

## 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 [Mitrans](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Tiratna 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 Tiratna 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 [Tiratna has acknowledged as unhelpful](#) and which form no part of our teaching today. In encountering all of the ideas contained in over seventeen million words of Dharma investigation and exchange, we are each challenged to test what is said in the fire of our own practice and experience; and to talk over 'knotty points' with friends and teachers to better clarify our own understanding and, where we wish to, to decide to disagree.

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

*Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team*

## The Three Jewels - Chapter 10 - The Wheel of Life.

Sangharakshita: We're studying the Wheel of life and the whole chapter falls quite naturally into two halves more or less, the first covering karma, certain technicalities of karma and the other covering the Wheel of Life itself. Now what I suggest we do is, because we've only three hours for this particular chapter, we go through the first half rather more rapidly, that is up to our coffee break, discussing only a few passages which raise matters of general importance, we shall find a lot of detail in this part of the chapter and it isn't necessary to discuss every item. So we'll just read more or less straight through this first half of the chapter just stopping to discuss sections which raise quite important matters of principle and not allowing ourselves to be bogged down in detail very much, and then of course after the coffee break we'll be into the Wheel of Life proper which is our main theme for this morning. So let's start off with the Wheel of Life and go round in a circle each reading a paragraph at a time.

Text Page 68. - "The laws in accordance with which individualized consciousness determines conditioned being are covered by the compendious term Karma, while the actual process is elucidated in the complex of teachings pictorially represented in Buddhist art by the "Wheel of Life" (Bhavacakra)."

S: This is rather cryptic, it follows from what has been said in the previous chapter but as it may not be altogether clear as it's very condensed I'll just briefly explain what that means. We have first of all as it were two things, there's consciousness and there's being, as far as human beings are concerned at least you can't altogether separate the two, you can certainly distinguish them, there is an aspect which we can call "consciousness", there is an aspect which we can call "being" and these two are related and as regards consciousness there is consciousness which is individualized, consciousness at the centre of which there is as it were an "ego" or "self", for want of a better term, and consciousness at which or at the centre of which there is not any such ego or self that's as regards consciousness. Then as regards being there is being which is conditioned, being which arises in dependence on conditions and being which is unconditioned. Now the conditioned being is determined by the individualized consciousness according to certain laws and these laws are summed up in Buddhism by the word karma. Karma is the [2] sum total of all those laws in accordance with which a particular kind of conditioned being follows from a particular kind of individualized consciousness, the laws governing that transition, as it were, are called karma and the actual details of the process, how it happens, it's different phases these are all pictorially represented in Buddhist art in the Wheel of Life. So therefore in this chapter first of all karma and then the Wheel of Life.

Question: What kind of beings aren't conditioned by karma?

S: Those beings which represent we may say or embody different stages of the Path which is non-conditioned, or different aspects of the Goal itself that is the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and so on, not that if they have physical existences that physical existence isn't governed by ordinary natural laws but in their inner being they are no longer bound by that, or even they enter voluntarily into that sort of situation but the situation in which they are including their own as it were embodied being doesn't follow from any limitation on their consciousness.

Text Page 68 - "So far as its usage in connection with Buddhism is concerned, the word

karma is often employed in a gravely erroneous manner. Some writers make it mean not only action, it's literal meaning, but the result of action, for which Buddhist literature reserves separate terms such as karmavipaka and karmaphala."

S: We're very familiar with these sort of you know mis-usages of the term, if you say "Oh, I guess it's my karma", or "That must be my karma", "something has happened to me, it's my karma", this is a very loose meaning - usage of the term indeed. Strictly speaking karma means just action not the results of action. There's a separate term for the results as I've said. Karmaphala, which means the fruit of karma, or karma vipaka which means the fruition of karma.

Text - "Others use it in the sense of fate or destiny, sometimes even going so far as to maintain that according to Buddhism [3] whatever happens to us, whether pleasant or painful, comes about as the result of previous karma. The confusion must be cleared up before the different types of karma are enumerated."

S: This is the first thing, before we go on to deal with the different kinds of karma we must be absolutely clear what karma is, karma is just action, action as it were of the individualized consciousness, willed action as we shall see a bit later on, it's certainly not action in general, it's certainly not fate, it's certainly not destiny; we're going now into these various confusions.

Q: Karmavipaka, what does that mean?

S: Vipaka means sort of fruition.

Q: Fruition? ... of action, and karmaphala means fruit?

S: Fruit, that's literally fruit, yes. There's the same sort of idea. You can also ( ) vipaka means ripening - ripening or fruition.

Text - "Though having the literal meaning of action, karma in this context invariably means act of volition."

S: That is willed action.

Text - "Thus we get the important equation karma = cetana (volition) = Samskaras ("formative" or rebirth-producing psychological factors). "

S: Yes this - it's a well known as it were equation in Buddhist thought. First of all karma the action, then karma is cetana, not just action of mind in the conceptual sense but action as it were of your total being, the total energy of your [4] being which is in some cases conscious and then of course we call it will; and these in turn equal the Samskaras as they're called when they appear in the list of the twelve nidanas that is to say the so called formative or rebirth producing psychological factors. So it's quite important to bear this in mind that karma means cetana and cetana means Samskaras. Cetana is very often translated as mind but it isn't that. It's more like volition, volition or will has been... has been explained as the sum total of psychic energy available to the conscious subject, but sometimes you're not quite clear where the conscious subject ends and where it begins because sometimes the conscious is a bit more conscious than it is at other times - it sort of shades off so what then enters into the definition

of will shades off. Sometimes the energy is very clear and because the subject, the conscious subject is very clear and sometimes the conscious subject is not so clear so the energy is not so much the energy of volition in the fullest sense but a sort of drift, a sort of tendency not completely conscious, in a particular direction.

Q: It's quite a difference in your ( ) it's conscious.

S: Right, yes. Yes this is how it is, so we mustn't interpret the word volition too, as it were, sharply, there are different grades, different as it were degrees of impetus, different degrees of clarity. But all this whether clear or relatively unclear or even confused is summed up in cetana or Samskaras. Cetana to me, I don't know that this is borne out by the text, has the suggestion more of the rather clear volition, Samskaras means the whole sort of muddled heap of conscious, you know, decisions, actual volitions, vague drifting tendencies only [5] partly conscious sort of glimmering with a bit of consciousness every now and then; the whole sort of heap and collection, all that drift and general tendency of one's being, this is known as the Samskaras, and it's they, according to Buddhism, which ultimately are responsible for us coming into yet another life. It's the motive force in all of them, you know, to bring about yet another life. All right, on we go then.

Text - "As opposed to Jainism, Buddhism maintains that involuntary actions, whether those of body, speech or mind, do not constitute karma and therefore cannot bring about the results accruing to karma."

S: I've given another illustration here but the classic one from Buddhist literature relates to the incident in which a monk, a follower of the Buddha was invited to somebody's house for lunch as we would call it, though this was before twelve o'clock, and no one was present in the room inadvertently he sat down on a chair or rather sat down deliberately but inadvertently he crushed a child that had been laid on the chair underneath a cloth, he probably thought it was some sort of cushion. So there was the cloth on the chair, he just sat straight down and of course crushed the child and killed it. So the question arose, "What action has he committed, has he murdered the child, was he morally responsible for the death of the child?" So the Jains who were apparently around in that place said he had committed murder because according to them it was the action which counted not the volition, the intention. But the Buddha said, "No, he had no intention of killing the child so he was not guilty of murder, but on the other hand", the Buddha said, "he should not have sat down in the house, one, without being invited by the owner of the house and, secondly, without making sure that he knew exactly where he was sitting." So he was somewhat unmindful. So he wasn't guilty of murder, of deliberately [6] intending to take someone's life and then taking it but he was certainly guilty of a rather culpable degree of carelessness and unawareness in somebody else's house. So he was guilty on that score but he wasn't guilty of murder as the Jains maintained. So this is the sort of classic story to illustrate this point and I've given another one here.

Text - "This does not mean that such actions produce no results at all: The unintentional dropping of a brick on our own toes hurts no less than if we had done it deliberately, perhaps more so. It only means that unwilled actions do not modify character."

S: Perhaps one should say, "do not modify character in the true sense in nearly the same degree", because you could say that if you were going through life just drifting without any

sort of very deliberate volitions your character would be modified but not as it were as a character. It would be weak and undermined and you'd become a sort of human vegetable more and more.

Text - "The confusion arises because the fact that according to Buddhism there is a relation of "cause" and "effect" between karma, or act of will, and karmavipaka, the fruit of that act in the form of pleasant or painful experience, has led some unwary students to jump to the conclusion that the law of karma and the law of cause and effect are synonymous."

S: This is a very important point, this is perhaps the biggest misunderstanding as regards karma and I'm going into it in greater detail in the next paragraph. Karma is cause, the karmavipaka is the effect. You perform a certain willed action and as a result of that you have a certain kind of experience. So karma is the cause, the experience is the effect - because of that some people seem to believe that karma means cause or [7] causation or the law of causation in general but it isn't that it's just one particular form of causation as we shall see later on.

Text - "Karma (or more correctly karma and karmavipaka) is only one particular type of cause-effect relation. The Nikaya/Agama discourses represent the Buddha as repeatedly condemning the doctrine of fatalism and as declaring that though He teaches that every willed action produces an experienced effect He does not teach that all experienced effects are products of willed action or karma."

S: There are several points here. I suppose you know what the Nikayas are, Nikayas means collections, collections of discourses of the Buddha in Pali, there are five collections - we need not go into that now and the Agamas are the corresponding Sanskrit versions which we mostly don't have in Sanskrit now - only in Chinese and Tibetan translations. So it means the dialogues and discourses of the Buddha according to quite an early tradition. So these discourses represent the Buddha as repeatedly condemning the doctrine of fatalism. The Buddha says that to hold any sort of fatalistic philosophy goes right against, directly against the spiritual life with the basic assumption of the spiritual life is that you are free at least to some extent. If all your actions are determined, well forget all about the spiritual life, what will happen will happen. And also the Buddha declares in these discourses that though He teaches that every willed action produces an experienced effect He does not teach that all experienced effects are products of willed action or karma, you have to make that distinction. Whatever you will produces its effect, you will experience that but you can't work it the other way round, it doesn't logically follow that whatever [8] you are experiencing is the result of some act of volition of yours in the past - that doesn't logically follow, if you think it does that's just your sloppy logic. So everything you deliberately will under law of karma results in an effect which you'll experience with certain exceptions as we shall see, even here there are exceptions, but all the experiences that you have, that crowd in upon you all the time are not due to previous willed actions, previous volitions, some are not - we'll see that in detail in a minute, is that clear? These are quite important basic points about karma. All right on we go then.

Text - "This important distinction is elaborated in the formula of the five Niyamas or different orders of cause-effect or conditionality obtaining in the universe. They are utu-niyama, physical inorganic order; bija-niyama, physical organic or biological order; mano-niyama (non-volitional) mental order; karma-niyama, volitional order; and dharma-niyama,

transcendental order. To distinguish effects produced by one niyama from those produced by another is not always easy."

S: Let's stop there for a moment and take this word niyama. Niyama means a sort of order, order in the sense of processes occurring in a regular manner on a particular level of existence. So here there are five Niyamas enumerated, and these are enumerated in the Abhidharma. Uta-niyama which means physical inorganic order this is quite simple, it's the order for instance to which physics and chemistry refers, and then bija-niyama, the physical, organic or biological order. Then mano-niyama the non-volitional mental order the level of mental processes which do not amount to volition for instance the process of perception. Then karma-niyama the volitional order that is to say the order of willed deliberate actions and then dharma-niyama the transcendental or at least we may say as a spiritual order, we'll see what that is [9] in a minute. So to distinguish effects produced by one niyama from those produced by another is not always easy, let's go from there.

Q: Just before we do go on are these five Niyamas the usual explanation of conditionality because when we were going through "Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism" I think there were only four enumerated.

S: No there were five but mano-niyama was called citta-niyama, so there were five.

Vangisa: Bhante could you repeat that...the definition of niyama, order in the sense of...?

S: A niyama is a regular process while order is in this sense a regular process occurring on a certain level of existence. All right go on to the explanation about the difference between the Niyamas.

Text - "Some effects, in fact, can be brought about by any niyama. Suppose there is a man suffering from fever. The complaint may be due to a sudden change of temperature (utu-niyama), to the presence of a germ (bija-niyama), to mental strain or worry, or tension due to experiences taking place in the dhyanas (mano-niyama) to the fact that in a previous life he had harmed someone (karma-niyama), or to chemical and cellular changes occurring in the body consequent upon transcendental realization (dharma-niyama)."

S: Let's go into this just a little bit. Suppose there is a man suffering from fever now if you aren't careful, I mean whether it's a fever or any other sickness, if you just have a sort of little bit of knowledge of Buddhism you might say, "Well according to Buddhism it's because of his past bad karma that's why he [10] is suffering", whether he is suffering from a fever or whether he loses money or whether he gets run over by a bus, you know, it's all his past karma but Buddhism says NO! This is not so. In this particular case, the fever, it may be due simply to a change of temperature which has got nothing to do with karma directly, yes there is a very general indirect connection in as much as why have you got a body at all, a body that is subject to the uta-niyama and which can be affected by changes of temperature, all that is surely due to karma. So that's an indirect and remote connection but the fact that this specific incident occurs that, you've, you know, fallen ill and suffer fever isn't directly dependant upon karma. It's not because you've induced fever in somebody else in the past it's simply due to the change in temperature occurring perhaps or to the presence of a germ, bija-niyama to mental strain or worry - it can be psychosomatic, not coming from anything that you've willed in the past but from mental strain and worry here in the present, or from tensions due to

experiences taking place in the dhyanas, this is quite important. I was reminded of this a few days ago when I was reading in a Sunday newspaper a lengthy article written by a man who had had a nervous breakdown and come through it, did anyone see this? He was a professional psychologist and it did strike me at one point that very often we don't know what is going on. I had a letter also, two days ago from someone who used to come and see me years ago when I was at the Hampstead Vihara who is now in a mental hospital and he certainly was a very strange and odd person. But from the letter it was clear that quite strange and almost sort of Buddhistic experiences were going on too, and he said in the letter that "of course here they think I'm mad and they have been giving me treatment but it doesn't do me much good so they've stopped now:" he said, [11] "that suits me. I'm looked after here and get enough food and it's warm." And of course he was roaming around for some years before that, was picked up by the police and he says, "Of course I know what is happening to me is you know because of the meditations I've been doing and so on and so forth, so I just go along with the treatment that they wanted to give me but", he said, "they can't understand anything of a spiritual nature so I keep quiet about all that." So is this person mad or not? One just doesn't know and certainly some of the so called symptoms or rather symptoms of so called illness even mental illness are due to sort of spiritual changes taking place, so we have to be able to distinguish these too even within the citta-niyama, these sort of physical symptoms i.e. in this fever which are definitely due to strain and worry and what we might describe as negative mental states and those outer changes, including even changes of temperature which happen as a result of spiritual processes and even aspects of our development which are taking place, and it isn't always easy to distinguish these two. You might think somebody's just ill when he's only developing and the developing can sometimes have symptoms which are almost symptoms of illness, including mental illness. This, for instance, this simple instance I've given of a fever this certainly does happen in connection with meditation and so on quite spontaneously, and this is why according to some Indian authorities the general word for spiritual practice, the word which goes straight back to the Vedas, which is Tapas, means to heat. Tapas is fire, heating. So to practise tapas is to heat yourself up as it were and quite literally you can get a high temperature which you can feel yourself and which others feel as a result of certain changes going on within you internally, spiritual changes not just mental upsets. So we have to be careful you know how we talk about these things and how we evaluate them. So this is all mano-niyama. [12] Nothing to do with karma, you know, that is past karma. If it's karma at all it's karma you're directly creating here and now in the present.

Q: Isn't the difference in the karma I choose for something and on the other hand it overcomes me.

S: What do you mean by overcomes ( )

Q: Without making conscious my decision.

S: Yes because here it's a sort of momentum of your whole being as I've described before which may not be sort of clearly conscious but a general tendency of you as a whole person or whole being at least... yes. But again it may be due to past karma, to the fact that in a previous life he has harmed someone, karma-niyama, it could be that too or to... Again "chemical and cellular changes occurring in the body consequent upon transcendental realization". So here we're distinguishing between the spiritual which is the higher mundane where there's no basic transformation of consciousness as regards the ego and that state where there is this basic, in fact, radical transformation where the ego is as it were seen through, one does see something

which we can only describe as unconditioned or Nirvanic and where one is permanently transformed by that, not only transformed in one's mind but very often the change extends even to the physical body. And I have a yogic friend in Bombay who's done a bit of study and experiment and he maintains that the cells of the body undergo change, the very constitution of the cells undergo a change as a result of higher spiritual, transcendental experiences and this is a Tantric teaching; they have the teaching of transforming the body into a rainbow body, that is completely purified and changed physical body even. The physical [13] body becomes different not just the mind. The realization percolates down even into the as it were lowest levels, brings about changes there so that it's not the same body, it looks the same body but it's sort of chemically and cellularly different from before.

Q: And is it also the opposite happens in someone who is doing a lot of things with his body and... also the mind is changing.

