

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

The Nature of Existence Seminar Chapter Eleven of “The Three Jewels” by Sangharakshita

[Second ‘Transcriptions’ Edition - January 2001]

Venue: Sukhavati, East London

Date: June 1982

Those Present: [There were four different sessions for this seminar and various people came for one session or all of them. Not all of them are included in this listing]

The Venerable Sangharakshita, Ratnaketu, Graham Stephen, Sagaramati, Ruchiraketu, Hridaya, Jinapriya, Kulamitra, Mangala, Nagabodhi, Vairocana, Kulananda, Darren DeWitt, Vajrachitta, Alan Vero.

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

Session One

Sangharakshita: All right then, ‘The Nature of Existence’, page 82 [*Note from Silabhadra (your transcriber): These were the page numbers of the edition used in 1982. You will find that later editions have different page numbers - but ‘The Nature of Existence’ is still Chapter Eleven!*]

Now that we have explored the universe of Buddhism as it exists in space, time and spiritual depth, as well as seen the way in which consciousness is involved in a process of perpetual objectification of itself to itself as one or another modality of sentient being, it is time to consider the ‘marks’ which attach to all conditioned existence and which express its true nature.

This is, as it were, connective tissue, one might say. It very, very briefly summarises the ground covered in the previous sections. ‘Now that we have explored the universe of Buddhism’ - that is to say the universe as depicted in Buddhism, in Buddhist thought, ‘as it exists in space’. We saw that Buddhism posits the existence of an infinitude of worlds - ‘time’ - spans infinite time - and ‘spiritual depth’. Do you remember what that was to do with? What does ‘spiritual depth’ signify, do you think? You’ve got space, time and then spiritual depth. What does that refer to?

Vajrachitta: Lokas?

S: The different lokas. That refers to the sort of hierarchical structure of existence. That is to say, as comprising the *kamaloka*, the *rupaloka*, *arupaloka*, and then transcending those three, the Unconditioned, that is to say Nirvana. So that is what one refers to as comprising the ‘spiritual depth’ of the universe of Buddhism. One has to take into account not only space and not only time, but spiritual depth. In other words the Buddhist universe is, so to speak, three-dimensional, or one might even say four-dimensional. [*Pause*] ...‘as well as seen the way in which consciousness is involved in a process of perpetual objectification of itself to itself’. This is to say, individual consciousness. This refers in fact to *karma* and *karma-vipaka*, doesn’t it? ‘... consciousness is involved in a process of perpetual objectification of itself to itself’. Because it is in accordance with your mental state, in accordance with your volitions, that you are born possessing a physical body, for instance, in contact with a physical universe. In this way you objectify yourself to yourself. According to the nature of your present body, your present bodily experience, you can infer the kind of mental state, the kind of volitions that you must have indulged in, in the past. [2]

Kulananda: Would you say there was a one-to-one relationship between the two? There weren’t other factors involved?

S: I mean there are other factors involved but from the point of view of the karmic process or process of *karma* and *karma-vipaka*, one takes into account only that particular factor. So here one is concerned with that actual objectification of oneself to oneself, on this particular level, or in this particular context and ‘objectification of itself to itself as one or another modality of sentient being.’ - that is to say as a human being of a particular kind or even as a deva and so on. So having considered all that, having explored all that, ‘it is time to consider the “marks” which attach to all conditioned existence and which express its true nature.’ I mean, so far one has considered the conditioned universe according to Buddhism, considered it ‘as it exists in space, time and spiritual depth’, has seen the way in which consciousness is involved in this process of ‘perpetual objectification of itself to itself’. But it’s now time to take, as it were, a more general look at the universe of Buddhism. It’s now time to try to see its general characteristics; characteristics which

apply to the universe of Buddhism as it exists in space and in time and in spiritual depth and to consciousness involved in this process of perpetual objectification of itself to itself. It's time to look at the 'marks', the characteristics, which characterise conditioned existence **as such**. Formerly the treatment has been more detailed. Here it's going to be much broader. We're going to consider the characteristics which all these things have in common, which this whole world of Buddhism, or universe of Buddhism, has in common. So that's just as it were, as I said, connective. One comes from the specific to the particular. If you like, from the concrete to the abstract.

Alan: Why are there single inverted commas around 'marks'?

S: Well 'marks' translates *lakṣaṇas* and one has not to take the translation itself too literally.

Besides provisionally distinguishing between *samskrta-* and *asamskrta-dharmas*, the Conditioned and the Unconditioned, Buddhism, like the great metaphysical idealisms of the West, also distinguishes the conditioned as it exists in reality from the conditioned as it appears, that is, as presented to the senses and interpreted by the unenlightened mind.

If I was writing now I'd split that up into two sentences. So first of all there is this distinction - yes? - between *samskrta* and *asamskrta-dharmas*. This is quite basic to traditional Buddhism. I usually translate this, following Conze, as conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas*. That is a little misleading actually, this particular translation, if one takes it too literally. It is really.... well, an alternative translation is 'compounded' but even that is not really [3] satisfactory. The most literal translation which I can think of is 'confectured' - 'confectured' and 'unconfectured' *dharmas*.

Voice: [*Inaudible*]

S: Well, what do you think 'confectured' means? It is a quite standard English word. In what context do we usually encounter this word?

Kulananda: Wouldn't it mean 'blended together'?

S: Blended together, yes. I mean you've all heard of confectionery. So what does confectionery mean really?

Kulananda: A combination of ingredients.

S: Yes, a combination of ingredients. It's essentially a combination, a putting together of a number of different elements. So *asamskrta-dharma* is not so much a conditioned *dharma*; it's a *dharma* which is put together from a number of different elements. Do you see what I mean? Though in that sense it is compounded. But if you translate as 'compounded' that isn't perhaps quite so clear, not quite so forcible as 'confectured'. So there is this basic distinction in traditional Buddhism between those things which are composite inasmuch as they've been put together, confectured from a number of elements, and those things which are not compound, not compounded, not confectured but which are in fact simple - simple in the strict sense of the term, that is to say indivisible, impartite, because they have not been put together from any **other** things. The incomposite or the unconfectured is necessarily the simple, in the philosophical sense. Yes?

Kulananda: Then it would have its own self nature using another [*inaudible*]...

S: Yes and no. That raises another question, we'll come to that later on. But, I mean, this is the basic distinction between those *dharmas*, those elements which are *samskrta* and those which are *asamskrta*.

Kulananda: Sounds like a very different translation to conditioned and unconditioned. [**S:** Yes!] The meaning is very different.

S: Yes. Anyway, it's important to grasp this distinction. Though it may seem or it may sound a rather odd one to us but it is very basic in traditional Buddhist thought, not only in the Abhidharma but in Mahayana thought, in the Madhyamika, in the Yogachara and so on. So something which has been put together [4] can be taken apart. So it's quite obvious from this that that which is compounded, that which is confectured, is also the transitory. The uncompounded, the unconfectured, inasmuch as it does not consist of parts, has not been put together from parts, inasmuch as it is the simple, cannot be taken apart. It is impartite, hence unchanging, hence eternal. So the distinction between the *samskrta* and the *asamskrta* is also the distinction between the changing or the changeful, the transitory, and the unchanging, the eternal, the Absolute.

Kulananda: So we have to write our 'Simple' with a capital S because it's only one thing, so not many...

S: Yes, yes, it is the same throughout so to speak. It is not made up of any parts. Now this is not a very easy concept. It's perhaps even a somewhat contradictory concept, one might say. But anyway I go into it because

it is so important in Buddhist thought. Now, I've fairly recently been having thoughts about the conditioned and the Unconditioned, using those expressions, in relation to the *samskrta* and the *asamskrta*. I think a bit of confusion has crept into our English terminology - I think this goes back to Conze - because one has obviously the conception of conditionality in the sense of *pratitya-samutpada*, and one has these conditioned *nidanas* - the positive *nidanas*, the sequence of positive *nidanas*, also arise in dependence - the succeeding in dependence on the preceding. These also are called transcendental *nidanas*, *lokuttara-nidanas*. So one gets what might seem terminologically a rather paradoxical situation in which the Transcendental is the conditioned. Do you see what I mean? Transcendental states themselves arise in dependence upon conditions, but you are supposed to be saying at the same time that the Transcendental is the Unconditioned. Yes? Because it is the *asamskrta*. So what does one mean by that? In other words the word 'conditioned' and 'unconditioned' seems to be used rather ambiguously and I think perhaps it's time that that was cleared up.

Kulananda: If the Unconditioned was Unconditioned in the full sense you couldn't aim to be Enlightened. You couldn't move towards Enlightenment - nothing you could do.

S: Yes, yes.

Nagabodhi: Is it not a matter of allowing or creating the conditions in yourself for the Unconditioned to manifest - is it not?

Kulananda: But then it would manifest in dependence upon those conditions. [5]

S: Yes.

Nagabodhi: Well it would be the manifestation - the Unconditioned...

S: But also supposing one, this goes back to our discussion previously about potentiality, if supposing you say that something manifests but does that really add anything to the statement that in dependence upon A, B arises? Do you really need to say that there is a manifestation of B as though it sort of pre-existed?

Nagabodhi: Doesn't it?

S: Well, do you need to make that statement? I mean from the standpoint of *pratitya-samutpada*, it would seem that you don't. As though that's quite superfluous. I mean is it literally that that state, let us say, the next *nidana* on, is sort of waiting there to manifest? Does it pre-exist? Is its potential existence in some way actual? Do we **need** to think in that way? Is it not sufficient, as the Buddha himself appears simply to say, in the Pali Canon, that in dependence upon A, B arises, in dependence upon B, C arises. Do you need to go further than that? Because if you feel a need, you also get yourself into certain metaphysical difficulties. I mean, the sort of metaphysical difficulties that I went into a little when discussing this whole concept of potentiality previously, but those difficulties or similar difficulties arise if we start speaking in terms of a sort of Absolute manifesting itself, even if you speak of it as manifesting itself in dependence on certain conditions. But can you not say that in dependence upon those conditions such and such factor, *nidana*, experience, arises? Is that not enough? Do you **need** to go beyond that, because the Buddha, as far as we can tell, did not seem to feel a need to go beyond that, with a certain exception that I'll go into in a minute.

Kulananda: Didn't he say to Ananda, 'There is, Ananda, one condition...'?

S: Yes, that was the exception that I was about to go into. But I'll go into it now since you've introduced it. It seems to me that how the question has arisen, how this apparent conflict has arisen is this. One's whole experience is, as it were, conditioned in the sense of being limited. If one thinks of oneself as a perceiving subject, if one thinks of oneself as perceiving, as a perceiving subject, an objective world, a universe, an object **out there**, then that perception would seem to take place under certain conditions or limitations. One would seem to perceive, or experience, not the thing directly, but to perceive or experience it through veils, in accordance with the nature of the perceiving instrument. And I think it's generally agreed in Western philosophy, since the time of Kant, that space and time are not objective realities, but part of the apparatus of perception itself. This would certainly be the Buddhist point of view, the traditional Buddhist point of view, that space and time (*suttaktis?* or *pannatis?*) are concepts, are not entities. You don't see space and time. Space and time are part of the way **in which** you see things, primarily. Do you get the idea? So your mind, your individual consciousness, is of such a nature, is so structured, so constituted, that it perceives things through that particular medium. Not that the medium is separate from the perceiving mind itself, but it's part of your apparatus of perception. Space and time are built into your perceiving process. So when you think of things, you cannot but think of them in terms of space and time because you cannot but perceive them in terms of space and time. So even when you're thinking about the spiritual life, even when you are thinking about Reality itself you cannot but envisage it either in terms of space, or in terms of time. Either by way of an analogy with space or by way of an analogy with time. It seems to me that early Buddhism, the

Buddha himself, seems to have done both, in a way, to have oscillated between the two modes of expression. So you can - let's speak provisionally in terms of, say, the Absolute with a capital A - but taking that not as a sort of cypher like X. Well, let's say just X - even drop Absolute - just say X - but a big capital X. And it can indicate something like Reality - something like - so just X - a capital X. You can think of this X in terms of space, or you can think of it in terms of time. When you think of it in terms of space, it is static, it exists out there. It is a sort of object, even a sort of ground. Do you see what I mean? And it's thinking of it in that way, envisaging it in that way that the Buddha said, 'There is, O monks, that sphere of Reality which is permanent, fixed, unchanging etc, etc, where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air, etc, etc. If it were not for that etc, etc, monks, there would be no release from this Samsara.' Here that X is envisaged in terms of space. It is static. It is unchanging.

But then again the Buddha also speaks in terms of *pratitya-samutpada*. So in **these** terms the Buddha speaks of even the series of transcendental *nidanas*, of which there seems to be no definite end, it goes on and on. So here you have got a conception of, let us say, X, not as something static, not as something fixed, not as something conceived in terms of space, but as something conceived in terms of time. That is to say what I've called a process of irreversible creativity. That corresponds to the unchanging Absolute. The one is in terms of space, the other is in terms of time, and the Buddha seems to oscillate a bit between these two modes of expression. Now this *samskrta/asamskrta* distinction seems to be speaking rather the language of space, not the language of time. Because your *asamskrta* here is, sort of fixed, unchanging, it's simple, so it cannot be taken apart. But I think one should not take that too literally because [7] it is also, at the same time, and one has to have a sort of binocular vision of that X, one has to think of that simple as being simple not in a sort of chemical sense, but being simple in the sense that it is ever intensifying its simplicity, if you like. In dependence upon, let us say, simplicity A, there arises simplicity B. In dependence upon simplicity B, there arises simplicity C. There is a sort of movement within the simplicity. This is why it can't be an *atman* because it isn't static, it isn't unchanging. So it is a sort of dynamic simplicity. The simplicity to which the principle of *pratitya-samutpada* still applies.

Ruchiraketu: Language seems to make it appear like it's an absolute one - but that is just language.

S: But it's not one in the sense of, you know, a mathematical one, It retains its value of being one in relation to the conditioned, the *samskrta*, but not, as it were, in relation to itself. Yes? I mean its relationship with, say, the conditioned, if one can use the expression relationship, remains constant even though there is internal change. Under the law of transcendental conditionality, within that one itself. Do you see what I'm getting at or is it rather obscure?

Jinapriya: It seems we cannot, as it were, talk about 'It' apart from in terms of, well, labels. 'It'. The only way we can talk about it is to reduce it to an absolute one, but in and of itself - to continue labelling - It's not like that.

S: Well we can even go further than that, we can even say more specifically, in what way it is not like that. It is not like that because even though it remains equally, say, transcendental, it becomes as it were more and more transcendental. It's a process of becoming more and more transcendental, so it's the same. It's unchanging in the sense that it doesn't ever change from transcendental to mundane, but it is changing in the sense that it becomes more and more transcendental every instant inasmuch as it is an irreversibly creative process. Not a static Absolute. At least one can think of it, or one must think of it, as much in those terms as in terms of a, so to speak, static Absolute. In other words you've got to have this binocular vision. You've got to try to see it simultaneously in terms of space and in terms of time. Not in terms of either exclusively.

Voice: It's much more a line than just one fixed point.

S: Yes, right.

Kulananda: Doesn't the language of consciousness move between those two quite [8] neatly? I mean just talk about it as being unfettered consciousness. Doesn't seem to get too hooked up on either pole of space/time duality.

S: Yes. Even if you speak, say, in terms of the 'one mind' it seems too static. So one needs to bear both these points of view in mind simultaneously.

Ruchiraketu: I find it very difficult to imagine something unconfected changing.

S: Hm. [Pause] Well, yes, this raises the question of what one really means by simplicity here...

(END OF TAPE) (TAPE I)

... I mean one might even raise the whole question of the validity of this sort of conception of things as being made up of parts. Well, this is certainly part of the traditional Buddhist intellectual apparatus to think of things in this way. Certainly, say, in the Abhidharma, though it came to be questioned in the Madhyamika, but yes, one can look at this. To what extent can one think of things as made up of other things?

Voice: It's a lot easier....[inaudible].....

S: Yes. I mean the Madhyamika, the Mahayana, seems to have come to the conclusion that one cannot literally think of things as made up of other things because where are you to draw the dividing line? You can't ever stop. I mean things are divisible infinitely. So you come in principle only to *sunyata*. This was the Mahayana's *sarvadharmasunyata* which meant that your so-called ultimate *dharma*s are themselves not ultimate - they are still further divisible, *ad infinitum*. Yes? So you can question that whole concept. But anyway, one might say in a crude practical common sense way, yes, things do break up, things are made up of parts. The physical body is made up of parts. The physical body has clearly been 'confectured' by the forces of *karma* and other factors and clearly the physical body is going to disintegrate into its constituent parts. That does not mean that those parts into which it disintegrates are themselves ultimate. They are capable of disintegrating into further finer, smaller parts. There's no reason why the process should stop at any particular stage. So bearing that in mind, how does one view the impartite? How real is that concept - of something that is not made up of parts?

Sagaramati: You can't really, because immediately your mind tries to, you make it an object. It sort of absorbs you.

Kulananda: ...[unclear].... and infinitesimal, are they separate or they linked [9] concepts?

S: Well, infinitesimal refers to divisibility. It refers to the possibility of continuing the process of sub-division, infinitely without infinite refers to the possibility of indefinite extension of something.

Kulananda: I think they must mean the same thing in the end, mustn't they?

S: Well, one is as it were 'internal' - the other is as it were 'external'. You could say that extremes do meet, but that wouldn't be the same thing as saying that they were the same thing.

Kulananda: Maybe they imply direction.

S: Yes, maybe more direction. But anyway, we're still on this question of the 'impartite'. One could say that - this is taking a somewhat different approach from the Abhidharma, though maybe not so different from the Madhyamika - one could say that 'composite' and 'incomposite' are both abstractions in the literal sense of takings out of our actual concrete experience - that things are both composite and incomposite, one could say that, and **cannot** but be both composite and incomposite.

Kulananda: Otherwise you couldn't talk.

S: That is how our experience comes to us - in wholes, but wholes which are divisible, for certain purposes.

Kulananda: Are they wholes which are Platonic ideals?

S: No, I think that would be something quite different - no - no.

Nagabodhi: Are you referring to wholes as in terms of your experience - empirical experience?

S: Yes, in terms of *gestalt* - that is to say, or *rupas*. So I think you can't possibly divide things into those things which are composite and those things which are incomposite. Looked at from one point of view things are composite and looked at from another point of view they are incomposite. One could look at things in that way. So therefore it seems in the long run, it seems to me, that if one is to choose between these two modes of expression, I think probably the more dynamic, the thinking of things, of spiritual life, Reality in dynamic terms, is at least - [10] to put it in a non-controversial way - more helpful. In other words one doesn't seriously think in terms of a static Absolute at all. And therefore not of that as simple. If simplicity in this sense has any meaning, it's only in the sense of a higher degree of integration.

Sagaramati: Couldn't you take it a stage further and say that by becoming self-conscious you see that these two ways of looking at things are actually just operations of your own subjective mind?

S: Well, to the extent that you are self-conscious or fully or truly self-conscious you will be aware of the limitations of consciousness itself. You will be aware of the conditions under which your consciousness, your perception, functions. You'll be aware of what is subjective in your experience and what is objective.

Nagabodhi: Can't you talk in terms of Reality to some extent waiting to be experienced once one's purified one's perception - just on an everyday level? We often don't see situations clearly, but if we meditate, if we do certain things, if **we** create the conditions, we haven't brought reality into existence, we have allowed ourselves to experience it. We suddenly see clearly what's been going on all the time. Isn't that a sort of valid way of thinking?

S: I think it is provided one doesn't take it too literally or try to sort of build a metaphysics upon it.

Nagabodhi: It's a sort of Zen, quite a lot in Zen literature which seems to work in that way. You kind of purify your mind by cleaning the mirror, eventually.

S: But all that in a sense you're saying is in dependence upon a different factor, a different succeeding factor arises. You don't even have to speak in terms of seeing things as they really are, though traditionally Buddhism uses this language too. You could say in dependence upon the pure mind you see things in a certain way. In dependence on the impure mind you see things in a certain way. You **could** say that, well, the pure mind sees things in a more real way but do you even really need to say that if you're pressed, so to speak? Is it necessary to speak in terms of Reality? Or when one **is** speaking in terms of Reality, in terms of what is one speaking?

Nagabodhi: What is reality? *[Laughter]*

S: Pali Buddhism, the Buddha's own teaching, seems not to speak in those sort of [11] terms. I think one has to take that quite seriously and ask *why?* It's as though the Buddha adopted an attitude of conscious philosophical naivety. I think it's a very subtle standpoint and I think it isn't very often appreciated. The Buddha refused to make certain statements - refused to be drawn - refused to go beyond actual experience. The barest expressions to indicate a pointer of actual experience. He didn't feel any necessity to construct a sort of metaphysical superstructure, or to propound a philosophy in the Western or non-Buddhist sense.

Hridaya: Which inevitably would have been misunderstood, presumably.

S: One might even say which could not **but** have been misunderstood. And this is why perhaps he says, 'the Tathagata has no views, no *ditthi*'. It is not even that the Tathagata propagates or promulgates *samma-ditthi* as opposed to *miccha-ditthi*. No. In another sense, a higher sense perhaps, he doesn't propagate any *ditthi* at all. He has no views.

Sagaramati: That must mean that as he's Enlightened he doesn't need any views. From another point of view .. *[inaudible]*.... confused and complex.

Hridaya: One advantage I see of still keeping the static idea of the dynamic alive is the possibility of having two possibilities and not getting stuck perhaps in one.

S: That's true. Your awareness of these two languages, so to speak, makes you more aware of the limitations of each.

Hridaya: So you could go up by going from side to side?

S: Yes. Because in relation to, let's say, the reactive mind, the creative mind is in a manner static, inasmuch as it does not regress. It is constant in that sense. But it is a constant creativity. It is not constant in the sense of standing still. But in relation to the reactive mind, yes, one could speak of it as standing still. It is **stable** rather than static. It is unmoved, in the sense that it does not react. But the fact that it is unmoved does not mean that it is inert.

Voice: It's still alive.

S: It's still alive. Yes. *[Pause]* Anyway - 'Besides **provisionally** distinguishing between *samskrta* and *asamskrta*...' - Why do I use the word provisionally?

Kulananda: For the reasons we've just gone into. [12]

S: No, not quite.

Ratnaketu: Is this because in some parts of Buddhism they say that there is no difference...?

S: That's right, yes. I'm speaking about **Buddhism** which is a very big generalisation. So if I were to say 'Buddhism distinguishes' I would be really confining myself to the Abhidharma; because the Mahayana, let us say, does not regard that distinction as absolute. So there is a distinction but taking Buddhism as a whole

it's a distinction which is made provisionally, because the Mahayana certainly is aware of the limitations of that sort of distinction. Well the *Heart Sutra* makes that clear. So -

'Besides provisionally distinguishing between *samskṛta* and *asamskṛta-dharmas*, the conditioned and the Unconditioned, Buddhism, like the great metaphysical idealisms of the West', that is to say those of Plotinus, Plato, Kant, Hegel, 'also distinguishes the conditioned as it exists in reality from the conditioned as it appears, that is, as presented to the senses and interpreted by the unenlightened mind'.

In other words a distinction between the real and the unreal is accepted, at least as a sort of working basis. [Pause] At least from a common-sense point of view one can speak of different people perceiving the same object, but perceiving it not only differently, but one perceiving rightly and the other perceiving wrongly. Though this can be questioned. For instance, supposing I look at a certain colour or a certain object and I say that it is red and you say that it is green. Now on what basis do we determine that it is really red and not green, or really green and not red? At present it is by majority vote.

Kulananda: Consensus. [inaudible]

S: But maybe that example does not apply to all cases. So what is the criterion of a true Perception? Anyway perhaps that will emerge as we go on.

Nagabodhi: Does this sentence here link up with the idea of illusory, relative and absolute truth?

S: I don't think it does. I mean I don't think I had that in my mind.

Nagabodhi: Because you have the conditioned and the Unconditioned, and you have the Unconditioned also being sub-divided. [13]

S: Yes, that is true because you've got the Absolute Truth, *paramārtha*, and then you've got the relative as it exists in itself, and the relative as it appears to exist. That is to say *paratantra* and *parinispāna*, isn't it? No, *parispāna* is, no, yes, *parinispāna*. So you've got Ultimate Reality, provisional Reality or relative Reality, and illusory Reality, if one can use that expression. So these words could be understood as referring to those three. So you've got 'the conditioned as it exists in reality distinguished from the conditioned as it appears, that is, as presented to the senses and interpreted by the unenlightened mind.' So using that terminology:

'In reality, conditioned existence is painful, impermanent, insubstantial, and ugly. Owing to our habitual self-centredness and our deeply-rooted attachments, however, we imagine it to be pleasant, permanent, substantial and beautiful, thus falling a victim to what are known as the four *viparyāsa*s or (mental) "perversities".'

I think *viparyāsa*s means something like, literally, more like 'hanging upside down'. [Laughter] It's sort of standing things on their head. Not seeing them the right way up. Not perceiving them the right way up, but as it were, in reverse. So shall we just look at this a minute, taking one example, in the light of what we've just been saying? 'In reality conditioned existence is painful' but 'we imagine it to be pleasant'. All right now, to what extent is this an instance of one kind of mind perceiving things as they really are and another kind of mind perceiving things as they really are not? In other words is this distinction between real and unreal really justified, really valid? And if so, in what way? So let's take that as the sort of concrete example. No, perhaps it would be better to take the second one - the impermanent. Maybe that would make it clearer. All right, the Enlightened mind sees things as impermanent. The unenlightened mind sees things as permanent. So how do we know that it's the Enlightened mind that sees things correctly?

Kulananda: You can judge it in its own terms. You can ask what are the characteristics of some things being permanent. Then ask if those characteristics pertain to the thing being called permanent. It's quite simple logic.

S: I think you can go even further than that. It is that your experience is, your own experience is, eventually contradicted. The experience of the unenlightened person is eventually contradicted. Whereas the experience of the Enlightened person is not eventually contradicted. Do you see what I mean? [Laughter] For instance, the unenlightened person thinks, 'Oh, this beautiful situation. It's going to last for ever'. This is really the feeling, due to what has been described here as 'our habitual self-centredness and our deeply-rooted attachments'. [14]. Or 'This is so good. This is for ever. This is going to last.' Do you see what I mean? But your own experience, your own succeeding experience, stultifies this because you find it doesn't last. It can't last. Its very nature is such. So you're convinced by your own experience eventually. Whereas in the case of the Enlightened person, perceiving, 'This is a very good situation. It's wonderful - but it's not going to last.' I mean that is not ever stultified because he doesn't actually, to his surprise, find that actually it does last. [Laughter] He doesn't find that. Do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: He'd never find out, would he?

S: So one might say that a real perception is a perception which is not stultified. Do you see what I mean? [Pause] If one wants to justify this distinction between real and unreal, a real perception and an unreal perception, this must be the basis, surely.

Kulananda: If it is not stultified then maybe it is permanent. Maybe the perception is permanent. If the perception is not stultified then the perception must be permanent.

S: Well it is never superseded. Your experience is never superseded by another experience which contradicts the first. So it is possible to justify the distinction between real and unreal on this sort of basis. I mean understanding the distinction in these sort of terms.

Ratnaketu: So using the example of painful - pleasant. If somebody is saying that conditioned existence was pleasant, or a certain aspect of it was pleasant, that means if they had that experience unlimitedly, if they just stood there forever they couldn't say it would always be pleasant, because...

S: They could say, well, it is pleasant **now**, but if they were to say, this is always going to be pleasant, that would be a wrong perception, an unreal perception, and therefore it would be stultified. The Enlightened mind would recognise the experience as pleasant, even enjoy the experience, but would not be misled into maintaining that that pleasant experience was necessarily going to last, or that that pleasant object was an eternal object.

Ratnaketu: But then you have said here that that pleasant experience is actually painful.

S: Pardon?

Ratnaketu: That the pleasant experience is not just impermanent but it is painful.

S: No, it's not quite like that. But we are going to come on to that, I think, when we deal with that *viparyasa* in detail. It is not that - well, just to anticipate a little - that what you experience as pleasant is actually not pleasant at all, but painful. It is only that the pleasure is not going to continue indefinitely, neither is the pleasure itself absolute, in the sense that it is not the highest conceivable pleasure even though it is very pleasant. Do you see the distinction? So when you say that all things are painful, it doesn't mean that you never experience pleasure. It doesn't mean that. It means you experience pleasure, mundane pleasure, but inasmuch it is mundane it is not going to last. And, also it is not even the highest or the deepest kind of pleasure. But you do not say that it is itself painful, except metaphorically perhaps by way of comparison with Absolute Bliss, Nirvanic Bliss and so on.

Hridaya: When you see the four *lakshanas* like that, it's as though *anitya* is like the centre, is the one that's creating. It's the source, as it were, of the others. If you look at those four ...

S: [interrupts] I think I went into this a little bit last time I was down here. I found myself going into it in one of the lectures in India. Saying of the three *lakshanas*, that is to say, *duhkha*, *anitya*, *anatta* - the *anitya* or impermanence is the middle one. In a way it's the central one because you can get from that to either of the other two.

Hridaya: It seems to run underneath the others.

S: Yes, it's because things are impermanent that they are painful, because the pleasure doesn't last. And it's also because things are impermanent, that is to say, constantly changing, that there is no *atman* because an *atman* is essentially an **unchanging** selfhood. So I think probably for purposes of reflection and development of insight, probably - I mean I don't want to generalise too much - the reflection on *anitya* is probably best for most people. It is more accessible, perhaps. I think I did say, last time I was down here in one of these study groups, that, in a way, impermanence was the fundamental principle of Buddhism.

Hridaya: The others are like **consequences** of *anitya*, aren't they?

S: Yes. Yes.

Voice: I think you said that Buddhism was essentially the working through of the [16] implications of impermanence.

S: Yes. If you recognise that things are impermanent, how are you going to live? What difference does that make to your way of life? I mean is it possible for you to realise, say, the truth of impermanence and at the same time devote yourself to acquiring money for your personal enjoyment and aggrandisement? Is it possible? I mean, probably, at the back of every man who is really trying to make money in that way is the sort of feeling that he can take it with him. [Laughter] Really.

Voice: That he can bribe his way in. *[Laughter]*

Ratnaketu: You do get people, though, who sort of, they know that it is impermanent and that they are going to die and in fact they might not believe there is anything at the end of their life but they are just making the best of a.....

S: I'm not even sure about that because do they, in what sense can they be said to **know** that? They might agree to the sentiment if it was expressed, but how deep does that knowledge really go? One can ask that question.

Voice: They seem to be living in a way as though that would - I mean, security going in that direction ... security.

S: I mean I go into this straight away, don't I? I say

Of course, most religious people, including even those who are nominally Buddhists, profess to regard the world as a vale of tears, a house of sorrow, a 'battered caravanserai' in which man passes but one night and moves on; but observing them in the affairs of daily life one will be able to detect little difference, if any, between their behaviour and that of their admittedly worldly brethren. and it will soon transpire that the principles on which their actions are based. and which therefore constitute the real though concealed mainspring of their being. are usually the very opposite of the ones professed.

That is perhaps expressed with a certain amount of wordiness, but *[some laughs]* it's clear, isn't it? That is what makes the difference. I mean there are a lot of, sort of, religious sentiments that everybody will subscribe to but do they really believe them? Do they really accept them? It's easy enough to say, well, yes of course, all things are impermanent, but does one really see that and does one really act upon it? Does one not, in fact, act in just the same way as everybody [17] else even though one professes to be, say, a Buddhist? I mean aren't you just as upset when you lose some prized possession as anybody else might have been? Perhaps not. If not, well then, yes, it means your Buddhism has begun to sink a little bit deeply in.

Nagabodhi: I've got a lovely memory to illustrate this point. When I was in Greece with Virabhadra last time, somebody brought his private yacht into this bay where we were staying and unloaded himself and two young girls, who disported themselves naked down the beach most of the day. And this guy and I got into talk at one point and he explained how he had dropped out from being a civil engineer and was just living a sort of easy life. It was lovely because he had his back to the sea with his yacht bobbing on the water behind him, with these two girls down the beach. He said, 'You know, people they do not realise how little they really need.' *[Laughter]*

S: Well, his requirements, one might say, were quite modest - one yacht, two girls. *[Laughter]* Some people would consider that a really modest allowance - especially of yachts. *[Laughter]* *[Pause]*

Sagaramati: Going back to seeing things as real and unreal - wouldn't it be the dynamic counterpart of that, seeing things in terms of the limitations of your experience? That you see things not in terms of being unreal but in terms of being quite limited?

S: It means you can take a wider view than of your present existence, your present experience. You do not over-generalise from that. For instance, I mean you get a bad toothache, You think existence is terrible. Life isn't worth living. You see - you over-generalise. Because you are so obsessed by your present experience, you can't see beyond that. In other words, you can't see that [18] that experience could change. You over-generalise. And to the extent that you over-generalise you get away from reality. So reality is not so much a sort of thing out there. I mean, reality is that sort of breadth of perspective. But even when you are suffering from a raging toothache, you can still remember all the pleasant experiences that you've had. Or the times that you have enjoyed yourself. They can be equally real to you. So you don't think just because you've got a toothache now that life is full of misery. Do you see what I mean? In the same way just because you are on a pleasant holiday, maybe with your yacht and your two women, you don't generalise from that and think that that is life and life is like that, and it's always like that and always will be like that. You don't - you are not so carried away by your present experience that you are unable to see beyond it, you are unable to see its limitations. So, in a way, this question of seeing reality is more like seeing things as a whole. I mean Plato said the philosopher is the spectator of all time and all existence. It's more like that.

Hridaya: It's a bit like keeping in contact with the blue sky and not getting caught up in the clouds. And not getting hooked in, like with a toothache to exclusion of others.

S: It's here that it's not that seeing reality means seeing something with, you know, a capital R - you know, the real out there. It means seeing the different aspects of mundane existence itself. Do you see what I mean?

You don't have to posit a separate reality in the seeing of which the perception of the real consists. The perception of the real is more like the perception of mundane experience itself in its totality. And because you see it in its totality you have a certain detachment from specific aspects of it.

Kulananda: How exactly do you mean in its totality? I mean, do you actually mean ongoing continuous experience or ...?

S: Well, in the present context, yes. More like that. You can see that your present experience will be stultified by some future experience. So you don't generalise from your present experience about the nature of your experience or of reality as a whole.

Kulananda: That seems to make the notion of the perception of your reality a quite simple matter - simple and smaller.

S: Perhaps it is.

Kulananda: Oh well. [19]

S: This is why, for instance, the Greek thinker said 'Call no man happy until he dies', because right up until the time of death itself a change can occur at any time, so a generalisation would be premature.

Kulananda: I suppose by that the 'simple' means the least general.

S: Well, the simple could also be the **most** general.

Hridaya: It's as though with breadth, in terms of one's own, one's going to get depth as well. You can't help but go out.

S: You get depth and stability. It becomes a bit like, you know, you get equanimity in the sense of *upekkha*. I mean you are able to bear these changes more because they'll pass, they are not going to last for ever. So you don't become too attached to the pleasant aspects, you don't become too upset by the unpleasant aspects. They'll change. You have that more, as it were, philosophical attitude towards things.

Kulananda: Is that all there is to it? [*Laughter*]

S: Well, one might say yes, but on the other hand it's quite a lot. It's quite a lot. It's not a sort of indifference, it is equanimity.

Voice: You feel it as it were, you don't think it..

Hridaya: It seems quite clear that awareness and recollection are really the important practices. You're talking about impermanence and really discovering that. One is only going to discover that through awareness, through recollection, through linking up parts of us. And not just lost in a toothache. Actually broadening oneself in that way through this awareness and breadth.

S: Also it sort of, it includes - I mean this is going off at a **bit** of a tangent, but I think it is relevant - it includes awareness of other people. Because, I mean, I've mentioned this self-centredness. You don't generalise just from **your** experience. Not even from your whole experience. I mean, just to give you a simple example from my own experience - I used to be very annoyed sometimes in Kalimpong because a certain very small self-centred group of people used to consider **themselves** as constituting the whole population of Kalimpong. There were only a couple of dozen of them but they'd say, I'd hear from certain people in this little group, things like 'Oh, everybody in Kalimpong is talking about it', which meant that **they** were talking about it. Do you see what I mean? This is self-centredness. They are out of touch with reality or, for instance, even in this [20] country, even in London, 'Oh, everybody in London is talking about it.' Well, it means maybe a few theatregoers. The vast majority of people in London just haven't heard about it. Even if they did hear they wouldn't care. But you identify your little group with the whole of the people of London. So you sort of over-generalise from your own experience in such a way that you're ignoring, or discounting, the experience of everybody else, or the vast majority of people.

Jinapriya: But, I would say, you have to start from something like that. You have to assume that other people's experiences are close enough to yours to, do you see what I mean? From the other side, have some sort of fellow feeling.

S: Well, that is, as it were, the more positive aspect. [*Pause*] But one must be careful that one is not generalising illegitimately. Not only generalising about one's own whole experience from some tiny section of it and also not generalising about human experience from the experience of a particular group of people.

I mean this is something I've been pointing out recently when people raise the question of, say, women. Ask some questions about women. I say, do you mean women in Britain or in the West, or are you including women of Asia? Are you thinking of Chinese and Japanese women too? And then of course the question is at once seen as absurd. Because when they said, well it's a bit like that old joke, 'When I say religious I mean Christian. When I say Christian I mean Protestant. When I say Protestant of course I mean the Church of England'. [Laughter] Do you see what I mean? It's a bit like that. You can say, talking about women - well, actually they mean Western women, well, actually they mean Anglo-Saxon women - well, they mean English women, well, the South-East of England, anyway. Well, London at least. Well, Bethnal Green. [Laughter] Do you see what I mean?

Ratnaketu: What would be the opposite process of that? Instead of being unaware of other people. The more and more you become aware of other people ...

S: Well, it could be. You may realise your ignorance more.

Ratnaketu: Could you - the more and more you really became aware of other people, you are sort of stopping, you are breaking down the barriers a bit more?

S: Well, you would not generalise in this illegitimate way. You would realise. You would not speak about women, for instance, when really you were [21] speaking about the handful of women that you happened to know yourself. Or you wouldn't indulge in grand generalities about life when you just meant your little tiny slice of it. So, 'Life's like that' - well, you mean your experience this afternoon.

Nagabodhi: To some extent, surely, you do have to do that or you fall prey to the chestnut of having to go through things. In order to really subscribe to the doctrine of impermanence or whatever. You can't go through everything before you are going to fully believe in impermanence.

Kulananda: Isn't the doctrine of impermanence itself a generalisation?

Nagabodhi: You have to extract that maybe from just what your experience is, otherwise ... I mean I think a lot of people do this. Rather than just look at maybe quite delicate processes in themselves and from that come to the conclusion that certain things aren't satisfactory, certain things are really ugly, certain things don't last, they feel they've got to go out and try all these things before they'll be convinced that they are not worth pursuing.

S: Do you think that that is an honest quest? Whether the quest itself is deluded?

Kulananda: Looking for permanence.

S: Do you think they are genuinely looking for permanence or do you think they are pretending to be looking for permanence? [Pause]

Nagabodhi: It's not necessarily that they are looking for permanence, but you get people saying, 'Well I've never lived alone, I've never been married. I've never had a baby. I've never done this and I need to go through it before I can put it down'.

S: I think that's different from saying that these things do last, because I think that even any such person, or at least, theoretically, admit the possibility of these things coming to an end. But they want to experience them even though they recognise that they are impermanent. Because, - again this is perhaps a different kind of *miccha-ditthi* - even though they recognise them as impermanent they also recognise them, or profess to recognise them, as necessary stages of development, even though admittedly impermanent. Do you see what I mean? So if there is a *miccha-ditthi* it's a different *miccha-ditthi* perhaps.

Kulananda: It does seem so simple. [22]

S: Anyway, just to continue my little description -

They, no less than other men,

that is to say professed Buddhists etc.,

live as though the world was on the whole a pleasant enough place, as though whatever they acquired could never be taken away from them, and as though they were going to live for a few centuries at least, if not for ever. Everyone will smile at the portrait, and perhaps recognise himself in it; but none but will continue to act as before. This is because the mental perversities

the *viparyayas*

are not just a matter of incorrect information, like thinking that the Buddha was born in China,

I mentioned this because in India quite a lot of people seem to think the Buddha was born in China.
[Laughter]

but attitudes as deeply rooted almost as sentient existence itself. According to the Buddha's teaching they can be extirpated only by prolonged systematic meditation on the fact that the world as we know it is unreal.

Perhaps I shouldn't say 'the world as we know it', not even as we experience it, but as we interpret it, as we think we know it. In other words it's our self-centredness and our obsession with the present experience in such a way that we just over-generalise. We are not able to stand back sufficiently far from our own experience to be able to see it in proper perspective, or in context.

Sagaramati: There is an unwillingness as well.

S: But again

Kulananda: But the thing is that one forgets.

S: Yes, one forgets. One becomes immersed. Well, certainly it doesn't mean that one should not fully experience what one is experiencing, so to speak. You don't want an alienated awareness. You don't want an alienated experience, but at the same time, even though you experience things vividly and intensely, you don't want to generalise illegitimately from that experience. It's not suggesting that you should, sort of, limit your experience or it should become a bit dull and a bit pallid. No, I mean, experience it fully. But at the same time see the limitations, have the wider view. It isn't very easy to do that, to have both at the same time. [Pause] Because you can, for instance - well, you can think you can - cultivate the wider view by trying to eschew experience. I mean, try to guard against the danger of becoming obsessed by the present experience by keeping the present experience rather low key. That I think is not really the solution.

Sagaramati: It's only an integrated person who can have the vision at the same [23] time as a pool of experience.

S: Right. Yes. You need a combination of vision and full positive - that is to say skilful - experience. Or even when your experience happens to be unskilful - suppose you've been unable to prevent that - at least still try to maintain that vision and that wider view, at least, that broader perspective.

Kulananda: It seems that that is really more important because in the light of that experience one can begin to really live more fully, and experience

S: One could even say if you maintain the broader perspective, any unskilful experience in which you are at present involved will tend to be transmuted into something more skilful if you can only sustain that broader perspective and that greater vision.

Jinapriya: That's the essence of non-reactivity in a sense, is not being, so you don't instantly react to a stimuli, in that context....

[End of Side One Side Two]

..... you are able to stand back so to speak, and ...

S: You could also say that illegitimate over-generalisation was a form of reactivity.

Jinapriya: Yes. It's like you go through a pain, you say, 'Oh my God it's all like this'.

S: So over-generalisation, I mean illegitimate over-generalisation is a form of reactivity. I mean reactivity has many different forms, many different aspects. [Pause] I mean we all know, and again that reacts on us emotionally, because if we start generalising illegitimately we may perhaps experience the corresponding negative feeling. For instance, supposing you are engaged in some quite big project and just some little detail just doesn't go right, and you get so upset about that, you think the whole thing is going wrong. And then that affects your whole mental attitude. You're plunged in gloom and despondency etc., etc., because you've made an illegitimate generalisation. Just because one little thing has gone wrong you feel that everything has gone wrong, when it's quite unjustified. You just cannot see beyond that present, quite tiny failure. You can't

even find your pencil, perhaps, but sometimes a little thing like that would be the last straw. 'I can't even find my so-and-so-pencil. Nothing is going right today. It's all useless!' You can even get into that sort of frame of mind, can't you? And just fail to see the wood for that particular tree. *[Pause]* I mean we could extend this to co-ops etc. etc. but I won't. *[Laughter]* I'll let you work that one out for yourselves. *[Pause]*

Kulananda: The greater your vision the less likely you are to be hampered by things.

S: Yes. Yes. Or the less likely you are to be thrown by temporary setbacks. **Even** your own failings because sometimes, all right yes, sometimes one may commit an unskilful action but if your vision is not sufficiently great or if you've lost contact with that wider perspective, you think, 'Well, how terrible. Look what I've done. Oh, I'm dreadful. Oh, I'm the worst person that ever lived. Oh, I am an absolutely useless Buddhist. There's no hope for me', etc., etc. Do you see what I mean? You become so obsessed with that one, maybe, quite tiny unskilful thing that you've done. On the other hand it can work the other way round too. You may perform some skilful action and over-generalise in a wrong sort of way from that. You may become a bit self-satisfied and complacent just on account of that small single skilful action. You can think you are a really good person, a really good Buddhist.

Jinapriya: It's very.... It's quite hard not to do that in some respects, because like, it does seem very much it's a trial and error sort of situation. You know, because ,as it were, one's depending on one's own awareness all the time, one's, you know ...*[inaudible]*

S: Well, I think, sooner or later, life itself brings you up against your own limitations. Life itself exposes the hollowness of your illegitimate generalisations.

Jinapriya: In other words then you have to become more and more deluded to maintain -

S: And, of course, your spiritual friends are also helpful.

Jinapriya: I mean for the Buddha then to actually have got to Enlightenment, I mean, it's just dawned on me what an indescribably amazing thing for a human being to do.

S: Well, especially without help, really. No help from other people.

Jinapriya: That's what I mean.

Sagaramati: It shows the importance again of positive emotions because if you do [25] have a reactive feeling like that you've got to have something of equal intensity, you know, so that doesn't take over your whole world, because that's what tends to happen.

Voice: It's quite hard isn't it?

Sagaramati: Because the vision has got to have some intensity. It can't just be 'in your head' as it were.

S: Yes. Well, it's like the vision that sustained at least a few people in the midst of all the dust and sweat of Sukhavati a few years ago, when you couldn't see much, you could only see - well, it was just a building site. It was dreadful. Looking at it just in those terms. It really was awful for the people who were camping here. I remember it very well. The utter lack of facilities. There were no toilets at the very beginning. There was no bath. There was nowhere even to spread one's sleeping bag. I mean floorboards were missing and so on. It was a really dreadful place at the very beginning. But a few people had a vision of what it could be and they managed to hang on to that vision though it did sometimes fade a bit but still they did keep it. *[Pause]* I mean there's quite a lot of people just don't know what it was like at Sukhavati in the very early days. I can remember very well coming down and staying for a while, and the sort of conditions were in a way quite appalling. *[Pause]* I mean now it's almost luxury itself, but it's still not good enough. *[Pause]* But, yes, you can get so immersed in your own little corner of something that you lose sight of the whole. We can all think of examples of this sort of thing. So you need to be able to see beyond your own little bit, your own little corner, see beyond your own present experience. I mean this sort of broader view, this broader perspective, even vision, is absolutely necessary from so many different points of view. And so from so many, in so many different ways.

Sagaramati: It even applies to Centres. You need an overall view of the whole Movement as well.

S: What to speak of the whole Centre. So you don't get one little bit doing this and another little bit doing that and they never really meet, and no one has a common vision. But, at least, the Chairman should have, and ideally all the people in the Council or even all the people participating; they should all have, all share in, that common vision. *[Long pause]*

Kulananda: So from that point of view you can see how Compassion leads to Insight. If you are considering other people ... *[inaudible]*... [26]

S: I mean there is another tangent, but it is connected. This whole environmental question or environmentalist question. You should be behaving in such a way that you don't contribute to the degradation of the environment in such a way that other people are affected. I mean, some people do this. They are so intent on their own profit they don't care about the amount of pollution that they pump into the atmosphere, to the rivers and so on. They are unable to take a broader view, due to their 'habitual self-centredness and deeply-rooted attachments.' I saw glaring examples of this in India. Little factories but pumping out all sorts of, oh I don't know what you call it, absolute muck and filth, you know, straight into a little stream and it's even spreading over the whole bank and over quite a wide area of land and no one is taking any notice, and no one bothered about it. Did you see a few of these things? Sometimes dye. No one was bothered. It's just effluent. Just flowing anywhere. It wasn't the business of the factory owner where it went or what happened to it. They just let it flow out. Sort of horrible stinking stuff. *[Pause]* A lack of environmental consciousness. Just concentrating on your own convenience, your own advantage, your own profit. So another example, a very notorious example, of lack of that wider perspective, lack of an awareness, an appreciation of how other people are being affected, even future generations. I mean one's awareness should extend as far as that, down to one's children's children's children.

Hridaya: It's like an inability to actually connect or sympathise with something outside of yourself.

S: Yes.

Ratnaketu: Presumably if you were really able to do that, to open up to the outside like that, you'd also really share in the beauty of that, and of a beautiful place, you would really experience beauty. The person who'd pumped all that dye out into the fields, if they walked through a beautiful place they wouldn't be able to feel the beauty. They wouldn't be able to appreciate it.

S: Well, they don't think in terms of beauty at all. They think only in terms of utility. But your awareness should be such that you're able to take into consideration people that you don't know, people that you haven't seen, and that you're never likely to see, and people that don't even exist yet. Your perspective should be as broad as that. *[Pause]* When people cut down trees one might even say, 'What about future generations?' 'Well, too bad. That'll be their problem, not mine.' That is an utterly selfish and self-centred attitude. This is implicit in the behaviour of many nations, depleting irreplaceable world resources and not caring about future generations. [27]

Ratnaketu: Even things like thinking the world's not going to end simply because you're alive *[Laughter]* because you're so self-centred that all these amazing things are going to happen when you are alive.

S: Yes. *[Pause]* Anyway:

'attitudes as deeply rooted almost as sentient existence itself. According to the Buddha's teaching they can be extirpated only by prolonged systematic meditation on the fact that the world as we know it is unreal.'

Perhaps we should be a little careful how we take this word meditation - not too literally. It represents a sort of determined systematic attempt to change one's mental attitude, to bring about a change in the way that one perceives existence, a way that is more in accordance with the way things actually are. Which as I said means not directing oneself to a Reality with a capital R, not directing one's attention to that, but just taking this broader view, this wider view, this more inclusive view, first of your own experience, of everybody's experience, and not indulging in illegitimate over-generalisations, as I called them. *[Pause]*

Kulananda: It seems quite simple to realise the effect of illegitimate over-generalisations and even temporarily to do away with them almost. It's quite difficult though to sustain that. That seems to be almost the brunt of the problem - not to realise but to continue realising.

S: Well, one's experience, whether painful or pleasant, can be such you can become quite obsessed by it, in the sense that your mind can be quite filled by it to the exclusion of everything else. And for you that is everything. That is the whole world. That is nature. That is life. Existence.

Jinapriya: It seems to relate sort of to the Wheel of Life in so much as the person who's obsessed with pain is the hell being, and the person who's obsessed with pleasure is the deva.

S: Yes, right.

Jinapriya: And therefore there is the auspicious human stage where there's a balance.

S: Or you could even say that the *preta* is obsessed by deprivation. The asura is obsessed by competitiveness; these are all **aspects** of life but they've made them into their whole world. So you can say the deva is one who has illegitimately generalised in such a way that for him pleasure is everything, life is pleasure, his world is a world of pleasure. That's how he sees things or experiences things or would like to. In the same way the being in hell is one for whom life itself is painful, who is totally engrossed in that [28] particular aspect of existence. And the animal is one, say, who is totally engrossed in the pursuit of food and shelter and sex. If you're only interested in those things, well, those things constitute your world and you are therefore an animal. And with the *preta* you're constantly thinking of all the things you haven't got. You don't see the things that you have got, even if it is only a big belly, but you're just seeing the things that you haven't got, and hankering after them. For you the world is just one big need, it's a world of need, you're deprived. 'I don't have this, I don't have that'. I mean you could say there are some politically motivated people who live in a world of deprivation of rights. They can think only in terms of all the rights that they don't have, and are fighting for the rights which they don't have. I mean, many of them are quite imaginary and self-created. And of course the asura - the asura is one who sees life as essentially competitive. There's nothing but competition. You have to fight and struggle for everything.

Voice: The law of the jungle.

S: The law of the jungle. Survival of the fittest. This very often means the survival of the unfittest. So yes, you could look at it like that. You could look at all these different beings of these different worlds, as depicted in the Wheel of Life, as being people for whom this or that aspect of life is the **whole** of life. And, as you said, the truly human world is the world in which we can take a more balanced view, a more overall view, a more total view, a more all-inclusive view. But that suggests vision. I think it probable, I think one can say that it isn't possible, or at least it isn't at all easy to have that broader view unless one has some vision.

Kulananda: What do you mean in this context by vision?

S: Well, if one was to speak metaphorically - and this goes to some extent against what I've been saying so far - the vision means that you're able to have this broader perspective because you see everything in the light of a higher reality. Now here I'm sort of changing to another kind of language but do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: I don't quite because it seems to me that the seeing is itself a vision.

S: Well, we'll put it this way - that if you want to see things from a broader perspective you have to see them from a higher point of view. If you're down here on the ground there's not much you can see, but if you're up in an aeroplane and look down you can see a very great deal more. So vision refers to not only..... the fact that you cannot cover a large area of ground without, as it were, looking down on that area from a higher point of view.

Kulananda: The vision is the experience itself?

S: Well, the vision doesn't merely refer to horizontal extension but sort of vertical expansion, one might say, but again you might say in one's actual experience what does that correspond to?

Kulananda: Doesn't the very fact of having done away with illegitimate over-generalisations in itself elevate one's point of view?

S: I'm suggesting not completely. I think you need also, to begin with, a much more intense experience of emotional positivity.

Kulananda: Yes, well, in order to actually be able to do away with illegitimate over-generalisations you need to be able to see other people.

S: In other words it isn't a mere absence of the illegitimate generalisations.

Kulananda: Yes, because to see other people is to develop *metta*.

S: Yes.

Nagabodhi: Do you say in the, in some sense the human realm's position in the Wheel of Life is a bit different to the other realms in - not just that it's another realm, but that it has a qualitative difference in that it's perhaps closer to Reality?

S: Yes, I think that Buddhist tradition does tend to suggest that, as when it says that Enlightenment is more easily accessible from the human state. This suggests that in a manner of speaking the human state is closer to the Enlightenment experience.

Nagabodhi: It actually is closer? I've always tended to think the realms of the wheel, they're all on the wheel so that they're qualitatively the same in terms of Enlightenment.

S: Or in some representations the deva realm is depicted as nearer because you get, for instance, higher and higher and higher deva realms shading into Nirvana. There is a certain truth in that but also it can be somewhat misleading. [30]

Voice: In what way is it misleading?

S: Because it suggests that the deva realms, as such, are 'nearer', inverted commas, to Nirvana, to the Transcendental, than is the human realm.

Nagabodhi: How does that come about, except in terms of bliss, perhaps, being a reward of meritorious conduct?

S: Well, you could say that the devas are people who are obsessed by bliss.

