

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

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on the lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Second Transcriptions Edition - July 2002/2545

*[Numbers in square brackets refer to the page numbers of the **first** edition. These original page numbers are still used in the 'Unedited Seminar Index', available separately from Transcriptions]*

Present: Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara (Chairman) Nagabodhi, Kovida, Prasannasiddhi, Mangala, Sona, Bodhiraja.

First Lecture: The Growth of a Mahayana Sutra - 24th February 1987

Sangharakshita: So who's going to read the questions?

Dharmadhara (Chairman): We are each going to read a question and I'm going to co-ordinate - chair - the questions.

S: All right. In what order are we going to have them?

Chairman: First of all, a question from Abhaya on the oral tradition of *The Sutra of Golden Light*. That's his first question. Then Abhaya's second question on the Vajrayana Sutras. We erased the third question because it was duplicated; that was the one on other series. The third question is Ratnabodhi's on other sutras; and the fourth question is Abhaya's on redressing the balance between the Mahayana and the Hinayana. That was the question which we didn't erase; the other duplicate was the one we erased. Then my question on the FWBO context of the series in 1976. Then my question on the Gnostics. Then the question on the Holy Grail. And then, if we have time, Prasannasiddhi has a supplementary question of his own.

S: All right.

Chairman: So this is the first evening of the Questions and Answers on *The Sutra of Golden Light*, and the first question comes from Sona on the oral tradition of *The Sutra of Golden Light*.

Sona: This is a question, in fact, from Abhaya.

S: Yes, it's good to mention who the question is really or originally from.

Sona:

Bhante, in the lecture you speak of *The Sutra of Golden Light* as growing out of successive literary deposits from an oral tradition. With respect to this and other Mahayana sutras, I can see how they have grown out of literary deposits but not how they relate to an oral tradition. They do not have the obvious oral characteristics of the Pali suttas such as repetitions of formulas, and passages repeated many times which are identical except for the substitution of a single word or phrase. What exactly is the evidence of their connection with an oral tradition?

S: Yes, the real question is that last sentence: 'What exactly is the evidence of their connection with an oral tradition?' I don't think that we can say that there is any *direct* evidence. The evidence is indirect, or one can even say that it's a matter of *deduction* rather than *induction*. In this [2] connection, we have to bear in mind two points: the Mahayana sutras are sutras; in other words,

they purport to be the personal teaching of the Buddha himself. They purport to be *Buddhavacana*. On the other hand, the Buddha himself did not *write* anything. He taught only orally, and his teachings were written down subsequently. So if we accept - and, of course, we don't have to accept if we aren't convinced - if we accept that the Mahayana sutras are *Buddhavacana*, and if, of course, we know that they were written down some several hundred years after the Buddha, then, of course, we have also to accept that there was a period of oral transmission. It's exactly the same with the Pali Canon. There's no difference in principle, because it's known that the Pali Tipitaka wasn't written down in Ceylon until nearly 500 years after the Buddha's Parinirvana. And we know that the Buddha himself didn't write anything, so in that case, too, if the Tipitaka is accepted as *Buddhavacana*, it must be a deposit from an oral tradition, just as in the case of the Mahayana sutras.

It is, of course, open to one to say that the Mahayana sutras were simply composed at the time that they were written, but that would mean rejecting the Mahayana sutras as *Buddhavacana*. None the less, it's not really quite so simple as that, even, because Abhaya goes on to say: 'They' - that is, the Mahayana sutras - 'do not have the obvious oral characteristics of the Pali suttas such as repetitions of formulas, and passages repeated many times which are identical except for the substitution of a single word or phrase.' I think that can be explained by the very different natures of the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions. The Theravada is very much concerned with the letter, with verbal accuracy, so it's only to be expected that in the Pali suttas you *would* find these repetitions of formulas and passages repeated many times. And it's only to be expected that you would *not* find that in the Mahayana sutras; the Mahayana sutras being more concerned - or the Mahayana tradition being more concerned - to transmit the *spirit* of the Buddha's teaching.

So when I say that *The Sutra of Golden Light* - in fact when I say that the Mahayana sutras are deposits from an oral tradition, I am not thinking in terms of those deposits being a literal word-for-word writing down of something which was already existing in exactly that oral form. I am thinking rather of ideas, or ideals, which were in circulation, perhaps in a number of different alternative renderings, and which were reduced to writing and at the same time given, perhaps, a 'literary' form which they didn't have when they were circulating orally more or less in the form of just ideas. That would be more in accordance with the nature of the Mahayana as such. [3]

But there is very little direct evidence that that was the case. I think the important point is whether one does accept some kind of spiritual continuity between the teaching of the Buddha and the Mahayana sutras as we have them today. But someone must have produced them; so if you maintain that *The Sutra of Golden Light* and, say, *The Saddharma-pundarika Sutra* and the *Perfection of Wisdom* Sutras and all the others have no connection with the Buddha, are not in any sense a deposit from an oral tradition, then you have to posit a whole galaxy of remarkable spiritual personalities who were responsible for producing those sutras - personalities who left no trace, no record of themselves *whatever*. If one thinks of something like the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, which is in process of being fully translated now, it is an extraordinary work; well, who produced that - if the leading ideas, so to speak, don't go back to the Buddha, at least essentially? Maybe not in the form of ideas, but in the form of a spiritual inspiration.

Anyway, is that reasonably clear?

Sona: Yes, thank you.

Chairman: Prasannasiddhi has a question.

Prasannasiddhi: I always thought that when it was said that Mahayana sutras were *Buddhavacana*, it was more in the metaphorical sense, that they were spoken by the Eternal Buddha. You seem to say that they definitely have a source with the Buddha.

S: Well, the Mahayana tradition is, or seems to be, that they were spoken by the *historical* Buddha. Some Mahayana sutras begin with the Buddha on the Vulture's Peak. But one must also remember that the ancient Buddhists, whether Theravada or Mahayana, and perhaps especially the Mahayana Buddhists, didn't distinguish between what we would call historical and what we would call mythical in the way that *we* do. So it is open to one to believe that the Mahayana sutras weren't preached by the historical Buddha in the literal sense, in the sense that had you been there, had you been around in middle India in 500 BC, you would have heard the Buddha preaching those sutras in exactly those words. But you are at liberty to believe that the Mahayana sutras were written down after the parinirvana of the Buddha by yogis or mystics or meditators who, in their meditation, had heard the *Sambhogakaya* Buddha preach in that particular way. But that is *not* the actual Mahayana tradition. Because, as I said, in those days they didn't distinguish between the historical and the legendary or mythical in the way that we do.

Bodhiraja: Do you think there was what could be called the Mahayana oral [4] tradition, or are the Mahayana texts literary renderings of the same oral tradition that the Pali Canon was the rendition of?

S: Well, there was an oral tradition - one has to posit an oral tradition - and no doubt there were different strands in that. I think a lot of what one finds in the Pali Canon represents a working up of certain elements in the total oral tradition, let us say. There were certain elements in the total oral tradition which the Theravadins ignored or which they didn't preserve. This is where the importance of the Mahasanghikas comes in, because the Mahasanghikas seem to have preserved traditions which did go back to the Buddha, but which were ignored by, or unknown to, the Theravadins. So it's not that you have one particular oral tradition with the Mahayanists, or rather the Mahasanghikas, giving different versions of that one same tradition. It's more that each school gave a sort of selective rendering, preserved certain teachings which it regarded as important, and didn't preserve others.

I was reading the other day somewhere - I forget where, I'm afraid - that in some ancient account it's written that, in the case of the Mahasanghikas, their scriptures, or their canon, even, was recited or was defined by both monks and lay people; which is rather interesting. So it's as though the Theravadins tended to preserve those teachings or those traditions which were of a special relevance to the bhikkhus. This gives the whole Pali Tipitaka a somewhat monastic cast, a somewhat monastic slant, which is probably not justified by the *total* tradition - meaning the total oral tradition. So it's as though the Mahasanghikas, and through them the Mahayanists, preserved more of the non-monastic elements; and this fact was partly responsible for the fact that the Mahayana was, in a way, a more universal teaching. In other words, it placed less emphasis on lifestyle, as we would say - especially the monastic lifestyle - than did the Theravadins.

Dharmadhara: In *The Eternal Legacy*, you mention that in China it was known that sutras which had been created in China were sort of backdated to having been translated from India, and I think you give the example of the Chinese *Surangama Sutra*. So this is an example of an apparently quite good sutra, quite a good literary document as a sutra, having been created apparently in China. Could this give a precedent for believing that this may have happened with other Mahayana sutras in India? - that they could have been created more or less afresh after the time, rather than being direct *Buddhavacana*?

S: We have really no reason to suppose that. We also have to bear in mind the different nature of Chinese culture. The Chinese had a very literary culture from a very early period, from the time of Confucius, you could say. [5] The Chinese were very critical students of texts. They were well

aware of the existence of different readings and, even at a very early period, they made studies of the authenticity of ancient texts. For instance, around the - I think it was the beginning of the Christian era, as far as I remember - there was a certain Chinese emperor who wanted history to begin with his reign, so he ordered a burning of the books; and an enormous amount of literature was burned. But anyway, some years later, when he was gone, scholars started taking old books out of their hiding places. At that time a lot of forgeries were produced, but Chinese scholars were quite able to deal with that sort of situation, because they were quite aware, for instance, that a certain word didn't come into existence before a certain period. So if they found a text, say, which was ascribed to a writer or a teacher, of, say, 300 BC, but in it there was a word which wasn't in circulation until 100 BC, they would know that it couldn't be genuine. In other words, they were quite well acquainted with the principles of textual criticism. The *Indians* had absolutely nothing of that.

So those forgeries, as you may call them, forged sutras which were produced in China, were, one might say, deliberate literary creations by people who knew what they were doing. But I think sutras which did not actually go back to the Buddha, which were produced in India, were probably produced by people who were in touch with some kind of existing tradition, especially old tradition, and who did believe that what they were reducing to writing was the Buddha's teaching. They didn't have the literary sophistication that the Chinese had.

Also one mustn't forget that a lot of sutras went to China from India via Central Asia, and there were quite a lot of traditions which were circulating in Central Asia, and which became sort of incorporated with Buddhism and reached China as part of Buddhism, and found their way into sutras which were written down in China.

Anyway, is that enough?

Chairman: The next question is Abhaya's question on the Vajrayana sutras.

In the section of the lecture headed 'What is a Sutra?' you say that the scriptures of the Vajrayana are mainly Tantras. But you refer also to two major Vajrayana sutras. What are these?

S: These are generally considered to be the *Mahavairocana Sutra* and the *Vajrasekara(?) Sutra*, I think. I think I referred to them in *The Eternal Legacy* [*Second edition transcriber's note: no reference is found to this second sutra in the Eternal Legacy*]. These are often regarded as sort of intermediate between sutras [6] and Tantras. Though they are called sutras they have many Tantric features.

I was also thinking of the *Manjusrimirakalpa (?)*. I don't think it's ever styled a sutra, though it isn't exactly a Tantra. But the two works which are generally considered as intermediate which, in a sense, are Tantras but which are styled sutras, are these two which I mentioned.

Prasannasiddhi: Does that mean they are earlier sutras - or earlier Tantras - those two? Or is this in *The Eternal Legacy*?

S: What do you mean?

Prasannasiddhi: The *Mahavairocana* and *Vajrasekara* sutras. Would they be earlier Vajrayana Tantras? You said they were in between - does that mean they came...

S: Well, broadly speaking, sutras as literary documents are earlier than Tantras as literary

documents, though there's a bit of overlapping; so that when one says that these two works are intermediate, one means not only intermediate in content but intermediate chronologically too. They are definitely later than the major Mahayana sutras, like the *Saddharma-pundarika*, *Prajnaparamita*, *Lankavatara*.

Dharmadhara: And they are attributed to the Buddha? Do they start with 'Thus have I heard'?

S: This I can't tell you offhand. But I imagine that they would do so; but you'd need to check that.

Chairman: The third question is Ratnabodhi's question on other sutras for possible future lecture series.

Towards the end of the tape on *The Growth of a Mahayana Sutra*, you speak of the movement drawing into its orbit scriptures which are relevant to our needs. You speak of *The Sutra of Golden Light* as being, at that time, a new addition. Do you feel that there are any other scriptures which may be of particular relevance to the movement, but to which we have not yet given any attention, or any to which we could give more attention? If so, are you likely to be giving lectures or leading seminars on them in the future?

S: I think in a way the question puts the cart before the horse, because you can only really find out which sutras are especially relevant to people's needs if you give them some attention. I can't say that I selected the various sutras on which I have given lectures simply because they were especially relevant to people's needs. Obviously I didn't consider them irrelevant, but there are other factors to take into consideration. First of all that [7] the sutras were available; that they had been translated, so that if I gave lectures on them people would be able to read them and study them; that was obviously a consideration. So I think it's a question of as many people as possible reading as many sutras as they can, and just asking themselves or trying to see for themselves whether those particular sutras are relevant to their particular needs.

This has happened, to a small extent, already, because several Order Members have explored the *Majjhima Nikaya* - at least, part of it - and have dug out individual suttas which they have felt were particularly relevant and on which they have even given talks. So perhaps the movement shouldn't rely simply on me to do this. It's in a way something that anybody can do. I don't know whether I *will* be giving any more talks on sutras. There are one or two that I've thought of giving talks on, but haven't got around to it. One was especially the *Amitayur-dhyana Sutra*. And I have thought vaguely from time to time about giving talks on the *Lankavatara Sutra*, but I don't know whether I'll ever get around to doing that.

But I would certainly quite like to see people - I mean Order Members - making their own sort of independent studies of sutras, whether Pali suttas or Mahayana sutras - sutras which I've not dealt with or haven't lectured on - and making their own special study and perhaps lecturing on them, or leading study groups in them.

Does that more or less answer that question? I wonder whether there are particular texts which people are finding relevant to their needs at present. I know some people at least do study or do read those sutras on which they are giving courses of lectures, usually in connection with the Mitra study course. But, apart from a handful of suttas from the *Majjhima Nikaya* which I mentioned, I wonder if there are any other texts which people quite independently - that is, independently of any lectures I've given or study I've taken - have found especially relevant to their needs?

Nagabodhi: I think the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* is quite widely read. -

S: Ah, good.

Nagabodhi: - That's an impression I've had over the years.

Prasannasiddhi: And one does get readings in pujas from certain sutras; certain readings seem to be very popular in pujas.

S: I don't think many people do any very individual study in that sort of way; they don't pioneer. We don't seem to have many people who eagerly get hold of the latest translation of a sutra that hasn't been translated before, and go through it. [8]

Mangala: Bhante, you said that you haven't really selected things, but apart from the specifically Buddhist works, you have given seminars on other - well, like Islamic texts etc., so you obviously have chosen some things quite clearly here and there.

S: Of course, in the case of *Duties of Brotherhood*, that was for study in a study group. I didn't actually give any lectures.

Mangala: Ah, I see, yes.

S: With regard to the series of lectures on Mahayana Sutras, I can't recollect exactly what guided me to select particular sutras at the time that I did. For instance, if you take the *Parables, Myths and Symbols of the White Lotus Sutra*, that's reasonably clear, because I've dealt with those parables, myths and symbols, and that was to illustrate the fact that truth could be communicated not just through conceptual means but imaginatively, through parables, myths and symbols; and that was an approach that many people favoured at that time, mainly on account of their contact with Jung's writings, whether directly or indirectly. So I think I chose to speak on those parables, myths and symbols knowing that things like myths and symbols were very much in the air at the time. Often I spoke on something in which I was myself especially interested, but clearly I couldn't speak on it *simply* because I was interested in it. Perhaps I was a sort of barometer with regard to the spiritual climate within the Movement, and responded more or less naturally.

Chairman: Did you have a question, Prasannasiddhi?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I was just wondering about *The Diamond Sutra* and the Prajnaparamita literature in general. You haven't given lectures on that, only the *Heart Sutra*. Well, you did give one on the Diamond Sutra - not a series.

S: No, there's no series. I spoke on the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*. It's difficult to say why I did it. Yes, I have thought of giving lectures on, and taking study groups in, the *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*, but I've never got around to that, for one reason or another. I think in the case of the *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines* I probably felt that the content is so rich that one would need a series of at least forty or fifty lectures. It's not something that you can dispose of in just eight or ten. Also the approach is in many ways highly conceptual, and at the time I was giving series of lectures I think I wondered whether many people would appreciate that kind of approach. Now it might be different. In principle or in theory, I'd like to give series of lectures on *all* the major sutras, but there is a limit to what one person can do. So one can only just give some [9] general guidelines and just a few illustrations as to how these things are to be done, or the sort of general spirit in which they could be done. I think I have provided a few *models* as to how you approach a sutra, how you go into it. So others perhaps can do likewise with the other sutras, and

works of other kinds.

Chairman: The next question is Abhaya's question on redressing the balance between the Mahayana and the Hinayana in your lecture series.

It so happens that three out of four consecutive series of your lectures which we will have studied on these retreats by the middle of this year, 1987, are expositions of Mahayana sutras: *The White Lotus Sutra*, *The Sutra of Golden Light*, *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*. It also happens that none of the lecture series you have given in the last twenty years have been on material from the Pali Canon, though you have given occasional lectures on individual suttas. On the other hand, you have recently, on more than one occasion, stressed that, valuable as the Mahayana sutras are, it is important that we do not lose touch with the historical Buddha, and that we should study accounts of his life. How correct would it be to conclude from this that, over the period when you delivered the lectures on Mahayana sutras, you felt that such material was more suited to the spiritual needs of people involved in, and attracted to, the Movement, the FWBO; whereas these days you feel that material from the Pali Canon is, for the time being, more appropriate? Or did you just think that Buddhism in the West was over-identified with the Theravada, and the balance needed to be redressed?

S: Yes, I think I did think, at least in the beginning, that Buddhism in the West was or had been over-identified with the Theravada and that the balance needed to be redressed. But at the same time it is true that, over the period when I delivered the lectures on Mahayana sutras, I felt that such material was more suited to the spiritual needs of people involved in and attracted to the Movement, the FWBO; or at least that they were more *interested* in such material. But I don't think it's a case now of either/or. Abhaya's question seems to suggest either/or, as when he says, 'Whereas these days you feel that material from the Pali Canon is for the time being more appropriate'. It is as though there has been a tendency, I think, to *add* study of Pali suttas *to* the study of the Mahayana sutras; as though the Mahayana sutras give you your broad ideals - your broad panoramic picture of the spiritual life - whereas the Pali suttas fill you in on the detail. It's more like that. Do you see what I mean? That's true, of course, of only some Mahayana [10] sutras because some, in certain respects, fill you in with a great deal of detail. When I say 'fill you in with the detail' in the case of the Pali suttas, I mean more with regard to actual practice, especially ethics and meditation, and things like that. In the Mahayana you get the broad principles, but in the Pali suttas you get more of the details of the practical application of those principles. So you really need both.

So if - assuming this to be true - people were originally more interested in Mahayana sutras but have since become interested in the Pali suttas, it means that they are trying to bring general principles more into actual personal practice. I think this is broadly what it means; but not that, having been introduced to the Mahayana sutras, we have now switched over to the Pali suttas, *forgetting* the Mahayana sutras. I don't think that is the case at all. I think it is more a question of consolidating one's position.

But I must say I don't have a very accurate picture of the extent to which even Order Members study more of the Mahayana sutras or more of the Pali suttas; I really don't know. Perhaps someone should do a sort of survey.

Certain Pali suttas have been popular in the Movement from the beginning, mainly because I have taken study groups on them: that is to say, the *Udana*, the *Itivuttaka*, the *Sutta Nipata*. These have been popular all the time, almost from the very beginning. But I think I can say that if I was to think in terms of giving a series of public lectures, probably even now, lectures on a Mahayana

sutra would have more general drawing power than lectures on suttas from the Pali Canon. I am not quite sure why that is, but I think that would still be the case.

Prasannasiddhi: What about the Tantra? Does that have drawing power?

S: I am very doubtful if *lectures* on the Tantra would have drawing power, but Tantric ceremonies definitely do have drawing power. Tantric *rituals* definitely do have drawing power, because they are performances; they are very colourful, they are exotic. They have some aesthetic appeal. This is one of the strong drawing points of the different Tibetan groups in the West. They can lay on very impressive pujas and so on, and initiations which are essentially Tantric.

Chairman: The fifth question is from Dharmadhara on the FWBO context of the series - this particular series in 1976.

In 1976 when you gave this series of lectures, perhaps the two main themes in the FWBO were Right Livelihood and communities. For example, there was a *Newsletter* on each at (that) time, and Sukhavati was being rebuilt. How much did all this contribute to your choice of *The Sutra of Golden Light* [11] as the subject for your series?

S: I must say that I can't remember at all. Those factors could have influenced me, but I don't remember. I think it was more that for some time I had wanted to give some lectures on that particular sutra. You would probably have to consult other people who were around at the time, and ask them whether I'd said anything on the subject - if I'd made any remark about why I selected that particular text. I really don't know.

Chairman: I think it was only published in about 1970 or so, so presumably you wouldn't have come across a translation before. It would have created interest in that way as well.

S: Right, yes. Very often, if one does read something newly, when your mind is full of it, you feel like talking about it, writing about it. That happens very frequently.

Sona: Do you think that the fact that *The Sutra of Golden Light* has as its central theme confession played a part in choosing that lecture series at that time?

S: I don't think it was a major factor in my choosing the sutra, though I must have realised from the beginning that this was an important theme. Very often one just has a sort of general impression about something, and realises its importance fully only when you get down to studying it or writing about it or talking about it. Though when I did come to talk about that particular theme, that particular chapter, I realised I did in fact have quite a lot to say about it. Some people think it's the most significant lecture in the series. It was probably the lecture which had the strongest effect on the audience.

I remember giving those lectures quite clearly, even now. I gave them at the Hampstead Town Hall. Were *you* present at any of them?

Nagabodhi: Oh yes. I think actually at only one, because it conflicted with one of our class nights at Aryatara, which I had to lead, but I got up for one or two of them.

S: I remember Kularatna one evening bringing along his friend -

Nagabodhi: Kulananda, wasn't it?

S: No, it was Kularatna bringing along his friend - I forget what his first name was - Mr. Stones.

Kovida: Will Stones. [12]

S: Will Stones, that's right. I remember him introducing me outside on the landing. He came along twice, I think, and I remember this chubby friend of his quite well. That was his first contact with the FWBO.

Nagabodhi: It was Kulananda's first meeting with you, coming to that one.

S: Was it? I'm afraid I don't remember.

Nagabodhi: Kulamitra brought him down.

S: Perhaps I do, very vaguely, but for some reason or other not as clearly as I remember meeting Virabhadra, yes. [*Transcriber's note: Virabhadra was formerly Will Stones.*] I think the extraordinary thing was that there should be *two* medical students coming along; Kularatna was then still a medical student, as was Virabhadra.

Nagabodhi: It was close to the time that you gave this series that you gave the series in Brighton on *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*, which in a sense perhaps had more to do with current developments within the Movement.

S: Yes, that's right.

Nagabodhi: There was a year or less between the two series.

S: Yes, I remember giving *that* series very well, too, in the William IV room at the Brighton Pavilion. Anyway, let's carry on.

Chairman: The next question is on the Gnostics and the Mahayana. This is a question by Dharmadhara again.

You mentioned that Conze believed there was a connection between the Gnostics and the Mahayana. Do you think there is any validity in this?

S: I'm afraid I'm not really very convinced. I've mentioned this in my review of Conze's *Further Buddhist Studies*, which contains his paper on *Buddhism and Gnosis*. So what I say is:

To me, the most interesting of the essays in many ways is the second of the long articles, 'Buddhism and Gnosis'. In this essay, originally a paper read at a learned congress on 'The Origins of Gnosticism', Dr. Conze describes what he thinks are the eight basic similarities between Near Eastern gnosis and Indian Mahayana Buddhism. Though I have long felt that there was some connection, not necessarily a historical one, between Buddhism and Gnosticism, on the whole I find Dr. Conze's similarities not very convincing, possibly because the discussion is not exhaustive enough to be conclusive. In particular, the discussion of Wisdom as a feminine deity seems to require, in the case of Mahayana Buddhism at least, rather more than the rash application of the vague and uncritical distinction [13] between matriarchal and patriarchal religions. Most uncharacteristically, Dr. Conze would seem to have fallen victim here to the methods of analytical psychology

that is to say, Jungianism. Anyway, I just quickly looked through these eight basic similarities between gnosis and Mahayana Buddhism which he speaks of. I think my objection reduces itself just to one point - that I don't agree with his first similarity, which seems to be the basic one:

Salvation takes place through gnosis or jnana - or prajna. Nothing else can finally achieve it. Both words etymologically derive from the same Indo-European root. The meaning also is quite similar. 'Not baptism alone sets us free but gnosis. Who we were, what we have become, where we were, whereinto we have been thrown, whither we hasten, whence we are redeemed, what is birth and what rebirth, so (we?) accept ex theodoto'. Buddhism, in its turn, claims that - etc., etc.

But to me it seems that the significance of wisdom in Gnosticism, and the significance of wisdom in Buddhism, are totally different. I think Conze, for some reason or other, has not seen this. In Buddhism, Wisdom - *prajna* or *jnana* - is essentially a sort of metaphysical insight into the ultimate nature of reality or the nature of Ultimate Reality. But in Gnosticism, almost always, I think, wisdom is a sort of acquisition of knowledge about certain occult mysteries, or even about the details of what we can only describe as a mythology. It's almost as though you should say that, say, wisdom in the Christian sense consisted in knowledge about how God had created Adam and Eve and put them in a garden, and how Eve had eaten the apple, and then how they had both been punished and driven out of the garden - that *knowledge*, even though Christians might regard it as essential to salvation, is not equivalent to knowledge or Wisdom in the *Buddhist* sense of a metaphysical insight into Ultimate Reality. The Gnostics seem more to have had the idea that there were certain great mysteries about the cosmos, certain factual mysteries, that there were so many spheres of existence and so many aeons and so many archons, and that they had originated in a particular way and were related in a particular way; and if you understood all these mysteries, if you had all the right passwords and key words and all that kind of thing, all the right initiations - then you had gnosis, you had that *saving knowledge*. But it seems to have been of a much more *external* order, that knowledge, than was the case with Buddhism, where that knowledge is essentially a *saving metaphysical insight* of something which far transcends the myths and the occult mysteries with which the Gnostics were concerned. Do you see what I mean? [14]

Dharmadhara: Yes. Would it be that the gnosis is actually knowledge of those passwords and myths and so on, or does that knowledge lead to gnosis?

S: As far as I recollect, that knowledge is the gnosis itself.

Dharmadhara: Do you think it would - that gnosis-type knowledge - would be more in keeping or more in line with this teaching about the imaginal faculty, or would it have more of a rational aspect to it as well, or more of a rational emphasis?

S: Well, let me give you a sort of example. The Gnostics, or many of the Gnostics, believed that man was a prisoner - well, fair enough, one can take that as a metaphor of the human condition - but then they believed that the different spheres - the sphere of the sun and the moon and the different planets - constituted so many prisons within prisons; and each of those spheres was presided over by a particular divinity, and he had a name or there was a password, and you had to learn this name or learn this password to become free. So it was more like a sort of *factual* knowledge, or a knowledge of occult *facts*, rather than of ultimate reality in the metaphysical sense, which was required. So this also suggests - though this may differ a bit from one form of Gnosticism to another - that the acquisition of that knowledge is not a matter of personal spiritual development in the Buddhist sense. Yes, you approach somebody in the right way and you become a disciple and he learns to trust you, and he then imparts these occult facts to you. *That* seems to be

the attitude.

In other words, the knowledge has a sort of quasi- or pseudo-scientific form, because a lot of it consists of knowledge about the universe, but not knowledge about the universe in a scientific sense but in a *mythological* sense, which is understood quite literally. And that would seem to be quite a different sort of knowledge from the knowledge of Buddhism. It's almost like saying that *prajna* in Buddhism means understanding all the different planes of existence and knowing the names of all the deities who were in those planes - if you know all that that will give you Nirvana. But no Buddhist would ever *say* that. The knowledge of those planes is part of Buddhist tradition, but the Buddhist will always say that you don't really develop *prajna* or Wisdom until you have realised the *dukkha-anicca-anatta* nature of all those realms - in other words, until you have realised their true nature, considered from the highest possible point of view.

Therefore, it seems to me that, with regard to the basic theme itself, that of gnosis or wisdom, there is a tremendous difference between Gnosticism and Buddhism, and that difference is concealed by just using the same word, [15] wisdom, for both things. Conze also brings in the wisdom literature of the Apocrypha, the Jewish wisdom literature. But then again, though the word 'wisdom' is used, it has a very different significance. It has a more sort of cosmological significance.

So, without going into it further, I think one can't agree that one of the basic similarities between gnosis and Mahayana Buddhism is in respect of the fact that salvation takes place through gnosis; because gnosis is so differently conceived in the two systems.

Then again - just to add on something here - 'this Gnostic knowledge is derived solely from revelation, although each one has to experience it within himself.' Well, one could say that, even taking this to be so, this is much too general; because it's not only, one could say, gnosis and Mahayana Buddhism that are derived solely from revelation - that is, revelation by the Buddha - but all other religions too. Christianity is a revealed religion; Islam is a revealed religion; Hinduism is a revealed religion. So it doesn't make any special connection, it doesn't prove any special similarity between Gnosticism and Buddhism if one makes the point that they are both based on revelation, because *all* religions are based on revelation. But, even granting that, my original objection still applies, because the revelation from which knowledge is derived in Gnosticism is a revelation of occult facts, of facts about the universe. Whereas in Buddhism it's a revelation of - well, you can't call them facts - but revelation of realities about the true *nature* of the universe, the true nature of existence as such.

Kovida: It's quite interesting; your description of Gnosticism is very like the description of very many popular computer games, where you've got to learn the password before you can go on to the next stage. It's quite strange, that.

S: Mm. So I think the wisdom of Gnosticism is a much more *external* thing than the wisdom of Buddhism. No doubt it's difficult to generalise about Gnosticism, because it's a very broad phenomenon, but I think this does on the whole hold true. So I think Conze is really completely on the wrong track here.

Bodhiraja: Do you think that Conze is misunderstanding *Buddhist* wisdom?

S: I don't see how he could possibly have misunderstood Buddhist wisdom, because after all he has translated those *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras. I can only imagine that he hasn't a sufficient knowledge of Gnosticism, though he clearly has read *something* about it. Perhaps he had some sort of personal reason of which he wasn't conscious [16] for trying to bring Buddhism and Gnosticism

closer, or to try to see some similarity between them. Don't forget, he called his memoirs 'Memoirs of a Modern Gnostic'. (**Voices:** Mm.) So in what sense was he a Gnostic, and why did he want to think of himself as a Gnostic? Being a Buddhist, why not 'Memoirs of a Modern Buddhist'?

Prasannasiddhi: Could I suggest, perhaps, that he had a lot of contact with the *writings* of Buddhism but perhaps hadn't assimilated them and in a sense made Buddhism his own?

S: I don't think it was as simple as that. I think it may be connected with the fact that he was very isolated all his life, in many different ways; and Gnosticism does stress the isolation of the individual in a hostile and alien universe from which you can be rescued or liberated or saved by learning the right passwords. I think it was his sense of isolation that made him feel an affinity with Gnosticism. I think probably by 'Memoirs of a Modern Gnostic' he means something like 'Memoirs of an Isolated Buddhist'! I think that's where, emotionally, the affinity lay. All right, let's leave that, then.

Chairman: We have some further mythology, to do with the Holy Grail. This is our last question from the study of this tape. A question from Dharmadhara.

Bhante, you speculate that there may be a faint reflection of the Mahayana in the Arthurian cycle, especially the Grail legend. The Grail legend seems to fall into two halves: an early pagan base and a later mystical Christian part. Which half do you think reflects the Mahayana more? Have you come to any conclusions about a possible link between the Mahayana and the Grail legend?

S: I must say it's many years since I gave any thought at all to this question, and I can't easily remember what *made* me 'speculate that there may be a *faint* reflection of the Mahayana in the Arthurian cycle, especially the Grail legend.' I can't recollect now. If I immersed myself in the Arthurian material, especially that relating to the Grail, it would all come back to me. But I think I can say that it was the early, pagan base, or the material which seems to belong to the early pagan base, not the material that belonged to the later mystical Christian part, that I thought reflected the Mahayana more. Because it seems we can trace quite clearly the way in which Christian, especially Cistercian, mysticism was incorporated into the Arthurian cycle, especially into the Grail legend. We know when that happened. But to say anything more I'd really need to go back to the Grail literature and think about it all again.

Is that *really* all? [17]

Chairman: That's all, but Prasannasiddhi had a supplementary question, if there was time.

S: All right.

Prasannasiddhi:

Bhante, in your lecture you say that 'As the Bodhisattva meets people halfway, there comes into existence the more popular side of the Mahayana. This popular side acts as a bridge between the worldly and spiritual life. This popular side of Mahayana Buddhism only becomes a degeneration when it becomes an end in itself.' In the FWBO, we have introduced many elements from our Western culture to meet people halfway. Do you feel that our overall spiritual momentum is currently strong enough to avoid degeneration in the immediate future, or are we settling down on a lower level? Do you have any views on the current strength and direction of the Movement?

S: I think we're meeting people halfway - perhaps more than halfway - through things like yoga,

T'ai Chi, Alexander technique, and quite a host of other things. People initially might not be interested in Buddhism - I mean some people - but are interested in yoga, or interested in T'ai Chi, and interested in Alexander technique, needing them; and come in some cases into contact with Buddhism by attending classes in those subjects taken by people who are themselves Buddhists and who see them as stepping stones to spiritual life in the Buddhist sense. So in that way, yes, some people running those classes, whether Order Members or Mitras, are running the classes as a means of meeting people halfway - also, of course, as a means, very often, of supporting themselves.

One could say the same about the co-operative businesses. Apart from their function of making money for the Movement, they do provide a sort of halfway house where one can meet people. For instance, the vegetarian restaurants. People might start coming along to them just for the sake of the food, but clearly, there must be some element of idealism, possibly, because of the fact that they prefer to be vegetarians, and therefore perhaps, in some cases, are quite open to something like Buddhism.

But there's no doubt that we do meet people halfway in all these different ways. But, yes, definitely the danger is that those things become ends in themselves. I was thinking only a few days ago of certain very successful communities in America in the last century. Some of them set up businesses which provided funds for the communities. But in several well-known cases, the communities became so to speak absorbed in the businesses, and the businesses became just ordinary secular businesses, quite successful ones. So one could imagine a sort of scenario - take, say, Hockneys; it's an excellent vegetarian [18] restaurant. Supposing, by some series of accidents, that no Order Members were left actually running it, and it was gradually taken over by people who had nothing to do with Buddhism. Well, for a while they would no doubt continue to run an excellent vegetarian restaurant - well, they might run it indefinitely; but it would lose its Buddhistic flavour, and it would lose its Buddhist function, it wouldn't any longer be a halfway house in which you could meet people. So I think there is always that danger that something that has been started as a means of approaching people becomes an end in itself.

Now whether that is happening yet is difficult to say; I think it probably isn't happening - certainly in the case of Hockneys, in the case of Cherry Orchard, in the case of our yoga classes and so on, I don't think it's happening.

But there is always the danger. I think the danger usually arises when a situation develops in which you've got something thriving but you haven't got enough Order Members to run it; that the Order Members who started it or who were running it aren't interested any longer, for one reason or another, so there are no Order Members. That is a dangerous situation, anyway. You might even get a situation in which after a while there were not even many Mitras. Well, then what happens? To some extent, there is this situation with regard to Phoenix, or at least the possibility of it developing - that there were not enough FWBO people, especially Order Members, actively interested in Phoenix to keep the running of Phoenix so to speak within the Movement.

So I think the only real safeguard, apart from Stream Entry - is for all these activities which go halfway towards meeting people to be run by Order Members, or at the very least by Mitras, and that those Order Members or Mitras should maintain very strong contact with other Order Members, especially through their chapters.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, I was thinking even of Order Members themselves perhaps immersing themselves in, say, study of psychology or general studies, or maybe in painting, things like that, and in a sense not having very much direct dharmic practice.

S: Well, there is a little Japanese story that I printed in an issue of *Stepping Stones*. There was a young monk, and he thought, 'One day I'm going to be in charge of a temple, and people are going to come along and want instruction. It's very important I should be on good terms with them. It's important I should be able to please them. So what shall I do in order to do that?' So in the end he decided he had better learn to play the flute, because if he could give a bit of a performance on the flute when they came to the temple, it would create a good impression and lead to friendly relations and all that. So he started practising on the flute and, to cut a long story short, eventually he forgot all about becoming a monk! So it's a little bit like that.

I think, in the early days of the FWBO, there was a real danger that anybody [19] who ventured outside the FWBO and took up some outside interest of that sort would go away from the FWBO. It's happened in the case of Mamaki and her Jungian psychology, but I doubt if it would happen with an Order Member now. One or two perhaps come dangerously near, but not quite.

I think probably there will be more danger when a particular, let's say, a yoga centre, or something of that sort, becomes very popular and very successful, and then the temptation is to bring in, to help you run it, people who are not really committed to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - maybe because you've built up something which is quite big, and other people within the Order aren't interested in that particular activity. So I think one has to provide for that very carefully. Otherwise you will be confronted with the choice between either closing down what you've built up or running it on what will be in the long run non-Buddhist lines; and especially if that thing is your livelihood you may be very much tempted to go on running it, even at the cost of it having to be run to some extent by people who are not spiritually committed. And that will have its effect upon *you* in the long run, too.

Nagabodhi: Bhante, do you think that such a centre - say, a yoga centre or, for example, Bodywise in East London - should measure its success in terms of what we are generally trying to do in the Movement by the fact that people are crossing over from their first entry to a yoga class to the Dharma classes; that it would be only a very sort of social success if people merely get a lot out of yoga or get healthier because of T'ai Chi, and that we should really be looking for that centre to act as a stepping stone to Dharma classes? Would that be the criterion in your mind, for success?

S: Well, if something was regarded as intended to meet people halfway. If, say, an Order Member engaged in it merely as a means of livelihood, that would be another matter, and they would have to keep up their spiritual contacts in another way. It would be almost like an outside job, almost like working in the world. But if it was *meant* to be functioning as a means of going halfway to meet people, you should ask whether in fact you are meeting them - that is, introducing them to the Dharma. We have found, for instance, in London at least, that karate didn't function as a halfway house; though, of course, admittedly, classes that were held at our premises weren't run by an Order Member. For instance, at Archway, very big classes were taken by George. I don't remember a single person, though, coming from karate to the FWBO, though they were using our premises and though we were very friendly with George. I believe it has been a little bit different in Scotland, but there the karate class is being taught by Dharmavira. [20]

So if something is supposed to be a means of meeting people halfway, we have to ask ourselves whether we *are* meeting them halfway, or whether we are not in fact going the whole way *with them*.

Prasannasiddhi: So, Bhante, basically, you are not particularly worried at the moment about the overall direction or -

S: I'm not worried at the moment, though I think we need to keep a close watch on the situation and even monitor it. Some people have said that it's a bit surprising, or even alarming, that so many Order Members and Mitras, say, in London are involved with various alternative therapies and so on, but I have recently said to Dhammarati that that's a bit of a generalisation; we need to be sure of our facts and see what people actually *are* studying or teaching, and exactly how many of them are there. We don't really have sufficiently detailed information to be really able to say very much. It's very easy just to generalise on the basis of inadequate knowledge.

OK, then.

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Second Lecture: The Bodhisattva's Dream - 3rd March 1987

Present: Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara (Chairman), Mangala, Prasannasiddhi, Kovida, Nagabodhi

Chairman: Today is the 3rd March and we are on the second lecture in *The Sutra of Golden Light* series. The first question comes from Dharmadhara on the causes of long life.

Mangala: Dharmadhara's question.

Ruchiraketu recalls the Buddha to have said that the main causes of long life are twofold: firstly, to refrain from killing living beings, and to give away food. There seems to be a trace of this also in some of the *Jataka* tales, but have you come across it fully stated anywhere in the Pali Canon? Is it a pre-Buddhist belief at all?

S: Karma itself is not a pre-Buddhist belief. At least, it wasn't very widespread before the time of the Buddha, that is to say in Vedic times, though there is one reference to the doctrine of karma in the Upanishads, but it is referred to there as a secret teaching, something that is known to very few people. So one can't really say that the doctrine of karma, in the more fully developed form, at least, in which it is found in Buddhism, is a pre-Buddhist belief.

As for the point that 'Ruchiraketu recalls the Buddha to have said that the main causes of long life are twofold: to refrain from killing living beings and to give away food' - the Buddha certainly does say things to that effect in the Pali Canon, because in the Pali Canon, especially for instance in some of the suttas of the *Majjhima-Nikaya*, the nature of the different kinds of karma and the nature of their effects are both described in some detail. And one of the points that is made is that the results of karma are in keeping, so to speak, with the particular karma that has been performed. For instance, if you are very greedy or very selfish, and you are always misappropriating other people's property, you will be poor. Do you see what I mean? In the same way, if you are always taking the life of others, your *own* life will be taken or at least it will be shortened. So when Ruchiraketu recalls the Buddha to have said that the main causes of long life are twofold: refraining from killing living beings and giving away food, there is certainly some basis for that in the Pali scriptures themselves; though, very often, the formulation is negative rather than positive, that is to say, what are the results of *unskillful* actions is explained, but not so often, perhaps, the results of skillful actions. But none the less, we are left in no doubt that the effect is in keeping with the nature of the cause, the nature of the karma that has been performed.

I mentioned this in that lecture I gave on karma. There was a congruence, [2] as it were, between the karma and the karma *vipaka* in this way. So perhaps it can't be as it were scientifically justified, but it does seem reasonable, one might say, that the nature of the karmic effect had something to do, as it were, with the nature of the karmic cause. Not that *any* unpleasant effect could follow from *any* unskillful action. So is that clear?

Chairman: Yes. And we have a question from Nagabodhi, a supplementary.

If karma was not a fully developed belief before the Buddha's day, what was the justification of the caste system? - because there was a form of caste system in existence. How was it justified in those days?

S: Well, there was, of course, the Vedic verse to the effect that the Brahmins were created out of the head of Brahma, the Kshatriyas out of his shoulders - or proceeded from his shoulders - the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet. So that might well have been regarded as a sufficient basis. It's in a way, one *might* say, a bit like the later Christian conception that everybody was born in the particular social class that he happened to be born in due to the will of God. The verse in the hymn says: '*The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, He made them high and lowly And ordered their estate.*' So you don't need karma to explain social differences. It's enough, in a general way, to attribute it to the will of God, and the Brahmins seem to have done that by means of that particular Vedic myth.

Mangala: So the belief in karma, in a sense, undermines the idea of God.

S: To some extent, because it has been argued that karma exercises at least one of the functions, so to speak, that in theistic religions is exercised by God. I should, though, say that it is perhaps more correct to say that before the time of the Buddha the doctrine of karma was not known to the Brahmins. It was not part of the Vedic tradition. But it was known to the Jains. Because in India you have these two traditions - the so-called Brahmanic and the so-called Sramanic. And it does seem that the doctrine of karma and rebirth pertained more to the Sramanic tradition generally than to the Vedic tradition, even though subsequently belief in karma and rebirth became general in India. Later on, most of the Hindu schools of philosophy or schools of thought maintained that it was God who apportioned the results of karma, whereas in Buddhism and Jainism karma operates so to speak automatically, just like a natural law. It doesn't require any God to apportion its results. [3]

Mangala: Can I ask one more question about karma? I hope it's not too unrelated. It's from another seminar you gave, when you said that everything that happens to you cannot be the result of your karma. And you went on to say that the fact that you have encountered the Dharma, or Buddhism - how could that possibly be due to your karma, because assuming your karma has been unskilful, on that basis how could you therefore hope to encounter the Dharma?

S: I don't remember the context - but if you think of the Dharma as transcendental essentially, which it really is, how can you conceive that even a skilful *mundane* action could have resulted in your coming in contact with the Dharma? So in a sense the Dharma is offered, so to speak, quite freely. At least, that's one way of looking at it. In other words, you can't really think that you have *deserved* the Dharma. Do you see what I mean?

Mangala: Not quite, no.

S: Well, if you are a mundane being, and if even your skilful actions are mundane, how can those actions have any consequence other than a *mundane* consequence? How can they have a *transcendental* consequence or reward, so to speak?

Mangala: But couldn't it be like indirectly leading you to that? They may not be transcendental yet, but at least they are preparing you for that.

S: Yes, they may predispose you to receive it, even though it is not the direct consequence of those actions, or your contact with the Dharma is not the direct consequence of those actions. Certainly they can make you more ready to receive it or to be receptive to it when you do encounter it. One could say that. But I don't remember the original context of that statement.

Dharmadhara: But that suggests that, as a result of mundane skilful actions, you come into contact with something that helps you grow. But that suggests that that may not necessarily be the Dharma.

S: Yes, because there's a sort of intermediate stage or level which is so to speak neither completely mundane nor at the same time really transcendental. That is that part of the spiral which is definitely positive but from which you can slip back. So your skilful actions can bring you into contact with that, and that in its turn can form a basis for contact with something transcendental. But the Transcendental itself cannot be the reward, so to speak, of any mundane action, even though it is skilful.

Prasannasiddhi: Would this apply to the case of the Buddha's Enlightenment as well?

S: Presumably it would. The same rule, so to speak, the same principle, would hold good. [4]

Kovida: It seems to imply that the Transcendental is always there, doesn't it? Underlying.

S: As regards the individual human being, it's always there, at least as a potentiality. Whether it's always there in a metaphysical sense, that's another question. In some places in the Pali Canon the Buddha seems to say that the Transcendental, or the Unconditioned, the Incomposite, is there in a metaphysical sense; that is to say, it is an actual existent; that it isn't simply a psychological experience, so to speak.

Mangala: In the case I am thinking of, Bhante, you seemed to be implying or suggesting that there's some outside force as it were, presumably benign or something, which as it were intervened, as it were cut across or cut into your karma and therefore disposed you or brought it to you or brought you to it in some way. In other words, that your unskilful karma wouldn't have taken you there by itself but there was some outside force not due to you, which actually influenced you.

S: You can argue that, say, in the case of the historical Buddha; because those who were then around and who came into personal contact with the Buddha may not necessarily have done anything, so to speak, to deserve that. In a sense, it's almost luck that you happen to be around at that time.

Nagabodhi: At the beginning of the *Platform Sutra of Hui Neng*, it says how his audience must have acquired great merit to be present on this occasion. Would you therefore say that that is more of a rhetorical device, or would you place more on that?

S: You could say he was sort of paying them a compliment, but they hadn't as yet come into contact with the Transcendental - except to the extent perhaps that *he* was there and embodied that, though they would not *realise* that.

Prasannasiddhi: Coming back to the Buddha again, it does almost seem like on the eve of his Enlightenment he was so wholeheartedly behind what he was doing that in a way he could hardly avoid contacting the Transcendental, considering the circumstances that led up to his experience.

S: But that's quite different from as it were *deserving* it, or having done anything which could produce so to speak the Transcendental or the experience of the Transcendental by way of a sort of equivalent reward. Because however great the Buddha's efforts may have been over however many lives, they were still *finite*, and the Transcendental is infinite. So how can you, so to speak, be

rewarded for your finite efforts with something that is infinite?

But leaving aside theoretical considerations - one can get lost in those - this has a practical upshot or application, which is that one should not think [5] that one has *deserved* Enlightenment, as it were. It is not that 'If I fulfil all the necessary conditions, I must get it; I have deserved it; it's due to me.' That is the practical significance of that particular way of looking at things.

Nagabodhi: Isn't the way into this, perhaps, just to feel that if the giving of food or the refraining from killing is spontaneous, it arises out of a perfectly natural repulsion from such mundane confusion and blindness as would make one withhold food or kill, then to that extent one is living closer to the Transcendental?

S: Yes, if one can use that language at all.

Nagabodhi: And one is living less deluded, one's life is less deluded. So it would be conditional on it being not so much a forced giving, a wilful giving, but a spontaneous giving.

S: But where's the connection? I don't quite see the connection. What you say is true, but ...

Nagabodhi: Well, if you started giving food away and maybe taking tremendous care not to kill as a matter of will because you were hoping thereby to gain Enlightenment, that would be one thing, but to be free from the desire to kill or to have a spontaneous urge to give, that's something else, and I would see the latter as being karma expressive of a state which was closer to the Transcendental.

S: Yes, but I still don't see why you make the point, and what the connection of that point is with what we have been discussing. Or is it just a - what shall I say? - just a little diversion?

Nagabodhi: No, I don't think ...

S: Where does the connection come in? I don't see that. *[Pause]*

Nagabodhi: It feels very direct to me, but I can't ... Well, I suppose talking about we're in a position where we're working on our spiritual development and it's wrong to have an idea that you can 'deserve' Enlightenment; and so for us the point isn't so much to necessarily, wilfully, do good acts, but to work on the basis out of which good acts would arise.

S: Yes, that is true. But I don't see the logical connection with what we've been discussing, even though what you say is correct.

Nagabodhi: I'll leave it, then.

S: Is it reasonably clear on the whole? The main point - to get back to the actual question - being that the consequences of karma are in harmony with the karma that has actually been committed. They are appropriate to the karma that has been committed. [6] Therefore, if you take life, your own life will be shortened; if you misappropriate the property of others, then you will be poorer. And this belief, in its more fully developed form at least, was *not* found in Brahminical circles at least before the time of the Buddha.

Chairman: The second question is from Abhaya. It concerns Order Members doing longevity practices for each other.

Abhaya's question:

The section on Ruchiraketu's problem concerning the length of life of the Buddha got me thinking about the length of life of Order Members. Vessantara recently spent a considerable amount of time on a solitary retreat doing the White Tara practice for the prolongation of your life. Don't you think it would be a good idea if such practices were done more extensively by Order Members for Order Members, in the interests of spreading the Dharma to a greater number of people over a longer period of time, on the understanding, of course, that the practice was free of any superstitious element, and that Order Members are doing their utmost to protect their lives in the usual ways?

S: There's one big difficulty here, which is that there is no way of proving or demonstrating that these practices work. Because, all right, you may - let's take it for the sake of argument - you *may* have succeeded in prolonging your own life, or somebody else's life by performing the White Tara practice; but how are you to prove and demonstrate that, but for the fact that you had performed that particular practice, you or another person would have had a shorter life? So there has to be, so to speak, an element of faith. I don't know what exactly Abhaya means by 'any superstitious element', but those who were very scientifically minded, especially non-Buddhists, would regard the practice itself *as superstitious*, inasmuch as it was incapable of verification. Though, of course, it's also incapable of falsification. You can't prove it, you can't *disprove* it. But one can certainly say that, regardless of whether one believes in the efficacy of this particular practice, certainly it must be a positive thing, a beneficial thing, at least for oneself, to direct those sort of thoughts towards another person, whether an Order Member or some other.

The Tibetans do not, of course, believe that if you perform this White Tara practice, either for yourself or for somebody else, their life will be automatically prolonged. It is able to counteract only certain obstacles to your life force. I think this is dealt with in Stephan Beyer's book *The Cult of Tara*.

Mangala: It sounds a little bit like transferring merits.

S: In a way, but it isn't a transference of merits. [7]

Mangala: What do you yourself feel about the efficacy of such a practice? Do you have any views about that?

S: I think I am more inclined to believe in it than not. But I recognise the fact that there is no way of justifying that objectively, in scientific terms. But it cannot but be good to do the practice, because you are in a particular way wishing well to another human being, and your thoughts are preoccupied with them and their welfare in a highly positive manner. And it could have an objective effect for subjective reasons. If you were doing the practice for your own benefit and you had faith in it, you might feel more alive and fuller of energy, and that might help prolong your life. And if you were aware that other people were performing the White Tara practice on your behalf, this could certainly have a strong effect on you, and could even help you to be more healthy and to live longer. But it would be not a sort of objective, magical efficacy, but a sort of subjective, psychological efficacy. And, of course, you would have to know, in the case of someone on whose behalf somebody else was doing the practice - you would have to know, presumably, that the other person was doing it. If, of course, you wanted to be a bit sceptical, you might say, well, the Tibetans do have all these long-life practices, but is there any evidence that their average longevity is greater than that of other people?

Mangala: But, on the other hand, it might be much shorter if they weren't doing it!

S: That's true. There's no way of proving that, one way or the other, yes.

Prasannasiddhi: It might be possible to determine whether lamas have longer lives than, say, people who don't have much ...

S: Well, on the whole, the clergy, I think, in all religions, live longer than the laity. In some cases it's because they have an easier life, but more often, perhaps, it's because they never retire. They go on working. And it's the work, and their interest in the work, that keeps them going. *[Pause]*

Dharmadhara: Bhante, is it *possible* to transfer merits? I mean, is this more a way of not being attached to one's own merits, or is it actually ...

S: Well, that is certainly one way of looking at it. I am very doubtful if one can transfer merits in a literal sense; though no doubt there is a level of spiritual experience where you genuinely do not distinguish between yourself and another, and perhaps at that level, whatever you do in the way of skilful actions doesn't just redound in reality to your own personal benefit because you don't have that sense of personal identity, really. So it's as though it then, so to speak, is credited perhaps to humanity at large, if one [8] can speak in those terms. I don't think one can think in terms of a literal transfer. As I think I say in the *Survey*, the idea of the literal transfer was developed probably to counteract the idea that your merits were literally your own. This is something that does require further thought. But certainly one can say this: that if the transference of merit is possible, it would only be possible *if* you no longer distinguished between yourself and the other person. That would have to be the precondition. Because, so long as you had a sense of ego-identity and experienced yourself as yourself and the other person as another person, there could be no question of transference of merits. But there might be if you had transcended that distinction. That would have to be the condition, I think.

Mangala: Wouldn't it also depend to some extent on the other person and how, as it were, receptive or what kind of receptacle they were to...? They might not at all be anywhere near appropriate for that sort of merit.

S: But then this would mean investigating the whole idea of transference. What does one mean by transference, on that kind of level, in that kind of sense?

Prasannasiddhi: Wouldn't it simply be a matter, Bhante, of if you didn't think in terms of yourself and others, that you would just do things for other people which would help them, in a sort of almost practical sense of your merit...

S: Well, no, that's not the same thing. Your helping them is not the same thing as transferring your *merit* to them. If you help them, you help them. But over and above that, because of your skilful actions, including helping other people, well, you've accumulated a certain amount of merit, of *punya*. So, according to some Buddhist teachings, it is possible to transfer that, so to speak, to the account of other beings. So that is quite a different thing from benefiting them by your actions in the ordinary way. Though, of course, you would be benefiting them if you transferred your merits to them.

