneself apart from other people. You sometimes need a bit of stimulation, a bit of sparking off, a bit of exchange.

Subhuti: Would you define the distinction between the human need and the neurotic need?

S: In the neurotic desire for company there is an inner emptiness, and this inner emptiness is experienced as a sort of inner craving, as a need. You feel empty, and you want to fill that emptiness, and you feel unhappy without the object that you think is capable of filling it. With the healthy human need that hasn't been satisfied for some time you just feel a bit dull, a bit bored, not very lively.

Jitari: Perhaps there are friends nearby, and you know that if you go and see them, you will have a very wholesome time ...

Sumedha: A sense of relief and friendliness ...

S: It is more than that: you want to express something that is in you, rather than take something from somebody else. In the case of the healthy desire, you always start off with the feeling that you would like to give, to express. Then maybe it occurs to you that by meeting other people you can do this. Whereas in the case of neurotic craving, you at once think in terms of the company, and what you can get from it.

With the healthy desire, the healthy human social contact, you get something, but you are not grabbing, as it were. You can say that the healthy human contact enables you to be yourself in another way, another dimension. You are more yourself.

Sumedha: Reciprocation, giving and taking.

S: Reciprocated giving and taking. When it's neurotic, it's all taking ... You sometimes meet people that you feel drain you. They always want to take from you, they don't give or contribute anything. There is no exchange, it's all one way traffic.

Khema: You reach a point where you can give no more.

Sumedha: Emotional vampires ...

[23]

S: It's not that literally you can give no more. If the next instant someone positive comes along, you are giving like anything! It is just that functioning which is one-sided can be tolerated only for a certain length of time. Healthy human contact is reciprocal, is two-way. It enhances your feeling of individuality, and enables you to be more yourself; whereas the neurotic contact doesn't satisfy you. If anything, it intensifies your craving. You don't go back into your solitariness satisfied and fulfilled. You feel no better afterwards. Five minutes by yourself, and you're just as full of craving as before ...

I think that one must recognize that before one comes definitely to the spiritual plane, it is very difficult to be yourself on your own, that is, if you are on your own all the time. Unless you have already reached a certain spiritual level, you will deteriorate in the absence of positive human contact.

Subhuti: Can we continue the definition? How would you define spiritual contact?

S: In the case of spiritual contact, you're relating on the basis of a common spiritual commitment, a common spiritual ideal. Whereas in the case of the human contact, you are

relating simply on the basis of human warmth, almost gregariousness, though in a quite healthy and positive sense, even though it does have, from the spiritual point of view, its limitations. It is definitely a group thing, but it is a healthy group thing.

Chintamani: So it is necessary to function as a healthy, happy human being as a foundation for entering upon the spiritual path proper?

S: I would say so. I think it is almost impossible to go from the first stage to the third stage directly, without going through the second stage. And some of the people who are coming along to us seeking the warmth and friendliness of the group mustn't be prevented from having that, and mustn't be told that they have got to go straight on to a sublime spiritual fellowship. It just won't work ...

Sumedha: Does this mean that the 'spiritual' cannot be a substitute for the human?

S: This is very true ...

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Vangisa: Presumably, the passive equivalent to a neurotic need for other people is a cutting off from other people, wanting to be alone for the wrong reasons.

S: The important thing is that a person in that state should come into contact with someone who is at least psychologically, if not spiritually, positive; someone who can relate to that person on the basis of that positivity, and induce him - and that has to be done entirely by ear, entirely by rule of thumb - to give a positive response ... Which may mean you have to accept a relationship which from his side is neurotic to begin with ...

But if you maintain your positivity, and some exchange is going on, and if you are skilful, then you will be able to transform that person's neurotic relationship, or what is neurotic in his relationship to you, into something positive. But you have to be careful, because sometimes people's neurosis is extremely strong, and you may find yourself becoming involved neurotically ...