Nagabodhi: But in that it's an obsession it seems that a mark of the human realm is that it's relatively free of obsession.

S: Yes, you can experience an intense bliss but within the human state there is the possibility of experiencing the opposite of that, so that will help one preserve one's sense of balance.

Nagabodhi: But how in some areas of Buddhist tradition has it come that god realms have been seen as being closer to Nirvana, because it sounds a bit like Christianity?

S: Well also, I mean, the experience is of a more **refined** nature.

Ratnaketu: Similar to your thing of man, artist, angel?

S: Yes. It's more suited as a sort of symbol, or more suited for use as a symbol.

Hridaya: Sometimes the deva realms **are** associated with the higher states of consciousness.

S: I think when one uses this sort of symbolical language one must be prepared for a certain amount of ambiguity. There isn't one single consistent cut-and-dried meaning running through all contexts.

Jinapriya: Is it like learning the different sort of meanings on the symbols? I was thinking, when you look on the Wheel of Life from another point of view and you include the Buddha seeds, you see the Hell realm has got the most Buddha seeds because

S: Well, no, not most, but more than the deva realms. [31]

Jinapriya: More than the devas. So it's like looking at it from a certain point of view, you use a symbol in a particular way.

Kulananda: If you're obsessed with pleasure then you're not going to progress, or if you do want to progress you can progress through the devaloka. which is not necessarily going through the devaloka.

S: Well, put it this way, you're more likely to be dissatisfied with your experience in hell than with your experience in heaven, so inasmuch as dissatisfaction is necessary to spiritual life, there is a greater possibility of spiritual life in the hell realm, at least from one point of view.

Hridaya: So the teaching of the four *lakṣaṇas* is important for the deva realms, would be even more important than they are for the human realm. That the devas need to be reminded of *duḥkha*, *anitya*, *anatma*.

S: Yes, I mean presumably beings in hell do also need to be reminded that it's not going to go on for ever. I mean that is the Buddhist view if not the Christian view. [Laughter] Quite simply if the painful experience is very painful, even in the case of ordinary human illness or bereavement, sometimes it's very difficult to imagine that it's going to come to an end.

Jinapriya: Bhante, that does seem to be the basic lack of insight that makes them either a hell realm or deva realm, it's that total loss of contact with the idea of

S: Yes it's that tendency to universalise from the present experience, whatever that may be.

Jinapriya: Yes, that's right!

S: And everybody has this tendency. Not even generalise, it's you universalise from your present experience. I mean you do it all the time in all sorts of ways. You have a particular experience, say, with someone of a particular nationality, maybe they pick your pocket, you say, 'Oh, those people are all thieves.'

Jinapriya: It's interesting that we accept the absurdity of it on a very gross level and to almost like outlaw it, so to speak, but it's on the subtler levels that we're doing it all the time.

S: Yes. [32]

Sagaramati: The opposite seems to be like where there's alienation there's.... because there's not much in terms of present experience, there's a tendency to generalise about everything - I find.

S: Yes, but sometimes your generalisations may be technically correct but have no value because they're almost entirely devoid of actual experience. They've no real content. In other words, I mean, equanimity is to be distinguished from indifference. I mean, you don't broaden your experience by eschewing experience.

Sagaramati: That's what I meant about the full-blooded life. *[Laughter]*

S: Well a full-blooded life is all right provided you have a powerful vision.

Kulananda: Insight.

Sagaramati: That was the way I put it. I said for somebody who had some experience, then they could.

S: But I mean an anaemic person does not necessarily have more vision.

Sagaramati: Yes.

Nagabodhi: Quite a good example is with meditation. You can feel tired or you've got a headache or you don't want to sit because you don't think you're in a good state. That applies to going on a retreat as well, but actually doing the practice or going on the retreat puts you into a state that you couldn't even have conceived of, imagined, from the state you were in before.

S: Yes, right.

Jinapriya: I think that a tendency in this over-generalisation is a refusal to look at how unintegrated one is. The fact that in ten minutes it is going to be totally different.

Voice: Yes.

Nagabodhi: Sometimes you have to bully someone to go on retreat because they say 'I'm too tired'.

S: Well, it's as though sometimes people want to hang on to their present [33] experience. They don't want to broaden out from that. They insist on being tired or miserable. They resent your efforts to chivy them out of that. They don't want to be positive. It's almost like that sometimes, isn't it? They just put up a resistance.

Nagabodhi: If they can just tip themselves over that threshold and wake up in a new dimension, from which standpoint say they were in before, just seems (**S:** Absurd.) absurd.

S: Well, sometimes one does look back upon one's own past experience and first one may say 'How could I have possibly got so upset about that? It was really so ridiculous, so unnecessary'. *[Long pause]*

So -

'prolonged systematic meditation on the fact that the world as we know it is unreal. As an ancient and famous verse incorporated in the *Vajracchedika sutra* exhorts us:

*'As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp,
A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble,*

*A dream, a lightening flash, or cloud,
So should one view what is conditioned.'*

This is the sort of traditional formula, traditional series of images for helping one to develop Insight. Insight means in a way not only the more intense, but the broader perspective. So:

In order to assist such meditation *sutras* like the *Lankavatara* and *acaryas* like Asanga and Vasubandhu not only multiply such similes but explain them elaborately.'

Perhaps we can go a little bit into this, though I don't know whether we'll be able to finish it, I rather doubt if we're going to finish this paragraph tonight. But never mind, we'll just have to carry on when we can.

'Conditioned things are like stars, for instance, because having no real existence they cannot be got at or grasped; because they are insignificant in comparison with Absolute Reality, even as the stars in comparison with the vastness of space; and because when the Truth is realised it is no more possible to discern them than it is to see the stars after the sun has risen.'

This gives an example. Just the stars. So 'conditioned things are like stars, for instance, because having no real existence they cannot be got at or grasped.' Does one take this literally, that conditioned things don't have any real existence? Because they have no real existence they can't be grasped any more than you can grasp a star by stretching out your hand.

Kulananda: There's nothing external change which is ultimately definable. [34]

Sagaramati: You can't ultimately possess it.

S: Yes, you can't ultimately [*word unclear*]. They're out of reach, like the stars.

Kulananda: You can't fully describe them in the end.

S: You can't sort of appropriate them, for once and for all. [*Pause*] If things are distant, they're just like the stars, they just exist in themselves, as it were. You can't grasp them, you can't catch hold of them.

Sagaramati: But you perceive them?

S: You perceive them.

Jinapriya: But you can't own them.

S: You can't own them. Yes. And 'because they are insignificant in comparison with Absolute Reality; even as the stars in comparison with the vastness of space.' So I mean here there's a different basis for the comparison. 'As the stars' seems to refer to particular aspects of our experience, which are, one might say, insignificant in comparison with the totality of our experience or the totality of our possible experience, 'even as the stars are insignificant in comparison with the vastness of space'. Do you see the point of the comparison?

Kulananda: If you just start thinking of other people, you just start getting vaster and vaster and vaster.

S: So one could say, a particular experience of one's own is insignificant in comparison with one's total experience, whether actual or potential. And, in the same way, one's own experience, even one's **total** experience, is insignificant in comparison with the total experience of all the other people in existence, or all the people who were in existence, or will be in existence.

Hridaya:? The greater mandala.

S: Yes. Yes, to shift the image and to think in terms of the mandala, the greater mandala, this sort of sense of perspective, this broadening of perspective, consists in shifting from the centre of the mandala things that don't really belong there; shifting them way out to the periphery. It doesn't mean you're throwing them out of the mandala altogether, except those things which are actually [35] completely unskillful. But you just relegate them to a distant corner instead of putting them right in the centre.

Kulananda: Why should your own experience be any more important than any other experience? [*Laughter*]

S: Indeed. Yes. Right. Well, this is one of the points which Shantideva makes in the *Bodhicaryavatara*. What is it? I mean, for instance, you experience suffering. He experiences suffering. What is it that makes you

devote yourself to the removal of **your** suffering and not his suffering? Sheer delusion. Because objectively speaking, what difference is there between this suffering and that suffering? Is there any objective reason why you should devote, or let us say, why energy should not be devoted to the removal of that suffering rather than this?

Nagabodhi: (Yet no place is subjective?) *[Laughter]*

S: Well, the subjectivity is in the suffering. It shouldn't also be in the attempt to remove the suffering. There's subjectivity enough already in the fact **that** someone suffers. **Someone** suffers.

Ratnaketu: Something I've thought about in the *metta bhavana* - In a way you're trying to be objective about all these, all the other people, well it's not like in the first stage you're being subjective about yourself. It's trying to be objective about yourself, and have an objective feeling of goodwill towards yourself.

S: Yes.

Ratnaketu: Not a subjective feeling of goodwill to yourself.

S: Because you're trying to see yourself as a whole.

And then too, there is this comparison with the stars - 'and because when the Truth is realised it is no more possible to discern them', that is to say the stars, 'than it is to see the stars after the sun has risen'. In other words when you see things as a whole, when you see things in that broader perspective, the things which are, say, right under your nose, the things which you're experiencing just now, they almost disappear from sight; they're so insignificant in comparison with the totality, the vastness of existence, your experience as it **now** is, that broader experience. The fact that your tooth aches - what does it really matter? What cosmic significance has **your** toothache got, or the fact that **your** girl-friend has left you, or the fact that you have no money? Of what cosmic significance is that? What difference [36] does that make to the structure of the universe? None whatever, presumably. *[Laughter]* But here you are utterly obsessed with that fact! *[Laughter]*

Ratnaketu: You still would have to have a lot of positivity. I mean just like, if you were living, well, in Bethnal Green, and you'd sort of opened yourself up to the general experiencing of what's around you, and quite a bit of it will be extremes of ugliness and pain.

S: But would it necessarily be so? I suppose in point of fact it would be but then of course the question arises about the steps - the concrete, practical steps - you take to modify your own experience and one of them may be the withdrawal into a different situation, until such time as you've been able to restructure your consciousness in such a way that you're **not** perturbed. I mean one's perceptions are very relative. I noticed this especially coming back to England from India, or coming back from Bombay to London and to Bethnal Green - I've mentioned this more than once already but I'll mention it again - my experience of Bethnal Green was so different, I think, from what **your** experience may be. Coming, driving straight from Heathrow through London to Bethnal Green, I thought, 'how calm and peaceful London is!' Yes. *[Laughter]* How smoothly flowing, how quiet the traffic, how sedate everything, how clean. Coming through to Bethnal Green - what a peaceful place, how silent. I really felt as though everybody, the whole population of Bethnal Green was on meditation retreat, and how neat and clean Bethnal Green was, *[Laughter]* how well swept the streets are. This really struck me. It seemed a really nice place. Just because I'd been immersed in Bombay just a few hours before. It really is all relative. Bethnal Green seemed, if not like heaven, a pretty good place, but the quietness. It really was amazing. A sort of hush over the whole of Bethnal Green, just like, as though everyone was on meditation retreat - even the dogs. But **you** don't experience it **quite** like that, do you? We'll have to send you to Bombay then.

Nagabodhi: I don't know if I can get this out but if you do become fully aware of a broader picture in your own life, say, I could imagine that one could get quite reckless, because to some extent it's the things we're afraid of and ... I'm not quite sure what I'm trying to say.

S: I think ... You might **appear** to be reckless because, for instance, we've all got experience of this sort of thing, we've seen it, but what happens . . . people actually give up their careers, they give up their university courses, they give up their good, safe jobs, they give up their houses, they give up their mortgages, to do what? To come and sweat it out in a co-op within the LBC complex. And their friends must surely be thinking they're utterly crazy. They're doing completely reckless stupid things. They don't see it like that, do they? [37]

Nagabodhi: But you've got to somewhere have the foundations in something. It's as if when you're deluded you gather some substance from your fears and your limitations and having a broader view isn't just suddenly having those limitations ... I get a sort of feeling of dizziness if I just conceive of all the barriers and fears

being taken away. You've got to be grounded in your meditation in your it's not just a broader vision but there's got to be kind of integrity and substance.

S: Otherwise it becomes like the after-death experience for a lot of people. All the barriers are removed, the physical body is removed. It can be a quite **terrifying** experience, as the 'Book of the Dead' tells us.

Nagabodhi: So this would be born of what? Of integration or meditation?

S: Yes.

Kulananda: I'm sorry, isn't there another experience, though, that Ratnaketu was talking about - suddenly becoming open to all the pain and ugliness, but isn't the experience of other beings, isn't **your** experience of the suffering of other beings somehow mediated by the fact that you are experiencing it and you don't experience it as painful as such, but there's a feeling of your own response to that suffering which is not necessarily painful for you.

S: I sometimes quote in this connection a line, I think it is of Tennyson, he speaks of '*some painless sympathy with pain,*' and it's rather like that. It's the sort of sympathy, to use that word, that the Bodhisattvas feel. They're keenly conscious of the sufferings of others but they're not actually suffering themselves, not in the way that those others are suffering.

Kulananda: Wouldn't they perhaps even experience a warm response to that suffering?

S: Because if one was to experience the sufferings of others literally, it would cripple you, it would incapacitate you, it would be too much. But therefore you need a sort of ground, a sort of basis within your own experience which is so positive that even though you're fully aware of other people's suffering and are doing whatever you can to alleviate that, you're not overwhelmed by that suffering as a suffering of your own.

Kulananda: Because although you are receptive you're also generating emotion.

S: Yes, it's your positive emotion, even more than that, your, say, positive [38] transcendental emotion which is able to transmute the experience and make you effective in the situation instead of being paralysed by it.

Hridaya: So perhaps in that sense it wouldn't necessarily be a smaller suffering. If the Bodhisattva experienced the suffering of the other person he perhaps experiences as strong a suffering but the fact that there **is** so much more perspective, so much more breadth, it can be contained, and it can be...

S: Yes, obviously there is a whole, as it were, hinterland of experience, positive experience that the actually suffering person just doesn't have. I mean there are accounts of people even being burned at the stake but being happy and joyful nonetheless. They're able even to contain, so to speak, to subsume, even that experience.

Kulananda: Especially if you're in touch with something like the *sambhogakaya*, it's pure positivity which is just coming through oneself in relation to one's experiences ...

S: I think, putting the whole thing into a sort of much more everyday context, I think you can tell the difference - when you're, as it were, suffering oneself - you can tell the difference between someone who comes up and sympathises with you but who is affected by your suffering and someone who sympathises with you but who is not actually affected by it. Do you see what I mean?

End of Tape One, Tape Two

Because it sometimes happens that someone sympathises with your suffering but he's upset by it. He cannot therefore really help you very much. He is himself involved. But if someone is able to sympathise with you and genuinely feel for you but not be involved in the way that you are involved, then he can be of greater help to you. He can affect you much more positively and help you get out of it. Otherwise he's just in it together with you and you may end up just pulling each other further down, instead of one helping the other up.

Hridaya: I'm reminded of the beginning of 'The Tempest' where Miranda, having seen the shipwreck, seeing all the people suffering, is obviously in some ways undermined, but even so she has the strength, a very strong sympathy, she says to Prospero something like 'Oh, how I have suffered with those that have suffered.'

S: But it's very difficult to understand the nature of, say, the Bodhisattva's experience, but perhaps one **can** say that yes, though the Bodhisattva doesn't simply observe but **experiences** the sufferings of others, the perspective within which he has that experience is such that in a way the nature of the experience is entirely transformed. [39]

Hridaya: It's in perspective itself. Like the two things, it's not the centre of the mandala. Somewhere it's part of the whole picture.

S: So it does very much come back to this question of the mandala and what you put in the centre of the mandala. So seeing things more really, or in more real terms, could be expressed in terms of putting at the centre of the mandala those things which really belong there, and relegating to the periphery those things that really do belong to the periphery.

Hridaya: It's something to do with the size of the mandala too. What happens when I think about the centre, that becomes a little bit restricted. I find more inspiration from trying to relate to the perspective of the mandala, the greatness of the mandala. Maybe it's the same thing.

S: Well, if you've got a very big mandala you need something really big to put in the middle of it. You can't put a little tiny something there that nobody can even see, except you because you've got your nose right close up to it. So if your mandala is the universe itself, only the Buddha is big enough to put at the centre of **that** mandala. But if you've got one little tiny mandala maybe you can put some little petty interest right in the centre of it. It might not look too ridiculous. This reminds me of the old Cockney saying where it looks like a pimple on St. Paul's.

Well, maybe that's as far as we should go tonight unless anyone's got any further comment on what we've already covered. We are stopping in the middle of a paragraph but it does go off on a slightly different tack even so and we can continue that on Sunday morning.

Sagaramati: 9 till 1 o'clock?

S: I'm happy starting at 9. Anyway, we have covered quite a lot of ground actually, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Perhaps we'll have to go into it a bit every time I come down and hope to finish the whole chapter in, say, a year. *[Laughter]* It's going to pose a bit of a problem for you isn't it? *[Laughter]*

Sagaramati: Somebody can send me the tapes.

Nagabodhi: That was one of the richest two hours I've ever spent. *[Laughter]*

S: Well it's surprising what does come out when one puts one's mind on to it.

Ratnaketu: This book is strong whisky.

Sagaramati: Ninety-nine percent proof.

S: Well, perhaps you shouldn't take too much at one time. *[Laughter]* Take it in [40] homeopathic doses. *[Laughter]* Just a drop or two on the tongue so you really taste it with relish. *[Pause]*

Are you going to be taking a study group in Glasgow on this?

Sagaramati: Yes, I've done this at Aryatara about 3 weeks ago, and that's where I got the idea.

S: But it was originally your idea even though subsequently adopted by everybody else?

Sagaramati: Yes. You could argue that with a title like the Nature of Existence.... I feel, basically, we have to make much more of these fundamental ideas that people just pass up rather superficially.

S: It's as though everything is transitory - 'well, it's pretty obvious, there's no need to go into that. Who disagrees with it?' Then no-one does disagree but it doesn't mean that everybody has really understood. It's only a formula. It's quite empty. You have to fill it with content, to make it more real.

Hridaya: Not even Buddhist books(?). Catching insight.

Sagaramati: We've done that. It struck me on the Order Convention when you took a study on the Dhammapada, and the time we were doing the, what was it, 'Cease to do evil, learn to do good and purify the heart' etc. I mean nobody had anything to say. *[Laughter]* And there was... I mean, three senior Order

Members there. And they said, 'Well, what was there to say on the matter?' It didn't strike me as being, there was something lacking. It struck me as though people didn't really think about it, basically.

S: I think it's an absence of *chintamaya-prajna*. Again, this is something I've gone into very briefly in one of the India lectures I've just edited. I'd given a quite short and simple description in a couple of typed pages of these three Wisdoms. This might be useful in some context. I mean the Wisdom of hearing, of independent thinking, and of meditating.

Voice: Which is Chintamaya?

S: That is the second one. In other words having read, say, a *sutra* or Buddhist text, people don't then seem to turn it over in their minds. They don't think about it, try to fathom it; whereas this is something I've **always** done. There [41] are some things I've been thinking about for thirty or forty **years**, on and off. So one must be thinking about what one learns. *[Pause]* Reflect on what one learns. It isn't enough just to be able to reproduce it as learned. That really isn't very useful.

Hridaya: I think we often spread ourselves so very very thinly. It seems so easy to be able to do that. Not just within Buddhism or the Dharma but outside of it. You think that you, rather than stopping and turning something over in the mind, say in the context of meditation, you move on outwards and do other things.

S: There is an analogy in that, you know, as when sometimes people want another practice when they haven't really got very deeply into the one that they already have. This sometimes happens. I'm not saying that you can never have a second or even a third practice; well, clearly you can - there can be a perfectly good reason for that. But nonetheless it sometimes happens that people just want to take up another practice, out of a sort of restlessness or reluctance to get very deeply into the practice they already have. So in the same way, instead of going a bit more deeply into the Abhidharma you want to move on to the Madhyamika etc etc. Also some people can learn a lot and be reflecting on a lot at the same time. This has always been my own attitude, but I don't recommend it really. It works for me but I think I have a particular kind of mind to be able to function in this way, but I've always just carried on reading and, sort of, thinking at the same time. I sort of read a lot and I think a lot. I don't, sort of, read something and then think about it until I've mastered it, and **then** take up something else. No. I read about a lot of different things and I'm thinking about them all, at the same time, virtually. Well, from time to time, at least. I go back to them. I can keep them in my mind. I don't forget them. Some people have difficulty remembering what they've read, and therefore it's difficult to maintain continuity of thought.

Let's call it a day, shall we?

Voices: Thank you Bhante.

End of Session One Session Two

Kulananda: Sagaramati, do you really want those mike-stands over there?

Sagaramati: No.

S: Your face **would** have been red, Sagaramati, wouldn't it? *[Laughter]* Anyway, we broke off, when was it, Friday evening, in the middle of a paragraph, so perhaps we'd better recap a bit, just to re-establish the connection and the thread of the discourse. I'd been making the point that: 'According to the Buddha's Teaching they'- that is to say the *viparyayas* - 'can be extirpated only by prolonged systematic meditation on the fact that the world as we know it is unreal.'

And then I mentioned: 'an ancient and famous verse incorporated in the *Vajracchedika sutra* exhorts us: "As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp," etc. In other words these are different metaphors, different comparisons just to help us understand the true nature of the Conditioned. And I've mentioned that: 'In order to assist such meditations *sutras* like the *Lankavatara* and *acaryas* like Asanga and Vasubandhu not only multiply such similes but explain them elaborately. Conditioned things are like stars, for instance, because having no real existence they cannot be got at or grasped; because they are insignificant in comparison with Absolute Reality, even as the stars in comparison with the vastness of space; and because when the Truth is realised it is no more possible to discern them than it is to see the stars after the sun has risen.' One of the principal points which seem to emerge from the whole trend of the discussion was that it's important to get things into perspective. It's important to have a sufficiently broad perspective. It's important, changing the metaphor, to put at the periphery of the mandala, of one's personal mandala, things which belong at the periphery, not to put things which belong at the periphery right in the centre of the mandala, which one tends, in fact, to do when one becomes over preoccupied, not to say obsessed, with one's immediate experience, to the exclusion of everything else, Then I went on to say, and now we come to the new material:

In their zeal to uproot the *viparyayas* both *sutras* and *acaryas* sometimes went to the extreme of declaring that the world was not only unreal but absolutely non-existent.

There's a hint of that in one of the comparisons of conditioned things with the stars. Because you noticed that the first comparison says that: 'Conditioned things are like stars, for instance, because having no real existence they cannot be got at or grasped'. But they are still there, you still see them. It's just that you can't get at them, you can't grasp them, And then again: 'because they are insignificant in comparison with Absolute Reality, even as the stars in comparison with the vastness of space'. Well, the stars are still there, conditioned things are still there, your individual experiences are still there, however limited. It's just that you see them now in the context of the vastness of space, you see how vast space is in comparison, you see also perhaps how many other stars there are. You are no longer confining your whole attention to just one particular star, however bright that may happen to be. But then, the comparisons go on: 'and because when the Truth is realised it is no more possible to discern them than it is to see the stars after the sun has risen.' Well, clearly when the sun has risen, yes, the stars are no longer there. So here the comparison seems to go a bit further. It seems as though the stars are annihilated, conditioned things are annihilated. Your particular, specific experiences are just no longer there. So one can take that a little over-literally. And one can even go further, and declare, as I've mentioned, that: 'the world' is 'not only unreal but absolutely non-existent.' Some texts, some *acaryas*, do in their zeal, in their over enthusiasm, so to speak, make that point, just to inspire you all the more that not only do conditioned things have their limitations but that conditioned things don't really exist at all. It is sheer illusion that you think you see them there in any way. So this is really a going to extremes. I think it **can** cause quite a bit of confusion in people's minds, if you tell them that what they think they see isn't really there, and doesn't even really exist. I mean sometimes people teaching Buddhism in the West sometimes make the statement - I used to hear this in pseudo-Zen circles years ago - that, well, the world just doesn't exist, it isn't really there, and this is what you've got to try to realise; not that your perception has its limitations and you've got to see things in a broader perspective, but that you ought not to be seeing things at all, they just ought not to be there. It's a pure figment of your imagination that things are there at all. So this is really going to extremes, do you see what I mean? I think we have to be very careful of doing that, as it were in theory, because in a way that prevents people from taking seriously the proposition that things do have their limitations, and one's experience has its limitations and one needs to see things within a broader perspective. If you put things in too extreme a form people no longer take you very seriously. In fact they are unable to take you seriously. Do you see what I mean?

Hridaya: Such *acaryas*, would they place any importance at all on *metta*?

S: Well, I don't think there's any *acarya* who would not place importance on *metta*, But whether he succeeded in making the connection between the importance he placed on *metta* and this particular point, that's another matter.

Nagabodhi: The idea that things are not as they seem - things do have their limitations - is quite easy to take hold of and find examples of, on a purely psychological level. Then, at the other extreme, you've got the suggestion that you're going too far to apply this in terms of the universe and whether things really exist. [**S:** Yes.] But there must be - all this teaching does go beyond merely just clearing up psychological delusions - but how far does it go? You see certain situations with a bit of clarity, they're not what they seem, but how far does that process go, because at some point it stops when you have to say, well, it's not as if nothing exists?

S: Well, this does come out really quite clearly. We touched upon this also, the other evening, in the threefold Yogachara distinction between the **three** kinds of reality. The Madhyamika distinguishes between two kinds of reality, Absolute Reality and conventional reality, *paramartha* and *samvrti* but the Yogachara goes on to distinguish between three kinds, and I think this is a very useful distinction. There's *parinispanna*, the Absolute Reality, there's *paratantra*, the relative reality; what's the other one?

Sagaramati: *Parinispanna*,

S: No, I'm sorry. *Paramartha* is still the first. *Parinispanna* is the third. So here a distinction is made between relative reality and, let us say, illusory reality. The fact that you overcome illusion, the fact that you no longer see relative reality in an illusory manner, so to speak, doesn't mean that the relative reality is no longer there. The relative reality is there. There is a relative reality which [45] though relative is a reality, if you see what I mean? You cannot reduce relative reality to illusory reality.

Nagabodhi: Even in the face of Absolute Reality?

S: Even in the face of Absolute Reality. Because to take the argument a stage further - I don't know whether the Yogachara actually puts it in these terms - it isn't correct to distinguish between relative reality and Absolute Reality as though they were two mutually exclusive principles. Do you see what I mean? One could, I think, put it in this way, that the relative reality is the reality which is conditioned in the sense that

it is the reality which is a sequence of effects which have arisen in dependence upon causes or conditions. This is relative reality. The whole web of these dependent - in fact interdependent - *dharmas*, let us say, which arise in dependence upon conditions and cease when those conditions cease, and the fact of their dependence, the fact of their interdependence, this constitutes their conditionality. It also constitutes their emptiness, their voidness, which, of course, constitutes their Absolute Reality. Do you see what I mean? So there is not that distinction between a conditioned reality and an unconditioned reality. The two are - one can only put it in this way though it is inadequate - interwoven together. Do you see what I mean? The illusory reality has no place. That is illusion and to be banished but you are still left with, so to speak, the relative reality and the Absolute Reality but not as two separate principles. The Absolute Reality is the Absolute Reality of the relative reality. There is, as it were, no Absolute Reality separate from the relative reality though, again, that may be a sort of contradiction in terms. It's as though the Absolute Reality itself needs a basis. It is the Absolute Reality, as I said, **of** the relative reality.

Kulananda: So you could say the relative reality is Absolute Reality, as it were, viewed through delusion or with emotional biases, if you like.

S: No, I wouldn't even say that. No, because that would suggest that when your delusion goes you no longer see relative reality as relative reality. But you **do** see relative reality **as** relative reality, though cleansed from illusory perception, illusory reality, so to speak. You can then also see that the relative reality is - I won't say at the same time as the Absolute Reality because that would be to confuse, to create two principles and then confuse them - but you don't set up two [46] ontological principles here.

Sagaramati: Could you say that to see the conditioned as really conditioned is to see the unconditioned?

S: Yes, you could put it in that way. To see how the conditioned is Unconditioned inasmuch as the conditioned is the conditioned; it is what arises in dependence upon conditions. Because it arises in dependence upon conditions it is not only transitory but is also *anatman*; it has no abiding, permanent reality, sort of underneath it. Because it doesn't have it, it is *sunyata* and it is *sunyata* which is Absolute Reality.

Kulananda: *Sunya*.

S: Yes. Of course. There are two meanings of *sunyata* here in a way, or two aspects of *sunyata*. Well, altogether there are more than two but you sort of pass from the *sunyata* of the conditioned to the *sunyata* of the Unconditioned which is not really a separate *sunyata* - language has great limitations here. One can only say it's another dimension, it's that deeper dimension of the relative reality itself. So It does not mean, you know, that you, sort of, banish your experience of the conditioned world or conditioned reality, but it's completely transformed. But that conditioned reality is still there. You're still eating and drinking and laughing and talking and seeing trees and houses but you're seeing them in a completely different way. On the one hand illusion is no longer present because self-centredness is no longer present, unskillful emotions are no longer present, so your perception is no longer distorted. You're no longer a victim of the *viparyayas*; your perceptions are no longer upside down; you're no longer seeing the conditioned as permanent and pleasurable and so on. You know you see it as impermanent and painful and all the rest of it. But as it were **behind** the relative reality, behind the conditioned or, as it were, shining through it because your perceptions have been cleansed, as Blake would say, you see the Unconditioned which at the same time is not a separate reality standing behind. Again language has its limitations. Another comparison is it's like the wave which is not separate from the ocean. The ocean **is** the wave or the waves, the waves **are** the ocean. When you're in touch with the waves you're in touch with the water, the ocean, and when you're in touch with the water, well, you cannot be in touch with waves.

[Pause] So it is important to make this point as I make it here - that it is not that the world as we perceive it is really non-existent; it is a complete illusion. [47] Yes, there is a sort of superstructure of illusion that we have to get rid of, but when that's got rid of isn't that all we've got left is a bare, naked Absolute with no features whatsoever. And therefore I think it was a very useful distinction that the Yogachara made here. Otherwise, if you take the Madhyamika teaching too literally you get the impression of the whole phenomenal universe being swallowed up in a great sort of metaphysical black hole and nothing ever coming out again, which would be a very one-sided sort of view.

Hridaya: Does that mean - the removal of that superstructure of delusion - would that also correspond with the ending of rounds of rebirth?

S: Well, it would correspond to the ending of, let us say compulsory rebirth, from the Mahayana point of view; from the point of view of the Bodhisattva Ideal. You exhaust unskillful *karmas*; well you exhaust **all** *karmas*, skillful and unskillful. You are no longer **obliged** to be reborn, but the Mahayana view is very much that you can choose out of compassion to be reborn. Why should you not because you no longer in any case see any real distinction, any real division as between two distinct principles, between the conditioned and the Unconditioned - why should you **not** be reborn? What's **wrong** with being reborn? What's wrong with

rebirth? What's wrong with *samsara*? A cleansed and purified *samsara*, so to speak, if you can use that sort of language. That would be the Mahayana, Bodhisattva view. You don't really mind, you don't mind remaining in the world. You see it in a different way, experience it in a different way.

Nagabodhi: To have a vision of life and death that makes it difficult for you to believe in rebirth, to have a view, in other words, I suppose, of the universe to some extent that finds it quite hard to admit the idea of rebirth that, that would be delusion, that would be something, an aspect of illusory reality, your view of the world that isn't open to that possibility?

S: I'd hesitate to say that, because views about rebirth can also be bound up with views about the unchanging self. Perhaps it wouldn't be very helpful from a Buddhist point of view even if you did believe in rebirth, if for you that entails a belief in some-body or some-thing who was reborn. Do you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi: Yes. [48]

S: So perhaps one could say that it's just as easy or just as difficult for someone who believes in rebirth but who has that idea of someone who is reborn - it's as difficult for him to have access to Absolute Reality as it is for someone who doesn't believe in rebirth but who presumably, at least, doesn't entertain that view of an enduring individual reborn.

Nagabodhi: I suppose what I'm getting at is that going beyond illusory reality isn't just a matter of getting a bit of psychological clarity. Clearly it must involve quite radical transformations in your vision of the world.

S: Well, yes, of conditioned existence itself, leaving aside the Absolute for the time being.

Nagabodhi: Yes. It goes a long way just overcoming illusory reality.

S: I've spoken about self-centredness. What causes us to perceive things in terms of the four *viparyayas* is self-centredness as well as unskilful mental states and unskilful emotions. So self-centredness goes very very deep, very deep indeed, and you certainly need quite a lot more than just psychology to extirpate that self-centredness, that constant reference of things to your own self, and how they affect **you**, and what's in it for you. I don't think there's - well, I know there is no modern system of psychology that even **dreams** of removing human self-centredness - just making you a bit more accommodating, a little less selfish, but it doesn't really go to the root of the matter. So certainly a little psychological tinkering with one's unskilful mental states and attitudes is not going to be enough, even to remove delusion. I think from all that I can gather, that the systems of psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and all these encounter groups - they've absolutely no idea of what one is really up against. They only scratch the surface at best, not to say titillate the surface. Yes? But it's a question of self-centredness. People very often don't realise how deep their self-centredness is. I mean, sometimes the *metta bhavana* brings one up against it - you realise how self-centred you are, how lacking in feeling for other people. You can see it manifesting even in ordinary areas, like 'Who's going to do the washing up?' sort of thing. You can see sometimes the conflict in people. You can see it, even if it doesn't register in their faces; you can feel it. You know, duty struggling with inclination. [Laughter] Yes? And the sense of duty itself not perhaps itself not being a very healthy one, and the sense of obligation, [49] resistance to obligation. All that sort of struggle, and what should be a simple straightforward decision becomes a very complicated psychological business indeed. Because if you just take this simple instance of washing up, well, it's either he does it or I do, so you mean you ought really to make no difference whether he does it or you do it. It's all the same. It's just depending upon circumstances. So if he has to go and lead a class, well, obviously he can't do it, you do it, but there's the self-centredness comes in. 'Why should I do it? I'd like to go and do something else, I don't like washing up.' All these factors come into play, so these are all manifestations of self-centredness. Even sometimes, 'Why should I do it? I've already done it twice this week.' They fall back on a sort of legalistic position. So constantly one is coming up against self-centredness. And though the various systems of psychology and the psychotherapies, they make no attempt, even, to tackle this. It's only tackled with real uncompromisingness, I would say, not only in Buddhism but in the Mahayana, in the Bodhisattva Ideal, in texts like the *Bodhicaryavatara*.

Hridaya: You used to use the term 'consciousness turning back on itself' which seems to be quite appropriate. Rather like with the *metta* when you try to generate expansiveness or outward-goingness, consciousness moving out, [unclear] it's consciousness always coming back to itself.

S: Yes, so you're constantly referring back to yourself.

Nagabodhi: When you say you think it's only tackled in the Mahayana, it does occur to me what about Christianity, do you not think there's a trace of

S: Well, yes and no. Christianity's method is not to see through the limitations of self-centredness, but to crush it and bludgeon it and stamp upon it, and I don't think that really works in the long run. That is almost the opposite. Instead of indulging it you flog it, but it's still there except that you're made to feel bad about it. It may be - yes, human nature being such - it may be that certain Christian saints have broken through into genuine non-self-centredness. I'm quite prepared to accept that, but I think the **methods** of the church have been very unfortunate in this respect because they're bound up with the Christian conception of original sin and man as a fallen being and so on. *[Pause]* And what is the opposite of your self-centredness? You should be God-centred. Instead of following your own will you should follow the will of God, and how does the will of God come to you? Well, according to a few minor Christian traditions it comes in prayer, but according to most it comes through the Bible and it comes through the Church. So there are those other factors to be considered. So, I wouldn't say, as I've mentioned, that there aren't some Christian saints and mystics who have achieved a genuine, well, turning about, perhaps. It does seem that there are a few remarkably other-oriented people, but I think the Church's actual methods don't really help very much. They're concerned more with bludgeoning self-centredness into submission rather than really illuminating the situation. Rather than seeing what is really there. You're made to feel bad about your selfhood rather than to transcend it. You're given a bad conscience about it.

Well, let's go on a bit.

According to the older and more widely accepted tradition, however, systematic meditation on the unreality of the world does not involve impugning its existence but consists in viewing it simply as painful, transitory, and insubstantial.

You don't really need to go into metaphysical flights of fancy about the world being unreal or not really being there. All you need to do is bear in mind that it is painful, transitory and insubstantial.

These are the three 'marks' or 'characteristics' (*lakṣaṇas*) of conditioned existence with which we are now concerned.

I think there is sometimes a tendency just to escape into a bit of metaphysics instead of staying with a quite practical, common-sense, helpful approach. I think even the Mahayana is sometimes guilty of this, or at least you can use Mahayana teachings in this of way.

Nagabodhi: Are there any major schools of Buddhism or traditions that might disagree with what you've been saying in the last half-hour, with your fundamental interpretation of reality, the way you talk about reality? Are there schools of Buddhism that would step in and say, 'No, Absolute Reality is something quite different'?

S: Quite different from what?

Nagabodhi: Argh! *[Laughter]*, well, from being merely a way of really seeing the conditioned nature of conditioned existence. [51]

S: Well the Theravada **in a way** - but only in a way because the Theravada, in a slightly sort of crystallised form, let us say, does tend to posit an Unconditioned Reality and a conditioned, and not make any sort of connection between the two. But one could go back to the Pali *suttas* themselves and one could question whether that later, more crystallised sort of - as I put it - Theravada teaching did really represent the Buddhist position. So even if one were to say that the Theravada might not accept the interpretation that I've been giving, one might say that even going by Theravada sources, very likely the Buddha **would** have accepted it. In the Buddha's own teaching there was not really that hard and fast distinction. The Buddha himself didn't think in terms of a sort of metaphysical Absolute standing behind phenomena. I think one could very easily show that.

Nagabodhi: Now is it at the beginning of *The Door of Liberation* various Mahayana standpoints are explained? The conjurer and the elephant is used as the example. Geshe Wangyal talks about the various different approaches to the relationship between ideas of Absolute Reality and ontology and so on, and I just wonder how many schools would go along with you. I suppose, in a way, I wondered whether you are, in some people's eyes, heretical in your views or whether you're right in ..?

S: *[Interrupting]* Well this raises the question of what is heresy, I mean, in Buddhism? What **is** heresy in Buddhism? In Buddhism there isn't any term corresponding to heresy, as I think I pointed out somewhere or other. It's rather interesting that when those early discussions arose, many of which are recorded in the *Katthavatthu*, one of the books of the Abhidharma, there were quite strong disagreements on certain topics between different schools and sub-schools and in western terms one school might have been regarded as heretical by another. But the point is always made that they all agreed about the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path and all schools agreed that their opponents were capable of attaining Nirvana.

[*Laughter*] So within that sort of context what does one mean by heresy, because heresy, I think in the West, would suggest that the heretical person had departed from the true faith to such an extent that it was no longer possible for them to be saved. But these sort of, as it were, philosophical differences, or differences of philosophical interpretation within Buddhism, never amounted to - I mean it was generally agreed, never amounted to a deviation from the faith, so to speak, to such an extent that the possibility of gaining Nirvana was precluded. I don't [52] think if I've read it rightly that anybody suggested that even the Pudgalavadins could not gain Enlightenment. So the whole concept of heresy in the Western sense falls to the ground. So long as you go for Refuge, so long as you are practising the basic meditations, you accept the Four Noble Truths, you accept and try to follow the Noble Eightfold Path; **however** you may interpret all that matter philosophically, however you may **present** it philosophically, doesn't really make any difference. You are still bound for Nirvana. The philosophical interpretations are quite secondary, may be helpful for some, not helpful to others, agreed with by some, not agreed with by others but nonetheless you are all marching forward on the path to Nirvana. It's quite a different point of view.

Nagabodhi: Even though you may interpret a subject, you disagree with each other as to what Nirvana is?

S: Yes, indeed, yes. [*Laughter*] Because everyone agrees that Nirvana cannot really be reduced to any intellectual formula. Everybody agrees.

Voices: Yes. [*General murmurs of agreement.*]

S: It is *atthaka-macchara*. Everyone accepts that. [*Murmurs of agreement.*] And if you were to press them they might even say, well, even if you don't accept the teaching about rebirth, probably even that doesn't make any ultimate difference, especially if you accept so many other things. Apart from which, there are so many different interpretations of what rebirth is. [*Pause*] But provided you accept - well, I think the minimum is usually given as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path and the three or four *laksanas* and Nirvana, whatever Nirvana might be, conditioned co-production; yes, it doesn't, in a sense, matter which school of - it's really only philosophical interpretation - you belong to. That's why, perhaps, we might say in the FWBO we haven't been in a hurry to hoist any particular kind of Buddhist flag. Not only not been in a hurry to say we're Theravadins or we're Mahayanist or whatever, haven't been in a hurry to say we follow the Madhyamika or we follow the Yogachara. Well, there can be people within the Friends who are especially fascinated by any of these schools. We don't identify ourselves exclusively with any of them, they are all possible points of view. What we do identify ourselves with are the Mindfulness of Breathing and the *metta bhavana* and the Going for Refuge and so on. That's what we identify ourselves with. I mean, whether Sagaramati follows the Yogachara or Nagabodhi [53] follows the Madhyamika and have long arguments about it, well, that's neither here nor there. I don't know whether they do. I'm just giving it as an example! [*Laughter*] Or, whether Kulananda is an out-and-out Hinayanist and very ascetically inclined. [*Laughter*] And somebody else is really Tantric and whether they have ding-dong intellectual arguments late at night. [*Laughter*] Again, that's another matter entirely. Do you see what I mean?

I think, perhaps, it's quite difficult for people in the West with their Christian and Judaic background to appreciate the - well, tolerance isn't quite the right word - but the breadth of the Buddhist attitude and the extent to which Buddhism is really based on experience and practice but at the same time allows very free play to the intellect. You can speculate as much as you like but you mustn't think that intellectual speculation is the sort of determining factor or that a particular line of intellectual speculation is the only value, the only acceptable one and it is **that** that makes you a Buddhist. That's why a lot of people in the West might find Buddhism rather vague and rather shifting, rather cloud-like, because it doesn't come down categorically in favour of this position or that position. There's something analogous to it in Catholicism, although only very distantly analogous. You can be a good Catholic and an Augustinian, let us say, and you can be a good Catholic and a follower of Thomas Aquinas. There's a **certain** sort of difference between them as regards certain theological positions and philosophical positions, but they're not of sufficient importance to constitute a breach with regard to the faith itself, such as exists, or perhaps it doesn't exist, they are beginning to wonder that - as between Catholics and reformed Protestant Christians.

And this is why, in India, you found monks of different schools and different philosophical traditions often living side by side in the same monastery, because they'd be performing the same puja, they'd be observing the same precepts, they'd be practising the same meditations, but some would be accepting the Bodhisattva ideal, others would not, and some would be studying Mahayana *sutras*, in addition to the Abhidharma and Hinayana *sutras*, whereas others wouldn't be studying the Mahayana *sutras*. But their way of life was in common. Just as you might be living in a community, and he, say, reads *The Three Pillars of Zen* and you read *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa*, but you don't fight about it, you know you have slightly different sorts of inspiration but you all assemble in the shrine room together in the morning, you all do the same *metta bhavana* or Mindfulness of Breathing. You eat together, you work together but you don't divide yourself into two sort of hostile camps, one upholding *The Three Pillars* [54] of *Zen*, the other upholding *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa*. But this is possible within Buddhism. And I don't think there's really any parallel in other religions. Hindus usually go too far in that direction and Christians don't go nearly far enough. I think here

Buddhists really do follow a middle way. We don't attach overriding importance to intellectual differences, even differences about Buddhism itself, provided that there is a common basis of practice. It's that common basis of practice that sustains everything else. [Pause] But if, for instance - to follow this up a little - supposing you no longer meditate, supposing you no longer observe precepts, you no longer even live in communities, **then** these intellectual differences may assume greater and greater significance. Do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: I'm not quite sure what you mean. Do you mean about actually.....

S: [Interrupting.] Well it's all that you're left with of Buddhism.

Kulananda: Ah, yes.

S: Yes. Mm?

Kulananda: Yes, they're not actually more significant ..

S: [Interrupting.] For instance, when I came back to England in '64, I was really surprised how acute were the differences between Buddhists, and they were lay Buddhists at that. They were all people living at home with wives and families - or husbands and families - and jobs, but they strongly identified themselves, either with the Theravada or with the Mahayana or Zen or Abhidharma and in a purely intellectual way. Why? That was all that they had. They didn't have a common basis of practice. So all that they **did** have, which was their intellectual interest in a certain aspect of Buddhism, became the determining factor. I mean, had they all been living together in a community, had they been working together and meditating together, the fact that one was into the Madhyamika and another into the Abhidharma would not seem so important. But inasmuch as it was their **only** point of connection with Buddhism, it did assume an exaggerated importance.

Anyway, 'These are the three 'marks' or 'characteristics' (*lakṣaṇas*) of conditioned existence with which we are now concerned.'

[55]

They correspond with the first, second and third of the four mental perversities. The *locus classicus* of this most important doctrinal formula is *Dhammapada* verses 277-9, according to which the vision, by means of wisdom (*prajna*), that all *samskaras* are *anitya*, all *samskaras* *duhkha*, and all *dharma*s *anatman*. constitutes the Path of Purity (*visuddhi-marga*).

S: This introduces the question of wisdom. That one sees with wisdom. One sees that all *samskaras* are *anitya*, and so on, by means of wisdom. I think it's quite important to have some idea of what one means by this term wisdom and maybe not be misled by the English word which is generally used to translate this Sanskrit and Pali word. I mean Guenther translates *prajna* - it's well known - as 'analytical appreciative understanding', doesn't he?, which is very clumsy but it certainly helps remind us that we mustn't take this English word wisdom too literally. *Prajna* is analytical in the sense that it's able to break things down into their component parts. Though we did see the limitations of that sort of approach the other evening, didn't we? It also appreciates them at their true value and it's an understanding of what they are in reality. It comprehends all those sort of aspects. So 'analytical appreciative understanding' doesn't convey quite the same flavour as this, as it were, wisdom. Do you see what I mean? And *prajna*, what is *prajna*? *Jna* is knowing, knowledge. *Pra* suggests the superlative. It is knowledge *in excelsis* as it were. It's knowledge at its most intense, its most clear, its most radical, but even knowledge, I mean, I do believe that the Sanskrit '*jna*' and the English '*know*' are etymologically connected but even that doesn't help us, because I think there is a limitation here that we tend to think of *prajna* in exclusively, or more or less exclusively, conceptual terms. Do you see what I mean? There is a similar disability attaches to the term insight. We tend to think of that also in predominantly conceptual terms as though there wasn't a feeling element, a feeling quality. But I think one can say that

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S:what constitutes the difference between *prajna* or *vipassana*, Insight and a purely, to use the expression, intellectual understanding of things, is that *prajna* incorporates one's [56] emotion. This is what makes the difference. *prajna* is not just what we've come to call 'intellectual', though debasing the word intellectual. It's not just theoretical, it's not just conceptual. In *prajna* are included all the emotional energies which are usually tied up with one's self-centredness and one's unskillful mental states. All that emotional energy, all that positive emotion, has become integrated with one's understanding and incorporated in *prajna* whereas the translation of *prajna* as wisdom or even as 'analytical appreciative understanding' doesn't really communicate that at all. Do you see what I mean? It's as though the whole energy of your emotional nature which usually goes after so many worldly things, even unskillful things, has now been put behind your

understanding. [Pause] So we don't really have a satisfactory word for it. Even the Sanskrit word *prajna*, *prajna* itself, I think, is not very satisfactory. Even in Sanskrit or Pali it's **too** intellectual. So this is why I have sometimes been a bit paradoxical and said that *sraddha* can be regarded as the emotional equivalent of *prajna*. Especially *sraddha* as used for instance in the Jodo Shin Shu school of Japanese devotional Buddhism. One can even think of wisdom in terms of imagination. Hm?

Voice: Right.

S: When imagination sees, as it were, archetypal forms, it sees forms as they are, divested of any sort of illusory interpretations. [Pause]. So when the *Dhammapada* says that it's 'the vision - by means of wisdom, that all *samskaras* are *anitya*, all *samskaras* are *duhkha*, all *dharmas* *anatman*, that constitutes the Path of Purity', one really has to be careful not to misunderstand the word 'wisdom'. Or even the word *prajna*. It's as though all one's emotional energies have been swung behind one's understanding of life, instead of being behind all sorts of worldly objectives and ambitions. [Pause] Well, we know from experience how much energy, how much enthusiasm, goes into quite ordinary worldly things and how little, very often, into the understanding - well, I said of the Dharma, but that's putting it at one remove - it's understanding of life, understanding of Reality, understanding of what things are really like. That it makes all the difference that one's emotional energies are lined up behind one's understanding of the Dharma, because if they are not you won't ever really practise, you won't really throw yourselves in, you won't **commit** yourself, to use our current term. One can apply that in all sorts of ways. You might, for instance, understand, well, that co-ops are a good thing and you wish them well but your [57] emotions, your emotional energies, are not there so you don't really commit yourself to that type of situation.

Sagaramati: It seems that, on our part, there's a lack of what you might call imagination, as if the imagination has to be awake for you to put your emotional energies behind it. If there's no imagination then it's just going to be mental, and therefore not very effective.

S: Yes, but how do you understand imagination in this connection, because you're making a distinction between imagination and what tradition calls wisdom?

Sagaramati: Well, I'd say the imagination would be the initial engagement of your emotional energies, whereas wisdom would be like the end product. You can't talk about engaging your wisdom immediately. There has to be something, a precursor to wisdom. And I would see what I would call imagination would be that.

S: Hm. In a way this is the more standard view. You could say that one of the purposes, one of the main purposes, of the visualisation practices is just to do that, because it engages the emotions with a whole world of more refined and beautiful forms, and we'll be coming on to that shortly. And your emotions having been engaged in that way, well then, understanding can come into operation on that particular basis. So this is the way in which some traditions of practice of this kind proceed. You visualise these archetypal forms of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and dakinis which engage your emotions powerfully and draw your emotions away from ordinary things, and **then** you can reflect upon their significance, their deeper significance, you can approach the voidness even, see them as manifestations of the void.

Hridaya: Just to clear one thing up for me. Using this kind of definition and description, do we need to understand the difference between *prajna* and *jnana*?

S: *Prajna* and *jnana* are sometimes synonymous and sometimes they're differentiated. Usage is not very clear, not very consistent but the *jnanas* are usually spoken of more in the Yogachara context and when one is speaking of the Five Buddhas, because each Buddha embodies a particular *jnana*, they're often translated as 'awarenesses'. Perhaps it would be good to translate the *prajna* as wisdom but *jnana* as Awareness with a [58] capital A. It's not the awareness that is synonymous with mindfulness but awareness of the higher reality itself.

Hridaya: Manjugosha's sword is the sword of *jnana*, isn't it?

S: Yes and no. Because he also has the book of *prajna* and he's usually considered to represent *prajna* rather than *jnana* but again one doesn't, perhaps, need to differentiate too closely. They both have the root 'Jna', it's *pra-jna* or *jna-na*.

Sagaramati: Could you give any suggestions for, well, to help people develop the imaginative faculty? If, say, a visualisation of Bodhisattvas is a bit too refined for most people.

S: I was, in fact, about to make some comment about that or some suggestion even. I think for people just trying to make that initial connection, the reading of poetry and so on is quite helpful. Not all kinds of poetry. I'd say the more visionary, more romantic kinds of poetry. I think Shelley is a good example here. Maybe

he's in some ways a bit too rarefied, but on the whole he's a very good example because there are the, there is the intense emotionality. I mean you establish a connection with that quite quickly and easily. At the same time ... [Pause for change of tape] At the same time that there's the intense emotionality there's the equally intense ideality. He's always bringing in Eternity and Life and Love, with a capital L and so on, so one's interest or one's energies are directed in this more visionary, idealistic direction all the time. Do you see what I mean? There's nothing gross about Shelley, there's nothing unrefined, there's very powerful emotion - great sort of mental and spiritual clarity at the same time. So if you're really carried away by Shelley, you're in a sort of semi-spiritual state, you might say. Or if you read something like Plato's *Symposium* it operates in the same sort of way and, of course, Plato's *Symposium* was quite important for Shelley. In fact, he translated it. It's all very visionary, it's very - well, not just idealistic, but ideal. I mean some poets are very readable, very enjoyable, but they don't introduce you to that higher visionary realm in the way that Shelley does. Some may even be greater poets but they don't do that. He's especially good from that point of view. He is incidentally, I am told or I was told, the most popular English poet in India. That was certainly with the older generation, whether that is any longer so I don't know. I rather doubt it, which would be a pity. I think it would [59] be a pity if, say, Dylan Thomas was now the most popular English poet, or Auden or Eliot. But certainly it used to be Shelley. This is what I was told by the professor of English literature at the Shantiniketan Forest University in West Bengal. He said Shelley was far and away the most popular English poet. The Indians really loved him. Perhaps they loved him for the wrong sort of reason but there was that idealistic upthrust, you might say, in Shelley which many Indians would find very sympathetic, or with which they'd be very sympathetic. I mean have people actually found that reading Shelley - those who have read Shelley, I hope I'm not assuming that everybody's read Shelley when they haven't - but have those who have read Shelley felt this? Yes? [Laughter] Oh dear.' What do you read, then?

Chintamani: The Odes of Keats I'm more familiar with.

S: Well I think Keats is a great poet. He might even be greater than Shelley, but I don't think he functions in quite that way. He doesn't have that sort of, you know, that upward movement. He's much more, one might say, earthy. He's much more sensuous. Hm? Shelley is much more, well, for want of a better term, it's a very overworked term, idealistic.

Nagabodhi: Some of Wordsworth's poetry.

S: Some of Wordsworth. Sometimes Wordsworth - Keats too - is very deeply thoughtful but ...

Chintamani: Even a tiny bit laboured.

S: In the case of Wordsworth, perhaps. but I mean, yes, some passages in Wordsworth which are very, again to use a very overworked, possibly misunderstood term, are very uplifting indeed. Yes? So poetry can function in this way. I think *Prometheus Unbound* is a good example. It can really widen one's horizon. You have to be, of course, really in the mood for it. Well, that means you have to give [60] yourself time and space to get into the mood. You can't just sit down after a hard day's work and pick up Shelley and at once be into it. That isn't possible, perhaps. But he does provide a sort of stepping stone, a sort of bridge even, into these worlds of more intense yet more refined emotion, so that half the work is done and then those more intense and more refined emotions will link up with your understanding of the Dharma and reinforce it and lead your emotional energies into your understanding of the Dharma so they blend and coalesce and gradually give birth to actual Wisdom. *prajna*.