Mangala: In that case, could a Buddha not just transfer his merit to everybody, and just make them all Enlightened?

S: Well, one could argue that - that if there was such a thing as transference of merits, the Buddhas would surely have transferred their merits to all sentient beings and no one would be unenlightened. But I think the whole concept of transference of merit has not been properly investigated. But, as I have said, I think I would say that if transference of merits is possible at all, it's only possible on the basis of non-discrimination between oneself and other people. There can be no question of a *literal* transfer; so *if* there is any [9] way in which what is yours can become somebody else's, it can only be by transcending the conception of self and other.

Dharmadhara: The Sanskrit term for transfer is *numodana* - is that right? *Punya numodana*?

S: *Parinama* - no, not *parinama*.

Mangala: That's rejoicing in merit, I think.

S: I can't remember.

Dharmadhara: I was going to ask whether it was the literal translation, but I can't remember.

S: I can't remember the word, but the term or expression 'transference of merits' represents it pretty accurately. It is in the *Survey*. So I certainly wouldn't discourage people from performing the White Tara sadhana on their own behalf or on behalf of other people, but I don't think one can be very dogmatic about what actually takes place. Though it is clear that it is a positive practice and has a positive effect, both on the person doing it and the person or persons for whom it is done, if at least they know about it. But perhaps by being free of any superstitious element, Abhaya means not regarding the practice as something magical which has a sort of irresistible effect, regardless of your own mental state and regardless of whether the person on whose behalf you are doing it knows about it or not.

OK, then, let's pass on.

Chairman: The third question is from Ratnabodhi on Dundubhisvara.

Ratnabodhi's question:

Could you give us some more information on Dundubhisvara? For example, what is his connection with Amoghasiddhi? Has Amoghasiddhi developed out of, or replaced, Dundubhisvara? Do they have any characteristics in common?

S: 'Could you give us any more information on Dundubhisvara?' I looked up the *Dictionary of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*, and there is very little information there indeed. He seems to be known exclusively from *The Sutra of Golden Light*, though there is another Buddha associated with the North mentioned in the *Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, but his name is Dundubhisvara Nirghosa. So actually Dundubhisvara is a very minor character indeed in the Mahayana sutras. He is mentioned mainly in this particular context. As for his connection with Amoghasiddhi, it seems to consist merely in the fact that both reside in the northern direction in the Mandala. 'Has Amoghasiddhi developed out of, or replaced, Dundubhisvara?' He certainly replaced him, but there is no evidence that he developed out of him. 'Do they have any characteristics in common?' Well, in *The Sutra of* [10] *Golden Light* no characteristics of Dundubhisvara are mentioned except that he occupies the Northern direction or Northern position.

I think we must realise that the Five-Buddha Mandala or Four-Buddha Mandala developed really

only with the Vajrayana, only with the Tantras, and is not found in the Mahayana sutras. Maybe the fact that we do have this Four-Buddha Mandala in *The Sutra of Golden Light* indicates a slightly Tantric development within *The Sutra of Golden Light*, which, as a literary document, is quite a late work. Or, at least in the composite form in which we have it, it is quite a late work. The original nucleus seems to be quite old. So we don't really know very much about Dundubhisvara. Amoghasiddhi seems to have permanently replaced him as the Buddha of the North.

You notice that, even in the case of Ratnasambhava, he is called Ratnaketu - assuming it to be the same Buddha - so it seems that the personages of that mandala were not standardised at that time; they were standardised only with the rise of the Vajrayana. That is all we can say on that, I think.

Kovida: This is another question by Ratnabodhi.

In this lecture, you speak of Ruchiraketu as being unable to reconcile the problem of the Tathagata's span of life. You then say that this situation of being unable to reconcile the problem is reflected in the Zen *koan*, and that here in the West a *koan* is something that springs up quite naturally from your own life, from your own effort to develop. This being the case, it would tend to suggest that the more formal type of *koan* - that is, a *koan* that one is given by a master - should be unnecessary if our spiritual practice is really being effective. Could you say a little about the history of this type of *koan*, and whether, being an artificially induced problem, it is as efficient as a means of transformation as the problems we are likely to encounter in the course of our spiritual life?

S: When I say - if in fact I did say exactly this - that 'Here in the West a *koan* is something that springs up quite naturally from your own life, from your own effort to develop', I didn't mean to suggest that that had not happened in the East; because that clearly was the case. *Koans*, or what were later known as *koans*, do seem to have originated out of actual problems, or to have crystallised actual problems arising in the lives of the old Zen masters and their disciples. It would seem that, having found that a certain problem which, of course, focused attention on a certain aspect of Reality or constituted a point where it had been possible to break through into Reality, had been helpful to *them*, the masters naturally tended to think that that particular *koan*, to call it that, might well be useful to their disciples, and so had, [11] so to speak, given them the *koan* - not as it were given them the *koan* in a sort of external and mechanical way, but had somehow drawn their attention to that particular sort of existential dilemma which the *koan* represented. I mean, that existential dilemma being inherent in existence itself.

But eventually, of course, the whole thing became rather routinised and formalised, so that in modern Japan, so I have read somewhere, you not only have dictionaries of *koans*, of which there are about 2,500-3,000, but you have even got books which provide you with the answers. So, obviously, the *koan* system in that case has degenerated. But I think that originally the *koans*, or the sayings, or the words that were recognised as official *koans* as it were, did embody life experiences of the kind that I have mentioned.

I know that the Japanese do talk in terms of 'giving a *koan*', but it can't really be as literal as that. There is this well-known *koan* 'Mu', which means 'Not'. So, yes, you could say this has a certain universal validity, because, looking at it very broadly and from a philosophical point of view, 'Mu' or 'Not' sort of denies that anything can be predicated of Ultimate Reality. So this is what you have got to realise. So you reflect on this 'Mu', and you reflect in all sorts of ways. And usually all your reflections and all your solutions to 'Mu' are rejected by the master because they are all intellectual; but eventually, by trying to see that nothing can be predicated of Ultimate Reality, you do actually break through as it were at that particular point represented by the 'Mu', and that is

what is meant by solving the *koan*. And then what you say to the master, though it may not seem to have any logical connection with ‘*Mu*’, shows that you have actually broken through into that dimension. So perhaps one should not even think too literally in terms of solutions of *koans*. But since ‘*Mu*’ has a place in Zen tradition, someone familiar with that tradition or working in that tradition will be able to use that ‘*Mu*’; and also, of course, there is an assumption that the disciple has great faith in the master, so even if the master rejects all his solutions and explanations the disciple will be able to accept that, and not insist that the master is wrong and that his explanation is correct - which is what happened, apparently, in the case of Alan Watts when he spent a short time with a Roshi. He ended up losing his temper with the Roshi and saying that he had got it wrong and that he had solved the *koan* - or something like that.

So one has to see the *koan* as representing originally a sort of existential dilemma, but subsequently that *koan* became routinised and formalised, and lost a lot of its significance. So I won’t say that a *koan* in the traditional sense isn’t of any use, but it needs, so to speak, to be used properly, not mechanically. [12] For instance, you might suggest as a *koan* to someone ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’. Because they think ‘How can truth be beauty and how can beauty be truth? They are two quite different things! What did Keats mean by saying they were the same thing? He was talking nonsense!’ Then there is the *koan*: ‘If you smack two hands together you produce a clapping sound, so what sound is made by *one* hand clapping?’

Mangala: Does a *koan* by definition have to be inherently self-contradictory, as it were, or could you just take some profound philosophical statement or metaphysical statement and just -

S: No, that seems to be rather different. Traditionally in Ch’an or Zen *koans* do seem to embody a logical contradiction, but which cannot be solved logically, like the goose and the bottle which I mentioned in the lecture. But ‘*Mu*’, of course, is rather an exception because it is just a single word.

Mangala: Do you think taking some abstruse metaphysical point and sort of really meditating on it, pondering on it, do you think that - ?

S: It’s not a question of an *abstruse* metaphysical point. It’s a question of a metaphysical point which involves a contradiction. That is to say when you are strongly convinced of two different things, two different ideas or principles, but you see they are inconsistent, and that really one cannot be true if the other isn’t, but at the same time you are convinced that *both* are true. So solving a *koan* is not just pondering on some deep teaching - for instance, that all things are void - that is not a *koan*. The *koan* seems to involve essentially an element of contradiction and dilemma, which you cannot resolve.

Mangala: I suppose what I’m asking is: what, if anything, do you think the difference would be in pursuing one or the other - either the *koan* approach or the thinking logically about some deep point? Do you think they would bring you to the same conclusion?

S: I think they do; not conclusion, necessarily, but they certainly can function as means of breaking through. Yes. I think the fact that, in the case of the *koan*, you reflect or meditate on something or a situation that is contradictory sort of stimulates your thinking and your effort; that is, if you have faith in the system. If you don’t have that faith, you say it’s just a nonsensical statement; what’s the point of trying to puzzle it out? I think this is what happens in the case of many Westerners who take up, say, *koans* and practise Ch’an or Zen, They are not really convinced. [13] They don’t really believe - at least, in some cases - that they can break through in that way.

Kovida: It almost sounds like the bit of grit in the oyster - it irritates you so much, you produce a pearl.

S: Yes, right.

Nagabodhi: When I heard Trevor Leggett give a talk about the origin of *koan* practice, he attributed it to Chinese masters having little grasp of Japanese, and needing to put the Dharma across in a very short way. But he talked about the master needing to *trap* the pupil; to somehow manoeuvre the situation so that the disciple really was *lumbered* with the *koan*. It wasn't just given as a sort of abstract thing for him to take up, but the master would manoeuvre the disciple into a position where he'd suddenly find he'd got this question, which he just had to...

S: Yes, that seems to be more skilful and more in accordance, presumably, with the original tradition. Yes, it's more like the master manoeuvring, as you say, the disciple into a position, into a corner, where the *koan* naturally arises. The *koan* is a natural expression of the position that the master has manoeuvred the disciple into.

Dharmadhara: I met the disciple of one Zen master whose first *koan*, which he struggled with for about six weeks, was 'What was your original face before you were born?' He struggled and struggled, and one morning he went in, as he did many times a day - but before he went in he noticed the sun was rising - and as he went in he just spontaneously said 'Good morning, Roshi!' and the Zen Master said 'Right! The next *koan* is' - and went on to the next one; and it was only later that he realised that he had solved it by being completely spontaneous.

S: Yes, he'd shown his original face.

Dharmadhara: Right. So what I'm asking is, do you see any possible benefit from having a formal structure like that, to put people on the spot?

S: Well, it raises the question of the general usefulness of formal structures; because one gets them in all situations. You find, to begin with, that someone has a certain experience, so you try, so to speak, to make it easier for other people to have that experience by reproducing the conditions under which the first person had it. So this happens on all sorts of levels in all sorts of ways. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. But you have to be very careful you don't try to reduce the experience to the conditions under which it took place, or think that if you reproduce the conditions faithfully the [14] experience must automatically happen.

Kovida: It does seem to depend very much on the relationship between the two, doesn't it? - between the master and the disciple.

S: So that, if you try to reproduce that, you must make sure that you have not only got a disciple, but you have also got a master of the original calibre.

Dharmadhara: Perhaps the testing of the chairmen is a current *koan*.

S: Well, would it be classified as a *koan*? I mean a *koan* is a test, but is a test necessarily a *koan*?

Dharmadhara: I don't know; it depends what you have in mind.

S: Well, I have spoken of a test. I haven't spoken of a *koan*.

Nagabodhi: Something I notice - I think you've talked about it before - is the way the Movement works on people. You once said that in the Movement we don't so much have techniques but that the Movement is one big technique. The people who get involved with the FWBO find themselves continually confronted with problems that they can only resolve by rising to a higher level: like whether or not to go on a holiday with their family or go on a retreat.

S: Or a very common dilemma is to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the spiritual life *or* to devote a lot of time to their particular art. That's a very common one. And they don't succeed in solving it on its own level

Anyway, maybe we should go on.

Chairman: The next question is from Dharmadhara on big dreams.

In the talk, I think you stated that ordinary dreams are in black and white, while 'big dreams' are in colour. Last night, I had an ordinary dream but it was in colour; so, to be a bit nitpicking, were you generalising or being categorical?

S: I am not sure what you mean by 'generalising *or* being categorical', but I don't think one can be too definite. I think one can certainly say that big dreams are in colour, and that ordinary dreams are usually in black and white. There may well be sort of intermediate dreams. So I wouldn't like to be too definite. But I think one does find, normally, that the big dreams are in colour. Also, of course, there is the question of - to go back to your own dream - what makes one determine that a dream is a big dream or a little dream? Perhaps one hasn't recognised its significance; there is that possibility. Though, usually, the big dream - which, as I say, is normally in colour - has a certain quality to it, an emotional quality, which causes you to recognise it as a big dream, whereas normally the ordinary dream, so to speak, just doesn't [15] have that quality to it, and therefore you don't think of it as a big dream. Perhaps one shouldn't say anything more than that ordinary dreams *tend* to be in black and white, and big dreams *tend* to be in full colour. Perhaps that would be a reasonable way of stating the matter.

Prasannasiddhi: Where I was studying art history, one of the points they made was that colour has the strongest emotional effect on someone who is looking at paintings: the colour was actually going to make, generally speaking, the strongest immediate emotional impression.

S: Therefore it would seem natural that if a dream affected you very strongly emotionally, it would be in colour.

Dharmadhara: It just so happened that I had a dream in colour the night before; and now, two months later, I can still remember it, but it still doesn't seem to be a big dream. It still seems to be just -

S: But it's strange that you remember it. Ordinary dreams we usually forget.

Dharmadhara: I think it's only because I had a question on it that I recall it. Also because I don't understand it.

Chairman: The next question is from Ratnaprabha on Akhenaton and monotheistic religions.

Ratnaprabha's question:

In discussing solar symbolism, you mention the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaton. According to Ken Wilber and others, the sun god worship that Akhenaton introduced represents the first monotheistic religion. Would you agree with Wilber that monotheism represented an advance on previous forms of religion? His arguments seem to be that: (a) monotheism allowed for the possibility of the idea of a religion being universal, and (b) that it comes from a more highly developed form of reflexive consciousness.

S: Well, the first point that occurs to me is that a religion *doesn't* have to be monotheistic to be universal, because there is the case of Buddhism, which is a universal religion but which is not monotheistic. So monotheism does not allow for the possibility of the idea of a religion being universal in the sense of a universal religion necessarily being monotheistic. I mean a monotheistic religion *can* be universal, but a universal religion doesn't have to be monotheistic. So that is rather irrelevant.

And then: 'it comes from a more highly developed form of reflexive consciousness'. I tried to track down the passage in which Ken Wilber discusses this matter, but though I have consulted four of his works which we have in the library - I have looked up monotheism in the index - and there is only one [16] reference, and that is just a footnote, which doesn't tell us anything. But so far as I remember, Wilber regards monotheism in the sense of the worship of a Father God as an advance on the worship of the Great Mother. As far as I remember, he seems to regard *that* as representing a higher degree of religious development, and that may well be the case. Usually, of course, monotheism is contrasted with polytheism, and it is usually held that the belief in one god is superior to the belief in many gods and represents some kind of advance. I have recently been really doubting that, because it seems to me that very often polytheism has distinct advantages, in the sense that - if you take a polytheism like that of Greece and Rome - you have got different gods and goddesses representing different aspects of life, different interests. If, for instance, you wanted success in battle, presumably you prayed to Ares or Mars; or if you wanted success in love, you prayed to Aphrodite or to Venus. And so on - that is a gross oversimplification, obviously.

But, in the case of monotheism, everything is centred on one supreme figure, and that seems to set up a certain tension, sometimes a very great tension indeed, between that one supreme god and the worshipper. You have to put, as it were, all your eggs in one basket; and sometimes his attributes seem contradictory. So perhaps belief in one god does sort of heighten your reflexive consciousness, but it seems to do so sometimes in a rather painful and even distorting way. This is why, possibly, in the case of Christianity - certainly Roman Catholic Christianity - in practice, monotheism is considerably modified; it is modified by the cult of the saints. In theory, of course, or in principle, Catholic Christianity is strictly monotheistic, in the Trinitarian sense; but in actual practice it's a polytheism, with people worshipping, or at least praying to, a wide variety of saints in a way that you don't get in Judaism, you don't get in Islam and you don't get in Protestant Christianity.

So it is perhaps significant that, in Protestant Christianity perhaps, there is more of that religious tension, to even a neurotic degree, than you get in Catholicism.

Mangala: It sounds a little bit like a sort of nuclear family situation as opposed to an extended family, where everything is invested into one small relationship and gets overloaded. Whereas with the extended family it's more spread out.

S: Yes, indeed, that's a good way of putting it. So I think there is no harm [17] in having a supreme god, but if it is the *only* god I think an element of tension is introduced. So, in the case of practical Roman Catholicism, you've got a supreme God, but he presides over all these as it were minor

gods in the form of the saints. So you can virtually ignore God, really, in practice as a Roman Catholic, and you can just concentrate all your devotion and faith on the particular saint of your choice; it can be the Virgin Mary, it can be St. Christopher, St. Joseph, St. Philomena, St. Francis - anyone you please. But, in the case of Protestantism, you are just landed with God - or perhaps Jesus too, to some extent.

Mangala: Do you think this sort of increase in tension, or upping the stakes as it were - it would seem that it can either make for a breakthrough or a breakdown! But it makes the whole thing more ...

S: So there is a relationship between, as it were, the objective and the subjective, inasmuch as different levels of religious conceptions correspond to different levels in development of consciousness, according to Wilber - he is probably correct here. So if in the psyche you have one particular element which is *dominating* all the others, or even *excluding* all the others, that corresponds to monotheism, because God not only dominates all the other gods but he excludes them in monotheism; and he is the one sole source of all values, all power, all authority, etc., etc. But in, so to speak, a more balanced, a harmonious system, you could well have the one supreme authority - he would represent the highest value - but he would not exclude the other, lower, values; he would as it were rule over them or reign over them, if that's the right expression, giving them all their due place but not actually repressing or *eliminating* any of them. So, as in later Greek thought, Zeus is considered as supreme and, yes, perhaps he is the highest of the gods and the best of the gods, and perhaps he *does* represent ethical values in a way that other gods don't, let's say for the sake of argument. But the other gods are still there on Mount Olympus; he is ruling over them; he doesn't negate them or destroy them or cast them out. But the God of the Jews and the God of the Muslims and the God of the Christians, in principle, *excludes* all other gods; denies them. So in the psyche this represents the dominance of one particular aspect or interest, to such an extent that all the others are excluded, and this automatically creates tension, because the others are being held down. And, of course, they don't want to be held down.

So you could say that monotheism represents an advance on, let's say, polytheism only if monotheism means the organising of, let's say, the gods or [18] the contents of consciousness, into a harmonious hierarchical system, with what is genuinely best and greatest at the top, but without excluding the lesser gods.

Mangala: Could you not also perhaps see this monotheistic God as not excluding the others but actually *including* them, and being in fact composed of all of them, if you see what I mean?

S: You could, but that might be a sort of intermediate stage of development. You get this in Hinduism, you get it in the *Bhagavad Gita*. But this can lead to tensions of its own, because this god then has to contain all sorts of apparently contradictory elements. He has got to be Venus as well as Pallas Athene; he's got to be the god of peace and also the god of war.

Mangala: But isn't that like what the Bodhisattva is supposed to do? Isn't he supposed to resolve all these apparently contradictory elements and aspects?

S: Not in the same way, because he doesn't, for instance, reconcile the difference between peace and war, or good and evil, because the Bodhisattva is a purely transcendental being. The monotheistic god rules not only over the world of values but also over the world of nature, in a way that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas don't.

Anyway, what I am basically saying is that monotheism does not necessarily correspond to a more

highly developed form of reflexive consciousness. It depends on whether it allows room, so to speak, to other elements in the psyche. You could say that the monotheistic god corresponds in reflexive consciousness to the ego; so if the ego holds down the - to use Freudian terms - the *id* too much, that is an unhealthy situation. But if the ego, while maintaining its own supremacy, allows a reasonable amount of room to the *id*, that is a different kind of situation. Do you see what I'm getting at? (**Voices:** Mm.) So I sometimes think that polytheism is quite a healthy sort of thing, because it does cater to different people's different needs, in a way that perhaps monotheism doesn't. In the ease of monotheism, you have to put all your eggs one basket, so to speak.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, my Open University literature that I was reading today described Hinduism as monotheism, because they said there was one supreme god - I think Bhagavan - whom all the other gods were considered to be a part of, and he was omnipresent or whatever.

S: This is what most Hindu philosophers believe; but so far as ordinary Hindus are concerned, the different gods are all different gods, in practice, in effect. If you ask them 'Are these gods really all different, or are they all aspects [19] of one supreme god', many people will say, 'They are all aspects of one supreme god.' But they are concerned with the individual gods; they don't usually really think much about the one supreme god of which all these others are aspects. A bit like the Roman Catholic who is much more concerned with this or that saint, or the Virgin Mary, than with just God in the abstract.

Prasannasiddhi: So you wouldn't consider Hinduism to be monotheism?

S: It's certainly not monotheism - well, it's not monotheistic in the sense that Islam or Judaism are monotheistic.

Prasannasiddhi: It seemed silly to me to call a religion ...

S: Some of the sects of Hinduism have a *tendency* towards monotheism, but really no more than that.

Prasannasiddhi: I tended to think it was a Christian writer who was trying to say that Hinduism is really saying that the one God idea of Christianity is there in Hinduism as well.

S: Well, most Hindus would agree, if you asked them, that all the gods are really different aspects of one god, or one reality; but that isn't what their religious life is centred upon.

So if you were to say that Hinduism is monotheistic, I think it would be a bit misleading, because you would assume it was monotheistic in the way that Christianity and Islam and Judaism are monotheistic. It isn't really quite like that. Anyway, you'd better not argue with the textbook!

Prasannasiddhi: They might overrule me.

S: But in, say, Theravada Buddhism on the whole you've only got the figure of the Buddha, whereas in the Mahayana you've got all the Bodhisattvas too; so there is a greater richness, and there is greater room for one's individual choice in matters of devotion - though, of course, ultimately, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are aspects of the Void. In the Theravada they are restricted, as it were, to the figure of the Buddha, which is all right for some people but perhaps not for all. In, say, the Nyingmapa tradition there is the figure of Padmasambhava. The ultimate significance of the figure of Padmasambhava is exactly the same as the ultimate significance of the figure of Sakyamuni the Buddha; but some people are able to make a better connection - or they

can more easily connect - with the figure of Padmasambhava than with the figure of the Buddha.

Prasannasiddhi: So, Bhante, would you say that it is necessary for Buddhists to develop a complete pantheon? [20]

S: They've got it already - well, Mahayanists have got it and Vajrayanists have got it. It's not a pantheon in the Greek sense, but there is the possibility of selecting one or another form from a whole multitude of forms. But then again, as I say, in principle it's not the same as Greco-Roman polytheism, because there were Greek and Roman gods standing for very worldly aspects of life. Bodhisattvas don't usually do that - not in the sutras anyway, though sometimes they have been given that sort of function. For instance, Kuan-Yin in China becomes the Bodhisattva that women pray to for children, a bit like Juno in Roman mythology. But that's a sort of debasement of the function of a Bodhisattva.

Dharmadhara: Would you see that particular difference as the main difference between, say, the Greek pantheon and the Mahayana Buddhist pantheon?

S: I suppose it is. It is certainly an important difference.

Dharmadhara: The worldly values of the Greek?

S: The Greek gods represent, one might say - well, some represent purely worldly values and others represent spiritual values more. In some cases, there were different aspects to one and the same god, sometimes on account of historical development. But in the case of the Bodhisattvas, they definitely represent different aspects of spiritual Reality; they don't represent different aspects of nature, or different aspects of mundane life. There's no Bodhisattva of sex, for instance; there's no Bodhisattva of war.

Prasannasiddhi: But would you consider - perhaps it might be necessary, say, for Order Members to include not only the Buddhist figures but also, say, the Greco-Roman figures, just for a balance? Because you could get the same sort of thing happening that you have with monotheism, where you have got these very exalted Buddhist figures, whereas in actual fact people have their energies on a much lower level and perhaps they need to contact ...

S: But can you, in this day and age, actually believe, say, that by praying to the goddess of love you will get *success* in love? Maybe some people do. For instance, during war people pray to God as the god of battles. They seem to believe in a god of battles. But could a Buddhist really do that?

Mangala: I suppose you could have figures symbolising positive mundane qualities, or you could as it were try to identify with ...

S: But they are not an object of worship in the same way that those figures are which represent or symbolise positive transcendental qualities.

Mangala: I meant - suppose if you take people like maybe William Blake and maybe some philosophers and artists who are mundane but at the same time they are like the positive path... [21]

S: Yes, but you wouldn't actually worship them or meditate on them; you would just get to know about their lives and read their works, and just feel generally inspired by them - which is rather a different thing. But they could certainly be around. It does seem that people do need quite a lot of

figures of this sort. Some of our Friends worship the Bloomsburies! They seem very *close* to the Bloomsburies. And maybe the Bloomsburies do represent a step in the direction of positive emotion. But you wouldn't actually have images and icons of the Bloomsburies and sort of make offerings of flowers and candles to them.

Mangala: I don't know, some people get very close to that!

Nagabodhi: ... sort of postcards and

S: But it was certainly very obvious - to change the subject a little bit - in the case of Ceylon some years ago, that the Buddha wasn't enough. Because a lot of Sinhalese Buddhists were worshipping the deity of Kataragama, and there was a big discussion in the columns of the Buddhist magazines at that time; because it was found that Sinhalese Buddhists were building more temples to Hindu gods each year than Buddhist temples or viharas. So I saw this as meaning that - well, yes, the Theravada didn't give them enough emotional nourishment. It didn't permit Bodhisattvas, so people had fallen back on Hindu devas.

Prasannasiddhi: When was this, Bhante?

S: Well, this was in the fifties.

Nagabodhi: Is that not cited as one of the reasons for the decline of Buddhism in India - that the Hindus were able to offer that sort of stimulation?

S: No, I think that's not true, because there were the *Bodhisattvas*. There was the cult of Bodhisattvas, and the cult of the Bodhisattvas was, I think, at least as old as that of the modern Puranic Hindu deities.

Prasannasiddhi: But the Bodhisattvas are quite exalted beings, and perhaps many people -

S: Yes, perhaps they were a bit too exalted for many people. But I think perhaps we have come to a time when we shouldn't be trying to fulfil purely mundane ambitions, so to speak, by pseudo-religious means, which is what the Nichiren people are doing. If you want prosperity, money, success, all right, go after those things; but go after them in the ordinary way. If you believe that you can get these things by semi-magical means - well, this has got nothing to do with spiritual life and spiritual development, and nothing to do with Buddhism. Though, historically, of course, Buddhism, like virtually every other religion, is mixed up with these sort of things. But I think we really [22] need to dissociate it from them.

Prasannasiddhi: But, in looking at things in a certain way, all aspects of human existence have a kind of divine dimension, I suppose, or there is that element in it; like the Hindu gods, for instance.

S: I am not so sure that all aspects of human life have a divine aspect; I am not so sure of that.

Prasannasiddhi: It just seems to me the idea of, like, the Hindu gods, polytheism is actually quite a healthy thing for people.

S: Well, in the case of Mahayana Buddhism, there are the Bodhisattvas; but, at least in the form that they appear in the Mahayana sutras, they are rather *exalted* beings and on the level of popular practice they have perhaps been rather degraded. I rather doubt whether that is valid - whether you should use, or try to use, an essentially spiritual religion or teaching or tradition for the fulfilment

of mundane goals, even though you recognise that those mundane goals and what they represent do have a place in ordinary human life. But should you dignify them with some sort of religious sanction, or think that they can be achieved by religious, in other words by pseudo-religious, means?

For instance, supposing you want to seduce a woman. Well, if you were a Greek or a Roman, you would go and pray to the goddess Venus. But the fact that you pray to a goddess - does it really make that activity of seducing the woman a spiritual activity? It gives it a sort of sanction, but does it make it a spiritual activity in the *Buddhist* sense, or from the *Buddhist* point of view? Similarly, if you are a farmer: you want success with your crops - so, all right, you've got a divinity of the fields - all right, you pray to that divinity or you make offerings, perhaps little sacrifices. Well, is that necessarily a part of religion as spiritual life in the *Buddhist* sense? Quite apart from the fact that presumably the divinity of the fields can't in fact give you a better crop.

Nagabodhi: But, accepting that that practice would have no spiritual value, on the level of popular religion, on the level of popular culture where you have perhaps a lot of people with no interest in spiritual matters, could that sort of practice at least in some way act as a bridge? In cultures where Buddhism has been corrupted to that degree, has it been shown to act as at least some form of bridge?

S: I think it would be very difficult to show that it did actually act as a bridge. How would it act as a bridge?

Nagabodhi: If it was successful! [23]

S: If they *believed* it was successful, it might give the people concerned a belief in some higher power, but then it's a higher *power*, it's a natural power, a mundane power; it's got nothing to do with the spiritual in the sense of the Transcendental.

Mangala: So you think, in a mundane sense, that the Nichiren thing possibly or even probably works?

S: Well, it *might* work, but from a spiritual point of view that is quite irrelevant. I mean a typewriter works, a computer works, but it doesn't make them spiritual. [Laughter]

Prasannasiddhi: It's almost as if there were two types of religion.

S: Yes. It's as though under the term 'religion' we lump two quite different sets of phenomena, two quite different sets of attitudes and experiences. For instance, you've got a mob attacking someone and killing him out of the excess of their religious feeling. Well, is that really religious, from a Buddhist point of view? So you can have religion as something which pertains to the group and is an expression of group values, and affirms group values, and you can have religion in the sense of something that concerns itself with the spiritual development of the individual, both by himself and in association with other individuals. So the word religion is popularly used to cover both things. I think the two are really quite distinct; I think it's a mistake to confuse the two.

Mangala: Perhaps you could say that all religions aren't Buddhism.

S: All religions aren't religions! But, historically speaking, most religions comprise both elements, even Buddhism, though it certainly didn't start off comprising both elements. I'm not so sure about the other religions, but Buddhism certainly didn't start off in that way. But, as historical

phenomena that have developed in the course of the centuries, *all* the major religions definitely include or cover religion in *both* senses; that's their strength and that is their weakness also.

Anyway, that's quite a big subject. Maybe we should go on to the other questions. I think there are some left. [24]

Chairman: There are two questions to go, Bhante. The first one is about the bhikkhu and the Brahmin.

By the time of the appearance of *The Sutra of Golden Light*, were the terms 'bhikkhu' and 'Brahmin' still more or less synonymous? Have you had any further thoughts about the significance of the Brahmin beating the drum? For example, we were wondering in our group if Brahmins were commonly associated with drums and other ritual instruments - possibly like the Hare Krishnas in general.

S: I think it's doubtful that, at the time of the appearance of *The Sutra of Golden Light*, the terms 'bhikkhu' and 'Brahmin' were still more or less synonymous. I think by that time it had become apparent that there was a great gulf between the actual bhikkhus and the actual Brahmins. I think the Buddha's attempt to use the word Brahmin in the sense of bhikkhu, to sort of upgrade it and dissociate it from its caste significance, had really failed. Brahminism was just too strong for it.

So I think no; which makes the appearance of the Brahmin, of course, in *The Sutra of Golden Light* all the more remarkable.

There is something that I have got very near to mentioning in the lecture but didn't actually mention. Ruchiraketu sees the Brahmin in a dream, and I have mentioned that a dream is something archaic, something that goes back to the beginning, as it were; but I have interpreted that as it were more metaphysically. But, looking through my notes, it did occur to me that one could regard Ruchiraketu as an Indian, or in a sense a Hindu or ex-Hindu, with as it were residues of Hinduism and even Brahminism in his unconscious, and that his deeper psychological experience was in more Indian and Hindu terms. In fact, the sutra itself exemplifies that by bringing into the sphere of Buddhism quite definitely Hindu figures in some cases. So it's as though the sutra represents, or even the dream represents, an attempt to integrate those more archaic contents and attitudes into the Buddhist vision.

As for having any further thoughts about the significance of the Brahmin beating the drum, I haven't had any further thoughts. As far as know, Brahmins were not commonly associated with drums and other ritual instruments. Drums seem to have had no particular place in Brahminism. If they had any place in *any* particular cult or tradition, it was with the followers of Shiva; they had the damaru, which was taken over by the Vajrayana - that little Tibetan drum - but that is quite a small hand drum. There seems to be no particular prominence of the drum in Brahminism. Shiva himself had one of these damarus. But in the dream this seems to be a great big drum that was beaten. [25]

As far as I remember, in the *Amitayurdhyana Sutra* - I think it's the *Amitayurdhyana Sutra* - the setting sun is described as hanging like a golden drum. I have only a vague recollection, I'd have to check that.

Kovida: I think you said that in the lecture, actually.

S: Did I? Ah.

Prasannasiddhi: My Open University - I was watching a television programme on that today, and they actually had a sadhu going through the village beating a drum; I'm not quite sure if he was a brahmanic or sramanic figure. I imagined he was brahmanic.

S: It's not very usual. Usually they call out.

Prasannasiddhi: He was singing. He spent his life singing and beating the drum.

S: Oh yes, often the drum is used to accompany chanting or singing. But it has no particular connection with the Brahmins. In fact, very often it's low-caste - yes, it's low-caste people that beat drums or have anything to do with drums, because drums, don't forget, are made of leather, which high-caste people wouldn't touch. A really big drum would have to be made of cow hide!

Nagabodhi: Could there be something in there reconciling opposite elements in the sutra!

Prasannasiddhi: This could relate to Ambedkar's theories on the origins of caste: that at one time the cow wasn't all that sacred to the Hindu people, but they did afterwards to get back on the Buddhists. So that could be an element.

S: Anyway, there seems to be no particular association between Brahmins and drums.

Chairman: The last question is the one on thangkas.

In Tibetan thangkas, the body halos are often quite similar for different deities, the outer part being golden - Mangala has a picture of one here to show you - with a rainbow ring outermost, and the inner area being deep blue with radiating golden lines. Does this similarity, between different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas having quite a similar aura, reflect a stylistic convention, or is it more symbolical? If the latter, do you know what the different elements represent - the deep blue, the golden ring and the rainbow?

S: It seems to be more stylistic. When I was in Kalimpong I tried to discover whether there was any real uniformity or any significance to the colours, but I wasn't able to do so. Perhaps some lamas do give a particular [26] significance to particular colours and combinations of colours, but there doesn't seem to be any real uniformity. So I assume that, to a great extent, it's left to the taste of the artist; unless a particular *sadhana* definitely says that the halo is of this colour or that colour, which means that the original person who had the vision which was eventually represented in thangka form actually did see just those colours in the halos.

Mangala: Quite often this one is transparent, this inner blue one; you can see clouds and things through it; it's as if you could see the sky through that - it's not a halo, in a sense, it's a - well, perhaps the golden bits are the emanation, but the rest is just sky.

S: The green head halo is quite common, but again not universal. I think very often aesthetic considerations play a part.

Dharmadhara: I notice that commonly, also, there is a rainbow ring around the outside of the whole thing, or a rainbow shell. Does that have anything to do with the rainbow body?

S: I don't think so, no. I've never come across any reference to a connection of that sort. One could say, perhaps, that this awaits further investigation, but to the best of my knowledge there is no

overall scheme of symbolism as regards the colours of the halos. There may originally have been, and it may have broken down in the course of centuries owing to the artists having preferred to do things, so to speak, in their own way. I'm not sure.

Anyway, was that the last question?

Chairman: That was the last question.

S: OK, then.

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Third Lecture: The Spiritual Significance of Confession - 10th March 1987

Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara (Chairman), Nagabodhi, Prasannasiddhi, Mangala, Kovida.

Chairman: Today is 10th March and we have got the third lecture from *The Sutra of Golden Light*. There are just six questions. The first question is from Surata, and it is on the manner of confession.

Bhante, in this lecture you say that after the Buddha's *Parinirvana* the monks no longer meditated or chanted Dharma verses together when they met in large numbers. Instead, they confessed any offences committed against the monastic code. Then again, later, they made another change in procedure by confessing before the meeting in twos, so that when the code was recited all would remain silent, having already confessed. Could you say something about how and why these changes were decided upon? Is it still the case that Theravada monks do not meditate or chant Dharma verses together during these meetings?

Sangharakshita: Well, the main question obviously is: 'Can you say something about how and why these changes were decided upon?' This is really quite a long story, and I would suggest that anybody who is especially interested in the matter should consult Sukumar Dutt's *Early Buddhist Monachism*. I was just checking that it was in fact still there in the Order Library - it is - and this gives one a very clear idea of what actually happened. There is also a summary of what happened in *The Three Jewels*, in the chapter on 'The Monastic Order'. So I think the best thing I can do is to refer those who are interested to those two sources.

If, of course, these changes are regarded as degenerations in some way, then of course the explanation no doubt is to be found in the gravitational pull.

Then the other, less important, question is: 'Is it still the case that Theravada monks do not meditate or chant Dharma verses together during these meetings?' Well, quite a lot of Theravada monks, especially, I believe, those [2] in Ceylon, no longer meet together even to recite the *patimokkha*, and whatever confession does take place would seem to take place as between pupil and teacher or disciple and teacher. I believe, in Thailand, they very often, or usually, do recite the *patimokkha* at regular intervals, but it is, it would seem, more of the nature of a formality, with no actual confession being made at that time. It's more a sort of *affirmation* of the solidarity of that particular gathering of monks, that particular chapter of the bhikkhu sangha. Again, if there is any question of confession, no doubt it is made privately as from pupil to teacher. Perhaps it isn't possible to say more than that in reply to these two questions.

Dharmadhara: The next question is from Ratnaprabha - in fact, the next three questions are from Ratnaprabha - in the order that you have them. The first one is on contacting the Golden Light.

During the lecture you remark that, once you contact the Golden Light, you are usually stuck with it. You have elsewhere said that once one has attained the *human* level of reflexive consciousness it is probably very difficult to lose it again. Could one infer that there are achievements analogous to, but less reliable than, Stream Entry at lower levels of progress than Stream Entry - specifically, achieving some consciousness of the Golden Light, or the spiritual life in general, which has then

caught you?

S: 'During the lecture you remark that, once you contact the Golden Light, you are usually stuck with it.' I referred to my notes, and I find that I said that with especial reference to the Bodhisattva, that is to say one in whom the Bodhicitta has arisen, so obviously if one is a Bodhisattva in whom the Bodhicitta had arisen, if you are a Stream Entrant, you are stuck with the Golden Light, you are stuck with the Transcendental. None the less, I make this remark - 'once you contact the Golden Light, you are usually stuck with it' - quite a few minutes, I imagine, after I speak of the Bodhisattva, the one in whom the Bodhicitta has arisen, and therefore, perhaps, the remark is quite reasonably or quite naturally understood as having a wider application.

So let's consider it in that wider application. Ratnaprabha says: 'You have elsewhere said that once one has attained the human level of reflexive consciousness it is probably very difficult to lose it again.' I think this is correct. I'll say a bit more about that in a minute. [2] And then he goes on to ask: 'Could one infer that there are achievements analogous to, but less reliable than, Stream Entry at lower levels of progress than Stream Entry?' I don't think one *can* speak of achievements at lower levels than Stream Entry as being analogous to Stream Entry, because the essential feature, one may say, of Stream Entry is that the experience is irreversible, so there cannot *really* be an analogy between an experience or series of experiences that is irreversible, and an experience or series of experiences that is not irreversible, however long it may take to reverse the series. The point is that it *can* be reversed, so it is not analogous, and cannot be analogous, to an experience or series of experiences which cannot possibly be reversed. So there is no question of any analogy here.

So, coming back to the point of it being very difficult to lose reflexive consciousness, I think one has to realise that, from a Buddhist point of view, one has perhaps enjoyed reflexive consciousness for a very long time; because, according to Buddhist tradition, one has undergone many births. So reflexive consciousness in one form or another, attached to this or that human body, has been with one for a very long time; and what has been with one for a very long time, and what has developed over a very long period, takes quite a lot of undoing.

For instance, one can see, even in the course of a single lifetime, a human being can degenerate very greatly through unskilful actions - maybe through taking what is not given, maybe through murder, even; maybe through persistent alcoholism. But none the less, however degenerate, that person is still quite recognisably a human being, and reflexive consciousness is still quite clearly there, at least to some extent. So what one has developed in this way, and according to Buddhism over a long period, over a whole succession of lives, takes quite a lot of undoing. So it was this point of view that I had in mind when I said that what I said about being stuck with the Golden Light had a more general application also, as well as a special application to the Bodhisattva; because once, with so to speak your reflexive consciousness, you have come into contact with the Golden Light, inasmuch as usually your reflexive consciousness persists intact, you can't forget about your experience of that Golden Light, even though you haven't attained Stream Entry, even though you are not a Bodhisattva, and even though you could in theory fall right back to a very low state. But none the less, that is difficult, and so long as your reflexive consciousness continues to be there - and it is likely to continue to be there - you are going to find it very difficult to shake off that [4] contact that you have had with the Golden Light; even though, yes, in the long run, so to speak, with a great deal of difficulty and as a result of a great deal of unskilful behaviour, you could; but that is highly unlikely. But none the less, there is quite a sharp difference between that state and the state of actually having achieved Stream Entry. Perhaps I haven't put it very clearly, but do you see what I'm getting at? [*Murmur of assent*]

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, do you personally believe in the doctrine that a human being can be reborn as an animal?

S: Well, I think I've dealt with this before somewhere. It depends what you mean by a human being. If you mean by a human being someone who not only has a human body but who has a fully and genuinely human consciousness, I think it is *extremely* unlikely, to say the least, that on his dying he will be reborn as an animal. But supposing someone was born with a very rudimentary human consciousness, one might say, or had developed a very rudimentary human consciousness, and that even that had been degraded by all sorts of unskilful actions, so that when he came to die his mental state was not much higher than that of an animal - especially perhaps one of the higher animals - I don't think it's impossible that he should be reborn as an animal. I remember when I was in Darjeeling years ago observing someone who was a keeper of pigs; he was a Nepalese, and he was probably a Tamang, he was a Buddhist, but he was a keeper of pigs, which meant that he also slaughtered them for the market; he bred pigs and reared pigs for the market. And he spent his whole time with those pigs and, believe it or not, he actually *looked* like a pig. And I got the impression that he was in close mental rapport with those pigs, and I would find it quite easy to believe that that man had been reborn as a pig, especially as he had slaughtered, in the course of his life, so many hundreds and even thousands of pigs. He had his piggeries and slaughterhouse just below the place where I was staying, and every night I would hear these pigs screaming. You know they slaughter pigs by cutting their throats, and they emit a very dreadful, long drawn out scream which seems to go on for minutes together. I used to hear this every night. But this man *looked* just like a pig. His features were like those of a pig, and his expression was like that of a pig, his whole *build* was like that of a pig - with short legs and forearms, so to speak, and almost like trotters. [5]

So I say that it depends what you mean by a human being. In the strict sense, I would say that it would be very difficult for a human being to be reborn as an animal, but that some who were not truly human beings, whose consciousness was closer to an animal consciousness, could conceivably, I think, be reborn as animals; perhaps as very marginal and exceptional cases. But even so, I wouldn't like to dogmatise. I wouldn't like to say I am absolutely certain of this, but it seems to me quite likely, it seems plausible that such people should be reborn as animals. Just as one can't help feeling sometimes that some animals have got such definitely human qualities you could easily imagine them being reborn as human beings.

Prasannasiddhi: It almost seems to me to go against the idea of the Lower Evolution and the Higher Evolution, in that the Lower Evolution is automatic and sort of casts one up in the human state, and from there you have to make an effort. It almost seems as if, having been cast up, it would be impossible to be redrawn.

S: But you have got your reflexive consciousness, and I think one of the characteristics of that reflexive consciousness is that it can work against itself; it can destroy itself, it can commit suicide as it were. For instance, when a man starts drinking just to forget, he is deliberately wiping out, or trying to wipe out, one part or one aspect of his higher, truly human nature. So it's as though reflexive consciousness has the power to turn round on itself and undo itself; or, as I have said, commit suicide. It is a very two-edged weapon.

Chairman: The last question was from Prasannasiddhi. I'll just remind people to announce their names each time they speak, unless they are reading a question.

The third question is from Ratnaprabha again, on the oppressions.

The oppressions - *samkata* - pages 12 to 13 in Emmerick. The sutra confesses evil committed in

the oppressions of existence, birth, bodily activity, existence again, the world, the fleeting mind, impurities caused by the foolish, the arrival of evil friends, fear, passion, hatred, folly and darkness, the instant, time, gaining merits. Could you say something about how these oppressions could give rise to unskilfulness, especially the [6] underlined ones? [*Transcriber's note: Underlining not indicated on recording.*] Is this teaching found outside this sutra, and is there a standard list? You say in the lecture that you would have said more on this if there had been time.

S: I'm afraid I can't recollect what it was that I had in mind to say, but anyway I've looked, or tried to look, this word *samkata* up in the dictionary. I don't know if anybody else has done this? It's not in the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary, but it is in the Sanskrit Dictionary, interestingly enough, which is a very useful little book; everybody should have a copy! So let me read you what it says: '*Samkata (prob. Prakrit for sam-krita): brought together, contracted, closed, narrow, strait, crowded together, dense, impervious, impassable*' - it gives various references - '*crowded with, full of*'. Then, lower down, it says: '*a strait, difficulty, critical condition, danger to or from.*' So that gives one quite a good idea of what *samkata* means, and makes it clear that 'oppression', though not bad, is not a fully adequate translation by any means.

So the *samkatas* are those factors by which one is surrounded, which crowd in upon one, which oppress one, which squeeze and limit one. And it's interesting to look at the list: 'existence, birth, bodily activity, existence again, the world, the fleeting mind, impurities caused by the foolish, the arrival of evil friends, fear, passion, hatred, folly and darkness, the instant, time, gaining merits.' So the sutra confesses evil committed by all these things, in the oppressions of existence, birth and so on. So this suggests that all these things are not factors that you occasionally encounter and have to resist; they are things which surround you and almost crush you all the time, which, in Emmerick's translation, *oppress* you; which are constant hindrances, and perhaps even very active. It's not as though they are just there but they don't bother you; they are all around you and hemming you in, restricting your movements, and so on; so that you are in a dangerous, a critical situation, a critical state.

Perhaps it is not possible to go into exactly how all these *samkatas* function in that way, but it's probably pretty obvious anyway. For instance, take 'the arrival of evil friends'. It's not that you occasionally meet an evil friend, that you occasionally meet - that is, if you live in the world - someone who is going to try to induce you to perform unskilful actions; you are *surrounded* by them. You go for a ride on a bus; there they all are. Or you go and watch a football match; there they all are. You are surrounded by [7] people who in a sense are evil friends, whose influence on you is not a positive one, not a skilful one. Do you see what I mean?

It might be more difficult to explain in what sense, for instance, 'time' is an oppression. I think it's pretty obvious in what way '*existence*' is an oppression - that is to say, conditioned existence. And perhaps even - well, obviously, fear, passion and hatred - and even gaining merits; because you could be so attached to your merit and think so much of the religious life, even the spiritual life, in terms of acquiring and accumulating merits that gaining merits can become quite oppressive so far as your real spiritual life is concerned.

So perhaps this list - if it is a formal list we don't know - draws attention to the fact that there are all sorts of unskilful factors in existence which are ubiquitous and which are always pressing in on us, and which it is very difficult for us to escape from because we are experiencing them all the time; they never let up. So one confesses evil committed as a result of these oppressions, or in the midst of these oppressions. Does that make some sense? [*Murmurs of assent.*] So Ratnaprabha asks: 'Could you say something about how these oppressions could give rise to unskilfulness, especially the underlying ones?' Well, probably the question of the 'how' doesn't really arise

because, if you are *surrounded* by these things, sooner or later they are going to have some definite effect. It is not that they give rise to unskilfulness in some very mysterious, indirect sort of way. If you are constantly surrounded by evil friends, well, of course sooner or later they will have some influence on you; and so on.

I would say that probably the list is selective, and that probably all unskilful factors or unhelpful factors are of this nature. There's a lot of them around.

Mangala: That therefore wouldn't absolve the individual of responsibility for his behaviour or actions?

S: Oh no, there's no suggestion of that; because you confess the evil committed, which of course means you accept responsibility for it. If it's not your fault, why should you confess? There is no point in confessing. The fact that you confess means that you accept responsibility, even though you were as it were very strongly tempted. [8]

Mangala: So, in other words, even though these oppressions, as you say, are responsible for your...

S: Oh no, I wouldn't say that they are responsible for the evil that we do. Ratnaprabha says: 'The sutra confesses evil committed *in* the oppressions of existence' - that is to say, in the midst of, or perhaps on account of. One might make a technical distinction and say that these oppressions are the *occasion* of unskilful actions, but not their cause. *You* are their cause, and therefore the responsibility is yours. Perhaps you have been very strongly tempted, but you did have the capacity to resist. But they are called oppressions because, as the dictionary makes clear, they sort of weigh on you; they hem you in. It may be that we are not conscious of this, because we go along with them to such an extent.

Anyway, I think that's all that one can say with regard to that question.

Chairman: The fourth question is again from Ratnaprabha on your Tibetan teachers and confession.

The lecture suggests that confession is necessary at all stages of the spiritual life. Used you to use your contact with Tibetan teachers in India to confess? Do you *now* ever feel a need for anything that could be called confession? If so, how do you go about it? How do Tibetan monks go about *their* practice of confession?

S: Sometimes I wonder with what motive or for what reason people ask me questions about my *personal* experience. I sometimes can't help wondering whether it's a kind of idle curiosity; or whether in fact they ask in the hope that my experience might be of some use to them. I am quite sure, though, that *some* of the questions are asked out of idle curiosity; I don't say necessarily this one.

But I certainly believe that confession is necessary at all stages of spiritual life. As for my contact with Tibetan teachers, in most cases it wasn't close enough or personal enough or regular enough for any confession to have been possible, even if I had wanted to make a confession. And I think to some extent, in another way, that applied to my contact with Theravada [9] bhikkhus, who in any case had dismantled the whole structure of confession in any real sense.

Just the other week I was writing about an experience of mine of this sort, when I was in Nepal in 1951. On that occasion, a couple of novices were to be ordained and I was to take part in the

ordination ceremony. So, before the ceremony could commence, the monks had to purify themselves, and that meant they had to confess. So what happened was that the monks paired off: two monks squatted down on their heels, which is quite a difficult position, face to face, and confessed to each other. The elder or senior confesses first to the junior, then the junior confesses to the senior. So I was quite pleased, because I had been ordained about a year and I hadn't had an opportunity to confess any faults, so I started thinking, 'Well, what have I got to confess? Have I done anything which I shouldn't have?' But before I could even think about it properly, the monk with whom I was paired started chanting something very rapidly in Pali - I could make out some of it but not all of it because he was chanting so rapidly - it only took him about a minute and a half; and he said, 'Come on. Now you chant.' So I said, 'Well, I don't know it by heart.' So he said, 'All right, repeat it after me,' and he rattled it off and I repeated it phrase by phrase after him. I looked up and all the other monks were standing up already! *[Laughter]* So I was very disappointed.

So confession in that sort of way has become a formality, by and large. But even among Theravadins I think it does sometimes happen that a monk who feels something weighing on his mind goes and tells his teacher or confesses to his teacher; and I think the same thing happens among Tibetan monks.

But, coming back to my Tibetan teachers, in most cases I just had contact with them at the time of my initiation, and that was all. They were rather distant figures. I certainly didn't have the opportunity to get to know them well enough to be able to make a real confession had I felt the need. I think the only person with whom I did actually sometimes open up in this way was Dhardo Rimpoche, whom I *did* get to know; and once or twice there was something that I was a bit uneasy about, and I spoke about it to him. But, by and large, there wasn't much opportunity, and I think I didn't think as much in these terms as I do now. It was one of those things that I had to find out for myself, as it were.

But, yes, I'd say confession is necessary at all stages of the spiritual life; because spiritual life involves spiritual friendship. In fact, we are [10] told that the spiritual life *is* spiritual friendship, and if you have spiritual friends, or if you have *a* spiritual friend, one of the characteristics of that friendship is that you are quite open with one another. So whether it's something skilful or something unskilful, you will want to share it with that person, and if it's something unskilful you will want, to so speak, therefore to confess; you won't be happy till you have confessed it.

So perhaps that's enough about that one.

Chairman: The fifth question is Susiddhi's question on confession and the Order.

Bhante, in this lecture where you outline when one should confess, you say that confession should be a regular, integral part of the spiritual life. Confession has not developed as a separate regular practice in the Western Buddhist Order chapter meetings. Do you think this might be because of male competitiveness - male Order Members finding it difficult to regard each other as worthy confessors - or is there some other reason? Would you like to see confession as a regular practice at chapter Order meetings?

S: I am not sure whether the question of male competitiveness is relevant here. I think male competitiveness, or masculine competitiveness, has become a bit of a cliché, or is tending to become a bit of a cliché, in the Movement. It tends to be invoked, I think, rather too readily, to give a rather superficial explanation of certain phenomena. So I think I would prefer to leave the question of male competitiveness out of it altogether.

I think I'd like to say simply that confession is only possible where there is confidence and where there is trust. So if you happen to be a member of a chapter, and if you happen to trust - really and deeply trust - all the other members of that chapter, I am sure you will feel like confessing to them if you have committed any seriously unskilful action. I think you will not be able to keep it back from them. But I think there aren't many chapters where that degree of trust exists among the members. So then, perhaps, in that case, if one feels that one has something to confess, one thinks in terms of confessing perhaps just to two or three Order Members whom you happen to trust or perhaps whom you respect, or perhaps even just to *one* other Order Member. But it is important that you do confess, and if you can't find someone to whom [11] to confess, and you don't feel like confessing to anybody, it means you don't really trust anybody; and that means you don't have any real spiritual friendship with anybody, and that's really a very sad state of affairs.

As for whether I would like to see confession a regular practice at chapter Order meetings - of course, I would really rather confession wasn't necessary because no one performed any unskilful actions; that's what I'd *really* like to see! But, assuming that Order Members do from time to time have something to confess, I don't think one can make a sort of rule that people must confess, that confession must be a regular practice at chapter Order meetings, because, as I have said, it depends upon trust; and you can't force trust. You can't demand trust. It is something which is essentially natural and spontaneous. But I would only say that it would be a very positive state of affairs if the degree of trust within a chapter was such that anybody who happened to have committed an unskilful action felt quite able to confess at that chapter meeting without any hesitation. We don't want confession to become a sort of mechanical procedure, as it has in so many parts of the Buddhist world. So I think, if one wants to encourage confession, one needs to encourage spiritual friendship, especially among Order Members, and encourage Order Members to trust one another more, regardless of this question of male competitiveness which may or may not be relevant here.