S: Yes, the mind could change but I don't think you could bring about the transcendental change yes. So this is quite important from the highest levels as it were the change, and the influence, and the effect percolates right down to the lowest levels... Anyway this is a little by the way. What we are mainly concerned here is to show that karma is not synonymous with the whole law of cause and effect, karma is only one kind of cause-effect process, that there are five in all, karma is only one of them this is the main point that is being made here, so therefore you must not think of karma as causation - karma is one kind of causation operating on a particular level and in the universe there are all these other modes of causation or rather conditionality also operating. Karma is just one. So not only that but to make it even more difficult and complex as it were when something happens and when we experience something it isn't even that this particular happening is always due to that particular niyama, this particular happening always due to some other niyama, no, the same experience or what seems to be the same experience can be due to the operation of any one of those Niyamas as in this particular instance of the fever. It could be physical inorganic, it could be organic, it could be mental, it could be psycho-somatic, spiritual, it could be karma, it could be something even transcendental. So karma is a rather complex subject, [14] so what we have to beware most of all is thinking that karma simply means the law of causation, no, it is just one particular variety of the law of causation or law of conditionality to use the more Buddhistic term. So let's go on and clear up another misunderstanding.

Text - "This doctrine an important practical bearing. Critics of the Dharma sometimes allege that Buddhists are indifferent to human suffering, and take no steps to relieve it, because their religion teaches them to regard it as the result of past karma."

S: Yes, this is a common criticism isn't it, I take it that most of you have heard of it or read of it at some time or other, that according to Buddhism all the suffering in the world is due to past karma so when people suffer they are simply expiating their past karma and therefore you should not interfere with that, this is how some people look at Buddhism or interpret Buddhism. But from what we've just seen as regards the five Niyamas we can see that this is certainly not correct because not even every suffering is due to past karma. If you indulge in unskilful volitions you will suffer but you cannot reverse this and say that all your sufferings are due to past unskilful volitions therefore karma. No! There are quite a few sufferings that we have to undergo which are not directly connected with any karma of ours in the past at all, in fact you don't know whether a particular suffering a particular experience is due to karma or not. Sometimes you may have to work it out and even think or reflect that even then, very



often, you just don't know whether about yourself or about other people. So we have not to just sort of jump rather rashly to conclusions, and if we see someone suffering we say, "oh, I guess it's his past karma", you just don't know it may be it may be not - let's go into this a little bit more. Read on.

Text - "However true this may be of Hinduism, which generally [15] inclines to a fatalistic view of karma,"

S: This is certainly true of at least many Hindus in India, you often get this and I've often heard this that all your suffering, all your worldly life, your worldly misery is due to your past karma: what can you do about it your expiating, you've got to live it through and especially this is applied to the whole question of caste. For instance the higher caste peoples teach that if you're born into a low caste this is the result of bad karma you performed in the past so it is extremely wicked for you to try to alter your caste status because if you do that then you're sort of rejecting the fact that you are responsible for your present lowly status, so if you accept it, if you accept that you are a low caste person and are very humble and faithful and serve the higher castes then you can expiate the karma due to which you've been born as a low caste person. So in this way the doctrine of karma is very often interpreted by the upper class Hindus in such a way as to support the social status quo and to keep the lower castes down, but this is certainly not a Buddhistic interpretation, Hinduism by the way doesn't have that teaching of the five Niyamas. For some reason or other though the belief in karma is so wide spread in India the Hindus on the whole have got no detailed teaching about karma as the Buddhists have, it's rather odd the Jains have just as the Buddhists do but not the Hindus. Hindu utterances about karma are really very vague and very general indeed and very often strongly tinged with fatalism, they never seem to have applied their mind at all seriously to the subject of karma.

Q: This is really something that happened to me personally that although you can ... in the previous section you're talking... that paragraph you went on about Hinduism, how when I was travelling in India and through Europe a couple of times I saw insects very badly damaged so I just killed them purposely, one was a [16] little beetle, but somebody who was becoming, going to become a Buddhist, an English guy he said I shouldn't do that because it might be working out its karma or something like that. I mean is my action of actually killing an insect that was suffering like that, I didn't really think that was the...

S: Well it might be suffering as a result of its past karma, you just don't know, on the other hand it might not - your guess is as good as his. He was saying that it must be past karma it's therefore expiating it - you were saying not necessarily so I'll take a chance on that.

Q: But my action was that - not that I'm bothered about it though it interests me (Laughter) it was more or less a sort of theoretical point.

S: Well of course in the case of an insect there is the point of view of to what extent it is individualized, to a very lowly extent indeed, one can hardly speak of karma in the case of an insect, at best one can speak of a collective karma of the species as a whole so I don't think you can regard an insect in the same way as you would a human being or higher animal and therefore you know think of it as working out its karma etc. etc. I mean you can't commit karma really individually at that level of existence only in a very very sort of analogical way. So I think he was being perhaps sentimental in thinking of the insect as you know possibly or

even definitely working out his karma then you shouldn't interfere with that, I don't think I'd agree with that at all, on the other hand you didn't definitely know that it wasn't, you were simply looking to the present and wishing to end the present suffering and you may have been right you may have been wrong. Put it this way if he thought that it was definitely working out previous karma then he was wrong because even if it had been a human being who could work out previous karma how did he know that it was karma [17] and not something else? So there was certainly a bit of blindness in his attitude certainly and in your case also at that time - you didn't know - at least you weren't sure whether it, the insect, had karma whether it was working out previous karma or not so you might have made a mistake but I would say more likely that in as much as the degree of individuality in the consciousness is so low and in fact perhaps non-existent certainly very very vague indeed.

Q: It's interesting because it relates to the whole issue of things like euthanasia, ending the, not prolonging people's suffering unnecessarily, if they're suffering from incurable diseases that kind of thing, and what is ...

S: In the case of... To make it more concrete and in a way more meaningful, in the case of a person who is suffering it may be as a result of previous karma or it may not be, but even if it is a result of previous karma it doesn't mean that they've to expiate that by suffering. For instance in some books on Buddhism or about Buddhism you get expressions like "The iron law of karma", "The inescapable law of karma" etc. etc. It is not so at all. According to Buddhism the law of karma is not an iron law, for instance you will see a bit later on that there are some karmas which if you do not experience their results, within a certain period, is not experienced at all, you know they just sort of fade away, they lose their force as it were. So it isn't you've absolutely got to, whereas you can read books about Buddhism which say "under the iron law of karma even the tiniest offence will catch up with you after millions of years". This is rubbish, this is not Buddhism at all. There are some offences and they are unskilful volitions but if circumstances don't permit of their fruition for a life or so then they lose their force, you don't experience them so there is that to be considered, though supposing that person was even suffering that [18] particular illness or whatever it was as a result of previous karma even then it isn't that if he or she doesn't experience it now they'll have to experience it later on, it may not be that kind of karma even. But supposing that they are suffering as a result of a serious bad karma of such a nature that they will have to experience that over again if you put a stop to the suffering at the end of this life, supposing they have to go through it again, well that is a possibility and you have to weigh that when you're deciding upon that person's euthanasia if you are a Buddhist. (Pause) This also, I'll just elaborate a little bit more, this also brings us up against "Well how do we know that something is due to karma?" One way is what we may describe as the method of residues, that means supposing someone is suffering, take again the question of illness and you try all known remedies and it should have cleared up. I mean of course obviously there are some illnesses that we don't know very much about and it may be due to something - limitations of our scientific knowledge we can't cure, but in some cases we're pretty sure you know of what we are dealing with; so we try all known remedies nothing happens, only then perhaps are we justified in concluding it's probably due to karma. Also, when we try to do something and we fail, we can't succeed, there's no reason why we should but everything goes wrong again and again, it's as though some factor is working against us, so we are justified then in concluding that could be karma, it seems too much just to be a coincidence and there's no reason, we've taken all precautions, we've taken all the necessary steps but we're not able to achieve that, something is always working against us, then we can justify and say "Well that is karma", the

method of residues, it could hardly be anything else. So even then we are not absolutely sure but it is very likely. So in the case of the person with regard to whom we're considering [19] whether their suffering should be terminated we have to consider this too, but if all our efforts to relieve it have failed and should have succeeded as far as we know, then it may well be due to karma. So if it is that we'll just have to accept that then we just have to accept responsibility for our action if we decide that all the same that person's life should be terminated because the suffering is so terrible, but we take a chance to some extent we don't exactly know.

Q: Is it not up to the person himself, if he asking to die?...

S: It's a question, also, up to the person himself. I mean you just want to get rid of pain for instance is it you, is that a volition, or is it just an instinctive reaction. But apart from that, I mean this question was discussed on the radio last night, we listened to it, the panel of people then were all in favour of voluntary euthanasia and it seems quite reasonable to me that the decision is yours morally and it should be yours legally. If you... suppose you're sedated and suppose you are just conscious but you know that your life is going to be a life of just suffering if it's going to be prolonged, and if you've got a clear respite because the pain has been alleviated to some extent and you can think it over and you come to a conclusion that life is not worth living on those terms, and in that sort of state of relatively clear consciousness you say, "Please can it be terminated" then that seems quite reasonable. And even if that suffering was due to previous karma I think as it were that decision in the long run karmically speaking would not count against you. (Pause) It depends very much and our attitude depends very much on the extent to which we bring in this whole question of karma.

Q: Yes I'm putting the question, I've got a question of a woman who has cancer for ten years and was operated on eight times and now she wants that I will rid her and I love.. I don't know. [20] Now if she ( ) her mind I think she has to go through a lot of things anyhow ...

S: You mean the mental suffering?

Q: Yes.

S: Yes she. The questions which arise are quite difficult and complex, the main point of course that we're concerned with here is that whatever suffering we undergo is not by any means necessarily due to our own past karma and that therefore from the Buddhist point of view it's entirely wrong to say that suffering should not be relieved because by relieving it you're interfering with peoples karma and preventing them from working it out, this is simply not the Buddhist view. It could sometimes happen that in a certain case you were in fact doing that but then you have to accept the responsibility.

Q: So when she asks for it it's her responsibility also.

S: And also that person who helps her to terminate the life, the doctor he will have to say "well it may be that this woman is expiating something", if he believes in karma, "but well, I accept the responsibility that I may be interfering in her karma but I think it's better that I should. I accept that".

Well this is my personal view, there's no sort of official Buddhist teaching about this. As I

have though mentioned in the past that the teacher of one of my own teachers did as it were, you could call it commit suicide in this way, I have mentioned this to you before. That he was an Indian, he was a very well known scholar and was helping to revive Buddhism in Western India, his name was Dharmananda ( ) he was very well known and he was a very old man or by Indian standards, early seventies and he was at Sarnath. And one of my own teachers or someone who became my teacher many years later who was then a young man was looking after him, looking after Dharmananda ( ) and he was completely as

[21]

It were useless and he felt he was a burden on others, that others were having to look after him, I mean it wasn't that he sort of minded in a way because Indians don't mind being looked after, they've none of our sort of inhibitions about that but he thought "oh what's the use I've done my work, I've written all my books, done what I could to revive Buddhism in India and here's this young man who is having to look after me, you know he's got his work to get on with, what's the use of it. So he decided to terminate his own existence quite sort of calmly and he decided simply to stop taking food and he stopped taking food and after about three weeks he simply very quietly and calmly passed away in that weakened state. So this is what happened in his case and this seems completely justifiable you know. He took the decision mindfully. He certainly wasn't suffering unduly but he was quite useless and he was requiring someone else to attend the body as it were and he thought that wasn't correct and he'd done his work he was passing away at the end of a quite long and quite full and successful life, he was quite ready for a next time round if there was one. So this seems to be quite justifiable this sort of thing, certainly didn't seem to be creating any bad karma there.

Q: If the intention with which you are doing an action enforces ( ) karma in future for instance killing animals for eating their flesh or their meat or stop for them suffering. Can you say more about this, is it important?

S: I'm not quite sure what you are asking.

Q: Well does it make any sense when you're killing them because you want to eat for instance, the meat, or when you're killing them because you want to stop them suffering?

S: Ah I'd say there was quite a difference. I mean there's no difference in the act but there is a difference in the mental attitude, so from a karmic point of view I'd say there was quite a difference between the two. Many Buddhists do believe that [22] mercy killing has got some legacy of karmic component that you cannot in fact take life without doing a violence to yourself even when your motivation is as it were merciful.

Q: Do I have the right to make the pain longer if the person doesn't want it, for example is it right...

S: But there is also that in the case of the physician, I'm rather dubious about any discussion of these things in terms of rights. The whole conception of rights and I've been thinking about it quite a lot over the past few months, seems to get more and more vague and dubious, yes, from the philosophical point of view. I've almost come to the conclusion that there's no such thing as rights, it's a sort of legal fiction and not really corresponds to anything.

Q: But it's a law for the physicians to be modelled, but it should make life as long as

possible...

S: Which very often means you should cause as much suffering as possible.

Q: Yes.

S: So you could... It's very much, in such cases, a decision for the individual because you could also ask yourself, "well do I, can I really go on creating so much suffering for this person by keeping him or her alive?". There comes a point where you say "well I can't do this any more, I can't prolong their agony". I mean I'm quite sure some physicians do feel this and just quietly give a quiet overdose and nothing is detected, I'm quite sure that some do this sometimes but they're of course not admitted, would not and could not admit it.

Q: I meet a lot of crippled people who are lame and who have resented that they were kept alive after an accident.

Q.2: You find sometimes in those who kill, suffering, suffer indeed, in many cases you may find a strong element of hatred towards the people who are suffering because it's making you feel [23] uncomfortable not because you're really genuinely...

S: You'd like to have the suffering out of the way because it makes you uncomfortable, there is this also to be taken into consideration, weighed as one possible factor.

Vangisa: ( inaudible)

S: It rather looks as though in the same way that we've discussed us having a Buddhist school that we shall also need a Buddhist (hospital) where at least people can go and die in peace without being so doped up to the eyebrows ( ) and help them on their way if necessary.

Vangisa: (inaudible)

S: Yes they seem over preoccupied about the wrong thing, I mean over preoccupied with the mere prolongation of existence which can hardly be called life in some cases, but they're not in the least concerned with the prolongation of your state of clear consciousness which from a human point of view is much more important. So it's not so much the question of can you go on existing and can your existence be prolonged somehow but whether it is possible for you to go on living as an individual with a clear consciousness if that isn't possible it would seem that there's no further reason for your existence. We know that ( ) for instance in his radio programme, people make these reasonable quite... and then someone would say "Well I don't want to be sentenced to death by a panel of doctors". So it's not that which is being suggested at all, you're reacting sometimes so emotionally that it's so silly, there's the priorities to speak of. Anyway we've gone a bit away from our main point which was karma is not fate and if you're suffering including suffering from some terrible disease which is obviously not necessarily your past karma, therefore efforts to relieve suffering are completely justified.

(END OF SIDE ONE)

[24]

Side two

S: So where were we then?

Text - "or even of some less instructed Buddhists in Asian lands, the accusation certainly does not hold good in respect of the Buddha and His Teaching. Buddhists are urged to make every effort to remove disease, privation and want in all their ignoble, soul-crippling, life-destroying forms because not being enlightened they cannot know by which niyama they have been brought about."

S: Yes this is the sort of practical - you're not enlightened and you don't know whether someone's suffering is due to his past karma or not so therefore you have to make every effort to relieve that suffering if you possibly can.

Text - "Only after making every attempt to remove a certain condition, and finding that although other circumstances are favourable an unknown factor frustrates all our efforts, are we entitled to apply the method of residues and conclude that the condition is due to karma. In any case it would be a mistake to regard the karma-niyama or any other niyama as an absolutely self-contained system. Despite the contrary impression sometimes created by modern Theravadin writers, the five niyamas not only all act one upon another, but are collectively acted upon and influenced by the higher and wider containing reality of the Universal Consciousness (alayavijnana) . Unless this is borne constantly in mind, the dryly analytic manner in which such writers tabulate and chart the workings of karma may make us feel that we have to do not with the heart-throbs of a living human mind and character but with an intricate piece of dead mechanism."

S: As I mentioned earlier on there is quite a bit of Buddhist literature on the subject of karma especially in the Abhidharma, but it must be admitted that much of it is very dry, very analytic, so if you're not careful you get the impression that [25] the workings of karma are sort of very mechanical. And it's just a question of cogs and wheels going round, but of course it isn't like that at all that one is as I say here "with the heart throbs of a living human mind and character and not with an intricate piece of dead mechanism," but very often if you read the literature on karma without due mindfulness, or without relating it all to experience and concrete things and you get the impression as though you're just a piece of mechanism being taken to pieces but it really isn't like that at all.

Q: Could you elaborate a little on the previous sentence on reality of the Universal Consciousness?

S: Well, one can't really say very much because this would take us very far afield indeed but broadly speaking it's related to the teaching that you find in the Awakening of Faith about the mutual perfume of the conditioned, ... and unconditioned, the defiled and the undefiled. You can't keep the different kinds of karma, in separate as it were watertight little boxes. It's a very complex sort of system indeed and though we distinguish different kinds of karma, though each has its own sort of path as it were there's a constant overlapping, a constant mutual influencing and so on and in the end the whole thing becomes very very complicated or rather complex indeed so that you get an influence not only as between different karmas on as it were on the same level but even from higher levels of consciousness and being where other laws altogether are operating they too have their own effect on the whole karmic existence, whole karmic set up. At least I think to put it metaphorically and properly, when the Bodhisattva descends into hell what is happening? He's interfering with their karma. Well we

can't have that. Well maybe he is or in the context of karma, but you know Bodhisattvas consider themselves quite entitled to interfere with [26] our karma because a higher law comes into operation, the law of Compassion and so on. So the law of karma is not a sort of watertight little vista, I mean higher realities can break into ( ). In the west people just think a little more um... otherwise if everything was due to karma, karma itself an enclosed system you'd never get out, there'd be no such thing as emancipation, no such thing as Nirvana. Luckily for us karma is not a rigid self-contained system. But unfortunately, some presentations of Buddhism rather give you that impression. Even if they don't actually say so, they give the sort of expressions I mentioned earlier on: 'the iron law of karma', the 'infrangible law of karma'. And with, you know, those references to karma catching up with you, yes, even if you kill a mosquito in this life after millions of years you'll have to pay for it: and this is a sort of fantastic caricature of the teaching of karma. You can get away with it, there are loopholes, it's a living thing you know not just a blind mechanical law. It is because it isn't you know rigid self-contained system that you can help others and, they can help you between you can get beyond the law of karma.