Sagaramati: Do you see poetry as being the best form of art to do this or what about the visual arts or music?

S: I'm not sure. Well, first of all there is the fact that poetry is handy and accessible. You only have to keep a little volume lying by you. You can't just go and look at paintings in an art gallery. You need to journey. I don't think reproductions or little reproductions in a book help very much. I think you need to see the paintings. But then there are other factors. Very often the gallery is crowded, you're jammed in with a lot of other people and this can really detract from the experience itself. Whereas with a volume of poetry you can go and sit in a quiet corner of the garden, if you have a garden, or if the garden hasn't a quiet corner you can sit quietly in your room and you can just get into it. So it is also partly perhaps that poetry is more accessible or more available in this way. But I wouldn't like to suggest that, well, the visual arts are intrinsically less able to help in this way. Perhaps they are.

Nagabodhi: What about music?

S: Music, of course, does have a powerful effect on the emotions. You know Plato was quite right, I think, to, well, even prohibit certain kinds of music. I think we have to be very careful where music is concerned. People don't usually appreciate this. I think we should be very careful also not to use music just as background. I think this is a misuse of music. I'm rather horrified by the use or misuse of music as

background. I think you must **listen** to it, allow yourself to be fully absorbed by it. Otherwise if you've just got it on while you're doing something else - some people have Bach on when they're typing, which I think is dreadful. It means you, sort of, habituate yourself to not paying attention, not giving serious attention to serious things.[61] Do you see what I'm getting at? You trivialise it. I mean it's dreadful if you go along to, say, Heathrow and they're piping music. They used to pipe Mozart and Beethoven. I don't know whether they still do. That seems dreadful just having one of their symphonies in the background while all the bustle of Heathrow was going on at the same time. How **could** you really listen? How **could** you do justice to Mozart or Beethoven? You are just trivializing it, you're degrading it. You're making yourself familiar with it in entirely the wrong sort of way. Hm?

Hridaya: You'd never think of having a poem going on in the background, would you, if you were typing?

S: No, because, well, there is the conceptual content which would - well, the fact that that was there would be a serious distraction from what you were doing. But I think this whole idea of *muzak*, as somebody's called it, ceases to be music. *Muzak* is really dreadful, it's one of the most displeasing manifestations of our present civilisation. It trivialises it. But, yes, to go back to the question of the importance of music. I really do think one must be very careful the sort of music you expose yourself to. You must all know, surely, that music of different kinds affects you in different ways, maybe at different times. I think it's not surprising that on the whole people in the FWBO tend to favour, say, Mozart or Bach or Beethoven or early music and I don't think they're just being precious. I think this does mean that music of that sort has a closer relevance to what the FWBO is all about. I'm sure there are other composers too, some of whose works can have a very, well, inspiring effect, but I mean maybe those composers are outstanding. And I think we should be very careful about things like rock music and jazz. I think a lot of rock music is very disturbing from what little I've heard, or overheard of it. You're just shaking yourself up emotionally. You're just disturbing yourself emotionally. You're not inspiring yourself. But has anyone any views on this topic? Does anyone disagree?

Ratnaketu: Well, when reading - with the medium of the printed word, we don't just confine ourselves to reading *sutras*. Sometimes we read short stories and sometimes travelogues and things like this and other things, so with music, which is a sort of audible medium, do we have to confine ourselves just to listening to almost *Dharma* music like Beethoven and Bach? Do other forms of music which if you definitely identify them as not being high forms [62] of culture but do they have a place?

S: Well, I'll turn the question back and say why should one read in such a miscellaneous way? *[Laughter]* Do you see what I mean? Because one's reading affects one too. Maybe not as powerfully as the music that you listen to. But one's reading affects one and I think one should be careful and scrupulous about one's reading. Now this is something which I've not done myself. *[Laughter]* I must be quite honest about this. I've always read almost anything, but even so there are some things I haven't read. *[More laughter]* When I say I've read almost anything I mean, history, biography, psychology *[more laughter]*, philosophy, you know, all that kind of stuff. But I think one should be really selective, especially when you've got not much time. And I'm not happy about newspaper reading, for instance, though I do read the newspaper myself now every morning but I must tell you that this is more out of a sense of duty. I don't enjoy it and I was really pleased, when we were in Tuscany last year, that I was let off this. I didn't have to read the paper every morning, but I feel, in England at least, that I just need to know, you know, from the standpoint of the FWBO, what is happening in different fields. I mark certain things in red pencil for Subhuti to cut out and file away for future reference. For instance, sometimes there are reports about charity law or religious education in schools. Well, things of that sort we need to know about. But reading the paper is not a pleasant business at all and I think most of **you**, if not all of you, could do without it. In the same way what about detective fiction and horror stories? What about these, well, what about pornography and, you know, things like that? Does one really need to extend oneself so far? *[Laughter]* Do you see what I mean? Travel, well perhaps travel, travelogues, they do broaden the mind a bit. Certainly those that appear in *Shabda*. But I think one has to be quite careful that one isn't just reading to pass the time, to fill in the time, not just reading for entertainment. I know the human spirit cannot sustain itself upon the heights indefinitely - that it has to descend from time to time and seek humbler nourishment - but even then I think one has to be a little careful. I mean, yes, read biographies, read Life of Shelley *[Laughter]* or Life of Nelson or whatever but I think don't read trivial stuff. You so often see people doing this. I'm not even against people reading fiction. Some modern fiction has become, in some cases, the vehicle of quite a profound understanding of life. When I say modern fiction, I'm thinking of, for instance, Dickens and Hardy. I'm not thinking of *[Laughter]* ... Well, you know, if you only have a limited amount of time, why sort of pass by [63] those masterpieces and read something that came out the other week or the other year and is really quite trivial and debasing in comparison? Why bother? You've got these lovely thick volumes of Dickens, a good thousand pages each. Well, you shouldn't dream of reading all the modern stuff unless you've experienced those. I recently re-read *Bleak House* having not read it since I was in my teens and I was really impressed by it. I very much disagreed with some of what some critics had said about, well, this particular book and Dickens' treatment of some characters in this book. I thoroughly disagreed with what some of them had said about Dickens having no insight into character and just producing caricatures. I think this is a gross misunderstanding of

Dickens. He had a very deep understanding of human nature, and didn't just caricature, you know, recognisable social types. He had quite a deep understanding of Life in many ways and this communicates itself through very powerful images, which one can reflect upon at length. So by all means absorb yourself in literature of this sort. It's not exactly elevating and inspiring but it's certainly sort of sobering and it certainly gives one an understanding of certain things. You certainly participate in a great artist's, a great genius's vision of life. It certainly does expand your own vision of life in certain directions at least. Hm? But don't read trivial stuff. I mean don't read Barbara Cartland or is it James Hadley Chase? is that the other sort of masculine counterpart? I haven't read him. I'm only guessing. *[Pause]*

Nagabodhi: I suppose Alistair Maclean and people like that.

S: Well, I really think one has to be careful what one does, so to speak, to one's emotions. Here one is talking about integrating the emotions and refining the emotions and all that kind of thing, well, this is one's emotional life. What is one doing with it? All these things are very powerful agents - music, poetry, literature in general. One's communication with other people. *[Pause]* I was hoping to draw somebody on the subject of rock music, because some people do go to rock concerts still, don't they? Or listen to rock music records? Or are these things entirely out now? *[Laughter]*

Graham Steven: Not entirely. *[Laughter]*

S: But do you think that people do get anything positive out of them at all? [64]

Harshaprabha: I suppose a release of energy.

S: Why do you want to release your energy? You mean throwing away your energy?

Voice: I think when you're doing hard physical labour, for instance, rock music or disco can get the energies moving and...

S: I thought the hard physical labour did that. *[Laughter]* Oh dear, doesn't it? *[Laughter]*

Sagaramati: I think what it is, if you are doing physical things like physical work, building work, driving, then it's **easier** to listen to, because you're more physically in tune. It's a very physical music so you don't have to think or do anything, you just respond to it. If I'm driving I rather listen to the Grateful Dead than Bach. Do you know what I mean? Because I'm doing something with my body.

S: *[interrupting.]* Yes, yes, Because you don't want to be on two wavelengths at the same time. Hm? Well that one can understand.

Ratnaketu: It's too demanding.

S: But you have to work, whereas you don't have to go to the disco, if you see what I mean? Yes, it's just easier to continue, so to speak, on the same level rather than make an effort to get up on to the next level. So perhaps one needs to watch that, or is it as simple as that? Why I'm raising the question is that one argument that I have heard is - there may be a certain validity in it - that people are very blocked and they've got a lot of repressed negative emotions. Do you find rock music and all that sort of thing helpful in getting in touch with those and expressing them? Is that so? Do people agree with this or not?

Nagabodhi: With **negative** emotions?

S: Or very crude emotions.

Nagabodhi: Crude. *[General murmurs of agreement.]* It can be quite crudely positive sometimes, rock music.

S: But that may be so and I can quite recognise that. At the same time one must recognise that all this is taking place on a quite low level, [65] and that one really needs to build up from that level and really it should be a level that one has achieved and left behind certainly by the time one goes for Refuge. Do you see what I mean?

Nagabodhi: I mean, in fairness - I mean I don't listen very often to rock music but sometimes if I listen - I get quite impressed just by the skill, (**S:** Hmm, hmm) you know, that's used in putting some of this stuff together. I can quite enjoy just listening to the sheer technical skill of the arrangement and the mixing and that sort of thing.

S: Well I'm told Bach is even more skilful. [*Laughter*] The Goldberg Variations, they say, are absolute masterpieces. (*More laughter.*) There's 48 of them, I believe. And as for Bach's counterpoint [*Laughter*] that's dazzling, the experts say - the way he works out the canons and fugues...

Nagabodhi: Well, you've never heard a good Ginger Baker drum solo. [*Lots more laughter*]

S: Almost as though he had a computer to hand.

Voice: Take a spoonful some time.

S: Well, I think the overall point, not to forget, to come back to that, is that through one's experience of or participation in music, your emotions should become more powerful, more positive and more refined. I think these are the three great characteristics you aim for, feel your emotions much more powerfully, much more positively. That is to say they should be positive emotions rather than negative emotions. They should be emotions of warmth and friendliness and joy and faith, not of anger and frustration and rebellion and resentment. And also they should be more refined. Even those emotions of joy and faith and delight and so forth, shouldn't be, sort of, crude and boisterous, they should become more and more, well, delicate, more refined, more transparent. So that that more refined emotional experience, or higher level of intensity can fuse with your understanding of things. You're [66] then a much more unified and much more integrated being and can develop real understanding and real wisdom and really see things as they are. Be free from all self-centredness and free from unskilful mental states, unskilful emotions especially. So, anyway, all this has grown out of a consideration of wisdom.

'The *locus classicus* of this most important doctrinal formula is *Dhammapada* verses 277-9, according to which the vision - by means of wisdom (*prajna*), that all *samskaras* are *anitya*, all *samskaras dukkha*, and all *dharmas anatman*, constitutes the Path of Purity (*visuddhi-marga*).'

Perhaps we could just say a few words, since we're going through this in some detail, about the expression *visuddhi-marga*, as a description of the Path, or Path of Purity. In fact it's more than Purity, it's *Vi-suddhi*, *suddhi* is already purity. It's extreme purity, Absolute Purity, you might even say, or even a progressive purification. You know there is one discourse in the *Majjhima Nikaya* which deals with the seven stages of purification. Are you familiar with that? I've dealt with them in a lecture somewhere but it might have been in a lecture in India.

Sagaramati: It was an Indian lecture.

S: In which case you wouldn't have access to it. Maybe we ought to go into these some time. It's historically of some importance because Buddhaghosa's great work is called the *Visuddhi Marga*, the Path of Purity. And the whole work has a sort of twofold structure, there's a two-fold framework. On the one hand it's divided into three parts according to *silā*, *samadhi* and *prajna*, and on the other hand it's simultaneously divided into seven parts according to the seven stages of purification. Hm? And as I said these seven stages are mentioned in a *sutta* in the *Majjhima-Nikaya*, it's the *Ratanabanita sutta* and perhaps we should go through that sometime. But just for the present I wanted to stress this fact that the Path - the same Path that is very often called the Eightfold Path - is here called the Path of Purity, of extreme Purity, of Absolute Purity. So what does one mean by purity? What sort of connotations does the term have? If I'm not mistaken without looking at the dictionary, the Pali or Sanskrit word has connotations of washing, cleansing, purifying in that sense.

Kulananda: So in this case it would be getting rid of delusion.

S: Getting rid of delusion and also getting rid of, presumably, [67]negative emotional states, unskilful mental states generally. But one notices that in modern times, even among the Friends, this idea of purity or purification is not exactly a popular one. Do you see? People like the idea of growth and development, they don't seem to have an equal liking for the idea of purifying themselves. Or the spiritual life as a process of progressive purification. Why do you think that is?

Kulananda: Anaemic Christian overtones.

Voice: Yes, I think so.

S: Well, what about anaemic secular humanistic growth groups?

Voices: [*General murmurs of agreement.*]

Hridaya: One's been around a lot longer than the other.

Kulananda: A more powerful element of the culture.

S: Hm, hm, hm, so I think the metaphor perhaps is appropriate here, that one shouldn't throw the baby away with the bath water. I was noticing, for instance, that on one of the women's study retreats last year quite a number of the women became quite heated on the subject of the Virgin Mary. They became so heated that they appeared to me to throw away the whole idea, not to say ideal of virginity altogether, which seemed to be throwing away the baby with the bath water. Here, perhaps, the metaphor is not altogether appropriate. *[Laughter]* But you see what I mean? You go, you swing very much to the opposite extreme. From being an absolute ideal, virginity becomes almost something to be avoided at **all** costs. Do you see what I mean? So maybe we've done the same with this whole concept of purity and purification. We've, perhaps rightly, reacted against a rather anaemic conception of purity or purification but we've abandoned the more robust conception of the same thing. Yes? I mean in the Victorian period if you were to say of a young man he's a very pure-minded young man, it was high praise, but if you were to say nowadays 'That young man is very pure minded', people would wonder what on earth you were talking about. Do you see? Which in a way is a pity, because someone who is pure minded is someone whose mind is devoid of unskilful thoughts, unskilful feelings. And, as we shall see later on, in Buddhism the idea of purity is also bound up with the idea of beauty. *[Pause]* I mean nowadays if you use the expression a [68] pure woman, that would be almost a joke, but it certainly wasn't a joke, say, in the Victorian period.

Ruchiraketu: I think that's the trouble with the word purity though, it does have Victorian overtones.

Kulananda: It has connotations of repression, basically.

S: But does it **necessarily** have?

Kulananda: Not necessarily.

S: I mean are we going to be reacting against the Victorians indefinitely? Are we going to allow the Victorians, so to speak - I mean if one can blame them in this way, and even that is a bit doubtful, I think, in some cases - are we going to allow them to fix the usage of the language?

Kulananda: I suppose it's a question of the relationship between wisdom and experience, which is something that perhaps we're not yet clear on, and there seems to be a strong feeling that in order to attain wisdom, one needs to have a certain degree of experience, worldly experience, as well, and that does seem to be appropriate.

S: Well, again this raises the question, what does one mean by wisdom? I mean there's an ambiguity in the use of the word wisdom because we have such a thing as worldly wisdom so it's almost as though you can't develop insight unless you know your way around the world. But I mean that can really be doubted very much. I mean, think of Milarepa. Well Milarepa certainly had *prajna*, he certainly had *jnana*, but what experience of the world did he have? Not very much. But what **is** experience of the world? Does one have to know every nook and corner of Soho in order to qualify as having knowledge of the world or experience of the world? I mean what **is** worldly experience? Perhaps it is just living, breathing, eating, drinking. Perhaps it's no more than that. That is the basic worldly experience which everybody has. Do you have to explore every corner of the samsara? Does that really help? Do you really become more wise?

Kulananda: It's an unending process.

S: It's an unending process. [69]

Jinapriya: I mean, hasn't, what we're talking about now point to something bigger, it's the general, if you like, inherited attitude to religion generally. I mean it's like religion where the people who were essentially weak and couldn't cope with the world, you know, so, I think they are like in reaction to that, be it a reaction but in reaction to that, you know, there's this very sort of (unclear).

S: I think the point I'm getting at is our approach to Buddhism itself shouldn't be indefinitely determined by our reaction against Christianity, or Judaism for that matter, or Islam or Hinduism in the case of our Indian Friends. I mean our Indian Friends only too often, one can understand this, they just see Buddhism as everything that Hinduism is not. Their understanding of Buddhism is **defined** by their understanding of Hinduism. They don't see, very often, Buddhism for itself. And I think sometimes **we** don't. We're still seeing Buddhism itself in terms of our reaction to Christianity. We're not appreciating what Buddhism has to say, for instance, about purity because we're still tied up with what Christianity has to say about purity. We've not freed ourselves from that, not disentangled ourselves from that.

Hridaya: Wasn't the Buddha a good example of how to use the conditions of his time, the words of his time or the language of his time to get across?

S: Yes. At the same time we recognise its limitations and not be misled by those.

Ruchiraketu: Surely we do actually need to disentangle ourselves from, say, Christian language before we start using it.

S: Well, put it this way, there is, in a way, there's no such thing as Christian language, there's only the **English** language in our case which, yes, Christians have used but we've got to use that same language. If we're not to use the English language in, say, a Buddhist sense, if we're always to adopt the Christian connotations, well, it's as though we need a completely different language, to stop speaking English altogether, because every word of any significance has **been** used by Christians, has got **some** Christian significance. [70]

Ruchiraketu: No, I'm thinking for example of the word, say, 'sin', in my case I wasn't happy to keep on using the word 'sin' so I use the word, say, 'unskilful'. Now after using that for a while I could then go back to using the word 'sin' in the sense of unskilful, but if I hadn't made that leap into throwing away this concept of sin and then coming back to it then I couldn't **use** it, at least in a skilful way. So it's like maybe this even goes for a concept like purity.

S: So, right, what is another word that one could use instead of purity say to translate *visuddhi*?

Voice: Undefined.

Vajrachitta: Simplicity.

S: Well, that has got unfortunate connotations too, a sort of Simple Simon and all that. 'He's a simple soul.'

Vajrachitta: Heroic.

Kulananda: Clarity.

S: No, no, they're different. They're all different. No. Purity is freedom from stain, immaculate.

Jinapriya: Pristine.

S: Pristine, unsoiled, uncorrupted.

Nagabodhi: Unalloyed.

S: Unalloyed.

Ratnaketu: Perhaps you just need to really narrow what the Buddhists really mean by purity and then, know what the Christians mean by purity so that you can in discussion get across the difference
.....[Unclear]..... [71]

Hridaya: It's usually helpful to use more than one word.

S: Yes, yes.

Hridaya: You get misunderstood.

S: Or to give a concrete example, or metaphor, or a story to illustrate the particular point.

Jinapriya: I mean there is a genuine confusion, because like you get words like positive and negative. I mean often one thing you can call positive a lot of people might think are negative and vice versa, you know, so that all the time there does need to be, you've got to have clarity, you know.

S: I think we shouldn't use positive so much as a substantive. I think we should remember that it is actually an adjective and we should speak of positive emotion, this is what I try to do myself - not 'well he's very positive these days'. No, he's in an emotionally positive state these days.

Jinapriya: But even then I find they are very ambiguous terms because often people sort of say someone didn't agree with me but they actually say they were negative, I mean ...[unclear]

S: Yes. Well, we've had quite a few sessions on that sort of thing in study groups and it's all on tape. I won't go over that ground again. But this is the sort of thing that people do. I summarise it by saying that they present as a factual statement what is, in fact, a value judgement and this is a quite illegitimate procedure. Someone disagrees with you and you say that he's being very negative. He's merely expressed a different opinion. But you've made that sort of emotional judgement. Anyway this is, as I've said, all on tape at length, in several places, so we don't need to go into it again. I don't think we've ever really discussed this question of purity. I think we really ought to get this notion of purity out of the hands of the Catholics. They don't have a monopoly on this any more than they have a monopoly of the English language. We might even, perhaps, think that, astounding as it may seem that, perhaps, sometimes in certain respects from a certain point of view, the Catholics haven't always been wholly wrong. [Laughter] Do you see what I mean? [General murmurs [72] of agreement.] Perhaps in their ideal itself [Laughter], even in the ideal of the Virgin Mary there is some positive quality, even, let me say, just [Laughter] a word or two in favour of that much maligned woman.

Session Two - Tape 4.

S: People shouldn't persist in treating it as though it was a courtroom case. [Laughter] You mustn't forget that this idea of virgin birth is something that precedes Christianity, you find it in every mythology. When people come across it in Greek mythology they don't turn a hair. You know that there are numberless examples.

Jinapriya: You don't take them with the same degree of seriousness though. That's why.

S: But why do they take the virgin birth of Christ so seriously? I suppose because it was rammed down their throats. [Laughter] But was it? I don't even know that. It certainly wasn't rammed down my throat.

Jinapriya: Well, the thing was if you don't believe it you will go to Hell was the implication. Not believing in the virgin birth. For not believing those Greek mythologies, the implication was not the same.

S: So that suggests one doesn't have anything against virgin birth, or virginity as such, only when it is presented in a particular way. Now, for instance, if one looks at some, say Renaissance paintings or medieval paintings of the Virgin Mary, I mean it's just a visual image. There are no theological trappings. Sometimes there are but one doesn't understand them, because one can't read the language, so to speak, but visually, simply in visual terms, one is presented with a very positive image, even a very inspiring image. So one shouldn't refuse to acknowledge that. There is an impression sometimes with some very great painters, of purity, of emotional positivity, and, you know, very highly positive qualities. One shouldn't refuse to recognise that.

Jinapriya: Leonardo's 'Madonna of the rocks'. The face of the virgin is quite remarkable.

S: I wouldn't say it was especially expressive of purity. [73] It's expressive of something else very very much more subtle and recondite perhaps, and mysterious. But there are some Madonnas that do express the ideal of purity. I mean for instance, Fra Angelico's. They are very notable in that respect. So, I mean, all I am really saying is, right, we don't accept the extreme sort of sin-ridden Catholic way of looking at purity. This is very often a matter of, well, *virgo intacta*, and maybe not much more than that. But our reaction against it or the fact that we just objectively reject their way of looking at these things doesn't mean we cease to be able to appreciate the moral and spiritual significance and value of this whole idea of purity, as an integral part of, well, eventually of Enlightenment itself. However, I think our own practice sometimes becomes distorted. You're practising Buddhism but you've got one eye all the time on Catholicism. You say, 'I don't want to be like that, I don't want to be a Catholic'. So your being a Buddhist to at least some extent is your not being a Catholic. You are not just being a Buddhist. I mean I don't underrate the difficulty of the situation because I have seen it, to refer to India again, in very extreme forms there, and one can see its justification, because our Indian Buddhist friends are still suffering so badly from the Hindu culture, the Hindu conditioning and the Hindu society, and in the way in which Hindus actually treat them, I mean we, after we become Buddhists in this country, we don't have to suffer from Christians in the same way that our Buddhist friends have to continue suffering at the hands of Hindus.

Jinapriya: True.

S: So I am not suggesting that it is easy to get away from these sort of conditionings. It isn't. But still we must make an effort to get away, and to try to see Buddhism more and more in its own terms.

Nagabodhi: In the Christian tradition purity in a way is something which can only be lost. whereas in the Buddhist tradition it's to be gained.

S: That's true, yes, yes, that's true. I mean that there is a *sutta*, I think it must be in the *Majjhima-Nikaya*, where the Buddha makes this perfectly clear. I mean he gives a comparison - I don't know, I think it was of a cloth. It's a very simple comparison of a cloth. He said it is possible, you know, well, I don't remember the details, I think there are two kinds of people or two kinds of monk, even. The first kind, they keep their cloth clean all the time, it never becomes stained or dirty. [74] That's one kind of person. There's another kind of person who starts off with a clean cloth, but he allows it to become stained, allows it to become impure, but that person by certain means makes his cloth clean, makes it pure again. So both men in the end have got clean, as it were, pure cloth. You see what I mean? It is not that the second person has stained his cloth, blotted his copy book as we're taught, for ever and ever. It is possible to regain purity. I mean purity in the technical Catholic sense is no doubt not possible to regain, because they take this thing so literally. But mental purity...

Ruchiraketu: In Catholicism, after confession you...

S: No, I mean for instance in the case of virginity. If you lose your purity in that sense, well, you can't become a virgin again. Even though yes, you can become sort of morally pure. But nonetheless, Catholicism attaches, historically, importance or significance or even value to technical virginity that Buddhism doesn't. This may be historically due to the fact that Christ is supposed himself to have been a virgin all his life. It is only very recently that anyone has suggested anything different. Whereas it's well known that the Buddha was a married man, and you know, had sexual experience, and then went forth and left it all, and gained Enlightenment. So this historical example might have great significance in each case because the Buddha's example showed that whatever your experience might have been before, well, you can purify the mind, you can gain Enlightenment. In a sense it almost doesn't matter what you've done. Angulimala is another extreme example. I think that if Christ throughout his life was a virgin, and was born of a virgin mother, this puts too much weight on the physical virginity, and I think that Catholicism has been guilty of that.

Sagaramati: Even in Buddhist scriptures, say the *Mahavastu*, they have turned the Buddha's mother into a Virgin Mary.....[inaudible].....

S: Yes, one might say that is so. But it hasn't caught on. I mean the Buddha's mother occupies no place whatever in Buddhism. No place whatever. There's hardly a shrine to her. [75]

Sagaramati: Why was it necessary then to sort of get rid of the sexual element? Assuming his mother was not impregnated by his father.

Jinapriya: Do you get the feeling as if there is somewhere underneath something wrong about sex, the implication.....

S: Well one might say that Buddhism Itself, not just the *Mahavastu*, does take - what shall I say? - a not very favourable view of physical sexuality. It sees it as predominantly unskilful rather than as skilful, doesn't it? At the same time it doesn't see it in terms of sin in the way that Christianity does. It certainly sees it as pertaining to, let us say, the *kamaloka* and not the *rupaloka*. Perhaps one should put it at no more than that. If one is engaged in sexual activity, for that particular time at least you are operating on the *kamaloka*, you are not on the *rupaloka*, you are certainly not on the dhyanic level. You certainly are not on the *arupaloka* level. At least Buddhism says that.

Jinapriya: I would say it's slightly undermining of the humanity of the Buddha that the *Mahavastu* brings in this sort of.... it's like the Buddha as it were, came from the *kamaloka* as we did. The Buddha is a man as we are men.

S: Well, ah, but if you look far enough back the Buddha did come from the *kamaloka*, because the Buddha is, whether you attribute to the Buddha a virgin birth in this last life or not, well, if you go back far enough, you find a very ordinary human being. So the principle is the same - the Buddha started as a human being. So you don't really change things by suggesting that in this last birth, as He was going to become a Buddha, in this last life he was born parthenogenetically. It doesn't really change the basic position at all.

Jinapriya: I just wondered why, I mean why that?

S: Well it's difficult to say **why** things were seen in that particular way, in that particular text. It isn't the general sort of Buddhist tradition. [Pause] Perhaps one should be open to the possibility of there being virgin births.

Jinapriya: We are told if it's physically possible it would be a woman anyway, rather than a man. [76]

S: Hm. Yes. If one looks at it in terms of the genetic code, yes, yes, because the, I think it is the X chromosome, which is found in the male, comes from the male; so a woman by herself could produce only a female.

Jinapriya: XY, it's the XY.

S: It's XY, is it?

Jinapriya: I think so.

S: I've read about this somewhere. Without being able to recall all the details, but certainly yes, if parthenogenesis was possible the offspring would have to be female.

Ratnaketu: Perhaps Jesus was a woman. *[Laughter]*

S: That would explain a lot. *[Laughter]*

Kulananda: Why would you think it would be important to stay open to possibilities, as you call them?

S: Well, it is important to stay open to possibilities in general. *[Laughter]* A possibility is **only** a possibility. I don't feel personally any need to say, 'Well, there **cannot** any such thing as a virgin birth - it's **impossible**.' I feel no such need at all. That's all that I mean. That one doesn't feel obliged to nail one's colours to the mast in that particular way.

Kulananda: At the same time wouldn't it seem to be reasonable to be highly sceptical of any claim?

S: Oh yes, indeed. But even if you are highly sceptical, that is quite different from dogmatically maintaining that such and such a thing is impossible. There's quite a big difference. But anyway, what I am trying to point out is that purity can be an ideal, or can be seen as part of the spiritual ideal. Sometimes in Theravada Buddhism - I've spoken in these terms too - the Buddha's Enlightenment is spoken of not only as Great Wisdom and Great Compassion, but also as the great purity. The *Mahavisuddhi*. I think this is quite important. A lot of you like to think in terms of wisdom, compassion and power. I [77] think that's a bit dangerous. I think it would be preferable to think in terms of wisdom, compassion and purity, especially when one, in Buddhism, tends to identify, as we shall see in a minute, I hope, purity and beauty.

Kulananda: It is just so very difficult to retain a positive concept of purity. Imaginatively to retain it. One can recognise it in pictures, recognise it in poetry.

Sagaramati: You can recognise it in your own mental states. I mean when you go on a good solitary retreat you feel purified.

Jinapriya: When we talk of Vajrasattva, with purity, is that *visuddhi* - is it the same?

S: Well yes, it is within a Mahayanic, in fact a Tantric context. But yes, the figure of Vajrasattva embodies absolute purity, not just in the psychological, not just in the emotional or moral sense, but in a metaphysical sense, because it's purity from the beginning. So the concept of Vajrasattva is quite important. Perhaps it is quite significant that a lot of you are attracted by the figure of Vajrasattva even **though** he represents purity. But perhaps because the context is so very different, it's a different kind of figure. There's nothing anaemic about it, nothing wishy-washy and sentimental about it.

Kulananda: Not the slightest hint of guilt.

S: Or even of freedom from guilt, because even if you speak in terms of freedom from guilt, the point of reference is still guilt. He's not even free from guilt. He doesn't know anything about guilt or about being free from guilt. Those words are not in his vocabulary. Never have been and never will be.

Kulananda: So purity in the Buddhist sense comes very close to *sunyata*. One could say that, yes.

Sagaramati: The mantra from the Manjugosha practice - *Om svabhavasuddham sarvadharma* - that's all *dharma*s are pure. That's pure not in the moral sense but pure in a what you said - a metaphysical sense.

S: Yes, metaphysical. [78]

Kulananda: Existential.

Sagaramati: It's not existential.

S: You could say that *sunyata* is pure of all concepts, it's purity in that sort of sense.

Voice: What did you say about, I think you said something about purity and *sunyata*?

Sagaramati: In an existential sense.

S: It isn't just moral purity. It's not simply purity from negative emotions, or unskilful emotions - it's purity from misconceptions of reality, it's purity from delusion. It's both of those.

Kulananda: Experiential purity. The experience of *sunyata* as an experience of purity.

Sagaramati: But even in the five precepts, the positive version, you say 'I purify my mind.' But nobody gets up and says 'Oh, to hell with this!'. *[Laughter]* Nobody has mentioned anything about any Christian or Catholic connotations - at all. So we must accept it.

S: But how do you feel about saying 'I purify my mind'? Does this raise sort of ex-Catholic hackles or anything like that?

Ruchiraketu: It can do at times. Yes, it does.

Sagaramati: I find myself, I am beginning as an ex-Catholic to accept maybe some things are actually quite, well, not harmful in the Catholic church, that there are some positive elements in it.

S: I must say that I couldn't help noticing, following the events of the papal six days, the extent to which Catholics, even the pope, now use modern language. They talk about commitment, openness, they are also using these terms now. It's quite extraordinary. They really are singing a different tune. But you know, whether, what shall I say? *[Short pause]* whether the story line has really changed, that's I think a different matter. They are using all this sort of language, which we also use, but I think they still are referring back to their strictly Catholic concepts. They are using these terms which they know are attractive and go down well with people, really sort of as a substitute for [79] their own dogmatic language. But it's the dogmatic language that they are really speaking, that's the undertone all the time. That's the accompaniment that you don't hear. You only hear the overtone as one might call it. I don't think they use those terms with complete sincerity, with complete appreciation of their meaning. What it really **means** to be open. If they really were open could there **be** a Catholic church? *[Laughter]* Could there **be** a pope? If they were really open. But they use this language, certainly. Openness means openness to the truth. Well, what is the truth? Truth means Catholic truth. I mean this constant sort of sleight of hand with Catholicism. Freedom, but freedom to obey. *[Laughter]* 'Real freedom is not the freedom to go **against** God. That isn't freedom at all because you're in bondage and slavery then to your own selfish will. So real freedom is obeying the will of God.' So they may use the language of freedom but that's what they mean. So they don't mean by freedom what we mean. They don't mean by openness what we mean. They don't mean by commitment what we mean. But they use the same language, which can be very confusing; though I am sure they are confusing, not to say misleading, some young people nowadays by adopting to some extent this more popular kind of language which is very widely current.

Hridaya: This pope too is a bit of a literary man, isn't he?

S: Yes. I think he is very clever, very skilled. Shall we stop for a drink for a few minutes? *[Pause for tea break.]*

[..... end of tea break discussion follows.....]

Jinapriya: a basic shift in our whole sort of appreciation of the whole thing.

Chintamani: The Elizabethans and the Puritans.

S: Perhaps we should say first of all we had the Romans, the late Romans with far too much licence; then you had the Christians with far too much repression; now we've got to get back to a healthy attitude and the ancient Greeks. *[Pause]* The new Atticism.

Jinapriya: It's interesting that Greeks are very sort of physical, ugly sort of people, but there's none of lurid hushed tones - you know what I mean? - that pertains to bodies. *[Laughter]*

S: They were physically healthy and athletic, but they weren't [said in an American West Coast Accent] 'into their bodies' [Laughter] They didn't have women leading massage retreats. [Laughter] Say no more. [Laughter] Back to the subject.

So path of purity, *Visuddhi Magga*. Maybe someone should remind me sometime that we ought to have somewhere or other around the Movement, a study group on that *sutta* in the *Majjhima-Nikaya*, the *Ratnabhanita sutta* where these seven stages of purification are dealt with. Maybe Sagaramati will get to it before I do. [Laughter] In which case it won't be necessary. [Laughter] [80]

So:

As the third characteristic applies not only to the conditioned but also to the Unconditioned, in this case the all-inclusive term *dharma* is used instead of the word *samskaras*, which denotes only the conditioned.

Do you notice this distinction? The word *dharma*s is a term which can be used within the context of the conditioned as well as the context of the Unconditioned. I take it that everyone is familiar with this kind of usage of the word *dharma*; as meaning not the teaching in this context, not the basic spiritual law, but the - what shall I say - the essential elements of existence. The Ultimate elements. Even, according to the Abhidharma, the irreducible elements of existence. [Pause]

Nagabodhi: I thought the Unconditioned was meant to be void of the three marks. I thought the three marks, impermanence, insubstantiality and *dukkha*, applied to the conditioned and that the characteristics...

S: Yes. The conditioned has the three marks, of the painful, the transitory and the insubstantial. The Unconditioned has only the mark of the insubstantial. That is the common mark, as between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. Both are equally, in Mahayana terms, void.

Ratnaketu: Insubstantial.

S: Yes, insubstantial in the sense of void. The conditioned, one could say, is painful, transitory and void, whereas putting it in positive terms, the Unconditioned is blissful, eternal and void.

Kulananda: Eternal and void?

S: You see, so the voidness, the insubstantiality, is the common factor. This is, as it were, to suggest, even within the Hinayana context, that there isn't an altogether rigid or absolute distinction between conditioned and Unconditioned; they have in a sense a common nature. The duality is not complete, not total, not irreducible.

Voice: They are both void.

S: They are both void. [Pause] Well, put it in this way, this is a sort of novel approach in terms of the reactive and the creative. Put it in this way - in terms of change. We were talking about this, I think, in a sense, on Friday evening. Putting it paradoxically, both the conditioned and the Unconditioned change. We mustn't be misled by this term Unconditioned in English here. The conditioned changes in the sense that there is an alternation between factors which are opposites. The Unconditioned changes in the sense that there is not an alternation but a succession between factors which augment the preceding [81] augmenting the succeeding and augmenting the effect of the preceding. Do you see what I mean? But inasmuch as in neither case is there any unchanging element, in that sense both are devoid of permanent unchanging selfhood, and both are void, both are *sunyata*. But of course, they're *sunyata* in a different way, or rather perhaps for different reasons. There is the *sunyata* of the reactive process. There's the *sunyata* of the creative process. But both are *sunyata* - *sunyata* is the common feature, the common factor, the link. Do you see what I mean? So therefore, as I suggested on Friday evening, the stability, or even eternity of the Unconditioned does not consist in it being static and immobile and inert, but in the continuity of the creative process itself; or the constancy of the creative process itself.

Kulananda: Is the creative process a process from the point of view of, as it were, the subject? Or is it creative from the point of view of, as it were, the object?

S: Well, it's both and it's neither. I mean to the extent that there is a subject, to the extent to which there is an object, to the extent to which there is a distinction between the two. It is both, it can be either, and it can be both. But yes, one might say at the same time a point comes when that distinction between subject and object, as we normally experience it, no longer obtains, and it is very difficult for us to form a conception of **that** sort of creative process - where the two as it were, coalesce, subject and object

coalesce. One can have some sort of hint or analogy of it, I think, even in ordinary experience, as when - this is an example I've given several times before - as when, say, one is performing a piece of music, actually performing it. You are performing it, and you as the subject are distinct from the music that you are performing, **but** you can get so much 'into it', to use a fashionable phrase, you become completely at one. You are playing the music, the music is playing you. There isn't that distinction between you and the music which you are playing, it's more like that. It's as though there's a coalescence, or at least a convergence, of subject and object. You the musician and the music.

Kulananda: One does have the impression that there are processes at work in the world, which are unfolding independently of subjects. Chairs are going on with the process of being chairs and changing. But an Enlightened person starts to perceive it as... How do you get into a creative relationship without perception? [82]

S: Well, you can't get into a mutually creative relationship with something which is not itself creative. There is a limitation. You can have a creative, a **mutually** creative relationship - which is an extension of creativity itself - only with something, which means someone - which is or who is creative itself or himself. Well, put it in more ordinary terms - you can't have a creative relationship with another individual who is himself completely reactive. So you can't have a strictly speaking fully creative relationship with a chair, or even with a tree.

Kulananda: That would suggest, then, that a chair, or a tree, was an object apart from oneself,

S: In common-sense terms yes, but again, going outside Buddhism, there's the Blakean vision of things as people. Do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: Yeah, but then again that must then allow some space for creativity in the relationship.

S: But put it in this way. To the extent that things are, or to the extent that things are perceived as, non-people, let us say, non-individuals, non-creative, to that extent a fully creative, i.e. mutually creative, relationship with them is not possible.

Sagaramati: Wouldn't the idea about *tathata*, - seeing things as 'such as they are'?

S: That's a different thing. That is in a way one-sided. In a way you've got a one-sided absolute. You can see that one Absolute **in** other beings, but that is distinct from having a creative relationship with the being himself which would be only possible if that being had a conscious realisation **himself** of *tathata* to some extent. All right, you say a stone is *tathata*, but you can't have a fully mutual creative relationship with a stone unless the stone **realises** that it is *tathata*. So the only object that can realise *tathata* is a human being, so the only object - using that term - with whom you can have a fully creative, that is to say mutually creative relationship, as distinct from simply seeing Ultimate Reality **in** that object, is another human being - a **creative** human being. And this, you may say, is the significance of the *sambhogakaya* and of the Pure Land. The *sambhogakaya* is the 'Body of Mutual Enjoyment' of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Kulananda: The *dharmakaya* reflected too.

S: You can see the *dharmakaya* in all beings, but to have that **full** experience of communication, have a fully creative, a mutually creative relationship, with all things, those things have themselves to have the experience that you have. Do you see what I mean. After all the Tathagata has **three** 'bodies', and one mustn't give over-emphasis to the *dharmakaya*, even the *dharmakaya*. The complete experience includes the *sambhogakaya*. [83]

Kulananda: There is an element of duality?

S: There is an element of reciprocity. There is not an element of duality, **really**. The previous position will be dualistic, because you would be making an ultimate distinction between the absolute and the relative, the conditioned and the Unconditioned; and you would be accepting that it was enough, it was sufficient, simply to see the Unconditioned **in** the conditioned. But that is not the point of view of the fully developed Mahayana, because it leaves out the *sambhogakaya*; leaves you with only the *rupakaya* and the *dharmakaya* - using those terms. So there is also this other aspect of mutual enjoyment, of creativity, which is only possible with other creative individuals.

Sagaramati: At the same time wouldn't you see, say, a cat, if you were say Enlightened you see sort of cattiness, you would see, well imagination would be involved, and you wouldn't see the same cat as you saw.

S: No, you wouldn't. You would see the *dharmakaya* in the cat, but you would not have a *sambhogakaya* relationship with the cat. That would only be possible if the cat evolved and became more human in a way. So this is why it's human beings that are at the centre of the Mandala. The Pure Land is occupied mainly by Enlightened human beings; and trees and animals and so on occupy a quite subordinate position. They are there, they are included in the Mandala, but their position is peripheral.

Kulananda: I was wondering about this Superconsciousness which pervades everything; a sort of intelligent fabric of the universe, in some ways. How much credence do you give to that? Whether one can't enter into a relationship with that.

S: Well, perhaps you can; but in order to enter into a relationship with that you have yourself to be creative and to have at least some measure of that. I mean just as you can see a cat as a cat, but unless the cat can see you as a human being no full relationship is possible. So all right, assuming that there is this Cosmic Intelligence, that Cosmic Intelligence may perceive you; and may perceive the Absolute in you; may even perceive itself in you. But do **you** experience that Cosmic Intelligence? If you don't, no mutual relationship between you is possible. A mutual relationship is something quite different. It's like - I mean there's the relationship between parent and child - or let's say, to make it more extreme and intelligible, parent and baby. The parent may [84] be fully aware of the baby, and may understand the baby, but the baby is not aware of the parent in the same way. Therefore can there be a mutual relationship between them? No, the relationship is very one-sided, because the baby does not see the parent in the way that the parent sees the baby - because the baby is a baby and not a mature human being. But the normal process should be that when the baby grows up, when the baby becomes an adult, then there should be mutual, a fully mutual relationship, between the parent and the child. This doesn't usually happen, of course, unfortunately, for one reason or another, but this is what should happen. Aside from the question of the greater worldly experience of the parents, in purely human terms there should be a fully mutual relationship between them, because the baby is no longer a baby; the baby is a mature human being. They should be able to relate now as mature human beings. But very often that doesn't happen. In the eyes of the parents not able to see the baby beyond a certain point, the baby remains a baby.

And Christianity is like that you see. In Christianity, it seems, you are always a child. Whereas in the case of Buddhism you may start off as an unenlightened being but you can become an Enlightened being and enter into fully mutual relationships with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas eventually. But in the case of Christianity that is not possible. You can become a saint, even enjoying the Beatific Vision, but that Beatific Vision is not fully mutual, because you can never become God, as it were. You can see God and God sees you, but God as it were sees more of you than you see of God, because you are still a creature, essentially a creature. You were created by God out of nothing. So there's absolutely no comparability between you. The Creator and the creature are absolutely incommensurable. I've quoted I think once before a little phrase of Francis Thompson's where God is supposed to be speaking in one of his poems, and he addresses the soul as 'My dear nonentity.' [Laughter] This is very significant, isn't it?

But anyway, to get back to the original point, we mustn't forget the *sambhogakaya*. We mustn't forget that to see Reality in all things in the universe isn't enough. To see Reality everywhere isn't enough. Though it's the profoundest spiritual experience, in a way, it isn't complete. There also needs to be that mutual recognition and enjoyment between, as it were, creative individuals - or at the highest level, between Enlightened beings. It's not enough that one sees the true nature of the other. It's an addition, or it's an increment to your experience if you each recognise that in the other simultaneously. Otherwise it's like the parent just understanding the child, without being understood by the child. That is why it really should not be possible for an adult, a mature human being, to be fully satisfied with its communication with a baby; with a child.

Now a woman - I hope I am not treading on dangerous ground here - finds it much more easy, I think, to be satisfied with a communication with the child, [85] with the baby. I think for a man that is more difficult - to be absorbed in the communication with someone less developed in that way. That has, perhaps, implications that we won't go into this morning. Leave you just a few things to think about.

But anyway all this has come out of consideration of the fact that the third *lakṣaṇa*, the third characteristic of *anatman*, or in more metaphysical Mahayana terms, *śūnyata* is common to both the conditioned and the Unconditioned. And that has various implications, as that we don't see the 'Unconditioned', single inverted commas, as something inert but as in itself a process, but a creative process, and there's eternity consisting in its constancy.

End of Tape Four, Tape Five

S: So to repeat:

As the third characteristic applies not only to the conditioned but also to the Unconditioned, in this case the all-inclusive term *dharma* is used instead of the word *samskaras*, which denotes only the conditioned. Sometimes a fourth *laksana*. 'Nirvana alone is peace', is added to the original set of three.

They are then called the four *mudras*, I believe.

This obviously applies only to the Unconditioned.

'Nirvana alone is peace'. Perhaps we could say a few words about peace. You know, the conception of Nirvana as peace. I suspect that the original Sanskrit word here is *nirodha*. No, no, it isn't that. No, it isn't *nirodha*. It's, oh what is it? It's, sort of, pacification. What is the Sanskrit word? It begins with an S. It's sa- something. I can't think of it at the moment. [Pause] It's the quiescence, therefore pacification, therefore peace. [Pause] But, certainly, the English word 'peace' probably does convey the connotation quite adequately. [Pause] We haven't got *Systems of Buddhist Thought* in the..?

Voice: No.

S: No. That would give it. Anyway, I might think of it in a minute. But, anyway, the term really... [86]

Voice: *Shanta*?

S: It's not *shanta* but it's a similar word. It suggests the subsidence, that's the literal meaning of the word.

Sagaramati: Subsidence?

S: Yes, subsidence. It's the subsidence, the dying out, the dying away of everything disturbing. That is the whole samsaric process.

Voice: Is it *prasarabhi*?

S: No, no, it's not that. No. But anyway, you get the idea? That everything disturbing, everything painful, just subsides, is pacified completely, permanently, so that Nirvana, inasmuch as it represents that state of subsidence of the mundane, is the state of peace. Yes? But we don't very often present Nirvana as peace. Do we? Any more than we speak of it very often as purity. So why is this? I mean one would have thought that peace would have been a very attractive way of presenting Nirvana.

Hridaya: We've all grown up with various negative descriptions.

S: Well, has it? One would have thought that after two world wars we would have grown up with very positive associations of the word peace. Yes?

Hridaya: Well, I mean, Nirvana as being what you've got rid of rather than...

S: Well, isn't there a lot that we'd like to get rid of? Be only too happy to get rid of? I mean, surely, the state in which you'd got rid of suffering, surely, that should be a most attractive proposition. But why - I mean, if it is the case - why do people seem not very ready to think of Nirvana or the 'Goal', inverted commas, of the spiritual Life as a state of absolute peace?

Voices: [inaudible] sleepy.

S: Not exciting enough?

Voice:[mumbles] Not enough stimulation. [87]

Ratnaketu: Yes, it's not that really high-power experience. [Laughter]

S: Who wants to be stimulated? I mean those who are already dull and apathetic, perhaps, who want to be stimulated.

Jinapriya: I didn't realise that it is that unpopular. I've always found it very helpful to think of it, of peace [Laughter], as an element of Nirvana.

S: Well, put it this way. We often speak in terms of gaining Enlightenment. We speak in terms of Supreme Wisdom. We speak in terms of Compassion. We don't often speak in terms of Peace, with a capital P. Do we? Even my own lectures. I don't, do I? So often?

Nagabodhi: Isn't it - I've always thought that it might be to do with a rejection on our part of the hippy mentality. You know peace and love. Very laid back...

S: Well, in my own case, that couldn't be so, because my own lectures and writing antedate the hippy movement. *[Laughter]* If I may say so.

Nagabodhi: But you might have had that in mind in the West when you came to...

S: Yes. But that is possible. I can't say that I consciously had it in mind but I can remember being a bit put off by this slogan 'Love and Peace'. Some people, some of our Friends in those days, used to sign their letters, 'Love and Peace, George', or whatever it was. Yes. I think that made me retch just a little bit. It all did seem to me rather anaemic but I don't think for that reason I would have not used the word Peace, with a capital P.

Jinapriya: Is it generally in the West we are hyperactive anyway, you know, we can't, the last thing we can do is relax.

S: I think it's got something to do with that. That we don't take very kindly to the idea of - well, peace. Peace. We aren't very peaceful.

Nagabodhi: It's generally quite popular among T.M. people and, you know, church. It just seems like I feel that we've side-stepped it as an antidote... [88]

S: It could be.

Nagabodhi: Our whole getting people into work and seeing...

S: And people getting their energies moving.

Nagabodhi: It's been very much our emphasis. But I don't think it's culturally unpopular. I think it's still...

S: Well, assuming that the current notion of peace corresponds to the traditional Buddhist notion, which is perhaps a question.

Kulananda: I mean it's all very well, when you say 'Peace Is a Fire' where you talk about a Bodhisattva being peaceful without and then blazing with fire within. But it's altogether different. Our cultural notion of peace is quite an anaemic one.

Ratnaketu: Well, pacifism is peacism, because I think even Margaret Thatcher would like peace, you know as opposed to war. But pacifism has definitely got that, you let people throw stones at you and you don't do anything back.

S: Well it's very often you let people throw stones at other people. *[Agreement]* *[Pause]*

Ratnaketu: Or somebody throwing stones at somebody else.

Sagaramati: We did go into the question in Trungpa's commentaries on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. We went into the peaceful deities. The fact was that you just could not stand the experience of peace. It's so overpowering. And that's why the wrathful deities put on a show.

S: It's a bit like equanimity. *Upeksha*. It's as though these positive states, more refined qualities, are very difficult for us to find any analogy to; any satisfactory analogy, you know, in our own ordinary experience. I mean, I have mentioned many times before that Tibetan artists, especially *thangka* painters, say that it's much more difficult to depict satisfactorily a peaceful divinity than a wrathful one.

Ratnaketu: it's interesting because yesterday Sagaramati and I went to the National Gallery and we were looking at this whole endless row of [89] altarpieces, you know, Christian. All these, the artists were trying to portray the Virgin Mary and Jesus, and they couldn't - most of them just couldn't do it. The best they could do was bored-looking ones. Sort of bored.

S: I think in this connection I would go so far as to hazard a generalisation, and say that it's a sign of real spiritual progress when you start having some real feeling for such things as equanimity, 'Peace', in a very positive way. I think you would have to go quite a long way before you could experience those things, or associate with the concept of those things, a really positive experience. *[Pause]* I think ordinarily we miss out on a whole important dimension of spiritual experience. Because we can't get any real inkling of peace, or tranquillity. We see them as just quite negative or anaemic and so on. And non-violence - we see that as just something negative. *[Pause]* It's very difficult for us to get an experience or have a real experience of something which is as it were very very powerful in the sense of being very positive, very vivid but at the same time completely non-coercive. I think it's very very difficult for us to have any experience of anything, or any inkling of anything like that. So that when we do begin to get it, I think it's a sign of real spiritual progress.

Kulananda: But the *dhyanas* are like that.

S: Yes the *dhyanas* are like that but I'm thinking even beyond the *dhyanas*. I'm thinking in terms of something transcendental.

Sagaramati: Because *priti* isn't exactly peaceful.

S: No, *priti* is - well - there has to be *prasarabhi*. The pacification of that more excitable element in *priti*.

Hridaya: When you reach the description of the fourth *dhyana* you realise that there has been agitation or whatever below them - don't you? As you go up you'll find you'll reach the top and realise there's been something ...

S: Yes, yes.

Hridaya: *[Unclear]* [90]

S: Maybe current phraseology, current terminology is indicative. I mean, I notice it in connection very often with blurbs for books. Because, obviously, the people who write the blurbs for the publishers are writing them in such a way as to sell the book. Formerly the blurb might have included words like serious, thought-provoking, and so on. Or even instructive, informative. But now what are the sort of current as it were trendy adjectives used by blurb writers to try to sell a book? Well, you just tell me.

Kulananda: Exciting, stimulating.

S: Exciting, stimulating. Hm, bawdy, lustful, this is quite a new one, in the last couple of years. You see? And I think this is very, very, indicative.

Sagaramati: Do you see that as a degeneration rather, or just as a change?

S: I think I tend to see it more as just a change. But significant nonetheless. *[Pause]* Because it's as though people want to be excited. And any sort of description of the Absolute, even, or Nirvana, which suggests it isn't exciting, you know, doesn't appeal to people very much. You might even try, I don't know whether one could try, say, advertising for the LBC classes, 'meditation is exciting'. Well, one wouldn't be surprised to see an ad. of that sort. But in a sense meditation **is** exciting, but again in another maybe even deeper sense it's the opposite of that.

Voice: Would you say that ...?

S: *[interrupting]* Well, you see, our mind - it's as though we'd find it very difficult to conceive of a mental state which is so profoundly satisfying, in which you are so happy, so content, you just require **no** excitement. Do you see what I mean? I mean, on the highest level it means, well, Nirvana is the only peace. But that *[laughs]* doesn't attract us. We want excitement, stimulation, variety, change. I think that's **not** a very healthy sign. It seems to be a sign of a corrupt and diseased organism with hectic, feverish activity.

Kulananda: Bhante, do you think we can pacify our way to Enlightenment? I mean ...[91]

S: Well, one can certainly think of the way to Enlightenment in those terms of the gradual, complete, and eventually final pacification of all unskilful mental states. Of all unrest. Of all reactivity.

Kulananda: But at the same time we do seem to need to generate a considerable amount of energy.

S: Yes, I think that we have to be very careful that we're generating and properly directing our energy and not just making ourselves restless and agitated, whereas before we were merely dull and inert. You can think you're being active when you're merely being restless.

Ratnaketu: When I sometimes look at statues of the Buddha meditating you get the feeling that he's not doing anything at all, but you couldn't push him over if you tried, you know, it just - he has got an immense amount of energy but he's ..

S: He's not sitting there just limply.

Ratnaketu: ... not sitting there, yes he's not just physically passive, he's....