Any supplementaries on that?

Dharmadhara: Bhante, you say that you are rather sceptical of this usage of the term 'male competitiveness'. You are wondering whether it's over-used -

S: Not so much over-used as used a bit automatically and unthinkingly, without due consideration of whether that particular phrase, that particular cliché, even, really applies; because you don't examine the situation or you don't examine certain people's behaviour closely enough; you just unthinkingly label it all 'male competitiveness'. For instance, two people have an argument - two *men* have an argument - and just because you are men they say, 'Oh, it's just male competitiveness'; but they may both be very seriously concerned about that particular issue which they are discussing, and very seriously concerned to get at the truth. There may not be male competitiveness involved in the negative sense at all. But a third party, seeing those two people arguing vigorously, might just dismiss it as male competitiveness. [12]

Another phrase which I believe is overworked and misapplied very often is 'He feels threatened'. Have you heard this one?

Dharmadhara: Oh, yes, a lot.

S: Women are rather fond of using this in the Movement. If a man disagrees with a woman with regard to a particular point or a particular matter, she will very often say, or other women will say: 'Oh, that's because he feels threatened.' Whereas the question of feeling threatened is sometimes, or even usually, quite irrelevant. If a man disagrees with a woman or rejects her point of view, she just says very often, 'Oh, he feels threatened by that point of view.' It's of course usually

something to do with women or feminism or something of that sort. It's a pseudo-psychological comeback.

Dharmadhara: It's not really tackling the point, or the issue.

S: Yes, it's trying to dismiss the issue, or deal with the issue just by invoking one of these well-worn clichés, which originally had, or perhaps still does have, a genuine meaning, but it has come to be used in such a mechanical way that it hinders rather than helps discussion.

But all the sort of jargon phrases and expressions which are in common use are very liable to this sort of misuse. We have dealt with this before, from a slightly different point of view: for instance, the expression 'Oh, I think you're rationalising.' You can't make headway with someone, perhaps, and perhaps he is insisting on not agreeing with your point of view or accepting your arguments as valid, and then you try to get the better of him by saying, 'Oh, I really think you're rationalising!', when perhaps the question of rationalising doesn't enter into it at all. So this may be the case with this business of male competitiveness here. It could be quite a red herring. But I think the whole issue should be discussed without reference to this alleged male competitiveness; quite aside from the fact that there is such a thing as *positive* male competitiveness - there is such a thing as *positive* competitiveness. I have gone into this on various occasions. Competitiveness is not necessarily a dirty word. Competition is not necessarily a dirty word. [13]

Dharmadhara: There was a sort of mini-survey in the study on the use of confession in different chapters, and it was quite noticeable that it formed a very small part of most chapters' proceedings, formally or informally. It was almost unknown, in fact. I was quite interested in that, because it was quite rare in my own chapter; so I was wondering why, and I thought that if you confess to someone you put yourself to some extent in their power. You reveal stuff about yourself which they could, if they so chose, use; and if you trust them -

S: But this is where the question of trust comes in, isn't it? Because if you trust them, you don't feel that you are putting yourself in their power, because you don't see them in terms of power at all. But I think there is another reason for the fact that there isn't much confession in chapters. I think that is that, very often, people don't realise that a certain action which they have committed is in fact unskilful, or even highly unskilful. For instance, I will give you concrete examples without mentioning anyone's name. There have been two or three instances where someone - I'm afraid an Order Member - has struck somebody else; but talking to them afterwards, I got the distinct impression that they weren't fully conscious - in one case, perhaps not at all conscious - of what an unskilful action they had committed. So therefore I think there's not much confession in chapters partly because of lack of trust but also partly because people don't realise sufficiently strongly that an unskilful action which they have committed *is an unskilful action*. If they realised it very strongly, they would *want* to confess it; and if they felt trust in their chapter, or at least in just a few fellow Order Members - or even in *one* fellow Order Member - they would in fact confess it. But there is a tendency, I think, to dismiss an unskilful action which one has committed and think it doesn't really matter all that much.

Also - here comes another cliché - someone might say: 'Oh, you shouldn't try and make me feel guilty.' I mentioned guilt in the course of the lecture, but there is a distinction I have made since, which is between rational guilt and irrational guilt, and I now go to the extent of saying that if you have committed an unskilful action you *should* feel guilty; that is to say, you should feel rational guilt. Otherwise, someone might have committed a highly unskilful action, like striking another person, and perhaps you take them to task for that and point out how unskilful it is, and then they turn round and [14] say, 'What right have you got to make me feel guilty?' That is a quite serious

confusion of thought.

Mangala: Sometimes, Bhante, I think it's not always that easy to tell if you have been unskilful. Sometimes there are very obvious cases, but I think there are a lot of not so obvious cases...

S: Well, in that case it's easy, because you tell your spiritual friends and say, 'Look, what do you think? Have I been unskilful? Give me your opinion.' That is one of the things that spiritual friends are for.

But I think, with regard to those actions which are definitely unskilful, you should *know*. I am quite concerned that some people at least, even within the Order, seem not to recognise unskilful, even highly unskilful, actions *as* unskilful. There are quite a few people who aren't particularly bothered by telling a lie, even when it's *not* a white lie. Some people aren't particularly bothered by not keeping their promises.

Dharmadhara: I think that's quite a common one.

Prasannasiddhi: Very often I think people are willing to tell things or admit things to their peers or maybe their close friends that they would perhaps feel reluctant to confess more formally. Would this almost casual admission - do you think that constitutes confession?

S: It depends what one means by casual. If you say: 'Oh, I suppose that wasn't very unskilful', but clearly you're not saying it with full seriousness, then it really isn't enough. I have gone into this a little bit in the course of the lecture, where I've said that confession, to *be* confession, must be made to someone who shares the same spiritual ideals as yourself and who therefore can recognise the seriousness of the unskilful action you've committed, and share or empathise with your regret in having committed it. An ordinary friend can't do that. He might even think, as I've pointed out, that you're just bothering yourself unnecessarily, so you can't really confess to such a person. You can *admit* what you've done to him, but you can't really confess. He might even think, in some cases, that it's something to be proud of rather than something to be ashamed of. [15]

Mangala: I think if you do something really quite bad, it's pretty obvious that you need to confess; but maybe a lot of the things we do are in a way minor things. They may be not very skilful, but you don't immediately feel 'I must go and confess this.' I think that's probably the state that a lot of us are in. We don't do really bad things -

S: You haven't the guts. [*Laughter*]

Mangala: Well, perhaps. I think a lot of us are just moderately unskilful and ...

S: Well, very often we've got into the habit of committing certain unskilful actions, and we've got so used to them that our conscience, to use that word, is rather blunted, and we don't really think of them as unskilful or feel that they are unskilful or that they need to be confessed. But, again, consult one's spiritual friends; try to be more mindful. Perhaps one was a bit greedy at suppertime; well, how unskilful is that? Is it something you should confess? It depends on how strongly you feel it. But if you think to yourself, 'I was a real pig. If anyone from outside had seen me, they would have really got a bad idea about the Western Buddhist Order' - well, if you feel it like that, confess it.

Prasannasiddhi: Very often - going back to my question about admission: very often just to admit something to another person does give you some relief in a certain way, even though it might not

be a full-blooded ...

S: It's a step in the right direction. It's a sneaking sort of way of confessing, if you see what I mean. It's like a half confession. But perhaps it does help; at least you've said it out loud, as it were, and perhaps you can go on from there to make a genuine confession. But one needs, I think, to understand the difference between just admitting in that way to ordinary friends and confessing to one's spiritual friends.

Confession is surely an aspect of openness, and one should want to be open with people, as open with them as one can. One can't, unfortunately, usually be open with the whole wide world, but there should be just a few people with whom one can be completely open, and therefore to whom one can confess if necessary. Confession is just a specific aspect of your general [16] openness to those people, so in that sense it's not anything special; it's just a continuation, under more specific circumstances, of something which you are doing all the time anyway.

Prasannasiddhi: That again almost makes it sound a bit sort of casual.

S: Well, I certainly didn't mean that. You're taking your openness with other people very seriously, so therefore you will take, also, that form of openness which we call confession very seriously too. Yes, one could say confession is a form of openness; so, if you cultivate openness, indirectly you will be cultivating confession too as and when that happens to be necessary.

Mangala: I think, Bhante, also the obverse of this is true, that probably there is not enough - what shall we say? - helpful feedback with regard to one's, let's say weaknesses or unskilful actions; i.e. perhaps we're not told enough by other people who see us if we are doing, not necessarily very bad things, but just a bit unskilful; the sort of things maybe you mentioned earlier.

S: That is true, but I think it's not easy to point out someone's faults to them in a positive manner, to do this in such a way also that they don't react and come back at you with a startling revelation of your own faults! They *shouldn't* do, but this does sometimes happen. But it should be possible for fellow Order Members and spiritual friends actually to draw attention to one another's faults if that seems to be necessary, if one feels that the other person is just not conscious of the unskilfulness of his behaviour.

Mangala: Do you think that should be given the same weight as confession - do you see what I mean?

S: I'm not sure about that. Certainly it should be given weight. But I think here one must proceed with more caution, just because other people can be very sensitive and even touchy. I don't think one can attempt to point out another person's faults unless you are reasonably confident that they trust you, at least to some extent, depending on the seriousness of the matter that you are pointing out. Sometimes it happens that someone's unskilful behaviour is pointed out and he absolutely refuses to recognise it as unskilfulness. He might even try to justify it. [17] *[Pause]*

Dharmadhara: It suggests, Bhante, that trust is a large part of spiritual friendship.

S: It does, indeed, yes. I suppose it raises all sorts of questions about why people find it so difficult to trust one another.

Mangala: It even raises the question what is trust? What do you mean by trust?

S: I think trust is the confidence that the other person will deal with you in accordance with the love mode rather than in accordance with the power mode; this is basically what it is.

Prasannasiddhi: That suggests that not many people are living in accordance with the love mode.

S: Not necessarily. It suggests that not many people believe that other people are living in accordance with the love mode. They may be right in some cases; in some cases they may be wrong.

Prasannasiddhi: But if not many people *believe* that others - if they were living in the love mode they would probably be aware that others were also living in the love mode.

S: Yes. That's true.

Prasannasiddhi: So therefore if there's not much trust then probably there's not much love.

Mangala: I know people who I would say operate from the love mode, but at the same time I couldn't say that I altogether would trust them, because I think perhaps they haven't quite got the - let's say the wisdom, as it were: they may be very well-meaning and warm and friendly and kind, you can see that, but somehow you feel they haven't quite got the - well, somehow the intelligence -that's not quite the right word -

S: I'm not sure that one is not taking the word 'love' in the expression 'love mode' in a rather narrow, even sentimental, sort of sense. I find it difficult to believe, or difficult to agree, that someone who was nice and sincere in that way was *genuinely* experiencing or operating in accordance with the love mode. [18] I think the love mode necessarily means also a certain element of clarity and intelligence and understanding. I know what you mean - that you may not feel inclined to confess to someone who, yes, is quite harmless, but he or she is more like a harmless idiot! I don't think such a person would be a genuine example or genuine embodiment of the love mode; I don't see the word 'love' in the context of the phrase 'the love mode' in that sort of one-sided way.

Dharmadhara: I have been speculating about the transition from the power mode to the love mode, and that this must be a conscious, a voluntary, decision, an effort to change from one to the other.

S: Yes, I remember a few years ago a particular Order Member wrote me quite a remarkable letter to the effect that she had seen how, in connection with Order matters, she really needed to make a conscious effort to change to the love mode. She didn't say that she had been operating in accordance with the power mode, though perhaps that was implied, but she saw very clearly that, regardless of difficulties, she just had to operate in accordance with the love mode; and only that was going to resolve the difficulties and even problems that had arisen. So I think sometimes people *do* take this sort of conscious decision and really act upon it, even though it isn't easy. One begins, as it were, by abdicating the power that you have; you don't invoke it; so you may appear for a while very weak and ineffective; but you don't use the big stick - you've discarded the big stick. And sometimes people are so *used* to other people - and themselves, too - operating in that kind of way with the big stick, they find it very difficult to imagine operating in any other way, and therefore sometimes they can't *believe* that you are *not* in fact still operating in that particular way. They may think that you're just being devious! [Laughter] And, of course, sometimes people *are* devious and manipulative, and that is *still* an expression of the power mode. If you cease operating in accordance with the power mode, it means you stop trying to *coerce* people, even nudge them in

your particular direction or *a* particular direction without them realising it.

Prasannasiddhi: It seems interesting that the Movement's been going for 20 years and yet there doesn't seem to be much of this love mode in strong evidence. Yet you'd think it was in accordance with the First Precept. [19]

S: Well, so it is, but it's a very difficult thing to develop, a very difficult thing to achieve. I think also - going back to this question of trust, which is obviously connected - you only develop trust in someone as a result of quite regular contact with them over a fairly lengthy period of time. Well, these days people get *around* so much; you don't stay in one place long enough to really get to know people sufficiently well to be able to trust them. Perhaps you spend just a few months here and then a few months there, and perhaps a couple of years somewhere else; and even two years isn't a very long period in which to develop that degree of trust. That's an aspect of all modern relationships - the extent to which they are changed or abandoned after a while.

Nagabodhi: Earlier on in this conversation, you wanted to set aside the issue of masculine competitiveness for the purpose of the discussion, but from your awareness of the Order and from letters you receive, and talking to people, do you think there is more trust or less trust among men than women, or do you think it's about the same?

S: I don't think it's all that different, speaking with regard to the Movement; though, where there is a lack of trust, it probably manifests in different ways in the case of men and in the case of women.

Nagabodhi: Can I follow that up a little? - because my impressions - this could be a generalisation based on no real evidence - but my impression is, from *Shabda* entries and from women I know, that women within the Order seem to communicate quite intimately, they seem to share their personal lives, on a one-to-one basis at least, to quite a high degree. Would that suggest that that sort of communication is operating in a different range from the sort of area in which confession would take place?

S: I think very often that is the case. It's perhaps difficult to generalise, but I know what you mean. I think perhaps women find it easier to share common interests and experiences on a comparatively, let's say, basic human level. I'm not so sure that men find it so easy, or are so interested in doing so. I think, for instance - I may be wrong here, but I think - women share concern about their health more readily than men do. But this is only an [20] impression. Perhaps we should resist the temptation to generalise from not very adequate evidence or data.

Nagabodhi: I think an underlying question there, not so much about the difference between the sexes, is whether this kind of more basic human communication is in fact a forerunner for the kind of trust we have been talking about - whether among men or women; or whether really the kind of communication on which this kind of openness and trust is based is something of a higher level.

S: I am sure it is of a higher level, but none the less I think openness and freedom of communication on the more ordinary human level does prepare the way for the higher, more distinctively spiritual, communication and trust.

Prasannasiddhi: Though it wouldn't be absolutely necessary.

S: I think it would be rather surprising if someone went straight from not trusting anybody on the ordinary human level to trusting them in terms of spiritual friendship. I think one doesn't usually make that sort of leap unless one has had perhaps some quite dramatic higher spiritual experience.

That sort of thing is, of course, quite exceptional.

Prasannasiddhi: I was thinking, say, of people in the Movement who have had very little personal contact with you, but perhaps they would come and ask you things, say things to you that they wouldn't to people they knew very well.

S: I'm not sure of the relevance of that - or the connection, rather.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, perhaps - just to be open on a basic human level demands time, and perhaps you do meet people perhaps on a higher level who you don't spend much time with, but if you did you would actually be willing to be open to them, because you could perhaps respond to their ...

S: I think in my case, even though somebody might not have met me before, or might not have seen me very often, they have heard my voice on tape and they have read my books and they have written letters, and in some cases they have thought about me quite a lot and even dreamed about me quite a lot! - so that, [21] when they do actually meet me, they don't feel it's like meeting a stranger, and therefore very often they *can* be quite open, even from the very first meeting sometimes, within the first five *minutes*.

Nagabodhi: They must have built up quite a bit of trust before they have met you.

S: Yes, as it were almost by hearsay.

Mangala: Then you get the case of people going to psychiatrists and analysts and so on, or you just meet somebody - maybe you're hitching or something, or whatever - and people tell you all sorts of things, very intimate things, perhaps because they *don't* know you very well, in a sense, and there's no reason to trust you at all, perhaps. Maybe that's different.

S: Yes, I think that's a different situation, though it does obviously happen. But that wouldn't be confession in the full spiritual sense that we have been talking about. It would be more like admission.

Prasannasiddhi: I think it does happen, perhaps, where Order Members come into contact with people who have just come into the Movement and perhaps have had things they've bottled up for a long time; and [to] an Order Member they have perhaps had one conversation with or just seen at one class they will come out and almost seem to respond to some sort of ...

S: No doubt that does happen; it's difficult to generalise. Sometimes it may be a case of admitting, and sometimes it may be a case of genuine confession, depending on the level on which that particular person is operating - at least on that occasion.

Do we have any more questions left?

Chairman: There's one more. We think the handwriting is Virananda's.

S: Oh yes, it is.

Mangala: It's a poem. [*Laughter*] [22]

Chairman: It's an ode to -

S: He's sneaked a poem in, perhaps.

Chairman: It's on confession of negativity on behalf of Order Members towards yourself.

Prasannasiddhi: Better not transcribe Mangala's comment!

_____: Why not?

Prasannasiddhi: Virananda might not appreciate it.

Given that the relation to one's spiritual teacher will likely have an important bearing on one's spiritual life - e.g. if one is in good communication with him, one's spiritual life will probably be facilitated - should people in the FWBO be making more of an individual effort to (a) rejoice in Bhante's merits, and (b) confess their negativity towards him? Some Friends and Order Members, for instance, seem to consistently rejoice in your merits; but could these people do more to overcome their diffidence, reticence and confessing their misgivings and criticisms of you and your presentation of the Dharma? Would you encourage Order Members at least to make more of an attempt to make such confessions to *you* or would it be better that they confessed such matters concerning you to their fellow chapter members?

S: So: 'should people in the FWBO be making more of an individual effort to (a) rejoice in Bhante's merits' - well, yes, please! [*Laughter*] His merits weren't rejoiced in for years together, so it's quite a pleasant change now that some people at least do rejoice in them. But this is probably putting the matter rather too narrowly. I think one should rejoice in the merits of anybody one comes into contact with or hears of who performs meritorious actions. Don't only rejoice in Bhante's merits, but rejoice in the merits of Order Members, rejoice in Lokamitra's merits on account of what he is doing in [23] India, and rejoice in the merits of all those Order Members, and even Mitras, who are doing something to further the Dharma. Even rejoice in the merits of Buddhists outside the FWBO who belong to other groups but who are making a genuine effort of one kind or another to spread the Dharma; or rejoice in the merits, if that is possible, of those outside the Buddhist fold altogether. So be prepared to rejoice in merits wherever one sees them. I think that is where the real emphasis lies, and that of course should include rejoicing in Bhante's merits.

And then: (b) should they 'confess their negativity towards him?' I think it depends what one means by negativity here. If it's negativity in the form of actual ill will, which a few people do experience or have experienced occasionally towards me, then I think one should always confess negativity of this sort to the person towards whom one has actually felt that negativity. I don't think it's a full confession if you confess to somebody else other than the person who is the object, or has been the object, of that negativity; unless, of course, they are dead or for some reason or other no longer available. But even if they are living at a distance you can still write to them. To confess your negativity towards a certain person to a *third* party is certainly helpful to some extent, but as I have said I don't think one has made a *full* confession unless one has confessed to the person with regard to whom one felt the negativity, and that goes for me too. I have had, in the course of the last couple of years, two or three letters from Order Members who have confessed that at some time in the past they did experience some negativity, in the sense of ill will, towards me which they now want to confess and which they deeply regret. So that's a very healthy sign.

Then the question goes on: 'Some Friends and Order Members, for instance, seem to consistently rejoice in your merits' - oh dear, split infinitive [*Laughter*] - 'but could these people do more to

overcome their diffidence, reticence and confessing their misgivings and criticisms of you and your presentation of the Dharma?’ Well, misgivings about me or about my presentation of the Dharma, and even criticisms of me and my presentation of the Dharma, are not necessarily negative and unskilful, because they *may* represent genuine doubts or genuine difficulties which need to be thrashed out. So there is not necessarily here something to be confessed. If there is an element of personal ill will in it all, obviously *that* is unskilful and would need to be confessed; but to have misgivings and criticisms of - well, [24] whether it’s of me or of anybody else - or of their presentation of the Dharma, is not *necessarily* a negative thing.

So: ‘Would you encourage Order Members at least to make more of an attempt to make such confessions to you?’ Well, I’ve already answered that. If it’s a question of ill will directed to me personally, which somebody has realised was an unskilful thing and wants to confess, well, in the long run they’ll have to confess to me since I’m the object of that - ‘or would it be better that they confessed such matters concerning you to their fellow chapter members?’ Well, they can certainly do that as a start, but as I say in the end they will no doubt have to confess to me, unless the ill will or whatever in question was very slight and very passing. I don’t want to have dozens of letters from people saying ‘I want to confess that I was a bit annoyed when your lecture went on for so long’! *[Laughter]* I think they can just confess that to their fellow Order Members.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe I am reading more into this question than there is, but he almost seems to be suggesting that there are Order Members possibly, and even Friends and Mitras, who actually have some misgivings and criticisms of your presentation, which perhaps they aren’t coming out with, in a sense; they are just harbouring them without saying anything about it.

S: That may well be the case. I did hear, some time ago, that in the course of a discussion somewhere in London about single-sex communities, somebody - and I was told it was an Order Member - had made the remarkable statement that Bhante didn’t understand women! I’m not quite sure what the connection of that was with the subject under discussion, namely single-sex communities, but there must have been some connection. But if that person did in fact make that statement, he certainly never attempted to discuss the matter with me; and if in fact he did make that statement, it’s a pity that he hasn’t raised the question with me, if not personally then at least on some other occasion when perhaps I was answering questions, and so on.

Mangala: Bhante, would you in fact welcome more as it were critical feedback on all aspects of your work and - ?

S: I am not sure quite what you mean by critical feedback. I am quite in favour of people *thinking for themselves* and trying to understand for [25] themselves, and not just accepting something merely because I have said that that is so. And I certainly welcome people asking questions for the sake of clarification. But I think I have to be careful not to encourage people to make me a target for their negativity, which is something which could, I think, quite easily happen - at least in the case of some people.

Mangala: Just to follow that up: do you think people, even Order Members, do actually question your teachings sufficiently, or - ?

S: I don’t think it’s a question of questioning my teachings, but of making a more vigorous effort actually to *understand* them: in other words, developing more *cintamaya prajna*. I certainly would like to encourage people to *think* much more about what I say. You can’t really start criticising and challenging unless you’ve started *thinking*.

Prasannasiddhi: Although to criticise and challenge might actually help one start thinking, help in the thinking process.

S: I get a bit fed up with people who don't really ask genuine questions out of genuine difficulties as a result of thinking, but who are just trying to stir me up. It is as though I am a sort of peaceful animal in a zoo, just sort of snoozing quietly in the straw, and they come and look through the bars and poke me with a stick so that I get up and shake myself, and maybe give a little roar or something of that sort. In other words, they want to see me perform. I'm afraid I don't respond very well to that sort of treatment. I think that's something quite different. But sometimes people do that. They try to ask questions which will set me going, almost for the sake of their amusement, not because they are genuinely concerned with those questions which they are supposedly asking. This doesn't happen very often; it happens much less now than it used to, but it does happen sometimes.

Prasannasiddhi: It does seem that there's almost some mechanism whereby people seem very reticent about criticising their spiritual teachers in any way. Maybe it's connected with projection or something like that. [26]

S: It depends what one means by criticism. I have just said that perhaps one should think more in terms of seeking clarification.

Prasannasiddhi: So it would be a question of people being honest if they actually have misgivings, rather than feeling 'Well, I shouldn't...'

S: Yes. Say, 'I have misgivings, I'm not really able to understand this, in fact I don't really think I can accept it, for such-and-such reasons. What have you to say?' - rather than pretending to go along with it because Bhante says so. Of course, if you are very new and very inexperienced, you may well think that you just have to suspend judgement, you need to study a bit more and understand a bit more, discuss a bit more with Order Members. That is a quite correct attitude. But if one does, on serious reflection, have certain definite misgivings, or can't agree with something I've said, the best thing to do is to be quite open about it and seek clarification in order to see whether your misgivings are based on a misunderstanding, or whether in fact there is something in what I say or in my presentation of the Dharma which is basically unacceptable to you; in which case you may have to seriously consider your position in the Movement.

For instance, someone may come to the conclusion that spiritual friendship *isn't* very important, despite the emphasis that Bhante places on it. They might think, 'Well, Bhante's got hold of the wrong end of the stick. He's belabouring this point too much.' Or someone might come to the conclusion that Buddhism is an essentially monastic religion, and the real Buddhist is the monk. They might come to the conclusion that Bhante is really mistaken about this. Well, that would mean - if I couldn't convince him and he couldn't convince me - that there wouldn't really be a place for him in the Order, if he happened to be an Order Member.

I think, in our day and age - one gets this impression listening to the radio and reading the newspapers - people have got into the habit of thinking that criticism is necessarily something challenging and attacking. They think in these sort of terms. They don't think in terms of seeking clarification. They jump into the attack immediately, without even making sure that they have understood the other person's position. Perhaps they don't even *want* to understand, they just want to take advantage of what looks like an opportunity of doing the other person down. [27]

So I think we have to encourage people to think much more in terms of seeking clarification from

those with whom they think they disagree; not just jumping straight in and attacking them. Sometimes people start attacking others before they've even finished speaking - they won't even let them finish. They start reacting to what they are saying before they've even finished saying it.

So, with regard to Order Members and Mitras and Friends and myself, I don't think it's a question of allowing or not allowing criticisms of Bhante and his presentation of the Dharma, so much as of encouraging people to seek clarification when they do have any misgivings. I think the language of criticism is perhaps not a very fortunate one.

Dharmadhara: Just a moment ago, you said that you thought nowadays people were less able to take criticism objectively, and they weren't able to see that someone might be looking for clarification ...

S: Assuming that they were in fact doing that.

Dharmadhara: Right, assuming that they were doing that. This reminds me of a book I am reading at the moment, called - well, it's about narcissism in the modern day. It's putting the case that, in our present society, in so many ways our confidence is being undermined, for example with advertising; rather than meeting our needs, it's just creating new ones and therefore undermining our self-confidence. Similarly in the educational sphere and the family. Everything, according to this book, is undermining our self-confidence. What do you think of all that?

S: I have looked into that book some time ago. I am not sure that I follow the argument as you've summarised it, but it does seem to me, as a result of my experience with people within the Movement, that a remarkably high percentage of them, as I would have thought, are lacking in self-confidence for whatsoever reason. I don't know how representative people in the Movement are in this respect; it could be, of course, that a lot of them are attracted to the FWBO just because they feel their own lack of self-confidence and want to *develop* self-confidence. So perhaps we can't extrapolate too readily from the state of affairs in the FWBO to the state of affairs in society at large. But [28] I have sometimes been surprised by the extent within the Movement that people seem to lack self-confidence, and to have very often a very poor self-image.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps a lot of people outside the Movement have got a false sense of self-confidence; and coming into the Movement, practising some meditation, and becoming aware of things like Enlightenment, gives you a bigger perspective perhaps.

S: One has certainly seen that in the case of some people who have bounced into the Movement full of self-confidence, but the balloon has very quickly been pricked in some cases and they have virtually collapsed. They have had to build up a genuine self-confidence over quite a long period. One has indeed seen this.

Dharmadhara: Do you think meditation can cause a loss of self-confidence?

S: Well, if meditation helps you to see what you really are or what you are really like, and if that doesn't agree with, say, a false image of yourself that you have had, that can certainly lead to a lack of confidence, because your confidence has been based on that false self-image. That is, of course, a highly positive development; but at such a time, in those sort of circumstances, you will need quite a lot of genuine positive support from your spiritual friends, otherwise you probably will have a very difficult time indeed.

Nagabodhi: Perhaps part of the difficulty with confession is that, in the *group*, we are used to

winning affection and friendship and acceptance through the creation of a self-image. In the spiritual community we have to do almost the opposite by confessing; we have to let go our self-image in the trust that we will find the friendship waiting for us. But it goes very much against the grain.

S: Well, clearly it is one of the things that go to make confession difficult.

Nagabodhi: But it is also the perfect antidote to the reliance on image. [29]

S: It must be quite an experience to go from being all sort of confident in, say, a co-op meeting to being very weak and unconfident in a chapter meeting, as I think sometimes happens. Because sometimes it's the same people, at least to some extent; and that certainly makes things more difficult.

Anyway, perhaps we'll leave it there for this evening.

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Fourth Lecture: The Protectors of the Dharma - 17th March 1987

Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Nagabodhi, Kovida, Mangala, Dharmadhara (Chariman), Prasannasiddhi, Bodhiraja

Chairman: Tonight is 17th March, and we are doing the fourth lecture, called 'The Protectors of the Dharma'. We've got, I think, 14 questions. The first question is from Ratnabodhi and is on the treasures of the gods.

Bhante, in your description of the cosmological context of *The Sutra of Golden Light*, you speak of the palace of Indra as containing the entire treasures of gods and men. Could you say a little more about this?

S: I'm not so sure that I can, because on looking at my notes I find that my notes say nothing at all about the palace of Indra containing the entire treasures of gods and men; so it seems to have been a little spontaneous addition at the time of giving the lecture. I can only assume that I wanted to emphasise the fact that the palace of Indra represented the sort of peak of mundane perfection, so far as the worlds up to that level were concerned; as though in Indra's palace you had everything that gods and men up to that level could possibly desire. So, in that sense, it contained the entire treasure of gods and men. There's a verse in the Bible, in one of the gospels: 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' So treasure represents what you desire. So Indra's palace is the place where, so to speak, all your desires are fulfilled - again, your desires up to that level, because there are many heavens and many realms above the heaven or the realm of the thirty-three gods, led by Indra. So there isn't any particular treasure of which I was speaking here.

Chairman: The next question, or group of questions, comes from Ratnaprabha, and it's on cosmology. There are three questions.

S: Let's have them separately, shall we? [2]

The first one:

To what extent was this cosmology originated during the Buddhist period? To what extent is it pre-Buddhist? Is it Indian or is it partly Tibetan-influenced? Where can we find the details?

S: The cosmology is pre-Buddhist only to a very limited extent. It would seem to be almost entirely an *Indian* Buddhist production. In the description which I gave, there is virtually no Tibetan influence at all - perhaps a little Tibetan colouring here and there. The only element in the cosmology which *might* be Tibetan, and I am not completely sure of this, is the blue winds and the two crossed dorjes; but I won't be completely certain that even that element in the cosmology is in fact Tibetan and not Indian, but it might be.

And 'where can we find the details?' There are some modern works, but in terms of the tradition details are to be found in works like the *Mahavyutpatti* and the *Abhidharma-kosa* - works of that sort, which are not very easy of access. But if one looks at fairly comprehensive books on Buddhism, one will find in most of them some description or some account of Buddhist

cosmology.

Dharmadhara: What was the first reference you mentioned then - the Maha - ?

S: *Mahavyutpatti*. This is a sort of Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary, compiled to help translators of text from Sanskrit into Tibetan. I used to have a copy, but it disappeared quite a few years ago. I think one would just have to search through the available books on Buddhism. More recently a few books have appeared dealing quite substantially with Buddhist cosmology; I might even have one or two of them, I can't quite remember. I might have others on order - yes! there we are. But there's another one, which I think I haven't got yet, a Thai version of traditional Buddhist cosmology, I think compiled by a King of Siam, as it was then. All right, that's enough on that one.

Ratnaprabha's second question:

You say that Meru is 80,000 feet high.

S: Yes, that's a slip of the tongue.

Bodhiraja: So it should read 80,000 *miles*?

S: That's right, yes. [3]

Thirdly, you say that there is no such thing as positivity with solely a psychological or spiritual source. What is the reason for believing this? Cannot it come from a higher state of consciousness which is *not* transcendental? Similarly, you say that one cannot be truly human without Going for Refuge, and that a culture cannot be purely secular. Is this an argument using Aristotle's doctrine of final cause?

S: No, I didn't have Aristotle's doctrine of final cause in mind at all, as far as I recollect. I must say, though, that I haven't thought about this particular question - that is to say, the question of there not being such a thing as positivity with solely a psychological or spiritual source - since I gave this lecture. This is one of the things that I haven't given any further thought or further attention to. So I can't say very much more than I said then. But one thing I can say, which is this: what is one's criterion of what is positive and what is not positive? Or what is one's criterion of what is skilful and what is not skilful? Because from a Buddhist point of view, the criterion is that the skilful is something which provides at least a base for the development of the Transcendental, so that what in practice provides a base for the development of the Transcendental *is* positive or is the positive. So if you do not have that reference, so to speak, to the Transcendental, how are you going to determine what is genuinely positive, in the Buddhist sense at least? You have no means of ascertaining the difference between, say, what is genuinely positive and what is merely pleasant, or what simply gives personal satisfaction. So it does seem to me that you can't be sure that what you think is positive *is* in fact positive without the possibility of a reference to the Transcendental. In that sense, the Transcendental underpins the mundane positive. You might experience a mundane positive mental state, but in the absence of a reference to the Transcendental it would be difficult for you to know that it was in fact positive, and that it ought, so to speak, to be sustained.

Another consideration is that, supposing you experience a positive mental state in the ordinary psychological sense, if you have at least a concept of the Transcendental, and if you have a concept of the positive as providing a base for the realisation of that Transcendental, whether by you personally or by society in general or *individuals* in society in general, you then have an incentive to continue and sustain that experience of the positive. It's as though in the absence of a reference

to the Transcendental you have no *reason* to be positive. [4]

Bodhiraja: Does that mean that someone in that particular group has to have *experienced* the Transcendental?

S: Well, I think in the long run, yes. If you can only refer to it as a memory or an ancient tradition, then it loses its sustaining power - as was the case in the Buddha's day with the Brahmins. Their ancestors had been knowers of Brahma, had attained to Brahma, but *they* hadn't. So they were not able to sustain the spiritual tradition.

Prasannasiddhi: On the Wheel of Life you have the gods of the Round and the gods of the Path; wouldn't the gods of the Round have a sense of the positive, but that wouldn't have a transcendental element?

S: They might have a sense of the positive in the sense of experiencing something positive, but it wouldn't be possible for that to function as a basis for the realisation of the Transcendental unless they had some *awareness* of the Transcendental; and one mustn't forget that it's usually considered - according to tradition - that the gods are simply reaping the reward of previous skilful actions. So in their case what sustains their positivity is karma; it's their previous skilful actions. But when that factor is removed, then they fall from that state, unless perhaps in that state they can envisage the Transcendental and provide a further base not just for the realisation of the Transcendental but for the extension of their positive experience.

So if one accepts that, of course it does follow that one cannot be truly human without Going for Refuge; and you can't sustain your human state without some reference to a transcendental factor. It's as though you are human just by accident, or just for a short time, but you can't *sustain* that human state.

Mangala: It's a result of your karma.

S: You could say that, yes.

Mangala: And to perpetuate that you have to create fresh positive karma.

S: Yes, right. And what is your reason for doing that? Ultimately, it's a transcendental reason. Often, of course, you're just living on a memory. For instance, one might say perhaps, on another level, in the last century - or even [5] in this century, though to a lesser extent - that lots of people didn't believe in Christianity, but they continued to follow Christian ethics, because there was still some momentum left in those Christian ethics, but that momentum had been imparted originally by Christianity *as a religion*. By this century, a lot of that momentum had died down. Therefore a lot of people see no reason for continuing to follow Christian ethics. You could perhaps say that one saw that in the case of Nazism in Germany. One can see it in a diluted form throughout society, perhaps, today, in Britain and other parts of the West.

So even after a religion, or let's say a transcendental experience, has ceased to be a living thing and is only a memory, the memory continues to exert some influence, at least for a time; but it can only be for a time. Eventually that influence is exhausted, and then, if there hasn't been a fresh impulse from, or experience of, the Transcendental, all that has *depended* on that transcendental factor becomes weaker and weaker.

Mangala: I suppose that's what happened to Buddhism in India: it just gradually petered out.

S: Yes.

Mangala: People with a transcendental vision - gradually there were fewer and fewer of them and they just got weaker and weaker, so that -

S: A society or a culture can run on the memory of a vision for a short while, but not for very long. A vision needs replenishing. As I said, this was the situation, it would seem, at the time of the Buddha: the original vision of the Brahmins, let's say, had become only a memory among their descendants, and could not exert any real influence on people's lives, so the Buddha had to open up the path to the Transcendental all over again.

Mangala: You say the Buddha had to open it up. Are you saying that that earlier vision which the Brahmins used to have was a transcendental vision?

S: One does get the impression from the Pali scriptures that the Buddha did see things in those terms. [6]

Mangala: I suppose what I'm asking is did Buddhism exist before the Buddha?

S: Well, yes; that has always been the Buddhist tradition, that there were Buddhas before the Buddha. And also sometimes the Buddha uses 'Buddha' and 'bhikkhu' and 'brahmin' interchangeably. Certainly the Buddha believed that enlightened people had existed before himself; whether he pictured them as having lived within what we would call history or in some period that we would regard as prehistoric and mythical, that's another matter; or whether the Buddha and others of his day distinguished as *we* do between the historical and the mythical it's very difficult to say; probably they didn't. But the Buddha certainly believed that there had been enlightened beings before him, and he also seems quite definitely to have believed that the succession had been lost and that he was restoring it.

Nagabodhi: Would you yourself say that there is any evidence of transcendental Insight in the Vedas or in the Upanishads - the ancient Hindu scriptures?

S: I am very doubtful if there is any trace of Insight in the Vedas - not that I've combed through every verse. And also one has to bear in mind that they are written in a very peculiar language; they are not written in conceptual language, they are written in what one might call symbolic language. So there is a big question of interpretation. If one has some understanding of the Transcendental, it's not difficult to read a transcendental meaning into a symbolic text.

As regards the Upanishads, there is some difference of opinion as to their date - I am speaking of the major Upanishads - whether they are pre-Buddhistic or whether they are post-Buddhistic. What bearing that has on the question of whether they contain expressions of transcendental Insight or not is perhaps not very direct. It is very difficult to say, partly because of the difference of language - though here, in the case of the Upanishads, the language is considerably more conceptual than that of the Vedas. But, again, once you have got the idea of the Transcendental, it is very easy to find that, if you *want* to find it, in almost anything. So it isn't really easy to answer the question.

The very least that one could say would be that, even in the greatest of the Upanishads, it's not very easy to discover something that traditional Buddhism would recognise as Insight into the Transcendental. [7]

Dharmadhara: What signs would you look for in a culture or a teaching to give the impression that there was a transcendental Insight present there?

S: In the midst of it?

Dharmadhara: Yes.

S: I think you'd look for a high ethical standard. I think that would be the real test, both in individual life and in collective life, social life. I don't mean ethical in a puritanical sense, but in the more as it were genuinely human sense.

Dharmadhara: A degree of sensitivity in the ethical values that suggest it.

S: Yes, right. Not necessarily culture in the sense of the fine arts. Very likely, but not necessarily. You could dispense with those, but you couldn't dispense with ethics. I think if you found that the ethical level of society, both individual and collective, was really low, you would be justified in doubting the presence of the Transcendental in the midst of that society. Again go back to that well-worn example of Nazi Germany. In a society, let's say, which does build concentration camps and literally incinerate millions of people, would there be even a *memory* of a transcendental state or experience or value in that sort of society? One would, of course, then have to doubt whether it was present in, say, Catholicism, because Catholicism was certainly present in Germany at the time. But what was the state of that Catholicism, from a Buddhist point of view? Because many German Catholics did condone what the Nazis were doing. Some - many of them, in fact - were Nazis themselves. They didn't see any contradiction between being Nazis and being Catholic Christians. So in a society of that sort, where things like not just concentration camps but *death* camps could exist, could one really accept that there was any element of experience of the Transcendental in that society, except perhaps just here and there in the case of some isolated individual who was remote from it all - perhaps buried in a small monastery somewhere, or something of that sort; or some highly developed artist, perhaps?

Mangala: Can I just go back to an earlier point? You were talking about the Vedas and the Upanishads and saying that if you had some inkling of the Transcendental then you could conceivably read that into these texts. I am just [8] wondering how that relates to Buddhist texts. Presumably somebody could say the same thing about *Buddhist* texts. What I am saying is, what sort of guarantee have you? How do we know that what is in the *Buddhist* texts is actually transcendental?

S: In a way, that's not very difficult to ascertain, because if, say, just for the sake of argument - we regard Mahayana sutras, which have a much higher symbolic content than do, say, the Pali suttas, as being *later* than the Pali suttas, we find that the more conceptual formulations of the Buddha's transcendental experience or realisation come first in Buddhism. Do you see what I mean? So you therefore have a clear criterion, a clear statement in conceptual terms, of the transcendental experience or realisation. So if you read that into the Mahayana sutras, you are quite justified, inasmuch as the Mahayana sutras are also Buddhist and are also regarded as part of the Buddha's teaching. So nobody can say, 'Ah, you're reading things into the Mahayana sutras,' when you read a transcendental teaching into something quite symbolic, because there is that same transcendental teaching in definitely non-symbolic form *before* the Mahayana sutras.

But if you take a work like the Vedas, which comes at the *beginning* of tradition, then how do you know that what you're reading into it subsequently was in fact there before, or is actually in those particular texts? Do you see the point that I'm making? So there can only be agreement about

meanings on the basis of rationality, as it were, and on the basis of a conceptual language, one might say.

So if you find a transcendental content in the Mahayana sutras, no one can say, 'Well, you're just reading that into it, because that isn't in Buddhism at all, that sort of transcendental content,' you can point to texts which are supposedly earlier than the Mahayana sutras and which quite unambiguously, in clear conceptual language, communicate that same transcendental message.

It is much the same with the Old Testament. You can read so much into that. But then you can't really be sure that it was really there, because the Old Testament is historical and mythological and symbolical and poetic, but there's no *alternative* version in conceptual language existing earlier. So you can't be really sure that the higher meanings you are reading into, say, the Old Testament really were present in the minds of the people producing that literature. [9]

Bodhiraja: Do you think it's just by chance that the conceptual came before the symbolic?

S: In the case of Buddhism?

Bodhiraja: In the case of Buddhism.

S: It's very difficult to say. It's not that the symbolic elements were not present in the Buddha's own teaching, perhaps - well, symbolic elements were present in the form of parables, at least. But the greater part of the teaching, even allowing for possible distortions, seems to have been presented in clear, rational conceptual terms which were quite unambiguous, and the meaning of which could not be mistaken. *Why* that was, it's difficult to say. One could say that the Buddha saw that that would be the most skilful way to teach; or perhaps it was dependent on purely historical circumstances. It could be that humanity in India was moving, generally speaking, from a more non-conceptual to a more conceptual mode of expression, and that the Buddha simply went along with that.

But it is a quite interesting point, isn't it? - that probably, as far as I know, Buddhism is the only major religion which has started off with a conceptual presentation of its teaching; with, so to speak, almost a rational presentation of its teaching - with, perhaps, the possible exception of Confucianism - but Confucianism isn't quite a 'religion' in the way that Buddhism is or Christianity is or Islam is, or Judaism is or Zoroastrianism is. So it's as though all the other religions start off with myths and legends which have to be progressively purified and interpreted, but that's not the case with Buddhism. You get the clear, straightforward, unambiguous teaching expressed in conceptual terms right from the beginning. No doubt it has advantages and also disadvantages. Perhaps the main disadvantage is that it possesses, for some people at least, comparatively little in the way of direct emotional impact. It could be that the Mahayana, among other things, partially supplied that.

Prasannasiddhi: Though, in the Buddhist suttas, in the early Pali Canon, you do get people being very overwhelmed by what the Buddha has to say.

S: That's true. I mean, have people realised this before? - that what seems to have been the Buddha's own personal teaching, as far as we can make out, was expressed predominantly in conceptual terms? Though perhaps not quite so much, [10] or not to quite the extent, that the Theravada seemed to be, because there was a non-conceptual element, too; quite a strong one, in fact. Whereas all other major religions seem to have started off in the other way.

Dharmadhara: I had realised that, but I hadn't realised its unique place in that respect before.

S: So, in that respect, the Buddha is, one could almost say, more like a philosopher than a religious founder. He is in that way more like, say, Socrates or Plato than he is like Muhammad or - it's difficult to compare with Christ, because Christ's teaching was not very conceptual, to say the least; it didn't constitute any kind of philosophy. Of course, Christians see that as an advantage.

Dharmadhara: An advantage that there's no philosophy in Christ's teaching?

S: Yes. Well, partly on account of their particular conception of philosophy; and also, in the case of Christ, it wasn't so much what he taught as what he *was*, which was the incarnate son of God, which was important.

So there's very little in Buddhism in a way, in the Buddha's teaching, that needs to be *explained* away. There's a lot in the Old Testament that, in the light of more developed ethical notions, just has to be *explained* away; and a lot in the Vedas that has to be *explained* away. There's a whole class of Vedic works, the Brahmanas - some Upanishads, too - which do quite a lot of explaining away; allegorising things, interpreting things. You find that even with the Greeks, when the Greeks became sensitive to the fact that some of the exploits of their gods and goddesses were not very edifying, so they tried to give them allegorical interpretations. That seems to be one mode of religious development. But, in the case of Buddhism, in the case of the Buddha's own teaching or what appears to be the Buddha's own teaching, there is no *need* for any explaining away; *nothing* needs to be explained away. It's crystal clear. As when, say, the Buddha says hatred never ceases by hatred, it only ceases by non-hatred; well, what is there to explain away? It's completely rational and completely intelligible. It's almost trite, in a way; there's no poetry about it, no appealing symbolism. It's almost too sober and too clear.

So it's in the light of those very sober and very clear things that you have to interpret things like the Mahayana sutras. Whatever interpretation you [11] gave to the symbolism of the Mahayana sutras, it could *not* go against those simple earlier teachings, which are crystal clear. You couldn't possibly interpret any Mahayana sutra in such a way, for instance, as to justify war, because the controlling factor in the form of those very unambiguous conceptual teachings of the Buddha are there as a controlling factor.

Prasannasiddhi: Does that mean, Bhante, that the people who were reading and composing Mahayana sutras would also have had quite strong contact with the basic formulations as in the Pali Canon?

S: Well, the basic formulations, as occurring not only in the Pali Canon but in the corresponding Sanskrit canonical literature, recur throughout the Mahayana sutras - the constant references to the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, and so on. So it shows that that particular tradition was quite alive, even though the Mahayana sutras went, in a sense, beyond it. But they couldn't go beyond the principles involved in those, as it were, earlier formulations in the sense of going against them. They could enlarge upon them or elaborate them, or show further applications of them, but they could never go beyond them in the sense of contradicting them.

Dharmadhara: Bhante, is that in fact the case, then, that they never did go beyond those early teachings?

S: I think occasionally they did. It's a matter of very fine judgement. I am thinking of one particular passage in a Mahayana sutra - I think one of the Ratnakuta sutras - where it is said that

the Bodhisattva can take life, the Bodhisattva can kill. I am very doubtful about that, personally. I think there, perhaps, the Mahayana sutras go a little too far. One could perhaps understand it as a way of glorifying or eulogising the Bodhisattva's great compassion that it doesn't stick at anything, but I think the statement that the Bodhisattva could even kill can't really be taken literally.

So the well-known basic teachings come into play here as a sort of limiting factor. Otherwise, with skilful exegesis, you can make anything mean anything - look at the meanings that have been read into Shakespeare's plays, for instance.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you get the same thing happening in the Vajrayana tradition? Do they still maintain contact with - [12]

S: I think in their case, perhaps, they have got a bit out of touch with, let's say, to use that term, the Hinayana, and therefore perhaps they have run a little wild at times, in the absence of that controlling factor, as I have called it, provided by the clear conceptual formulation of the teaching, which we do find in the Hinayana. Anyway, I think perhaps we'd better move on.

Dharmadhara: May I remind people to just announce their names each time they speak, apart from the initial question?

Question 3 from Ratnaguna, regarding something from the book on Buddhist Cosmology by Randy [Randolph] Kloetzli.

Bhante, in *Buddhist Cosmology*, the book by Randy Kloetzli, he says: 'The Abhidharma-kosa is quite emphatic that these, i.e. the four levels of the *arupaloka*, are not abodes. There are no abodes above the *akanistha*. Moreover, one cannot be reborn in the *arupyas* as such.' I thought that on occasion you have suggested that it is possible to be reborn in the *arupaloka*. Would you like to comment on this?

S: I must say I am not sure what is meant by saying that levels are not abodes. But perhaps we can approach the question back to front, as it were, by way of a consideration of whether one can in fact be reborn in the *arupyas* as such. I looked into this, and I found in McGovern's *Manual of Buddhist Philosophy*, which deals fairly extensively with Buddhist cosmology, that one can in fact be reborn into the *arupalokas*. The author says, in fact: 'Rebirth in these realms' - that is, the four *arupa* realms - 'is said to be due to meditation on the four immeasurables, one for each heaven. Yet notwithstanding their many merits, rebirth in one of these abodes was deprecated as the duration of life is so inconceivably long that progress to the supreme goal of Nirvana is seriously delayed.' And the references he gives are the Mahavyutpatti [*pause to consult reference*] - and also among them is Abhidharma-kosa, which is the work that Kloetzli refers to, and the - the Yoga-bhumi, maybe.

So it does seem that, according to the Sarvastivadin tradition, it is possible to be reborn in the *arupyas*; and also according to the Theravada tradition, because I looked up the Abhidharma-tasamgaha(?) and that also says: 'Resultants of the first stage of arupaloka-dhyana meditation and of the following stages take effect on the plane of the four grades of the arupa plane respectively by way of rebirth', and so on. Then it says: 'There are four modes [13] of rebirth in the arupaloka.' So that seems very clear, doesn't it? - that according to both the Sarvastivada and Theravada traditions rebirth in the arupalokas is possible, does occur. So one can't agree with Randy Kloetzli. I don't know if he gives a reference for his statement that 'The Abhidharma-kosa is quite emphatic that these, i.e. the four levels of the arupaloka, are not abodes' and that one cannot be reborn in the *arupyas* as such. I am not sure what 'as such' means here.

But coming to this question of abodes - the usual word is *nivasa* - one could say - and this is only a possible interpretation, only a guess of mine - that at the *arupya* level, as it were, the distinction between subject and object has become very fine indeed, very attenuated. So there isn't that sort of gross and obvious distinction between subjective state or person, and world, as you find on lower levels; and that therefore the term 'abode' is not perhaps so appropriate. But that's only a bit of speculation on my part. But certainly rebirth on those levels is possible, according to the two major Hinayana traditions.

Mangala: He says there are no abodes above the *akanistha*. What's the *akanistha*?

S: That you really need to look up for fuller information, but it's the highest of the *rupaloka* abodes; and it's inhabited, so to speak, only by *anagamis*. You can look it up in the Buddhist Encyclopaedia - there's a lengthy article about it there.

Chairman: Fourthly, a question from Chakkhupala on what the Four Great Kings might represent.

Considered from the point of view of the contents of the individual human psyche, is each of the four kings a personification of the as yet largely untransformed energies symbolised by his legion, or is, for example, Virudhaka to be considered as symbolising something distinguishable from the preta forces which he commands? In what sense can preta-like forces be put at the service, and in protection, of the Dharma? Likewise Gandharvas, Nagas and Yaksas? [14]

S: I would say that each of the four kings is not simply 'a personification of the as yet largely untransformed energies symbolised by his legion.' I would say that each of the four kings is in fact to be considered as symbolising something distinguishable from the forces which he commands. I think that is quite clear from the symbolism, so to speak, itself.

But 'in what sense can preta-like forces be put at the service of and in protection of the Dharma?' I don't think I'm going to make any categorical statement here, because of the very nature of this kind of material. This sort of material, one might say, is multi-faceted in meaning. I'll just give you an example from nearer home. I recently got and have read a little monograph on Hermes. Now you might ask me, 'Who or what was or is Hermes?' Well, I could say Hermes was the messenger of the Greek gods, and you might be quite satisfied with that. But that's not really an answer at all. Reading this little monograph it's very clear that Hermes was a deeply complex figure, with all sorts of aspects, all sorts of facets to his character, some of them apparently quite contradictory. It also was borne in on me, reading this monograph, that in order to have even *some* idea of who or what Hermes was or is, you have to comb through the material very carefully, and this is what the author of the monograph does. He goes through, for instance, the references to Hermes in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, and gradually, bit by bit - and there are hundreds of little pieces - he builds up his picture in a quite impressive way.

So it's not enough just to say, 'Well, Hermes was the messenger of the gods', and leave it at that. That doesn't really give one any idea of who or what Hermes was or is *at all*, really. So it would be quite misleading just to say 'Hermes was the messenger of the gods,' because then people would think they knew all about Hermes; which would be quite a big mistake, because actually they would be no wiser than they were before.

So it's like that with all these mythological figures mentioned in this chapter of *The Sutra of Golden Light* and, in fact, all the other chapters too. Even creatures like the pretas have to be, as it were, studied. It is not enough to say just 'The pretas are hungry ghosts, so how can the hungry

ghosts be put at the service of and in protection of the Dharma?’ You have to comb through the literature; you have to study the pretas - *who* are the pretas? *what* are the pretas? - and try to get some idea, some sort of understanding, of what they are really like; and then, perhaps, you can begin to see in what way they can be put at the service of and in protection of the Dharma. [15]

We have done a little bit of that sort of work in connection with the Nagas - a little bit - because we’ve got this idea of Nagas, inasmuch as they have dragons’ heads and snakes’ bodies, as representing the over-developed intellectual, or rather the person who is intellectually over-developed, who is very good at theory but very poor when it comes to practice. So this gives us a bit of an opening, a bit of a foothold as it were, and we can perhaps begin to see that if these sort of people were to become more balanced, and if their theoretical understanding, their purely intellectual understanding, was to be balanced by practice, and if they were to be more integrated, then their undoubtedly powerful intellects could be of great *service* to the Dharma, by way of explaining it, by way of defending it against criticism and so on. Do you see what I mean? But that is just one aspect of the Nagas.

