General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
with Study Group Leaders
on the VIMALAKIRTI NIRDESA Lecture Series

Padmaloka, May 1987

2 May 1987
'The Magic of a Mahayana Sutra'

PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Kovida, Prasannasiddhi, Nagabodhi, Dharmadhara, Bodhiraja.

Subhuti: ...questions on the first lecture in the series on The Inconceivable Emancipation. I am the quiz master tonight... So we've got nine questions for you, Bhante. They are not brilliant ones.

S: Well, we'll see what we can make of them. Perhaps we will have to polish them a little.

Subhuti: First of all there is a question from Saddhaloka on the historicity of Vimalakirti, asked by Kovida.

Saddhaloka's question: Apart from the speculation with regard to Vaisali that you mention at the start of the chapter on the Vimalakirti Nirdesa in The Eternal Legacy, is there any evidence for the historicity of Vimalakirti?

S: To the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence at all, but that is not to say that someone like Vimalakirti or someone on whom the scriptural Vimalakirti was based did not actually live in Vaisali at some time or other. I think one can't really say any more than that.

Subhuti: The second question from Prakasha, on the definition of magic.

Prakasha's question: In the first lecture, you describe the magician conjuring the elephant and say that magical acts demonstrate the Dharma. However, in this series the term magic is used very loosely. I have not really found an adequate definition of what the term magic means. How would you define magic? How can it be differentiated from supranormal phenomena generally? What is magic? PS: My definition: The art of using the mind to produce effects directly on the 'material' or sensory plane without 'material' causes.

S: (Pause). Yes, I suppose it's a question of the definition of the term magic. I don't think it's quite correct to say that in the series I have used the term very loosely. I have and I haven't. In some contexts I use the term quite loosely, apparently; but in others I use the term in a quite precise sense. I use the term loosely because in a way one can't do other than use it loosely. One isn't concerned with the rational; one isn't concerned with the logical. One is concerned with something of a quite different nature, for which I have simply used the term magical; and in those contexts where I use the term loosely I am using it, I suppose one could say, to suggest something, to produce a certain effect. One might say that, used loosely, the term has much more connotation than denotation. I think at the very beginning of the first lecture I give a sort of hint of this that magic suggests something out of this world, it suggests something colourful, it suggests something unusual, [2] something extraordinary, something of a highly

imaginative or even imaginal nature. I am not thinking of magic in the sense that Prakasha defines it, that is to say 'the art of using the mind to produce effects directly on the "material" or sensory plane without "material" causes'; I would say that was a quite narrow definition of magic, because there is such a thing as ritual magic where you produce those sort of effects by an actual ritual. It is something that takes place on the material plane. I would say what Prakasha defines as magic is something more like occultism. So there is this first, rather loose usage of the term, in a semipoetic fashion, just to conjure up a feeling, a sort of atmosphere, a certain attitude. Then there is this more precise sense in which I have used the term, which I do go into in this first lecture, which is that in Buddhism the magical illusion illustrates a specific dharmic point I mention this quite clearly that is to say, that the elephant conjured up by the magician cannot be said to exist in the absolute sense because it has, after all, been conjured up and there isn't a real elephant there. On the other hand, it can't be said absolutely not to exist because people are perceiving it. So phenomenal existence, relative reality or relative truth is said to be like that; it doesn't have any absolute existence, it isn't Ultimate Reality, but on the other hand it cannot be said absolutely not to exist, because it is perceived and it arises in dependence upon causes and conditions. So the magical illusion illustrates that point that what we ordinarily perceive and experience isn't absolute Reality, it is only relative reality, it is paratantra satya, in Yogachara terms. It arises in dependence upon causes and conditions, so it is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal. So the illustration of the magical illusion illustrates that particular point. That is what is meant by magic more precisely. I do go into that. So on the one hand I've got this more precise sense of the term, and on the other the looser sense of the term, which is more to create a sort of aura of feeling, one might say. Is that reasonably clear? One doesn't want to have too rigid a definition of magic, otherwise the term loses its suggestiveness, and it is in its suggestiveness, to a great extent, that its usefulness consists.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, if everything is in a sense like a magical illusion, you've got this phenomenon of things that we consider to be real just being, well, like an illusion, but yes, it would seem that actually we still have to engage with that material, or people still engage with that material.

S: Yes, Buddhist literature does make that point, because when the magician conjures up the elephant, the elephant is perceived by people; because they perceive it they may become frightened; that fright is a real experience and something has to be done about it. Maybe they run away, etc. So the fact that one's experience, or the fact that relative existence is what we call illusory doesn't mean that nothing has to be done about it. We experience it as real, just as the people who perceive the illusory elephant perceive it as real; they don't know that it's illusory; they don't know that it has arisen in dependence on the complex of causes and conditions represented by the magician himself. They don't know that. So they act as though it's real. But they only cease to act as though it is real, only see through the illusion, when they realize that it has depended on a particular set of causes and conditions, or that their perception of the elephant, or elephant-perception, has arisen in dependence on a complex of causes and conditions which are the magician. Then they see through it that there isn't an elephant there absolutely existing in its own right, but only a phenomenon that has arisen in dependence on the volition of the magician.

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Prasannasiddhi: That almost seems to suggest that an Enlightened person would just not be affected by anything in the world, as it were; you would hang extremely loose to phenomena.

S: Again, continuing the traditional Buddhist line of thought, the Enlightened person might well perceive the elephant, but he would know that what he was perceiving was in fact a magical illusion, therefore he would not react to it in the way that other people, who did not realize that it was a magical illusion, reacted. He would see it sort of charging towards him, but he would know that nothing was going to happen, it was only an illusion, only a hallucination, so he would not try to get out of the way; he wouldn't experience any fear. He would know it was just a magical creation. One could carry that a little further. Supposing the elephant is only used as an illustration supposing an Enlightened person saw a real elephant charging towards him; he would get out of the way because his physical body is on the same level of existence as the elephant; both are physical bodies. So even though they are illusory in the metaphysical sense, they exist within the same order of reality, belong to the same order of reality, and therefore within that order of reality can affect each other. But he would not experience fear, because his mind would be attuned to Absolute Reality, not to relative reality relative reality being represented by the level on which his physical body and the physical body of the elephant exist. So it is very easy to confuse the illusory elephant of the illustration with the illusoriness of actual existence itself.

Subhuti: The important thing really is: what do we mean by absolutely real? You are not saying that it is 'unreal' in a

S: Yes, one is not saying that it is not experienced.

Subhuti: So what is ... Is there a formal definition of 'absolutely real'? What would it be?

S: Yes, in a purely negative sense: the absolutely real is that which does not arise in dependence on causes and conditions. In terms of the older Buddhism, it is what you usually translate as the Unconditioned, the asamskrta, that which is not put together, literally the incomposite.

Prasannasiddhi: So you could perhaps say that the Enlightened person would in a sense feel things and respond to things, but at the same time he would be in contact with a deeper level of reality

S: Well, he wouldn't feel things or experience things in a certain way. He wouldn't experience negative emotion, wouldn't experience unskilful mental states. For instance, to take perhaps a more simple example, things are said to be impermanent, so obviously it is inappropriate to be attached to things which are impermanent. None the less, people do become attached to things which are impermanent because, despite the fact that they 'know' that a particular thing is impermanent, they treat it as though it was permanent. Their mental, or rather their emotional, attitude towards it is that it is permanent. Their emotional state depends on the nature of their perception. So in a sense the Enlightened and the unenlightened person see the same object, but they interpret it differently; their experience of it is the same but their evaluation of it is different one in effect treating it as permanent and the other as what it really is, that is to say impermanent. o it is the same with illusion and reality. One can see or experience an [4] illusion as an absolute reality and treat it accordingly, in which case that will give rise to unskilful mental states. think the use in English, when discussing Buddhism, of the term illusion or illusory creates a lot of misunderstanding. Even this illustration of the magician and the magically produced elephant can create a lot of misunderstanding; because it is an illusion only metaphysically considered. It is not an illusion in terms of ordinary

human experience. I think that is the main point.

Subhuti: It's an analogy, isn't it?

S: It's an analogy, yes. It is not that the elephant that you actually experience is of the same order of reality as the illusory elephant that you experience. There is an objective difference, so to speak, between an elephant which is actually an elephant and an elephant which is only an illusory elephant.

Nagabodhi: In the case of the illusory elephant, a clear-sighted man could say 'It's all right, an illusion; sit still and you will be all right,' and people could, out of blind faith, follow his word and come out unscathed. But in the case of the real elephant the responsibility is on the individual to well, death is coming, for example; the Enlightened man can say 'There is nothing to fear,' but unless we have actually become Enlightened we can't know the fearlessness. So the misunderstandings of the illusion idea seem to deprive people or stop people taking responsibility.

S: In the case of the magically produced elephant, an illusory elephant is used to illustrate the nature of an elephant which is only relatively real or anything else which is only relatively real. Do you see what I mean? Anyway, perhaps that's enough about that. wonder why Prakasha wasn't satisfied with my definition, if you can call it that, or my definition and non-definition, of the term magical; because one would have thought that, if one tried to pin down the term too much and have a clear-cut definition, the term then ceases to do its work, it ceases to fulfil its function. So though I've defined it in a certain context, in a certain way, in the traditional Buddhist way, I've also used it in a rather looser sense deliberately, one might say, to create a particular kind of atmosphere. Perhaps I haven't succeeded in doing that so far as Prakasha was concerned. would have thought, though, that when one spoke in terms of the 'magic' of a Mahayana sutra, it is clear enough what one is trying to convey, so that it's really not very appropriate to ask what exactly does the term mean. Well, if you are going to say exactly what something means, you clearly should abandon terms like magical and poetical and imaginative, and express yourself in quasi-scientific terms; which is exactly the opposite of what I was wanting to do. Normally, if you say of something that the effect was magical, or that the scene was really magical, or that person's got a really magical personality it is pretty clear what you really mean, isn't it, or what you are trying to convey, or what your experience of that particular thing or that person was? think I said some time ago, speaking about Sir Walter Scott, that some of his descriptions of scenery were magical. Well, exactly what does one mean by that? one could ask; but if you've missed the point, so to speak, you can't really fall back on precise definitions. It's as though, if you are asked for a precise definition, the person has really missed what you are trying to get at. So if you tried to introduce precise definitions, you would in fact be talking about something else, something quite different. But not by way of comment on this particular question, but just by way [5] of associative thinking I have noticed on quite a number of occasions that people would understand better what I meant, and therefore would not ask 'What did you mean by such-and-such?', if they just tuned in a little bit more carefully to what I was trying to say.

Subhuti: I wonder if it's the product of studying a transcript; because the original lecture series I remember very much being a magical experience.

S: Well, as I said, I am not referring especially to this particular series or this particular

comment, but it is a general thing that I've noticed. Anyway, perhaps we will go on from that.

Subhuti: Another one from Prakasha, asked by Kovida, about what characterizes Bhante's life.

S: I've got '3', which is something else ... Oh yes, that's right.

Prakasha's second question: In the first lecture, you mention that 'sameness' characterizes many people's ordinary lives. On asking myself, I found that 'struggle' characterizes mine. What would you say characterizes your life?

S: I did think a bit about this this afternoon, but found myself unable to come to a conclusion. I am not so sure whether in my case sameness characterizes my life at all. I suppose there are certain threads running through. I was thinking perhaps I could say 'effort' or something like that, but in a way it's so sort of vague or general as to be almost meaningless. I do speak of sameness characterizing many people's ordinary lives; well, perhaps I haven't led an ordinary life, and therefore sameness doesn't characterize it; not in the sense in which I was using the term sameness in this particular context. Well, in a sense sameness characterizes it, yes: I have breakfast every morning at 7.30, my lunch every day at 1 o'clock, and I usually see people at 4 o'clock, so I suppose there is a certain sameness. But I wasn't really talking about that; that's only a purely external, superficial framework, not my real life. So I think probably sameness in that sense doesn't characterize my life at all. Because perhaps it isn't a very ordinary life. But perhaps on reflection people should have realized this that the emphasis here is on people's ordinary lives.

Prasannasiddhi: I think he realized that, but then he was thinking about his life that it wasn't all sameness, so what was it? And he thought struggle was the thing in his life. So then he was

S: Well, I think he was thinking we can't ask him, so we can't be sure that sameness was a general characteristic, so there could be specific types of sameness. One person's life might be characterized by sameness in the form of struggle, it was a struggle all the time; somebody else's that it was a life of deprivation all the time that it was in that that the sameness consisted. One could, on the other hand, say that there were dozens of things -

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S: which characterized one's life all the way through. But, yes, as I said, the emphasis should be on 'ordinary'.

Dharmadhara: If your life isn't characterized by sameness in that sense, what was behind your using that introduction to the lecture? Was it because it is obviously a feature of many people's lives, or were you picking up on a sense of sameness in the Movement at the time?

S: No, not at all. Don't forget I am talking about the magic of a Mahayana sutra; and what is the opposite of magic in the sort of sense in which I use the term? It's sameness. I was just getting into that topic of the magical, and so I did that by starting from people's lives and then contrasting their sameness and ordinariness with the extraordinariness, the magical quality, that one encounters in this particular sutra. It was just a way of getting into the subject.

Subhuti: At the same time, I do remember at the time you gave the series, before you gave it, you said you felt what was needed was something as it were from a totally different dimension.

S: Well, that's always the case, isn't it?

Subhuti: You seemed to be saying at that time that you felt it

S: It could be that I did feel it. I can't remember. Clearly, it must have been appropriate to some extent to a lot of the people there, otherwise I wouldn't have taken that particular point of departure. It would have been rather unreal. Perhaps people had been complaining about the sameness of their lives; I can't remember. But basically it was a means of getting into the main subject matter, and arriving at the magical nature of the sutra by way of contrast.

Subhuti: Taking this question a little bit further: at the beginning of the lecture you stress the need for experiencing a totally different dimension, experiencing the magical, broadly speaking. But, having just come back from El Bloque, where people try to live well, they live in a sort of magical world, or they live in a sort of interpretation of the world as magical

S: Having stayed at El Bloque for a week, I think 'magical' was about the last word I would have applied to the situation there!

Subhuti: Sure, yes. But they do their interpretation of their experience is a pseudo-magical one.

S: I'm afraid I've lost you here, because I am not quite sure what you mean by them thinking of their experience or situation as magical. It would seem to be something quite different from what I've been getting at in the course of this talk. My impression was that of course, this is going on tape, but anyway we will be careful who hears the tape I got the impression that, in many ways, people's experience there was very coarse. That is, to my way of thinking, almost the opposite of magical. There was certainly a certain amount of crudity around.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, could you perhaps say your life has been characterized by being magical?

[7]
S: No, I can't say I feel particularly magical, you know. Perhaps I should say it was characterized by hard work! One certainly doesn't feel a sort of sameness about that, because sameness implies repetition and boredom, and I certainly haven't ever felt that.

Dharmadhara: Is it characterized by excitement, or discovery?

S: Sometimes. Yes, discovery; especially intellectual discovery, spiritual discovery. Those are all features of it. I don't know whether one could say that any of those things were the overriding general characteristics. But again, that wasn't quite what I was talking about in the lecture. I was using the term sameness more in the sense of repetition and boredom, or the type of sameness that gives rise to boredom; and, as I said, contrasting that with the magical quality of the Mahayana sutras in general. But how did El Bloque come into it?

Subhuti: It's a rather vague and unformulated point of view, but I suppose I was thinking that people escape into irrationalism, and justify that as magical.

S: Yes, I don't personally associate magic with the irrational; as defined by Prakasha, for instance, magic seems highly rational, quasi-scientific.

Prasannasiddhi: Or would it be more like the superrational, in a sense, rather than the irrational?

S: I don't really associate it with the rational at all, even in that sort of way. I think as I've used it, in this looser sense, 'magical' has a sort of connotation of something unexpected, something wonderful, something of the nature of a revelation, something inspiring, something exciting, something that opens up new worlds; or as I've said, I think, a new dimension. Anyway, let's pass on.

Subhuti: Fourth, from Chakkhupala and I can remember his asking this on the difference between 'same' and 'not different'.

Chakkhupala's question: Page 142.9 (...because they have no separate characteristics.) 'All dharmas are therefore the same; or rather not different.' Please elucidate the distinction you are making between 'same' and 'not different'.

S: This is really quite straightforward. I would have thought it was quite clear, quite obvious. Why am I speaking of 'not different' rather than 'the same'? Because, clearly, I want to avoid giving the impression that Buddhism teaches some sort of monism. And Buddhism does use the term advaya, which means 'not-two'. I think this is quite familiar ground. Buddhism doesn't teach that all the phenomena of existence are reducible to one substance, as it were, one absolute being like the Brahman of the Vedantic tradition, or the substance of Spinoza, or, on another level, to matter. So therefore one speaks in terms of 'not-different' or 'not-two' rather than 'the same' or 'one'. One speaks of 'not-different' so as to avoid giving the impression that one has reified the concept of sameness.

Dharmadhara: On the same page, 142.9, which actually refers to the transcript of your lectures, you use the adjective 'nirvanized', in the sense 'Because these dharmas neither appear nor disappear, they are peaceful from the beginning, and by nature completely, to coin a word, nirvanized.'

[8]
S: I was coining a word only in English, of course, because in Pali or Sanskrit one can use 'nirvana' as a verb.

Dharmadhara: Right. I had a bit of a stumble over that, because Nirvana, referring to an Enlightened One, implies a subject in a non-subject-object sense. But this is used in the sense of an adjective; 'nirvanized', actually it's a past participle. I just had a stumble over the English.

S: It's not that the dharmas become nirvanized in time; obviously to nirvanize is a verb, a verb represents action, action takes place in time. But 'nirvanize' is not to be understood in that

sense as a process taking place in time. It represents the fact that all dharmas are in a state of, one might say, not being affected in reality by either arising or ceasing. Again, of course, one should not conclude that, because this is not a process taking place in time, it therefore represents something static. We really know no words for that state of affairs, so to speak. I use 'nirvanize' in my version of the Dhammapada, don't I? It's nibbuta. We are accustomed to thinking of Nirvana as a noun, as representing a state rather than a process, but it does appear in its verbal form in Pali, and in Sanskrit too. The Buddha is said to be yes, it is what in some translations of the White Lotus Sutra is rendered as 'the Buddha's extinction' or 'the extinct Buddha', a nirvanized Buddha. They want to represent the original word in Chinese or whatever by a verb, so they use the verb 'extinguish'. But I get the impression that quite a few of the questions that people ask they could in fact answer themselves if they just reflected a little. I think we are going to find that in some of the other questions, too. Let's carry on and see.

Subhuti: Ratnaguna's next question, on the arupa dhyanas.

Ratnaguna's question: In the lecture, you talk about the eight vimokshas, four of which are synonymous with the four arupa dhyanas. 1) Do the arupa dhyanas predate Buddhism, or are they a purely Buddhist set?

S: Well, I would have thought that if one had studied the life of the Buddha it would have been obvious that the arupa dhyanas did predate Buddhism, because the Buddha is represented as learning and experiencing these four arupa dhyanas under his early teachers, who were, of course, not Buddhists! So '6)', does that follow on?

Ratnaguna's second question: 2) The fact that the four arupa dhyanas come in this list suggests that they are Insight experiences.

S: 'This list' meaning the eight vimokshas.
(continued): We know that you have been thinking about this area for a while. Have you had any more thoughts recently?

S: 'The fact that the four arupa dhyanas come in this list suggests that they are Insight experiences' is that the case?

Prasannasiddhi: No. (Pause).

Subhuti: Well, the previous vimokshas emancipation through freedom from craving suggests that they are Insight experiences; emancipation in that sense through a deep understanding of -

[9]
S: Not necessarily, because the emancipation can be temporary, as in the case of one's suppression of the hindrances.

Subhuti: Has he got 'Insight' with a capital I there?

S: Yes, he has. (Voice agreeing.) Because if one looks at the first two vimokshas, what does one see? Well, in the case of the first, it's pretty obvious that there is no Insight experience;

isn't it so? Because, in the case of the first vimoksha, you are contemplating the asubha nature of the object, while still experiencing it actually yourself as subha. That seems to be the significance of the first vimoksha. So clearly that isn't an Insight experience. Though still subject to craving for what is asubha, thinking it is subha, you are contemplating an external object which normally you perceive as subha when it is asubha, and trying to see that it is in fact in reality subha. That seems to be the nature of the first vimoksha, though as I said there are a number of interpretations. Then, following upon that, not perceiving that which is asubha as subha, and to that extent being free from craving for the asubha, you strengthen, you deepen, your experience of that which is asubha as asubha by continuing the practice of the asubhabhavana. Of course here the cessation of the craving is probably temporary, as in the case of the suppression of the hindrances. But it is sufficient to give you support to rise to the next level, which is the level at which your perception changes. The text doesn't say so, but it would seem that the experience of the third vimoksha takes place on the level of the rupadhyanas, the experience of the first two vimokshas taking place on the level of the kamadhatu, the kamaloka. The experience of the third vimoksha takes place on the level of the rupaloka, the rupadhyanas, hence the experiences of light which is not light in the ordinary physical sense but the light of the imaginal. There you experience subha in the form of that light. So from there you proceed to the arupadhyanas, which of course are all enumerated all four rupadhyanas seem to be included under the third vimoksha, but the four arupadhyanas are all enumerated separately as separate vimokshas. So you proceed from the kamaloka to the rupaloka kamaloka as represented by the first two vimokshas, rupaloka as represented by the third vimoksha, and arupadhyanas as represented by the fourth to seventh vimokshas; and the eighth vimoksha which I think is described differently in different places; sometimes it's described as the cessation of suffering, in which case it clearly represents the Transcendental; in other places I think it's sometimes described in terms of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, something of that sort, isn't it?

Subhuti: That's the seventh

S: No, there's another one, then.

Subhuti: Aren't there sometimes five arupadhyanas?

S: There are sometimes five rupadhyanas, but not arupadhyanas. Anyway, be that as it may, the fourth vimoksha is at least sometimes described in terms of the cessation of suffering, so it is clearly the Transcendental; so Insight pertains to that.

[10]
Bodhiraja: The eighth?

S: The eighth, yes, if one understands the eight vimokshas in that way. So, yes, understanding them in that way there is a progression, but it is a progression from the kamaloka to the rupaloka, rupaloka to arupaloka, and arupaloka to the Transcendental. That seems to be the traditional understanding. On the other hand, I think there could be a way of looking at the eight vimokshas which would make them out to be all of the nature of Insight, but that is not the traditional interpretation. I won't go into that now, because I would still have to look at more texts. But what seems to be the traditional interpretation is as I have given it.

Dharmadhara: So this is using vimoksha or emancipation in the sense of just an absence of, a

freedom from, something, in quite a limited sense.

S: Right. Yes. We have in any case the term samayavimutti, temporary release vimutti being etymologically the same word as vimoksha.

Dharmadhara: In what sense is that used?

S: It is used in the sense of the dhyanas in certain contexts. Anyway, is that reasonably clear? It would seem that the series of vimokshas take as their starting point the asubhabhavana. And they go from the experience of seeing well, first of all, the asubha is seen as subha, then the asubha is seen as asubha, and then the subha is seen as subha. Then one proceeds across to the sphere of infinite space. But there is a lot that needs to be investigated yet; I don't think I want to say anything prematurely. But certainly the vimokshas as I have explained them, or the explanation I have given, rather, represents what appears to be the traditional understanding of the meaning of these terms or of this particular sequence. The first three vimokshas are in a way very relevant and valid, and perhaps deserve more attention. The basic point being, if you are taking subha as meaning not just purity but beauty, or pure beauty in a sort of platonic or near-platonic sense, the point that is being made is that you can't really perceive beauty so long as your perception is distorted by craving. This is really the point that is being made. To take an illustration or two from the visual arts supposing (this is bound to be a controversial example) you take a painting of a nude by Renoir and then perhaps an angel figure painted by Fra Angelico. You could say that marks the sort of difference between the perception of beauty as contaminated by craving and the perception of beauty as not contaminated by craving. Do you see what I mean? It also ties up with some of the things that Schopenhauer says, doesn't it? about the difference between aesthetic perception (and also I think he says meditation, you know, the spiritual life), and ordinary perception. He says that in the case of aesthetic appreciation there is a suspension of desire, there is a suspension of the will to live. Do you remember this? So the experience of craving, in more Buddhistic terms, distorts the perception of beauty; you are not able really to experience beauty in the more spiritual sense so long as you are under the influence of craving. So in this sequence of the three vimokshas, you learn to see things without craving by the practice of the asubhabhavana, so that you can rise to a perception of pure beauty on the rupaloka level or the archetypal level or, if you like, on the level of the imaginal. In a way it corresponds a little to Plato's description of the spiritual path as we find it in the Symposium, and as we find it, [11] continuing that tradition, in Neoplatonism and those forms of mysticism influenced by Neoplatonism, whether Christian or Islamic. Therefore, this sequence of the first three vimokshas are of some interest and, well, utility. So in a way one won't be able to perceive or experience the beauty of the rupaloka so long as you still see the asubha of the kamaloka as subha, with the consequent craving for experience of that type on that particular level.

Mangala: I suppose you have to ask the question: what do you mean by beauty?

S: I think this is probably another of those cases where you can't really give a precise definition. That's why I gave an illustration from the arts that is to say, the nude by the perhaps rather worldly French artist and the angelic figure as painted by the very unworldly Italian monk. If one is at all sensitive to the arts, one can perceive the difference, though it is difficult to put it into words.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, do you know of any painters of nudes who have managed to paint with a non-craving element or does that seem to be impossible in terms of

S: I think it's very difficult. I think probably some painters have succeeded. But then, does the spectator succeed in seeing the picture itself properly, even if the painter has?

Prasannasiddhi: Would it be that perhaps, say, Michelangelo painting male nudes has succeeded, or Leonardo?

S: I'm not sure about Michelangelo; no, not at all! I am a bit surer about Fra Angelico. Possibly Botticelli, possibly but certainly Fra Angelico

Mangala: If Renoir and Fra Angelico were looking at the same person, presumably they would actually see different things, wouldn't they?

S: [I'm thinking of?] different people looking at the paintings.

Mangala: No, different people looking at the same person, say they were both painting a woman they would both see a different woman, or what they would represent would be different; because if they were different kind of people or perceptions

S: Yes; so what does that tend to?

Mangala: Um

S: I think I know what you're getting at. For instance, I was just looking at Durer's portrait of his mother, who is an ugly wrinkled old woman. You could certainly argue that there was a certain beauty in her face because Durer perceived it with sympathy and affection and so on, and perhaps one could argue that there is a certain human expression in her face actually, she looks rather a hard old woman, but we'll let that pass. But I don't think that even the most as it were objective and sympathetic portrait of, say, an ugly old woman would be able to reflect beauty in the more [12] spiritual sense as [much as] a portrait of a woman who was beautiful in the sense of being, you know, of harmonious proportions and so on. Do you see what I mean?o it's as though, in order to represent in human form beauty in the more spiritual sense, you've got to take the risk of being attracted by that same beauty in a worldly sort of way. Not all artists succeed, or perhaps even attempt to do that. This brings me to a question I was asked by someone I met in Bombay. [I shall be] writing about this in my memoirs shortly, I hope. He happened to be a prominent film actor, and he had been to Ajanta. And I don't know if I have mentioned this before; I hope I haven't told the story to too many people before he had been to Ajanta and he wanted to ask me a question about the paintings there. He said: 'I understand that those paintings were all done by monks?' I said, 'Yes.' Then he asked: 'Well, how is it that you find so many naked and half-naked women? Were the monks influenced by desire? Why did they represent those naked, or at least half-naked, women in the caves?' I had never considered this before, so I did some very quick thinking, and what I said was that the monks saw the women just as beautiful objects in the natural world, and they had the same attitude towards them, the same mental attitude, I thought, as they had towards the leaves and flowers and fruit that they had also painted. He was quite satisfied with this; and, reflecting on it afterwards, I concluded this was in fact the correct explanation. But I think if one was to depict an ugly woman in that way, and if one was to depict a beautiful woman in that way, the

picture of the beautiful woman would be more inspiring as an embodiment of something spiritual than the picture of the ugly woman. Some people might disagree with that, but this is what I feel. Because, in the case of the beautiful woman, there would be a greater harmony of proportion and so on; the colour, perhaps, the complexion would be more pleasing, and so on.

Mangala: If you just take that to a slightly different level, if that's the right word: if you consider paintings of Buddhist deities peaceful and wrathful ones and I mean most people look at paintings of Tara, Avalokitesvara, M... and their comment would be 'Oh, that's really beautiful'; and then they'd look at, say, Mahakala or Vajrapani and I mean you can't say it's ugly and yet you can't really say it's beautiful; in a way it seems as if those kind of judgements are just invalid and inappropriate, and you can't even really say that Avalokitesvara is beautiful! Somehow that is an inappropriate response.

S: It depends to some extent on the way in which you use the term beauty. And in Western aesthetics there is a distinction made between the beautiful and the sublime. You could say that a representation of Tara was beautiful, whereas one of Mahakala was sublime. But there is a quite different way of looking at things, which is the way of looking at them that we find in Indian aesthetics. Indian aesthetics doesn't operate with the concept of beauty; it operates with the concept of rasa or aesthetic experience, and it has a list of, I think, eight principal types of aesthetic experience, of which what we call beauty would be only one. Others are the peaceful and the terrible. So the difficulty you mention perhaps illustrates the inadequacy of Western aesthetics to some extent, operating with this rather narrow concept of beauty.

Mangala: Yes, it implies that for something to be aesthetic it has to be beautiful, whereas it may not be beautiful.

[13]
S: Yes, you can have a profound aesthetic experience, an experience of rasa in the Indian term, which has nothing to do with beauty in the Western sense.

Mangala: So, to get back to [...], you could presumably look at an old woman maybe a Rembrandt portrait or something which conventionally speaking wouldn't be considered beautiful or attractive but maybe in the Indian, what shall we say ?

S: Rasa, aesthetic experience.

Mangala: Yes, within some of those Indian classifications it could, because it would be an aesthetic experience none the less.

S: Yes, but that's in a way not quite relevant, because we were talking in terms of beauty, and in a way I was making a different point. For instance, supposing there is a Rembrandt portrait of an old woman. She could be very ugly, but her expression could be beautiful, and you could experience the beauty of that expression. But what I am saying is that your experience of beauty in that sort of case would be much more intense if you had the same expression, let us say, on the face of a beautiful woman. You know, the physical beauty would reinforce, so to speak, or intensify, the beauty of the expression. So you have a more complete, a more total experience of beauty. You could apply that to Indian aesthetics, because Mahakala to take that figure you could say represents, among the rasas, the terrible, the parava(?), but that has been as it were enlarged upon by giving him so many arms and so many heads. If it had

just been an ordinary person with just a wrathful expression, you would not have had that sort of experience to that extent. You would have had it to some extent, but what you really want to express can be fully expressed only with the help of all those extra arms and legs and so on, which is presumably why he has them. You see the connection? In other words, it's not just a question of expression and meaning. A certain bodily form, it seems, is more appropriate to a certain kind of aesthetic experience. The rasa which corresponds most closely to our concept of beauty is what is called sringera(?) rasa, which is usually translated as the erotic, but that's quite inadequate. It comes much closer to 'beauty', just as arapa(?) comes much closer to the sublime. Other rasas include the peaceful, which I have mentioned, and also the karuna or the compassion rasa, which is said to characterize Buddhist literature. Some Indian aestheticians or rasikas say that the Mahabharata is characterized by the sentiment or rasa of shantih, peace, and the Ramayana by karuna, as being the predominant rasas. It's a sort of aesthetic experience or mood, even; literally taste or relish.

Dharmadhara: Is there a rasa roughly corresponding to the third vimoksha, of an intense enjoyment of the state of freedom from craving?

S: That would be shantih rasa, the peaceful. Because, according to this interpretation, the basic theme of the Ramayana (?) is the achievement of a state of peace through disillusionment with worldly life.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, would this imply that maybe the term beauty to describe, say, the realm of the rupaloka that 'beauty' is perhaps not quite the best term we could use?

S: Perhaps, but it seems difficult to find a better. Subha in Pali and Sanskrit literally is purity, but with the connotation of beautiful as well. It is not just pure, but also the attractive, the fascinating, even inspiring, in a [14] spiritual sense. You could even say dazzling or intoxicating. Perhaps we should pass on, though.

Subhuti: What time are we due to finish?

S: Well, we usually devote as much time as need be. We sometimes haven't finished before ten.

Subhuti: Seventh, from Chakkhupala.

Chakkhupala's third question: In your comments on vimutti and vimoksa you list the eight Emancipations. This formula appears to outline a progressive path to Enlightenment, with four of the successive stages corresponding exactly with the four arupa dhyanas, the next and final stage being Enlightenment.

S: Yes, I've already explained this, haven't I? It is in fact progressive, the series of eight vimokshas, because we progress from the kamaloka to the rupaloka, from the rupaloka to the arupaloka and from the arupaloka to the level of Enlightenment. So what's the question, or the next part of the introduction to the question?

(Question continued): This progression seems at variance with the view that the arupa dhyanas are 'compartments' of the fourth rupa dhyana and do not in themselves lead to the emancipation of Enlightenment, but rather are dhyanic 'cul-de-sacs' (as for example

demonstrated by the Buddha's circuitous route at his Parinirvana).

S: One mustn't take the term 'compartment', which I think I have used myself, too literally. The traditional view is that the arupa dhyanas are a sort of branching out from the fourth dhyana if you like, expansions or additional dimensions of the fourth dhyana. One may or may not explore them. Here, of course, in the eight vimoksas, they are represented, so to speak, as stages of the Path, but they are not stages of the Path, apparently, in quite the same way in which the four rupa dhyanas are. On the other hand, one mustn't be too literal-minded. You can include the four arupa dhyanas in the fourth dhyana, in the sense that the fourth dhyana is the basis of the four arupa dhyanas; so inasmuch as the fourth dhyana is part of that progressive series, surely the arupa dhyanas are also part of that same progressive series. Why should one not have, say, a fuller experience of each successive stage, rather than a more restricted experience of it, or why not explore all the different aspects and dimensions of every stage of the spiritual life, just for fun as it were? Are you really in a hurry to get to the Goal as quickly as you can? That does suggest that you are goal-oriented in a slightly well, we might say negative fashion or one-sided fashion. Why not explore and enjoy every stage as you pass through it? Surely, the more thoroughly explored the preceding stage, the better will be the foundation for the experience of the succeeding stage, and maybe that goes for the arupa dhyanas too, inasmuch as they are in a sense contained within the fourth dhyana. One could certainly argue like that.

Dharmadhara: If they could be in any sense a cul-de-sac, would there be some advantage in not exploring them, if it seems

S: Well, the arupa dhyanas themselves are cul-de-sacs, in the sense that samatha is not vipassana. Though I have perhaps used the expression, and other [15] writers have used the expression, 'cul-de-sac', again it is not to be taken literally.

Dharmadhara: Not in a physical sense, not literally in the sense of being a dead end, you mean in that sense?

S: Not in the sense of there being literally a dead end and you literally have to withdraw from them and retrace your steps. It isn't really like that.

Subhuti: Presumably, the analogy is being drawn to make clear that the Transcendental is not an extension of those particular states?

S: Right, yes. But, as I say, that applies just as much to the rupa dhyanas. They are cul-de-sacs in the same sense.

Subhuti: Yes, but only in that sense.

S: But only in that sense, yes. Anyway, we then come on to the question.

Chakkhupala's question concluded: Can Bhante comment on this variance? The formula of the eight emancipations does not seem to draw any line between samatha and vipassana, between mundane dhyanic experience and Transcendental realization.

S: Simply as listed, they don't. But it is clear, if one studies them more and more carefully,

that the first seven no, the first belongs, as I explained, to the kamaloka; the second and third to the rupaloka; and the rest, except for the last, to the arupaloka, and the last itself to the Transcendental sphere. So the distinction between samatha and vipassana within the series of the vimoksas is in fact quite clear. It just needs a bit of explanation. So the line between samatha and vipassana is drawn as between the seventh and the eighth vimoksas. Anyway, I think we've gone over that ground sufficiently,
haven't we? Let's go on to the next question.

Subhuti: The eighth comes from Abhaya.

Abhaya's question: This is a joint question arising out of a discussion on why we find sutras difficult to read. (It seemed to be the experience of people in our group that they found Mahayana sutras, on the whole, much more difficult to read than great works of Western literature. But we all soon agreed that the Vimalakirti Nirdesa is much more 'accessible' than others.) So why can we not more easily read sutras as literature? Why do we not so easily get emotionally involved in them? We came up with a few possible answers ourselves and would like you, Bhante, to comment on them and, possibly, add to them.

S: Well, let's see. A couple of comments occur to me straight away. This introduction almost suggests that people at least, people in the FWBO are constantly reading the great works of Western literature like Paradise Lost and Dante's Divine Comedy and King Lear. I am just wondering whether that is really the case. That's point one; and, two: I am really amazed by this statement that the Vimalakirti Nirdesa is much more accessible than others. I have always thought of it as one of the more recondite and difficult sutras. (Laughter.) Is it really more accessible than the White Lotus Sutra? I would have thought the White Lotus Sutra was much more accessible. Is it more accessible, say, [16] than the Pure Land sutras, the Sukhavativyuha sutras? Or the Amitayurdhyana Sutra? So yes, I don't really think of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa as being well, more accessible than others; I would have thought it was one of the least accessible of the sutras. So I'm not quite sure in what sense or in what way it is found to be accessible. But anyway, those are just comments in passing. Perhaps some answers will emerge as we go through the questions.

Abhaya's question continued: (Possible answers.) 1) The spiritual gap between us and 'it' is too great. In the sutras we read of perfection heaped upon perfection.

S: Well, is that always the case, that in the Mahayana sutras we read of perfection heaped upon perfection? Is that always the case?

Dharmadhara: Well, not always.

S: No; for instance, one thinks of the parables of the White Lotus Sutra; these are, I would have thought, quite accessible. They don't represent 'perfection heaped upon perfection'. And there is the episode of the withdrawal of the Hinayana monks who think they have already learned it all; episodes like that seem quite straightforward and relatively easy to understand, even though there are other things in that particular sutra which aren't so easy to understand. So we don't always read of 'perfection heaped upon perfection'. Talking of perfection, what about the distinctive perfections of the great works of Western literature? Do we always appreciate those the perfection of language, construction, plot, characterization? Do we always appreciate those perfections? I am not saying that those great works of Western

literature are on the same level as the sutras, but there seems to be an assumption that we do appreciate the perfections of the great works of literature, or at least that we read them. But, yes, there is a spiritual gap between us and it, and no doubt it is very great, but I think in every sutra there is something that we can catch on to, that we can catch hold of. I have cited the example of the White Lotus Sutra, where there are certainly, at the very least, those parables, which are quite numerous. Do people make enough effort with the Mahayana sutras? Perhaps they expect to be able to take them up and read them easily straight away. How many Mahayana sutras have most people tried to read? Has anybody any information? I certainly don't.

Prasannasiddhi: I should imagine quite a number of Order Members have had at least a go at reading [two?] sutras.

S: Which ones, do you think?

Prasannasiddhi: The White Lotus Sutra, I think quite a few people seem

S: On the other hand, I can remember years ago asking people what they had read and what they liked best in Buddhist literature. A surprising number of people mentioned the Diamond Sutra

Prasannasiddhi: Gosh!

S: as being their favourite sutra. Or perhaps they were deluding themselves; or perhaps they weren't, perhaps it really was their favourite sutra. Do you remember this? This was at Archway. Those days. Well, perhaps you have all deteriorated.

[17]
Dharmadhara: I was in Abhaya's study group, and I asked the other members of the group whether they had read any Mahayana sutras from cover to cover as a work of literature, and they all said they had. I was the only one who hadn't read from cover to cover a substantial sutra.

S: At least one, you meant?

Dharmadhara: Yes.

S: You didn't ask them what great works of Western literature they'd read? Or what they even meant by 'great', perhaps?

Dharmadhara: I think the ones you listed earlier Dante's Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost and those; maybe Shakespeare. The great novels. I think those were the literary works mentioned or suggested.

S: Another point that arises as well: does one read a sutra in the same way that you read even one of the great classics of Western literature? I think one usually expects to be able to read the great works of Western literature through and enjoy it all at least on a certain level, just with a straight read through. I don't think perhaps one expects that or should expect that in the case of a sutra. Perhaps that does require more study, does require more reflection, before you

can read it through in that sort of way; even then, without exhausting its meaning by any means. Anyway, what's the next possible answer to the question?

Abhaya's question continued: 2) Compared with works of Western literature, the sutras on the whole lack cohesive form; they are loosely composite.

S: Does that necessarily make them more difficult to read? Because the question is: 'Why can we not more easily read sutras as literature?'

Dharmadhara: I suppose if they lack a cohesiveness, that does make them a bit more difficult to read.

S: Does it? because some works of Western literature are episodic. Certainly, if there is a continuous story which gradually unfolds, yes, that does make for I won't say so much easier reading, but more interested reading. But there are great works of Western literature which are quite rambling in their structure.

Nagabodhi: I think a lot of people like books that go from one story to another, [where] you can read a bit and then move on to something else. Publishers like these anthology-type books. I wouldn't have thought it was a problem myself.

S: I would say, in a sense, there is a lack of interest because, yes, the following of a continuous story does create interest, but that doesn't mean that in the absence of that story one will find it difficult to read a particular book, necessarily. Because even some novels are episodic or picaresque, like Dickens's early novels. But they are very readable, the particular episodes that are strung together are very readable, so one just goes on reading, even though there isn't so much of a single continuous story being unfolded. So I don't think this is a fully adequate reason that, 'compared with works of Western literature, the sutras on the whole lack cohesive form; they are loosely [18] composite'. Some sutras don't lack cohesive form. On the whole, the White Lotus Sutra, the Vimalakirti itself, the Sukhavativyuha sutras. But is there any evidence that people read these particular sutras more because they do have more of cohesive form, and read other sutras less because they have less of cohesive form? Is there any such correlation? Again, there seem to be some generalizations perhaps on insufficient evidence. [Go on to No. 3.]

Tape Two, Side One

Abhaya's question continued: 3) Literature is easier for us because it takes our human frailties more into account; it deals with real people in difficulties. (There are plenty of instances of such in Pali suttas, of course, but not so many in Mahayana sutras.)

S: I think there's something in this, because literature certainly does take 'our human frailties more into account; it deals with real people in difficulties' not always, of course. It doesn't always deal with real people 'in difficulties'. Sometimes it does, or even often. But perhaps, yes, we do feel more at home with Western literature, whether great or otherwise, for that reason. Think of the popularity of Dante's Inferno, which is said to be much more read than the other two books of the Divine Comedy, dealing with Purgatory and Heaven, Paradise. But then does one expect to encounter real people in difficulties in works like the Mahayana sutras? Are there not other compensations? How relevant is it to say that one finds works of

Western literature more easy to read? You might say, 'Of course one does, because they were produced by unenlightened people,' perhaps with little glimmers of Enlightenment here and there. Do you always want to be reading about human frailties? Don't we have enough experience of those? Anyway, pass on but there's something in that; yes, we certainly find literature easier because it does, so to speak, take our human frailties more into account. Perhaps we should try to read, even in the case of great works of Western literature, more those works which do not take our human frailties so very much into account which are inspiring and uplifting, perhaps.

Abhaya's question continued: 4) The characters in Mahayana sutras are very two-dimensional. There is no development or exploration of character.

S: Hm: wouldn't it be rather nice to get away from our human personalities sometimes? And are the characters in Mahayana sutras really very two-dimensional, or is it perhaps not that they are multidimensional and we can't fully apprehend them very easily? Do you see what I mean? At least one could look at it like that. And doesn't one expect the Mahayana sutras to take you away from the ordinary to be magical, in a word? Obviously, it is difficult to get up to that level, but if the Mahayana sutras embody that level whereas even the great works of Western literature don't, well, of course it's going to be more difficult to read them. You are going to be reluctant because they make much more of a demand upon you. So I remain a bit sceptical as to what extent many people really appreciate at least some of the great works of Western literature that have been mentioned. I mean when was the last time that you read Paradise Lost? (Pause.) It is one of the great classics of Western literature, isn't it of English literature in particular? So it probably is one of the half-dozen works that one really must read, but it isn't something that most people, even those who love English literature, read very frequently.

[19]
Nagabodhi: It's really rather like a Mahayana sutra! (Laughter.)

S: No, I don't find that it is at all like a Mahayana sutra.

Nagabodhi: In one particular respect.

Dharmadhara: I found it much easier to relate to than Mahayana sutras.

S: Yes. It is intelligible on the whole.

Dharmadhara: Much more gripping.

S: Anyway, on to the fifth answer to the question.

Abhaya's question continued: 5) In the case of literature, it is possible to develop a relationship with the author even though you do not know much about him. (This is why, perhaps, we find the Bodhicaryavatara easier than a sutra. We are definitely aware of Santideva, the man, communicating.)

S: '...possible to develop a relationship with the author' I am not quite sure what exactly is meant by that. Develop a relationship with the author as distinct from being aware of the

presence of the author in the work being aware of the personality of the author, in a way; doesn't 'relationship' imply something two-way rather than one-way?

Dharmadhara: I think this was meant as a one-way awareness of him.

S: And also, I wonder whether people find the last chapter of the Bodhicaryavatara easier than a sutra? I would have thought that it was much more difficult than many sutras.

Subhuti: Do you mean the penultimate chapter, the Wisdom chapter?

S: Yes, not the epilogue.

Dharmadhara: Obviously not!

S: Perhaps they forgot about that one!

Prasannasiddhi: I would have thought also that you can detect, in a sense, the authors in the Mahayana sutras as well. There is a relationship coming through; there is something trying to be said by the writers of the Mahayana sutras, the composers. But that relationship is a much higher relationship.

S: The point is that of relative difficulty and easiness, and certainly it is more difficult, say, to establish a relationship with the Buddha assuming the Buddha to be the author of the Mahayana sutras, or someone very like the Buddha much more difficult to establish a relationship with him than it is, say, even with Milton through Paradise Lost. We do have a lot of independent information about Milton, anyway, quite apart from what we infer from his works; and you can develop a feeling for him, or so to speak a relationship with him, much more easily than you can, say, with the Buddha. But again, would you not expect it to be more difficult to establish a relationship with the Buddha? In a way, the whole discussion here amounts to saying, 'Well, of course we don't read the Mahayana sutras because they are so difficult. We go for what [20] is easy rather than for what is difficult' which seems in a way a rather pitiful admission. Perhaps we should get into the habit of stretching ourselves a bit more. I mean, people tackle Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake; why don't they tackle the Mahayana sutras? Some people even read Proust! [not] to speak of T. S. Eliot and other, more recondite [authors]. Think of Mallarm a few people in the Movement rather like Mallarm; well, I don't think, as regards language at least, the Mahayana sutras are more difficult than Mallarm. Think of the sort of music that some people listen to, that requires real deciphering, so to speak. Why [do] we find sutras difficult to read'? That's what the whole thing starts from. So we find sutras, it seems, more difficult to read because they are more difficult! (Laughter.) Anyway, let's carry on.

Abhaya's question concluded: 6) Perhaps sutras pall on us because we expect them to be didactic, a bit dogmatic; this perhaps is a stumbling block. Whereas in literature the point emerges from the story or aesthetic arrangement of the material.

S: It doesn't always just emerge; sometimes the author the novelist, for instance makes his point very explicitly. I have been reading E.M. Forster recently, and George Gissing; they sometimes, as author commenting on the story, make their points very obviously indeed, especially E.M. Forster. He preaches little sermons every now and then. He doesn't just allow

the point to emerge. Some novelists do, but he certainly doesn't. In fact, sometimes he repeats his little slogans two or three times to make sure that you get the message like 'Only connect,' or, you know, 'Connect the prose and the passion'; and he repeats this several times, just to make quite sure you get the message. Some Victorian novelists pause in the story to reflect upon what has happened and comment and moralize upon it at great length; Trollope does this, doesn't he? Even sort of ponders aloud whether he should continue the story at all, or if so along what particular line. Sort of takes the reader into his confidence. So it's not quite true to say that in the case of literature it says here 'the point emerges from the story or aesthetic arrangement of the material'. Sometimes the point is spelled out quite explicitly. One reason I can think of 'why we find the sutras difficult to read' is on account of the language of the translations. (Murmurs of assent.) If, for instance, you think of the Authorized Version of the Bible, you can read it and enjoy it even though you don't believe a word of it; but in the case of the Mahayana sutras, very often you can neither read them nor enjoy them, even though you believe every word of it, as far as you understand the words. I noticed this recently, in a way, in connection with the Soothill translation of the White Lotus Sutra I am speaking of Soothill's volume of selections, with connecting commentary, just translated by him. I'm not thinking of the version based on his translation as corrected by other scholars. He is sometimes, especially in the verse portions, very readable indeed. One really wishes that all translations of Mahayana sutras were as readable as that. Whereas some [21] translations are very wooden and uninspiring, from a purely, say, linguistic point of view. But no doubt more attractive versions of the Mahayana sutras in that way will well, we hope come in the future. The Authorized Version of the Bible is based on three or four earlier translations, at least to some extent. There are books which give you in parallel columns the same passages translated by Wycliffe and Tyndale and Coverdale and various other people, and then by the authors of the Authorized Version; you can see them gradually shaping the language. I think personally that is one of the most important reasons, because if the language is, so to speak, beautiful (to use that term), you can read and enjoy even though you don't fully understand, or understand only to a very limited extent. It's as though the beauty of the language has its own value. I can't think of any other reason why we don't read the Mahayana sutras more, except perhaps just laziness in the sense of not being prepared to make that sort of effort.

Bodhiraja: Could it be that the sutra has an effect on you as you read it; it's designed to lead you on, to make you change in an upward [direction]?

S: Great works of Western literature also have an effect on one well, most works have an effect on you, good, bad or indifferent, but the great works of Western literature usually have, on the whole, a positive effect which sometimes can change you; but no doubt the impact of the Mahayana sutras is far greater, and no doubt will change you even more. Perhaps people aren't always ready for that. But I think, even so, it is not that you read a Mahayana sutra and it affects you very strongly and starts changing you dramatically all at once, because you have got to understand it first, and that will take some time and perhaps many readings; though certain phrases, certain sentences may affect you quite powerfully straight away, just by themselves.

Prasannasiddhi: I was wondering if it might not be something to do with the fact that possibly Mahayana sutras were meant to be read out in Shrine Rooms and things like that, whereas a book, a novel, is almost inherently designed just to be read personally by a person sitting in a room.

S: It is not altogether the reason, because, for instance, the Iliad and the Odyssey were meant to be recited, weren't they? But we read them as written down and translated, quite easily, quite happily.

Prasannasiddhi: It is said of poetry that poetry is supposed to be spoken rather than read.

S: Originally, no doubt, yes.

Prasannasiddhi: I think personally, hearing poetry read out is much more, does have a stronger impact

S: Well, perhaps people should try reading the Mahayana sutras aloud. That does happen to some extent, of course usually in the context of festivals.

Nagabodhi: Bhante, do you think it's a wrong expectation that we have that it is a book that you can pick up and read like a novel, and that perhaps we can take steps to encourage people to have a different attitude say, organizing -

[22]
S: Well, it depends what sort of novel, as it were. People don't usually pick up War and Peace and just read it straight off like that, do they?

Bodhiraja: Yes, that! Precisely that, I couldn't put it down!

Nagabodhi: [But] not Milton. But do you think we could perhaps organize, or think of organizing, weekend retreats precisely for listening to a sutra?

S: Well, this has been suggested before; I think it has been done to a limited extent.

Nagabodhi: Perhaps it would be of value to encourage that attitude to a sutra, almost to divert people from the idea that it is something you try and read intimately like a novel, and read it as

S: Of course, in the last century and even before, novels were read aloud. People didn't think of them as just to be read as it were to themselves. Dickens was perhaps more often than not read aloud in the family circle, chapter by chapter as the different issues 'numbers' appeared. So we have lost, perhaps, the art of reading aloud generally.

Mangala: You could have dramatized readings, I suppose, by the performing arts group.

S: Well, some of the Mahayana sutras are dramatic to some extent; I mean the White Lotus Sutra is. But I see no reason why people shouldn't read, say, the White Lotus Sutra at least, much as they read a novel. It is really quite there is a definite story, so to speak, a quite dramatic story. There are lots of parables. Also, of course, there aren't all that many Mahayana sutras translated; certainly we have far more novels, great works of Western literature, than we have Mahayana sutras available. wonder whether people do read even at least some of the great works of Western literature, especially novels, more as a sort of escape; whereas you can't really read Mahayana sutras in that sort of way. I am not saying that the great works of Western literature are just escapist, but people I think can certainly

sometimes use them in that way, especially the novels and stories not so much the epic poems or dramas. But, of course, you could argue what's wrong with escaping? I have said that myself sometimes. It depends whether the escape is real and effective from the less real to the more real. I have spoken of the Mahayana sutras carrying one into another world; you could say that was escapism.