S: Well he's also capable of uttering his lion roar. *[Laughter]*

So,

For convenience of exposition we shall review the marks attaching to conditioned existence, and their corresponding mental perversities. not in the traditional order but in that of the ugly, the impermanent, the insubstantial, and the painful.

Now while you're just considering why I have reversed the traditional order I shall just go and do something else for a few minutes and then come back to you. *[Pause]*

Before we go on, though, could I backtrack a little bit? Something that has just occurred to me. Talking about purification, talking about purity, to what extent is a subjective feeling of purity dependent upon or helped by an objective state of cleanliness. (**Voices:** Ah-ha.) Do you see what I mean?

Voice: I would say ninety percent. [92]

Nagabodhi: Do you mean physically?

S: Of oneself and of one's immediate surroundings.

Jinapriya: Very much so. I mean I think just on a psychological level I would have thought a lot of washing and things like that that people do is more psychologically based rather than an objective need. And I'm also - comparing it to when I have had a sauna or something, and that just affects one's mental states as well, and in many respects it's almost like a physical version of the Vajrasattva practice, quite literally feeling clean.

S: Well, one knows, of course, quite well that mental purity is a quite different thing from physical cleanliness and one does know that one can subsist apart from the other, but nonetheless, I mean, at the beginning of one's spiritual life one is only too grateful for any little help that one can get. So might it not be the case that practically speaking it is rather difficult, or rather **more** difficult, for people to experience a feeling of mental purity if they are living, let's say, in physically dirty surroundings? So that, therefore, they should be more careful about their surroundings in this respect. That at least where they live - where they work they may not be able to control things - but at least where they live. Do you see what I mean? And, therefore, especially within a community, should not more attention, perhaps, be given to this aspect of community life?

Nagabodhi: Was it your little visit just then? *[Laughter]*

S: Perhaps it was. *[Laughter]* You know, just, I mean I hope I'm not being too crude. *[Laughter]* I hope I'm not being too down to earth, I hope I don't, sort of, disgust anybody, but I do notice, I have noticed that there are people who after these little visits, as you call them, don't, sort of, follow up the little visits by the ablutions which in some cultures are considered indispensable on such occasions - even when they are cooking.

Jinapriya: Ah.

S: Ah yes. Do you see what I mean? So it becomes not only a question of cleanliness but even of hygiene. Even of health. Do you see what I mean? I mean I have seen on many occasions, I'm sorry to say, people going straight into the toilet, straight out again and carry on with the cooking. I think that's really quite dreadful. They shouldn't do that. People should be very aware of these sort of things. So perhaps we should be a bit more practical and think in terms of cleanliness as a means of helping us achieve - I chose my words quite deliberately - a **feeling** of purity. It's a psychological feeling, and it is a positive feeling, but it doesn't necessarily mean that we are completely free, even temporarily, of

unskilful mental states, but I think it does have - I think it is a positive experience - if we even just **feel** pure, feel, as it were clean. Do you see what I mean? Rather than feeling a bit grubby and all the rest of it. A bit soiled. So, I think, yes, it is an important aspect of community life. I mean, when you are building a community, as when people are building this place, originally maybe it was just a building site, well, cleanliness was out of the question. It would have been a joke. But now one can begin to think about that very seriously and keep the place clean and tidy, and aesthetically pleasing - well that will come on a little bit later, when we consider this particular *laksana*. But I mean, certainly we can think in terms of cleanliness as conducing to, well, let's say, a degree at least of feeling of purity of mind.

Sagaramati: There are some communities I've seen in the last few months, I wouldn't actually live in them because the standards in the kitchens and things like that are so awful. It really is. So awful. I just wouldn't - I used to live like that but I just wouldn't go back to it.

S: Anyway, anyone disagree? Is anyone reacting against or feeling *[Laughter]* a need to react against the cleanliness and spic-and-span order of a middle-class home? *[Laughter]*

Graham Stephen: Is that what you're advocating?.

Sagaramati: It's a question of finding the women to do it. *[Laughter]*

S: No! I would say it's a question of **not** finding the women to do it. It is a question of doing it oneself. I think they are not all that great themselves anyway. *[Laughter]* They don't clean things, don't believe that, and they hang a little curtain up over the dirt. *[Laughter]* [94]

Jinapriya: I'm wondering if it's something like when things are tidy, actually it's to do with sort of order as well, isn't it?

S: Yes. You feel you are in the midst of a mandala rather than in the midst of a sort of dust heap, junk yard. I mean order is beauty, in a way.

Ratnaketu: It's one of the things I noticed about Buddhism when I first came in contact, that Buddhism itself seemed to be clean and clear.

S: Ah. Uncluttered.

Sagaramati: I think we can go a wee bit far. I find this with cockroaches. People have a horrendous reaction to cockroaches. I quite like them! *[Laughter]* I mean, I feel no antipathy. I don't believe they are any dirtier than human beings.

S: But what does one mean by dirt? Dirt is defined as matter in the wrong place. I think cockroaches in the kitchen are in the wrong place because they carry germs of disease.

Sagaramati: They are relatively clean.

Kulananda: Apparently they are merely indicative of matter in the wrong place rather than - they are symptomatic rather than the cause.

S: Well, it is possible for people to be personally clean, clean in their personal habits but at the same time be carriers of disease germs. So I think there's this inseparable connection between cockroaches, however clean, and disease germs, well, cockroaches have to go. Hmm?

Graham: They did go.

S: They have gone. *[Laughter]* It does seem, though, that not enough importance is attached to this whole question of cleanliness in communities. It doesn't only have a hygienic and medical significance. It has a psychological, perhaps even ultimately spiritual significance, so should not be neglected.

Hridaya: It is interesting we still use the same words - clutter, [95] chaotic, untidy.

S: Well, in mediaeval English I believe, cleanliness, was used, whereas in modern English we've used the word purity. 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' was the original phrase. And cleanness of heart was often used as an expression rather than purity of heart. Cleanness of heart. A clean virgin. That expression was used. A pure virgin. But would clean do better than pure? Could you accept a clean virgin? *[Laughter]* I mean assuming we could find one. *[Laughter]*

Jinapriya: I mean the psychological significance is much much older than any medical significance. Because people have been cleaning things longer than any theory of microbes.

S: Yes, right, yes.

Jinapriya: So it's a sort of psychological satisfaction.

S: Well, you may remember that the Buddha uses the image of a man who has a bath and wraps himself in a clean white cloth or robe as a simile for the fourth *dhyana*. A feeling of cleanliness and purity, remoteness from everything dirty, unclean, impure, unskilful etc., etc.

Voice: It's like when you've been doing something pretty hard, after you've been running or something and you have a shower. I mean you've obviously got a sweat on you but there's not, I would have thought, much medical risk of you spreading anything horrendous. But you just feel so much better when you've, you know, cooled down by the shower.

S: Well, perhaps, again it is symptomatic that Christianity during the Middle Ages, well, during the Dark Ages, closed down all the baths. Bathing was discouraged. Washing was discouraged.

Voice: Really?

S: Oh yes. And dirt or even lice were considered, you know, indicative [96] of saintliness. We're still suffering from that, you know.

Voice: [Unclear]

S: You weren't aware of that? Baths were associated with degenerate pagan civilisations. The institution of baths, I think, crept into Europe from the Muslims.

Kulananda: From the Romans.

S: No, I think that tradition was broken down and then the tradition was re-introduced after the Crusaders had had contact with the Moslems. I mean Moslems attached importance to ablutions, because they have to wash, I believe their arms, their hands up to the elbow, and wash their feet, and I believe their faces too before they pray, before they enter the Mosque or before they do their *namaj*. There's been no - I think in Judaism there is a corresponding obligation but Christianity got away from all that.

Jinapriya: Well, the waters of baptism is the main washing activity.

S: Well it's done once and for all.

Jinapriya: Yes, once and for all.

S: And also significantly enough, though perhaps we shouldn't pursue the theme too much, it became just a few drops. [Laughter]

Voice: Except the Baptists.

S: But they were a very much later phenomenon. But, anyway, perhaps we've made the points sufficiently. And perhaps communities generally could bear this in mind. As I said, not only the hygienic and medical value of cleanliness but even its psychological value.

All right then: *asubha*, the fourth *laksana*. But do you have any ideas about why I reversed the order? Why deal with *asubha* and *subha* first? I think I remember but see if you guess at it.

Sagaramati: It brings what comes after in a more positive context. [97]

S: Yes. This is basically the reason, yes. One tries to establish a certain contact with emotional positivity first, so you don't see the others either in a rather negative way or in exclusively theoretical or intellectual terms.

So

Asubha, which means not only ugly but also horrid, disgusting, repulsive, or impure, is best understood by referring to the word from which it is derived by the addition of a negative prefix.

Prefix it with A-*subha*, it is **not** something. So what is that something which it is not? *Subha* [*shubha*], to give it the correct pronunciation.

Subha, literally 'purity', really means beauty, though beauty of the spiritual rather than of the sensuous order. It is pure beauty in the Platonic and Neoplatonic sense of something shining in a world of its own above and beyond concrete things, which are termed beautiful only so far as they participate in its perfection.

I'm not saying, because I use this sort of language, that I'm necessarily literally subscribing to Platonic or even Neoplatonic philosophy. I'm trying to give some sort of sense of what this term means. But certainly this is the sort of impression you get from very much of Shelley's poetry. Yes? That of a 'sense of something shining in a world of its own above and beyond concrete things, which are termed beautiful only so far as they participate in,' that is to say, partake in or reflect, 'its perfection.' So this is what *subha* means. It's a very sort of refined, almost rarefied conception. This pure beauty. Something which is pure. Something shining, bright, beautiful, but pertaining to a much higher world. Something much more refined, Something, if I dare use the term, sort of angelic. I mean the word angel was a bit debased during the Victorian period but it seems to be coming back into its own, It seems that it is becoming possible to speak of the angel or the angelic in a positive way.

Hridaya: More pertaining to the *sambhogakaya*.

S: Yes, yes. So [98]

When Buddhism insists that all conditioned things are *asubha* [that is to say non-pure, non-beautiful], it does not mean that we have to regard a flower, for instance, as essentially ugly, but only that in comparison with the beauties of a higher plane of reality those of a lower plane are insignificant. Beauty and ugliness are relative terms. We cannot really see the conditioned as *asubha* until we have seen the Unconditioned as *subha*.

Now don't take that in a too extreme way. Let me try and put it more practically. You have the conception or you have the picture of degrees of reality, degrees of beauty, degrees of purity, from the lower to the higher, the higher still, the highest of all. And one's aim, obviously, is to make an ascent, a sort of spiritual ascent, from the lower to the higher degrees of reality. From the lower to the higher degrees of beauty, purity, and so on. But how does one do that? Well, take the example of the flower, since I mentioned that. You see a flower. You appreciate its beauty. but you recognise that the beauty of the flower is a beauty of quite a low order. You want to go from the beauty of the flower to beauties of a higher order. So how do you do that? You don't simply disregard the flower. You don't simply say, out of sort of sheer intellectual conviction, 'The flower isn't very beautiful. I ought not to be really appreciating that.' The flower is really quite ugly. Because you don't actually perceive the flower as ugly. You perceive the flower as beautiful. So what do you do? You increase your appreciation of the beauty of the flower. You dwell upon that. And then you try to, as it were, imagine, say, something which is twice as beautiful. Maybe to begin with a flower which is twice as beautiful - maybe a more beautiful colour, a more beautiful scent, more beautiful petals - and you try to get a feeling for something which actually does go beyond the flower, which is more beautiful than a flower. And you try to direct your attention more and more on to that. And in that way start forgetting about the flower, and starting to appreciate and experience something which is actually even more beautiful than a flower. But you don't, as it were, get there by just throwing aside the flower and saying, 'It's quite ugly after all,' purely, as it were, out of intellectual conviction. [99]

So this is why, I say, 'we cannot really see the conditioned as *asubha* until we've seen the Unconditioned as *subha*.' You can't really see the limitations of the beauty of the flower until you have got some experience of beauty of a higher order. Then you can look back as it were, and see that the flower wasn't so beautiful after all. But you can't quite do it the other way round. Yes? By thinking that you can appreciate the beauty of the higher order more by appreciating the beauty of the flower less, without having experienced the beauty of the higher order more.

Hridaya: You are sort of suggesting that you are building your vision each time a higher level, on, sort of, lower levels.

S: Yes, yes, right, yes.

Hridaya: Perhaps like meditation.

S: Yes, you can't reach the higher stage by cutting off the lower stage from beneath your feet. Of course, one must be very careful that this does not provide one with convenient rationalisations. And I've

deliberately used the image of the flower. I could have used other images. Maybe other images will come in a minute. But, I mean, this is what I'm getting at in principle.

Jinapriya: Out of the fullness of the lower does the higher arise.

S: Hm, yes. Well, you appreciate the beauty of the flower so much that it spontaneously carries you to a higher level. To a higher kind of beauty.

Hridaya: There seem to be parallels with altitude, as well. You don't appreciate that the valley is lower until you actually move up the hillside.

S: Yes, that's true.

Hridaya: The higher up you go....

S: Otherwise it's only a statistic that you've been given.

Hridaya: You don't really experience it as being lower. [100]

Kulananda: I've a sense, Bhante, though, it's almost being decadent to indulge in this sort of practice - thinking about Shelleyesque beauty or Keatsian beauty - to actually involve oneself in it strikes me as being a bit... well, it seems to me personally I feel it's almost like being a dead end and a bit dangerous. I don't know but I suspect it could be also because[unclear] is quite destructive of one's own lower nature almost, that actually it presents a threat to engage....

S: [interrupting] Well, it does really in the long run. Yes. Because the higher level is always, as it were, an enemy of the lower level, inasmuch as it supersedes it. Though at the same time it fulfils it. Because what you are enjoying in the flower is the beauty. So if you really enjoy beauty you'd want to enjoy more. More beauty than the flower is able to give you.

Kulananda: I suppose the idea that it is decadent is bound up with guilt.

S: I think you are using the word decadent in a somewhat idiosyncratic fashion.

Kulananda: Hm. Maybe this refers back to your piece on 'Hedonism and the Spiritual Life' and, perhaps, the Christian usage of the word hedonism.

S: Yes, talking about 'Hedonism and Spiritual Life', since you introduced the topic - this is not just a little bit of publicity for my eventually forthcoming article, but it was quite instructive - an experience I had in this connection. I have mentioned it before but I'm going to mention it again. I hope I haven't mentioned it to the same people. Not to all of them anyway. But somebody, out of the goodness of his heart, tried to obtain, or to produce an illustrated title page or something of that sort for 'Hedonism and Spiritual Life', and gave someone a sort of commission, and eventually something was produced and submitted to me, and I found it really quite awful, because my recollection of my original book review or article was that I'd tried to present pleasure as a positive value. That is to say pleasure dissociated from craving. I tried, I think, to make the point that pleasure was not something in itself unskilful. Unskilfulness entered into the situation when pleasure became the occasion of grasping and craving - or rather craving and grasping - but that Buddhism did not devalue pleasure as such. And I saw pleasure in this sense as something innocent and sort of carefree and something that was compatible with the spiritual life. But the images [101] that were evoked in the mind of the person to whom the commission was given were of a very different nature. They were slightly satanic, and rather crudely erotic and someone commented that it was a bit Aubrey Beardsley-like, which wasn't what I'd had in mind at all. Somebody else had another go and produced something different. But they were just as much a failure in another way. So that sort of underlined for me the fact that people really find it very difficult to have a conception of pleasure which is just pure, sort of - well, I was going to say guilt-free but it's even more than that - it's pleasure free from any taint of unskilfulness. They find it very difficult to have the idea, even, of innocent pleasure. That in order to make those feelings pleasurable it has to be tarted up with some sort of stimulation, a bit of, well, a bit of something crude and erotic or something a bit satanical. You know, something of that sort. Something a bit unpleasant, a bit negative. I mean pleasure for them has those sort of associations and they seemed unable to **extricate** the experience of pleasure from those sort of associations. I thought this quite revealing, even quite alarming. I mean, I hope I'm not over-generalising just from one little incident, but I think it's pretty characteristic.

Harshaprabha: One idea comes to my mind and that is of somebody diving into water. A sort of illustration.

S: Well, it's as though some people will only dive into the water if there is a lot of mud in it. Or at least a lot of weeds or a lot of rubbish, but they find it difficult to dive into pure water.

Jinapriya: An illustration from Blake would be quite... Glad Day or something.

S: But Glad Day is a little hackneyed, if I might say so. Even Glad Day. Anyway, I believe we now have something from David Hockney.

Jinapriya: Oh dear. *[Laughter]*

S: Well, he is innocent, He's bright and innocent, at least. I would say so. *[Voices interrupt]* Or was it Picasso? I don't think I'm quite so... Never mind, we will see. I'm reconciled to the FWBO being unable to produce an adequate image of 'Hedonism and Spiritual Life', or simple innocent pleasure.

Sagaramati: Can you give some examples of simple innocent pleasures? [102]

S: Well, looking at a flower.

Kulananda: A walk in the country.

Voice: A cup of tea or a swim.

S: A swim.

Nagabodhi: A walk in the hills.

Kulananda: Conversations with a friend.

Sagaramati: Well, these would be the positive counterparts of the third precept. We should be trying to cultivate contentment.

S: I think it's more positive. I think it can be strong, it can be physical, it can be sensuous, but the element of craving and attachment is not there. I mean, theoretically one should be able to experience pleasure even in the most intensely stimulating situations. But usually in situations of that sort craving and attachment just creep in and it becomes unrealistic to think of experiencing pure pleasure in those sort of situations. So I suggest things like looking at a flower or enjoying the breeze. Or a walk, early in the morning when everything is fresh. The dew is still on the ground. It can be intensely pleasurable. Or a warm bath after you've been running. Just to lie there can be an intensely pleasurable experience, without any associations of greed, craving, clinging and all the rest of it. I think - again I return to, or get up on to an old hobby-horse of mine - I think it's very important that there should be an experience of pleasure in people's lives, even spiritual lives. And it's important to remember that meditation involves a strong element of pleasure. Sheer *sukha* and *priiti*. I think human beings or organisms generally cannot thrive without pleasure. But the unfortunate feature is that pleasure is so tied up with craving, clinging, attachment, anxiety, jealousy etc., etc.

End of Side One Side Two [103]

S: You know, at all costs one must learn to separate these. Otherwise you are in a position of having to choose between, well, being quite skilful but without any experience of pleasure or experiencing pleasure but being very very unskilful. One wants to be able to experience pleasure without unskilfulness. I think this is what I found the artist in question had difficulty in conveying. You know, unadulterated pleasure without any experience of unskilfulness. *[Pause]* And I think it's one of the characteristics of Mahayana Buddhist art, and especially Vajrayana Buddhist art, to be able to convey this experience of intense pleasurableness without any association of unskilful mental factors.

Nagabodhi: *[two voices speaking together so what is said is unclear]* ...angels.

S: Yes, a bit. But they are usually a bit subdued. more often than not. There is not quite enough vitality, life, energy.

Nagabodhi: Botticelli's mystical nativity.

S: Botticelli I think goes, well, quite a long way in this kind of direction. Michelangelo doesn't, I'm afraid. He's much too heavy, too serious. There seems not to have been enough joy in his life.

Jinapriya: A lot of conflict.

S: Anyway, ‘we cannot really see the conditioned as *asubha* until we have seen the Unconditioned as *subha*.’

Similarly, within the conditioned itself, in order to see the ugliness and impurity of objects belonging to a lower plane it is necessary to ascend. in meditation,

or let’s say, in heightened aesthetic experience,

to one which is higher. This is the significance of the well-known episode of the Buddha’s cousin Nanda and the heavenly nymphs:

Well, if you don’t mind we’ll allow ourselves to think about heavenly [104] nymphs for just a few minutes. *[Laughter]* I hope, I trust I’m not leading you into unskilful paths. *[Laughter]* So this is from the Pali Canon:

“The Lord said to the venerable Nanda: “You admit it is true that without zest you fare the Brahma-faring, that you cannot endure it, and that, throwing off the training, you will return to the low life. How is this?”

Apparently the Buddha had heard that Nanda, who was a cousin of his, having become a bhikkhu, was now thinking of going back to worldly life, so He called him and this is what He said to him. There are several sort of incidental points we will comment on here. The Brahma-faring. The Brahma-faring was the word for what we call the spiritual life. This is a very important and significant word. The *brahmacarya*, translated here as the Brahma-faring but it’s also the Brahma life. The Brahma experience. The experience of higher and ever higher states of consciousness and being. *[Pause]* So what we call the spiritual life is essentially that. It’s a path. It’s a series of steps, or a flight of steps. It’s an ascent, as I said earlier on, from lower to higher levels of reality, beauty, purity and so on. That is what the Brahma-faring or Brahma life or *brahmacarya*, or Brahma experience, essentially is. So ‘The Lord said to the venerable Nanda: “You admit it is true that without zest you fare the Brahma-faring.”’ So this is quite important. That here is somebody who is faring the Brahma-faring without zest. Does that mean that he’s **really** faring it? No, he’s just going through the motions. All right, he’s a bhikkhu. All right, he’s wearing his yellow robe. All right, he sits and meditates - but without zest, his heart isn’t in it. And I think this is a very common state for people to be in. You’re supposed to have taken up the spiritual life. You’re supposed to be working on your own development. You’re supposed to have gone for Refuge. But maybe it’s all become a bit half-hearted. You’re sort of just going through the motions. Or even you’re supposed to be working in a co-op, you’re just going through the motions. You’re supposed to be living in a community but you’re just going through the motions. You are not putting all your heart and all your self, and all your energy, into it with full zest and enthusiasm. So that was Nanda’s plight. That was Nanda’s position. He fared the Brahma-faring without zest. He admitted that without zest he fared the Brahma-faring and ‘that you cannot endure it, and that, throwing off the training’ - the *siksa*, throwing off these specific spiritual practices, abandoning the specific [105] spiritual practices that enable you to fare the Brahma-faring, ‘you will return to the low life.’ The life of the world, the life of self-indulgence. ‘How is this?’ The Buddha is asking ‘How has it come about? You went forth from home into the homeless life. You started faring the Brahma-faring. You were full of zest and enthusiasm. Now you’ve lost it. You are just carrying on mechanically, dully. And you want to return to our old life. How is this? How has it happened? What is the reason?’ And then he says:

“Revered sir, when I left my home a Sakyan girl, the fairest in the land, with hair half combed, looked back at me and said: ‘May you soon be back again, young master.’ Revered sir, as I am always thinking of that, I have no zest for the Brahma-faring, can’t endure it, and throwing off the training. will return to the low life.”

So what sort of experience does this illustrate? I mean just leaving aside the particular example, the particular thing that Nanda was thinking of, what is the situation, basically?

Hridaya: One particular thing has got stuck in the centre of the mandala.

S: Hm, yes.

Jinapriya: He’s not as integrated as he thought.

S: He’s not as integrated as he thought. That’s true. He hasn’t been able to leave behind, really to leave behind, all those things of his old life, as he thought.

Ratnaketu: The world still lures him.

S: Which also suggests that he hasn't been able to get into the Brahma-faring as much as he had hoped, perhaps.

Kulananda: Wasn't he more or less abducted by the Buddha?

S: Hm?

Kulananda: Didn't the Buddha give him his bowl to carry and follow him into the forest?[106]

S: *[Laughs]* That was the Buddha's skilful means. *[Laughs]* So we're told. I think it was this Nanda. Sundarananda he was called. Handsome Nanda.

Kulananda: So really he didn't actually fully go forth in some ways. Out of a real desire to ...

S: In some ways. But one might say does anybody go forth as a fully integrated being? Don't they require very often some encouragement to go forth? The Buddha just gave a little gentle encouragement. After all, no force was used. *[Laughter]* He just said, 'Please hold my bowl', *[Laughter]*, and he didn't take it back. He just went on walking, although Nanda could have said 'Well, wait a minute. I've got your bowl. I've got to go back. Here it is,' and he could have gone back. But he didn't. Maybe he was too polite. *[Laughter]* But before we go a bit more into the general considerations here what do you make of this 'Sakyan girl, the fairest in the land,' the *jenapada kalyani*,(?), 'with hair half combed, looked back at me and said: "May you soon be back again, young master."' What does that show about **her** attitude?

Nagabodhi: She obviously didn't take him very seriously.

S: She didn't take him very seriously. She was expecting him back. In other words she didn't really accept that he had gone forth.

Kulananda: In the context of the actual story he hadn't. He was about to get married, in fact. He was just walking off to help the Buddha carry his bowl. *[Laughs.]*

S: I think we may say that this is the sort of earlier version. I think there are many elaborations later on. Here she is just looking up and saying, 'I hope you're back soon'. Or 'I think he'll be back before very long'.

Voice: He'll soon get over it.

S: So it was almost as though he was obsessed by this implied invitation. The sense of possibilities not followed up. That he'd been missing out on something that was available. Do you see what I mean? This is very [107] often an important part of people's psychology. They don't want to miss anything. It's not perhaps that they really **want** something but they don't like the idea of missing it if it is available. *[Laughter]* And I think this is also associated with this whole idea of having a broad experience of life and the world before you can get into spiritual life. You don't really want to sort of miss any opportunity that is actually available. As though if you go into the spiritual life you must be missing something. So maybe in Nanda's case it was this sort of idea that he'd missed out on something. That here was something that was available and he'd not taken advantage of the opportunity. *[Pause]*

One could have this attitude towards all sorts of things, say a career, or going to college. It's quite interesting the number of people nowadays who want to go to college. I mean it's as though they feel they'd never had the opportunity. Now they've got the opportunity so almost automatically, perhaps, in some cases, they take advantage of that opportunity just because the opportunity is there. It may not be that they **really** want to go to college. Or that they really want, in some cases, to study those subjects. But if the opportunity is there why not take it? Sometimes that is the sort of attitude. Rather than asking yourself, 'Do I really want to do this? Do I really want to have this?' I think this general attitude of not wanting to miss out on anything is quite indicative of people's general state of mind. *[Pause]* 'Oh, I might as well do it. I might as well have it.' If someone offers you a chocolate, well, 'I might as well'. It's not that you really wanted the chocolate. You might as well have it. So what does this suggest? What does this show about one's mental state, do you think?

Kulananda: Is it *preta*-like?

S: A bit *preta*-like. Not even very strongly *preta*-like. A bit *preta*-like.

Voice: A lack of contentment.

S: Lack of contentment. Lack of positivity. Lack of decisiveness.

Hridaya: A lack of really knowing what you want.

S: Lack of knowing what you really want. Being in a sort of emotional limbo. So perhaps this was an element in Nanda's mental state. We can [107] only speculate to some extent. But anyway this is what he said. And then he said: 'Revered Sir, as I am always thinking of that'. Do you see? Always thinking of that missed opportunity. 'I have no zest for the Brahma-faring, can't endure it, and throwing off the training, will return to the low life.' So what does the Buddha do?

Then the Lord, taking the venerable Nanda by the arm,

The compiler is very polite - he still calls him 'the venerable Nanda',

as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or might bend back his outstretched arm, vanishing from the Jeta grove, appeared among the Devas of the Thirty-Three. At that time as many as five hundred nymphs were come to minister to Sakka, the lord of devas, and they were called 'dove-footed'.

Why were they called dove-footed?

Voices: They had pink feet.

S: Indian women still have these pink feet. Pink soles at least.

The Lord asked the venerable Nanda which he thought the more lovely, worth looking at and charming, the Sakyan girl, the fairest in the land, or these five hundred nymphs called 'dove-footed'.

'O, revered sir, just as if she were a mutilated monkey with ears and nose cut off, even so the Sakyan girl, the fairest in the land, if set beside these five hundred nymphs called "dove-footed" is not worth a fraction of them, cannot be compared with them. Why, these five hundred nymphs are far more lovely, worth looking at and charming.'

So what has happened? I mean one mustn't take the story, mustn't take the anecdote, too literally. What has happened?

Hridaya: Well, maybe in the first sense, the most beautiful thing he's known, or the most captivating thing he's known has been the Sakyan girl. That's sort of at the top of his pyramid. [108]

S: And, of course, there's not only the fact that she was the most, say, beautiful object to come within his experience, there is the fact that so many unskilful mental states, no doubt, are tied up with that. But, yes, nonetheless, perhaps she was the most beautiful object that had come within his view. But now he sees these nymphs. So his attraction, his interest is directed towards something still more beautiful and therefore dissociates itself in a quite natural manner from the Sakyan girl.

Perhaps we could take a less contentious example. Supposing that you really loved art. But so far all you've seen of art are some very ordinary illustrations in a book by a very ordinary artist but you like them. And you might think, 'He's a great artist.' Sometimes one does have this experience. Like when you're quite young and your experience is limited, you really like the painting by a certain painter. You think he's the greatest. But then one day you go to a really good art gallery and you see Raphael. You see Leonardo. You see, oh so many other great artists. You think, 'The artist I admired before, he just isn't anywhere compared with these people. He's nothing.' You can still see in a way what you appreciated in the image before but your range of experience has widened to such an extent you say, 'These other artists are so much greater, and the beauty depicted in **their** paintings is so much greater than what is depicted in that **old** favourite of mine.' That your interest is deflected. Do you see what I mean? It's rather like that. Or when you progress for instance, from jazz and rock-and-roll to Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Handel. It's a bit like that, let us say. But you can't really experience the limitations of the one until your consciousness has been expanded by your experience of the other.

Sagaramati: So what actually did the Buddha do to him? How did the Buddha evoke this experience?

S: Well, one can either take this literally or one cannot. Is it actually possible for one person to give another an experience? This is what it boils down to.

Nagabodhi: Of this order, probably it is, isn't it?

S: The Heaven of the Thirty-Three is not very high. It's still within the *kamaloka*. It's the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Vedic gods of whom Indra is the most prominent. It is still within the *kamaloka*. To my way of thinking this corresponds to art in the ordinary, or the Arts in the less sublime sense. There's a certain degree of refinement. [109] There's a certain degree of, say, enhanced beauty, but it's still within the sense sphere. It's not the **lowest** of the *kamaloka* Heavens. I think it's the second lowest. There's the Heaven of the Four Great Kings and then I think there's the Heaven of Indra, this heaven. But this is not even the *rupaloka*. The *dhyanas* are further on.

Jinapriya: Not even *dhyana*?

S: So, he gave, one might even say he gave, if one uses that expression or thinks in those terms, he gave Nanda an intense, a powerful, aesthetic experience. Perhaps he took him by the hand and took him round a really good art gallery. [Laughter] Perhaps now some of you may appreciate the technique. The very skilful means shown by some of our senior Order Members who take impressionable young men around art galleries.

Kulananda: Well, sometimes that can end in tears.

S: Well, there shouldn't be too many pictures, otherwise it just gets dull and boring. But maybe a few sort of selected examples.

Jinapriya: It's interesting the level it's putting sexual experience on by implication. And in a way it can be over-ridden just by aesthetic experience.

S: Well, I think one must think in terms of a broadening of the context. It's not a question of complete and utter elimination. It's a question of relegation of something to the periphery, whereas perhaps before, it had occupied a position in the centre of the mandala. To take a more neutral example, there is eating and drinking. You can be addicted to food, and you can gorge yourself. On the other hand, eating and drinking can be in the centre of your mandala, as drinking is, say, for the alcoholic. But these things can occupy a position at the periphery of the mandala. You don't stop eating and drinking because you are involved in the spiritual life but you may stop eating and drinking in a particular way. You would certainly stop over-eating. You would [110] certainly stop eating as a means of psychological gratification. You would certainly stop eating in an unhealthy way. You would certainly stop spending a disproportionate amount of money on eating and drinking. But you would still eat and drink. But eating and drinking would have receded to a peripheral part, a peripheral area of your personal mandala. So it's the same with these other things. I mean, it's clear that the Sakyan girl was occupying the centre of Nanda's mandala, because he says, 'I am always thinking of that.' 'I am **always** thinking of that' So if you are always thinking of eating and drinking, well, clearly, those things are in the centre of your mandala. They have got to be pushed towards the circumference. Not that you have to eliminate them. Of course it may be that in order to help you push certain things to the periphery of the mandala, you may have to abstain from them for a certain length of time. You may even have to, say, go on a fast for a few days. Or you may, perhaps, observe silence for some days. Or you may go on solitary retreat. Or you may observe a vow of celibacy for a few weeks or a few months. You may, in order to be able to push certain things to the periphery of the mandala, you may have actually to abstain from them for a while. This may be necessary. But it is a question rather, of rearranging your mandala, rather than necessarily throwing away everything that you've got at present in or too near to the centre. No doubt there are certain completely unskilful things that have to be thrown away completely. But only such things. And it's very doubtful whether there are any specific activities apart from those which are quite obviously opposed to the precepts which have to be thrown away in that manner.

Hridaya: So what the Buddha does here is to actually refine the centre of Nanda's mandala. He actually[inaudible].....

S: In a way, yes. He actually does put his nymphs in the centre now. But clearly after that he should put, say, meditation more in the centre of his mandala.

Voices: [Unclear].....

Sagaramati: Well the Buddha sometimes, but the monks revile him for his attitudes.

S: But that was rather short-sighted because one goes from a lower state to the next higher state. They also would be proceeding in that [111] way. I mean whether it's from second to third to fourth *dhyana*. You might say 'Ha ha, you only do meditation for the sake of the *dhyana* experience.' You could be reviled and ridiculed in the same sort of way. They weren't very understanding, those monks, I would say.

Sagaramati: There did seem to be a factor in him going beyond the *kamaloka*. A spur.

S: That's true. You could say that what they were doing, or should have been doing, was just to urge him to go further. Not to make him ashamed of what he'd done so far. But it would seem that what the Buddha was, in effect, doing was to give Nanda an aesthetic experience, and that shows the, sort of, mediating role of the fine arts. In the Buddha's day there were no fine arts in our modern sense. There was no poetry in the modern sense, no drama. No fiction in the modern sense. No, well, very little, in the way of visual arts in the modern sense. So the Buddha couldn't take Nanda for a walk in an art gallery. Well, he did the next best thing. Perhaps he did something even better. He took him up to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, and showed him five hundred dove-footed nymphs attending upon Indra. But you can see the principle involved. I mean a modern *kalyana mitra* might just hand his young disciple a volume of Shelley. But the principle is the same. You just direct your emotions to something of a more refined, and more truly beautiful nature. You try to lead them upwards in that way.

Ruchiraketu: You've got to be careful not to over-reach, haven't you? You know, like Shelley, for example. If you handed some people Shelley they just wouldn't respond at all. Whereas you'd have to, sort of ...

S: Well, skilful means has to be genuinely skilful. You mustn't hit people over the head with your volume of Shelley.

Ruchiraketu: No, I was thinking that even in a way this does relate to what we were talking about earlier, about music as well. Like I know sometimes if I listen to Mozart, sometimes it just sounds very, sort of, flowery. Very light. Not ..

Voice: No guts.

S: Well. A lot of Mozart is light. A lot of it is light music. But [112] a lot of it isn't.

Ruchiraketu: But I feel that when I'm in that state it's not very good for me to, sort of say well, I must.....

S: What state are you referring to?

Ruchiraketu: Just a state when I hear Mozart, say, and it just sounds flowery and light, then I don't, I tend to then to listen to, say, some rock music though maybe not ...

S: Well one can try another kind of Mozart [*Laughter*], the Requiem.

Sagaramati: Come down to Schubert

S: Or Beethoven, Wagner. But anyway, I think one just has to be aware of the general principle that you need to progress from the less to the more refined. And clearly what constitutes the next step for you depends upon where you are at any particular moment.

Ruchiraketu: So the most important thing really is to be honest about where you are at.

S: No, that's not the most important thing. The most important thing is to ascend from the lower to the higher which, of course, includes or involves being honest about where you are at. You know, people can pretend to enjoy Mozart when actually they don't really enjoy him at all. They would much rather have Bing Crosby. [*Laughter*] There is such a thing as cultural pretentiousness. [*Amid voices and laughter*] There is such a thing as cultural pretentiousness, cultural snobbism and people professing and pretending to enjoy things which they don't in fact enjoy. They might even think they do but they don't.

Jinapriya: That's the feeling one often gets, just the atmosphere of a lot of art galleries.

S: Oh, yes, you get, well, it's really sickening. I've noticed it myself in, well, I won't give an example. I'm afraid, sorry to say it's usually elderly women. But elderly gentlemen too. Going round with their catalogues and gawping at the paintings and you can overhear their utterly fatuous sort of remarks. It's in fact, painful. They're sort of, culture vultures. Well not even vultures. They are, sort of culture, sort of cocks and hens just picking and pecking and scratching [113] around them. [*Laughter*] Well you know what I mean, don't you? It's really dreadful.

Sagaramati: What you were saying earlier about the *sambhogakaya* experience, in contrast to *dharmakaya*, I mean these things you are mentioning, the aesthetic experience, they are always with dead objects. Art or poetry. In my experience is they are not **embodied** enough. That's why they don't, sort of,

hook you enough, because, I mean Nanda here has gone into an actual realm with actual real people but with the artist it's too subjective.

S: I'm not exactly clear what you are saying.

Sagaramati: I feel it isn't powerful enough and with all the people I know who are into music and art, including myself, I don't feel they are actually stimulated enough. [*Sounds of agreement*]

S: But why does one, perhaps, not have a sufficiently powerful experience? I can remember in my own case when I was in my teens and I first encountered classical music, I found it a oh, very, very, powerful experience. Quite overwhelmed. I was quite, well, almost consumed by it. I mean the first time I heard certain symphonies, I remember Mozart and Beethoven especially - I did like Beethoven more in **those** days. [*Laughter*] I went around in a daze for several days. I could hear that music going on for days on end. I couldn't think of anything else. I was completely wrapped up in it. And I can get into that sort of mood quite easily even now. Even though, I mean, so many other interests have arisen since. Even some superior to that. But I don't find it at all difficult to get into this quite rapt enjoyment of music and poetry. Poetry is a **little** more difficult. And, perhaps, the visual arts a little more difficult still. But music, certainly. But very often now I don't feel any need to get into, you know, those sort of experiences because I can have a positive experience without them. I don't need them. If I do listen to music it's an additional enjoyment, an additional dimension. But I don't need music to get me into that sort of state.

Hridaya: One of the difficulties with music particularly, I think, is that you can get stuck with too passive a role. There are very few people who can actually play an instrument, so you take a lot in and sometimes you do get something from it. And you do just keep taking [114] more in. And sometimes then the whole thing ... [*Bhante interrupts*]

S: I think the danger is not so much that you play a passive role, I think in a sense you don't. But you tend to become passive or to play a passive role if you just switch it on a bit mindlessly or just have it on. But I think if you deliberately sit down to listen to a piece of music, in a way, in full seriousness, you're not really playing a passive role. I think you really are participating in the music or the music takes you over. You're not just sort of sitting back and taking it all in. In a sense you are, but there's more to it than that. I think you are only merely passive if you are treating music as muzak or tending to do that.

Voice: Quality not quantity.

S: I think, perhaps, we do listen nowadays, many of us, to music much too indiscriminately. I really find it quite shocking, in a way. Supposing I'm listening to a piece of music myself and sometimes people think I might just be listening to music so they can come in and have a chat or ask me something. It doesn't matter if I miss a few bars. I really find this so obtuse on people's part and so insensitive. It's as though they don't realise what happens when you listen to a piece of music. As though they don't know.

Sagaramati: I find that in India, I must admit.

S: Yes. Though, again, Indian music is of a different kind.

Sagaramati: I mean, I was sometimes listening to Bach, they would come in and they would be utterly oblivious to the fact you are listening to music.

S: Whereas if you had been typing they would have been careful not to disturb you. You are only listening to music. You know it's just a, sort of, well, passing the time. You'd be only too glad to have a chat about serious matters. [*Laugh*]

Ratnaketu: I actually found, Bhante, I went to a few operas, two by Mozart, and I thought that they were really trivial. The story, basically, I thought was just - I don't think you can just land... [115]

S: Well, it's a well-known musical problem of the libretto. It's very difficult sometimes - so one is told - for great musicians to find really good librettos. That is the words to the music.

Ratnaketu: But even the story. I mean, the whole thing was just like a dirty story set to music. [*Laughter*] *The Marriage of Figaro*. They were just running about and you

S: Well, it's about marriage, you know.

Ratnaketu: It wasn't **just** about marriage! [*Voices together and laughter*]

S: I think that is a well known, let's say, drawback of some quite well-known operas - that the librettos are distinctly weak. But you wouldn't be able to say that, perhaps, about the *Magic Flute*, even though there is a certain amount of, sort of, what shall I say, romance - to use another dirty word [*Laughter*] - in it. But one is supposed to listen much more to the music. Pay more attention to the music. It's a long time since I heard the *Marriage of Figaro*. Perhaps it's a mistake to mix up music with words. I mean, some purists do say that the opera is not a pure form of art, because - pure, not in the moral sense, but in the aesthetic sense because - it's a mixture. It should be either one thing or the other. Some people say.

Sagaramati: You can listen to it in Italian, can't you?

S: Mm, yes.

Sagaramati: It's like the voice is another instrument.

S: Well Subhuti and I the other evening heard the *Flying Dutchman* sung in German and I don't think we missed anything. This was up in Norwich. Our own little cultural backwater. [*Laughter*] But anyway the *Flying Dutchman* was on in German and one knew roughly the outline of the story and one didn't need to know any more.

Anyway, I go on to say:

The Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods is only two *kamaloka* sub-planes above the world of men; but regarded even from this level the loveliest human face is repulsive.

This is probably putting it a bit strongly. I probably was still under the influence of the *sutra*. [116]

The *rupaloka* sub-planes, corresponding to the four *rupa-dhyanas*, are higher still. Viewed from these levels the five hundred nymphs called 'dove-footed' are ugly. Thus objects are *subha* in comparison with those of a lower plane, and *asubha* in comparison with those of a higher plane of existence.

Perhaps it's not so much that the beauty of the lower plane comes to be regarded as psychologically repulsive, but you see that the reflection is comparatively very dim. It's as though you've got, in sort of Neoplatonic terms, you've got, say, beauty, in the highest sense and then you've got a series of mirrors. And on the lowest level the mirror is not at all a good mirror so you get a very poor reflection of beauty. But the mirror on the next highest level is a better kind of mirror. You get a more adequate reflection. And then the higher you go the more adequate the reflection. So it's not as though there are different beauties and you, sort of, dislike the lower when you come to know the higher but it's as though, in the higher, you also know the lower better because it is after all the absolute or ultimate beauty with which you are basically concerned. This at least is the Neoplatonic way of looking at it. Do you see what I mean? I'm not suggesting that this is the only valid way of looking at it, but this is historically a quite important and influential way of looking at things. So you are not literally rejecting the beauty of the lower order. You are seeing that it is a less adequate reflection of that same beauty, than the reflection which now you have.

But I think this whole question of the aesthetic and beauty is something that probably needs much more attention paid to it.

Since we're on the subject of beauty, maybe we should connect it with what was said a little earlier on about purity and cleanliness. It is good if your surroundings are beautiful, that is to say your immediate surroundings. It doesn't necessarily mean luxurious or ornate or over-decorated, but they are beautiful in a simple, pleasant, clean, harmonious way. I think perhaps a lot more attention should be given to that. Unfortunately, it very often requires money. But I think when one is working out one's priorities as regards spending, I mean this should be pretty high on the list. I'm talking within the context of communities. It shouldn't be the last thing. Well, if you can afford it after managing everything else, all right, **then** you might put a bit of paint on the walls. It shouldn't be like that. [*Pause*] Padmaloka presently is undergoing a certain amount of renovation and [117] redecoration. Next time you come, with luck you'll see actually new carpets on the stairs and in the corridors, at enormous expense.

Sagaramati: I hope we see new carpets in the Shrine Room. I find the Shrine Room really quite disgusting.

S: Which one?

Voice: The new barn.

S: Ah. That is not going to be the permanent Shrine Room.

Sagaramati: There weren't even any lamp covers. There weren't any lamp shades. There were just bare lamp bulbs. I pointed it out to them and people were quite a bit reactive actually.

S: Well, it's probably, at present, a matter of expense. But that is not going to be the final Shrine Room. The biggest barn is going to be the Shrine Room.

Voice: Really?

S: Yes. There are plans under way for renovating that. It's all been worked out, Originally just as a shell. It'll have to be decorated in stages because it's going to cost a lot of money. But it will be done. But maybe, well, we're talking about all sorts of possibilities. Not only big Buddha images but, maybe, a stained glass, a big stained glass window Buddha. I mean, these are all ideas which have been floated. Even enormous hanging appliqué work Buddhas. Again there are all sorts of possibilities. We are probably going to divide the whole thing horizontally so we can have an upper and a lower floor with the shrine on the upper floor. Possibly with the two ends completely transparent. Triangular-shaped ends. And downstairs just for ordinary meetings, lectures, yoga, etc. But again this is all under discussion at present. But people are very enthusiastic about doing these things. To do everything will cost between fifty and eighty thousand pounds. So clearly it has to be done gradually. What we're working on at present is extra dormitory accommodation. Well no, not dormitory, extra sleeping accommodation. There's going to be four extra rooms, available quite soon, to accommodate sixteen people. Four in each room. And the showers and toilets are going to be made. But, yes, not to speak of shrines, [118] you know, just one's own room, one's living room, kitchen. All these should be pleasing, aesthetically pleasing, as well as clean and tidy. This is my great criticism of the average clean and tidy middle class home. It's normally completely lacking in any aesthetic sense. You know, the furniture, the patterns of the curtains are terrible, normally. Dull, unimaginative, repetitive. With little knick-knacks collected from here and there. Even the vases on the table. Really dreadful more often than not. So it is neat, it is clean, it is tidy, but usually it shows such a lack of aesthetic sense, it's really offensive. The cleanliness itself and tidiness become offensive, when they are so dissociated from an aesthetic sense. So react against all that by all means.

Anyway, I think we've done as much as we can for the present. I'm afraid we've only done, one, two, three, four pages. And how many are left? Two, four, six, eight, **ten**. We haven't really covered very much ground.

Nagabodhi: A life's work.

S: No. Not exactly a **life's** work. Not to, well, to cover in practice, of course, perhaps. But to get up to the Heaven of the five hundred nymphs, that might be a life's work for some people. What I was thinking of - it's rather a pity to leave it just there. I was wondering whether there'd be a possibility of continuing and finishing it. I mean, are people interested? Would [*mumbles of yes*]. Because for reasons not unconnected with publications, I have to come down again quite shortly. So I was wondering whether if I came down just a little bit earlier we couldn't get together again, in the same sort of way. Would that be possible? Or is everybody doing something else, say, next weekend?

Nagabodhi: There are a few of us away next weekend.

S: There are a few away at present.

Kulananda: There will be two of us away next weekend.

Sagaramati: Who'll be away next weekend? That's four.

Nagabodhi: I don't know about Kulamitra and Kulananda.

End of Tape Five

Tapes Six, Seven, Eight and Nine were no longer in existence in the Madhyamaloka Archives at the time of checking for this second edition. These manuscripts have been read through and corrected where mistakes were obvious, but proper checking continues with tape ten.

Tape 6

Next Session (The following week) [119]

S: We got last weekend as far as page 86. I'm not going to try to recap the discussion that we had but the point at which we left off was this - this sentence summarises the previous discussion:

'Thus objects are *subha*'

that is to say, purely beautiful,

in comparison with those of a lower plane, and *asubha*

or impure or ugly

in comparison with those of a higher plane of existence.

So that one has the conception of a hierarchy of levels of Reality or levels of existence, each of which is more beautiful than the one below. But one can, as it were, appreciate the inadequacies of the level below only after gaining some experience, at least, of the higher level. So as you ascend, the things which you experience become more and more beautiful and the things that you look back to, as it were, are seen as less and less beautiful. This is the general background of the discussion. So then we come on from that and the text says:

The type of meditation exercise that will help one to realise this personally by ascending into the *dhyanas* and actually seeing the lower ranges of conditioned existence as *asubha* differs according to temperament.

This sentence introduces the whole question of temperament or psychological type, as we may also say. So I go on to discuss the different temperaments according to the Theravada tradition, as represented by Buddhaghosa:

The *lobhacarita* or 'passionate temperament', which tends to concentrate on the bright side of life ignoring the dark, and in which greed and attachment therefore predominate, will find the *asubhabhavana* helpful. This method consists in contemplating the ten progressive stages of decomposition of a corpse. The *dvesacaritra* or 'malevolent temperament', which sees the bad side of everything, and in which aversion predominates, on the contrary will be helped by concentrating on discs of pure bright beautiful colours such as those of flowers. One of passionate temperament [120] should never begin by concentrating on attractive objects, which in his case will stimulate greed, nor one of malevolent temperament on repulsive objects, which in him will excite hatred, and greed and hatred are hindrances to meditation. On attaining the *rupadhyanas*, however, both see the *rupaloka* as beautiful and the *kamaloka* as in comparison, ugly.

So we're concerned here with the specific problem, or question at least, of ascending in the *dhyanas* or via one's *dhyana* experience, from a lower to a higher level of Reality, from a lower to a higher level or degree of purity and beauty. And the question of temperament comes in. And here one mentions the two, two out of the three, or two out of the six, temperaments classified, analysed, explained by Buddhaghosa. There is the *lobhacaritra* and there is the *dvesacaritra*. But the question arises **how** have these two temperaments come about? How is it that some people are of this passionate temperament or greedy temperament, and others are of the malevolent temperament? So how is this? Before raising that question, perhaps we'd better try to understand what is meant by *lobhacaritra* and what is meant by *dvesacaritra*. *Lobha* is - well, put it in the nearest English word, greed, everything to do with greed, desire, appropriation, clinging, passion. It's everything of that sort. And *dvesa* is everything to do with anger, hatred, malevolence, rejection, antagonism. It's all those sort of things. So one might say that *lobha* represents a sort of movement of trying to appropriate things, even trying to swallow things, trying to incorporate things. Whereas *dvesa* is such more a movement of rejection, trying to get rid of things, shake oneself free of them. It consists in adopting a hostile attitude towards things. I mean both terms represent sort of mental states or mental attitudes or drives or tendencies much wider, much broader than these two terms *lobha* and *dvesa*, or passion and malevolence, might suggest. Do you get the general idea? There are some people who want to incorporate everything, make everything part of themselves. Whereas other people want nothing to do with things, want to reject them, don't want those things to be part of themselves.

But then, as I said, the question arises, what has **made** some people of one temperament and some people of the other? **How** has this difference come about? According to Buddhist tradition it has come about mainly as a consequence of one's previous experience of conditioned existence, one's previous predominant experience of conditioned existence. So that also suggests that if you are of a particular temperament, a particular psychological type, a particular character type, there isn't something absolutely fixed and given that affects your innermost [121] being. It is a conditioned phenomenon. It's

arisen in dependence upon certain ascertainable causes and conditions. And since it has arisen in dependence upon those causes and conditions it can cease when those causes and conditions cease. So what has been, let us say, the predominant experience of existence or of conditioned existence, that is to say on the part of the person of greedy temperament, passionate temperament? How has he found existence? How has he found life in the past, maybe earlier in this life, maybe in previous lives? What has been his predominant experience of life?

Voice: Pleasant

S: Yes, it's pleasant.

Voice: Enjoyable.

S: It's enjoyable.

Voice: And that he's gained a certain sense of security by including things into his orbit.

S: Possibly. Maybe that's sort of one stage further on. But he's certainly found existence, conditioned existence, embodied existence, agreeable rather than disagreeable. So he has a sort of liking for it. He has, so to speak, a positive attitude in, of course, quite a conditioned sense. He doesn't mind coming into contact with things. He likes coming into contact with things. Not only likes coming into contact with them, he likes appropriating them, making them part of himself. They don't feel strange or inimical to him. Do you see this? But then on the other hand, what about the other person? What about the person, that *dvesacaritra* or malevolent temperament? What has been his predominant experience of life?

Voice: Disagreeable.

S: Disagreeable, yes. Painful, disappointing, frustrating.

Nagabodhi: Worth keeping out of.

S: Yes. Worth keeping out of. Worth keeping away from. Worth rejecting. Threatening.

Ratnaketu: Cramping.

S: Cramping, confining. So one can see that if one's experience of life, of conditioned existence, is predominantly either of one kind or the other, that can very deeply affect one's basic temperament. Of course, it is only a question of predominance. In some cases the predominance may be relatively slight. It may not be easy to say of any given person at any given stage of their career, or in any given set of circumstances, whether they are predominantly passionate or predominantly malevolent. But with regard to some people at least, it may be possible, very clearly and very definitely, to say that they fall into this category or that. I don't go into this in the text just yet, but there is of course a third category, out of the three principal characters and that is the *mohacaritra*. This is a person who, in a way, doesn't know where he stands. His experience has been pretty evenly, fairly evenly mixed so sometimes he thinks it's pretty painful to be alive and to be a human being. Sometimes he thinks it's pretty pleasant. Because he can't decide, so to speak, whether existence is predominantly agreeable or predominantly disagreeable. It's so mixed for him. So, perhaps, we shouldn't think so much in terms of three distinct, mutually exclusive character types. We should see all the different possibilities of pleasure and pain. We can see a whole spectrum of human experience from the very very predominantly painful to the very very predominantly pleasant - with the extreme *lobhacaritra* at one end, extreme *dvesacaritra* at the other and the *mohacaritra* in the middle. But with many intermediate types, so to speak, on either side. Do you see what I mean? But also this makes the point, this sort of classification, that our feeling experience, perhaps one can't even use the word emotional experience at this stage, that one's feeling experience, one's hedonic experience is very, very important as a determinant of character, because we think so much in terms of pleasure and pain. I mean the universe presents itself to us, life presents itself to us, as something we experience as either pleasant or painful. Though there is a possibility of neutral so-called sensation. But this is one of the things that we are most aware of: that we're feeling good or we're feeling bad; we feel in a positive mental state or a negative mental state - that our bodily state is comfortable or uncomfortable and so on. So our whole experience is almost dominated, one might say, by the fact that it's either predominantly pleasant or predominantly painful, predominantly agreeable or predominantly disagreeable. So perhaps we should realise that more clearly, or more deeply.

Voice: Would you say that the *moha* type in the middle is more a question of confusion rather than being neutral?

S: It does seem from what Buddhaghosa and others say that it is a question of confused rather than neutral, yes. It's not so much an absence of pleasurable and painful experience but a mixture of the two. So it's as though the person can't make his mind up whether life is a good thing or whether it is a bad thing. He can't make up his mind whether to be an optimist or a pessimist. But do you think you can recognise, at least some individual examples of people who are definitely the one thing or the other, definitely either the greedy or passionate temperament or the malevolent temperament? Do you know at least a few people who fall quite definitely, quite distinctly one or the other of these categories?