So one can’t, therefore, give categorical answers to these sort of questions. It would be premature and misleading. One needs to study what the four kings represent, what their respective legions represent, and try to get a definite feeling for them; not just try to ascertain the dictionary meaning, so to speak, of their various names - though one should do that too. In other words, there’s a lot more work to be done on this sort of subject in this sort of field.

Prasannasiddhi: Just one question, Bhante. Could you say, though, that if a Naga balanced out his one-sided intellectual development, then in a sense he would no longer be a Naga?

S: Well, he would no longer be a Naga, but he at least would be someone who had *been* a Naga and who therefore would have inherited, so to speak, whatever positive qualities the Naga did have.

Anyway, let’s progress.

Chairman: The next question from Abhaya on procreation and the higher *kamalokas*.

Bhante, in your account of the heaven worlds above Mount Meru, you refer to the means of sexual gratification between gods in the different levels of the *kamaloka*. Does the sexual activity at some or all of these levels include or exclude procreation? If it excludes procreation, then presumably we are to conclude that procreation is a relatively crude aspect of sexuality, confined to the human realm. [16]

S: It would seem that that is what we have to conclude; because even though, according to tradition, the sexual activity at some or all of these levels - that is to say, levels of gods - does include copulation, that copulation does not result in procreation. In the *devalokas*, all the beings who are born there are born by way of apparitional birth, as it is called; they are *opapatika* - that’s the Pali word. They just appear. And they appear having the form of devas or beings aged about 16 years, and there is no period of gestation for them; they appear as 16-year-old devas with all their senses and faculties intact and fully developed from the beginning. So there is no parturition, there’s no procreation, in the heavenly realms; even in the case of those realms where there is actually copulation.

Now we know! That’s what tradition says. So indeed, yes, we have to ‘conclude that procreation is a relatively crude aspect of sexuality confined to the human realm’. But it’s not confined to the *human* realm, is it, because it extends to the *animal* realm?

Prasannasiddhi: Did I hear you correctly that sexual activity is possible in the higher *devalokas*?

S: No, it's on the different level of the *kamaloka*, not in the *rupaloka*. There are six - I think it is, yes - six deva realms within the *kamaloka*, and there sexual activity of a more or less refined nature does take place, but *not* among the brahmas of the *rupaloka*.

Prasannasiddhi: Such sexual activity as holding hands, for instance?

S: That's right, up to - or down to - copulation.

Mangala: So even among the devas in the *kamaloka* - they may have sexual activity but there would be no procreation?

S: That's right, yes. Yes, beings appear there apparitionally, by way of apparitional birth. There is no connection, it would seem, between the copulatory activity of some devas in the lower deva realms and the appearance of new beings in those realms. So presumably there is no parentage in those realms. [17]

Dharmadhara: From an evolutionary point of view - I don't know if you can apply evolution to the gods, but presumably the development was that procreation led to copulation -

S: No, it's usually copulation leads - *[Laughter]* .

Dharmadhara: From an evolutionary point of view, originally you had asexual reproduction, then sexual reproduction appeared; and then presumably at a later stage, pleasure became associated with sexual activity. So now it seems that the procreation has been left behind. I am just wondering how one could explain it from an evolutionary point of view, that that has occurred with the gods.

S: I suppose it depends whether one regards the gods as representing a higher or a lower evolutionary development as compared with human beings. I think one would have to settle that first. Sometimes it's said that they represent a higher, sometimes that they may a lower, evolutionary development, depending on one's point of view.

Anyway, let's move on.

Dharmadhara: Question 6 from Satyaraja, on your own experiences in preparing this lecture.

I heard Subhadra reading from a journal that he kept at the time you were giving *The Sutra of Golden Light* series. He said that, while you were writing the lecture on the Four Great Kings, you saw them around you. You described them as being seven or eight feet tall, grave in appearance as though they did not underestimate the weight of their responsibilities, although they were equal to the job of protecting the Dharma. You said they were not so much like separate entities as like four clouds joined together. In what sense do you think that they exist? You say they represent the forces of balance and harmony in the cosmos. In what way does their influence manifest itself in the world?

S: Let's deal with that one first, shall we? 'In what sense do you think that they exist?' I suppose that one has to ask what does one mean by exist? I certainly didn't have the impression that my experience of them was purely subjective. I certainly had the impression that they did in some sense exist [18] objectively, though obviously I can offer no proof of that, but that was certainly

my feeling or, more, my experience.

As for them representing the forces of balance and harmony in the cosmos, and as for the way in which their influence manifests in the world, I think again it's quite difficult to say. Again, this is something I've not given any real thought to since giving the talk. But perhaps we could give a sort of - what shall I say? - ecological analysis. There seems to be a sort of principle of balance at work *in nature* - or in the human body, as it were; nature seems to have a tendency to right itself if there's any imbalance brought about, perhaps, by some man-made disaster, something of that sort. So one *could* regard that as a sort of manifestation of the influence of one or another of the Four Kings. If you are ill, for instance, the healthy organism has a natural tendency to compensate and to put right. I hope I'm not treading on dangerous ground here?

Dharmadhara: It's very true.

S: So perhaps the Four Kings just represent that tendency writ large, so to speak, in nature as a whole. The Four Kings are not, as it were, apart from nature or separate from nature; they are in a way a part of nature. Though they do have distinct personalities. It's not as though they are standing outside nature and sort of interfering with nature, in the way that, say, a mechanic puts a car right when something goes wrong with it. But I'm afraid I can't offer anything more specific than that at the moment.

And as for the way in which the Four Great Kings differ from the guardians of the Mandala of the Five Buddhas: [*Transcriber's note: Although that part of the question was not read out loud, Sangharakshita had a copy of the questions to refer to*] sometimes it's the Four Kings who are guardians of mandalas, and sometimes it's other beings altogether. But I think we can take the Four Kings as the sort of archetypal guardians of the Mandala, let's put it in that way; because they are just the archetypal guardians, anyway. You get them, as I think I mentioned, always outside the entrance to Buddhist temples, regardless of the images, regardless of the particular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and so on who are enshrined in that temple.

And 'Do they both occupy the lowest plane of *kamaloka*?' - both, presumably, meaning the Great Kings and the guardians of the Mandala of the Five Buddhas. The Four Kings, obviously, occupy the lowest plane, not of the *kamaloka* because that's occupied by the hell and preta and animal and Asura and human realms. They occupy the lowest of the *kamaloka* **heavens**, and whether the other guardians of the Mandala of the Five Buddhas occupy the same heaven it is difficult to [19] say; it would depend upon the nature of those guardians. Sometimes those guardians are in essence transcendental beings, Bodhisattvas, because here you come into the Vajrayana, where the whole picture becomes much more complex.

Nagabodhi: When talking about the kings as representing the forces of balance within nature, can you think of any Western mythological counterparts?

S: I can't offhand, though there may well be such. I was wondering a little while ago whether one couldn't represent the Four Kings in Western terms, taking perhaps four mythic or semi-mythic kings and representing the Four Kings with their features, as it were. The only one I could think of, actually, was King Arthur, and King Arthur is represented as holding back the pagan Saxon hordes. Of course, he is identified as a Christian king, which no doubt he wasn't. But, disregarding the actual details, he is represented as holding back, or fighting with, the forces of evil; but, of course, he is defeated in the end, which the Four Kings never are, apparently. So perhaps he doesn't quite do. Perhaps we have to look at figures from pure mythology; but I can't think of any corresponding to the Four Kings.

In some ways, Hermes - one aspect of Hermes - corresponds to at least one function of the Four Kings, because he is very often represented as standing outside the house, or outside the temple; as it were keeping out evil influences. Though that's just one aspect of his character, as it were. But there don't seem to be any figures definitely assigned that particular task in Western mythology or any of the Western mythologies. But one would just need to look a little more closely, because perhaps one just hasn't thought about it and therefore there are connections which one hasn't noticed.

For instance, reading this monograph on Hermes which I have just referred to, I saw many resemblances between the figure of Hermes and, believe it or not, the figure of St. Jerome - which one would not have thought! But, yes, there are some very definite points of contact.

Dharmadhara: Maybe one day there will be a paper on Hermes. Possibly some of the saints? - I was thinking of St. George, even though he destroys the dragon.

S: Yes, that's true.

Dharmadhara: There seems to be a similarity. [20]

S: And St. George is - well, at the very least, legendary. He doesn't seem to have been a historical character, except in the very remote sense that King Arthur was. But, yes, there is St. George. Well, there's the archangel Michael: he could be regarded as a guardian, in a way, because he fights with the devils, doesn't he?

Prasannasiddhi: What about the idea of the divine king in Christianity? Is there any relation - ?

S: *Divine king?*

Prasannasiddhi: Yes; in medieval Christianity, the idea of the king who is -

S: Ah, well, that's more like the *Dharmaraja*, isn't it? As I think I mentioned, you can regard the *Dharmaraja* as a representative of one or another of the Four Kings, or of all Four Kings collectively; in the same way that the divine king was the representative of God on earth, so that there was no appeal from him to any higher earthly power. This was King Charles I's claim, wasn't it? - 'A sovereign and a subject,' he said, 'are clean different things.' He was answerable only to God, he wasn't answerable to anybody else for anything that he did. He certainly wasn't answerable to the people.

All right, let's pass on, then.

Chairman: The seventh question, from Ratnaguna.

Why is it that Maitreya resides only in the Tushita heaven? One might have thought that he resides in a higher level than this.

S: Well, let's deal with the second question first. Why might one have thought that he resides in a higher level than this? What are the assumptions underlying that point?

Mangala: I think the assumption is that in the Tushita heaven you haven't developed Insight or Wisdom. Presumably Maitreya - is it Maitreya?

S: Maitreya, yes. [21]

Mangala: Sorry, forget it. I thought it said -

Nagabodhi: Perhaps the assumption behind it is maybe a slightly confused, almost Christian, assumption that he is more of a god than a human being, and emanates from a godly realm, or ought to.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps it relates to the Buddhist idea of the Pure Abodes and the Non-Returners being reborn in the Pure Abodes.

S: But, of course, Maitreya isn't a Non-Returner. In fact, if one looks at the question in purely traditional terms, he has abandoned that particular path which is the path of the arahant, and he is very *definitely* going to return. He is going to be born on earth for the last time in order to gain full Enlightenment and teach the Dharma. So, in a sense, he is just the opposite of a Non-Returner; so there would be no point in *him* being reborn in the *akanistha* heaven - that would be the *last* thing he would want, as a Bodhisattva.

Prasannasiddhi: Although you could perhaps say he no longer had the *karma* where he would be reborn as a Non-Returner.

S: A Bodhisattva who has reached that level has overcome karma in that sense and is reborn according to his own free will wherever he wishes or chooses to be. That gives one a little clue, doesn't it, as to why Maitreya resides only in the Tushita heaven: well, clearly he chose that - perhaps we don't understand why - but he must have chosen it because that was most appropriate to his mission, as it were.

But what about these assumptions behind this idea that 'One might have thought that he resides in a higher level'? I think there is a confusion between two different kinds of higher; because, according to the Mahayana, Maitreya has already developed a degree of Insight before he descends to be reborn. So perhaps there is a confusion between higher in the transcendental sense and higher in the mundane sense. If in fact he has developed the necessary transcendental vision, it doesn't really matter whether he is in a higher mundane realm or in a lower mundane realm; it doesn't make really any difference - to him. But it might be just, as it were, more convenient that he resides in the Tushita heaven rather than any other - but I don't know that any indication is given as [22] to exactly why that should be. It could be, but I don't remember. Perhaps he just wants to keep an eye on humanity, as it were.

Mangala: Bhante, where was the Buddha prior to his last rebirth as Siddhartha - which heaven did he come from?

S: That depends on one's sources. Both the Hinayana and the Mahayana agree that *the* Buddha, *our* Buddha, was in the *Tushita devaloka* before his birth; but the Hinayana traditions are rather late, and may have been influenced by the Mahayana. What appear to be the oldest teachings, or the oldest canonical records, say nothing about the Buddha descending from the Tushita heaven at all.

Mangala: I was thinking perhaps there was some connection, that maybe all Buddhas-to-be will come from that heaven.

S: That's true, there is a tendency of that sort; so that if it was established, for whatsoever reason or however late, that Gautama the Buddha had resided in the Tushita heaven before his birth, the tendency would be to say that all Buddhas resided in that particular heaven before their birth; because the Buddha is supposed to follow the pattern of his predecessors, just as his mother always dies when he is seven days old, and he always has two chief disciples, and he always gains Enlightenment under a particular tree. It could be just a part of that general pattern. Though that still wouldn't explain why the Buddha himself, Gautama the Buddha, had resided in the *Tushita devaloka* rather than in any other prior to his last birth. That would still need to be explained. As far as I know, there isn't an explanation in the tradition, but it could be that I just haven't come across it.

Mangala: Could it be that that represents the kind of perfected mundane, even though in a way it's above the *kamaloka* birth - in a sense, the higher mundane, and it may have been his last birth, he then gained Insight?

S: One could look at it like that, yes. Though, of course, the Mahayana point of view, certainly, is that Insight was already present in him when he resided in the *Tushita devaloka*. I'm not sure that the Hinayanists would agree with that. That would be something I'd have to go into. [23]

Prasannasiddhi: Which level is the *Tushita devaloka*?

S: It is one of the lower heaven realms, isn't it?

Prasannasiddhi: I thought it was in the *kamaloka*.

S: I think it is.

Dharmadhara: It's the third one up. There are four -

S: Yes. It is a relatively low one, then, isn't it?

Prasannasiddhi: Is that the one for those who delight in their own creations?

S: No. The third one is the Yama and the fourth one is the Tushita. So it must be the fourth one up. There's first of all - going from below upwards - the heaven of the Four Great Kings; that's the lowest of the *kamaloka* realms. Then the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods. Then the heaven of the Yama gods; and then the *Tushita devaloka*. Yes? So it's the fourth up out of six *kamaloka* realms.

Prasannasiddhi: So it's the heaven of the contented.

S: Yes. This work [*not named*] says: 'This is a very popular heaven among the Buddhists, for here went Mahamaya, the mother of Gautama, on her death, and here reside the Bodhisattvas before their final incarnation on earth as Buddhas.' But no reason is given for them residing in that heaven rather than any other. So we don't really know.

Nagabodhi: I may be making this up on the basis of pictures I've seen, but one gets the impression that the Buddha's mother almost enjoys her time in the Tushita heaven because she can watch her son's career in the world, as if there is some value in the Tushita heaven as a vantage point on the world.

S: Yes. I don't remember that actually being stated, but it could be so. Though again, one might

say, why could not the Bodhisattva make *any* sort of realm his vantage point? But there may be a bit of literalism sort of creeping into the mythology here, and it could be that there is a reason of that sort. [24]

Dharmadhara: I was wondering, Bhante, if the assumption that Maitreya deserved a higher heaven was influenced by Christian conditioning, along the lines of the Messiah - the coming and this great glory, and so therefore he deserves the grandest -

S: Yes, might be. I would have to cross-examine Ratnaguna! But I was going to say that we mustn't forget the original cosmology, which is as it were *material*; which is, as it were, three-dimensional. The cosmos described in this lecture is conceived in tradition three-dimensionally. There's Mount Meru, for instance, in the middle, and then there's the heaven of the Four Great Kings and then there's Indra's heaven, and so on and so forth. So these are presented, at least, as actually occupying physical space. We mustn't forget that. Certainly, the *kamaloka* realms are represented as occupying physical space, just like the old Christian heaven. So it could be that the *Tushita devaloka* was that *devaloka* from where you were high enough to be able to survey the whole of the cosmos below. If you were to go any higher, you would still be able to see the whole cosmos, but not in sufficient detail. If you were to go lower, you would not be able to see the *whole* of the cosmos any more.

So that might have been the reason why the *Tushita devaloka* was [chosen] - because the Bodhisattva *surveys* Jambudvīpa; he *selects* his parents. So we mustn't forget that the Buddhist cosmos was conceived quite materialistically, from our point of view, even though perhaps they didn't distinguish between conceiving it materialistically and conceiving it symbolically in the way that we do. So perhaps, yes, the *Tushita devaloka* did represent the most convenient vantage point for the Bodhisattva who was about to be reborn for the last time.

Anyway, last question.

Chairman: The last but one, from Dharmadhara.

In what ways do you see Virupaksa acting to subjugate the intellectual dragons of the West?

S: I suppose, perhaps in the way that Subhuti acted in his *Old Net for New Monsters*, wasn't it?

Dharmadhara: Yes.

S: Unfortunately, modern intellectual dragons don't take very kindly to being caught in the great net, and they not only squirm and wriggle and try to escape but even sort of fight back, which they are not supposed to do. So I think one has to [25] proceed with great caution. Perhaps Virupaksa has to adopt slightly more indirect methods, or subtle methods, in dealing with the intellectual dragons of the West. But, broadly speaking, I'd say Subhuti was on the right lines. Perhaps intellectual dragons have to be combated on their own level and defeated with their own weapons. Though there is something to be said for at least sometimes adopting completely different tactics, if you see what I mean.

If you meet one of these intellectual dragons, you can do one of two things. You can either, as it were, meet him on his own ground and argue the point with him quite exhaustively, and hopefully convince him and convert him; or you can just not operate on that level or in that way at all, just refuse to discuss and just be emotionally very positive and very friendly or something of that sort. Or say, 'Well, come with me and let's attend the Puja at the FWBO centre', or something of that

sort, bypassing all the intellectuality. Some people can do that.

Prasannasiddhi: He probably doesn't want to attend the Puja.

S: Well, I give it just as an example. No doubt he will wriggle, whatever you try to do, however you try to subjugate him. But I think probably the intellectual dragons of the West are in some ways worse than any dragons have been before in history, because they hardly recognise the authority of Virupaksa, even. Do you see what I mean? It's as though even *that* level or degree of organisation has broken down - that the Nagas have broken away from the control of Virupaksa, and perhaps all these other beings and other creatures have broken away from their respective guardian kings, too. There's a degree of confusion, a degree of chaos, perhaps, that hasn't existed before. That creates a very difficult situation. The Nagas don't even acknowledge the leadership of Virupaksa.

Nagabodhi: Would you mind spelling out more what you mean by that? [26]

S: In a way, I think it's quite simple. Suppose you take the example of society. Supposing, in a certain country, in certain areas, the only real authority is the authority of the godfathers - at least on certain levels. Well, supposing a situation arises where the godfather's followers no longer take even any notice of the godfather, and just indulge in whatever crime takes their fancy. That would be an even worse state of affairs than if things were under the control of the godfather, because so long as the godfather is there at least there is *some* degree of control; at least things don't get out of hand to *too* great an extent. And it also ties up with what I said about the Transcendental sustaining psychological positivity. Just as in many areas of modern society, in certain countries more than others, there is no effective recognition of the Transcendental, no effective presence of the Transcendental, and therefore the *moral* order starts breaking down.

Similarly, on the kind of level represented by the Four Great Protectors and their respective legions, there is a sort of loosening of the tie between the legions and their respective kings, so that there's a further disintegration. I think this represents what has happened and is happening in the West. Some of the primitive, more chaotic forces have broken away from the control even of their immediate superiors, as it were.

Nagabodhi: So, on the level of the intellect, the breakaway - the Nagas, the disembodied -

S: Well, you could say *science* represents that, because science has broken away, really, from any recognition of any sort of moral controlling factor: if you can find it out, if you can do it, well, do so, *regardless* of any moral considerations. There was a feeble attempt, I think, some years ago, some decades ago, in connection with the discovery of atomic energy; some scientists did realise that they had some moral responsibility to humanity not even to *know* these things, if it was possible to know them; but that was very quickly swept aside. And now, I believe - I can't remember the exact figures - I think it's roughly about three-quarters of the scientists in the world, above a certain level of qualification, are involved, in one way or another, with projects involving atomic power - usually for military purposes. So it's as though they've sold themselves to the devil for the sake of professional success and a [27] comfortable job and a good income, a certain amount of prestige, and so on. So they've wrenched themselves free, at least as regards their work - not necessarily their personal lives, to the extent that one can distinguish their personal lives - from any moral considerations. So it's as though those Nagas have got completely out of control - well, out of the control of any authority of an ethical nature. They've sold themselves to the politicians and the militarists, and this happens in several countries. They work, and they work willingly, and they just see it as a job.

Prasannasiddhi: So, presumably, the way to counter that would be to try to make them aware that their actions have consequences.

S: Yes, indeed. Well, they know it, they know the sort of uses to which atomic power can be put, but they seem not to care. If they really cared, they'd all down tools. All of them, whether it was in Russia or whether it was in America, they just would refuse to do this work; but they don't. There's tens of thousands of them doing it, very clever, very intellectual people, very well-paid people.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps in some way they are just sort of unconscious of what they're doing - well, they must be -

S: In a way they are - they are *morally* unconscious, though not unconscious intellectually; or morally insensitive rather than unconscious. But that would be the quickest and easiest way of abolishing nuclear weapons - that these scientists - after all, there's not even 100,000 of them altogether - would just down tools and refuse to work any more. Maybe they would all be shot, but that would be a very small price to pay for the abolition of nuclear weapons. But they themselves would have to be willing to pay the price, of course, if it did come to that. So they are the Nagas of the twentieth century, or at least some of the Nagas of the twentieth century, the atomic scientists, nuclear scientists. Not just the scientists, but *all* the people involved in the production of nuclear weapons, but especially the top scientists.

Nagabodhi: To perhaps follow a slight side track, if you want to: would you see the Pope's recent pronouncement on surrogacy and genetic engineering as an attempt by a reflex of the Four Great Kings to hold some of the - [28]

S: Well, that would depend upon the sort of intrinsic value of what he had said, which would need to be independently estimated or assessed. One must be fair: one could see some of the Pope's pronouncements as representing an attempt on the part of one or another of the Great Kings to fight back, though in a very small way. I haven't studied it carefully, but judging by what I heard on the radio I wouldn't agree with a lot of the Pope's assumptions in this particular respect. I might have been with his conclusion or conclusions, possibly, but I am sure that there are quite a few of his assumptions which I wouldn't agree with. But perhaps we won't pursue that.

There is a second question.

Chairman: This is another question.

What is the connection between the Four Great Protectors and the Dharmapalas? - for example, one, Vaisravana, is a *Dharmapala* and also a *Lokapala*. And the second part: What are the Four *Gauris* - I am not sure of the spelling - about which I heard a talk here once at Padmaloka? They apparently guard the gates to a mandala, and somehow stop people leaving the mandala by means of hooks.

S: Yes, they are *Gauris*. I think they're female, aren't they? *Gauris* means 'the fair ones': *gaura* is fair, white in colour. I'm afraid I don't really know anything about them. I am quite happy to accept that they 'guard the gates to a mandala and somehow stop people leaving the mandala by means of hooks'.

Hooks are associated with Bodhisattvas, but perhaps our associations aren't quite the right ones from a Buddhist point of view, because they are sort of hooks at the end of ropes which you throw,

and you hook people and draw them, and Bodhisattvas, or some Bodhisattvas, are supposed to be provided with these sort of hooks. But they are for drawing beings towards Enlightenment, and Kurukule especially, who is associated with the drawing and fascinating aspect of Enlightenment, is provided with these hooks. So one could say that hooks don't represent a *forcible* drawing of beings in the direction of Enlightenment - that's where perhaps a misunderstanding comes in from a Western point of view, because you associate the hook with violence - but that isn't the meaning here. It's a hook of fascination, as when, say, a very fascinating woman sort of hooks you. She doesn't have to use *violence*, she just exerts her charm. So, in the same way, the Bodhisattva exerts his charm, as it were. He shows the beauty aspect of Enlightenment and draws you with that. So the *Gauris* represent that. [29] You have to be kept, for your own good, within the mandala, but by the very nature of the situation you can't be *forced* to remain within the mandala. Someone can't take you by the arm, as it were, and just keep you there, just hold you down. So the *Gauris* - this is just impromptu thinking - would seem to represent the more fascinating aspect of the *Lokapalas*, in a way, which makes you want to remain within the mandala, rather than leaving as you might otherwise be tempted to do. That's probably why they're female rather than male, and why they are called *Gauris*, which means the fair ones, fairness being associated in India usually with beauty.

Perhaps, just on an ordinary level, so to speak, the mandala is decorated with flowers, and it looks very beautiful, and perhaps even though you're not spiritually drawn to what the mandala represents very strongly, well, at least you like it in there, it's attractive, it's pleasant, it's beautiful, and that helps you to stay. Well, that is, so to speak, the *Gauris* at work with their hooks. But one mustn't imagine them as sort of dragging people back into the mandala by force! That would be quite a wrong interpretation.

Prasannasiddhi: I kind of had in mind a scenario where, say, a person was involved to some extent with the Movement and they started to drift out of contact, and then maybe an Order Member sent a postcard to them, or -

S: Well, it would have to be a picture postcard, wouldn't it?

_____: A bunch of flowers.

Prasannasiddhi: Or even just visited them, but somehow the actual contact -

S: Yes, but it would have to be positive and pleasant, and you'd have to attract the person back, not try and pull him back by force or bully him, or try and intimidate him or make him feel guilty or anything of that sort. Just draw him back quite gently, just by your sheer friendliness and charm, as it were. I wonder how many people have got as much charm and friendliness as that? - well, friendliness maybe, but charm's another matter! Or maybe it isn't; maybe if you're friendly enough the charm will be there.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, you don't think it's just sort of reasoning with a person, which could maybe look a bit unpleasant - [30]

S: I think that also does sometimes succeed, but then it's not the *Gauris*. The *Gauris* represent another type of approach. That's more like the Kings themselves.

Dharmadhara: Could you make any comparisons between the *Dharmapalas* and the *Lokapalas*? They seem to be -

S: I'm not quite sure; they seem to overlap. But Dharma here has a strong ethical connotation. One

mustn't forget that, in Buddhism - originally, I suppose, in the Hinayana - *hiri* and *ottapa* were called the two *Lokapalas*. You know what *hiri* and *ottapa* are? - that is shame and blame, as they are usually translated. They are represented as the guardians of the world, because without *hiri* and *ottapa* there's no moral order. So it's clear from the fact that they are called the *Lokapalas*, the guardians of the world, that guarding the world is possible only on an ethical basis. So really there's not much difference between being a *Lokapala* and being a *Dharmapala*.

Though, again, the Vajrayana gave a somewhat different slant to things, and sometimes *Dharmapalas* are very fierce and wrathful beings who are in essence enlightened Bodhisattvas, whereas the Four Kings, the *Lokapalas*, are not represented as essentially Bodhisattvas but as definitely mundane beings of a high order. [Pause]

Dharmadhara: One of them, for example, Vaisravana, is both a *Dharmapala* and a *Lokapala*, in the Vajrayana, so there must be quite a bit of overlap.

S: Yes. So one could even regard them as two separate beings, both called Vaisravana, because they could hardly be mundane and enlightened at the same time. But certainly the Vajrayana tends to make things much more complex than they were in the Mahayana and the Hinayana.

So is that all?

Chairman: There is one more, from Virananda.

S: Oh, where's that?

Chairman: It's on the correspondence between humans and non-humans. It doesn't have his name on it. [31]

S: Oh, I don't have that one. Never mind.

Kovida: Shall I read it or would you like to see it?

Chairman: There it is.

S: Oh that's how we lost it. Oh yes, here we are.

Are there further correspondences, besides the Nagas being equal to the non-active intellectual Buddhists, to be made between humans and non-human beings that can be remarked? For instance, are the Garudas sworn enemies of academics in human form? Should other classes of *bhutas* be identified as such?

S: All right, let's go into that. I think I have really dealt with it in principle, earlier on, where I said that one needs to study these figures and see what sort of connection one can make. One can't just make a categorical statement straight off. But, yes, it is interesting that Virananda has pursued this question of the Nagas and has brought in the Garudas, who are definitely the enemies of the Nagas. So if the Nagas are, let's say, the pseudo-intellectuals, those who are strong as regards theory but weak in practice, then if the Garudas are the enemies of the Nagas, who are the Garudas? It becomes fairly obvious - well, perhaps Subhuti is a Garuda! Do you see what I mean? So being a Garuda would mean taking the offensive against these sort of pseudo-intellectuals. So certainly one can pursue the matter, pursue the symbolism, if you like, in that way, but one can't make a categorical statement prior to going through the material relating to all these different classes of

non-human beings quite carefully, and *educing* a meaning rather than imposing a meaning.

And ‘Should other classes of *bhutas* be identified as such?’ Well, certainly, but only as a result of this sort of painstaking study; and not just study in an intellectual sense, otherwise you could still be a Naga and doing this sort of work and writing a big book about it but with no feeling for the subject.

Kovida: There’s a further question.

How does one invoke the Four Great Kings? Are there explicit practices? [32]

S: I’m not quite sure what is meant by invoking here, but let’s take it in a broad general sense. I suppose the only real way of invoking the Four Great Kings is by thinking about them or by concentrating on them. You could say, when I had that experience of the Four Great Kings standing round when I was writing my lecture, that that happened because I was intensely concentrated, and I was thinking *about* the Four Great Kings; so I had an experience which corresponded to, or was of, one might say, their actual presence there. So one could invoke them by reciting their mantras, if they have mantras; I am not even sure that they have. As for there being explicit practices to invoke them - well, yes, in the Vajrayana there are certainly pujas directed towards the Four Great Kings, or at least pujas which include the making of offerings to the Four Great Kings, and these would certainly help to invoke them; but surely only to the degree that one was actually concentrated and absorbed in the thought of them. The explicit practices would simply help one to become concentrated in that particular way.

And, of course, you must be interested in the Four Great Kings. If you just believe it’s a bit of outmoded Tibetan mythology, you certainly won’t be able to invoke them. You must have some feeling for them, as for any other such mythological figure, so to speak. I think if you absorbed yourself very deeply in material dealing with Hermes you would have a sort of experience of Hermes, and so on, or any other figure of that type; because they all correspond to something in the human psyche. It is through that aspect in your psyche which corresponds to them that you are able to contact them, but you’ve got to activate it.

Prasannasiddhi: Presumably, trying to put what they stand for into practice would also help?

S: That would also help, yes.

Dharmadhara: When you had that experience of the Four Great Kings, did you have an experience of their individual characteristics in any way, or were they more or less synonymous?

S: I can’t remember very clearly, because I’d forgotten about the whole thing - at least consciously - until I read Subhadra’s notes. I think I was more conscious of them as a group than of four individuals - I mentioned that in [33] saying that they were more like four clouds partly joined together. But none the less, to the best of my recollection I did experience them as being individual to some extent, and as having their individual characteristics to some extent. That is why I experienced them as being like, so to speak, four clouds joined together rather than as one cloud. But I as it were saw their forms as those of the Four Kings. I didn’t see four clouds; that was just my own comparison, as it were, talking to Subhadra. What I actually saw was these four figures.

Prasannasiddhi: Were they aware of you?

S: I can’t say, I can’t remember now. Maybe I could say they weren’t *unaware* of me. But I can’t

say more than that.

Prasannasiddhi: Were they still figures - like statues?

S: Yes, just standing there. They didn't move - yes, like statues. Quite solid, and as I say, quite grave.

Blake used to experience things in this way, very frequently and vividly, didn't he? So it isn't really very uncommon. *[Pause]*

Is that all, then?

Dharmadhara: That's all.

S: Then we've done quite well, we've got through all the questions. That's good.

Dharmadhara: Two hours, almost exactly. Thanks Bhante.

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Present: Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara, Mangala, Kovida, Prasannasiddhi, Nagabodhi.,

Fifth Lecture: The Protectors of the Dharma - 24th March 1987

Chairman: Today is lecture No. 5 on 'Buddhism and Culture', and it's the 24th March; Dharmadhara chairing the questions. We have a question first from Ratnaprabha on the use of Sanskrit in the texts.

The Buddha forbade monks from recording his words in Sanskrit. However, the Mahayana sutras *were* written in Sanskrit. Had anything changed? (You talk of Sanskrit as representing higher culture.)

S: Yes, something had certainly changed and that was the spoken language. When the Buddha forbade the monks recording his words in Sanskrit, he didn't actually use the word 'Sanskrit'; he used the expression *chandasa*, which I have dealt with in *The Eternal Legacy*, and that is generally taken to mean the language of the Vedas, which was at that time not a spoken language. So the Buddha did not want his words to be translated into what was, for most people, a dead language. He wanted people to be able to *understand* his teachings, and he therefore preferred that his teachings should be available to people in their *own* language, whatever that was.

But by the time the Mahayana sutras came to be written down, Sanskrit - not Vedic Sanskrit but classical Sanskrit - had become a sort of *lingua franca*; it was much, much more widely understood than Vedic Sanskrit had been in the Buddha's time. And the reason why the Mahayana sutras were written down in Sanskrit, and why, in fact, the Sarvastivadins and after them the Mahayanists adopted Sanskrit as their language, was that it was most widely understood. So there was no departure from principle, one might say; the idea being throughout simply to make the Buddha's teaching accessible to as many people as possible.

I am not sure what Ratnaprabha means by this addition in brackets: '(You talk of Sanskrit as representing higher culture.)' It is not so much that Sanskrit represents higher culture, but that the word Sanskrit means 'perfected', as I explained in the course of the lecture; it represents 'artificial', as opposed to natural. It is Sanskrit as opposed to Prakrit, Prakrit being the natural speech, the [2] speech of perhaps less educated people. So there is really no contradiction between the later Mahayana practice and what the Buddha had recommended.

Mangala: I've got a question, Bhante. If the Vedas weren't written in Sanskrit, what language *were* they written in?

S: It's usually called Vedic Sanskrit. One could say that there were three kinds of Sanskrit: there's Vedic Sanskrit; then there's classical Sanskrit which is based on Panini's grammar, which is rather different from Vedic Sanskrit; and then there is the so-called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, in which the Mahayana sutras mainly were written.

Mangala: So the Buddha was really referring to Vedic Sanskrit.

S: Yes. Classical Sanskrit was not in existence in the Buddha's day. Probably its beginnings, perhaps, were there, but Vedic Sanskrit was certainly not understood by the generality of people.

Prasannasiddhi: Is Buddhist Hybrid very similar to classical Sanskrit?

S: It depends what one means by similar. It is sufficiently different for scholars to have decided that it deserves a separate name, as it were. I think, therefore, it is correct to speak of there being three kinds of Sanskrit - Vedic, classical or Paninian Sanskrit, and Buddhist Hybrid.

Prasannasiddhi: So presumably, if you learned Sanskrit, you would be taught classical Sanskrit.

S: Yes, usually when people speak of Sanskrit they mean classical Sanskrit, and it is usually that which one studies, or at least starts off with. The *Bhagavad Gita*, for instance, is written in classical Sanskrit; the *Ramayana* is written in classical Sanskrit; the works of Kalidasa are in classical Sanskrit. The works of Asvaghosa are in classical Sanskrit.

Prasannasiddhi: From that basis, if you learned classical Sanskrit, would you be able to understand Buddhist Hybrid, or works [written in it]? [3]

S: You'd understand quite a bit, but you would have to study Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit specifically, as you would have to study Vedic Sanskrit specifically in order to understand properly.

Dharmadhara: Bhante, what factors do you think led to the expansion of classical Sanskrit as a *lingua franca*?

S: That is very difficult to say. It does seem to have been connected with, or to have been part of, the so-called Gupta revival, which was to some extent a revival of Brahminism - a Brahminism which had taken over quite a lot of things from Buddhism. But in some respects one might say the fact that language changes doesn't need any explanation. After all, Vedic Sanskrit goes back to about 4000 BC, so it's not surprising that by, say, around the beginning of the Christian era or just before, it should have changed into something rather different. One doesn't expect a language to be static.

Dharmadhara: I was thinking more of - it appears to have spread quite widely and become a common dialect, and I was interested more in that phenomenon rather than that the language changed, but that a particular dialect was so widespread.

S: Well, Sanskrit wasn't exactly a dialect. Sanskrit was in a sense the principal language, one might say. And, of course, it is from Sanskrit that all the northern Indian languages are descended, much as the Romance languages in Europe are descended from Latin.

Dharmadhara: From what you said, the Vedic Sanskrit, which was not a spoken language, evolved into classical Sanskrit.

S: It was originally, of course, a spoken language. It was originally the language of, for want of a better term, the Aryans. But one might say that if religious traditions come into existence in a particular linguistic form, due to religious conservatism - and religion is always conservative, it would seem - a difference develops between that particular form of the language and its later developments. Once a religious tradition is embodied in a particular language or a particular form of language, it remains embodied in that form, due to religious conservatism. Meanwhile, the spoken language - that is, the ordinary spoken language - goes on changing, so eventually a

difference develops between the language of sacred texts, whether oral or whether written down, and the ordinary everyday language. So this is what [4] happened in the case of Sanskrit. The Vedas existed in that particular archaic form of the language which couldn't be changed due to the sacredness of the Vedas, but language went on changing, so in that way Sanskrit developed and Prakrit developed, Sanskrit and Prakrit being basically the same language, one in a more refined, the other in a less refined, form.

You have much the same thing in Latin. There is a very archaic form of Latin, apparently, of which we have very few remains, but those remains include some ritual formulae, the meaning of which scholars are not completely sure about, the language is so archaic. So those formulae are preserved in their original archaic form; they don't survive in later Latin, because, being so sacred, they were kept in their original linguistic form that couldn't be tampered with.

Again, you get an example in England, where, at least until recently, the *Book of Common Prayer* was used in Church of England churches even though that language is not the same as modern English.

Mangala: Bhante, so were the Mahayana sutras written down in classical Sanskrit or Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit?

S: They were written in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, though many of the Mahayana *acaryas* - or probably all of them - wrote not in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, they wrote in classical Sanskrit. Nagarjuna and Asanga and so on all wrote in classical Sanskrit. The Abhidharma-kosa is in classical Sanskrit.

Mangala: But the sutras are in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit?

S: The sutras are in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, yes - to varying degrees. In some cases it's more hybrid than others! It is not easy to generalise but, broadly speaking, that is the case.

Prasannasiddhi: I thought classical Sanskrit was the language of the educated. Did it at one stage just become a language for all ...?

S: Well, it was a bit like standard English, you might say. Again, I have referred to this fact in the lecture - that in dramas more educated people, upper-class people, are represented as speaking in classical Sanskrit and servants and women in Prakrit. They could understand each other, it seems, because they speak their own language to each other in the course of the play, so it's a bit like the difference between standard English and, perhaps, something like broad cockney English. [5] Except that Prakrit also was a literary medium: the Jains, for instance, used Prakrit quite extensively, as well as classical Sanskrit.

Anyway, perhaps that's enough about that question. The answer to the question itself is clear enough, isn't it?

Chairman: Question 2 is from Virananda, and it regards training of the memory.

From the time of Simonides onwards, there has been a Western tradition of visualisation and memorising systems, which seemed to culminate at the Renaissance. (For a survey of this tradition, there is Frances Yates' book *The Art of Memory*.) In terms of a vehicle for the Dharma, could this particular aspect of Western culture be as significant as those aspects mentioned in your lecture? (Given its usefulness in training its followers in elementary arts of visualisation and memory.)

S: I can't really say, because I haven't read this particular book, though it is one of the things I have on my list of books to be read. But it's quite possible that it could be as significant as those aspects of visualising and memorising which I have mentioned in my lecture. In any case, I am quite in favour of making connections with the classical tradition. But I can't say more about it at the moment; I will just have to get the book and read it.

Simonides, by the way, is an ancient Greek lyric poet. I don't think much of his works. I have read just a few. Virananda ought to have sent me a copy of the book along with the question! Anyway, carry on.

Chairman: The next question is Dharmapriya's. It's about ritual herb baths.

On pp. 44-45 Sarasvati describes how a monk-preacher should take a ritual herb bath. You describe this as an 'undigested lump' of ethnic culture, i.e. of Brahminism. I have heard that the Mahayana absorbed ethnic elements as a skilful means to help communicate Dharma. Is this instance of the herb bath a case in which the skilful means got out of control and became an unskilful avenue for the infiltration of Hinduism into Buddhism? Do such 'undigested lumps' constitute the beginning of the end of the Mahayana in India (as seems to be held by T. W. Rhys Davids)?

S: I would answer both of those concluding questions in the affirmative. I think it's quite clear what happened. I think perhaps one has to understand what [6] exactly is meant by, or what exactly is involved in, the Mahayana's absorption of ethnic elements as a skilful means to help communicate the Dharma. I think the essential point is that a lot of people's emotions, especially perhaps in some cases their more refined emotions, are bound up with these ethnic elements, and of course one wants to integrate people's emotions, and especially their more refined emotions, into their practice of the Dharma; and one does that by absorbing into the Dharma, so to speak, or one's presentation of the Dharma, those elements with which their emotions are tied up. That is the principle, that is, so to speak, the rationale. Though, of course, at the same time, when one absorbs those ethnic elements as a skilful means to help communicate the Dharma, one at the same time subtly transforms them. That has not happened, it would seem, in the case of this ritual herb bath. Perhaps it *could* have happened if there had been more time, but taking the incident as it occurs in *The Sutra of Golden Light* it doesn't seem as though that particular ethnic element had been really properly absorbed. Do you see the general principle? [*Murmurs of assent*]

Dharmadhara: I'd appreciate it, Bhante, if you could say more about the more refined emotions that you are talking about here.

S: Well, clearly there is a difference between more refined and less refined emotions. Some of our emotions we know are very crude, even positive emotions; others are more refined. So when, for instance, one appreciates a painting - say, a painting by Turner - obviously more refined emotions are brought into play. If you go and watch a football match, well, emotions are brought into play there, perhaps quite positive ones, but they will definitely be of a cruder nature. So one speaks of absorbing the more refined emotions into one's spiritual life, because it's only the more refined emotions which have reached a point where it is possible for them to be absorbed. You can't directly absorb, it would seem, the cruder emotions.

So if you had, for instance, ethnic elements with which quite crude emotions were associated, you couldn't really absorb those into one's presentation of the Dharma. Just to give you a concrete example: there is such a thing as the party - I mean the party in the social sense. And, in connection with the party, all sorts of emotions arise. Some of them might be quite positive, but they can be

quite crude. So let's suppose that you hold a party, and let's suppose that there's lots of liquor flowing and people are very merry. Well, that party is a sort of ethnic element, you could say, especially if it is associated with somebody's birthday or some celebration. But could you have a party of that sort as an integral part, say, of a Wesak celebration? It just couldn't be as it were absorbed. If it was present [7] at all as nominally a part of the Wesak celebration, it would really *disrupt* the Wesak celebrations.

But supposing it was a question of an appreciation of the fine arts, appreciation of beauty in a more refined form, that kind of appreciation and the emotions associated with that kind of appreciation could be absorbed, could be integrated, into a Wesak celebration, into Buddhism itself. You could, for instance, have an exhibition of Buddhist art, which wouldn't strike a jarring note, which *would* seem to be quite appropriate and *would* arouse in people's minds refined positive emotions which were completely in harmony with what was being celebrated.

Nagabodhi: Would you say that that applied, say, to an exhibition of Impressionist art, or Renaissance art? You specifically said 'Buddhist art'.

S: I think one couldn't generalise. I said 'Buddhist art' quite specifically, meaning thereby not just art which was technically Buddhist, but art which was not only Buddhist in theme or inspiration but which was real art at the same time. With regard to, say, the Impressionists and, say, Renaissance paintings, you could probably make a *selection* which would be in harmony with such an occasion as Wesak, but I don't think you could take just any dozen or so Impressionist paintings or any dozen or so Renaissance paintings, however good they were as paintings, and expect them to fit and expect them to be in harmony with the spirit of that particular occasion.

For instance, supposing you selected an Impressionist painting of waterlilies; that, presumably, would fit, would harmonise quite well; or perhaps if you selected a Renaissance picture of an angel's head, that would fit, that would harmonise quite well. But what about a rather gory Crucifixion, however well it was painted? It would just strike a very jarring note indeed.

Anyway, I think there, too, the general principle is quite clear, isn't it?

All right, let's move on, then.

Chairman: Chakkhupala's question is on the origins of culture.

How far does Bhante subscribe to the view put forward in the lecture that the origins of culture are to be found in archaic religious rite and ritual? Did arithmetic really develop on the continuing need to reproduce a certain shape and configuration of shrine or altar or through barter and transaction of commodities necessary to life? Is culture rooted in the *aryapariyesana* solely, or is another root found in the mundane in search of the mundane? [8]

S: 'How far does Bhante subscribe to the view put forward in the lecture that the origins of culture are to be found in archaic religious rite and ritual?' I think, to some extent, the question is wrongly put, because it's not, I think, a question of finding the origins of culture in archaic religious rite and ritual. It's more that, in the case of let us say primitive or archaic man, all the different things that we have separated out as art and religion and ritual and even culture all exist as a sort of undifferentiated matrix. Do you see what I mean? And it is as the distinct, or possibly distinct but certainly not different, aspects or elements within that matrix become differentiated, that we speak of rite and ritual as something separate, religion as something separate, art as something separate, and even culture as something separate. One might say that in a primitive community there is no

such thing as an uncultured person. In a primitive community there is no such thing as an irreligious person. In a primitive community there is no such thing as an inartistic person. Everybody fully shares, more or less, in whatever obtains within the group by way of what we now call religion, culture, art and so on. So one might say, well, if the origins of culture are not to be found in that primitive matrix, where are they to be found?

Also, it is wrong, perhaps, to oppose culture to the archaic religious rite and ritual, because they are as it were bound up one with another. It is not that *one* simply differentiates itself from what I have called the matrix, but they *all* differentiate themselves progressively more or less equally, more or less at the same time.

As regards arithmetic developing 'on the continuing need to reproduce a certain shape and configuration of shrine and altar' - well, in the case of India that is certainly true. But more generally one might say that things like arithmetic and geometry do develop out of practical necessities. That is why I've got this reference here in the case of geometry. I hoped there would be a history of arithmetic, but there is no history of arithmetic at all; but there is a tiny bit of history of geometry, and the article says: 'Geometry is encountered in the first written records of mankind. Fundamental formulas for measurement were known in ancient Egypt and Babylonia.' This is quite significant: 'Fundamental formulas for measurement.' People *wanted to measure*, and geometry means 'measuring the earth'. They wanted to measure the earth for practical purposes, just as the ancient Indians wanted to construct their fire altars for practical purposes. It was out of those practical necessities that arithmetic and geometry and astronomy and so on all developed; not, it would seem, out of a purely theoretical interest unrelated to any practical need. I would have thought that that was all sort of common knowledge. [9]

Then as for the question of whether culture is 'rooted in the *aryapariyesana* solely, or is another root found in the mundane in search of the mundane?'; I would have thought that was obvious from what I said about the relation between Manjughosa and Sarasvati: Manjughosa representing what I called universal culture or, one might say, the *aryapariyesana*, and Sarasvati the ethnic culture or the *anaryapariyesana* or the mundane in search of the mundane, rather than the mundane in search of the Transcendental.

Perhaps one really can't say much more than that on that question, unless there are any supplementaries.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think in the West we over-analyse things, we over-separate things out, and in a sense become a bit alienated in the process?

S: Separation doesn't necessarily mean alienation, separation in the sense of differentiation. But perhaps there can be an excess of analysis over synthesis.

For instance, you can analyse a work of art into what seem to be its component parts; that is a quite legitimate activity. But the fact that you analyse the work of art into its component parts shouldn't mean that you thereby lose your experience of the work of art as a whole. Sometimes analysis of a work of art can *enhance* your appreciation or your experience of the work of art as a whole. The two are not necessarily contradictory, I think - the analysis of a work of art into what one might call its constituent parts and the experience and appreciation of it as a whole.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose, Bhante, I feel that there is so much intellectual discussion and writing available in modern times that one can very easily lose touch with one's feelings in a basic sort of way through too much reading or intellectualising.

S: I don't think that's so much the question - that's going off at a bit of a tangent - but I think it's important that you don't, say, analyse a work of art or, say, a poem, or read books written by people analysing poems to such an extent that you never get round to reading the poem itself and experiencing the poem itself. I think that is quite important. I think there are so many books available now about the writings of great poets, great novelists and so on, that very often I think those are read as a substitute for the works themselves. [10]

When I was quite young, I made a sort of rule - this was in my early teens - I didn't read books *about* books; I read the original classics themselves. It was only quite a while later I departed from that rule, when I was much older. I always went to the classics themselves. I think that's quite important. Otherwise there is almost a sort of academic industry, writing about what various other academics have written about some poet; and you never get around to the original text, or you get it in little snippets in the academic discussion. I think that's a great pity. You could very easily discard all that the academic critics have written and just read the original poems or novels or dramas. Some great critics or good academics are or can be very illuminating, but even they are no substitute for the experience of the original work. Think how many books have been written *about* D. H. Lawrence, *about* Blake, *about* Yeats. I think you are probably much better off just reading those authors themselves, even if it's for the tenth or twentieth time.

Mangala: You even get books about painters and artists and musicians. I suspect sometimes people read those but never actually go and look at their paintings.

S: Sometimes the biographical interest predominates. You are more interested, say, in a particular poet's love affairs than you are in his actual poetry.

Nagabodhi: At university, certainly at undergraduate level, it's definitely common practice to read the books about writers more than the writers themselves. One is in a way almost actively encouraged to do that.

Prasannasiddhi: The *Open* University actually goes the other way: they actually encourage you to read the poems etc. and do as little of the other stuff as - make sure you get a definite balance, at least.

S: Maybe that is why an Open University degree doesn't rank all that high! [*Laughter*]

Prasannasiddhi: In some circles it does!

S: 'Good heavens, they've only read the original texts, they've not read the commentaries at all!'

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose, Bhante, one just feels there is so much you can be told about different things - like you turn on the television and - [11]

S: Well, you shouldn't!

Prasannasiddhi: - and there are programmes about different things, and there are books, so many books available nowadays, it's almost as if one loses a certain sort of purity of appreciation in the process of just absorbing so much - it's just being so much influenced.

Nagabodhi: I think the problem so far as university is concerned is just time, in that, in the same week on your course, you might be studying Chaucer for one part of the course and Melville for

another, and you've got to write an essay on both of them; and although obviously explicitly you are advised to read the books you actually don't have the time to read and absorb, and so people just from a purely practical consideration -

S: Very often you are too busy socialising!

Nagabodhi: Well, yes, and that. And so people just turn to the cribs.

Just returning to Chakkhupala's original question, it struck me - I was remembering my university sociology - that in the different gradations of society the most primitive societies don't have a barter system at all, in fact. All communal wealth was considered to be the property of the king or the tribal leader or whatever, and it would usually be distributed among the people on holy occasions. It definitely -

S: Was this the so-called potlatch?

Nagabodhi: No, that's a slightly later development, in fact, but it's - yes, that's a part of it. But the distribution of goods was an essentially religious function in society.

S: Well, this survived in India in the king's great, I think it was quinquennial, distribution of all his wealth. I think Harshabharjuna did do this, as described by Euan Trond, I think. He distributed absolutely everything that he had, giving it to monks and Brahmins and the poor and so on. That perhaps was a survival of a very ancient custom, reinforced and reinvigorated, perhaps, by the Buddhist teaching about *dana*, *dana paramita*. Apparently he didn't leave himself as much as a loincloth; he had to beg one from somebody. He literally emptied the treasury. Just like Mr. Lawson! [12]

Anyway, shall we pass on?

Chairman: The next question is from Ratnaguna on festivals and especially Christmas.

In the lecture you talk about the Sarasvati festival in India, which seems to be a strong ethnic-cum-cultural festival. This set me thinking about Christmas, which we in the FWBO largely try to ignore. However, unless one is on retreat, it is really impossible to ignore it - after all, for the few days around Christmas shops are closed,...

S: Few days?!

... public transport stops, etc. etc. Moreover, one is conscious that almost everyone else in the country is 'celebrating' in one way or another. I wonder, would it be a good idea to have some kind of festival ourselves at this time, rather than ignore Christmas? - i.e. try to appropriate the festive atmosphere and put it to positive use? I for one have very pleasant memories of Christmas. I don't feel that it is necessarily a negative festival. Comments, please?

S: I think that, though one wants to be an individual and not simply go along with the ideas and attitudes of the group, especially to the extent that those are unskilful, nevertheless it isn't wise to put oneself too much in opposition to the group; especially if the group is very much bigger than you are. I mean, not put oneself in opposition to the group to too great an extent, at least, on such occasions as Ratnaguna mentions. Because certainly it is true that you can't ignore Christmas. I mean, there is such a tremendous build-up to it, for one thing - 'only 100 shopping days to Christmas' and all that sort of thing; the decorations in the shops and the streets, and the Christmas

sales; everybody is buying presents. You might even get Christmas cards from your non-Buddhist friends. So you can't really ignore it, and I think it probably isn't a good thing to sort of try to ignore it in the sense of shutting it out, because it *is there* and you cannot but be aware of it to some extent - unless, as Ratnaguna says, you actually were on retreat somewhere. Even then, you might be aware of it to some extent, for one reason or another. For instance, you might hear special peals of church bells in the distance; you wouldn't be able to shut those out. [13]

So it probably is better to go along with it to some extent and have some kind of festival ourselves at this time. This is one reason why I myself don't mind, say, having, here at Padmaloka when I'm here at Christmas time, a sort of Christmas dinner, or just a special meal. Do you see what I mean? Because you don't have turkey, obviously, you don't have any wine; it's just a special meal. So you are joining in to some extent. But perhaps you could go even further than that, recalling the fact that we don't really know on which day Christ was born; I don't know exactly when the 25th December was fixed upon, but it was comparatively late, I think at least some *decades* after the death of Christ; and the 25th December was a solar festival, it was taken over by the Christians. So why shouldn't one re-appropriate it and celebrate Christmas, i.e. the 25th December, as a solar festival - festival of light or something of that sort? And perhaps sort of incorporate some of those ethnic, pagan elements which really have nothing to do with Christianity at all, like the holly and the mistletoe and even the plum pudding, which the Puritans *banished* because it was pagan.

I am not sure, but I believe I have read somewhere that even when churches are decorated for Christmas they have holly inside the church, but mistletoe is not allowed inside the church, because the church preserves some awareness of its pagan origins. It apparently occupied an important place in certain Druidic ceremonies. It was harvested with a golden sickle, wasn't it, by the chief Druid?

There is probably no reason why one shouldn't have a Christmas tree. The Christmas tree is really nothing to do with Christianity *at all*. It's a German or Teutonic, presumably pagan, custom introduced into Britain in the last century by the Prince Consort. You could very well have a Christmas tree, decorated in your own Buddhistic way; it could be a sort of tree of life or wish-fulfilling tree, something of that sort. And you could have your Christmas meal, you could have candles on the tree, and there need not be any mention of Christianity at all! You would have your holly and your mistletoe, even your paper chains if you like; shaking hands under the mistletoe! [Laughter]

Mangala: In Sweden, Bhante, they've got a little figure, looks just like Santa Claus, but he's called Tomte. He's nothing to do with Christmas; he's not the Santa that drives the reindeer, he's more a kind of folk or ethnic kind of figure from the past. But he looks exactly like Santa Claus; he isn't actually a Christian saint. So a lot of people have these little figures at Christmas time.