Mangala: Perhaps distraction would be a better word than escape. You don't really escape, you just get sort of distracted.

S: Well, the reading is sort of compensatory rather than inspiring. Anyway, let's wind up that discussion and maybe have the last question.

Subhuti: This is from Chakkhupala on recasting [...] the sutras.

Chakkhupala's third question: '...it might be helpful to read Sutras more as works of imagination.' Might this sort of reading be greatly facilitated by rewriting the Sutras in an accessible modern literary form, for example by excising repetitions, removing archaisms and freely translating cultural obscurities into contemporary native equivalents? Would [23] Bhante favour such a recasting of the Sutras? With what provisos? If not, what particular value does Bhante see in their unmodified retention?

S: It's almost like doing a Reader's Digest 'Condensed Books' on the Mahayana sutras! I say: 'It might be helpful to read sutras more as works of imagination.' What exactly did I mean by that? I think I meant by that approaching them more with the attitude that they are sources of inspiration, that they are not sort of texts that you have to slog your way through; they are not just prescribed reading, just because one happens to be a Buddhist. You can enjoy them. I think that is what I was trying to get at. So 'Might this sort of reading be greatly facilitated by rewriting the sutras in an accessible modern literary form?' I am not quite sure what is meant by 'accessible', much less still by 'modern literary form', although it says, 'for example by excising repetitions' well, sometimes the repetitions have their own value; perhaps not always, but sometimes. 'Removing archaisms' well, presumably he means in the translation. I wouldn't rule out archaisms completely; one can use them judiciously, they do have a certain effect which is perhaps appropriate. I wouldn't like to remove archaisms in the translation completely. ' and freely translating cultural obscurities into contemporary native equivalents' I am not sure whether that is possible. I mean would you treat the Iliad, for instance, like that, where Achilles is represented as, say, using a sword and shield; would you feel the need to translate that into a more contemporary idiom and have him with perhaps a machine gun? Do you see what I mean?

Subhuti: The Royal Shakespeare Company does it all the time.

S: Yes, well, that's sort of meaningless experimentalism, I would say. I'm afraid it's directors doing their own thing in a very unpleasantly individualistic way. (Laughter.) 'Would Bhante favour such a recasting of the sutras?' I think not. Therefore 'With what provisos?' doesn't [apply].

Subhuti: In a way, what he's saying is, wouldn't it be better to have a better translation? That's what it really amounts to in the end.

S: I think perhaps one could have, just for introductory use, condensed or shortened versions, or even versions of this type, but only as a sort of means of introduction to the full version. Yes, better translations, certainly. But I think it still hasn't become fully clear why this resistance to the reading of the Mahayana sutras; if in fact there is resistance, which the people formulating these questions do seem to suggest. 'We find the sutras difficult to read'; 'it seems to be the experience of people in our group that they have found Mahayana sutras on the whole much more difficult to read than great works of Western literature... But we all soon agreed (soon agreed!) that the Vimalakirti Nirdesa is much more accessible than others'! Of course, if one wanted to be a little pedantic, one could say, 'What does one mean by read?' I suppose one means start at the beginning and carry on to the end of the volume with at least some degree of comprehension and appreciation. But one does really no more than that with the great works of Western literature. If they really are great, you need to read them through dozens of times. There's always something new to appreciate, always fresh beauties as in the case of the sutras. Perhaps with the sutras you just need to read a greater number of times. The question does not actually say that the great works of Western literature are easy to read; but in saying that they [24] are on the whole 'much more difficult to read than great works of Western literature' suggests that the great works of Western literature are really comparatively easy to read; but is that really the case? Well, yes, to read just in the sense of to go through, once at least that is not all that difficult; but have you really read that work, in the full sense?

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, I would be inclined to say they are much easier to read than some of the lesser works of Western literature. In my own experience, I have found that my mental state definitely affects what kind of text I can read. Sometimes I have tried to read sutras but I have just not been able to sustain

S: Sometimes you might have tried to read Shakespeare and not been able to.

Prasannasiddhi: I've not been able to read, say, Wordsworth, even, or Milton; I have just not quite managed to be able to understand what he is saying. Whereas something like, say, history is a lot easier to

S: Well, it's more factual.

Prasannasiddhi: In my own case I have found that my mental state has definitely determined what has been within my range at any particular time.

S: What occurs to me, sort of reading through all these points, is that perhaps people should make just a greater effort with the Mahayana sutras; even perhaps a greater effort with the great works of Western literature. I am not even sure what exactly the questioners are regarding as great works of Western literature. I mean, do you include, for instance, Trollope? I wouldn't, not if you take the expression 'great works of Western literature' in the full sense. It would be quite interesting to make a survey of people's reading in the FWBO what they do actually read. We don't really have a very clear idea, perhaps; except that apparently they find Mahayana sutras difficult except The Diamond Sutra, of course!

Prasannasiddhi: You could look in the register, that might give an idea.

Subhuti: It just tells you what books people have taken out.

Voices: Yes!

S: Sometimes they take them just to refer to, for a particular purpose. But I have sometimes looked, and there's quite a mixture of works taken out. And, of course, the Library itself is limited; after all, we've got more books on Buddhism than on any other subject. But, yes, none the less, people do take out quite a mixed lot of books, especially members of the community I mean specially the retreat community. It is sometimes perhaps surprising what they do take out.

Dharmadhara: It would be good to do a survey of the Movement and see what sutras they have read, and also what Windhorse publications they [have] read.

S: Yes, read as distinct from buying.

Nagabodhi: We are embarking on something along these lines.

S: Perhaps we should start with Order Members first.

[25]
Dharmadhara: I went through the register of this Library the other day, and I was surprised at how many transactions there have been in the last year. There have been about 600 or 700. There's just a continual

S: Yes. Someone some time has to take responsibility for going through the register and checking that books that have been borrowed have been returned. I have not been able to find the Hurvitz translation of the White Lotus Sutra, Saddharma Pundarika.

Dharmadhara: In fact, I've not seen it there for quite a while.

S: We definitely have a copy.

Dharmadhara: I was unable to track it down, so I thought of buying another one.

S: We may have to, because it is in print. And even if the other one does turn up, a second copy isn't a bad idea. It didn't by any chance go to Guhyaloka?

Mangala: I'll check, but I don't think so.

S: It may well be wrongly placed, but I have looked through. That is something else we have to look into reorganization of the Library. But we won't talk about it now. But, yes, the reading habits of people within the Movement, especially the Order it would be quite interesting to follow that up. Quite a few people, of course, read books on various kinds of therapy. Anyway, any further points, or have we really finished? I am afraid from that latter discussion not very much emerged, did it, really? except that it does seem to be the case that many people find Mahayana sutras quite difficult to read, and perhaps that suggests that they should just make more effort. And perhaps start off, I would suggest, with the White Lotus Sutra, which I would have thought was relatively easy to read; especially being diversified with all those parables. There are quite a few translations both from the Chinese version and from the Sanskrit.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, the Lalita Vistara.

S: The Lalita Vistara, yes; that is also very readable if one likes the more sort of poetic or imaginative approach.

Dharmadhara: Which do you think is the best translation, the most attractive translation, of the White Lotus Sutra?

S: I think Soothill's unedited one, though unfortunately you don't have it complete. I'd certainly give that to a beginner. It would give him a good taste of the sutra. I think, for purposes of study, Hurvitz. In Soothill's version you are not able to get at, or get to, the original technical terms very easily; but at the first reading you probably don't need to. But the language is certainly quite attractive, especially the versified portions, in that rather sort of loose rhythm. People always did seem to enjoy my lectures on the Mahayana sutras, and they usually said that they did make the sutras more intelligible or more accessible; though none of those series were at all exhaustive.

All right, let's leave it there.

[26]
9 May 1987 'Building the Buddha Land'

PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Dharmadhara, Prasannasiddhi, Mangala, Kovida.

Subhuti: This is the second lecture in the series The Inconceivable Emancipation. Tonight's lecture is 'Building the Buddha Land'. The first question is from Abhaya.

Abhaya's question: You say in the lecture: 'It is possible, we are told, for the Buddha to transform an impure Buddhaland into a pure Buddhaland, and vice versa Why would a Buddha want to transform a pure Buddhaland into an impure one?

S: Well, I think the answer to this question is found in the story of the fish seller, the woman who sold fish. The only conceivable reason for a Buddha transforming a pure Buddha land into an impure one would be that beings found it difficult to live in a pure Buddha land, it was too much for them. Both the question and the answer, of course, are based on the assumption, which is true so far as it goes, that a Buddha literally creates a Buddha land, whether pure or impure. That isn't, of course, the whole truth, as I have made clear in the course of the lecture, because a pure land is, one might say, a sort of cooperative venture. But if one thinks in terms of the Buddha transforming a Buddha land, and if one thinks in terms of the Buddha transforming a pure Buddha land into an impure one, it can be only as a skilful means, for the sake of those beings who are not able to benefit from a perfectly pure Buddha land. That is, I think, fairly obvious, actually, isn't it?

Subhuti: The second question is from Tejananda.

Tejananda's question: You refer to 'applied Zen' in this lecture. What exactly did you mean by

this? Why bring in Zen at this point?

S: So what is the point? (Where is this?)

Dharmadhara: It's right at the end. The very last page.

S: Yes, it's to do with the context the point is that of creativity. I say: 'We are creating all the time and that there is no question, therefore, of anyone not being creative, it's only a question of degree. It's only a question of greater or lesser success, greater or lesser clarity, greater or lesser positivity; only a question of the quality of that creativity. We are being creative when we speak, we are being creative when we paint and decorate a room, we are being creative when we write a letter. This is the basic principle of what we may call applied Zen that is to say, Zen applied to the art of living itself.' So that's the point at which Zen is brought in. So what exactly does one mean by applied Zen? I would have thought that was obvious from the description I have given of it. One the one hand, one has so to speak a spiritual experience, or one has a spiritual path or a spiritual method or a spiritual realization; and on the other, one has different aspects of life, different human activities, to which that experience or that method or that realization is applied, in such a way as to bring them into harmony with that realization or with that method, and to make them a means for the realization of that experience or the practice of that particular method. [27] So one has Zen, say, as applied to architecture, Zen as applied to landscape gardening, Zen as applied to the art of archery, Zen as applied to flower arrangement, Zen as applied to everyday manners and customs, Zen as applied to swordsmanship, Zen as applied to all sort of things. So 'Why bring in Zen at this point?' Well, it's to illustrate the principle of a certain kind of creativity that kind of creativity in which the world is transformed. I think is that the expression I've used? Yes, 'we also impinge on the world, we impinge on our environment or part of our environment... We don't impinge on the world at random, we don't alter or arrange it at random. We impinge on it in accordance with a certain idea, in accordance with a certain pattern, image, gestalt, myth. This idea ... is not always consciously realized.' So it means that our relation with the world is essentially creative. The subject, the human subject is essentially creative in relation to its object and therefore, as I said, we are creating all the time. So one might say that I have brought in Zen here as an example of the way in which the human subject is creative in relation to its object, which is what I've been talking about. And of course, in the case of Zen, it is creative in a particular kind of way, a way which is, one could say, quite akin to the building of the Buddha land.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, to what extent do you think it is possible to maintain that kind of creativity outside, say, the formal structures of spiritual practice, particularly meditation?

S: It depends on all sorts of factors. It depends on resources; it depends on the nature of the environment. It depends on the degree of cooperation that you get from other people. Supposing, for instance, you wanted to apply the principle of Zen, one might say, to the surrounding countryside, to the landscape; well, it wouldn't depend just on you, you would need the cooperation of other people to do that, because they would have as much responsibility for the environment or for the landscape as you. Again, you might need material resources in the form of funds. But in principle there is no reason why it shouldn't be done.

Prasannasiddhi: I was just wondering to what extent one could maintain that level of

positivity and creativity without having recourse to meditation practice in particular to sort of maintain a deeper level.

S: Well, it doesn't only depend on the meditation; it depends on other, in a way, quite mundane factors, even it depends on worldly power. Because, in the past, say, kings and, in the case of, one might say, China and Japan, emperors who have been sympathetic to Ch'an or Zen have been able to order the construction of Zen-type gardens or Zen-type buildings and so on. So other people are necessarily involved; material resources are necessarily involved. It's not just your own personal inspiration or realization.

Subhuti: In a way, though, it's not a question of a particular formal expression, is it?

S: It's not a question of a particular formal expression but in the case of the example cited there is a formal expression. It's never just an expression. The expression has to take a particular form, whether that of painting or poetry or architecture or landscape gardening or archery or whatever.

Subhuti: But really, fundamentally, what you seem to be saying was that you can be creative in whatever you do, so that if you don't have the power to construct a Zen temple you at least are able to paint your own room.

[28]
S: Yes, at least you can do that.

Subhuti: or just tidy it up in a certain way.

S: Yes, certainly you can do that. It's a question of degree. The way you eat your own food, you know; the way you set out your own dishes, even the way you do the washing up. All these can be Zen applied to the art of living.

Dharmadhara: Bhante, in this section you are summarizing the previous part of the lecture, in the sense of 'What has all this got to do with us? What has building a Buddha land got to do with us?' and you answer that indirectly in terms of creativity, especially artistic. It occurs to me that this is a major part of your teaching as [also in] 'Mind Reactive and Creative'; it recurs a number of times. I was wondering if there is any other way of putting it, other than in terms of art. Are there any other indirect examples ?

S: Well, one speaks in terms of art because in art particularly it seems there is so to speak an idea in the mind which is then given what one may describe as a harmonious external embodiment. And this is what, say, the Buddha or a Bodhisattva, in a very much higher sense, is trying to do when they set about building a Buddha land. It's a sort of work of art, one might say, in the highest sense. But the principle is there all the time, because people all the time are having an influence on their environment, they are impinging on the world, as I say; they are interacting with the world, and that impingement or that interaction can be negative and destructive or it can be positive and it can be creative. It's the positive, creative kind of interaction with the world to which especially we give the name art.

Dharmadhara: I'm not sure, but I wonder if for some people the term creative may have certain connotations, you know, of being unpredictable and, in a negative sense,

individualistic.

S: I don't know that it has.

Dharmadhara: I've got nothing to go on, I'm just wondering.

S: But what makes you wonder whether creativity might be interpreted in that sense?

Dharmadhara: I think, going back to a couple of weekends ago, I was on a day retreat, and I think I used the term. I forget who I think it was a working class sort of chap and I think he didn't really follow the right implications; I had to do a lot of filling in. It may have been the word or it may have just been the whole system of ideas

S: One has to recognize, perhaps, that people who don't appreciate the arts or recognize the value of the arts, and who at the same time associate the word creativity with the arts, will tend to assume that creativity represents some kind of impractical, useless function; because they see the arts as useless. They see them just as, at best, entertainment or something decorative, but not as anything really useful or having any real value or any real place in life; they are something that can be very easily dispensed with. I mean, for instance, every time a lot of money is spent, say, on the purchase of a picture for, say, the National Gallery, someone is sure to write in to the you know, the

: Guardian?

[29]
S: Not the Guardian! No, to the BBC's 'Today' programme, saying why shouldn't that enormous sum of money be spent on improving drains or something like that. They don't see the arts as having any value at all. They see them, in a way, as essentially frivolous. Of course, sometimes they are, but then they really have ceased to be art. So I think if anyone understands the word creativity in that sort of negative way, it is because they associate it with the arts and because they think so lightly of the arts. They have to be convinced of the seriousness and value of the arts themselves.

Dharmadhara: So maybe an alternative would be to pick some expression of idea more in their world, even in a business sense?

S: Probably you couldn't express what you want to say in those sort of terms. Could you express it in terms of making money, for instance? That would be rather difficult though that is an activity that people would appreciate. It's almost like asking how would you explain Enlightenment to someone who had no conception of spiritual values and attached no significance or importance to them.

Dharmadhara: Perhaps you could use the analogy of social work or some sort of activity like that.

S: In the case of ?

Dharmadhara: Looking for something more accessible for whom the arts represented something completely flippant and frivolous.

S: I suppose you could point out that you could make money through the arts. But would that really convey what the arts were all about? There is the story about D. H. Lawrence when he showed his father an early novel, and his father took it in his hand and said, 'How much did tha' make for that, lad?' and D.H. Lawrence said, 'Fifty pounds!' So he said, 'Fifty pounds! And tha's never done a day's work in thy life!' He didn't regard it as work, writing a novel; it just wasn't work. So he could appreciate the $50, that you could get $50 by just doing a little bit of work and writing a novel, he could understand that, he could appreciate the $50, but the fact that you could get $50 for writing a novel didn't convey to him any idea of the value of the novel as a novel.

Dharmadhara: So really it would be difficult to communicate what you were putting across without an appreciation of higher art, would you say?

Subhuti: Higher something.

S: Higher something, however sort of rudimentary, however germinal. Otherwise an analogy is an analogy, but an analogy doesn't consist in explaining something in terms of something else, in such a way that the something else in terms of which you explain it doesn't enable you to understand it or appreciate it. You can point out that Picasso died a multimillionaire, his paintings worth $100 million, apparently; so that might enable someone to appreciate, from their point of view, the value of art but it wouldn't be art valued as art. It would be 'art' valued as a moneymaking activity. Similarly with explaining creativity or the arts in terms of social work.

[30]
Subhuti: I suppose another analogy is statecraft and statesman[ship] it would be a difficult one to pursue today, because politics is so badly looked upon, but it is an obvious analogy to building a Buddha land.

S: Yes, because if one leaves aside the ruler there is the lawgiver, and the lawgiver lays down laws which make possible the development of a positive and a harmonious society. I certainly regard that as being one of the arts, in the broader sense that I have defined the term, because you are impinging on the world; and you are impinging on it in accordance with a certain idea, in accordance with a certain pattern, image, gestalt or myth, which usually the lawgiver quite consciously realizes. So therefore one could regard great statesmen and leaders in the true sense as being essentially creative or as exercising a specifically creative function. In the past, usually, people or the masses were relatively passive, so probably that would not be the highest form of such creativity; it would be a higher form if you enlisted their willing cooperation in the laying down of your laws and the creation of the kind of society that the laws made possible. Because statesmen can certainly change society, whether individually or collectively. Whether they change it positively, or in a genuinely creative manner, that is quite a different question. o one could say there is also Zen and the art of statesmanship. I have commented in the past on the fact that, in Buddhist tradition, the cakravartiraja is ranked second only to the Buddha, in the sense that, had the Buddha not decided to become a Buddha, he would have become a cakravartiraja, suggesting that that is the next best alternative. We are told quite specifically that the principal function of a cakravartiraja is to create or to maintain a society in which the ten akusaladharmas are banished and the ten kusaladharmas are encouraged to be practised. So he doesn't work on himself, though he does observe those ten kusaladharmas, so much as on society. You could say that, in the case of the

Buddha, he works on a restricted section of society; he works primarily on the Sangha. But the cakravartiraja works on society as a whole works, of course, without being Enlightened in the way that the Buddha is.

Subhuti: Presumably he can't work on the level of the Sangha?

S: Presumably he can't, though, of course, historically speaking, Buddhist rulers have sometimes intervened and so to speak reformed the Sangha when it seems to have been in need of reformation or when the king himself thought it was in need of reformation. But sometimes that constituted a sort of violent intervention not really in accordance with the spirit of the Sangha; Sangha, of course, in the sense of monastic order.

Subhuti: Do you think that the conception of the Pure Land, say, with Amitabha creating Sukhavati, combines those two? Or is it more that the Pure Land is just the realm of

S: The Pure Land does seem to exist on another level. The cakravartiraja is operating definitely on the mundane level, which Amitabha isn't when he creates his particular Pure Land. At the very least, it is a transfigured material world or a transfigured samsaric world, whereas the world of the cakravartiraja is definitely the ordinary workaday world, of society, economics, politics, ethics and so on, the world of government in the ordinary sense. But I have thought for some time that the ruler is actually performing essentially the same function, or engaging in essentially the same type of activity, as the artist; possibly a much more difficult one, inasmuch as he is having to deal with to as it were manipulate, using the term in a positive sense human beings rather than inert materials. It's comparatively easy to [31] manipulate pigments and marble and words; but to manipulate human beings and to do something with them, without infringing their autonomy, is an extremely difficult thing.

Subhuti: In the lecture, you differentiate between two different kinds of working on other people: one was where they are passive and the other was where they are actively cooperating.

S: Right. In the old days, as I mentioned, the people were passive and you had wise rulers who just issued orders, which were to the benefit of the people; but the sanction of that was force, usually, or fear. But a much higher kind of creativity of that type is when the ruler, so to speak, or the leader, enlists the willing and active cooperation of people. I don't know whether that's really ever been done to a great extent.

Subhuti: You've got to be both a politician and a statesman.

S: Not to speak of a bit of a saint, too. People talk rather negatively about organizations and about the state, but really they don't know what they are talking about when they talk in that way.

Mangala: There is a bit about this in the Tao Te Ching, isn't there? he talks a lot about how leaders should behave and so on.

Dharmadhara: That's more Confucius, isn't it?

Mangala: Wouldn't that have quite a bit the same value(?) as well? I'm wondering if the

Buddha has got very much to say in that sort of way.

S: Well, he does speak about the cakravartiraja; assuming those discourses to have been actually by the Buddha. He certainly speaks about the cakravartiraja and how he encourages people in the practice of the ten silas, and how he punishes those people who deviate from them; how he upholds justice. Justice isn't a very popular virtue nowadays, is it? You notice, if you listen to the radio, if you read the papers, the talk is always about caring and compassion. No one speaks about justice. The word is never mentioned. I've not heard it mentioned once, I've not come across it in writing in the newspapers once. They have mentioned a third 'C' just recently, since the election machine started rolling what was that? caring, compassion

: Conservatism!

S: No, no; something else.

Dharmadhara: Consideration?

S: No, something relatively mundane but as a third 'C'.

: Concern?

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S: No because we've got caring, which is much the same as concern; compassion; I'll probably hear it on the radio umpteen times before we're through.

: A virtue?

S: It's regarded as a virtue, obviously, because the speaker claims his party is standing for it.

Mangala: Not charity?

S: No. The point is, that no one speaks in terms of justice.

Dharmadhara: Law and order.

S: Some speak in terms of law and order; but not justice.

Subhuti: Anyway, it's different, isn't it, from law and order?

S: It's quite different, because you can maintain order through sheer force, and also by means of sheer injustice, too. Justice implies law and order; but law and order do not necessarily imply justice, in fact they can imply gross injustice or involve gross injustice.

Dharmadhara: Justice implies judgement and judges, presumably.

S: It implies judgement in accordance with ethical criteria. There was law and order in Hitler's concentration camps; there was law and order at Auschwitz, but there was no justice. Far from it.

Dharmadhara: It seems that justice has gone with the loss of faith in the judiciary system, with its susceptibility to politics and

S: No, it's really nothing to do with that, because the judiciary can administer evil laws. There was a judiciary to take the same example in Nazi Germany, but the laws that the judges were administering were the laws of the Third Reich. Justice is a philosophical concept rather than a purely judicial one. It's interesting that Plato begins the Republic with a discussion of justice; because without justice there is no ideal state.

Mangala: What does justice actually man?

S: Well, justice this is just an off-the-cuff definition which I may have come across somewhere means the apportioning to everybody of what is due to them.

Subhuti: That's Plato, isn't it?

S: Is it?

Subhuti: I think so, from the Republic.

S: Ah. It must be on the right lines, then.

Mangala: Which would imply some ethical standard by which to judge them.

[33]
S: Yes, indeed. Which would again imply philosophical standards, one might say; some sense of values.

Mangala: So when you said that any society which hasn't got these, let's say, high ethical values or standards cannot but be unjust as it were

S: It cannot be essentially just, and is likely to be unjust. It can maintain law and order but, as we've seen, that isn't really enough, because the law and order can be based on injustice rather than on justice.

Mangala: And presumably you would say that that ethical standard would have to be that of Buddhism?

S: I'm not sure that it would have to be that of Buddhism in a narrow sense.

Subhuti: If it was ethical it would be Buddhism, wouldn't it?

S: Yes, one could argue that way. Sometimes we do feel that a perfectly legal decision of a court is unjust; sometimes there is that conflict. Sometimes it is a real conflict, sometimes it's not because sometimes people's ideas of justice are a bit arbitrary. In fact, when they say justice they really mean pseudo-compassion very often.

Subhuti: It is interesting, though, that that concept of justice is inherent in the British judicial system that the laws are supposed to be interpreted in the light of natural justice, and it is

claimed that that can be perceived.

S: Natural justice is a philosophical concept, isn't it? in a way, a rather arbitrary one. But there is such a thing as what do they call it? Oh dear, I can't remember now. In addition to law there is something else. Equity. There is not just law, there is equity; so that the law must be administered, presumably, in a spirit of equity. In other words, it isn't enough to apply the law, however correctly, if the law results in obvious injustice; the principle of equity is then invoked to right the balance. So the laws of a country should really reflect a concept of justice. On the whole, in most countries, they probably do at least in theory. For instance, it's often said that there's the same law for the rich and the poor. Well, in a sense there is; but the poor can't always afford the law! It's like saying that diamonds are freely available both to the rich and the poor; well, in a sense they are, anyone can buy them, but you've got to have the money to buy them. So sometimes it's not so much justice that has to be bought but the means by which justice is obtained has to be bought. Well, we've discovered that, in a way, in our little dealings with the press; because supposing a newspaper publishes something which slanders you, you can have redress, sometimes, only if you go to law, and you can't afford to go to law, because to go to law costs a lot of money, and in any case would cost you much more than it would cost the paper or rather you could afford much less than could that paper. So really you are not equal in the eyes of the law. Justice is not really open to you in practice. You cannot obtain what is due to you, in other words redress for the libel; so that extent you are living under a system of injustice, you are living under an iniquitous system. So it is probably quite important to draw people's attention to this aspect of applied Zen - Zen and the art of statesmanship, Zen and the art of organization, Zen and the art of running things, Zen and the art of administration; all these things are in a way Zen-like, they all have in them an element of creativity. They are the product of a positive impingement on [34] and a positive interaction with the world. Anyway, is that enough about that one? I think those questions all came out of supplementaries, didn't they? Ultimately, it grew out of Tejananda's question about applied Zen, what exactly did I mean by the term and why bring in Zen at this point? I think it should be sufficiently obvious now.

Subhuti: The next one is from Sarvamitra.

Sarvamitra's question: What is the source of the fish-seller story?

S: I am not sure what the ultimate source was. It is a story quite well known in Indian literature. I probably encountered it in the course of my reading of the Ramakrishna Mission literature. It may well have been told, this story, like so many others, by their founder or inspirer, Sri Ramakrishna.

Subhuti: Next, from Prakasha.

Prakasha's question: You say that a Buddha's sphere of knowledge is infinite, whereas his sphere of influence is limited. Why should there be a limitation in influence when in principle the Buddha is coterminous with the whole Dharmadhatu?

S: It is, incidentally, not what I say but what tradition says. 'Why should there be a limitation in influence when in principle the Buddha is coterminous with the whole Dharmadhatu?' Presumably one is speaking here about a human historical Buddha; one is speaking here about a nirmanakaya Buddha, in the language of the Mahayana. So a human

and historical Buddha, a nirmanakaya Buddha, will have a physical body, he will have physical senses, and his influence presumably will be communicated through those; so there is a definite limitation imposed by the fact that he is embodied, one might say, in that particular way. It isn't always clear, though, whether the Buddha whose influence extends over so many worlds is a nirmanakaya Buddha or a samboghakaya Buddha or a Buddha, so to speak, intermediate between the two, even though there isn't a particular term for that, not a separate term. In other words, whatever term is used, whether the term nirmanakaya or whether the term samboghakaya, a Buddha whose influence extends over many, many worlds or universes is not as limited in his influence as a nirmanakaya Buddha in the narrowest sense, that is as a human historical Buddha; but however far the Buddha's influence extends, whether the influence of a nirmanakaya Buddha or a samboghakaya Buddha or of a Buddha as it were somewhere in between, it has a limit, because it proceeds from a Buddha who is limited, so to speak limited, that is to say, with regard to his outward form, whether that outward form belongs to a lower or to a higher level. It is only that the...

Side Two

(?)kaya which is unlimited, and it is therefore only on the level of the dharmakaya that a Buddha's knowledge has no limit. In other words, a Buddha's knowledge or inner realization is unlimited just because it is an inner realization, and not dependent on or manifested through any particular form, however subtle or however refined. Whereas his influence, which is an influence on other beings, who by very definition are not on the same level, has to be exerted through a particular form. Do you see the difference?

Mangala: So his influence is conditioned, whereas his Insight, as it were, is unconditioned?

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S: Yes, it's not so much that the influence is conditioned as that the medium through which the influence is exerted, that is to say the Buddha's personality, for want of a better term, is limited. Whereas, as you said, his Insight is not limited, because there there is no question of manifestation, no question of influence. It exists on its own level, the dharmakaya level, in its own right, so to speak. But when the Buddha wants to communicate, when he wants to influence, he has to come down a step or two, so to speak, in order to communicate with the beings on those lower levels and in order to influence them. Therefore, the influence is limited, by virtue of the fact that he is influencing them or communicating with them through a medium, i.e. his own as it were human or archetypal personality, which has its own limitations.

Dharmadhara: How would the samboghakaya form of Buddha influence beings on that level? if the [...] came through the physical senses?

S: Usually it is said that the samboghakaya Buddha is that aspect of the Buddha through which he communicates with the Bodhisattvas. Sometimes it is said that there are two levels, or in a sense two samboghakayas: through one of which the Buddha communicates with advanced Bodhisattvas, and through the other with other Buddhas. Because, if you think in terms of other Buddhas, there is division, there is limitation; but if all those divisions, all those limitations, are removed, there is only the Dharmakaya, so on that level there is no question of communication, there is no question of influencing; there is only a non-dual sort of knowledge or intuition. So the Buddha's knowledge, on that dharmakaya level, is

unlimited, whereas his influence, exercised through a limited body whether of the nirmanakaya type or the samboghakaya type is limited, because that body itself is limited, by very definition. So it really is quite straightforward, isn't it?gain, that principle is exemplified on all sorts of levels, because even in the case of the artist to come right down from the purely spiritual level he has an idea in his mind, has an image in his mind; but he is very often able to embody it only to a very limited extent, partly on account of the limitations of the medium in which he works.

Mangala: That just reminds me of something I think you said. I can't get it quite right, perhaps, but something like there are no 'mute, inglorious Miltons'. So can you have that kind of realization without also having the means of expressing it?

S: I don't think you can; because actually, I think, in point of fact, you don't have the idea fully in your mind to begin with in all respects and then proceed to work it out through a particular medium, or embody it in a particular work of art. I don't think that ever happens. But, at the same time, though it is by means of the actual process of embodying the idea in a work of art, say, that you come to realize what the idea was really all about, none the less there is still always something left over I think probably in almost all cases. There might be possibly a perfect work of art which absolutely adequately embodies the artist's idea, though he doesn't usually realize what that idea is in its fullness until the work of art is complete; but there almost always is something left over which he feels he has not been able to embody, or not been able to embody fully enough. Marlowe gives expression to this idea in those lines I have quoted in The Eternal Legacy:

'Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.'

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So it's as though, in the process of actual creation, the idea of which the creation is the embodiment becomes clearer and clearer, but yet at the end of the process of creation, when the work of art stands complete, there is still something of the idea which is left unexpressed. I think probably this happens in all cases; or perhaps all except a very, very small handful of cases. I am thinking, say, of perhaps something like Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, which is generally considered to be a perfect work of art; but it could have been that Sophocles himself was quite dissatisfied with it and felt that it didn't at all represent what he really wanted to create; we don't know.

Kovida: He went on to write another Oedipus at Colonus.

Prasannasiddhi: In a sense, you can see that process in the development within Buddhism; the different forms of Buddhism trying to give full expression.

S: Yes, because surely the first few words that the Buddha spoke, or his first few teachings, didn't give anything like full expression to what he had actually realized. Perhaps it has taken the whole course of development of Buddhist thought, so to speak, to even begin to give expression to what it was that the Buddha realized.

Subhuti: What is that? Why can't it be distilled?

S: Because the medium of expression always imposes, at the same time as it presents a possibility of communication, it also imposes a limitation. This is why probably it is necessary to study the history of Buddhism in the sense of studying all the different successive schools of Buddhist thought and practice and realization, in order to get a better and better, or a fuller and fuller, or a richer and richer idea of the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment, or the Buddha's spiritual experience. The Hinayana gives you a glimpse of it; the Mahayana gives you another glimpse of it; the Vajrayana gives you another glimpse of it. But it can't be tied down to any particular set of words or to the teaching of any one particular school. And even when you have gone right through the history of Buddhism, even when you have become acquainted with all the different schools and traditions and methods of spiritual practice and biographies of great Buddhists, you still haven't fully grasped the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment. You have take them, therefore, all just as pointers. It is a slightly Hegelian way of looking at the history of Buddhism, isn't it? Because Hegel regarded the whole process of world history as a progressive embodiment of the Idea, didn't he, or the Absolute, for want of a better term? But it isn't really quite like that.

Prasannasiddhi: So, Bhante, the artist can never be satisfied?

S: So the artist can never be satisfied. He can become tired or worn out, or not know what to do next; but I think if he is a real artist he can never be satisfied. Or, no, let's say if he is a great artist he can never be satisfied, because there are some artists with a very limited vision which they are able to give fairly adequate embodiment to; but a great artist is always extending his vision.

Prasannasiddhi: And so a Buddha could never be satisfied, as well.

S: You could put it in that way. I have gone into that when I have spoken about the last of the positive nidanas not being really the last in the literal sense; and saying that one shouldn't think of the Buddha, when he attained [37] Enlightenment, as coming to a complete full stop. We do usually think of the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment in that way, and the scriptures usually present it in that way, but that's only one way of looking at it, to say the least.

Subhuti: You could talk of the Buddha as always trying to give a more and more adequate expression to the Dharmakaya, which he is never able to do?

S: Yes, one could certainly say that, though that wasn't quite what I was meaning to say. Yes, you could.

Subhuti: Because it could never be adequately expressed; there's always a further level to be gone to.

S: Presumably, at the end of the Buddha's teaching career of 45 years or whatever it was he actually taught, he must have given a fuller expression of the content of his Enlightenment experience than he did, say, during the first week or the first month or the first year. And one could say that the history of Buddhism in the true sense, the best sense, carries on that process. You could say the Ch'an of China or Zen of Japan, or the Vajrayana of Tibet, gave expression to aspects of the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience which were not able to find expression in the teaching of the historical Sakyamuni. Because the Buddha

lived at a particular time, in a particular place. He functioned within a particular cultural context which necessarily imposed limitations. So there must have been aspects of his Enlightenment experience which could not find expression through or within, let us say that particular context, or through the particular medium provided to him by his environment in the widest sense of the term; or provided for him, perhaps I should say. Do you see what I'm getting at? have found the same thing myself, in a very limited context, when I think of the difference as between the way I can function in India and the way I can function in Britain, just due to the difference in social, cultural context. So functioning in, say, Britain imposes certain limitations in respect of what one wants to express which are not present in India; and vice versa. One can express here things that one can't express there; one can express there things that one can't express here, or can express it in different ways or with different degrees of fullness.

Kovida: But presumably the actual historical Buddha must have been satisfied with what he was able to do at the time he was doing it.

S: Well, presumably he was satisfied with what he was able to do within that particular context; but that doesn't mean he was absolutely satisfied. But even within one and the same country you are limited by its specific contexts, so there's a certain limitation when, as an Order Member, you are speaking to Mitras. There's a certain limitation when you're addressing an audience of schoolchildren or when you're addressing an audience of scientists or an audience of Christians. There is a certain limitation necessarily imposed by the nature of the situation within which you are functioning. So that is undoubtedly true of the Buddha. So when Buddhism went, say, to China, perhaps Buddhism was able to say in China things that the Buddha had not been able to say in India.

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Dharmadhara: Has this ever been articulated by other Buddhist commentators?

S: I don't think so. Though it's obviously there in principle in Buddhism itself, especially in the Mahayana, but it has never been actually spelled out.

Subhuti: It's a limitation of the situations in which Buddhism has functioned, it hasn't been able to say that.

S: Yes, indeed. So perhaps we are able to say certain things in the West, able to say as Buddhists certain things in the West that Buddhism has not been able to say before. One could even say, 'Why, if that wasn't possible, what is the point of having Western Buddhism?' That is what Western Buddhism, to the extent that there is such a thing, objectively speaking, really means. Western Buddhism means Buddhism saying things that Buddhism was not able to say in the East, not even in the person of the Buddha himself. Because how could the Buddha have said everything in the course of one short lifetime, in one particular place under one particular culture? How could he have said everything that he had realized? This is in a way, in principle, perhaps, one of the messages of the White Lotus Sutra.

Mangala: Do you think, Bhante, that possibly in a way he did say everything, at least in sort of essence, but maybe not in a particular let's say language of China or the West or whatever; but if you look into the teaching you can see how it applies to the West or to China or

S: Oh, yes, when you look into the teaching; having for instance heard what the Buddha had to say in China or what he has to say in the West, one can see that it is there. But until the content of the Buddha's realization finds expression, finds a voice, in that particular way, you don't actually see it.

Mangala: I'm not sure. I mean, presumably, you yourself must have looked at, say, the Pali texts and so on, and you found something there which as it were attracted you which you thought seemed right, appropriate, meaningful. But presumably that could only have been based on your experience of life in the West, so that you must have made some connection. Do you see what I mean?

S: No, I'm not sure that it was based on my experience of life in the West. I doubt that it had anything to do with my experience of life in the West. I think there is some ambiguity about this word 'essence'. If one thinks of essence in as it were purely conceptual terms, then a sort of analysis of that concept doesn't give one the full content of what the experience itself represents. Do you see what I mean? (Doubtful laughter.) When one says 'essence', what does one mean? I mean, what is an essence?

Mangala: I suppose what I meant was that the Buddha said some things with regard to human beings which as it were are part and parcel of humankind and would be applicable anywhere, whether the West or China or whatever.

S: Again, that only pushes the question one stage further back, because what does one mean by 'applicable'?

Mangala: I mean they are of the essence of

S: But again you are coming back to essence.

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Mangala: Well, all right, I mean they are part of the essential stuff of human make-up.

S: I think we still have to understand what we are doing or what we are meaning when we use this term 'essence'. Let's just say, to give a concrete example, if you ask, say, a Theravada Buddhist, 'What is the essence of the Buddha's teaching?' he might well say, 'The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path'. And he might well be correct, up to a point. So one can speak of the Noble Eightfold Path as the essence of Buddhism; one can have that particular concept. And that particular concept of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path representing the essence of the Buddha's teaching is, one might say, a concept; in other words, the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path concept represents the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. But if, so to speak, you lose sight of the fact that that particular concept represents the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience, and if you simply analyse the concept of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, that analysis will not enable you to appreciate, or will not bring you to, those expressions of the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience other than the concept of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path which developed subsequently. In order to appreciate those, you will have as it were to go behind the concept and have some direct spiritual contact with the Enlightenment experience itself.

Mangala: So, well right. I suppose 'essence' wouldn't be those concepts, it would be something beyond or behind them.

S: Right, yes. So in a way you can't define the essence, because when you define it you have to define it by means of concept, and if you direct your attention simply to the concept and lose sight of what it is a concept of, in a sense, you are not able to go beyond that concept; you are not able to get beyond, say, a formulation like that of the Four Noble Truths or the Noble Eightfold Path, not able to establish contact with or appreciate other alternative formulations, perhaps subsequent to the Buddha himself, and are therefore not able to appreciate or not able to have a fuller and a richer notion of the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. So, in other words, the notion or concept of essence doesn't really help one in explaining how it is that it's possible to enrich the unfolding of Buddhism in the course of Buddhist history. In other words, it's not a sort of filling in of a concept, divorced, as it were, from what the concept represents. Probably that isn't very clear.

Mangala: I've lost the

S: What made you bring in this concept of essence? What were you trying to achieve

Mangala: I can't remember

S: by bringing in this concept of essence, because you brought it in? Yes, you said that the essence was the same, but it was the East or the West. But that isn't enough to explain what is distinctive.

Mangala: I'm not quite sure what I was trying to say.

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Prasannasiddhi: Were you trying to say that the concepts that we develop in Western Buddhism have probably been touched upon as concepts in the other Buddhist traditions?

Mangala: Well, no. What I was saying was that perhaps the concepts we use in the West are different, but that what they are pointing to or what is behind those concepts is actually the same.

S: Ah. This is true, yes. But that is not essence in the sense that we have been using the term so far. It's that to which notions like essence point. So, yes, one could say that the experience of or contact with or appreciation of the content of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience would in principle be the same whether it was in the East or the West, depending on how far it went; but there would be certain aspects of that experience which would be able to find expression in the East or in the West which were not able to find expression elsewhere. It has been asked: 'Why was the Buddha born in India?' Well, perhaps at that time Indian culture offered the best medium for the expression of the sort of experience that the Buddha had or was going to have. But when in, say, China people started having the same experience, it was able to find expression of a type that it was not or had not been able to find in India. Similarly when it came to the West, perhaps it is able to find an expression which it wasn't able to find before. Not that the experience itself is different, but that different aspects of the experience can reveal themselves under different conditions. So that, if we study all the different manifestations and expressions, especially if we haven't had much contact with the content of

the Enlightenment experience itself, we can get a better and better idea of what that content is, a fuller and fuller idea.

Mangala: So could you say what aspects of the Buddha's teaching either have become more clear in the West or you think will become more clear? As, I suppose, the East

S: It is probably too early to say with any confidence. Have we touched on any, do you think, which apparently have not found expression, or so much expression, in the East?

Subhuti: Well, isn't it the sort of thing that you can't really talk about?

S: Yes, I would say so.

Subhuti: In the East, there's a sort of historical criticism, a higher criticism that could be applied.

S: You certainly couldn't talk about it in India; certainly not during the lifetime of the Buddha, because there was nothing with which to compare the form of Buddhism that existed then. There was just, at the beginning, one form of Buddhism. Well then, of course, there arose the distinction between Hinayana and Mahayana; but in the absence of historical sense both were regarded as the Buddha's teaching, but one was regarded, by the Mahayanists at least, as higher than the other; so that didn't really help. That sort of particular intellectual framework didn't allow for the emergence of the sort of idea that we are talking about.

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Subhuti: Perhaps it is a sort of social dimension, or rather another aspect of social dimension in so far as Buddhism is now encountering democracies, and, again, something we touched on a bit earlier.

Mangala: So, Bhante, would you say that in a way Buddhism in itself is incomplete and is something constantly developing and expanding?

S: Yes, well, Buddhism as let's say an organized religion, for want of a better term, is never complete. This is one of the great weaknesses, one of the great limitations of the Theravadins and perhaps of other schools too Eastern schools. They think that this is Buddhism, you've got it, all in a little box, all in a neatly tied-up package, as it were, and you've just got to learn that; just like learning geometry. But Buddhism is not complete, it's never complete. It can't be complete inasmuch as it is an expression, in one form or another, of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience or the content of that experience, which is infinite, so how can Buddhism ever be finished? How can it ever be complete? Western Buddhism certainly won't complete it. It will just reveal further aspects of it hitherto perhaps unrevealed.

Mangala: So it's not just a matter of covering old ground, as it were, but actually breaking new ground?

S: Yes, but I suppose one can break new ground in two different ways; one by sort of logical extension of what one might call the old ground, and, two, as a result of or as an expression of one's own personal Enlightenment experience, of whatsoever degree. But for it actually to be a sort of extension of Buddhism, you would have to connect the expression of your own

personal Enlightenment experience with the previous expressions of Enlightenment experience of the Buddhist tradition, going back to the Buddha himself.

Dharmadhara: Presumably Buddhism can be enriched by sub-Enlightenment experiences, after the Buddha's Enlightenment experience, by later Buddhists, who are not fully enlightened? Or does it always have to be enriched by Enlightenment experience?

S: I think it can be enriched by people on different levels of experience, but obviously the higher the level of experience the greater the degree of enrichment and the purer the enrichment. An enrichment on a lower level will very likely be contaminated by various impure elements of whatsoever kind.

Dharmadhara: So we'd need Stream Entrants at the least?

S: Yes, I think really to enrich Buddhism, yes, in a spiritual sense. I mean an unenlightened person might set up a very useful organizational structure which in its own way would be a great enrichment of Buddhism. But not quite in the same way as, for instance, a teaching which was the expression of someone's direct experience of Enlightenment.

Dharmadhara: Mm, and the Theravada have apparently precluded that possibility by [taking Enlightenment [as] not being attainable.

S: Well, perhaps they wouldn't quite all say that now. They were certainly saying it some years ago, but there doesn't seem to be a very widespread or strongly held conviction that Enlightenment is possible even in this day and age, or even that Stream Entry is possible in this day and age.

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Dharmadhara: So some Theravadins do think it's possible?

S: Apparently, yes; whether that it's actually achieved by them it's mainly people following the modern vipassana tradition that's another matter, of course. But one even hears of people in Thailand or in Burma who are believed to be arhants; but whether they are arhants, that's quite a different question. They often seem to be quite eccentric people who are believed to be able to work miracles, and that sort of ability does impress ordinary people. They tend very often to regard that as a sign of arhantship, a mark of arhantship. That is not to say they may not be arhants, but the belief in the possibility of such attainments is not really very widespread in most parts of the Theravada world. Perhaps more so than some decades ago.

Dharmadhara: What do you think led to that change?

S: Oh, that's a very big question.

Dharmadhara: It wouldn't be other forms of Buddhism?

S: My personal belief is that what played a very big part was the quite low level of cultural development in the Theravada countries. If you read the history of the [...tion] of Buddhism into the Theravada countries of South-East Asia, one will find that nowhere did it encounter a really highly developed culture. In fact, Buddhism brought culture to those countries. They

were quite wild, quite savage, even, before Buddhism. That holds good of Japan too, really; and Tibet. It was only when Buddhism went to China that it went to a country which had a level of civilization and culture comparable to that of India; so this is why I think Chinese Buddhism has a special significance and value, and perhaps holds special lessons, for Western Buddhism, because only for the second time in its history has Buddhism encountered a civilization and culture comparable with that of India, within which it originally arose. In the case of Christianity, it came into contact with the culture of the Greeks and the Romans, especially the Greeks; and Christianity had to assume a very different form in many respects, for that reason. When it came in contact with the barbarian tribes of the north, that was a very different story; again, it changed its form. o speaking, so to speak, the language of Chinese culture, Buddhism, in the sense of the basic Enlightenment experience, was able to say certain things, or express certain aspects of itself, which it had not been able to say or to express before in India, because of the limitations of that particular culture.

Mangala: Would a good analogy be that you may have an artist who, up to a certain point, always used paints, and then his paints ran out so he started to use mud, and he started using stone and sculpting, and in that way made discoveries which he hadn't been able to do because he didn't have the

S: Yes, right. Because certain media enable you to do things which other media don't allow you to do. For instance, if you take painting in water colour; through that particular medium you are able to obtain certain effects, or in other words to say something, which you can't say in oils through that particular medium. I mean different languages; there are certain things you can say, say, in French which you can't say in English, and vice versa; or say better than you can [in English]. t's as though one of the great heresies, one of the great micchaditthis, is to think that the Infinite, to use that term, can be fully and finally expressed in any one particular way. Theravada Buddhism doesn't fully and [43] finally express the spirit or the nature of Buddhism, nor does the Mahayana, nor does Ch'an, nor does Zen, nor does Vajrayana, nor does Tibetan Buddhism. But, unfortunately, the followers of all these forms tend to think that it does. You could even go farther than that and say that perhaps no one religion is capable of saying everything about the Infinite. This is a point that has been made recently by students of comparative religion, or what used to be called comparative religion that some Christian students of comparative religion have begun to admit though there's very few of them that Buddhism may have attained certain insights that are not available within historical Christianity. And it may be that there are insights even within Christianity that Buddhism hasn't been able to attain; at least on certain levels; though we might believe as Buddhists that Buddhism has, so to speak, a greater number of insights. But that is not to say that all the insights are within Buddhism.

Mangala: So one constantly has to have a very open mind?

S: Yes, indeed, and be able to have some feeling for the meaning which is trying to be conveyed by means of an unfamiliar language, using the word in a metaphorical sense.

Kovida: But what motivates people to want to discover the answers?

S: Answers to what?

Kovida: Well, why does Buddhism continue to express through different generations.

S: It's not that people have the idea, so to speak, that Buddhism has got to continue to express itself through successive generations, but they want, say, to have some experience of Buddhism, and having had that experience they want to communicate. So naturally they communicate in terms with which they are familiar, the terms of their own language and culture and so on. And that adds something to the sum total of expressions of Buddhism. It's not that they are necessarily conscious of what is happening in that sort of way. It's not that the Mahayanists say, 'Oh, we must enrich Buddhism by a further expression.' No, the Mahayanist had, let's say, an experience of Enlightenment, at least to some degree; he was trying to communicate that. He was trying to communicate it under conditions rather different from those that prevailed in the Buddha's day. So the form that the communication took was different from the Hinayana form, different from the form that the Buddha himself had expressed himself in.

[44]
Tape 2

Subhuti: So the new way of looking at a certain aspect of Buddhism has arisen out of our attempt to understand?

S: Well, as I said a little while ago, there are two ways in which the expressions of Buddhism can be added to; one by way of elaboration of preceding formulations, the other by way of some experience of Enlightenment of one's own which one then tries as it were to express directly without reference to preceding expressions. So obviously one will usually want to link up one's own expressions with the preceding expressions. And, of course, one can try to fathom the meaning of those preceding expressions, with more or less of spiritual insight of one's own. There are all sorts of possibilities here. You can try to fathom the meaning of the previous expressions of Buddhism in a purely intellectual fashion, with a little bit of spiritual understanding or with a lot; and so on. And similarly one can give a direct expression to one's own experience of Enlightenment, especially if one was just a yogin, with no reference whatever to previous expressions, because you have just not studied them, you don't know of them. That work may be done by other people, that sort of linking up work.

Kovida: That was more the question I was asking; it's that basic motivation which presumably is the Insight, then?

S: Well, again, a lot depends upon just the conditions in which one finds oneself. For instance, take the case of Milarepa. He didn't link up very much with tradition in the full sense; he was concerned with his own realizations and his references are usually to Tantric teachings. He was living, usually, in the mountains and didn't have a lot of books with him, so he wasn't comparing, usually, his own realizations with the teachings found in Buddhist scriptures.

Mangala: [...] very much as if experience and expression are two separate things. I wonder to what extent that's actually so, or

S: Well, I mentioned previously in the case of the artist [that] the idea, to use that term, which he is trying to express becomes fully clear only in the process of expressing it. I don't think it's quite the same as that with spiritual experience.

Mangala: How else does one have the experience if it's not through some kind of expression, as it were?

S: I don't think one has the experience through any expression, but I think the experience will tend to find expression. For instance, if you have some spiritual experience, it will find expression in your dealings with other people; but not necessarily, because you don't have to come into contact with them. You might not come into contact with them if you were living in a cave. But it probably is a moot point whether, if you did come into contact with other people, the content of the experience that you had in solitude would not find a new dimension of expression which might possibly, conceivably, add something to the original experience. I hesitate to insist on that, because that would suggest perhaps a serious limitation for instance to the Buddha's Enlightenment, beyond the sort of limitation that we were speaking about some time ago.

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Mangala: I suppose what I mean is can experience just arise in a vacuum, as it were? Presumably there must be some kind of creative process going on for you to have that experience.

S: According to Buddhism, nothing arises in a vacuum; that's axiomatic. Everything arises in dependence upon causes and conditions.

Kovida: Except Enlightenment.

S: Oh, Enlightenment arises in dependence upon causes and conditions in the form of practice, in the form of meditation.

Subhuti: Spiral conditioned ...

Kovida: But it's unconditioned, isn't it?

S: Yes, but then you come to the question of whether the Unconditioned arises in dependence on the conditioned, or the Transcendental in dependence on the mundane. Well, yes, that would appear to be the case; because in the sequence of the positive nidanas, you get the knowledge and vision of things as they really are, which is a Transcendental nidana, arising in dependence on samadhi, which is a mundane nidana. But I was going to say that the basic question is the extent to which one can compare the Enlightenment experience, in terms of expression, with the artistic experience. Because it's as though the Enlightenment experience assumes a degree or a level of clarity which is attained, in the case of the artist, only at the end of the process of artistic creation; because the Enlightenment experience takes place, presumably, on a level where there is not that difference between the artist and his material that one finds on the level of ordinary artistic creativity. Because, on the level of spiritual experience or Enlightenment experience, is the content of one's own mind that is one's means of expression, and the difference between the two oneself as, say, the person gaining or experiencing Enlightenment and one's mind as the medium through which that finds expression becomes less and less. There isn't that gross external medium. So there is no question of the idea working its way through or finding progressive embodiment in that gross external medium.