Kulamitra: I can definitely think of examples, but given the number of people that I know these examples are relatively few. Most people I couldn't really tell, including myself, where exactly....

S: There are some quite conspicuous examples, for instance, among Buddhist scholars. Dr. Conze. He is a proudly self-proclaimed hate type. He seems very proud of it. Or he seemed very proud of it. In politics, perhaps, Mr Enoch Powell is a good example of a hate type. don't know about greed types. In politics, perhaps Willie Whitelaw is a greed type [*unclear*]..... but greed types are easier to get on with. Hate types are difficult to get on with.

Anyway, you've got the distinction clearly in mind. So why has this point arisen, this question of temperament arisen here, in this particular context? Can you see that? Can you see the connection?

Nagabodhi: Isn't it knowing what to do as the next step?

S: Knowing what to do as the next step - yes.

Nagabodhi: Particularly relating to the *dhyanas*.

S: Because you're thinking in terms of the *dhyanas* and, well, you're thinking of the *dhyanas* as a means of ascent from lower to higher levels of existence, say from the *kamaloka* to the *rupaloka*. You want to use the *dhyanas*, the practice or experience of the *dhyanas*, as a means of making that ascent from the less beautiful to the more beautiful levels. So supposing you're a person of, let's say, passionate temperament. Your experience so far has lain within the *kamaloka*. And you see the *kamaloka* as very agreeable, very pleasant, very nice. Yes, you're quite attached to it. Maybe you cling to it. And nonetheless you want to rise to the next highest level, or the next, as it were, whole band of levels. You want to rise from the *kamaloka* to the *rupaloka*. So you've got to loosen your hold on the *rupaloka*. You've got to see the *rupaloka* as less agreeable so that you can rise to the higher level. You've got to be able to see the *kamaloka* as less attractive. Do you see what I mean? You've got to see the other side of it. Perhaps this is a point that should be made before we go any further: that if you are of a particular temperament, not only has that temperament been formed or constituted by a certain experience of life, being endowed with that temperament you tend to see life in a particular way. Perhaps this point should be made first, or made clear first. Do you see what I mean? The person of, say, greedy or passionate temperament tends to look on the bright side of things. The person of the malevolent temperament tends to look on the dark side of things. But the point is that things, life, existence have got both a bright side and a dark side. So each particular temperament, both the *lobhacaritra* and the *dvesacaritra* tend to take a one-sided view, a jaundiced view. Even a prejudiced view. The person of a passionate temperament will tend to ignore inconvenient facts, disagreeable things, whereas the person of angry or malevolent temperament will tend to ignore agreeable things or favourable things. You can certainly see that at work in people. There are some people who find it very difficult to see any bad in others. There are other people who find it very difficult to see any good in others.

Voice: Cynics.

S: Cynics, even, yes. Cynicism is a sort of malevolent-type temperament gone sour. And when it comes, say, to undertaking any practical thing, any job, you could see that there are some people who are, what we call, over-sanguine. They underestimate difficulties. They underestimate obstacles. They take a much too - oh, is this ringing any bells? [*Laughter*] They take a much too rosy view of things. So sometimes because of this they get into difficulties. They even come a cropper. So if you are aware within yourself that you are more of a greedy type, a passion type, you have to be very careful you don't look too much on the bright side of things, ignoring the dark side, ignoring difficulties, ignoring dangers, even ignoring the dark side of other people. Because you just don't like to face that. Even ignoring your own dark side. You don't like to face up to that either. You like to think everything is nice. Everything is agreeable. Everything is pleasant. Everybody is good. You like to think like that. So sometimes you insist on seeing like that, even though the facts state otherwise. So to the extent that you insist on seeing things in this very rosy, optimistic terms, to that extent you delude yourself, to that extent you mislead yourself. Do you see what I mean? This can masquerade as a sort of pseudo-positivity. 'I always look on the bright side of things. I always try to see the good in people.' That can be a sort of rationalisation of your own one-sided psychological temperament. In the same way, if you're the opposite temperament, you can

over-estimate, you can exaggerate difficulties. You can exaggerate other people's weak points, other people's faults. You can take an unnecessary gloomy view of the situation.

So if you are of the one type, that is to say, the greedy type, the passionate type, you may be led into carelessness, even recklessness, because you've underestimated difficulties, faults and drawbacks. On the other hand, if you are of the angry or malevolent temperament, you may just see things in such negative terms that you almost give up hope and you don't do anything. So if you're aware of that sort of tendency within yourself you should be careful to encourage yourself to look more on the bright side of things, not to attach so much importance to difficulties, drawbacks. So having one temperament or the other, and you're approaching the *dhyanas*, you're wanting to be able to use the *dhyanas*, so to speak, use meditation as a means of transition from the *kamaloka* to the *rupaloka*, from a lower level to a higher level of beauty. If you are of a greedy temperament, if you're of a passionate temperament, you are, because you always see the good side of the *samsara*, the good side of the *kamaloka*, you would tend to be quite attached to that. You will tend to see that as a much brighter, more pleasant place than it really is. So you will tend to see those things which are *asubha*, in comparison with the higher levels of existence, as *subha*, so what you've got to do is to learn to see them more as *asubha*. In other words you've got to see the other side which you hitherto have ignored. So therefore, for the greed type, the passionate type, at this point there come in the so-called corpse meditations.

[126]

In the case of other people, in the case of other human beings, you've always concentrated on, you've always stressed, the bright side, the attractive side, the agreeable side, the pleasant side, even of their bodily existence, and you have to remind yourself that there is another side. You may be very much attached to that person. You may be very much attached to them physically, but what are you attached to? What is going to happen to what you are attached to? What is it going to be like in ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, a hundred years' time? What is going to be left? You need to look a little at that other side. So, not as an end in itself, but so that detaching yourself from over-occupation with the lower degree of *subha* you can free yourself for the experience of a higher degree of *subha*, something more as it were refined, more as it were mental, more as it were spiritual. Do you see what I mean? But in the same way, if you are of the hate type, if you are of the malevolent type, it will not be a good thing for you to practise the *asubhabhavana* because already you see things as disagreeable, even disgusting. You need to concentrate on seeing things in a different way. You need to remind yourself that things have a bright side, an agreeable aspect, especially as regards people and therefore, for you perhaps, the *metta bhavana* will be more suitable. Do you see what I mean? So if you want to get from a lower to a higher level via the *dhyanas*, if you want to have an experience of a higher level or higher degree of beauty, in a spiritual sense, as I said earlier on in the text, in an almost sort of Neoplatonic sense, then if you are of a more, let us say, greedy type, you should take up, at least to some extent, the *asubhabhavana*. But if you're of the hating type, the malevolent type, then you should concentrate more on the *metta bhavana*, so as to correct your one-sidedness.

Voice: Do you think that anyone reading this for the first time may feel there's a contradiction in what has come before when the Buddha is approached and Nanda wasn't taken to the cemetery? He does seem to be perhaps more on the lines of a greed type. He doesn't take him to the cemetery, but he doesn't look below, he looks above. He looks towards *subha*.

S: This raises the whole question of what happened then? Did the Buddha, as it were, give him an experience? Did he take him along to an art gallery or something like that? It raises the question of how literally we can take the framework of the story. Perhaps we can't take it too literally. Whether the question, the main point of the story is that when you have the experience of a higher degree of [127] 'reality', an experience of a higher level of existence at least, the *rupaloka* as opposed to the *kamaloka*, then what appeared beautiful on the *kamaloka* level appears less beautiful when viewed from the *rupaloka* level. Not because it is objectively less beautiful than before but because you've seen or you've experienced a higher level of beauty which in comparison with the lower level is so much more attractive, so much more inspiring, so much more captivating. Just as I said last week, just as after reading perhaps a very third-rate author and really enjoying that, you read a real master, a real classic, well, you can see the difference but until you've read and experienced the work of the great poet, the great writer, perhaps you don't realise fully how inferior the work of the hack writer is. It's rather like that. But to make that transition, if you are of a greed temperament, you'll need to detach yourself from the *kamaloka* by practising, to some extent at least, something like the *asubhabhavana*. Or if you're more of a hate or malevolent type, well, already you're detached in a wrong sort of way so you need to cultivate a more positive attitude, given to the *kamaloka*, to begin with.

Hridaya: The fact that the *metta bhavana* practice is a key practice within the Friends, does that suggest that in the West perhaps people tend towards more the hate type?

S: But this raises the question, what does one mean by a **key** practice? In what sense is *metta bhavana* a key practice in the sense that the *anapanasati* **isn't** a key practice? I mean they are all indispensable. Whether you spend a little more time on the one or a little more time on the other, that's according to your individual temperament and circumstances, But they both seem, as it were, double-keys, one might say.

Kulamitra: We could generally agree to do the *metta bhavana* but we don't encourage everybody to do the Ten Stages of the Decomposition of the Corpse.

S: Ah, but that's because this is more extreme. I have mentioned, I think, on previous occasions that there are different degrees of intensity of this type of practice. If you are really very, very greedy by temperament, and obsessed with material things, obsessed with other people, on the purely physical level, then a visit to a cemetery, a burning ground, if you could find one, may be a very salutary thing. [128] But if you aren't of that extreme type you can reflect upon death. That would have the same sort of effect. Or even just on impermanence. I mean the recollection of impermanence, recollection of death, and recollection of the Ten Stages of Decomposition of the Corpse - from this point of view these are all practices of the same kind but of different degrees of intensity. Different degrees of radicalness, one might say. [Long Pause]

Kulamitra: Traditionally speaking, who would actually decide what type that person was and therefore what practice was best for them?

S: Well, usually the informed observer, the *kalyana mitra* or teacher. In other words Buddhaghosa does give various hints to enable one to recognise the people of the different temperaments, the different character types. I think I've gone into this somewhere, haven't I? Maybe in more than one place?

Voice: Could even be an idea that at some time we had as a business, an undertaker's.

S: This has been talked about for several years, in fact, but one can quite easily obtain access to a mortuary. That isn't very difficult if one really is determined. Several of our Friends have done it. Some have even worked in mortuaries, and found it quite an interesting experience. But there is another point I mentioned here. In the text itself I don't actually speak in terms of practising *metta bhavana* but 'concentrating on discs of pure bright beautiful colours as those of flowers.' Because here, also, you see things in a more positive light. Or you concentrate on the bright and more attractive aspects of existence. I mean it is said well, this is one of the things that Buddhaghosa says that one of the ways in which you can recognise people of the greedy temperament, they like to be surrounded by beautiful things. Whereas the person of the hate type, malevolent temperament, doesn't bother. He doesn't mind if things are dirty and untidy and displeasing and disagreeable. For him it's almost a penance, just surrounding himself with beautiful objects, but that's what he's got to do. Where in the case of the greedy person it's more salutary perhaps for him to surround himself with rather more sober things, things which are a bit austere, a bit plain, not very colourful, not very decorative - a little cell perhaps, quite bare, quite sparse. But does one see any echo or any reflection of this rather in oneself? Because [129] there may be one's overall temperament but from time to time one may change, at least within certain limits. Then one just has to put the appropriate means of restoring the balance or more balanced outlook or balanced attitude.

Darren: Are you speaking here in terms of, sort of, higher *dhyanas*, because to have a room in which you had nice paintings on the wall and things like that, it will be quite bright but one would think it was, as you could use it as a support, i.e. in the sense of you surrounding yourself by sort of refined and more beautiful things?

S: Yes, because there is a question of refinement. Buddhaghosa speaks about bright and beautiful things, but there are degrees of aesthetic refinement. If you are a person of, say, moderately greedy type or moderately passionate temperament it doesn't mean you've got to surround yourself with bleak things or unattractive things. But you should certainly watch your tendency to be too showy, as it were. Or too gaudy, yes? To concentrate on refined things. Instead of having a great big bunch of flowers just have maybe one flower in a vase, like the Japanese do. Or instead of having lots of bright colours, well, just be a bit more selective. Combine them more carefully. Do you see what I mean? I mean, cultivate a tendency towards simplicity.

Kulamitra: You see, can you see this with yourself but I always find it quite confusing. I wonder if it is because conditioned existence does consist of a number of different elements and maybe you've had different experiences of different sorts of things and some things you actually don't want to be close to, you don't want to trust. And other things you do actually feel quite happy in their company or their surroundings. And maybe one's temperament is quite mixed in that way. I mean, do you think that most people are actually mixed? Well, very mixed, as it were - not predominantly of one type or another. I mean how do you experience other people from that point of view?

S: I think I would say that those who are sort of identifiably and distinctly and definitely this type or that are a comparative minority. Most people seem either slightly predominantly this or that or very, very mixed. So if one finds oneself to be very, very mixed, you have to apply the remedies, as it were, for both temperaments on occasion, as they are required. [130]

Kulamitra: Sort of work from both ends.

S: Yes. In one set of circumstances you may find you're, well, you're very, very greedy, and another set of circumstances very angry, very antagonistic. So apply the appropriate remedy. But from the point of view of this particular paragraph, or the point of view of what we are actually talking about, the main thing is that you should make an ascent. You should refine your experience. You should lift yourself from the *kamaloka* to the *rupaloka*. You should experience a more and ever more refined and, as it were, spiritual beauty. This is what one is concerned with here. Whether one relies predominantly on one method or predominantly on the other or whether you combine them according to circumstances, that doesn't matter so much. But you must be sure that you are making an ascent; that you are ascending through the *dhyanas* and you are experiencing higher and ever higher and purer and more captivating levels of beauty. Right up to and including an archetypal level, an archetypal plane, archetypal forms. And then, of course, when one has that sort of experience, you are naturally less attached to or less preoccupied with the objects of the lower, the *kamaloka*.

Nagabodhi: Do you think it's possibly confusing to draw parallels between greed type and hate type and compassion and wisdom as Dr. Conze seems to do? When he mentions the greed type and the hate type can possibly tend towards Wisdom and penetration ...

S: But I think one must be careful not to establish too much of a correspondence between a purely psychological conditioning and an aspect of Reality. Yes, what Buddhaghosa says is that in the case of a hate type, just as hatred seizes upon the negative aspects of things, in the same way Wisdom seizes upon the faults of conditioned existence. There does seem to be a certain resemblance but I think it is probably more of an analogy. I think the relationship is analogical rather than that the one directly leads into the other. Rather than if you are of the hate type then quite literally you're more likely to develop Wisdom or you will develop it more easily. That suggests that Wisdom itself is something a bit one-sided which by its very nature really it cannot be. So I would say one mustn't take that sort of statement too literally. There is an analogy between the two but it doesn't mean that the more hatred you have the closer you are to Wisdom. Or the more likely you are to develop Wisdom, as compared [131] with the person of greed type, greed temperament.

Kulamitra: I'd have thought what's most likely is that if you are a hate type you would have an intellectual penetration which you confused with Wisdom. And if you are a greed type you'd be very affectionate which you got confused with compassion.

S: Yes, right. It's a question of near enemies, and far enemies.

Kulamitra: And sort of rationalised it on that basis.

Voice: I must say I felt that quite a few people are quite proud to claim, 'Oh I'm a hate type.' I've never heard anybody proudly claim to be a greed type.

Ratnaketu: It's because they're hate types, does have that - they are proud to be a hate type because hate types are, sort of wisdom - have got this . . . [Laughter]

S: So why shouldn't greed types be proud of being greed types because greed is sublimated into compassion? What can be more beautiful than that?

Kulamitra: I think [unclear] there are some people who are. I think some people do consider themselves to be more compassionate because they are really a greed type.

S: Yes, yes. Well, one can certainly meet people who have got very active critical, attacking sort of minds. One could say that they are not, for that reason, any closer to real Wisdom. I mean they give a semblance of wisdom, a semblance of intelligence but it isn't the real thing. It's very one-sided, very limited - even alienated, very out of touch. In the same way, yes, one can meet people who are very 'friendly' in inverted commas, they are very affectionate, but it is in a cloying way. There's nothing fresh or clear about it. But that isn't compassion. That is just quite mundane attachment and affection. There's no bracing element in it.

Ratnaketu: I thought also that if wisdom is the breaking down of the subject or seeing through the subject-object dichotomy, hatred is actually reinforcing that, that type is re-enforcing that dichotomy, not breaking it down. [132]

S: Well, in the same way the greed type is reinforcing the dichotomy by sort of trying to merge the subject and object instead of transcend them. In the case of the hate type it's trying to keep the ...

END OF SIDE A - SIDE B

S:... if they are trying to squeeze themselves into each other. [Laughter]

Voice: What about when two hate types get together?

S: Well it's like the two tubes of toothpaste, sort of, tail to tail and just sort of squeezing themselves flat [Laughter], at either end [Laughter]

But it's very easy to mistake the imitation for the real thing. It is very easy to think that a person is very critical, maybe outspoken, and, I mean, intellectual, let us say to use that word in its debased sense is really intelligent, is really wise. And they like, maybe, to think that they see through things. They're not taken in. They are smarter than others. Well, that has really got nothing to do with real Wisdom and real understanding.

Nagabodhi: Perhaps with them there is also the thought that it is something manly to be attacking, or critical, more of a masculine quality.

S: Anyway, let's go on to a quite important misunderstanding. It's not important as a misunderstanding; it's important in the sense that one should be careful to avoid it.

Unfortunately, the specific function of those practices which focus attention on the repulsive and disgusting aspects of existence, as well as their special relation to one type of temperament, is not always understood even by Buddhist writers, some of whom appear to believe that according to Buddhism ugliness is real and beauty unreal and that one progresses in the spiritual life merely by seeing more and more ugliness and less and less beauty everywhere and at all levels of existence.

All levels of mundane existence.

As a well-known Sri Lankan Thera remarked to the writer once when shown an album of Tibetan religious paintings, [133] 'I'm afraid that being a monk I'm not allowed to appreciate beauty.'

That's exactly what he said.

Such strange misunderstandings, though current in some modern Theravadin circles, are easily refuted even from the Pali scriptures.

So what is the misunderstanding here? It's as though one sees things exclusively in terms of what is appropriate to the hate type. One sees that the greed type needs to concentrate on the unpleasant side of existence, to counteract his natural tendency to see the pleasant side. So he does that in order to rise to a higher level of existence and experience. This is interpreted as meaning that he has to see that things are not really pleasant as they appear. Not **really** beautiful. They are **really** ugly. It's forgotten that this is the prescription just for the greedy person. That the more you see things as ugly the nearer you come to Reality. That beauty is unreal. Beauty is a delusion. This can lead to a quite, sort of, cynical attitude rather than a truly spiritual attitude. The spiritual attitude is that you want to rise from the experience of the lower degree of beauty to the higher degree of beauty, not to try to see things as more and more ugly. That is to say, conditioned things as more and more ugly. But this is what some presentations of the Theravada, or this aspect of the Theravada do suggest. As in this monk's remark, 'I'm afraid that being a monk I'm not allowed to appreciate beauty.' He's got to see everything as ugly.

But it's as though, unless you've got some appreciation of the beautiful already, you can't really rise to the experience of that which is more beautiful. Otherwise how do you know what you are looking for? How do you know in which direction to go? What you have got to do is to dissociate yourself from the limitations of your experience on the existing level so as to free yourself for an ascent to a higher level of existence, where you would experience a greater beauty. So if you are of a greed type you can do that just by gently, as it were, taking a look at the less attractive aspects of existence on the *kamaloka* plane.

Sort of gently detaching yourself and rising to the higher level by a greater appreciation of beauty, greater sensitivity to beauty. [134]

Voice: Could there also be the suggestion here that somehow beauty misguidedly is associated with the *kamaloka* and not ...?

S: Well, if one has that association, if one makes that association that beauty is something which pertains only to the *kamaloka*, one has failed entirely to understand the nature of the *rupaloka*, even the very meaning of the word *rupa*. But, yes, in the Theravada there is that tendency, at least in some quarters, to see beauty as essentially sensuous. As essentially, not just mundane, but as essentially pertaining to the *kamaloka* level. But of course, one must at the same time recognise that when one speaks about beauty on the *rupaloka* level that is a rather different kind of beauty. It's a very much purified beauty. It's something which is *subha*. It is not only beauty but purity and radiance and so on in a very inspiring way, such as we hardly glimpse even in the greatest art.

So it is a question of deepening one's experience of beauty, one might say, by detaching oneself from its grosser forms, its grosser aspects, grosser manifestations, and freeing oneself from any sort of tendency to self-indulgence, any tendency to appropriate the beautiful rather than to just appreciate it for its own sake. One finds in certain great artists that they're sensitive, in some cases, to a much higher, more refined degree of beauty than are certain other artists. Some artists, even though they may be technically very competent, have a certain grossness about them. The beauty that they depict isn't very refined, isn't very ethereal, yes? Do you know what I mean? Can you think of specific artists? I'm thinking, well, of someone, say, like Botticelli or Fra Angelico in the West.

Voice: The opposite side would be Titian and Rubens.

S: Mm?

Voice: Titian and Rubens. Picasso.

S: Yes, yes. I remember in this connection a quite interesting incident. I mean I've mentioned about this Ceylon Thera and his remark. This took place in Sanchi in 1952 - the opening of that new Sanchi Vihara, and I met Lama Govinda there also. I'd met him before. We met together there too. And the three of us were there together. Lama Govinda actually was showing an album of Tibetan religious paintings, *thangkas* mostly, and that was this Thera's comment at that particular time. Well, at Sanchi I also met a well-known Indian film [135] star, who was known as the Clark Gable of India [*Laughter*], if the name of Clark Gable means anything to you. [*Laughter*] Some of you might not have heard of him. He was well-known in the thirties, I think. But anyway, I met him also in Bombay and he wanted me to help write a film [*Laughter*], which actually I did. [*Laughter*] I never found out what it was like. The film was never actually made. But I did help to produce a script. There was a well-known Hindi film script writer and myself working together and he became a great friend of mine. I used to stay with him in Bombay, sometimes, when I wasn't staying with God. [*Laughter*]

Voice: Do you have a copy of that script?

S: No. It might be around somewhere. It was called 'Ajanta'. And part of the theme was to be made in Ajanta. So, anyway, I was talking with this film star one day who was also the producer and director. He was a very famous person in the Bombay film world. Perhaps the most famous person of all at that time. Now he's not so famous as he was. But anyway he was producer and director as well as chief actor in all his own films. He was rather a greed type. [*Laughter*] Anyway, he had quite an enquiring sort of mind and we were talking about the film one day, talking about Ajanta and the cave paintings there. You know the walls of the Ajanta caves are covered with beautiful frescoes. So we were talking and he said, 'Is it true that the walls of Ajanta are covered with beautiful paintings?' I said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'Isn't it true that a lot of those paintings are of women?' I said, 'Yes.' 'And isn't it true that a lot of those women are depicted in a very sensuous way, in a state of virtual undress?' I said, 'Yes, true.' [*Laughter*] He said, 'Is it not true that those paintings were all painted by Buddhist monks?' So I said, 'Yes, true.' [*Laughter*] So then he said, 'But how was that possible? How was it possible for Buddhist monks who are above desire and craving and completely passionless, how was it possible for them to depict all those beautiful women?' So I'd never thought about this but I must confess I saw the answer to this instantly. I said, 'Well, you know the answer to that. There aren't only, on the walls of Ajanta, paintings of women. There are also paintings of fruit and flowers.' So I said, 'Could not a passionless monk paint fruits and flowers?' He said, 'Yes, yes certainly'. 'And also paintings of animals, just representations of the natural world?' He said, 'Yes of course a passionless monk could depict them too. It doesn't suggest any sort of craving or desire.' So I said 'Well, they depicted the beautiful women in just the same way. Just as though [136] they were some fruit or flower. They just saw it as a beautiful object in the sensuous world and that was how they depicted it.' At the time this sort of reply came quite spontaneously. But

afterwards I reflected upon it [*Laughter*] It wasn't just a piece of quick thinking. I thought, no, that is actually the answer. Because if you actually look at the Ajanta paintings, which I did actually some years later, though I was familiar with them in reproductions, I mean it is really true that whoever were the artists, whether monks or others, they did depict, you know, those female forms, those 'attractive', inverted commas, you know, female forms in the same spirit, in the same manner, with the same attitude that they represented fruits and flowers and trees and animals. Do you see what I mean? There was just a sort of objective appreciation, but without any sort of attachment. Without, well even a sort of rejoicing in the merits of all those beautiful forms, rejoicing in the fact that they were beautiful. Without any admixture of craving, any admixture of attachment or any admixture of appropriation. They were just sort of happy to see them there. Do you know what I mean? Just as like Blake says in that little verse where he says, you know, what is it?

Voice: 'He who binds to himself a joy'

S: 'Does the winged life destroy.
And he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.'

In the case of, well, those monks there wasn't even any great [*unclear*] of kissing it as it flew. [*Laughter*] Just seeing it fly. That was quite enough. Do you see what I mean? So one can see beauty even on the *kamaloka* level, the admittedly inferior beauty of the *kamaloka* level, in this way. One doesn't have to adopt a sort of negative or cynical attitude towards it. One doesn't have to depreciate it. One only needs to say to oneself, 'Well, it isn't as beautiful as it seems.' If one is of a strongly craving type and needs to have one's attention drawn to, as it were, the darker side of life. Just so that one can detach oneself a little from it.

Kulamitra: So you are saying if one was in the *rupaloka* one would still see those things as beautiful but just less beautiful?

S: Yes, yes, yes. [137]

Kulamitra: You wouldn't actually start seeing them as ugly?

S: No, no. So we have this quote, you see, from the Pali Canon:

Addressing a non-Buddhist recluse the Buddha says:

'Now. Bhaggava, ... certain recluses and brahmins have abused me with groundless, empty lies that have no truth in them, saying: "Gotama the recluse and His brethren have gone astray. For Gotama the recluse teaches this:

'When one reaches up to the Release. called the Beautiful, and having reached it abides therein, at such a time he regards the Whole. (Universe) as ugly.'"

'But I never said that, Bhaggava. This is what I do say:

"Whenever one reaches up to the Release called the Beautiful, then he knows indeed what Beauty is.'"

That, I must say, is a bit of a paraphrase. I think the original as far as I remember simply says 'Beauty'. You know, simply 'Beauty'. That this is Beauty. This is the Greater Beauty. Not that he did depreciate the beauty or the beauties of the lower levels. Do you see what I mean? So there's a very great difference between these two viewpoints. That when you reach the, let's say, the *rupaloka*, you'd look down on the *kamaloka* and see it as ugly. Positively ugly. There's a great deal of difference between that point of view and the point of view which says you reach the *rupaloka* and you appreciate its beauty, and when you look down at the beauty. of the *kamaloka* you say it's inferior. It's a lesser light, but it is still a light. It's not just darkness. It's light, but there is less of it.

So I think one has to be quite careful not to try to make the ascent in a false way, a pseudo way, by deliberately depreciating in a purely intellectual way, or in a psychologically negative way, the beauty of the lower level. I mean, let that be appreciated too in a detached, calm way. [*Long Pause*]

One could say that the frescoes of Ajanta depict the beauty of the *kamaloka* as seen by a non-*kamaloka* consciousness. I think you get something of that with Botticelli. I don't think it's quite so pure even in the case of Botticelli. You get it with Fra Angelico - though in his case, well it's as though the purity

becomes, I was almost going to say, a little too pure. There's a certain narrowing of interest, a certain restriction. Though within its limits his art is very very pure, very intense, really very beautiful, but it's been achieved at the cost of [138] sort of breadth of range. Do you see what I mean?

Voice: It loses a certain power.

S: There's a certain lifelessness to it in a way. For instance, there's Walter Pater's famous comment on one of Fra Angelico's Virgins. Virgin Mary that is to say. He says 'She is corpse-like in her refinement.' She is very refined but it is the refinement of a beautiful corpse. But there's nothing, I mean, the women, the ladies depicted on the walls of Ajanta are certainly refined. There's nothing corpse-like about the refinement. They are very alive. They are very vigorously alive, one might say. So that sort of art represents the beauties of the *kamaloka* seen through the medium of almost a *rupaloka* consciousness. Do you see what I mean? You can have, say, a parallel experience. Supposing you have a very, very good meditation, say early in the morning and you slowly come out of that meditation. You slowly emerge from it. And it's a beautiful day. Maybe you've been sitting and meditating in a garden and you open your eyes. So you just see everything around you. All very fresh, very bright, sparkling, beautiful, colourful. So you just see it. And there's no trace of desire in your mind, no sort of craving. You just see how beautiful everything is. And you are able really to appreciate it, every flower, every leaf, every blade of grass. Every little light. Every little shade. You appreciate it. But with a completely, as it were, pure mind. So you see everything as beautiful in a sort of purely beautiful way, an almost sort of paradisaical way. Do you see what I mean? So, it's something like that, though of a greater degree of intensity, that I'm referring to. Because somebody else might see those *kamaloka* forms, you know, with a *kamaloka* consciousness, so will see them very differently, will see them in a very crude, gross, unrefined way, with a strongly erotic appeal etc., etc. But somebody else seeing those same *kamaloka* forms with a *rupaloka* consciousness will see them as something much more refined, transparent, buoyant, not ethereal. They are still just very much of the *kamaloka* but the *kamaloka* forms seen with what I call the *rupaloka* consciousness. So then one has to try to think in terms of seeing *rupaloka* forms with a *rupaloka* consciousness. Very often what happens is the artist tries to depict *rupaloka* forms with his *kamaloka* consciousness. He can't do it. You can see his failure, very often; great heavy fleshy, gross angels. You can see it in Western art; some artists just can't manage an angel. They can hardly manage a [139] human being. They've got tremendous skill, tremendous technique, but they are trying to, in the case of religious painters, say, ostensibly religious painters, they are trying to depict what is essentially *rupaloka* form with or through the medium of a *kamaloka* consciousness. And you can see this. It's very rarely that an artist develops a *rupaloka* consciousness and with that *rupaloka* consciousness depicts *rupaloka* forms, angelic forms or Bodhisattva-like forms and so on. Usually there is something missing. There's something missing in the artist's own perception. He's got the skill. He can copy previously existing models. He can copy other painters. But he can't depict an angel because he hasn't seen an angel. He's got no idea what an angel really looks like or feels like. He knows conventionally, yes, lots of beautiful draperies and some beautiful big wings and a sort of simpering expression, a lily in his hand. That's all he can do. And it deceives most people. But if one has any sort of experience of *rupaloka* consciousness oneself, in any way, I mean you can just look at that angel, that picture of an angel and say, 'That's not the real thing. That man never saw an angel.' You know he had no experience of the *rupaloka* state. But then again, you can, for instance, see - I've gone into this a little in *The Religion of Art*, I think - you can see a painting by an artist who has achieved, say, a *rupaloka* level of consciousness, and it's a painting only of a tree or a flower or a waterfall but he sees it in a particular way. And, if you just look at that painting of the tree or flower or waterfall, in some strange way, though it's only a picture of an ordinary natural object, you're somehow in contact with a higher level of consciousness, the level of consciousness of the artist who painted it, or drew it. Something more refined. Something more beautiful.

Voice: You've mentioned one or two Western artists in connection with so-called religious paintings. Can you think of any that you would [word unclear] in connection with natural art? Paintings of trees and landscape, forms, objects rather than angels, rather than subjects of Fra Angelico paintings. Would you think Constable?

S: I must say, perhaps my own taste has its limitations. I find Constable a bit insipid. What I will say, sometimes Turner, here and there. Maybe not all over the same painting. [Laughter] Parts of paintings but sometimes Turner. Sometimes, yes.

Voice: Can you see it perhaps more with the Chinese artists?

S: Perhaps, yes. Japanese artists too - though not all of them by any means because there, also tradition can become ossified. Artists can become mechanical. They can just copy without any vision of their own. [Pause] You certainly find this, say, in the sphere of the Buddha image. I mean, there are some Buddha images that unfortunately show no reflection of any higher spiritual beauty. The artist had just not been up to it, either technically or spiritually or both. You may have a great spiritual vision but you also need the technique to embody that. Some artists, some painters don't have either. Some have got tremendous

technique and all that sort of thing; you know, they can produce something which is quite interesting, quite attractive, quite powerful, but if it is supposed to be something like an angel, well, there's something missing. Something they have not been able to catch because they've never seen it. They have to put the angel together from, sort of, well, traditional religious stage properties. Just as you get some really dreadful-looking Buddhas which are just, well, it's a man sitting cross-legged in a robe and he's got a big bump on the top of his head. I mean, they put all the right elements there but there's no feeling for Enlightenment. No feeling for Buddhahood at all.

Voice: What do you make of Vermeer?

S.: Ah, I think Vermeer is a very interesting case. I really like Vermeer's paintings. I think you could say that Vermeer did look at things with another kind of consciousness. I wouldn't, I mean it's very difficult to say whether, say, he did experience *rupaloka* consciousness. How can one say? But certainly it does seem as though he did look at life. He looked at the familiar things of life, looked at people, certainly, at the very least, with a very still mind, a very simple, even a very pure mind. One definitely gets that impression. He really does see things as I think no other Western artist sees them. It is a very pure vision. I've seen quite a bit of his work in Holland itself when I went over some years ago. I really appreciated it. And reproductions don't do it justice. A reproduction, I mean I examined in the *Rijksmuseum* a number, about five or six reproductions of that famous view of Delft, and the colours were completely different in each one. Amazing! I wouldn't have believed if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. What was pale margarine yellow in one, was a vivid yellow-green in another. And neither bore any resemblance to the original painting which I'd just seen. They were so awful I really lost my faith in reproductions. [141] It was amazing. I didn't buy any of them because - there were five or six quite big reproductions of that particular painting - they differed, each of them differed so much from the original, in different ways. Usually the blues and the yellows. There might be a technical reason for that, but I've never seen adequate reproductions of Vermeer's painting. It is a shame. Perhaps they do exist but I certainly haven't met one.

Kulamitra: This whole thing of beauty, the beauty of the *kamaloka* and the beauty of the *rupaloka*, you were talking about the beauty of *rupaloka* forms. I mean, do you think sometimes that the beauty of the *rupaloka* is not experienced through *rupaloka* forms? It's more a sort of, I don't know, a feeling. I mean, is the *rupaloka* always associated with different kind of form?

S: Well, what does one mean by a different kind of form? I mean, to take a slightly different line of approach, it's not literally as though the *rupaloka* was stacked above the *kamaloka*. Yes, that is a useful way of looking at things. It is true up to a point. But one can also think of the *rupaloka* as, so to speak, a more refined version, a much more refined version of the *kamaloka* itself. So that one can think of the *rupaloka* forms as *kamaloka* forms sort of transfigured - as though lit up from within as it were. Do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: It's as if the forms don't exist apart from the consciousness which is throwing up the forms.

S: Well yes, which arises, one might say, in association with the *rupaloka* forms.

Kulananda: Consciousness arises with association with the forms?

S: Well, put it this way. All right, supposing, for the sake of argument, it's a question of seeing in the *rupaloka* the face of an angel. All right, descriptions of angels have come down to us, but usually the face of the angel is very much like a human face. It's got a nose and it's got two eyes. It has a mouth and so on. So it is as though it is a human face. A human face of a particular kind and seen in a particular way. It's not a completely different kind of face or even a completely different kind of thing. [142] Though again, of course, there are some people who've had mystical, visionary experiences see completely different things.

Voice: Indescribable.

S: Not even indescribable but things which, well, they might even see angels that have really no resemblance to human beings. But let's say that what I've said holds good at least for angels of the lower orders. So it isn't as though one has literally gone from the *kamaloka* where there are no human forms and human faces, but when one sees a human form or human face in a particular way, with a particular kind of consciousness, with a consciousness of a higher level, it becomes, as it were, transformed into something corresponding to that higher level which you are experiencing or from which you are perceiving. It's as if you've seen more in that particular form. More in that particular figure.

Kulananda: It is still conditioned.

S: Yes it's still conditioned. When one is speaking only of the *kamaloka* or the *rupaloka*, one isn't speaking of the Transcendental.

Kulananda: So the imagination perceived in the terms according to which it holds conditions?

S: Yes, yes.

Kulamitra: But, I mean, OK, imagine it is someone sitting in meditation, with their eyes shut. I mean, some people when they sit in meditation - maybe when their consciousness is in *kamaloka* experience lots of visual images, and other people don't. You know, some people may see lots of, like, what's gone on during their day or just ordinary human faces visually, and other people don't. Does that mean that on the *rupaloka* level some people see lots of visual images and other people don't in the same way?

S: I think one has to distinguish between, let us call the archetypal types of the *rupaloka* level and eidetic images, such as you see in dreams or in meditation. It's as though some people have a special faculty for perceiving these eidetic images. They perceive them very vividly. But these eidetic images can be ugly as well as beautiful. So they are not, as it were, archetypal *per se*. One [143] could say - it's not easy to express this but - one could say that the *rupaloka* archetypal form is not a form in the literal spatial sense, though it's very difficult to convey that. But at the same time it does have dimension and proportion and so on.

Voice: It's luminous and not substantial.

S: Yes, yes, yes. So I think for most people it is very much a question of working with what they already have; working with the perception of beauty that they already have and divesting it progressively of its cruder associations. Or trying to see it in a different way, see it in a different kind of light. I mean, for instance, trying to see the beauties of the objective world, the natural world. And also, perhaps, it's a question of familiarising oneself with more and more refined types of art.

Darren: One experience I had actually does connect; we went around the Uffizzi and we were looking at all these Madonnas and so on and then I came out and saw this painting in the back of a van by Warhol. Do you know that, what's her name, American?

Voices: Marilyn Monroe.

Darren: And previously I'd seen that Marilyn Monroe poster and even reproductions in the Tate and thought it's not unattractive. But seeing it after going around the Uffizzi, all these Madonnas and so on, it was really quite repulsive.

S: I think one thing one has to do is to distinguish the biologically attractive or biologically agreeable from the aesthetically beautiful. I think these two things are often confused. You mustn't confuse a certain kind of biological response with a certain kind of aesthetic response. I mean, after your experience in the Uffizzi you were able to differentiate the two I mean, assuming you hadn't been able to do so before, so to speak. But, at least, that experience underlined the difference for you. It's much the same with music. It's the same with poetry. But I think this is where what is called taste comes in. I think it isn't enough to say, 'One man's meat is another man's poison and your taste is different from my taste but they are both, sort of, equally valid.' I think one has to recognise that taste can be developed. Taste can be cultivated. [144] One person's taste can be more refined than that of another, so he may be able to savour and appreciate a more refined, even, one might say, more spiritual kind of beauty.

So I think this is quite important and I think there is quite a lot of Western art which is often regarded as beautiful or as of high aesthetic value, or as depicting or representing things as beautiful, which doesn't really depict or represent the most beautiful so much as desirable, especially in the case of those paintings of women we saw. That's quite a different thing. I mean, not that there cannot be a painting of a woman which is, let's say, akin to those of the Ajanta artists. There can be. But only too often woman is not depicted or represented in that particular way.

In that respect the work of some artists is really quite repulsive and completely lacking in refinement or spiritual sensitivity. So I think we not only have to cultivate, well, not only have to recognise that there are different levels of existence, different levels of experience, different levels of perception, different levels of taste, but consciously cultivate the higher at the expense of the lower. And this is what this passage is really all about, this whole section is really all about. Do you see what I mean?

So, therefore, the Buddha says 'But I never said that. Bhaggava. This is what I do say: "Whenever one reaches up to the Release (that is the *Vimokkha*) called the Beautiful, then he knows indeed what Beauty is.'" Because he can see the whole range of experiences of beauty from experiences of lesser degrees to

experiences of higher degrees of beauty. He really knows then what beauty is. Well, of course, in Western literature or Western tradition, what is the sort of classic text for this sort of approach to the spiritual life? [Pause]

Voice: Are you thinking of the works of Plotinus?

S: No, I'm going back a little before that.

Voices: Oh, the *Symposium* - Beauty.

S: Buddhism seems not, historically speaking, to have developed that particular approach to the extent that Platonism and Neoplatonism did in the West. But the seed is there, but even more than the seed is clearly there in the Pali texts, as you can see. So [145] perhaps this is something we should take up more and develop.

So then I go on to say:

However necessary a negative approach may be at first for those of passionate temperament, it is clear from this notable passage that, in principle, awareness of beauty, the positive factor, predominates in the Buddhist spiritual life over awareness of ugliness, the negative one. In the absence of any awareness of and delight in the 'beauty' of the Unconditioned all our efforts to convince ourselves rationally that conditioned existence is *asubha* are likely to remain unfruitful, with the result that despite our protestations we shall continue to wallow in the mire of the *kamaloka*.

That is putting it a bit strongly because the 'mire' is not so much in the *kamaloka* itself as in our own attitude towards it.

The failure to appreciate this fact is one of the reasons for the spiritually moribund condition of most parts of the Theravada Buddhist world today. [Long Pause]

Kulamitra: Why is that 'beauty' in inverted commas?

S: Well, one has spoken so far of, say, the beauty of the *kamaloka*, beauty of, well, *kamaloka* forms and beauty of *rupaloka* forms, but when one passes, at least within this context, from the conditioned to the Unconditioned, you pass to something completely different, something absolutely different. So you can speak of, say, the beauty of the Unconditioned only analogically. You're not saying that the beauty of the Unconditioned is anything like the beauty of the conditioned. So therefore, I've put the word in inverted commas. But why, then, speak of the beauty of the Unconditioned at all, even with inverted commas? What's the reason for that? [Pause]

Voice: It expresses its desirability.

S: Yes, it expresses its desirability. You've got to see the Unconditioned, to use that term, as attractive. Your spiritual life cannot proceed exclusively upon the basis that the conditioned is unattractive, howsoever one may formulate that. You can't be inspired [146] by a vision of the limitations of the conditioned. You can only be inspired by a vision of the perfection of the Unconditioned. So even though you don't really have any idea of what the Unconditioned is like but you have you're forced, so to speak to think of it in terms of, well, beauty of some kind or other. Well, even 'beauty' within inverted commas, but something which you can find attractive, fascinating, inspiring. I mean, this is recognised in the Vajrayana in the four main functions of Buddhahood. I've mentioned these in one or two places. Are you familiar with them? The four main functions of Buddhahood. In the Vajrayana, I mean, in fact, there was quite a list of the different functions of Buddhahood, and they are associated with different colours. Usually a set of four main functions is given, though the set is not always the same. That is to say the four are not always the same four. But usually it is said that the four main functions of Buddhahood are, first of all, purification. To purify. So what's the appropriate colour here?

Voices: White.

S: White. Then another function is maturation. To bring to maturity, to ripen. So what is the appropriate colour here?

Voices: Green.

S: Well actually it's yellow, golden yellow. And then there is another function which is destruction. Destruction of everything unskilful. Destruction of everything that is opposed to Enlightenment. So what is the appropriate colour here?

Voices: Red. Dark blue.

S: No, it's black, it's black - usually black - though there are variants. And then there is the aspect of attracting and drawing and fascinating all things. So that is to say, the aspect of beauty. Because it's beauty which attracts and draws and fascinates. So what's the appropriate colour here? [147]

Voices: Red.

S: Red, yes. A very rich red. And this aspect of Buddhahood finds expression, or one of its expressions, in the figure of Kurukulle, the so-called red Tara. And she's often represented as having, sort of, robes with hooks at the end, with which she hooks and catches sentient beings. And, in fact, many Bodhisattvas are represented with these hooks. And this is the hook, they hook you with this beauty, as it were, of the Unconditioned. If you're hooked on the beauty of the Unconditioned, the beauty of Buddhahood, nothing to worry about, because that's what you want to be hooked on. So this is what this hook at the end of a cord, as worn by Bodhisattvas, signifies. Have you ever noticed this? It's quite a big hook on the end of a great cord, great rope or cable, almost. So a Bodhisattva will hook you, so to speak, with his beauty and draw you in.

Nagabodhi: Is it a bit like the Golden Light in which you are exposed....

S: Mm?

Nagabodhi: Is it a bit like the Golden Light, in the *sutra* of Golden Light, when you are exposed to the Golden Light you step ...?

S: Yes, because light is beautiful. The colour gold is beautiful. All pure bright colours are beautiful. This is why they appear in visionary art. Visionary art is never dull-coloured. Do you see what I mean? Visionary art always consists of pure bright, transparent, luminous colours. Yes. You can see, looking at - I mean, I'm generalising wildly now but bear with it a bit - you look at, say, eighteenth-century painting on the whole, you could tell it was a rationalistic age. [*General agreement*] You don't have pure bright clear colours, usually, in it. It was a sort of, well, chocolate brown age, you might say, where the paintings are treacly or gravy-like. The colour of rich gravy.

I mean colour came back with William Blake. It came back with, well, maybe that's an exaggeration but a certain kind of colour, or a certain use of colour or sense or vision of colour came back with William Blake, with Turner, with the Pre-Raphaelites.

Voice: Blake had to discover his own from the old-fashioned ones. [148]

Voice: What would you say the colour of this age was?

S: It's a very mixed age. [*Laughter*] Colour comes in with the Impressionists, doesn't it? [*Pause*] It's interesting that Hockney's paintings are quite positive when it comes to colour, but not very bright, vibrant, not very visionary. There's a certain, definite limitation there. I don't know that there is any more visionary painting.

Voice: In some of the modern paintings, the colours seem quite clear and bright but not very refined. Their tendency is towards primaries.

S: Yes, yes, yes. They're rather crude, in other words. But then again, for what one might call a visionary use of colour, one can look at many of the Persian miniature paintings. They have quite remarkable examples of this sort of thing, very often. [*Long pause*]

I read a quite interesting account, some time ago, of Persian miniature paintings and it made this point or, at least, made it, perhaps in other words, in another way; that these pure bright colours did correspond to something visionary in the painters' experience, and then went on to say something about gold. Because gold, pure gold, also plays a quite important part in these paintings, and this writer made the point that it was as though the gold sort of represented the Transcendental itself breaking through into this archetypal world. I thought that a very good comparison. Anyway, whether the artist consciously realised it or not just seems ... That's the sort of effect it produces. And sometimes the gold background, the pure gold background, it's the transcendental world.

Voice: You get that a bit in some of the Renaissance paintings. When you get rays of gold going from - sometimes like in an Annunciation - you get from the hand of God to the dove rays of Golden Light. And then from the dove into the virgin, you get rays of gold.

S: Yes, gold has a certain symbolic value, the gold colour has. There are certain Japanese Buddhist paintings where you get Amitabha rising from - I mean, that sort of half-length figure of Amitabha rising from behind mountains. Just like a rising sun with rays coming out with a pure gold background. It's just like the vision of Enlightenment dawning on the purified human consciousness. So this is really archetypal of even spiritual art, which we have, in fact, very little of and we do have perhaps to learn to recognise it, even though there are very few perfect examples - perhaps no absolutely perfect examples. Maybe they are all imperfect. But they all give some glimpse. *[Long Pause]*

Voice: Why don't Enlightened minds paint more as a method *[Laughter]* of communication?

S: Well, there's a very interesting thing here, that there was at least one founder of a religion who was a painter, and whose name came to mean, in one particular language, the painter. Who was that?

Voice: Mani.

S: That's Mani. Yes. Mani in Persian, *[Mani (Manis) founder of Manichaeism, 3rd Century BCE]*. I am told, came to mean a painter, because he himself was a painter.

But maybe it is also with painting as it is with another medium, say the medium of words: that the more deeply one gets into the Unconditioned, the less you feel able to say or to represent. The Unconditioned, also, is the imageless. The *animitta* as we shall see, later on.

Voice: I can accept that's one of those things that occur to the Buddha, isn't it? 'How do I communicate?'

S: Yes, yes. It does seem that words are the - I was going to say highest, but perhaps I should say the most effective means of communication. But that doesn't mean the other means of communication are underestimated.

Nagabodhi: Do you think as far as painting goes that the Tibetan *thangka* is the fullest expression of ...?

S: I'm not so sure. I think I'd put the Chinese and Japanese higher. Some *thangkas* do go very far. Yes, Chinese and Japanese Buddhist art.

Voice: The lack of culture in Tibet really shows.

S: Yes, and I think it's generally accepted that the very best, the very greatest Tibetan *thangkas* are those which show very strong Chinese influence.

Voice: In terms of exposing oneself to the higher things, I found with classical music, it's been very good to live here because I knew a bit [150] about Handel but people have introduced me to other things. It sounds like painting is even harder because it sounds like a lot of quite low-level painting around.

S: I think that's true. I mean, some years ago I went to Italy for the first time and I went to a very large number of galleries, and one of the things that struck me there was that though there was a great deal of art around and a great deal of very good art, really first-class art was very rare indeed. Not one painting in a hundred. Maybe not one in several hundred. And some works of art, even by some of the greatest names, I mean, weren't always themselves very great, certainly not in these terms.

Voice: So in this case you can't even, perhaps, look to your friends to guide you?

S: Well, not your friends outside, so to speak. They may guide in certain respects. They may guide with regard to matters of technique, historical association. Historical values, place in historical development. That may be quite useful to know. Yet, a more refined, as it were, spiritual appreciation of art is something one has to cultivate oneself. And I think very, very few people are able to help you to cultivate the appreciation of art in that way, that sense.

Nagabodhi: It seems to be much more organic than just turning a light on and saying this is great art. You turn it on and you get a result. Perhaps great art is the one that is going to refine you or inspire you or move you, possibly to a higher level of consciousness.

S: Also, I think, when you go to an art gallery, you have to be very careful you don't try to look at too many things, because your senses, so to speak, can become quite blunted, quite tired.

Ratnaketu: I found that at the Tate Gallery, especially with the Turners because you've got so many of them, they look all the same.

S: Yes, there's too many, but also edge to edge, almost.

Anyway, one sees what I'm trying to get at here, in this paragraph, and one sees the sort of misunderstanding or misrepresentation that I'm trying to counteract. But this is not an aspect of Buddhism that is often stressed or even mentioned by standard books on Buddhism, or standard [151] books, say, on the Buddhist spiritual life or Buddhist meditation. I think it is one of the more neglected areas, the more neglected aspects, even though one has, of course, many albums of Buddhist art and things of that sort. But writers, say, of books on Buddhist meditation hardly ever mention beauty, even as an adjunct to the spiritual life, you know, not to speak of mentioning it in this sort of way; even though the texts are there, even in the Pali Canon. I mean, mention is made of 'The Release called the beautiful'. You know, there is a list of eight *vimoksas*, eight releases. This list is often mentioned in the Pali Canon but it is not made much of by later Theravada Buddhism. But the third Release is beauty. This is not dwelt upon. This is not made anything of. This is not really regarded as having any significance. No one asks, what does it mean? *Subha*, that you reach up to a state, a release, an emancipation where you're just overwhelmed by the experience of beauty and all you can say is 'Oh, Beauty. It's so beautiful'. This is an experience which comes in the course of one's spiritual life, according to this classification, this presentation. An overwhelming experience of beauty, with regard to which you can only exclaim 'It's beautiful.' You can't say anything else. *Subha*. The word is '*subha*' *subhati*. *Subha* means, not - as I explained last weekend - *subha* means not just beauty in our sense but purity: beauty and purity. In other words a sort of spiritual beauty, transcending anything that we normally experience. So this is a, sort of, well, integral part of the spiritual life. It's represented in this classification as a sort of necessary stage of the spiritual life, this overwhelming experience of beauty. But do the manuals of Buddhism say very much about this? I think I've mentioned in my little booklet, formerly a lecture on Buddhism and art, that often people, even those who appreciate Buddhist art regard it as something extrinsic to Buddhism, as though, well, because of the cultural conditions that happen to prevail, Buddhism happens to produce an art. There were such things as Buddhist artists. But not recognising that the appreciation of beauty is an essential part of the spiritual life, an essential stage of the spiritual path itself. This seems never really to have been appreciated.

Voice: Why do you think that is?

S: [Pause] That's quite a question. I was, of course, referring more to south-east Asian Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, because in practice, for instance, in the Vajrayana there does seem to be something that we could describe as an appreciation of spiritual beauty. That comes out in [152] Vajrayana art, very clearly. You couldn't have had that sort of art unless there had been some association of beauty with the spiritual life, and intense pleasure, bliss with the spiritual life.

Ratnaketu: Zen is very aesthetic.

S: Yes, in another kind of way.

Voice: It's there in the Mahayana texts as well as in the sense that the *sutras* are made beautiful in a literary way.

S: Well, the *sutras* are, in a way, more than made beautiful in a literary way. The *sutras*, the content of the *sutra*, is often archetypal, so any appreciation of that element will amount to much the same thing as I've been talking about. But there's another aspect that I haven't really touched upon, though we did talk quite a lot about it last time, and that was pleasure. Because when one experiences beauty as the beautiful, it is also an experience of intense pleasure. A very refined pleasure. And, as I also said last weekend, it's as though the human organism can't thrive without pleasure. So inasmuch as pleasure is an integral element, almost, of life itself, the higher the form of life, the higher the kind of pleasure experienced, until, in the course of the spiritual life, pleasure, ordinary pleasure, is refined into bliss. So one's hedonic experience also becomes more and more intense, more and more refined, as does one's aesthetic experience; the two are very closely associated.

Voice: It's as if the Theravada felt it had to deny the hedonic experience in order to affirm impermanence.

S: Yes. Well, they didn't stress the beauty aspect, so to speak, of the Absolute or the Unconditioned, nor so much the bliss aspect. Even though in the *Dhammapada* it does say '*Nibbana aranam sukham*':

Nirvana is the highest happiness, as it's usually translated; Nirvana is the highest bliss. This wasn't really, in a sense, taken very seriously. *[Long Pause]*

So these are all quite important elements of the spiritual life; a sort of refined or purified pleasure and a refined or purified experience of beauty. Or one might even speak in terms of colour, light and bliss, as well as of clarity and awareness and so on. I mean, only too many philosophers and maybe one has to include some forms of the Theravada - see existence, not in glorious technicolor but just in black and white. *[Laughter]* It's not just a question of [153] seeing everything as black or white, skilful or unskilful. No, there are all sorts of beautiful colours and it's that which comes out in Mahayana *sutras* very often and in Vajrayana art: the light and the colour.

Voice: Do you think this was indicative, then, of just how far many of them were able to go with their meditations because of many people's experience of beauty ... it's not automatic but - developing meditation it arises? If it arises then, perhaps there comes along the need to express that.

S: So it's as though one needs, one might say, a greater development of what one might call the Platonic element in Buddhism, I mean, in a manner of speaking, or Neoplatonic element in Buddhism. There is a famous treatise in Plotinus on beauty - supposed to be one of his earlier ones - based very much on the *Symposium*.