Q: How can you get... the more I'm conscious of what I'm doing the more I can change.

S: Yes. Right, yes.

Q: This brings in another form of conditioning or will it be the same point that one's made I suppose... the Bodhisattva...

S: Yes, that's good karma, so far we've been talking in terms of, as it were has karma.

Q: Yes that's what I mean.

S: Well there is such a thing as good karma.

Q: Just ( )

S: ... not I

Q: ... for the Bodhisattva.

S: Yes that's true.

Q: Working from a high level, obviously one has to react to that in a positive way.

S: Right, yes,

Q: And so that would come back to karma again I suppose.

S: But then, the fact that you might be predisposed, by the very experience itself, to react probably spontaneously and positively. In other words, there are certain things that come to you which you don't deserve, For instance, a Buddha appears in the world. That is something transcendental, How can you deserve the transcendental? How can any amount of good karma, which is purely conditioned and worldly, qualify for your contact with something which is quite transcendental? It can't possibly do that, can it? So karma fails here too from

that point view, in that context. You go beyond karma, you don't come into contact with a Buddha as a result of your good karma.

Q: Is there nothing you can do ? ( )

[27]

S: I'm very suspicious about that, but this seems to tie up with the whole ideology of, that you know, pain being good for you and expiating guilt. No, but it seems to. But even... what did you mean by pain and guilt?

Q: Well looking back in my mind and well, OK... the things that happen to me and I suffer from well OK. I will feel it after this. I can look upon it as a gift and I ( ).

S: And that's fair enough, you look upon it as a gift. Well what one mustn't do, I might say, is look upon pains as suffering of peoples, because they're not.

Q: No, no the reason I said...

S: No but sometimes the connection is made, isn't it? Or sometimes it you know, is seen. In the Middle Ages, in Christian Europe, you go on to the next stage and say 'Well if I inflict pain and suffering on him that'll be a gift. It'll help him.' 'Suffering is good for you so therefore I shall inflict this.' (laughing) This is what we've seen isn't it, constantly in the past? I know the most dreadful story ( ) a short story, but it's too long, by a French short story writer of the last century about the Spanish Inquisition. You know very broad-minded. Anyway, we are wandering a little bit . Let's go on to the next paragraph. But I said all that because with this next paragraph we do start going into detail about karmas.

"The different types of karma are described in the Abhidharma literature with a wealth of illustrative detail."

S: The Abhidharma literature, anyone not know what that is ]? It's a, what shall I say, it's more the commentarial and scholastic side of Buddhism, developed a few hundred years after the Buddha's death, but, which was regarded by some schools as being actually taught by the Buddha, but not so by others. It maybe that, in some cases, the, sort of, seeds were, sort of, furnished on the Buddha's own teaching, but in its fully developed form the Abhidharma is a very good atlas ( ) but certainly not created by the Buddha himself. The Abhidharma does have the merit of discussing karma in detail logically.

"Here we shall be briefly concerned only with the broad principles of classification. These are seven in number. Karmas may be grouped in accordance with their ethical status, the 'door' through which they act, the appropriateness of the resultant experiences, their time and relative priority of taking effect, the nature of their function, and the plane of existence on which they mature."

S: If you believe that the seven, as it were, principles according to which the karmas are classified again ( ).

"of these principles, the first is the most important, since this constitutes the basis of the rest. From the point of view of its ethical status or quality a volition (including its concomitant



mental factors ) is either wholesome (kusala) or unwholesome (akusala)."

S: Kusala literally means skilful but it's very often nowadays translated as wholesome and akusala is unskilful. [28] Unwholesome volition as that rooted in greed (lobha), hate (dvesa) and delusion (moha)--- another primitive formula --- and wholesome volition that rooted in the opposite of these passions that is to say rooted in contentment, love and mental pellucidity. Each of these two types of volition can act either directly through the 'door' of the mind (the terminology is not to be taken too literally) or indirectly through the door of body or the door of speech."

S: So this is the first of these ( ), the basic classification according to whether our position, your sort of conscious trend, our relatively conscious trend of our whole being is motivated by greed or by hate or by illusion. Illusion here meaning a sort of mental confusion, bewilderment, lack of clarity of motive, distraction and so on and so forth. Or is the opposite of those. That is to say, whether we're motivated by love, in the sense of positive parts of your own emotion and motivated by contentment --- this is the best English word I could find. Contentment being, a sort of harmonious acceptance, not with just the way things are, but first of all of yourself, not just as you are, that sort of thing ( ) but well... er feeling as it were pleased with yourself, contented with yourself and therefore contented with others. Not that that represents a limitation on your development, but you've no sort of neurotic self hate for yourself. You're satisfied with yourself, even though you recognize you have to change quite a lot --- contentment. And of course mental pellucidity; increasing mental clarity, which isn't just intellectual. But, as it were, one's whole awareness is growing brighter and brighter. And you're more and more motivated and guided by that. It's almost sort of non-volitional. You see quite clearly that that's what you should do. So, as it were, automatically, perhaps better, spontaneously you just do that. There's no conflict. There's no choice. There's no decision. You see it has to be done. You see it quite clearly and your whole tendency then is just to do it. So that is skilful. That's good karma, as it were; wholesome karma as opposed to the unwholesome. So the basic distinction, as regards karmas, is the skilful, is the unskilful. The whole subject is in these ways that the skilful, or the wholesome, is motivated by love, or, is the embodiment or expression of love in the true sense, in contentment, harmony, being at peace with oneself, and increasing mental clarity carrying you forwards. Because you're so harmonious and so integrated, that, as soon as you see what needs to be done, you at once start doing it. And of course unskilful karma unwholesome karma, being the opposite. Your basic motivations are greed, not just sort of healthy animal greed, in the sense that you need food so you feel like eating, but a sort of neurotic, possessive, convulsive, clutching greed, like that of the pretas, and being in a state of constant irritation and frustration, being dissatisfied with yourself and displeased with other people and being bitter, angry and annoying and being very confused. Your thinking is not at all clear; rather muddy. All these make the unskilful, unwholesome kinds of karmas. We can see that the two trends very clearly. But the basic distinction, as regards karmas, is between the, as it were, love, content, clarity ( ) if you like, the greed, hate and bewilderment sauntering on the other. So these are the two, this is the basic distinction as regards karma. One may not bother too much with the precise tabulation: this ( ) or that ( ) Just get a good clear idea of the basic types, of what skilful or unwholesome karma broadly is and what unskilful, unwholesome karma broadly is. You get the feeling of these two, the difference [29] between them? And each of these two can act either directly through the door of the mind, just a mental state or a mental cum volitional state, or it can be expressed in action obviously. So then, you get, you know, another classification of karmas, you know, karmas working through the door of the mind

which is just within you and karmas which pop out, as it were, through the door of speech or even through the door of action.

Q: Why are speech and action mentioned?

S: Ah, why indeed ? You always find them distinguished in Indian, though not only Buddhist thought: Body, Speech and Mind. And speech represents the whole, as it were, principle of communication; is regarded as so important, its given this separate enumeration; not just lumped together with action. Speech is more than action. It's almost midway between body and mind. It represents a sort of subtle principle between body and mind; as I said, the whole principle of communication.

Q: Another thing is that as feelings are translated into actions they go through thought, will, speech and then down to a very gross level of action.

S: Right, yes indeed, yes. So therefore you find, also in the case of the Buddha that is the Enlightened being, this body, speech and mind becomes the Three Kayas: Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. Again body speech and mind, to be a little more philosophical, are not quite body, speech and mind in the ordinary colloquial English sense. It's not quite easy to convey. Guenther has gone into this in quite a few contexts. So let me give you a brief idea. Body means your concrete individual existence here and now. Yes? that's body: not just your physical body, your concrete individual existence here and now (???) as opposed to your so called mind. Your speech is your communication in whatsoever way with other people, yes ? And your mind is not just your thoughts as opposed to your body; your deepest personal essence. This is more what it means: body, speech and mind. What you are in reality as an individual. That is your mind, not just mind in the ordinary ego sense.

Q: Is your whole mind influence( ).

S: That's your speech, yes, that's your Sambhogakaya or your developing Sambhogakaya. So what can you ask...

Q: Aura?

S: Aura, yes, aura would be included in speech ... yes. Your influence, your field of action, that's all speech, Yes. So body; your individual concrete existence, as it were, for yourself. Your speech is your existence for others. And your mind is, as it were, that even higher dimension of yourself which contains the two and goes even beyond that.

Q: So speech is the result of ( ).

S: You could say that; not quite the result in the sense of the product. But when the deepest essence of you wants to express [30] itself to others, well, it has to go through your individual existence first; your own hand to make a gesture; your own voice to speak, to express. So in that sense, the speech is the product of the mind and body. But it's rather as though mind is up 'there', body is 'there' and they come together 'there' and then communicate after - midway between.

Q: The body, when one is doing salutation one takes the hands to the eyes for body and to the heart for mind, so...

S: When you raise your hands here for body, because we tend to think of it as brain, but there's no association of that sort here at all, it's the head. The head is known as 'Bhuttanunga'. It means the chief limb, The head is the noblest part of the body. So the head stands for body here. It doesn't stand for mind, it stands for body. And then the throat centre and the heart stands for the inner consciousness; the mind. Mind is not here, technically. To Buddhists, mind is here. This is only the head; this is only the noblest part of the body.

Q: (unintelligible)

S: You can have it either way round actually. The only centre which doesn't change is the speech, which is always Sambhogakaya.

Q: The Dharmakaya in that sense being the Universal Body.

S: Yes. So the speech principle is regarded as very very important. So you can understand now, why speech isn't just included under action. It's the whole, as it were, interdependent principle in itself, the principle of communication with others, your influence on others, your effect upon others, in a way on every level, all that is speech. But of course speech, in the narrower sense, is as it were, in the main being almost speech by itself.

Q: It also seems to stand where ( ) a system of thought after all activity, communication without regard to a subject... true.

S: Well yes. In the case of the Buddha, there's no ego idea by which he might regard himself to others. So what does this communication represent - it's a sort of play, a spontaneous overflow; not a sort of transaction between a rigidly defined 'I' and a rigidly defined 'you'. It's something which we can hardly sort of conceive.

Q: Action would be a part of speech?

S: Action in the sense of, say, gesture could certainly be regarded as speech, in as much as it's communication. I mean ( ) is untrue in the eyes of speech.

Q: ...

S: Well it's a language because the language is part, the language is gesture. And it's also not only communication in the sense of a deliberate communication, of something to someone, but your whole effect upon others, your aura, the influence that you set up, the influence you radiate. There's a little sort of ray of sunshine you are or being the black cloud that you are. This is all under speech. So this sort of classification of karmas according to body, speech and mind is again quite important and fundamental. There's that very distinction is important and fundamental, and [31] also in the classification, the arts are included under speech. All the arts come in here, yes.

Q: I see someone says that is almost the most important (...) is speech in the sense... the very fact that links the other two since, seems to be (...) says the most about Buddhism (...)

emphasis upon personal communication and...

S: We mustn't overdo it. All three are equally important, ultimately, but maybe for us, speech is of a greater practical importance because it helps us make the transition from body to mind, as it were, and links the two. Because it goes far beyond any sort of reconciliation of conscious and our unconscious in a psychological sense. It's much more than that. To hazard a comparison I'm not going to go into - so I refuse to be drawn - it's (...) to Kant's Critique of Judgement. There's quite a lot in that really but I agree with this about Kant (...) you'll see exactly what I mean - the whole world will open up. It's very, very important. Anyway, let's press on.

"On this fact are based two of the most important ethical findings of Buddhism. First, that a man will reap the consequences not only of what he has deliberately thought or allowed himself to think, without giving it overt expression in word or deed."

S: Karma does catch up with you. That is, the result of karma does catch up with you simply as a result or in consequence upon what you've concretely done or said. It also catches up with your thought because your thoughts are karma. Your thoughts are like (...).

"One who, in the vigorous language of the New Testament, looks at a woman to lust after her, not only has already committed adultery with her in his heart but, under the operation of the karma niyama, will one day suffer the consequences of adultery. This does not quite mean that we are no less answerable for a passing dirty thought than for the actual unwholesome deed. Volitions admit of varying degrees of intensity. A volition that fulfils itself in word or deed is generally stronger than one that does not, and a strong will obviously produces greater results than a weak volition."

S: Yes, so, the basic principle we're being reminded of here is that karma is action and in the first place it is mental action. So even when the mental action hasn't expressed itself in verbal or physical action it is still karma, and consequences still follow. Nevertheless, when a karma in the sense of a mental state, a mental volition, is very, very strong, its natural tendency will be to express itself in word, in deed as it were, reinforcing itself in this way, and making itself even more powerful, and so when we not only think something, but also act it, speak it, if it is something of a karmic nature, then the karmic consequences will be more powerful still, than if we'd merely thought of it. But we are accountable for our thoughts and we'll see an instance of this in a very positive way a bit later on.

"Whether wholesome or unwholesome, however, a mind-volition of the degree of intensity that normally results in word or deed or both will, even if denied overt vocal or bodily expression, undoubtedly bring about the same pleasant or painful experiences that the actual performance of the deed would have done. The point is illustrated by a number of charming traditional anecdotes, like that of the Chinese pilgrim about the old woman who worshipped a dog's tooth thinking it was the Buddha's... "

S: You know this anecdote?... Apparently an old woman has a son who went off on a pilgrimage to the holy places and before leaving he asked his mother what he could bring back for her. So she said, "What I'd really like is a relic of the Buddha, a tooth of the Buddha's, if you could possibly bring that back I'd be very happy". So he promised to bring it back. But anyway, the pilgrimage took a rather long time. He was away for about three years.

And he was on his way back and he got quite near home... 'Oh, good heavens, I've [32] forgot all about her tooth, a relic for my mother, what shall I do?" So he was really perplexed and wondering, when he saw by the wayside the skeleton of a dog. And of course there were some teeth. So: "Ah that will do." He took a tooth and wrapped it up in a piece of silk pattern and took it home to mother. And he happily presented it to her. She was overjoyed and put it on her shrine, worshipping it with great zeal every day and developing great faith and devotion. And after a few weeks, a light started to shine from it just like a rainbow and the old woman was very very pleased with this. To cut a long story short she became enlightened (laughter) ... yes ... So it's the mental state that counts. This is like a little popular anecdote and then there's another one.

"... or the Zen story of the monk who carried a pretty girl across a stream and then forgot her while his more straight-laced companion 'carried' her in his mind all the way back to the monastery."

Voice: ( ... )

S: Eh, no, really (laughing) Well, can you tell it John? (laughing) All right then, let me think... just make sure I remember it first. Oh yes, there wasn't just one person anyhow. Two monks were going for a walk during the rainy season and they came to a river which was rather muddy. They picked up their robes and were wading across when they noticed a pretty girl wanting to cross but was rather upset because she'd ruin her little silk dress as it was going to get splattered with mud as she waded through the torrent. So one of the monks at seeing her in distress waded across and put her over his shoulders just like a bag of coal and strode back across the river. When he got to the opposite shore he, the monk, put the girl down (...) So after the two monks had been walking along their way for quite a while the second of the two monks started getting quite agitated, just thinking to himself "that wasn't a very good thing to do, here we are monks ( ... ) and he picked that girl up, actually carried that girl, put her over his shoulder, that wasn't very nice, that wasn't very good, I think I'd better report him to the abbot" etc. etc. So in the end, he's so upset, he couldn't contain himself any longer and he said to the other one: "why did you do that? Why did you take that girl? Why did you touch that woman? Why did you carry her across the river?" So the other one, who was deep in thought, said: "Woman? - oh you mean the one I put down after we crossed the river?" So he said: "yes, the one you put down after we crossed the river." So the first one realized the situation and he said: "I put her down. Why are you still carrying her?" That is the next preoccupation and he wasn't mentally disturbed. He just rendered a good deed, a good turn, and that was that. He forgot all about it, as it were, put it out of his mind; his mind was undisturbed, but the other monk who didn't carry her was much more mentally disturbed by the idea.

Voice: And make up his way?

S: And make up his way. So that's the little model there. Of course, Buddhism also says: "don't fool yourself, don't think that you can say to someone: 'don't judge by my action, my mind is quite all right, I'm not really attached you know. You might think so by looking at my behaviour but I'm not really attached in my mind.' Don't fool yourself in this sort of way. Though actually it is the mental state which you have to judge by, not necessarily by the action. But make sure you really do know what your mental state is.

Tales such as these, which generations of Buddhists have found more illuminating than pages of psychological analysis, link the first with the second of the two important ethical findings based on the relation between volition and 'doors'.

S: We can usually infer the first door from the second and the third but not necessarily, you know. You have to be quite careful about that. You might think someone is being quite cruel but he might be kind and vice versa. [33] One can deceive one's own self very easily in this respect (...) All right on we go then.

"On account of this second finding Buddhist ethics has been described as an ethics of intention. Words and deeds are wholesome or unwholesome, it says, not in themselves, but according to whether they are the expression of wholesome or unwholesome volitions. Despite its formidable list of rules, therefore, Buddhist ethics consists essentially in the cultivation of a morally healthy attitude towards life. The rules, whether those prescribed for the monk or those prescribed for the layman, merely represent the normal behaviour-pattern of one in whom such an attitude is predominant."