Prasannasiddhi: But could you say it was the artist's vision which could be akin to the Enlightenment experience? but then the artist wants to embody his vision in the

S: Well, I used the term idea as synonymous with vision; but I am reminded of something that Dr Johnson wrote, I think it's in the Lives of the Poets, where he is discussing the devotional poetry of Watts; and he says something to the effect that at a certain level of experience he is speaking about religious experience the question of aesthetic expression just ceases to exist. So, taking that as so, one could say that, when spiritual experience reaches a certain point, a certain level, there is no desire or no urge to give expression to that through a comparatively gross medium. So it would seem that there is a sort of limit to what can be expressed, or what the person concerned would even want to express through, say, the medium of painting or the medium of poetry.

Prasannasiddhi: But in a way, Bhante, I would have thought that you get the impression that the person who has had the experience of Enlightenment wants to express that as well, just in the way that the artist wants to express [his vision].

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S: Ah, but 'express' is a very loose term; because one might say there is artistic expression aesthetic expression and non-artistic, non-aesthetic expression; say, the Buddha can express himself in prose as well as in poetry. And it seems, judging by the historical records, that he expressed himself through prose more often than he expressed himself through poetry; and the poetry isn't particularly good poetry, the Buddha was no Shakespeare!

Kovida: So what's the point [here?]?

S: No, what was Prasannasiddhi's point? He raised the question.

Prasannasiddhi: I just sort of found that the differences between the artist and the Enlightened being I just felt there was somehow more of a similarity than there is between experiencing

S: There is a similarity in the sense that there is a creator and there is a medium of creation. But it would seem that the higher you go in spiritual experience, the more refined your mind becomes, and therefore the more refined also the medium in which you work or want to work becomes. And you no longer, it would seem, want to work in the comparatively gross medium in which the ordinary artist works. You want to express yourself in a more refined medium, perhaps without even words.

Kovida: So, in a sense, it is like holding up the flower; it is an expression on that kind of level.

S: Yes, it was certainly an expression, but you wouldn't exactly call it an artistic expression. Though on the other hand it might be argued that the way in which the Buddha held up the flower had a sort of beauty that no painting, however great, could possibly reach. You could look at it in that way, or could speak in those terms.

Dharmadhara: It seems to be a difficult balance between reaching more people with relatively less dust on their eyes, and the few with virtually no dust. It could be argued that it might be worth working in comparatively grosser media to reach more people.

S: Well, this is the medium in which to come back to the beginning of the evening the cakravartiraja works, that is to say very unenlightened people, people prone to criminality; he has to work with them, a very gross medium indeed.

Subhuti: Is what you are saying, perhaps, that the artist's desire to express is something different from the Buddha's desire to express? His desire to express is also an attempt to overcome the subject-object distinction; but in a sense, the Buddha has already done that.

S: That's true, that's putting it more metaphysically. Also, the artist is, I think, more often than not, through his artistic activity, trying to work out something of a subjective, personal kind, almost, that a Buddha does not have to work out.

Subhuti: Yes, that's what I was getting at. There is a point beyond which you can't work it out on the material artistic level.

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S: This is why the question has sometimes been raised: why did Shakespeare stop writing plays? Why did he just retire to Stratford and just do nothing, having written, apparently, the last of his plays, The Tempest? He lived how many years after that? Twelve, or sixteen something like that. And some scholars have given the answer that he had gone beyond the limits of that particular medium. They imagine him retiring into a profound sort of contemplation, almost; he had reached another level. This is what some seem to think, whether fancifully or not. (Voice: Gosh!) It seems possible, in view of the nature of The Tempest itself and the symbolism of it, and Prospero breaking his wand at the very end, yes; and saying something what are those concluding lines? He speaks of forgiveness and prayer; which clearly points in a spiritual direction, beyond the theatre.

Subhuti: It's quite an important distinction, actually; I think it's one that's not all that clear.

S: I'm not sure that what I have been saying represents my considered judgement; I am still very much thinking aloud. But I think what I have said is broadly correct, at least.

Prasannasiddhi: In a way I suppose it seems more like the way you look at things, because you could see the artist in terms of trying to contact deeper levels of experience and express that; he expresses what he is trying to contact. In the same way, enlightened beings are trying to contact deep levels of experience.

S: Yes, but there is a difference, because the artist ordinarily is trying to contact levels of experience which are very mundane, even very negative, even very unskilful; whereas in the case of the enlightened being that just isn't the case.

Prasannasiddhi: It would depend on the artists. Some artists seem to be trying to search for like Shakespeare, perhaps.

S: Yes, but when you approach that level you begin, it would seem, to cease to be an artist.

Kovida: Are artists using the medium and their work as a means of spiritual discipline, as it were, to grow and develop?

S: I think some are, but it's not very often that that reaches the level of consciousness.

Kovida: They are not aware that they are doing it?

S: Yes, I think that is quite rare, probably. Well, I've spoken in those terms, but I don't think they are the terms that people generally use, certainly not nowadays: art as a spiritual discipline. Art as a therapy, perhaps, but that is rather different from art as spiritual discipline. Because you have to have some concept of spiritual life and spiritual values for that to be possible. But I think, to come back to the lecture, one is basically left, as I virtually said in the lecture, with a sort of subject and an object, a subject existing on various levels and the object, the world, existing on various levels, and one has a process of interaction going on between the two, the one impinging on the other. And one of the forms that that takes is artistic creativity, or just creativity whether the relatively lower creativity of the [48] artist, especially the ordinary artist, and the relatively higher creativity of, one might say, the statesman, the cakravartiraja, the Bodhisattva, the Buddha and so on. And works of art, so to speak, of various kinds are produced, whether a poem or a picture; or a society, a state; or a Pure Land, a Sangha.

Dharmadhara: Is that wide definition of creativity quite recent? Is it your own broad

S: No, I think it's fairly common, though perhaps not spelled out in quite the way that I've done. To create is to bring something new into existence, and clearly you don't bring it into existence out of nothing; it represents the embodiment of an idea or an inspiration or a vision, in some particular material, more or less refined.

Subhuti: I think if anything it's in danger of being cliched, isn't it, it's overworked in a way?

S: Yes, creativity is confused with expression: whatever you allow to hang out is automatically creative. It's just an adjective which is used to sort of dignify all sorts of, well, rather undignified activities. Anyway, perhaps we'd better leave it there. Something came out of at least one question, though probably with a good deal of pumping on our part!

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6 May 1987

'On Being All Things to All Men'

PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Dharmadhara, Kamalashila, Mangala, Prasannasiddhi, Nagabodhi, Bodhiraja.

Subhuti: Tonight's questions are on the third in the series The Inconceivable Emancipation: 'On Being All Things to All Men'. I have divided the questions up into three sections: about Vimalakirti as a layman, about skilful means, and miscellaneous. So first of all, questions on Vimalakirti as a layman. The first question is from Dharmadhara.

Dharmadhara: Bhante, you make the point in this lecture that Vimalakirti is not a layman, and say that this is the whole point of chapter 2, if not of the whole Sutra (paraphrasing you). You

gave this series of talks in 1979, just three years before the change-over from Upasaka/Upasika to Dharmachari/Dharmacharini. How much, if any, was your thinking before the change-over affected by this Sutra?

S: I don't think it was affected at all with regard to this particular matter, that is to say the change-over from Upasaka/Upasika to Dharmachari/Dharmacharini. I don't think it had any bearing on the matter at all.

Dharmadhara: Did it have any bearing on your terming the Western Buddhist Order neither monastic nor lay?

S: No, I don't think it had any connection. No.

Subhuti: Secondly, a question from Prakasha on married lamas.

Prakasha's question: I understand that the Sakyapa, Nyingmapa and Kargyupa were not wholly monastic orders, and that some lamas married. What led to this happening? Is it a degeneration or was there good reason for this? How do you evaluate this? Was there any similarity in their approach and that of the WBO?

S: So the question starts off by saying 'I understand that the Sakyapa, Nyingmapa and Kargyapa were not wholly monastic orders and that some lamas married'. I think the use of the word 'orders' in this connection or in this context begs the question. Do you see what I mean? One can speak of the monastic order that is to say the bhikshu sangha, but in what sense are the Sakyapas, the Nyingmapas and the Kargyupas orders? What differentiates them? As far as I know, on the whole and broadly speaking, they are differentiated mainly in respect of their lines of Tantric transmission and the particular Tantric practices which they follow. It isn't usual to speak of a group of people following the same Tantric practices to be described as orders, taking 'order' to correspond to sangha; they could be described as Tantric fraternities, and I think in India the term gana(?) was used, or gana cakra. But if one makes it clear that the Sakyapas, Nyingmapas and Kargyupas as such do not constitute orders, then in a way the question answers itself. They had practitioners of various kinds; for instance, the Kargyupas had teachers like Marpa, teachers like Milarepa, following, as we would say, different lifestyles, but belonging to the same Tantric lineage and following the same Tantric practices. Some of them happened to be lay people like Marpa; some happened to be I can't even say monks here with regard to Milarepa, because it isn't [50] clear that he even was a monk. But certainly, among the Kargyupas as among these other schools, there were monks. So why was it that some of their lamas married? Well, because they weren't monks, they were free to marry. In a way it's a simple, straightforward answer, because the Sakyapas, Nyingmapas and Kargyupas attached, one might say, greater importance to the purely Tantric teachings and practices which were open to lay people as they were to monks. And some of the lay people following the Tantric teachings became very skilled and experienced in them and became so to speak married lamas. What led to this happening?' Well, I think I have probably explained it. 'Is it a degeneration or was there good reason for this?' I'm not sure why the question is couched in those terms; because is it a degeneration when you have lamas presumably the questioner means real Lamas who happen to be married? Isn't the real point that you are a lama or that you follow the Tantric practices and achieve the fruits of the practices, regardless of lifestyle? If they were real lamas, it surely doesn't constitute a degeneration. If they were bad lamas, well, it would constitute a degeneration, but if they

were bad monks or bad abbots that would also constitute a degeneration. How do we evaluate this?' Well, since it isn't necessarily degeneration, I suppose we don't need to evaluate it. If you practise the teaching you practise the teaching, regardless of lifestyle. The whole thing seems to stem from the fact that, in these schools, there was a strong emphasis on the Vajrayana, on the Tantras, on the Tantric teachings and practices, meditations, visualizations and so on; and so far as the Vajrayana was concerned there was not that dichotomy between the monk follower and the lay follower as you had in the Hinayana and as you had to some extent even in the Mahayana; so there was just as much reason for there being married lamas as for there being unmarried lamas. In fact, if there were more as it were lay followers you would probably expect that there would be more lay lamas or married lamas, though that doesn't seem to have been the case. But certainly, even in recent times, some of the most prominent Nyingmapa lamas have been married lamas, like Dudjom Rimpoche and Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche. 'Was there any similarity in their approach and that of the WBO?' Well, yes and no. In the WBO there isn't that particularly strong emphasis on the Vajrayana as one finds in these three Tibetan schools, but we do regard, as we say, commitment as primary, lifestyle as secondary; so no doubt we have our own married lamas, so to speak; perhaps we can think of a few. There aren't any present, but we do have them and we have unmarried lamas, too, so to speak. So the similarity consists in the fact that in the WBO, as in those Tibetan schools, we don't emphasize the difference between monk and layman in the way that some other Buddhist schools do.

Kamalashila: I wonder if behind this question he is asking why would the lamas marry, if they became real Lamas, as you say? What might be the reasons for them marrying?

S: Well, I suppose there are two kinds of married lamas: those who marry first and become lamas afterwards and those who become lamas first and marry afterwards. Presumably, in the first case you marry because, in a way, you don't know any better, but none the less you have a spiritual interest and you develop that, and within the framework of married life you become a lama. In the case of those who become lamas first and then marry, obviously the situation is different. I can remember, for instance, asking one of my teachers that was Kachu Rimpoche why Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche was, I won't say married, because the Tibetans don't speak in those terms with regard to lamas who are married; they don't refer to their wives as wives, they refer to them [51] as their yums or consorts, you could say. So Jamyang Khyentse had a consort who was the daughter of his secretary, and I met her several times; she was very much younger than he was. So I asked Kachu Rimpoche how it was that Jamyang Khyentse came to have a consort. So he said that some years previously Jamyang Khyentse had been told that I am not sure, either Jamyang Khyentse himself had been told or some of his disciples had been told by an astrologer that Jamyang Khyentse had only so many years to live, that he would die in a certain year, but that if he took a dakini then his life would be prolonged, and his disciples therefore requested him to take a dakini, whereupon he did so. But Kachu Rimpoche hastened to assure me that it was not a marriage, and that there was no sexual element in it. He was quite emphatic in assuring me on that score. So, in the case of a lama marrying after becoming a lama in the way that Jamyang Khyentse did, it seems to be more of that nature. Though I have heard of people recognized as lamas marrying in the ordinary way.

Kamalashila: Yes, that seems quite a special case, doesn't it?

S: I didn't go into it with him further, so I don't really know what to make of it, what effect it

had, how it worked as it were. I am not so sure even that one can take it very literally. Because if a lama really was a lama, what would there be lacking that would be supplied by a dakini? If he was just a one-sided scholar, very dry and intellectual, maybe the woman, the dakini, would represent a coming into contact with another side of his nature, something that hadn't been developed, a side of his nature that was objectified, as it were, in the dakini. But the Lama with a capital L, and by definition, doesn't suffer from that kind of limitation.

Kamalashila: Might it have had something to do with his just the fact that he was a human being in a body might it not have to do with just the effect of having somebody like that around, almost in a sort of automatic

S: Yes, because it is also said that I was told that she was a dakini; she was a very unusual woman; but even so, even supposing she had a stimulating effect on a higher spiritual level (assuming it for the sake of argument), that would suppose some limitations, surely, in the lama? The Buddha, as far as we know, did not have any dakini after his Enlightenment though, of course, one might say he represented the Hinayana, not the Vajrayana. So I'm not quite sure about this. I do know that in the case of some lamas, perhaps not with a capital L, there is a certain amount of rationalization. But she was an unusual person, this dakini; there is no doubt about that.

Mangala: Bhante, as far as I know you have always said that for a man to contact or experience his own feminine side he can do so better in the company of other men; so, had that been the case with this particular lama, why get married in that case? Why have contact with a woman?

S: That's true, yes. So one can only speculate. We don't have any real information to go by. But it does seem that the majority of married lamas married when they were young and became lamas subsequently. In the case, of course, of the heads of the Sakyapa school, they have a rather peculiar system, a system peculiar to themselves, that is to say, whereby the head of the school is succeeded by his nephew. Ideally there are two brothers in each generation, at least two; one of them becomes head of the school, the other marries and produces a son who succeeds his uncle, as well as having a brother who produces a son to succeed him. It would seem that the reason for this was that, in those early days of Tibetan Buddhism, the Sakyapas [52] had achieved some political power I think for 80 or 90 years the heads of the school ruled Tibet and there was the problem of succession. So, since they were monks in those early days, they couldn't be succeeded by their sons, they wouldn't have sons; so the custom developed of their being succeeded by their nephews. But later on, of course, developed the theory of the so-called hubalganic succession, whereby a deceased lama, or deceased head of a school, was succeeded by his own reincarnation. In the case of the Kargyupas, there was a sort of interweaving of the monastic and lay elements in that kind of way. But one often finds nowadays among Nyingmapas, at least, that teachers, lamas and so on are succeeded by their sons. Dujong Rimpoche, it seems, has been succeeded by his son or one of his sons; I'm not sure whether he has more than one; he probably does. So it would seem that, just as in the case of the Mahayana, the Bodhisattva ideal, which was common to both monks and lay people, tended to mitigate the dichotomy between monks and lay people so that it became less important to be either a monk or a layman. In the same way, the Vajrayana mitigated that dichotomy to an even greater extent, so it seemed to them important to practise the Tantric teachings. To them it did not seem very important to be a monk or to be a lay person. So, under those sort of conditions, obviously there would have been produced

quite a few married lamas, as well as monk lamas, unmarried lamas.

Prasannasiddhi: Bhante, I thought that the Gelugpas were full Vajrayana practitioners, but they were also 90 per cent. monastic.

S: Yes, the Gelugpas certainly emphasized monastic life much more than did the Sakyapas, the Nyingmapas and the Kargyupas. I remember, I think it was Dhardo Rimpoche telling me, and I didn't notice before, that in the monastic universities in Lhasa Tantric symbols weren't allowed, because they weren't following the Tantric teachings at that stage of their education. They took up the Tantric teachings when they progressed to the Tantric colleges. So, in theory, all Tibetan schools follow the Triyana Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana but it seems that the Gelugpas achieve a much better balance than do the other schools. The other schools tend to rather neglect, very often, the Hinayana and the Mahayana, and concern themselves simply with the Vajrayana. So one could say that, inasmuch as they do emphasize the Mahayana and they do eventually follow Tantric teachings, the Gelugpas do not have the same dichotomy between monk and lay as, say, do the Theravadins of Ceylon and Burma. None the less, there is some little difference recognized, to a greater extent than is the case with the other schools, who seem to disregard it almost totally. o in this respect, you could probably regard the Gelugpas as intermediate between, say, the Chinese Buddhist schools and the Theravadins, you could say. Or you could arrange them in a series, with the Theravadins having an extreme dichotomy and the Chinese schools having a much less extreme dichotomy, though monks were still monks and lay people were still lay people they were united via the Bodhisattva ordination and Bodhisattva ideal. And then the Gelugpas, still retaining monastic discipline and observing it quite strictly, but none the less being well aware that both monks and lay people were on the same spiritual path, the path of the Bodhisattva; and practising the Vajrayana, though not so exclusively as the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. And then you have those other schools where the dichotomy between monk and layman exists only to a very limited extent and is certainly not insisted upon and sometimes seems to be virtually forgotten.

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Subhuti: I am not quite clear what the distinction is you are making between the Gelugpas and the Chinese schools; because didn't the Chinese schools by and large emphasize monastic discipline?

S: Well, yes, but I am putting the Gelugpas next, so to speak, after the Chinese Buddhists on the whole because the Chinese Buddhists were Mahayana, or they were Hinayana plus Mahayana; whereas the Gelugpas are Hinayana plus Mahayana plus Vajrayana.

Kamalashila: Just one more supplementary question on that. There are sexual yogic practices in the Tantra, aren't there? Wouldn't that be a factor in lamas, even real Lamas, marrying?

S: Well, there is a difference of opinion here, because there are certain as it were what Mr Chen used to call sexo-yogic practices in the anuyoga of the Anuttara Yoga Tantra. It is generally agreed that at the time of the practice of those sexo-yogic practices a light emerges from the point of conjunction between the male and female partners, and that the next step is to meditate upon that light. I'm not quite sure what for the Nyingmapas, this presents no problem, no difficulty, because they don't emphasize monastic life. But in the case of the Gelugpas, it would seem that they maintain that it is possible to produce this light and to

meditate upon it without it having to issue from the point of conjunction between the male and the female. They seem to believe that it is possible to visualize not exactly a sexual partner, but a dakini and to achieve or attain the light, or experience the light, in that kind of way. So the Gelugpas, if they did at all engage in sexo-yogic practices, would do so only in a symbolical manner, not in a literal manner; whereas the Nyingmapas would most likely engage in them quite literally. Though I must say I have made this point before I never got the impression, in the course of all my contacts with Nyingmapa lamas or Nyingmapa practitioners and so on, that the sexo-yogic practices figured at all prominently. I doubt if I ever heard them actually referred to. They certainly weren't very central, as far as I know. If they were practised at all they were perhaps practised quite privately and nothing really was made of that. But it is quite an interesting point, perhaps. In the West, those who start becoming interested in the Vajrayana, the Tantras that's almost the first thing they want to know about, the first thing they ask about. But I got the impression that the Tibetans didn't see things in that way at all; that it was something they came to when they came to it, and that was all.

Subhuti: I understood it was that motive, it was that reason, that was a factor in married lamas, lamas getting married.

S: Well, not just lamas but Tibetan Buddhists generally that if they were married or at least, not if they were married, if they were non-celibate, not vowed to celibacy then they would be able to proceed with the sexo-yogic practices when they came to them in a literal manner. I am not sure it is possible that the Nyingmapas regarded that as important, and apparently the Gelugpas didn't. Perhaps I don't know, I'm only speculating but perhaps the Nyingmapas regarded the literal practice of those sexo-yogic methods as more thorough or more efficacious. That is possible. But again I must make the point that that is nothing to do with being married in the ordinary sense. Mr Chen once bitterly complained to me that nowadays Nyingmapa lamas were quite corrupt and degenerate, and engaged in sexo-yogic practices with their own [54] wives! this seemed to shock him greatly instead of taking a dakini, who had no such mundane relationship with him, in the traditional manner.

Prasannasiddhi: So they would take a dakini just for the duration of the practice?

S: It would seem so. The idea seems to have been, according to Mr Chen, if he was correct, that one shouldn't mix up, so to speak, the spiritual and the mundane. Though, of course, it did sometimes happen that the wives were dakinis; that seems to have been the case with Marpa. But I think what Mr Chen was concerned with was that people should not think even though some Tibetans, perhaps, thought it that being a Tantric yogi or practising these sexo-yogic methods simply meant being a married man and having sex with your wife and sort of somehow incorporating it with the Dharma. In other words, he was making the point that sex, if it was sex, within the context of the practice of a sexo-yogic method, was quite a different thing from ordinary sexual relations with one's own wife, and that the two should not be confused; that the one was not the equivalent of the other, so that your wife did not automatically function as your sexual partner. So there was no sort of glorification of sex as such, or glorification of the marital relationship, as you sometimes get in the West.

Dharmadhara: Presumably this applied to female lamas, though much rarer. Did they take dakas?

S: I've never heard of that, and I have never heard the question raised among Tibetans. And it certainly didn't occur to me to ask it.

: In the life of Yeshe Tsogyel, there is an example of that, I think; she finds a young lad who becomes her daka.

Prasannasiddhi: What about the other two, Kargyupas and Sakyapas? Did they follow the Nyingmapas?

S: Well, they are distinct traditions, but there are many similarities and they sort of hang together as a group of schools, in comparison, say, with the Gelugpas. The Nyingmapas, Kargyupas and Sakyapas are very small in numbers as compared with the Gelugpas. I have been told that, out of all the monks and as it were serious practitioners in Tibet, 90% were Gelugpas and the remaining 10% collectively comprised those other schools. But it is interesting, in the West the Nyingmapas and Kargyupas seem to have done particularly well, probably much better than the Gelugpas, when ?

Subhuti: I'm not sure.

S: There seem to be many more quite eminent and active Nyingmapa, Kargyupa and Sakyapa teachers. For instance, there was Dujong Rimpoche, there was Trungpa, Kalo Rimpoche, there was the Karmapa, the Situ(?) Thai Rimpoche.

Subhuti: Tarthang Tulku.

S: Tarthang Tulku. Whereas among the Gelugpas you haven't got many of that eminence. You have certainly got the Dalai Lama, though in a sense he isn't a [55] Gelugpa. And you've got lamas like Lama Yeshe, but they are not great Lamas in the way that those I have mentioned are or were. So, at the very least, people who have got only a tenth of the numbers have kept up their end, so to speak, if one wants to think in those terms, surprisingly well.

Dharmadhara: In what sense is the Dalai Lama not a Gelugpa?

S: Well, he's not a Gelugpa exclusively. He is not the head of the Gelugpa order. Glenn Mullin makes all these points very clearly in his introduction to his series of translations from the works of the Dalai lama. The Ganden Ti(?) Rimpoche is the head of the Gelugpas or the Gelugpa order. The Dalai Lama is the head or the patron of all the schools, of Tibetan Buddhism as such.

Dharmadhara: Is that (inaudible; microphone noise)

S: I don't think that there are any Tibetan Buddhists who would not recognize the Dalai Lama as the head. Tibet is under the special protection of Avalokitesvara, and who is the incarnation of Avalokitesvara? Well, it's the Dalai Lama.

Subhuti: If these schools were not orders, to what extent were they conscious of themselves as schools and as having an identity?

S: Their consciousness of themselves as having separate identity seems very strong indeed;

very strong.

Subhuti: In what did that consist?

S: It consists in a strong consciousness of their particular Tantric lineage. As you know, the idea of lineage features very prominently in Tibetan Buddhism. All right, enough on that?

Subhuti: The last one on Vimalakirti as a layman, from Prakasha.

Prakasha's question: To what extent is Vimalakirti the ideal model of Sangha for members of the WBO? How influential has Vimalakirti been on your conception of the real nature of the Sangha?

S: I'm not really sure that the question means. I'm not sure what 'Sangha' means in this context. 'To what extent is Vimalakirti the ideal model of Sangha?' not 'of the Sangha' but 'of Sangha' 'for members of the WBO?' I just don't know, I can't understand the question. But Vimalakirti as an ideal model well, what is the difference between a model and an ideal model? I don't think Vimalakirti can meaningfully be a model for members of the WBO, either individually or collectively, for the simple reason that Vimalakirti is, we are told, a Buddha; or, one might say, a fully enlightened Bodhisattva who simply appears as a householder. So one can't take that appearance as an ideal. If one takes anything as an ideal, one has to take the Buddha or Bodhisattva of whom that appearance is the appearance, as a model. Otherwise you are putting, so to speak, the cart before the horse. Before you can be Vimalakirti you have got to be the Buddha or a Buddha. So Vimalakirti as such can't be an ideal, because the ideal presupposes Buddhahood already attained or already achieved. I mean, to function in the way that Vimalakirti functioned could possibly be an ideal for Buddhas, but not for those who are not yet Buddhas. The point is clear, I think, isn't it?

[56]
Nagabodhi: Could one not try to take him as a model, in the way that the Christian is enjoined to take Christ as a model, as a human being, even though he was God incarnate?

S: I wouldn't like to mix up Buddhism and Christianity in that way! I think you would have to perform quite a few theological somersaults before you could do that. In any case, in the case of Christ, his Godhead is in abeyance, isn't it, during his earthly life? And so it is one's humanity that one imitates. But I wouldn't really like to confuse the two; they belong to two such very different worlds of thought. You could imitate Vimalakirti in a purely external fashion, to some extent. But even that would be difficult, because you couldn't really imitate him, you couldn't even go through the motions in certain instances without being the real thing. What about all those supernormal phenomena? Could you produce them? Could you go through the motions of producing them? Would that be enough?

Kamalashila: I think that Prakasha is asking that, actually: whether the external life of Vimalakirti as a layman isn't an ideal model for us.

S: How can an external life be a model? How can a lifestyle be a model? Only a commitment can be a model.

Prasannasiddhi: But once you've made a commitment, you can have a model for a lifestyle,

surely?

S: Yes, but in what respect is it a model? It is a model inasmuch as it shows you how you can pursue, say, the spiritual path under a certain set of conditions. But commitment to that spiritual path in principle must precede following it in that particular way. In other words, commitment must precede lifestyle. But there is a second part to the question. 'How influential has Vimalakirti been on your conception of the real nature of the Sangha?' Well, no influence at all, because presumably it is the fact that Vimalakirti appeared as a layman which is relative here, but I suppose in the case of my conception of the real nature of the Sangha the main point is that the Sangha is constituted by commitment and not by lifestyle; so, at the very most supposing Vimalakirti had been just an ordinary layman, just a good Buddhist, he could have been an example inasmuch as he was a member of the Sangha in our sense. But the fact that he is a Buddha or fully Enlightened Bodhisattva, appearing as a layman, as a householder, makes it impossible even to say that. It's as though this whole point that Vimalakirti, despite what I've said in the talk, so clearly as I thought, is not a layman, he is a fully Enlightened Bodhisattva, even a Buddha, appearing as a layman, as a skilful means, which is a completely different thing, [has been missed]. That sort of confusion, as it appears to be, is I think quite widespread among Mahayana Buddhists, perhaps.

Nagabodhi: It's the [...] effect.

S: Yes.

Prasannasiddhi: But surely, Bhante, if you are already a layman and following the Buddhist path, you could perhaps look to the way Vimalakirti some aspects of Vimalakirti's

S: No, no, you can't. You have to look to Buddhahood. Because Vimalakirti's life is a skilful means, a skilful means of a Buddha. So, if you want to [57] exercise skilful means in that way, you have to become a Buddha first. All his activities are based on his Enlightened consciousness. At best, you can go through the motions of imitating him, but well, lifestyle as such does not constitute a spiritual practice, one might say. One has to ask oneself, 'What was it that made Vimalakirti Vimalakirti?' It wasn't his lifestyle, it was his spiritual attainment. So if you really want to imitate Vimalakirti, you must imitate him in respect of that spiritual attainment. Then you really will be able to imitate Vimalakirti.

Side Two

When you imitate Vimalakirti it is not a question of imitating a layman; it is a question of imitating a Buddha who is appearing to function as a layman, as a skilful means. That's really what imitating Vimalakirti means: attaining Buddhahood, and then, having attained Buddhahood, appearing to function as a layman as a skilful means. You don't imitate Vimalakirti simply by living as a layman, because Vimalakirti was not just someone living as a layman.

Bodhiraja: In fact, Vimalakirti is very unpredictable; that is part of his nature. He always surprises you, he always catches the monks out.

S: Well, he is clearly not an ordinary layman. Mr Chen told me once I forget the details about meeting someone who claimed to be Enlightened, who claimed to have attained Buddhahood.

Mr Chen looked at him very scrutinisingly, and said: 'I don't see your 32 marks!' (Laughter.) So it's a bit like that.

Mangala: Bhante, as a Buddhist can you say that we kind of follow in the footsteps in the Buddha, we try to in a sense be like the Buddha? without getting too complex? Which in a way seems to be, you're trying to behave, follow those teachings, like, for example, the practice of the Precepts; that's the way which will help us to approximate more to the Buddha's

S: Yes, but Vimalakirti was doing far more than practise the Precepts. Think of all those supernormal phenomena. And you could say the same in the case of the Buddha: if you really want to follow the Buddha or imitate the Buddha, well, you have to be able to do all the things that the Buddha did. And that means, first of all, gaining Enlightenment by whatsoever means. And you may gain Enlightenment by following a way of life different from that of the Buddha. You may gain Enlightenment by being a householder, whereas the Buddha gained it by being a monk.

Mangala: Yes, but what I mean is that not that you sort of imitate the Buddha and try to live exactly as he did, in his particular lifestyle, but perhaps try to understand, try to become or be like his more try to understand and approximate to

S: Yes, but there is still a difference, if one takes the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings in a way literally; because according at least to the Pali scriptures, the Buddha did start off as an ordinary human being, who gained Enlightenment by his own efforts. So, yes, we can follow in the Buddha's footsteps, even though we may not do exactly the things that the Buddha did. But we are not told that about Vimalakirti. Vimalakirti, as it were, starts off as a Buddha, so that his human life does not represent an effort to gain Enlightenment, it represents an approach by the Buddha or a Buddha to other human beings purely as a skilful means. So that we can imitate, so to speak, only by ourselves first of all becoming a Buddha. But I mean Vimalakirti, acting as a layman, may [58] perform certain actions which to us appear, say, ethical actions, but he is not performing them to attain Buddhahood; he has already attained Buddhahood. He is performing them as a skilful means. So if one wants to imitate Vimalakirti, we have to imitate those actions performed as a skilful means, and we can't do that unless we have gained Buddhahood first, as was the case with Vimalakirti. So imitating Vimalakirti means imitating Vimalakirti, so to speak; it doesn't mean imitating Vimalakirti's skilful means without actually being Vimalakirti.

Dharmadhara: It's quite a big misunderstanding, then, isn't it? if it's widespread in the Mahayana to think that you just imitate Vimalakirti and that skilful means. That's not only

S: But it is thought by many people that you imitate Vimalakirti just by being a lay person.

Dharmadhara: Right; thank you.

S: Which is just obviously not the case.

Dharmadhara: So if they think that, they are not only missing the importance of commitment but they are not appreciating the significance of the Buddha himself. They are not really seeing the Buddha.

S: Yes, they are not really seeing the Buddha. In a way, their false conception of Vimalakirti has obscured their vision of the Buddha too. It's almost like saying that Richard III had a humpback, so if you have a hump on your back you are Richard III. It's a bit like that. So, well, Vimalakirti was a layman, so if you are a layman you are Vimalakirti, or very much like Vimalakirti. It's like saying the Buddha had a wife and child before his Enlightenment, so if you have a wife and child you are the Buddha; or the Buddha wore a yellow robe, so if you wear a yellow robe you are Enlightened. It's a bit like that.

Subhuti: It's the parallel of literalistic monasticism.

S: Yes. Of course, in the case of the Mahayana with regard to Vimalakirti, there is the parallel of literalistic laicism (with a c and not an s). (Nagabodhi laughs) It might be a koan: how does one imitate Vimalakirti? If you imitate Vimalakirti, you've got to go the whole hog. Vimalakirti is Buddhahood plus what we see as Vimalakirti; it's not just what we see as Vimalakirti.

Kamalashila: Skilful means, then, is really the prerogative of the Buddha, would you say?

S: Well, certainly it is the prerogative of a highly developed Bodhisattva and a Buddha. Skilful means in the strict Mahayanic sense is not something that an ordinary person can engage in. I think we have got a question on skilful means. Anyway, perhaps that's enough about Vimalakirti. Let's pass on.

[59]
Subhuti: We've got this series of questions on skilful means, and question No. 4 is from Ratnaguna.

Ratnaguna's question: Upayakausalya (skilful means) seems to be a specifically Mahayanic virtue. Is there any evidence of it occurring as a concept in the Pali Canon?

S: I did look this up, just to check my facts. Upayakausalya as a skilful means in the spiritual sense does seem to be a specifically Mahayanic virtue or quality. The term upayakusala seems to occur, as far as I have been able to find out, in the Pali Canon only once, and in the quite ordinary sense of a trick. So, yes, upayakausalya in the spiritual sense is a specifically Mahayanic virtue. Though we can certainly see the Buddha exercising that virtue in various ways, as for instance with Kisagotami one could describe that as a skilful means. But there is no, as it were, doctrine of the skilful means in the Mahayanic sense in the Pali Canon or the Theravada tradition. It occurs, the term upaya kusala, in the sense of a trick in the Jataka book, interestingly enough, which is, of course, apart from the verses, quite a late work.

Subhuti: Question No. 5, from Saddhaloka.

Saddhaloka's question: In lecture 3, 'On Being All Things to All Men', you define 'skilful means' as essentially a question of really being with people of empathy, of being open to people, and encouraging them to be open to you. 'Skilful means' is often used, perhaps rather loosely, to describe actions that appear unskilful or devious, but that are motivated by skilful mental states, e.g. lying to save a life, or the story that you tell of a Tibetan hermit who tries to rape a peasant girl to prevent the wicked local abbot being reborn as a donkey. Your definition would exclude this sort of usage. Do we need to be more rigorous in our usage and

understanding of the term 'skilful means'? Is there another term that would be more appropriate to describe the second sort of action?

S: 'The second sort of action' meaning those actions which appear to be unethical?

Subhuti: That's what I assume.

S: I suppose, in principle, from the Mahayana point of view, there is no need for a separate term. In those, one might even say, actions or actions of that sort which appear to be unethical but which are not actually so on account of the underlying motivation are in fact examples par excellence of upaya kausalya; because you are being so very skilful that you use even an apparently unethical action in such a way that it fulfils a spiritual purpose. That is still more clever, still more skilful, you could say.

Dharmadhara: But if you are using the skilful means to try and bring about beings' liberation, and they interpret that as being unskilful, how does that make it more skilful?

S: No, I'm not referring to what, say, third parties might think, but the effect on the person towards whom the upaya kausalya is directed, and therefore the nature of the action as such. What is it that makes it skilful, that it fulfils its purpose? And if it fulfils its purpose in an apparently unethical manner, [60] it is more skilful than ever, as it were. But you could also say that, yes, the Bodhisattva with skilful means at his disposal, has to take into account all the sentient beings in the environment, so he does perhaps have to consider the possible effect of his skilful means, though genuinely a skilful means, in those cases where it appears to be unethical, on other people who may be observing. Having done that, he may, none the less, decide to go ahead with the apparently unethical skilful means for the benefit of the person to whom it is directed; or he may not. But, in any case, whatever the Bodhisattva does, it will be a skilful means. He may have supernormal powers; he may be able to make his action invisible to those who are not directly concerned with it, not directly the objects of it. That will all be part of his skilful means. famous example of skilful means in the Mahayana sutras is that of the Buddha himself in the parable in the White Lotus Sutra, the parable of the burning house. And in that parable, the Buddha appears to justify himself and excuse himself, saying he has not told a lie in promising the boys the three different kinds of cart, knowing that he was only going to give them one kind of cart; he has not deceived them, he has not tricked them, because clearly, at the time that that work was produced, the term upaya kausalya apparently had a double meaning, and the meaning was ambiguous. Perhaps the distinctively Mahayanic sense, the specifically Mahayanic sense of the term had not been definitely established. This is a bit of a speculation; but certainly the Buddha in that parable appears very conscious of the fact that his skilful means could be regarded as just ordinary trickery. But eventually, in the Mahayana, upaya kausalya means skilful means in a purely spiritual sense; which is not the case in Pali, in the instance I gave. But anyway, what is the actual question? Have we dealt with this? 'Do we need to be more rigorous in our usage and understanding of the term "skilful means"?' Well, we have to understand what skilful means really means. I think perhaps what Saddhaloka is getting at is that people use the term 'skilful means' not just loosely but really as a sort of rationalization for unskilful behaviour, for behaviour which is anything but skilful. So certainly we shouldn't do that. It's not a question of being more rigorous in our usage well, in a sense it is but of using the term upaya kausalya only when we are talking about upaya kausalya, and not when we are talking about our own weaknesses or mistakes. For instance, in the course of discussion, you may become very

angry with someone and lose your temper; and you may say afterwards, 'Oh well, I guess that was just my skilful means. It must have done him good that I lost my temper.' But that surely would not have been a real upaya kausalya, and you shouldn't use the term upaya kausalya in that way; it really debases it. don't know whether that is at all widespread, whether people actually do that? Saddhaloka appears to think that they sometimes do. But the ambiguity is inherent in the original term, which can mean either trickery or a skilful means in the later, purely spiritual Mahayanistic sense. Perhaps 'skilful means' can be just a euphemism for tricky behaviour, and we shouldn't use it as a euphemism for that kind of behaviour.

Subhuti: The next question is concerned with the misuse of the term. It is from Sarvamitra.

Sarvamitra's question: Would you like to say something on other misunderstandings about the nature of skilful means? E.g.: rationalizing your means to an end ('Going to the pub just to get people interested'); rationalizing your weakness; teacher figures like [61] Trungpa or Rajneesh behaving 'immorally' because 'they do it out of compassion just to shake up their disciples' world view'?

S: These are all examples of what I have been talking about, aren't they? I don't know whether I have, therefore, anything more to say. I think it's pretty obvious, isn't it, that one mustn't do these sort of things and not confuse them with genuine skilful means; and not, as it were, cynically refer to one's rationalizations and so on as 'skilful means'. I think very often it is the disciples who do that sort of rationalizing, and who insist on regarding something which is really not very acceptable on the part of the so-called teacher as being his skilful means. I can't say that I personally have known of teachers doing this, but I certainly do know of disciples as it were rationalizing in that way on their teachers' behalf, because perhaps they need to keep up their faith in their teacher and have the wrong sort of faith in him 'he could not have got angry' and actually refusing to believe that he got angry, because they need to believe, apparently, that he could not possibly ever get angry. So that sometimes lands disciples in very strange positions. Yes, I've mentioned in The Thousand-Petalled Lotus the example of a Hindu teacher who seems to rationalize a bit in that sort of way, the Advaita Vedantin who, in the course of discussion with my friend Buddharakshita did get angry and lose his temper. But, as far as I remember I don't remember the exact words that I used in The Thousand-Petalled Lotus when my friend pointed out to him that he was losing his temper, he said that that was my friend's delusion that he saw things in that way, because actually all was one! Or at least, not-two! But one finds among some Western followers of Tibetan Buddhism this very firm, very rigid belief one can't call it faith in the real sense in some of their lamas, some of their teachers. And they have very rigid notions about him, which they are just not prepared to question or examine at all.

Subhuti: I expect you've had some experience of that in your own teaching.

S: I don't think so. I can only think of one little example at the moment: a woman who couldn't believe that I could feel bored, and I had to insist I could! Anyway, it's all pretty obvious, isn't it? I don't know how we can approach, say, Western followers of Tibetan Buddhism who have this sort of attitude towards their teachers; because sometimes they want you to share that or assume that you share it, which can make communication very difficult. Anyway, perhaps that's something we need not discuss now. Let's go on.

Subhuti: On to the miscellaneous questions. No. 7, from Ratnaguna, on the Pratisamvids.

Ratnaguna's second question: The four Pratisamvids were 'taken over by the Mahayana from the Hinayana, and the Mahayana modified their meaning in accordance with its outlook to some extent.' What was the Hinayana conception of these terms?

S: Well, it wasn't really very different from that of the Mahayana. The difference was made by the fact that the Bodhisattva exemplified the more altruistic Mahayana ideal; whereas in the case of the Hinayana that Ideal, at least to that extent, was absent. So the Hinayana conception of the terms was the same as that of the Mahayana, but in the case of the Mahayana there was that tinge given to them of Mahayana altruism, one might say. The terms are [62] exactly the same. What about the other question here? Can we have that?

Ratnaguna's third question: The four Sangharavastus. Are these an exclusively Mahayana set of terms, or are they found in the Hinayana? If the are, did the Hinayana conception of them differ in any way from the Mahayana?

S: It's just the same; you get the same terms and they have roughly the same meaning, except that in the case of the Mahayana they are tinged by the altruism of the Bodhisattva ideal. These terms are explained within the Hinayana, or rather the Theravada, context in the Pali-English Dictionary. One has only to look them up there to get some idea of what the Hinayana conception of them was, but broadly speaking, it was the same; the only difference being, as I have said, that in the case of the Mahayana they would be situated within the specifically Mahayana framework and therefore have a tinge of that characteristic 'altruism' of the Mahayana. They were certainly carried over from the Hinayana to the Mahayana.

Subhuti: No. 9, a question from Prakasha on dharani.

Prakasha's third question: In the third lecture you enumerate Dharani as an aspect of skilful means and say it brings in a magical aspect. I still don't see much of a connection between Dharani and skilful means. Could you elaborate?

S: I suppose 'What is a dharani?' A dharani is sort of on its way to being a mantra. It usually has some sort of magical power, some sort of magical potency, it brings about results. I suppose one could look at the Bodhisattva's use of dharani in two ways: one, he uses the dharanis to bring about certain results as a skilful means, and, two, he could teach the dharanis to others as a skilful means whereby they could bring about results themselves. I suppose one could say that, in order to see the connection between dharani and skilful means, which is in effect saying how a Bodhisattva uses a dharani as a skilful means, one would have to be a Bodhisattva. It may not be obvious to us at all, especially as magic appears to be involved. Just how does a Bodhisattva do it? How does he use magic? How does he use a dharani as a skilful means? Well, presumably only a Bodhisattva knows. It's a very subtle business! Perhaps we have to reflect on it quite a lot.

Subhuti: You said that they are 'on their way to being a mantra'.

S: Well, they are usually much longer, and their conceptual content is, one could say, quite considerable sometimes. Mantras, one could say, are usually relatively short and very often have a minimum of conceptual content. Some dharanis go on for pages together.

Kamalashila: Would you say that a mantra is a further evolution of a dharani?

S: That would appear to be the case, historically speaking.

Prasannasiddhi: Would that further evolution of the mantra from the dharani be in connection with meditation, do you think?

S: To some extent, yes; because the dharani seems to have been on the whole used in a purely magical sort of way, not repeated as an aid to concentration; [63] whereas a mantra very often is repeated as an aid to concentration, and therefore becomes part of meditation practice in a way that I think the dharani very rarely does.

Prasannasiddhi: So perhaps in a way if you were evoking a quality, it might be easier to evoke that with a mantra, because it's less you wouldn't have to concentrate so much on the actual words

S: A mantra is, of course, one could say, more concentrated; at least inasmuch as it is shorter. Mantras are very often connected with particular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, whereas dharanis appear not to be connected in that way.

Dharmadhara: Do we use any dharanis in the FWBO?

S: I don't think we do; no.

Kovida: Doesn't the end of the Heart Sutra says 'the great dharani'?

S: It does, but it also says 'great mantra', doesn't it? No

Subhuti: 'Radiant peerless mantra.'

S: Yes. But it is a bit like a dharani, regardless of whether it is technically described as such.

Prasannasiddhi: Wouldn't the Heart Sutra itself be like a dharani?

S: No, a dharani usually contains quite a high percentage of what are called meaningless vocables, like 'ri ri ri ri, hri hri hri hri', and so on.

Mangala: Also, Bhante, I think didn't you say that the 'Gate' mantra is not associated with Prajnaparamita? Or at least the visualized one.

S: The Heart Sutra is of course a Mahayana sutra, so in the Mahayana you don't have visualized figures which you visualize and the mantras of which or of whom you recite. That is a Vajrayanic development, one might say. So in the case of the Heart Sutra, it is not that there is a sort of goddess of Wisdom, of whom the 'Gate, gate' mantra is the mantra. So when the Perfection of Wisdom is personified, so to speak, in the Vajrayana, she has a different mantra the 'Om Ah Hum Ti Svaha'. So you could describe the 'Gate, gate' mantra as a dharani attached to the Heart Sutra, but not as a mantra in the strictly Vajrayanic sense by 'mantra in the Vajrayanic sense' meaning a mantra which was the mantra of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva whom one proceeded to visualize in accordance with the Vajrayana tradition.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you, Bhante, use the 'Gate, gate' mantra in conjunction with the

visualization of the figure?

S: I don't see why you shouldn't. But the 'Gate, gate' is correlated with the four, even the five stages of sunyata, and of course before you visualize a Buddha or Bodhisattva properly you need to reflect on or experience sunyata the blue sky symbolizing that. So you could certainly experience sunyata with the help of, or by means of, reflecting on those four or five levels of sunyata as represented by or embodied in that 'Gate, gate' mantra.

Prasannasiddhi: So you could use that mantra as part of the visualization?

[64]
S: Yes; to help you have the experience of sunyata which precedes the visualization.

Kamalashila: Yes, perhaps it could substitute for the 'Om svabhava'. The same sort of

S: That's right, yes, it fulfils the same function. Except that, in the case of the 'Gate, gate', it has been analysed in such a way as to give one the four or five levels of sunyata, which is quite helpful.

Kamalashila: (inaudible; microphone noise)

S: In a way, yes, indeed. One can of course recite the Heart Sutra and then dwell more on that concluding as it were mantra, repeating that a number of times and reflecting on it, and maybe repeating it again and then reflecting on it, until one feels ready to commence the visualization.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you recite that mantra and visualize Prajnaparamita, the actual female figure

S: That's what I'm saying, yes. Because you could take, as Kamalashila suggested, the place so to speak of the 'Om svabhava' mantra.

Prasannasiddhi: I was actually thinking of using it usually you recite the 'Om svabhava' while you are setting up the clear blue sky.

S: Yes, because the clear blue sky is a visual symbol of the sunyata; in other words, space represents sunyata, but it is only a symbol of sunyata. One mustn't think that sunyata is emptiness in the literal sense, or that it's empty in the way that the sky is empty when there are no objects in it.

Prasannasiddhi: I was thinking of using it in the actual figure of Prajnaparamita, the goddess that mantra, visualizing it and using that mantra.

S: That's what we were saying. You just go ahead in the usual way, except that instead of reciting the Om svabhava mantra you recite the Gate, gate, perhaps preceded by the Heart Sutra, and you reflect on the five subdivisions, so to speak, of sunyata as represented by the Gate, gate mantra. I have explained all that somewhere.

Subhuti: There is one last question about Buddha fields; I think it's from Prakasha. No. 11.

Prakasha's fourth question: In the chapter on the Purification of the Buddhaland, Thurman says on page 19: 'The Tathagatha makes the Buddhafield appear to be spoilt by many faults in order to bring about the maturity of living beings.' But later on in the same paragraph it says: 'Living beings born in the same Buddha field see the splendour of the virtues of the Buddha fields of the Buddhas [65] according to their own degrees of purity.' This is contradictory. Could you explain what the text means?

S: Well, the text clearly means both. Both statements are there and they are contradictory, aren't they? And in a way this contradiction runs through this particular aspect of the Mahayana: on the one hand, the Mahayana speaks of the Buddhas as creating Buddhalands, building Buddhalands, but on the other hand, it speaks of human beings perceiving Buddhalands, whether as pure or impure, according to the impurity or purity of their own minds. So these are two quite contradictory things, aren't they? Don't they seem to be?

Kamalashila: Well, doesn't it depend on how you understand the meaning of it?

S: Yes, carry on.

Kamalashila: I'm thinking here. 'The Buddhafield appears to be spoilt by many faults in order to bring about the maturity of living beings'

S: So, in other words, the Buddha creates an impure Buddhaland because he realizes that a pure Buddhaland would not be so helpful to the beings who need to mature spiritually as would an impure Buddhaland. So he apparently creates a Buddhaland which is actually and truly impure, because that suits certain beings better. That would seem to be the meaning of the statement.

Kamalashila: It's objectively impure and there is no variation between the perceptions of the different beings who reside in it?

S: Apparently not, no. Nor between their perception and the Buddha's. He creates an impure Buddhaland. To the extent that it is real as a creation it really is an impure land.

Kamalashila: Yes, but it isn't really like that, is it? The pure land consists of the perception of the beings in it.

S: But that is to say that the Buddha creates the perceptions of other beings.

Kamalashila: Yes. Which he doesn't.

S: Which would seem to deprive them of all freedom and spiritual autonomy. Whereas the implication of the other statement is that they have their own perceptions, which are their own, which are not created by the Buddha.

Prasannasiddhi: Don't beings who are Enlightened perceive even an impure land as a pure land?

S: Well, it raises this whole question of what a thing really is and the way in which it is perceived. Supposing the Buddha created a pure land well, he would see the pure land only as

pure; others might see it as impure, but he would see it only as pure, and in fact couldn't see it as anything else but pure. Even if he so created it that it seems to be [im]pure to others, he would know that it was in reality pure and not impure. But this is looking at the pure land as created by the Buddha. So one of those quotations does speak of the pure land in that way, but the other speaks of the pure land not as created by the Buddha, or at least not of the apparent impurity of the pure land as created by the Buddha, but speaks of it as the creation of the perception of the impure beings. So there seems to be a contradiction. That's a sort of koan. [66] Perhaps it's intentional. Perhaps it's something to be reflected on. I don't think we should try and explain the contradiction away, but meet it as it were head on. Say: 'Yes, there is a contradiction'.

Kamalashila: Which seems unavoidable.

S: Which seems unavoidable, yes.

Kamalashila: You've got to [...] it from [...] point of view.

S: So presumably you've got to reflect on it and even meditate on it from both points of view, and see whether that meditation doesn't result in a flash of Insight which enables you, so to speak, to reconcile those opposites or rise above that contradiction. That would seem to me to be the procedure unless there is in fact some other explanation which I must admit I can't think of at the moment. I'm quite happy, in a way, to stick with the koan, to stick with the contradiction. Not very satisfactory, is it, when questions actually aren't answered? But one can't answer an unanswerable question, and it shouldn't be expected of one, should it?

Kamalashila: So it's not unsatisfactory.

S: It's deeply satisfactory, you might say, to have actually found a real contradiction in the Mahayana sutras on which you really have to meditate in order to resolve it; not just look up one or two words in the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary? So, as Prakasha seems to have quite a lot of time on his hands, perhaps we should ask him to meditate upon this contradiction!?

Tape 2

So is that all? (sounds disappointed. Laughter.)

Subhuti: Yes, it appears to be.

S: Have we then dealt with the questions? I don't know whether people will agree with this, but it does seem to me that at least some of these questions the questioners could really have answered themselves if they'd thought a little bit more or perhaps in some cases taken the trouble to look up words in the appropriate dictionaries. It is as though people don't do enough work themselves, very often. Do you think this is the case and, if so, why is it the case?

Subhuti: It isn't unusual, is it? This is quite common, isn't it, with these question and answer sessions?

S: But why do you think it should be so?