Anyway, perhaps we'd better leave it there for today. Close on that note.

END OF SESSION 3 SESSION 4

S: All right then, on to page 87. I think we're going to go a little more quickly now. We have covered already quite a lot of ground. We've dealt with the first of the *viparyayas*. We've dealt with *asubha*. And we're coming on now to *Sabbe sankhara anicca*. It's the last paragraph on page 87.

The characteristic of all conditioned things being impermanent, the first *laksana* according to the traditional order, and the second *viparyaya*, occupies a position as it were intermediate between the characteristics of *anatman* and *duhkha*, the one representing a higher, the other a lower, degree of generality of the same truth.

Do you see this? I mean why is *anatman* said to be of a higher degree of generality than either *anitya* or *duhkha*? We did touch upon this on Friday evening.

Kulamitra: Is it because each one follows as it were, from the one before, that because things are *anatman*, they are also impermanent, because they are impermanent they are experienced as unsatisfactory? [154]

S: No, because one can argue that it's because they are *anitya* that they are *anatman*, as well, that it is because they are *anitya* that they are *duhkha*. Yes? So it doesn't really quite work out in the way you suggested. So how is it that the truth *anatman* represents a higher degree of generality? It's quite simple. *[Pause]* There is nothing recondite about it. *[Pause]* Well, I mean, just remember that formula for this particular *laksana*. You've got, you remember, or, at least, you should remember, you've got *Sabbe sankhara anicca*. You've got *Sabbe sankhara dukha*, and then you've got *Sabbe dhamma anicca*. Didn't we go into this: the difference between *sankhara* and *dhamma*? So what is that difference?

Voice: *Dhamma* is appertaining to the Unconditioned as well as the conditioned.

S: Yes. So therefore *anatta* as pertaining to the Unconditioned as well as the conditioned is of a higher degree of generality than either *anitya* or *duhkha*, both of which pertain only to the conditioned. Do you see this? I mean, is this clear? I mean I take it that you understand what is meant by a 'higher degree of generality' and a lower degree of generality? These are logical terms. Is this clear to begin with? Perhaps it wasn't.

Voice: No, it's not.

S: Well, would someone to whom it is clear like to explain it? *[Pause]*

Voice: It's more universal.

S: Yes, it's more universal but then universal is almost synonymous with general.

Ratnaketu: Does it mean that the quality can be said about more things?

S: Yes, yes. That quality can be predicated of a great number of objects. [Laughter][inaudible]..... For instance, the term or the expression 'human being' is of a wider or higher degree of generality than is the term, say, Englishman or New Zealander. Londoner, again, is of a lesser, a lower degree of generality still. We say lower and higher because someone in the Middle Ages constructed a sort of genealogical tree of genera and species and so on, showing terms of a higher degree of generality nearer the top of the tree, and terms of a lower degree of generality nearer the [155] bottom of the tree. So one says not only a greater degree of generality, but even a higher degree of generality and vice versa. So this term *anatman* is of a higher degree of generality than is the term *anitya* or the term *duhkha*, because, as you say, it refers to a larger number of things. It can be predicated of a greater number of objects.

Ratnaketu: Because something is of a higher degree of generality is it necessarily of a higher degree of reality?

S: Well, here you come into questions of philosophy. According to some philosophers, yes. Broadly speaking the Platonists would say that. But according to other philosophers, no, They tend to be more empiricist, you may say. That's a separate question. But what about this lower degree of generality. Why is *duhkha* of a lower degree of generality than *anitya*?

Voice: Because the Unconditioned is not *duhkha*.

S: Yes, but then both the *anitya* and *duhkha* pertain to the conditioned. So how is it that *duhkha* is of a lower degree of generality than *anitya*? What's it really mean to say that?

Nagabodhi: Well the conditioned isn't always experienced as *duhkha*.

S: Yes, the conditioned isn't always experienced as *duhkha*, whereas it is always experienced as *anitya*, therefore the concept of *anitya* is of a wider degree of generality than the concept of *duhkha*. Though still of a lesser degree of generality than is the concept of *anatman*, yes? So *anitya* comes in the middle, as it were. So, therefore, I say, now this sentence must be clearer. You must have read it before but I wonder whether everybody understood it when I read it.

'The characteristic of all conditioned things being impermanent, the first *laksana* according to the traditional order, and the second *viparyasa*, occupies a position as it were intermediate between the characteristics of *anatman* and *duhkha*, the one representing a higher, the other a lower, degree of generality of the same truth.

Yes?

For this reason, personified Impermanence, and not Insubstantiality or Pain, is the monster shown clutching the Wheel of Life in murderous fangs and claws.

You remember this picture of the Wheel of Life, the Tibetan [156] Wheel of Life, and the monster clutching it from behind. So this monster is not *duhkha*. This monster is *anitya*: Impermanence. He's shown clutching the Wheel of Life, representing or suggesting the fact that the whole of conditioned existence is in the grip of impermanence. Though the whole conditioned existence is not in the grip of *duhkha*, or, at least, not completely in the grip of *duhkha*, because there are pleasant or pleasurable as well as painful experiences.

Voice: Just to go back a bit, can the Unconditioned be at all said to be substantial?

S: Well, yes and no. If one speaks of the Unconditioned in terms of *anatma*, and if one renders *anatman* as insubstantial, then the Unconditioned also is insubstantial, in the sense that it doesn't have any, well, selfhood. It is not a self. This is not easy to understand. This is something we went into quite a bit last weekend. We went into it from the standpoint of it being possible to think of Ultimate Reality, either in predominantly spatial or in predominantly temporal, dynamic terms. And I think we came to the conclusion - certainly I came to the conclusion, or this is a conclusion to which I have come - that the temporal or dynamic way of looking at the Unconditioned is at least more helpful than the spatial and static way of looking at it. And one of the reasons is that it exorcises any remaining ghost of substantiality. Last weekend I was talking in terms of a process of irreversible creativity, because one can think of the conditioned as constantly changing but of the Unconditioned as not changing, in contradistinction to the conditioned which is changing. But that can lead one to viewing the Unconditioned as something fixed, something static, in a sense, even, as something substantial, in a quite unBuddhistic sense. But one mustn't forget that in traditional Buddhism the term that we render as Unconditioned is really the unconditioned, and we speak of conditionality also. We speak of *pratitya-samutpada* as being as conditioned co-production, the law of conditionality. We speak of this law as universal. We speak of it as comprising not only the mundane but the Transcendental, the

so-called Unconditioned. And, therefore, we speak in a sense, in English, of the Unconditioned as conditioned. Yes? Which seems a contradiction.

So how are we to resolve this contradiction? Do you remember this discussion or the main gist of this discussion? It seems to me we resolved this contradiction only by adopting a sort of wholeheartedly dynamic approach. That is to say, one recognised the universality of the Law of Conditionality. Well, one sees quite clearly, or more clearly than ever, that there's not only a [157] reactive conditionality but a creative conditionality - what has sometimes been called Transcendental conditionality. And one sees that, as it were, within the so-called Absolute, there is still movement; there is, as it were, life. And it is the movement, it is the life of an irreversible creativity, infinitely progressing. It's not a sort of fixed or stable state to which one attains and in which one, as it were, permanently settles down. It's not a state of permanent spiritual retirement to which death never comes. It's not like that. Do you get the idea?

So if one thinks of the Transcendental in this way then of course one isn't thinking of it as a sort of substance, one isn't thinking of it in substantial terms. It certainly isn't impermanent, because impermanence suggests something that comes to an end by way of the cyclical process. It sort of merges into its opposite, so to speak. In that way it is said to pass away, to be impermanent: like day merging into night, night merging into day; life merging into death, death into life. But on this level of the irreversible creativity life never merges into death; life becomes more life and still more life, as, for instance, symbolised by Amitayus. It is not the unchanging life of something that attains a certain state and remains fixed in that state indefinitely - that corresponds a little bit, in a way, to the Christian concept of immortality, personal immortality - but that there is a constant progression, and all that is unchanging - there is an element of unchangeableness, one could say - all that is unchanging is the nature of the creative process. In other words, it is only its creativity that remains unchanging but the content, so to speak, of the creativity changes, inasmuch as it is continually enhanced. It continually reacts from it, to use that expression, from itself to itself. It adds to itself. It multiplies itself indefinitely. So this would seem to be a more helpful, a more useful, and also a more consistent way of looking at the 'Unconditioned'.

So, in this way, one sees Stream Entry or the Point of No Return as the crucial point. In a way one isn't thinking so much in terms of Enlightenment, so much as in terms of Stream Entry. If you think in terms of Enlightenment it suggests there is a fixed goal. If you think more in terms of Stream Entry - that point at which you make the transition from being predominantly reactive to being predominantly creative - if you think in those sort of terms then you obviate the necessity of thinking of the Unconditioned, with a capital U, as something static and fixed and final; in other words as an entity or substance.

Voice: That way of thinking would change the order of generality because insubstantiality would become more general [158] than impermanence.

S: Well, insubstantiality in the sense of *anatman* is more general than impermanence. One might say I've refined upon the concept of impermanence. One could say, if one wanted, though it might not be very useful to use this sort of terminology, that one speaks of a reactive impermanence and a creative impermanence. Do you see what I mean? But maybe to speak in that way means that you bring impermanence too close to insubstantiality; You virtually identify the two. Yes, one can do that because, yes, they are very close. Things are *anatman* - at least, conditioned things, to go back to that terminology, are *anatman* - because they are impermanent. They are insubstantial because they're impermanent. Just as, descending to the lower degree of generality, they are *duhkha* because they are impermanent. Anyway, this is all by way of re-capping somewhat what we've done earlier on, maybe from a slightly different point of view. But you see that the sort of general conception of the Spiritual Path at which we arrive, is all really a development, a further development, of what I've outlined in some of the earlier chapters of the *Survey*, or earlier sections of the *Survey*, in chapter one.

Voice: It seems to me that using permanence and impermanence in that way - I don't know, maybe English terms give a different impression from the Indian terms - but when one thinks of something as permanent, one does think of it usually as fixed.

S: Yes, more like a stone than like a flower, for instance. So you don't want to use an analogy for the goal of the Spiritual Life, to suggest it's stone-like rather than flower-like, but when we say something is permanent, we do think of something sort of fixed and solid, of considerable bulk, just there, like a great big boulder or like a mountain. This is the way that we feel. These are the associations which come along with the use of that particular term.

Nagabodhi: I mean, since what you said about insubstantiality, I mean, it does almost seem to cover impermanence. I mean, what is the use of that term, what is the use of seeing things in terms of permanence and impermanence?

S: Well, as I've said, there is as well - the other day I was using the term 'constancy', rather than permanence - there is a constancy of direction. The constancy consisting in the continued, in fact the continually [159] enhanced, creativity. So there is, in a sense, permanence in which there is not what we have called the conditioned. Because that creativity ...

SIDE B

Nagabodhi: ... impermanence is pertained to the conditioned. It's not just the fact everything is changing that worries us, it's its inconsistency.

S: Well, what is inconsistency? It's a special kind of change. [Pause] But is it the inconsistency of things that worries us rather than the fact that they change? Under certain circumstances it is as if one means by inconsistency a sort of logical inconsistency, as when we try to make sense of existence. We try to make of it something meaningful and we keep finding that life breaks down our categories that we try to impose upon it. I mean, should we do that? For instance, Christians have great difficulty wrestling with the problem of suffering, because God has created everything, is responsible for everything. Why do people suffer? Why doesn't God keep everybody happy? I mean that is a problem for the Christian. There is an inconsistency, apparently, for the Christian. But that is only because he has chosen to think in those particular terms. So he is constantly coming up against, as we would say, reality, and he is being forced, perhaps, to redefine his conception of God, or even to get rid of the conception of God altogether. So sometimes, I know we can be affected by the apparent inconsistency of things, but the apparent inconsistency, maybe the result of our trying to superimpose upon reality a pattern that doesn't really fit it, a pattern to which reality is continually refusing to conform. Like, for instance, when somebody gets married, and their pattern is that when you get married you're happy, you live in happiness for ever after. Then after a while they find perhaps their marriage breaking down and, according to their ideal, marriages ought not to break down. So they are confronted by inconsistency and perhaps they have to come to the conclusion in the end that their approach to marriage itself was rather inconsistent - well, was rather inadequate. They were expecting from it something rather more than it was able to deliver, hence the apparent inconsistency. It's an inconsistency between reality, the facts of life, so to speak, and illusion. That is to say, one's ideas about that particular state.

So when one speaks in terms of inconsistency, it's inconsistency with what? In a sense nature cannot be inconsistent with itself. [160]

Voice: No, it's inconsistent.

S: However little you may be able to explain in what its consistency with itself consists, but nature, to use that term, may often be inconsistent with one's ideas about nature, whether those ideas are of a scientific nature or any other. And then when the inconsistency is forced upon you as, for instance, in the case of the Christian West - the facts of astronomy and geology and biology were forced upon its attention - then you have to undertake a serious reappraisal of your way of looking at things.

Voice: It's oneself that is inconsistent with reality, really, isn't it?

S: Not so much yourself but your ideas. I mean, yourself, to use that expression, is after all a part of existence; it cannot be inconsistent. But your mind, your brain has got the capacity of alienating itself from existence and seeing everything in a distorted, upside-down way: Hence the *viparyayas*.

The *viparyayas*, you could say, are the inconsistencies. You see things, or you try to see things, as permanent which are impermanent. You try to act, to behave, as though certain things are going to last for ever, to stay that way for ever. But, you know, sooner or later you stub your toe against reality, to say the least, and you are forced to recognise that those things are not permanent, they are impermanent. There's been an inconsistency between your way of looking at things and the things themselves, the nature of the things themselves. So one could very well describe the *viparyayas* as the inconsistencies. Those attitudes of yours which are inconsistent in the long run, certainly, with Reality itself and which you are obliged, eventually, to correct if you are to have any happiness, or any peace of mind, or any Enlightenment at all.

But there was something else I was going to touch upon when we spoke about these lower and higher degrees of generality. I said that impermanence, *anitya*, is of a higher degree of generality than *dukkha*, of suffering. If we come back to the Wheel, to the Tibetan Wheel of Life, the monster impermanence certainly grasps that wheel; in other words, the whole of conditioned existence, in all its forms, in its heights and in its depths. But *dukkha* doesn't grasp the whole of it. Pain, suffering doesn't grasp the whole of it, because there are many conditioned experiences which are still pleasurable experiences. So then the question arises whether conditioned existence as a whole, taking into [161] account the

experience, the total experience of all forms of conditioned being, is predominantly pleasurable or predominantly painful. which would you say it was?

Voice: It depends where you are looking at it from.

Voice: It depends what realms of existence you are in.

S: Yes, I said taking it as a whole. Well, put it this way - perhaps this is a more Abhidharma-like way of putting it - whether the number of different pleasurable states within the samsara is greater than the number of disagreeable states within the samsara.

Ratnaketu: I think there's more pleasurable states. *[Laughter]*

S: You're a greedy type.

Ratnaketu: Yes. *[Laughter]*

S: All right, who disagrees?

Voice: According to the Abhidharma, yes, but not according to my experience. *[Laughter]*

S: Well one's experience, perhaps, doesn't range over the whole of the conditioned. Perhaps it doesn't quite reach up into the deva realms.

Voice: There are certainly a greater number of negative mental states, according to the Abhidharma, than positive ones.

Voice: Are there?

Ratnaketu: I think there are a greater number of positive ones.

S: Lama Govinda has discussed this point in a quite interesting way, in *Aspects of early...* what is it? Psychological Philosophy?

Voice: *Psychological attitudes in early ...*

S: Psychological attitudes, yes, that's right. And he has pointed out that if you take conditioned existence as a whole - all its forms, all its [162] different levels - the possibilities of pleasurable experience within the samsara are greater than the possibilities of painful experience, because you've got all the heavenly realms, you've got all the *dhyana* realms. Do you see what I mean? If you construct a sort of cosmological map you've got many many different levels of deva existence, all of which are predominantly pleasurable. Pain only creeps in if you insist on becoming attached to those states and resist the fact that they do come to an end. So Lama Govinda goes into this from the particular point of view; he's trying to counter the suggestion that Buddhism is essentially pessimistic, taking pessimism to mean that view which holds that life, ordinary life, conditioned existence, is, on the whole, painful rather than pleasurable and therefore on the whole, not worth living rather than worth living. He's concerned with this. I think this is worth pointing out or worth remembering: that, according to Buddhism, even conditioned existence is - with all its imperfections, with all its drawbacks, with all its weaknesses, with all its faults - is on the whole, if you take all spheres of existence into consideration, pleasurable rather than painful. But provided, and I think this must vary, provided you accept the fact of its transitoriness. If you resist that then even the pleasurable will be turned into the painful. If you insist on capturing that butterfly and imprisoning it, if you insist on doing that to all the butterflies that you encounter, you won't even be able to enjoy the butterfly.

Nagabodhi: But if you do that, if you can actually see the transitoriness and the insubstantiality of things and not, therefore, get hung up on them, to that extent you are beginning to enter the Unconditioned, because you are seeing the conditioned nature of the conditioned, so there is more opportunity, in a way, of pleasurable experience in the conditioned if you are in contact ... (*Bhante interrupts.*)

S: Yes, that's true, that is paradoxically true. I have actually said this in the past at a considerable risk of being misunderstood. But yes, I would say that the person with some experience of the Unconditioned has a greater possibility of enjoying the conditioned. Yes, I would say that. Because, after all, what is it that prevents one from enjoying the conditioned or enjoying such pleasures that the conditioned is able to give? What is it? It is only your attachment. You hang on to them so hard and are so unwilling to let them go, you *[laughs]* you can't even enjoy them. You know, this is what actually happens. I mean today may be a fine, beautiful sunny day but if you are obsessed with the idea that every day [163] should be like

this and the whole of today you are wondering what it's going to be like tomorrow [*Laughter*] this prevents you from enjoying today.

So this is why one often finds that people who are spiritually more developed enjoy ordinary life more than other people. They enjoy their food more, they enjoy nature more, or they enjoy fine weather more, but when those things aren't there they are not bothered. They don't hanker after them. But when they come along they can enjoy them more because that element of attachment and appropriation which is present in most people and which prevents them, more often than not, enjoying even more, there is a possibility for them to enjoy, isn't there? So if you want to enjoy conditioned existence, aim for the Unconditioned, so to speak. [*Pause*] The worldly, mundane hedonist is a very miserable sort of person. In order to really enjoy life, to speak in those terms, you should really forget all about enjoying life. Do your duty. Just enjoy pleasures as they come, if they come, without bothering about them, without thinking about them, without planning for them or trying to manoeuvre situations and so on.

Ratnaketu: It's a much bigger way, it's a very good way of looking at the spiritual life, because I remember at first when I came across the Four Noble Truths - the first one being suffering - trying to explain that to somebody.

S: Ah, but what were you trying to explain? I mean, someone might say - well, I assume it was in New Zealand, yes? - so here was someone, maybe sitting at the Auckland Buddhist Centre and maybe he was eating one of those luscious New Zealand peaches [*Laughter*], and there was Ratnaketu who wasn't Ratnaketu then [*Laughter*], saying to him, 'You're not enjoying that. [*Laughter*] That's suffering. You're not really enjoying that peach at all.' Then he says, 'Well yes, I am enjoying this peach. How can you say that everything is suffering? Buddhism is refuted.' So isn't that the sort of situation that you got yourself involved into? Yes? So where was the flaw in your argument, so to speak? What was your underlying assumption?

Ratnaketu: It was just seeing it from a specific point of view rather than as seeing that things are *dukkha* from a higher point of view.

S: Yes, because it's the Noble Truth, the Aryan Truth of *dukkha*. The Aryan Truth of *dukkha* does not maintain that there is no such thing as a pleasurable mundane experience. I mean, this is how people see it. They [164] say, Buddhism says that all things are painful. That means that there are only painful experiences, because all things are painful. But Buddhism does not, in fact, say that, because Buddhism admits the existence of pleasurable experiences, mundane experiences, as well as painful ones. But the pleasurable experiences are not permanently pleasurable. They are subject to the law of impermanence. They don't last for ever. So if you hang on to them, and if you want to make them last for ever, if you go against the grain of Reality in that particular way, then you turn those pleasurable experiences themselves into occasions for pain and suffering. But they are not, in themselves, necessarily painful. They can be pleasurable. But if you have a measure of insight you see this. You see that a pleasurable experience, even though pleasurable while it lasts, cannot last for ever. And that if you try to make it last for ever then you just lay up suffering for yourself. You see this and then in that way you see the Truth of *dukkha*. But seeing the Truth of *dukkha* does not mean seeing experiences which are actually pleasurable as actually painful. You see a mundane experience which is actually pleasurable as actually pleasurable. But you see, also, that experience as potentially painful, almost potentially giving rise to other painful experiences if you insist on hanging on to it and trying to make it last longer than it is naturally able to last. Seeing that is insight into the Truth of *dukkha*. Not trying to convince people that experiences which they experience as pleasurable are in fact painful experiences. Do you see what I mean? It's a sort of semantic confusion. Yes?

So Buddhism does not say that all conditioned things are painful in the sense that all conditioned things, all experiences, are actually painful. Because there are three kinds of *dukkha*. You may be aware of this. I've mentioned this, haven't I, on several occasions? There is *dukkha dukkha*, which is, we might translate as actually painful experience as when someone sticks a pin into you. This is actually painful. Then there are potentially painful experiences. This is called *viparinama dukkha*. This is a pleasurable experience which transforms itself into, so to speak, a painful experience. But it is not that the experience itself transforms itself into a painful experience, you transform it into a painful experience by trying to hang on to that pleasurable experience. So that's the second kind of *dukkha*. This is the fact that pleasurable experiences are potentially painful inasmuch as you cling on to them. And then there is *skandha dukkha*, which is, what shall I say, the *skandhas*. *Skandhas* are the five *skandhas*; they are synonymous practically with conditioned existence itself. This is the Truth that conditioned existence, or the reactive process, let us say, even when it is pleasurable, is [165] incapable of giving you the kind, the degree, the intensity of pleasure that the creative process is capable of giving you. In other words, pleasure, even when pleasurable, has its limitations. It cannot totally satisfy you. You can only be satisfied with the pleasure, the bliss of the Unconditioned. That is to say, the pleasure which you

experience when you are undergoing, so to speak, or when you become, the irreversibly creative process. This suggests a rather different attitude towards the pleasurable or the hedonic in human existence.

So one might say, if one wanted to be a bit paradoxical, it's not that Buddhism says you should enjoy yourself less, Buddhism says you should enjoy yourself more, and it points out that the way to enjoy yourself more is to get rid of craving and attachment, not to run after objects of enjoyment but, as it were, let them come. I mean not that, well, don't take that too literally, not that you shouldn't go to the shop and buy a *Mars* bar. [*Laughter*] The *Mars* bar won't come to you. Don't interpret what I've said too literalistically.

But I think the point made by Govinda is quite important to remember. [*Long Pause*]

For this reason, personified Impermanence, and not Insubstantiality or Pain is the monster shown clutching the Wheel of Life in murderous fangs and claws.'

But why a monster? Why murderous? Why fangs and claws? Why should you not have an angel holding the Wheel of Life? Or a Bodhisattva? Why a monster?

Voice: Well, this is how we experience impermanence.

S: Ah. We experience impermanence as something threatening. And why do we experience impermanence as something threatening?

Voice: Because we want to hang on to....

S: We want to hang on because at the centre of that Wheel we've put, so to speak, greed, hatred and delusion.

Voice: Isn't it generally a refusal to accept experience, actually? So it's as if not only do we try and cling to the good, we actually try and, as it were, thrust away the painful.

S: Yes, yes.

Voice: And that [*unclear*] like the actual thrusting away of [166] certain painful experience can even compound the whole thing and even create more painful experience.

S: Hmm yes, yes. Well, by refusing to face present suffering you may just lay up greater future suffering for yourself.

Then I go on to say:

The idea thus concretely expressed is not, of course, peculiar to Buddhism: in one form or another it is a commonplace of all higher religious and philosophical thought, as well as the oft-recurring theme of poets and mystics in every age and clime.

That is to say, this theme of Impermanence. You find it especially, perhaps, in Chinese poetry. You certainly find it in English romantic poetry. You find it in the poetry of Shelley - the sense of the impermanence of all created things. And, very often, the poet is lamenting or mourning the impermanence. It makes him feel sad, which is, in a way, an unrealistic attitude, perhaps a self-indulgent sort of attitude.

Voice: In some ways permanence would be incredibly tedious.

S: It's perhaps only Blake, in a way, who rejoices in Impermanence. It represents a great opportunity. That's why, perhaps, we should have an angel or a Bodhisattva holding the Wheel of Life. Perhaps we ought to suggest to Chintamani that he paints this kind of positive Wheel of Life.

Ratnaketu: Or you could have two mandalas - like the Wheel of Life is like a mandala - of seeing it from a very attached point of view. You could have another mandala held by an angel with different things in the middle - but it's still a cycle, not a circle but a spiral - holding a spiral.

Voice: But in a sense, well, the spiral diagram is that [*unclear*]

S: Yes, yes.

Voice: It could be represented in the same form...

S: But if you changed your attitude towards the conditioned well it's as though the conditioned becomes the Unconditioned. In a sense you could [167] say if you changed your attitude towards the conditioned you don't need the Unconditioned. It's your attitude itself which is Unconditioned. I remember hearing a talk by Krishnamurti which pleased me quite a lot. I heard it in Bombay. It was the only talk of his that I did hear. He put it in his own wordy way, but I understood him to be saying essentially that unconditioned acceptance of the conditioned was itself the Unconditioned, and I felt this an excellent point. The unconditioned acceptance of the conditioned was itself the Unconditioned.

Voice: What is it, then, that is going on with the poets and other people like that? I mean they sort of see impermanence but it makes them melancholic.

S: Yes, they see it, yes, because they are not willing to accept it. I mean, a few rare exceptions apart, like the often-mentioned Blake. Yes? (Laughs.) But very few see impermanence as an opportunity, as an escape from the past, as representing a possibility of a new development, further development, higher development. They usually mourn the passing of their mistress or some dear friend or loss of wealth or youth, or life itself, so they strike a mournful, melancholy sort of note.

*The curfew tolls the bell of parting day,
A lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea.'*

What's next?

*The ploughman homeward plods his weary way [Laughter]
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.'* [Laughter]

And then further on the famous and very celebrated verse;
*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

You see there's regret.

Voice: You seem to get this, not just in poetry, also, I think, in literature. Sometimes people really seem to see the faults of the conditioned but they don't seem to have any sense of a creative path.

S: Or of the unconditioned implications of that. Though some do. Some do get a glimpse of it. I mean, somebody said - I don't remember who it was, it might have been one of the German romantics - but said something like 'The angel of death is the angel of intuition.' You see there are odd remarks of that sort. Some did seem to have a glimpse, but not very much of a glimpse, and a lot didn't have even as much of a glimpse, even [168] though they could sing and say it very musically, the mournfulness of the transitoriness of things.

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Well, why should they be? Why should the sweetest songs be those that tell of saddest thought, of loss and disappointment? Why shouldn't the sweetest songs be those that tell of joy? Again I think Blake would have agreed with that.

Nagabodhi: And there seems to be this view, almost, built up, at least in our culture, that impermanence is something grisly and macabre.

S: Ah, yes, I've gone on to that. Let's carry on.

What distinguishes the Buddhist treatment of it from that of other teachings is the relentless thoroughness with which it pursues, explores, and exhausts the topic. In traditional Christianity, only the more remarkable and catastrophic changes in human life, in history, and in nature were ever taken into consideration. Towards the end of the medieval period the crudely macabre vision of the Dance of Death, representing the transitoriness of mortal joys, haunted the imagination of the age; but however much a prey to worms sublunary things might be, for medieval thought all above the sphere of the moon rested in immutable perfection. Bodies might rot, but then, as now, the soul was a simple, incorruptible, and immortal substance.

So, this vision of the Dance of Death, are you familiar with that? I remember I encountered a book of engravings of the Dance of Death when I was very young, in my teens, by Holbein. I believe there are two series by Holbein, engravings of the Dance of Death. Are you familiar with this? Anybody remember

what the Dance of Death is? Well, it's interesting, you see, you go back to Greek thought, Greek imagery. How do the Greeks represent death? *[Pause]* In their art? Anybody remember? All these lovers of ancient Greece.

Voice: Is it a physician?

S: No.

Voice: Is it a, sort of, hooded figure rowing people across the river? [169]

S: No, that's different, that's Charon after death. No. Death is represented as a beautiful winged boy. Oh yes. Rather like Eros. Just a little bit different from Eros. But how was death represented in this period of late medieval Christianity?

Voices: Like a clothed skeleton. A skeleton.

S: Well, just as a skeleton. Usually as a skeleton. Sometimes as an old skeletal man - with a scythe. But in this particular period almost always as a skeleton. Just as a skeleton. That was death. And for various reasons into which we need not go now - historical and social - death was depicted as a really grisly sort of figure, and dancing. And dancing with all sorts of people. You had this figure of death, the skeleton, dancing with a young woman, dancing with a rich merchant, dancing with a monk, dancing with the Pope. So what did this mean? You've got the juxtaposition of the figure of death with all these other figures.

Ratnaketu: Everyone would die.

S: Everyone would die. And death was seen as a horrible thing, because dying meant coming into the embrace and being clutched by this horrible skeletal, grisly, leering, unattractive, repulsive, disgusting figure. *[Laughter]* It was just like going to bed with a skeleton. That was death, because you lay down in the grave with this skeleton. That was death. So even the most beautiful woman was being embraced by death. Death was dancing with her and kissing her, you see. So there was this whole series of little woodcuts. This series was called the Dance of Death series, and there were two series as I mentioned, I think, by Holbein. So you see the way in which the Christians saw death? Even if this was the popular imagination, according to official theology, when you die you went straight to Heaven if you were a good Catholic. You became a sort of angel.

So why should death have been so terrible? That was the official teaching. Why should good Christians be so afraid of going to heaven and being with God, and Jesus and the Virgin Mary and all the Saints, for ever and ever? Why should they be so afraid of that? But they saw death as something fearful. They didn't have a very positive view of death. We can see this from the imagery of the Dance of Death. And it's quite interesting to compare this with the ancient, the Classical Greek imagery, where death was represented as a beautiful winged boy or winged youth. It suggests that the Greeks accepted death [170] much more easily and much more naturally. It was a sort of falling asleep. They didn't expect very much afterwards. They didn't expect great things afterwards. They had no conception of a sort of heaven. At best an Elysium for some, and a rather obscure sort of post-mortem existence for others. The Greeks certainly preferred life to death but at the same time they didn't have this macabre vision of death that Christians had or developed in the late medieval period. There is a book by a Dutch historian called Huisinga, a very famous book called *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, and he goes into this to quite an extent and explains the reasons for this sort of attitude towards death.

Voice: The feeling that comes across very strongly in that Bergman film 'The Seventh Seal'.

S: Which one?

Voices: 'The Seventh Seal'.

S: I've not seen that one.

Voice: Someone has a series of games of chess with death, who is sort of coming for them and they are trying to put it off, and right at the end there is an image of about half a dozen figures dancing in a black silhouette against the horizon with this Death with a big sickle - it's a very strong image.

S: Mm. We also in the West, I think, the Christian West, see Time as an old man with a sickle and hour-glass. In other words we don't see time as something very positive, the fact that things change, that things pass. But there is this other side, because things can not only change for the worse, they can change very much for the better. They can change from being reactive to being creative, even. And what

can be better than that? And this is only possible because of the law of impermanence. The law of impermanence becomes the law of transformation. I think it has been pointed out in connection with Hindu thought that the figure of the dancing Shiva, sort of destroying everything, stamping on everything, is an essentially positive symbol because it represents the possibility, not just of change and destruction, but of transformation.

Voice: And, also, within the Wheel of Life there are two symbols, or [171] two aspects, aren't there? There's the monster but there's also the Bodhisattva with the lute.

S: Yes, right, yes. Well, you know, the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara appears in various Buddha forms in all the six realms of existence. That reminds us that the possibility of transformation exists within every one of these spheres. In every one of these you can initiate a series of changes which will eventually bring you into contact with the Unconditioned or let's say the Transcendental series.

So I've mentioned here that 'What distinguishes the Buddhist treatment of it from that of other teachings is the relentless thoroughness with which it pursues, explores, and exhausts the topic.' That is to say the topic of impermanence. The Christian view is that - coming to the last sentence of the paragraph - 'Bodies might rot, but then, as now, the soul was a simple, incorruptible, and immortal substance.' The Christian view was that, yes, the body changed but the soul didn't change. The soul was immortal. The soul would go either to Heaven or to Hell after death and remain there for ever and ever, but the soul did not change, essentially. But certainly this is not the Buddhist view because the Buddhist view extends the concept of change to the so-called soul itself, in other words extends to the so-called soul being the concept of *anatman*. It sees the soul as insubstantial. Which doesn't mean that when you break up the soul, what you've got left is just a number of bits and pieces. You reduce the reactive mind to the creative mind. The reactive is transformed into the creative because of that very possibility of change, on the mental as well as on the physical level.

So in Buddhism there is no such idea as saving the soul, sort of rescuing the soul from the corruption of the body. The soul also changes, the soul develops, the soul is transformed, so it ceases to be a soul in the Christian sense. We don't really have a word for it, it's a stream. In fact, Buddhist tradition uses that term, *santana* - stream of consciousness - which is not a stream in the modern stream of consciousness sense. It's more directed than that. It has an overall direction, its unity consists in that overall direction, not in the fact that it remains in itself unchanged. So you see the Buddhist view of things is very different. We have always to try to see Buddhism in its own terms rather than in Christian or Western terms. We don't want to see Buddhism just as the negative of Christianity, because that means our point of reference is to Christianity or Judaism as the case may be, or Catholicism or Protestantism. So, in a way, we have to be able to understand or to see Buddhism without any reference to Christianity at [172] all. We shouldn't even say such things as 'Well, you know, in Buddhism there's no such thing as guilt as there is in Christianity.' No, we should be able to say what there is in Buddhism without any reference at all to Christianity. That's still quite difficult, I think, for nearly everybody, because our point of reference - even if only on account of the culture by which we are surrounded - is still Christian. I mean, even in this book, though I wrote it in India, there are many references to Christianity. To some extent I define Buddhism by reference to Christianity. But that is very much a provisional sort of thing. One really should be able to define Buddhism without any reference to Christianity at all. One shouldn't even have to say that Buddhism is non-theistic. Why bring in that *theos* at all, even to negate it?

Voice: It would be impossible at the moment to do this.

S: I think it would be impossible, probably even within the Friends.

Voice: Also in the practical sense we've got to take that Christian background into account, I mean like...

S: Yes. [*Bhante interrupts*] because it isn't just background. It's very much foreground. It's part of a lot of people. It's not a remote background that you could ignore if you wanted to. No, it isn't.

Voice: It's very built into the language.

S: It's built into the language. Yes. And you have to continue to use that language. You haven't yet moulded it in accordance with your Buddhist ideas and Buddhist thought, Buddhist feeling, Not to speak of meeting members of the public who ask one leading questions, like 'What does Buddhism have to say about God?' I mean I take it you still do get such questions from beginners or from new people. Or you might be asked whether you pray to the Buddha. Or what you say when you pray to the Buddha. It may be taken for granted that you do pray to the Buddha. You can either say such things as 'Oh, I don't pray at all', or 'We don't have any prayer in Buddhism' if you're not feeling in a very good mood that day. [*Laughter*] Or you can say, 'We don't pray for anything. We just pray for Enlightenment.' In other words you've made your point but you've used their language. Then they might say 'Do you believe that the

Buddha will give you [173] Enlightenment if you pray to him?’ You say, ‘Well, no, by praying for Enlightenment we just mean opening ourselves to the Ideal of Enlightenment. We don’t believe that the Buddha is there to give us Enlightenment. We believe that we gain it by our own efforts, but those efforts include making ourselves open to the Ideal of Enlightenment’, and you can, if you like, describe that as praying to the Buddha for Enlightenment. That sort of answer would probably make them quite happy. Whereas if you say, ‘No, we don’t have any prayer in Buddhism’, as if to say, ‘What a stupid question.’ (Laughter) they’ll feel a bit disappointed, perhaps. You have to meet people half way. Maybe use their language but change it, adapt it and make your point.

Voice: When you get on to the level of trying to develop insight into these aspects of conditionality I thought that Christian background does have a very strong effect. I mean we’ve had the experience here of someone, even a bhikkhu coming, an American, who was a very melancholic and morbid sort of person, walking round all the time and saying ‘It’s all *dukkha*,’ and...

S: I must also add that Eastern bhikkhus are not like that. They go around, yes it’s true, they do go around saying everything is *dukkha*, but they say that with a big smile. [Laughter] I mean they may not have any insight, I’m not suggesting that, but, at least, they’re psychologically, emotionally quite positive people, whatever they may say. [Laughter]

Voice: This person - presumably that is the difficulty for Westerners - had tried, at least, to study, and understand the conditions, the nature of conditioned existence and so on, but it had brought him to that kind of melancholic poetic - I don’t think it’s totally alienated - I think his feelings were melancholic.

S: I remember there was a poem written some time ago by a Bhikkhu Kantipalo, on the subject of impermanence, and each verse ended with a refrain. I forget what it was, but the refrain was ‘Doom, destruction, death, decay.’ [Laughter] The verse went something like this.

*The Buddha’s teaching is the only way.
Doom, destruction, death, decay. [Laughter]
This is what to others you should say.
Doom, destruction, death, decay. [Laughter]*

There’s a whole series of verses like this. You know, a very worthy [174] effort, no doubt, and not technically incorrect [Laughter], but conveying the wrong sort of feeling. Even this very word ‘doom’, you see. This is a very Christian word. [Laughter]

Voice: Is there any kind of practice we can do to help us to sort of appreciate the positive creative side of impermanence?

S: Well, I think the six element practice does that, because it’s a very, one might say, beautiful practice. It’s very aesthetically inspiring. We did it quite a lot, I think I can say, comparatively speaking, when we were in Tuscany. And I think everybody experienced it as quite stimulating and inspiring.

Tape 8

S: There’s something else I was thinking of - something much more simple and ordinary, a sort of little exercise. Very often people keep flowers or a flower in a vase, don’t they? Yes? Pick a nice rose or something like that and put it in a vase. But when it sort of fades a bit, what do you do?

Kulananda: Throw it away.

S: Throw it away. One might, as a sort of little exercise in a way, just keep it and try to see that even the faded rose is still beautiful. It’s beautiful in another way. Even the dried petals are still beautiful. When the petals fall and you’ve just got a sort of seed left, that is also beautiful. It is not just the rose which is in full bloom which is beautiful. Do you see what I mean? But when we throw it away, when it’s a bit faded, we are suggesting it’s no longer beautiful. In a sense we are placing a certain limitation upon it so perhaps in this quite small way we could do something different, do the opposite.

Kulananda: It may well be a shortsighted view, because you’ve probably thrown away the seeds to get the new flower anyway. Even if you like the flower you’ve actually thrown away the seeds to get the new one.

S: Yes, or there might even be a bud on that same stem, and if you are [175] a bit patient you may get another bloom. But if not, all right, you can still contemplate the beauty of the withered flower, its leaves and so on.

Kulamitra: It can be like that looking at old people as well. I mean sometimes you have the reaction that old people are rather disgusting. But sometimes when you look at a really old weather-beaten face and hands, they are really, really beautiful.

S: I think a lot depends upon expression, and I think, very often, one has to recognise old people are ugly and repulsive. This is not because of their wrinkles; it's because of their expression. It's because that expression represents a mental state that has been developed and confirmed over a very long period, I mean for decades and this is what constitutes the real ugliness or repulsiveness of an old person, when it is there. Whereas supposing that old person has thought positive thoughts, had positive emotions, all his or her life, you would get a tremendous positivity expressing itself, even through those wrinkled features, so there would be a certain beauty, even though it wasn't the same thing as the beauty of a young person. So in the case of a young person, very often, it isn't the beauty of expression, it's just the beauty of youth, it's vitality. So, for there to be, one might say, perfect beauty, there has to be, one might say, a beautiful mental state as well, expressing itself through the beautiful features. Because sometimes you can see someone with beautiful features, but the expression may be quite cold, unsympathetic, and you feel there is no real beauty there. It's too hard.

Kulamitra: A sort of Dorian Gray.

S: One could say that. I don't know what Dorian Gray was like but...

Kulamitra: Well, supposed to be *[inaudible]*.....

S: Yes, he didn't certainly have a beautiful nature, so however beautiful his features might have been, he couldn't have been beautiful in the sense that I am referring to. You sometimes find this with celebrated beauties. Certainly in the old days of the female sex - with beautiful Venus-like, or Juno-like features, and bearing and courage and all the rest of it, but with cold, haughty, disdainful expressions. So that isn't true beauty, at least it's not complete beauty. One doesn't [176] want to go to the other extreme, and say the only beauty that really counts is the beauty of the mental state. I mean the beauty of the form, the beauty of the body, yes, it does have some significance and maybe the greatest beauty is when you get the two together. And you won't get them both together in an old person. You can only get them both together in a young person. It's not easy for a young person to have that degree of positivity which comes only after many years. Sometimes you do get it, maybe coming from experiences in perhaps earlier lives, but very often the beauty of a young person is a bit empty, because there isn't much there in the way of character or real emotional positivity. But in the case of the older person the emotional positivity may be there, but the vehicle for that is rather inadequate. You don't often get the two just meeting at the right time.

Anyway, how did we get on to that? Beauty. Did you lead us up a by-path?

Kulamitra: Well it's talking about sort of a non-Christian way of looking at impermanence.

S: It's not really a by-path, I suppose.

I remember recently, I was in Crete -well, recently, it's a long time ago now. But one of the things I did in Crete was obviously to look in these souvenir shops and so on, and it was extraordinary the number of icons that could be bought. Quite old icons. Most of these icons were of saints of various kinds. Many of Christ. But lots of other saints of all kinds, monks and so on. But what was surprising was the expression. The expression could only be described as miserable, sour. So much so that Kevala, who was with me at that time, after a while he refused to look into any of these shops. He said the sight of these sour, melancholy, disagreeable faces, as though they all had chronic indigestion, or something like that, at least, really upset him. He just wouldn't look at them any more. He didn't see any point in it. I just continued more out of psychological interest as it were. But it was really dreadful that these sort of expressions represented something saintly. Something spiritual that had been attained. So this must all have its effect.

You compare, say, Buddhist Bodhisattvas. You won't find Bodhisattvas depicted with disagreeable expressions. Maybe the artist isn't always adequate to the subject by any means, but you can see there is at least an effort to produce an impression which is agreeable, and the artist is trying to convey some impression of beauty and peace and sweetness and so on. Not something harsh and disagreeable, and disapproving. Nearly all these saints have got knitted brows and [177] frowns as though they are tut-tutting over the sins of humanity. Ticking people off. Practically all of them. The only icon where there was some approach to something a bit positive were icons of angels. But even they were sometimes quite stern.

[Pause for coffee break]

Voice: About the creative process, is that to say you don't have constancy in the reactive process?

S: Yes, you have a constancy of reactivity.

Voice: So in a sense then ...

S: When I speak of the constancy of the creative process, I am trying simply to avoid the use of the word permanent with its implications of something static.

Kulananda: I think perhaps one can talk about continuity and discontinuity because one's experience, reactive experience, is discontinuous from the start. But the creative experience is continuous.

S: Yes, that is true. It's continuous without being continual. It's continuous in the sense that the process of creativity continues, but it's not continual in the sense that it is not one particular type or kind of creativity.

Anyway, before going on to the next paragraph, I wanted to back track a little bit. Going back to the icons of these saints and so on.

I don't want to leave anyone with the impression that anything of the nature of asceticism is absolutely out. That would be going very much to the other extreme. Do you see what I mean? I mean asceticism is still a very essential, a very necessary, even a very healthy element in the spiritual life. But asceticism properly understood. I think in order to obtain a proper understanding of what asceticism really is, one needs to go back to the original meaning of the Greek word, which is *asketis*. So what was the literal meaning of that word? Has anybody any idea?

Voice: Training.

S: Training. *Asketis* was training. For instance the athlete goes training. The athlete leads an ascetic life [178] because he has to fit himself for the race or the competition, whatever it is. He needs perhaps to control his diet. He needs to take regular exercise of one kind or another. He needs to accustom himself to experiencing a certain amount of hardship. He's got to be tough. So all this is ascetic. All this is asceticism. So asceticism is really the sort of training you put yourself through in order to make yourself fit for a certain purpose. Fit for achieving a certain goal. So this sort of asceticism, asceticism in this sense, very definitely and very clearly has a place in Buddhism, an essential place. Do you see what I mean? For instance, supposing you have a problem with food. Supposing you are over-addicted to food. Or suppose you're at least over-indulgent, where food is concerned. Then you may need to adopt certain 'ascetic' procedures. That is to say you make various little rules for yourself. That you are not going to eat in between meals. Or you are not going to have second helpings. Or you are going to abstain from certain items of food. Do you see what I mean? That would be a form of asceticism. Certain measures of training that you subjected yourself to in order to fit yourself better for leading a spiritual life, by curbing your greed with respect to food. So asceticism in that sense can take various forms, depending on the various objects to which you happen to be over-addicted.

Kulananda: One might make the point clearer by saying also that the appreciation of beauty was part of one's ascetic practice. Or learning how to enjoy life was actually part of an ascetic practice. Would that balance out?

S: One would then be being, perhaps, just as well somewhat paradoxical, one could say. You could say, yes, you had to enjoy life as part of your asceticism, but you might equally say, you have to be more ascetic in order to enjoy life. Which is what I was saying a little earlier on.

So I am supplementing that now with the present statement. But you've insisted on reiterating the original statement. Which is perhaps a little significant. *[Laughter]* I thought I'd enlarged sufficiently on that already. No, we won't go into that. I am sure everybody has got both points. But, yes, the importance of asceticism in the real sense, the true sense, the original Greek sense, and the Buddhist sense, is not to be underestimated. It has been said that Buddhism is an ascetic religion and this is very true. But it's ascetic in this sense. It is a religion of training. It consists in getting into training. The spiritual life is getting into training to enable yourself to reach [179] the goal of at least Stream-Entry, and you won't reach that goal if you are too sort of flabby or out of condition, spiritually speaking. So you need to go into training. Maybe people don't attach enough importance to discipline and training. Perhaps they don't sufficiently realise, you can alter your attitude, even supposing you are greedy and over-indulgent where food is concerned, you can alter that quite quickly actually. In a matter of weeks, or at least of months. Just by adopting certain simple procedures of an 'ascetic nature' such as those I mentioned.

Some people are very fond of comfort. You can adopt a slightly more ascetic regimen to lessen your dependence upon comfort. But never in Buddhism is the idea of asceticism associated with the idea of self-torture, or self-mortification. This is regarded as one of the extremes. Self-indulgence is one extreme, but self-mortification or self-torture is the other extreme, and both are to be avoided. So asceticism in a way constitutes a middle path. So the more you enjoy life the more ascetic you will be, and the more ascetic you are the more you'll enjoy life.

Anyway. Oh yes, there was something else I was going to mention. I'm being quite hard on the representations of the Christian saints in these icons, but there's something a bit like them, though only a little bit like them, in Buddhism itself, and Buddhist art, and that is the representations of Arahants. But they aren't really very much like the representations of the Christian saints and the icons. They certainly don't look like Bodhisattvas. I think I've commented before on the contrast between Arahants, as represented in Mahayana Buddhist art, especially Chinese art, and Bodhisattvas. Do you remember about that? A thing I've mentioned in *The Three Jewels* itself, certainly in lectures, that the Arahants are represented as old and wrinkled, a bit worn, though they certainly don't have the moroseness of the Christian saints in the icons. Whereas the Bodhisattvas, in comparison, are represented as sixteen-year-old youths. They are extremely handsome in appearance, beautifully dressed, with very graceful postures. So one could, looking at it in a way a bit psychologically, say the Arahant represents what you have to go through perhaps, but the Bodhisattva represents more of the nature of the goal. Not goal in a quite rigid, limited sense but what you are trying to break through into. The Arahant represents, well sort of embodies all the stresses and strains that you undergo in trying to transform the reactive into the creative. But the Bodhisattvas represent that state of achievement of the purely creative. There's none of the stress of the original battle, the original struggle shown in their case. So you sort of go [180] through, being, as it were, an Arahant to being, as it were, a Bodhisattva. You go through the stage of that struggle between the reactive and the creative, which may need a tremendous, well, result in a tremendous strain. Requires a tremendous effort, but what you achieve is purely Bodhisattva-like, purely creative. So you may look a bit battered and Arahant-like to begin with, but you should end up looking more and more Bodhisattva-like. Or at least something more and more Bodhisattva-like to shine through the battered Arahant-like features, if you see what I mean. Sometimes it's useful to think in terms of images and art and illustrations rather than in purely abstract terms. In some ways the way in which Arahants are represented and the way in which Bodhisattvas are represented does illustrate in a very broad general way the whole difference between what we might call classical Hinayana and classical Mahayana.

Anyway let's go on to the next paragraph.

No such exceptions to the law that all conditioned things are impermanent have ever been recognised by Buddhism,

There is no such exception as say the soul in traditional Christianity.

for it sees clearly that whatever has a beginning must also have an end. Whether in the physical universe without or the psychic world within, nothing is so huge or so minute that it can escape the clutches of the demon Impermanence. Already we have seen revealed as the cosmological background of Buddhism infinite space and infinite time wherein universes unnumbered rise into existence, persist, and disappear, the life period of each one covering thousands of millions of years. At the opposite end of the cosmic scale Buddhism shoots a penetrating glance at the tiniest conceivable unit of 'matter', the so-called atom, and sees not a microscopic billiard ball, static, homogeneous, and eternal, but a continuously changing dance of forces about a common centre. Again, plunging into the spiritual depths of the universe, instead of everlasting abodes of eternally redeemed or eternally tormented spirits it beholds mental states objectified as perceptible worlds which, even though enduring for thousands of aeons, are still finite as the healthy or un [181] healthy volitions that first conjured them into being. Heaven, the ultimate goal of so many faiths, since it is a mode of contingent and hence transitory existence is accounted no more than a pleasant interlude in a pilgrimage fundamentally of more serious import.

So here I am just enlarging upon this fact that for Buddhism impermanence is truly universal, that Buddhism sees the universe or sees existence as impermanent, both on the largest conceivable scale and also the smallest conceivable scale. It sees nothing as permanent, however tiny it might be. Whether it looks outward into the heavens or whether it looks inward into the atom. it still sees only impermanence, it sees change. It doesn't see anything conditioned as exempt from change. And this leads it, of course, not to view the soul as something eternal, which is the sort of classic Christian position. And it doesn't see heaven or hell as eternal. These are clearly conditioned states, conditioned spheres. So for this reason alone, if for no other, Buddhism cannot imagine an everlasting heaven, or an everlasting hell. In fact, one might go so far as to say it's a very odd kind of mind indeed that could conceive of, even want to

conceive of, an everlasting heaven, and certainly an everlasting hell. It seems an absolutely maniacal sort of idea.

Voice: It's one of the most unattractive aspects of Christianity.

S: And also the way in which this is insisted upon. And even the idea, the Calvinistic idea that there are some people who are predestined to everlasting torment; who were created for everlasting torment, who had no hope and no chance of anything else. This really is almost theology run amok, or theism run amok. It really is insane, as Blake would have said. That you can get so far out of touch with your human, your ordinary human feelings, as to be able to posit, on strictly theological grounds, the existence of an eternal hell to which certain unfortunate beings were eternally predestined. Who were created so to speak, for hell. Or for the greater glory of God. We are so used to these sort of things it no longer shocks us. It's like the atom bomb, or you know, it's like nuclear weapons, they've been around for so long. *[Long Pause]* They've been around for so long that we are no longer shocked by them. Nuclear weapons have only been around a few decades, and we are almost ceasing to be shocked by them.

I mean the idea of God, the Christian idea of God, the Christian idea of the eternal heaven, and the eternal hell, [182] these ideas have been around so long that we are no longer shocked by them. We sort of take them for granted, but really we ought to be horrified. We ought in a sense to be going along to churches every Sunday and protesting against them, with banners outside. Down with hell, down with God. I mean, this is what they are still teaching. Maybe not in the fully fledged forms, a little bit subdued, a little bit watered down. But still this is the official teaching, certainly of the Catholic church. Still the Pope is given a great welcome in Britain. What a nice kindly old gentleman and wonderful charisma. But this is what he stands for, one mustn't forget that. This is what he proclaims. This is what he believes in. This is what he teaches. This is what he does his best to reinforce. So don't be misled by the beautiful smile, and the way he sort of kisses baby, and pats little children on the head. That's all quite beside the point. Down with the Pope. *[Laughter]*

Voice: How do they justify the idea of people being predestined to eternal hell?

S: For that you should consult a work called *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, written by John Calvin. He explains it in great detail, very convincingly.

Ratnaketu: I think some Christians - I think it's the Seventh Day Adventists - believe there is only a certain number of positions in heaven.

S: Yes. A certain number of vacancies. *[Laughter]*

Ratnaketu: They've already got filled up. Nobody else has got ...

Voice: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that as well.

S: It does help to create a certain sense of urgency, I mean one must admit. *[Laughter]* No doubt the Buddhist position is truer, but it doesn't, one really has to act upon it, because a lot of good Buddhists in the East believe they've got unnumbered lives. And it doesn't matter if they don't follow the Buddhist path in this life, they can follow it in the next, or the one after. What's the hurry? So they lose all sense of urgency, thinking in this way. So the Christians certainly do know how to achieve a sense of urgency. So it's as though we need to follow a kind of middle path. Or not be so broad-minded and so universal. But at the same time not get away from [183] the truth of Buddhism and Buddhism's genuinely universal, genuinely tolerant, genuinely optimistic attitude. I think it is very easy for people to lose a sense of urgency. I mean, one even notices this amongst our own Friends, in some cases. Things become a little bit deva-like, and people tend to settle down in that sort of state, and that sort of situation fairly happily, and they just jog along or they just let things carry them along, they don't think so much in terms of making a really consistent sustained effort of their own. I mean, yes, in collaboration with other people, but they lose a sense of urgency. One experiences that sense of urgency very strongly in India, for social rather than psychological reasons. Because the conditions under which many so-called Buddhists live are really so bad, that they really feel impelled to do something about them, and Buddhism provides a sort of lever. It gives them a basic philosophy of life, a way of life which enables them to surmount their present difficulties and drawbacks.