S: Well, think about it. But I think in principle I agree with Ratnaguna. But one just has to be very careful, because clearly we are surrounded by Christian culture, [14] to the extent that it does still exist, and it's very easy to allow these ethnic elements to enter along with, sometimes, their Christian meanings. I think some of the Tibetan groups have slipped up here by trying to incorporate Jesus Christ into their liturgies and things of that sort, and even into their iconography.

Dharmadhara: I went along to a Tibetan group in Auckland at Christmas, and they had a Nativity scene in their lounge, quite prominently displayed.

S: Well, that isn't really incorporating Christianity into Buddhism, which you probably couldn't do anyway. It's just an undigested lump, as I have called it.

Mangala: What would you say about people going along to listen to the *Messiah* or the *Christmas Oratorio* or something like that?

S: You can't completely separate the music from the words, but I think for most people it is definitely an aesthetic rather than - I won't say religious experience, because there may be some shade of religious emotion there for them, but I don't think, in most cases, it's a specifically *Christian* experience. Though I would personally say that it would probably be better to go along, if it's available, and see a Handel opera. I think that perhaps *Messiah* is a little overrated, in the sense that a lot of Handel's other works, especially his operas, are *underrated*. I mean, *Messiah* is a great work of art, no doubt, and I think often people go along at Christmas time because there are so many good productions of it at Christmas time. But perhaps one just shouldn't get into the habit of going along to hear *Messiah* or going along to hear the Bach *B Minor Mass* - be a little more thoughtful and a little more aware of what one is doing. But if one thinks, yes, music is all part of the celebration - well, yes, there are sure to be *other* things on at that time.

Prasannasiddhi: To go back a bit - what about actually giving such festivals as the Christmas one an overtly Buddhist association and tone, maybe a figure?

S: I think that would have to come gradually. I think you'd just have to introduce the purely ethnic element first and then gradually link it up with Buddhism more specifically. I don't think you could just decide that the 25th December was going to be a Manjughosa celebration; I don't think you could do it like that. But just have [15] the meal and maybe some of the other accessories, and just see where that led. It's going to take decades, and perhaps even centuries, for these things to evolve.

Dharmadhara: Last Christmas I was in London and I noticed in a couple of parts of the FWBO quite a surprisingly strong desire for people to sing carols and to attend carol services. For example, there was a carol evening in one of our communities, I gather. Do you think that's going too far?

S: I think it is, because if it means singing specifically Christian hymns I think it is going too far. On the other hand, it is understandable, from as it were an emotional point of view; because we don't have any actual *singing* in the FWBO, or in Western Buddhism. And I think probably sometimes people do feel like singing, and feel like singing together and most people know the carols; they know the tunes, they know the words, so even if they are not particularly musical they don't experience much difficulty singing the carols or singing along with people who are singing them. So it's understandable, and I think we just have to try to find something equivalent.

In this connection, there was something that I intend talking to the musicians in the Movement about - especially Dave Keefe, when I can get hold of him - that was to do with something I heard about on the radio, that I'd like the musicians to look into. Apparently, in France somewhere, there's a Christian religious community called, I think it's - [*voice prompting*] - Taizé; a sort of community; it's non-denominational. But they seem to develop a style of music of their own, and I've heard bits and pieces of it on the radio. It sounds very attractive, and I think we could develop as it were Buddhistic music for our festivals, and perhaps even pujas, along those sort of lines. Very broadly speaking, it's a sort of cross between baroque on the one hand and Country and Western on the other. [*Laughter*] But it's actually very pleasing, and people seem to enjoy it and to feel able to join in. It's quite distinctive. I couldn't help thinking, when I first heard this in the course of a Sunday programme, that we could make something of this. I think we do need something of that kind; I think it is something lacking. Because, yes, I am sure people sometimes

do like to be able to sing, as distinct from chanting, because you open up more, so to speak, when you are singing; your lungs expand, you are putting more energy into it, it's a more strongly emotional experience, usually.

Dharmadhara: And the melody is - [16]

S: The melody is pleasing and emotionally appealing. So I can understand people wanting to sing carols. It's just a pity that they have to sing *carols*, and not something better integrated with the Buddhist tradition in the West.

Nagabodhi: In India, the chanting is much more melodious, even the *Tiratana Vandana*, and there are several other *vandanas* which are really quite tuneful and which are usually chanted in unison, almost as if singing. Do you think that we should perhaps look into some of these?

S: Well, we have done to a small extent. There is the *Last Vandana*. I encouraged that, but it seems to have died out a bit. A lot of people know it, and Padmavajra was propagating it. But it sort of started and then it sort of faded out. I think maybe people didn't find it easy to know where exactly to put it

Nagabodhi: Yes, I think that was it.

Mangala: There was also the *Mangala Sutta* years ago, which just died a death after a short time.

S: I think we just need more people to specialise in these things. We need a liturgical group.

Mangala: I was in Stockholm over Christmas, and I went to a church concert, and there was this choir, a male voice choir, and an internationally famous tenor singing. It was absolutely astonishingly good, it was really -

S: Of course, we have done more things. We have had the Padmaloka Male Voice Choir, haven't we? Yes, with Ratnaprabha and Sthirananda and Vajrananda, and at last year's Tuscany there was quite a little male voice choir; and Ratnaprabha composed a Tuscany song which we all sang when we had our farewell or concluding feast; and it went down very well indeed, it was greatly appreciated.

Mangala: I'd love to hear it.

Kovida: It's very popular in the performing arts retreats, the singing we do, singing with Bodhivajra. It's very popular and good. [17]

S: I haven't heard it. You've been hiding your light, or whatever, under a bushel. But, yes, people like to open up their throats and lungs, don't they? But maybe we could get Dave Keefe and some of the other musicians and look into this Taizé-type music and perhaps find out if there are recordings of it. I should think there must be; there must be tapes available.

Dharmadhara: Is it partly instrumental, or is it largely vocal? [18]

S: It's largely vocal. I think, as far as I remember, there is some instrumental accompaniment, but it's largely vocal; people just singing the words.

Dharmadhara: You don't remember any, Bhante?

S: No, I don't. I'm afraid I don't have a very good ear. I appreciate music and enjoy music, but I don't have a good ear, so I haven't been able to do anything really myself in this respect along these lines. I don't want my as it were deficiencies to become deficiencies of the Movement.

Maybe the next time someone is in a record and cassette shop they could just check and see whether there are any cassettes of these Taizé - what shall I call them? - new religious music. You might even be able to just take some of the tunes and just change the words. But I think there must be a musical accompaniment, because it sounds - the sound is sort of semi-baroque, semi-Country and Western. Anyway, let's pass on and see what else we've got; I think there's not much left.

Chairman: There are three more questions. Dharmapriya's question is on Insight traditions outside of Buddhism.

Edward Conze (in the *Introduction to Buddhism*) and Lama Govinda (in *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, chapter 2), both refer to non-Buddhist traditions of Wisdom or Insight equivalent to *prajna*. Have you encountered any convincing evidence that there have been such traditions of real Insight outside of Buddhism, especially in pre-Buddhist India?

S: I must say I haven't. One can't exclude the possibility of certain people - for instance Sufis, Christian mystics, neo-Platonists - having individually attained to something that Buddhists would recognise as *prajna*, at least for limited periods, so to speak. But there certainly doesn't seem to be any non-Buddhist *tradition* of Wisdom or Insight. Of course, it is open to one to believe that the symbols of certain religions are the equivalent of *prajna* in another form, but one would need to have convincing evidence for that; that is what the question speaks about. And [19] also one would need to see the fruits of that Insight. For instance, some Christian mystics have apparently had quite exalted spiritual experiences and so on and so forth, but then you find them condoning the work of the Inquisition or rejoicing in the burning of heretics, so one can't really believe that there has been an Insight experience if its fruits are of that nature.

Mangala: So would you say, Bhante, that in a way you sort of judge Buddhism by the example of the Buddha in his life, in his own life following his Enlightenment?

S: I think - I don't know whether I have spoken much about this - that really there is no other way of deciding or knowing whether someone has had an Insight experience or not than by examining his life, as far as you are able to see it and understand it. I don't think there is any theoretical criterion; not a *real* criterion. If someone, say, claims to have developed Insight, the only way in which you can know whether he really has developed that Insight is by trying to see whether his behaviour is in accordance with that Insight, or is in accordance with what one would *expect* to be the behaviour of someone who had Insight. This is, I think, where some of the Tibetan lamas, some of the Tibetan teachers, some of the Vajrayana teachers, confuse the issue by saying such things as 'You mustn't criticise the guru, he behaves in an apparently unskilful way just to test the disciple's faith'; I think this completely confuses the issue by making it impossible to have any sort of criterion by which to judge or to assess whether someone has attained Insight or not.

Mangala: So, just to follow on: would you say, therefore, that as a Buddhist your principal refuge is in the Buddha and his life rather than in his Dharma or teaching? - if the two can actually be separated, but I think they probably can from what you've been saying?

S: I'm not quite sure what you mean, what you're getting at.

Mangala: Well, I mean - what do you sort of base your faith on? Do you base it on the life and example of the Buddha himself, or on -

S: Ah, I see what you mean. You don't base it merely on his words; because anyone can speak those words. You base it on the fact that the words are exemplified in the Buddha's *life*. I think that's where the records of the Buddha's life as a historical person are important. Some people might say, 'It doesn't matter whether [20] the Buddha actually lived, just as they say it doesn't matter whether Christ actually lived. It's just the teaching that matters.' But in a sense it is and in a sense it isn't; because unless the Buddha had actually lived, and unless he had actually *practised* those teachings, how would you know that it was possible for any human being to practise them at all? Because *you* are certainly not able to practise them, at least not to any appreciable extent. So, if you want to practise them, you've got to have the faith that they are practicable by a human being, and that means you really need to have the faith that *some* human being in the past has practised them - at least *one*. So you need a historical figure, in addition to the so to speak theoretical teachings. You need a historical person in whom the teachings are actually embodied, so that you can know that they are practicable; and it doesn't help you if some teacher or some guru says, 'Yes, they are practicable, but I seem not to be practising them because I'm just testing you.' That is absolutely disastrous and leads to dreadful hypocrisy and deceit and so on, and confusion and exploitation.

Prasannasiddhi: You may have gone into this somewhere else, but I was wondering where you felt Blake came into this.

S: Well, I think I have gone into it - or rather, not gone into it - somewhere else. It's very difficult to say. But if one looks at Blake's life - and as I have said that is really the criterion, not what Blake has written - there does seem to be *much* that is very admirable about his life, especially if you think of the way in which he died. He doesn't seem to have had any fear of death, he seems to have died joyfully, he seems to have died singing songs. So not to have a fear of death is quite a big thing; so that would suggest he wasn't attached to his ego or selfhood, and that suggests that perhaps he did have some Insight in some way, in some form, into the fact that the so-called ego or so-called separate self wasn't ultimate. He seems not to have been afraid of losing it by death. There is the possibility, at least, that Blake had a *degree* of Insight. But, again, the criterion is not what Blake might have written but the way he lived.

Mangala: Following on from the earlier point: you said before that the Mahayana tends perhaps to give more emphasis to the Buddha's life than to his teachings. But I think earlier you said that was to sort of redress of one-sidedness of the Theravada, which was concerned mainly with his teachings. Would you say, therefore, that perhaps one needs both of these? [21]

S: I would say one definitely needs both; yes, indeed. It's true that the Mahayana drew attention to the Buddha's life, but drew attention to that life in the rather glorified form of the Bodhisattva ideal; it didn't draw attention to the Buddha's life in its concrete, historical particularity, one might say. And we need that, too; and we do find that in the Theravada, in the Pali Canon. That is why I think the Pali Canon is indispensable. It does bring you into contact with the human, historical Buddha, and you actually see him practising his own teaching. Whereas the Mahayana, though in a way, yes, it does emphasise the importance of the Buddha's life, it has glorified that life in the Bodhisattva ideal to such an extent that it sometimes seems to go beyond that life. So we still do need the Pali Canon, we still do need the human, historical Buddha, who is preserved, so to speak, to some extent, at least, in that Pali Canon. You certainly don't see much of the human, historical Buddha in the Mahayana sutras.

So I think we can't dispense either with the Pali Canon or with the Mahayana sutras.

Dharmadhara: Have you had much personal experience of Tibetan teachers behaving in the way that you describe, with Western students?

S: I have heard about it quite a lot. I can't say that I've had personal experience in the sense of actually observing it at first hand, but one has heard quite a lot about it. Well, yes, one has read about it, too; for instance, in a recent issue of the *Dharmadhatu Sun* there were quite a few remarks by Kalu Rinpoche on the subject of Trungpa and his illness; and Kalu Rinpoche virtually says, in so many words, that it is not to be regarded as an ordinary illness, and he's got everything under control, and so on and so forth; whereas it is really quite clear that his illness is, at least to some extent, the result of his own unskilful actions earlier in this very life. [Pause]

Of course, when one says that behaviour is the only criterion, one has to be quite careful that one does distinguish clearly, in the case of ethics, between the natural morality, as Buddhism calls it, and the conventional morality. For instance, it might be the custom to take one's hat off on certain occasions; so, supposing someone who claimed to have Insight didn't do that, it wouldn't mean that he was behaving unethically, because the behaviour in itself would be just a violation of convention, not of natural morality. One might say that he ought to consider people's feelings, but then that would be a separate question. He could skilfully, on certain occasions, disregard people's feelings in matters of conventional morality; not disregard them in a negative sense, but think it would [22] be more skilful on his part not to respect their wrong notions, or rather their over-attachment to certain matters of conventional morality.

For instance, the Dayaratna, to go a bit off at a tangent, asked the Vajra Regent what Trungpa's movement's attitude was towards alcohol, and he said, 'Well, alcohol is *amrit*.' Well, that is just a great big - well, really, a confusion of the issue. Has alcohol really been *amrit* for Trungpa? It seems to have been *poison* rather than *amrit*. What does one mean by alcohol being *amrit*? It is quite clear that in some Vajrayana rituals alcohol does symbolise *amrit*, in the sense of an experience of Enlightenment; but what has *that* got to do with ordinary, mundane drinking? And what sort of confusion does it not create if you describe the alcohol which you consume on ordinary social occasions as *amrit*? Does it help in any way to describe it as *amrit*? Does it throw any real light on *why* you drink, or why alcohol is not only tolerated but encouraged in a particular Buddhist movement? It's a complete confusion of the issue. Are they thinking of Enlightenment, or Nirvana, when they drink alcohol or get drunk?

Dharmadhara: With, say, the Gelugpa tradition, with the great emphasis on the Wisdom aspect, it seems so strange that even there so many Westerners apparently concentrate purely on the faith side, in terms of their teachers. Would you agree?

S: Well, one says 'so many', but do we have any actual statistical information? And perhaps one is confusing faith with a search for security. Perhaps the people themselves have confused faith with a search for security. Some of them seem to have done that.

Dharmadhara: I have met - not that many, but I have met a few - Westerners from the Gelugpa tradition, and one claimed that a certain teacher was Enlightened, but refused to be drawn into a discussion on the fact; it was beyond question. And another one had a similar sort of respect for all lamas, which seemed to be beyond question or reproach.

S: - rational discussion.

Dharmadhara: And yet I think they were both studying Madhyamika philosophy.

S: That would suggest a severe split between intellect and emotion, in the case of those people. Because what's the use of studying Nagarjuna's philosophy and [?aga]'s [23] logic if you are not going to apply that to the situations of your own life and your own experience and your own views and your own attitudes?

Prasannasiddhi: It seems also to be tied up with some sort of authority projection.

S: Well, I don't know whether the word projection is appropriate here, but if there is insecurity, and if that sense of insecurity is painful, people will surely go *looking* for an authority. That is why there are so many Roman Catholics: they've got a pope to believe in, an infallible pope or a pope who at least on certain occasions, in connection with certain matters, is infallible. You've got ultimate supreme authority.

It's almost as though some Western Buddhists are looking for a pope *within* Buddhism. In fact, they are not satisfied with *one* pope like the Catholics; they seem to have hundreds of popes - every lama is a pope. There must be a great deal of insecurity there to want to be able to depend on authority to that extent, and to be unwilling to enter into rational discussion in the way that Dharmadhara mentioned.

Perhaps, if such people refuse to enter into discussion, one should just disagree with them head on: just say, 'I know that he isn't Enlightened, that particular lama. I just know' - and leave it at that. Well, your 'knowing' is just as valid as theirs! That might provoke them into trying to give some reasons for their belief, or into trying to give some reasons why you are wrong.

Anyway, let's press on.

Chairman: Question 7 is from Abhaya. It's on the FWBO and Western culture.

Bhante, in answer to your own question, 'Will a Western Buddhist culture ever develop?', you observe that a small start has been made in the FWBO. That was in 1977. What progress, if any, do you think we have made in that direction since then?

S: I am not sure what that small start was. It was probably so small that I've forgotten! But there hasn't been any progress on the musical front; there hasn't been any progress on the artistic front. Perhaps there's been a little bit of progress on the literary front? But even there, even if you take into account Nagabodhi's book on his experiences in India, and Abhaya's own [*unpublished*] autobiography, there isn't really very much progress. And it's only progress to the extent that it's a genuine contribution to Buddhism and a genuine contribution to culture; that is to [24] say, has a definite artistic value. So the progress is still quite small: a little bit of progress has been made, but it's very tiny. I'm not mentioning the theatre group just yet; I think that remains to be seen. I think it's more of an idea than an achievement so far, isn't it? One would need an actual production on stage before one could say anything. A few people have written poems; but judging by those that have been shoved at me, I don't think there has been any progress on that front at all - in fact there has probably been a regression! [*Laughter*] - on the whole; there might have been the odd poem - we won't mention by whom - that constitutes an exception, but not more than that.

Nagabodhi: What about on maybe a lower level of the use of the word culture, in terms of a lifestyle that we are developing, or our Right Livelihood schemes? Do you feel there's been progress on that level?

S: Perhaps it was those that I was thinking of when I gave this talk. But, well, they are culture in a rather limited sense, and - well, we don't have really many people following that particular lifestyle; perhaps a few more than in 1977, not *all* that many more, I'm afraid. We could say - I was going to say the standard of cooking has gone up considerably at Hockneys; but to what extent is that *Buddhist* cooking? Is there anything specifically Buddhist about it? Perhaps there is something a little bit Buddhist about the whole set-up, in the way it's served and all that kind of thing, but perhaps not in the food itself.

Nagabodhi: In that there is a preoccupation, say, at Hockneys with the pursuit of excellence in their food, and you do get the feeling, could that not be seen as the distinguishing Buddhist factor?

S: Well, others are in pursuit of excellence, even in that particular field, while having no connection with Buddhism whatever.

Mangala: Even more so, I think.

S: Even more so, perhaps, yes. So really we haven't achieved much yet. Very, very little, in fact, in this respect.

Nagabodhi: Does that disappoint you, Bhante, or do you feel it will just take a very long time? [24]

S: Both, in a way. I'd like to see an improvement in the way people live. I'd like to see people living in, as it were, a more cultured sort of way, without being precious about it. To some extent, it depends on having a little more money, but not perhaps so much as people usually think. People could at least live in a neater and tidier way than many of them sometimes do.

Mangala: Do you think that has happened already, Bhante? -

S: To some extent, here and there, but I don't think it characterises the Movement sufficiently. For instance, look at the way in which some of the women dress - well, perhaps I should say some of the men, too. I couldn't help noticing - I won't say exactly where and when - but one particular woman was dressed in quite a variety of very crude colours which really did clash. So that shows a lack of aesthetic sense, and therefore a deficiency in culture, doesn't it? Look at those curtains, come to that! I mean they're not all that attractive; they don't display any great aesthetic sensibility. I don't know where we got them. Maybe someone gave them or something like that. But there's all sorts of things like that; do you see what I mean? Maybe Subhuti chose them.

Prasannasiddhi: Padmapani chose them.

Dharmadhara: He spent quite a bit of money on them.

S: Oh dear! It was not quite as successful as the room downstairs, in that case. But perhaps it was difficult to fit something in.

Dharmadhara: When you say you'd like to see people living in a more cultured way, you're thinking more of their surroundings?

S: Yes, right; more refined, aesthetically pleasing surroundings.

Dharmadhara: And you said ‘without being precious’ - how did you see that as being something to be avoided? In what way did you see that?

S: Well, preciousness, I think, is just attaching an undue importance to these things in a rather artificial, self-conscious way. I’d like to see people listening, perhaps, to a better type of music or going to see a better type of film; that sort of thing. Not just watching any old TV programme. [26]

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, I wonder if you could say that the actual development of the structure of the Movement represents quite a cultural development, with the systems we’ve organised and I was also thinking of ... *[end of sentence lost from recording]*

S: Yes, in a way that is so, because I don’t take organisation as a sort of dirty word. Organisation, one might say, represents cosmos as opposed to chaos. So organisation makes it possible for something to attain a higher degree of development than would otherwise be possible. A picture is organised, isn’t it? A novel is organised, and usually the more highly organised it is the greater a novel it is, at least in that respect or to that extent. So if one’s *life* is organised it is a more highly developed life; if the *group* is organised it is a more highly developed group. Not that a structure is imposed from without, but that the group develops a structure which enables it to function more effectively, and to do the things it wants to do in a more satisfactory and harmonious manner. This is not in accordance with a great deal of current thinking. Sometimes outmoded structures have to be dismantled, but that doesn’t mean that structures themselves aren’t necessary or helpful.

Mangala: I sometimes feel, Bhante, in the Movement to some extent that there are attempts to be more cultured. I sometimes feel it’s rather laid over the top of an uncultured base; it doesn’t really quite fit. It’s like it hasn’t really quite developed organically, somehow, or properly, but it’s a bit like people think they can just suddenly start listening to Handel instead of some rock music, and it’s that easy - you just sort of switch from one to the other. And I don’t think it *is* that easy. I think it has to be more of a natural development.

S: Sometimes you can deceive yourself, and you can think that you’re enjoying something when you’re really not enjoying it at all.

Mangala: Or you should be enjoying it.

S: Yes. I think this is a bit similar to, say, thinking of ordination in terms of appropriating something rather than growing into something.

I am sure there *are* some people who can jump from rock music to Handel, but I think one has to be quite sure that one is actually enjoying it and appreciating it, and not just experiencing a feeling of satisfaction that you’re doing the right thing. You can see this in art galleries; you can see sometimes people looking at pictures [27] and it’s pretty clear that they haven’t got a clue as to what they’re all about. Sometimes you can tell from their comments that they’re concentrating on really quite irrelevant and extraneous things.

Mangala: I think this must lead to a kind of alienated emotionality, because you’re trying to convince yourself that you like this; and you think you like it, but you don’t actually *feel* you like it.

S: Yes, you don’t *really* like it, you’re not really enjoying it. I think, therefore, it is important to be honest with oneself and to ask oneself what you really do enjoy. There are some people in the

Movement who I am sure really enjoy reading comics much more than they enjoy reading Dickens or Henry James.

Mangala: So how do you go about making these people more cultured, if you see what I mean? What can they do?

S: I suppose it's difficult to generalise. It depends where they stand. I think, first of all, they've got to assess where they do actually stand, be honest about what they really like and don't like; perhaps try to move up just one notch at a time. If they like rock music, not to try to go straight to the *Goldberg Variations*. I must admit I don't enjoy the *Goldberg Variations*, despite the fact that they are said by some people to be one of the supreme achievements of Bach. Too me they seem just like sort of exercises. I believe there are some musicians who actually hold this heretical view!

Mangala: When I was in Sweden - I can't remember how it came up, but somebody made a comment that just because *you* happen to like Handel, therefore everybody's listening to Handel in the Movement, and -

S: I am not so sure of that.

Mangala: Well, there are a lot of people I think who do.

S: Well, there's Handel and Handel. There are some very popular pieces of Handel that most people do *enjoy*. They are not particularly subtle, and they are good rousing tunes, and all that sort of thing. The *Water Music* and the Fireworks Music; most people can enjoy those. They are not very difficult. They are very good music indeed, but there's nothing especially complex about them or anything of that sort, [28] they are really quite accessible. But if it was to come to certain organ concertos, maybe people wouldn't enjoy their Handel quite so much. So I don't think one need question the genuineness of people's enjoyment of such things as the *Water Music* and the Fireworks Music, which are available in very popular selections of records and cassettes. You always find them included, and they wouldn't be included if the manufacturers didn't find that they sold. There is such a thing as popular classical music, music which is definitely classical and of high standard, but none the less quite accessible and popular with a lot of people.

Dharmadhara: Bhante, I do have leanings towards both rock and classical, at different periods of the day or in different moods. The thing I miss in classical music which I find in some complex rock is the rhythms. This is something which I haven't been able to find in classical music, and I'm not talking about simple rhythms but complex rhythms of the Spanish or Latin American variety, or even some of the jazz variety, which isn't discordant but which is very complex, and emphasised and brought out and developed.

S: Well, the most complex rhythm of all is supposed to be in Indian music, especially in the tablas, and that is quite refined. I don't have any real technical knowledge of these matters, but I do understand, I think it is generally held, that the rhythm of Western classical music is not particularly subtle, as compared, say, with the rhythm, especially as exemplified by the part played by the tabla, in Indian classical music.

Dharmadhara: On the other hand, the development of melody and counterpoint is far more developed in the West than in India.

S: Oh, yes! Yes, indeed.

Dharmadhara: - chords and -

S: Oh, they don't have anything *like* counterpoint, as far as I know, or anything like harmony. And Far Eastern music has developed in another direction again. And each, no doubt, contributes something which the others don't. In Far Eastern music you've got all sorts [29] of sounds just as sounds that you don't *hear* in Western music, except in the case of some very modern composers who have incorporated some of the Far Eastern instruments into their own music, into their own orchestras, especially percussion instruments. In classical Chinese music I believe you've got all sorts of sounds of wood striking wood, wood striking stone, and stone striking stone, and things of that sort. So it could be that there is an element of more complex rhythm in, for instance, rock music - not that I know anything about it from experience - which is not found elsewhere. What is the nature of one's need for that kind of rhythm is difficult to say.

Dharmadhara: I suspect it's more a physical need than a cerebral need.

S: I think it was Goethe who said that all music is basically either dance music or religious music. I think that was a very profound observation. One mustn't forget that classical music, as one finds it, say, in the symphony - taking the symphony as the paradigmatic form of Western music - the symphony is an arrangement of dance measures, really, isn't it? For instance, you've got the minuet; in the classical symphony of, say, Mozart and Haydn there is one movement which is a minuet, which is a dance measure. One sees this in baroque music, too, where the organisation is not so highly developed, and you've just got a series of dances - a gigue, a gavotte, and so on: all these are dances. So you've got music to which your natural response is physical movement, and a lot of classical music is of this type. And this is one of the reasons - though only *one* of the reasons - why you find it so satisfying. There is a sort of physical response. There's a sort of unconscious feeling to dance to it; at least, you start tapping your foot or tapping your finger.

Then there is the other music, what Goethe called, I think, just religious music, where there is no sort of dance rhythm, and where it's your feelings, mainly, that are involved, and where you are carried away into some sublime state; as, for instance, you are with a mass or an oratorio, something of that sort. When you listen to an oratorio usually your foot doesn't start tapping. It's not appropriate.

So I think Goethe has hit upon something here, in making that sort of distinction. There *is* a kind of music which seems to find a physical correlative, a kind of music that you want to dance to, which makes you feel like moving. The movement is more or less harmonious, depending upon the nature of the music itself. I seem to think, for instance, that Tchaikovsky incorporated the waltz rhythm into one of the movements of some of his symphonies.

So it does seem that there is a kind of music which fulfils or meets the need to dance, more or less harmoniously. In the case of some music, the dance movement that accompanies it is quite aesthetic and quite pleasing, harmonious and graceful; in the case of other kinds of music that we can think of, it is very - well, [30] chaotic, one might say, and abrupt and violent. Again, perhaps there are degrees of refinement possible.

Prasannasiddhi: There seems to be quite a contrast between the sort of - I think it's often mentioned - the very strong rhythmic element in rock music, beat etc., and the classical music which seems to be very sort of - well, I suppose one would be cerebral in comparison.

S: I wouldn't say it was cerebral. I'd say it was more harmonious and more positive. For instance, just hearing bits and pieces, just snatches of it, I get the impression that the beat of some rock

music expresses violence, a desire to smash and disintegrate. I think it appeals to people because people do have, it seems, these urges to smash and disintegrate, quite strongly. I mean, there is some rock music - I think it's called rock; I'm not quite sure about these technicalities - that expresses violent sexual feeling. Think of Elvis Presley and his movements on the stage, in accordance with the music that he was playing or singing. And if people find that sympathetic or pleasing or if they go along with that or like to listen to that or like to act that out, as it were, it means that they are acting out these strong, possibly repressed, sexual feelings.

Prasannasiddhi: It almost seems as if the classical music shies away from that sort of thing.

S: Well, when one says shies away, one assumes it was there. Perhaps it wasn't there at that time, in the case of the people for whom it was intended. Just as nowadays there are people who can listen to classical music and feel fully satisfied, completely fulfilled. There aren't any sort of raw emotions left over which they still want to express and which that music doesn't enable them to express.

Nagabodhi: I think actually our ears are coarsened by the sort of rhythms that we hear; we think of rhythm as being something that comes out of drums, but the piano was a percussion instrument and was used way back as that. It later developed its more melodic usage in orchestral music -

S: Yes, the - what is it? - the harpsichord was used as a continuo instrument, wasn't it? [31]

Nagabodhi: Yes. And if you hear someone like Trevor Pinnock playing the harpsichord in Bach's music, you really get the feel of the percussion element. It's very rich, so it obviously was there, that rhythmic side; but I think we are so coarsened by heavy bass guitars and heavy drums that we don't realise the amount of rhythm and percussion there is in classical music.

S: Yes, I'm thinking of one of Bach's overtures; I don't remember what it's called, I don't remember its number, but there are so many trumpets and kettledrums there.

Prasannasiddhi: But then often in a performance, if there are kettledrums at all they will only come in once in a performance.

S: Well, you could say that they are all the more effective for coming in once. Think of the way the kettledrums come in towards the very end of Parts I and II of *Messiah*. If Handel had been using kettledrums all the way through, he could not have produced that sort of effect. It's just like putting too much spices into your food; you end up by just blunting your taste, blunting your palate.

Prasannasiddhi: I don't know if one can make this comparison, but looking at the Tibetan music, somehow it seems to be much more - I don't know, raw in a sense, and it seems to have that sort of quite strong -

S: I wouldn't have called it *raw*. I have discussed it several times before - it's a different kind of music again; it doesn't, as I think I have said, aim at the emotions directly. It seems to aim at the *psychic* centres more.

Nagabodhi: What music is that?

S: Tibetan music, that is Tibetan ritual music, liturgical music. Not their popular music, which is rather different.

Mangala: Bhante, a related question. What part, if any, do you think culture does play or should play in, say, a more monastic situation like, say, Vajraloka or Guhyaloka ? Do you think it has any place there, or - ?

S: Culture? [32]

Mangala: Well, I mean perhaps there it might take the form of having nice crockery and a nice shrine room and that sort of thing.

S: I did say at the beginning, when Vajraloka was established, that I thought they should perhaps take their inspiration a bit from Zen: have everything very simple, but at the same time very harmonious and aesthetically pleasing.

Mangala: So culture doesn't necessarily mean like living in a city, an urban environment, listening to lots of music, and -

S: - and going to see lots of concerts -

Mangala: - and art galleries and that sort of thing.

S: Well, you can have a surfeit. It depends how much you get out of it. You could have just one picture in your room, or one *flower*, as the Japanese do; and you just look at that and study that. You don't necessarily get a greater experience of culture by whipping round an art gallery and seeing 200 paintings in one afternoon; probably trying to carry on a conversation with the person who is with you at the same time. Do you see what I mean?

Dharmadhara: With the Buddhist caves in India - I was thinking specifically of Ajanta - the decoration there is, or presumably was then, of quite a high standard. There are all sorts of scenes, including dyads, for example. I wonder how relevant that was for a retreat situation - lots of depictions of females, for example.

S: I would have thought that a lot of monks would have found it a distraction. Perhaps - though they are very admirable from a cultural point of view - that did develop at a time when monasteries had become less austere than they were formerly, and perhaps aesthetic considerations, or even considerations of display, started predominating over purely spiritual ones. Perhaps there is also a difference in aesthetic attitudes. To me, to have a whole wall covered with paintings is in some ways a little vulgar, a little excessive; and one feels that sometimes in places like, say, the Doge's Palace in Venice, where acres and acres of walls are covered with paintings - not all of them masterpieces of art. Sometimes one longs for just a little bit of empty space in between, and a lot less gilding. Some interiors one can see that are positively vulgar. I am thinking especially of the Medici Chapel in - is it San Lorenzo? - the one with all those coloured marbles [33] - where one just gets the impression that the artist or the patron, whoever commissioned the work, just wanted to give an impression of a lot of money having been spent on it! It's just vulgar. Maybe it's the higher vulgarity, but it's still vulgarity.

Dharmadhara: Somebody compared it to the Mafia wedding cake.

Kovida: We're talking a lot about combining Buddhism and Western culture, or Buddhism and culture. Is there such a thing as just Buddhist culture in its essence, without relation to Western culture?

S: I think there's very little of pure Buddhist culture. I think there are very few cultural forms or artefacts which are purely an expression of Buddhism in the true sense, that is the spirit of Buddhism; just a few images, perhaps a few temples. Not everything that is sort of labelled 'Buddhist' is really an expression of, or really a part of, Buddhist culture. I think there is very little culture around, really, anyway. Even if you go into, say, a comparatively decent city like Norwich, how many of the buildings are *really* aesthetically pleasing? How many of them are decent works of art, decent examples of architecture? Not many of them. Or sometimes if you go into an art gallery; very often you can't help feeling that there is quite a lot of good work here, but very few things which are really works of genius, really outstanding. When you do come across works of this sort, they really do stand out from the rest. Well, there are certain artists who really do stand out; if you see them in an exhibition you see at once the distinction between ordinary sort of good art, competent art, even *very* good art, and the very best.

I think one of our dangers nowadays, when we have access to so much literature, so much art and music, is that we lose our sense of distinction between the good and the best.

Kovida: Do you think in that case that in the Movement we should concentrate more on developing what is essentially *Buddhist* rather than trying to create a sort of Western Buddhist culture?

S: I don't think you can hope to create a Western Buddhist culture unless you are deeply imbued with Buddhism in the first place. I think it's important to remain in contact with culture in the broader sense, but I don't think one can make any actual contribution to culture in the form of a specifically Buddhist culture unless you are, as I've said, deeply imbued with the spirit of Buddhism; how *can* you? [34]

Mangala: And presumably, Bhante, if you are imbued with that spirit of Buddhism, you cannot help but make a contribution to Western culture, provided you are working in that tradition.

S: To the extent that you are making a contribution to culture at all. You may not produce a poem or a picture, but the spirit of Buddhism, if you have really absorbed it, will find some sort of as it were cultural expression in your life.

Anyway, perhaps we should close. Just one more question?

Mangala: Yes; so would you say, in that case, that Buddhism comes first and then the Buddhist culture will follow, or could you also say that by getting involved in culture that will somehow help to produce the Buddhism?

S: To some extent it does, because involvement with culture in the best sense does help refine the emotions, and refinement of the emotions is important, even essential, for one's spiritual development as an individual. We haven't got any Western Buddhist culture around to help us to refine our emotions, so we have to rely on the best of Western culture. So it isn't just a question of forgetting all about Western culture and just concentrating on your meditation and study of the scriptures, and experiencing the spirit of Buddhism in that way, first, and *then* turning your attention to culture; it isn't as simple and straightforward, in a way, as that.

Mangala: You have to do both, as it were.

S: You have to do both, yes.

Anyway, have we really finished the questions?

Chairman: One more.

S: All right, let's have a look at it, then.

Chairman: A question from Tejananda on Sarasvati as the consort to Manjughosa.

At the end of this lecture, you say that in the popular Tantra efforts were made to regard Sarasvati as consort of Manjughosa, but Manjughosa remains eternally single and celibate, and there is no need for a separate personification of culture beside him. While I take your point about the 'self-[35] sufficiency' of Manjughosa in this respect, it seems to me, at the same time, a pity not to use the symbolism of Sarasvati as consort as well. After all, you speak of her as embodying ethnic culture and Manjughosa as embodying universal culture, and it seems quite 'symbolically appropriate' to have the female figure of Sarasvati embodying the 'receptivity' of the ethnic culture to the higher culture and Transcendental 'values' embodied by Manjughosa. Sarasvati seems to offer a sort of 'bridge' to Manjughosa. Would you be against devotees of Manjughosa offering some devotion to Sarasvati as well?

S: I think the question at the very end is a bit of a *non sequitur*. 'Would you be against devotees of Manjughosa offering some devotion to Sarasvati as well?' - not at all, but the point of what has preceded is Sarasvati as *consort* of Manjughosa. You can offer some devotion to Sarasvati as well as to Manjughosa without regarding her as the *consort* of Manjughosa; do you see what I mean? I agree with what Tejananda says about it being a pity not to use the symbolism of Sarasvati as consort, inasmuch as Sarasvati represents, one may say, ethnic culture and Manjughosa universal culture. But I am rather unwilling, as it were, to give any prominence to these - what shall I say? well, let's say *yab-yum* forms, as that is what they very often are, these conjoint male-female Buddha or Bodhisattva forms; because many people in the West will take that as justifying a sort of romanticisation, not to say glorification, of the couple, the sexual couple. This is why I am quite cautious in this respect. You see what I'm getting at, don't you?

But otherwise, yes, it would be a very natural and very appropriate symbol: Sarasvati as the spouse of Manjughosa, Sarasvati as representing ethnic culture, as receptive to the universal culture as represented by Manjughosa: it ties up, in a way, very neatly, it's very appropriate. But then you are landed with what a lot of people would just see as an exemplar of the couple, and they would take that as justifying and glorifying the ordinary couple, the neurotically dependent male and female human being. One doesn't want to encourage that sort of justification or glorification of the couple. I think that's the short answer to that question. It would not be a skilful means.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think that perhaps, at a future point, say, if the culture became much more refined, much more imbued with Buddhist values, it would be possible to have that symbolism?

S: Well, I hardly dare to say that, because people would seize on it right here and now as justifying some of their own attitudes and behaviour. Sometimes I have the [36] impression that some people are almost *waiting* for me to say something like that, so they can grab hold of it and use it to justify what they want to do or are doing.

Kovida: Do you think there's a reason why they haven't been able to combine the two in Buddhist art?

S: Well, they have combined, sometimes. But nonetheless the general impression that one is left with is of Manjughosa alone: I think perhaps because he was established so firmly as just a single, solitary male Bodhisattva figure, was established so firmly iconographically, that it was not so easy to popularise the *yab-yum* form, or the form of Manjughosa with Sarasvati as spouse. You get it to some extent in Nepal, which is interesting because traditional Nepalese Buddhism has come under very heavy Brahminical Hindu influence, and Buddhists often worship Hindu divinities and so on.

So for most people, where you get a god and a goddess as spouses, or even a male and female Bodhisattvas together, or male and female Buddha, the message that that communicates to a lot of people is that it's OK to have a spouse - not only that it's OK to have a spouse but that that somehow is spiritual: that they as spouses, say, as husband and wife or boyfriend and girlfriend, somehow exemplify the wisdom and compassion of the Buddhas, which is not usually the case.

It's also perhaps noticeable, as I think I've pointed out, that in Buddhist iconography a female figure is usually very much smaller than the male figure, whereas in actual human relationships it is very often the other way round: at least psychologically.

Anyway, we don't want to go into all that all over again. It's ground that has been covered more than once. Perhaps we really had better close. The questions weren't particularly good, I must say, but anyway we seem to have got something out of them which may be of general use.

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Sixth Lecture: Nature, Man and Enlightenment - 31st March 1987

Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara, Nagabodhi, Mangala, Prasannasiddhi, Kovida.

Chairman: This evening is 31 March, and we've got Lecture 6 in the series on The Sutra of Golden Light. The first question comes from Prakasha. It's on earth goddesses and sky gods.

In the lecture you say that all goddesses are earth goddesses and all gods sky gods. How far is this true? Are Sophia and Athene really Mother Earth figures? What about Pluto and Neptune?

Sangharakshita: This seems a slightly literalistic question, if I may say so. I think the original statement was a bit of an interjection, as it were, a sort of throwaway comment and not part of the actual structure of the argument, one might say. But none the less, I think one can say that, very broadly speaking, all goddesses are earth goddesses and all gods are sky gods. So the question therefore arises: what does one mean by that? Actually, it is quite simple, because if one, so to speak, steps down from unity, taking that as the ultimate principle, you've got as it were a primordial dualism. One finds this in all ancient philosophies, religions and systems of mythology. Reducing it to its simplest terms - as, for instance, you find it in ancient Egyptian mythology - you've got the earth and the sky, and you've got various gods who represent the sky - occasionally a goddess who represents the sky - and you've got various goddesses who represent the earth, occasionally a god who represents the earth. So this is all that I'm really getting at - that there is this sort of duality, which is perhaps not an ultimate duality, and in mythological terms it's symbolised by earth and sky; and usually gods were associated with the sky and goddesses with the earth. I don't think I intended anything more than that.

Coming to individual figures, I don't think that Pluto, for instance, the god of the underworld, can be seen as a god of the earth in the same way, for instance, [2] that Drdha is a goddess of the earth. He is a god, and he lives underground and rules over Hades, but that doesn't make him the masculine equivalent of an earth goddess. Demeter is an earth goddess, but she doesn't live underground; she lives on the surface of the earth. So living underground doesn't make one an earth god or an earth goddess; do you see what I mean?

As for Neptune, who is the god of the sea, even though he is the god of the sea he doesn't give the impression, so to speak, emotionally, of being a sort of masculine counterpart of an earth goddess. He is much more akin to his brother Jupiter, who rules the kingdom of the air, or heaven and earth even. *[Pause]*

One could say of Pallas Athene that she is not an earth mother or Mother Earth figure because of her close association with Zeus. She was born from the head of Zeus, according to Greek mythology. She had really no mother at all; so she is a sort of extension, in a way, of Zeus's own personality. And she has, of course, a number of masculine characteristics. But if she is an exception, she is an exception that proves the rule, as it were; though technically feminine, she doesn't have any of the usual attributes of the earth goddesses. I think I quoted a remark by a scholar comparing Manjusri with Pallas Athene, saying that, like Pallas Athene, Manjusri was all intellect and chastity. So intellect and chastity are hardly characteristics of the earth goddesses.

But, as I said at the beginning, the question is perhaps a bit literalistic, and one shouldn't really, as it were, reply in kind.

Dharmadhara: There is Sophia.

S: I am not quite sure which Sophia he is referring to: whether to the Gnostic figure or to the figure in Greek and Russian orthodox Christianity. But in neither case does Sophia have much in common with the earth goddesses. She is much more of an abstraction, and certainly does not have the widespread appeal that the earth goddesses have, or have had.

In other words, in the goddesses those qualities tend to predominate which are associated with the earth, and similarly in the case of the gods; in their case those qualities predominate which are associated with the sky - not that there aren't exceptions, but that seems to be the general position. Even so, many of the exceptions would seem to be apparent exceptions rather than real ones.

All right, then, let's pass on.

Chairman: The next question is Ratnaprabha's, and it's on the Blakean vision. [3]

Is not the Blakean vision of 'Creation - Fall - Last Judgement' (as described by Frye) a better way of looking at the evolutionary process than the Buddhist picture of beginningless and endless samsara?

S: I must say I don't know what Ratnaprabha means by 'better' here: whether he means more truthful, more appropriate, more in accordance with scientific facts, more appealing to the imagination. If we had him here we could ask him, but since we don't have him here we can't ask him. So it is difficult, really, to answer the question at all. If he for any reason thought it was a better way of looking at the evolutionary process, then he would have to produce some evidence in support of that contention. But simply asking whether the Blakean vision is a better way of looking at the evolutionary process really doesn't convey anything at all and doesn't therefore really constitute a question. I'm afraid we can't really deal with it.

Nagabodhi: Is there any way in which *you* might think that it was a better or more appropriate formula?

S: Well, the particular question does say 'a better way of looking at the evolutionary process', and I can't see really much in common between the Blakean vision of Creation, Fall and Last Judgement and the evolutionary process as generally understood. But it could be that the Creation/Fall/Last Judgement vision is a better way of looking at human life, or the life of man, or even man's spiritual development. But then that is not the question; the question is whether it's a better way of looking at the *evolutionary process*.

And 'the Buddhist picture of beginningless and endless samsara' is not a way of looking at the evolutionary process only; it is a way of looking at the evolutionary and *involutionary* process. So I think the question really needs a bit of filling out, perhaps a little clarification, too, before one can really begin to deal with it.

Chairman: Question 3 comes from Abhaya. It's about your own experience of expounding *The Sutra of Golden Light* through the lectures.

The goddess, Drdha, the Earth goddess, expresses her willingness to place herself at the service of

the Golden Light by 'leaning with her head upon the soles of the feet' of the monk who is preaching the Sutra. While realising this cannot be taken literally, I wondered whether you, as expounder of the Sutra at the [4] time of giving the lectures, encountered anything in your experience which could be said to correspond with this incident.

S: I can't say that I did. Except, of course, perhaps, for the cup of tea and biscuit I had afterwards, which was definitely sustaining after delivering a lengthy lecture! [*Laughter*] - which no doubt could be regarded as standing for, or even symbolising, the goddess Drdha; both the tea and the biscuit having been produced from the earth! But more than that I can't really honestly say. Possibly I was sustained or supported or protected by her, but if so I wasn't aware of it, not even in the way that I was aware, so to speak, of the presence of the Four Kings while preparing one of the previous lectures.

Chairman: Then, fourth, there is another question from Abhaya, concerning your experience with monks in the East.

Listening to the section of the lecture dealing with the monk who preaches the Sutra, I could not help thinking what an idealised picture of the monk you present here, in contrast to the picture of the monk one gathers from all the remarks you have made about monks in the East not living up to the Ideal, and about the essence of the ordination being the Going for Refuge. Have you any comments on this?

S: Yes. First of all, I did make it clear in the course of the lecture that the monk stands for Man, in the same way that Drdha stands for Nature and the Golden Light stands for Enlightenment. Do you remember this? So the monk is not just a monk. It's as though he only happens to be a monk. He is primarily, or essentially, Man, or Man as committed to the spiritual life, or Man as Going for Refuge. So it's not an idealised picture of the monk that is being presented, it's an idealised - if that is in fact the right term - picture of Man, Man as Going for Refuge, Man as committed to the ideal of Enlightenment, who, so to speak, happens to be living as a monk.

Here, of course, elaborating on that, I have taken 'monk' in the true sense; not 'monk' as meaning simply someone who has received formally a certain ordination and is therefore a monk in the technical sense. When I speak about monks in the East not coming up to the Ideal, I am talking about monks who are monks in the technical sense; they have been formally ordained but they aren't, in many cases, really committed to the Three Jewels, not really committed to the Ideal of Enlightenment. But perhaps it's a bit misleading that the monk in the sutra is [5] called 'monk', and the people who are wearing yellow robes but not living up to the ideals of Buddhism are also called monks. That is just an accident of history, one might say. Is that clear, or does it need to be gone into further?

_____: It seems clear. [*Murmurs of assent*]

Chairman: We're doing very well here! We are on to question 5. It's from Dharmadhara about 'glorious spiritual parasites'.

How realistic is it to think of being a 'glorious spiritual parasite' in modern Western society?

S: It's probably quite realistic to think in terms of being a parasite; I think that's quite easy, with the dole and so on. I think it's much more difficult to be a *spiritual* parasite, and still more difficult to be a *glorious* spiritual parasite! Clearly, the term parasite is used ironically, one might say. A spiritual parasite, glorious or otherwise, is someone who is not making any direct economic

contribution to society, to the community, but who nonetheless is economically supported by society, by the community. But, in a way, it's not really quite so straightforward as that, because sometimes the spiritual contribution that the spiritual parasite makes does have, in fact, an economic value - at least a nominal one. Do you see what I mean?

Let me give an example. In fact, I'll give two examples. Supposing you are an Order Member supported by your Centre. In a sense, you are a spiritual parasite, because you are not producing anything for society, anything of a material nature. You are not helping to grow food, you're not helping to manufacture shoes or to produce motor cars or to build houses, or anything of that sort. You are making, let us say, no economic, no material contribution to the society to which you belong *at all*. But you may be, say, taking classes at the centre. You may be leading retreats. And your taking classes and your leading retreats may have an economic value inasmuch as the centre which supports you is charging for them. In this way, even though you are a spiritual parasite, you are producing some wealth, so to speak, at least for the centre that supports you. One could say artists do the same thing. I don't know whether you heard the news, either today or yesterday, that Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* painting was sold for - what was it?

Nagabodhi: Seventeen million pounds? [*Whistles of amazement*] [6]

S: I think it was more than that; I think it was twenty or twenty-two million pounds. Christie's, the auctioneers, who sold it, were rubbing their hands together with glee. But you could say that, in a sense, the artist was a spiritual parasite. He just expects society to support him for the sake of his work. Well, his work, once produced, can have a very great economic value. Think of the value of the paintings left by Picasso: I think they were valued at 100 million pounds

So it isn't really quite so straightforward, this question of the spiritual parasite. You can be a spiritual parasite in a sense, but in another sense be at the same time producing wealth - though the wealth, or what you succeed in producing, may not come to have economic value until long after you are dead. So, even as a spiritual parasite, your contribution can, at least in the long run, be of immense *material* value to society; though again one could argue that the painting doesn't have material value in the same way that food or even shoes do, as it satisfies a different kind of need. But nonetheless, it is a need which people are prepared to pay money for in order to satisfy.

Anyway, that is getting a little far away from the question, which is 'How realistic is it to think of being a glorious spiritual parasite in modern Western society?' I think to be a spiritual parasite in the traditional sense, in the sense in which *sadhus* and *sannyasins* are in India, is very difficult in the West. But you can be a spiritual parasite in the sense of being supported by your particular religious group, or any kind of institution. You could say that the Christian clergy are spiritual parasites, because they don't produce anything of *material* value. If they render a service at all, it is a service which doesn't produce any direct material benefits, though it may do so indirectly.

Though, again, perhaps, if you are supported by some body in return for services rendered, you are not strictly speaking a parasite. Perhaps a parasite is someone who doesn't perform any sort of service at all of any kind for the society; but then someone who was spiritual and who was glorious *would* perform some kind of service, even though it wasn't translatable, necessarily, into economic terms, into terms of wealth.

But I wonder what was at the back of the questioner's mind when he asked the question?

Dharmadhara: I think it was to some extent rather tongue in cheek - playing devil's advocate. I don't think there is much more to be said, really. But I would be quite happy to hear anything more

if you wanted to say more. [7]

S: Even Buddhist monks of the traditional sort aren't, strictly speaking, parasites, because they are expected to render a service in return for being supported, even though it may not be a material service; though sometimes the service is thought of as bringing material benefits, as when bhikkhus, for instance, and so on recite *pirit* for the benefit of the laity. That is believed to do such things as drive away sickness, make the crops more fruitful and so on and so forth. The same with the similar ministrations of lamas in Tibet; their services were regarded as being of the greatest material value. They brought rain, and so on.

But I think perhaps a deeper question which underlies questions of this sort is the whole question of wages and payment and exchange. I think the Buddhist ideal, the spiritual ideal, is to give what you can on whatsoever level, not thinking in terms of *quid pro quo*, in terms of payment of whatsoever kind, of taking so to speak what you need from society or allowing society to give you what you need, but giving whatever you can, whether material or cultural or spiritual. So it isn't a Buddhist ideal in the strict sense, literally, to be a spiritual parasite, if by that one means someone who only takes and never gives. But there is certainly no taking and giving in terms of a sort of agreement of barter - that 'if you give me so much material support, then I'll give you so much of spiritual guidance,' as it were; it's not like that. So, that in a way, there can't be a spiritual parasite in Buddhism in the sense of someone who only takes and never gives, but there can be a spiritual parasite in the sense of someone who takes from society what he needs for his material support, without necessarily giving anything of a material nature in return, but who nonetheless is giving what he can in other ways - obviously doing that quite genuinely, and it can't be a rationalisation simply for allowing oneself to be supported.

Mangala: I suppose the word parasite is not really very appropriate, because that tends to suggest something which takes but doesn't give?

S: Yes, a sort of little bloodsucker.

Mangala: Yes; whereas like a spiritual parasite presumably would be a contradiction in terms; if the person is truly spiritual, then they *would* give something back, even if it wasn't material, or -

S: But they would give it *back*, so to speak, by way of exchange. They would just give, even if they weren't supported. I mean the truly spiritual person might work to support himself and at the same time give as much as he can in all sorts of [8] ways. The Theravada view tends to be that you can't *really* be a spiritual person, you can't *really* devote yourself to the spiritual life fully, unless you are freed from economic cares. That might work out in the case of some people, but it doesn't work out in the case of quite a lot, because quite a lot of people will gladly accept the economic support but not think in terms of doing anything for the society which is supporting them, except to the extent that is necessary to ensure the continuance of the support.

Dharmadhara: I suppose, rephrasing my question closer to what I wanted to get at, it would be something like 'How does one become a glorious spiritual parasite?' rather than 'How realistic is it?' - if you were wanting to know what was at the bottom of my question.

S: 'How does one *become* a glorious spiritual parasite?' - not taking 'parasite' in the literal sense?

Dharmadhara: No - although even parasites have their uses, I suppose.

S: I suppose you have to convince people, or persuade people, or inspire people, to think that you

are worth supporting. But usually they will support you if they feel that they are getting some service from you, not simply so that you can be a glorious parasite, spiritual or otherwise, without rendering them any sort of service at all.

Dharmadhara: Again, I suppose I was wondering more how to become a *glorious* spiritual parasite, rather than a glorious spiritual parasite.

S: Well, I suppose 'glorious' simply intensifies the idea of spirituality. You are a glorious spiritual parasite when you are a spiritual parasite to an extraordinary degree.

Nagabodhi: When you've changed the world, so that you are no longer considered to be a parasite!

S: Anyway, pass on from parasites.