Subhuti: I do wonder to some extent whether there isn't a desperate scramble for questions. They are trying to produce questions. It's a long time since I've been on one of these, but it is sometimes quite difficult to actually find sufficient questions, and perhaps one has tended to ask

S: Is that perhaps because one hasn't studied the text or studied the lectures deeply enough, or thought about them sufficiently?

[67]
Subhuti: That could be contributory, because you are after all dealing with eight lectures over so many days, and

S: But then you have the whole of one day for the lecture, apart from the time that you spend meditating, and people don't do much meditation on these retreats.

Nagabodhi: Do they not listen to the lecture, discuss it, and come up with their questions in the morning?

Subhuti: Yes.

Nagabodhi: It's not as if they really do have the whole day. And then they leave it to their leaders to get together and

Dharmadhara: They start the lecture about 10, I think, 9.30, 10.30, and then they finish about 3 on the lecture. They go on a little bit after lunch as well.

Subhuti: In a way people perhaps ought to do more work, maybe come already having listened to the lectures. Some people do.

Bodhiraja: The problem is basically the inability to really take one's thinking deep enough into it.

S: (agreeing throughout this.) So that, if one hasn't done that, the only questions that will be possible will be rather obvious questions, even questions which are really just verbally questions.

Kamalashila: Or questions which are just designed, rather vaguely, to draw you out in some way.

S: Right, yes. It means really, when people are studying in that sort of way, that they just need to think more, think more deeply.

Mangala: I think in some ways it's quite convenient having you [there]: 'I'm not sure about that, ask Bhante.'

S: Well, perhaps sometimes people ask questions on account of a certain lack of confidence in their own mental abilities. But one should be able to tell whether a conclusion does in fact

logically follow. You should have confidence in your own powers of analysis, your own powers of reasoning, your own capacity to understand.

Kamalashila: Still, sometimes one idea leads to another and sometimes it doesn't seem to be a bad thing to try to draw something new out just by asking a very general question. Or do you not agree?

S: I think that is sometimes the case, but I think sometimes people almost try a very general question of that sort in an almost blind sort of manner.

Mangala: It might be good if they'd met as a group and asked themselves these questions as a group and tried to answer them (S: Mm, that's true.) and then any they couldn't answer satisfactorily then they could put on a list and bring it to you.

[68]
S: Presumably they don't do that?

Dharmadhara: Those questions are asked by the leaders of each study group, but they're not sent back to the study leaders in their groups.

S: I think perhaps it is to some extent a question of confusing means and ends. If people don't understand things and there is definitely something to be resolved or sorted out, I am quite happy to answer questions. But, because I am happy to answer questions it doesn't mean I must be supplied with questions. So perhaps people have started thinking that I have to be given questions to answer. So that means they have mistaken the means for the end the end being that they should understand. If they've understood, they don't need to ask questions. So asking questions may have become, or tended to become, an end in itself, because if I don't have questions to answer, in a sense that suits me better because I can make some other, perhaps more creative, use of that time.

Dharmadhara: I think that's definitely the case. Much as you know that the whole purpose of the thing isn't just to produce questions, you are very much aware, if you've only come up with one question

S: Well, perhaps you should congratulate yourself on knowing so much ha! if you really do know it, of course! Perhaps sometimes people aren't sure, they just want to make sure and therefore ask questions.

Nagabodhi: Would you hope, Bhante, that when presumably some senior Order Members get together to discuss your lectures on the Vimalakirti Nirdesa that they ought as it were to be able to generate some questions that stimulate ?

S: I think so. I think so, indeed. Yes. Because I certainly haven't said the last word about the Vimalakirti Nirdesa in those lectures. It should certainly be possible to go deeper just on the basis of the lectures themselves, even without looking at the original text. But again perhaps people don't think it really necessary to go farther; perhaps they feel that they've got quite enough material there already to be getting on with that they don't want their intellectual understanding to outstrip their actual practice to too great an extent.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps also, in a sense, we've had questions and answers for many years in the Movement, and perhaps we've just reached a sort of in a way we've asked all the obvious questions and we now have to take perhaps a more thoroughgoing approach to

S: And that's only possible on the basis of much more thorough study or systematic study, comparing one thing with another.

Dharmadhara: I don't think one can go mm, better be careful. I mean my own limitations are that if I've only got a day to a lecture, and it's an eight-day retreat, I am aware that I can only go so far; whereas if I had a month or so on it I'd have the space to reflect and work through the implications a lot better, I could build up more of a network, I could understand (Murmurs of assent during this.)

S: Well, perhaps we need a further stage of study, when people do spend much, much longer on texts. That isn't impossible, is it?

[69]
Dharmadhara: In a way, I feel frustrated at not having that space on one of those eight-day retreats. I am very aware of the limitations in terms of space and time.

Kamalashila: I also sometimes wonder whether a group of, say, five or six or seven people is the best forum to bring out questions, and whether sometimes it wouldn't be better just one to one; just two people getting together sometimes.

S: It depends who the two are, I suppose.

Kamalashila: Yes, it does.

S: If you get certain people together, just two together, perhaps they wouldn't be able to say anything at all. (Chuckling.) But I have heard quite a few people, both men and women, Order Members and in some cases Mitras, say that they find one to one study very rewarding and very interesting. It seems to be much appreciated, especially when it's an Order Member and a Mitra. They seem to get a lot out of it.

Kamalashila: Well, you can always speak, you don't get interrupted so much. There's only one other person, so you can draw your own ideas out much more. If the other person is right.

Prasannasiddhi: Nevertheless, Bhante, I actually feel with this evening's questions and answers there were some quite important points well, at least one important point has been quite clearly spelt out, and there were a few other minor points, I think, that people have asked that couldn't have been answered by themselves.

S: Yes, well, sometimes it's worth while if one really good point emerges, thoroughly clarified, from just one session. That's quite good, especially if the point is an important one.

Dharmadhara: I think the point you're making was made in the lecture this about Vimalakirti being a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. I think that point was fairly clearly made in the lecture.

S: But one knows from experience that certain things have to be spelled out and enlarged

upon and elaborated, time and time again, before they really do sink in. And people have sometimes admitted just not hearing certain things that I've said in the course of a lecture, even when they've listened to it on tape; and have been astonished, on hearing it again, that those particular things were said or not said, because I have even had cases of people being convinced I had said certain things on tape and reacting perhaps strongly to those things, but then replaying the tape, hearing again and being astonished to find that I just hadn't said those things at all! So one does have one's own subjectivity to cope with, too. Anyway, we have dealt with three lectures now, so we are pretty nearly half way through. Presumably we'll finish before I go off to Rivendell?

Subhuti: Just. We'll have to double up one evening with a couple of lectures.

S: That probably will be all right. Right, then.

[70]
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on THE VIMALAKIRTI NIRDESA

2 June 1987 - 'The Transcendental Critique of Religion'

PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Prasannasiddhi, Dharmadhara, Mangala, Kovida, Bodhiraja (?)

Subhuti: This is Questions and Answers on Lecture 4 in the series 'The Inconceivable Emancipation' - 'The Transcendental Critique of Religion'. There are eight questions. The first one is from Sarvamitra.

Sarvamitra's question: You tell of an incident when you were actually asked to teach the Dharma in the wrong way. What did you do in the end?

Sangharakshita: I'm afraid I don't remember! I doubt very much whether I did agree to 'teach it' in that particular way. I remember the scene very well; in fact, I remember quite a number of those full-moon day celebrations at J ... Square. But I can't imagine myself agreeing to deliver a lecture which nobody was especially interested in and which nobody could hear anyway.

Ratnaguna's first question: In the lecture you mention Rahula and the young Licchavi gentlemen [who] ask him why he had renounced a kingdom of a universal monarch. Apparently the Buddha ordained Rahula when he (Rahula) was seven years old, and Suddhodana complained to the Buddha, saying that it was too much - first there was the Buddha, then Nanda, now Rahula. So the Buddha made a rule that children should not be ordained without their parents' consent. So:

1. If Rahula was really only seven years old, how could he be ordained - what would it really mean?

2. In our own Movement what would be the position of a young person who was still under the legal guardianship of their parents, asking to become a Mitra, or even for ordination?

Should we ask for their parents' consent?

S: First of all, 'the Buddha made a rule that children should not be ordained without their parents' consent.' That is quite correct, but there was also a rule that bhikkhus should not be ordained without their parents' consent. One must not forget that. In the case of bhikkhus, it was not an absolute requirement, even if the parents' permission had not been obtained, or rather if the bhikkhu ordination was conferred without the parents' consent having been obtained, the ordination was not invalid, but it was considered to be slightly as it were blemished; but it was none the less a valid ordination. So it wasn't just a question of the seven-year-old child - or it wasn't just a question of children, it was a question of all those wishing to be ordained.

Subhuti: Just to be clear: there was no special provision for children, then? It was just the same for anybody being ordained?

S: I can't say offhand, and perhaps it isn't even known, whether the rule regarding bhikkhus needing the permission of their parents before they were ordained was instituted before or after Rahula was ordained. But in any case Rahula is traditionally regarded as having been the first samanera. So when the questioner asks: 'If Rahula was really only seven years old how could he be ordained - what would it really mean?', well, in the first place, he wasn't [71] ordained as a bhikkhu, he was ordained as a samanera. And, again, traditionally, a samanera was regarded simply as one who had Gone Forth, not as one who had been accepted into the community of bhikkhus. The samanera ordination is still called pabhajja(?), that is to say, Going Forth; so that's considered as it were to be equivalent to the Buddha's original Going Forth, or the Going Forth from home to the homeless life which was customary in the Buddha's day for those wanting to devote themselves fully to the search for Truth. So, first of all, Rahula would have been ordained, if that is the word, only as a samanera. I am not quite sure what the expression 'what would it really mean?' means - whether the questioner is asking what type of ordination it was; I have answered that; it was pabhajja - or whether he meant what would it really mean for the individual himself, what it would have meant for Rahula in this case. Well, the Pali texts do contain accounts of seven-year-old arhants. We mustn't forget that. So if there could be a seven-year-old arhant, clearly a child of seven would be quite capable of understanding the meaning and significance of Going Forth, the meaning and significance of the samanera ordination, or the meaning and significance of the spiritual life. Presumably that is what happened. Presumably the Buddha would not have asked, or directed, Sariputra and Moggallana to ordain Rahula as a samanera, if he had not believed that Rahula was fully capable of understanding what it was all about. That is all relatively straightforward, isn't it?

Prasannasiddhi: I personally don't think it is. I think this sounds quite ridiculous, that a seven-year-old could be an arhant.

S: But why? On what grounds?

Prasannasiddni: Well, just on the grounds of seeing the way in which people develop as human beings, psychologically, etc., and just even how difficult it is for people to develop spiritually or even to attain the human state, it just seems to me that a seven-year-old ...

S: But, again, in the Buddha's time, there were many people - again, according to the

scriptures - gaining Enlightenment, many Stream Entrants, many Non-Returners, many arhants. We don't see many of them around today. So one could well argue that it was not only the fact that the Buddha gained Enlightenment but that around him there was a whole cluster, as it were, of people who were quite highly developed spiritually; perhaps some of them having - again, as the Jatakas say - been with him in previous existences. There are some quite precocious people in all walks of life: think, for instance, of Mozart. If one had not known about such a person as Mozart, one might well have doubted whether a child of seven or eight years could have written music like that.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, I can see that. But, even so, Mozart's music developed quite a lot from the age of seven or eight and throughout his life.

S: Well, in the case of Rahula, he also eventually became an arhant.

Prasannasiddhi: Ah, you said other people were arhants. I just wanted to state that personally I find it quite ridiculous.

S: Well, some people would find it quite ridiculous that anyone attains Enlightenment. They would carry their scepticism to that point. So one would then have to say: at what point? There is no record that anyone younger than seven, as far as I recollect, became Enlightened, or even became a Stream Entrant, so, all right, does one fix the age at eight, or nine, or ten, eleven? Or is it [72] 21? Or 35, as in the case of the Buddha? I mean, can one limit absolutely in that way? Can one say that it is absolutely impossible for a child of seven to have become Enlightened? Can one be so sure as that? Even though one might agree that it was very rare and even very unlikely.

Prasannasiddhi: I think possibly someone who was very familiar with child psychology would perhaps be able to give ...

S: But are people who are familiar with child psychology often familiar with what constitutes Enlightenment? And is it a matter of psychology in the ordinary sense?

Subhuti: And what is their psychology derived from? It's the observation of a sample of normal children.

S: Unenlightened children. There would have to be a special branch of child psychology dealing with Enlightened children, and deciding how the process occurred and how it was possible for a child to be Enlightened. One could even argue that a child, other factors being equal, stands a better chance, because it hasn't been as it were soiled by the world; it preserves its original innocence. One could argue in that way.

Mangala: Today in Sri Lanka, for example, and other places, is there any age at which children would first become samaneras? Because this bhikkhu I met last week became one when he was eleven.

S: They wouldn't become samaneras before they were seven; that would not be possible. But you can become a samanera at any age. You can't become a samanera before you're seven; you can't become a bhikkhu before you're 20, reckoning from conception.

Dharmadhara: Isn't the age limit of seven because that's the age at which young boys are able to scare away crows? Isn't that the tradition?

S: That was at least one reason that was given. But what does that mean - able to earn their living by scaring crows? What does that signify?

Dharmadhara: Presumably some sort of independence.

S: Some sort of independence. And children in India do seem to become independent, often, quite quickly.

Subhuti: Presumably if you accept the general doctrine of rebirth, it's not too hard to accept that a child could gain Enlightenment.

S: Because he isn't as it were starting from scratch in this life.

Prasannasiddhi: The impression I get is that a human being has to go through certain experiences in his life to attain maturity, and I just can't imagine that in the four years from about the age of three to seven a person could go through that much experience.

S: But what do you mean by maturity? What constitutes maturity, especially from the spiritual point of view? Some people, one could argue, don't ever attain maturity in their lifetime. Others attain it relatively early. Perhaps if that sort of maturity was necessary before one could gain Enlightenment - and [73] perhaps it's doubtful - there's no reason why one shouldn't gain it at the age of seven, even, in exceptional cases.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I suppose we could argue this ad infinitum. I still think it sounds an example of sort of (...] literalism or something of that ...

S: I don't think one can rule it out altogether, because there is, as Subhuti said, the question of previous births. If one does believe in reincarnation, clearly there is the possibility of bringing over some spiritual experience from a previous lifetime.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, in that case one would presume that the being who seems to have carried over the most merit is the Buddha, and it seems it took him till about the age of 35, and he was the Buddha, to attain Enlightenment; so for someone at the age of seven to ...

S: Ah, but if one goes according to the Pali scriptures, the Buddha was seeking to gain Buddhahood, whereas in the case of the seven-year-old arhant it was only arhantship that one is speaking of. That would be the traditional answer to that point.

But I think, to look at it more generally, that it is very difficult - I won't say to generalize, but to exclude certain possibilities from human nature. Perhaps one can't be too sure in the given instance whether it did actually happen. I doubt very much whether one could say absolutely, 'It could not possibly have happened under any circumstances.' Therefore, in any given instance that is mentioned by the scriptures, it might have happened.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, I'd have to agree with that. I certainly am not in a position to say categorically that it's impossible. It just seems very ridiculous to me.

S: But 'ridiculous' implies a logical contradiction. I don't really see the logical contradiction here.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I base it upon the feeling that a human being actually has to go through experiences in life to attain maturity, and I just don't see that ...

S: But it's quite clear that some people go through those experiences more quickly than others ...

Prasannasiddhi: Mm, yes.

S: - and that there is a great variability in that respect. For instance, you read about infant mathematicians, as well as infant musicians. Some very, very young people have done very important work in mathematics.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, J. S. Mill, for example, was very precocious. But on the other hand, he had some sort of breakdown about the age of 20; which shows that even very precocious people are not always balanced.

S: Well, I won't say - I think that's a rather dubious case, because he wasn't naturally precocious so much as very carefully educated in a particular way by his father, who had certain ambitions for him. He didn't spontaneously manifest those things.

[74]
Prasannasiddhi: In the case of someone like Mozart, he had natural talent but he was also trained by his father.

S: That sounds very much like the case of Rahula!

Prasnnasiddhi: Well, again, I don't know - I imagine Mozart was still maturing through the course of his life, but ...

S: So was Rahula, because he did gain arhantship, though I don't know at exactly what age, but he didn't gain it straight away after being ordained as a samanera. I think he gained it quite a few years later. In fact, we are even told that on one occasion the Buddha had to deliver a special discourse to Rahula on the subject of lying, so clearly there was some room for improvement. Since he gained arhantship eventually, presumably he did mature.

I think this whole concept of maturity is very doubtful. I don't think it's at all clear what it means. It is quite clear what biological maturity is, or reasonably clear; but all-round, say, emotional maturity, human maturity - in what does it consist, from the psychological point of view? So I think one shouldn't employ that concept as though it was very clear and therefore insist that maturity was essential before any radical spiritual development could take place.

Prasannasiddhi: My definition of maturity includes a spiritual element, an understanding of life, coming to terms with it ...

S: Well, it's not impossible for a seven-year-old child to have [that]. One can't rule it out completely, even though it is comparatively rare in the case of seven-year-old children, as it is

of course rare even in the case of older people.

Mangala: Didn't Ramakrishna, or Ramana Maharshi, or perhaps both of them, have spiritual experiences when they were very young?

S: Ramana Maharshi, yes.

Mangala: He was 17, maybe, or 15 or something.

S: As far as I remember - I won't be quite sure - his disciples believed, and presumably he had said something to this effect, that he was virtually Enlightened, on their terms, when he was about 16. But 16 is quite a lot more than seven. I think one should just, in a way, keep an open mind about it and not be too sure that it is absolutely impossible.

Prasannasiddhi: I'll keep my eye out on the village kids and see.

S: Don't keep your eye on them too closely; it might be misunderstood!

Anyway - no, there's something more still. The most important question is still remaining. 'In our own movement what would be the position of a young person who was still under the legal guardianship of their parents, asking to become a Mitra, or even for ordination? Should we ask for their parents' consent?'

Some years ago, I gave quite a bit of thought to this. I might even have started thinking about it before I came back to England. Despite the fact that there is a provision in the Vinaya for someone wishing to become a monk, let us say, to ask for his parents' permission, I don't really agree that that is desirable. Not only don't I agree that it is desirable, I think it is quite, in a [75] way, inconsistent with the spiritual life, one might say. I find it very difficult to accept that one's living of the spiritual life in a particular form should depend on the consent of other people. Of course, in the case of the Buddha himself, he didn't take his parents' - that is, his father's and his foster mother's - permission before Going Forth, though one could say that he was not Enlightened then and he made that sort of provision about asking for permission after he became Enlightened - assuming that he did actually make it. It's perhaps understandable making that sort of provision in the case of a child, but what about an adult? Assuming that the Buddha did make that provision in the case of the adult monk or would-be monk, why would he have made it?

There are, of course, stories, I think both canonical and uncanonical, of those who were refused permission by their parents going on fasts in order to bring pressure to bear upon them, but that doesn't seem very desirable.

Subhuti: I'm not entirely clear: were there special rules as regards children, or was it just a general rule that anybody who wanted to become either a sramanera or a bhikshu had to get the consent of his parents?

S: I am not so sure whether there was an actual rule regarding samaneras. But I think I can say that the case of Rahula was taken as a precedent. But in the case of bhikkhus, there definitely was a rule which is now in the Vinaya that one could not be ordained as a bhikkhu unless you had first received the permission of your parents. And normally one is interrogated with

regard to that. For instance, there are various subjects with regard to which one is interrogated before ordination. One is: 'Are you a human being, are you a man, are you a Naga? Are your bowl and robe complete? Are you free from debt? Are you free from certain diseases? And have you the permission of your parents?' And you have to reply 'Yes' or 'No' accordingly.

Subhuti: And if you replied 'No', you would still be eligible for ordination?

S: I don't know what a particular chapter would do. I doubt whether anyone would ever actually reply 'No'. It may be that sometimes the son didn't know the whereabouts of the parents. That situation might arise. Or for some reason or other there was some urgency about his ordination; perhaps an army was approaching and maybe the vihara would be sacked, so they wanted to ordain him very quickly and there wasn't time to contact the parents. But if that sort of thing did happen, or supposing it was just forgotten, then the fact that the permission of the parents had not been obtained would not invalidate the ordination. Whereas if he was subsequently found to be suffering from a certain contagious disease, that would invalidate the ordination. Or if he was found not to be a human being, or not to be a male human being, the ordination would be considered null and void. But not if he had not obtained the permission of the parents. So that would seem to suggest that it was seen as desirable, but not absolutely necessary. And perhaps in a way it is desirable, inasmuch as it is desirable to have the parents understanding what one wants to do and agreeing to it. And perhaps, despite the attachment of parents to children, their ambitions for them in India, especially ancient India, parents - especially those sympathetic to Buddhism - would be able to understand why their son wanted to become a monk, and usually, presumably, would agree.

But the question is asking something in a different context. 'In our own Movement, what would be the position of a young person who was still under the legal guardianship of their parents, asking to become a Mitra, or even for ordination?' I don't know what the position would be under the law, because this raises the question of what is ordination under the law. Ordination, as far as I know, into the Western Buddhist Order, doesn't convey any privileges or position [76] recognized by the state - does it? I don't know what the present position is, but formerly, if you were ordained as a clergyman into a recognized church, you would not be liable for conscription.

Dharmadhara: You are not liable for jury service etc. as a Member of the Western Buddhist Order.

S: On what grounds?

Dharmadhara: Because you are a member of a religious order.

S: But that would not apply to minors, because minors are not eligible for jury service anyway, are they? But any other privileges or exemptions?

Dharmadhara: Not that I know of.

S: Is permission legally required for, say, a child to join the Boy Scouts or the Girl Guides or the Boys' Brigade?

Dharmadhara: I don't know. Probably.

Kovida: What's the cue as regards confirmation in the Church of England as well? Because that happens quite young, doesn't it?

S: It's usually about 14 to 16. So could a child who had been baptized - because confirmation is a confirmation of your baptismal vows made on your behalf by your godparents - insist on being confirmed against the wishes of his parents? What is the position of the law there?

Dharmadhara: I would assume it would be on the side of the parents. I would expect, but not be sure. Certainly in this country.

S: How far does the authority over children extend? Has this been legally clarified?

Subhuti: I am sure it must have been ...

S: The fact that you are a minor does not necessarily deprive you of all your rights; because there are things which those who are minors can do. A minor can marry without the permission of his parents; you can marry without the permission of your parents, as far as I am aware, when you are 18, but you don't attain your full majority till you are 21. So British - or at least, English - law is a bit anomalous in this respect.

Subhuti: Yes, it is majority in different respects.

S: So it is perhaps an area that requires clarification.

Subhuti: Of course, it has been much explored in the case of people trying to rescue their children from so-called sects.

S: That's true.

Subhuti: So it must have been (clarified).

[77]
S: But it does seem as though, in some cases, the parents perhaps exceeded their legal powers. A case that does occur to me is that, in the Mormon church, full ordination is given from the age of 13, and sometimes is given as early as that. It can be given as early as 13, according to what I've read somewhere.

Dharmadhara: Is there in any way an age limit at the moment for ordination or becoming a Mitra in the FWBO?

S: I don't think we have. We could insist that anyone under a certain age came with the permission of their parents, but that would be in self-protection, to protect ourselves from any possible legal action - not because it was a requirement of Buddhism. We have had a slightly analogous case, which was that of - I think it was a Mitra - connected with the Croydon centre, who was wanting to move into the Aryatara community from about the age of 16, but his mother wouldn't allow him. And she made him wait until he was 18; and apparently at 18 she couldn't stop him, and he did move into the Aryatara community, where he now is.

Prasannasiddhi: I think there is a law that parents can choose where their child resides until a certain age.

S: But that again is different from ordination, though there might be a practical difficulty if, for instance, the parent did not allow the minor child to go on an ordination retreat.

Subhuti: Or even to visit a certain house - I don't know if they can do that.

S: Possibly. But I think probably we should proceed cautiously here, and not insist on our rights, if any, for the sake of avoiding giving a negative, or at least not a very positive, impression to the public.

Subhuti: That must have been the case in the Buddha's time too. What happened in (the case of Rahula) was that Suddhodana was upset because so many of his royal descendants were going into the Order, so perhaps the Buddha did this a bit in self-protection.

S: Though, of course, what Suddhodana did say was that attachment to sons is a very powerful emotion. Those were the grounds of his appeal to the Buddha, and he had suffered loss of his sons and nephews so many times.

But the question hasn't ever arisen; it could arise in the case of a Mitra. But I think probably in practice, if the Mitra or prospective Order Member was over 18, no one would really bother. I think it's only when you are seeking to ordain or even to make Mitras very young that there might be some objection.

Mangala: (It would be) worth getting it clear, though, wouldn't it?

S: Perhaps this is one of the things Subhuti will need to investigate when we look into various aspects of the Order. I don't know who has been the youngest person to be ordained?

Prasannasiddhi: Padmavajra, wasn't it?

Subhuti: He was actually a Mitra. He was 18, I think.

Prasannasiddhi: How old was Ratnaketu?

[78]
S: Oh, I think he was in his early twenties.

Prasannasiddhi: I don't think he was that. He might have been.

Subhuti: Yashomitra (?) was younger. Nineteen.

S: But that's not very young, is it?

Prasannasiddhi: We did have people in communities (...)

S: Well, you can get married at 18. You can be conscripted at 18, you can fight for your country at 18.

Subhuti: You can vote.

S: You can vote at 18. So why not be free to be ordained?

Kovida: In Scotland you can marry at 16.

Dharmadhara: Isn't the age of consent in England 16?

S: Consent to what?

Dharmadhara: Sexual consent.

S: It is in the case of females in relation to males, but not with regard to males in relation to males - except, I think, in Scotland.

Kovida: No, even there it is 21.

S: Ah, I was thinking of New Zealand.

Dharmadhara: If it's the age of consent, how come the age of marriage is two years later?

S: I think a man under the age of 18 has to get the consent of his parents to marry; but I won't be sure of this but I think possibly a girl of 16, that is two years under 18, can marry without the consent of her parents. I won't be sure of that. But a boy of 18 has to get the consent of his parents. He can't domicile independently without the consent of his parents, can he? Maybe these things do need looking into. But I would say a broad principle, from a more spiritual point of view, is that if in fact you are grown up - whatever that may mean - that if you are able to think for yourself and decide for yourself, as you should be by the age of 18, then no one who is related to you simply by virtue of relationship should be able to prevent you from doing what you want to do in respect of ordination. That is not to say that someone wishing to be ordained, of whatsoever age, should not do their best to make the significance of the step they are taking clear to their parents and others who are related to them; and even possibly delay their ordination if they felt that they could bring them round if given a little more time. But that would be a voluntary act on their part.

Ratnaprabha's first question: With reference to the meeting with Upali, Vimalakirti's advice is 'Don't waste time worrying about sin and atoning for it.' Upali should have revived their development, not chastised them as if the rule were an end in itself.

[80]
It was interesting to see Jyotipala's recent reporting in. He decided to impose penance on himself. Should we try penance?

S: 'With reference to the meeting with Upali' - Upali being the expert on the Vinaya - 'Vimalakirti's advice is "Don't waste time worrying about sin and atoning for it." Upali should have revived their development, not chastised them as if the rule were an end in itself.' There's a possible misunderstanding here, which is that it isn't necessary to repent of any unskilful action. All you need to do is to revive your development. Actually I think the two things are closely connected; they are inter-linked. If you've got something to repent of, it

means your urge to develop had fallen into abeyance, at least to some extent; so, yes, you do need to revive that urge to develop. But that doesn't mean that you don't need to deal with the specific question of your having committed a particular unskilful action. Upali, I think, is simply making the point that it is not enough just to concern yourself with your failures. Yes, if the failure represents an unskilful action, you do have to repent; you have to resolve to do better, you have to experience even remorse. But that is not enough. What you have got to be very careful to do is to revive your original inspiration; because it was due to the failure of that inspiration, due to the flagging or weakening of that inspiration, that you committed the unskilful action in the first place. Nonetheless, you do have to deal with the unskilful action itself, and possibly with its consequences; but within the context, so to speak, of revival of your inspiration. So the two are not alternatives, as it were. It is not that you should do the one rather than the other; you really need to do both. In fact, perhaps you can genuinely repent only if there is a genuine revival of your inspiration.

As regards Jyotipala's penance, I don't remember whether he gave any actual details, did he? Anyone remember?

Mangala: I don't remember that particular case, but I think I remember Lokamitra did something very similar, and I think perhaps Jyotipala got the idea from him. I think Lokamitra reported in Shabda that if he had been, say, angry with somebody he might sort of skip lunch or skip breakfast, just as a way of reminding himself, or making it very clear to himself that he had done something and he must bring the full force of his action home to him; he couldn't just dismiss it, I suppose.

Dharmadhara: In Jyotipala's case, he did that. I think he shouted at a boy or some boys who threw a stone at him; and he was depriving himself of meals because he lost his temper.

S: But the word he used is 'penance', and we have to be careful how we use that word, because the meaning can be ambiguous. I think it isn't the question of punishing oneself. I think it's important to remember that. In (Lokamitra's) case, as reported by Mangala, he was depriving himself of food, going without a meal, in order to remind himself of something that he had done and which he was sorry that he had done.

S: But there is another way of looking at it: that is to say supposing you decide that your behaviour is unskilful with regard to food. Suppose you decide that you are greedy. Well, a penance, as one might call it, could be just limiting one's food. But perhaps that is not so much a penance as a discipline. Penance, as ordinarily used, seems to be halfway between a punishment and a discipline. It seems to convey a suggestion of both.

[80]
Subhuti: Is not a penance quite clearly a punishment to atone for what you've done?

S: It's an atonement, but an atonement isn't quite the same thing as a punishment - is it?

Subhuti: It's a way of making up for it, paying for it, as it were.

S: It probably is. Suppose, say, in Catholicism, you commit a certain small sin; all right, your penance may be to repeat or recite ten Hail Marys. That is a quite mild penance. So what is that meant to do? That is really the question. If it is a sort of mechanical making up, a sort of

spiritual bookkeeping, as it has been called, it probably doesn't contribute all that much to your spiritual development, because very often you know in advance, if you commit a particular unskilful action, that is the sort of penance you will get, you will do the penance and then you will be quits. There will be no real modification of your behaviour or your mental attitude. So penance in that sense would not seem to have much value. It would seem to have value only when it becomes a sort of discipline, quite intelligently applied; especially when applied by oneself to oneself. So I think perhaps one should be careful of thinking of penance in terms of balancing the books, and be careful in thinking of it in terms of self-punishment on account of feelings of guilt. Think of it more as a sort of discipline that one imposes on oneself in order to check certain unskilful attitudes and develop skilful attitudes.

Subhuti: I wonder If there isn't also a bit of a danger perhaps of a similar kind that you have feelings of remorse, and you feel you are sort of paying off those feelings of remorse without actually facing up to them and modifying your behaviour.

S: Yes, this is what happens in the kind of example I gave from Catholicism.

Mangala: At the same time, Bhante, I think if you knew, say, that every time you were aware of having done something unskilful you were going to have to miss your breakfast or lunch, it might make you a lot more ...

S: But then that's a little bit like aversion therapy. I think you have to be careful you don't simply condition yourself in a particular way, without properly understanding what is happening and genuinely changing your attitude. Penance is perhaps not a very happy word for use in a Buddhist context. I would say probably 'discipline' is a better word.

Prasannasiddhi: Is it psychologically sound to inflict pain on oneself in order to remind oneself or drum home something?

S: Gurdjieff makes the point that pain is very important in the spiritual life - I don't think he uses the expression 'spiritual life', though - because he says that one does remember things that you've learned in association with pain. This idea figures quite prominently in Gurdjieff's teaching, but I have wondered from time to time whether it is really a sound one from the spiritual point of view or the Buddhist point of view.

[81]
Mangala: But, Bhante, you have said more than once that if you behave unskilfully you have to see that actions have consequences, and you should be made to suffer in some way, whether it's your pocket or some other kind of physical punishment.

S: That is true, I think, on the ordinary penal level. But I don't think it works on the spiritual level.

Kovida: it's not a very good system, anyway, because it means that you've got to commit the deed over again before you then do the penance; so you're not actually changing - you're not stopping the action, you're not becoming aware of the unskilful deed at the time you are about to do it ...

S: The penance, if you're not careful, as in Roman Catholicism sometimes, almost becomes a permission to repeat the action. it's a question of 'unskilful action, penance, unskilful action, penance', and in the end you hardly remember which came first, perhaps. So just as you can think of doing penance because you have done something unskilful, you can think in terms of having permission, almost, to do something unskilful because you have done the penance.

Subhuti: What do you think about viewing it as aversion therapy?

S: I really doubt whether this can play any part in spiritual development. Perhaps it can play a part in the treatment of offenders, from a purely social point of view - perhaps. But it can't, I would have thought, play any part in spiritual life.

Subhuti: No, if it was something you were imposing on yourself. in Lokamitra's case he was trying to curb his tendency to anger.

S: Suppose you try to curb your tendency to anger by as it were observing a penance, your purpose is to control your tendency to anger; the purpose, the primary purpose, is not to inflict suffering. it simply happens that if you try to control that tendency it is painful, but your aim is the control, not the pain. I therefore don't regard that as aversion therapy proper; though perhaps the aversion therapist would argue, well, that is just what he does.

i think in the case of aversion therapy, there isn't always a necessary connection between the action which is sought to be controlled and the means or the technique of control.

Dharmadhara: From what I remember of aversion therapy psychology, it has to be quite closely linked with the behaviour it is associated with, otherwise it produces neurotic behaviour in mice or whatever, so it has to be very closely linked.

S: in the case of, say, Lokamitra, he knew why he was imposing that penance on himself, and he understood that it was highly desirable that he should not experience or manifest anger. But I think in aversion therapy of the usual type, the aim is simply to produce a more or less mechanical reaction, or non-reaction, without going into the question of the patient understanding the whole process. Though, presumably, you can't give someone aversion therapy against their will; unless they are in prison, perhaps, I don't know.

Dharmadhara: it is done, actually. it is done in the States, it used to be done quite a lot.

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S: Against the patient's will?

Dharmadhara: Yes.

S: Because this would contradict Jaspers's definition of psychotherapy - that the co-operation of the patient is always required.

Dharmadhara: it used to be done with offenders.

S: So, if that co-operation is not forthcoming, or not invited, then the so-called therapy can have, I think, no spiritual value, probably no ethical value. it is just a sort of

counter-conditioning, with a sort of purely mechanical result.

Dharmadhara: There was a notorious case where homosexual prisoners were given shock therapy against their will, and shown slides of men on a screen to try and decondition them. That wasn't too long ago.

S: I think they have tried such treatment with rapists, haven't they?

Dharmadhara: Yes, I think that was done, too.

S: Clearly it can have no spiritual value, because for it to have spiritual value - and perhaps for it even to have psychological value, according to Jaspers - the co-operation of the patient is necessary.

Dharmadhara: There's that famous - The Clockwork Orange telling the story ...

S: Ah. This was a film I didn't see! But I would personally avoid the word penance, on account of its implications or connotations. I'd rather speak in terms of disciplining oneself. And I don't think punishing oneself really is very helpful, not as it were deliberately punishing oneself as distinct from any inconvenience or even pain that one willingly endures as incidental to the process of discipline. Of course, the old-fashioned penal conception of punishment did involve the infliction of suffering; but infliction of suffering as such, for its own sake as it were, doesn't seem to have any moral or spiritual value, though it might function as a technique of social control.

Dharmadhara: Could you give an example of this incidental suffering - incidental to the discipline?

S: Well, I gave it with regard to the case of Lokamitra. if you give up food in order to remind yourself to control your anger, you do suffer hunger, at least to some extent over a short period. But your purpose is not simply to inflict the pain of hunger upon yourself as a punishment, but simply to inflict it incidentally so that it can act as a reminder to you that you should not have committed that particular action, say, of losing one's temper.

Dharmadhara: I find it hard to differentiate that much between not having a meal and the experience of suffering - er, the experience of hunger.

S: it's not a question of differentiating between the hunger and the not having the meal; it's a question of differentiating between pain or suffering as incidental to discipline, discipline for a certain purpose, and the pain or suffering as an end in itself, inflicted therefore simply as a punishment.

[83]
Mangala: Bhante, presumably you do think, then, that punishment of some kind can be valid on a certain level?

S: I think it may be. I won't be completely sure of this; it is something I have been thinking about quite a lot in connection with the question of whether love can exercise power. But if it has any usefulness or validity at all, it can only be on the purely social level and not on the

spiritual level. it has no place, no significance, I think, for the spiritual life.

Mangala: Even on the social level, would you think the deliberate infliction of pain on another being ...

S: Well, it's a question of aversion therapy, I suppose. If it's the only thing that will control them, and if they need to be controlled for the sake of society as a whole, what else is one to do? If you imprison people, you are inflicting something on them, but there of course you are inflicting it incidentally; you are just trying to keep them out of harm's way - presumably - so that they don't do further damage to society. But formerly we had punishments like flogging, until fairly recently; well, the purpose there was the simple infliction of suffering. Whether it was compensatory or whatever it is difficult to say. It was vindictive in the literal sense.

Subhuti: I think there is confusion in the modern penal system, isn't there, as to what exactly the function of a prison sentence is?

S: Yes. The extreme 'liberals" view is that a prison sentence is sort of remedial; that you should view a criminal as a sort of sick person and treat him accordingly. That doesn't seem to work, always.

Subhuti: Mind you, neither does the view of prison as punishment. There is a very high rate of recidivism, isn't there? (...) Well, as deterrence, anyway - so that is a different matter, isn't it?

S: Yes, that's a different matter, because punishment as, as it were, vindictive does not have the motive of deterrence. It in a sense is inflicted for its own sake, not with any further end in view. Though I suppose one could say that the end in view is the satisfaction of society that the rules or the laws on which it is based have been vindicated. it is as though society is saying, 'These are the laws on which we are based, and you infringe them at your peril.'

Subhuti: Then that becomes deterrence as well, doesn't it?

S: No, not 'at your peril' ...

Subhuti: 'Therefore don't.'

S: 'Therefore you shouldn't. But that we, just because our very existence as a society has been threatened, almost revenge ourselves upon you, in order not simply to show you what you have done but for our own personal satisfaction, because we feel so outraged that the basis of social life has been destroyed or attacked in that way.' it is a way of reinforcing our confidence in our own laws - that is, the laws on which our society is based. That confidence has been as it were shaken, one might say, by the fact that a certain person has broken those laws, and that confidence is restored by punishing that person. This seems to be what happens in such cases. Because, if you felt - and this is actually happening, I believe, in our society today - that the laws on which [84] society is based can be flouted with impunity, this would give you a tremendous feeling of insecurity with regard to those laws, and therefore with regard to the society of which you are a member. I think this has not been properly thought out these days.

Mangala: Is that actually the case - that it is being flouted with impunity? Or are you just speaking hypothetically?

S: I think - I won't say there is less respect for law, but there seems to be less respect for law. People seem to get away with quite a lot these days, and think it good that they should be able to get away with quite a lot, even if it is only evading the tax laws. And then there are more fundamental laws. I wasn't thinking of laws just in a narrow legal sense, but what about things like the sanctity of life? This is where people feel most strongly, very often, when someone seems to get away with murder, gets away with a very light punishment, and there are all sorts of extenuating circumstances. It's as though their faith in that underlying principle of society is seriously weakened when they see so many people just getting away with murder.

Prasannasiddhi: Isn't it also tied up with the feeling of sort of balance - that society feels someone should suffer the consequences?

S: Well, it's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But why does anyone feel that? That's why I said a little while ago that it's vindictive. Something that you believe in, something that forms the basis of your society, has been attacked, your faith has been weakened, therefore the society has been weakened; so you have to make up for that. And you make up for it by as it were punishing, as we say, the person committing the offence. So the balance is restored; the law has been vindicated, and you again feel secure. Your society is in fact based on that law.

Subhuti: In a sense, it's a sort of natural group response, isn't it? That if somebody transgresses the rules of the group you feel 'Why should they get away with it?' - that sort of thing. It seems almost ...

S: It's not just that. I think in a way it's more than that. Because that, in a way, is an appeal to justice - 'why should they get away with it?' But it seems to go deeper than that: that, for the sake of your own psychological equilibrium, as it were, and for the sake of the equilibrium of your society, you need to restore the balance that has been disturbed by that particular anti-social act, or criminal act, even.

Prasannasiddhi: But doesn't that desire on behalf of the society stem from some kind of almost unconscious realization or knowledge that balance is necessary? So it's not just to secure ...

S: 'Unconscious knowledge' is an ambiguous term. But that is people's, one might say, very deep-seated reaction, and it seems, in purely human terms - or group terms at least - quite justifiable.

Prasannasiddhi: It does seem - I would think there would be several reasons all sort of interlocked, and you couldn't really separate them.

S: At least one can separate them in thought. I think one can separate this question of a need to restore a balance that has been disturbed. But I think this sort of motive for inflicting punishment just isn't recognized, usually, [85] nowadays, or else it assumes a very sort of blind form that is very easy to criticize.

Mangala: Bhante, do you think that could or should have any place within the spiritual community?

S: Well, no, I don't. No, I have made that clear in the past - that this is the power mode, and the power mode has no place in the spiritual community as such. But I also doubt very much whether there can be a spiritual community, as it were, in a vacuum - that is to say, not within the broader context of a positive group, as I have called it, and in that positive group there must be such a thing as justice. That positive group must uphold its own norms.

Mangala: I mean, what if somebody within a spiritual community behaved badly consistently?

S: I have said many a time that if someone within a spiritual community behaves badly, which means behaves not as an individual, to the extent of that behaviour at least he has ceased to be an individual and therefore ceased to be a member of the spiritual community.

Mangala: But I mean there wouldn't be any question of that community punishing him, as it were, and saying, 'Look, you have to leave. We don't want you'?

Subhuti: That's punishment.

S: Well, if he was no longer an individual - well, take an extreme case, someone who broke all the Precepts - he wouldn't be a member of the spiritual community and then it wouldn't be a question of you expelling him or throwing him out but really of recognizing that that was the situation: that he, by his behaviour, had expelled himself from the spiritual community and ceased to be a member.

Subhuti: But a spiritual community shouldn't resort to - shouldn't require that sort of vengeance that is appropriate on the level of the group?

Mangala: It's a matter of balancing ...

S: No, it shouldn't, in my view; it shouldn't experience that sort of feeling at all.

Prasannasiddhi: Though there could perhaps be a situation in which they would punish in accordance with the love mode ...

S: Well, as I said, this is something that I am still thinking about. But if someone has to be dealt with in that way, then clearly they are not individuals in our sense, they are not members of the spiritual community, so your action would not take place just within the spiritual community.

Subhuti: Is this something different from the group reaction to unconventional behaviour, let's say?

S: In principle, not, because the group does genuinely feel threatened by unconventional behaviour. I think the only question is whether that reaction is rational or not, because for instance the group is not necessarily a positive group, and the individual might be justified in engaging in that particular kind [86] of behaviour, because it is a healthy and positive kind of

behaviour. The group might be entirely wrong in its reaction. But I think one should be very careful not just to affront the group almost for the sake of affronting the group, and therefore provoking quite unnecessary reaction which has nothing to do with any real principles that you believe in.

Subhuti: There is a very close line, though, isn't there, between considering that the group is justified in wanting vengeance where a matter of natural morality has been infringed, and the group requiring vengeance when somebody has just acted in a way that outrages their sense of convention.

S: Well, the group as such, perhaps, is not able to distinguish between the two. Or perhaps even, one might say, from the point of view of the group, there isn't any real difference between the two. But the individual will need to take into account whether the group is positive or negative, or is predominantly positive or predominantly negative, if such a thing is possible. Or whether the behaviour that the group finds threatening is really essential to him and his work as an individual, or whether it is not just a personal idiosyncrasy which can be dispensed with.

Subhuti: Actually, I have observed this outrage in communities. Sometimes where somebody has behaved badly, sometimes when they have just behaved differently; and people do react quite strongly and ...

S: Can you think of any examples?

Prasannasiddhi: People who don't want to get up for meditation.

Subhuti: Yes, that's an obvious example of something which arguably you would expect people to do, but - well, somebody may be doing a different sort of work. Everybody else is working on a building site, and some people are - I don't know ...

Mangala: Painting?

S: Then that might be arguable.

Subhuti: But, in either case, the feeling seems to exceed or to go beyond what is reasonable.

S: Well, perhaps you could give an example: some years ago, if someone living in an FWBO community had normally worn a suit, that would have been regarded as unacceptable, wouldn't it? If they didn't wear dirty old patched jeans, but wore a suit, they would have been the odd man out, and some people would, I think, have objected to that.

Subhuti: Yes, there actually was a quite extreme situation, where somebody was very, very angry that some people were wearing suits!

Dharmadhara: I think also recently here in this chapter an Order Member didn't come along to the meeting, and there was a sense of outrage which I think exceeded what would have been expected.

S: Mm. Again, I think that's debatable. I don't think that's a clear-cut case. Because it must be

a great shock if, perhaps without explanation, someone [87] refrains from joining in something which he normally would be expected to join in.

Subhuti: It's as if one's response is: 'They ought to be made to do it'! Isn't that the essence of the feeling, that ...

S: Yes, I don't think that would be a negative feeling. But short of that feeling one can still feel extremely concerned and disappointed. What I am concerned to say is that one shouldn't calmly accept, 'Oh, So-and-so hasn't turned up today.' They ought to be really bothering. I think that's the sort of extreme that has to be, well, avoided. One should be very concerned indeed; there is hardly anything that one could be more concerned about. But that doesn't mean that one should feel like compelling that person to come, because that would be the negation of the very principle that you were supposedly concerned to uphold.

Subhuti: I think it's very difficult, it's a very fine line, as you say, between that sense of natural outrage and going into the next stage of wanting them to be made to do it.

Mangala: I think this outrage is perhaps because one feels 'I am making the effort to restrain myself, even though I would like not to have to, but I have to because I am afraid of the consequences; so I'm damned if I'm going to do it if he's not.'

S: I think it can be more positive than that: that you are making an effort and you need, in order to make that effort, the support of those who say that they are your friends, so that in not giving you that support they are letting you down, as well as themselves. In a way they are saying there is in fact no friendship.

Mangala: I think in that case you wouldn't feel outraged. You might feel disappointment or a little bit let down, but you wouldn't be outraged and vindictive and ...

S: No, you certainly wouldn't feel that. Does anyone ever feel vindictive if someone doesn't turn up for an Order meeting?

Mangala: Well, perhaps not for an Order meeting, but I think in some other sort of relatively trivial matters sometimes there is a certain amount of that.

S: I suppose it does represent a very deep disappointment, if someone on whose help and co-operation and friendship you had relied and were justified in relying lets you down. I don't think you can just not feel anything or treat it as a matter of indifference or just as that person's concern.

Mangala: Yes, I think that would be the appropriate response in a spiritual community, but this feeling of outrage and 'We must - '

S: I think this is inherent in the group. I don't think you can expect the group not to behave in that sort of way. It has its positive, cohesive function, as well as its negative, conformist function.

Subhuti: So you are saying that this has a positive function, that in a sense one can only justify that positive function where matters of natural morality are concerned?

[88]
S: Justify it from an as it were spiritual point of view.

Subhuti: Yes, and that within the spiritual community itself it has no place.

S: Even that has no place; even that, so to speak, relatively positive reaction on the part of the group in seeking to maintain its own integrity, even that type of reaction has no place in the spiritual community.

Subhuti: Although some response is natural to shortcomings on the part of one's fellows.

S: Well, again there is an ambiguity in the use of the word natural. It is not just natural, it is called for.

Prasannasiddhi: I was quite struck - in, I think, the last issue of Golden Drum there is an account of an assertiveness workshop done in Bristol.

S: They have been having them elsewhere too, I think.

Prasannasiddhi: It seems that people go to the extremes of either getting very angry or not saying anything, whereas there is actually a middle road of being assertive and getting your point across without actually ...

S: Well, very often I think people just keep quiet and the anger builds up, and eventually it bursts out in an unskilful way. Whereas I think, as far as I have understood, the essence of the assertiveness training consists in allowing the anger out in a controlled way before it has had time really to build up very much. You let it out while it is still controllable, rather than wait until it is no longer controllable.

Prasannasiddhi: In a way, I thought you can lessen that; it was just saying what you felt without any particularly negative emotion at all, but just stating quite clearly what you felt about the situation.

S: I think very often people are not able to do this, unless there is some element of negative emotion which eventually bursts forth. They are taught not to let it happen like that.

Dharmadhara: With some, say, infringement by an Order Member of natural morality, ...

S: When you say 'natural morality', what are you speaking of? The Precepts or something other than that?

Dharmadhara: Yes, well, the Precepts as well as in general; let's say, alcoholism, for example.

S: Well, that would be against the Precepts.

Dharmadhara: Yes. There may be a problem not so much with other Order Members but with non-Order Members, in that this lowers their picture of ordination or whatever, and they expect or hope for some recognition of that by this person not being an Order Member, because this Order Member can apparently (flout) tradition or the Precepts. So how would

that be best dealt with?

S: With regard to whom?

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Dharmadhara: Well, the Order in general.

S: You mean by the Order in general?

Dharmadhara: Yes.

S: Well, I suppose in some ways the Order in general couldn't deal with it, because probably the Order in general just wouldn't know that individual person well enough to be able to deal with it. It could only be dealt with satisfactorily on the basis of personal knowledge of that person or within the context of personal friendship with them, so that would suggest that it is at the most the local chapter that needs to deal with the matter.

Dharmadhara: I suppose what I'm asking is that this person, while flaunting (flouting) the Precepts, let's say, ...

S: Flaunting a breach of the Precepts.

Dharmadhara: Yes, flaunting a breach of the Precepts, still has the designation of Order Member, and ...

S: Well, again I've made this clear, I think, in the past: that an Order Member is not always an Order Member.

Dharmadhara: Yes, well, other Order Members would realize that and appreciate it, but non-Order Members may not, and probably wouldn't, in general.

S: I think non-Order Members probably have to realize two things: first of all, that in a general way, Order Members aren't perfect and they shouldn't expect them to be. Also, they should understand that, inasmuch as - apart from being not perfect, Order Members aren't Stream Entrants and aren't always able to maintain their individuality and self-consciousness, and that therefore they will, from time to time, go up and go down. People have to understand that. On the other hand, of course, Order Members mustn't take advantage of that fact. They should be making a genuine effort not to go down, as it were.

Subhuti: Then there might be a group expectation, let's say, from non-Order Members that this designation be taken away from the Order Member. Even in the power mode.

S: Well, if an Order Member is consistently not behaving as an individual over a lengthy period, he or she will actually have dropped out of the Order inasmuch as they have ceased to be an individual; and perhaps a time will come when that fact has to be formally recognized. At the same time, one must recognize that human nature is very complicated, and one has to be very careful not to fasten on one aspect of a person's behaviour, neglecting all the others, because people are often very strange bundles of virtues and vices. Anyway, perhaps we should proceed.

[90]
Ratnaguna's second question: I was very impressed by the fact that Vimalakirti not only shows up the spiritual shortcomings of the Hinayana, taken as an end in itself, but also he shows up the spiritual shortcomings of the Mahayana, taken as an end in itself. Bodhisattvas as well as Arhants are humiliated by Vimalakirti. I was impressed because I believe the Vimalakirti to be quite an early Mahayana 'Sutra'; I would have thought that at such an early stage of the Mahayana they would have been at pains to create a picture of Bodhisattvas as being perfect.

I was also impressed because I can't remember a similar sort of thing happening in other Mahayana sutras, certainly not in the White Lotus Sutra or the Sutra of Golden Light. Is the Vimalakirti Nirdesa unique in this respect?

S: It may well be unique. I can't say absolutely that it is, because I haven't read all the Mahayana sutras, and there are many hundreds of them. But certainly that sort of thing - that is to say, the humiliation of the Bodhisattvas - doesn't happen in the White Lotus Sutra or the Sutra of Golden Light. One of course perhaps shouldn't expect that everything that happens in one particular sutra happens in all the other sutras. They all seem to have their distinctive messages.

Ratnaguna says: 'I would have thought that at such an early stage of the Mahayana they would have been at pains to create a picture of Bodhisattvas as being perfect.' Well, other sutras do. Again, each sutra has its own particular message. Perhaps one should also make the rather pedantic point that the Vimalakirti Nirdesa does not actually call itself a sutra. It is the Vimalakirti Nirdesa, it is not the Vimalakirti Sutra or Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra. It's the 'instruction of Vimalakirti'. Of course, he is an Enlightened Bodhisattva, or an Enlightened Buddha, even, but none the less it isn't called a sutra. But the same principle holds good that all these works don't simply repeat one another; they do all have their distinctive message, to a great extent. Perhaps that is one of the functions of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa: to reveal the imperfections, so to speak, even of the Bodhisattvas. They don't seem to be archetypal Bodhisattvas; perhaps they are novice Bodhisattvas. And, of course, Manjusri, the archetypal Bodhisattva, is not humiliated and is, one could say, shown as being perfect. He certainly is not defeated by Vimalakirti in argument, even though in a sense Vimalakirti does have the last word. But sometimes it's a sign of great wisdom to allow the other person to have the last word. To be able to refrain from having the last word is quite a virtue, one might say. Anyway, perhaps we can pass on.