Also, with such a person, sometimes you should take the initiative, and not relate to him by way of reacting or even responding. For instance, you meet that person, and he says, 'Oh, I feel terrible today.' 'Oh, do you? Oh, I am sorry to hear that.' 'Yes, and I felt terrible yesterday as well.' 'Oh, did you?' This can go on indefinitely. You should say, 'Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. But it is a nice day, isn't it? Shall we go for a walk?' Then he has got to say yes or no. You have taken the initiative. It is very important to be able to do this. You allow him to express his negativity and his neurotic state a little bit, but you don't allow that to set the pattern, as it were. You don't allow him to set the pace. You get him adapting to you in a positive way. Otherwise you can go on listening to the long tale of woe all day sometimes, and feel thoroughly fed up and resentful by the end of the day, and a bit neurotic yourself if you are not careful.

Sumedha: In medieval times, if you wanted to stigmatise somebody, you would call them sinful. Nowadays, we are more diplomatic, and we call them neurotic. It seems that the word 'neurotic' is always used in a derogatory sense, as if we knew a) what neurosis is, and b) that a certain person is neurotic. I would like to know exactly what this word 'neurotic' is supposed

to mean ...

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S: Well, I must say, I use it only in a derogatory sense.

Lokamitra: (Laughter)

Sumedha: Yes, it is the twentieth century version of the word sinful.

S: No, I wouldn't agree there, because there are quite a few things traditionally considered sinful that I wouldn't agree were neurotic, that were just healthy and human. For example, you don't regard sexuality as such as neurotic.

Sumedha: No ...

S: Some medieval theologians regarded sex per se as sinful. But I would say that only certain manifestations of sex are neurotic, and that sex per se is not neurotic, and not sinful.

Sumedha: No, it is neither virtuous nor sinful, it is just a fact.

S: When I use the word 'neurotic' I mean mainly two things: 1) That I see a compulsive pattern of which the person concerned is not conscious. There is something that they keep doing over and over again. It is repetitive, compulsive, and they are not aware of why they do it. 2) That I am conscious of infantile craving. I am conscious that the attitude is basically infantile, and that their expectations are those that would be appropriate in an infant, but not in an adult, presumably mature, person.

Sumedha: What Freud would term the 'pleasure principle' rather than the 'reality principle' ...

S: You could say that, but it is a pleasure principle which is in conflict with reality, as it were.

Sumedha: Only, I hear the word 'neurotic' so often.

S: Well, this is mainly the sense in which I use it: behaviour which is compulsive and repetitive, and which seems to be powered by infantile cravings and desires ... Therefore it is not a word which can be used in a positive sense.

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Sumedha: It is a sort of portmanteau word, for want of anything more appropriate.

S: Well, no, I wouldn't say that. I hope I use it more precisely than that.

Jitari: When you say 'repetitive and compulsive', is that just another way of saying that they just don't know what they are doing?

S: They don't know what they want. They may think they do, but they really don't. They don't realize it is an infantile demand, and that they are repeating a pattern.

Jitari: I have noticed in neurotic persons, or persons that I take to be neurotic, that they are

continually drawing attention to their neurosis.

S: Well, that brings out a very important aspect that I haven't mentioned so far. I do feel very strongly from neurotic people that they want to involve you in their neurosis ... They are almost like a whirlpool, going round and round, and they will try to suck you in if they can, like the Sirens on the rocks: you listen to their siren song, and you will be lured on to the rocks and wrecked. You mustn't listen too long, or sympathize too much. It is very insidious. You must break it as quickly as you can.

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Jitari: It is because from deep down within, they are crying out for help...

S: No, I get more the feeling that they are very resentful, they would like to drag You down with them.

Sumedha: Perhaps it is a sense of vulnerability, helplessness and fear, that ...

S: No, again, with many neurotic People, I get a sense of tremendous strength. They're not weak. They're very, very strong. They're not helpless. They're stronger than you sometimes, so they can drag you down ...

Sumedha: I think that fear may be one of the most fundamental causes ...

S: It is anxiety rather than fear. It is the anxiety of not getting what they want, of being so near, yet so far.

Sumedha: Also, the unpredictability of life ...

S: There is that too ... One form of neurosis is wanting everything to be very secure and certain, to know everything in advance, to have everything planned to exclude the unpredictable, the element of chance ...