S: This is quite an important point to understand: where do the rules come in. The rules are only a rough guide. If you are a psychologically healthy, morally healthy, karmically healthy, you will tend to behave in a certain way. Suppose for instance your attitude towards other people is positive, is loving, is kindly, is affectionate, you will tend to behave in a certain way, Your behaviour will be considerate, it will be helpful or kind, as we say. So therefore, if it comes down to a question of rules, the rules roughly speaking correspond to the normal behaviour-pattern of the healthy person; not in a sort of rigid hard and fast way, because sometimes, the healthy person's behaviour may not be connected in a straightforward way with the mental state. It may seem sometimes, if you're not careful, to be non-healthy though actually it isn't. But broadly speaking, the ethical behaviour-pattern, or the ethical rule, simply represents the normal or standard pattern of behaviour that can be expected under normal circumstances from the psychologically, psychically healthy and positive minded person. Is that clear? There can be that there can be little exceptions and deviations. You're dealing with a living person operating in a living situation; you're not dealing with machines.

"Both ethical status and doors ..."

S: Doors being the three doors: body, speech and mind.

"...enter into the third principle of classification, that according to the appropriateness of the resultant experiences."

S: Appropriateness - that's the first ( ...?... )

"In the Cula - and the Mahakammavibhanga - suttas, or Greater and Lesser Discourses on the Analysis of Volitions, the Buddha makes it clear that those who are given to the taking of life, cruelty, anger, envy, avarice and pride, all of which are acts rooted in unhealthy volitions, will be reborn in states of suffering, or, if reborn as men, will be short lived, diseased, ugly, despised, poor and of mean descent."

S: Here, we can perhaps come to something a bit controversial because if you if applied to a series of lives, well empirically speaking at least, we don't know. We're taking the Buddhas

word for it. Well, we can see that it does seem reasonable and sensible, that the, as it were, punishment should fit the, as it were, crime. Well, you take life, so life should be taken from you. But, if we want to come closer to our own actual experience and maybe confine all this within the limits of one lifetime where we can see it working, we can look at this principle of appropriateness in this way. Supposing we ourselves think very negative inimical thoughts towards other people, suppose we don't like others, suppose we even have feelings against people, want to obstruct them or we're normally very critical and unhelpful and uncooperative even quarrelsome, we set up a sort of aura about ourselves, don't we. At least there's a certain association. We come to have a certain reputation. And then what happens? It's as though we tend to attract or draw ( ... ) people of that character to affect us. You see what I mean? So therefore, the fact that we were of that kind would ... er ... volition, it would tend to attract to us experiences of that kind; just because we are functioning as a real mass sort [34] of vibration. That isn't to say that sometimes quite, you know, innocent people won't suffer. That's another, you know, consideration. But if we ourselves are imbued with these sort of thoughts, it is as though we do tend to attract other people, who are imbued with those sort of thoughts. So, if two quarrelsome people get together, well obviously, there's going to be a clash sooner or later. So each of them will suffer. It's as though, you know, each has been rewarded according to his particular type of karma. So you can look at it like this. Certainly within the framework of the present lifetime it means, the principle is so... is sort of permanently based on sort of attraction going that way. And, if there is such a thing as a series of births, a series of lives, well, you can imagine it applying over that series too. Its not like the law. Karmic law is not like the legal law that you are punished some. Due to your own thoughts and feelings, because you're of a certain nature, you tend to attract other things of a similar nature to yourself.

Voice: But if it's a ( ... ) medical person as a ( ... ) if there was a way for them ...

S: Now, are you saying something negative or something positive? Hmm yes. Well sometimes we don't even know which is really positive and which is really negative. Sometimes the negative can become a basis for the positive and the positive for the negative. But that doesn't mean of course that the negative isn't negative and the positive isn't positive for the time being. But in the same way you can see that a person who is unjust and unkindly won't tend to attract gentle and kindly influences and people. So this is simply in explanation of this third principle of appropriateness. I mean we don't know as regards the series of lives. So we can at least try to understand it within the context of one single life. We do see this principle at work: that we tend to attract people who are like ourselves. We tend to draw to ourselves the sort of experiences which correspond to our mental state. We do notice that certain people seem to have certain experiences that we sometimes don't have. We see that some people are accident-prone, for instance. Why is this? Have you ever noticed that, some people being accident prone? So this is something of the same kind of thing. So that's just simply appropriateness of the resultant experiences. What comes to you does, that is not the only thing to be considered, very often have, or nearly always have, some relationship to what you are. And this is all that this principle is saying, the principle of the appropriateness of the resultant experiences. I must say we mustn't look at it too narrowly or we shall be, or legalistically. It's not like a punishment that's inflicted upon you by a court according to the crime you've committed. It's something much more gentle, as it were, psychological, than that.

Voice: So also that it's in hmm. If one's sort of very cunning one can draw out these

characteristics which divide oneself from other people so that, can ( ... ) healthy or unhealthy.

S: Yes right.

Voice: Can you go into that. Can you say a bit more about that?

Voice (2): Hmm. One is a strong person and maybe a very quarrelsome person then they'll bring out the sort of bad reactive sides of others around him.

S: Who are not normally like that.

Voice: Or one's impact ...

S: For instance, you may be so odd ( ... ) quarrelsome and difficult, you get in discussion with some mild weak gentle person, who after all being human, and you know, due to the force of your karma maybe, you may become so argumentative and quarrelsome that that meek person may even hit you on the nose in the end. You know, you've activated that same sort of thing within himself. So (laughter) experience is according to resultant experiences according to karma.

[35]

Vangisa: ... ( ... ) quarrelsome and then he goes ( ... ) general confusion ( ... ) incredible, you can't escape from them, you'd speak to them, you'd say something to them and immediately you're involved in a kind of ( ... ) I don't know where ...

S: This is also very important, this is not an aspect which is not usually touched upon. But I certainly have been very much aware of this lately even within the movement and especially on the fringe of the movement, I mean our movement. The prevalence of what, to use the classical term, are called micchaditthis, the wrong views. I know some people, both Order Members and Friends, have become very conscious of this. It's basically a sort of confusion of thought. We were very much preoccupied with this on our last study retreat. That was on Suzuki's "Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism" because Suzuki himself was labouring under so many misconceptions and confusions. That was really quite frightening to some people even Dr Suzuki ( ... ) of Buddhist things and developing them over again. Most people are really muddled in their thinking, especially people who take up with Buddhism and oriental religions and so on. You do get all sorts of weird statements thrown at you: "all is one" and "it doesn't matter what you think", opinions of that sort, and these are very simple examples of ... it becomes much more complex than that. So clear plain straightforward thinking is very often ( ... ) upon. And, as Vangisa said, you're not allowed to retain your own clarity. They extend their confusion and make you confused too and you have to resist it. Sometimes it's very difficult, because to sort out their confusion, might take weeks and months of discussion, very patiently bit by bit, or even years, you know, one hasn't got time for that. So after all what does one do? Sometimes the best thing one can do is to shut them up in some way or other, you know. At least retain your own sanity; even if you can't help them develop theirs (laughter). I think ruthlessness is quite justified sometimes ... kind to yourself and kind to them too although you may not feel very kind to them. But if you have a deep down confusion in you which they're only activating and you were thinking up 'til then 'how clear you were', well that's a different matter. There's very often a lurking confusion in ourselves with regard to certain things. Again, you know, the appropriateness of the resultant



experiences. You're bringing out some, or in others, what is in you, and experiencing the backwash from that, that's the karma vipaka on the spot. So this is all that is being said here, except that in this context, it's being extended over a whole series of lives. The fruit is according to the tree. Perhaps it would be better put that way, rather than to say the punishment fits the crime. The fruit is according to the tree, the volition is the tree, the resultant experience is the fruit.

"Contrariwise, those whose acts of body, speech and mind are the opposite of these, being rooted in healthy attitudes, will be reborn in the blissful higher planes of existence, or, if reborn as men, will be long lived, healthy, handsome, respected, wealthy and of distinguished family."

S: You notice when they said, 'Buddhism doesn't neglect sort of worldly benefits', all these things are the result of good karma. That you're 'long lived', you know, it's a good thing to live long in the sense of completing the full span of human existence. You know, going through childhood, youth, maturity, middle age, old age. It's good to go through the whole cycle - it's a blessing. Then you're 'healthy'; you know, health is a blessing. Also 'handsome' - Buddhism doesn't depreciate even such an apparently mundane thing as good looks. It's regarded as the result of good karma in the past. But not necessarily but if you are, it is the same, of a good temper then you'll be reborn as good looking. Because the explanation is that anger disfigures the face and if you do not disfigure the face with anger, you're born with a beautiful countenance and the comforts of life. And then 'respected, honest and wealthy' even, you know an abundance of material goods: and 'of distinguished family', you know, a cultured family that is, a good position. So these things are considered to be the results of good karma. Not that if you have them you must have committed those good karmas. You can't work it that way round. But that, if you do commit those good karmas, these will be the resultant [36] experiences. You have to be very careful, don't you, otherwise you end up sanctifying your status quo.

"Other texts give further examples of this type of correspondence. One declares stupidity to be the result of mental indolence, ..."

S: If you don't use your mind, you'll just become more and more stupid and you'll just be reborn stupid.

"... and intelligence of a desire to learn. In the case of this principle of classification one should be careful not to pervert the Buddhas Teaching by arguing that, for example, poverty is invariably the punishment for 'bad' and rich is the reward of 'good' karmas performed in past lives, for this would be to fall a victim to the very misunderstandings which we have tried to clear up at the beginning of the section."

S: All right, on to principles four and five and then we'll be getting quite near to break and coffee time.

"With regard to time and relative priority of effect, the fourth and fifth principles, the classifications of karmas is in each case a fourfold one. A karma may ripen in the very life in which it was performed, in the next life, in a succeeding life, or, owing to the preponderance of 'counteractive' karma or to its being too weak, it may never ripen."

S: That's quite important - may never ripen. There are some karma that can be counteracted, unhealthy karmas. And others that are so weak they, if after a certain time, haven't produced their effect, well, they won't produce it at all. So from this very fact one can see that karma isn't something rigid and mechanical.

"The classification according to priority of effect refers not to the effects of karma in general but to only one kind of effect, that which we call rebirth, or, more correctly, rebecoming. From this point of view karmas are classified as 'weighty', 'death-proximate', 'habitual' and 'residual'."

S: This is quite important. Some karmas are weighty and some are death-proximate, some habitual, some residual. We'll see now what these are.

"The dhyanas are all reckoned as healthy weighty volitions."

S: That's quite important, it sounds rather technical but it isn't so. What are the dhyanas?

Voice: The higher states of consciousness.

S: ... The higher states of consciousness or even the super conscious states that are entered into, as it were, as the result of the practice of meditation sometimes in other ways. The dhyanas are all reckoned as healthy weighty volitions. First of all the dhyanas are volitions, when you are meditating it is a state of volition. Yes? Now that's very important, it is an active powerful state. It is a karma. You are doing something and in fact it is so powerful that it is called weighty. It is the most powerful of all the volitions, I mean all the healthy volitions, skilful volitions. When you're in a meditative state you're doing more than at other times. The higher the level of consciousness, the more powerful it becomes. It's not just higher you know. It is higher of course: but it's also more powerful, there's more energy integrated the higher that you go ... yes.

Voice: How is it then that Devadatta who attained the higher states also tried to kill the Buddha?

S: Well, he hadn't got rid of ego.

[37]

Voice: So there's like two ways of direction struggling against each other.

S: Yes, yes, yes. Devadatta can be ... even though he had this higher experience and therefore was a more powerful personality, there was the deep rooted egotism and selfishness and competitiveness with the Buddha, wanting to take the Buddha place, get the Buddha out of the way. But even though he had had these experiences previously, they only sort of reinforced, you know, his bad intentions. Even the dhyanas are mundane, they don't actually pertain to the path. They're higher, but they're a more refined state of the mundane, they're not transcendental.

Vangisa: (... ) the dhyanas and so on are linked up with the instructions ( ... ) I mean apart from going into similar things are functions from a different sort of ideological point of view, I mean of course, have a much stronger residue of ( ... )

S: What you need in addition to the dhyanas is insight that's going to solve the dhyanas. But the dhyanas in themselves are healthy. They are positive. They are skilful in as much as they've left you in a more refined level of consciousness and therefore they are much more powerful and wholesome states of consciousness, and can have a much more refining effect upon the whole being. So therefore, they are called weighty volitions. And weighty volitions as regards their resultant effect, as regards their resultant experiences, take precedence over all others. You experience, as it were, a sort of conflict between the results of different kinds of karmas. Precedence is taken by the results of weighty volitions, whether healthy or unhealthy, including the dhyanas. So the dhyanas are all reckoned as healthy weighty volitions. So when you are meditating, when you are experiencing the Dhyana states, you are doing something, you're creating karma. You're bringing about such very powerful consequences for yourself, even though, in as much as the dhyanas are mundane, they may be concluded temporarily if not kept up, if they're not reinforced.

Voice: But in, you are talking about meditation and in body mind and speech I ought to get in with meditation, it's not just a secret mark.

S: Oh no, all your energies are involved yes.

Voice: ( ... ) required.

S: Oh yes, in some cases you can be walking but it's quite difficult actually to experience a dhyana state, you know, when you're boarding a bus, but it's not impossible. It can happen. Or even when you're speaking. Though this isn't usual, because usually you are so absorbed that you can't speak, you can't move. But the point that is being insisted upon, the point that is being stressed, is that a dhyana state, a higher state, is an action, is a volition. Though we tend to think of the dhyana state as passive and restful; no. But you are creating karma in those states even though the karma you've created can destroy that. You're creating karma that is positive. It's a volition and you're setting up very powerful consequences for the future; so powerful that those consequences have to take precedence over the consequences of other weaker kinds of karmas. So that, when you are meditating, you're doing something very very important. I think we've got to put this across to people, much more perhaps than we do. They tend to think of meditation as a sort of dream, drifting off into a vague pleasant mild state. It's very much more than that.

Voice: Yes try to ( ... )

S: Yes. All right that is an example, those are example of healthy weighty volitions. Now let's go on.

"Matricide, parricide, killing an Arhant, wounding a Buddha, and creating a schism in the Sangha, together with erroneous opinions of the type negating the very possibility of a life dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment [38] are all unhealthy weighty volitions."

S: Ah, this is quite important: unhealthy, unskilful, weighty volitions. First of all matricide. Matricide is put first, killing one's own mother, murdering one's own mother. So, why do you think this is? Why is, it's surely not just convention, just because it's convention it's regarded as very wicked to kill your own mother ( ... ). Why do you think matricide is regarded an unhealthy or unskilful weighty volition? Why is killing your mother worse than killing

somebody else to put it crudely?

Voice: It's much more intense and unhealthy.

S: Yes, but why is that?

Voice: It's like killing yourself.

S: Yes, in some ways it's like killing yourself, yes.

Voice: She gave you life. Life came through her.

S: All right, that's more like it. A sort of reflection isn't it; it's true certainly, but why should it be worse to kill someone who, you know, gave life?

Voice: She's given you so much maybe that's the result.

S: Ah yes, so take it a step further.

Voice: ( ... )

S: I wouldn't say that. Well it means the tie or the bond between mother and child is a very strong one; possibly the strongest natural biological human bond of all. So when, to murder your own mother, you have to overcome that. So that means it represents something much more powerful and much more strong. If your desire to kill is so strong that it ... all right it is so strong, it can overcome, you know, your strongest natural human attachment of all; I mean that desire to kill has to be very very intense indeed. So in this respect, it becomes an even more serious matter than killing somebody else. Because the natural tendency not to kill, that you have to overcome, by virtue of the fact that it is your own mother is so much stronger than in the case of other people ... you see this? But I think this is why matricide is regarded as so ... so great an offence; so weighty, unskilful volition. It represents a negation of so much, of so strong a natural bond. You'd have to overcome so much in you, which is quite good, you know, positive and healthy, in order to carry out that act. I mean, even to carry it out, you must have degenerated to a very great extent indeed. Do you see this? So matricide, the killing of one's own mother, is regarded as a weighty, unhealthy, unskilful volition. This brings me to another point, that I've mentioned fairly recently, not only with regard to mother but with regard to father. As one's spiritual life develops, when one progresses and becomes more healthy and positive, it is very important that, if in one's own case one's relationships with one's parents have not been or are not positive, that one should try to make them so. Because if there is within you, a residue of negative attitude, especially hatred and dislike towards one's own parents, it's because you're so deeply connected, it will stand in your way sooner or later.

Voice: It is very important in this sort of person ( ... ) improve your way. First you have to get to the bottom of it, before you can have a positive approach. And now translating the actual past; now I realize in the last month I've changed my way of working. And at times I can like the person himself and see the positive things and then working from the other direction.

S: It's not so much, that you have to murder your parents, but to realize that [39] you have

murdered them. Oh yes, you have murdered them. Yes, you've done it already in thought, and you just have to recognize the fact that that unskilful action is there, before you can start working on it, and getting rid of it and making it positive.

Voice: ( ... )

S: Well sure, you can't relate positively to others, until you're positive yourself and relating positively to yourself. And as I said, this is something I've been pointing out recently to people within the movement; that at a certain stage you must definitely think in terms of establishing a positive relationship with your parents. You can't just, sort of, as it were, discard them. This is not possible, you know, by virtue of the fact that you were so intimately connected for so many years. So you have, either got to clear up any mess that may be left over, or it remains a mess and continues to get in your way. But, you know, if there is a mess there, then clear it up. But this is quite positive but I'm a bit suspicious of someone, who seems to be getting on well with his spiritual practice and meditation, but who remains on bad terms with his parents in the sense you know of feeling very negatively towards them or still having resentment towards them. This is a sign of non progress. If of course the parents are uncooperative, they don't want anything to do with you, they don't like you, condemn you, well you can't change their attitude by force. You have to accept that is the way they are, and if necessary, even stay away from them. But you won't be feeling anything negative towards them on your own account. You'd be ready for a positive communication if they will allow you to have it.