Ratnaguna's third question: In the lecture you quote from the text, and a list of the 'five corruptions' [is] mentioned (Kasaya). They are the five negative attributes of our difficult age, namely, the corruptions of:

1. Life span (ayah)
2. Views (drsti)
3. Pass ions (klesa)
4. Living beings (sattva)
5. Cosmic era (kalpa)

Do you know them, and if so could you elucidate for us?

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S: These five do occur in a number of sources, but I haven't been able to find anywhere an explanation of all five. Even Lamotte, in his very fully annotated version of the Vimalakirti, merely enumerates them, which is quite unusual for him and leads one to suspect that perhaps a full and proper explanation is nowhere to be found. But I did find the kalpa kasaya explained - I think it was in the Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary - and kalpa kasaya is the corruption of not having a Buddha; the kalpa is said to be corrupt when a Buddha does not appear in it, or perhaps when Buddhas appear only very rarely in it.

Subhuti: So these are not so much defined features of our particular era, but those features which a corrupt era has?

S: Yes. Our era presumably cannot be totally corrupt inasmuch as - well, in this particular kalpa five Buddhas are to appear; whereas there are some kalpas that have no Buddhas at all.

The meaning of ayah kasaya, life span corruption, seems to be self-evident; that is to say that one's life span is very short. Shortness of the life span is a corruption, because many texts describe how - Prasannasiddhi might find this ridiculous; we'll have to see - human life can vary from, I think, 100 years to I think it's 85,000 or 84,000 years in some ages.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, I do find it ridiculous. (Laughter.)

S: But, of course, it's not absolutely impossible, I suppose. I heard or read today or yesterday somewhere about a woman who lived to the age of 140. Where was this? - in Russia, was it, or China? China, I think.

Dharmadhara: It was on the radio today: a woman of 114.

S: That was in Britain, yes. But this woman of 140 had had 37 children and had outlived 20 of them! So corruption of the life span is presumably equivalent to shortness of the life span. And I think corruption of views is by micchadltthis, and corruption of passions by the passions, by the klesas. I can't quite work out what corruption of living beings is, unless it's corruption in a very, very general sense, where they are not only short lived but weak and deformed and so on.

Prasannasiddhi: Could it be something to do with being born with a human body rather than by apparition?

S: No. If you take sattva in the general sense, it could be that very few are born as human beings, and many in comparison are born as beings of other kinds. But anyway, I haven't found any explanation of these five, though they are listed in a number of places. So perhaps we should carry on, in that case.

Tejamitra's question: Do you regret that Old Net for New Monsters was published without editing out the more personal aspects of Subhuti's argument?

S: Perhaps one could find a little fault with the way in which the question is put. 'Personal aspects of Subhuti's argument' - well, one can't edit out any aspect of an argument, because you weaken the argument as such. So I'm not really quite sure what Tejamitra is asking. Has

anybody got any ideas [as to the] 'personal aspects of Subhuti's argument'?

[92]
Dharmadhara: Presumably the aspects of the argument which were taken personally by people that he was criticizing.

S: But one can't really edit them out, in that case, without affecting the argument itself. Some people would seem to react unfavourably or negatively just to pure logic.

Dharmadhara: Maybe he wasn't using 'argument' in a strict sense, but more in a general sense.

S: Taking it in any sense, I don't personally regret that those aspects or whatever weren't edited out. I think quite a few people within the Movement or within the Order don't appreciate the effect that Subhuti's argument did in fact have in the long run. I think it's had a quite salutary effect on the people most concerned, who will be, I think, unlikely to cross our path - or at least to cross Subhuti's path - in that sort of way again. I would say, in the case of one person who was mentioned or whose arguments were mentioned, that Subhuti's counter-argument had a very positive effect indeed. I think these things are not generally understood in the Movement, even among the Order Members - that they just hear, in a vague way, that certain people were upset, and they tend to think you mustn't upset people. Well, you shouldn't upset them for the sake of upsetting them, but sometimes people cannot but be upset by what you say. I think you shouldn't refrain from speaking what you see as the truth simply because some people might be upset by it. Even so, you should be careful to upset them as little as possible, consistent with actually saying what you feel should be said at that particular moment. I don't personally regret anything that Subhuti wrote in his Old Net, and I certainly don't regret that he didn't edit out certain things.

Prasannasiddhi: I might be wrong, but I feel that the people buying copies of that pamphlet would read it and feel that it wasn't entirely skilful in the way it was written, and that would not be a good thing for the image of the FWBO.

S: Mm. I think one has to be careful in making such statements, because to whom is one referring, and what does one mean, say, by 'the public'?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I think anyone who reads it.

S: Well, we just don't know, we haven't done any survey, have we?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, even within the Movement itself quite a number of people have expressed their concern ...

S: Concern about what? That has not always been clear by any means.

Prasannasiddhi: Probably I'm not very good at expressing it, but they felt that - well, I imagine there was a feeling that Subhuti's comments that were quite personal towards, you know - there was one comment in particular towards - who was it?

Subhuti: Gerald.

Prasannasiddhi: Gerald, which was attacking his character and ...

S: No, not his character, surely not.

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Prasannasiddhi: It was that comment that Gerald lacked emotion and intellectual integration.

S: Well, that's quite a valid point, isn't it? I don't know if - did Subhuti actually say that?

Subhuti: It certainly wasn't as bald as that. It was set in a particular context, the context of his argument.

S: I mean is one not justified in saying of a particular piece of writing that it shows or suggests that the writer wasn't integrated? This is a point that is often made with regard to this or that writer. Why should it be so objectionable, especially if it is a fact or someone thinks it is a fact?

Mangala: I must say I thought that all the points, Subhuti's basic argument, was very sound, but I did think sometimes the way he put it was unnecessarily harsh and even provocative.

S: But do you really think Subhuti was harsh?

Mangala: Um, yes, I think he was a bit unnecessarily sort of cutting and slighting. I think he made his points very well, then I think in some ways he let himself down a bit by just a few comments which I think could have been deleted.

S: I think one also has to bear in mind, though, that very often a point does not get across to people unless it is pointed to some extent or unless it has some edge.

Mangala: Well, yes.

Prasannasiddhi: I think that is true, but I haven't come across an instance in your writing that seemed to have that kind of sharpness or even harshness ...

S: Oh dear, I'm disappointed! Well, I have upset some people with my writings.

Prasannasiddhi: But you are very, very tactful in the way you write things. In a way you object that other people can't ...

S: Well, I'm an older bird than Subhuti is! Some people consider some of the things I've written in, for instance, the Survey especially as quite offensive. But actually no one, as far as I know, none of the people against whom or with regard to whom what I wrote is considered is applying reacted. One or two protested on their behalf, as it were, but no one that could be regarded as the object of my criticisms actually, to the best of my knowledge, ever reacted; but some of the criticisms, you could argue, were quite harsh; I would have said harsher than what Subhuti wrote. But I didn't mention anyone by name. I didn't think it necessary, especially as - well, there was a difference, because I was criticizing attitudes shared by a lot of people, so there seemed to be no point in mentioning anybody by name. But in Subhuti's case, he had been attacked by certain people by name, and it would have been difficult for

him not to reply to those people by name.

Prasannasiddhi: But I got the impression that there is a literary convention - [I don't know] whether it has a sound ethical basis - that you try to avoid personally attacking -

[94]
S: What do you mean by 'personally attacking'?

Prasannasiddhi: Attacking their character.

S: Well, again, what do you mean by their character? If you say, 'Such-and-such person is a thief or is dishonest,' that is attacking their character.

Kovida: I also think, you only need to read reviews of theatre, even currently, to see the devastating personal attacks upon actors in the course of a review of a piece of theatre.

Bodhiraja(?): Well, perhaps that is also unskilful. I believe in debating if you start attacking a person rather than the argument, it is considered unskilful.

S: Well, you can't separate the argument altogether from the person. For instance, at present, Mrs Thatcher is being attacked for her 'style' of government. This seems to me to be completely ridiculous, because first of all the word style is so vague. She is criticized as 'dictatorial'. Well, the term is not, of course, defined. They can't surely literally mean that she is a dictator, because that would suggest that the whole British constitution had been suspended, or she had had an armed coup or something of that sort. Or 'autocratic' - she says that she knows her own mind and tries to implement the policies that she believes in. But nobody could seriously suggest that all the other people in the Cabinet are just yes-men and she absolutely dominates them. That is far from the case. So one could say that attacking her in that case is quite unnecessary and has very little to do with her actual views. But, all right, it is all part of politics and people ought to be sensible enough to discount it. But if someone's views stem directly from his or her character, and you are criticizing those views, you can hardly help criticizing the character too.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I personally think, in the case of Subhuti's paper, that that could have been avoided. I also ...

S: Could it have been avoided and Subhuti still have been able to say what he wanted to say? That is the real point.

Prasannasiddhi: I would have to read it again before I could say that.

S: Because, if one can put across one's point equally effectively, in a gentle way, fair enough; no reason not to do that. One should. But I do think that there are some people who are so dense and so resistant, and so closed to any other point of view, that you can't really get your point of view across to them unless you put things really quite strongly and sharply. Because again it has worked: in the case of one of the two people whom Subhuti really criticized, Subhuti's criticism has changed his attitude in a positive way. I doubt whether he could have been changed, as appears to have been the case, in any other way.

Prasannasiddhi: Which?

S That is Richard Hunn.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, he didn't receive the brunt. The other person seems to have -

[95]
S: Who says he didn't receive the brunt, objectively speaking? The fact that he didn't react, or that it was a positive effect in the long run, doesn't mean that he wasn't strongly criticized. Sometimes people react very negatively to a very tiny criticism indeed, a very mild one.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, but I didn't get the impression that the more severe of Subhuti's comments were directed towards Richard Hunn. The comments that I personally felt were perhaps ...

S: Well, I personally saw them as equally severe. I certainly don't think that Richard Hunn got off lightly in comparison with Gerald. But people's reactions are very subjective, and they react strongly to something that has been put quite mildly and gently, and perhaps don't react at all to something that you thought you had put quite strongly.

Prasannasiddhi: I think something that was directed to the person I would perhaps try not to write that in public but address it to the person privately.

S: But then again, they attacked Subhuti in public.

Prasannasiddhi: Then, again, you go back to the Buddha's teachings like 'hatred is not ...

S: But Subhuti was not seeking to indulge in hatred. I think this is perhaps one of the cruxes of the misunderstanding. Some people seem to think that Subhuti was just letting fly with a lot of hatred, without properly thinking; which I don't think was the case.

Prasannasiddhi: I think 'hatred' would be a bit extreme, but I personally, reading it, got the impression that there was something that was a bit severe; to enter into that sort of area in ...

S: Oh, I think that that severity was justified. It's as though those who are not happy with what Subhuti wrote in his reply just didn't appreciate how bad was what the other people wrote, how totally unjustified; and an attack, in the case of, I think, Gerald, a sweeping attack on the whole Order, which certainly hadn't ...

Subhuti: And very personal, too.

S: And very personal.

Subhuti: No names were mentioned, but he said that most Order Members had certain quite severe defects of character, as it were.

Dharmadhara: I think in retrospect it would have been good to publish his review, which you [Subhuti] criticized, because not a lot of Order Members have actually read it yet.

S: Right. And even perhaps some who have read it don't realize how outrageous it really was.

Dharmadhara: It was published in a sort of out-of-the-way magazine. And it really needs rereading after having read Subhuti's pamphlet.

[96]
S: Perhaps the only criticism I would have made is that Subhuti should have quoted more extensively from those criticisms.

Mangala: Or perhaps publish them both together, have a real battle.

S: No, I think that wasn't necessary. Because Subhuti didn't criticize every point but only salient points.

Dharmadhara: What Subhuti says about Gerald is quite mild compared to what Gerald said ...

S: I think, if anything, I am a bit concerned that so many Order Members haven't taken Gerald's criticisms seriously. They have not felt as it were concerned or even upset about them in a positive way, as though they don't really care very much. I would feel rather like that. As though they haven't really realized what Gerald had been saying.

Prasannasiddhi: No doubt there's a lot more could have been done. I suppose they feel that hatred is - I mean I believe the Buddha has said that hatred is the most unskilful passion you can manifest.

S: Yes, but I think that is beside the point ...

Prasannasiddhi: So therefore, I feel that when one is writing for general publication one has to be very careful that what one states doesn't go beyond a certain limit, so that one gives a general impression that one is always very fair, at least in public.

S: In private, too!

Prasannasiddhi: You know, because that does affect the reputation of the movement.

S: Well, then again, one has to consider: reputation with whom? Does one want simply to create a positive impression at the expense of your actual principle?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I think in this particular instance that - most of Subhuti's pamphlet did quite adequately deal with the issue, but that there were just a few, one or two points where it just went into that area which I felt was a bit unskilful; and that it would be a shame if that happened too often. I feel a bit sorry for - I would have to read it again, but I think I'd be sorry if that happened again; because if it had been perhaps just edited a bit, it would have had a larger impact in the - We would have ...

S: I'm not sure about that at all. I'm just not sure about that. I think had it been as it were milder, and those passages edited out, it is very doubtful whether the two people most concerned, the two people actually criticized, would have taken very much notice of it at all. I don't think they would have been impressed by Subhuti's fairness. I think they would have

thought he was just weak and probably afraid to answer them properly. I think they would have been more likely to react in that way.

Mangala: I don't know the bits Prasannasiddhi's referring to, but I think there were a few lines which could have been removed, which wouldn't in any way have lessened the strength of it. I think it might have improved it.

[97]
S: What does one mean by 'improved'?

Mangala: Well, I think some of those comments were actually a little bit childish and rather let the rest of it down a bit. It just seemed slightly childish and a little bit reactive. Whereas without those it would be much more solid and have much more impact.

S: But would it have had an effect on those people?

Mangala: I think it would, actually.

S: Knowing a little bit about those people, and having read their writings, especially Gerald's, I really don't think so.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, again, perhaps to have written in public and stated the view, and then written personally to those people and said, 'Look, I think you've got this, that and that.' I would feel that would be a cleaner way to ...

S: One can always write personally too.

Prasannasiddhi: Or even go and see the people and actually ...

S: I think Subhuti did actually see one and was willing to see another.

Prasannasiddhi: Personally, I would have preferred for the general image that the Movement presents if it had been done that way round.

Subhuti: What about that point, Bhante? Accepting that perhaps that was the way to have an impact on those two, but it does seem even that some Order Members have found it difficult to stomach, and this is for instance - Stephen Batchelor's - he seems to ...

S: I really think that some Order Members didn't realize the significance of what was being said by Gerald, and didn't take it sufficiently to heart in a positive sense. It's almost as though they didn't have enough positive feeling about the Order and their own membership of the Order to feel very much.

Subhuti: I suppose what in a way is an issue that goes beyond this particular incident - should one refrain from doing things which are in themselves, as it were, justified, because they create a negative impression in the minds of some people?

S: Well, one might be justified in certain circumstances, but I don't think one can say that one should invariably refrain from saying what one thinks, or saying it in a particular way,

because it might produce a negative effect in the minds of some people. Otherwise one would gag oneself completely. What about my Buddhism and Blasphemy essay? I must say, looking back on this whole episode, I have been more concerned about a certain confusion of thought, or a certain remissness of response, on the part of Order Members, than anything else. Because, all right, supposing you did go a bit over the top, supposing that that's the right word, I am quite sure that if you think you did that you will correct it, and that will be that. But I think in the case of some Order Members, all sorts of reactions have been stirred up about 'Oh, you mustn't criticize' and all that kind of thing, in a quite irrational way; joined, as I have said, together with the fact that I feel quite a few Order Members just don't have sufficiently strong positive feeling [98] for the Order itself and for their membership of it. It's almost as if they just want a sort of quiet life, not have to be bothered, not wanting you stirring up a bit of trouble, as it were. But I think some Order Members were made to feel uneasy - perhaps because they had to think and decide and choose.

Mangala: Yes, I think that's probably a very good point, Bhante, but perhaps not many people had seen this article by Gerald which was so bad, and ...

S: But then again, even granting that, surely they should trust Subhuti and not criticize Subhuti or react to what he wrote without going and reading the article or articles to which he was replying? They should surely have enough trust in him to refrain from judgement till they have done that.

Mangala: I think people do trust Subhuti by and large. I certainly ...

S: Ah, but on that particular issue. But they seemed to feel very strongly that he had gone over the top without, in many cases, seeing what it was that he was replying to.

Mangala: I had seen his reply, too, actually, but I think he - I don't actually use the words 'over the top' ...

S: Some people did.

Mangala: I just feel it was a bit disappointing, just a few little bits and he rather let himself down.

S: I really wonder whether a very as it were dignified and objective and emotionless reply would have had any effect on them at all.

Subhuti: I think what I did to some extent with Gerald was ridicule him, and I think that I had to do that because he was ridiculous. If I had taken his argument too seriously, I would have given it a weight that it didn't deserve. It was part of my argument.

S: You would have betrayed your own cause.

Subhuti: Yes. It was an aspect of my answer to what he said. If I'd removed that from it, I would have left something standing, as it were. I can't really see how I could have done less.

S: I have had this experience with a lot of people. For instance, people have come to me in the past, say, wanting to discuss the Order and Order Members - that is to say, people from

way outside the Movement - as though they are some great guru who looks down on the Western Buddhist Order and can see what is wrong with it and we can have a chat about it; but I can't possibly accept that attitude, and I have in a way to reject that, whether explicitly or implicitly, thereby perhaps upsetting them a little bit. Or I have gently to ridicule them. I can't seriously discuss the points that they make without accepting that they have that sort of super-guru-like position. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Prasannasiddhi: You say 'gently' ridicule them; whereas I feel Subhuti's ...

S: I might even, if I was pushed, do it far from gently.

[99]
Subhuti: The circumstances are different as well, because this was a publication that had been made, so you don't have the opportunity to gently enter into communication.

S: How can one accept people's pretensions and make those pretensions, which one doesn't accept, the basis of the exchange? How can that ridiculous person really be answered in a way as though he is a great philosopher, one of the great minds of the world, as he thinks himself to be?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, seeing Subhuti's paper was pointing out the wrongness of certain views, attacking the actual person would seem to me to be ...

S: No, I think you have missed Subhuti's point. I would say if Subhuti made any mistake it probably was that he did not sufficiently expose the ridiculousness of Gerald and his position, and make it very, very plain to the reader. I think perhaps he took it for granted that the reader would be able to see the ridiculousness of Gerald's position when actually they couldn't; so he ...

Subhuti: Maybe I didn't go far enough.

S: You didn't, in a sense, go far enough. I'm not saying you should have been more severe but you should perhaps have included more of the context of the discussion, and quoted a bit more from Gerald, so that it was plain how ridiculous he was, at least to intelligent people. He has got such a inflated idea of his own intellectual competence. It is really amazing. And how can one argue with him as though one accepted that competence or regarded him as being on that sort of level? So, yes, in a sense Subhuti didn't go far enough. Not in as it were severity, but perhaps in not giving a sufficiently full context, or quoting sufficiently from Gerald or underlining, as it were, some of the points he made.

But - to come back to the react ion of some Order Members - I couldn't help feeling with regard to some of them that if they are that, as it were, weak in their convictions, is the Order really going to survive, if there are too many people of that sort in it? This is what I was feeling at the time. They didn't seem to have any strength of conviction.

Mangala: You see, Bhante, I think that's a very, very good point. In a way, it's a pity that that wasn't somehow brought out and discussed a lot more in the chapters - do you know what I mean?

S: It perhaps was, but perhaps it's significant that there weren't people to do that.

Subhuti: So what was - ?

Mangala: Well, the fact that somebody had made these remarks about the Order; a) not many people seemed to be aware of them, and b) those that were, as Bhante says, didn't really seem to have seen the impact and how important that was. Perhaps the Order is very lacking and deficient in certain ways, so ...

S: It's as though people are not able to stand up for themselves, or don't even see the need for standing up for themselves, for the Order, in order to survive.

Mangala: In some ways that might have been a more appropriate response, but a very good thing to have done, to have brought this to the Order's attention and really get them to - 'Do you realize what - ?'

[100]
Subhuti: I thought I'd done that.

Mangala: Well, perhaps not.

S: Yes, perhaps not. But I was really quite surprised how strongly some Order Members reacted. They seemed just to think, I got the impression, they seemed to think that criticism as such is wrong. It's one of these sort of - well, it isn't even a pseudo-liberal attitude, it's one of the old hippie attitudes.

Prasannasiddhi: I would be very surprised if there were many Order Members who felt that criticism was wrong.

S: No, I was there, I think it was at a Chairmen's meeting when half the Chairmen at least were quite uneasy and upset, even, with the idea of criticizing.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, no, they were up set with certain parts of Subhuti's paper; probably only one or two lines. The rest of the criticism ...

S: No, it wasn't that, it was more than that; because, yes, they did mention certain specific lines, but from some of the things they said on that occasion it was quite clear that at least some of them were not happy with the idea of criticism as such. This really gave me cause for concern.

Prasannasiddhi: But criticism is quite a common feature of the FWBO; like the idea of fierce friendship and [being] positive in giving critical feedback to people - I thought that was a common ...

S: Well, Subhuti's expounded it in his book, and it also has been in an issue of Golden Drum. But people were especially sensitive to criticizing people outside the Movement, as it were. But anyway, that is where you most need to criticize, sometimes. But I was really quite struck by how uneasy some of them were with just this - I think maybe they were a bit afraid that you might bring terrible consequences on yourself or the Movement, without them really

being able to define it very much. I think it's all part of the fear that many Order Members seem to have of the outside world and feeling quite unable to stand up to it in any way or to any extent.

Prasannasiddhi: And that was the chairmen?

S: I'm afraid, yes, it was the chairmen. That was the only occasion when I discussed it with a large number of people. It wasn't possible properly to discuss it, because the reactions were quite strong.

Mangala: I don't think it was quite like that, Bhante, actually. I think what some of the chairmen were protesting against was that, through Golden Drum and perhaps generally, we do seem to have a very critical attitude, and most of our expressions about and towards other Buddhist groups seem to be definitely rather critical, and perhaps sometimes a bit harsh and ...

S: Well, there's a lot to criticize.

Mangala: - and we very rarely have anything good to say about anybody.

S: Well, we do sometimes - it isn't as though one has got to keep a balance regardless. I think even many Order Members don't realize how much there is to [101] criticize and how lucky they are to have got on the right path. I think many still don't appreciate that, maybe due to a lack of experience.

Prasannasiddhi: I know it's not a question of balance, but you do have to - you can only go so far before you start getting other Buddhist groups thinking that you are too critical and therefore ...

S: Well, what does one mean by 'too critical'? Supposing they do think that; if we are in the right, in a sense what does it matter?

Prasannasiddhi: It's a bit like when you are with an individual, you've got to have a basis of trust and metta before that person will accept your criticisms. So you have to withhold criticisms that you would like to give them until there is a sufficient basis of trust.

S: Well, some of these people don't even like to come anywhere near us.

Subhuti: I think people also don't realize the effect that we've had with some of our criticisms. We actually have made people change their tune.

S: Well, as in the European Buddhist Union.

Subhuti: Yes, and with the Manjusri Institute. They did, to some extent anyway, modify their policy on giving out ordinations wholesale.

S: Very often people do take note of what one says, but out of pride, so to speak, they don't admit it; they do just change their ways to some extent.

Mangala: I think another point that was made, too, was the way we make our criticisms, and ...

S: I think that's an invalid distinction. I think the way you make it is part of the criticism itself. I think this is what Subhuti has explained in his case.

Mangala: I have discussed this with Nagabodhi, and he feels that in 'Outlook' he has tried to modify it so that, yes, you are critical, you do say 'We think this is wrong from a Buddhist point of view, this is not right.' But he said that it is kind of reasonable, and that ...

S: Well, that's true, but in some of those early 'Outlook' items he put it so weakly ...

Subhuti: You can notice.

S: - that you didn't really notice the point he was making. And you just mustn't fall into that extreme. I think he has got more to a middle way now; but some of those early 'Outlook' items were really quite innocuous and useless.

Subhuti: You had to read them three or four times to realize he disapproved of something.

Mangala: Well, it seems we've got a divided opinion, because I know at that Chairmen's meeting these things were discussed, and -

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Mangala: - I would say roughly that at least half the people there felt that it was very clear, it was plain as day, what was being said, and any fool would know that he was criticizing him, although he wasn't doing it in an overtly harsh way.

S: Who are you speaking about now, Nagabodhi or Subhuti?

Mangala: I'm talking about some of the articles in Golden Drum which some people had said were just too innocuous, they're feeble, they're weak; but I would say at least half the people in that meeting felt that they were quite clear, very definitely critical ...

S: No, I'm talking about the 'Outlook' items; I'm not talking about articles in general.

Mangala: Oh, yes, that's what I'm referring to.

S: There were some that were so weak - two or three of them, especially - that I am sure they made no impression at all on people outside the Movement, which is where they were directed.

Mangala: I can't say, I don't know.

S: But this is again an aspect of what I said a little while ago: that, even granting, say, that Subhuti could have been, let us say, more diplomatic, or that Nagabodhi even could have been more diplomatic or less diplomatic, I still feel very concerned at the weakness of

response from the Order to what is actually said about the Order. I think that goes far beyond any of these other issues.

Mangala: I think perhaps that point that you are making hasn't been sufficiently brought out and appreciated. I think that is a very important point.

Subhuti: It hasn't been brought out at all! I think something else that I feel a bit annoyed about is that my motives have been impugned. I am completely confident there was no malice on my part. I didn't feel personally outraged by what they had said; it didn't worry me too much, personally.

S: Well, it was said about the Order as a whole, it wasn't exclusively to you, in one case.

Subhuti: In fact, I think I wrote a lot of it very playfully, and I enjoyed writing it. I made my points strongly, but I don't think there was any desire to hurt, or ...

S: I read it and to me it seemed good-humoured. But the only point I did make which might be construed as critical of Subhuti was that perhaps he should have realized that those who knew him would realize that he wasn't activated by malice; but (that] perhaps those who didn't know him and weren't very friendly disposed wouldn't realize that. Perhaps he should have put that across more strongly. But it is surprising that people within the Order, who should have known you better, should have questioned your motives. One wonders how on earth they could have done that; because surely they should know you.

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Prasannasiddhi: I just felt that Subhuti had, for whatever reason, perhaps gone a bit over the top. Take, for instance ...

S: Well, that's different from questioning his motives. That's only questioning his skilfulness or diplomacy, which you can certainly do without questioning his motives.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I suppose I had to wonder at Subhuti's motives and wonder if there hadn't been perhaps an element of even minor ...

S: But didn't you feel, from personal contact with Subhuti - well, he is good-natured and he isn't activated by malice? Didn't you feel that? (Laughter.)

Prasannasiddhi: Well, no, I felt that sometimes Subhuti gets - does express anger, you know ...

S: Does he?

Prasannasiddhi: Yes! He can - because he is so overworked, he sometimes gets a bit grouchy and ...

Subhuti: I have (...) time for this!

S: Well, that's perhaps rather different.

Prasannasiddhi: Take - I was quite struck by Advayacitta's reply to Stephen Batchelor's comment. In a way Advayacitta quite severely took Stephen Batchelor to task, but you couldn't say, 'Oh, look, he's gone and ...

S: It wasn't all that severe ...

Subhuti: No, it was just like an oyster, wasn't it? It slipped down unnoticed.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I've certainly felt that we've ...

S: I think, from my own experience and observation, very few people are moved by logic and reason. People are moved by very strong passion. You can affect them if you are passionate; because it's not enough, in the case of something like Buddhism, just to be passionate; you've got to have your passion mixed up, so to speak, with your reason. Your reason must be imbued with passion. I think that's one of the reasons why Subhuti's first book went down so well, and I think also it's why my Survey is still regarded as my best work or my major work; because I wrote it with a lot of feeling, perhaps more than I have written subsequent books with. But you can very rarely move people just by force of pure argument; I don't think it's possible. I think there must be some appeal at the same time to their feelings.

Prasannasiddhi: I felt with Advayacitta's article that - I don't know what effect it had on Stephen Batchelor, but at least to the general reader he had made what Stephen Batchelor had written appear rather ridiculous.

S: I'm not sure, not sure.

Prassannasiddhi: You know, that he completely missed the point of -

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S: When something is written like that in a reasonable way, people tend to read it and say, 'Sure, that's reasonable enough.' it doesn't have any real or lasting effect on them. I must say that, over the last few years, I've heard so much irrationality even within the Order that I believe less and less that people can be very much moved or influenced by reason or by argument. Not that there shouldn't be argument, but the argument must be imbued with very strong feeling before it can really move them and influence them and affect their behaviour.

Anyway, we still haven't finished these questions. Perhaps we should try to finish them.

Sarvamitra's question: I have been asked to give talks to Christian missionaries in Helsinki. How would you deal with an invitation of this sort? Is this an appropriate occasion to criticize Christianity? Is there any reason why one should refuse to give such a talk?

S: This probably requires quite a bit of thought and examination. The situation is that Sarvamitra has been asked to give talks to Christian missionaries in Helsinki. One question that arises is: what was their motive in inviting him to give talks? If they are missionaries going out to the East and they want just to sort of practise on Sarvamitra and find out something about Buddhism so that they can refute it when they get to a Buddhist country, one has to perhaps not agree to give talks which simply fulfil that purpose. I think one probably needs to enter into some sort of discussion with the missionaries and ask them why they have

invited one and what they hope to gain from it. Are they prepared to consider that they have something to learn from Buddhism, or not?

And whether it is an appropriate occasion to criticize Christianity: I think probably one shouldn't go out of one's way to criticize Christianity in a talk or discussion of that kind. I think one should concentrate on presenting, or trying to present, Buddhism; but if one has to criticize Christianity, especially in reply to a question, one shouldn't shrink from doing that.

'Is there any reason why one should refuse to give such a talk?' I think only if it's clear they simply want to get some idea about Buddhism so that they can be better equipped to counteract it. But it is difficult to say very much without knowing exactly who these missionaries are and what their attitude is, even what church they belong to, what sect of Christianity they belong to. I personally would be quite willing to give it a try initially, just one meeting, whether with or without a talk, and then agree to a follow-up or not as necessary. Maybe that's enough for that.

Ratnaprabha's question: What would be the results of applying the Transcendental Critique of Religion to the FWBO?

S: Well, several points occur to me here. First of all, the FWBO isn't complete yet; it's still in process of growth and development. So perhaps it would be premature to apply any such critique to it. Also, of course, a Transcendental critique, presumably, would have to be applied by someone like Vimalakirti, someone spiritually quite developed, let us say. And, thirdly - and perhaps this is the most important point - the questioner seems to imply that the questioner stands apart from the FWBO: do you see what I mean? The FWBO is made up of individual Order Members, so if one wants to apply any critique, Transcendental or otherwise, to the FWBO, one should apply it to oneself and one's own practice; and I have made that very clear towards the end of the talk. I don't know if you've been listening to the talk, but I have made it very clear that one should ask oneself, 'is meditation for me functioning as a means to an end, or has it not become an end in itself? Am I not just going through the motions? Or has [105] study become an end in itself?' etc. etc. You apply the critique in that way. But you apply it to yourself, not to 'the' FWBO, as though you stand outside it in some way. Also perhaps I could say, connected with what I said before, that I think probably at this stage appreciation of the FWBO is much more in order than critique. I think people should be very careful not to try to engage in critique when what they really need is to express more appreciation.

Subhuti: 'This stage', implying that at some later stage ...

S: Yes, if we are as it were more fully developed or people are more in touch with the Transcendental, let us say; and when a lot of appreciation has been expressed, then perhaps it may be time for a critique in this more general sense. Till then, perhaps the critique should be confined to oneself. If all Order Members individually apply this Transcendental critique to their own practice of the Dharma, probably there would hardly be need for a Transcendental critique of the FWBO as such.

Dharmadhara: At the start of your reply, Bhante, you said that the FWBO is at present incomplete and therefore it would be premature to apply a Transcendental critique. Will it ever be complete, do you think?

S: I think in a sense, yes, certainly much more complete than it is now. But I think the question assumes that the FWBO is something fixed and static; it is simply that that I am concerned to question.

Dharmadhara: Talking about it being complete implies being fixed and static.

S: (Pause) In a sense it does; in historical terms, it does, because that is usually what happens, though perhaps it isn't necessary for it to happen.

Subhuti: You are suggesting that the Transcendental critique is something that you apply once something has been built up, but that it then becomes dependent upon; so that the thing that you are criticizing, as it were, is valuable up to a certain point, until you start to take it as an end in itself. So that, if people start to criticize the FWBO too much too soon, they actually destroy the very ladder they are climbing on.

S: Right, yes. But it is certainly in order, as I have said, for them to apply the Transcendental critique to their own personal practice or to themselves.

Mangala: So to the FWBO it is a means to an end; but if you start criticizing the means too soon, you sort of destroy it.

S: Yes indeed, yes.

Mangala: You don't get anywhere. It's not a Transcendental (...)

S: And it's not also just a question of not applying the Transcendental critique through those means prematurely, but also of appreciating those means very strongly. I think perhaps there isn't enough of that yet.

Mangala: I suppose, too, a critique wouldn't necessarily exclude appreciation, would it?

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S: Oh no, not necessarily. Well, in the true sense it probably would. But it wasn't that Vimalakirti didn't appreciate the Bodhisattvas for what they were. But much of what I have said just now goes back to the fact that I think a lot of Order Members still don't think sufficiently for themselves. They just react to certain slogans, almost; criticism is a dirty word, authority is a dirty word, etc. etc.

Subhuti: I wonder if there isn't also something about groups being bad, so that if you are turning (...) you are in some way denying the group.

S: It is sort of self-criticism as an end in itself; self-criticism, that is to say, criticism of the group to which you belong, for its own sake. The group is there mainly to be criticized, as it were.

Subhuti: A bit like Stephen Batchelor's 'not Buddhists'. You can't just stand up and say 'We've got a Buddhist group and it's good and we've got a valuable approach' or something; you have to ...

S: It's really a quite anaemic, pseudo-intellectual attitude. I think this is part of our hippie legacy from the sixties. it shows some kind of sophistication to be alienated from the group and always to run down governments as it were on principle, and to believe that all politicians are rascals. This is supposed to be a sign of great sophistication and intelligence, that you've seen through it all. So it assumes a great superiority on your part. I think these are all attitudes that we really have to question.

Prasannasiddhi: Is this criticism generally that you are referring to, not Subhuti's (pamphlet)?

S: No, more Order Members than I would care to think seem to entertain some such ideas. Maybe it is difficult to generalize. I was going to say maybe some of the older ones from the sixties and seventies; perhaps less so with the newer and younger ones. I won't be completely sure of that.

Mangala: Do you think there is something about the FWBO itself which as it were encourages or doesn't encourage people to think?

S: It may be - I'm not sure here - that I've tended to assume that if people were as it were left to their own devices and not interfered with too much or told what to think they would think for themselves; but perhaps that is not the case - they have to be challenged much more to think for themselves, and shown much more vigorously that they are not in fact thinking for themselves. It could be.

Mangala: I wonder if people in the Movement - probably you can't generalize - think for themselves any less than people outside? Probably not.

S: As you say, it's difficult to generalize. Some people outside the Movement do think quite a lot. And some people in the Movement do think quite a lot, but I think there are far too many who don't really think. I think the proportion is far too high.

Subhuti: Did you have anything in mind when you were saying that? - did the Movement encourage people not to think?

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Mangala: Well, I was wondering if perhaps people come into the Movement and settle down; it's comfortable, it's cosy, it's warm, you know. Their needs are met in certain respects, and they can just sort of coast along and cruise along without too much aggravation, and do a bit of meditation, go on a few retreats, and, a pleasant kind of spiritual life, not really going anywhere, not very dynamic, but not very much edge to it.

S: Well, when Subhuti tries to give it a bit of edge he's criticized! When I speak of thinking for oneself, I am referring mainly first of all to thinking about the Dharma, not just taking it in in a passive way, actively thinking about it and exercising one's mind on it so that one understands it properly. And also applying one's mind in a quite active way to all sorts of human and current issues, not just repeating things that you've read in newspapers or heard on the radio or just picked up from your friends. A lot of people just seem to recite slogans. Yes, you do need to learn the facts first, you do need to learn the facts of the Dharma, even the three of this and the ten of that. But then no less necessarily, you have to start thinking about those things and things in general.

Mangala: So what could be done? Do you think anything could be done to encourage that much more?

S: It seems to me that people can't be left to their own resources. You have to engage them in discussion and stir them up, and question their assumptions, point out when they are just repeating words without understanding their meaning. Not many people are able to do that. You may not make yourself very popular. You will be accused of pedantry if you ask people 'What do you mean by that word?'

Prasannasiddhi: I know it's impossible to generalize without doing a survey, but I get the impression that people do try to think about issues in the FWBO, perhaps to a greater extent than the average person or the average group of people outside the FWBO.

S: People do have quite vigorous discussions or arguments about politics in the outside world, don't they? - at least about things of that sort.

Prasannasiddhi: Mm, but generally in, say, a community there is always discussion round a table going on about ...

S: No, this is not quite in the way that I'm thinking. There is usually a bit of talk or people air their views, as it were, but without too much of real thought. I think quite a bit of that goes on, but not any real sort of intellectual discussion in the best sense. That is my suspicion, anyway.

Prasannasiddhi: But is there much of that outside?

S: Well, leave aside outside; even if there isn't, from the Order at least one would expect more. One could say some people at least don't have time. But I'm not so sure whether that is a real excuse.

Subhuti: You couldn't really argue that the FWBO encouraged people not to think, unless you were actively telling people what to think. That's the only way you could really do it.

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S: No, I think probably Mangala meant encouraging them not to think in the sense of not actually making any provision, or helping them to think.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, we have study groups; retreats have study groups.

S: That's true, but they only work properly if the leader is really vigorous and himself fairly competent intellectually and able to stimulate people to think I think not many study leaders actually are like that. Some are; some are a bit like that, but there's only a handful of them. It's as though there is a lot more thrashing out of issues to be done.

Mangala: I'm not sure about this, but maybe people get into the habit of just taking things from you and swallowing it wholesale and repeating it.

S: Well, that's all right as the first stage. In fact, you could say it's necessary. But I don't want people just to stop at that stage. You have to study the subject and learn the facts before you

can begin to discuss it. I think that's one reason for some of the confusion - that people don't acquaint themselves with a subject properly, but they want to have views about it, so they just remain views, and the views are very often just reducible to emotional reactions.

Prasannasiddhi: I do at least get the impression that, say, on Order weekends people aren't just giving out what is the party line of the FWBO; they do actually have their own views, whether they are just views that they have at least come to the stage of ...

S: Well, the best speakers certainly have developed some independent understanding of their own; that is quite clear. But again there's only a handful of them.

Subhuti: When Peter Clarke (?) from King's College came, he came to an Order/Mitra event. Do you remember? He runs a centre for the study of new religions in Britain.

S: Ah, yes.

Subhuti: And one of the points he made was that, almost unique in any of the groups - I think he said unique in any of the groups that he had seen - in the FWBO we clearly wanted people to think for themselves.

S: He didn't get the impression that there was brainwashing?

Subhuti: No. That was quite impressive.

S: Well, perhaps people don't find it easy to think for themselves. And perhaps we underestimate the difficulty. I think I have always thought for myself, as far as I can tell, from quite early on. One doesn't expect people to have original ideas, necessarily, but at least to have made what they are studying and what they profess to believe in their own, at least on the intellectual level. That's a very good start.

Prasannasiddhi: I think that is generally known - until you make things your own you don't get it.

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S: Even that can become a sort of slogan, you know? You have to watch people so closely. But I get the ring of it now; I know when people are just engaging in the patter, whether they are just saying it to me or whether they are writing it in a letter. It is very, very obvious.

Prasannasiddhi: I did mean more in Order activities. (?)

S: But it's all right at a certain stage; all right, that's the way you learn, you just repeat things. But then you've got to start thinking. Some of the discussions or letters in Shabda about the ordination process - well, that wasn't really very uplifting. It showed a certain amount of confusion of thought on the part of at least some people; though perhaps less than on certain other occasions before. I suppose it's just a long and difficult and possibly painful business for a lot of people.

Mangala: There should be a lot more writing of essays and exams.

Subhuti: You could learn how to not think and do exams, couldn't you?

S: Yes, and give the right answers, or to think of the right answers or expected answers.

Subhuti: And you really see it a lot with study, don't you? - that people just learn what to say.

Mangala: If you have to write an essay on something, you do have to clarify your thinking and just get something down. You can't just ...

S: It would be good - this does in a sense happen on the ordination retreats, because people have to prepare at least two talks, I think. And quite a few of them do really look things up and make quite good jobs of their talks.

Mangala: Then they probably stop after that!

Prasannasiddhi: They also have discussion groups throughout at least two or three months of the whole process, which does get people to some extent thinking.

S: I just begin to think that the three months are not really enough; because the effect of those three months really, I'm afraid, wears off very quickly, usually. It's as though people need to keep up in that sort of way, live in that sort of way, for a few years perhaps.

Mangala: I've been amazed at some people who come back from Tuscany and you hear a couple of months later that they are in a really bad state or they are out of touch, and you can't quite believe it, somehow!

S: But it does suggest that a lot of people are very dependent on supportive conditions, and don't have much in the way of inner resources.

Prasannasiddhi: I think in this day and age that's true.

S: You don't quite expect it within the Order - at least, I don't.

Prasannasiddhi: That's what people come in from. (?)

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S: Some of them have been within the Movement for years and years.

Prasannasiddhi: Anyone in particular?

S: No names, no pack drill, as they say in the army!

Prasannasiddhi: Well, then we get back to Subhuti's Old Net.

S: Well, Subhuti wanted to give some pack drill, so in those cases he mentioned the names!

Prasannasiddhi: It sounds like you think we need some pack drill as well!

S: I still think people have, or give themselves, a very easy time. I really do. Compared with a

lot of people in the outside world who are working for a quite mundane objective.

Subhuti: (Some people have) a lot of holidays.

S: Yes, indeed. Yes. Oh well, perhaps we'd better leave it there and go to bed and sleep on it. I hope nobody has nightmares!

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PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Mangala, Nagabodhi, Prasannasiddhi, Bodhiraja, Kovida.

9 June 1987 - 'History versus Myth in Man's Quest for Meaning '

Mangala: Today is Tuesday, 9 June, and we come to the fifth lecture in the Vimalakirti Nirdesa series. The lecture is called 'History versus Myth in Man's Quest for Meaning'. We are going to start with three questions on adhisthana. Two of them are from Abhaya and one from Ratnaguna.

Abhaya's first question: Do you think the 'arising' of adhisthana in someone's spiritual life is analogous to the rising of inspiration on the artistic level, i.e. like the 10% 'reward' after the 90% perspiration?

S: As I heard it, it was 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration. But, looking down the page, I see that there is a question about the meaning of adhisthana, so I wonder if we can really discuss the question of whether the arising of adhisthana in someone's spiritual life is analogous to the arising of inspiration on the artistic level, without having discussed the meaning of the term? So perhaps it would be good to have that question 3 first.

Ratnaguna's first question: The word adhisthana is often translated as 'grace', which has unfortunate Christian overtones. Can you think of another word which would give the meaning of adhisthana but without the Christian flavour?

S: Well, whether adhisthana is justifiably or adequately translated as grace we can only decide after we have tried to see what the literal meaning, or the derivation, of the word is. I have actually dealt with this fairly fully somewhere, and I have quoted a very useful note from the glossary to Snellgrove's translation of the Hevajra Tantra. I have quoted it in full somewhere; so could someone give me the translation of the Hevajra Tantra? There are two volumes: there's the text and translation - (Pause.) I am really going over ground which I have covered before. Yes, there is a glossary of special terms. So listen to this carefully:

'Adhisthana: From the literal meaning of "position". This word is applied specifically to authoritative position, and then to the power pertaining to such a position. It can therefore mean the power which belongs naturally to divine forms' - that is to say of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and so on - 'and in this sense it comes near to the Christian conception of grace. It can also refer to the power which is experienced spontaneously in meditation or achieved through the recitation of mantras. In that it may be transmitted by a man of sanctity to his disciples, it may also be translated as "blessing". Abhiseka is essentially a ritual

empowerment. Adhisthana refers to innate or spontaneous power and always with the connotation of active expression. In the sense of grace or blessing it becomes, however, a form of empowerment. The Tibetan translation' - that is to say, adhisthana - 'is chin lab, literally "power wave". Chin means power in the special sense of its inherent splendour, i.e. majesty. Chin lab is also used to translate Skt. prabhava, power, lustre, splendour, which thereby becomes implicitly a synonym for adhisthana. We find this' - er - 'a term similar to the Skt. prabhava in [112] that sense. The term anubhava(?) in the usual Theravada Pali blessing' - do you remember that, or do you know that? How does it go? (Recites Skt. formula.) 'By the anubhava or prabhava of the Buddha' - that is to say, the adhisthana. So does the meaning now become clearer?

Despite what Snellgrove says, I don't think that 'grace' is really an adequate translation or equivalent. In the case of the word grace there is a sort of suggestion or connotation of - what shall I say? not gratuitousness ...

Subhuti: (makes inaudible suggestion.)

S: Yes. One can't really say that of adhisthana - not that one earns the adhisthana, presumably, but surely one's capacity to receive the adhisthana is not unrelated to one's merits. I can't really think of an alternative tradition [rendering?], that is to say one that isn't clumsy. One could render, not the Sanskrit word itself but the Tibetan equivalent, 'power wave', but we tend to use the word power in a different sense, don't we? After all, the word position can be understood in a purely as it were secular sense, and consequently 'authoritative position' can be understood in the same way. But, of course, one can think in terms of a spiritual position, a purely spiritual, purely Transcendental, position, and therefore one can think of the power pertaining to or following from that position - though that would be power in the sense of what we call love. Perhaps one could speak of a love wave rather than a power wave. So that the term love wave wouldn't have the same connotations as the word grace, would it? It is a sort of expression of good will, an expression of metta; but in this case the metta comes from a person of some spiritual position, and therefore has the effect of a blessing. Do you see what I mean?

Prasannasiddhi: Would 'blessing' be - ?

S: 'Blessing', I think, is better than 'grace'.

Subhuti: When you say that it has the effect of a blessing, what do you mean?

S: A blessing is something that benefits one, isn't it? So presumably one is benefited to the extent that one is open to it, to the extent that one is receptive to it; one is benefited by good will coming from someone of a superior spiritual position. One as it were feels something, and therefore perhaps one responds to something. And even on the ordinary level, if you experience good will coming from another person, that does have a certain effect upon one; it does alter your state of consciousness, and perhaps you do respond to it. So in the same way with the good will coming from someone of a superior spiritual position - presumably it will function even more effectively; especially if it isn't just metta, good will in the mundane sense, that is to say dissociated from insight, but is actually associated with insight also.

Prasannasiddhi: I would have thought 'blessing' was rather a weak term for what is trying to

be described here; you can have a blessing ...

S: Well, Snellgrove is trying to do his best with English words.

Subhuti: In a way, influences.

S: Influence, yes, a very powerful influence, coming as it were from on high. It is an influence which you can resist if you want to, but it is also an influence to which you can open yourself if you want to.

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Prasannasiddhi: It can have quite a transforming effect on a person, a sort of radical transformation.

S: One could even speak of a transformation wave, except that the transformation is not automatic; even if the adhisthana is there one still has to open oneself to it.

Subhuti: I think it's sometimes translated 'empowerment'.

S: Ah, empowerment is abhiseka.

Prasannasiddhi: Is that even stronger, abhiseka?

S: Not necessarily. Tibetans, I have found, generally regard chin lab as, so to speak, inferior to abhiseka, but that is strictly not the case, because the abhiseka is in a way only the adhisthana taking a specific ritual form, and by taking that specific ritual form it may or it may not be intensified. I have found that Tibetans do sometimes speak rather loosely of adhisthana and abhiseka as though they were two quite different things; as though the adhisthana or the chin lab is a sort of inferior kind of abhiseka. For instance, they may say: 'For such-and-such visualization practice you don't really require an abhiseka, a wong; you just require a chin lab, an adhisthana.' That isn't really a quite accurate usage of the terms, though it may have come to mean that in the course of Tibetan practice.

Prasannasiddhi: In what context would adhisthana be given? Is it just something someone might do - ?

S: One could say it's like - as I have suggested already - a sort of informal initiation; the full ritual element is not there.

Prasannasiddhi: Is it a sort of spontaneous happening with a ...

S: It is not completely spontaneous, but it is so to speak more spontaneous.

Subhuti: Is there not almost a suggestion that there is an adhisthana coming from highly spiritual beings all the time?

S: Oh yes, Snellgrove doesn't go into that but, yes, I think that is certainly the case; because one might say that just as light and heat are constantly coming from the sun, in the same way adhisthana is constantly coming from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It's only a question of

making oneself receptive to that.

Subhuti: And so the abhiseka is just a particular way of (...)ating that higher spiritual influence?

S: Yes, indeed. In the case of the abhiseka - which is the ritual form taken by the adhisthana, we may say - the guru giving the initiation identifies himself with the deity whose initiation he is giving, in those cases where he is giving the initiation of a particular deity or deities.

Subhuti: So he is putting himself in contact with those forces and therefore transmitting them to the disciple?

S: Right; by means of, or with the help or support of, the ritual procedure.

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Subhuti: So at any time he could just make contact with that high level and (...) it?

S: Yes, indeed; in the case of a sufficiently developed guru, he wouldn't as it were need the support of the ritual procedure. Though, of course, one may again say that the support of that ritual procedure may be very helpful, even necessary, for the disciple.

Subhuti: I remember in the Karaniya Metta Sutta the term adittheya(?) is used, which I think you said was the Pali term of adhisthana.

S: It seems to be connected.

Subhuti: It was to do with exercising this mindfulness of metta. Is it the same word?

S: We can find the Pali text. Do you know where the text is? Otherwise I have a little handbook for Buddhists. (Search in progress.) Perhaps it's simpler for me to get my - that little Handbook for Buddhists; I've got it just along by the side of my armchair; a little white book. Adittheya seems to be - what case do you call it? - it's like 'it may be', what case is that?

Subhuti: Conditional. (Subjunctive?)

S: Conditional case, yes. I'm confusing it with abhisameca (?). (Searching.) Yes: (quotes Pali): (... adittheya). The translation says 'develop', but clearly it is 'exercise the power of'. 'Develop' is not really quite strong enough at all. Yes, it must be the same word: 'let him'. 'This mindfulness let him' - not 'develop' but 'put forth', almost. Almost as though mindfulness is conceived of as a sort of power which one puts forth. 'Develop' is really not appropriate at all. Anyway, maybe we should come back to the question. 'The word adhisthana is often translated as "grace", which has unfortunate Christian overtones. Can you think of another word which would give the meaning of adhisthana but without the Christian flavour?' Well, 'power wave', provided 'power' is understood as meaning 'love'. Or 'influence', 'spiritual influence'; 'blessing'. So from that we come back to the very first question: 'Do you think the arising of adhisthana in someone's spiritual life' - I think we can now understand what that means - 'is analogous to the arising of inspiration on the artistic level?' Mm. Perhaps 'analogous' is the operative word. One doesn't really speak in terms of adhisthana 'arising', does one? It's more definitely being given. It is something which seems to come as it

were from above. Sometimes inspiration, artistic inspiration, seems to be spoken of as coming from within, coming from the depths; I think less often it is spoken of as coming from above, in the way that adhisthana does. I do remember that - yes, I think it was Haydn, after hearing the first performance of I think it was his oratorio The Creation - said 'it came from above', as though he felt inspired in that sort of way. But then it was a religious work.

Prasannasiddhi: There is also the invoking of the muses.

S: That's true. It's as though adhisthana descends rather than arises, and when you invoke the muses you address yourself to higher powers, as it were, so as to invoke their blessing.

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Subhuti: Isn't the analogy more with the inspiration you derive from looking at or listening to a work of art?