Nagabodhi: Can I just ask a supplementary there, Bhante? I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to ask it, but I'll start and see if I get anywhere. I have been [9] sometimes worried by a tendency which has developed, perhaps, around, well, one centre I can think of particularly, but perhaps it could happen elsewhere, where we have people closely involved with the Movement, Order Members and Mitras, who have learned certain therapeutic techniques, who will give to other members of the spiritual community on a barter basis, while Order Members continue giving spiritual teachings and nourishment but on an entirely different basis - on simply the fact of giving, and in a way being expected to give. It's a tendency which somehow worries me. There seem to be two ways of dealing with it: one which would be to try to get the people who have techniques to offer to give on a much freer basis without thinking in terms of bartering, or other options that I've heard being toyed with are to start almost offering Order Members' services on a sort of consultative basis, for reward - almost like money for a session's chat. At the end of that, I'm not quite sure what my question is, except perhaps: What is your attitude to this sort of development? How can we -

S: I think many of the people - and these are mainly, I think, non-Order Members - who do learn or acquire one of these various therapeutic techniques do so quite definitely as a means of livelihood, as a means of supporting themselves, for various reasons. One, they want a means of supporting themselves which is more or less in accordance with the Dharma, and many of them feel, rightly or wrongly, that these therapeutic techniques are helpful to people, do help alleviate suffering and that therefore to place them at people's disposal - to place one's services at people's disposal in this way is Right Livelihood. So some look at it like that.

Also, they like the idea of being self-employed, because then they can work their own hours, they can work part-time if they want to, and that leaves them with quite a bit of freedom - freedom to meditate and study and see their friends, and so on. So this, I think, is the attitude of quite a lot of people; and, of course, having acquired these techniques, they think of themselves as professional or semi-professional people, and therefore they charge fees. I think they all charge quite modest fees, but they charge what they think will bring them in enough to live on.

But supposing that one of them is, say, giving acupuncture and another doing massage, they might agree between themselves that 'If you give me a session of acupuncture I'll give you a session of massage.' I don't think that alters the basic situation. But I wouldn't be very happy to see Order Members operating on the same basis, with regard to personal chats and leading classes and retreats. I think it would be much better, as I think *is* in fact the present custom, that such Order Members should be supported as it were collectively by the centre to which they are attached. [10]

Nagabodhi: You don't think it would be better also for people who have these various skills to simply make them available to the centre and for money to be paid, whether it's for a retreat or for a massage session, to the centre and for them to receive payment in the same way that - ?

S: I think that might be possible; but it might be difficult, because sometimes they might need extra money for a holiday - well, normally they'd just work full time for a few weeks instead of part time, until they got the necessary money; so how would they sort that out with the centre that was supporting them? It wouldn't be so easy, would it?

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps if they were actually encouraged to support their centre materially, that would partly solve the problem.

S: Of course, if you've got the centre and the centre is supporting a number of people of this sort, if they've got varying claims which don't necessarily represent needs, then there is quite a big difficulty apportioning resources. Say, for instance, someone who normally does acupuncture might feel 'I want to go off to Greece for three months' and might apply to the centre that was supporting him or her, and the centre might say, 'No, we don't feel we're justified in giving you such a large sum of money just to go off and have a holiday.' But, under the other arrangement, the acupuncturist would just buckle to for a few months and work harder, treat more patients, and in that way get the money together. Of course, you could say that that was a somewhat individualistic approach - just keeping yourself a bit separate from the spiritual community and doing things in your own way.

That raises, of course, much bigger and wider issues, because, looking at things from the other end, as it were, very often people who are supported by a centre or a co-op don't get enough support for what they want to do and what perhaps they really *need* to do. So sometimes it seems as though private enterprise works more satisfactorily - even though in principle one doesn't feel quite so happy about it. So it isn't easy to adjust the rival claims of the different systems. Probably responsible private enterprise could function quite well. For instance, when someone who was, say, a self-employed acupuncturist would not simply work harder for the sake of his or her own holiday but when he or she saw that the centre needed more money - say, 'Right! I'll just set to and take on a few extra patients and give the extra money I earn to the centre.' If there was that sort of spirit, private enterprise in this sort of way would be more acceptable. But you could get a situation where someone, say, was working as an acupuncturist, making quite a bit [11] of money, going along to the centre and deriving quite a lot of psychological and perhaps spiritual support from the centre, but not really *doing* anything for the centre, and spending whatever money he or she earned by doing acupuncture entirely on himself or herself.

So, basically, it comes back to the individual's own sense of responsibility and awareness of the needs of other people.

Dharmadhara: I suppose that example that Nagabodhi quoted makes me uneasy in that it can appear that a psychological or physical therapy is being equated, to some extent, with - I won't say spiritual *services*, but other qualities, on another level, in terms of a barter system. It can bring down those other qualities to something which would enable -

S: That's all right if, as I said, acupuncture is bartered for massage, but you can't really barter acupuncture, say, for spiritual counsel.

Dharmadhara: Then it brings their spiritual counsel down to the psychological level, presumably.

S: At least in the eyes of a lot of people, rather than raising the acupuncture or whatever it is to the level of spiritual counsel.

Dharmadhara: I think that would be the danger if the two were linked like that.

Nagabodhi: Yes, I see what you mean. I think I sometimes am concerned that someone feels, 'Well, I've got to pay £10 for half an hour of acupuncture, but I can go round the pub with an Order Member for nothing' - so they rather assume that the acupuncture must be more valuable!

S: That's true; there is that, too.

Nagabodhi: They take it more seriously, and even the advice of - it might be a psychological therapist, or psychosynthesis therapist - they'll value their advice because they've paid for it.

S: Some people will, but I think there are a lot of people in the Movement, including Mitras, who don't make that sort of mistake. Certainly those who have [12] closer and deeper contact with Order Members - say, on retreats like the pre-ordination selection retreat - they won't make that sort of mistake.

Mangala: Then maybe part of the confusion is: what are Order Members supposed to be supplying anyway? Are Order Members in any case, as it were, qualified to give spiritual advice, so-called spiritual advice? I mean, I'm not sure they actually are - whatever that means, anyway: spiritual advice.

S: Well, I use 'spiritual advice' just as a sort of rough and ready way of indicating whatever it is that people do feel that they get from Order Members. It may be just inspiration, or some sort of lift.

Mangala: I mean, without going to the extreme that Nagabodhi's mentioning, there might be something to be said, somehow or somewhere, for perhaps a more, let us say, professional attitude or way of working adopted by Order Members.

S: Well, it depends what one means by professional. If one means more skilled, more conscientious, that is one thing; but if one means more professional in the sense of charging higher fees, that is another thing.

Mangala: That isn't what I meant: I didn't mean - well, yes, as you say, more conscientious, more sort of skilled, and in a way they'd be taking it a bit more seriously.

S: Well, that is quite a different issue, because they should be that, or try to be that, regardless of any economic consequences. But I think some people are quite happy to help support Order Members in whatsoever way when they actually see what they are doing. And people within the Movement are much more generous than they used to be in this way. They are generous now not only to me but to leaders of retreats; leaders of retreats get all sorts of presents now which *I* didn't get in the old days!

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps it would be a question of actually encouraging all people who are working for money to support their centre financially, rather than the centre thinking in terms of just getting enough money through its co-ops and things; actually encouraging all the people who are involved with the centre, who are working full time or working in jobs. [13]

S: I think this does happen already, but I think one has to be careful that one doesn't start slipping into the traditional pattern of there being two groups of people, one of worldly sort of people who don't lead much of a spiritual life but support those who are leading a spiritual life, and people who are ostensibly leading a spiritual life and are supported by the others. That's the sort of bhikkhulaity binary.

Nonetheless, there is no reason why those who are working outside in the world and are able to do so should [not] contribute financially to the centres. But they should at the same time be encouraged to participate fully spiritually, too, not to regard their financial contribution as the equivalent of spiritual practice in general. You give *too* - as well as getting on with your meditation and going on retreats and so on. It's not a substitute for those things, as it often is in the East. It doesn't excuse you or exempt you from those other activities.

Mangala: Presumably, Bhante, someone - maybe an Order Member living on his own somewhere, in some remote place - presumably he could have meditation classes or courses and charge for those as a way of supporting himself; so in a way he would be functioning maybe pretty much like an acupuncturist might charge patients in order to support himself?

S: I think he might sometimes - I'm not quite sure he can justifiably be doing that - but only if he was willing to give without consideration of how much he was actually receiving. Do you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi: You were in that position, Bhante, weren't you? When you first came to England, there were people who simply looked after your support, but that was all they were doing; they never thought that they were paying you per class or per lecture - they were simply looking after your support.

S: That's true. There was, for instance, Mr. Newlyn, who gave me so much per month out of a trust that he had established. And he certainly didn't think in terms of what he was getting out of it personally; he just believed that I should, on principle, be supported, and he was in a position to do that, so he did it. I very rarely saw him; he never came to classes. He lived down in Crawley. I don't think he ever attended a single class or a single lecture. He was a bit of a recluse, he didn't like mixing with people, but he firmly believed in what I was doing - or at least, he did at that time. Later on, his interest veered a bit to the Ramakrishna Mission. But he strongly supported me, and he supported me financially [14] for several years. And there were two or three other Order Members - well, two principally - who used to give me something from time to time on a fairly regular basis. One was Mike Ricketts, who was Shantibhadra, I think it was; and the other was Sudatta. They didn't give as it were very much, but they gave it quite regularly, whatever they could.

Mangala: Bhante, do you think it would be wrong for someone, say, to use their knowledge of Buddhism and, say, meditation as a way to support themselves, as a way to earn a living? Like, imagine this single Order Member -

S: It depends what you mean by *earning a living*. Like you might write books, and you might live on your royalties. Those books might be on the Dharma. But then, supposing, say, someone was to come to you and say: 'Oh, please teach me the Dharma.' Then you would say, 'How much are you prepared to give me?' - that would be wrong, wouldn't it?

Mangala: Yes.

S: But if you were to say, 'Look, I'm very willing to teach you the Dharma, but there is a practical problem. If I'm to teach you the Dharma I don't have time to work and support myself; could you help?' But not think in terms of 'If you can't pay me, then I'm not going to teach you, even though I've got the time to do so.'

Mangala: I suppose what I mean is, it's like for an individual to set himself up in the same kind of as it were professional way that, say, a homeopath or an acupuncturist might, saying: 'I teach meditation and give talks on Buddhism: £5 an hour or whatever it is, and everybody's welcome'! Do you see what I mean? Would you say that would be - ?

S: Well, a lot would depend on how you did it, the spirit of that - one couldn't generalise. It might be justifiable under some circumstances. One would have to watch oneself and the spirit in which one was doing it.

Nagabodhi: I think for me a distinction is between what happens in the orbit of a centre and elsewhere. I know there are Order Members who are giving classes at adult education institutes, or stress management now is a new thing; Order Members going out from their centres into the world in this way and receiving a reward on the world's terms, to me seems fine. But I think I've had the ideal that around our [15] centres we try to create a microcosm of the New Society, which has an economy which is not based on barter, and therefore one has an ideal of a collectivist economic structure. That to me is the distinction.

S: That's true. But even when one goes outside in the world and allows oneself to be paid for one's services, even for teaching Buddhism, say, in evening classes, one's attitude cannot be the same as that, say, of someone selling apples. [*murmurs of assent*] Even though the formal economic structure is the same, it cannot *really* be the same. Your attitude would be really quite different. Because you are always ready to go beyond what you're being paid for; if someone comes up to you after the class for which you are being paid and wants to have a chat or to go into matters further, you don't say, 'Oh no, I can't, because I'm not being paid for this.' You will willingly give extra time and energy to that person.

Nagabodhi: And presumably people in those positions usually come from a centre, and, quite apart from the money they earn, they hope - and probably the signs of success they would report in at an Order weekend would be that 'Now three people are coming to classes at the centre' -

S: Right, yes.

Nagabodhi: - they would actually see that as the gauge of their real success: i.e. people joining the New Society.

S: Yes. But it isn't easy, really, when one has one foot in the old society and one in the new, and you are operating in a different way in the two different situations. One has to think very clearly, have a clear understanding of what one is doing. For instance, you might have a case of someone who was being supported by the centre but who nonetheless was taking quite a few evening classes, earning quite a lot of money, which he just kept to himself. That wouldn't be at all desirable.

Anyway, let's pass on.

Chairman: The sixth and last question is from Dharmadhara on electronic distractions.

In a newsletter interview in 1979 about Vajraloka, you said that televisions would not be permitted there. You added that they were [16] not normally found in our communities anyway. Since then, televisions have increasingly appeared in our major men's communities in the UK. I heard one Mitra suggest that it was almost as detrimental as having a community member in an external sexual relationship.

What do you think of this current trend and do you feel any concern about it? Does it represent too much of an attachment to worldly ties or do you think that most Order Members can handle it and strike a worthwhile mean?

S: I don't really know. I don't know how many television sets have appeared in our major men's communities. I'm not even sure which the major men's communities are. Presumably Sukhavati, Padmaloka, Aryatara - I don't think they've got a television set at Aryatara. I know they've got one at Sukhavati.

Prasannasiddhi: I think I've seen three at Sukhavati, actually.

S: Oh!

Nagabodhi: We heard a rumour that there are five there. Somebody yesterday said this.

S: Oh! I take it they don't have one down the other end, here?

_____: No.

S: I don't think any of the *women's* communities have them, at least I haven't heard. I am pretty certain Taraloka doesn't have one. I am pretty certain Khadiravani doesn't have one. Women, by the way - this is only an impression - don't seem to be as addicted to TV as men. Perhaps that's just an impression.

Prasannasiddhi: In the Movement?

S: Yes, in the Movement. But, yes, it does seem that there are more of them than there used to be, and one wonders why that should be. In the case of Padmaloka, I got it for the sake of watching video tapes rather than TV programmes - of which I believe I've watched so far two since we acquired the TV set! I think, especially from the point of view of watching video tapes of dharmic interest, that TV is very useful and valuable, but obviously one has to look at the extent to which that is counterbalanced by the TV programmes as such acting simply as distractions, or as [17] detracting from community life inasmuch as people just 'watch the box' instead of communicating with one another, or simply use it as a means of escaping from themselves. Especially, of course, when they are not at all selective in their viewing.

Recently I have been thinking about this, and I couldn't help feeling that watching TV was a bit like taking alcohol. If you were able just to take the occasional glass of wine with a meal, there is probably nothing wrong with that for anybody. But, obviously, if you become an alcoholic, that is a different matter. So it seems much the same with TV. If you can just watch an interesting and useful programme - useful, that is, from a dharmic or at least a cultural point of view - fair enough; but if you are in danger of becoming a sort of TV addict and neglecting more important things just for the sake of watching TV in a mindless kind of way, that is a bit more like the alcoholism. And sometimes, in the case of alcohol, one has to discourage even - what shall I say? I won't say skilful

drinking, but not-unskilful drinking, let us say, on the part of certain people, just so as not to seem to encourage the very, very unskilful drinking on the part of certain *other* people. So if the majority of people in a community are unable to use TV skilfully, even those who are able to use it skilfully might have to give it up in the interests of the majority.

But do you think on the whole in the different communities people use TV rather than allowing TV to use them? I've no information other than what I happen to have observed at Padmaloka.

Nagabodhi: I heard the rumour about the five televisions at Sukhavati, but I've no idea how they are being used; because sometimes it's fed to you as a statistic of terrible horror, but it may be that they are hardly being used. I don't know.

S: I did see, on a recent visit, on the notice board at Sukhavati an announcement to the effect that 'Shantavira is watching TV at such-and-such time in his room; other community members welcome.'

Nagabodhi: To my mind, what gives the game away in that case is not that 'Shantavira is watching such-and-such a programme'.

S: Yes, right. 'Is watching TV.'

Nagabodhi: That in itself is the entertainment. [18]

S: Right, as though it doesn't matter. The medium is the message. But it does seem a bit odd, if people in the Sukhavati community, with so much to be done, presumably, in the community and round about in the Mandala, spend very much time watching TV. Maybe that's one of the things they ought to obtain facts about. Perhaps when I go down I'll talk to somebody about that. One also needs to ascertain the facts first before coming to any conclusion.

There is also the point that so many people seem able to afford it.

Nagabodhi: It's not expensive. You can buy a secondhand colour television for nothing these days. It's not an expensive -

S: No, I don't know about - But there is the licence.

Nagabodhi: Ahem. *[Laughter]*

S: Well, I hope they pay their licences, because then that would be -

Nagabodhi: Illegal.

S: Illegal; that would be defrauding the Inland Revenue or whoever it is collects it. So that would be breaking the Second Precept.

Nagabodhi: Well, quite literally, it's the BBC that collects it, and you are actually paying, through the licence, for the output of the BBC, so you are paying for what you take by paying for your licence.

S: Mm. So perhaps I do have to look into this. Not only with regard to Sukhavati but elsewhere.

What about this - 'I heard one Mitra suggest that it was almost as detrimental as having a community member in an external sexual relationship'? What do you think he meant, or was getting at by this? - that it took that community member *really*, in effect, away from the community, even though he was presumably present on the premises?

Mangala: Presumably.

Dharmadhara: It had an effect on - [19]

S: At least, while he was watching TV, he wasn't communicating with fellow community members; just as much as if he was actually out spending time with his girl friend or whoever.

Mangala: I am not sure if that always has to be the case. Sometimes I know I've watched television here for example.

S: No, we know it *need* not be the case, but we are wondering whether it *is* the case, because this is the remark made by this Mitra. Even supposing, for the sake of argument, you are an Order Member and you are watching some perfectly worthwhile programme; well, supposing you are watching it to the neglect of your Mitras - do you see? You might like to watch grand opera every evening on TV; that isn't in itself unskilful, grand opera can be uplifting, inspiring; but supposing it means that you are neglecting to keep up communication with the Mitras who are around. It then *does* become unskilful.

Nagabodhi: I would have thought from the Mitra's comment that it was, in a way, more serious than that: that he felt the Order Member was in a dependent relationship with television - *which can happen*. I know myself of friends and relatives who will consistently watch four or five hours a night; I think that is quite a normal thing for the British public, to watch several hours a night.

S: What do you think makes people dependent, in the strict sense?

Nagabodhi: Because the whole business of making television programmes is to make people addicted to the programmes: to make them exciting, to make them lively, to give them a feeling of knowing the characters that they consist of, they feel there are soap operas that they *have* to keep in touch with to the extent of getting a friend to record them when they go away on holiday. In a lot of quite complex ways, people -

S: Yes, but that is only to say *that* they become addicted. But then *why* do they become addicted? What is addiction?

Nagabodhi: Well, as you hinted earlier, the reluctance to face themselves.

S: I think there is probably a difference in the case of people outside the FWBO and people inside, because, all right, you could say the lives of many people outside [20] the FWBO are empty and not very interesting, and they themselves don't have any definite cultural interests, or perhaps any great mental ability, and watching TV just fills in the evening, and you don't have to bother to go out in the cold and the wet; you don't even feel like going to the pub, you just feel like putting your feet up and watching TV, it just passes the time until you go to bed. So one can understand that to some extent in the case of the ordinary person, the ordinary working person outside the FWBO. But what about the person *inside* the FWBO? What about the person living in a spiritual community? Why does *such* a person become, as may happen, actually addicted so that they watch TV regularly? - if that does in fact happen.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe, Bhante, it's a bit like one of the hindrances, in a sense: if you're in a sort of restless state, television can actually prolong that state, or you can sort of hook yourself on to the television and it just prolongs that state for several hours until you realise you have to give it up because you've got work to do in the morning, or something, and you ought to go to bed - something like that. If you're in a state of, say, like one of the hindrances, then you can latch on to television.

S: As regards men's communities as a whole, you probably need to gather further information. We don't really know enough to be able to come to any conclusion.

Mangala: Presumably, if someone in a community becomes addicted to television - which I find a bit difficult to imagine - presumably they are effectively just like somebody *in* the outside world; there's no kind of spiritual sustenance or nutriment within their community, so that's really all there is; they turn to that for some kind of sustenance.

S: Formerly, there used to be a complaint at Sukhavati - to take the example of Sukhavati - that people went out quite a lot in the evenings to films and so on. That doesn't seem to be happening so much. I think in the last year or two there have been more things happening within the community that people could take part in. But maybe another, perhaps minor, trend has come into existence, and in a way some people are sort of backtracking: instead of just going out to a film, they are staying at home, admittedly, but they are watching TV at least sometimes. [21]

Mangala: Sometimes I think watching TV with somebody, in a way - it's not that you are cut off from them and just become alienated into your own little world. Can't you be sharing something with somebody?

S: Well, it depends. It depends how mindfully you go about it and who you're watching it with. But it can be an interesting cultural programme, or, say, a programme about wildlife or a programme about the evolution of the universe, and you can discuss it with the other person afterwards; it can be a good discussion point. That's why I mean, like film itself, the TV rightly used is a very valuable instrument, but it's a question of you using TV, whereas addiction means that TV is using you. So this is what we really need to try to find out - whether people are making a skilful use of TV or whether they are just becoming mindlessly addicted to it. I am quite sure in theory it's possible to make a skilful use of it, and that it can be quite valuable, like film itself. It is even the same with reading - you don't necessarily read the classics, you can just read thrillers and detective fiction and pulp fiction and all that sort of thing.

Mangala: Listening to music?

S: Yes; even listening to classical music can become a bit of a habit, even an escape. It can become like Tennyson's - er - I mentioned him in my *Religion of Art*.

Mangala: *The Palace of Art*?

S: The occupant of the Palace of Art, yes.

'The glorious devil, large in heart and brain
That did love beauty only'

- but loved in a quite self-indulgent sort of way.

Prasannasiddhi: I think television is a very insidious medium; like a book, you do actually have to make some effort to read a book, whereas with television it's very stimulating visually and in terms of sound, and it requires very little effort to engage with. Certainly, in my experience, it's a stronger -

S: In the case of going to see a film, you at least have to make the journey to the cinema, perhaps sometimes braving the elements, even. But, in the case of TV, you just have to collapse into an armchair and switch it on. Sometimes, I believe, [22] you've even got armchair switches so that you don't have to cross the room to control the programme.

Nagabodhi: With remote control things you can just do it from bed. My parents have got two of those.

S: Have you ever discussed his TV with Shantavira?

Nagabodhi: Oh, yes. I talked to him just the other day, actually. He says he's watching much less. He's sort of - he talked about it almost as if it were something he'd given up. He did seem to have acquired quite a habit, almost.

S: Do you think it's the new toy syndrome in the case of some people - that they watch it a lot when they first get it, but then after a while they lose interest to a great extent and then just watch it sometimes?

Nagabodhi: For some people, perhaps. In his case I think it was a bit different. But I think he's realised that he was - I don't think he was watching a tremendous amount, but when he watched it it did seem it was a bit mindless. He told me he was not watching so much. He even suggested he was hardly watching at all, which I think in his case was probably quite a good - well, I'm sure it was a good thing.

Other people, I don't know how they are using it. I personally find it a bit difficult, because sometimes - well, recently there seem to be a lot, quite often, of what I would consider to be quite useful, valuable programmes to watch. For instance, there have been some very good films on recently, and a couple of very good plays.

S: Well, then again, what does one mean by 'good', especially from a Buddhist point of view? I mean, a film just recently has got an Oscar - what is it called, *Platoon*? It's about the Vietnam war, and apparently it's full of violence. So is that good from a Buddhist point of view, even though it is, say, telling the truth? Is it good to expose people to the sight of so much violence?

Dharmadhara: And you don't know in advance until you see it what it contains, really. [23]

Nagabodhi: You can usually -

S: Well, I think the last time or the time before last that I went to the cinema, I was astonished by the trailers, which we saw before the film, because they seemed to cram into those trailers, which lasted only about half a minute each, as much violence as they possibly could from the forthcoming film: all the most violent bits, as though that was what was meant to attract you. There were about three of these trailers, and it was all really quite unpleasant. Very, very, *very* blatant. And clearly intended to *appeal* to your instincts of violence, to cause you to think: 'Look what a feast of violence is coming up! Be sure to be here next week and the week after!' - as though that

would be the thing that attracted people most, so that was what you had to highlight.

Dharmadhara: I find it hard to imagine, say, Order Members being attracted to that violence; but at the same time they could be attracted to a film which contained some violence and there is no way of avoiding it.

S: I think even Order Members go to films knowing that they contain a lot of violence. Usually one does know from the reviews what they are like, generally speaking.

Dharmadhara: It's difficult to find a film without violence.

S: Yes. This I realise. But it depends how strongly one feels about exposing oneself to material of that sort. There are non-violent films - at least, there are cartoon films which are innocent and sometimes of good artistic standard.

Nagabodhi: I'd say there are a considerable number of films without a violent element, even in popular cinema.

S: And also without a too overtly sexual element; if it isn't the one, it's usually the other, often both. I saw a review recently, or several reviews, of a film which, it seemed, at least from the reviews, even *I* might think of going to see, and that was *84 Charing Cross Road*, which is the story of a bookshop and a customer of the bookshop in New York. *[Laughter]* So I thought maybe that would be right up my street. But I can't be sure, because knowing what producers and directors are like these days, I wouldn't be surprised if somehow or other into that innocent book they'd somehow managed to smuggle some [24] scenes of violence or at least of overt sex! I wouldn't be surprised. I just can't trust them any more!

Nagabodhi: I heard on the radio yesterday a mention of *Platoon*, the Oscar-winning film, and I read a review of it in the *Illustrated London News* today, and I felt from both - the fact that it's won an Oscar interests me, as someone with an interest in film as a medium, in seeing it; but the two things that I've heard, the things I've read, have alerted me to the fact that it's got a lot of violence in it. Neither of them, however, was substantial enough to give me an idea of the *value* of seeing the film, despite the violence. And I personally would wait until I'd read a richer or a fuller review, to see whether, frankly, the *pain* of witnessing the violence was in any way going to be justified by the insights or not.

S: According to an interview with the director, or according to the director himself in an interview, he made the film because he wanted to make sure that nothing like that ever happened again. Well, so far as *you're* concerned, you just don't want anything like that to happen again and you would be unlikely to contribute to it; therefore you don't need the message. You've got the message already. Why go and see the films? You know it.

Nagabodhi: Yes.

S: Probably the message doesn't even need any reinforcing.

Nagabodhi: I think if I felt that that was all the film had to offer I wouldn't go -

S: Whereas it might be useful to some American audiences of people who still believed that the Vietnam war was a good thing; well, it might be a good thing that they should see that film and realise that it wasn't, it was something that shouldn't be repeated.

Nagabodhi: I saw *The Deer Hunter* about five years ago, which had one particular scene which was, I think, the most painful scene I've ever witnessed in a film. I thought I was going to faint - it wasn't that it was so bad, it was so well filmed that you just couldn't dissociate from it. But at the same time I felt it -

S: There were one or two scenes like that in *Catch 22*, I remember. [25]

Nagabodhi: Ah, yes. But at the same time, I felt it was actually a very responsible film. I felt that the people making it, the man who made it, had a very responsible point to make - primarily to the American public - not just that we shouldn't have a war again, but that there were people among them who needed a particular kind of sensitivity and understanding. For the American public, at least, it was quite a responsible and worthwhile film. For myself, though, I wondered whether I had really needed to have that lesson. So, yes, it does really have this -

S: A bit like going to see public hangings in order to confirm one's opposition to the death penalty.

Prasannasiddhi: I think I'd be quite interested in going to see the film *Platoon*, just on the basis of - well, I would be interested to see what sort of things did happen during the Vietnam war. I don't know very much about it.

S: Well, you could find out less painfully from a book.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, a film would - it would be very easy to go and it would probably have quite a strong impact, and I believe the director was present during the war, so he's actually tried to create what the experience was like.

S: One knows, in any case, that it was sufficiently bad not to be repeated. One doesn't really need to see at first hand, so to speak, exactly how bad it was. One knows that so many people were killed, and all that sort of thing, and that it was a quite unnecessary and useless war, it served no purpose. So does one really need to go and see the film to confirm that which one surely knows already anyway?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I still think I might go and see it. But that's my own personal view.

Nagabodhi: I have found that I have personally got more and more sensitive to cinema violence. There are some kinds I can watch, like even, say, science fiction films, which are almost like *Tom and Jerry* cartoons - I can take that because I don't - it's just working within a particular convention. But there was a very highly rated film two years ago called *The Killing Fields*, about Cambodia, which I haven't seen because I know I will find it too upsetting, whereas perhaps five or six years ago I would have quite happily gone along because I had heard it was a [26] very good film, even with ... But I would have thought anybody who is meditating and trying to develop sensitivity to people - you'd have to start being very fussy, because these films can be *so* upsetting for such a long time.

S: Even theatre, sometimes. I think it was actually the stage production - yes, I think it was *King Lear* - or was it a film of *King Lear*? But anyway, there is this scene of the gouging out of somebody's eyes, and it was done so realistically - which Shakespeare surely never intended; I mean it would have been mimed, I think, in his day - that one felt that there was a quite wanton exploitation of that element of violence and savagery in the play.

Mangala: But violence does seem to have an incredible attraction. It does, it sells books, it sells films, it's very attractive.

S: Right. People go to boxing matches, and all that. Even football, they seem to enjoy a bit of violence.

Mangala: Do you think there is something perverse about that, or -

S: Well, that's part of a very big question: whether man is naturally violent and aggressive, or whether he is only violent and aggressive when other instincts are frustrated. This discussion has been going on a long time, hasn't it? - whether he is descended from a killer ape or from a peaceful ape. Robert Ardrey believed he was descended from a killer ape, and that was why he was so violent and aggressive. Not everybody agrees with that, so it is very difficult to decide whether man is innately violent or whether he becomes violent only under certain circumstances.

Mangala: Maybe also it's that, within most people's lives, there's nothing that comes anywhere close to the intensity, perhaps, of violence. It's a very intense experience.

S: Yes. Violence does represent an intense experience of some kind. Even sex, perhaps can't equal it, for a lot of people. But it does seem strange that the most intense experience for a lot of people should be one that is essentially negative and destructive, rather than positive. Well, perhaps it *is* because we are still so close to the animals - not, even, that the animals necessarily behave in the violent sort of way that man does. They only behave violently when they feel threatened or when they are hungry; otherwise not, or very rarely. [27]

Prasannasiddhi: But animals have to engage in violence every time they want to eat - a lot of them - so you could perhaps say there was that instinct of violence; but modern man -

S: Well, we have our food killed for us.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, so we've still got the instinct, but we haven't expressed it.

S: Yes. So perhaps we are killer apes, then. And ex-killer apes like to go and watch scenes of violence. Maybe it's the killer ape in you that wants to go and see that film. I hadn't thought of you as a killer ape before. Appearances are deceiving.

Prasannasiddhi (*gently*): I've got it in me, I can assure you.

S: I must say I dislike violence in films very much; I don't like seeing it at all. I wouldn't go and see a film that contained violence. That's why I hardly ever go and see a film now, because it is almost certain to contain something of that sort, or something which is sexually unpleasant, and often the two together. See a nice, innocent, lighthearted, colourful, well-produced little film. They do exist - a few of them. [28] I think the last one I saw was based on a book by - what's her name? - Jhabvala? - I forget what exactly the film was called, but it was Someone-and-Someone's paintings, these paintings or pictures were Indian miniatures belonging to an Indian maharajah and his sister, and the plot revolved round the efforts of different dealers who came to India and were staying in the palace guest house to get their hands on these things. It was a very good film, with Angela Lansbury in one of the leading roles. I think it's Angela Lansbury: the elderly actress, the very good actress who plays elderly lady parts.

[Several inaudible suggestions made as to title]

S: No, the maharajah and his sister had nicknames, and these two nicknames were in the title and it was them and their Pictures, or paintings. So that was an innocent, enjoyable film, with lovely shots of India. That sort of thing I am quite happy to see. There wasn't a trace of violence at all, and it was a very funny film, very comic scenes, and some very good acting, especially by Angela Lansbury. One doesn't see many such films.

Anyway, that's come a long way from the desirability or otherwise of watching TV, but perhaps we can't really come to any conclusion, so far as the Movement is concerned, for lack of hard facts and firm evidence.

Nagabodhi: This could seem like a sidetrack, *and* perhaps even a rationalisation, but I have sometimes felt that [for] people who come along to centres, people for whom we write magazines, people out in the world who *are* watching a tremendous amount of television by and large - the public beyond the movement - to some extent not to be in touch with that element of our culture does, I don't mean place us at a disadvantage, but it does mean to some extent that we can be out of touch with our own culture, because television is such an important part of it. I am not quite sure what the answer to that is -

S: Well, I suppose the most strong-minded member of each community should be assigned to watch TV every evening and make notes and then report to the other, weaker-minded members of the community! No, on second thoughts, not, because I don't really want to watch TV every evening! [*Loud laughter*]. That would really be dreadful. I don't think I could do that, even out of a stern sense of duty. Oh no - [29] not those soap operas, those interminable soap operas! Because that's what the public watches; they don't watch *The Magic Flute*, or something of that sort. What is it - *Dallas*? I'm completely out of touch.

But does one really have to be in touch with these things? Does one have to slip in the odd reference while you're explaining about meditation, to show that you too watch *Dallas*? Is it really necessary, to establish contact? 'I, too, am human,' you know? 'I'm just an ordinary bloke, just like you'; do you really need to give that sort of impression?

Mangala: Maybe in a way you might actually have *more* impact appearing almost like somebody completely out of touch, in fact .

S: Right, out of this world, yes.

Mangala: Not actually making a point of it but, yes, you just don't really know what's going on at all, in a sense. But for that very reason you're all the more attractive, you make all the more impact.

S: Like these old magistrates they used to quote in the old days, when some witness refers to Rita Hayworth and the magistrate asks 'Who is Rita Hayworth?'

Nagabodhi: Can I follow that with a story which in a way illustrates perhaps the point I'm making - there was the magistrate, or the High Court judge who, during the course of the Lady Chatterley trial, said 'Would you allow your servants to read this?', thereby proving that he was completely out of touch with the world. I accept Mangala's point, but I think there's another side to the coin, where sometimes we might seem a bit out of touch. I don't think I am trying to advocate that we *should* watch television, but it does seem like such an important element in our culture that to be ignorant of it can completely -

S: I suppose it depends who you're addressing. Does one have to take an interest in football and cricket and the Boat Race and boxing and the local elections - where does it stop? Wouldn't it be better to show how in contact you were with the Dharma?

Nagabodhi [*laughing*]: Ah, but if you can't have both! [*Laughter*].

S: Maybe, very *occasionally*, the odd little remark, just to show that you aren't completely out of touch, might be in order, but I think that sort of thing can be [30] very much overdone. I know with very simple, very ordinary people it does help, because I have found this in India: if you can make just some little reference in the course of your lecture to local affairs - that you know there was an election there the previous week or you know that there has been a bit of a dispute over the water supply - if you can just introduce a little remark to show you are *aware* of those things, it does help. But then those sort of things are relatively innocent things. But do you really want people to get the impression that you as an Order Member in fact spend quite a lot of time watching TV?

Nagabodhi: Right. You can actually probably get it from magazines, that sort of thing, just keep in touch with a magazine or two.

Dharmadhara: The *TV Times*, maybe!

Nagabodhi: What made me think of this, Bhante, was yesterday we were talking about *Buddhism and Blasphemy* -

S: Down in London?

Nagabodhi: Yes, during a publications council meeting, about arranging a reprint, and somebody questioned whether it was still up to date in some respects, because he said if you look at things on television, almost every day you can see the most appalling blasphemies, quite acceptable these days, in comedy programmes particularly.

S: Even on some of the Sunday radio programmes, even clergymen indulge in mild little blasphemies! It's almost as though it is part of the accepted language; though their little blasphemies, it must be said, are really quite mild. But they wouldn't have done it ten years ago. It would have been considered in bad taste for them to have done it ten years ago. But there is no reason why we should necessarily alter our standards.

So, yes, perhaps *Buddhism and Blasphemy* is a little bit dated in *that* sense.

Nagabodhi: To my mind, though, that doesn't obviate its importance in -

S: No, because the general principles are of importance. [31]

Nagabodhi: But it was just his point arose out of the consideration of people who watch television would now find even the blasphemy issue a very different one from how it was seven years ago.

S: And the law *hasn't* been changed. And there have been no more prosecutions. When did I write that?

Nagabodhi: 1977.

S: So that's exactly ten years ago. We ought to have a tenth anniversary edition!

I also find I've got, I think, thirteen books in print, excluding the little booklets and pamphlets; looking at what you put at the beginning of that book, including that. I remember that Dr Conze and Christmas Humphreys, years ago, found that they each had twelve books in print and so they had a joint celebration! But it is quite a lot, even though they are not all very big books - all being in print especially. That doesn't often happen, does it? Only with the best authors.

But I feel about TV as I feel about film - that it's such a good medium in principle, that it seems such a shame that it is misused, both by people who produce the material and those who view it.

Nagabodhi: Power corrupts.

S: Well, no, that isn't quite a parallel. It isn't a case of power here.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps, Bhante, you could see it in the wider context of technology in general; that's another aspect of technology: can man use technology skilfully?

S: That's true. It seems it's quite difficult for him to use it skilfully. Sometimes he does, but very often not. Think of the way people use the motor car. But so much depends on the attitude of the person using these things. In themselves, in many cases, they are neither good nor bad, but only in accordance with the use that is made of them. You *could* say that *perhaps* even about atomic energy - assuming that a way could be found to make its use perfectly safe.

Prasannasiddhi: I find it very interesting that, at the beginnings of the industrial revolution, it wasn't that they needed the things they were inventing, it was more like - the motivation seemed to be from the money - the classes with the money who [32] wanted to make *more* money, so they wanted to find a product that would increase their income, so it seemed to be inherently greed-based.

S: And a way of producing it more quickly and cheaply.

Prasannasiddhi: And then there's the whole element of exploitation of natural resources.

S: And people.

Prasannasiddhi: Then, when you find things like advances being made in atomic power in connection with the fighting of wars, one wonders about the whole basis.

S: Well, everybody deplores the evils of technology, but no one is willing to give up the benefits of technology. Everyone deplores pollution by exhaust fumes, but no one, or at least very few people, want to give up the car.

Dharmadhara: Getting back to watching television, and the question of whether it could be skilful or not: I suppose from an empirical point of view I was looking for criteria which could possibly indicate, and I could only come up with a couple. One was whether you are able to retain your individuality, or the degree of individuality you normally have, through watching a television programme, and whether it remains afterwards; whether you are enriched in so doing, whether you feel less of an individual as a result. And, secondly, how would you feel if the TV broke down or if it went back to the shop? Would there be that cold turkey sort of response? There may be other criteria. But, perhaps in that sort of empirical way, if one was really honest, one could certainly

tell.

S: I have heard of people, I think in the States, having severe withdrawal symptoms when TV programmes went off the air due to power cuts.

Nagabodhi: Any rental company that hires televisions would make a very important point in its advertising how quickly they can get a mechanic out if anything goes wrong - any time of night or day - it would be a *major* factor in someone's mind.

S: Right. Well, as regards this question of loss of individuality, I think a lot depends on whether you are watching TV, or watching a particular programme, as the result of a conscious decision for certain definite reasons, and not simply the [33] result of your happening to be sitting in front of the TV set because that's what you always do. And also, if your choice of a particular programme, or your decision to watch a particular programme, was a definite conscious decision for certain definite reasons, well, presumably those reasons will be of a positive nature, and the programme would be of such a nature as to *enhance* your experience as an individual, rather than otherwise. As with, say, some kind of cultural programme or something which was genuinely informative about some important aspect of life. So probably in a way the key to the whole process, or where it all starts or doesn't start, is that you *decide* to watch for certain reasons - not that you just *happen* to be watching, happen to find yourself just sitting in front of the TV just watching any old programme that happens to come along, including the ads.

Mangala: I suppose, in the same way, you should watch [that you're not] happening to find yourself sitting in front of the shrine, not really doing anything - in a very passive way.

S: Well, yes, you should; but even that would be better than sitting in the same way in front of a TV set. The shrine couldn't possibly do you any harm; it might even do you some good, even though you had got there in a mindless, sleepwalking sort of way. But clearly it would be better to be sitting there in the shrine room as the result of a very conscious, aware decision and choice; wide awake. At least you would come to no positive harm sitting in the shrine room, except possibly from the draught!

Mangala: Isn't the thing, really, to try and remain as it were active whatever you are doing, not just become passive, whether you're meditating -

S: Right. Not active in a one-sided sort of way, but taking the initiative; not merely submitting to circumstances or going along with things. In some ways, that slogan 'go with the flow' was a really disastrous sort of slogan, because that's almost the last thing you *should* do. If there is a spiritual flow with which you *should* go along, as when you become a Stream Entrant, you're a very long way from being in a position to go with it anyway! So the flow for you is just the flow of mundane life and mundane experiences; you certainly shouldn't just go along with that. You should go against it, in fact. The slogan should be 'Go against the flow', if you want to be a real individual. Go against the stream; go upstream. [34]

Anyway, perhaps we've discussed that enough. Perhaps it is not without significance that we have discussed this last question about television for longer than all the other questions put together!

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Seventh Lecture: Buddhist Economics - 7th April 1987

Present: Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara, Mangala, Kovida, Prasannasiddhi, Nagabodhi.

Chairman: Dharmadhara chairing this seventh lecture, the Questions and Answers being on *The Sutra of Golden Light*, 'Buddhist Economics'. It is 7 April. The sound levels look good, so we'll go into the first question, which is from Surata, on the order of the goddesses in your lectures.

Throughout the lectures you stated that there was a specific reason why you dealt with the goddesses in a different order to the Sutra and that this would become clear. Is your choice of order a hierarchy on the basis of the extent to which each of these goddesses and the factors they represent is supportive to the Golden Light, the spiritual life, and receptive to transformation by it, as follows:

Sarasvati - Culture being the most supportive and receptive;

Drdha - Nature having elements both supportive and receptive and also antagonistic to the Golden Light;

Sri - Economics the least receptive and supportive, if not completely antagonistic?

S: I think I must have had something like that in mind. I can't remember precisely, I'm afraid; but it looks as though the possibilities of, so to speak, alienation are greatest in the case of Sri, to speak in terms of the goddesses. It is as though there is a greater danger of economics getting out of control than there is of nature, that is nature as a part of oneself, getting out of control, and least danger of culture getting out of control. So I think that, if I have arranged them in a hierarchy at all, it is in some such way.

Though, having said that, it does seem in modern times that culture can be very alienated too and that can obviously do a great deal of harm. But for culture to be culture *at all* in the true sense it means, I think, that there must be some link with the spiritual life; culture must be to some extent supportive of the [2] spiritual life. Otherwise it just ceases to exist, virtually. But that's not the case with economics; except, of course, you could argue very distantly that to the extent that economics is an aspect of the life of the community, the life of society, and *that* can't exist without being sustained by a moral order. But, yes, it does seem that economics, that wealth, can be alienated from the spiritual life and be inimical to the spiritual life to a greater extent than culture, and even to a greater extent than nature. I think I mean here not nature in the sense of external nature, but that nature which is a part of oneself, one's physical organic being, its needs and its desires; it can get out of hand, but perhaps not to the extent that money, so to speak, can get out of hand. Not that money exists by itself; it's the people *with* money who get out of hand.

It's as though economics can sort of turn your head and alienate you to a much greater degree than can either the demands of your physical nature or your cultural interests; even if the two latter do go quite a bit astray. It does seem as though Mammon does far more damage.

But, looking back on it, I wouldn't be *too* confident about arranging these three goddesses in that sort of hierarchy. It holds good to *some* extent, but perhaps one shouldn't expect a very rigidly defined hierarchy here.

Nagabodhi: In this context, you seem to be talking about culture in quite a specific way *as* higher

culture. Could you not argue that culture, as the sort of sum total of human cultural activity, which includes popular culture, can get out of hand - [like] television in America?

S: Yes, one could say that. It depends how broadly one defines culture. The dictionary, I think, defines it as the ideas and pursuits of society, something of that sort - I was looking it up the other day.

I did even mention in the lecture the distinction between what I called universal culture and ethnic culture. I was thinking even of ethnic culture as something as it were quite positive and healthy, even though existing on a lower level; something a bit more like folk culture. Though obviously the term ethnic culture can be used in a broader sense than that. But perhaps we shouldn't think too seriously about arranging, as I said, the three goddesses and what they represent in a very definite, almost rigidly established, hierarchy.

Mangala: Do you think it's possible that for different people these three different factors would have different weight, as it were, in their particular lives? [3]

S: Yes, I think that must be true. But clearly, when one is speaking in these very general terms, one is thinking of what holds good for people at large or for large numbers of people. But, yes, in the case of the individual, it might well be that perverted culture offers a greater temptation than, say, perverted economics.

Mangala: Or even maybe very strong biological needs or desires.

S: Yes, that's true. But then you can sort of strike an average. I mean you could perhaps say that, if you look at culture *on the whole*, in the case of most people, what culture does exist does tend more to subserve or support the spiritual life than does economics, which, in the case of most people with lots of money, does get rather out of hand. The fact that one or another person would be susceptible to the weaker side of one or another of the goddesses doesn't mean that you couldn't generalise about society as a whole.

Prasannasiddhi: On the subject of the goddesses, I was just wondering if there is any significance in them actually being *goddesses* as opposed to having gods of these particular spheres?

S: Well, I suppose in the first place the sutra draws on traditional material. I mean, in Indian tradition there's a *goddess* of culture, a *goddess* of nature, a *goddess* of wealth, but perhaps you could say, going a bit beyond that, that they are represented as goddesses, or one might say that those three aspects of human life - culture, nature and economics - are represented by goddesses, or *personified* by goddesses, because their role is essentially supportive in relation to the spiritual life, in relation to the Golden Light, and one naturally, whether rightly or wrongly, thinks of women or goddesses, females, as fulfilling that supportive role more than one does men; I mean there are the Four Kings earlier on, but they're not exactly supportive; they're protective, which is, [4] perhaps on that level, a masculine rather than a feminine function. So there could be that sort of connection with - I was going to say mass psychology, but it isn't quite that - with the archetypes of the collective unconscious. [Long pause] I think that's enough on that.

Chairman: Question two also comes from Surata. It concerns Avalokitesvara's blue throat.

Is there a Canonical reference for Avalokitesvara being referred to as blue-throated? And/or for the story of his having drunk the pot of poison?

S: I suppose it depends what one means by Canonical. *Nilakantha* Avalokitesvara - *nilakantha* means blue-throated - as far as I know, is not referred to in the sutras; he seems to belong to the Tantras and certainly to Vajrayana *sadhana*s. I found a reference in the Indian Buddhist iconography. There is a *sadhana* of Nilakantha; the *sadhana* I think must be taken from the *Sadhana Mala*, which is a sort of anthology, yes, based mainly on the *Sadhana Mala* and cognate Tantric texts of rituals, but anyway, after translating a very brief *sadhana*, the editor and translator [in *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* by B. Bhattacharyya, p140] adds: '*Apparently, the conception of this god has been modeled on the Hindu deity, Shiva, who is said to have saved the world from destruction by swallowing the poison that issued from the mouth of Vasuki, the Lord of Serpents, while the gods and demons were churning the ocean together. The poison, should it have entered Shiva's stomach, would surely have destroyed him, but it remained in his throat; and as the colour of the poison is said to be blue there is a blue spot in the white throat of the god. That is the reason why the name Nilakantha, Blue Throat, has been given to Shiva. As this particular form of Lokeshvara (that is Avalokitesvara) has also the same name, it may well be that its origin was the Hindu god, Shiva Nilakantha.*' So 'is there a canonical reference to Avalokitesvara being referred to as the Blue Throated?' Certainly there is a *sadhana*, which means the Nilakantha Avalokitesvara does occur in the Tantras, in the Vajrayana. And as for the story of his having drunk the pot of poison, [5] I've read what Bhattacharyya says about the apparent connection of the Buddhist legend of Nilakantha Avalokitesvara with the Hindu legend of Nilakantha Shiva. Isn't there another question somewhere about this?

Chairman: There is one about the churning of the ocean of milk.

S: It's connected with that; that's right, yes. Perhaps we could have that one next even if you haven't...

Chairman: One could interpret the myth of the churning of the ocean of milk as follows: it is impossible to experience Samsara as pure pleasure; there is always unpleasantness or pain (a pot of poison). The only real way to deal with the pot of poison is with Wisdom and Compassion (Avalokitesvara). Could you comment on this?

S: Yes. In of course the Buddhist story, and I think in the Hindu one too possibly, the poison which comes from the mouth of the serpent Vasuki is so terrible that it could destroy the whole universe, so Avalokitesvara or Shiva swallows it out of compassion, so that it should not destroy the whole universe. According to Bhattacharyya, and the Hindu version of the myth, well, if it had reached even Shiva's stomach it would have killed him, but it was arrested at this throat, whatever that might mean in terms of symbolism, and simply turned his throat blue. So one could say, yes, as Dharmapriya suggests, that the only real way to deal with the pot of poison is with Wisdom and Compassion, though of course in the Buddhist and I think probably in the Hindu version of the legend, the emphasis is on the Bodhisattva's, or the god's, as it were, taking upon himself the sufferings of the world. Do you see what I mean? He is sort of intervening, but of course, that can't be taken literally. Even the greatest Bodhisattva can't swallow the poison for you; he can only show you how to swallow it for yourself, how to *deal* with it; he can only show you the way and of course he can do that out of Wisdom and Compassion. Not that he literally swallows the pain which otherwise you would have experienced. So, yes, with that rider, as it were, Dharmapriya's suggestion as to the meaning of the myth, interpretation of the myth is quite acceptable. I mean, as you churn the ocean of [6] Samsara - and this is what most of us are doing, most people are doing most of the time - all sorts of beautiful and delightful things do come up which everybody wants, but sooner or later the pot of poison comes up and nobody else, strictly speaking, can swallow it for you, but they might show you how to swallow it, in other words, how to deal with it, how to face your own pain, your own suffering. Even, eventually, how to, if not escape from it, certainly

how to transcend it, and here you have to be your own Avalokitesvara.

Mangala: You said earlier that, well, I think according to that book, it seemed that Avalokitesvara having the blue throat came from the Shiva myth; it couldn't have been the other way round?

S: That's not impossible, I think. There is no doubt, in the India of those days - we're not even quite sure when, there was a whole sort of floating mass of myth and legend and folklore, which wasn't really the property of any particular religion in the narrower sense. I mean all the religions, what we now call Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, they all dipped into this pool as it were, and drew upon these stories, these myths, these legends, these parables, these proverbs, these wise sayings, and adapted them to their own more specific purposes.

Prasannasiddhi: I'm just wondering about the demon who had the poison, what he stood for, whether he had any significance?

S: Which demon is this? Oh! Vasuki is the serpent, isn't he? I'm not sure whether it is the serpent that they are using to churn or another serpent. Often it is said that the serpent is Saysa, there might have been two great serpents; the usual story - maybe one should look it up in some book on Hindu Mythology - is that the Gods take Mount Meru as their churning stick, there is this great ocean of milk, they take Mount Meru as their churning stick, and you can see illustrations of this in Hindu art, and they take the great serpent as the rope which they put round the churning stick. So you pull it back and forth, and the stick turns round and in that way, the churning process is set up. So it would seem, though Bhattacharyya is not very clear that yes, he doesn't specifically [7] say that Vasuki is the serpent that they used, but certainly whether or not he was the serpent that they were using to churn mount Meru - the churning stick - while they were churning, poison came out of his mouth, the mouth of the lord of the serpents, while gods and demons, that is gods and *asuras*, were churning the ocean together. One of the things that came up, by the way, was the *kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree, which of course the gods and the *asuras* then started quarrelling over. This is how it all started, so to speak.

Prasannasiddhi: In the lecture you refer to the serpent as being Anantur.

S: Yes, the infinite one, the endless one. There was a serpent called Saysa. I mean Bhattacharyya isn't very clear and I don't recollect myself, but it could be that Vasuki is the serpent who is being used as the churning rope, or it could be another serpent out of whose mouth the poison came at that particular moment. One would have just to look up the legend. There might even be different versions. Or Anantur and Vasuki might even be different names for the same serpent. I'm not quite sure, though I have a vague recollection of a pair of serpents, I won't be sure of that, though. Oh, do you remember that volume of Tantra, that red volume of Tantra, can you just look there, I vaguely remember there's an illustration in that. I won't be sure, the churning.

Prasannasiddhi: Has it got Tantra written on it?

S: A bigger red book, it's a catalogue, it might be that one, or it might just be a book on Indian art. Is there a book on Indian art there? Yes, I have seen somewhere. No, it isn't that one. No, Indian miniature paintings, I remember an Indian miniature style of painting of this churning, let me just have a look at that just quickly? No, it's not in there. No. We have got somewhere an actual illustration. I thought there was a little fat book on Indian miniatures.

Prasannasiddhi: There's a book called *Indian Art*. [8]

S: Let's have a look at that, yes it might be. *[Pause]*... No, I'm afraid it's not in there. Never mind. You've got Mount Meru in the middle and the serpent wound round it, and all the gods pulling on one end and the *asuras* pulling on the other and these different objects emerging as they're churned forth. It's an episode that is often illustrated, and no doubt one can give it all sorts of interpretations as Dharmapriya has done here. All right, that's pretty clear, isn't it, so we can leave it there.

Chairman: Question 4 comes from Virananda. It's a long one on Finance and the Stock market.

Have you given any thought, Bhante, to alternative economic systems to be used in Buddhist Economics, alternative that is to the present world capitalist system - systems such as are mentioned in *Small Is Beautiful* - and have you considered the possibility of the movement having its own bank or credit funding system?

S: Perhaps I should take the different parts of the question one by one because they really are different questions. I certainly have considered the possibility of the movement having its own bank or credit funding system. Subhuti and I have discussed this, and I think we have discussed this with others, but as yet nothing has actually happened, though it may well be that eventually we are able to set up our own bank or credit funding system, but then the earlier part of the question is: 'Have you given any thought, Bhante, to alternative economic systems to be used in Buddhist Economics, alternative that is to the present world capitalist system? Systems such as are mentioned in *Small is Beautiful*'. I can't say I've given it any prolonged or systematic thought. The only consideration that occurs to me in this connection at the moment is more of the nature of a word of warning.