Vangisa: Doesn't the attitude ( ... ) the relationship.

S: I think not necessarily, in the sense of you know, going into all the gory details. I don't think you need to remember every instance, mull it over; no I don't think so. Make yourself positive. You're here now in the present and you, here and now in the present you relate positively to your parents. I don't think you have to drag up the past in detail all the time; I don't think that's necessary.

Voice: Maybe it doesn't drag up; maybe it will come up.

S: Well, if it does, you must deal with it in the present, as it were. All right, lets go on. "Matricide, parricide, killing an Arhant, wounding a Buddha ..." This is violence directed towards people who normally one ought to be looking up to, a sort of ... It's violation of one's, you know, feelings of reverence, to something that's greater than oneself. So if you violate that, that's a very serious thing indeed. Just as - you're doing here on the spiritual level what before you were doing on the biological and psychological. If anything, it's even worse to even think of murdering some holy person. That's a very very serious matter indeed. It's not so much that you're trying to harm that person, but you're negating something within yourself. You're doing terrible harm to yourself in that way.

Voice: Can one make a distinction here between a definite will as it were and a thought that suddenly seems to erupt?

S: It is the fact of a set conscious intention and the wish and the willingness to carry it out.

Voice: Not just the fleeting thought which you may well have, especially in the case of the

Arhant or the Buddha who ...

break in tape

[40]

S: And then "creating a schism in the Sangha", dividing the spiritual community itself. So this is regarded traditionally as unhealthy, unskilful weighty volition. It's one of the most serious offences, to create schism within the spiritual community itself, as Devadatta tried to ... In other words, you must be a really sick person to try systematically and deliberately to do that, you know. If you have a harmonious body of people, you know, who are united on a spiritual principle, a real brotherhood and fellowship, deliberately to go about dividing that and splitting it up, means that there's something really bad, vicious and nasty in you. So this is regarded as unskilful weighty volition, one of the most serious offences; to break up, or try to break up a good fellowship. Unfortunately I mean, one does come across people who tend to do this sort of thing.

Suvrata: This doesn't mean that you should completely avoid and sweep under the carpet any dissension, any point of controversy.

S: Well, points of controversy and genuine differences of opinion - these are quite different things obviously. (Pause) Then opinions, that is ditthis, of the type negating the very possibility of a life dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment, are all unhealthy weighty volitions. To be set in an opinion, even if it amounts to philosophy according to which no higher development is a possibility to human beings, then that is an unskilful weighty volition. This is very important indeed and not according to current modes of thought. That if you are consciously, deliberately committed to a system of thought, which precludes higher human development, that is an unskilful weighty karma. You're doing harm to yourself, as well as to others. So these are examples of positive and negative, skilful and unskilful, weighty volitions; particularly powerful and karmically efficacious mental states. Lets go on to the others.

"Death-proximate karma is the healthy or unhealthy volition occurring immediately before death, which may be the reflex of some previously performed healthy or unhealthy karma, or of something connected with it, or of a sign indicating the future plane of existence."

S: So death-proximate karma: that is the karma which near the time of death is the healthy or unhealthy volition occurring immediately before death. Buddhists traditionally attach great importance to your mental state just before you pass away. And this is one of the reasons why Buddhists are very concerned to pass away in a state of clear consciousness, because this is a volition. And not to pass away in a state of unconsciousness, if possible, not to pass away in sleep though one isn't necessarily unconscious even in sleep. So this death-proximate karma, which may be unhealthy or healthy, that is the mental state just before death, may be the reflex of some previously performed healthy or unhealthy karma. In other words, if you're habitually doing something during your lifetime, the chances are that you'll think about that just before death and in that way, what you've been habitually concerned with, will become a subject matter of your death-proximate karma. There's the famous story about the Rishi, or sage, who was very much attached to a deer that came to him in his hermitage and his last thought, his dying thought was about the deer as he passed away. So according to the legend, he was reborn as a deer. So that's another illustrative story. For instance, it's also said, that if

you were a butcher, then at the time of death, or just before death, you may see blood, you may see animals being slaughtered. I did actually hear of one case of this. A butcher near Darjeeling: this sort of story was reported about him, just before his death he kept seeing, as it were, visions of animals being slaughtered and got into a very bad mental state because of that. But it is only, as it were, natural or reasonable that other factors being equal, if you're not making any special effort to sort of modify your state of consciousness, just before death that you should think about something that you've been, you know, preoccupied with for quite a few years, maybe something of your work or family, your interests and so on and so forth. If you've been collecting stamps all your life, you know just before death, ridiculous as it no doubt is, you may be just thinking about your stamp collection and what's going to happen to it, [41] and in that way pass away. And also again, if you've been in the habit of meditating during life, the chances are that just before death you will be in a meditative state of consciousness or at least repeating a mantra, if you have been in the habit of doing that during your lifetime. On the other hand, a great deal may depend on the attitude of the people around you. You may be in a weakened state, you know, physically weak and you may be a bit mentally suggestible, and if the people around you or people with you at that time are saying: "well just forget about things; we'll look after everything; don't worry about your wife and family, we'll see to all that, just think about the Buddha, or just repeat your mantra." Or if you chant it for them so that they are just listening to you chanting, this is quite good in as much as it helps them to develop certain mental attitudes, volitions, just before they pass away. But therefore in this thing, think how unpleasant it could be to pass away in hospitals, with nurses bustling to and fro and someone just going to take your temperature and all that sort of thing, all cold and clinical and none of your friends may be around. All right, so that's death-proximate karma. "...or of a sign indicating the future plane of existence." This is of course a matter of Buddhist belief. It isn't something that you can say either is or is not with any confidence. But it is generally believed that if, for instance, you have visions, just before death, of some happy sort of heavenly paradise, like (Staypol -?- ), it probably means that you're going there, or, if you have a vision of people fighting and quarrelling, well, you may be reborn among the Asuras and so on. This is certainly a popular Buddhist belief, but it isn't something that we can very easily verify. But, even apart from all that, we can say even from a purely human point of view, how you pass away is quite important; the mental state. And we should make sure, as far as we can, that we ourselves pass away in a positive state of mind, and that we help others to do so also, if we happen to be with them at the time; help them to die happily. So that's death-proximate karma, in other words the karma, the healthy or unhealthy mental state or volition, occurring immediately before death. All right on to habitual karma.

"Habitual karma is a healthy or unhealthy volition either repeatedly performed or performed once and repeatedly reflected upon."

S: So two kinds of habitual karma which can be of course both healthy or unhealthy, skilful or unskilful. It's either action that you go on doing again and again which obviously builds up quite an influence on you after a certain time, or it's an action that you just do once but you're repeatedly reflecting upon it; that also is habitual karma. It may be a good action, it may be a bad action; it may be skilful, it may be unskilful. For instance, you might have had a wonderful meditative experience. If you go on reflecting upon it, well it can become a sort of habitual karma, even though you don't have the experience itself. If you're reflecting upon it again and again, it can become, as it were, an habitual karma and you can increase its effect. And on the other hand, if you've committed a crime and you've only committed it once, but it

troubles you and you go on, you know, thinking about it more and more and sort of living through it again and again, then again it can become a sort of habitual karma. All right lets go on to the next kind.

"Authorities on the Abhidharma agree that as a factor determining the nature of the next rebirth a weighty karma, whether healthy or unhealthy, invariably takes precedence over death-proximate and habitual karmas."

S: This is the authorities on the Abhidharma agreeing about this: that, when you're reborn out of all the different kinds of karma that you've committed and all the different effects that are now about to come into operation, "which" has the greatest effect and determines the nature of your next existence more than any other. "Which takes precedence?", and they agree that it's the karmic consequences of the weighty karmas, whether skilful or unskilful. They have, as it were, the greatest say at that time and they determine more than any [42] other kind of karma just exactly what your next birth, your next life, will be like at least to begin with.

Lokamitra: Can I just say something about the previous karma, the habitual karmas, just something which occurs to me to be quite a micchaditthi among some people. I've always been very regular in meditating and so on and I've been attacked by several people in the past for this. It hasn't really hurt me because I've been convinced myself. It's like setting up a positive habit, which seems to me important at the moment. But sometimes it's thought that it's necessary to break those positive habits. I've felt them from a rather negative point of view actually, but it does seem to be - I don't think it's so prevalent as it was.

S: I think it's quite true, if, for instance, you've kept up your meditation faithfully every day for seven or eight or nine years, then you might consider that, perhaps, once in a way one - you shouldn't sit that particular day. But this is something you think about after about seven or eight years for instance not after a couple of weeks.

Lokamitra: You know personally I've got so much out of leading a regular life and establishing positive patterns like that.

S: I think this is very important, especially when one lives in a very distracting environment, you know, such as a big city always is; I think it's very important to establish first the positive patterns and regular patterns.

Devaraja: I can see the possibility where, I mean, I was just thinking it might be good to say, to deliberately decide not one day to meditate if you start realizing through your meditation that you're doing it for very sort of guilty reasons and ...

S: I don't think there's any reason to stop though. I mean, you go on meditating, but without the guilty reasons.

Devaraja: Yes, well, I can see that's possible for some, just to say, to decide for one day not to do it just to show that you weren't kind of ...

Lokamitra: But that's a reaction. I think that's wrong. I think that's what these people are sort of saying, you know, as long as one can stop and not get hung up about it and not be very upset when one hasn't done it... feel guilty then, but if one just doesn't because one thinks one



might feel guilty then it seems to ...

Devaraja: Yes when one maybe doesn't stop because one is frightened of some awful guilt or ...

Lokamitra: But sometimes these things, maybe not clear in that sense, but they do spur you on too, you can use them to ...

S: I think we have to be very careful of that particular micchaditthi which is against any sort of regularity of practice. Which really means it's against commitment. It just wants to drift and do things in a lazy sort of, you know, good for nothing way. I think one must be very careful about that. And yet it's so prevalent especially in sort of pseudo Buddhist, pseudo Zen, pseudo Krishnamurti circles, that, you know, one just has to be very much on one's guard against all that, not to fall victim to it oneself and not to encourage it in others; and not go along with that sort of line of thought even by implication.

Voice: Do you think that with some people there is a danger of so structuring their time and activities, company that in effect exclude themselves from reality and you can do this as a way of not facing up to reality?

S: Well, I think I'll deal with that problem when I encounter it. I haven't [43] met anybody yet, who does over-structure themselves in this way. And whereas, I mean, you can count it in scores of the other kind. Though I would say also this that after ... if you're meditating and even supposing you're over-structuring it, you are meditating you know. The meditation eventually contains its own antidote. You would not be able to go on structuring in that rigid way, if you get on sufficiently with your meditation. The meditation itself will start loosening you up, so there is no real practical danger.

Voice: I get a lot of priests ... Catholic priests in my groups and if they heard the word meditation they get angry saying that they've for years and years sitting and so on.

S: After all they don't meditate, they don't meditate that's the trouble.

Voice: Of course, of course.

S: If they had meditated for years and years, they would never have had to come along to you to be sorted out. They don't meditate. I mean, you mentioned about that once, Mike, didn't you - meditating when you were in seminary and what happened.

Mike: Well they used this word meditation for a half hour's session before the morning mass. But there was no kind of instruction taught. People were completely at sea. The session began with a few prayers and then - well no one gave any guidance at all, so it seemed quite clear that no one was actually really meditating.

Voice: Bare knees on wooden floors.

S: But don't they kneel on ( ... ) or something like that?

Devaraja: I think maybe, it's occurred to me before, that there's a problem when we use the

word meditation and I think it, it's not really satisfactory.

S: Well when I say 'meditation' here and people 'practising meditation' and especially within the group, I mean that there is someone keeping an eye on them and who will know whether they are really meditating or not. So if there are these safeguards and they really are meditating i.e. entering into higher states of consciousness from time to time then any over structuring in their way of life, including their, you know, regular patterns of meditating will be looked after by the loosening, as it were, effect of the meditation experience itself. So for anyone sort of regularly functioning in the framework of the FWBO there's no problem at all. We don't have to worry about that. Let them be as, you know, as over-structured as they like, if they do meditate in this sense it will be resolved almost automatically. And in any case hardly anybody tends to over-structure; it's much more the other way round. We have to encourage them to structure much more than they do, positively. But I mean maybe in other groups and circles, 'over-structuring' is a danger. It certainly isn't for us; the under-structuring is the danger, a vague, you know - a jelly like drift.

"In the absence of a weighty karma, the determining factor is either a death-proximate or an habitual karma, the order of precedence being here a matter of dispute."

S: You can see also that the two overlap a little bit anyway so it's not, surprisingly, that there's a difference of opinion, OK.

"Residual karma is a healthy or unhealthy karma not included in the previous three classes which had been performed once and which can determine rebirth only if it has been repeatedly reflected upon."

S: I don't think we need go into that in any great detail, partly because we haven't got time and partly because at present we'd best get a general [44] picture of the whole thing or even a general impression. So let's go straight on finishing a bit rapidly now.

"Karmas are also fourfold according to function, the sixth principle of classification. From this point of view they are either 'reproductive', 'supportive: 'counteractive', or 'destructive'. The first function produces the psychophysical 'personality' of the next birth and maintains it for the period of its existence; the second produces no effects of its own, but supports and strengthens those of a reproductive karma; the third, on the contrary, weakens the results of a reproductive karma;"

S: This is quite important. The counteractive active karma; that karmas can be counteracted and in this way negated, they can be balanced out as it were.

"...the fourth destroys them and produces effects of its own. Reproductive karma is likened to sewing seeds, supportive to manuring and irrigating the field, counteractive to a hailstorm that spoils the crop and destructive to a fire that consumes it and leaves only ash."

S: All right, lets go straight on.

"Though enumerated one after another, the thirty two types of karma so far described are not mutually exclusive, for we have to deal not with a machine made up of a limited number of cogs and wheels, each with its own separate function, but simply with a play of healthy and

unhealthy volitions which can be looked at from various points of view as represented by the principles of classification. "

S: " ... a play of unhealthy and healthy volitions " ... this is what it really is ... "which can be looked at from various points of view as represented by the principles of classification". Don't get bogged down too much in these principles of classification, the sub divisions of them and so on and so forth. Just try to see in a very broad, general, impressionistic way the sort of thing that is going on, because it is after all a, you know, picture of our own mind and its working. All right lets carry on - we're getting quite near the end of this first half of the chapter.

"With regard to the plane of existence on which they mature, the seventh and last such principle, ..."

S: Ah yes. I think actually we can stop there, we come on here in fact to the planes and therefore to the Wheel. So I think we'll leave that seventh principle of classification of planes for the present, until after coffee, because it brings us right into the Wheel of Life.

BREAK

Lokamitra: ... murder this sounds, I think this is quite dangerous proposition or whatever but could one just put it down to a child's karma if one was ...

S: Well it might be but one doesn't know.

Lokamitra: Right. No. But one couldn't deduce from that that it's just like ...

S: Oh no ... it might be. One just doesn't know, but one couldn't say positively that it was. Also I think in this connection one must beware of saying; "well it wasn't very serious he wasn't - didn't murder, he was only unmindful". But unmindfulness is regarded as a very serious matter indeed in Buddhism, yes; not that he was, simply didn't think or he was only a bit unmindful, it didn't matter much. No. Unmindfulness is a very serious matter.

Voice: ( ... ) in terms of Christian ( ... ) it would be worse than a sin because you could not be forgiven for it...

[45]

S: Hmm ... yes ... yes.

Voice: ... and you could be for a sin.

S: It's sort of culpable negligence.

Voice: What does culpable mean?

S: "For which you are accountable"; which is, as it were, a sin, or a fault to which, for which you can be held to account, as in a factory. If you don't observe proper safety precautions and someone has an accident as a result of your carelessness it's sort of culpable negligence. You're responsible for that because you should have taken those precautions and knew that

you should. You can't argue simply: "Oh I forgot. I, you know, didn't think". It's your duty to think. And, you know, you should think. So then the negligence is culpable. So, in a way, Buddhism holds that all negligence is culpable.

Lokamitra: Do we have to be careful where we draw the line between ... hmm an act which isn't a sort of conscious act and an unmindful act.

S: Yes.

Lokamitra: Because people often use the excuse in their own mindfulness of saying: "you know, I can't help it, that's how I am you know; that's how I do things. I wasn't conscious", and so on.

S: Because, I mean, if it was something, that the person had never thought of before and had never had their attention drawn to before, it's not to be expected of the, sort of, ordinary person. Well fair enough, you can plead; "Well I didn't think of it, I didn't know". But, if it's something the ordinary person should be expected to know, for which they have been told about or reminded of, then you can't plead that it isn't their responsibility to remember. All right on we go then. It's the paragraph beginning "with regard to" - in the paperback edition it's page seventy one.

"With regard to the plane of existence on which they mature, the seventh and last such principle... "

S: That principle of classifying karmas.