S: Yes, one could say that. Which may or may not lead you to your own artistic creation, depending on your talent or lack of talent. Though Abhaya does say of this analogy 'like the 10% reward after the 90% perspiration'; but even in the case of appreciating works of art you probably do have to work at it. You don't just look at a painting without previous preparation and just appreciate it to its full extent; you have to study it quite hard, virtually to know quite a lot about art. So there is some analogy, one might say. Though perhaps one should in that case think of inspiration as coming from above, rather than from one's own depths, especially one's own personal depths, so to speak. Let's go on to the next question about adhisthana. I don't know whose it is.

Abhaya's second question: Do you think that in some cases, or in some sense, we in the movement put so much stress on self-effort that we can work too hard in the wrong way and actually inhibit adhisthana 'arising'? (You once used the image of having to row hard from the bank until you reach midstream where the current takes you. What I have in mind is people continuing to row even in midstream and not letting the current take them.)

S: I don't know whether this is a good analogy, in the sense that I don't see that this would actually happen. Because, presumably, if you feel the current taking you along, you'll naturally tend to rest on your oars. But one might also say that even if you feel the current taking you along, why not continue rowing, because you'll get along even more quickly then? Perhaps Abhaya is taking that comparison of mine a bit literally, because actually you wouldn't, so to speak, be able to get into the current unless, paradoxically, you had adopted a more relaxed, a more balanced approach? It's as though Abhaya is thinking it is actually literally possible to be making effort in that wrong sort of way and get to the stream, and get to the point of Stream Entry, and even after that go on making an effort in the wrong sort of way. This I would have thought was not the case at all; I would have thought it was quite impossible, by the very nature of the situation, by the very nature of that type of experience.

But that perhaps is a rather different question from the initial one: 'Do you think that in some cases, or in some sense, we in the movement put so much stress on self-effort that we can work too hard in the wrong way and actually inhibit adhisthana arising?' This does rather suggest that the adhisthana is very much your own, is very much a part of your own mental make-up, which as we have seen is really not the case. But can you obstruct its descent, so to speak, by too much self-effort? Can you? Can you invoke the muses so vigorously that you

can't hear them singing? Or is it a rather theoretical kind of situation?

Prasannasiddhi: I think you can obstruct higher states of consciousness by working too much on a lower level.

S: You say 'higher states of consciousness', but we're not concerned here with higher states of consciousness as such, but with the adhisthana, especially the adhisthana as actually descending from some other source, presumably or apparently outside oneself.

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Mangala: Perhaps he means trying to grasp something before you are ready - presumably for you to receive the adhisthana you have to be receptive to some extent.

S: But is effort as it were incompatible with receptivity? For instance, suppose you are playing a musical instrument, taking part in a symphony. You are making a tremendous effort; at the same time you are receptive. Are the two things really so antithetical? Do you have to sort of stop doing everything in order to be receptive? Is that really the case? When you are writing, sometimes you can be making a very intense effort, but at the same time it does seem that one is receptive; something is flowing within you.

Mangala: But isn't it possible to make the wrong kind of effort?

S: I think it is possible to make the wrong kind of effort. That requires us to define what exactly a wrong effort is.

Nagabodhi: The current lingo is wilfulness, isn't it?

S: But then again you still have to define wilfulness.

Mangala: I think perhaps it means kind of pushing, in a rather forced way ...

S: Yes, but what does one mean by forced, you see? Forced, wilful, self-effort - these are all more or less synonymous terms. One can't really explain one of them by another.

Subhuti: I suppose it's really to do with your motive for pushing, isn't it? If your motive is not actually to break through or whatever, to really experience something higher, but just to ...

S: To appropriate it. It is appropriation rather than actual experience.

Nagabodhi: But then why should you want to appropriate it?

S: Well, you want to appropriate because you think of the higher experience as something that you must incorporate into your existing being, rather than incorporating your existing being into the experience in such a way that your existing being can be transformed.

Prasannasiddhi: It's a sort of ego attachment, an ego-based experience, an attempt to maintain the ego as it is.

S: Mm. It means the attempt to retain the experience within the existing structure, one might

say, of one's being without allowing it to modify that structure.

Mangala: So I suppose, until one is Enlightened, there has always got to be an aspect of that in your motivation, so it's just a question of degree, isn't it?

S: Well, there will always be a conflict between experiencing and appropriating; between incorporation and surrender, one might say. But Abhaya does say: 'Do you think that in some cases, or in some sense, we in the movement put so much stress on self-effort that we can work too hard in the wrong way ...?' So it does seem that Abhaya is using the word 'self-effort' in a reasonably positive way. He thinks it is or can be a good thing, [117] but that perhaps we emphasize it to much, so he clearly isn't using 'self-effort' in quite the same sense as I have been using it. So 'self-effort', in the sense that he is using it, seems to be not real self-effort at all.

Subhuti: Isn't he saying that if you over-emphasise self-effort - this is his suggestion, I think - then people tend to be wilful?

S: But do they?

Subhuti: I don't know. He is saying that it is the emphasis on self-effort that then leads to a one-sided approach.

S: Well, I suppose there is always the possibility of misunderstanding, but I think that the remedy is not to give less emphasis to self-effort, because self-effort clearly is very important, but to make clear what you really mean by that. Though I think it remains to be proved that this does in fact happen; I don't think we should assume, because I do get the impression personally that - well, to quote Abhaya, 'in some cases, or in some sense,' some people are rather averse from self-effort and are glad of a justification for not engaging in that kind of effort.

Subhuti: It's quite strange, just coming from Spain, finding this sort of praise for people finding out that they are being wilful. I have been rather suspicious, actually; I wonder if people are really being wilful, and where it all comes from. It seems to me mainly that they think they need to stop and give themselves an easy time.

S: Yes. I think I must myself, in Tuscany, have made the point that a wilful effort wasn't a really positive effort. It's as though this has been seized upon since. Because, yes, it is a genuine distinction; but it's almost as though some of our Friends think that all self-effort is wilful effort, and therefore, out of their great concern not to be wilful, they cease making an effort, or they think that not making an effort is the best way of ceasing to be wilful, or making sure that you are not wilful. So to translate the sort of jargon, I suspect that, when some people say that 'I think I am being too self-willed' or 'I think I've been too wilful recently', what they really mean is 'I'd like to go on holiday'! I find more and more that people in the FWBO, and no doubt this applies to all spiritual traditions, learn the language; but then they make use of the language in such a way as to justify themselves in doing something, or not doing something, which is not in accordance with the tradition. Do you see what I'm getting at? Again, language becomes an end in itself, it is taken very literally.

Nagabodhi: Sometimes you can get a feeling from people that they have the idea that any kind

of effort must be wrong. If they feel themselves in effort, something's wrong. It's as if, if they'd got it right, they would slip totally effortlessly into the appropriate state; otherwise something must be wrong and unbalanced. I have often pointed out, I think it's the very first quotation in your selection from the Dhammapada's aphorisms, it's quite a strong comment on the importance of effort, even I think it uses the word 'will', 'willed effort', in the spiritual life; but it doesn't seem to encourage (?).

S: It's an aspect of people's craving for approval. They want the approval of what they take to be the group, so they know, in order to gain the approval of the group, you've got to be doing the right things, or appear to be doing the [118] right things. So, instead of conforming your behaviour to the terminology, as it were, you try to conform the terminology to your behaviour.

Anyway, it's all pretty obvious, but perhaps it's something that needs to be counteracted. I wonder if there is any real reason for this, this tendency, more specific than just people's general laziness and sloth. Because, yes, in the spiritual life it is difficult, everybody knows that, so sometimes one feels like resting on one's oars for a while. But is there something more than that to it?

Nagabodhi: I do wonder whether people, once they get involved in community life, centre life, co-operative life, find themselves making more of an effort than they have ever made before, but because of the social dynamic that they've got involved in they perhaps lose touch with their personal motivation, and maybe not having the right kind of communication, or putting enough effort into meditation or Puja, they lose that individual element of motivation; and yet the work has increased, and so a split arises.

S: What you are really saying is that the self-effort, though right in itself, is not directed to a sufficiently wide range of objects, and therefore your spiritual life becomes rather one-sided. Supposing you are working in a co-op - all right, self-effort, or just effort in that context, is perfectly in order, even a great effort. But, at the same time, there must be an effort in the direction of meditation, an effort in connection with developing spiritual friendships, and so on. So it's not that there has been an emphasis, or - what does Abhaya call it? - it is not that there is too much stress on self-effort, but that the effort is not distributed sufficiently widely. So, if there is, for instance, too much stress on self-effort within the context, let's say, of a co-op, the remedy is not to stop making that self-effort within the context of the co-op and just go on holiday; the remedy is to make more of an effort in such areas as meditation and spiritual friendship, which may involve devoting less of your energy to your co-op. It's not a question of self-effort, it's not a question of being wilful, but of not distributing your effort or your energies sufficiently widely over a sufficiently broad spectrum of your interests.

Prasannasiddhi: I almost get the impression that the problem is that people start, they get involved and they are working in a business, and they start getting all sorts of other interests as well, they want to read novels and they are developing aesthetic appreciation, so they get all these interests and then they suddenly find that they are doing too many things, and so they say, 'Oh dear, I'm being too wilful'; and they look for something to cut down and they go to work, they think, 'Oh, maybe I should do this work, because I've got all these other things I'm doing.' I almost feel that in some ways people's lives are too broadly ...

S: Well, as I've said before, there are two ways of approaching this. One can either make

some provision, in the course of every day, for all of one's requirements, or one can spend a few weeks or even a few months concentrating on one, often a few weeks or a few months concentrating on another, and so on. But over, I have sometimes said, the period of a year, in one way or the other, all your requirements should have been met. And different people will find one approach more suitable and others will find the other approach more suitable. But it's not a question of just stress on self-effort, not just a question of being wilful. If there is any wilfulness, it is only in confining oneself to a particular area.

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Prasannasiddhi: I almost feel that people should confine themselves to a few areas, do those things well, and then give themselves space to do things like meditate, and then ...

S: Well, as I said, it's over what period of time you distribute all your different interests. I mean by interests those which are an essential part of the spiritual life. Whether you distribute them over a day or a week or a month or a year, that's up to you. But all those requirements, all those interests, should be catered for sooner or later and certainly within the span of a year, I would say.

Anyway, let's go on, shall we?

Mangala: Now we've got a series of questions about the Bodhisattva, and we start with No. 4, which again is from Abhaya.

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Side Two

Abhaya's third question: We had an inconclusive discussion on whether the Bodhisattva actually suffers with beings in his great compassion for them, or if he does, in what sense? Isn't the Bodhisattva under all circumstances experiencing the bliss of emancipation?

S: I'm not surprised the discussion was inconclusive! I suppose it depends on what you mean by 'suffers'. I have quoted somewhere in this connection Tennyson's phrase 'Some pain less sympathy with pain'. I suppose, at the back of the question, there is the assumption that bliss and pain, or the experience of bliss and the experience of pain, are incompatible. Well, no doubt in our case that is so; we alternate between the one and the other, usually. But one can perhaps conceive, at least theoretically, of the Bodhisattva as experiencing both of them simultaneously. It might be very difficult to find an analogy with that in our own experience, but I think that is the only way that we can look at it: that the Bodhisattva, in a mysterious way that we can only glimpse, does experience the bliss of emancipation and yet does at the same time suffer with beings. I suppose it's an aspect of his experiencing Wisdom and Compassion, prajna and karuna, as non-different; or his being in Nirvana and being in Samsara at the same time. So, if that is possible, presumably it is possible for him to experience the bliss of emancipation at the same time that he suffers with beings through his great compassion.

Perhaps one can even suggest an analogy, a very faint analogy, with ordinary mundane experience, when we are enjoying something very much - maybe we are enjoying a very strenuous game - perhaps we even get hurt in that game; but none the less, though we are experiencing some pain due to the hurt, we are able to go on enjoying the game. The fact that

we are experiencing a certain degree of hurt does not exclude enjoyment of the game. If, of course, it goes beyond a certain point, we cease to be able to enjoy the game, but there is a point, as it were, where we are experiencing some degree of pain but none the less we do experience at the same time the pleasure, the enjoyment, of playing that game. in a sense, you don't notice the pain. It's there, you do feel it, but it's very much at the periphery of consciousness, because you are so much absorbed in the game and you are finding the game so enjoyable. Perhaps it's a little bit like that, just a very little.

Mangala: Perhaps it's not even that you find the game enjoyable; you are just so caught up in the game that you don't really think whether you are enjoying it or not, perhaps. You are just sort of into it.

S: Perhaps you don't. But I think there are some cases where you are actually enjoying the game and can so to speak ignore the pain while continuing to feel the pain; the one not excluding the other, at least not totally. I am only trying to suggest an analogy, not actually to prove anything.

Prasannasiddhi: Abhaya talks of Bodhisattvas suffering with beings. I would have thought it was more that he actually feels for the beings, rather than in a sense suffering with them.

S: Yes, he certainly doesn't suffer in the same way, or in the same sense, as they do, just because he isn't un-Enlightened, and their suffering is due to their being un-Enlightened. it's a sympathy rather than an actual experience. Of course, on the ordinary mundane level, it's quite impossible actually to experience the pain that another person experiences, however sympathetic you [121] are. Someone may have toothache, and you can be as sympathetic as you like but you certainly don't experience what he experiences.

Prasannasiddhi: The Bodhisattvas sort of feel a pain, but it would be the pain of seeing the other people ...

S: It is the pain that others experience pain. He wouldn't be experiencing their pain so much as his own pain that they experience pain, or his own pain on account of the fact that they experience pain. Unless you take the transference that occurs as between beings and the Bodhisattva quite literally, which I think would probably not be at all correct.

Prasannasiddhi: That pain the Bodhisattva feels would be of a specific quality, in a sense.

S: Presumably it wouldn't be that the Bodhisattva and beings were experiencing the same pain, or even the same kind of pain. His pain would be due to his sympathy; not that their pain was as it were literally transferred to him, or that he literally shared in it. So there is pain, but it is painless sympathy with pain, and the sympathy in a way involves a pain of its own.

Nagabodhi: Presumably the Bodhisattva's sympathy is far more painful, say, than mine would be!

S: Yes, well, you might say, 'Sorry about the toothache, ha ha!' The Bodhisattva wouldn't quite be like that, would he? He would be really sympathetic, and no doubt there would be a very great difference between his sympathy and your sympathy; a very great deal of difference between a Bodhisattva's sympathy for beings and one being's sympathy for another being. To

some people, a Bodhisattva's sympathy might not seem like sympathy at all! He doesn't indulge beings.

Prasannasiddhi: Is it suggested that compassion is a painful experience?

S: Well, again, one mustn't take things too literally. One doesn't think of the experience of compassion as being entirely as it were pleasurable, or entirely blissful in the one-sided sense in which we usually understand that term.

Anyway, let's go on.

Saddhaloka's question: What does it mean 'to seek the gnosis of omniscience yet not attain this gnosis at the wrong time. To know the Four Holy Truths, yet not realize those truths at the wrong time'? How can there be a wrong time for Enlightenment? Is this just another way of saying the Bodhisattva puts off his Enlightenment for the sake of all beings?

S: I don't think it's that. I think that this refers to the Bodhisattva attaining the gnosis and realizing the Four Truths at a point when the realization is sufficient to support the gaining of arhantship, but not sufficient to support the gaining of full Enlightenment. Do you see what I mean? In other words, if one accepts the distinction between samyak sambodhi and arhantship as a real distinction, then you require, so to speak, more wisdom to gain samyak sambodhi than to attain arhantship. If you are a Bodhisattva you want to gain samyak sambodhi. So you don't develop the gnosis of omniscience, you don't develop the realization of the Four Truths so that they can become a basis for the realization of arhantship but not for the [122] realization of samyak sambodhi.

So in a sense the expression is contradictory, because 'seek the gnosis of omniscience yet not attain this gnosis at the wrong time' - 'wrong time' I suppose really means when that gnosis is not fully developed. The Bodhisattva hasn't to settle down in a partial attainment of that gnosis; he has to push on. So one mustn't take the expression 'wrong time' literally. At the same time, of course, one can't help remembering that the whole distinction between samyak sambodhi and arhantship is really quite artificial and in a sense, if one takes it literally, due to historical developments rather than to the doctrine itself. But the general sense is very clear: that one shouldn't as it were settle down in a partial experience of Enlightenment, even though it may be a genuine experience of Enlightenment so far as it goes; to the extent that there is anything further to realize you must continue to make an effort, you must continue to seek, or you must continue to realize. Which fits in with what I have said about, in a sense, the Buddha's Enlightenment not being final; that is to say, that the Buddha didn't so to speak settle down in a static realization which thereafter remained the same.

So, if one takes the expression 'a wrong time' literally - well, clearly there can't be a wrong time for Enlightenment; but there is the possibility that one will settle down in and take as ultimate an experience, whether of omniscience or of the Four Truths, which is in fact only partial. So there can't be a wrong time for Enlightenment, but you can think you are Enlightened and don't have to make any further effort when in fact you are not, and still do have to make a further effort. I think we can say that is what it really means; to the extent that the question is really intelligible at all.

The historical development of Buddhism vis-a-vis the development of the Mahayana from the

Hinayana, so to speak, or vis-a-vis the relations between the Hinayana and the Mahayana, sometimes makes it very difficult to explain things.

Subhuti: Do you think the literal dimension of that difference between the arhant and the Bodhisattva is that the arhant gains Enlightenment in a context in which there is already the teaching alive and Enlightenment still to be gained, and the Bodhisattva gains Enlightenment on his own, as it were? Has that got absolutely no relevance at all?

S: Well, in the Pali Canon the Buddha is represented as saying that his disciples are Enlightened as he is Enlightened. There is the fact that he has gained Enlightenment first, so that in a way does suggest, at the very least, more of pioneering spirit, more of initiative. But if there was literally no difference between the Buddha's Enlightenment and that of his disciples, that pioneering spirit, that initiative, cannot ultimately be part of the Enlightenment experience itself.

Subhuti: But I was thinking that, for instance, you could decide to stay in England and live in a community and further your own development and do what you could for the Movement within the context of such a situation; or you could decide to go to South America and set up a centre on your own and just move things forward in that way. Isn't in a sense what is being said that you are in some senses more useful if you are a Bodhisattva, because you are going out into the wilds and bringing the Dharma to people who have got no connection with it at all? Isn't it that sort of difference: that, whether you are working in a centre in Patagonia or in England, your spiritual development is still your spiritual development - there is no difference - but what you are doing may be more useful to a wider number of beings?

[123]
S: Yes. I agree with that, but on the other hand I can't help feeling that that kind of pioneering spirit, that kind of initiative, does have some bearing on the actual spiritual life itself; that virya paramita is a paramita.

Subhuti: So, wherever you are, if you are developing, that must be present.

S: Yes.

Subhuti: But I was wondering ...

S: So if your not, say, going to Patagonia is an expression of absence of virya, then you are definitely not leading the spiritual life to the extent that the person who goes off to Patagonia is leading it. Of course, the person who goes off to Patagonia may not be practising virya paramita; he may simply be restless. There is that also. But, in the case of the person who stays at home and lives in a spiritual community, co-op and centre, there should be visible, so to speak, the same degree of virya, but it will simply be exercised in a different way. It won't take him to Patagonia but perhaps it will take him to a lot of places in the neighbourhood. He may be putting a lot of it into taking classes and so on, or even into his own meditation.

But if one is thinking in terms of usefulness to others, I suppose, yes, one can be useful spreading the Dharma more widely; one can be useful teaching a small number of people very intensively; one can be useful, perhaps, just meditating by oneself and exerting, perhaps - one can't be sure - some other, more subtle influence.

Mangala: One can be useful just by helping other people who might be more useful than you are!

S: Yes, indeed.

Mangala: You might not be doing the Dharma teaching yourself, but you might be enabling others to do it.

S: Yes, indeed. That is also quite important. That seems to have been Ananda's function, to a great extent, though he was quite capable of preaching the Dharma on his own account.

Subhuti: The trouble is, when you are talking against the background of countless kalpas, when there is no Buddha and so forth, it is a bit different from talking about Patagonia and England. I am just wondering whether there is anything in it at all. In a sense, all the Bodhisattva does is determine to go through the whole drama of his development in a time when nobody else is doing it, and thereby bring it to people who just wouldn't encounter it otherwise.

S: Well, the traditional Mahayana certainly does take that teaching quite literally. I suppose it is quite a question for us whether we do take it literally or whether we regard it as having a symbolical meaning. Perhaps that is a question that we aren't able really to answer just yet. I don't think it can be ruled out as an impossibility - the traditional view of the Bodhisattva's career. But if one does take it quite literally in the traditional manner, or what appears to us to be in a literal manner, then all sorts of other doctrinal adjustments will need to be made.

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Prasannasiddhi: Couldn't you take it as a myth, but that in no sense lessens its value, because myths do have a strong emotional impact on people? So to take the spirit, in a sense, of what's been said.

S: I think if you take a myth as myth, knowing it as myth in the modern, sophisticated sense, well, even so, just as myth taken in that sense, it does have an effect on you. But I think if you are also able to believe that the myth is literally true, it has a greater effect on you still; perhaps a very much greater effect. It is just like in Christianity: if you believe that the resurrection of Christ has a deep symbolical significance, even though he didn't literally rise from the dead, well, yes, that does have an influence on you, it's a very meaningful symbol, then, the Resurrection; but if you believe as an orthodox Christian that Christ literally rose from the dead because he was the Son of God and that inherent power was in him, I think your belief will have much deeper foundations, in a sense, or at least you will be much more strongly motivated. I think this is one of the quite basic questions that have to be faced nowadays - not only by Christians, but in some ways, perhaps, by Buddhists too.

Nagabodhi: What - we don't believe our myths, we don't really believe?

S: Yes, I think there is a difference between believing a myth as true and believing a myth, or accepting a myth or understanding a myth as just myth, in what I called the modern, sophisticated sense - say, 'Ah, well, it isn't true, we mustn't take it literally, but, yes, it's got some meaning'; and then appreciating the meaning and perhaps even being influenced by it. But that, I think, is quite a different thing from taking the myth not to be a myth but to be

literal truth, whether historical truth or not; usually, of course, historical truth, in the case of Christianity, at least. In the case of Buddhism, or certainly early Buddhism, the taking of myth or what seems to be myth as literal truth doesn't seem to occupy such an important place. It's peripheral. For instance, supposing you read that the Buddha walked up and down in the air, emitting water and fire at the same time. Well, you can believe that quite literally, and no doubt you would find it quite inspiring, but taking that myth - if it is a myth - quite literally and believing in it literally doesn't occupy nearly such a central place in Buddhism as believing that Christ literally rose from the dead, you know, literally ascended into heaven.

So Buddhism has its myths which in the past were taken literalistically, but they don't seem to occupy such a central place in Buddhism - except, perhaps, in the Mahayana, the myth, if it is a myth, of the Bodhisattva's career! Though that myth, of course, is found in the Hinayana too, but only with regard to the career of what we call the historical Buddha.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose if people could actually maintain a connection with that myth of the Bodhisattva's career, as long as it doesn't seem too difficult for them so that they lose touch with it and no longer respond ...

S: Yes, I think that for the vast majority of people, if they do understand that myth of the Bodhisattva's career literally, they cannot but feel that it is completely beyond them. It reduces them to utter impotence - if they've got enough imagination to take it literally! Some people don't have enough imagination to take it literally. It's too staggering, as it were. Therefore, I have suggested that one thinks in terms of one Bodhisattva, one Bodhicitta, and regards one's own individual Bodhicitta and individual Bodhisattva life as a [125] manifestation of that, or as representing one's participation in the life and career of the one Bodhisattva. Do you see what I mean?

Prasannasiddhi: Myth on a lower sort of level.

S: In a way; yes, it's more approachable; it's even, in a way, not exactly a compromise but a sort of middle way.

Subhuti: (...) stepped down - sort of power element.

S: In a way, yes; stepped down in the sense the electric current is stepped down. Because otherwise, if you don't step it down, what happens? It just - what happens?

Subhuti: It's stepped down by a transformer.

S: But what happens if you don't have that transformer?

Subhuti: The wires would burn through.

S: That's right, the wires are burned. The fuse blows.

Mangala: You are suggesting that people take one Bodhisattva rather than many Bodhisattvas?

S: No, no, no - I can't explain it all again now, but (Laughter.) - where have I explained this?

Subhuti: Tuscany.

S: It's all on tape, yes. No, not one particular Bodhisattva in preference to others, but seeing all the archetypal Bodhisattvas as different aspects of one Bodhisattva, or one Bodhisattva spirit or one Bodhicitta at work, so to speak, in the universe; and taking one's own aspiration after the Bodhisattva Ideal as representing a sort of participation in that career of the one Bodhisattva, under your own particular circumstances and conditions. This is broadly what I have said. I think I would be prepared to take that personal interpretation of mine quite literally; do you see what I mean? I am not sure that I can take the traditional Mahayana doctrine of the Bodhisattva's career quite literally; I'm not sure that I can. Quite apart from the question of any personal aspiration after it, I doubt if I can take it completely literally.

Nagabodhi: A further stepping down of the current is the idea of the Order as one Bodhisattva, and the increasing use of the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara.

S: Yes, I suppose it is - I wouldn't say a further stepping down, maybe another aspect of that same stepping down, another way of putting it. In some ways it's a stepping up, because instead of just one person, yourself, participating in the Bodhisattva's vow or the Bodhicitta, you've got a whole group of people or Sangha of people who are doing that in association with one another. Perhaps it is not even a stepping up, even though it isn't a stepping down. They are two aspects of the same thing or the same process - one individual, the other as it were collective.

Nagabodhi: It does become absolutely believable.

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Nagabodhi: In the Shrine Room at the Convention, when (...) in fact absolutely believe it, identify with it.

S: So on account of the fact that you can believe in myth as myth and you can believe in myth as - well, as history; there's a tremendous difference of perhaps energy and zeal as between those who believe in one way and those who believe in the other. Those who believe in the other way are mainly the fundamentalists, who believe everything quite literally, whether it's the Bible, the Koran, or ...

Nagabodhi: Or the White Lotus Sutra; yes.

S: Yes, that does give a sort of charge of energy that the more, shall I say relaxed, alternative approach doesn't seem to give.

Prasannasiddhi: Though it may not be very skilful energy.

S: Well, from our point of view, yes. You might meet someone who says, 'God has told me to do this.' If he literally believes that God has told him to do it, if he literally believes in God, or that kind of God, it's very difficult to stop him. But if someone says: 'Well, I think on reflection and after talking it over with my friends that perhaps I should do so-and-so,' there is not the same sort of impetus, is there?

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, but it might be - the person who has come to a considered decision

might be just as determined but more skilful.

S: Yes. But he usually doesn't achieve so much, does he?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, you perhaps are an example of someone who ...

S: I don't feel I've achieved very much. I feel that lots of more fanatical people have achieved, in a sense - at least externally - more than I have.

Mangala: Like the Buddha.

S: Well, in some ways, the Buddha didn't achieve all that much. I'm not thinking in terms of his spiritual attainment, but in preaching the Dharma. There was that famous scandal, almost, some years ago, when one of the Beatles, or perhaps all of them, said that they had reached more people than Jesus Christ. But it's absolutely true. How many people did he reach in his lifetime - even if he did actually live? The Beatles weren't saying - well, they might have seemed to say it but they didn't really mean - that they had done better than Christ but only that they had reached more people, influenced more people; whether they influenced them for better or worse, that's another matter. Perhaps there were other Buddhist teachers in history who actually influenced more people than the Buddha did. There were certainly people in history with more disciples than the Buddha had; probably Rajneesh had, or has, far more! But they were only concerned with quantity, not with quality.

But it's as though one of the problems for - I was going to say Buddhists in the West, but perhaps I should say just for the FWBO, is finding some sort of positive counterpart of that fanatical zeal that activates some other people, whether followers of different forms of Buddhism or followers of fundamentalist [127] Christianity and so on. You know what Yeats says - something comparable, which I've quoted before:

'The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.'

You very rarely have someone who may be said to be of the best, but who is still 'full of passionate intensity'; that is to say, one whose passionate intensity is positive rather than negative. You get lots of people with a negative passionate intensity, but very few, it seems, with a positive passionate intensity.

Mangala: Do you think that has been generally true throughout Buddhist history, or particularly just today?

S: No, I don't think it has been true throughout Buddhist history. Look at someone like Yuen Chuang, look at someone like Milarepa. But I think perhaps there hasn't been in Buddhism that emphasis on virya paramita which one might have expected. Think, for instance, that Buddhists in the East seem quite content to practise Buddhism in the East, without even thinking, in almost all cases, of spreading Buddhism in the West, even when they became aware of the existence of the West. In the seventeenth century, there was an embassy that went from Thailand to France, sent by the king of Thailand to the king of France, who was then Louis XIV; but we don't ever read that anyone in Thailand was interested in sending bhikkhus to France to preach the Dharma; there is no mention of that at all. You might say

that it wasn't very safe to do, because probably he would have been executed, would have been burned at the stake. But Christians went to the East and spread Christianity regardless of any danger to their life - many of them. Even though, luckily for them, usually, the East was much more tolerant than the West! But they were prepared to die; some of them went and tried to preach among the Muslims and did suffer death. St. Francis of Assisi did, and he got away with it.

Subhuti: Are you suggesting that's because of the lack of a myth, or the lack of centrality of myth?

S: Well, yes, perhaps, I won't be sure of this - the lack of a central myth which is taken literally. Also - it's not just that, it's a much more complex issue; it's all perhaps due to some extent to the universalism of Buddhism, though sometimes Christians are motivated to spread the gospel because they believe that people who don't hear it will perish in the worst possible sense, for ever; Buddhists don't believe that. A Buddhist can quite easily believe, well, maybe there is some good in Christianity, maybe it does help people, at least It's a deva-and-heaven yana, at least they'll get as far as that. Very few Buddhists, I think, if any, would think that a Christian will necessarily go to hell. A Buddhist will say, well, even Devadatta will one day gain Enlightenment, (not) to speak of a Christian. So a Buddhist wouldn't feel the urgency of going and spreading the Dharma among Christians in the way that perhaps some Christians at least feel the urgency of spreading the gospel among the heathen.

Mangala: Could it be something as simple as the fact that Buddhism started in the East? Some people think the Eastern mind, or Eastern temperament ...

S: But is there an Eastern mind, is there an Eastern temperament? There are Indians, there are Tibetans, there are Chinese, there are Japanese, there are [128] Burmese. To me, having known some of them, they seem very, very different. I don't see an Eastern mind at all.

Mangala: Yes ...

Prasannasiddhi: I was wondering if it might not be associated with the development in Europe of things like ships and all the sort of global exploration, and in the wake of that you ...

S: Well, this is quite true, that the missionary followed the flag and all that sort of thing. But once the contact was established, a really zealous Buddhist could presumably have taken advantage of that contact to come to the West and preach his religion.

Subhuti: But there was quite a lot of missionary zeal, wasn't there, at certain phases of Buddhist history?

S: Oh yes, indeed.

Subhuti: So it's not as if it's never been there.

S: Right, yes. It's almost as though ...

Subhuti: They did put themselves in quite difficult positions.

S: Yes, indeed. It's as though Buddhism had become moribund. But why it should have become moribund, and how exactly it happened, is perhaps a bit of a mystery. After all, Yuen Chuang(?) went all the way from China to India on foot, which was pretty difficult; but there were no Yuen Chuangs, it seems, in China in the nineteenth century willing to take advantage of the contacts which had been developed between China and the West to spread the Dharma in the West.

Perhaps you could say - again, this is a generalization - that the obvious material superiority of the West had resulted in a loss of confidence on the part of the nations of the East, and that that lack of confidence influenced even Buddhists.

Prasannasiddhi: Or perhaps it was just that all the historical links between the East and the West occurred at a time when Buddhism was in decline. If they had gone to the East when Yuen Chuang was there, he probably would have come (...)

S: Yes. The question of why Buddhism should have deteriorated to that extent is difficult to say. You might say that by the time all the Victorian missionaries went to the East, Christianity had deteriorated very much, but then I sometimes think it was not so much the power of Christian conviction that sent them to the East but, to a great extent perhaps, the force of imperial expansion. They went as empire-building Englishmen as much as they did as preachers of the gospel. I saw quite a bit of that in Kalimpong; in fact, I've just been writing about it.

Nagabodhi: I've been to various conferences and the like in the Western Buddhist world, and I've seen how touchy people immediately become as soon as someone starts to be a bit forceful. There's the reactions to Subhuti's Old Net ...

S: Yes, indeed. The monsters don't like being caught!

[129]
Nagabodhi: Well; and also in the Movement sometimes, in a situation that has been fairly stable, someone, or a few people, start to show a lot of initiative and drive, it often brings about a conflict as to whether this is really what we should be doing. It made me wonder whether somewhere quite deeply embedded in Buddhism is a problem: the problem of initiative and will, again.

S: But don't forget we are also dealing with Britain, and I just wonder what effect Britain's imperial decline has had on the national psyche, as it were.

Mangala: Bhante, you have said several times, I think, that Tibetan Buddhism very much stressed virya ...

S: Yes, that's true.

Mangala: But before the Chinese invasion the Tibetans didn't try to go outside and spread the Dharma very much, did they?

S: That's true, they didn't. I sometimes have found that. They had perhaps virya, but not enough of virya paramita. The Tibetans are a very strenuous, hard-working people, so they've

got the virya but that only provides a basis for the development of virya paramita; it is not virya paramita in itself.

Prasannasiddhi: But perhaps - did they have a very strong conception of the countries outside Tibet? Perhaps they thought - like China: they probably thought, well, Buddhism's already in China, we don't want ...

S: They didn't know very much about, well, even India at one stage. They certainly didn't know very much, if anything, about the West. The Gelugpas, of course, did their best to spread the Dharma in Mongolia and did succeed quite well.

Prasannasiddhi: There was Buddhism in China, so they probably thought, well, ...

S: But then the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was well aware of the West, well aware of the existence of the different Western countries; but even he, though a very enterprising individual, doesn't seem ever to have thought in terms of sending lamas to preach the Dharma in England, Russia - those were the two countries he was best acquainted with.

[130]
Tape 2

S: It did just occur to me that perhaps one of the reasons why I have a certain amount of initiative is that at a crucial period of my life I was In India; not only at a crucial period of my life, but at a crucial time in India's history, where there was a tremendous sense of released energies after Independence, and even of an expanding economy. So I missed that period in British history where Britain was trying to come to terms with the fact that it had virtually lost its empire, and didn't occupy that imperial role any more. Recently - this is in connection with the general election - I was reading someone to the effect that it used to be said of Britain that she had lost her empire and not yet found a role, but that that is no longer true since Mrs Thatcher came along, that she has as it were found a role for Britain. I think there is some truth in that. But I am very conscious of the difference of atmosphere as between the two countries in this respect. I have spoken about it: that in India one is living in an expanding economy. People are very conscious of possibilities of improving themselves, possibilities of raising their standard of living, possibilities of having better education, better jobs, better everything. But there isn't that sort of atmosphere in Britain. Well, there begins to be a little bit now, due, rightly or wrongly or in a good way or a bad way, to Mrs Thatcher. I think maybe that is her important contribution, to change the emotional climate in that sort of way.

Mangala: I remember you saying once, Bhante, that if you were a young man again you would go to America.

S: Mm. Of course - I don't know when I said that - but certainly when I did say it perhaps America was in a better state than it is now.

Subhuti: I must say that to me that is one of the greatest attractions of Spain. It does seem to be an expanding country.

S: Ah. It's as though that's the sort of wave that you need to take advantage of. To quote Shakespeare:

'There is a tide in the affairs of men
That, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.'

So it would seem that, in the case of any large-scale movement, there needs to be a sort of co-operation, even a sort of conjunction, between the individual effort of certain people and certain larger social and political developments; otherwise you don't achieve very much in quantity, however good your achievement is in terms of quality. We couldn't have done so well in India, in Poona, if it had not been for Ambedkar's work as it were laying a foundation for ours.

Subhuti: And in Britain we had the wave of the sixties, didn't we?

S: Yes, indeed. The FWBO in Britain took advantage of the wave of the sixties, and the FWBO in India, at a rather later stage, took advantage of the wave of the fifties, the mass conversion wave.

Subhuti: It is quite interesting, one of the comments that Ken Jones made in a private letter to me was that he thought what was wrong with the FWBO was too much accent on virya at the expense of kshanti.

[131]
S: Well, perhaps; but that doesn't mean - again, we go back to one of these questions - you shouldn't have an emphasis on virya, but if the emphasis on virya means no emphasis on kshanti, clearly one has misunderstood kshanti or one has distributed or apportioned one's energies wrongly. Because you need virya to practise kshanti, of course; this is what the Mahayana scriptures tell us, that virya is an integral part of all the paramitas.

Prasannasiddhi: Too much emphasis on virya, in the FWBO?

S: Well, I suppose he meant too many external activities and not enough meditation and so on. He probably meant something of that sort. Maybe you (Subhuti) should have asked him to explain himself more fully. I mean how intimately does he know the FWBO, anyway? You could estimate someone's virya, perhaps, because it has objective external consequences, but how do you estimate someone's kshanti? It's not so easy! Nobody knows how much kshanti I've got, because nobody knows how much I have to put up with! - and that's because I don't complain, very often. Probably we could all say that! But one's virya is much more evident, isn't it? If you hit someone on the head just once, everybody sees that, but if you refrain from hitting him on the head a hundred times, nobody sees that at all! I think Ken Jones could not have thought very carefully before writing that letter.

Anyway, perhaps we should press on.

Ratnaguna's question: When Manjusri decides to go to visit Vimalakirti as he lies apparently sick in his bed, a quarter of the Bodhisattvas and one sixteenth of the arhants decided to accompany Manjusri. In the lecture you say that you're sure there is some significance in these figures, but you've no time to go into it in the lecture, in fact you hadn't yet worked it out.

We came up with two possible interpretations: 1) being present when Vimalakirti and

Manjusri got together would have meant change; everyone would have had to rise to another level of being if they listened to the exchange. Therefore, less arhants than Bodhisattvas were willing to subject themselves to such a change. ii) only a quarter of the Bodhisattvas and one sixteenth of the arhants were able to go to the level where Manjusri and Vimalakirti would meet. Any other interpretations?

S: I think the first of these two interpretations is certainly a possible interpretation, but the only further thoughts I have had relate to the actual figures. A sixteenth of the arhants decide to accompany Manjusri, and a quarter of the Bodhisattvas, so the arhants are only a quarter of the number of the Bodhisattvas.

Subhuti: It depends how many their respective numbers were.

S: Does it? Oh dear.

Subhuti: If you had more arhants than Bodhisattvas, then ...

S: Ah. It is a question that the proportion would be the same, wouldn't it?

Subhuti: Yes, the proportion.

S: So you've got here a quarter, which is one fourth, and you've got one sixteenth, which is four fourths.(?) So you've got all fours or multiples of [132] four. Four is the number, apparently, of stability, and eight especially is the figure of stability, as far as I know from numerology. I did have a little interest in these things once, because I found that all my own birth numbers were eights, therefore numbers of stability, because first of all I was born in the eighth month, wasn't I? Yes: and I was born on the 26th day: 2+6=8. And I was born in 1925: 1+9+2+5=8.

Subhuti: 1+9+2+5?

S: Yes, that's how they do it, numerically. Or numerologically.

Prasannasiddhi: 1+9+2+5=17, and 1+7 = 8.

Subhuti: Ah!

S: So this is another possible line of approach, that's all I'm suggesting, via this fact, that all the numbers mentioned are multiples of 4. But I haven't really followed it up more than that. Clearly, yes, one would expect Bodhisattvas to be more willing to go than arhants; I think that's pretty obvious. (Laughter.)

Subhuti: Even the Bodhisattvas aren't very willing to go. Only a proportion.

S: That's right, yes. I think the Bodhisattvas are doing rather well, actually - even the arhants! I think we don't need to go into that any more, do we?

Satyaraja's question: In the lecture 'History versus Myth in Man's Quest for Meaning' (146/13), you say: "...we exist in both realms. We exist in the realm of historical reality, we

exist in the realm of archetypal reality. We exist in them all the time. Even though in the case of the realm of archetypal reality we may not be conscious of the fact." In what way do we exist in the realm of archetypal reality 'all the time'?

S: I suppose the logical reply to that is obviously (that) we exist in it unconsciously! Well, isn't it? That is in fact the case, I think. To give an illustration, say, from the dream state: when we are asleep, when we are in the dream state, we exist, one might say, in the dream realm; we have all sorts of dream experiences. But what happens when we wake up? We are not conscious of the dream state, we are not in the dream state as we were when we were asleep and dreaming, but has that dream state ceased to exist? Are not, let us say, those feelings, those emotions which we experienced in the dream state continuing, so to speak, until next time, until we descend, in a manner of speaking, into that dream state. Isn't it like a sort of subterranean river or underground river that we descend into from time to time through a hole in the ground? But it is flowing there all the time; there is continuity between dreams. You can even have a dream, then wake up and fall asleep again, and continue with the same dream, as though it has been going on all the time; you just pick up from where it's got to. So, in a sense, you are all the time living in that dream realm, that dream world, aren't you? I think you've only got to extend that to the realm of archetypal experience. You are, in a sense, existing in that realm, the realm of archetypal reality, all the time; just as, in a way, you are existing in the dream realm all the time, or even existing, perhaps, in the waking state all the time. Because if you continue to be in the dream state or dream realm even when you are not consciously experiencing it, surely you continue to exist in the waking state even when you are not [133] consciously experiencing it. I suspect, though, that they are not quite complementary in that way.

Subhuti: Yes, because otherwise you would have to say that you are experiencing the conscious state unconsciously.

S: Yes. But you could say that you were experiencing the conscious state - oh, I've missed it now; it's a very subtle point - you continue to exist in the no, I'll leave it. (laughter.) It was very subtle. Well, naturally! Clearly, you can't be conscious and unconscious in the same sense at the same time. That isn't possible.

Nagabodhi: There has been some research into dreams and lucid dreamers recently, where they've actually got lucid dreamers to send signals to people in the labs who are measuring minute muscular spasms where in the dream a person on a lovely desert is land is stamping his feet. They have actually taught them to communicate in Morse from the dream state, which they are totally living in, to people as it were in the waking state.

S: Presumably they programmed them beforehand?

Nagabodhi: Oh, yes, long, long periods of education which ...

S: Hypnosis, possibly.

Nagabodhi: - don't just got hold of ...

S: Yes, because you can put someone in a hypnotic state, can't you, and give them an instruct ion, and - for instance, that they will blow their nose, say, a minute after going out of the

hypnotic state, and they will do that but not realize that they are following an instruction. So that suggests that the command which they were given in the hypnotic state still exists, so to speak, in the waking state when they are not hypnotized.

Subhuti: I don't think that's usually the way in which such dream experiments are conducted. I think it's ...

S: No, I am not referring to dream experiences as such, but just to hypnosis. Because the state of being under hypnosis is analogous to the dream state, or the sleeping state, at least. The fact that in the waking state, having been hypnotized, you perform the action which you were instructed to perform in the hypnotized state shows that the hypnotized state, so to speak, still exists within you at that time, because it is exerting its effect. Unless, of course, you have, possibly, a purely sort of behaviouristic psychology. But I don't know quite how that would work.

Nagabodhi: Presumably, that you are to some extent living in the archetypal realm, or living out, is to maybe have your life powered by a myth, which perhaps you are only dimly conscious of but which you have assimilated. I am talking of the followers of Dr Ambedkar to some extent.

S: Yes, there is some connection. But, again, we use the word myth so loosely that perhaps it doesn't convey the right sort of meaning, even the right sort of emphasis. The word archetypal to me seems much stronger than the word myth.

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Subhuti: I suppose there is an analogy here. Sometimes if you have a very strong dream, it affects you through the day.

S: Oh yes.

Subhuti: Could it be a bit like that in the archetypal dimensions?

S: Yes, in other words its presence continues during the day, yes. You are being affected from that realm, and to some extent you are conscious of it; to some extent you are living in that realm.

Nagabodhi: Visualization practice (...)

S: Yes, provided it's done, so to speak, properly or really experienced, and isn't just a rather painful concentration exercise. In the life of Scott I read that when he was writing one of his novels he would really be living in that world, so to speak, be quite abstracted from the external world, even though he was a very practical and active person and could return to the world of ordinary everyday reality if necessary, but when he didn't have to return he was very obviously absorbed in his imaginative world and really living in that and experiencing it, even carrying on conversations, apparently, with the characters in that world.

Prasannasiddhi: I almost got the impression that what Satyaraja was trying to say is: 'What is there that is archetypal about the common, everyday experience that people have, or that maybe quite a few people have?'

S: I think the answer to that is more or less in what Subhuti said, taking the dream that affects the waking state as an analogy.

Subhuti: You suddenly feel that events are significant, don't you, in a certain way, (extra)ordinary. You suddenly feel they've got some ...

S: Yes. Many Christians believe in the myth, as we might call it, of the divine Providence. They can believe that, when you opened a certain book and your eyes fell on a certain verse, that was a message directly and providentially sent by God. Or even when something just happens to you; I mean they invest that apparently trivial happening with tremendous mythic significance, as we might say.

Subhuti: I remember one conversation with (...) He was describing how when he spoke the sun came out, and then he said something else and it started to rain. He obviously experienced his - using archetype in a rather different way - but he experienced his myth as something ...

S: Well, we have our very own example of that kind of thing, when a certain famous speaker defied God, and at once there was a response from the heavens! (Laughter.) Unfortunately, he didn't have complete faith in his own myth; I believe he made a joke about it! But what he perhaps ought to have said was: 'Well, you see! There is a God, but he is not as powerful as he thinks he is. He is not really omnipotent, he is just a rather old-fashioned thunder god.'

Prasannasiddhi: (announces his name very slowly as usual. Laughter.)

Subhuti: It's like the subterranean stream!

[135]
Prasannasiddhi: Could you say that the six realms of existence in the Tibetan Wheel of Life were archetypal realms and had an archetypal reality to them?

S: I'm not sure what you mean by archetypal, which is a rather overworked term. They represent states of existence, one might say, which can actually be experienced, which are therefore in a sense innate within you.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose they are sort of patterns of experience.

S: It depends what one means by a pattern in this case. But they are regarded as objectively existing, as well as subjectively existing. But perhaps in the end the two come to the same thing, because you don't experience a realm without experiencing the corresponding state.

Anyway, perhaps we'd better press on. We've got a little way to go.

Dharmadhara's question: In what sense are you using the term 'contingent' in the lecture? Is it equivalent to talking about the 'conditioned'? Is the term 'conditioned' equivalent to the term 'conditional'?

S: 'Contingent' really means 'conditional'. 'Contingent' means dependent upon certain factors or circumstances not arising independently. So, yes, it is equivalent to the conditional. I think that's really quite straightforward. The dictionary makes it quite clear.

Tejamitra's question: Among the Buddhists celebrating Buddha Jayanti in 1957 you mentioned a party of Russian Buddhists. Were they Mongolian Buddhists? Do you know very much about Buddhism in Russia nowadays?

S: Well, first of all, I don't really know anything about Buddhism in Russia nowadays. With regard to the party of Russians celebrating Buddha Jayanti in 1957 in New Delhi, they were of Mongolian or Tibetan descent. That was pretty clear from their features. They had a Russian interpreter with them, who was not a Mongolian. I tried, with a Tibetan friend, to have contact with the leader of the party, who was a monk, wearing the usual Tibetan-style monastic robes; so, suspecting that he didn't know any English, but possibly spoke Tibetan, I took an English-knowing Tibetan friend along with me, and we were all staying together at the Asoka Hotel and the desk had a list of who was staying in which room; so we went and knocked on the door of the room where the leader of the party or delegation was staying, and the door opened and there was the secretary, the interpreter - clearly, they had changed the rooms around and given the wrong numbers; you see? That is to say, the secretary, who must have been the man in charge; so that anyone doing what we had done would not meet the monk himself but would meet him. And he seemed not really able to understand what we were saying. I forget the details, but we didn't get to meet that monk, that lama. There were several of them, apart from him; and I think this Tibetan friend of mine, as far as I remember, said that he had overheard them talking among themselves and they were not speaking in Tibetan. Someone even suggested - one just doesn't know with Buddhists from some other country - that actually they weren't monks at all but had just been dressed up in monks' robes for the occasion by the Russians. There was that suggestion made. I really don't know. But they were certainly - the monks or professed monks - were certainly prevented, actually prevented, by the secretary who was in charge of them, from having any contact with other Buddhists. There is no doubt about that.

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Subhuti: There were some Russian Buddhists at the Peace Pagoda; there was one, I noticed.

Nagabodhi: We tried to talk to him.

Subhuti: No, that was a Mongolian. But the Russian was definitely Mongoloid or Tibetan.

Mangala: I was talking to Bodhisri's (mother?), and she had been to a Mongolian monastery, in Russia, I suppose; but (...) in the East;and she brought back postcards and things. There is actually a monastery there, or at least ...

S: Of course, that isn't Russia, though it is under Russian influence. Yes, I think it is known that some of Buddhism survives in Mongolia, though very little of it.

All right, let's have the last question.

Ratnaguna's third question: At the beginning of the lecture you talk about a Chinese mural painting (or copy of a mural painting) which you saw in New Delhi during the Buddha Jayanti celebrations, depicting the meeting between Manjusri and Vimalakirti. Do you know if there is a reproduction of this painting in any book?

S: To the best of my knowledge there isn't any reproduction of that particular painting, but

there are nowadays books on Chinese Buddhist art, Central Asian Buddhist art, which do contain reproductions of this type of painting. I can't really say more than that. All right, that's it. We've covered a little more ground.

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PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Mangala, Dharmadhara, Kovida, Prasannasiddhi, Bodhiraja, Padmaraja, Padmavajra

Mangala: Today is 16 June, and we are going to be asking questions on three lectures on the Vimalakirti Nirdesa series. We've got two questions left over from last week's lecture, No. 5; we've got two questions from lecture No. 6 and one question from lecture No. 8.

The reason we are combining questions from different lectures in this session is that we had only seven sessions available in which to cover eight lectures, and as Lectures 6 and 8 had very few questions each, they seemed the obvious ones to combine. Next week, hopefully, we finish off with questions on lecture No. 7.

So tonight we are going to start off with two questions from lecture No. 5. The first one is from Saddhaloka and concerns the Bodhisattva entering parinirvana.

Saddhaloka's question: Does a Bodhisattva of the tenth (or eleventh) bhumi have any choice but to enter parinirvana at his death? Is it misleading to try and speak of him as choosing a future rebirth for the sake of living beings, just as it is misleading to try and speak of what happens to a Buddha when he dies?

S: I'm not quite clear how this question is related to the text. I don't know if anybody has looked into that.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps I should have mentioned it is related to Vimalakirti's speech in chapter 5.

S: Yes, but I have read through that speech and I still don't see how it relates to it; certainly not at all directly. But I did find that the question is in a sense answered indirectly, in the sense that it is made quite superfluous, quite unnecessary. I'll just read you the passage. Vimalakirti says:

'Great compassion that falls into sentimentally purposive views only exhausts the Bodhisattva in his reincarnations, but the great compassion which is free of involvement with sentimentally purposive views does not exhaust the Bodhisattva in all his reincarnations. He does not reincarnate through involvement with such views, but reincarnates with his mind free of involvement. Hence even his reincarnation is like liberation. Being reincarnated as If being liberated, he has the power and ability to teach the Dharma which liberates living beings from their bondage.'

So, in the light of that quotation, if one looks at the question: 'Does a Bodhisattva of the tenth or eleventh bhumi have any choice but to enter parinirvana at his death?' one sees that the question is really quite meaningless. In a sense there is no choice, because the Bodhisattva

doesn't see entering parinirvana and not entering parinirvana as being mutually exclusive. There isn't any choice for him because there is nothing for him to choose between. That is made very clear when Vimalakirti says 'He does not reincarnate through involvement with such views' - that is to say, 'sentimentally purposive views', which I take to mean views such as 'Oh, I shall save such-and-such beings out of compassion'. He doesn't reincarnate out of those sentimentally purposive views, but he reincarnates, from our point of view, because he doesn't see any difference between reincarnation and non-reincarnation; doesn't see any [138] difference between samsara and Nirvana. And it is in that that his liberation consists; it is on that account that he can as it were liberate living beings. So it does seem that the question is based on a failure to grasp that point. If one speaks of a Bodhisattva of the tenth or eleventh bhumi, one is speaking of a very advanced, very exalted Bodhisattva indeed, and of him least of all could it be said that there was any choice, because he doesn't discriminate between reborn and remaining in samsara. Therefore, 'Is it misleading to try and speak of him as choosing a future rebirth for the sake of living beings...?' Yes it is, because that is what the text calls a 'sentimentally purposive view' - 'just as it is misleading to try and speak of what happens to a Buddha when he dies' - because, yes, the Pali texts certainly make it very clear that one can't speak of the Buddha ceasing to exist after his bodily death nor not ceasing to exist nor both nor neither. One could say much the same thing of the Bodhisattva; but the Mahayana says it - and perhaps it is of this sort - in a rather different way.