So 'Heaven, the ultimate goal of so many faiths, since it is a mode of contingent and hence of transitory existence is accounted no more than a pleasant interlude in a pilgrimage fundamentally of more serious import.'

One could refer those words to the heavens that we experience from time to time in this life itself. They are no more than heavens, and we mustn't settle down in any of these heavens. We have to press on

because our life is, so to speak, fundamentally a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage, of course, can be very pleasant. And there is no reason why the pilgrimage shouldn't take us through a few heavens provided it remains a pilgrimage and we still do press on.

Voice: What's that word contingent?

S: Contingent means depending upon something other than itself.

Kulananda: Is it just another word for conditioned or is there an extra meaning?

S: Yes, it's more or less just another word for conditioned. Contingent is usually contrasted with the Absolute in Western philosophy. Absolute existence: existence which depends upon itself. Contingent existence: existence which depends upon something other than itself.

Anyway, to continue:

Deep as such insights into the impermanence of the [184]conditioned go, and destructive as they are of cherished delusions, there is yet one which penetrates deeper still and destroys what, by reason of the natural resistance of the human mind, is the greatest delusion of all. Turning from the physical to the psychical, and focusing its gaze within, the Eye of Enlightenment pierces the depths of the human personality itself. Where common sense posits a real 'I', idealist philosophers the residual self, and theologians an immortal soul, that undeceivable Eye beholds not any such unchanging entity but, instead, an uninterrupted flow of mental events which, themselves arising in dependence on conditions, in turn function as conditions for the arising of further states.

In other words, the idea or the concept of impermanence in Buddhism is applied not only to material existence but to mental existence, applied even to the so-called soul. It's not so much that the so-called soul changes, but that it *is* change. Do you see the point of the distinction? It is not that there is an unchanging mental entity which is subject to various changes in a purely extrinsic sort of way, but whatever is mental is change, is pure continuum. Do you see what I mean? The structure of language misleads us here to a great extent. I think I've gone into this before. We say it changes as though there's an 'it' which is unchanging and then there are various things that happen to it, of purely sort of intrinsic and peripheral nature, which constitutes its change, but that the 'it' remains as it were underneath unchanging. So it's very difficult to avoid or to escape being conditioned in our thinking by that kind of language.

Kulananda: We need new sorts of words which can run subject and predicate together.

S: Right, yes, yes. For instance supposing you have a, well, we talked about a flower a little while ago, a flower fading. All right, let's say today the flower is red, tomorrow it's yellow; so is there a sort of flower entity which is at one time red and another time yellow? No, you've got, well, you could say red-flower, merging the adjective and the substantive into a single word, being succeeded by yellow-flower. You've not got an entity, the flower, which is neither red nor yellow, but upon which at one stage red impinges and on which at another [185] stage yellow impinges, the flower itself refining, all the time essentially unchanged. Do you see the difference? So we have to learn to think of things in that way. That is to say not as substantives, only the predicates of which change, but in a sense only the predicates are real. Do you see what I mean? Or rather put it this way, the distinction between the substantive and the predicate is unreal. Well, it is a distinction in thought, not a distinction in reality. You don't really have a flower which is not red, not yellow, upon which red and yellow are successively superimposed. It's a quite elementary point in philosophy in a way, but one which is not taken seriously. So Buddhism applies this to the soul, to the self. We say I, 'I', but there is really no 'I' other than the flow of mental states, thoughts, feelings etc. Ideas. Volitions.

Ratnaketu: Could you say if there was a soul Buddhism could be sum total of all the changing stream?

S: You could say that, but only so that one could just say something. *[Laughter]* It is not that the soul consists of real parts. Sometimes the so-called parts themselves represent quite arbitrary sub-divisions, as when we try to distinguish between, say, thought and feeling. Really you can't distinguish; wherever there is feeling there is thought. Wherever there is thought, there is feeling. Though the proportions may vary considerably. You can't really have a thought which is not affectively toned. You can't really have an emotion to which there attaches no concept at all. Except in meditation, when there are no thought processes going on.

So this point is very, very important, that Buddhism sees the soul also as transitory, and therefore as insubstantial. As soulless, paradoxically speaking, because it therefore suggests the possibility of radical

transformation, not that the soul sort of virtually unchanged can be whisked off either to heaven or to hell. No, it's a question of absolutely radically transforming that particular so-called entity. Radical transformation. That is to say a transformation which leaves no part unchanged. We can hardly conceive of that.

Kulananda: No.

S: *Anatta* represents the possibility of change, radical change, which means change from reactive to creative, or if you like, conditioned to unconditioned, mundane to transcendental. [186]

Kulananda: One of the major things which stop us being able to conceive of such radical changes is feeling that the past has become permanent and therefore ...

S: Yes, well, become fixed in certain habits.

Kulananda: Once something has been done it can't be undone. It can't change.

S: This is also an important point. We've got really to assimilate change. You can't change someone just by subjecting them to external changes. You will only drive them deeper within themselves in a quite negative way. For instance, we are quite attached to our surroundings. The surroundings in which we have been born and brought up, the surroundings with which we are familiar, the culture with which we are familiar, so it is a very good thing that we should say, go abroad, live abroad for some time. Do you see what I mean? This helps to get us out of our fixed habits, our fixed behaviour patterns, our fixed attitudes. But if one was to simply take someone and whisk them off from their native country, to some other distant country and put them down there for a few months and whisk them off to some other country, would you necessarily progressively decondition them? No.

Kulananda: You'd confuse them.

S: Yes, you'd confuse them. You'd drive them more back on themselves. Do you see what I mean? So the change has to be assimilated. You have to be given time to adjust to the change so that it can be assimilated.

Nagabodhi: That really does happen, with exiles.

S: Yes.

Nagabodhi: They dwell on the situation they've come from. But all their emotions are actually still involved.

S: Right, yes. They continue to think of themselves as exiles, even to the second and third generations. Or as refugees, even to the second and third generation. They're still thinking of the situation from which they've come, even though, perhaps they personally have never actually come from that situation. And sometimes one does see [187] that people of the older generation, parents especially, who, perhaps, have come from the old situation, resent that the younger generation no longer feels that way. No longer speak the old language. They speak the language of the country in which they have been born and brought up, which is perfectly proper. But sometimes people of the older generation don't like that. They feel they are being disloyal.

Ratnaketu: These changes have to be conscious, it seems.

S: Well, in the case of changes which are essential to spiritual life, the more conscious they are the better they fulfil that function. If they are changes which are merely imposed upon you from without, by force of circumstances, you may not be able to take advantage of the opportunity that that change of circumstances gives you. You may remain more fixed in your original identity than ever.

Voice: In other words, you can't force anyone to grow and develop.

S: No you can't. They must want to grow. They must want to develop. So if they do go into a new situation they will usually only grow and develop as a result of that change, if they really want to use that change in that particular way. I've met, out in India, plenty of English people who've been out there all their lives, whose parents have been out there all their lives, who haven't assimilated anything of the Indian environment.

[Part of original transcript missing, as well as a tape to check it against!] [188]

We must be careful not to go to extremes. It doesn't mean that you should not sometimes push yourself. Maybe I should make a distinction and say, 'Don't force yourself but you may certainly have to push yourself sometimes. Don't force other people, but you may have to push them a bit sometimes, especially if they are your Mitras or whatever.'

Kulananda: To the extent that you are unintegrated, if you don't push yourself you will never do anything.

S: Yes. Yes. Unless you know you are emphasising again and again the need to follow a middle way. The fact that it is important to do this, does not mean you should go to an extreme and not do it. Hedonism does not mean that you should neglect asceticism. Asceticism does not mean that you should neglect hedonism and so on. The fact that you shouldn't **force** yourself doesn't mean that you shouldn't **push** yourself. The fact that you should **push** yourself doesn't mean that you should **force** yourself. It isn't easy always to strike the necessary balance. Perhaps one shouldn't be too precious about it. If you are a healthy human being you can go a bit to extremes from time to time. If you are basically healthy the balance will eventually be restored quite naturally. If you've overworked for some length of time, you've pushed yourself rather too hard, almost forced yourself, if you are basically a healthy person, your organism will demand a rest, a holiday, and you'll give yourself a rest or a holiday. Or least if you are not able to do so for any reason, you'll know what is happening and maybe take precautions that what you are doing isn't having an undesirable effect upon you.

Kulamitra: Could you just elaborate a little on the difference between what you mean by forcing and pushing?

S: Well, what does one mean by forcing? What does one mean by being wilful? It's as though ideas sometimes have a dreadful compulsive force. It's as though if one lives very much in one's head, as they say, if ideas become very important to you, a lot of your energy can get, so to speak, locked up in your head. And it's drained, so to speak, from other parts of your being. Drained maybe from your physical being, drained from your emotions. Your energy is mostly in your head, and then in your head you get an idea that certain things are to be done. And then the energy [189] is there in your head, so to speak, ready to carry that out in practice. So you can do it for a while. But after a while the rest of your being starts rebelling, because in the first place energy or its natural supply of energy is being cut off, too much is going into the head, and that energy is being directed into channels which are proposed by the head, which means in a way, the alienated rational thinking consciousness. So there comes to be a sort of reaction or backlash from the rest of the being. It raises a protest, and eventually you are slowed down, or the head is slowed down, and the conflict develops between what the head insists should be done, and what the rest of the being is saying. And you may even reach an impasse. You may even reach a situation of stalemate where neither side is able to get his own way, so to speak. And then you have to tackle the problem of integration of your energies, and the different parts of your being. So this is sort of forcing.

But pushing is when you're a relatively integrated person and you can see with your more balanced mind, your more balanced mental consciousness, that is to say mental consciousness which is not very much cut off from the rest of your being, you can see that your energies are not going quite in the right direction, so you can give them a push. Maybe your mental consciousness has seen what needs to be done first. But it is in touch with the rest of you. It's not sort of appropriating the energies of the rest of the being for its own purposes. It can see what needs to be done in the interest of the being as a whole, and can, as it were, insist that the energies, the total energies, go in that particular direction. That is more of the nature of pushing. So pushing may involve a little healthy asceticism. So push by all means but don't force. Be energetic but not wilful.

Anyway let's go on to the next paragraph. Half way down page 89.

For Buddhism, no less than for modern physics and psychology, all the apparently stable and solid material and mental objects in the universe are in reality temporary condensations of energy. Hence despite what some have assumed the use of such words as 'states' and 'elements' to mean, seeing conditioned things as impermanent does not consist in conceiving them as chopped up into bits (which would raise the artificial problem of how the bits were to be joined together again), but rather in seeing them as so many phases of one or the other of two pure, absolutely continuous, interdependent streams of energy [190] which can be locked up in the atom, in the one case, and trapped in the individual mind, in the other. Whether the energy which is the reality of 'matter' and the energy which is the reality of 'mind' are ultimately one energy Buddhism does not at this stage of its analysis enquire. But according to some of the later developments in Buddhist thought, material is reducible to mental energy and both to the transcendental outpourings of the ineffable Void.

S: Which is quite a spectacular flight, I may say. *[Laughter]* But this idea, this notion, or this feeling of everything as an embodiment of energy - I think this is quite important, because this is what everything is. Everything is condensed or solidified or crystallised energy, to the extent that it is a separate identifiable thing at all. There are certain states of mind in which one can actually see things as congeries of energies, rather than as blocks, rather than a sort of building bricks. There are some meditative states in which one sees things in this way. And also some, let's say, abnormal mental states in which one sees things in this way.

Kulananda: These abnormal mental states are not, as it were, the Enlightened state which sees things in this way. *[inaudible]*.....

S: Well, put it this way. To the extent to which they see things in this way, to that extent some insight is present.

Kulananda: Is it then likely to be the case that the Enlightened perception would perceive congeries of energy, as it were, rather than blocks? Actually perceived rather than ...

S: Yes, perhaps even - energy is, perhaps, not quite the right word here, maybe it is a bit too, as it were, scientific. I think we touched upon this in a way last weekend and I was making the point that one needed to see things as alive - I think it was last weekend - rather than as dead. It's as though when one experiences more life within oneself one feels the life in other things, even so-called inanimate things. So it's not so much that things have energy - maybe that isn't the happiest way of putting things - but you feel that everything is alive, that the universe is alive. You feel that it is alive. Because you are alive yourself you have empathy with what is alive.

Some years ago when I was in Kalimpong, I [191] penned a little defence of animism. I am sorry to say it hasn't survived. It was never printed. No Buddhist magazine wanted it, of course. *[Laughter]* So it got lost, but I sometimes have wished that that little essay did survive. I made the point that if it was a question of choosing between a universe that was dead and a universe that was alive, the more Buddhistic alternative would be the universe that was alive. And we know in relation to the Pali Canon, some scholars or some scholarly students of Buddhism, or scholarly Buddhist students even, have had some difficulty - the difficulty existing almost entirely in their own minds - of reconciling the so-called animism of certain passages of the Pali Canon with the *dharma* itself. You know what I mean by the animism of the Pali Canon? When the Buddha is sitting under a tree, and the tree spirit speaks to him. Well, this is animism pure and simple. It's so utterly unscientific. Everybody knows that there aren't such things as tree spirits. Spirits don't inhabit trees. Or spirits don't inhabit streams, or live in stones any more. You certainly don't get spirits in the sky or in the clouds - everybody knows that! Animism has been banished from the scientific universe. All you've got is matter *[Laughter]*, moving in accordance with mechanical laws. That's the modern, that's the Newtonian vision, that so horrified Blake. Newton's vision and single sleep, I think he said something like that.

But one might say that even though in the Pali Canon, the language, so to speak, of Indian mythology has been bemused, what the text is really saying is that the universe is alive. Well, why shouldn't the Buddha hear a voice from the tree speaking to him as he sat there. Well what does that mean? He's got a feeling for the tree, an empathy with the tree. He feels it as alive. He feels that he is in communication with the tree, the tree is in communication with him. Surely if you have any sort of life in you, any sort of sensitivity, this is how you should feel, certainly when you are in contact with, say, the vegetable world. Maybe it's difficult to feel that brick and stone are alive. It's difficult to feel that steel is alive. I personally must admit I can't feel that plastic is alive. I recognise that as a limitation. Because one ought to be able to feel that even plastic is alive. But somehow I can't. Let's hope one day I will. Maybe the stage has not quite been reached when we should feel that plastic is alive. That will come maybe after we've thrown away plastic, and don't use it any more.

But I remember in this connection having Ratnaketu sitting in front of me, like a leprechaun. *[Laughter]* I bring in a little reminiscence from New Zealand, for the benefit of all New Zealanders. I remember travelling on my first visit to New Zealand, travelling on the west coast, the north-west coast of North Island, and [192] as you know there is a magnificent kauri forest there. For the benefit of those who haven't been to New Zealand the kauri tree is a really magnificent tree. It's absolutely enormous. I can't describe it in botanical terms. It's very, very, very big indeed. They are absolutely gigantic trees. At one time apparently they covered virtually the whole of New Zealand. But in modern times they've retreated to this extreme north-western corner almost of North Island. But anyway there's this magnificent sort of rain forest of kauri trees, and I remember being taken through this and to see this, and I was led into this forest to see the biggest of all the kauri trees, and it had a name in Maori - I forget what the Maori was - called the king, no, the God of the forest. [Additional Note: actually called 'Father of the Forest,' '*Te Matua Ngaliere*' - 2,000 yrs old.] It's really quite an amazing experience just to stand at the foot of this kauri tree. I forget how many feet it was across, at least twenty feet, possibly more. And for a hundred

feet there was no branch. I don't know how tall it was altogether, it was very, very tall. but anyway the strange thing was standing in front of this tree I really felt that this tree was alive. Not just alive in the usual tree-like way. It was alive almost like a sort of being, a sort of presence. I could really believe, well, I didn't need to believe I could really **feel** not that there was a sort of spirit in the tree, not like that, lurking among the branches, but that the tree **was** a spirit. I actually felt this. It was almost as though I could speak to the tree, and say 'Hello' [*Laughter*] The tree would say to me 'Hello'. [*Laughter*] Much, much deeper than that. [*Laughter*] It was a great big tree. It seemed a quite extraordinary experience to be in sort of contact with something which was alive and **so big**. Because it occurred to me, usually we don't come into contact ourselves with things which are alive, and so much bigger than ourselves, but this was so much bigger than a human being. At the same time it was alive in that sort of way.

So as with a number of these sort of animistic experiences in my life, I find animism a very natural attitude. I think it's quite in consonant with the *dharma*. I don't think these animistic passages in the Pali Canon are things to be edited out. 'Oh, these are later additions, these are corruptions, these are vestiges of Indian mythology. Nothing to do with Buddhism, nothing to do with the dharma.' I think that's all wrong. I think it's got a great deal to do with the dharma. I said the more you experience the Unconditioned the more able you are to experience the conditioned in a pleasurable way. So the more you develop spiritually, the more you become aware of, or identify with, the Unconditioned, [193] the life of the Unconditioned, the creative life of the Unconditioned, the more you appreciate the life of the conditioned. It isn't that the conditioned becomes all dead to you, and inert to you, and dust and ashes to you, it's not like that. You experience the life of the conditioned all the more than you did before. I think it's that which is represented by this so-called animistic element in the Pali Canon. It's as though Buddhism is surrounded by a beautiful aura of animism - if you like pantheism, except pantheism brings in the word *theos*, which is God, whereas animism doesn't.

Nagabodhi: That's a function of his insight rather than say his *dhyanic* experience.

S: I would say it can be a function of dhyanic experience inasmuch as *dhyanic* experience is an experience of greatly heightened sensitivity. I think perhaps it's not without significance that many of the old monks, bhikkhus, in the Buddha's day, lived in the forest and tree spirits were constantly speaking to them. I think this has a significance. But I think when one reaches, say, the level of the Unconditioned or the creative process, it becomes real Insight, you don't just feel things as alive, you almost sort of, it's not easy to find an expression here which might not be misunderstood, you almost experience the conditioned as an expression of the Unconditioned. I don't want you to take that too literally, because it might result in one adopting a crude kind of pantheism, which is not really a Buddhistic attitude at all. It's as though, maybe using the language of *The Awakening of Faith*, you really experience the Unconditioned as reflected in the conditioned.

Kulamitra: Is that what you mean when you say here that both perhaps can be 'reduced to the transcendental outpourings of the ineffable Void'.

S: Yes, yes, I am sort of hinting at that. I am being very cautious because I don't want to suggest that at some point, so to speak, in time, right at the beginning of time, the conditioned, the samsara emerged from the Unconditioned. That is not the Buddhist view. But nonetheless there is some expression of the Unconditioned on the part of the conditioned, some reflection. So that you see the Unconditioned in the conditioned and therefore you see it not as alive, you see it as much more than that, but you see it as something for which we don't really have a word. When Western writers or romantic poets and so on reach this point they usually start using the word pantheism, or their critics start using [194] the word pantheism, but that isn't what it's about at all. There is something in Wordsworth which might apply here. What is that? I am always thinking of something, some lines of his.

Nagabodhi: The joy of co-existence he talks about.

S: No, 'A spirit and a motion that impels all objects [*Pause*], and rolls through all things'. I can't remember the whole quotation. 'A sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused,'
[Transcriber's Note: The actual quote is:

*A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things (lines 100-102)*

*...a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused (lines 95-6)*

From Tintern Abbey (Wordsworth)]

S: He seems to be approaching that experience or hinting at it. [*Long Pause*]

So animism is certainly a preferable attitude to materialism, as against materialism in this sense. To bring Blake in again, that Blake was protesting. He was protesting against the conception of a universe devoid of life, a universe consisting of purely material objects moved by mechanical forces. To him that was the creation, the vision, so to speak, of the Spectre, the alienated rational consciousness of man. But we still see things very much in those terms. We can't help - I mean we've talked a lot about Christian conditioning, but there's a lot of post-Christian conditioning too. There's a lot of rationalistic conditioning that we have to contend with, almost materialistic conditioning that we have to contend with.

Some historians of thought are of the opinion that this sort of materialistic vision of the universe was a direct consequence of Christianity itself, but that's quite a long story and no doubt we shouldn't go into it now. Well, briefly, you sort of locate all spiritual values in God. You divest the material world of any spiritual value, you depreciate it. All spiritual values are sort of vested in God, and then of course you cease to believe in God, and then you are left with that universe which has been divested of spiritual values, and that's your scientific world, your scientific universe. That is your cold, sort of Newtonian nightmare world. Because it was created and then, as it were, deserted.

Kulananda: Because it was created it is mechanical.

S: Yes, well, Blake has that great drawing of God as a figure with a great pair of compasses, measuring out things, staking out his empire, as it were. So it's a mechanical image - compasses. It's not a question of a seed, not planting a seed. There's not any flower there, nothing that is growing. And then there's Blake's quite wonderful sort of imaginary portrait of Newton. There's that nude figure with, again, I think, a pair of compasses, marking out something on the ground. He's not looking up. [195] That's his vision of the genius of Newton, so to speak. [*Long Pause*]

Anyway, let's go on. We are getting on a little better, aren't we, now? In some ways we've been going a little too quickly, because in this particular paragraph on page 90, I am going into something that we've really touched on, even perhaps dealt with already, but we'll go through it anyway and see if any new point emerges. Here we come on to the next *laksana* - '*Sabbe dhamma anatta.*' The *laksana* of the greatest, highest degree of generality.

'Sabbe dhamma anatta.' From the impermanence of the conditioned to its insubstantiality is a short step; so much so that to penetrate at all deeply into the former is ultimately to find oneself in the midst of the latter.

I think we had better take this paragraph sentence by sentence. 'From the impermanence of the conditioned to its insubstantiality'- that is to say from *anicca* or *anitya* to *anatman* - 'is a short step; so much so that to penetrate at all deeply into the former' - that is to say into impermanence - 'is ultimately to find oneself in the midst of the latter.' - that is to say *anatman*. So how is that?

Voice: When you realise that things are impermanent it's a logical consequence to see their insubstantiality, because if a thing is impermanent you cannot have any permanent identity, therefore ...

S: If it is really radically impermanent. [*Long Pause*]

Formerly the atom was believed to be permanent and stable, wasn't it? But then they started analysing the atom. They found that the atom could be reduced to something still more ultimate. No doubt the more scientifically minded of you could give an account of the content of the atom. But you can go even further. Even those elements of which the atom is supposed to be composed can be broken down into others yet more ultimate, and it seems one can go on like this indefinitely. So one can, in this way, progress from the conception of impermanence to the conception of insubstantiality. I think in some ways modern science has helped us to conceive of this more clearly. Though perhaps only to conceive of this.

Kulananda:[*inaudible*]

S: Yes, that itself is useful. So this is why I say that 'From the impermanence of the conditioned to its insubstantiality is a short step; [196] so much so that to penetrate at all deeply into the former is ultimately to find oneself in the midst of the latter.'

Like other doctrinal formulas, that of the three marks is by no means best understood when understood most literally, and it would be well to remind ourselves that in it we

have to deal, not with three distinct properties of the conditioned, but rather with so many ways of penetrating into its true nature.

This warning against taking things literally, taking doctrinal formulae literally, needs to be repeated over and over again. We always have to ask ourselves what does it really mean? Not just take it literally, not just take it mechanically. There was an example earlier on with regard to this formula of the Four Truths. As when the first truth appears to say that everything is suffering. Well, if you take that literally you get into all sorts of difficulties, but you have to look into it more closely, more carefully. It doesn't really say that everything is actually suffering. It says something rather different. It's so easy to approach Buddhism as it were from the outside and take everything quite literally and never ask oneself, 'What does this really mean? Why was this particular teaching given? Why was this particular formula propounded?' That usually or certainly in the long run always means asking oneself what relation does this teaching, what relation does this doctrinal formula, have to the spiritual life? What is its bearing on the spiritual life? And this is something I used to ask myself constantly, especially around the time when I was writing the *Survey*, as I came across so many Buddhist doctrines, so many Buddhist teachings. The explanations which were given were usually to me quite unsatisfactory. They just didn't go deep enough. Not that they were actually wrong, they just didn't go deep enough, didn't go far enough, and the people writing books on Buddhism seemed never to ask themselves the question, why did the Buddha bother to teach this? Why did the Buddha say that? What bearing does it have on the spiritual life? What relevance does it have to the spiritual life? What difference does it make in one's life if one believes and accepts this particular teaching? Very often modern writers on Buddhism, even Buddhist monks in the East, seem never to ask this sort of question.

Voice: Doesn't it require some degree of insight into the spiritual life to be able to ask that question? [197]

S: I'd say not even insight, at least understanding, at least that. Because after all, why is one a Buddhist? I mean if you have to have insight before you can even start being a Buddhist, there is not much hope for us. (Laughs.) But, at least, there has to be some understanding, and that understanding would suggest that the Buddha must have had a meaning and purpose in giving certain teachings and that purpose must have been practical, because Buddhism is all about practice, Buddhism is all about change, development. Maybe that itself has been forgotten by some people. Certainly to all effects forgotten. I sometimes got the impression that Buddhists whom I knew in India, even bhikkhus, sometimes considered me quite odd and quite strange and eccentric, because I insisted apparently on taking Buddhism seriously. As when I turned up in Sarnath actually without money - I'd given up using money for more than two years - and the bhikkhus whom I met there considered that really extraordinary because I'd come to understand that a *sramanera*, at least, should not handle gold, silver, therefore money, so I hadn't handled it for a couple of years and more. But this was regarded as wildly eccentric and as disqualifying me for ordination. The monks would go on repeating that particular precept, but that it ought to be observed or even might be observed, apparently had never occurred to them. Well, I was no less surprised by them than they apparently were by me.

Voice: Maybe they weren't taking it literally enough.

S: Well, they weren't taking it literally enough. To **them** just a recitation was sufficient. I also, I must say, found this later on with Tibetans too in another way. A recitation of the *Om Mani Padme Hum* was enough. A recitation of the Bodhisattva Vow was enough. This is also literalism. Just to say something is enough. But you know you get this in every sphere of life, one might say. This is the essence of the Third Fetter, that you just go through the motions of something. You either just don't do it, which is bad enough, or you just go through the motions of doing it. You say you believe, but you don't live up to that. Or perhaps it just doesn't even occur to you that you ought to be living up to what you profess. I think it is very easy to get into that sort of mental state of professing but not practising, very, very easy, and again, this is the essence in a way of the *silavrata-paramarsa*, whether you profess verbally or you profess by purely mechanical actions.

Ratnaketu: You can even think that by saying and thinking something that you've actually done it. [198]

S: Oh yes. Oh yes. But you even find this sometimes in Centre Council meetings, that sometimes the people taking part in the meeting are under the impression that having discussed a subject they've dealt with it. Even though no decision has been arrived at, not to speak of any action taken. The fact that it's been discussed means it's dealt with. Anyway, we won't go into that.

So 'Like other doctrinal formulas, that of the three marks is by no means best understood when understood most literally, and it would be well to remind ourselves that in it we have to deal, not with three distinct properties of the conditioned, but rather with so many ways of penetrating into its true nature.'

One of the most convenient methods of making the transition from *anitya* to *anatman* is by considering the notion of change.

We've already touched on this with other illustrations.

We say 'the leaf changes from green to red'. In terms of the traditional grammatical cum logical analysis this is a sentence/proposition predicating in a certain subject/ substance the succeeding of one attribute by another. Such an analysis implies that *in some sense* it is possible for a substance to exist without its attributes - that a leaf can hang on a tree without being red or green or yellow or blue or any other colour. In *what sense* this is possible has not always been clear, though. Quite a number of philosophers have treated what is evidently a purely linguistic convention, useful enough as a means of facilitating the acquisition of a language, as a real distinction between things.

One can also remember that English idiom, as when we say 'It rains', but it would be almost, I mean, 'it' is the **subject** there, the **substance** 'rains' is the predicate. It tells you what the 'it' is doing. But the fact that we speak in this way does not really mean that there is actually something existing called 'it' which can be identified, and separated from the process of raining. But we say **it**, well, we've got the **it**, you know. There's no raining going on at the moment, we've got the **it** just by itself. Then **it** - what does it do? - it rains. *[Laughter]* But it's just the same when we say that the leaf changes from green to red, if we take that expression literally, that there's a leaf existing apart from [199] whether it's red or yellow or green or blue and so on. So this is why I say, 'Quite a number of philosophers have treated what is evidently a purely linguistic convention. useful enough as a means of facilitating the acquisition of a language', as when you learn the grammar, 'as a real distinction between things.'

An extraordinarily large number of philosophical and religious doctrines are in fact based on this fallacy, including the conception of God as Absolute Being (that is, as being abstracted from all particular existent things),...

You can have existence itself as an attribute, which is ridiculous. We say, well, this exists, that exists, therefore there is something called existence independently of actual concrete things which do exist. So you take this notion of Existence - you give it a capital E and speak of Existence - or you speak in terms of Being with a capital B - and you identify this with God the Absolute Existent, or the Absolute Being, and so on, and you have a sort of pseudo-philosophical concept of God.

Ratnaketu: The same mistake can be made when talking about rebirth, when you talk about **your** previous lives. Or **your** future life.

S: Right, yes, that's what I go on to say,

(a fallacy)... of the individual as embodying an immortal soul or changeless self independent of the sum total of psychophysical states, the dogma of the Trinity (unity of Godhead or substance distinct from plurality of persons), and the dogma of transubstantiation (change of the substances of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ while their accidents remain unchanged).

Voice: What does accidents mean?

S: Accidents here is the philosophical term, especially in scholastic philosophy, for attributes. For instance you've got bread and you've got wine - I am sure all good Catholics know this, or good ex-Catholics knew this - then the priest pronounces the magic words - they are really no more than that - the magic words, the bread changes into the body of Christ, the wine changes into the blood of Christ. Now it is not that the change is symbolical: [200] the change is literal. The Catholic church - as far as I've understood, unless they've changed it recently, unless the Pope changed his mind after breakfast this morning *[Laughter]* maintains that when the priest speaks the magic word the accidents remain the same. That is to say the fact that it is the whiteness of the bread that's one of its accidents, or its attributes, the softness of the bread, all that remains unchanged. The red colour of the wine, that remains unchanged, the smell of the wine, that remains unchanged, the taste but the substance is changed, from the substance of bread and the substance of wine into the actual literal body and blood of Christ. Do you see what I mean? But that whole dogma depends, at least that dogma so expressed depends, upon the validity of the distinction between substance and attribute or substance and accident. The Buddhist would say that there is not a substance of bread, apart from whiteness, softness, weight, temperature and so on. So there cannot be a substance as distinct from attributes. If you want to use that language at all, the substance is the sum total of attributes. So you cannot have a change of substance without a change of attributes. Do you see what I mean? So on those grounds the Buddhists altogether deny and refute the Catholic conception of transubstantiation. To give them their due some Catholics admit that this is not a

satisfactory way of explaining the matter in terms of substance and attributes, but they have not yet found an alternative way of explaining it. So this is still taught. This is the sort of accepted view. Anglicans have a dogma of consubstantiation, which is different from transubstantiation. Transubstantiation, a change of substance. This is why the Catholic teaching is called transubstantiation. So when you eat, or when you ingest the bread and the wine, you literally take the flesh and the blood of Christ into you. So from a traditional Buddhist point of view this is a rather unpleasant conception. *[Laughter]* It seems to be a sort of refined cannibalism. *[Laughter]* And again in the West we've got used to this. But people in the East, Buddhists coming into contact with this sort of idea for the first time, find it very odd that you should think in terms of actually eating your saviour. *[Laughter]* They can't assimilate it. It's crude, it's revoltingly crude, sort of fashion. They can understand the idea of, say, assimilating the spiritual qualities of Christ but that you should choose to represent that for the gross cannibalistic process of eating, literally; according to your faith, literally, not that the bread and the wine **represent** the flesh and blood of Christ, as some Protestants believe, but they **are** the flesh and blood of Christ after the priest has pronounced these what one can only call magic words. [201]

Voice: What you are saying then is, in a sense, things do not exist in the abstract. Only ...

S: Yes, things do not exist in the abstract. Abstractions are things. But at the same time things do not exist in the abstract.

Voice: You say abstractions are things?

S: Yes, well, that means thoughts are things, but only as abstractions.

Voice: Ah, yes. *[Voices]* Abstractions *[unclear]*.

S: Abstractions are not realities, in a sense, other than that in which they exist as abstractions as abstractions.

Voice: But you notice that, I mean, in alternatives like when, well, especially when you use titles and things like that, they can get divorced from the, you know, which seems to be another example of this sort of thing going on.

S: For instance you speak of the Crown, in England we say the Crown, whereas we mean certain people acting on behalf of the Queen in her official position. We say the Crown does this, the Crown does that, but we aren't usually deceived by that, but it does indicate a certain habit of thought of which we need to be careful.

Kulananda: Is this what you meant by confected?

S: Confectured means put together.

Kulananda: Put together, so you've got an abstraction, which is put together with.

S: No. Confectured. I used that as a synonym for *samskrita*. (*samskrita*)

Kulananda: I am trying to think of you used *[unclear]* as simple .. I'm thinking of 'in the seen only the seen, in the heard only the heard, in the thought only the thought,' that is simple, and opposite to that would be a confection, and a mixing up of 'in the heard there is also a thought and an association.' [202]

S: Well, one could use the word confect in that sort of way, but when I used it the other day I wasn't using it in that way but just as a synonym for the compounded, because confected suggests a more actual putting together of things from different parts. Because you mustn't think of those parts as ultimately unanalysable elements, as sort of entities. But you see how important it is to just examine the words that one habitually uses, one's conventions of speech. For instance one speaks of different, even - to bring it into the FWBO context - one speaks of a Centre or a Community in a sort of pseudo-personified way. For instance - just to give an example close at home - I might hear, it might be repeated to me, some such thing as 'Sukhavati is very annoyed about such and such'. As though Sukhavati exists as a sort of entity, quite apart from the people who actually reside in the community so named some of whom may not be angry or annoyed about that particular thing at all. The statement is made that Sukhavati is very annoyed about so and so. Or else I hear 'Aryatara is doing such and such'. 'Padmaloka has decided not to do such and such.' Do you see what I mean? Here the label attached to the particular group or corporation, which consists of people, comes to be regarded almost as having a life and identity of its own, and actually accredited with options and ideas, which in some cases may not have very much to do with the opinions and ideas of the people to whom that collective label is applied.

Voice: Another one I can think of - the idea of the state, apart from the people who compose it.

S: Yes, yes, yes. I noticed one or two examples of this sort of thing in the newspapers recently. I was trying to think of them, but I can't at the moment. You have abstractions like fate or destiny and you attribute to them an activity like that of a person. You say, 'Fate intervened and such and such happened'.

Voice: I think it tends to happen all the time, like, well, for example a Buddhist, someone being a Buddhist but actually not practising the dharma, if you've got a Buddhist, you know what I mean? Labels in some sort of vacuum somewhere.

S: Yes, you can be a Buddhist

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S: ... and you are still the exclusive property of your church. [203]

Voice: Yes, it's going the other way, isn't it?

S: Yes.

Voice: This thing exists without all the attributes.

S: So it's very easy to mistake abstract ideas for actually existing things, and that leads to a great deal of mental confusion. But Buddhism, if I may say so, is very hot on this sort of thing, and very much against what is usually referred to as the reification of concepts, that is to say, the endowing of what are very abstract ideas with existence! Treating them as though they were existent things, rather than just abstract ideas or notions.

Ratnaketu: So a whole long history of having to de-reify ideas to just get rid of them

S: Right, yes. Or perhaps rehabilitate the reified ideas, just as ideas. Guenther has the useful term, 'operational concept'. That is a concept which you use for certain practical purposes, but without falling into the error of reifying it. Buddhism traditionally regards 'self' as an operational concept. 'I' as an operational concept, not as a reality.

Other philosophers sought to evade the obvious difficulties of realism by maintaining that the distinction between a substance and its properties is conceptual: that it exists, but only in thought.

That's a sort of half-way house.

Anyway, I think it might not be a bad idea if we stopped there. I think that our little minds have taken in enough just for the time being. They might have a little rest before lunch and then we can re-assess.

Anyway, I hope people's brains aren't dulled by the nutrients that they've received.

[*Break*]

Anyway, we continue - top of page.

Buddhism, however, goes to the root of the matter and declares that, as modern studies in the subject have established, a phenomenon viewed dynamically is the totality of 'its' conditions and viewed statically the totality of its parts, and that over and above these conditions and [204] parts no phenomenon exists. Abstracted from its green and red colour a leaf is not an independent entity but only a name. When it changes its colour what really happens is that, as the traditional formula would have it, in dependence on a green leaf a red leaf arises.

Is this clear? 'A phenomenon viewed dynamically is the totality of its conditions and viewed statically the totality of its parts, and that over and above these conditions and parts no phenomenon exists,' [*Long Pause*] But when one says - again we touched on this, I think, the other day - when one says that a thing consists of parts, one mustn't take this statement, also, too literally. We discussed *samskrta* as the composite. That which is made up of parts. But it is not so much that something consists of a fixed number of analysable parts, so much as that a thing is divisible, even infinitely divisible. Do you see what I mean? If you divide things into a finite number of discrete parts, and if you regard those parts as ultimate entities, if you regard those parts as something at least relatively fixed and unchanging, then you

are faced by the problem of combining those parts. What is it that makes those parts cohere? Then you have to introduce an additional factor to act as the unifying agent. And when you do that, that is sometimes identified as the self or the soul of that particular object. Do you see what I mean? But you need that particular connecting factor, or unifying factor, because you've taken the fact that something can be indefinitely analysed as meaning that it can be literally broken up into a finite number of fixed parts, which then have somehow to be brought together again. Do you see what I mean?

This comes out in connection with the traditional Buddhist teaching of the 'five *skandhas*'. To begin with, Buddhism usually - though perhaps one is referring here to a somewhat late development in Buddhism - but Buddhism first of all divides the human being into a psychical element, so to speak, and a material element, into *nama* and *rupa*, and then *nama* is further subdivided into the well-known *vedana*, *samjna*, *samskara*, and *vijnana*, so in that way you arrive at the 'five *skandhas*', one being material, and four being mental. But in many presentations, especially modern presentations of the Theravada, it is suggested or even actually stated that the human being, the human individual, consists of these five elements. As though they are in themselves five parts - not that the parts are actually regarded as indivisible.

They are themselves again subdivided - but the parts you get as a result of subdividing those 'five *skandhas*' tend to be taken as finite and as fixed. Do you see what I mean? But even the 'five *skandhas*' themselves, [205] in some authors, tend to be regarded in that way. You speak of the so-called individual as unreal, but of the 'five *skandhas*' as real. They represent Reality. Do you see what I mean? But then the question arises, if you have these 'five *skandhas*', if these 'five *skandhas*' are all that really exists - and that statement is made - then how is it that the 'five *skandhas*' come to be combined? What holds them together? And then you have to introduce some other factor which becomes a pseudo sort of self, a sort of thread. And don't forget that *atman* means something like thread. There was a *sutta atman*, a thread self. This is like a string which is holding these *skandhas*, or elements into which they are subdivided, all together. So you need a factor to hold them together because in a way you've regarded too literally your original division of them into parts. These are not real separate parts. They are not like parts of a machine. It is perhaps rather significant that many Theravada writers explaining the 'five *skandhas*' doctrine, explaining the dharma, brought into play the comparison of a piece of machinery: that just as you can take a motor car apart and it consists only of wheels, and whatever else it consists of [*Laughter*] - my knowledge is a bit limited here. This comparison is quite a favourite one. Well, the original one was the chariot. But modern writers on the Theravada, on Buddhism, use the analogy of the motor car. When you take a motor car apart, all you've got left is a heap of spare parts. So they say this shows, this proves, that there is no such thing as a motor car, there are only spare parts. The spare parts are the only reality. In the same way there is no such thing as a human being. There are only the well-known thirty-two parts. That is to say there is the blood, bile, bone, and of course associated mental states. There are only these three things. There is no such thing **really** as a human being. Do you see the trend of thought? So it's all analytical and reductive. In a way materialistic, even in a way mechanistic. But how do you get over that? Some people try to get over it by saying, 'In **addition** to those parts of which the so-called individual consists, in addition to those parts, there is another part, maybe a higher part, a spiritual part which holds them all together.' But that doesn't really help very much. Because what holds that higher spiritual part together with the other parts? You see?

Voice: God.

S: Well, you could apply the same difficulty to God himself. So you have to retrace your steps, and realise your original mistake, which [206] consists in believing that since things could be divided in thought, they could in fact be divided in reality. Of course, yes, the human being, the human body, especially, is finite. it is changing. it is subject to impermanence. but it is not just that there is a certain limited number of parts, which can be numbered almost, which come apart. It is more that the whole thing is flux. The whole thing is a constant process of change. You isolate certain factors, or you allow your process of analysis to stop at a certain point, well, really there is no logical reason why you should do that. So if you don't take things apart in that way, if you don't reduce things to a finite number of parts, then you don't have to find any other fact or element to hold all those parts together. It is not again, though, that the whole is the sum total of parts, it is not a sum total of anything. It is not a sum total of parts, because in the real sense there are no parts. Do you see what I mean?

Kulananda: In that case it's not really a whole, because it's not itself separate from anything else.

S: It's not a whole in the sense of being the sum total of finite parts. Perhaps the emphasis here is on finite.

Kulananda: Then it's also not a whole in the sense of being separate from its environment, you could say as well.

S: Right, you can say that also. Yes! because there are certain elements which we've incorporated, say, into our physical bodies which belong also, or which belong at the same time, in the environment. There's air, there is the air in our lungs. We dwell upon that, when we do the Six Element practice. That in a sense the distinction between self and environment is an arbitrary one. Or it becomes arbitrary if taken literally and pressed beyond a certain point. Because if we were to put, say, our skin under a microscope, we would see that all the little tiny particles are coming off the skin and mingling with the atmosphere. It would be very difficult to draw a hard and fast line where those little particles come to an end. So in a sense it's very difficult to draw a hard and fast line where we come to an end.

Kulananda: I think there is a dust cloud around us that extends about three feet, of skin particles.

S: Well, that just shows you shouldn't get too near to some people. [207] [Laughter] Maybe that explains why it's sometimes said for a successful meditation you need three feet of clear space all around you. In other words, you need to be completely within your own aura, well, this is more, though, like psychical aura, rather than physical aura. Yes, there is a physical aura too, in a quite literal sense, one might say. An aura of tiny physical particles, little tiny bits and pieces of you. Or what was once you. Maybe those little tiny bits and pieces still do maintain some kind of electrical connection with you, still within your sort of personal gravitational field. So we are not really dealing with finite things, made up of finite parts. We are dealing with what we can only describe analogically, as a sort of flow, a continuum, some parts of which can be regarded as relatively solid, relatively stable, but the analogy of the machine, the motor car, even of the chariot, for the human being is really a very odd one, and though it does occur in the Pali scriptures, I think it's given rise to a lot of misunderstanding.

So therefore, 'Buddhism, however, goes to the root of the matter and declares that, as modern studies in the subject have established, a phenomenon viewed dynamically is the totality of "its" conditions', not totality of its finite conditions, 'and viewed statically the totality of its parts.' Not as literally the totality of a certain fixed number of finite parts, but the totality of, one might say, what one regarded as parts. You can say, for instance, that the eye is a part of the body, but is the eye part of the body in the same sense, say, that a wheel is part of a motor car? I mean in a sense where does the eye end? There are certain nerves attached, there are certain muscles attached, which connect it with the rest of the body. Can you really sort of tear out the eye and it is still an eye in the sense that it was an eye when it was part of your body? A wheel taken out of a motor car is still a wheel. It's exactly the same. It doesn't undergo any change, but a bodily part being separated from the physical body undergoes a change. It is no longer the same thing. So it is not really a part in a mechanical sense. For one thing it may die. You chop off a finger. Well, it's not a part of you which has been taken away from you, whereas it immediately starts dying.

Kulamitra: But you could even say the same with the motor car. I mean if you take off a wheel and put it on its side so it can't roll, is it really a wheel? If you actually remove the spark plugs from an engine so that it can't function is it really an engine in that sense, because it is no longer what we understand by that word, it's just an - it's not able to fulfil the function you usually ... [208]

S: But of course in the case of the motor car it can be reconstituted from parts which have been completely separated.

Kulamitra: Yes.

S: But that is not the case with the human being, despite heart transplants and so on. So I think we have to be very careful of this sort of mechanical model. It doesn't really help us very much in understanding what *anatta* is all about. This is what it is supposed to be illustrating: that there is no sort of separate unchanging soul. That the so-called individual is only - and it's significant that this word is used - the sum total of a certain fixed number of finite parts. This is very much the Theravada view, and this is, as I said, supposed to explain the *anatman* teaching, but it doesn't really do so. I think I've explained it more successfully in the terms that I've used here.

Nagabodhi: So would it be better to say something like a person is the name given to a process which includes form, feeling, perception ...

S: Yes. A process which includes except you must be very careful not to suggest that the process is not something distinct from, or apart from.

Nagabodhi: A process involving that.

S: You'd have to be very careful how you phrased it, wouldn't you?

Kulananda: Because you also cut the process off from other processes.

S: Yes, you mustn't use words like 'consisting of', if you want completely to avoid that sort of misunderstanding.

Kulananda: A hypothetical description of patterning tendency. [Laughter]

S: Yes, yes. Patterning. This term has been used I remember by a writer on Tibetan Buddhism. He spoke I think of *pratitya-samutpada*, Conditioned co-production, in terms of patterning. But then again, even in the case of the pattern, the pattern is something superimposed upon the material. You could have the material just a plain colour without any pattern. So even that analogy is not altogether satisfactory. I think it's more a question of thinking over the matter very carefully and trying to understand it independently of any particular [209] analogy. And that you really require at best a moderate degree of insight to have any real understanding of this, I think. You really have to reflect upon it very seriously, because it goes completely against our ingrained habits of thought, even against language itself. Well, certainly against the structure of the language that we speak.

So 'Abstracted from its green and red colour a leaf is not an independent entity but only a name. When it changes its colour what really happens is that, as the traditional formula would have it, in dependence on a green leaf a red leaf arises.'

This does not mean that the green leaf and the red are discrete,

Discrete meaning completely separate, the one from the other with sharp edges as it were, so you can see exactly where one ends and the other begins.

much less still that one is the 'cause' of the other, for the change from green to red is a continuous process. What it really means is that while the first *laksana* affirms only that all conditioned things change. the second *laksana*, penetrating far deeper, affirms that there is nothing which changes.

There is not an unchanging object which is subject to the process of change.

To abstract the 'thing' which is changed from the process of change itself and set it up as an independent entity upon which change impinges as it were from outside is fallacious.

Do you see this?

The difference between *anitya* and *anatman* can also be expressed by saying that whereas according to the former the conditioned changes, according to the latter it *is* change - the implied distinction between subject and predicate, substance and attribute, being merely verbal. Further, since the change is continuous we are not to think of conditioned *dharmas* as entities [210] lying as it were in a row side by side. They are in fact only so many sections marked off in the continuum of conditioned existence.

Do you see what I am getting at? Let me give you an analogy. Supposing you've got a stretch of road, and that stretch of road is marked off with milestones. Let's say that the stretch of road is ten miles long, so that there are ten milestones, one every mile. So one could say that the road is ten miles long. One could also say that the road consists of ten miles. It consists of ten one-mile sections, placed end to end. So does that ten miles of road really consist of **ten miles** of roads? No. The marking off into sections has been quite arbitrary. The road does not really consist of ten separate one-mile sections. You could just as easily mark it off into kilometres, or into yards. You are superimposing something quite arbitrary on to the unity and continuity of the road. The road is one continuous thing, so to speak. It is not made up of ten sections. The ten sections are superimposed upon it in the same way, since the change is continuous. We are not to think of conditioned *dharmas* as entities lying in a row, as it were side by side. 'They are in fact only so many sections marked off in the continuum of conditioned existence.'

In other words, the existence of the *dharmas* into which Buddhism resolves the so-called personality is in the final analysis as much nominal as that of the personality itself,'

and it is this that the Hinayana tended not to understand.

Kulananda: In fact, inasmuch as it's more particular it's probably more nominal.

S: Yes, yes, yes.

Kulamitra: It seems to me that that indicates why wisdom has to be intuitive because no amount of continuation of the sort of rational procedures can actually give you complete understanding.

S: No, no. I think I said something to that effect in *Peace is a Fire*. Though I am not quite sure, it might have been in a saying [211] which wasn't included. I think I've said, whether in or out of *Peace is a Fire*, something like this, that 'You cannot arrive at Reality by means of any number of increments of the unreal.' Do you see what I mean? But this is what in a way science tries to do. That is to say not real science, not the real science which is turned out by scientists, but the science in the abstract, so to speak, when it goes beyond legitimate territory and in a manner of speaking sets itself up as - not that 'science' ever does that, because there's no such thing as science - as an all-sufficing explanation of existence. I think you really do have to start with a total sort of vision of existence. You have to start off with Imagination, with a capital 'I'. I don't think you can proceed from the rational to what you call intuition. However far rationality is carried it never turns into intuition, to use that terminology. Intuition or imagination, whatever one chooses to call it, or Insight is a completely different faculty, to be developed by completely different means.

So

This understanding receives explicit formulation in the doctrine of the twofold *nairatmya*, of *pudgalas* and of *dharmas*, advanced by the Mahayana to counteract the pluralistic realism of the Sarvastivada, an influential early Hinayana school, which while agreeing that personality, as a congeries of conditioned *dharmas*, exists only nominally, maintained that the substance of these *dharmas* persists unchanged through the three periods of time. Such a position, as its critics saw, and as from the positiveness of their denials we may infer even the Sarvastivadins felt, logically results in a species of substantialism.

Do you see what I mean? This is again taking quite literally the motor car model of human existence, or even of existence itself. There's not much point in saying, 'The motor car is unreal, it's the spare parts that are real', because your purpose in doing that, allegedly, was to get rid of the idea of the motor car being a fixed unchanging entity. But instead of that, you have got rid of the motor car as a fixed unchanging entity, but what you've got instead are the spare parts as a number of fixed unchanging entities. So that corresponds to what has been called pluralistic realism, and the Mahayana went on to point out that the existence of those parts also was only nominal. They had been quite as it were conventionally distinguished one from another. They could be broken [212] down into further parts, and further parts, and further parts. You could continue that process indefinitely, and this was therefore to reduce them to *sunyata*.

So what does *sunyata* really mean? It's very difficult for us not to think of *sunyata* as an entity, some kind of thing. But more recently I've been saying that what *sunyata* really means is that reality - or to use a less pretentious word - experience, or to use an even less pretentious word, **life** - is essentially undefinable. [Pause] *Sunyata* means empty, so taking that word quite literally, what is *sunyata* empty of? It's empty of concepts. This is what it is principally empty of. So what does that mean, that it is empty of concepts? Its concepts don't apply to it. Concepts aren't adequate. So what does that mean? That concepts, say, abstract ideas, well ideas themselves, words, are not really adequate to one's experience, adequate to life. Experience transcends one's capacity to express or describe it. Life transcends one's capacity to describe or express it. This is what we are really finding all the time. We can't really describe anything adequately. It transcends all our efforts. So it's really empty of concepts. It's really ineffable. You can communicate something of It in a sort of rough and ready way, maybe in a pictorial metaphorical way, but you can't ever give an adequate description of Reality, or even of just one's own experience, even one's mundane experience. Can you even give a satisfactory description of the external world? Can you even describe a blue sky to someone who's never seen a blue sky? Can you describe a colour to someone who's colour blind? You can't.

Voice: Isn't that happening all the time whenever we describe something? But presumably what happens is there are experiences common enough for the approximation to work.

S: Yes. It's common enough, as you say, for the approximation to work. [Pause] You can say to me 'please pass me an apple' and I'll pass you an apple. I won't pass you an orange, and you can sink your teeth into that apple. But I think it would be virtually impossible for you to describe what an apple tasted like to someone who had never in fact tasted an apple. Your description could be only very approximate indeed. When we say that all *dharmas* are *sunyata*, what we really mean is that they are arbitrary - arbitrary from the standpoint of *sunyata* - our constructs don't really correspond to *sunyata*, don't do justice to it. It's not that there is a thing, though, called *sunyata* that we are unable to describe. Obviously there are things, plants, trees, rocks, human beings, animals, but really we can't describe any of them. In that sense [213] they are all empty. They are all empty. They are all indescribable.

Kulananda: Because they are all infinitely discrete there's no one entity [Unclear] ...

S: Infinitely continuous. *[Interrupts]* You must have had the experience, certainly anyone who has done a bit of writing, how difficult it is to describe a scene so vividly as to convey it, and you don't convey a scene by describing it item by item. You have to give expression to your own imaginative apprehension of the scene. Supposing you are trying to describe a scene in the country; it is not enough to say, in the foreground there is some grass, and then over to the right there is a big tree which is an oak tree with four main branches, and a lot of green leaves, and over to the left there is an elm tree, and in the middle there is a cottage with four white walls, and a thatched roof and a red chimney. That is not description. Do you see what I mean? That does not really convey the scene. Someone like D.H. Lawrence will come along and say something like, there were two green blotches on the horizon, with a red chalk mark in the middle, and he gives the whole picture. You feel you see it. With this sort of impressionistic technique. But that's because he's grasped, so to speak, the essence of the scene, imaginatively with this higher faculty. And he's re-creating that scene out of that higher faculty. He's not copying it with little sort of painstaking strokes of the brush. Do you see what I am getting at?

Ratnaketu: Gives general atmosphere rather than specific details.

S: Yes, yes. He's absorbing the general atmosphere, to call it that, and then out of his experience of the general atmosphere, he's creating something, which roughly corresponds to the scene in front of him, but which, since it is an expression of his experience of the atmosphere of that place, can convey to you also something of the atmosphere of that place. Even though it may not be exact in matters of detail, in a sort of photographic sense. You really notice this with Lawrence's descriptions of scenes. They are really absolutely amazing. They are so evocative, but they are not sort of, as it were, Pre-Raphaelite, stroke by stroke. He doesn't build up his impressions with little strokes, keeping his eye constantly on the picture. No, he re-creates in a sense a new picture, out of his experience of the scene, the intensity of his imaginative apprehension of the scene. [214]

Ratnaketu: That could be quite important for explaining the Dharma to somebody. Instead of giving these quite often specific elements of what the Dharma is, just giving them an atmosphere.