I'm actually quite doubtful whether there is an alternative economic system which can supply us with consumer goods in the way and to the extent that the - what does he call it? - the world capitalist system does. I think very often, what people tend to think or what they tend to assume is that one could change from [9] the world capitalist system to some other, no doubt, ethically more desirable system, and still have the consumer goodies coming in just as before. I personally rather doubt that. I don't even know that there is a viable alternative system, but if there is, it is quite possible, I think, that you could have that alternative system only at the expense of at least *some* of your consumer goodies and I think probably that is an alternative that the majority of people would not be prepared to contemplate, not without a very very great deal of education, perhaps over a period of centuries. So I'd like at least to sound that note of caution, but economics is a very vast and complex subject. I was going to say science, it probably isn't a science, not an exact science, and I can't really claim to know very much about economics. But perhaps it is a subject to which I should give some more systematic consideration some time. But certainly somebody within the FWBO should, or some *group* of people should.

For instance, supposing, just to give you a very crude example, supposing everybody does go back to the land and does grow their own food and all that. Well, probably you'll have to give up your motor cars and your TV sets, and are you prepared to do that? I think the majority of people wouldn't - they *want* those things. I'm just sort of, as I said, sounding this word of warning. I can't really go into the question in any greater detail than that, I don't really feel I know enough about economics, but I just suspect very strongly there is a price to be paid if one wants to introduce a more ethical system. I just doubt whether most people will be prepared to pay that price.

Nagabodhi: Can I just ask - in principle do you wish people were? In principle would you like to see people being prepared to pay that price, to work for an alternative system at that expense?

S: Oh yes, I'd certainly like to see people prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of the ideal,

regardless of the particular *form* of that ideal, or regardless of the particular form that that ideal happened to take. [10]

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, would you feel there's room for the movement to in some way show support for the Green movement in the West, because it does actually seem there are a lot of people on a relative scale who are interested in ethical standards of economics; and it would seem that we aren't alone in the movement in wanting an ethical system or institution?

S: I certainly think it would be good if some Order members and others who felt so moved took the trouble to acquaint themselves with what the Green people are doing and to try to ascertain to what extent it was compatible with what we are trying to do, and feed the information back into the movement via *Shabda* or *Golden Drum*, or writing booklets and pamphlets or whatever.

Mangala: It seems, Bhante, over the last - well, I'm not sure how many - years the movement seems to be trying very hard, perhaps with some success, to as it were enter the capitalist world and be more successful in that sort of way. It seems to be that that's what we are trying to do more and more.

S: I wouldn't say the movement as a whole; there are certain individuals who have made that attempt, notably Kulananda and the other people in Windhorse Trading. But I think that's probably the only point, or they represent the only point, at which we have sort of broken through even in a very small way into the capitalist world, because our co-ops don't break through; I mean they try to create a quite different kind of world. But where else except with Windhorse Trading have we broken through into the capitalist world?

Mangala: Perhaps Hockneys is approaching that?

S: Well, no, that hasn't anything to do with the capitalist world because it is a co-op. I regard the co-op structure as opposed to the capitalist structure. That's one of the reasons why we favour the co-op structure. Perhaps one should examine more carefully the expression 'breaking through into the capitalist world'. Do we mean just taking money from them, or do we mean creating for our own purposes a capitalist-type [11] structure which competes with them on their own terms? If we think in terms of just taking *money* from the capitalist-type structure, well, every FWBO is breaking through; because it takes it in the form of at least retreat fees and massage fees and so on, to the extent that you take them from the world outside. But that isn't exactly breaking through - that's more like licking up the few crumbs that fall from the capitalist table.

Mangala: I suppose perhaps what I meant is a much more definitely aggressive approach to making money, and that becoming a very definite goal as it were to make ...

S: It's only really Kulananda who has shown that sort of aggressiveness, and others working with him; not anybody else as far as I know.

Mangala: I think a lot more people would *like* to be doing that - they just haven't been so successful.

S: Well, it again depends what one means by 'a lot'. I think most people in the movement think much more in terms of co-operative structures. I think they are quite suspicious, many of them, of these non-co-operative type structures which conform more closely to the sort of structure that one finds in the capitalist economic world, even though the purpose of those structures of ours is to bring money into the movement for the sake of helping to spread the Dharma.

Dharmadhara: Though there is this difference between the capitalist-based structure - for example Windhorse Trading - and the co-op structure - for example Hockneys - in principle, do you think in practice there is much difference between the two?

S: Well, the difference could only be in the attitudes of people, because the structure within which, say, Kulananda works is not exactly a *co-operative* structure, but he definitely works for the more co-operative attitude; because he and others only take their needs, they're not concerned with paying themselves high salaries and their aim is to just make money for the movement to spend on spreading the Dharma. [12] On the other hand you could find somebody working in a co-op but with a quite capitalist attitude and I think some people do, to some extent, and that gives rise to difficulties in co-ops, because they are thinking of working in the co-op mainly in terms of just earning some money so as to be able to support themselves. And not thinking perhaps in some cases, a few cases, especially in the case of new people, not thinking so much in terms of working for the co-op, so that the co-op can make money which it can then donate to the movement. So one has to take into account a possible difference of attitude and there can be, on the part of people working within a particular structure, a mental attitude which is not fully in accordance with the nature of that structure, whether for better or for worse.

Mangala: Bhante, it's I think round about ten years now since we started co-ops and so on. Looking back over ten years do you think that the co-op structure is, let's say, the best one for us? or. ...

S: I would certainly say that the co-op principle is best, I would certainly say that. I have more faith in that than ever, but I think what has been realised in the course of the last ten years is it isn't easy to apply that co-op principle. Because in a co-op, as distinct, say, from a business of the ordinary capitalist type, there is an equal sharing of responsibility, residually let us say - at least the responsibility is equal to one's experience, but everybody has some responsibility to the measure of their experience and understanding of the business. And that factor has certainly given rise to difficulties within co-ops. Sometimes for various reasons people don't find it easy to co-operate with one another and that is essential. Some people sort of *want* to be bosses as it were, even though the co-op structure doesn't really provide for bosses, their temperament is like that. Others perhaps want to be bossed, they want just to be told what to do, they don't want to take a share of responsibility, they just want to be given instructions and they'll just carry them out. So those sort of opposite tendencies both detract from the application of the co-op principle within the co-op structure, and make it more difficult. So I think in the course of the last ten years people have become much more realistic about what it really means, in [13] practice, to operate a co-op, to work in a co-op. I think formerly it was almost taken for granted that it would be comparatively smooth and easy and everything would be lovely, because you would all be just working together. It isn't really as simple as that and I think that's quite widely appreciated now. I think people are less starry-eyed about co-ops, more realistic, and I think therefore to the extent that there is more chance of genuine success with our co-ops - I mean they have lasted much longer than co-ops usually last, and so my own faith in the co-op principle is confirmed, that you take what you need, and you give what you can, and you work together.

Dharmadhara: Can I go back to the previous question because I'm not completely satisfied with it? I take your point that within a co-op you can have capitalists and within a capitalist structure you can have co-operatives.

S: No, no, I didn't quite say that you could have capitalists, but people with a more capitalist attitude. When I say 'you could have', I mean 'they may occur despite your best intentions'.

Dharmadhara: Perhaps I exaggerated, but I certainly appreciate that point, but what I was wondering was whether in effect there is that much difference between the two, using those two examples, Hockneys and Windhorse Trading, because they are both trying to make a lot of money for the centre, they are both producing Mitras, hoping to get them on ordination courses...

S: Perhaps there isn't, and that isn't surprising in view of the fact that they operate within a common framework, which is that of the movement.

Dharmadhara: Right, I was wondering whether it was just window dressing, calling one a co-op and one a more capitalist-based structure.

S: Well, this is perhaps why we tend nowadays, and I tend, not to use the actual expression 'co-op'. Though clearly in *Windhorse Trading*, whatever [14] the actual organisational structure may be, they do function co-operatively. Kulananda doesn't act as the boss - he consults everyone, everybody has a say in a way that you wouldn't have in an ordinary capitalist business. So whatever the structure, their spirit and the way they function is really co-operative, in perhaps the full sense.

Dharmadhara: More than some co-ops.

S: Possibly, well, more than some structures which are *labelled* as co-ops. So to come back to what I was saying, therefore we tend nowadays sometimes to speak in terms of - and I certainly tend to speak in terms of - team-based right livelihood projects. Whatever the precise nature of the structure, legally and financially, there is a team that works as a team and it is right livelihood, it is ethically based.

Nagabodhi: Sometimes people say that the co-ops haven't worked by which they mean they are not making enough money, and so on.

S: Well, to some extent that's true.

Nagabodhi: And I've heard you've responded, 'Well, it's not that they haven't worked; it's just that the system hasn't been fully tried out.' I've heard that response. If that is what you do feel, what aspect of the co-operative ideal, or the co-operative principle, the team-based right livelihood principle, do you feel we have been weakest in pursuing?

S: We usually say that a co-op or a team-based right livelihood project has three aims and objects. One is to provide its workers with a means of support, to provide for their needs as fully as possible - within needs, including their need to go on retreat for instance, or the need to pay their Order fees - not just their food, clothing and shelter; their need to buy Dharma books, and so on. And so that's the first objective - to provide the workers with means of support, with what they need, not with wages, but with what they need. And then to provide a working situation which is conducive to spiritual progress, inasmuch [15] as it functions within that particular economic context, as a sort of spiritual community, inasmuch as there is that type of interaction between all the members of the co-op. They are friends with one another and they share the co-op or team-based right livelihood project ideals, so its second function is to provide the people working there with an experience of *kalyana mitrata*, one might say. And then thirdly and lastly its function is also to help finance Buddhist activities, Dharma work, centres and so on, publications. So, if I say that, or if it is said that a co-op is not functioning properly, I certainly would usually mean by that, that it's not adequately fulfilling all three of those objectives. Sometimes you see in a co-op that

everyone is quite happy, they have quite good [] and are being supported adequately, but they are not making any surplus from which they can donate money to the movement. Or you might find - this is perhaps a hypothetical example - that they are donating money to the movement and their own needs are being met but there is not much experience of *kalyana mitrata*. Do you see what I mean? So a particular co-op or team-based right livelihood project is only fully successful when all these three objectives are being adequately met. This is the view I personally take.

I did find that certain people working in one particular co-op at one time were under the impression that what they actually paid, as rent to the centre owning their premises, was dana [Laughter]. It took me some time to unravel this because people working in the co-op were saying 'Oh, we give dana to the centre', but when I looked into it I found that that was actually the *rent* that they were paying, that particular centre being the owner of the property where that co-op was functioning.

Nagabodhi: I had that tripod, as I think you once called it, in mind when I asked the question and wondered whether, just in your experience of observing co-operatives and right livelihood situations around the movement, you felt there was any one imbalance or dynamic of imbalance that seemed more common than others. Which elements seemed to lack... [16]

S: It's very difficult to generalise because we've got so few co-ops really, or team-based right livelihood projects. We have only got three, well, we've only got two really successful ones, one being Hockneys, and the other being Windhorse Trading. Cherry Orchard is moderately successful, but it can't be compared with either Hockneys or with Windhorse Trading I think. So we don't have really much basis for generalisation. Also the situation may change, from month to month, depending on various factors.

Nagabodhi: Why is that, that after all these years of propounding right livelihood and co-operatives we still do have so few'?

S: Well, I think one reason I can think of is we don't have a bank or credit funding system to help us set up such team-based right livelihood projects. You could say that we don't have the people, but you need also the money, you need the capital, to use that word, so to speak. You have to get your filthy lucre from somewhere; and most people will need to be supported, they will need to have their needs met, otherwise they can't work within the team-based right livelihood project, however much they would like to. So you can't employ them unless you've got the capital to set up the business to start with. I mean that has been one of our big difficulties and very often we have capitalised ourselves by in effect cutting down on people's needs, I believe there is a technical term for this - I can't think of it. But it's only been possible to start the co-ops, to use that expression, and to run them for the first few years in most cases by not fulfilling one of - well, at least one of - the objectives, namely that of meeting the needs of the workers, the members, fully.

Also, of course, there has been a lack of managerial experience, because even though in a co-op or team-based right livelihood project everybody has what I've called an equal residual responsibility, you do need some people, a few people, at least one person with experience and managerial skills, and we have been very lacking in that field. People have learned usually as they've gone along. [17]

Dharmadhara: I was thinking that though, in theory, all our co-ops or right livelihood projects would be training situations, perhaps we need some situations for managers to train, almost a training co-op.

S: Well, I think there are schools to which people can go. I think if one approaches the matter more

systematically, then some Order members, especially, should go to these schools. I think one or two have gone, at least on courses, to schools of, or to courses of, business management, accountancy; all that sort of thing. I mean these schools do exist, these *courses* do exist, certainly in all big cities, and we just have to make more use of these sort of facilities and equip ourselves better. I mean, there are evening classes in these subjects. It can be done. Usually we have gone about things in a rather haphazard, amateurish sort of way. Kulananda, fortunately, did have previous experience of business. As far as I know Padmaraja had no previous experience of cooking but somehow or other he managed - or *more* than managed. I sometimes wonder how he did it. I mean, years and years ago the last thing one would have thought of Padmaraja as doing was running a successful business of *any* kind, but there he is doing it. Well, in collaboration with others obviously, but he is the leading light.

Dharmadhara: Do you think, Bhante, that in addition to training one needs a business instinct or a particular attitude to life in general?

S: I don't like to use this term 'instinct', but I sometimes do use the word 'flair'. I think you need a bit of a flair for business. I think it is probably quite important, especially in some kinds of business, to be able to get on well with people - to be a bit 'hail fellow well met', a bit sociable, a bit articulate, friendly, outward going. I think those qualities do help, quite apart from financial astuteness and things of that sort. Some people do seem to have a knack of making money.

Dharmadhara: Do you think, as well as being easy-going and articulate, one has to be almost rapacious to succeed? [18]

S: I think leaving aside ethical considerations, yes. It has been quite shocking some of these more recent revelations about this insider dealing on the American stock market. And the sheer *greed*, that some people no longer think in terms of making a million or two - they are thinking in terms of a *billion*. Even though it is only a billion dollars, not pounds sterling, but even a billion dollars is a billion dollars. I mean they're as greedy as that. What on *earth* is anybody going to do with a billion dollars? So this is really where Mammon has got out of hand, because the amount of money you want to make has absolutely no relation with any of your needs except your '*need*' just to make more and more and more money. It doesn't even give you great political influence necessarily. It doesn't give you any great prestige - you are merely the owner of a billion dollars. Perhaps you can order people around and people will crawl to you and perhaps you enjoy that. But what are the degrees? I mean if you've got a billion dollars, will people crawl twice as much as if you had only half that amount! [*Laughter*]. So if even someone's got ten million dollars, some people will crawl to such an extent that they could hardly crawl any more! Even if you've got a billion dollars, so what's the point if that's what you're after? If you want to buy jewellery for your wife, she can only wear a certain amount, and she probably couldn't wear a billion dollars' worth of jewellery. The poor woman would be completely smothered and weighed down. You can only live in one house at a time, only sleep in one bed at a time, only eat one meal at a time. So why this utterly excessive, neurotic greed to make a billion dollars, unless it's a sort of competitive spirit amongst the upper financial echelons? 'Well, he's got five hundred million dollars, I must have a thousand million, I must go one better.'

Prasannasiddhi: Sort of social prestige in the top of the pack.

S: Anyway, let's come on to the next question [*murmurs*] - yes, I mean the next sub-sub-sub-question.

Nagabodhi: We've only established a beachhead in Virananda's question! [19]

What is the ethical status of usury and stock market speculation, and in general the production of money not by work but simply by charging interest on money already possessed, and loaned out?

S: I suspect that there's a bit of confusion of thought here. This question of usury and the ethical status of usury. I'm not so sure about stock market speculation; but let's just look at it in these sort of terms, or reduce it to these sort of terms.

All right, supposing you've worked, you know, 20 or 30 years, and out of your wages or salary or whatever you've saved, let's say for the sake of argument, £25,000. That's what you've *earned* in the sweat of your brow, so to speak. All right, you buy a house with that £25,000. You don't live in that house, you let it and you live on the rent. Perhaps you don't have any other provision for your old age so you live on the rent. All right, so that's one thing. That would usually be considered quite ethical, wouldn't it? But all right, supposing, say, instead of buying a house you lent your £25,000 and you lent it, let's say for the sake of the argument, at a rate of interest corresponding to what you would have got in the form of rent, had you bought a house with it instead. I find it difficult to see any real difference between the two positions from an ethical point of view. This is the first consideration that strikes me. What is it that makes the first ethical as most people would agree, and the second unethical? You are using the wealth, let us say - use that term wealth to cover both property and money - which you have earned for your support.

So that's as I say a point that just occurs to me, but stock market speculation I'm not so sure as I'm not quite sure in what exactly that consists and how it operates, and it is very complex, I know. So I'd just need to read up much more about that before I could really say anything, but the production of money not by work, but simply by charging interest on money already possessed - and in the case of the example I gave - and earned and loaned out, I would say there's no essential difference between the two. You could say, supposing [20] instead of earning that money which you lent, you inherited it. That would be rather different, you could argue, but it would also be different if you'd inherited a house and wished to rent that out in the same way. So I don't think you can sort of assume, as the question appears to assume, that there's some difference of ethical status between usury on the one hand and changing your money into property and making use of that, as when you let a house that you've bought with the money that you've earned. Can anybody shed some light on this question of stock market speculation?

Mangala: I think he's alluding to something perhaps a little bit akin to gambling, where you take a risk with your money. You say 'Right, well, if I invest a thousand pounds on this, maybe my luck will come up and maybe next week my shares will be worth five thousand.'

S: Well, that's a distinct thing from usury. Usury is not gambling, but, yes, one can do what you suggest. It is playing the stock market. Speculation is not exactly gambling. It isn't so entirely dependent upon chance as gambling. Gambling, if it is properly conducted, as far as I know is dependent entirely upon chance, though one can, I believe, perhaps calculate or think one can calculate the rules of chance; if such and such a number hasn't come up for so many throws, if there is only a limited number of numbers, the chances that that number will come up will increase with every throw of whether it is of the dice, or whether it is a turn of a wheel, or whatever. So gambling is based upon chance, even though there are, so to speak, rules of chance. But stock market speculation is not pure gambling in that sense. It's based to a far greater extent upon information, hence the importance of insider information...

Nagabodhi: ... too much information!

S: ... the inside information! But I am not sure about the ethical nature or unethical nature of stock market speculation *as such*, because that is obviously related to the ethical [21] and non-ethical nature of the whole capitalist system. But I think one definitely and strongly unethical element is the intense greed that usually is behind stock market speculation.

Dharmadhara: There's a recent development in the stock market; it's ethical stockbroking or investing in ethical stock, and it actually advertises itself as that so it guarantees that your money won't go into arms and death-dealing ...

S: Tobacco

Dharmadhara: Tobacco, exactly, and alcohol.

S: Well, that is quite a positive development, even though within the capitalist system. It's almost as though some non-capitalist ideology has got a toehold there, because usually the capitalist ideologies make money at any price, at any cost, regardless of ethical considerations. Well, at least that is the attitude of some capitalists, it would seem. So this is at least an improvement, even though it is a modification of the system rather than a replacement of the system by something more ethical and more idealistic. At least it's a *step* in the right direction.

Dharmadhara: There is the economic law that the higher the profit the higher the risk, so the most profitable businesses, for example drug trafficking, have the highest risk of all.

S: Well, it is under certain conditions, but necessarily. For instance when a gold mine is discovered, it's not a high-risk business but it's very highly profitable.

Dharmadhara: Although I suppose so many prospectors flock there that they can't all strike a lode.

S: But that comes at a later stage when word has gone around, or for instance when the railways were being built in Britain, in the last century, that was very, very highly profitable, you could hardly not lose, [22] not unless you were really foolish and invested in a company which clearly wasn't sound.

Dharmadhara: No doubt there are exceptions as there are to every law but I think it's quite a simple, primitive law of economics that the higher the profit, the higher the risk. So I suppose we should be ...

S: Well, I am not sure what is meant by risk in this connection?

Dharmadhara: Well, the risk of losing your capital, or worse.

S: But again what nature is the risk? - because in the case of drugs the risk is from government legislation but that is not inherent, so to speak in the economic situation as such, or economic structure as such.

Dharmadhara: I suppose human nature as well, the higher the profits the more likely you are to be attacked by rivals and competitors and undercut.

S: Yes, in the case of supply of drugs you can even be killed, because different gangs, different

mafias almost, are trying to get their hands on the same profitable substances and they are so highly profitable they are willing to kill. So that is a high risk, as well as high profit business in that sort of sense, though again that is not an inherent part, it would seem, of the economic structure, not an inherent part of the laws of supply and demand. Usually something is highly profitable if it is *rare* and that rarity can come about in various ways because it can be rare because it's found in very few parts of the world, like gold and uranium, or it can be rare, in a sense purely artificially, because someone has got a monopoly on it, as people had monopolies in Britain in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. So if you had a monopoly you made very high profits but just because you had a monopoly - not for any other reason. So there are different reasons why a particular business, so to speak, or a particular commodity, is a high profit commodity, and those reasons can vary very greatly and sometimes have nothing to do with economic laws as such. [23]

Nagabodhi: In a way it seems to come down to this principle of alienation you were talking about at the beginning of the session. If you buy shares in a company on the stock market, what you are actually doing is making your money available to a company to invest, to employ people, to develop, and as we know the government *wants* people to invest in industry, and if that was what people really felt they were doing when they bought shares that could be quite ethical, perfectly ethical, because their *intention* would be ethical, but we know that within the next year or two there is going to be a collapse on the stock market because prices are getting so high, there's going to be a point where there's a loss of confidence, then people will all sell their shares as fast as they can, which means that their intention has not been to help industry, it's been to make money purely for themselves through speculation.

S: Well, this comes back to greed which I said was certainly an identifiable, unethical factor in stock market speculation. Perhaps it's mainly that which fuels it.

Nagabodhi: It's a very good argument for us having our own bank, that investment can be an ethical activity. If you are investing something you believe in and want to see grow, and then yes, you may get a return on your capital but also you are making something possible that you believe in, that you're not going to suddenly pull the rug out from under the moment things look a little shaky. Have our own stock market.

S: You talked about people sort of buying and selling shares, but I heard on the radio the other day that - I think it was on the radio or I might have read it - that they now have a computer to do these things, or some of these things, that the computer is so programmed that if shares fall below a certain point then they are automatically sold. No instructions are given on the spot, the computer has been programmed in that way because it's all so instantaneous now. Anyway, that's a little side issue. Let's carry on, shall we? [24]

Chairman: You mention that the traditional view of money is that it is good, wholesome stuff, as long - and you make the significant qualification during the lecture - as it is earned or made in an ethical Right Livelihood way.

S: Yes, this point is made again and again in the Pali scriptures where the Buddha is discussing this particular matter that he gives in form of *dana*, to paraphrase, his ethically earned wealth.

Chairman: Given that the majority of money is made in the sense of 'is brought into being', i.e. as capital, through usurious interest nowadays, this must mean there is some justification for regarding it as filthy lucre.

S: This of course begs the question that I have raised about usury being essentially unethical. So

let's carry on.

Chairman: So finally, what do you think of the karmic consequences for us if we engage in capitalist investment, and is not our playing the stock market, e.g. making money for Guhyaloka through buying and selling British Gas shares, the Robin Hood ethic at work, the end seen as justifying the means?

S: No, I don't think it means that at all, I think there's some confusion of thought here. If the structure is essentially unethical and every part of it is unethical, yes, well, that would be the case, as Virananda says. But I think that is questionable because though perhaps one structure might be more conducive to ethical attitudes than another, the really operative factor or determining factor is your mental attitude. Do you see what I mean? Just as you could have what was nominally a co-op run in a capitalistic spirit and you could have what was nominally a capitalistic business run in a co-operative spirit, in the same way I think probably you could play the stock market for a definitely ethical purpose, just as you could make money in any other way for a definitely ethical purpose; the ethical purpose being to give the money to something like Guhyaloka. The Robin Hood ethic is taking from the rich [25] to give to the poor. Are you *doing* that when you play the stock market? Are you taking from the rich what *belongs* to them or is rightfully theirs, at least in law, in order to give it to the poor? Are you doing that? Because Robin Hood, if he had been caught, could have been prosecuted and hung for theft, but if you are successful on the stock market in a legitimate way, without cheating, *can* you be prosecuted? Well, obviously you can't, so there is a difference - so I see some confused thinking here. You could of course argue, as I mentioned, that if the whole capitalist system was irremediably tainted, you could have nothing to do with it, well, you could have nothing to do with it not only by way of playing the stock market but in any other way - you couldn't even go to a shop and buy anything because you would be involved in that capitalist economy. You would have to have recourse to *barter*. I mean if there weren't co-ops, if there weren't consumers' co-ops. So yes, woolly thinking, I am sorry, Virananda, as far as I can see, confused thinking. And also 'the end seems to justify the means', I don't see that at all, for the same reasons.

Prasannasiddhi: Just going back to this thing of ethics being intention. You might...

S: I'm not exactly saying that ethics *are* intention but that intention is the determining factor, it would seem.

Prasannasiddhi: Intention is the determining factor. Bearing that in mind, I was just thinking that you might be playing the stock market from very good motives but if you were actually ignorant of the whole workings of the stock market then even if your motives were good, the fact that there was ignorance would actually mean that you could be performing an unskilful action.

S: Well, it would depend on the nature of the ignorance whether it was an ethically culpable ignorance or just an absence of information. Yes? - I think you are using the term ignorance in an ambiguous sense here, do you see what I mean?

Prasannasiddhi: Yes. [26]

S: For instance, you might play the stock market not really knowing what you were doing, but you could do it quite innocently, and just not knowing, through lack of experience; that would not be ignorance in the spiritual sense. If you were to play out of a strong feeling of greed, there would be spiritual ignorance and blindness there, to that extent because there was the greed, and because you attach so much value and importance to money.

Prasannasiddhi: But if you played the stock market without and you didn't know what the businesses, the companies were all about that you were investing in but you just played it, you would be culpable to the extent that you didn't bother to find out what these...

S: No, you would not necessarily be ethically culpable or be morally culpable - you might just stray into it out of sheer innocence and inexperience with, as it were, the best of intentions. This very often happens, this sort of thing.

Prasannasiddhi: Ah, you wouldn't *necessarily* be culpable. I suppose I was thinking of the - like in law - to not know is not an excuse for doing something that is illegal.

S: But that's the law, that's not ethics. Because you could be punished for breaking the law unknowingly even when no ethical issue was involved. For instance, supposing you park your car wrongly, you may just not know, you may be a newcomer to the country, you may not know - well, you are fined all the same, but it isn't an unethical action. It's just a convention that you shouldn't park in that particular place.

Nagabodhi: But on the stock market you buy shares in a company, at least you ought to say, 'Well, what do they make?'

S: That is true, yes. But that does not relate to the stock market type of transaction itself. [27]

Nagabodhi: That's true, no.

Kovida: But you would still suffer through ignorance on the stock exchange

S: Oh yes, indeed you would, yes indeed, you would lose your money. [Pause] Anyway, let's...

Dharmadhara: What on earth does the last footnote [to Virananda's question] mean?

S: Apologies for the length of this question, which only an economist king, of platonic ideality could answer fully.

Well, in that case why ask me?! [Laughter] Presumably the reference is to the philosopher king, so here Virananda is speaking of an economist king instead of a philosopher king, such as is mentioned by Plato in the *Republic*. [Pause]

Let's press on.

Chairman: Question number five. I think it's the last one, from Susiddhi on medical treatment according to spiritual principles.

Bhante, could you explain what you meant when you said in the lecture that, 'the principle is that medical treatment should be in accordance with spiritual principles, with the laws of life, with nature'?

S: I am not *exactly* sure what I had in mind then but I think I can roughly indicate. 'Medical treatment should be in accordance with spiritual principles' - well, what does one mean by that? You can't have Buddhist medical treatment or Islamic medical treatment, presumably. So what does one mean by 'in accordance with spiritual principles'? I suppose one means that medical

treatment should be had recourse to, so as to keep one in health or to restore one to health, so that one can use that health and that energy in order to lead a spiritual life. That's the first thing and also that the nature of the treatment shouldn't be unethical or violate any spiritual principle. For instance, [28] I have very serious doubts about experimenting with animals. This is not in accordance with spiritual principles, to have recourse to medical treatment which is dependent upon the suffering of other living beings. So I suppose one has to look at the purpose of the treatment, the nature of the treatment, perhaps these are the two main aspects. There may well be others but I am not able to think of them at the moment. Can anybody else suggest anything further here?

Bodhiraja: Perhaps some treatment could take away pain at the expense of one's mental clarity.

S: That's true, yes. And clearly mental clarity is a spiritual principle which one shouldn't sacrifice lightly.

Dharmadhara: Sometimes pain can take away mental clarity more than medical treatment. I think that's more of a matter of the past, I think nowadays allopathic medical treatment aims to retain the mental clarity without the pain. I think it largely succeeds.

S: I must say when I had my operation recently, just to advert to that, I was surprised that I didn't suffer any pain afterwards. I think you said it was due to the morphine, was it?

Dharmadhara: Probably, yes.

S: I was really surprised, I quite expected *some* pain in the region where I had had the operation. It was also the same when I had dental treatment a few years before that, I quite expected that when the effect of the injection wore off I'd be experiencing pain, but no, not the slightest. So yes, one doesn't need to experience pain, and in such cases there seems to be no diminution of one's mental clarity as a result of the administration of the drug. Whether one could extrapolate from that I just don't know, but then that's my own limited experience. I was quite surprised how free one can be from pain under those circumstances. My most painful experience was probably when my stitches were taken out and that [29] was just a little stinging sensation as each stitch was removed, nothing more than that.

Bodhiraja: When I was in hospital not long ago, I was a bit alarmed at the availability of pain killing drugs and sleeping potions. It didn't seem that you were expected to undergo any sort of pain whatsoever without any recourse to painkillers...

S: I don't think one should suffer unnecessarily, I think one should only refuse painkillers if the use of painkillers has results or implications that are worse than the pain itself. I think there is no point in suffering if you don't really need to and if there are no other deleterious effects. Also I was given these painkillers and also sleeping tablets, or asked if I wanted them, every evening; and I took them for two or three nights and then I myself refused them, I didn't want to become dependent on them. But I would have seen no point in not taking, say, the painkiller, and enduring the pain if the painkiller had been available and if there'd been no other undesirable effects, which apparently there weren't.

Bodhiraja: Don't you think that the experience of pain is part of one's awareness of one's body?

S: One experiences pain anyway from time to time. It has been *my* experience, I've had violent toothache, also stomach ache and so on. I don't think I am likely to forget that.

Bodhiraja: Wouldn't a drug that can take away that pain be impairing your general awareness?

S: You can be aware of non-pain just as much as of pain. Also, I have made the point in the past, I think at some length, that one must distinguish between the experience of suffering and insight into the truth of suffering, and you are not necessarily any nearer to insight into the truth of suffering because you are *experiencing* suffering. I have even said that you can have insight into the truth of suffering [30] while you are in a state of happiness, do you see what I mean? So you can be experiencing lots and lots of pain and no nearer to any insight into the truth of pain or suffering at all. So therefore it isn't an argument against the use of painkillers that they will make you less aware of pain. By aware, meaning really aware, to the point of having insight, and there's no point in just experiencing suffering. Experiencing suffering as such doesn't teach you anything. People who have suffered quite a lot can very quickly forget, if there has been no insight into the truth of suffering.

Bodhiraja: Perhaps I am assuming that painkillers actually act by dulling one's awareness.

S: Well, they certainly dull one's experience of pain, but as far as my own personal experience goes they don't dull one's experience as such, or one's awareness as such - but I certainly didn't become less aware. I was very, very aware of that state of freedom from pain.

Dharmadhara: Painkillers can be very mild or very strong.

S: These, of course, were very mild, I'm sure.

Dharmadhara: Yes, I think the tendency is to use the painkiller which has the minimum impairment of awareness. That seems to be a general medical principle. Nowadays whether it's in fact possible to do it or not depends on the staff and their experience, and how much co-operation there is from the patient. But I think painkillers generally don't impair awareness, whereas I think pain can. I think pain actually can impair awareness significantly. People just withdraw from their total experience which includes the pain.

Nagabodhi: This may be a failure of my medical knowledge but I'm under the impression that people, as they die of a terminal disease like cancer, are given increasingly large doses of a morphine-type drug, [31] which presumably does cloud the mind. How would you feel about that in relation to particularly Tibetan teachings about ideally dying with mental clarity?

S: Well, I think the point here is much as Dharmadhara says, that if the pain is clouding your awareness, to use the term clouding, as much as the drug - well, it's almost six of one and half a dozen of the other. So you have to try and strike that fine point of balance where you are not taking so much of the drug that you've no mindfulness left, but not taking so little that the pain is clouding your mind just as much as the drug would have done. That might be a very very fine point of balance indeed, and in some sad cases it may not be possible to strike that point of balance.

Nagabodhi: Presumably you'd be in the hands of the doctors and nurses by that time.

S: It's as though you have no choice. Either the pain clouds your awareness or the drug does, you've no choice - there's no third alternative. It may happen sometimes like that which is really quite dreadful. But not that you could just bear the pain and just remain very mindful. For most people that might well not be possible. The pain itself would be destructive of the mindfulness. I

mean *could* you think of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in agonising pain? Well, very few people could.

Nagabodhi: I don't know, this may be a bit of an old chestnut, but I've heard it argued that the pain is the beginnings of an expiation of your karma and that you shouldn't really interfere with that process. I mean one could argue that the availability of a drug must also ...

S: You don't *know* whether it's the result of your karma. It may be, but it may not be. You normally don't know unless you've some very special insight. I mean the practical test is usually said to be - if all the means of relieving that condition fail, you can fall back on the explanation of karma. But if your pain can be relieved by drugs presumably it isn't due to karma, because drugs could not defeat karma [*Laughter*]. I mean it's not a question of just drugs relieving pain, also the question is asked very often with reference to medical [32] treatment as such: 'Well, if someone is ill, it's due to their karma so don't interfere.' But you don't *know* whether the illness is due to karma. You can only try and see if it is by treating the patient. If you've tried all conceivable methods, maybe it's due to karma. Of course it may just be due to the inadequacy of your medical knowledge and treatment.

Mangala: Even if it was due to your karma, Bhante, couldn't it also be due to subsequent good karma that you're now able to have medical... [*Laughter*]

S: Oh yes, you could argue that way too. You don't *know* but it could be. Yes.

Mangala: So why not use it as well?

S: Yes, yes. Well why with all the good karma that they have created with their pujas and meditation the Tibetans didn't have better medical treatment available to them? [*Laughter*] Perhaps that's the sort of question one mustn't ask.

Chairman: Do you have a question Prasannasiddhi?

Prasannasiddhi: I'm not sure, though it's pretty obvious - I was thinking, Bhante, that you could probably distinguish between a neurotic use of painkillers and a healthy use of painkillers.

S: Yes, because some people are afraid of even the tiniest twinge of pain - which one shouldn't be. One should have a certain amount of stoicism and not rush to the aspirin bottle every time you get a tiny tiny headache. Yes, that can be neurotic and, well, can express a neurotic avoidance of pain.

Prasannasiddhi: I was also thinking of relying on painkillers. Like you keep getting headaches and you keep taking aspirins, rather than looking at what's the cause of your headaches, you just keep taking the aspirin. Presumably that would actually accumulate some substance in [33] your body - which could have a detrimental effect and what was causing the headache is ignored.

S: Anyway, let's pass on from the principle that medical treatment should be in accordance to spiritual principles, because that's reasonably clear perhaps, yes? Probably a lot more could be said on the subject. And then '... it should be in accordance with the laws of life.' Again I'm not sure what I meant exactly by that - the laws of life, I think I meant something like medical treatment should not be simply palliative. Should not just treat symptoms. Shouldn't just sort of patch people up. I was talking the other day about people leading really unhealthy lives and as a result of that suffering from all sorts of ailments; and then going along to the doctor, telling the doctor about these ailments and saying, 'What are you going to about it now?' Expecting the doctor to restore

them to health while continuing to live in that unhealthy sort of way. So medical treatment must be in accordance with the laws of life - yes. I'm not sure that 'laws of life' is the correct expression here.

Mangala: You also mentioned just after that that perhaps the two are sort of connected.

S: I mean that the law of life is that if you lead a healthy life you will *be* healthy, and that the way to be healthy *is* to lead a healthy life. So medical treatment, yes, put it this way, medical treatment should enable you to lead a healthy life - not simply enable you to carry on, whatever that might mean, despite the fact that you're leading an *unhealthy* life - that would be medical treatment in accordance with the laws of life, one might say. And also one might say in accordance with nature; perhaps the two are more or less synonymous.

Mangala: Or encourage one to live according with the laws of life and nature.

S: Yes. And of course I don't regard naturopathy or nature cures as having a monopoly of nature, so to speak. I mean if an ordinary doctor says to a patient, 'You've just got to cut down on the meat, [34] and you've got to take fewer eggs - that's the cause of your troubles; no use me just giving you pills, it would be good to take more exercise, and take less alcohol.' Well, that's giving medical treatment or medical advice in accordance with the laws of life and the laws of nature. But sometimes you read of people suffering from all sorts of ailments, and they want to carry on in their unhealthy way, and insist that the doctor just gives them this injection or that injection to pep them up a bit.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, what's your feelings on such things as face-lifts, and dyeing one's hair to sort of ...?

S: Well, useless! An absolute waste of money! Well, more than a waste of money, almost a criminal and totally unethical use of money. I mean, the saying is, why should old mutton want to look like young lamb?! [*Laughter*] It's a form of deceit. It's a form of imposture. It's a form of false pretences. And women running off to these - what do they call them?

_____: Plastic surgeons?

S: These beauticians. Plastic surgeons - to have their wretched faces lifted and their sagging breasts that are somehow heaved up. [*Laughter*]. And their hair sort of dyed, or in some cases removed from certain areas. It's really awful - and when you think of the billions of dollars, I don't know about pounds, but billions of dollars that go into this industry - it's really quite shameful, when people are dying of hunger in the world.

Mangala: Again, where do you draw the line here? What about cosmetic dentistry and why bother having your hair cut *at all*? Why not just let it grow any old way?

S: Well, there is the question of neatness and cleanliness. I mean long hair is much more difficult to keep clean, it gets in the way. It's less hygienic. You could argue like that. And also one doesn't have to spend a lot of money keeping one's hair in order. [35]

Mangala: What about teeth that fall out or rot? Why bother getting dentures and crowning your teeth?

S: You need, for instance, to be able to masticate your food; if you can't masticate your food

properly, you probably won't digest it - and that'll affect your health. Certainly I'm not in favour of *gold* teeth, for instance.

Mangala: But do you not think there's room for a modest use of, let's call them cosmetics, for want of a better word?

S: Give an example.

Mangala: Well, I mean, just trying to look so smart, and maybe try to appear fresh and clean and maybe smell quite nice!

S: Well, all you need is soap and water, or even just water? *[Laughter]* I mean, does a woman look better because she's got smudges of rouge on her cheeks, and a smear of some sort of scarlet grease across her mouth? Does she really look better?

Mangala: I think some of them do actually! *[Laughter]*

S: I mean, also it tends to disguise the face, and the expression. You don't really see that person, so it gets in the way of communication, you could say. And also, another point is that the cosmetics used by the majority of women are very cheap and are harmful to the complexion. So you'll find that after a few years, the woman will have a really bad complexion. I've noticed that on the whole, men have better complexions in the West than women, and just for that reason. And think of the things they do to their hair. Can dyeing one's hair repeatedly or as they used to do in the old days having it sort of frizzed into a perm, as they used to call it - a permanent wave, which you had to have renewed every three weeks! *[Loud laughter]* I mean, what does it do to the hair? And the hair loses its gloss. And it might even end up falling out. So it's really awful. I think a woman looks much better if she's her own natural self and [36] just uses soap and water. And also if she's healthy she shouldn't have such a bad complexion that she needs to disguise it with cosmetics. She's probably constipated due to lack of exercise, and pale due to lack of exposure to sunlight and air, and probably flabby due to lack of exercise and then she has recourse to cosmetics!

_____: Don't! *[Loud laughter]*

And what's even worse is that *men* are beginning to have recourse to cosmetics - and why? It's not that the poor innocent male has thought of having recourse to cosmetics - it's the cosmetics industry wants to lure this enormous untapped *market* into its fold. So they start producing cosmetics not only for women but for men, and advertising them. There's cosmetics probably for adolescents and soon there'll be cosmetics for children, cosmetics for babies. I believe there are cosmetics for *dogs* anyway! I think it's really *disgusting*, the amount of money that is spent on these things, and also the reasons for which it is spent are thoroughly unworthy sort of reasons. I mean, I often tell women in the movement, especially women Order members, that they look much better without cosmetics, and comparatively few of them now, I think, use cosmetics compared with women outside. Some women who do come to see me look *awful* in their cosmetics. Well, they might look even worse without them, I don't know! *[Laughter]*

Nagabodhi: They've probably done it especially for you.

S: But very often women that one sees around, they don't use cosmetics in an artistic sort of way, it's a smear or a gash of colour.

Dharmadhara: I suppose a common argument that women use for using cosmetics is that it gives

them confidence. They feel more presentable.

S: What they need is to develop confidence in themselves and to realise that they are essentially presentable if they're decent human beings. I mean, why should they want to look like pseudo-Cleopatras before they can feel confidence? For whose *benefit* is all this anyway? Not usually for the benefit of other women. [37]

Dharmadhara: It's often, well, partly for themselves.

S: Self-confidence in relation to whom? I mean you don't feel the need for self-confidence if you're just sitting alone in a room. Usually.

Dharmadhara: Maybe it's to some supposed ideal they're approaching ... some advertising ideal ...

S: Yes, there could be something in that.

Mangala: I suppose one should have a pride in one's appearance, and try to look ...

S: Well, yes, so then in that case you don't put on a mask. Because you're proud of *your* appearance, your own *real* appearance. Not the way you appear when heavily disguised.

Mangala: But in a way perhaps it's not quite as simple as that. I mean you can as it were, bring out or highlight certain aspects, and play down others.

S: Well, surely you can paint your nose red if you please, if you think your nose is one of your attractive features! *[Laughter]* Well, yes, it would certainly bring out the quality of your nose and draw attention to it.

Prasannasiddhi: Where did cosmetics originate?

S: Well, the ancient Egyptians had them, we know. They probably originated millions of years ago, when the cave woman smeared ash from the fire round her eyes, to enhance her appearance.

Mangala: Probably did it by accident and her husband said 'Oh, that's marvellous - keep it.' *[Laughter]* [38]

S: Probably originated with Eve; I'm sure that the Bible doesn't contain the full account. There wasn't just a sort of apron of a fig leaves, I'm sure also there was a bit of mascara and lipstick too. But I think also, people, or women, make up to disguise - what shall I say - their unhealthy appearance. You shouldn't need to have to put rouge on your cheeks. You should have red cheeks if you are reasonably healthy, in most cases.

Mangala: All right, but let's extend it perhaps to clothes, like take a woman, she can put on any old thing, just, well, what does it matter what you put on, I mean, 'cos I just keep myself warm. So you could choose to put on any old coat, or whatever, or you could select which you thought showed you to your best advantage, whatever that means.

S: Well, it depends what you mean by 'shows you', and depends on what you mean by 'best advantage'.

Mangala: Yes, exactly.

S: If you mean, ‘accentuates your secondary sexual characteristics’, from a Buddhist point of view that is questionable.

Mangala: Well, what criterion should someone use, then? When a woman goes to buy a dress what criteria ...

S: Well, the advice I would give her is certainly buy something of say, pleasing colour, not a harsh and glaring colour. Something which was of a decent material, an honest sort of material, not some cheap flimsy material. And something which suited her, which harmonised with her complexion and her height and her proportions generally, but which did not aim at rendering her sexually more attractive to the opposite sex. In other words, aim at being aesthetically pleasing. Or presenting an aesthetically pleasing appearance, not one that was merely sort of sexy.

Mangala: That’s a tall order, isn’t it? [39]

S: Well, it requires some artistic sense, which the majority of women, apparently, judging by the way they dress, don’t possess. Probably the majority of men don’t possess it either. I mean, there are all sorts of other considerations too, especially in the case of men, because normally you can only buy what is available, and you’ve a limited amount of money to spend. And most of the garments that are available are available in very unattractive colours, garish colours, harsh colours, aniline dye sort of colours. Not natural colours. Sometimes shops sell rather expensive woollen goods where the garments have been dyed only with natural dyes, and you see the difference in the colour. We’ve lost that sense I think, because since aniline dyes were discovered, I think in the last century, they’ve driven out the natural dyes, and we’ve lost our colour sense to a great extent. Harsh, glaring colours don’t offend people any more. I’ve written a little bit about this in my memoirs, because my friend Marco Pallis was very much into this. And he pointed out that even the Tibetans were beginning to use aniline dyes because they were cheaper and easily available for dyeing the wool with which they wove their carpets. And he just took them and showed them, and said, ‘Look, here’s one with aniline dyes in it and here’s one with natural vegetable dyes in it’, and the difference was enormous. So we’ve lost our colour sense; to a great extent our colour sense has been corrupted.

Mangala: Several times I’ve heard you say that people wearing bright colours indicates a healthy psychological disposition?

S: By bright colours I don’t mean garish colours. I mean soft, rich, glowing sort of colours, luminous colours, pure colours. Not these *horrible* greens and blues and reds that one sees actually in garments. Whether frocks or pullovers or whatever. So clearly there’s some sort of revolution needed in this sphere. William Morris was very conscious of this. But unfortunately the products of his workshops were so expensive because they were made by hand and a lot of trouble was taken over them, so only the rich could afford them; that was the difficulty. Most people could only afford these cheap - cheap in every sense - clothes; don’t take much trouble [40] trying to find clothes which are of a genuinely pleasing colour from an aesthetic point of view.

And also there are simple principles to be aware of. If, say, you are very fat, especially if you are a woman perhaps(!), don’t wear blouses and frocks with horizontal stripes. Or if you are very, very thin, don’t wear frocks with vertical stripes. Do you see what I mean? But I think in our own movement maybe we don’t set a very good example ourselves - maybe I don’t set a very good example *myself*, but I look sometimes in clothing stores - it’s not easy to find something which is

or which fulfils the criteria I've mentioned. I must admit I don't try *very* hard because I'm concerned with so many other things, but I certainly do encourage this in principle.

I really don't like to see men, especially young men - well, old men don't usually do this - wearing these horrible jeans, which are not only worn out; but because they've been worn for years and years there are urine stains all down the front [*Laughter*]. I think this is utterly *awful*! I don't think it should be tolerated, it's so really indecent and unaesthetic, and I'm sure it's unhygienic too! It's *repulsive* to see this. I'm very surprised people aren't more sensitive - well isn't it so?

Dharmadhara: I'm surprised to hear that this goes on.

S: Yes, it really is; it's really quite disgusting.

Bodhiraja: In the FWBO, do you mean?

S: Yes, sometimes, yes. I mean I'm not necessarily talking about Order members, but I've certainly seen people around, people have seemed to come to see me like that, wearing those sort of jeans [*Laughter*]. Well, isn't it so? Haven't you noticed? Or perhaps you've just become a bit blunted in your sensibilities. [41]

Dharmadhara: I've noticed really tatty jeans, I don't know if I've noticed urine stains ... [*lots of voices!*]

S: ... they're yellowed all down the front, you see... [*Loud laughter*].

Nagabodhi: It's pollen! [*Laughter*]

S: Well, they can call it pollen, I'd call it urine!

Mangala: Lunchtime soup!

S: I think we ought to encourage people to dress in a cleaner and neater, and more aesthetically harmonious way. Maybe the Order Office ought to set an example. Well, that would mean establishing a small fund, wouldn't it? [*Laughter*]

Dharmadhara: The Order Office Sartorial fund.

Kovida: Well, if we bring in robes that won't be a problem, will it?

S: Yes, but you only wear robes for certain special occasions.

Nagabodhi: You'd get stained robes.

S: Well, fortunately because they're loose they don't get stained in that particular way.

Nagabodhi: But they're also yellow! [*Laughter*]

S: We won't go into that! I think in some ways it is quite important, though it seems a simple thing to do, or to do something about, it's not so easy because you really need to change your whole habitat. This is why I am quite pleased with our front downstairs room because we have very nearly created a quite pleasing room - thanks largely to Padmapani. The colour scheme is

harmonious and restful etc., etc. I mean, well, the materials aren't in all cases of the [42] greatest, but that was just due to relative lack of funds. Not wanting to spend *too* much on those things, but we do something which is quite pleasing in that room. Well, some people have remarked upon it; some people who come to see me seem to be quite *oblivious* of the room, which is quite interesting. But a few do remark on it. Those a little more aware or more sensitive, or perhaps a little less wrapped up in themselves.

But I think with regard to women - oh dear, this is all being taped - but with regard to women I think one should make a point of commenting when they *do* dress in an aesthetically pleasing way. I think, well, first of all it shows one's awareness of them, and secondly it gives them a sort of nudge in the right direction. But perhaps if one knows the woman really well one shouldn't hesitate to criticise her in a positive way if she's dressing in a way that really makes her look a fright. Some women do even in the movement. I remember, some of you may remember Yuveraj, and he happened to pass one particular woman Order member in the street and he said, 'Why don't you get yourself a bra!' [Laughter] And she really did need one - she was wearing some sort of singlet or something like that, I'm afraid, and she really did need a bra, it seemed. But he said that quite bluntly - I'm not sure how she took it. I wasn't told. But I think one need not go as far as that, but one can say, That doesn't quite suit you, or do you realise it makes you look stouter than you actually are? Or, Do you realise that your jacket and your skirt really clash? I've seen this, and I always notice when women come to see me what they are wearing. Sometimes it tells you something about them.

Mangala: But, Bhante, bras aren't natural.

S: Well clothes aren't natural! [Laughter] Are they?

Mangala: But at least you have to wear something to keep warm, don't you, at least in the winter, but I mean like women wear bras so that they can look - well - their best, as they would say. Look smart and sexy and all that. [43]

S: I'm not sure about that.

Dharmadhara: They do have other advantages, if you're an active woman you...

S: Yes, well, we won't go into that. [Laughter] But I think the general idea is clear, isn't it? Or is it?

Voices: Yes.

S: Well, maybe we should try and set more of an example ourselves within the limits of our modest resources.

Mangala: Perhaps we should all dress for dinner in ties and jackets.

S: But I mean, for instance, when we entertain people, try and make a point at least of being presentable without necessarily wearing a suit, but at least having a clean shirt and being shaved or something of that sort. It does help create a pleasant impression, to take a little bit of trouble for people. You are aware you've got a visitor and you're just trying to make the whole experience of coming for a meal as pleasant as possible. After all, why do you invite them?

And that's why we've tried having decent china, within reason. Who wants to eat off a *chipped*

plate? Well, if you absolutely have to, fair enough, you just accept it, but one should try to give one's guests decent treatment. Make sure the knives are clean etc., so the guest doesn't get a knife with a greasy smear on it or something. This does sometimes happen, I've known it happen. Anyway, perhaps we should leave it there. It will be interesting to see how people are turned out for FWBO Day, as people should make a bit of an effort on festival days, just to be a bit more festive. I think quite a few do, actually, but some don't.

Dharmadhara: I'll head off into town tomorrow. *[Laughter]* [44]

Mangala: Straight to Oxfam. *[Laughter]*

S: Well, it's good that the medical profession does seem to impose certain standards on its members - not simply strictly medical standards. And maybe that isn't altogether a bad thing. I've noticed that in the case of all the doctors in the movement, they're always spick and span.

Prasannasiddhi: They can afford to be. *[Laughter]*

S: Well, there's something in that. But one can select even clothes from Oxfam with a certain amount of discrimination.

Mangala: While we're on the subject, can't we get some decent soap instead of the coal tar soap that we always have?

Nagabodhi: We've had decent soap for a couple of weeks!

S: The soap was *improved* recently I noticed, from that yellow soap - whatever it was, to this oval soap.

Kovida: Cussons Imperial Leather is the most expensive soap on the market.

S: What's that semi-transparent soap?

Kovida: Pears.

S: That is supposed to be very good, isn't it? But then how does one judge a soap, I mean I've given some thought to this! *[Laughter]* Well, there are several points. First of all some soaps contain animal fat - one should avoid such soap.

Dharmadhara: Most of them do.

S: Then another point is that - I don't know an awful lot about soap but one of the things I do know is that soaps contain, among other things, oils and they also contain detergents, so to speak, that is chemicals. Now there are certain soaps which contain, I think this must [45] be cheap soaps, more chemicals than oils, let us say - using these terms quite roughly. If you use soaps which contain a relatively small proportion of oil, and lots and lots of chemicals, the chemicals will get the dirt off but they will have a quite bad effect on the skin. They will leave the skin a bit rough. Probably do other things too. So ideally one should not use those soaps which have a very high chemical content. Try to use those which have at least a good percentage of oil in them. This is correct I think, isn't it?

Dharmadhara: I often advise people to change their soaps if they are getting, say, facial eczema,

or very dry skin.

S: Yes, because chemicals sometimes they're removing the natural oil from the skin, it sort of dries up the skin.

Dharmadhara: Right, yes.

S: And that doesn't have a good effect. And you need therefore a soap with a fair proportion of oil in it - whatever that proportion may be.

Dharmadhara: A moisturiser.

S: I normally, throughout my life, have used very little soap. I mean, use water, yes, but I don't use a lot of soap. I think I've got a reasonably good complexion for my age. I think that's part of the reason. Over the years, I normally in the morning only wash my face just with water, I don't generally use soap at all, just water.

Dharmadhara: One of the main things which damages skin is sun, strong sun, and it causes premature wrinkles. So I think for a good complexion I think that, and also smoking, are probably major factors in wrinkles.

S: Well, look at W.H. Auden. [*Laughter*] He was a heavy smoker, I know - I don't know whether he was an outdoor man but he was as wrinkled as a rhinoceros wasn't he? I think one must pay some attention to all these sort of areas, they are all areas for applied mindfulness, one might [46] say. For instance if you want to give someone a little present, maybe give a cake of really good soap. I've sometimes given people - women mainly - cakes of Norfolk Lavender soap, which I think is quite a good soap. You can get it in little portions, too.

Dharmadhara: What do you think of perfume or perfumed soaps? After-shave?

S: Perfume - well, again there are two kinds of perfume. There's a chemically produced perfume and natural perfumes. We use incense in Puja. And I think certain aromas, let us say, do have a very positive influence. In Islam they make very extensive use of perfumes, especially in connection with religious ceremonies. And I think this is or can be quite a positive thing. For instance some Sinhalese bhikkhus I observed, before they chanted sutras, before they chanted *pirit*, would rub a little perfume on the palms of their hands which in a sense is against the *vinaya*, but this had become a practice, and it probably was quite a positive practice because incenses vary - again. I've devoted a little thought to this. I noticed that different kinds of incense, different kinds of aroma, have a different sort of psychological effect. So I think one should study this a little. Yes, we all know what is meant by cheap scent. I think cheap scent should be avoided but I think good natural aromas could be very skilfully used within the context of puja or religious ceremony. Or even for personal use. [*Long pause*]

Anyway, perhaps we really must end there.