But we shouldn't think in terms of neurotic people being weak and helpless., They are that only in a certain, narrow sense. Very often there is a tremendous strength and energy there, which, if you are not careful, will suck you in and pull you down.

Jitari: This 'so near and yet so far' which you mentioned, what exactly do you mean by that?

S: Suppose You are with such a person, and they say that they want love and affection: do they feel it when they are getting it? Do they feel that they are really with you? If anything they feel further away than ever; their desire is not satisfied even though they are with you - so far - because their desire is neurotic and cannot be fulfilled by something external. it's the emptiness inside that they have got to come to terms with.

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There are quite a few neurotic people around, even within the Movement. We have to be very careful how we deal with them. Neurosis spreads. Neurotic people will involve you in their neurosis ... You must not relate to a neurotic person on the basis of their neurosis.

Jitari: It takes a great deal of strength to remain free, not to be sucked in.

S: You don't help anybody by being sucked in. If you can't relate to them without being sucked in, it is better if you break off and leave them to it. It is better that one should perish than two. You might say that this sounds rather hard, but sometimes it is just like this.

Sumedha: Nietzsche said that pity drains one.

S: Pity is not compassion. One has to differentiate the two. Pity is a weakness; it's not compassion.

Sumedha: Pity is just ... what is pity? Pity is just... Well, I don't know.

Jitari: It is very difficult to see someone suffer for ...

Sumedha: Yes, and stand aside ...

S: Right. It's very difficult not to want to comfort Them.

Jitari: And, in a sense, cushion or shield them from their own development.

S: It may be the result of one's attachment to them ... Since coming back to London, I have been very aware of the number of neurotic elements that are around.

Khema: Do you mean London in general?

S: London in general, and even within the Friends ... Perhaps the most general characteristic I have noticed is that people try and grab something from me ... Not that they are [29] being receptive, they are just trying to grab. Sometimes sympathy, sometimes information, sometimes maybe, they think, spirituality ... But they are trying to grab, almost by force.

Chintamani: In such an instance, would you consider just saying, 'Please, don't grab'

S: It might be appropriate, but in most cases, people wouldn't know what I was talking about ... I don't think I experienced this grabbing once the whole time I was in New Zealand. I experienced it at least five or six times within the first couple of weeks of arriving in England.

Jitari: You paint a lovely picture of New Zealand ...

S: But it also makes one aware of how much surroundings and conditions of life can help or hinder. They have a healthy, human base there, compared with here.

Let us carry on and finish this section: 'So long as the brethren are not slaves of evil desires'. Well, that's pretty obvious, that's pretty strong. 'So long as the brethren are not the friends, comrades and associates of men of evil ways'. Evil communication corrupts good manners, as I think the Bible says, quoting from one of the Greek playwrights. Just be very careful about the people you associate with - something will rub off on you. It's all very well to talk in terms of being a Bodhisattva, of living in the world and associating with everybody. Make sure first that you are a Bodhisattva! Don't fool yourself. It's best to preserve your own integrity and

keep away from other people whose company is not conducive to your own spiritual development. You can think about helping later on, when you are stronger. Have the ideal of helping, have it very strongly, but be under no illusion as to your own strength and your own weakness.

'So long as the brethren shall not come to a stop upon the way by the attainment of lesser excellence': this is what Devadatta is supposed to have done. This is very important. The good is very often the enemy of the best.

Lokamitra: We reach a certain level, then we get satisfied, stop putting energy into things, and slow down.

S: Yes, rest on our laurels.

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Lokamitra: And begin to dream of a nice life, or something

S: Take a long holiday ...

Khema: I was thinking once that it was like hitting an island mid-stream, and thinking it was the opposite shore ... Other people are going right past you who are not hitting the island, but you feel it is the opposite shore because it is land.

S: (Laughing) Yes! Because of the lovely golden beach and palm trees ... You could improve on that analogy still: you come to an island in the midst of the ocean, and you anchor there. You are all happy that you have reached dry land, that you have found this beautiful island, this firm spot. And then it starts moving (laughter). You find you are on the back of some gigantic turtle.