"... four classes of karma are distinguished: unhealthy volitions maturing in the four lowest, sub human kamaloka planes, "

S: Lets take this bit by bit. The basic principle here is that karma, that is volition, can have its fruition, can bring about results on a number of different planes. In other words, according to traditional Buddhist thought, there are a number of planes of consciousness, planes of existence. There is another dimension, as it were, to existence. There is a lower and a higher, which goes beyond the lower and higher of modern scientific knowledge. Broadly speaking, there are three great sub divisions. There is what is called "kamaloka", which is the world of sensuous desire which includes the human world, we could even say the material world if you like. Then what is called the "rupaloka", which is the world of form, we could say archetypal world, yes. And then, there is the "Arupaloka", the formless world, where there is mind or different states of mind without even archetypal form; these are usually conceived of in terms of pure light of various kinds. Beyond that is Nirvana. Beyond that is the Transcendental. So this is basic classification according to level. So here it says, that unhealthy volitions maturing in the four lowest sub human kamaloka planes, namely those of the anti gods "Asuras", revenants "Pretas", animals and infernals, these are all in the kamaloka. "All of which are planes of misery." Then ... carry on from there then.

[46]

"... healthy volitions maturing in any one of the seven higher kamaloka planes, "

S: You notice that these planes are sub divided. The kamaloka consists of a number of sub

divisions. And the four lowest of these are those of the anti gods, the revenants, animals and the infernals. And then, there are seven higher ones which consist of: the human plane, which is the fifth up, as it were, and then, above those, six other sort of heavenly spheres, which are still, as it were, material; though the word material doesn't really apply here in the ordinary sense, but which are still kamaloka planes and these are the lowest realms of the gods.

" namely the human plane, where 'joy and pain are woven fine', ..."

S: A quotation from a poet, meaning, where there's a mixture of joy and pain, the lower worlds mainly pain, the lower karmic world, the lower loka world; the human world a mixture of pleasure and pain, the higher heavenly worlds above still within the kamaloka only pleasure, only joy though not lasting."

"... and the six lowest divine realms, where there is only joy; healthy volitions (namely the four rupadhyanas maturing according to their degree of intensity in any one of the twelve higher divine sub planes of the rupaloka, where from the fourth sub plane upwards even joy is transcended; and healthy volitions the four arupa-dhyanas maturing in the four sub planes of the Arupaloka. Counting the human plane and each of the three lowest kamaloka planes, omitting that of the asuras, separately, and reckoning all the divine planes, lower and higher, as one plane, we get the panca-gati or five 'goings' of sentient beings according to their karma as depicted in the five principal segments of the Wheel of Life."

S: In other words, in a sense, the Wheel of Life distorts the picture, do you get that, yes? Add up all the sub planes and we'll work it out, how many sub planes are mentioned altogether in this paragraph so far, can anyone work it out quickly?

Voice: Twelve kamalokas.

Voice: Six lower divine.

S: So there's how many kamalokas, how many rupaloka, how many Arupaloka?

Voice: Twelve rupas.

Vangisa: Twenty altogether.

Devaraja: Aren't there thirty three because in the (...) I was just wondering that ...

S: No, there's the heaven of the thirty three gods - that's one particular heaven, that's the highest of the karma, rupa-, kamaloka, devalokas; don't go into that, there are ( .. ) agreed. How many kamaloka sub planes then?

Voice: I can see eleven.

S: You pick up eleven do you? All right, the four lowest, then the human, so that's five and then six above, that's eleven, yes, and then ... healthy volitions maturing in any one of the seven higher kamaloka planes, that is, seven of the eleven already enumerated and the six lower divine ones where there's only joy ... healthy volitions, namely the four rupa-dhyanas. How many there?

Voice: Twenty five.

Devaraja: Well there's ...

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S: I think there's a bit of overlapping that you need to take into consideration, yes?

Devaraja: Well it seems to say there are eighteen rupa planes, in fact there are twelve higher and six lower divine realms.

Aryamitra: No, because the seven is still in the kamaloka, the seven higher kamaloka planes.

S: Yes - that's still in the kamaloka the...

Voice: The higher rupalokas?

S: So you come on to the healthy volitions, namely the four rupa-dhyanas, maturing according to the degree of intensity in any one of the twelve higher sub-divine sub-planes of the rupaloka, yes. So there's twelve, in the rupa-loka. "Where from the fourth sub-plane upwards even joy is transcended; and healthy volitions ... maturing in the four sub-planes of the Arupaloka." Actually the four sub-planes of the Arupaloka are again subdivided but that hasn't been mentioned here. So you've got eleven, twelve and four, how many does that give you?... twenty-seven, well I think you will find with the subdivisions it brings you up to, I think its thirty-two. But anyway, that doesn't matter very much at the moment. But what I'm coming on to point out is this, that... Let's work for the moment with a list of eleven plus twelve plus four, in other words, how many? Twenty-seven. All right, then, you've got five or six in the Wheel of Life. So what has happened here? Out of those twenty-seven, one is represented by a complete segment, yes, in other words it's the asuras, yes; out of, if you take six, six divisions, the asuras, who are only one out of twenty-seven, get a complete segment to themselves. The pretas, who are one out of twenty-seven, get a complete segment to themselves. The animals, who are one out of twenty-seven, get a complete segment to themselves; human beings, who are one out of twenty-seven, get a complete segment to themselves, yes. The infernals who are one out of twenty-seven, get a complete segment to themselves. So that's five. Five away from twenty-seven is twenty-two. That leaves you with the devaloka. The devas though, they represent twenty-two segments, twenty-two sub-planes. They only get one segment of the Wheel of Life; do you get that? So in other words, if you look at the Wheel of Life you get the impression that all the six different kinds of beings are reborn there, represent an equal percentage of the total. But they don't, the gods... the sphere of the gods is twenty-two times out of scale, as it were.

Vajradaka: In excess.

S: No. No, it's the other way round. It should be twenty-two times bigger than it is to give you the same proportions. Because the world of the gods, even though it's only one segment of the Wheel of Life, represents twenty-two sub-planes. Whereas each of the other five represent only one sub-plane, yes.

Lokamitra: You quote something - from Govinda - later on in "Stages of the Path" which...

S: Yes right. So, if you put the world of the gods at the top and your other segments to make it proportionate, you should multiply that twenty-two times to give you the correct proportion, as it were; or even more, if you go into the sub-planes of the arupa properly. In other words, what it really means is that the Wheel of Life, although its very good from certain points of view, does not represent the scale of existence in depth correctly.

Lokamitra: But on the other hand it... There may be all these different levels but couldn't most of humanity be right down on the bottom five, as it were, so that proportionately, in another way the world of the gods is perhaps more correct.

Devaraja: In terms of our experience of the world I think that probably the Wheel of Life is very accurate, I mean for most people.

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S: Well yes.

Devaraja: That's their experience of the world within those limitations.

S: Well I mean the majority of human beings would not experience the world of the gods at all, yes.

Vangisa: Well on the other hand, are gods in fact (...) Chinese (...) the obvious difference between animals and hungry ghosts, just purely from our subjective human point of view.

S: Yes, but looking at it objectively, in terms of the number of planes actually existing, as it were, and therefore realms of experience open to us, there's a much further possibility of development up the devaloka line than the Wheel of Life suggests. Yes? Otherwise, you get the impression of something almost a bit cramped. Whereas the devaloka should be opening up in the direction of Nirvana, as it were, with many, many more sub-planes, so that the "human-animal-preta-asura" range of experience represents a very small proportion of the total.

Voice: Perhaps again, it may be what the Wheel of Life is trying to say about the devaloka, it's not that it's not the devaloka in terms of the Path and higher states of consciousness, but a kind of realm of being trapped in aesthetic and sensual delights.

S: Well lets look at it... But that applies all the way up, that applies to all the twenty-two. You can be trapped in any one of those.

Devaraja: But from the point of view of saying that one would be, could be, trapped in that; because isn't the emphasis laid on breaking through and getting outside the Wheel?

S: Yes but the higher up you go, the greater the possibility or danger of being trapped, because it becomes more and more blissful and more and more entrancing yes. So, if one looks at it from the point of view of the trap, then you should include all the twenty-two and represent the trap as becoming more and more and more refined. But anyway, I'm only sort of pointing out that the two don't square. You've got these sort of, these twenty-seven or even, you know, thirty-two planes. And the Wheel of Life doesn't illustrate them fairly, because twenty-two, these twenty-two planes at a conservative reckoning, are all lumped together in

one segment. Whereas the other five planes each get a segment to itself, so we mustn't take that bit too literally.

Vajradaka: So, in terms of the Path practically, and in terms of the experience of the five lower and twenty two higher, you are actually calling the twenty two Devalokas higher spiritual planes.

S: Yes.

Vajradaka: You are referring to them as spiritual experiences which are necessary for the refinement of the psycho-physical organism to be able to open to Enlightenment.

S: Yes. You can, as it were, branch off and develop your insight without traversing the whole length of that spiritual path. Insight can begin before that, but that's a quite different thing. But obviously a certain measure of development of that is necessary as a basis for the development and much more so, the retaining of that insight. Otherwise it's got no sort of basis to settle down upon as it were. Your ordinary consciousness can't sustain it, it's not refined. So the higher up that path of the gods, as it were, the more satisfactory you can retain your higher spiritual insight; but also, the greater the danger of getting trapped on those levels; as the rewards increase, well the dangers also increase. The more you stand to gain, the more also you stand to lose, which seems to be entirely as it should be, until you pass the point [49] of "no return". But anyway having said that, lets go on ... So we get the five goings or six if you reckon the asuras separately, between which or among which are distributed all these sub planes, but as I've said not very fairly. All right carry on, "A sixth segment..."

"A sixth segment is often made by dividing that of the gods into two and allotting one half to the asuras."

S: That's rather interesting, any reason anyone can think of for this? There is a reason.

Devaraja: This is ... isn't this to make the struggle between the two, it's aggressive and quite negative and er ...

S: There is a conflict. I've sometimes said ... hmm ? ...

Vangisa: The tree has its roots in the world of the asuras, the branches with the fruit with the gods.

S: Yes that too. Yes it spans the two and they are struggling for that, for the good things of life, as it were. But you notice in the Wheel of Life all the other segments are definitely marked off from one another. But the world of the asuras and the world of the gods, they're not marked off. Because they're fighting, they're in contact. And so, in a sense, it is one world, it's one segment, even though they're in conflict and so different from one another. And sometimes the gods win and sometimes the asuras win. So that's quite interesting.

Lokamitra: It's strange that ... well it seems strange to me that er ... it was split up, one is one of the lower kamaloka planes and the other represents the higher and it's brought these two right together, the two extremes.



S: Yes right. The asuras are generally regarded as higher than the pretas and of course the animals and beings in hell. In other words, you can say, putting it in your own terms, aggression is a step up.

Abhaya: I'm not quite clear why these two are put together.

S: Well the connection is that they're fighting. They couldn't be fighting if there was a wall between them like the human beings and the animals, the animals and the pretas. But just here, there's no sort of spoke of the Wheel coming between them and they are in contact and they're fighting.

Abhaya: Is it Geshe Rabten's "higher aspirations fighting in conflict with lower" or ...

S: I think you could even say from a human point of view it's an example of, "the better being the enemy of the best". I mean the asuras have got wealth and posterity and vigour and strength but the devas have got something even more and there's a conflict between the two.

Vangisa: How strongly ... how strongly ...

Voice: Immortality?

S: They haven't got immortality.

Vangisa: How strongly are the gods fighting back?

S: Well again the thangka, the painting, doesn't give you the facts of the case or at least it only gives you one part of the picture: the gods at ease enjoying everything. But the gods also fight according to legend. And the gods are [50] fighting with the asuras, just as the asuras are fighting with the gods; and sometimes the asuras win and sometimes the gods win. It's almost like, sort of positive and negative forces, which are in conflict, but which are interchangeable, which are going up and down like that and you only resolve that conflict by getting on to some, as it were, higher level still, which is, you know, the Transcendental, the Path of Wisdom.

Lokamitra: It seems quite ... it's opposite the pretas, the preta realm and it seems quite relevant there because it seems just like the hungry ghost' on a higher level in ...

S: Hmm yes.

Lokamitra: They've got a lot but ...

S: They're successful hungry ghosts.

Lokamitra: Yes, that's right. Not withering and poor.

S: Right yes. It's satisfied craving or at least for the time being, satisfied up to a point, but just want more still. They've got a lot and they want more. The pretas haven't got anything, but they want more.

Vairochana: In the asuras, there's a tree growing isn't there?

S: Yes that's the wish granting tree.

Vairochana: And they can't get the benefit of the fruit, is that right?

S: Well according to Indian legend - here Buddhism is making use of general Indian legend and mythology - the wish granting tree is the wonderful tree that grants all possible desires, gives you everything you want. And the asuras and the gods are fighting over this tree. It's a sort of Aladdin's lamp, the same sort of mythologen; it's what gives you all your desires. So they're naturally fighting for possession of it. In Indian mythology there's a wish fulfilling tree, a wish fulfilling cow and a wish fulfilling vase or pot, which reappears in Buddhism. They're all symbols of the, you know, the satisfaction of all one's desires and wants and so on and so forth, and sometimes the gods manage to secure this tree and sometimes the asuras.

Vairochana: It seems to grow in the realm of the asuras, it doesn't grow in the realm of the gods.

S: Hmm.

Voice: Then you see you've made it in-between because there's no real dividing line, it's usually in-between the realms of the gods and the asuras.

S: It does, sort of demarcate the two spheres of influence as it were. But it' also what they're fighting over and therefore also what unites them.

Devaraja: It might be that because it's roots are in ... because it does appear too, on quite a lot of paintings I've seen, it does appear too ... the roots are in the realm of the asuras and the fruitings seem to occur in the realm of the gods that ... there's that particular sort of vigour and energy and decisiveness which may be associated with sort of businessmen who you, can refer to as the asuras. It's kind of necessary to stimulate a fruiting growth that can be collected in the deva realm.

S: But then again the scales can reverse ... you know because you can have all this powerful energy and vigour and, as it were, get up into the higher levels, the meditative levels, represented by the gods. But in as much as it isn't [51] joined yet with insight, you can come down again and go back to the previous asura state. That's why the victory is never constant. Sometimes the gods win, sometimes the asuras, sometimes the spiritual life, sometimes the worldly. It's only when you get on to the Transcendental path, you start getting past the point of no return, that victory becomes constant and you don't fall back. Otherwise ... you know you just go up and down, like a yo-yo, all the time from the world of the asuras to the world of the gods. At least with the asuras, the energy is aroused and it can go in that direction. With the pretas and the animals and the beings in states of torment, it isn't like that. The animals can't understand, they're blind as it were. The beings in hell are suffering too much. And the pretas are so famished, that they sort of don't know what to do. But the person whose energies are sort of out and are vigorous, he's aggressive. He can make some sort of effort towards the world of the gods, but he can't stay there, without insight he comes down again.

Devaraja: It really comes ... it's also there's a ... I was thinking there's quite a connection really

between this thing and the Path of Regular Steps and that until we can develop really there seems only one thing we can really do and that's to follow the precepts and ...

S: ... to make merit ...

Devaraja: Right.

S: ... keep up your meditation.

Lokamitra: Doesn't the ... don't the asuras have less Enlightened seeds than the pretas and the infernal beings?

S: They do. This is the Chinese Buddhist teaching that I referred to in one of my lectures. But seed is potentiality, not something actually existing. In the case of someone, who is intensely suffering, he can become completely fed up with conditioned existence and go directly for the Transcendental. Whereas the asura type may get bogged down in the higher goodies, as it were, of meditative states.

Lokamitra: This is what I've always, I've always thought of the asuras not striving after Enlightenment but striving after something...

S: Oh yes! Not striving after Enlightenment.

Lokamitra: Yes, yes, striving after a sort of joy which would keep them satisfied for a long time.

S: Right yes. You could say that the approach of many people in the West to the spiritual life itself is very asura-like.

Lokamitra: I've noticed this in myself and I've noticed it in other people in the Order and the Friends, that people come along because they are very hung-up or unsettled and so on. And they get it together, it again came up in your lecture, and they start feeling more outward-going, their problems are solved for the time being, and they can forget about Buddhism.

S: Yes. So in a way after a while down they go again.

Lokamitra: So they just ... they don't really want the heights.

S: Yes right, yes. And also it works the other way round: that sometimes, that they're doing the right thing and really progressing but if they don't have this rather nice blissful feeling along with it all, they think that something must be wrong, yes.

Vangisa: I've noticed this in my group that you've got to be careful of [52] emphasizing (...) from time to time you can expect (...) a general euphoric state of mind (...)

S: I'm afraid that sometimes that people say: "well you're a Buddhist doing all that meditation, why aren't you happy?" Well it doesn't necessarily bring happiness. That may just depend more on your constitution and temperament, that you find existence more or less agreeable.

But, so long as your basic willing, your basic attitude is skilful, that's all that is needed. You may not necessarily be particularly blissful or ecstatic, but you're certainly going in the right direction. In other words, to put it again in Kantian terms: "the criterion of the good is not the agreeable", yes? (laughter) He didn't say that. That's my own paraphrase, which, the criterion of the good is not the agreeable or the agreeable is not the criterion of the good. Therefore, you are not necessarily doing what is good because you feel good and you can be doing what is good in every sense and not be feeling good. But what sometimes people aren't happy with is that they say: "well I'm doing what is good, therefore I ought to be feeling good and if I'm not then something must be wrong". This isn't so at all. You can be not feeling good, but you can be doing what karmically what is good. So you mustn't expect, sort of, you know, psychological and spiritual goodies all along the line, which is what some people do expect. All that you can ask, I mean, is your own consciousness of your volition or that your consciousness of your volition, is that it is a positive and skilful volition, if you're conscious of that, that is all that is needed. But you don't have to feel good too. You may. If you do, you're lucky; that's a bonus. Though it's though it's not an essential part of skilful willing, the skilful mental attitude.