Mangala: Is it also said, though, that the Bodhisattva, from the point of view of wisdom, sees that no beings exist, but from the point of view of compassion sees that beings do exist?

S: That is certainly said, but one needs to take the spirit of that. It doesn't mean that there are two aspects of the Bodhisattva quite literally, or two qualities or two attributes, one called Wisdom and one called Compassion. It is not as though he has two eyes, you know, a Wisdom eye and a Compassion eye, and with one sees the voidness and with the other sees living beings. It is just that attempt to communicate something of the nature of that non-dualistic outlook. Even when one speaks of a non-dualistic outlook, one is being self-contradictory, because the minute you speak of 'an outlook', which suggests someone who is out-looking and something at which he out-looks or looks out, one is involved with duality. In a way, it seems strange to ask this sort of question - 'Does a Bodhisattva of the tenth bhumi have any choice but to enter parinirvana at his death?' when the whole chapter is about non-choice, because it is about non-duality. There can only be choice where there is duality. You only feel a need to make a choice when you feel or see that there are two things. If you don't see those two things as two things - if you see them not as two things, as other people do, but as one thing - you don't make a choice, there is no need to make a choice. The whole chapter is about non-duality, isn't it, so how can there be any choice? You could say, 'You choose between duality and non-duality', but that again is being misled by words and not taking the spirit of what is said. You could even say the Bodhisattva does not even choose non-duality as distinct from duality; he doesn't really see any difference between duality and non-duality. Both terms are really quite meaningless. He lives in a state which we try to indicate by the term non-duality, but it is not that we are defining non-duality as something opposed to something else - say, duality. That is really quite clear, isn't it? So I don't really see how the question arises.

Anyway, let's go on to question 2, then.

Prakasha's question: At the end of the lecture, you emphasize the importance of a marriage

between Time and Eternity, the historical and the mythical...

S: Excuse me; before you go on, it just occurred to me that I am using the translation by Thurman. Is it possible that there is a different chapter division in Luk's translation and therefore I have not got the right Vimalakirti [139] speech? (Someone hands Bhante a book.) No, it seems to be the same. Is it chapter 5 or 6?

Mangala: Five.

S: Ah I have looked at chapter 5 here; 5 is 'The consolation of the invalid', but here 5 is - yes, 'Manjusri calls on Vimalakirti'; that's the same one, isn't it? Yes. OK, let's carry on.

Prakasha's question continued: If the historical is overemphasised then this leads to fundamentalism and literalism. What dangers does the overemphasis of the mythic and eternal lead to? Did the Mahayana suffer there? What danger does the individual confront?

C. G. Jung warns of the danger of over-identification with the archetypes in a person's life. He says this leads to inflation and consequent humiliation. Could you comment and expand on this, please?

S: I think there are quite a few assumptions here. 'At the end of the lecture you emphasize the importance of a marriage between Time and Eternity, the historical and the mythical. If the historical is overemphasised then this leads to fundamentalism and literalism.'

What does one mean by overemphasising the historical? For instance, we believe that the Buddha was a historical character. In what way is it possible to overemphasise that, or is it possible to overemphasise that?

Dharmadhara: Presumably the only way you can overemphasise it is by under-emphasizing the other aspect - but that wouldn't be overemphasising the historical per se.

S: I think perhaps there is a confusion here between overemphasising the historical and overemphasising, or even emphasizing at all, the historicity of something which is really not historical but which is in fact mythical. From a Buddhist point of view, we can say that the resurrection of Christ is of that nature. It is an essentially mythic event which is seen as or represented as a historical event, and it being seen as a historical event results in what we call literalism. Fundamentalism I think is usually applied to something rather different; fundamentalism primarily means the taking of the actual text of, say, the Bible - it can also be applied to the Koran - as infallible; as inerrant, as they say, incapable of erring, incapable of making any mistake, to be taken quite literally. In the case of Buddhism it is difficult to speak of an overemphasis on the historical, unless, as Dharmadhara suggested, one means a relative overemphasis inasmuch as the supra-historical is not brought in at all; the mythic, the legendary, the archetypal, is not brought in at all. If you say that the Buddha was a historical character, a fact in a way can't be overemphasised; if you say that 2 + 2 = 4, well, that's that; you can't over-emphasise the fact, or if you do it has no significance whatever, so your overemphasis has no significance whatever. You can Insist that 2 + 2 = 4 as often as you like, but it doesn't make it any more true that 2 + 2 = 4. So similarly with the historicity of the Buddha, if one is thinking in those terms. You can't really overemphasise it, because a fact is a fact. But you can give more importance to it in relation to the Buddha, say, as an archetypal

being than would be justified by a more complete view of the Buddha's nature.

So, yes, it is difficult, I think, to overemphasise the historicity of the Buddha, and people don't usually do that except in the purely negative way of [140] omitting any reference to the mythic and eternal, as Prakasha puts it. But what about overemphasis of the mythic and eternal? How does that happen, what does one mean by that - 'overemphasising the mythic and eternal'? Presumably, one means, as in the case of overemphasising the historical, a comparative neglect - that one is so taken up by the contemplation of the mythic and eternal Buddha and one almost forgets about the historical Buddha. I certainly found that with the Tibetans - I have mentioned it before, I think: that I found that, say, Amitabha and Padmasambhava (though Padmasambhava was basically a historical figure) and Vajrabharava also were much more real to them than Sakyamuni.

Padmavajra: Do you think that that had bad consequences for them spiritually speaking, or do you think spiritually speaking it was all right?

S: Well, it doesn't seem to have had bad consequences; but then one has to look into the matter more deeply, because why did it not have bad consequences? As far as we know, the Tibetan Buddhists were no worse as Buddhists than, say, the Sinhalese or the Burmese, who, one might say, rather neglected the mythic and eternal Buddha in favour of the historical Buddha. But, going a little deeper, as I said, one has perhaps to make the point that traditionally speaking Buddhists didn't distinguish, in the way that we do, between these two categories - the historical on the one hand and the mythic and eternal on the other. They did distinguish between the nirmanakaya, say, and the samboghakaya, and (between) the samboghakaya and the dharmakaya, but that was rather a different matter.

We talked about this either last week or the week before. We talked in terms of symbolism. Again, I referred to the example of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It's quite easy for a non-Christian, for a Buddhist, to appreciate this as a symbol of the victory of life over death, spiritual life over spiritual death, and so on. That isn't at all difficult. But the Christian does more than that. The orthodox Christian regards that not just as an inspiring myth but as an actual historical fact, and he believes it quite literally; he believes that it literally did happen, that had you been there at the time you literally would have seen Jesus coming back to life and rising from the tomb, stepping out of the tomb. But what I was concerned to point out was that the fact that the Christian - that is to say, the orthodox Christian or one might say the practising Christian, the sincere Christian - believes that to be literally true gives his faith a sort of edge or a sort of - what was the term I used?

Mangala: Zeal.

S: - that he would not have felt if he had simply taken the resurrection as a symbol. We can take the resurrection as a symbol of something in which we believe, but it doesn't inspire us with that sort of zeal. So the point I was making, that religious zeal in the sense with which we are familiar, usually in the form of Christianity and Islam, no doubt Judaism also, is based on a taking of myth for historical fact. That seems to be a necessary part of it.

I have just lost the thread a little bit.

Padmavajra: You started with the point about, say, the Tibetan Buddhist believing more in -

he takes more than the mythic figures, the eternal Buddha and they are believed as - he doesn't make a distinction between myth and history. Because what differs from, say, the Tibetan Buddhist - because presumably he believes that Padmasambhava really did come out of a lotus flower; well, this is the difference between his belief like that and the [141] Christian's belief in the historical fact of the resurrection. Why doesn't the Buddhist's faith have that edge, that zeal?

S: That's true. I suppose there are several reasons for that. in India there was never the sense of history that one finds both in Judaism - the Semitic tradition - and in the Hellenic tradition. The Greeks certainly had a sense of history; Herodotus and Thucydides were really the first historians, weren't they? The Jews certainly had a strong sense of history, because they had a strong belief that God interfered in the life of the Jewish people, and Christianity has inherited that and also inherited the Greek view. So, in the West, with this joint heritage, we've got a very strong sense of history. We've got a very strong sense of history as distinct from myth, as distinct from legend. But that seems not to have happened in the case of India, and therefore Tibet. They did have a history of the Dharma, but that didn't seem to have promoted a sense of history in the Western sense. So, when they, for instance, believe that Padmasambhava was born from a lotus, they are not insisting that it happened historically, as distinct from happening mythically, because they didn't think of history in that sort of way, and therefore didn't insist on the fact that Padmasambhava was literally born from a lotus in that sort of way.

Padmavajra: So this is like a different perspective - say, the Greek and the Jewish perspective - from the Indian, Tibetan perspective, different way of ...

S: Also, of course, one must remember that in the case of Padmasambhava, that appearance was regarded as a Nirmanakaya, a sort of apparition; because Buddhism is sort of shot through with the belief or the conviction that things are not as they seem. Ordinary mundane reality isn't regarded in the sort of irreducible way that the Jews and the Greeks regarded it. it's a sort of magical appearance, a sort of magical display; it's not hard and solid, as it would have been in the Jewish or the Hellenic tradition.

Perhaps we could in a way come a bit nearer home, look at another interesting example. For instance, in Sri Lanka they do believe that the Buddha visited Sri Lanka personally three times, and they regard that as a sort of setting of the seal of his approval on Sri Lanka. And they believe that on that occasion he entrusted the Dharma especially to Sri Lanka, and that belief becomes the basis of a lot of cultural and religious chauvinism. There is nothing about it in the Tipitaka. The story is contained in very much later material - I think in the Mahamamsa(?) - so it is a sort of legend. But the Theravadins of Sri Lanka do believe that to have been a historical fact, and believe in it with a sort of fanaticism which isn't usual in Buddhism. But clearly you can see that the reason they need to believe in it is sort of nationalistic and ethnic in origin.

i suppose you could say that, given the presuppositions of Buddhism, in a way, which are shared by all Buddhists, there is nothing inherently impossible in the Buddha visiting Sri Lanka. it is not really to be compared with someone rising from the dead and ascending into heaven, because it could be argued that the Buddha did actually visit [Sri Lanka]; that it is not a physical impossibility that he should have made that journey. Even if you argue that the Buddhists of Sri Lanka believe that he flew through the air by his yogic powers, all Buddhists

believe that the Buddha had that sort of yogic power, and some believe that yogis have it even today. So if they believe that he went over land, that would still have been a possibility, even from a quite mundane point of view. And even if they believe that he went flying through the air, that is not impossible, on Buddhist presupposition, because lots of rishis and yogis go flying through the air by their supernormal power. Hindus believe it too. But in the case of the resurrection of Christ and his ascension into [142] heaven, that sort of thing is not believed to be so general, you might say - though you do get examples in Greek myth.

But broadly speaking, despite that sort of example from Sri Lanka, in the Theravada to the extent that it has some sense of history, you don't get essentially mythic events regarded as historical facts and therefore quite fanatically believed in. That is not at all common in Buddhism. You get a little of it with the Nichiren Buddhists, who believe literally that Nichiren was the Bodhisattva of whom it was spoken in the Saddharma Pundarika. But on the whole there isn't that tension in Buddhism, you could say, between the historical and the mythical.

Padmavajra: And you think that's very much to do with, if you like, the philosophical basis of Buddhism, that things aren't as they seem?

S: I think that has something to do with it, yes. it does seem to me that if you are to have any sort of zeal or enthusiasm at all, religiously speaking, you need to believe that what you believe in is in some sense actually even literally, true. it isn't enough, as it were, just to believe that it has a symbolical value. One sees that in the last century in the case of people like Matthew Arnold. He was able to believe that almost everything in Christianity had a value, in the sense that it was symbolically true, but he couldn't bring himself to believe that it was literally true; so from the religious point of view he remained rather tepid, as it were. But those people seem to have the greatest zeal and enthusiasm who believe in the teachings of their religion and the historical records of their founder as being quite literally true.

Padmavajra: How do you think of where the Movement or the Order stands in this regard, given that we have to have our historical perspective? We often talk about the Bodhisattvas as symbols of this, symbols of that; we are living in an age when it's difficult to believe in, if you like, the Bodhisattvas as spiritual forces. Do you think we are alive enough to the Bodhisattvas as forces 'out there' ?

S: Probably not! it's psychologically difficult for some people.

Padmavajra: - and do you think we have enough zeal and enthusiasm?

S: I don't think we do, and that might be part of the difficulty. But I was just thinking again about this question of as it were facticity - that it's necessary for you to believe that a thing did actually happen, or that something is sort of literally true; but there is the question in what sense you believe something to have happened or to be literally true. it's as though in the West the criterion has been as it were historical, so that if a thing is true it must be historical. But you don't get that, I think, with Buddhism and Hinduism. They are just as concerned with truth, but they don't think of truth in those specifically historical terms, so they can be inspired by an ideal or by the life of a teacher, without believing that it is historically true in our sense. it is not that they believe in it even though they don't think it's historically true in our sense; they don't think in those terms at all. For them, truth is not really historical. it is not

really factual, not really material. But in the West, truth is historical, it is factual, it is material. So religious truth, even, is thought of in those terms; whereas in the East, in India, in the case of Buddhism and Hinduism, it is not thought of in those terms.

So - to come back to your question or comment - from the point of the Western Buddhist, it is not primarily a question of whether he can believe that certain things did happen in the historic sense; it is more a question of [143] whether he can believe that certain things are true. And, of course, very often for him, truth will necessarily mean historically true. I think if you were, for instance, to convince a Tibetan Buddhist - for instance, if you could get him to understand the distinction between historical and mythic and eternal - if then you were to convince him that the Buddha, Sakyamuni, had never lived, I doubt if that would affect his faith at all. But in the case of Christianity, doubts with regard to the historicity of Christ result in a loss of religious faith. So it is really a question, for us, of 'What is truth?' is truth history? is truth myth? But it is as though, for religious teaching or tradition really to inspire you - inspire you with zeal - you have to believe that it is true; which means in a sense believing that it is literally true. Though things can be literally true either historically or as it were mythically, so it would seem. But I think in the West people find it difficult to believe that something is true - say, difficult to believe in the existence of the Buddha - unless they conceive of it as a historical existence. The Buddha is true, so to speak, because the Buddha did live historically, because he was a historical figure. But for the Tibetan, one might say, the Buddha is true because he is a mythic and eternal figure. There is something of that in Christianity, because Christians do believe that there is a glorified Christ who ascended into heaven and is still there; but that glorified Christ did once live upon earth, was a historical figure.

Prasannasiddhi: But couldn't you say that, in the Tibetan's case, that need for a historical element is fulfilled by figures like Padmasambhava?

S: I thought you were going to say 'like the Dalai Lama', because he is not embodied in the past but in the present. You could say that, because all the incarnate lamas occupied a very important place in Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetans felt that through them they were in contact with the Bodhisattvas. Marco Pallis has written about this very well, in an additional chapter to Peaks and Lamas. He points out that it is not the Dalai Lama's (function) to teach primarily - he may teach. but that is not his primary function; his primary function is just to be a presence, and that is in a way the primary function of all the incarnate lamas, just to be a presence, quite irrespective of anything they do. This is why Tibetans, at least some Tibetans, are not too bothered if an incarnate lama happens to behave in a somewhat irregular manner. His function is not to teach, not even to set an example, in a sense, but just to be a presence. And if he is really what he is supposed to be, all that really matters is that he is there! So, yes, one could say, that a contributory reason why the Tibetans aren't bothered about, say, the historicity of the Buddha, if they could imagine any such thing, is because they've got incarnate lamas, incarnate Bodhisattvas, right there with them, now, as it were. They don't need to bother about the past.

Mangala: Bhante, what relation if any does superstition have to this sort of mythic element?

S: That's in a way getting a bit off the track. What does one mean by superstition?

Mangala: I mean people believing in gods and beings, deities, powers as it were which are not

scientifically or historically verifiable. I think that ...

S: One might say: can a spiritual reality be scientifically or historically verified at all? Is it not applying irrelevant criteria? Can one even [144] scientifically demonstrate one's emotions, as it were? So that is a rather broad use of the word superstition, isn't it?

Mangala: I suppose I am trying to find out what it actually is, because like the Buddha himself said, 'Don't take anything on hearsay, and on rumour and so on, but only things that you can from your own experience make sense, as it were.

S: Yes, but there are different kinds of experience, and different kinds of criteria. The Buddha would certainly say, 'Yes, don't take it from me that if you concentrate your mind you can enter into third and fourth dhyana'; but that is not to say that he was meaning that you have to test it scientifically, in a laboratory. How do you test it? You test it by practising meditation; so don't take the Buddha's word for the existence of such states, try and achieve them yourself. That's not the same thing as saying that they've got to be scientifically tested, in the sense of tested in the laboratory. So certainly test things for yourself, but there are different ways of testing in accordance with what you are trying to test. So to say that spiritual states or spiritual realities have to be proved in a laboratory is just mixing up one's criteria. But that is not to say that there aren't things that may not be superstitions in the stricter sense. You may believe that certain mantras cure certain diseases; well, you can try it out and that may be proved to be not so. In the sphere of medicine there are all sorts of superstitious beliefs. For instance, I think Virabhadra found that in Maharashtra women had all sorts of odd beliefs and practices regarding childbirth, some of them highly dangerous to the infant. Wasn't there something about cutting the ...

Mangala: Putting cow dung on the placenta.

Dharmadhara: The cord, yes.

S: Right, yes. So one could say that would be superstition in the strict sense - believing something to be efficacious which wasn't, without ever having applied the appropriate criteria.

I think - going back to the original point - it's as though in the West, very broadly speaking, there was a different sort of criterion, a different conception of reality. Truth is what conforms with reality, so one's notion of truth, including historical truth, will vary according to one's conception of reality. A Tibetan, say, could be inspired with spiritual or religious zeal by the example of the life of Padmasambhava, including his birth from the lotus, because he believed it to be true. But he didn't believe it to be true in the sense of having actually occurred historically, because he didn't think of truth in historical terms at all - not even to the extent of rejecting it.

Dharmadhara: So it wouldn't really be possible to talk about it in terms of inductive and deductive logic, because that wouldn't be really in that framework. Would that be ...

S: Not that Tibetans didn't have some sense of historic truth, because there were well-known Tibetan scholars who argued about the dates of different personalities in Buddhist history and tried to work them out on a quite empirical scientific basis. But that had nothing to do with

their religious faith, as it were. They weren't as it were trying to establish the date of the Buddha - which some of them did - because they couldn't believe in the Buddha unless they could prove that he was a historical character.

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Prasannasiddhi: I was recalling a previous discussion on a Tuscany, where you were referring to the tendency by Tibetans to in a sense project on to their guru; so it didn't matter what he was like, they would believe that he was a great figure. I was wondering if you could perhaps tie that in with this discussion on the overemphasis on the mythical, in a sense.

S: That's true, because then one would very often be as it were disregarding the evidence of one's own eyes.

Prasannasiddhi: So perhaps they were even a bit unbalanced to the other pole.

S: Yes, that could be.

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Tape 1. Side 2

S: But it is not such a simple matter as it might appear, because it is as though - supposing you are the sort of person, you know, you are born and brought up in the sort of tradition that does distinguish between the historical and the mythic, let us say, it would seem that if you believe that something was historically true, it did actually happen, then it can become a firmer basis for your belief and conduct, and can inspire greater zeal. If it is demonstrated that, as in the case of the resurrection for many people in the West, it didn't really happen in the sense of not happening historically and having only symbolical value, your faith is weakened. So you could say that for us in the West, for Western Buddhists, a lot of our faith is actually based on our belief in the historicity of the Buddha, because we say that the Buddha was a human being just like us, and he made an effort as a human being, so if we make that effort inasmuch as we are human beings we can attain what the Buddha attained. But supposing that was ever proved that that was all myth; it could be demonstrated that there was a historical person who came to be known as the Buddha, but it might also be shown that this whole idea about him attaining Enlightenment and all that sort of thing was just a sort of mythical superstructure - where would that leave us? Clearly, if we were convinced that it was just myth, in the sense in which we think of 'just myth', as being in a way inferior to historical reality - presumably our faith would be weakened. I am only trying to suggest that perhaps the dividing line between historical reality isn't so sharp and clear cut; perhaps it shifts.

Prasannasiddhi: I think my own faith would be weakened if I didn't believe it was possible for a human being to gain Enlightenment. But then I think that it would diminish - but it needn't necessarily, in a sense, be the Buddha although logically it proceeds from the Buddha.

S: I suppose this is one reason why the Tibetans emphasize the refuge in the guru; because at least you are in actual personal contact with him. You are not even in contact with his teacher, if his teacher is dead, much less still are you in contact with the Buddha; so you can doubt their existence, even, but you can't doubt the existence of your own teacher. And much less still can you doubt your own experience.

Padmavajra: Just thinking back to this whole thing of history - the Jewish people, the Greeks and their historical perspective, the Indians, the Tibetans and their comparative lack of it - do you think that that perspective comes about when you start to make too sharp a distinction between man and - well, God, the divine?

S: I thought you were going to say man and the animals; that could be the case too.

Padmavajra: Because if you have a religion where, if you like, man can move more between the divine and - well, he can move into the divine ...

S: Yes, history becomes less important. But there is another way of looking at it, too, or another sort of approach. We say 'history' as though history was history; but what is history? Doesn't so-called history itself contain a largely mythic element? In the past, all sorts of things happened, sort of quite concrete, discrete things; but when a history book is written, they are all sort of tied up very neatly together and explained, and certain lines of historical development and causation are indicated. Herodotus is a good [147] example.

Sometimes people say - well, perhaps I shouldn't say 'people', but the more literary historians work up their material. You cannot but do that. Otherwise you would just be presenting, just printing old documents and records of various kinds, and they wouldn't give you any sort of idea at all as to what actually happened; you need to synthesize them. The writing of history is an art, it's not a science. So what is this history that we oppose to myth? Is it as much history as we usually think? Is history itself completely historical? Is not history sort of shot through with myth, really? Is it not that we can't even make sense of our so-called history unless we interpret it in almost mythical terms? So that is another way of looking at it. I am only talking about these things and dealing with this question - I am really only going around the question and indicating different lines of approach, because it's not possible to come to a definitive conclusion about these matters at this stage; it just isn't possible at all. What is history? What is myth? These are questions that need to be gone into quite extensively. You can have books written about the same historical character, giving you a completely different picture, a completely different interpretation; in one book he's a villain, in another book he's the hero. You've got, in a sense, the same facts, but they are interpreted very differently, and you can never, it seems, get the facts apart from the interpretation.

Dharmadhara: I suppose underlying it is a belief that with history at least, even if you never reach (them), you are dealing with some objective facts; you are trying to approach some objective facts. Whereas with myth there is not that underlying belief.

S: Well, not in that sense, because from the point of view of myth, or from the point of view of someone believing in myth in the sense of not making that distinction between myth and history, the myth does approach fact. Fact is another way of saying truth. I have noticed recently, in connection with various political debates, it is sometimes very difficult to establish what actually happened; and one is sometimes left with the impression that nobody really knows what happened. One is left only with interpretations. The facts seem to be inaccessible; sometimes because nobody really realizes exactly what happened, or perhaps in retrospect they unconsciously alter the facts, if even there were any facts to begin with. You find that even sometimes in the FWBO, where people sometimes remember a Council meeting quite differently - same meeting; they were actually there; but some people remember coming to one decision, some are under the impress ion that another decision was

arrived at. And some people who were present can be quite sure that a certain topic wasn't mentioned, but others also present can be quite sure it was mentioned. This can happen very easily, even on a very simple, relatively uncomplicated level. So how much more can it happen on the level of government, where there are many, many more people involved, and where the issues are very much more complex? So, again: what is history?

Dharmadhara: Maybe history is based on a myth - that underlying history there is a factual basis; there is that sort of myth itself in history.

S: It's as though our minds have a sort of mythic structure, almost, which we impose on history, one could say. Because history doesn't happen tidily; it can't really be divided into centuries. We divide it into centuries, to begin with; that's really quite ridiculous. There are no actual centuries existing in history itself. But we speak as though there were. There is just a jumble of facts, or at least what are reported as facts, and we just try to make sense of [148] them by imposing a certain structure, a certain pattern, upon them. Otherwise we can't get to grips with them as a whole. Sometimes that pattern is highly arbitrary.

In Soviet Russia they quite consciously rewrite history; they leave out certain people. Certain people are made non-persons. Even people who at one stage played a quite important role, a prominent role in the history of the Soviet Union, are just left out. Their names are systematically eliminated from the records, from the history books.

So the upshot of this little bit of the discussion would seem to be that you can't really separate history from myth, which really means from interpretation, quite as strictly as people often suppose. Perhaps one could say that the so-called myths and legends, in the case of a Buddha - and this is a point I have made - are an attempt to as it were get at the real meaning of the facts, without, of course, the facts necessarily being known, not in their entirety or not perfectly, at least.

'At the end of the lecture you emphasize the importance of a marriage between Time and Eternity, the historical and the mythical.' Well, in a sense or to some extent, we do already have - we always have - a marriage between the historic and the mythical, but it's not always recognized. Going off again at a little bit of a tangent: suppose - well, no, maybe not. I was trying to think of an instance where one side was convinced that they had won a certain war and the other side was convinced that they had won it. What was that?

Padmaraja:(?) The battle of Jutland?

S: I wasn't thinking of the battle of Jutland, though, yes, that very likely is an example.

Dharmadhara: The Vietnamese war, for a while.

S: No. I can't remember now. But it's as though it is possible to prove, in certain limited instances, that certain things didn't happen; so they can't as it were be incorporated into the myth. You can't incorporate into the myth those facts which are demonstrably false; and sometimes that is the case. I am trying to think of that example. I think it was in recent history.

Mangala: I suppose that's what history is, isn't it? I presume it's supposed to be a record of

facts which are demonstrably able to be proved, or which are ...

S: For which there is some evidence; or which depend upon other known facts.

Mangala: Whereas myth doesn't rely or depend on that, presumably.

S: Well, not on historical fact as we understand it in the West today.

Prasannasiddhi: Wasn't there something in the Iran-Iraq war where they both claimed - ?

S: No, I was thinking of a much more flagrant example than that. Oh yes, I remember it now: Yes! Some French writers or French historians claimed that Napoleon won the battle of Waterloo, firmly believe that he won the battle of Waterloo. Yes; that he wasn't defeated. Yes, that was it!

Mangala: Only the French could do that!

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S: There was a very interesting sort of in a way logical essay written by a famous logician around the time of Napoleon, called, I think it was, Couelle(?). He subsequently became an archbishop; but anyway as a don he was a well-known logician. And he wrote a humorous essay to prove that Napoleon Bonaparte, who had recently died or been imprisoned, was a solar myth. And it all fitted in extremely well, including his final descent into the Western Ocean, when he was immured at St. Helena. But what he was trying to do intellectually was to say that you can interpret historical facts as mere myths if you wish, and this is what, according to him, critics of Christianity were trying to do, and that their attempt to interpret Christ as a purely mythical figure were no less ridiculous than the attempt to interpret Napoleon as a purely mythical figure would be. That perhaps can be disputed; but it is a very interesting little essay, which I have somewhere. He makes a quite detailed comparison, and shows in considerable detail that all the incidents of Napoleon's career were purely mythical.

Prasannasiddhi: I believe that modern historians are aware of the fact that there is a subjective element in history.

S: Oh yes, I think some at least are more and more aware of that.

Prasannasiddhi: I don't know if they realize the extent to which people think in symbolic terms and sort of project ...

S: Marxist historians don't seem to realize that. They tend to think of history as a science, not as an art. (...) question: what is the meaning of history? Why do human beings think in historical terms at all? It is an attempt to grapple with reality in a certain sense or on a certain level. It's a sort of shorthand, one could say.

Anyway, I think the question, in the light of this discussion, seems to be based to some extent on a rather naive acceptance of the mutual exclusivity of the historical and the mythic and eternal. I think we probably must conclude that we need to explore all these issues to a much greater extent before we can even understand what we mean by the historical - what we mean by over-emphasising the historical.

In the case of the Mahayana, I think there is no danger in its alleged over-emphasis on the mythic and eternal, if the mythic and eternal are still understood as being true in such a way as to be able to inspire zeal; because to, say, the Tibetans, a myth is not just a 'mere' myth, in the sense of a sort of fantasy that you can't take seriously. The myth is true, and you act upon it. So what you act upon is really, for you, truth. Maybe this is what William James meant when he said that truth was what worked. Because if you really believe something to be true, usually you act upon it. So we believe that the historical is true, and therefore we act upon it, also on the truth, if we believe the truth to be historical. We believe myth to be untruth, so we are not able to act upon myth.

So it doesn't really matter whether you believe the historical is truth or the mythical is truth, you could say. The important thing is that you must act upon it. Though, of course - again another refinement is there is the historical and the historical; there is the mythic and the mythic. Because I have distinguished between what I have called negative myths and positive myths. Then that leads into a further - because you could say there is the Nazi myth about the Jews. That wasn't a true myth, you could say, because it was false information masquerading as a sort of myth. So facts which are not facts are not really the material of myth, or at least there are some alleged facts that can be proved to be non-facts, and therefore there is no question [150] even of incorporating them into the myth. And to some extent you could say a negative myth was one which incorporated alleged facts which were demonstrably untrue.

But, yes, I come back to the main point which, it seems, is that for you to be able to act upon something, and for something of a religious or spiritual nature to be able to inspire you with zeal, you must believe that it is truth, and it doesn't matter basically whether the truth is of the historical or of the mythic order. By 'true' you mean corresponding to reality, or congruent with reality. So perhaps it isn't a question of 'This is historical and that is mythical'; perhaps they overlap to some extent. Perhaps certain elements can be distinguished as more or less predominantly historical, or more or less predominantly mythic, but I don't think there can be too sharp an opposition between the two categories in toto.

Prasannasiddhi: Couldn't you just see myth as in a sense the deeper layers of human beings?

S: Certainly you could. This seems to be the case in the Trikaya doctrine, as I've said again and again. It's not that the Sambhogakaya is another kaya above or beyond or behind the Nirmanakaya; it is the inner depth of that same Nirmanakaya. But there is also a question about what danger does the individual confront when there is an overemphasis on the mythic and eternal. Well, leaving aside the question of the overemphasis, if he believes that the mythic and eternal is true and therefore acts upon it as such, there is no question of any danger at all. But in the West there can be an over-emphasis on the mythic and eternal in the sense of just reading lots and lots of books about archetypes and Jungian things, and not taking any of it very seriously, just dabbling in it, daydreaming about it, and not making it the basis of any real ethical or spiritual action - well, that would be a danger for the individual or for certain individuals in the West. But I'm not too sure about this business of over-identification with the archetypes in a person's life. 'He says this leads to inflation and consequent humiliation.' Is anyone familiar with this way of looking at things? 'Inflation' seems to correspond more, in certain cases, to what I call appropriation. For instance, when we have talked about the guru, you can say there is a guru archetype. You could say that someone like Rajneesh just tries to appropriate the guru archetype by sort of acting in what he considers as a guru-like sort of way; he tries to copy the Buddha, for instance. So you could

say, in Jungian terms, that he is inflated as regards the guru archetype, he just tries to appropriate it instead of trying genuinely to embody it or to allow himself to be transformed by it or allowing it to speak through him, as it were. He speaks through it instead of it speaking through him. He uses it, or what he presents as it, as a sort of mouthpiece for his own ideas and thoughts and beliefs.

Prasannasiddhi: It's as if his ego is trying to hold on to itself but at the same time it's got hold of an archetype that's probably (...) destroyed (...)

S: Anyway, perhaps we'd better pass on because we've spent quite a lot of time on those questions or, as I said, going round them a bit.

Mangala: Now we come on to a question from lecture No. 6: 'The Way of Non-Duality'. This question is from Dharmadhara and it's about Sariputra's sex change.

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Dharmadhara's question: You describe Sariputra's sex change from male to female as 'bad enough', but his change back to male again as 'even worse. Were you meaning that, to Sariputra, two sex changes were much worse than one, or that instead of becoming androgynous as a result of the first experience Sariputra still remains within the dichotomy of gender? Or did you mean something else?

S: I did make the remark rather light-heartedly, as far as I remember; but even so I think it was the second point that I was getting at, not the first: that, if one did undergo a sex change from male to female, that ought to alert one to the relativity of gender; but if, after having had that experience, you just went back to your original gender, so to speak, it would have been as though you hadn't really learned anything, just going from one gender to the other - as does happen when people sometimes have a sex change operation. From a spiritual point of view it just doesn't help at all. What is important is, for a man, to incorporate the so-called feminine psychological qualities, and if you are a woman to incorporate the so-called masculine ones, in addition to those proper to your own physical-cum-psychological gender. This is what I was getting at, though again not in a very serious way.

Dharmadhara: I thought you probably were. It was just ...

S: I'm not happy with people having sex change operations. As I think you know, I discouraged one person from having that operation. I know of people having these sex change operations; I haven't as yet heard of anyone having a second operation to restore them to their original sex. It probably has happened, or if it hasn't happened it probably will in due course. You might find people having quite a number of such operations before being able finally to make up their mind what they want to be! They'll say, 'Oh, let's have a year or two as a male' and then 'Let's have a year or two as a female,' and they can't really settle down in either. But that wouldn't be the way. It's alternation, not integration.

Mangala: They haven't got an operation for making you an androgyne yet!

S: Well, there's no such operation! They might be able to make you a hermaphrodite, but they couldn't make you genuinely androgynous.

Anyway, we've talked about androgyny quite enough in the past, so I think we don't need to go into it now. Let's go on to No. 4.

Prakasha's question: How and when did the term Maya come into usage? Was it originally Buddhist or Hindu? Is there a difference in its usage by Buddhists and Hindus? In Buddhism does Maya become a goddess as in Hinduism?

S: To start with the last question first: in Buddhism Maya does not become a goddess. One is not thinking of Maya the mother of the Buddha, who certainly doesn't become a goddess, though she is believed to have been reborn as a goddess, but she doesn't become a goddess in the sense of becoming the centre of a religious cult. Nor does the philosophical conception of Maya in a personified form become the object or centre of a cult in Buddhism, though that is the case to some extent in Hinduism, because Kali and Durga, the great Hindu goddesses, are identified with the cosmic Maya, which again is identified with cosmic Shakti.

But 'How and when did the term Maya come into usage?' it's a very ancient term which originally meant simply magic or something magical or a magical [152] appearance; and it originated in Hinduism. I think it occurs in the Vedas. In its very early sense, it simply meant art or skill, apparently, according to the dictionary; but very early it assumed the meaning of a special kind of skill, sleight of hand; and perhaps that became magical skill or just magic, a magical performance. So in that sense, the term was taken over both by the Hindus and by the Buddhists. One has a Maya-vada, a doctrine of Maya. So far as the Buddhists are concerned, the point was very clear - I have mentioned this a number of times before - that the notion of Maya or magical appearance just illustrated the nature of reality. The magical illusion arose in dependence upon the magician. Or you might say, if the magician made a big stone look like an elephant, the illusion of the elephant arose in dependence on the magician on the one hand and the big stone on the other; they were its basis. So in Buddhism that was used to illustrate the nature of reality - that is to say, relative reality, mundane reality, samsaric reality. But you couldn't say of it that it existed absolutely, because it was brought into existence by the combination of the magician and, in the case of the illustration I gave, the stone. So it wasn't absolutely existent, it arose in dependence on causes and conditions. But you couldn't say that it was completely unreal or non-existent, because you actually perceived it, so according to Buddhism relative reality was like that. So in Buddhism the idea of the magician's performance was used to illustrate the fact that ordinary reality, so to speak, relative reality, is neither existent nor non-existent.

But in the case of the Advaita Vedanta, that same illustration was used in a rather different way. It was used more in the sense of illustrating that the elephant that the magician had conjured up on the basis of the stone just wasn't really there, didn't exist in reality at all. So the whole of existence - phenomenal or relative existence - was like that, it didn't really exist.

So it's as though the Buddhists use that same illustration to illustrate the fact that relative reality had only a relative existence, whereas the Advaita Vedantins seem to have used it in order to make the point or to illustrate the fact that what we think of as phenomenal existence or relative reality in relation to Ultimate Reality doesn't exist at all, which Buddhism would have regarded as a one-sided view. So the Maya-vada of Buddhism, if one uses that term, is quite different from the Maya-vada of the Advaita Vedantin. Some Advaita Vedantins might regard that as not a very fair presentation of, say, Sankara's view, but many Indian philosophers have taken that to be his actual view, including Sri Aurobindo.

Mangala: What would be the ramifications be, say you had the Vedanta view as opposed to Buddhism - how would that actually affect one's behaviour, one's life, one's philosophical outlook?

S: Well, in theory you would not believe in difference, because according to the Advaita Vedanta all difference is illusory; only non-difference is real. But, say, in the light of Vimalakirti's teaching, the Buddhist would not distinguish between duality and non-duality; he would go further than the Advaitin. The Buddhist would say, 'There's no difference between duality and non-duality'. You can't say - well, in a sense you can say that non-duality is the reality, but if you go even deeper you have to discard the notion of non-duality itself. it isn't really that non-duality is different from duality and that therefore you choose between the two, as I said earlier on.

It's as though the Advaita Vedantin takes non-duality, advaita, as Ultimate Reality in a quite literal sense, thereby cancelling out all difference. All difference is regarded as illusory. So in theory, because of that, the Advaitin should not distinguish between one thing and another, between one human being and another - should treat all alike. So an Advaita Vedantin who really [153] believes that will do so. But you very rarely, if ever, find an Advaitin of that sort. He couldn't possibly treat anyone as an Untouchable, really; but brahmins who believe in Advaita Vedanta certainly have done that in many cases.

For instance, there is a story by Ramakrishna, the teacher of Vivekananda, that goes something like this: there was a certain Advaita Vedantin who saw a mad elephant coming, and the elephant had got out of control; and the mahout, the man on the back of the elephant, was shouting, 'Get out of the way, get out of the way! This elephant has gone out of control!' But the Advaitin thought, 'Why should I get out of the way? There is no difference between me and the elephant.' So he just stood where he was and he was trampled underfoot and very seriously injured. So afterwards his teacher asked him what had happened, and he said: 'I didn't get out of the way because, after all, I am at one with the elephant, and I've got to take that seriously.' So then - I think I've got the story slightly wrong, but anyway, roughly speaking, the teacher said: 'But what about the man on the back of the elephant who told you to get out of the way? Couldn't you have taken that seriously, too?' As I said, I've got it very slightly wrong, I don't remember it perfectly, but it's something like that. In other words, he was distinguishing between - he was non-dual up to a point, but he wasn't completely non-dual; he had not reached the non-duality of duality and non-duality.

Prasannasiddhi: Isn't there a kind of fatalism in Hinduism?

S: I think in practice there is, and I think it's connected with their teaching about karma, to some extent. I read an article someone sent me, written by someone not a Buddhist, but writing about Buddhism and mentioning Padmasambhava, and he attributed to Padmasambhava a saying to the effect that everything that happens to us is due to our karma and there is nothing we can do about it; we just have to submit. And I was asked 'is this a genuine saying of Padmasambhava?' Well, one doesn't know, but it certainly isn't the genuine Buddhist teaching. But that is the Hindu view of karma; everything is due to karma and there is nothing you can do about it, especially your social position by birth; it's the result of karma and there is nothing you therefore can do about it, and you shouldn't try to do anything about it. So I think, very often, there is a confusion in people's minds between the Buddhist view of Maya and the Hindu view, especially the Advaita view. In the Advaita Vedanta, Maya

indicates that which doesn't have any existence at all, it's pure illusion. But in Buddhism it indicates that which has a relative but not an absolute existence. And, of course, Buddhism does go further and says that, in the last analysis, there is no distinction between the relative and the absolute. Not that the relative is merged in the absolute in a one-sided manner, as in the Advaita Vedanta, but they are both equally applicable and inapplicable to Ultimate Reality.

Padmavajra: So there is no undifferentiated unity, no featureless unity?

S: Right, yes.

Padmavajra: Do you think the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Indra's net image, the intersecting beams of light, is trying to ...

S: It is trying to communicate a state which cannot be spoken of entirely in terms of oneness nor entirely in terms of difference; a state where the two are in a sense the same, or a state in which the distinction between one and many, unity and difference, breaks down, a state which can be just as well or just as truly described in terms of oneness as in terms of difference; or vice [154] versa. This is a state which is almost impossible to imagine. But certainly Advaita Vedanta has come to mean a one-sided monism, regardless of whether that was Sankara's actual meaning or not; but Buddhism is certainly not a one-sided monism. Sunyata is not a 'one' to which everything is reduced or into which the many are resolved.

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Tape2 Side 1

S: So, just to conclude this question: 'how and when did the term Maya come into usage?' Well, it's a very ancient Indian term, definitely pre-Buddhistic. 'Was it originally Buddhist or Hindu?' It was Hindu, if one can speak in terms of Hinduism at that early period. 'Is there a difference in its usage by Buddhists and Hindus?' Yes, there is, as I've explained. 'In Buddhism does Maya become a goddess as in Hinduism?' Well, no, she doesn't. That is quite clear, I think, isn't it?

Mangala: Now we come to the final question. This is from Surata and is from lecture No. 8, which is on 'The Four Great Reliances'.

Surata's question: Bhante, Thurman says that Vajrapani is 'the king of incantations and teachings' (p. 98 and note 9). Why does Vajrapani have this title, and in what way are the Scriptures 'stamped with his insignia'?

S: (Searching for reference.) Ah, yes, the text - not Thurman - says: 'As Scriptures, they are collected in the Canon of the Bodhisattvas, stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings.' And Thurman says: 'That is Vajrapani.' All right, let's look at the question, then. 'Bhante, Thurman says that Vajrapani is, in the words of the sutra, 'the king of incantations and teachings.' 'Why does Vajrapani have this title and in what way are the Scriptures stamped with his insignia?'

There is an assumption underlying this part of the question: 'Why does Vajrapani have this title?' Can you see what it is? Or perhaps I should say a confusion of thought. (Silence.) Well,

let me give you an easier example. Take Manjughosa. Manjughosa is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, but why does Manjughosa have the title of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom?

Padmaraja: He is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

S: He is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. Manjughosa is the embodiment of Wisdom, so it is in a way absurd to ask 'Why does Manjughosa have the title of the embodiment of Wisdom'? He is the embodiment of Wisdom. You can't really distinguish between him and his title, so there is no question of asking why he has that title. The title is not an attribute, as it were stuck on to Manjughosa himself, who is something quite different from his attribute. You can ask why somebody wears spectacles, but you can't ask why is a human being a man? Or 'Why does a man have the attribute of masculinity?' It's a bit like that. So 'Why does Vajrapani have this title?' Well, Vajrapani is the embodiment of certain qualities, so to speak - speaking from a slightly unBuddhistic point of view - Vajrapani is the personification of certain qualities, so there is no question of asking why he possesses those qualities or those titles indicating the qualities. That is what he embodies; he is that, he is those. Do you see what I mean?

So Vajrapani has this title, to use that language, because he has that title. It is a bit like asking, 'Why is the Queen the Queen?' Well, she is the Queen because she is the Queen. She was born that way - almost; she couldn't help it. So I think that answers that part of the question. 'And in what way are the Scriptures stamped with his insignia?' Let's go to the passage. Maybe I'll read the whole little passage.

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'The Tathagata Such-and-such said "Noble son, the Dharma worship is that worship directed to the discourses taught by the Tathagata. These discourses are deep and profound in illumination."' That is quite clear. '"They do not conform to the mundane and are difficult to understand and difficult to see and difficult to realize. They are subtle, precise and ultimately incomprehensible. As Scriptures they are collected in the Canon of the Bodhisattvas"' - the Bodhisattva Pitaka, presumably - '"stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings"', i.e. Vairapani.'

So 'in what way are the Scriptures' - presumably the Mahayana sutras - 'stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings?' To begin with, Vajrapani is said to have collected: 'As Scriptures, they are collected in the Canon of the Bodhisattvas' - no, it doesn't say that he collected them specifically - 'and stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings.' Sometimes, of course, it is said that Manjughosa collected the Mahayana sutras, but they are stamped with the insignia of Vajrapani. It's as though Vajrapani has guaranteed them. And he is also the king of incantations and teachings, especially perhaps of incantations: dharanis, mantras. So it's as though he sort of guarantees the authenticity of those Scriptures by putting his seal upon them. But what does it mean, putting his seal upon them?

Mangala: Kind of protector.

S: He's a kind of protector of the scriptures. In a way, Vajrapani is the Protector par excellence, because he embodies power, energy. But I think it isn't just that.

Padmavajra: His insignia is the vajra, isn't it?

S: You could look at it like that: stamped with the vajra, yes. Because the vajra represents indestructibility. You could say that it is the power of Vajrapani that renders those discourses, those Mahayana sutras, presumably, indestructible. Also, you could make reference here to him being the king of incantations; presumably, as I said, dharanis, which have a sort of magical power. It's as though he sort of imparts to those discourses a sort of magical quality that enables them to endure or to attract people. Again, one mustn't take it, I suppose, too literally, that they don't have that quality before and have to be stamped with Vajrapani's seal or insignia before they have it.

Prasannasiddhi: He tramples on ignorance as well, too.

S: That's true, yes.

Padmavajra: Could it also be something to do - isn't Vajrapani sometimes called the lord of ascetics and guhyapati? And maybe the idea that the Mahayana sutras are sort of in some way a revelation from ...

S: There is that. I think probably it's a mythic way of saying that the Mahayana sutras are endowed or imbued with a sort of magical power. They don't just address the reason. So one could say that they have been stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings, that is to say Vajrapani, who embodies or represents that particular powerful, magical quality. You could, for instance, say that someone has written a drama in blank verse, and it has the seal of Shakespeare upon it. Do you see what I mean? Well, what would you understand by that? That it is imbued with something of the quality of [157] Shakespeare, his sort of magical quality. So in the same way, the Mahayana sutras, the scriptures, are collected in the canon of the Bodhisattvas, stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings; they partake of something of his quality, that magical quality. I take it to mean something of that sort; I have not come across any actual traditional explanation.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose in a way the natural thing is to think that Manjughosa was the king of incantations and teachings.

S: Well, in a sense, yes; but Vajrapani is especially associated with power, with energy, the thunderbolt; and apparently with the dharanis. He seems merged with the figure of Vajrasattva.

Padmavajra: There might also be the connection with Aksobhya, who appears in the Vimalakirti Nirdesa.

S: That's true.

Also, it's as though Vajrapani has authenticated those scriptures after they've been collected. He authenticates them by imparting to them something of his magical power, so that they don't operate just from a purely rational level, but appeal to the deeper levels of the psyche. Again, one mustn't take it all too literally as though there is a figure of Vajrapani literally putting his seal and imparting to them a certain quality; it is really a way of saying that the scriptures collected together in the Bodhisattva Pitaka actually do possess that magical quality which is embodied separately in the figure of Vajrapani. It just illustrates how, when we can't understand the myth directly, we have to sort of translate it into the language of concepts,

which isn't always easy; and then, having translated it into the language of concepts, we can try and understand the myth as such!

Prasannasiddhi: Isn't that a bit perhaps because we aren't all that familiar with the figure of Vajrapani?

S: Possibly, yes. I think if you were familiar with it in a visual form, it would mean much more.

Prasannasiddhi: Or even (...) absorb the feeling of ...

S: That's why I have sometimes said that, just as the Tibetans often keep themselves surrounded by thangkas, we at least should have a few pictures of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas around, that are always there, so that one does familiarize oneself with what they look like and develop some feeling for them. Most people in the Movement are reasonably familiar with all the major Buddha and Bodhisattva forms; I think they are quite well grounded in them, aren't they? The five Buddhas and at least the four or five major Bodhisattva figures. Some people say they dream about them; that means they have entered into their unconscious, so to speak. Someone wrote to me a few days ago that he found he was having lots of dreams about the red dakini. It wasn't Padmavajra!

Padmavajra: Did you receive any initiation into Vairapani?

S: Yes.

Padmavajra: Did you ever do the practice?

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S: No, I didn't do that one. But I have it, I have it. I think, generally, in the Vajrayana, Vajrapani, as I say, is merged with Vajrasattva, whom he resembles in many ways. So people don't usually do the two separately. But he is one of the three family protectors, so his initiation is often given separately along with theirs. Two or three people - I think three Order Members now - have the Vajrapani practice.

Prasannasiddhi: The fact that we tend to see Vajrapani as a wrathful figure is partly because Vajrasattva is actually similar to the peaceful element.

S: Yes, you could say that they are related, roughly speaking, in that sort of way. Usually in Tibet, when you have the three family protectors together, Vajrapani is represented in a wrathful form. Vajrasattva, certainly in the Vajrasattva practice, which is one of the four mula yogas, is represented in a peaceful form, so they do come to be almost the peaceful and wrathful forms of each other. Basically, Vajrapani does exist in a peaceful form, but he is more often shown in wrathful form; so in that way he comes to be almost the wrathful form of Vajrasattva, since Vajrasattva is more often represented in peaceful form.

Padmaraja: You sometimes get a blue Vajrasattva as well, don't you?

S: Yes, blue and/or white.

Anyway, that's the questions. I don't know how many we have left for next week.

Mangala: About seven.

S: But they are rather miscellaneous. Sometimes I feel people need to think a bit more themselves, or even look things up in dictionaries. I have said this before. There is still a certain amount of literal-mindedness in the Movement, or in the Order, perhaps. Sometimes a question is based upon taking quite literally something which sometimes obviously shouldn't be taken literally; the question arises simply because you do that, and the question is so to speak answered by not doing that.

Prasannasiddhi: I was thinking of that literalism, and also relating to the discussion on historicity, I was thinking of Blake's division into single vision, double vision, triple vision and fourfold vision. It's as if a lot of people only exist on the level of single vision.

S: Mm. For instance, you might use the expression 'once in a blue moon' and then someone might ask you 'Why do you believe that the moon is sometimes blue?' Well, you didn't mean to assert that the moon was sometimes blue; you were merely using the expression to convey the meaning of 'not very often', because a blue moon is not something you see very often; perhaps you never see it.

Mangala: Do you think there is any reason for that? (Laughter.)

S: Maybe the moon occasionally has a blue tinge, but it can't be more than that. Or you might say, 'The sun rose at five o'clock,' and some pedantic person might say, 'The sun didn't really rise at all, it was just the effect of the revolution of the earth.' But you use that phrase because it's customary; you don't mean to assert that the sun did literally rise. Some people might possibly believe that, but most nowadays don't.

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So sometimes a question is based simply on taking quite literally something that is not meant to be taken literally at all.

Another kind of pseudo-question is illustrated by that famous question - I don't know if it comes out of Alice in Wonderland, or something like that: 'Why is water wet?' it is really a pseudo-question, isn't it? The mere fact that it is water means that it produces a certain impression when you come into contact with it, that impression being called wetness. It is a bit like asking 'Why is Vajrapani what he is?' or 'Why is Manjughosa the Bodhisattva of Wisdom?' as though there was a Manjughosa who had nothing to do with Buddhism originally and who was quite arbitrarily made the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. I think we have to ask ourselves, when we ask a question, whether in fact the question is not of this kind, as often turns out to be the case.

Another - this is slightly different - I have found in the last couple of years that quite a few of people's questions take the form of 'if such-and-such, then isn't there the danger of such-and-such?' Have you noticed that? 'if we have co-ops, isn't there a danger that we don't place enough emphasis on study?' Or 'if we meditate too much, isn't there a danger that we lose our ability to communicate?' Or 'if we study the Pali Canon, isn't there the danger that we neglect the Mahayana sutras?' I can't help wondering why so many questions come in this

form.

Padmaraja(?): Why do you think? Have you come to any conclusion?

S: Well, a tentative conclusion. I think in a way people are very indirectly resisting something, or registering a very faint protest, without very often realizing it.

Mangala: Isn't it also, Bhante - in Buddhism we do stress very much the Middle Way and not going to extremes and trying to find a balance so that our lives don't develop into ...

S: Yes. Well, if you say something is dangerous, you are warning against it, so why do you want to warn against it? Maybe you don't particularly like or want that particular thing. For instance, supposing - this is just a crude example which I have given - if you say, 'if we study the Pali Canon, isn't there the danger that we neglect the Mahayana sutras?' - this may be a way of saying, though you may not realize it, that you just don't want to Study the Pali Canon, so you warn other people off the Pali Canon and therefore justify your own going off the Pali Canon by presenting it as an effort to avoid a danger.