Chintamani: That's just about to dive (Laughter)

Sumedha: This means, I suppose, that the idea of peace of mind (as an end in itself) can be a seduction?

S: Sometimes you can be really upset, pained, distraught, torn, in conflict, and yet it can be very positive and you can be making real progress.

Sumedha: Unfortunately, living beings do not like suffering, even if it helps to educate them. On the one hand, you realize that a certain troublesome situation may make you a bit more mature, and on the other hand you say to yourself, 'It upsets me too much' ...

Subhuti: It seems quite important to distinguish between neurosis and suffering. They are two different things.

S: Traditionally, there are three types of suffering:

1) Dukkha Dukkha: This is suffering which is suffering, in other words, actual painful or mental sensation.

2) Viparinama Dukkha: This is, suffering by transformation. You have a pleasant experience, but it depends on the possession of something which by its very nature is impermanent. So to [31] the extent that you enjoy having that thing, you will suffer at not having that thing when it is taken away, when it disintegrates, which is inevitable.

3) Khanda Dukkha: This is the suffering which is inherent in the nature of things, in conditioned existence itself. It is not suffering in the sense of a sensation of suffering, because it applies also to happy and joyful experiences. Inasmuch as these experiences fall short of the absolute bliss of Nirvana, to that extent, they are actually painful. If you enjoy some pleasant experience, you are depriving yourself of the absolute bliss of Nirvana. Even though you don't know it, even though you may think that you are enjoying yourself, you are in fact suffering.

... Coming back to this question of neurosis: neurotic people in a sense are not suffering... They will tell you that they are unhappy and miserable, but in a sense this is what they want, they are really enjoying it. They may say that they want help, but when you try to help them and deprive them of their neurosis, they hold on to it. You have to be very careful you don't get involved in this little game which they play.

Khema: So they are not really suffering in the true sense of the word ...

S: Right.

Sumedha: You mean, what from the outside looks like suffering, from the inside, to them, is pleasure,

S: I would not put it as crudely as that, but they are certainly getting a deep satisfaction out of it ... There may, in a superficial sense, be a kind of suffering or discomfort, but the satisfaction they get out of being neurotic is so deep that they can tolerate that discomfort, and that is why they can carry on like that year after year. It doesn't wear them out. Real suffering would wear you out after a few years, but some people can go on being neurotic decade after decade.

Jitari: If one comes into contact with this sort of person, then one would do well to be aware of the fact that they are getting a great deal of satisfaction out of the situation.

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Khema: And even more satisfaction in drawing you into it.

S: Sometimes their plea for help is very specious. They are trying to trap you. They want to involve you in their neurosis, or whatever it is.

Sumedha: I have heard the view expressed that all suffering is the consequence of neurosis, which seems to me to be irresponsible ...

S: If a normal, healthy person loses someone who is near and dear to them, this is not neurotic suffering, this is real suffering ... And one can genuinely and wholeheartedly sympathize with that person, and know that he will get over it in due course, because he is healthy. In a healthy person, there might be a slight element of neurosis, but nothing to speak of, as it were. In such a case, you know that time will heal the wound. Neurosis is not healed by time.

Subhuti: You could say that neurosis is a particular type of relationship to somebody. With a healthy relationship, there is suffering which you experience and which you work through, but with neurosis, you keep on endlessly repeating the same pattern of behaviour.

S: This is why I said earlier that repetitiveness is one of the characteristics of neurosis ...

'Just so long, brethren, as these seven conditions that prevent decay shall be established and the brethren are instructed in them, - so long may the prosperity of the brethren be looked for, not their decay.' What I want to emphasize is 'and the brethren are instructed in-them', which means, of course, especially new brethren, new people coming into the Order. If we observe these principles, then by virtue of that observance, the Order will continue, it will prosper, it will not decay. We must not take these things for granted. People do not necessarily know or understand them, so they are to be instructed in them. A conscious effort is necessary. It won't just happen.

Originally typed by a small, but very devoted, chimpanzee with little knowledge of English long long ago. Checked without the original tapes by a chinchilla with a fair grasp of English - more work needed - 18 November 1993

Spellchecked and put into house style Shantavira December 1998