Suvrata: I'm a bit confused about the realms, from the point of view as realms rather than psychological states and the earnest disciple on the Path is looking for Nirvana. Is it right that in the state of the gods you have to be, as it were, a man again and if so, how can you avoid this time wasting diversion in heaven? (laughter)

S: Get Enlightenment straight away you know.

Suvrata: Well I didn't express it very well, there seemed like a bit of a waste of time, time wasting diversion, that to go up to the gods and ...

S: Well also one can look at it positively. There is the analogy of sleep. You could look upon sleep as a waste of time couldn't you? But it's also said that the stay in the realm of the gods on the part of someone who was reborn there after death, someone ... who's led a healthy positive life, represents a sort of rest from mundane existence; an opportunity to assimilate and digest experience, absorb experience. And then, as the sort of residue of his skilful deeds, which have caused him to be reborn in the realm of the gods, he then has subsequently a happy and positive human rebirth among good people with long life and so on and so forth. So I mean, one will de cease from the world of the gods, sure. But, one need not look at it completely negatively, as a waste of time. It's a sort of a, well, if it doesn't go on for too long, it's like a sort of sleep, but with awareness according to tradition. It's a sort of, archetypal state more of absorption and assimilation, until you come round next time and can make another positive effort. But in the state of the gods you ... it's not easy, though not impossible, to make a positive effort, just because it is sort of ... just as during sleep or during dreams.

Suvrata: Are you liable to lose your resolution by having a spell there?

S: Apparently not. I don't remember that possibility being actually discussed but apparently not. If anything the opposite; again depending on your temperament. If you've had a good night's rest, a really good sleep, how do you feel when you wake up in the morning? You feel a healthy human being, you feel like getting on with it, don't you? Unless you're one of those sluggards, who nestle down into the bedclothes and, you know, want another couple of hours [53] snooze. That's another matter. But, if you're healthy, well when you've had a good night's

sleep, you feel like getting up and getting on with it. So it's just like that when you emerge from the world of the gods and are reborn here on Earth, there's that sort of positive experience behind you, which was pleasant and agreeable and happy. You feel in a good mood. You can even see it with some babies. Apparently quite irrespective of their experience in this life, as far as one can see, some seem more happy than others, you know, with themselves, why is this? You could say, as a Buddhist, that well, maybe those babies have, you know, come straight from the devaloka, whereas others perhaps might have come straight from a human state or some other state not quite as comfortable as that. But there does seem to be a difference. So it could be due to something like that, that if one does have any sort of, you know, belief or faith ( ... ) necessarily in a negative way.

Suvrata: Could I clear up another point? I hope I'm not wasting time. This is about the gods being in a painless realm. Does this mean that they're not subject to dukkha? Because it seems to me that they're just as much subject to dukkha as humans are ...

S: All right, just a minute, what, which kind of dukkha, there are three kinds of dukkha.

Suvrata: Not dukkha dukkha.

S: Well they're subject to viparinarna dukkha aren't they?

Suvrata: Thank you.

S: Well, no, it comes to an end doesn't it? And that isn't very pleasant and so on. Sometimes that is represented graphically. They feel that they're coming to an end of their span. And they feel a sort of decline in their powers and they're not very sort of happy about it. Anyway we mustn't take these details too sort of literally or sort of theologise, you know, upon them too confidently, because we don't know strictly speaking.

Devaraja: How does rebirth take place in a pure land, where one can attain Enlightenment in this one lifetime, how does ... I just wondered that, that sort of slots into this scheme because I have heard it put by a Geshe and I was never really totally satisfied.

S: Well how did he put it?

Devaraja: Well he said it was ... it was outside the Wheel of Life but at the same time it was kind of ... it was rebirth, it wasn't the same as Enlightenment.

S: Well that is correct, that just about sums it up. It isn't included in the Wheel of Life and it isn't rebirth in the ordinary sense. It isn't Nirvana. It's a sort of half way stage, it's sort of ... irreversible stage. You're not reborn back into the world. So it's analogous to the Pure Abode of the Theravada, the Pure Abodes at the top of the world of form. And there's no regression from them. And that's where the anagami, the non returner, is born because he's exhausted the karmas which would bind him to a lower rebirth, or lower realms of being, but, he hasn't completely freed himself from karma. There's still some slight pull of karma remaining, so he's reborn in these higher heavenly, archetypal worlds and from there, gain Nirvana directly. That's straightforward Theravada teaching. And the Pure Land seems to, in a way, be a slightly Mahayanistic form of that. And so, what the people are in fact saying, is by virtue of the Nembutsu or so on, the repetition of the name of Amitabha you can in fact become an

anagami. This is in fact what they're saying, isn't it?

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Devaraja: So is there ...

S: So, in that case, strictly speaking those worlds are included in the Wheel of life. But the anagami is not born there in the ordinary way, because he's got his transcendental consciousness too. Whereas in the case of other deva occupants of the Pure Abodes, they've been reborn there, as a result of positive karma without insight. But the anagami retains his insight. So presumably when one is reborn into the Pure Land, it's rather like that. As it were outwardly it's a deva world, but inwardly it's a transcendental state yes?

Devaraja: Which of the twelve positive nidanas would that correspond to, is there a correspondence equivalent to stages on the ...

S: Where do you mean?

Devaraja: In the twelve positive nidanas.

S: Yes, well they only represent the process.

Devaraja: But presumably a stage in that process of ...

S: Where one is reborn.

Devaraja: ... spiritual development would correspond to a particular devaloka.

S: Well it's that point of transition where "in dependence upon craving, grasping does not arise".

Devaraja: No, I meant the positive nidanas, that's the negative nidanas.

S: Ah, there it is, of course, "in dependence upon the high meditative states of consciousness, there is insight into things as they really are". To be an anagami, you have to have developed insight. So in the case of the Pure Land school, they've faith in Amitabha, which is not just belief, which corresponds to insight. I discussed this in the "Survey"; faith as being the emotional equivalent of wisdom. That's in the chapter about the Pure Land school. So it seems, as though the Pure Land conception of the Mahayana has some connection with the anagami and Pure Abode conception of the Theravada. And the latter throws light on the former I think but the comparison isn't usually done.

Vangisa: I'm not very clear on one point. Devaraja said that the Pure Land ( ... ) I think you spoke about it as not being rebirth.

S: Well it's not rebirth in the normal sense, because there are rebirth factors there are samskaras. Otherwise you wouldn't be reborn at all. But they are very light, as it were; so you're reborn higher up. But you have developed insight, otherwise you wouldn't be an anagami. You are on the Transcendental Path, whereas other occupants of those same realms wouldn't be. Externally you belong there, internally you don't.

Vangisa: As regards the other occupants, there are a number of references to gods being reborn or being about to be reborn in a state of woe which is a similar kind of thing. So where you are advocating, to some extent anyway, advocating the world of the gods as being a good place for rebirth, but you are thinking more in terms of the Transcendental state than the common devas, in which rebirth into states of woe takes place. But is there in fact a connection between what you're saying and the Pure Land idea of the anagami?

S: I think there is a connection, though this is not traditionally worked out; just because, that the anagami conception is of the Hinayana and the Pure Land conception is of the Mahayana. I don't think they've been compared along these lines, but the broad outline i.e. of a world or realm which is not part of the world of the gods in the ordinary sense, in which a measure of Enlightenment [55] already has been achieved, from which you do not regress into the world and from which you also, you do not attain Nirvana directly. These features are common to both conceptions.

Vangisa: But you yourself are actually saying that this is an aim of or, a particular path?

S: Well, its not a particular path. Because, in the case of the Hinayana, you know, the stages of "stream entrant", "once returner" and "non returner", these are actually vaulting places on the way for everybody, so that, if you die as an anagami, you would be reborn in one of these Pure Abodes, as they are called. Whereas, of course, in the case of the Pure Land Schools of the Mahayana, you seek to be reborn in one of these Pure Abodes. You don't want to come back to this earth, so you try to get so far in this life, that you won't have to come back. You don't aim at attaining Enlightenment. That's too much; but, at least you think you can get to a place or a sphere or a realm, where you can continue your spiritual development and from which, you will not have to be reborn back in the world. From which, you can just go straight on, as it were, to Nirvana or Enlightenment. So in the case of the Theravada, rebirth in the Pure Abode happens, sort of, incidentally. But in the case of the Pure Land School, rebirth in the Pure Land comes about as the result of definite aspiration to be reborn in that Pure Land.

Vangisa: But, in a sense, this is what we are doing all the time, even if it's not stated succinctly as you have. In one sense or looking at any practice from this particular point of view, it could, any practice could, be described as an aspiration towards rebirth in a more satisfactory state, on the grounds that our present state in which we're starving is utterly unsatisfactory. Therefore the only thing to do is to improve our situation. Once you... once you...

S: Well sure, that's why I've said that, you know, when we come away on retreat it's the same principle. You're getting into a more satisfactory environment, so that you can make a more undistracted and therefore stronger effort.

Devaraja: But I think, I may be wrong, that... but I think, I heard you refer to on some retreat as being like the Pure Land.

S: I think I have, yes. So you can think of the Pure Land as a sort of glorified retreat going on, for ever and ever, until you get Nirvana. (Laughter) And food and drink are provided, you don't even have to cook. Foods appear just floating and bobbing in front of your lips, raiments appear on you, beautiful new clothes and dresses, you don't have to do anything about it; music sounding in the air. And, you know, no tape recordings necessary, just the voice of the

Buddha just sounding in the air all the time. No possibility of tape recorders going wrong.

Dutch Lady: I've broke already my microphone and losing my luggage and I'm sure its not like that in the Pure Land. (Laughter)

S: When you go, you mustn't say he or she, only it.

Lokamitra: To get the Pure Land implies irreversibility.

S: Yes, and the Pure Abodes too.

Lokamitra: Yes but here it says, well you say here, that the world of the gods are made up only of the higher rupalokas and the...

S: Arupalokas.

Lokamitra: Ah yes, the divine realms, that these consist in the attainment of the rupadhyanas and arupadhyanas; but they don't consist, which don't, which [56] aren't irreversibility.

S: Ah well, you're not reborn anywhere as a result of irreversibility at all. For instance, you're not - if you die as an anagami, there's not sufficient force of, sort of, what I call "gravitations", spiritual gravitations to keep you down in the lower realms. You, sort of, float up. But you're not completely released, so you stay there, as it were. And that's your rebirth into these higher worlds with your partly enlightened consciousness intact.

Lokamitra: I just wondered if one could, I just... It seemed to me that those come completely outside the Wheel of Life because that...

S: Well yes and no. Internally, if you can distinguish in this way, internally the person born there does not belong to that sphere. It's just the same case as the person who gains Enlightenment with a human body. Well he's got a human body, but he's not in the human world. So there, they've got this rupaloka body but they're not in that world yes.

Lokamitra: I've got it.

S: Good. Anyway let's go on, otherwise there won't be any lunch.

"According to the Divyavadana or 'Divine Heroic Feats (of the Buddha and His Disciples)', one of the best known avadanas of the Sarvastivadins, the original model of the Wheel of Life was painted over the gateway of the Veluvana Vihara at Rajagrha on the personal instructions of the Master, Who indicated exactly how the work should be done. Whether or not of so ancient an origin, it undoubtedly figures on the wall of one of the rock-cut monasteries of Ajanta, and is still well known in Tibet where it is often depicted inside temple porches for the edification of the faithful."

S: We'll just carry straight on now.

"The Wheel consists of four concentric circles. Working from centre to circumference, the first circle, which constitutes the hub of the Wheel contains three animals representing the



three poisons: a dove (or cock) for lust (lobha) a snake for hatred, (dvesa), and a pig for delusion (moha), each biting the tail of the one in front."

S: I've translated these terms just by one single word, but obviously you can't really do that. 'Lobha' is not just lust: Its craving, greed, clinging, possessiveness, grasping, attachment; all these things. And in the same way 'dvesa' is not just hatred: Its aversion, spite, opposition, aggressiveness. And in the same way, delusion or 'moha' rather, isn't just delusion, but mental bewilderment, confusion, unawareness, wrong views and all the rest of it. "Each one biting the tail of the one in front", well what do you think that means?

Devaraja: Each conditions the other.

S: They're all interconnected, you can't really have one without the other two lurking somewhere nearby. All right.

"They represent different aspects of egocentric volition which, whether it's subtle healthy or gross unhealthy forms, keeps going the whole process of conditioned existence. The second circle is divided into two equal segments, one white and one black."

S: Can you see this, as it were, in your mind's eye?

"In the former, human beings whose volitions were healthy joyfully ascend into the realm of the gods; in the latter, those whose volitions were unhealthy plunge terrified headlong into hell."

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S: Its rather interesting to see in most thangkas, those who are plunging downwards are chained together. Have you noticed that? (Murmurs of agreement) In the case of those who are ascending, they're ascending individually. They're not linked together, though they're obviously on the same path. But those who are going down are chained together; a sort of force of mutual attachment. You're clinging on to other people and pulling other people down with you. Whereas, in the case of those who are ascending, on the other side, they're going up, sort of as it were, one by one. Though, of course, they are in contact, you know, influencing one another. But they're not chained together, they're not sort of visibly linked, the link if anything is (...) but the others are chained. This is quite significant.

"The third circle is divided into six segments, one for each of the six classes of sentient beings already described. At the top is the realm of the gods, next in clockwise order, the asuras, then the animal kingdom, at the bottom the infernal regions, after that the plane of the pretas, and finally the human world. In each sphere of existence the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, representing the omnipresence of Absolute Compassion, appears in a differently coloured Buddha-form with insignia appropriate to the needs of its inhabitants."

S: Here, you find the sort of compassion of the Buddha, the Transcendental aspect, breaking through in every realm of the conditioned. These realms do not represent self-contained karmic systems. They are in contact with other realms, or at least, other realms are in contact with them and insist on breaking through into them, as it were. And that fact is represented by the form of the Buddha Avalokitesvara in each of these; is present in each of these realms of the thanka or the painting of the Wheel of Life in a particular Buddha form. And he bears

"insignia appropriate to the needs of its inhabitants". Let's see what they are then.

"As a white Buddha he plays the melody of impermanence on a lute to the long-lived gods,..."

S: So among the long-lived gods, the realm of the gods, the Transcendental breaks through in the form of a Buddha, a white Buddha, something peaceful; playing a lute and that lute plays the melody of impermanence. The Buddha reminds the gods: "don't hold on to it. It isn't going to last. It's only mundane, however pleasant. It's going to end one day, remember the truth of impermanence".

"...as a green one brandishes at the warlike asuras the flaming sword of knowledge, which alone wins the true victory,..."

S: It's like the sword of Manjusri. It's only through knowledge that they get what they really want. That is, spiritual knowledge, not just the fighting for material possessions.

"... as a blue one shows the animals a book,..."

S: The book representing knowledge and Enlightenment, the animals are in a state of ignorance.

"...as a smoke-coloured one showers the infernal beings with ambrosia,..."

S: They're hungry.

Devaraja: I've also seen a smoke-coloured Buddha holding sort of flames, a purifying fire.

S: Could be that but its usually ambrosia.

Vangisa: (...)

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S: It doesn't seem nearly so appropriate as the ambrosia though. In each case the insignia is appropriate. What is being offered is appropriate. I mean a purifying flame could be offered in any of the spheres, I would have thought.

Vangisa: As it's, perhaps it's just because the association of flame anyway with the infernal regions, hell regions which features...

S: But that's the infernal region. You might think it appropriate there, but why in the case of the pretas? You could say, you know, the animals could be offered the purifying flame, to purify them from ignorance and so on. But it seems that the gift of ambrosia, which, as far as I know is the general one, the more common one, is much more appropriate.

Devaraja: I think maybe...

S: Sometimes of course in some descriptions, it's simply just food and drink and not even ambrosia, but food and drink.

Lokamitra: (...)

Devaraja: But the red one "regales the pretas with food and drink".

S: Yes, yes.

Lokamitra: Ambrosia goes to hell.

S: Oh sorry, yes; showers, yes, showers beings with ambrosia. You could say that the ambrosia represents the direct antithesis of their state; because ambrosia is a synonym for Nirvana. But in the case of the pretas, it would seem more appropriate to give them something they can eat and drink.

Devaraja: Yes, but the flame was for the hell realms.

S: I'm sorry, I thought you meant the flame was for other ones.

Devaraja: But I think that's appropriate as well then, because I mean it's, it the fires of hell are like the purification through suffering or karma.

S: There isn't really purification through suffering, there isn't really a Buddhistic idea, you know there seems...

Devaraja: Well that... there's only one direction they can go up from the, they can only go upwards from the hells.

S: Right yes, then ambrosia represents the upwards...

Devaraja: Yes, yes.

S: ... much more so than the purifying flame which should only be the process.

Devaraja: Yes, yes.

S: ... but the ambrosia is Nirvana, there's only one way, as you say, to go now and that's up, as in the case of Milarepa.

Voice: The case of all of us.

S: No. Not all quite in hell. Some people are sort of sideways or grouped, slither off round the corner. (Laughter) All right, let's get it straight then, at least for the sake of the tape recorder or whoever's trying to edit it. And that is, the smoke-coloured one showers the infernal beings with ambrosia or sometimes with a purifying flame, and there's a red one that "regales the pretas with food and drink". OK.

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"... and as a yellow one bears among men a staff and begging bowl, symbolical of the holy life which they alone of the different classes of sentient beings are fully capable of leading."