**Study Group Leaders Questions and Answers based on The lecture series:
Transformation of Self and World in
*The Sutra of Golden Light***

Eighth Lecture: The Moral Order and Its Upholders - 14th April 1987

Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Dharmadhara, Nagabodhi, Kovida.

Chairman: Tonight is Tuesday 14th April, the eighth and final lecture in this series on *The Sutra of Golden Light*, and there are only three of us present in addition to Bhante - that is Kovida, Nagabodhi and myself, Dharmadhara, in the chair. We've got seven questions, and the first question comes from Sarvamitra on the mythology of Indian kingship.

In the lecture you mention that the mythology of ancient Indian kingship is a very interesting subject, but there was not enough time to go into it in the lecture. Could you say more now, and perhaps indicate sources we could read up?

Sangharakshita: I think I had better just refer you to the sources. There are two sources that one could refer to, though there are others, too. There is first of all the little book on Kingship by A.M. Hocart, published in the Thinkers Library series. That contains some information about Indian kingship. And then there is the article under the heading of *King: Indian* in the *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

One of the points that I was especially interested in, and which I think I mentioned in the lecture, was that the king in ancient India was not only considered to be a god, or the incarnation of a god, but to have had given to him, as it were, at the time of his incarnation, a portion of the essence of all the gods - that is to say, the Vedic gods, especially Indra. But I think, apart from mentioning that, I'll just refer you to those two sources. The whole subject is quite complex.

Chairman: Next we have three questions together from Ratnaprabha about Brahma and so on.

Who is Brahma in the chapter on instructions concerning divine kings, and in Buddhist cosmology in general? [2]

S: These are really two quite different questions, because the Brahma who appears in the chapter on *Instructions Concerning Divine Kings* is the Hindu or brahminical Brahma rather than the Brahma of *Buddhist* cosmology. In Buddhist cosmology, Brahmas occupy, so to speak, heavens corresponding to the *rupaloka*, or corresponding to the four *dhyanas*. They are more or less spiritual beings, but the Brahma of Hindu mythology is a somewhat different kind of figure. He is conceived of, especially within the Vedic context, as the sort of chaplain of the gods, the spiritual adviser of the gods. The gods, especially Indra, have their chaplain just as an earthly king might have his chaplain. Sometimes he is described as the *purohit* of the gods. So it's in this capacity that he appears in this chapter, so one must dissociate from him, as he appears in this chapter, the more refined and more spiritual *Buddhist* associations of the term Brahma. He here appears as the preceptor of the gods.

Nagabodhi: Is that generally his position within the Hindu system, rather than him being a sort of Zeus figure, an overlord of the gods? It sounds quite -

S: He is again quite a complex figure. There is a book to which I can perhaps refer people. I forget the name of the author, but it is *The Mythology of Brahma*. We do have it in the Order Library. So

in Puranic Hindu mythology he appears as the creator, but in the earlier what one might describe as the Vedic mythology, perhaps, he appears more as the preceptor of the gods. Though, again, the two are not mutually exclusive; mythology isn't like that, in mythology there are no clear-cut divisions. But he isn't a Zeus-like figure; Indra is much more like that. Indra is sort of half a Zeus-like figure, half a Thor-like figure, one might say.

Brahma, in this particular Hindu context, is often sort of conceived of as the Brahmin *par excellence*. If the gods, especially Indra, are rulers, and therefore *Kshatriyas*, Brahma is the sort of archetypal Brahmin adviser of *Kshatriya* kings and rulers. So it is quite appropriate, quite in keeping, quite in character here, that Brahma gives the instructions concerning divine kings.

In the sutra as a whole, we notice *Hindu* mythology, for want of a better term, being incorporated into the structure of Buddhist thought and Buddhist spiritual practice. We have noticed, for instance, that Sarasvati and Sri have very definitely 'Hindu' features: they are ethnic features, Indian features, one might say; and as such they are incorporated into the structure of Buddhism. So it's much the same here, as it were. Here it's Brahma in his more original Vedic or semi-Vedic character who is introduced, not a Brahma such as we encounter in, say, the Pali scriptures, where they seem to be purely spiritual conceptions, having very little in [3] common, really, with the Brahma of *Hindu* mythology. But here it is very definitely the Brahma of *Hindu* mythology, or *one* of the Brahmas of Hindu mythology because, as I have already said, he has a very protean character even in Hindu mythology.

Nagabodhi: I am still not clear whether the emergence of these Hindu mythological figures in this sutra represents a sign of a possible corruption from the Hindu world encroaching on the Buddhist world, or a brave attempt to go out to the Hindu world on behalf of the Buddhists - or something altogether different.

S: Well, here I think there is a case of a thin dividing line. Because, yes, you can go out into the world and you can speak the language of the world, and you can try to express in the language of the world your particular spiritual message. But you have to be very careful that the world doesn't overcome you, that the world doesn't swallow you, and that the medium doesn't become the message. You have to be very careful of that. So perhaps there was a point, one could argue, at which Buddhism as it were overbalanced and incorporated, perhaps, so much Hindu mythology, so much of Hindu popular belief and practice, that the spiritual message of Buddhism was swamped and eventually lost sight of. And one *could* argue that that was happening in this particular chapter. One *could* argue that.

Nagabodhi: Do you feel that it is happening here? Is that your conclusion, or do you think it is just a possibility?

S: Well, in the abstract, one can't really say. For us in the West - well, for us in the FWBO - there is no danger of being overwhelmed by Hindu mythology. But some of our friends in India might be very suspicious of any attempt to express Buddhist truths in this sort of language, the language of Hindu mythology. We have to be much more on our guard against Christianity, perhaps Christian attitudes, beliefs, myths and legends and so on. Anyway, let's pass on to the next question here.

Chairman: Brahma implies that kings are kings because they were *devas* in their last life. Can we take this literally? If not, how could we use such an explanation to account either for ancient kings or modern rulers? Could it be that *asuras* now have the upper hand, and most rulers are (in some sense) *asuras* reborn? [4]

S: 'Brahma implies that kings are kings because they were *devas* in their last life. Can we take this

literally?’ I suppose it depends on what your conception of kingship is. I think, if Brahma does in fact imply that kings are kings because they were *devas* in their last life, it suggests a quite ideal view of kingship. It would seem that Brahma is thinking of righteous kingship rather than just of kings as such, or kingship as such. Suppose you think of kingship, ancient Indian kingship, as being a blessing, as being a state of extreme human happiness, then you cannot but conceive of it as the fruit of skilful actions in previous lives; so it would be natural, as it were, for someone whose skilful actions had raised him after death to the position of a god, to be reborn on his decease from the state of a god, as a king in a royal family. But this, as I have said, does suggest a rather ideal view of kingship. It suggests that the institution of kingship is such that it has a definite moral basis and is an extremely *happy* state. It would have to be that in order to be the reward, as it were, of skilful deeds. So I think one could say that kings can be said to be gods reborn only where the institution of kingship exists in a rather ideal form.

Put it this way. Supposing you were to be reborn, say, in the family of one of the Caesars, say, Caligula or Nero. Would that be a blessing or would it be a disaster? Do you see what I mean? So kingship *as such* cannot be the reward of virtuous deeds, and therefore kings as such cannot be necessarily *devas* in their previous existences. It would seem to depend upon the nature of the institution of kingship at the time at which they were born or reborn, or *into* which they were born or reborn. Do you see what I’m getting at?

So if one happens to be born or reborn into a royal family which represented or which embodied quite an ideal conception of kingship, in a time of peace and so on, that could be conceivably the result of skilful actions performed in the past, and you could conceivably have been a *deva* in your previous existence.

But if you were born into a royal family which simply exercised power, which had no moral basis, no moral standards in time of war and conflict, even conflict within that royal family itself, with a possibility of being murdered or assassinated at an early age, or living in terror for decade after decade - well, clearly that would *not* be the result of any skilful actions you had performed.

So it would seem that Brahma is speaking of quite an ideal state of affairs, of kingship in the ideal sense, under what one might describe as cosmically normal conditions; and, of course, at the time of which Brahma is speaking, it would seem that kingship is hereditary. It wasn’t always so in India, but it would seem that, at the time when the sutra was composed or written down, the time of which Brahma can be supposed to be speaking, the institution of kingship - monarchy - was [5] hereditary. Whereas in modern times, of course, rulers are often elected or even seize power, like military dictators.

So Brahma’s statement does not imply that present-day rulers, even, are gods reborn. They could well be *asuras* reborn or even worse; they could be *pretas* reborn.

Dharmadhara: Bhante, I have a question. The later Dalai Lamas - eighth, ninth, tenth - died, or were murdered, very young, in quick succession. Presumably one could question what led to them being reborn in those very unfavourable circumstances, and whether they actually were incarnations of the Dalai Lama or Avalokitesvara. Would you comment on that?

S: Well, I suppose it raises the question: can the innocent suffer? They could have been the real Dalai Lama; they could have been the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara trying to do his best for Tibet, but simply being put out of the way by people who were hungry for power themselves. On the other hand, it could be that that particular being who was - I won’t say *born* as Dalai Lama but who was *identified* as the Dalai Lama - was not in fact the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara but some other

unfortunate being, whose unskilful actions had caused him to be born into that particular family and selected in that particular way. There are those two possibilities. But whether, in the case of any particular Dalai Lama, this or the other possibility was the case, we probably have no way of knowing.

Kovida: Is it conceivable for a Bodhisattva to be overwhelmed like that, if the former is true?

S: Well, 'overwhelmed' - I suppose a Bodhisattva is willing to take risks. The Indian Buddhist attitude seems to be that the good man is always successful. The good man has such a lot of *punya* to his credit that no real misfortune can happen to him. I think one has to question that.

Dharmadhara: That's the Indian attitude or the Indian Buddhist attitude?

S: Well, Indian *and* Indian Buddhist attitude. So I think the Indian, including the Indian Buddhist, attitude can be one of rather superficial optimism, I am afraid. I think it doesn't, or at least it sometimes doesn't, give sufficient weight to the fact that a person who is genuinely innocent and who doesn't have a lot of unskilful karma to his debit, can actually suffer as the result of other [6] people's unskilful actions. I think traditional Buddhism doesn't give enough weight to that fact. Perhaps there is *too* great a tendency - not so much in Buddhism, but in Indian thought in general - to believe that if anything unpleasant befalls you, you *must* have deserved it; which would seem to reduce everything that befalls you to your karma, to your own previous skilful or unskilful actions. But that is not really the Buddhist teaching.

Kovida: If someone is born with skilful actions, an accumulation of merit, you would think that they would be able to sort of guide their life away from this adverse influence.

S: I think that is certainly the case; but I think at the same time that there are limits, because sometimes other people, in an unskilful way or for unskilful reasons, are determined to do you some harm or some injury. I don't think that the fact that you yourself have always been skilful and are also highly intelligent will necessarily enable you to evade that, or escape it *altogether*. They may be too much for you, at least as regards outward appearances. You may be able to maintain a positive mental or positive emotional attitude, but externally you may be defeated or you may even be killed, despite your *punya*, despite all the *punya* that you have accumulated. So I think traditional Indian thought, including Buddhist thought to *some* extent, doesn't take that sufficiently into consideration. It always wants a happy ending.

Nagabodhi: Do you see that as just an Indian psychological tendency, a social or cultural tendency?

S: Perhaps psychological isn't quite the right word; perhaps social and cultural aren't, but it seems quite embedded in the Indian attitude to life. That's why in India they haven't developed tragedy; they've got *drama* but they have never developed tragedy. There is always the happy ending, whatever happens before that, even if it necessitates a god appearing and just restoring all the dead bodies to life. It's a bit like the Book of Job, which comes very *near* to being a tragedy but escapes at the last minute, as it were, and after all Job's sufferings God gives him back everything that he has lost tenfold; as though having ten more sons and ten more daughters, or whatever it is, would more than compensate you for the sons and daughters that you'd lost! It was as though the tragedy, or the misfortune, or the suffering, could be wiped out.

Dharmadhara: It's like the usual fairy story, it comes right at the end. [7]

S: Yes. Anyway, that's a somewhat separate issue from what the question is dealing with.

So it's not so much that we can't take what Brahma is saying literally, but we have to ask ourselves what Brahma is in fact really saying, what he is referring to; what sort of kings he is referring to, what type of conception of kingship he is referring to, within what context he is speaking.

Nagabodhi: It doesn't seem to be a very Western conception of kingship in terms of Shakespeare's idea of 'Uneasy rests the head who wears the hollow crown'.

S: But then Shakespeare also says: 'There's a divinity doth hedge a king.' I think Shakespeare's historical plays do seem to involve the assumption that there is something divine about kingship. This increases the enormity of the offence of someone who overthrows or kills an anointed king, because he has not just been crowned, he has been *anointed*, and in the English coronation ceremony - and I assume this goes back into medieval times - the sovereign is actually ordained as a clerk in holy orders, and is anointed with consecrated oil; and, of course, the king is often regarded - especially in Stuart times was regarded - as God's representative on earth. King Charles I asserted this principle *very* strongly at the time of his trial - that he was responsible only to God, and he was not accountable to his subjects. That was his basic principle and he never moved from that. He said 'A subject and a sovereign are clean different things.'

Also there was the belief, right down until the time of Queen Anne, that the sovereign had *healing* power, a power which could touch for the king's evil, as it was called. Dr. Johnson, as a child, was touched by Queen Anne for the king's evil; one of the last people to be touched. Charles II, it is estimated, touched about 200,000 people in the course of his reign. It was believed that this power died out with the Stuarts because the Hanoverians were a collateral branch and hadn't inherited, therefore, that power; but it is supposed to have descended from Edward the Confessor through all the English sovereigns.

So there are even now some remnants of this belief in divine kingship, in the case of the English monarchy even now.

Dharmadhara: Do you think with Lady Di shaking hands with the AIDS victims, there's a trace there?

S: Well, there might be some sort of distant echo of that, who knows? It's interesting that she has done that. [8]

Dharmadhara: Can you marry into that power? [*Laughter*] Traditionally.

S: I'm not sure, I think you'd have to be consecrated as well. It doesn't inhere in all members of the royal family, but only in the sovereign. So presumably it's partly a matter of blood and partly a matter of anointing with the consecrated oil.

Dharmadhara: Could you say what remnants you do see - for example, with Elizabeth and Charles - remnants of this divine kingship?

S: Well, there is the coronation ceremony itself, which has - Hocart goes into this - many features in common with very ancient conceptions, even primitive conceptions. Almost everything that happens in the course of the coronation ceremony has a parallel in ancient rites.

Dharmadhara: It's almost like they spend the rest of their lives riding on that ceremony, or that

consecration.

S: Well, the consecration is normally for life. This is why, no doubt, people felt Edward VIII's abdication so strongly. But it's almost like a pope resigning - when you're pope, you're pope for life. An ex-pope is almost unthinkable, though there have been two or three in history; so in the same way, an ex-king. The Middle Ages couldn't conceive of an ex-king. That is why when, for instance, Henry IV usurped the crown from Richard II, and when - who usurped it from Edward II? *[Silence]* Oh dear. I can't remember now *[Edward III]*. But the usurper was faced by a problem: what to do with the king whom he had displaced. He couldn't execute him; that would have been too shocking to the people. He couldn't allow him to remain alive, because that would have been too dangerous. So usually he was done away with quietly: in other words, he was murdered in secret. In the case of Charles I, what shocked people was that a king could be executed. Of course, Charles I didn't agree that he could be *legally* executed; he maintained it was completely *illegal*. But Oliver Cromwell and the puritans - the Independents - thought otherwise. So this was, in some ways psychologically, a sort of turning point in English history, that the king could actually be charged and tried and executed, even though it's generally agreed now by constitutional authorities that it was illegal. But what else could Cromwell do with him? The king had shown himself personally to be unreliable and completely treacherous, and unwilling to keep his promises. The king believed that he was not doing wrong in breaking his promises, because a king could [9] not be bound by promises given under duress to subjects, so he had no moral scruple about breaking his promises at all. So it was quite impossible to trust the king. On the other hand, if he had been allowed to remain alive, there could have been more rebellions and more civil war. On the other hand, Cromwell was a straightforward sort of person; he couldn't think of just doing away with the king privately. And he also believed that he was *right*, and that the king must be shown to be in the wrong, and he believed in doing things with some sort of legal form. So he had the king tried and executed.

Queen Elizabeth I was faced with the same problem in connection with Mary Queen of Scots. Her presence in Britain was a continuing threat to the queen's life. None the less, she was an anointed queen. Queen Elizabeth was the *last* person who wanted to publicly execute an anointed queen; she herself was an anointed queen! But, in the end, she was driven to it, most unwillingly.

Kovida: It's quite interesting, in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, when he loses his crown he becomes nothing. He just loses his identity almost as a man.

Nagabodhi: Bhante, do you think that the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in some way prepared the ground for the execution of the king?

S: I am sure it did. And I am sure Queen Elizabeth realised this; she knew perfectly well what she was doing; she was no fool. I think this is why she shrank from it to such an extent, and was gradually persuaded by her advisers. She knew perfectly well what she was doing, I am sure. And, of course, when it was done, she had a strong revulsion and some people say she just put on an act, that she hadn't really intended that Mary Queen of Scots should die, even though she had signed the death warrant, and she put all the blame on the secretary who - Davies, I think his name was - she fined him and sent him to the Tower of London for several years for carrying out her orders, just to demonstrate that she hadn't really intended that the order should be carried out! So, quite apart from diplomatic considerations, she was clearly in a very ambivalent state of mind about it all. She was *years* in making up her mind even to sign the death warrant, even though it was known that Mary Queen of Scots was plotting to assassinate her; Mary Queen of Scots being next in line of succession to the throne of England.

Dharmadhara: Coming to the present and Prince Charles, with his unexpressed interest in Buddhism - assuming there is an interest there - do you think it would [10] be possible for him to retain the kingship and have a publicly stated involvement in Buddhism?

S: Well, he couldn't, because he has to take the coronation oath, and part of the coronation oath is that he vows to uphold the Protestant religion by law established; which he couldn't possibly do, he couldn't take that oath if he really believed in any other religion.

Dharmadhara: Do you think politically or -

S: And of course the sovereign is the head of the Church of England.

Dharmadhara: That oath was presumably introduced by Henry VIII, or afterwards. Would there be any way of -

S: No, it was introduced at the time of the Glorious Revolution, in 1688.

Dharmadhara: Do you think it would be at all possible to remove it, for him to skilfully remove it?

S: Oh yes! No, *he* couldn't remove it; it would have to be removed by Parliament and receive the Royal Assent. It could be removed only if the Church of England was disestablished.

Dharmadhara: Really? Gosh!

S: Yes. So that the sovereign was no longer head of the Church of England, and presumably would be free to follow any religion which he or she thought fit. At present, the sovereign is bound by law to be Protestant. A Catholic, I believe, even now cannot succeed to the throne, or at least would not succeed to the throne.

Kovida: There was all that trouble with Enoch Powell, when a marriage to someone else was looming and she was a Catholic.

S: There was some talk of Prince Charles marrying, I think, the daughter of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Luxemburg, who was a Catholic, and *this* question arose. So in some ways the issue is still quite a living one, and quite a lot of people seem to have a feeling for the king or the queen, or both, that goes beyond their [11] actual constitutional position, with definitely emotional overtones. I read somewhere, for instance, that seasoned actors or stage performers say that, if it's a Command Performance and the Queen is there, they have nerves in a way that they never have if anybody else is there; they experience this *only* for members of the Royal Family - which is quite revealing. They are not in the least formidable, they have really have no power, they can't order anyone to the Tower or have their heads chopped off [*Laughter*]; the most they can do is not invite you to their garden party. That's the only power they have. But nonetheless, people are nervous when they approach them; so why is this? Do you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi: They still embody a lot of power.

S: Well, they still fulfil a sort of mythic role.

Nagabodhi: My mother once was walking round some ornamental gardens near where they lived, and she came to a pond - she was with an old aunt of mine - and they were looking in the water,

and when they looked up the Queen was just on the other side, as close to them as you are to me, Bhante! - the way they described this event, it was almost traumatic, severely traumatic, they just didn't know what to do or where to look; they were terrified, and the Queen was simply standing there.

S: Not like Queen Elizabeth I, who might come across you walking in her garden and send you to the Tower on the spot. [*Much laughter throughout this story.*] But the reactions are much the same; it's interesting. Just this elderly lady - not even wearing her crown; wearing a hat, just like yours!

Nagabodhi: Probably walking a corgi.

S: I remember some years ago, when Prince Charles, I think, visited America and stayed at the White House, when Nixon was president; and then the Americans, people connected with the White House, started some talk about what a good thing it would be if Charles was to marry Nixon's daughter - what was her name? Patricia or something like that. And I think Nixon himself was talking in terms of the family in Buckingham Palace and the family in the White House, as though they were equally royal, as it were; and this gave quite a lot of offence in England - that the President of the United States, who was the most powerful man in the world, had dared to compare himself with the Queen of England! Yes. Because there was no [12] aura of divinity around Nixon; in fact rather the opposite! Whereas there is an aura of divinity still, however faint, around the Queen of England. It was even around people like Charles II, who led a much less moral life than the Queen does. Anyway, let's pass on.

Chairman: You say that a few small societies may have been moral orders for a short time. Which ones had you in mind?

S: I'm not sure that I had any in mind particularly. I was perhaps not even thinking of whole states or kingdoms or just certain areas. I can't remember now. I looked up my notes, and the way I expressed myself doesn't suggest that I did in fact have any particular societies in mind.

Chairman: The third question is from Prakasha.

Page 59 of *The Sutra of Golden Light* mentions an Untouchable (*candali*). The Sutra was largely compiled by the year 400 AD, according to Nobel; this is the period Dr. Ambedkar considers Untouchability to have started. Ambedkar considers that the Untouchables were 'Broken Men', and that these broken men were Buddhists. I can understand that, after the Muslim invasion and the destruction of the monasteries and the Buddhist community, the remnants of the Buddhists might be so dispossessed as to become Broken Men; but surely, when the Buddhist community was strong and thriving during the period of the Sutra's composition, this would be unlikely. How is this explained? How far do you agree with Ambedkar's theory that the Untouchables were originally Buddhists?

S: I'm afraid there's a bit of a mix-up here. First of all, the question **says:** 'Page 59 of *The Sutra of Golden Light* mentions an Untouchable (*candali*).' Well, the *translation* uses the word Untouchable, but in the original is presumably *candala*, not *candali*, and *candala* does *not* mean Untouchable. When I say *candala* does not mean Untouchable, I mean that the word itself is not to be translated as 'Untouchable'. The translator is in a way misleading the reader, I'm afraid, by translating *candala* as Untouchable, though a *candala* appears in the Pali Canon. *Candala* literally means one who is fierce, violent and cruel. Originally, a *candala* was someone who literally was just that. But eventually it seems that *candala* came to mean simply someone who was rather base and rather despicable, and in the brahminical texts, the brahminical law books, the *Dharmasastras*,

a *candala* was technically the term applied to the offspring of a *Shudra* man and a *Brahmin* woman. [13] You can see how the term gradually changed from being psychological to being social, as it were.

So one realises that the rest of Prakasha's question really is redundant, because it goes on to say: 'The Sutra was largely compiled by the year 400 AD, according to Nobel; this is the period Dr. Ambedkar considers Untouchability to have started.' Well, the sutra is not talking about Untouchability; the sutra is not speaking of an Untouchable in the sense that Ambedkar is in his book on the Untouchables; do you see what I mean?

And then the question goes on to say: 'Ambedkar considers that the Untouchables were Broken Men and these Broken Men were Buddhists.' I think perhaps Prakasha either hasn't read what I wrote very carefully, or what Ambedkar wrote very carefully, or doesn't remember it very clearly, because when it is said that the Untouchables were Broken Men the meaning is that due to internecine tribal warfare at a very early period, some people became detached from their tribes or maybe their tribes were wiped out, and became Broken Men; this is *before* the Buddhist period. And some of those Broken Men became Buddhists. And when the brahminical reaction set in, those Broken Men, some of whom had become Buddhists, who had encamped on the outskirts of the village, *became* Untouchables partly because they did not give up the eating of carrion and partly because they insisted on remaining Buddhists. So the question is based, to some extent, on a lack of understanding of what I said in *Ambedkar and Buddhism* or what Ambedkar says in his own book on The Untouchables.

'...the remnants of the Buddhists might be so dispossessed...' - yes, the Broken Men are not remnants of Buddhists; Broken Men as such. They antedate that by perhaps a thousand years.

And 'How far do you agree with Ambedkar's theory that the Untouchables were originally Buddhists?' It seems to me to be the most plausible theory that has been advanced so far. I am not sure that it can be understood as meaning that all Untouchables were originally Buddhists, but I think it's fairly certain that a *percentage* of them were. Unfortunately, Ambedkar's theories or views haven't been given serious consideration by sociologists and anthropologists, and that is rather a pity, because no doubt the academics were not happy about him breaking into their particular field, he not being a sociologist or anthropologist in the sense that they were.

Chairman: Question 4 is from Saddhaloka, regarding the success of Right Livelihood businesses. [14]

Ten years ago, you spoke of 'team-based right livelihood projects' as playing a major role in our efforts to 'transform the world'. Nowadays we usually point to India as our major success in working in the world. Do you have any reflections on why we have not been as successful as we might have been in respect of our efforts to establish right-livelihood businesses?

S: There's a bit of a jump here from 'team-based right livelihood projects' as playing a major role in our efforts to 'transform the world' and 'India as our major success in working in the world'. There is a bit of a hiatus between the two, because in India we don't have much in the way of team-based right livelihood projects, do we? There have been one or two very small attempts, not particularly successful; so our working in the world in India is of rather a different type, it's less specialised, it consists more in the actual spreading of the Dharma.

Dharmadhara: Excuse me; I think he is using India as an example in the West, to point out to people the success of the FWBO, rather than working in India, using India in the West.

S: I don't get the point.

Dharmadhara: Rather than basing our prestige, if you like, on our own right livelihood projects, nowadays we tend more to point towards our work in India to show the success of the FWBO in general.

S: But, even so, the two aren't quite parallel; because, even if that is the case, you have as it were jumped from talking of working in the world in terms of right livelihood, which is something very specific, to working in the world in terms of simply preaching the Dharma and carrying on purely dharmic activities. So you can't really compare these two, even though perhaps people do. I'm not even so sure that people do usually 'point to India as our major success in working in the world'. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Dharmadhara: Could you say a bit more about that - about how it's not so much working in the world as right livelihood?

S: In the case of team-based right livelihood projects, you are actually trying to replace, even though to a very small extent, a capitalist structure by what we call a co-operative one. This is something quite concrete, quite practical. But when you [15] are preaching the Dharma, though that lays the *foundation* for all the other developments, the more concrete developments, it is of a much more general nature. You are literally *in* the world, you are working *in* the world, that is to say in the *midst* of the world, surrounded by the world, as distinct from transforming the world to a small extent externally, as it were, or in terms of its institutions. Because perhaps you have transformed to a small extent in other ways through your communities - because there *are* a few communities in India. But you haven't started transforming the world through an alternative *economic* set-up in the way that the team-based right livelihood projects have done or are doing in Britain. So the two are not quite comparable.

Nagabodhi: Nevertheless, Bhante, I think what Saddhaloka is hinting at is that, if in a class an Order Member is asked, 'What do you people do for the world?', whereas six years ago the Order Member might have said, 'We're setting up co-ops and communities,' now I think there is a very strong chance that a lot of them would say, 'Well, in India we are developing medical centres and educational hostels.' This is how an Order Member will as it were win a kind of credibility. I think people will resort to that rather than talking about our co-operatives and communities if in a tight spot.

S: But if it is true that nowadays we usually point to India as our major success in working in the world, one is taking advantage of an ambiguity in the expression 'working in the world' - do you see what I mean? Because, when you speak of working in the world in terms of, say, co-ops, it's a rather different thing from talking of working in the world in terms of simply spreading the Dharma. I say 'simply spreading the Dharma' not because I underestimate that, but because it is a different kind of activity. It is an activity which takes place in the midst of the world, but without in itself actually transforming the world, even to a small extent, by creating institutions, alternative institutions.

Kovida: One is working *in* the world, and one is working *on* the world.

S: Right! Yes. So if we do refer to India rather than to our co-ops, it means we have confused working in the world with working on the world.

Nagabodhi: And presumably, Bhante, that applies to the medical centres and the hostels: that they

are not in any way as radical as the work we are trying to do with our co-operatives and communities. [16]

S: The question that comes at the end is none the less still valid: 'Do you have any reflections on why we have not been as successful as we might have been in respect of our efforts to establish right-livelihood businesses?' I have dealt with this, I think, already. I've spoken, one, of the lack of capital and, two, of the lack of managerial expertise. I think these are probably the two most important reasons why we have not been as successful as we might have been. I was reading the other day about this new Bloomsbury publishing house. They have raised finance - how much finance have they started off with?

Nagabodhi: I heard two million pounds.

S: Two million, yes. So if Windhorse Publications had two million to play about with, we would be more successful than we have been. Well, perhaps we will have one day. But all our team-based right livelihood projects have suffered from under-capitalisation and even *non*-capitalisation - they really have run on a shoestring financially - and also from lack of managerial expertise. I don't think I need go further into that. This is all well-worn, well-trodden ground.

Kovida: But it's interesting - I don't know if you saw that article that I gave Dharmadhara about Globe Road becoming a *[unclear]*. It's obvious we've created an atmosphere that is desirable. People are buying properties. They are moving into it.

S: Yes. And unfortunately we weren't able to buy that property, which is a real shame. It is going to be very difficult to get now, even if it does come again on the market.

Nagabodhi: Just going back to the earlier part of the question, the ambiguous part. In that I think people in the Movement do speak rather proudly of our work in India, particularly the social work, do you think *in a way* that people should be encouraged to put more emphasis on communicating our co-operatives and communities? - because I think, in some ways, the communication of those aspects of our work has been underplayed.

S: It could be.

Nagabodhi: I think the India story has been a dramatic and an easier option for convincing outsiders of the value of what we're doing - [17]

Dharmadhara: More human interest.

Nagabodhi: Yes, that too; perhaps the emphasis needs to be shifted a little.

S: It's not that we should talk less about India but that we should talk more about co-ops.

Nagabodhi: And perhaps appreciate more what we are actually doing in setting them up.

S: I think that sometimes the people working in them, especially the people who work in them for short periods and part-time, don't always appreciate the ideology, so to speak, underlying the co-op.

Dharmadhara: I think even people who have been associated with co-ops for a number of years may not appreciate that. They may have become rather hardened and cynical, due to the lack of

capital and management, and miss the fundamentally undermining effect it has on a small part of capitalist society.

S: We did have that co-ops brochure brought out, didn't we? I don't think any copies of that are left.

Nagabodhi: It is still in print.

S: Is it still in print?

Dharmadhara: We've got several hundred in the cupboard along there. But they're so out of date, because out of the 20 or so co-ops most - over half - are now extinct (**S:** Oh), and it's quite badly dated, so we are stuck with -

Nagabodhi: Not ideologically, it isn't.

Dharmadhara: It's more the back cover. Maybe they could be re-done.

S: Yes, it's interesting that some co-ops or some co-op businesses have closed down, but no *centres* have closed down. I have sometimes been a bit struck by the lack of will to keep co-ops going that have been started. I think in [18] one or two cases they have been wound up rather too easily, as though they were a bit inconvenient. *[Pause]*

Maybe this is one of the things to be discussed when Subhuti comes back - whether we ought to re-emphasise co-ops and team-based right livelihood. I think that the co-ops that have survived are on a firmer footing now than they were, and I think people working in co-ops on the whole are more realistic in their attitudes towards co-ops than perhaps they were.

Nagabodhi: It's not many, is it, now?

S: Well, we've really got only three - only two sort of really big co-ops, and perhaps three businesses. I mean, Windhorse Trading is not exactly a co-op in structure, though it is to a great extent in spirit. We've got Hockneys and we've got the Cherry Orchard.

Dharmadhara: I did a quick tally the other day. There are 100 people supported in the FWBO, and almost all of those are supported by co-ops.

S: That's interesting. So it is working to some extent, isn't it? Well, there's Ink - perhaps they are still in the medium range.

Kovida: There's Friends Foods.

S: Yes, there's Friends Foods. Gardening. They are all quite long-established businesses. But there's no co-op in Brighton any more. Where else? - Bristol doesn't have one, as yet, though they want to have. Manchester doesn't have one.

_____: Norwich.

S: Norwich doesn't have one. West London, of course, has got the gardening business and the wholefood shop, so they are quite well off in that respect for a small centre: one a men's business, one a women's. And there's no men's business around the LBC any more.

Kovida: Friends Foods.

S: That's true, yes, that's a small one, though, isn't it? How many people are working there? [19]

Nagabodhi: Eight.

S: Is it as many as that? Not all full-time, anyway. Probably no more than four full time.

Nagabodhi: Yes, at some time there have been a lot of men in the area employed by *Globe*, by Windhorse Associates, by Windhorse Trading, by Friends Foods; and now there's only one business in the area.

Dharmadhara: You might consider Phoenix a sort of slight - working in the office -

S: And of course the women have got Bodywise.

Nagabodhi: Yes, and Cherry Orchard, Typesetters, Jambala.

S: On the other hand, a lot of men have sort of gone forth into other areas in a way that the women haven't; I mean like Windhorse Trading and Aid for India.

Anyway, let's press on, shall we?

Chairman: The next question from Dharmadhara - actually three questions.

From this lecture and elsewhere it is possible to form the impression that your time in Kalimpong was fairly free and leisurely and that you could spend as much time meditating and writing as desired. Yet recently you said in conversation that it was actually quite a busy period. Could you elaborate more on this?

S: Well, I was 14 years in Kalimpong, so it did vary from time to time. But I think during the first seven years in particular I was busy in all sorts of ways. I then lived nearer the town, nearer the bazaar. I had quite a lot of students whom I used to teach, quite a lot of people came to see me, quite a lot of people came to stay with me; and I did my writing and meditating and study in between. So I seemed able in those days to do an hour of this and an hour of something else, and then an hour of something quite different without any difficulty. But the second seven years I spent at the Triyana Vardhana Vihara, which was farther away from town, and there I *did* devote myself much more to study and meditation. [20]

Nagabodhi: When were you editing *Stepping Stones* and the *Maha Bodhi Journal*?

S: *Stepping Stones* I edited the first two years in Kalimpong, and the *Maha Bodhi Journal* for about 12 years altogether.

Nagabodhi: So almost throughout your stay.

S: Though I must admit, towards the end of my stay, the last two or three years, I wasn't putting as much energy into it as I had done earlier on, for various reasons. It had become a bit of a chore, I'm afraid, by that time.

Nagabodhi: Were you as busy during the rainy season throughout the time?

S: Not so busy with visitors, for obvious reasons. I would usually do more study and more meditation then. And, of course, after I moved to the Triyana Vardhana Vihara I developed a practice of not going outside the vihara during the rainy season retreat period. I observed the rainy season retreat, or the rains residence, in that way. I wouldn't go out, I wouldn't go beyond the gate. So I would spend much more time than usual studying, meditating and writing; and as it was the rainy season I would get very few visitors. But even here at Padmaloka, a few years ago, my time was more free and leisurely than it is now.

OK, then, second question.

Chairman: The Buddha spoke in the language of myth and also in the language of reason. Is this distinction made in the early strata of the Pali Canon? Does this distinction correspond in any way to the Buddha's use of both prose and verse?

S: Do you mean: is the distinction explicitly made by the Buddha himself - 'This is the language of myth and this is the language of reason' - or that examples of these two languages occur?

Dharmadhara: Does the Buddha make the distinction?

S: To the best of my knowledge, not. No. I don't think one can say that the distinction corresponds to the use of prose and verse. It's not that when the Buddha speaks the language of myth he speaks in verse and when he speaks the language of reason he speaks in prose; no, that is not the case at all. He [21] sometimes speaks the language of myth in *prose* and sometimes speaks the language of reason in verse. The verse is not always poetry. I'm speaking of verse attributed to the Buddha; I mean many verses of the *Dhammapada* are not poetry - a few are.

Dharmadhara: Why do you think the Buddha didn't distinguish between the language of myth and of reason, would you speculate?

S: One can't really say. The distinction was not in the air and, presumably, he didn't find it necessary to make it in the kind of way that we do.

All right, the next one, the third question?

Chairman: Does the teaching of the five *niyamas* appear in Buddhism outside the Theravada? For example, it does not seem to have reached Tibetan Buddhism or the Sarvastivada, apparently. If not, how could this be, and what are the consequences for Tibetan Buddhism and the Mahayana in general? Does this illustrate the benefits of the FWBO non-sectarian approach, i.e. not drawing exclusively from one school?

S: To the best of my knowledge, the teaching of the five *niyamas* doesn't appear in Buddhism outside the Theravada. In the Theravada itself, it appears in the commentarial literature, not in the Canon. It represents a sort of systematisation of the teaching contained in the Canon. I tracked down one of the more important places in which the teaching appears in the commentarial literature; it is in Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Dhamma-sangani*, the first book of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. In English, it's *The Expositor*, Vol. II, pp. 360-361.

Yes, it doesn't seem to have reached Tibetan Buddhism or the Sarvastivada. 'If not, ... what are the consequences for Tibetan Buddhism and the Mahayana in general?' I think the consequence is that

perhaps in Tibetan Buddhism generally, and the Mahayana generally, there isn't such a clear realisation that not everything that befalls you is the direct consequence of karma committed by you in a previous existence. There's a tendency to regard *everything* that happens to you as a result of your own personal past karma, whereas the teaching of the five *niyamas* makes it clear that that is not necessarily the case. So therefore, this does 'illustrate the benefits of the FWBO non-sectarian approach, not drawing exclusively from one school.' No one school of Buddhism has got the whole Buddhist teaching, although there are useful teachings to be found in *all* the schools. Sometimes those teachings are *distinctive* to that particular school or that particular group. So had one confined oneself to [22] Tibetan Buddhism and Sarvastivada sources, one would not have come across this teaching, the five *niyamas*, as far as is known, and that would be a serious loss.

Dharmadhara: Again, would you be able to speculate on why it didn't get through to the Sarvastivada?

S: I should think it's impossible to say. I suppose the broad general reason is that not everybody, not even every school of Buddhism, can concern itself with all possible aspects. Something is *bound* to get left out, or something is *bound* to be emphasised; so all the more important to have as wide an acquaintance as one possibly can with all the different forms of Buddhism. It may be, even, that points of relevance are being missed by the Buddhist tradition as a whole, for various, perhaps historical, reasons, and that perhaps we can take a point from Plato or a point from Schopenhauer or a point from Shelley that is *useful* to us, but which does not actually occur in the Buddhist tradition, in Buddhist canonical literature. It probably won't be a very *major* point, but sometimes even *minor* points are of extreme importance and value to one at a comparatively early stage of one's spiritual development. I mentioned earlier on that Indian Buddhism, at least, didn't appear to be sufficiently aware of the fact that the innocent could suffer, or that such a thing as tragedy was possible. That perhaps is an insight that has been contributed by the West.

Nagabodhi: There is the tragedy of King Bimbisara in the Pali Canon.

S: But *was* it a tragedy in the Western sense? Because, after all, he was a Stream Entrant, possibly an *anagami*, so was he unfortunate? Was his kingdom a real loss, from his point of view?

Nagabodhi: He was content to be able to see the Vulture's Peak.

S: A man who had attained Stream Entry could not possibly be regarded as having failed in life, [*Laughter*] regardless of what happened to him externally! If Oedipus had gained Stream Entry there would have been no tragedy. If King Lear had gained Stream Entry there would have been no tragedy. A bit difficult to *imagine* King Lear gaining Stream Entry!

All right, then, let's pass on.

Chairman: The next question from Ratnabodhi on law and punishment. [23]

In this lecture you say that a society should reflect the Law of Karma; that people need to be taught, through punishment, that actions have consequences. Do you foresee a time when the Movement will need to develop its own system of 'law' and punishment? If so, could you comment on the possible nature of such a system? Would punishment in the WBO require particular considerations which would distinguish it from punishment in the FWBO? If so, in what respect? Can you comment on law and punishment in other Buddhist societies and in other spiritual communities?

S: 'Do you foresee a time when the Movement will need to develop its own system of "law" and punishment? If so, could you comment on the possible nature of such a system?' I see that the question is asked with regard to the Movement. One has to distinguish between the Order and the Friends - as, in fact, the questioner does in the next part of the question. One would have to distinguish, because in the Order as such there can't be any question of law and punishment, because law and punishment, strictly speaking, are based, at least to some extent, on the power mode, whereas the Order, by its very nature, is based on the love mode, to use those expressions. So the Order as such cannot punish - an Order member cannot punish another Order member, because that would mean invoking the power mode. And if an Order Member behaves in such a way that punishment is necessary, he or she is to that extent no longer an member of the Order. Supposing a member of the Order commits a murder, and assuming that murder requires punishment - at least by the state - the Order member would cease to be an Order Member by virtue of the fact that they had broken the precept to such a disastrous extent. There would be no question of them being *punished* by the Order; they would cease to be an Order member, would place themselves beyond the pale of the Order. So it wouldn't be that the Order would punish them by expelling them; they would automatically expel themselves, and the Order would simply recognise that.

But supposing the FWBO, or supposing even the Order, somehow succeeded to or acquired political power, *then* the question of law and punishment would arise. One would have to consider to what extent a member of the Order could exercise political power; in other words, to what extent they could operate or function in accordance with the power mode. I have suggested, I think, earlier on - not in connection with this series of lectures but in some other context - that one can operate in accordance with the power mode in the world, so long as that power mode is based on and controlled by the love mode. The example I gave was when you [24] forcibly restrain a child from doing something which would be harmful for the child.

What form punishment would take if the FWBO or an Order Member were to possess and exercise political power, I couldn't say; this is something I haven't thought about, as it seemed so remote from the present reality, so to speak; but it might have to be considered one day.

As for law and punishment in other Buddhist societies, other spiritual communities, in a spiritual community as such there can't be law and punishment. But Buddhist societies, in the sense of Buddhist states, have had laws and have had punishments. They don't *always* spring directly from Buddhist principles. For instance, in Burma, it seems they base themselves on the Laws of Manu to a great extent.

Usually what has happened is that the influence of Buddhism has *modified* laws and punishments to some extent, rather than introducing a system of laws and punishments based on Buddhist principles. I think one has to regard the whole question of the extent to which a spiritual community can exercise political power as an open question. Traditionally, I think, usually the view has been, except in Tibet, that the spiritual community, especially in the form of the monastic order, should exercise *influence* rather than actually exercise political power, but one could argue that that was a sort of *shirking* of responsibility. [Pause]

Ambedkar has discussed the question of whether a society can be kept in order, so to speak, by force, and he says obviously it can't, therefore there needs to be some generally accepted moral principle or principles which will hold society together and on account of which [25] society will be held together and order maintained, because you can perhaps keep the antisocial minority under control by force, but you can't keep the *majority* of the people under control by force - not for very long, anyway. So a moral order is needed, moral principles are needed, a moral basis is needed. So

perhaps the spiritual community would be better occupied trying to strengthen the moral basis of society in various ways, rather than by taking on political power and having the direct responsibility of dealing with the anti-social minority by methods which were in accordance with the power mode rather than the love mode. All these things can be argued, and we haven't really given them sufficient thought yet for me to be able to say very much - I myself haven't given them sufficient thought.

Nagabodhi: It's a very complex area.

S: Yes, indeed.

Nagabodhi: Because the spiritually committed can never really give up hope for anyone. There's no way that the spiritual community could assume 'Well, there are these people who are not spiritual beings, so they need one kind of law which is distinct from that operating within the spiritual community.' They must be open to the possibility that all people in society are -

S: But on the other hand, they probably need to be open to the possibility that even those people who, in the *long* run, would be amenable to the love mode, in the short term can only be dealt with in accordance with the power mode. The fact that you forcibly prevent the child from running into the fire doesn't mean that you give up all hope that one day he will be a rational human being. But it seems to me that the so-called law and order problem that we have today in many countries, including Britain, is mainly on account of the fact that the *moral* order has broken down for many people, or that there are certain moral sanctions which a larger number of people, perhaps a higher percentage of people now than before, no longer accept or no longer recognise.

Nagabodhi: Bhante, within the Movement, the closest phenomenon I have heard of to a punishment or a system of punishment is the somewhat enforced taking of responsibility - there was one incident a few months ago that I heard of, which I know some people were upset about: somebody working within a centre or a co-operative made a mistake in a job that he was doing which ended up being quite [26] expensive - I think it was a plumbing mistake or something like that; and he was held personally accountable, and I think there was money involved that he had to find. I think sometimes there seems to be a tendency to almost - well, if the taking of responsibility might mean financial hardship or a lot of extra workload for somebody, it almost seems to appear as a punishment - I don't know whether you would care to comment on that.

S: Well, take the actual incident, whether real or hypothetical, that someone, just due to carelessness, does cause serious financial loss to a particular centre. If that person is at all sincere in his or her spiritual life, they will recognise what they have done and they will confess it, and they will do their best to make good the loss. They will *want* to make good the loss. If they *don't* want to make good the loss or even resent the suggestion that they should make good the loss or that they are in fact responsible, they are really putting themselves beyond the pale of the spiritual community because they are not acting as responsible individuals. So that can't be overlooked.

It could be that they are not *legally* accountable, so there is no question, in any case, of legal action; but I think the spiritual community or centre has to give some expression to the fact that that person, by his behaviour in not accepting responsibility, has placed himself beyond the pale. Supposing he was a Mitra and had asked for ordination, that ordination request could not be taken seriously, and the centre or the chapter, or the Order Members there, would be quite justified in refusing even to discuss that person's request for ordination while he maintained that attitude. It wouldn't be a *punishment*, but it would just be a recognition of the objective fact that that person was not serious about the spiritual life. So you could not proceed with his request for ordination as

though he *was* in fact serious about the spiritual life. It would be a psychological and spiritual impossibility; it is not a question of punishment.

Nagabodhi: The crucial factor being his readiness to accept responsibility for his mistake.

S: Right, yes. Not only to accept responsibility but to make good the loss to the extent that he could or that he reasonably could. Of course sometimes it might be a rather fine point whether that person can really be blamed. For instance, I remember in an example years ago - I think it was years ago - when someone did make a mistake which cost the centre money. But then that person had been entrusted by apparently responsible Order Members with the responsibility of doing that particular thing [27] which he did wrongly and therefore losing money - he not being an Order Member. So should *they* not have been more careful in their choice of the person to whom they committed the responsibility? There is that sort of consideration also to be thought of.

Usually, an organisation bears losses incurred by its employees or other such people if they just represent ordinary human error. But there is such a thing as culpable error, criminally culpable error; and that does fall into a rather different category.

Dharmadhara: What do you think of docking the employee's pay for dishes they break more in a careless way rather than in a culpable way?

S: It depends what you mean by docking. If the person accepted the responsibility, well, in a way there would be no problem except that they had been originally careless; but at least they recognise that they have been and are making up for it. But if they refuse to recognise any responsibility and wouldn't agree to their pay being docked or whatever, they just place themselves in the position of an ordinary employee, don't they? You can't take them as seriously as a member of the spiritual community or a member of the co-op. There can be a question, as it were, from the beginning, of docking someone's pay only if they are just a straightforward employee and you don't recognise any sort of spiritual bond with them, as when you hire someone from outside. *[Pause]*

Sometimes it is not a question of punishing but of *penalising*. For instance, when someone makes a mistake in printing something for you - a printing firm - you make them make up for it; you insist. You don't have to go to court about it, but you put on a little bit of pressure and in the end they usually agree, don't they? They agree that they should be penalised.

Then there is the case of the building team in Norwich having to go to court over that £2,000. It was quite right that they should do so, because it was almost an attempt to cheat them - well, it probably was. And I think Kovida's been to the Small Claims Court. What was it?

Kovida: Regularly in the candle business people try to not pay for candles.

S: Ah, yes, you see; so one is dealing with the world now. You don't want to harm them. Supposing you learned that someone, through no fault of their own, had gone bankrupt, and say they were almost starving and they had a family - well, you wouldn't then sue them. But if it appeared, as was usually the case, that they were [28] just trying it on, I think one is fully justified in resorting to the courts. You are operating in accordance with the power mode, but you are operating in accordance with the power mode on the *basis* of the love mode; you don't wish to do that person any harm. You wouldn't operate in accordance with the power mode if it *meant* doing any harm, but you are not going to allow yourself to be swindled.

So I very much doubt if you can afford, so to speak, to deal with the world entirely in accordance

with the love mode. Perhaps you can as an individual, but probably not as an organisation. Supposing you are running a team-based right livelihood business, and supposing nobody pays the bills you send them for goods or for services rendered; what are you going to do? Are you going to sacrifice that money which was going to be used for propagating the Dharma? Somebody might argue, 'Isn't your behaviour contradictory? On the one hand you are wanting to get the money to propagate the Dharma; on the other hand, you are getting the money from people who don't want to give it to you, by forcible methods.' But I don't think that that is a real argument, because you are getting from them not what is theirs but what is *yours*. They have wrongfully detained what is yours. It is just as when you lend someone some money and they don't return it by the promised date; it becomes theft, it becomes taking the not-given.

So you can't argue that all cases of having recourse to the power mode are not in accordance with the Dharma. I don't think one can argue that. But one must be very clear that, if you do have recourse to the power mode in dealing with someone, you are *ipso facto* not recognising them as a member of the spiritual community. With regard to a member of the spiritual community, say in this case the Order, you should not have to deal with them in that way. If you do, if you really have to, it means, to the extent that you are having to deal with them in that way, that they have ceased to be a member of the spiritual community.

Dharmadhara: Earlier, when you said that Order Members, if they commit a disastrous crime, expel themselves automatically by doing that -

S: To the extent of the crime, yes.

Dharmadhara: - from the Order, and that this is merely recognised by the Order, did you mean recognise in a formal sense or in an informal sense?

S: Well, certainly informally, and perhaps there would need to be a formal recognition. We haven't yet got round to that, in a way fortunately. Though I have sometimes wondered about it, when an Order Member has, say, been guilty of an act [29] of violence. Some day we shall have to devise some formula for dealing with a situation of that sort.

Anyway, I think that's probably enough on that particular group of questions. I have gone over this ground several times before in some detail.

Chairman: The final question is from Virananda on the influence of *The Sutra of Golden Light*.

What influence - in terms of imagery and thematic content - has the Sutra had on subsequent Buddhist literature? For instance, does the Transcendental appear under the symbol of the Golden Light in other texts?

S: Well, to answer the second part of the question first, the Transcendental doesn't appear under the symbol of the Golden Light in other texts, to the best of my knowledge. I certainly haven't come across it appearing in that way. And as for the influence in terms of imagery and thematic content that the Sutra has had on subsequent Buddhist literature, I don't think it's possible to say very much about that. I have certainly not come across any trace of this influence. Just to give you an example: if you look at Chinese Buddhist art, there are innumerable illustrations of *the White Lotus Sutra* and the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* - I don't remember any illustration of *The Sutra of Golden Light*. Yes, there are plenty of illustrations from the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*, too, but again nothing from *The Sutra of Golden Light*. I don't remember any depiction of any incident from *The Sutra of Golden Light* either in Chinese art or Tibetan art or Japanese art. There *might* be, just here and there, but they are certainly not prominent in the way that illustrations of *the White Lotus*

Sutra and the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* are. I am not sure why that should be, because there are some quite dramatic incidents. There are illustrations of the Pure Land Sutras, the *Sukhavatī Vyūha* Sutras also. I believe there are illustrations of the *Srimaladevī Simhanada Sutra*.

Nagabodhi: Have there been any sects that have shown a particular allegiance to this Sutra?

S: Not that I recollect, at all. Though apparently the Sutra is very popular in Tibet and Mongolia, especially Mongolia, but one hasn't come across any trace of its influence on the literature or the art, which is rather strange if it is in fact so popular. It is not as though it doesn't lend itself to that treatment, and it isn't as though there aren't plenty of images and themes. It is possible that there are [30] illustrations that haven't been identified, but even so the Sutra hasn't exerted that kind of influence in the way that *the White Lotus Sutra* has, and the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*, because one can't miss illustrations of those texts if one looks at, say, Chinese art.

Nagabodhi: Images of Ruciraketu -

S: The 500 parasols, or the Earth Goddess with her head against the soles of the monk's feet, the preacher's feet. And the expression of the Golden Light for the Transcendental doesn't occur in literature, as far as I know.

Dharmadhara: Do the Four Great Kings appear as prominently in other sutras, the four great protectors?

S: I'm not so sure that they do, but of course they appear very prominently in art, but they are quite standard figures in Buddhism generally; they are not especially associated with *The Sutra of Golden Light*, so when they *do* appear, as in Tibetan temples, they can't be regarded as illustrations of *The Sutra of Golden Light*, because they are so well known generally.

Dharmadhara: If their most prominent position is in *The Sutra of Golden Light*, I suppose it would be difficult to prove it was connected.

S: Because if it was connected you would expect to see them collected all four together promising to protect the Sutra, and you would see the Buddha there and other figures. But I'm not aware of any such illustration.

Nagabodhi: At around the section of the confession, there is a sort of Sevenfold Puja, abbreviated. Is that a common theme in the sutra material before *The Sutra of Golden Light*, that there should be that, that the formula, the sevenfold formula - ?

S: I think one could find that Sevenfold Puja there only if one already knows about it. I think it's found in several sources. But it is a bit odd that the Sutra has been comparatively neglected as regards the arts, when it is said to be so popular, at least in Tibet and Mongolia.

I was also wondering about Nepal, because the Sanskrit text has survived. I am not aware of any Nepalese illustrations. I don't know whether the *manuscripts* are illustrated: they might be, because manuscripts of the Perfection of Wisdom in [31] 8,000 Lines found in Nepal are definitely illustrated with little miniature paintings. I wonder whether there are any such manuscripts of *The Sutra of Golden Light*; I don't know. It's not impossible that there are.

Anyway, that seems to be that. A reasonable batch of questions. But, anyway, we've got to the end now, which is quite good. I looked through the transcript of some of the sessions, and it struck me

that the whole discussion on the lecture on confession was quite useful. It could well be edited and published separately. I might even try to turn it into a *Dhammamegha*.

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