Mangala: But could it also be that you query - that's maybe a bit strong, but you are concerned perhaps that if you just study the Pali Canon then you become a bit Theravadin, a bit narrow in your outlook, rather than being a bit broader if you also study the Mahayana sutras?

S: But then one would imagine people would put (the question) in the form 'The Pali Canon is great, but let's study something of the Mahayana too.' But the way they put it - sometimes when they put it themselves, the tone of voice with which they ask it - 'Oh, don't you think there's a danger?', which is really quite odd sometimes.

Padmavajra: Do you think also in this there might be a resistance to really putting yourself into something, really ...

S: I think there's something in that, yes.

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Padmavajra: - people just put their toe in the water and ...

S: Keeping your options open a bit. Yes, indeed.

Padmavajra: They might accuse somebody who is really having a go of being an extremist, even. They think you are being a bit extreme, doing all that work.

S: Yes. Wilful is the current word.

Padmavajra: Wilful. Classic, absolutely classic!

S: Yes. Not that there isn't such a thing as wilfulness, but very often the word wilfulness is invoked when someone is doing no more than making a healthy vigorous effort.

Prasannasiddhi: Is it perhaps related to some sort of fear, maybe an irrational or sort of existential fear that confronting something just brings out this fear in people?

S: Could be. I was just thinking that people actually use the word 'danger' in connection with wilfulness; or 'If you do this or do that there's a danger of wilfulness'. Yes.

Padmavajra: Danger of repression!

Padmaraja: Danger of making some progress!

S: Oh, no, they don't put it in those terms. Just the opposite, in fact! Can you think of any other current 'dangers'? Wilfulness is a favourite at present - you are in danger of being wilful. Danger of being one-sided.

But, yes, I do think in a way it is a not very straightforward way of expressing your resistance to something, in many cases.

Padmavajra: I find it also a bit of a dampener as well. It's a bit ...

S: Yes, indeed, yes.

Padmavajra: You have somebody who is really trying to - they might even be mistaken to a degree - really trying to fly, you know; and it's ...

S: 'Isn't there a danger of crashing?' There's the famous case of Icarus. You might break your wing if you fly!

Padmavajra: 'Don't get carried away! Calm down!'

Dharmadhara: 'You're going over the top!'

S: Yes, take everything very easy. Or 'You're shouting!'

Prasannasiddhi: 'You're getting angry!'

S: Well, you might get angry. It might not be a good thing to get angry, but that is to be distinguished from talking with real conviction and vigour.

Padmaraja: Are you suggesting, Bhante, that that's a rationalization of a sense of inertia?

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S: That could be one way of looking at it. It might well be that in some cases, yes. You are just trying, as Padmavajra said, to dampen down other people's efforts; you don't like energy to be flying around, and all that sort of thing. That is not to say that sometimes people aren't wilful, or aren't this or aren't that. But one can invoke the 'danger' of that in the wrong way, in order to avoid or evade something, or to damp people down.

Mangala: Perhaps we should look for or try to get a pseudo-equanimity ...

S: Right, indeed, yes.

Mangala: - which is actually a kind of dullness.

S: That's true. Yes, other things I've heard are like: 'If you take the spiritual community too seriously, aren't you in danger of making it into a group?' (Laughter.) Oh, yes!

Padmavajra: Classic!

S: Oh yes, I've heard this sort of thing. Or 'If you encourage people to be clear in their ideas, isn't there the danger of following a party line?'

Padmavajra: 'Danger of being dogmatic'.

S: 'Danger of being dogmatic', yes.

Mangala: Would you go as far as to say, Bhante, that perhaps we need to be a bit more 'extreme', as it were, in the Movement?

S: I think, yes.

Padmavajra: 'Isn't there a danger in being extreme?'

S: Subhuti rather stuck his neck out, didn't he, in his Nets - or Net, I should say; there's another one coming - ? You could say he was being a bit extreme, perhaps, very mildly; but it is surprising the reaction that that provoked, even within the Order. They really thought Subhuti was going a bit over the top, etc. etc. Perhaps that's a controversial example, but I think that there is perhaps an unnecessary fear of extremism. Perhaps that sometimes does prevent people from really putting themselves into something.

Supposing you are being quite extreme: if you are a basically healthy person, sooner or later a balance will assert itself. Supposing you are the sort of person who is very extreme, and you think: 'OK, I'll go for the next three months all out for meditation.' So suppose you do - sometimes people have done that - but the time will come when you start feeling quite naturally: 'Enough. It's time to get into some study or to meet some people, or open up communication with people.'

Padmaraja: Probably the worst that could happen is you learn that you are doing it in the wrong way, which is (...)

Prasannasiddhi: 'The path of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.'

S: Sometimes, yes. But here has to be a path of excess!

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Padmavajra: Do you think the 'danger' also might be tied up with the fetter of doubt?

S: Oh yes, I am sure it is. And hesitation.

Padmavajra: Vague.

S: Also it's warning people off, discouraging people. 'Play safe. Don't take any chances. Don't risk anything. Danger! Keep out!' And you surround yourself with these big 'DANGER'

notices; you just try to keep close within yourself, not risk anything. I am exaggerating, but there is that kind of tendency here and there in the Movement.

Mangala: Again, maybe there is also the whole heroic aspect rather than the serene aspect that needs to be emphasized; the more dynamic, adventurous ...

S: Yes! I thought we had in the past. I have even given a lecture on the heroic ideal in Buddhism, haven't I?

Dharmadhara: One 'danger' I think academics are prone to is stating the danger of losing your objectivity by taking something seriously! That is quite a serious one.

S: Yes, objectivity implies aloofness, lack of feeling, lack of involvement, lack of commitment.

Dharmadhara: Eternally sitting on the fence.

S: Well, I've told before the story of how someone in Finland tried to get the translation of The Three Jewels accepted by a commercial publishing house, and they refused to accept it - though they were looking for a book on Buddhism to publish - because it was written by a Buddhist and therefore could not be objective! What a confusion of ideas that statement represents!

Padmaraja: Who would write the science books, in that case?

S: They'd have to get someone like D. H. Lawrence to write the science books, on that sort of principle.

But, whatever the details, constantly talking in terms of danger is really a very negative sort of attitude. It discourages, dampens down any enthusiasm, makes people timid. It almost makes the spiritual life consist in nothing but a sort of systematic avoidance of dangers, and everything is seen as dangerous - which it is, in a sense. Sometimes, when people ask me, 'Don't you think such-and-such would be dangerous?' - I say, 'Everything is dangerous!' It is something you just have to accept. There is always a danger of a wrong approach to anything that you take up; but that doesn't mean that you just play safe by not making any approach at all. It used to be thought, in Buddhist circles in Britain, that meditation was dangerous; it was dangerous to meditate for more than five minutes at a time. All right, for some people it might be, but that is no reason for avoiding meditation and not meditating. Yes, If you study too much, there is certainly the danger that you become too academic, but that doesn't mean that you should play safe by giving up study.

I think this ploy of presenting things as dangerous, or objecting that something might be dangerous, is related to the broader sort of habit I have spoken about of - what shall I say? - using the language of the Movement, or the language we have developed in the Movement, or using the language of [163] Buddhism itself, in such a way that it negates itself, or is made to negate itself.

Anyway, perhaps that's enough for one evening. We've done our best, perhaps, with these questions. They weren't particularly stimulating.

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PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Mangala, Nagabodhi, Kovida, Dharmadhara, Prasannasiddhi, Bodhiraja.

Mangala: Today is Tuesday, 23 June, and this evening we are going to deal with questions on the seventh lecture in the Vimalakirti Nirdesa series; the lecture being 'The Mystery of Human Communication.' As we dealt with lectures 6 and 8 last week, this will be the final session. We are going to start with two questions from Prakasha about the rules concerning eating before 12.

Prakasha's first question: In the lecture Sariputra is worried about eating before 12.

1) Did you practise this rule in India? For how long, and with what effect? How strict were you in keeping the rules of the Vinaya?

S: Did I practise this rule in India, for how long and with what effect? Yes, I did practise it for a number of years. I can't tell you exactly how many years without consulting notes and things like that. It might emerge from my memoirs. As for its effect, it is very difficult to say. One thing I certainly noticed was that you get used to something. I can't remember, during the period that I wasn't eating after 12, that I was ever bothered by missing that evening meal; and I have a quite clear recollection of entertaining people, or having people staying with me at the hermitage or at the vihara, and sitting down with them in the evening and just having a cup of tea while they had a full meal. You might think that one might find that a difficult situation, but that actually isn't the case. If you are in the habit of not eating in the evening, it just doesn't bother you to see other people eating; you can sit down with them quite happily and just have your cup of tea. So I find it quite difficult to say what the effect was. I think again it's a question of just not eating after 12 o'clock being part of the deal, as it were; you just follow the rules. I certainly didn't take it very seriously, because I could see so many monks whom I met from time to time really observing the rule in a quite ridiculous sort of way; for instance, as when they would get up at the crack of dawn in order to have an enormous breakfast, and then go back to bed, then get up and have another breakfast, and then have their third meal before 12 o'clock. So I couldn't take it all that seriously. I certainly took seriously the idea, or the principle, of moderation in eating; I certainly took that seriously. But not eating after 12 o'clock, I can't say that in my heart of hearts I ever really took it very seriously, even during the period that I was observing it, which was for quite a few years.

I can't remember quite why I changed, because a time did come when I did start eating in the evenings. I can't remember a definite decision to do so. If I look back over the years, I just find that at some period in the middle 50s I started taking something in the evening; I think it was probably no more than a little snack. But then again, in the later 50s, after I moved to the Triyana Vardhana Vihara, for the whole of the period that I was there - I think a seven-year period - I observed the rule during the rainy season retreat. I had my own way of observing the rainy season retreat. This was when I was at the Triyana Vardhana Vihara. I didn't go outside the vihara grounds. We had five acres, and I didn't go outside for that three-month period, and at the same time I didn't eat after 12 o'clock during that three-month period. And this I decided entirely off my own bat, I think partly to make sure that, in the case of the [165]

not eating after 12, I hadn't just slipped into eating in the evenings out of greed, as it were. And also observing the restriction of not going outside the compound, just to make sure that I wasn't becoming too fond of going to the bazaar and seeing my friends, as it were. But I must say, after a year or two I really quite enjoyed that spell of confinement to the vihara grounds. I really felt it as in a way a quite liberating experience. And I also remember quite clearly that I didn't have any trouble not eating after 12 o'clock, because I had made up my mind that I wasn't going to do this for three months, and that was that. There is no question of adapting to it. As far as I remember, the very next day that was that and there was nothing to think about; I didn't hanker after food in the evening or anything like that. At no stage of my career in India did I ever overeat, I think; I was always reasonably moderate in food. Overeating was never a temptation. So that was the way in which I practised the rule in India and as far as I can tell that was the effect. As for how strict I was in keeping the rules of the Vinaya, that isn't easy to answer, because what does one mean by strict? I think I was sensible; I think one can put it that way. I was sensible. I was stricter than quite a few bhikkhus I knew. Sometimes I was strict about things they didn't think were at all important, like vegetarianism. But, admittedly, I wasn't as strict as certain others who, as far as I could see, regarded the Vinaya rules as an end in themselves.

But my present view is, of course, very definitely that moderation in eating is the principle. One can refrain from eating after 12 o'clock as a means of ensuring moderation. Well, you can do it the other way around, as the Sufis do, and eat only in the evening and not during the day. The Sufis try to observe a perpetual sort of Ramadan, don't they? Because, during the month of Ramadan, the orthodox Muslim doesn't take solid food during the hours of daylight - well, he doesn't take anything, he doesn't even drink water. So the Sufis, particularly power(?) Sufis, try to follow that regime all the time; they eat only in the evening, only after dark, just once. So whether one eats once in the morning or once in the evening, it doesn't really matter, the particular pattern of meals. You can eat ten times a day, if you eat just a small quantity. Somebody else might eat the same quantity all at one sitting. And then, of course, Buddhaghosa, in a famous passage, declares that someone is a one-mealer, an ekabatika(?), even if he eats ten meals, provided he eats them all before 12 o'clock. Well, to me this is really just ridiculous; I can't take it seriously at all. This is the Theravada at its most formalistic.

But the fact that one is, so to speak, easy-going with regard to this rule of not eating after 12, certainly doesn't mean that one shouldn't pay any attention to the amount of food that one eats. One should eat only what is really necessary for health and strength, and eat mindfully.

Subhuti: Do you think there is any value in following the Vinaya (...)?

S: In this respect, or ...

Subhuti: In all respects; in taking that set of rules and ... ing oneself to them. The people from Chithurst argue quite strongly that ...

S: Well, leaving aside that particular set of rules, I think it is certainly a good thing to follow rules or to have a sort of definite framework of that kind, especially perhaps when one is young. I think one will find that, probably, if you study people's way of life in the FWBO, you will find, for instance, that a rule emerges. Very few people in the FWBO eat meat or fish, so you could say that there is a rule in the FWBO that 'Thou shalt not eat meat or fish', though

we don't see it like that; it is just our natural way of life. But it is [166] something quite definite, something which is understood and which hardly anybody does. So I think it is a good thing to have those sort of guidelines, and even to be quite strict in observing them. But that is not to say that all the guidelines which one finds in the traditional Vinaya Pitaka are necessarily helpful to us now. I think the principle behind all of them is probably still valid, but it may require a different application, a different expression. I have sometimes thought that it might be a useful exercise one day, on a seminar, to go through all the Vinaya rules systematically, examining what principle is involved, how that principle was applied or formulated in the Buddha's day or shortly afterwards, whether that formulation still applies; if not, what fresh formulation of that principle might be helpful. I think one could very well go through all the Vinaya rules in this way.

You may well find - I think you would find - that there are certain rules that, in fact, the FWBO as a whole or the Order as a whole is in fact following: certain rules of procedure with regard to Order business and so on; the fact that we have chapters. But that would, I am sure, be a quite interesting study, if we could get around to it one day. But one certainly doesn't want to undervalue the importance or usefulness of what, for want of a better word, we call rules.

Subhuti: The modern Theravadins, you could say the forest monks, would argue that that particular pattern of rules, that particular way of life, is itself a very good one for attaining to Enlightenment - they'd say.

S: I'm sure it is for some people; I don't doubt that. But one may perhaps doubt whether it is suitable for everybody, and also question whether the alternatives are simply lay lifestyles which have got no direct bearing on the attainment of Enlightenment at all. One might question that the purely monastic lifestyle is the way to Enlightenment, even though it might well be a way, in the sense of the way for some people.

Subhuti: So, in a sense, one could say that there is a place for those who want to follow such a way of life; it is just the way in which they regard others that is ...

S: And also whether they see clearly that their way of life is a means to an end. Also there is the point, as I think I have argued in the Ten Pillars, that the basic ethical precepts, even in the Theravada, are really common to monks and laymen; that the precepts which differentiate the monk from the layman are of relatively minor importance. For instance, there are rules about the wearing of robes. These are not of great importance, when you compare them with the Five Precepts or the Ten Precepts, which involve really quite basic moral principles.

Subhuti: Can you envisage a time when there might be Members of the Western Buddhist Order who considered that it was beneficial to them to follow the Vinaya as presently laid down?

S: Well, even at present there is nothing to prevent anybody observing any of those rules, if they think it would be helpful. Some, perhaps, do already. Some have taken vows of celibacy, haven't they? That is one of the most important of the monastic rules, even though there isn't that difference between celibacy and non-celibacy in an absolute sense as sometimes people think.

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Subhuti: Just observing the nuns at the weekend from Amaravati, it obviously wasn't just a matter of - I don't think for them it was just a formal matter that they thought that because they were doing that that was their entire Buddhist duty, as it were. They did see it as a way of life they were following to a particular end. But they obviously derived a great deal of strength from the fact that they felt it was the way of life that the Buddha had laid down. There was a sort of devotional dimension to it. I suppose they were sort of living out a myth, you could say.

S: Well, it does give one a great deal of strength if one believes that one is doing the right thing, the thing that has been laid down, as it were. Clearly, it is difficult to say to what extent that represents a group attitude, and to what extent it represents a genuinely spiritual attitude. I have mentioned, for instance, in The Thousand Petalled Lotus - I don't know if you remember the incident - the incident with the old brahmin lawyer in Muvattupuzha, the very rigid orthodox old man. I quoted one of his sayings: 'A disciplined life gives strength', and this is very true; I commented on it at the time, I think that if you follow any pattern of discipline, it does give you a certain strength. He derived his strength from following the brahminical rules, with some of which I would violently disagree because they involved the strict observance of the caste system; but they did certainly give him strength of a sort, there is no doubt about that. He was a very strong character, he believed that he was following these divinely inspired rules, caste rules, this divinely inspired way of life, that is to say the caste system of which he was a part. But that doesn't necessarily have a spiritual value. You get that sort of strength in the army, too, where you have to observe certain rules, where you belong to a body of men, you are governed by a certain ethos. This came out in Beware of Pity, didn't it?

Subhuti: But of course you're not, as a bhikkhu, at least in the forest tradition, you're not just cleaning your rifle, you are also meditating and - at least to some extent, not very much - studying. So presumably as a context for engaging in spiritual practice, it might provide a very strong basis, it could be argued.

S: Well, an ethical basis is necessary anyway. I think the only question is the extent to which you seek to crystallize your ethical principles into specific rules covering details of conduct.

Subhuti: So you are not referring to the principle.

S: Yes - well, whether you've referred to the principle or not. But certainly those ethical principles are the basis of the spiritual life, and I think for most people (they) need to be formulated into rules to some extent. It is just a question of how far you go. Because the Jews in Leviticus go very far indeed; the brahmins go very far indeed; the Jains go very far indeed - much farther than the Buddhists do. The Buddhists - I mean Buddhist monks - are very moderate, middle of the way, compared with the Jains. They were criticized in the Buddha's day by followers of the Jina as lax.

So I don't disagree with the principle; it's only a question of how far one carries it, in the case of any given individual. And also whether one regards it as a means to an end or whether one regards it as an end in itself. But someone within the FWBO or within the Order could very well read through the Vinaya and come to the conclusion that certain rules would be helpful for him or her to observe. That would be quite in order.

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Subhuti: From my observation of these people, it seemed that the main thing as far as they were concerned was that it was laid down by the Buddha; it had a sort of, well, authority. They considered 2,500 years ...

S: Well, that certainly does enable one to observe the rule, at least helps one to observe the rule, if you can believe it really was laid down by the Buddha or really laid down by - well, by God, through Muhammad, or really laid down by Jesus. Sometimes one believes that at the expense of ones critical faculty, and clearly that does have its disadvantages. One might say that in the case of those people in Britain who take up that way of life, it is perhaps to some extent due to the fact that they feel the need of some kind of authoritative guidance, just as some people feel the need of a body like the Roman Catholic church. I don't know what the situation is now, but in the 20s and 30s quite a few people, especially intellectuals, took refuge in the bosom of the Roman Catholic church because they just wanted an authority. They just were tired, almost, of having to think things out for themselves, decide themselves, take responsibility themselves. So one can approach Buddhism, especially the Theravada, in that way.

Subhuti: There was an extremely amusing moment when - one of the nuns was very strongly under attack for the relationship between the nuns and the monks, and she said that she had raised this question with Sumedho, because she had been ordained for seven years, and she had to defer to a monk of one day's standing. And she had raised this with Sumedho, and Sumedho had said 'it was good enough for the Buddha, it's good enough for me.' And this didn't go down at all well.

S: Well, this is a point of view; but then one can't help questioning, in certain instances, whether it was good enough for the Buddha. This is where one accepts tradition unthinkingly, perhaps; just as the follower of Tibetan tradition might say, 'It is good enough for the lama, it is good enough for me.' Again, it's a Middle Way. You can't go it alone; you can't rely in a one-sided individualistic way on your own judgement, your own opinion; you need to consult with those who are wiser and more experienced than yourself. On the other hand, one doesn't want to submit unquestioningly to authority, especially when the authority is perhaps of a dubious nature. It is not easy to follow this middle path, and we certainly don't find it easy in the FWBO, as you know; but I think we have to try to follow it. There has to be a place for faith, and there also has to be a place for healthy scepticism. And it's very easy just to go to one extreme or the other, rather than trying to find that middle way. If we are just going to accept some authority unquestioningly, why bother with Buddhism? Why not just go straight and join the Catholic church, which is so much closer to us in culture and everything? Why give ourselves the trouble of going to the East and setting up an infallible authority there? And, again, if you're going to be a thoroughgoing sceptic, why bother with Buddhism at all? Go and be a humanist, go and be an agnostic. Why Buddhism? But I see Buddhism as a Middle Way between the extreme of authoritarianism and the extreme of individualistic thinking for oneself.

But when you say that that remark of Sumedho was not very well received, do you mean not well received by the nuns at Chithurst or by those present at Sharpham (?)?

Subhuti: By those present at - yes. I suppose in a way it seems like a head-on collision between authority and individualism.

S: Well, except the nun doesn't seem to have been very individualistic.

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Subhuti: No, I mean the individualism of those present. She accepted, she was quite satisfied with that.

S: Anyway, there's another question about the Vinaya.

Mangala: Just before that, could I ask people to say who they are before speaking, to make it easier for the transcribers? The second question is also from Prakasha.

Prakasha's second question: 2) Originally the rule of eating before 12 was a codification of their actual lifestyle. How relevant was the continuation of this rule once the monks had changed from an eremitical to a coenobitical lifestyle? Has the continuance of the rule for the last 2000 years or more by the Sangha really been a case of monastic formalism? If so, what does this say about Buddhism?

S: 'Originally the rule of eating before 12 was a codification of their actual lifestyle.' To some extent. I am quoting from memory. I may not have got it quite right - it would seem originally, during the first few years of the Buddha's teaching career, bhikkhus went out and begged - to use that term - twice a day, and ate twice a day, morning and evening; but then, the Vinaya goes on to relate, a certain monk, begging in the evening, scared a woman who thought he was a ghost; as he approached the doorway of the house or when she saw him standing there she had a miscarriage. So the Buddha asked his disciples not to go and beg in the evening. The commentator, I believe, says that the Buddha was, so to speak, just waiting for an opportunity to institute that rule; but one thinks that, if he had really wanted to institute it, he would have done so.

But there is a passage in a sutta, I can't remember which one, where the Buddha is represented as saying: 'I, O monks, eat one meal a day' - he doesn't say at what time of the day - 'and experience happiness and vigour', or words to that effect; 'do you, O monks, do likewise.' So that is quite apart from the Vinaya; this is in the Sutta Pitaka. So it would seem that the Buddha did recommend one meal a day, though not necessarily one meal a day taken before 12 o'clock. But there are other passages, of course, where the Buddha recommends simply moderation in eating, moderation in food.

So it isn't quite correct to say that the rule of eating before 12 was a codification of their actual lifestyle. But, of course, as for the relevance of the continuation of this rule once the monks had changed from an eremitical to a coenobitical lifestyle, - according to the Vinaya, even the eremitical monk was permitted to accept invitations to people's houses. According to the Vinaya, the monk, whether coenobitical or eremitical - not that that distinction was necessarily made in that context - was permitted to receive his food in three ways: one, he could go on an alms round, that is to say he could go from door to door of people's houses; two, he could accept an invitation to somebody's house; or (three), he could eat in the vihara food which had been brought there for him by the laity.

So the connection between the eremitical lifestyle and begging for one's food isn't quite as close as the question seems to imply; do you see that? Because, even before the monks became coenobitical, before they started living all the time in what we call the monastery,

they were already able, according to the Vinaya - they were permitted by the Vinaya - to receive their food in ways other than by begging. So the reasoning isn't really quite accurate here. 'Has the continuance of the rule for the last 2000 or more years by the Sangha really been a case of monastic formalism?' it depends which Sangha you [170] are talking about. It isn't as though there was one completely unified Sangha throughout the whole of Asia. In Tibet and in China, in practice if not in theory, the rule was indeed modified, with monks taking in the afternoon what was called medicinal food. It usually amounted to a meal, but in the colder climate of Tibet and North China monks considered that they were justified in taking this second meal. But out of respect for tradition it was called medicinal food. Even according to the Theravada Vinaya, a bhikkhu who is sick or unwell - and unwell is defined pretty loosely - is allowed to take five things after 12 o'clock: he is allowed to take molasses, crystallized sugar, butter, honey and oil. And in Sri Lanka, pious lay people make these five things into a sort of toffee which they serve to the monks after 12 o'clock, and this is quite acceptable, though it is understood that the monk is considered to be not very well, or maybe a bit weak, and therefore needing that extra nourishment. So in the Theravada countries technically they don't eat after 12 o'clock, but that medicinal food is permitted and is quite often taken.

In the so-called Mahayana countries, the bhikshus, who are of course Sarvastivadin bhikshus, do take a more substantial medicinal food than that. It is more like a meal. I believe, in many monasteries, perhaps including Tibet, they don't cook a second time, where there is cooking in the monastery. At four o'clock or five o'clock they take only leftovers.

So there is some awareness of the rule, so one can't say that the monks of Tibet, the monks of China or Korea are guilty of formalism in this respect, because they actually have sensibly modified the rule, in practice if not in theory. And even the Theravadins have to some extent, inasmuch as they do take this gilampasa(?), this medicinal food, when they are not really seriously ill. I have even heard from Thai bhikkhu friends that there is a sub-sub-commentary on the Vinaya which mentions a particular herb as being permitted after 12 o'clock - I believe it grows in the water - and I have been told that that is made into little cakes by the faithful laity and given, at least in some parts of Thailand, to monks after 12 o'clock.

Prasannasiddhi: In China, this medicinal meal out of respect for tradition - isn't that in a way just a form of weakness, that they are not actually willing to admit openly that they just need another meal? It seems a quite straight-forward case.

S: I think they would say, if asked, that they need another meal, because it's cold there. At the same time, they don't want entirely to break with tradition.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes, but the Buddha does say just before his death that they can change any of the minor rules ...

S: That's true, but the Sangha, early on, probably before it was divided into Theravada and Sarvastivada, decided that it didn't know which were the major and which were the minor rules, because Ananda hadn't asked; and that was one of the charges against him. One can't help thinking that 500 arhants - after Ananda had become an arhant - ought to have been able to perceive which were the major rules and which were the minor ones. If they couldn't even see that, well - what could they see? One doesn't like to go against tradition, especially when it is so old, but then what is one to think of these things? - that 500 arhants didn't have the wit

between them to be able to tell which rules the Buddha was referring to when he spoke of major rules and which rules he was referring to when he spoke of minor rules. Of course, the commentators ancient and modern do have an answer to that: it wasn't that the arhants actually couldn't distinguish - though that is what the text seems to convey - but that out of respect for the Buddha they decided to obey them all. But that [171] doesn't really sound very convincing. Some Theravadins do argue that one should just continue to observe the rules out of faith in the Buddha. That factor can't be disregarded altogether, but I don't think it is a good thing if faith in the Buddha in that sense makes one rigid and formalistic.

Prasannasiddhi: In a way, then, in that instance, it wouldn't actually be faith in the Buddha, because they wouldn't actually be putting into practice the spirit of the teaching.

S: One could argue in that way, because the Buddha did encourage you to think for yourself. But there is no doubt that the observance of rules does, as I said before, give one strength; so I think the value of observing rules is not to be underestimated, but I think one has to give careful thought to what rules one does observe, and why, and not be inflexible and rigid.

So 'what does this say about Buddhism?' Well, it doesn't say anything about Buddhism in, say, Tibet and China, but it does say something about the Buddhism of the Theravada countries, and there, even granting what I have just said, I think they are too rigid and unimaginative, let us say.

I believe, though, that the monks of Chithurst have already made little modifications, haven't they?

Prasannasiddhi: They have introduced medicinal food?

S: I'm not sure about medicinal food, but in the robes, I think?

Subhuti: They also work.

S: And work, yes. Again, one must be careful what one says, because some of them are bhikkhus and some are samaneras. But bhikkhus certainly shouldn't dig the soil, according to the Vinaya; they shouldn't light a fire. I'm not sure whether the bhikkhus at Chithurst would break those particular rules. Usually the breaking of those rules, if it is a breaking, is left to the samaneras, who don't take those rules specifically.

Nagabodhi: When Sumedho showed us round Chithurst, when we visited a few years ago, he showed us the kitchen garden and made a point of saying, 'Of course, we can't work here. (...)'

S: 'We' meaning bhikkhus. It wouldn't include samaneras.

Subhuti: And anagarikas ...

S: Anagarikas certainly could. Well, in countries like Burma it's amazing the number of jobs around the vihara that the anagarikas can do, that the bhikkhus are prohibited from doing! This is one of their grievances - that they are used just as servants. And there is something in that. Though you might find some anagarikas in Britain feeling that - that the monks, just by

virtue of their ordination, are not supposed to do certain things, with the result that a disproportionate amount of the work falls on the shoulders of the anagarikas and, of course, the samaneras.

Anyway, perhaps we'll move on from the Vinaya.

Mangala: Question No. 3 comes from Tejamitra, and it's about an apparent discrepancy in the different translations of the sutra.

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Tejamitra's question: At a certain point in chapter 10 of the sutra, Vimalakirti asks who of the assembly can go to the distant Buddhaland to beg for food from that Buddha. All remain silent and there is a discrepancy in the different translations of the sutra as to why.

According to Luk: 'All the Bodhisattvas remained silent as Manjusri was noted for his supernatural power.

According to Thurman: 'No one volunteered because they were restrained by Manjusri's magical power.'

And Lamotte says: 'Through the supernatural intervention (adhisthana) of Manjusri all the Bodhisattvas remained silent.' Could you comment on these discrepancies and explain the significance and purpose of the adhisthana of Manjusri?

S: It's quite easy to see what the various translators were translating. According to Luk, 'All the Bodhisattvas remained silent as Manjusri was noted for his supernatural power', and according to Thurman, 'No one volunteered because they were restrained by Manjusri's magical power.' They translated from the Chinese - we don't have the Sanskrit text. The Chinese must have read: 'All the Bodhisattvas remained silent because of Manjusri's supernatural power.' One translator takes that to mean 'because of the intervention of that power', and the other takes it to mean 'because Manjusri had the reputation of possessing great supernatural power'. But in other cases it was 'because of Manjusri's supernatural power'. Lamotte says that supernatural intervention, as he renders it, is equivalent to adhisthana. That doesn't really correspond to adhisthana. It's more like iddhi or riddhi, supernatural power. We discussed adhisthana at some length some weeks ago.

In the lecture itself, I give the explanation that - I think this follows the text - that Manjusri wanted to give an opportunity to Vimalakirti to show, so to speak, what he could really do, because Manjusri realized what Vimalakirti was capable of; so he didn't want, perhaps, the other people present, the other Bodhisattvas, to just make an exhibition of their own blundering efforts to go to this other Buddha land. He in a sense prevented the other Bodhisattvas from volunteering so that they might see what Vimalakirti could do. This seems to me the sense of the text. And that would seem to make clear the purpose of the adhisthana of Manjusri - whether one calls it adhisthana in the strict sense or whether it's just a manifestation of supernatural power.

So if one is to understand the sentence as referring not just to Manjusri's supernatural power but his restraint of the Bodhisattvas by that supernatural power, it could only be as a skilful means; it couldn't be for any selfish motive, and as Vimalakirti immediately afterwards sends

this emanated Bodhisattva to fetch the ambrosia, clearly he is leaving the way clear for Vimalakirti. That seems to be obvious. Is it clear? Is it obvious? (Murmurs of assent.) Let us go on, then.

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Side Two

Mangala: Question No. 4 is from Sarvamitra about the meaning of false wisdom.

Sarvamitra's question: (referring to transcript p. 5 of lecture) Describing how our Buddha teaches the Dharma, Vimalakirti says: '...this is false view; these are their retributions... this is false wisdom and this is the fruit of false wisdom... What is false wisdom? Lamotte (p. 214) gives the Sanskrit dausprajna.

S: Dausprajna corresponds to the Pali dupanna, which occurs several times in the Dhammapada. 'False wisdom' is a very misleading translation, as though there are two kinds of wisdom, one true and one false. In translating from the Pali, it is usually rendered as 'evil understanding'. It is not a technical term, it is a very general term. There is not, for instance, - it doesn't consist in anything in particular, or there is no list of the five or the six dausprajnas or anything like that. It just means 'evil understanding', an understanding clouded by unskilful mental states. You could say that false view, or micchaditthi, is much more definite, much more precise. It consists in certain definite points of view, which are wrong. But the dupanna or dausprajna is just the general state of having an evil understanding, an understanding clouded by unskilful mental factors. It is not really a technical term, in the way that micchaditthi is. Dauspraina does occur in the Hybrid Buddhist Sanskrit Dictionary.

One could say that dausprajna and micchaditthi are roughly synonymous, though in the case of micchaditthi, the dausprajna is articulated into specific, as it were philosophical, positions which are mistaken. The prajna here is not used in the full sense, it is just used in the more general sense of understanding or intelligence; because, taking prajna in the highest sense, you can't possibly have a false prajna.

Anything more?

Mangala: Question No. 5 is from Ruciraketu ...

S: No, we really have dealt with that.

Mangala: Did you want to just leave it?

S: I think so, yes. There is no point in going over the same ground again. Do you remember that?

: Yes.

Mangala: Questions Nos. 6 and 7 are both from Ratnaguna and are about the incarnation Bodhisattva.

Ratnaguna's first question: In chapter 10 of the text, Vimalakirti magically creates an

incarnation Bodhisattva, whom he sends to the Zenith, where the Pure Land Sarvagandha-sugandha is situated. You say in the lecture that there is quite a lot that could be said about this emanated incarnation, especially as providing a link between Sarvagandha-sugandha and our own world. Apart from the obvious interpretation of the Bodhisattva being the link or the bridge between our world and the Pure Land, what more could be said?

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S: You notice that I said 'There is quite a lot that could be said'? I didn't say 'There is quite a lot that I could say'. (Laughter.) Did you notice that, or not? We are dealing with a sutra that contains a lot of myth, a lot of symbolism, obviously, so the myth and the symbolism is meant, among other things, to stimulate one's imagination. So that when I say that there is quite a lot that could be said about this Emanated incarnation, I don't mean exactly that there are quite a lot of specific points that one could make in the ordinary discursive way. I mean more that, if one was to allow one's mind to dwell upon this particular episode and its significance, quite a number of different facets and aspects of its meaning would disclose themselves. I don't think it is appropriate for me to spell it all out; I think the reader or the listener has to do just that, has to let his mind dwell upon that myth, that symbol, and see what it unfolds for himself or herself. In fact, there is a whole string of things that I referred to and said - what exactly do I say? - For instance, I say: '...much that could be commented on. For example, significance of the Emanation Bodhisattva's bowing down, significance of the remains of the meal being given, significance of the meal itself, significance of the ambrosia, significance of the vessel, significance of the fact that it is not depleted, etc. etc. But I'm not going to say anything about any of these things.'

It's not that there is a definite detailed specific significance which Bhante could proceed to expound and explain if he wanted to; I am indicating that all these actions and all these items, these elements, have a certain symbolical, mythic significance which will disclose itself to you if you just ponder upon it. It's not that there is a conceptual explanation which I could proceed to give if I wanted to - not that there aren't any possible conceptual explanations; no doubt there are; but I don't want that people should approach the sutra throughout in that way. They must allow it to stimulate their imaginations.

So I think I would prefer to leave it just there. People shouldn't always expect, as it were, me to do all the work. It's not good for them. There is quite a lot of work I can do, but especially with sutras like this there is quite a lot that people have to do for themselves, especially in the way of opening themselves to the significance or the impact of the myths and symbols.

(Has) anyone anything to say on that? (Pause: Laughter.) But this is something I have seemed to notice in various ways throughout this course of lectures - that people sometimes seem to leave it to me to do things that they ought to be doing for themselves. It has been suggested that (this is) because they couldn't think up any other questions, but I'm not sure that that is the case. I don't mind answering real questions that people have tried to get to grips with but really need some help with, but perhaps people should do quite a bit more for themselves at the same time. Perhaps they should try much harder to produce real questions, and also try much harder to answer themselves questions which they can answer themselves, especially questions which simply involve looking up words in dictionaries. That people should certainly be encouraged to do more of.

Mangala: Bhante, maybe you should be asking them the questions.

S: Yes, sometimes that is what I have ...

Mangala: - and getting them to find the answers.

S: But, of course - maybe I trust that that is done in study groups; study group leaders do put questions to people, to check up on how well they have understood something. I did have a question and answer session with Order [175] Members, years ago at Archway. The results were dreadful. Maybe that's the reason I haven't held one since. You weren't there - no, you couldn't have been there, Subhuti, no. The Order Member who came out with flying colours and had answers to 90% of the questions was Dhammadinna. Next to Dhammadinna, though quite a long way behind, came Marichi; and everybody else was nowhere at all. There must have been about 15 or 20 present, not more than that. But Dhammadinna really had done her homework, it was very noticeable. I think she still is one of the better informed, or better read, Order Members. And maybe Marichi likewise; Marichi is probably at least a good average.

Mangala: Bhante, maybe if your views regarding these sort of matters are or have been sufficiently communicated to the study group people, I think that they would feel obliged to come up with questions; like that's partly what it's for.

S: But I hope they don't think that they've got to produce questions even when there really aren't any questions. But I think if they do address themselves very seriously to the text, genuine questions will emerge. I think if they don't, they haven't addressed themselves to the text with sufficient vigour; they haven't really tackled it, haven't really attacked it.

Mangala: I suspect that if Ratnaguna - if you'd asked him 'Why don't you write a talk on this?' or something, he probably could do it; but somehow, just because he has thought about it and it's a big job to come up with questions, he's just written down something that ...

S: No, the purpose of the study group leaders' retreats is not to come up with questions. Perhaps there is some confusion about that. The purpose is to understand the text, and when they study it among themselves and find certain obscurities or things which are not clear, which they are not able to resolve just by themselves, well, then there is the opportunity of raising whatever the question may be with me. What we are basically trying to do is to understand the text, especially to understand it well enough to be able to explain it to people in their study groups. If it is perfectly clear and they understand the text fully as far as they can see, they don't need to ask me anything. So the purpose of the whole procedure is not to ask questions; that is only incidental. But perhaps some people think that if they don't come up with any questions, I'll think that they haven't been working properly. Maybe that will be so; but one doesn't guard against that by manufacturing questions which are not the product of real thought and real investigation. Anyway, I am hoping to be able to take the next series of question and answer sessions live, as it were, and maybe I can go into things of that sort.

Mangala: I just wondered to what extent (let's say) the study group leaders, because they know that you are there and they can ask you these things, that almost precludes their own engaging with things and trying to think out things for themselves.

S: It might be, it might have that effect.

Subhuti: My impression is of quite a considerable degree of artificiality and contrivance in a lot of these questions. There seem to be three standard questions; one is a sort of technical question which they could resolve very easily by going and looking them up. The others are questions like 'What did you do, Bhante?' ...

S: Or 'Please comment on such-and-such event'.

[176]
Subhuti: The other ones are trying to get you to give a literal rendering of something that is basically imaginative and poetic. They seem to be almost contrived ploys.

S: Well, if you are around when we do have the next study group leaders' retreat, perhaps you could raise some of these issues - apart from me, before you get together with me. I am not sure when we will be doing it; perhaps in November.

Dharmadhara: December, now, I think.

S: Well, in December, of course, Subhuti won't be here. But there seems to be a certain lack of what one might call intellectual sophistication.

Mangala: Do you think, Bhante, that perhaps you haven't been challenging enough and maybe you've been just giving a bit too liberally and too easily and too freely, and not encouraging people to take a bit more initiative, think a bit more for themselves, (so that) people become over-dependent on you?

S: I'm not sure.

Subhuti: My impression is actually the opposite: that they are taking refuge in these non-questions, really, because they are afraid, in a sense, to step out into real questions; because you are quite demanding, actually. My experience in the question and answer sessions is that you often spend most of your time criticizing the question; and ...

S: Mm. Especially more recently, and in Tuscany.

Subhuti: For quite a long time, for five or six years ...

S: Oh dear.

Subhuti: - ever since Tuscany, perhaps. It is quite clear that people are becoming more and more kind of ...

S: Wary.

Subhuti: Wary. But I think that then what they are doing is taking refuge in non-questions they can't be faulted on. You know, if they ask 'What did you do with the Vinaya?' you can't say 'What kind of a question is that?'

S: Well, I could!

Subhuti: Well, you are now, Bhante! So they come up with their list of questions, but they're not actually very adventurous or challenging ...

S: They just try to get Bhante going, as it were. I do sometimes feel that.

Dharmadhara: I think it's especially difficult, when they are not asking the questions but having to write them down for someone else to ask. They want to be especially safe.

S: Yes. But it's interesting that, when I was speaking - I think last year - about testing the chairmen, some chairmen, I know, did become quite anxious - I [177] believe I wasn't misinformed? Perhaps not all chairmen, but certainly some. I haven't forgotten about that!

Prasannasiddhi: Are you still going to test them?

S: I didn't say that; I just said I hadn't forgotten about that! (Laughter.) You see how they try and catch me? They always try and jump the gun, don't they? and try and push me a little further than I intend to go at the moment! I suppose the awful thought hasn't occurred to anybody that they have had the... test? (Laughter.) I don't mean simply telling them that I was thinking of testing them; I don't mean that.

Subhuti: Something else?

S: Something else, yes. It's not impossible, is it? They might have had even more than one, without knowing it at all; without even knowing whether they've passed or failed, or passed with honours.

Prasannasiddhi: It might be going on all the time.

S: I sometimes think that perhaps I don't always appreciate the extent to which material that I've in a sense put into circulation is not in fact effectively in circulation. The fact that it's on tape, the fact that I have spoken those words and they've been taped, or even transcribed - or even transcribed and printed, after a fashion - doesn't necessarily mean that they really are effectively in circulation in the Order, even.

Dharmadhara: There have been a number of reasons why it's taken so long, but the other day a printed seminar finally came out, unedited, which I'd been on in 1979. (S: Ah!) it had taken that long to come out. Whereas this stuff is being transcribed and made available this year, and I think there is a lot more interest in the current material coming out, the very current stuff.

S: Yes, we've no facts or figures to go by, other than sale of newly published transcripts. But (there are) a few people who listen to tapes and read transcripts quite avidly, but I think they are very much in the minority. The sale of The Threefold Refuge and other edited seminars which have come out in book form has been very disappointing, even allowing for the perhaps poor standard of production, especially in the case of The Threefold Refuge.

: It's adequate.

S: It's adequate within the Movement, just about. I don't know how many copies of Endlessly

Fascinating Cry we have sold.

Nagabodhi: We sold out, and I think that was probably 300 or 400. (...) sold out years ago.

S: It's not very many, is it?

Nagabodhi: At the same time, it was available for years.

S: And it was, of course, the first of its kind, and when it did come out there weren't all that many publications of mine available.

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Nagabodhi: That seminar was talked about for a long time. It was your first seminar.

S: But there is some very good material still untranscribed and unedited. Sometimes when I come across bits and pieces transcribed and edited for Mitrata, I am quite surprised what material is there - things that I have said that I'd forgotten.

Prasannasiddhi: It's quite a major undertaking for one person to acquaint themselves with even a proportion of your seminar material.

Subhuti: (...) saying this, not about the amount that was being used, but that in a sense whatever was being read or listened to was really being used.

S: It doesn't sink in.

Subhuti: It doesn't really sink in, people aren't grappling with it.

S: Well, perhaps not everybody needs to. Perhaps, for some people, concentrating on meditation or observing Precepts or performing pujas is better. Not everybody is going to do a lot of study. But there need to be, within the Movement, a quite substantial body of Order Members who do understand the Dharma and can communicate it, and can clarify doubts, clear up confusions. Otherwise, in the long run, practice will be wrong.

Subhuti: Do you think that study is an activity in its own right, and it tends to be something that for a lot of people is an adjunct of a very busy life?

S: Oh, yes, that's true. I think there's a lot in that, especially for Mitras, perhaps.

Subhuti: And that really we do need to give ...

S: Perhaps there aren't all that many people with an aptitude for Dharma study in the deeper sense, or more exclusive sense.

Subhuti: The most we do is a bit in Tuscany; it's relatively little, really.

S: Well, perhaps more study will take place at Guhyaloka, and maybe at Vajrakuta too.

Anyway, are there any more questions?

Mangala: Yes, there is one final question, also from Ratnaguna, on the same subject ...

Subhuti: I'm not sure it's necessary to ask this one.

S: Well, let's have it, it's there on the agenda.

Ratnaguna's second question: When this incarnation Bodhisattva arrives at the Pure Land, he bows down to the Buddha Sughandakuta. You say in the lecture that a lot could be said about the significance of this. (Laughter.) What could be said?

S: Well, perhaps I should just ask all of you. (Laughter.)

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Subhuti: I think we really ought to sort of just reflect upon it. (Laughter.)

S: Until next time we see Ratnaguna? Well, a lot could be said about bowing down, yes. A lot has been said in the past, hasn't it? Because people have had difficulty with bowing down in front of the shrine, haven't they - certain people? It has sometimes taken them quite a while to bring themselves to do it, but they usually succeed in the end.

I did hear, early on - either just after the study group leaders studied this text, or perhaps while they were actually engaged in studying it - that on the whole they had found it pretty clear and straightforward, which rather staggered me, I must admit. Perhaps there is a level on which it is clear and straightforward, but there is a lot in it. But anyway, it does seem to be generally agreed that the three-year Mitra study course, to which, of course, these study group leaders' retreats are geared, has resulted in a quite considerable upgrading of Dharma knowledge throughout the Movement. That seems to be generally agreed. So something must filter through. But I think probably people still need to be clearer about basics. I suppose that can only be really assessed when they give talks or write articles. That has become quite an important feature of the ordination course. The women have adopted it.

: Giving talks?

S: Oh yes. Women Mitras nowadays give quite a lot of talks, I think even on ordinary retreats. They seem quite keen on it, actually; well, I think maybe the men are, too. And, as I've said before, the standard of talks has gone up remarkably over the last so many years. Maybe that is some indication - the sort of talks we now have on men's events - we wouldn't have had those five, six, seven years ago; certainly not ten years ago, nothing like them. Even Nagabodhi wasn't as good ten years ago as he is now!

Mangala: I think he was better than (...)

S: Do you? In what way? Nagabodhi's? Not mine? (Laughter.) Nagabodhi's! Oh, this is getting interesting!

Mangala: What I'm saying is that I'm really sure that I think the talks people are giving these days are better (than), or even as good as talks given say over ten years ago.

S: In what respect?

Mangala: Well - both in terms of content and style. It's just to put it very generally.

S: In what way, in content?

Mangala: I've seen Order Members give talks in the last year, and I have been especially impressed.

S: Well, you're not easy to impress. (Laughter.) What I go by, what I notice, is - first of all, I see that people can reproduce the Dharma - the good speakers. They clearly have studied quite carefully. Their presentation of the Dharma is quite accurate. Their presentation of what I've said explaining Buddhist teachings and traditions is quite accurate. But, on top of that, over the last few years, I notice that they are able to add something from their own [180] experience and from their own reflections - something quite valuable; which was not the case, I think, five, six, seven years ago. And that more original element, in the true sense, is featuring more and more in people's talks. It isn't just a reproduction of something I've said. It represents genuine, original thought and reflection on their part on what they have learned, on what they know. So I see the progress there. Because when there is something that doesn't come from me, I notice it immediately. I perk up then! Well, yes, it becomes more interesting to see how they handle it. And some - Ratnaguna is especially good; Chintamani is good; Vessantara is good. They are all capable of giving a very original turn to their talk, showing that they really have thought and reflected quite independently, and made the material their own. I consider this very important.

Mangala: I still have heard quite a few very mediocre talks in the last year, say.

S: On the men's events or (in) other contexts?

Mangala: I think they were probably Order Members.

S: Well, I'm quite sure that mediocre talks are still given - at least, talks which we might experience as mediocre, but which might still be quite useful to relatively new people or to beginners. But if anyone ever feels that someone's talk is mediocre or not up to standard, they should certainly give them feedback. I think that can only help. I sometimes think I am not as good a speaker as I was; I think my peak time was my thirties, when I was in India, think I waned after that, for various reasons. I mean, as a speaker - the content probably is better than it was then; but just as a speaker I sometimes think I am not as good as I was then. I don't have the same flow of language, for one reason or another. I don't have the energy that I had then.

When is your next talk?

Mangala: I don't know.

S: I think we do need more in the way of public lectures. It's a very good approach to a lot of people. Quite a lot of people will come along to a public lecture who won't go to the centre for a class.

Subhuti: It is interesting that in a sense what we're saying is that in the question and answer sessions people don't seem to be displaying that much thought, but when they give talks they

do. I wonder if there's anything that's worth considering there?

S: Well, giving a talk is, I imagine, a much more creative experience.

Prasannasiddhi: One has generally got time to think it over. It's at the back of your mind for several weeks.

Subhuti: You've also got a certain urgency, haven't you, the objective situation?

S: Well, there is the occasion That is stimulating, the fact that you are going to be addressing so many people; perhaps on the occasion of a celebration.

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Mangala: I think also a lot of it is due to the fact that you have to express it. In that way you have to really get hold of your material, think about it and how to present it. It's a bit like when you teach somebody, you really have to be on the ball. But if you just ask a question, well, you just have a vague idea ...

S: But then you don't have to ask a question. This is the point I've been making. I'm not insisting on questions. But there is the opportunity of asking questions if, after all the study you've done, there is something that you haven't understood or that you're not sure about.

Subhuti: I suppose what I am working towards is my own experience of these question and answer sessions, which has not been very extensive - I think it's only been two, which were probably philosophically more easy to get questions out of. It's not really a very easy situation in which to think very deeply about the issues that are involved in a retreat. First of all, in the morning, you try to skate over the whole talk and sort of general discussion amongst ten people or something like that; it's not really very systematic or deep, or not really an opportunity for very creative thinking about the issues. We probably should have been thinking about them already beforehand.

S: Oh, yes.

Subhuti: But I do wonder whether that format is the best one for - it probably makes sure that people have listened to the talk, you make sure that they've ...

S: Made some notes.

Subhuti: Made some notes, and that's about it.

S: But then again, as I said, the purpose of the exercise is not to produce questions.

Subhuti: Yes, it's to make sure that people have really understood and thought about the talk. I wonder whether it actually is the best format for that. Probably, if you didn't have it, people would be far less well prepared. It is a way of making sure ...

S: Perhaps they wouldn't even come on the ...

Subhuti: If you didn't any retreats, no doubt the study group leaders wouldn't have done

sufficient preparation, so it is a way of ensuring that they do do that. But I just wondered if there's not some way in which one could make sure that the whole thing went a bit further, was a bit more stimulating and interesting.

S: Well, perhaps one could have, for instance, sessions where somebody does actually put questions or ask people to give a five or ten-minute impromptu talk on one particular aspect. These are all possibilities.

Dharmadhara: As one of the study leaders, I could point out that when we have these retreats some study leaders don't listen to the tapes because they've already listened to them. They go away and do their own study. And some other study leaders would like - there are differences amongst us - some would like to cover the material on their own during the retreat, and (study?) in their own rooms; so we are not clear about that. And, for the last two or three study [182] retreats, we have arranged that for next time we'll cover a tape each, a lecture each, and one of us will prepare in advance. But when the time comes, it's often not done; no one's done it enough ...

S: That is quite disappointing.

Dharmadhara: It's still being examined, it's not yet an ideal ...

S: Though of course we will have come to the end of the three-year course. But there are still people going through the system, as it were, but not taken by me.

Dharmadhara: The study leaders who have completed the three-year course are hoping to have a couple of further study retreats next year to come together, just to keep the faculties going, and maybe look at new material, or whatever; just to gather together regularly. And also to look at the teaching methods.

S: Right, yes; that is perhaps important.

Dharmadhara: Sort of educational theory, teaching techniques.

Mangala: Learning methods!

Subhuti: I do think what we need is another level of study going on. I know there are some people doing university courses and so forth, but - and in a sense the study group leaders' retreats have been a development, an advance, but I do think it needs to go further. Perhaps this is something that could happen at Guhyaloka.

S: Or perhaps a time will come when people like Sagaramati and Sthiramati will be more in circulation and able to take, perhaps, very well organized study retreats on particular doctrines or topics.

Prasannasiddhi: We need a course for Order Members, really. It stops once you get ordained.

S: Well, we're hoping to entice them out to Guhyaloka. Anyway, perhaps we'll leave it there, because I want to start doing some packing this evening.

Voices: Thank you, Bhante.

S: I hope it's helped brush up all your brains just a little bit, asking these vicarious questions!

Subhuti: Well, we wouldn't ask questions like that!

S: Oh, no, never! (Laughter.)

Prasannasiddhi: No desire whatsoever to ...

S: Well, a few of them were good.

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