S: The begging bowl and the staff of the Sarvastivadin monk, standing for the practice of the spiritual path in general. And that, broadly speaking, is only possible among human beings. They only have the leisure and the relative freedom from suffering to make that effort. And at the same time, they're not overpowered by heavenly enjoyments and not intoxicated by, you know... Someone says that the human state is a middle state. There's enough suffering to keep you on your toes and enough pleasure to keep you moving forward. (Laughter) All right, on we go.

Aryamitra: Can I just, sorry, can I just... Is there any other influence that the colours of the different forms of the Buddha Avalokitesvara, the smoke-coloured one doesn't to... seem to apply to anything else... and I should... the white one in the gods?

S: I don't know why these particular colours are assigned, they are different from the colours of the different Buddha families. One can't quite correlate them that way. The particular Buddha family and therefore its colour is connected with a particular segment of the Wheel of Life. It doesn't seem to work quite like that. But also, don't forget, when they're represented pictorially, each one needs to be a different colour. Smoke-colour is, of course, grey. So it may be as simple as that, you know, you need to distinguish them. The simplest way to distinguish them is by way of colour. So each Buddha gets a different colour. Perhaps there's no sort of symbolical reason why one is red and another is green. Perhaps some meaning could be given and maybe has been, but it could have originated, as it were, accidentally.

"The fourth and outermost circle of the Wheel is divided into twelve segments, each representing one of the nidanas or 'links' in the process of the pratitya-samutpada or 'conditioned co-production' of the so-called individual stream of conscious-volition as appearing now in one, now in another of the six spheres, it twists round and round in the vortex of conditioned existence. The first two segments (again counting in clockwise order from the top) depict a blind man with a stick and a potter with wheel and pots. These represent Avidya and the samskaras 'ignorance' and the 'formative' psychological factors) ... "

S: The psychological factors which are formatted at the new birth, a new life.

"... which together constitute the karma-process of the past life and in dependence on which arises the result-process of the present life. This result-process is covered by the next five segments, which respectively depict: a monkey climbing a flowering tree; a boat with four passengers, one of whom is steering; an empty house with six apertures; a man and woman embracing; and a man with an arrow stuck in his eye. The monkey is vijñāna, consciousness... "

S: Because it sort of clutches, now here and now there. The monkey clutches at the flowering branch and in the same way the rebirth-seeking consciousness clutches at another new physical organism.

"... not in the widest acceptance of the term, but in the narrower sense of the initial flash of consciousness arising in the mother's womb at the moment of conception in dependence on the last flash of consciousness of the previous life. This patisandhi or 're-linking' consciousness, as it is technically called, is neither the same as nor different from the cuti-citta or 'death-consciousness' "

S: It's the cutting-off consciousness.

"... by which it is conditioned. Hence it does not constitute an unchanging, transmigrating entity. Though the requisite physical factors are present, in the absence of the re-linking consciousness no conception can take place."

[60]

S: This is standard, old Buddhist teaching that for rebirth, for reconception rather, to take place there must be at least three factors, that is the parents representing the first two, and the consciousness to be reborn, representing the third.

"The boat and its four passengers are the skandhas, the five 'groups' or 'heaps' into which Buddhism analyses the psycho-physical personality. These are rupa or body (the boat) and vedana or feeling, samjna or perception, the samskaras or non-volitional mental phenomena, and vijnana or consciousness (the four passengers; consciousness is steering). They will be dealt with in Chapter 12. The empty house with six apertures stands for the six sense-organs (sadayatanas) mind being reckoned as the sixth, while the man and woman embracing represent contact (sparsa) in the sense of the mutual impingement of the sense-organs and the external world. The man with the arrow stuck in his eye depicts feeling (vedana), whether pleasant, painful or neutral. The eighth, ninth and tenth segments of the circle show a woman offering a drink to a seated man, a man gathering fruit from a tree, and a woman great with child. These represent the karma-process of the present life. The woman offering drink to the seated man symbolizes thirst or craving (trsna), the man gathering fruit from the tree grasping (upadana), and the woman great with child 'becoming' (bhava) or conception. Though the Theravadins include the last of these three links in the karma-process of the present life, it ought really to be reckoned as the first link of the result-process of the next life. According to the Sarvastivadins, who interpret the word differently, it refers to the antarabhava or period of 'intermediate existence' between the two lives of which the Bardo Thodol, known in the West as The Tibetan Book of the Dead, paints a vivid picture. The eleventh and twelfth segments, representing the two links which constitute the result-process of the next life, show a woman in childbirth and a man carrying a corpse to the cemetery on his back. The first obviously illustrates birth, the second (old age, disease and) death."

S: I think we'd better carry straight on because we have gone quite a bit over our time.

"Thus after being divided into karma-processes and result-processes the twelve nidanas of the pratitya-samutpada are distributed over the past life, the present life and the future life. Herein it should be noted that ignorance and the formative psychological factors, the karma-process of the past, coincide with craving, grasping and becoming, the karma-process of the present. Likewise consciousness, name and form, the six sense-organs, contact and feeling, the result-process of the present, correspond with birth and death, the result-process of the future. In each life karma-process and result-process go on simultaneously, the result-process of the preceding co-existing with the karma-process of the succeeding existence."

S: Is that clear? Well think about it; it's actually quite clear. It needs a bit of reflection. In each life, karma-process and the result-process go on simultaneously. They are successive too. Of course, you've got the whole process of the twelve links of the individualized consciousness or 'flowing-on'. And there's a two-fold movement, there's a, or two-fold phase. You can say there's a phase of action and the phase of reaping the results of action. There's a positive

phase or an active phase and a passive phase or a receptive phase. So these alternate: active, passive, active, passive; just like waking and sleeping, as it were, to some extent. So, not only that, but the whole thing goes over several lives: the past life, the present life, the future life. And not only that, again, but you can have an active process or action process going on side by side with the passive process or reception process. The one sort of relating to the past and the other relating to the future. So in each life karma-process and the result-process go on simultaneously. The result-process of the preceding co-existing with the karma-process of the succeeding existence, yes? So in other words, you've got, side by side in the present life, the result-process of the preceding life and the karma-process of the succeeding life. So, it's not as though you're being totally active or totally receptive all the time. Both are going on, as it were, One part of you, one [61] aspect of you is active, another is passive. But on these different aspects or within these different aspects, of the active and the receptive, are alternating all the time. So it's a rather dynamic sort of conception.

Abhaya: So is that how positive karma can overcome negative karma? Is that how it works?

S: No. That's two kinds of active. They're both active; one cancelling out the other. For instance, your - the body that you have now is the embodiment of resultant karma. Because it is on account of the samskaras of the past that you have this present psycho-physical system and all its powers of perception and receptivity. So you've got that now. The use you make of it volitionally is setting up karma for the future. So in... so the body that you've got represents the effect-process of the karma-process of the past, yes? And the use you make of your body now, means that you are setting up, by means of this karma-process in the present, the effect-process of the future.

Abhaya: I was thinking of the internal state of mind. Say you do something which is considered bad and then you're suffering the effects, that's the effects of past karma. But then, in the present moment while you are suffering these effects of that, you can create good karma and your efforts are actually stronger than the...

S: Yes, right, yes. That's exactly what I said. Because you're experiencing through the body, yes, aren't you? It's your psycho-physical organism in its, you know, in its capacity to perceive and receive. Through that you experience the karma-resultants of the past, at the same time, as you say, you can create karma and set up more positive karma-resultants for the future. So in this way action-process and result-process are going on at the same time. You can say, very broadly speaking, body and its powers represent result-process, your mind and what you do is action-process.

Lokamitra: Well one needn't even separate things like that, I mean as a result of past karma you're in a good state of mind. That good state of mind is in itself a samskara, a volition for the future...

S: Well it's not a volition. You have to set up the volition again because, you know, it can come to an end...

Lokamitra: So... yes... to come back to a state of mind so from that a volition.

S: ... when the energy behind originally is exhausted, it comes to an end and passes into some other mood, as it were, depending on circumstances. But until you're past the point of

no-return, you have to set up your positive, your skilful, states of mind again and again. That's why you can never afford to let things slide. And why you have to keep up your regular practice; sort of scour away at the pot everyday, because otherwise it will sort of gather rust. You might say: "Well you know it's clean and bright, what's the need, you know, of scouring it everyday?" But you will soon find that, if you miss even for one day even, the rust accumulates.

Devaraja: The roof hasn't been fixed on.

S: Yes right. Well, or to change the metaphor, the roof hasn't been taken off and the house completely dismantled. (Laughter) Anyway on we go, no more side-tracking.

"The karma-process in a way resembles the Will, and the result-process the Vorstellung of Schopenhauer's philosophy."

S: We're not going to go into that now.

"To summarize the message of the twelve segments: Sentient existence consists of [62] activities set up through spiritual ignorance; as a result, beings take rebirth as psycho-physical organism equipped with sense-organs by means of which they establish contact with the external world and experience pleasant, painful, and neutral sensations; developing a craving for pleasant sensations, they try to cling on to the objects that produce them, which leads (according to the Theravadins, to fresh conception in a womb or, according to the Sarvastivadins, to the plane of intermediate existence; in consequence of this they again have to undergo birth, old age, disease and death."

S: All right straight on.

"Finally, peering over the rim of the outermost circle a fearsome monster wearing a head-dress of skulls is shown clasping the Wheel with all its circles and segments in his teeth and between his arms and legs. This is Death or Impermanence. Outside the Wheel above the monster's head, floating on clouds to the right, the Buddha compassionately points out to sentient beings the way of release from conditioned existence. The details of the Abhidharma discussion of karma and the pratitya samutpada, a few of which have just been given, should not be allowed to obscure the great truth of which they are both expressions, namely that, on the level of individuality, consciousness precedes and determines being, and that being is therefore in essence consciousness."

S: You could say that consciousness, very broadly speaking, corresponds to action and being to reaction.

"Consciousness-volition is of two kinds, individual and collective. As Takakusu, using a slightly different terminology, puts it: 'Individual action-influence creates the individual being. Common action-influence creates the universe itself'. The Wheel of Life is the objectification of the lust, hatred and delusion in the mind of man. A modern writer, Ben Shahn, seems to have understood this more clearly than some scholars in Buddhism. 'In a monastery near the border of Tibet', he writes, '(where I went hoping it might be over the wall) I found a portrait of myself. Someone in saffron told me that it was called the Wheel of Life, the Round of Existence, but it was myself, exact and representational. There were all the

many aspects of myself painted crude and clear: the pig, the lion, the snake, the cock, all animals, angels, demons, titans, gods and men, all heaven and hell, all pleasures and pains, all that went to make me, and all as it were, within the round of myself, within the wall, exactly as I had found it. All that I could be was within the enclosure of myself, all that I could do would only turn the Wheel around and around. There was no way out. I would go on and on, now up, now down, never ceasing, never changing. The mechanism was perfect. I had achieved perpetual motion: immortality'."

S: That's a bit ironic isn't it? Anyway carry on.

"Wei Lang (Hui Neng), the Sixth Patriarch of the Ch'an or Dhyana School in China, had given the same idea profounder and more succinct expression centuries earlier. 'The idea of a self (Atma) or that of a being is Mount Meru.'"

S: Mount Meru of course stands at the centre of the universe according to traditional Indian cosmology.

"A depraved mind is the ocean. Klesa (defilement) is the billow. Wickedness is the evil dragon. Falsehood is the devil. The wearisome sense objects are the aquatic animals. Greed and hatred are the hells. Ignorance and infatuation are the brutes.' "

S: All this refers to the well-known fact that even though the Wheel of Life exists outside, it exists inside too and the different segments of the Wheel of Life represent different phases of one's own, I won't say development, but one's own going round and round within the wheel of oneself. That one can feel [63] as it were, that one is now a human body or now a hungry ghost. When you're really in a neurotic state of craving, you know, can't get that bar of chocolate for instance or, you know, when you're among the gods, you know, painting or out in the country, very pleasant and happy and carefree. Or when you're being quarrelsome and combative and fierce and aggressive, well you're just living among the asuras and so forth. So it's all within you as well as without. No need to emphasize that point too much. Anyway, on we go.

"The universe referred to here, and depicted in the Wheel of Life, is of the kind known as an impure Buddha-field. As previously described (see page 38), a Sambhogakaya Buddha exercises jurisdiction over and is responsible for the spiritual progress of the inhabitants of one world system, which is therefore known as His Buddha-field. Such fields (ksetras) of influence are of two kind, pure and impure. An impure Buddha-field, like the one to which our own earth belongs, is inhabited by beings of all the six classes of existence. A pure Buddha-field contains only two of them, namely gods and men, and the conditions under which they live are infinitely more favourable to the attainment of Enlightenment than those of an impure Buddha-field. Some pure Buddha-fields come into existence as a result of the collective karma of divine and human beings of more than average spirituality; others are willed into existence by a particular Bodhisattva who, out of compassion for sentient beings, vows to establish for their benefit a Pure Land whereof, after his Enlightenment, he will himself be the presiding Buddha. Both kinds of pure Buddha-field arise in dependence on a consciousness that, whether individual or collective, is not merely healthy but spiritually pure, for which reason they are not regarded as included in the three great planes of existence, the kamaloka, the rupaloka and the arupaloka, but as it were standing apart from and outside them all. As the Vimalakirti Nirveda Sutra declares: 'If one wishes to reach the Pure Land, he



must purify his mind. In accord with the purity of his mind, so will the Buddha-field be pure'. Just as the impure mind, whether healthy or unhealthy, creates impure Buddha-fields, so the pure mind creates Buddha-fields which are pure."

S: This applies also within our own world and is connected with this whole thing of speech and Sambhogakaya. That you tend to sort of draw out from the worlds about you, all the more positive harmonious elements if you yourself are more positive and harmonious. And to sort of organize them around yourself, and in this way, you create or set up in a very small way, a sort of, if not Buddha-field, at least a very healthy positive field of influence. And in the same way, you create a little hell, in which you may even try to draw people. I've known this. I knew for instance, I remember very well in India one woman, who lived in Kalimpong, where I also lived and sometimes when she was talking to me, it really seemed as though we were not living in the same town, you know. She related such awful horrifying incidents and described such awful people, that she seemed absolutely surrounded with. I never met these people or maybe one or two, once or twice, but the way she spoke or seemed to experience, there were hundreds of them around and she reacted accordingly and the way she spoke sort of tried to draw you into this world, also make you an inhabitant of it. And it's as though some people definitely do this sort of thing. And one has to be quite careful sometimes, not to be drawn into other peoples worlds and made inhabitants of their worlds and brought under their jurisdiction in this sort of way. If it's a positive world and a healthy influence, that's another matter. So we can say that, even our own movement is a sort of world. It's a sort of field. It may not be completely pure, but at least relatively positive and healthy. Anyway lets go on and finish now.

"In the words of the Avatamsaka Sutra:

'All the Buddha-fields rise from one's own mind and have infinite forms;  
Sometimes pure, sometimes defiled, they are in various cycles of enjoyment and suffering.'

Nevertheless it should not be thought that the six spheres of existence depicted in the Wheel of Life, and the various Pure Lands described in the Scriptures [64] are no more than figurative expressions for what in essence are purely subjective mental states. The 'objective' world we perceive, with all its seas and mountains, trees, houses and human beings, is in reality a state of mind. Contrariwise, what is in reality a state of mind can appear as an objectively existing world which those who inhabit it or, more precisely, those who have been or who are in the mental state correlative to it, can actually experience and perceive."

S: Perhaps we need not go into that, this whole question of subjective and objective idealism and so forth. Just one comment before we close, because that is the end of the chapter. And that is with regard to the difference, or rather the parallelism, as between the Pure Abodes of the Theravada and the Pure Land or lands being, as it were sort of, willed into existence. Created, not just by the positive healthy volitions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but by, as it were, their Transcendental volitions. In other words their sort of Nirvanic volitions. And this is why the Pure Lands are not included in the Wheel of Life.

Devaraja: Ah, I see, yes.

S: So one can look at it in this way. And in this way therefore, there is a different, a definite difference between the Pure Lands as traditionally conceived and the Pure Abodes of the

Theravada of the Hinayana in general. But obviously, one must be careful how literally one takes all this. If it's Transcendental, it doesn't occupy a place. Therefore it can as it were coincide with, or be present within, as it were, an impure land or an impure world. So one can say, that the person in the Pure Abodes has been reborn there and the whole sort of Wheel of Life, the whole system of worlds and planes, of which that Pure Abode is a part, is an impure world. But in his own heart and mind, in his own Transcendental consciousness, he dwells in the Pure Land and to that extent, the Pure Land overlaps with the Impure Land. So one has to be quite careful how literally one, you know, takes these things; how logically one draws one's conclusions.

Vangisa: Suzuki takes this idea right into the... right into a state indistinguishable literally from any other teaching on meditation or Zen meditation because this is of course the Pure Land is - this is where you are if you were aware of it right here and now in this life.

S: But you have to go back, go rather away before you can come back. There's no meaning in saying: 'Well this world itself is the Pure Land', until you've experienced the Pure Land. Otherwise it's just words. It's just sort of decorating this dirty old world with fine words.

Vangisa: I credited him with the experience.

S: Well you were very kind.

Devaraja: I must say I wonder whether we could do that.

S: We were thinking of sending Dr Suzuki back to the monastery weren't we?

Devaraja: Yes. I was thinking maybe the Pure Land is really a poetic way of, dwelling in the Pure Land is a poetic way of describing the arising of the Bodhicitta and its functioning in the conditioned world.

S: Well that too, but it seems to pertain to something even further on than the Bodhicitta. Though no doubt the Bodhicitta arise more easily within it. Anyway I think quite frankly we're going to stop there I'm afraid because we are about two hours, oh no not two hours, an hour and a quarter over the programme.

Spellchecked and put into house style Shantavira December 1998