S: Yes, yes. You can go all through the lists, and say it's the four of this, and the three of that. You can do that quite successfully. People can learn all those things, and be able to answer questions on them and reproduce them, but they still will not have got the essence of the Dharma. You would not have communicated the essence of the Dharma. You will not have, let's borrow a term, you will not have communicated the *Gestalt* of the *dharma*, but only bits and pieces. It's like for instance going off, say, to some savage, backward country where they have never seen the motor car and you take along a complete set of spare parts. Here is the wheel and here is the ... and whatever else you have in a motor car. *[Laughter]* You show them all the bits and pieces, but they still don't have an idea of what a motor car looks like, or how it functions. Do you see what I mean?

Some Abhidharma teaching, I'm sorry to say, is rather like that. Or even some teaching of Buddhism itself. This was in a slightly different sense a criticism I made - I think others made it too - after my visit to the Buddhist Society Summer School, the first time I visited their Summer School after my return to England in 1964. Because there were classes and lectures on the Theravada and others on Zen, and another on Tibetan Buddhism etc., etc. But I made the point, and I think others did too, where is Buddhism? The parts were all there, but where was the whole? So you don't sort of arrive at Buddhism by putting side to side all the different schools. You've got to have an imaginative apprehension of the *Gestalt* of the whole lot. Again, this is what Blake was getting at. It is not enough to know parts, and just sort of add up parts and hope to get to reality in that way. That is not the way to do it. You have to have in a sense what one can only call the overall sort of spiritual imaginative vision. Your hold on the parts may be a bit shaky even. It won't matter so much. You must give an overall general, for want of a better term, impression of the Dharma. You must communicate that. And you can do that on occasion - I was going to say without enumerating all the parts - even up to a point, without knowing all the parts. Though it very often helps if you do. But not just as parts - knowing them as parts isn't enough - but specific expressions of the whole. You very often find that if you read a book on a particular subject, it's very easy to tell the difference between someone who's got a real grasp of the subject and someone who hasn't. The person who hasn't got a real grasp of the subject [215] gives it to you just bit by bit. There's no spirit or understanding informing the whole.

And if I may make a sort of modest claim on my own behalf, I think this is what distinguished my *Survey* from other books on Buddhism. Buddhism was grasped in that book, as a whole. There was a single spirit and line of interpretation running through it all. It wasn't just a little account of the Four Truths added to another little account of the Eightfold Path, added to another little account of something else. It wasn't that sort of book. I think that is why it made the impression that it did at that time.

One finds that in the visual arts all the different parts of a picture really hang together, they cohere. Otherwise you could have a number of people working on different bits and pieces of the painting. Sometimes that does happen, but it doesn't usually work well.

So it is perhaps not surprising that such a thing as *Gestalt* psychology should have arisen, which represents, in a sense, from a certain point of view, an attempt to see things as wholes, rather than simply summations of parts. To try to understand the human being as a whole. Especially not just as divided into a body and a mind, or into reason, emotion and volition, or whatever the other subdivisions are. [Long Pause]

Voice: I wonder how related this is - I am relating it in my own mind, with Hui Neng. In the story he hears the *Diamond Sutra*, or part of it, and gains Enlightenment, and some while later, when he is giving an audience, someone comes to him and asks him to explain a particular *sutra* from somewhere else and he's never heard of it. And he just says, tell me what it is and I'll explain it to you fully.

S: Yes, yes! Because you can understand the part or the so-called part, in the light of the whole. But you cannot understand the whole in the light of the part. There are certain things you need to be informed about - but that applies only to a limited range of material - but there are other things that you can explain without in a sense knowing anything about them, because you understand the part in the light of the whole, and you've got the whole, you've grasped the whole. So that light that you derive from the whole, you can direct on to a part, even though you haven't encountered that part before.

Checking with the tapes continues from here

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Side A Tape 10

S: ... so-called parts of the human whole. if you understand human beings, or if you understand human nature, say, you understand those problems too. You don't need to have had personal experience of those problems.

But this is a great danger in the modern world, and it's one to which attention has often been drawn - we're **smothered** by details. I mean, even in a spiritual movement, even in the case of a religion, you can be smothered by details. I think that is what very often happens with people who study Buddhism. They get lost among the details. And very often there are very very few books which can give them a feeling for the whole, just Buddhism, just the Dharma. Usually it's just a sort of treatment *seriatim* of a number of quite disconnected teachings and sayings and doctrines and practices and beliefs and so on. But where is Buddhism? You don't get any impression of that. But one could also say, with regard to the FWBO itself, we have to be very careful to remain in contact with the *Gestalt* of the whole thing, with the overall vision, and not lose yourself in details of administration or, well, etc., etc. - you can fill in the gaps for yourself.

Kulananda: Can we talk a bit about *sunyata* again? Just describing it as being the undefinable.

S: No, not **the** undefinable as though there was a sort of separate object which was **the** undefinable, like **the** Unconditioned or **the** Absolute. It's as though the teaching of *sunyata* tries to communicate to us the fact that everything has this sort of indefinable quality. I mean, Reality, experience, life, cannot be adequately and fully reproduced in thought. Thought is incommensurable with Reality or Reality with thought.

Kulananda: When you say it has an indefinable quality, you say there is a quality that cannot be defined or that simply

S: Well, by calling it the indefinable I've defined it in a sense. What I'm saying is really no more than that experience transcends thought, and we tend only too often to think, even if only by way of assumption, that thought is fully equal to experience, and that isn't the case really even with mundane experience.

Kulananda: Isn't there more attributable to *sunyata* than that? Guenther talks about the open-ended dimension of being which hasn't ... [217]

S: But then it comes to the same thing because what makes it closed? The fact that you think that you have grasped it in thought.

Kulananda: Yes, the fact that you haven't grasped it in thought doesn't ... it doesn't follow from the fact that you haven't grasped it in thought that it is open. It could just be that it is bigger than you see and yet further.

S: Well, if no conceivable thought can really apply to it, one might say it's open enough. One mustn't even take this expression 'open-ended' literally. Is it literally open-ended? It's only a pointer. It's just that it represents a warning not to try to superimpose one's conceptual categories too rigidly upon reality, to use that term, or upon experience, or upon life.

Mike Howes: When we were talking a few minutes ago about *sunyata*, it occurred to me that what you were talking about was quite different from my conception of emptiness and voidness. It seems that the meaning of those words was quite ...

S: Well, we tend to take them literally. We think of something literally empty, void, like an empty space.

Mike Howes: The room isn't here, the people aren't in it. That's not what you mean.

S: No, not at all. I mean this point is specifically made, that the emptiness of empty space is quite different from the emptiness of Reality itself. I believe there are 32, is it? Yes, 32 kinds of *sunyata* according to the Perfection of Wisdom teaching. The emptiness of empty space is just one of them and is not the most important. It is not the one with which one is really concerned.

Voice: So the person who has understood *sunyata* - they actually experience things as indefinable rather than actually **know** everything?

S: Well, what we call knowledge remains possible, but the value which we normally ascribe to it will not be ascribed by that kind of person. He certainly won't lose his capacity to know, but he will certainly have transcended knowing. He may not feel any **need** to know.

Kulamitra: I mean you can't judge someone's experience or not of *sunyata* [218] by the amount they seem to know about any number of things?

S: No, oh no. Even if they can give lectures upon it or courses of lectures, no, certainly not.

Kulamitra: And the reverse as well, that somebody might have understood *sunyata* but he's not known well, not been too bothered about knowing details of this, that and the other.

S: What exactly do you mean by this, that or the other? [*Chuckles*]

Kulananda: Motor cars, for example. [*Laughter*]

S: Well it doesn't mean - if your experience is an experience of *sunyata*, then whatever you come into contact with or whatever comes into contact with you, you will see as *sunyata*. Just as, in the same way, if you are in a state of *metta*, in order to be in that state of *metta*, you don't have to consciously think of or bear in mind every conceivable sentient being. But any particular sentient being that comes within range of your *metta*, so to speak, will become an object of that *metta*. You will apply your *metta* spontaneously, of course, to whoever comes within range of it. In the same way, anything that happens to come within your spiritual vision, you will see as *sunyata* even though you have never seen that thing before and don't know anything about it. But to the extent that you know anything about it, to the extent that you perceive it at all, or experience it at all, to that extent you will see it and experience it as *sunyata*.

Kulananda: So your seeing and experience of it is no longer limited by your concepts.

S: Yes. Yes.

Kulananda: Would that be an exhaustive description?

S: Well, the whole idea of an exhaustive description of *sunyata* is really inapposite, inappropriate, as though it **can** be described, and this is what one is saying - that it cannot be described.

Kulananda: [*Unclear*] attributes which I'm obviously rather keen on. [*Laughter*] [219]

S: Well, remain keen on those attributes by all means but one doesn't necessarily therefore have to consider them as attributes of *sunyata*.

Jinapriya: So we'll be aware of the verbal inadequacy of any description then if one will experience *sunyata*.

S: Well it's not that, again, there is a thing called *sunyata* which you experience.

Kulananda: It's a mode of experience.

S: It's more like a mode of experience, yes.

Kulamitra: So it's much more like a changing your attitude, changing your perception of knowledge in the usual sense of the word?

S: Yes, right. Again perhaps there is a sort of analogy with *metta*, because when you experience *metta*, in a way you see things differently. You **see** people differently. In a **way** they haven't changed, but in a way, yes, for you they have. You see them as more lovable, attractive, appealing, whereas maybe before you thought they were pretty dreadful or pretty despicable. [Laughter]

Jinapriya: But it sounds like - it sounds lighter and more poetic.

S: Hmm, yes.

Kulananda: I should imagine the two, to a great extent, go hand in hand in fact - *metta* and *sunyata*.

S: Well, yes, certainly this is the Mahayana teaching, though it generally uses the word *karuna*. Though it is really *metta* of *mahamaitri* which is the basis of *karuna*. Well, the Mahayana does, in fact, explicitly make that point that the Great Compassion cannot really be separated from the Great Wisdom. That the conditioned cannot really be separated from the Unconditioned or samsara from Nirvana. Not that there were two things which are sort of joined together, but one's lost that dualistic perspective. Not, again, that there is a dualistic perspective as distinct from a non-dualistic perspective. The mind is very subtle. One has to, well, beware of that. Dualism will tend to creep in. Literalism will tend to creep in. [220]

Kulamitra: The sort of literalistic thing, I mean, sometimes I think it's surprising that people are so literalistic, though maybe it's to be expected actually.

S: This is one thing that has surprised me more than almost anything else. I was a bit surprised by it last year, at the beginning of the Tuscany course. Quite a few people seemed to have quite a literalistic attitude towards Buddhism. I must say that when I went to New Zealand for the first time well, yes, for the second time even more so I was rather struck by the literal, even literalistic, way in which people approached Buddhism or even approached quite specific issues like ordination. This is quite noticeable. And I attributed it to the fact that, well, New Zealand, however promising, was a bit on the periphery of the Movement at present, so there wasn't that degree of intellectual sophistication that one has to some extent here. Yes?

Voice: To really get away from literalism you need at least a taste of *sunyata*.

S: Well it's saying the same thing in different words. Yes?

Voice: No amount of intellectual game playing is going to sort of get rid of

S: You need vision. And maybe that vision has to be communicated by someone with vision, because it's very difficult for you to develop vision out of lack of vision. Or you've just got a mental idea of vision and you're trying to develop in accordance with that. So maybe this is where *kalyana mitrata* does come in, in the way that we don't usually think of it. It's more like communicating a vision, one imagination sparking off another.

Because one can certainly read all the books, even understand them quite well up to a point but have no inkling of what the Dharma is really all about. One can meet people like this and they really do seem to be doing dreadful things to the Dharma or what they think of as the Dharma, or say is the Dharma. It really seems quite bad sometimes. Especially this excessively rationalistic approach to the Dharma. It seems **so** out of place. It seems such a travesty of Buddhism.

Anyway:

Such a position, as its critics saw, and as from the positiveness of their denials we may infer even the Sarvastivadins felt, logically results in a species of substantialism. Occasional deviations of this kind apart, [221] Buddhist thought as a whole adhered faithfully throughout the long course of its development to the strict nominalism inherent in its doctrine of insubstantiality, for which reason it was able not only to root out from the minds of its true followers the last vestige of attachment to self, but also to remain free from the sort of confusions which arise from the uncritical assumption that the structure of reality must conform to linguistic usage.

That's the danger that one must beware of - the 'assumption that the structure of reality must conform to linguistic usage.' The fact that you say 'it rains' means that there must be something called 'it' which is raining, even some one. In Pali the expression is *devovassati* which means the god rains instead of it rains. But there's not strictly really any sort of god who is sending down rain, there's just the process of raining. Perhaps you could take the fact that in Pali one says 'the god rains' as suggesting a sort of animistic idea. That no process is just a natural process, no natural process is just a natural process. Do you see what I mean? But 'it' rains doesn't convey that. That 'it' is so sort of neutral and impersonal. I wonder how we came to speak in that sort of way. 'It' rains. The 'it' is raining.

So do you see the connection between nominalism and the doctrine of insubstantiality? Do you understand what is meant by nominalism? I believe there are two or three philosophy students present, or ex-philosophy students, I should say. Nominalism? *Nomen* is 'name' isn't it? So nominalism - which incidentally was very strong in British philosophy in the Middle Ages, in fact, William of Ockham was really the first great nominalist - nominalism holds that universal or general ideas are only names, are just mere words. There's nothing in reality corresponding to them. For instance, you can have - this is really very, very general and I'm really riding roughshod over all sorts of subtle philosophical distinctions - but nominalism would say that there is no such thing, for instance, as 'man', there are only individual men. Man is only a name. There is no reality corresponding to the word man. There is only a plurality of individual men, to which the label 'man' can be attached inasmuch as they share certain common features. This is nominalism, very broadly and very roughly speaking. **Realism**, using the word in the philosophic sense rather than the popular sense, is the belief that 'man' indicates a distinct and separate reality, even an unchanging reality, which exists quite independently of individual men. Hm? That is realism. Platonism is a form of realism. Aristotle believed in a modified realism. [222] He did not believe that universals existed independently of particular things, but he did not believe that universals existed separate from individual things. He believed that they were distinct from them or even different from them but sort of inhered in them. Again you see spatial terminology being taken quite literally. Um? So Buddhism is really - according to my interpretation anyway - a strict nominalism. It believes that general terms are only names.

Kulananda: There is a degree, well then, you come down to a question of the degree of generality and in the end you abolish language.

S: The limitations of language. All concepts, all ideas, are void. [*Laughter*] In other words one might say the only valid use of language is poetic.

Kulamitra: I mean we seem to use that sort of nominalistic thinking quite a lot when we talk about the Dharma. It seems really useful to me. I mean we can say there are no Buddhists there's only people practising the Dharma.

S: Ah right! Indeed, yes. There's no such thing as Sukhavati. Sukhavati doesn't exist people apart from the actual people who are living and working here and may not always be, you know, the same people.

Kulamitra: I mean, we don't recognise that there is a Sangha unless it consists of people who are actually practising the Buddha's teaching.

S: Ah indeed, yes. Sangha is only a label attached to a number of people who are living and working together in that particular way. Apart from them and the things that they do or do not do, there is no such thing as a Sangha. So yes, so this nominalistic approach has a quite immediate practical value in many ways.

Kulamitra: It saves us falling into a sort of formalism, doesn't it, [225] where you've got things which we think they exist but it's not a real thing? If something isn't actually helping individuals to evolve then we don't consider it to be Buddhism, whatever it was in the past or whatever other people call it.

Kulananda: You're mixing your nominalism with a kind of functionalism because you're not taking it the whole way, you're still allowing language, because there are just degrees of generality which you can pursue all the way until you actually have to stop speaking. You're bringing in another value which is functioning. So long as the thing keeps working, stick with it.

S: Yes. Well, if it's working you're not taking it literalistically.

Kulananda: Right.

Jinapriya: It still comes down to saying that nothing exists apart from its attributes.

S: Except that you mustn't sort of distinguish those attributes from a substance as though they really are different things.

Voice: Yes.

S: If you give up the idea of substance strictly speaking, you give up the idea of attributes too. You continue to use the word even though you don't really continue using it in the old way. But one could also say... I mean I know that there are people, as it were, on the fringes of the FWBO who reify this notion FWBO. People say 'The FWBO is against marriage'. [*Murmurs of agreement*] Well, that's a very sort of, well, I was going to say disputable statement, but it's not even disputable because there's no such thing as the FWBO, hm?

Kulamitra: You continually have people trying to impose that on you. In public situations, if you're not very careful, they keep trying to get you to make a statement as a Buddhist.

S: They get **you** to identify with what they want to attack.

Kulamitra: 'Why does Buddhism have such and such?'

S: Yes. I was up against a lot of this sort of thing in the very [224] early days of my life in England, when I came back in '64. And even in the early days of the FWBO, when dealing just sort of with general members of the public. They had a very fixed idea of what Buddhism was and then they wanted you to explain why Buddhism was like that. Hm? You were seen as the representative of that abstract ideal of Buddhism. You weren't seen as an individual Buddhist, no. You were **assumed** to believe in extreme asceticism. You were **assumed** to be against this, that and the other. You were **assumed** to be ready to acknowledge that Buddhism and Christianity were the same thing because as a Buddhist you were very 'tolerant'. [*Laughter*]

Anyway, let's go on.

The meaning of *anatman* is by no means exhausted, however. As we have seen, not only the conditioned, but also the Unconditioned, is insubstantial. But in what does its insubstantiality consist? Conditioned things are *anatman* because they are no more than the totality of their conditioned parts or functions and because, when they change, there is nothing which changes apart from the process of change itself.

I am still here to some extent using language which I actually discard.

But the Unconditioned, the *asamskrta* or uncompounded [or unconfected] is by definition impartite and unchanging. How, then, can it too be designated as *anatman*? On the face of it the term cannot be used in the same sense in both cases. The Unconditioned is *anatman* in the sense that it is *nihsvabhava* or devoid of determinate nature. It cannot be pointed out as this or that. All descriptions, such as that it is eternal and blissful, are true in the conventional sense only. In reality it is ineffable. Consequently it cannot be defined as existent, nor as non-existent, nor as both existent and non-existent, nor yet as neither existent nor non-existent. Carried to its logical conclusion, this means that it cannot be defined even as the Unconditioned, for such a definition limits it to being something other than the conditioned. Just as freedom, in order to be truly free, must liberate [225] itself from the freedom that is opposed to bondage, so the Unconditioned, to be really such, must transcend the opposition between what is conditioned and what is not.

This, in a way, is quoting it in a rather roundabout way. I mean using, as I've said, language which really I've discarded, discarded even in this passage. But you can see what I'm getting at. I think if I were to sort of express myself now, I'd tend to use the sort of language that I used earlier on and used last weekend. That is about the Unconditioned, as it's called here, being really, or at least being more usefully viewed as, irreversible creativity. Instead of change in the ordinary sense, one has got irreversible creativity. That's probably a more helpful concept. So there's no determinate nature, from that point of view also in the sense **that** there's even change, because the creative is becoming more and more creative. if you like. To be paradoxical, the Unconditioned is becoming more and more unconditioned. Of course one could say, if one wanted to be argumentative - it doesn't seem any of you have thought of this - you could say it has a determinate nature because you've spoken of it as creative, or as irreversibly creative. But what does that mean in content? It means that the creativity does not remain a determinate creativity. Do you see what I mean? If you use words at all one must accept a certain amount of limitation and even self-contradiction.

Kulananda: You can't avoid paradox.

S: You can't avoid paradox. It's one of the great points of the Perfection of Wisdom *sutras*. You can't avoid paradox, all right make full use of it. Exploit it to the utmost, exploit it to the limit.

All right let's carry on.

At this point the insubstantiality of the conditioned and the insubstantiality of the Unconditioned overlap. As we have already seen, the *dharmas* into which analysis resolves the so-called *pudgala* have themselves ultimately only a nominal, not a real, existence. Conditioned existence is in reality a pure continuum. The more deeply we fathom this continuum the more we realise that its true nature, too, is ineffable and that even as by penetrating into *anitya* we ultimately emerge in the midst [226] of *anatman*, so by knowing the conditioned in its depth we know also the Unconditioned.

Or unconditioned acceptance of the conditioned is the Unconditioned.

Thus although at the level at which the two orders are seen as different *anatman* is used in one sense for the conditioned and in another for the Unconditioned, at the level where this difference is seen to be nominal the two kinds of insubstantiality resolve themselves, on sufficiently deep analysis into a third, a profounder, kind. For *anatman* in this wider and deeper sense of the indescribable 'thusness' ...

sort of just like thatness,

(*tathata*) which constitutes the ultimate reality of both conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas* Mahayana thought generally appropriates the term *sunyata*, literally 'voidness'. Nirvana, the fourth or supplementary *laksana*, broadly coincides with the Unconditioned as cessation of the conditioned and hence as the goal of the aspiration of those to whom the surface of conditioned existence appears as permanent, pleasant, and real.

That is actually very clear. Though it could be perhaps put differently or perhaps though I'd put it a bit differently now. I think in the sense that I've detached myself rather more from traditional formulations, and problems arising from traditional formulations, I'd just sort of express things more directly without going through all the different historical developments of Buddhism.

Nagabodhi: It seems as if, just from a very simple it might be a mistake, a linguistic device, they use the term **the** Unconditioned.

S: Yes.

Nagabodhi: Such a, such amount of words, concepts...

S: Waffle. [227]

Nagabodhi: ... and waffle.

S: Pseudo-metaphysical waffle, pseudo-spiritual twaddle. [*Laughter*]

Nagabodhi: Which all actually may be with good intentions trying to show that it's not like that, that you shouldn't think of the Unconditioned as something real and fixed and substantial goes to such sort of strange lengths that there must be something underneath it.

S: Well, why talk about the Unconditioned at all? That's why I appreciate the Zen point of view. The Zen point of view, when the master is asked about the Unconditioned, he says 'Back to work, boys, carry on planting rice.' [*Laughter*] Well, that seems really very, very, I won't say just practical, it's really down to earth and Buddhistic. That's where it's really at, you know, pounding rice. Well, in a manner of speaking. [*Laughter*] At least for a few years.

Voice: Rice, rice, pack up rice. [*Laughter*]

Jinapriya: We've got plenty of rice downstairs!

S: But, in a way, I really do appreciate what the great Zen masters or Ch'an masters, rather of China did in the early, the golden period of Ch'an Buddhism. It's really one of the richest and most creative periods in the whole history of Buddhism. Because here is this very complex and profound and intellectually sophisticated tradition of Indian Buddhism coming to China from one civilisation to another, and perhaps the Indians **were** rather over-intellectual, a bit hair-splitting and all the rest of it, and the Chinese mind, though again one mustn't exaggerate, wasn't like that. It didn't take very kindly to that sort of thing. They also kept asking themselves, as it were, what does it all mean? What difference does it make? What must we do? And one notices them sort of gradually cutting down, cutting away, all this vast lush exuberance of metaphysical speculation and presentation and getting down to what we now call Ch'an or Zen. Though of course we of course proceeded to muck up that and misunderstand it. Maybe they did that in the East long

before it even got to the West. But in those golden days of Chinese Ch'an you can see what they were doing. You can see what Hui Neng is doing, and so many other great masters. In those volumes of the *Blue Cliff Records*, they are really amazing in this way. They started doing things, doing **crazy** things, anything to stop people thinking, stop them asking silly questions, hit them over the head, shout at them, jump at them, [228] chase them out of the room, anything to stop those awful questions about the Absolute. [Laughter] As though that had anything to do with Buddhism. Some people thought that Buddhism meant asking questions about the Absolute, answering questions about the Absolute, having a good discussion about the Absolute, dragging in Nirvana and *sunyata*. The Zen masters who really had some idea of what Buddhism was all about, they'd really had enough of it so out they brought their big stick [Laughter], chased after their disciple, hit them across the backside good and hard, and, as I said before, back to pounding the rice.

That's where it's at. This is really their attitude. It was really, it wasn't just pseudo-Zen like it tends to be nowadays, it was really down to earth - it was the real genuine article. Sometimes I think a lot of that is happening with or without the big stick, you know, in the case of the FWBO, because people are asking, as I said some time ago, what does it mean? How do we practise it? What is its cash value as it were? You know this is the question that William James, the famous American pragmatist, used to ask. 'What's its cash value?' [Laughter] when confronted by the rather rarefied conceptions of Hegelian philosophy. What are their cash value? [Laughter] In other words what practical down-to-earth difference does it make? And again this was something I noticed when I came back to Britain in 1964: here were nice middle-class people going to church and talking about Christ and there were nice middle-class people going along to the Buddhist Society on Sundays and talking about the Buddha. It all seemed exactly the same, really in a way, because their ways of life were the same. Same sort of lower middle class, middle middle class, upper middle class way of life. Buddhism didn't seem to be making a difference. It wasn't surprising that some of them kept a foot in both camps, that is to say the Christian camp and the Buddhist camp, didn't really see any difference between them. Well how could they?

But I feel that there's still a lot to be done cutting away the traditional metaphysical or pseudo-metaphysical verbiage of Buddhism, and going back, well, it really is going back. The Zen masters, I think, really didn't realise the extent to which, historically speaking, they were going back to the Buddha. They understood it spiritually, but I don't think they understood it in historical terms because that sort of consciousness wasn't so well developed - certainly not in India - though it was developed much more in China. They really got back in principle to Sakyamuni. It's not surprising that he reappears in Chinese, even Ch'an, art in a very sort of human way. He's a recognizable human figure again. That really illustrates the way in which Ch'an brought Buddhism [229] really down to earth, with a big bang, after centuries almost.

One has had in the past some good ladies around the Buddhist Society who'd give their little talks on Zen and even write their little books about Zen and say 'Oh, the FWBO is against Zen' [Laughter], when they haven't even grasped the first thing about Zen.

You could say that, well, it has been said that the Vajrayana is the direct application of the teaching of *sunyata* - the same has been said about Ch'an, but you could also say that Zen represents an attempt to apply the principle of nominalism to the spiritual life. It's a cutting away of all concepts. A Zen master would much rather write you a poem or give you a little brush painting than give you a long lecture about what the Dharma is all about, about *sunyata* and *tathata* and all the rest of it. Some Zen masters do function in that kind of way. It's a good kind of way providing it's the real thing, not just a modern fake.

Kulamitra: The thing is you need **Zen** masters, don't you?

S: You need Zen masters, you need Ch'an masters. Yes. Or any kind of master. Why Ch'an masters? Even among the Theravadins you do get some people approximating to this sort of attitude. It just means the ability to distinguish between words and things, and see that words are just words. It's really no more than that. A word is a mere word. A word is a word is a word.

Nagabodhi: I have a feeling that things are things. [Laughter]

Kulananda: That was a word. [Laughter]

S: There's no such thing as a thing. Did you ever see a thing? [Laughter]

Ratnaketu: Is there such a thing in your life? [Laughter]

S: Anyway, I think what we'll do is have an early cup of tea, because we come now to the last section of the chapter and I think we can do that sort of comfortably at one stretch. [250]

Voice: *Duhkha* after a cup of tea. [Laughter]

S: It'll only be *duhkha* if you insist upon having a cup of tea then another cup and another cup. *[Laughter]*

[Break for Tea]

Ratnaketu: What actual word - I'm wondering what Enlightenment, the way that word is translated and has it got anything...

S: Well, that can be very misleading, because the word that Enlightenment translates or is supposed to translate is the word *bodhi* or *sambodhi*. And *bodhi* is derived from a Pali and Sanskrit root meaning to understand. It also has a connotation of 'awakening'. *[Someone laughs]* Well, it's clear the word has associations for you which it doesn't have for me! *[Laughter]* But do you see what I mean? So, in the original Pali or Sanskrit, there's no suggestion of light. The English word is En-light-enment. There is no suggestion of light literally in the original word *bodhi*.

Ratnaketu: Are there any Sanskrit words that talk about the difference between dark and light?

S: Oh yes. Yes. Oh yes. *Krishna* and *shukra* or dark and bright - those are used as synonyms for skilful and unskilful.

Voice: A thing you also get - another sort of aspect of literalism - is people thinking that if they've heard something once with one person explaining it, then it's not worth hearing it again at a different time from someone else because, I mean often you hear things again and again at different times from different people and you sort of piece together a real understanding.

S: That's true. You get different perspectives. At the same time one mustn't think that a real understanding of the subject consists of the sum total of these different perspectives. You've still got to have some sort of higher intuitive faculty which unites, which synthesises, all those perspectives into something like a whole.

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Kulananda: It's got to be based in experience.

S: Well, yes, it mustn't be just verbal. *[Pause]* I think it's very important to be able to deal with people's questions in such a way that you're not misled by merely semantic confusions. That's a real test of understanding, because you really have your eye on the ball, as it were, you have your eye on the subject itself, not simply on the words about the subject.

Voice: This is understanding when it's a question to you?

S: Yes. Sometimes it happens that in their case there is in fact no subject. They're just confused about words. Their questions may be even purely verbal, but it may be that there's some obscure motivation in them, at the back of their mind, which is causing them to ask that sort of pseudo-question. You've got to try to put your finger on that.

Ratnaketu: Sometimes people ask you a question whereas if you answer it, if you answer what they ask, you give them the wrong answer.

S: Yes.

Ratnaketu: You give them an answer which will satisfy them but won't actually be the correct one.

S: Well, you have to find a middle way between speaking the truth and displeasing them to such an extent that they go away and never come back. You have to sweeten the truth a little sometimes for them. You may be tempted to say, 'Of course not, you silly cow.' *[Laughter]* You have to really restrain yourself and say, 'I think you've got a point there *[Laughter]*, but you know it's not quite like that. I mean you've very nearly got it but you know in Buddhism we do go a little further than that' and such and such and such.

Graham: Two thousand viewers just suddenly switch off.

S: I'm sure quite a few of you have had experiences of this sort, or been in these sorts of situations of really realizing the need for a skilful approach, which means that you're true to the Dharma but at the same time you're taking that particular person's psychological background and all that into consideration. And at the same time you're [252] not misled by words.

I think, whether for those who are writing or whether for these who are speaking, your best friend is a dictionary. You really must use the dictionary, because very often we use words without having a very clear

idea of what they actually mean. And it's only when you look them up in the dictionary you realise how vague your understanding of the meaning of those words was. It's very very helpful to look them up in especially a good dictionary, preferably a dictionary that gives etymologies. I think to consult the dictionary regularly really does improve one's English, whether written or spoken, but especially, perhaps, one's written English.

Voice: We've been forced to start doing this in some of the study groups I've been doing because we've been doing the *Survey*.

S: Yes. Which dictionary do you use?

Kulamitra: Which one is it?

Nagabodhi: It's from the Sukhavati library.

Prasannasiddhi: I think it's the *Universal English Dictionary*. - Chambers.

S: Oh, just a medium-sized one then. *[Laughter]* I have the twelve-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*. *[Whistle of amazement]* It's not the one I regularly consult. I consult that only on special occasions. I usually consult the four-volume *Websters International Dictionary*. That I find very useful.

Kulananda: What's the new Collins like?

S: Do you mean the one that ...

Kulananda: The one that Mike bought you.

S: The former Mike Scherck bought. That's very good. it's very good [255] indeed, I would say, especially for contemporary words, expressions, idioms. Very useful. I'd say that nowadays it was virtually indispensable. I probably consult that more than any other dictionary.

Voice: What one was that? What's it called?

Kulananda: Collins.

S: Collins. There's a fuller title than that. I believe we've got it in the library anyway.

Voice: There is a Collins one.

S: But it is very good indeed, for modern English. I mean one does realise that in my lifetime so many words have crept into the language, or jumped into the language, the meaning of which I'm not sure about. Modern terms, slang terms. Terms used in particular professions, politics and so on. It's very useful to be able to look up the precise meanings of such words. it defines things like rock 'n' roll, for instance, *[Laughter]*, pop festival, pop music. It's all there. If you're not quite sure what these things really mean. *[Laughter]*

Nagabodhi: I don't think one needs to get hung up on the words that have to do with pop music.

S: I think I can say that, on the whole, I do use words very carefully, especially when I'm writing. And I frequently look up words in the dictionary to make quite sure I'm using the word in a strictly accurate fashion. I really dislike sloppy language, I think it represents sloppy thinking, even sloppy feeling, sloppy emotions.

All right, page 95 - the last of these *viparyayas*.

'*Sabbe sankhara dukkha.*' Though all the characteristics present difficulties to those who seek to understand Buddhism from a point of view other than its own, it is with regard to the statement that all conditioned things are suffering - corresponding to the second *viparyaya* and the first Aryan Truth - that they are apt to become most acute.

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There's one quite significant phrase here, 'those who seek to understand Buddhism from a point of view other than its own.' Hm? I mean, in a way, there's no harm, well, I won't say no harm, it's understandable that people should try to understand Buddhism from their own point of view. If you're a Christian, it's understandable you approach Buddhism as a Christian. You see it in Christian terms. That is understandable. But what you shouldn't do, or shouldn't think you are doing, is that you're really seeing Buddhism. You can see Buddhism really only when you see Buddhism from the point of view of Buddhism itself, so to speak.

If you profess to give an objective view of Buddhism you must give a Buddhist view of Buddhism; not a Christian or a Hindu, or a rationalist or a humanist or Marxist view of Buddhism. But very often people give what is in fact a non-Buddhist view of Buddhism but they think it is a Buddhist view. Or they even insist that is a Buddhist view, that it is an adequate and objective view. Do you see what I'm getting at?

On account of this characteristic do its critics complain that Buddhism is morbid, pessimistic, cynical, a lover of the shady side of the street, the enemy of harmless pleasures, an unfeeling trampler on the little innocent joys of life.

Like cups of tea. *[Laughter]* 'Little **innocent** joys of life', you notice. *[Laughter]* But, yes, I mean is this still true? This was true when I wrote it. It may be a little out of date now. It may be that there is a better understanding of Buddhism now to some extent. Would you say that from your own experience, say with beginners? I wrote this after all, what? - thirty years ago. No, no I exaggerate, twenty years ago.

Kulamitra: I'd say there's still a lot of misunderstandings of Buddhism, a lot of which clear up when people meet us. You know, because a lot of them just won't hold on what they find when they come to a centre just in terms of people's first

S: *[interrupting]* But which wouldn't clear up, perhaps, if they encountered other Buddhist groups, which might even be **confirmed** if they met them, unfortunately.

Kulananda: I should think that these particular misunderstandings [233] are much less current.

S: Yes.

Kulananda: There are other misunderstandings.

S: Yes. Yes, perhaps I need to enlarge my list.

At the same time they are confounded by the indisputable fact that the peoples of Buddhist lands seem happy; and often the more Buddhist the more happy. Some try to explain the anomaly as simply a case of Far Eastern cheerfulness breaking in through the Indian gloom of Buddhism;

This is a little allusion of mine to a famous ... *[interrupted]*

Kulananda: Have you come across that attitude?

S: No. To a famous little episode in Boswell's life of Johnson. 'Far Eastern cheerfulness breaking in through the Indian gloom of Buddhism.' Johnson had a certain friend - I forget his name actually - and he once had an intimate talk with Johnson, and he was describing his own life and what he'd been trying to do, and he said, 'Sir, I've tried very hard to be a philosopher,' he said, 'but cheerfulness was always breaking in.' *[Laughter]* So I had that at the back of my mind. 'Some try to explain the anomaly as simply a case of Far Eastern cheerfulness breaking in through the Indian gloom of Buddhism;

others dismiss it with irritation as a sheer perversity.

Buddhists have got no business to be cheerful. They're not being true Buddhists, they're not being faithful to their religion. A Buddhist should be gloomy and serious and pessimistic.

In either case the critics remain uncomfortably aware of a plain contradiction between what they represent as the pessimistic principles of Buddhism and its optimistic practice. According to them, apparently, Buddhism being a pessimistic teaching its followers ought always to look sad.

This used to be a very common attitude. I mean I've found it to a [236] very great extent among Hindus, among Indians. They were a bit surprised seeing, say, Tibetans so cheerful or Burmese or Thais so cheerful. They used to try to explain it as due to racial differences etc., etc, They hadn't really appreciated Indian Buddhism. *[Laughter]* Do we come up against this misunderstanding at all nowadays? Buddhism being pessimistic and therefore Buddhists being expected to be very serious, I came up against it originally.

Ratnaketu: Yes. You do get that, I think, sometimes.

Kulananda: Lawrence had that misunderstanding.

S: Lawrence had it - yes. But we can't blame him because he read only maybe just a few books about Theravada Buddhism, so you can hardly blame him for having that impression, but he did have that sort of impression.

I remember - I have mentioned this before - I remember when I came back to England in '64, started giving talks at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, as my custom had been in India, I introduced little jokes and the first time I did this, people looked a bit aghast. *[Laughter]* Had they heard correctly? Did Bhante actually make a joke? And you could see that some of them thought well yes, he had but it's not very Buddhist *[Laughter]*. You weren't supposed to make jokes in the course of a lecture on Buddhism which was a very serious affair, hmm? But anyway they got used to my jokes or reconciled to them, anyway. *[Laughter]* You know, even started laughing occasionally. But the first time I made a joke in the course of one of my talks, there was no response at all. Some of them looked slightly shocked, You know, laughter was clearly incompatible with Buddhism. There is, of course, a passage in the Pali Canon where the Buddha does say, or at least he's represented as saying, 'Laughter that shows the teeth is madness. If you have cause to show your pleasure it is enough to smile.'

Voice: Who said that?

S: The Buddha, according to the Pali Canon.

Voice: Good Lord! [237]

S: So, well, let's assume that the Buddha did say that. In that case well what was the Buddha getting at? Bear in mind that he was addressing a particular, a specific situation, individual people - perhaps one shouldn't generalise, well what do you think he might have been getting at? 'laughter that shows the teeth is madness'.

Mangala: Don't get drunk.

S: Pardon.

Mangala: Don't get carried away.

S: Don't get carried away. Yes. Don't lose your mindfulness. Don't become hysterical. Don't give way to uncontrollable giggles etc. *[Slight laughter]* Anyway carry on.

In reality Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic.

I mean pessimism is usually understood to mean the view that life is essentially evil. And optimism the view that life is essentially good.

If compelled to label it in this way at all we should borrow a word from George Eliot and call it melioristic, for though asserting that conditioned existence is suffering it also maintains, as the third Aryan Truth teaches, that suffering can be transcended. The mistake of the critics lies in assuming that according to Buddhism the conditioned is painful under all circumstances and from all points of view.

We went into this a bit yesterday didn't we?

Despite the loftiness of its thought. however, Buddhism is not so absurdly remote from ordinary human life as to deny that for the average man a glass of beer, an evening with his girl friend, or a new motor car, are pleasant things,

I hope I'm not open to misunderstanding here!

What it does is to point out that life also contains a [238] number of undeniably unpleasant things, which nobody would ever pretend were enjoyable, such as old age, disease, death, being separated from what we like and associated with what we dislike. The latter make up the dark, painful side of existence which most of us do our best to ignore, and it is because we act in this ostrich-like fashion, not because, as sometimes alleged, it considers pain more real than pleasure, that Buddhism recommends various spiritual exercises which by bringing this dark side of life more prominently into view will give us a less one-sided picture of existence. Having done this, it goes a step farther and points out that the pleasant things and the painful things, the sweet and the bitter experiences of life, are interconnected, so that it is impossible to enjoy the one without having to suffer the other.

I'll go on because it's connected.

This is not to say merely that a glass of beer may result in a headache, a girl friend prove unfaithful, or a ride in a new car end in hospital, though of course all these things may happen. Pleasure and pain can be connected in much more subtler ways than this. The repressed awareness that we are enjoying ourselves at someone else's expense, as nearly always is the case, gives rise to an unconscious sense of guilt that spoils the enjoyment. Pleasant things are tied up with worry and anxiety, because we are afraid of losing them. Enjoyable experiences, whether of body or mind, strengthen our attachment to the psycho-physical personality that is the basis as much for suffering as for enjoyment. Moreover, pleasures differ not only in kind but in degree of intensity, and what was once pleasant may become less pleasant, or insipid, or even positively painful, in comparison with something more pleasant, or within the context of a wider range of experience.

This is all as it were from the standpoint, so to speak, of the ordinary man. I haven't taken into consideration here the fact that as one becomes more detached from conditioned things, so to speak, one's enjoyment of the pleasurable aspects of conditioned existence becomes as it [239] were progressively less tainted by attachment, clinging and so on, because some of the examples of painful experience that I've given are painful mainly on account of one's attachment or one's clinging, so one has to make that sort of exception.

Vajrayana tradition recognises four stages of bliss: arising from the senses (*ananda*), from the *dhyanas* (*paramananda*), from the attainment of Nirvana (*viramananda*), and from the realisation of the non-duality of the conditioned and the Unconditioned (*sahajananda*) - literally 'congenital' . i.e. innate or natural bliss. On experiencing the bliss of a higher degree one naturally loses interest in that of a lower degree of intensity. Thus although not maintaining the absurd thesis that all conditioned things are painful under all circumstances and from all points of view, Buddhism certainly does most vigorously maintain that no conditioned thing can be pleasant under all circumstances and from all points of view.

It's a sort of relativity of pleasure. You mustn't expect too much from conditioned pleasurable experiences. If you expect too much, well, the pleasurable experience will tend to turn into a painful, a disagreeable, experience.

But anyway the point that I'm making here is one that I have made already. I think it should be sufficiently clear. It can be summed up in a few words by saying that Buddhism is not, in fact, pessimistic; does not take a pessimistic view of life or of conditioned existence; does not say that pain predominates over pleasure within the sphere of conditioned existence. If it does only too often in our experience it's because of attachment very often rather than on account of the intrinsically painful nature of life itself.

So we could be very much happier than we are even without changing our circumstances, you know, by just changing our attitude. I'm not saying that circumstances don't need to be changed, but even without changing circumstances we could be very much happier by changing our mental attitude. And being in a way more adaptable. We might have got a fixed idea about the weather - the weather ought to be fine - and if it turns out not to be fine then we are disappointed, even annoyed, and we're unable to enjoy the rain and the cold which we could do if we put our minds to it. I mean, there's a [240] little verse in *Alice in Wonderland*, I think, which illustrates this - what is it?

*'Speak roughly to your little boy
And beat him when he sneezes ...*

*For he can thoroughly enjoy
The pepper when he pleases!'*

I mean this is just a little off-beat example.

Kulamitra: There's a poem in 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' about that, isn't there, called something like the 'Happy Clod' or something like that or the clod who

S: Or the clod of clay which warbled a sweet tune when it was trodden upon. Don't take this too literally. *[Laughter]*

I once had quite a discussion with somebody - I forget who it was, it was some years ago. I think it was with a Buddhist, he might even have been someone within the FWBO, it was quite a number of years ago - and he maintained that a good Buddhist could not enjoy the food which he ate. He maintained that everything tasted the same to him. That it had in fact no taste. That he was completely indifferent to taste and did not even recognise differences of taste and did not enjoy his food. A good Buddhist **could** not, in fact, enjoy his food, would be incapable of enjoying what he ate. But I made the point in comparison, in contrast to this, that a good Buddhist would in fact enjoy his food more than someone who wasn't a good Buddhist because

first of all he'd be much more aware of the eating process. He'd be much more aware of the different flavours. And at the same time he'd be detached, he wouldn't be greedy, and for that reason also he would enjoy the pleasurable taste or sensation of the food more than someone who didn't have that kind of detachment.

But this is very often the sort of picture or part of the picture of the good Buddhist. But in a way it is a sort of razor's path because it's not easy to have enjoyment without attachment. And sometimes you have, so to speak, to deprive yourself of the enjoyment so as to be able to overcome your attachment. But merely to deprive yourself of the enjoyment is not enough, you have to actually work on the feeling or the attitude of attachment. But you can't completely deprive yourself of enjoyment because, as I've said before, it's as though enjoyment or pleasure sort of nourishes the [241] human organism. You have to get it from some source, ideally a more and more refined source, a more and more refined enjoyment of art or more and more refined enjoyment of human communication and so on, but you can't really thrive without pleasure, without pleasurable experience. But what must **not** happen is that pleasurable experience becomes the occasion for attachment, clinging, dependence, and all the rest of it. If it does, to that extent there's an end of spiritual life, there's an end of spiritual development for you.

And then the question arises, how do you know that you're not attached? Well, you only know when you're not attached when you're as happy without that pleasurable object as you are with it, or at least not very much less happy. At least that. But if you're sort of really unhappy without it then it's time you gave it up, at least for a while.

You sometimes speak to people who say, 'It's not necessary for me to give up that particular thing, whether it's cigarettes or beer, I can give up any time I please.' Well, remember the little story about Mark Twain, He was asked whether it was easy to give up smoking, He said, 'Oh yes. It's very easy. I've done it dozens of times.' [*Laughter*] It's really a bit like that. The test is that you're able to get on without that particular thing; you're happy without that particular thing; lead your own life very positively without that particular thing.

This is why some form of solitary retreat from time to time is very very good, because it removes you, it isolates you from your customary sources of satisfaction and enjoyment, and it throws you back very much on your own inner resources, or on very simple things, just like the simple act of eating your breakfast or just looking out of the window and enjoying the sight of nature. Or just the simple pleasures - sitting there all by yourself not doing anything and being perfectly happy. That's probably a great test, that you can be happy not doing anything, at least from time to time until your energies start bubbling over again.

Anyway to continue, we are getting near the end, actually.

It goes even further than this. it maintains

that is Buddhism maintains

that even if one could cut out from the variegated web of life the bright parts of the pattern, leaving aside [242] the dark, and assemble them into a single blaze of unmitigated brightness, the resultant experience would not even then be one of unmixed enjoyment. In the depths of the heart there would remain a void which no conditioned thing, but only the Unconditioned, could fill. This profound truth is echoed at a lower, theistic level of thought by St. Augustine's famous apostrophe:

'Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee'

Don't, from the Buddhist point of view, take the word 'rest' too literally.

It is illustrated by Goethe's great and complex philosophical poem *Faust*, wherein the hero promises his soul to Mephistopheles

(Who is the devil, of course)

if he can give him one permanently satisfying experience:

And then there's a quote from what Faust says on that occasion.

And heartily

When thus I hail the Moment flying:

*“Ah still delay - thou art so fair!”
Then bind me in thy bonds undying.
My final ruin then declare.*

If ever you can give me experience, if ever you can give me a moment which is so wonderful, so beautiful that I can say stay, stay for ever, let me just have this experience for ever and ever - if you can give me that sort of experience, all right, I give you my soul.

So

Knowledge, love, wealth, power, fail to pass the test. Like Mara in the Scriptures, Mephistopheles has at his disposal only conditioned things. The Unconditioned, which alone can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart, is beyond his power, and Faust therefore [245] never pronounces the word that would seal his doom.

Again, don't take the terminology too literally. Not that the Unconditioned is a thing and that you need this thing. What you need is to be absolutely, irreversibly creative. That is happiness.

Kulananda: Which means unconditionally accept the conditioned.

S: Yes. That's a somewhat different sort of approach. But I was in a way bringing it even more down to earth. If you can sustain an uninterrupted and continually increasing creativity that is, one might say, the only happiness that you'll need. [Laughter] And that can take so many forms. It can take the form of work, meditation, artistic production, continually improving communication and so on, creating and organisation. But if one can strike upon a way of life which enables you to be continually productive, continually creative, eventually irreversibly creative, so that you're producing and creating more and more and more, you've no need to look for any Nirvana outside that. You'll lose interest in Nirvana. So:

What the third *laksana* really means is, in positive terms. That Nirvana alone is peace

this is the traditional terminology

and negatively that conditioned things are painful because we seek in them that absolute bliss which only the Unconditioned call bestow and have, therefore, inevitably to experience disappointment and frustration,

This is the essence of the matter, the essence in a way of this whole question of the *viparyayas*. You expect from things what by their very nature they are unable to give you. You expect from the conditioned something Unconditioned. That's the essence of your mistake, the essence of your topsy-turviness which is what *viparyasa* literally means.

Perhaps it is quite useful to think in terms of creativity, the creative mind, even of irreversible or indefinitely accruing creativity. Provided one uses the term in a sufficiently wide sense. It doesn't mean just writing poems and painting pictures. [244]

How would you understand creativity? It's a word we often use. Perhaps we ought to look it up in the dictionary, How would you understand creativity? What do you mean by it?

Vairocana: Your energy not being restricted.

Voice: Expanding.

Nagabodhi: Bringing something new and better into being.

S: Yes, It's essentially that. Bringing something new, something better, into existence. Something higher, something of greater value, something more satisfying. But it's very easy to use this word creative in a rather hackneyed cliché-ridden way. Do you know what I mean? it's the sort of word we often hear; creative this and creative this, even creative advertising.

Kulamitra: It's a shame it has got used in that way because it [words unclear]

S: It's become debased.

Kulamitra: I mean it does seem to be, like sometimes you're trying to give a talk or write something and you think what could I say instead, but there doesn't seem to be anything that's quite as effective as that.

S: I was remarking the other day that even the Pope, in his recent address, in Britain was using a vocabulary remarkably similar to ours but in a quite different sense. He was talking about openness, for instance.

Kulananda: Openness to the authority of the bishops,

S: It is unfortunate in a way that this sort of rather more positive language is becoming more and more widely current and is therefore being more and more generally debased. Hmm? [Pause]

Graham: Is there no way round that? [245]

S: I'm afraid there isn't except to ask ourselves when we use these sort of words, 'Do I really mean them? What do I mean by them?' Use them with conviction, use them with understanding, and that will come across, surely, and people will pick up on the fact that you are using those words in a rather different way, using them perhaps in a more **real** way than other people do. I mean a lot of religious groups, including Christian groups, are now talking in terms of communication, openness. What are the other words that we use?

Voice: Positivity.

S: Positivity.

Voice: Commitment.

S: Oh yes, commitment is a very favourite word now.

Kulananda: Spiritual community is being used a lot now.

S: Spiritual community, yes.

Kulananda: They've all been listening to your lectures.

S: It's almost as though they have. I mean probably it isn't but it's very odd sometimes. It's almost suspicious. Perhaps I'll have to deliberately put a certain expression into circulation which I know is not in circulation and then see what happens, whether I actually encounter it or hear it on the radio one day.

Kulananda: The word individuality, the notion of individuality is coming up more.

S: Oh yes, that's true, and the individual. Yes, definitely.

Voice: We'll have to find a new language.

S: Well, there's no language which people can understand and yet at the same time not use in their own way. [246]

Mike Howes: You used the term continuous creativity. Is that right?

S: Well, I said in fact irreversible creativity.

Mike Howes: Irreversible creativity seems to me to conjure up activity, an active, er, presumably then there is a passive side of creativity that I can't quite conceive of. I mean in passive situations there is....

S: Well, that depends on what one means by creativity. I mean can one have creative listening? Can one have creative silence?

So it's as though creativity is not exclusively a matter of activity in the overt sense. I think it's generally understood, or generally accepted, that creativity - especially artistic creativity - does include an element or an aspect of receptivity. I mean there is this famous passage of Shakespeare where he says:

*'My brain now proves the female to my soul.
My soul the father And these two beget
A generation of still breeding thoughts.'*

In other words there is an active within himself, a passive within himself and the interaction of these two, like the interaction of male and female, gives rise to a whole generation of thoughts. So there is, as it were, receptivity as well as activity within the creative process itself. I mean I talked of being continually creative or irreversibly creative - that shouldn't convey connotations of being always on the go, always doing things,

always busy. No. It can include periods, at least elements, of profound stillness, receptivity. You're active without being activist, or one could be paradoxical and say you're doing most when you're doing least, but that could be misunderstood, Take it in the Taoistic sense.

Kulananda: I think it's a language that we could use a lot more, the language of creativity.

S: Yes, indeed.

Kulananda: In the past we've always just used it in relation to reactivity but in fact there's a much more positive.

Hridaya: It's a very powerful word. [247]

S: Yes.

Anyway let's come on to the last paragraph because I think some of you have had just about as much as you can take this weekend.

To learn to see the conditioned as ugly, impermanent, insubstantial, and painful, instead of as the opposite, is not, of course, the work of a day.

Understatement of the weekend. [Laughter]

It can be thus seen only by means of *prajna* or wisdom, a purely transcendental faculty that does not spring into existence all at once or by accident, but which has to be systematically nurtured, cultivated, and developed on the twofold basis of an ethical life expressive of healthy mental attitudes, and a purified, concentrated, and meditative consciousness. These categories, the first and second of which are covered by the terms *silā* and *samadhi* respectively, together constitute the three great stages underlying all more detailed subdivisions of the Path to Enlightenment. Before we can proceed to discuss either the path in general, or the stages of which it consists, it will be necessary to make the acquaintance of the pilgrim.

And so we come on to 'The Human Situation'. So that is to some extent a sort of connective passage. I mean truly to 'see the conditioned as ugly, impermanent, insubstantial, and painful instead of as the opposite', you need to develop *prajna* or wisdom. You can't see it, you certainly can't see it fully and effectively purely by rational means. You need *prajna*, or don't take that even too literally, you need some higher spiritual faculty, You need intuition, you need Imagination with a capital 'I.' And it's not just a faculty sort of superadded to you as you are now - you need to be a different kind of person, you need to be an Individual with a capital 'I' in order to be able to see in this way. It's not just a question of opening a third eye while remaining otherwise unchanged.

Kulamitra: It does often sound, you know, when it's used that *prajna* is a thing, [248]

S: Yes, yes,

Kulamitra: You say you need *prajna* so you think 'Where can I get it?'

S: Ah, yes. Hmm.

Kulamitra: It's not a thing but it's a faculty...

S: Ah, yes.

Kulamitra: ... but faculty again sounds as if it's a thing within you.

S: But *prajna* means functioning in a totally different way. *prajna* means irreversible creativity, You have *prajna* when you function in this irreversible creative manner.

Kulamitra: It does sometimes sound as if, like where is it? Is it....

S: In which book?

Kulamitra: Or where in yourself?

S: Yes.

Kulamitra: Where do I find this faculty? It must exist somewhere so where do I find it?

S: 'Tell me where is fancy bred? Or in the heart or in the head?' [*Laughter*]. Where oh where? Shakespeare. For fancy read imagination.

Nagabodhi: Where was that lovely quote from Shakespeare that you gave a minute ago?

S: I don't remember.

Voice: Was it a sonnet? [249]

S: No. It's one of the plays.

So it's as though you can only see things differently if you are yourself a different person. It's much more than just developing an extra additional faculty. It requires a complete transformation, as you are so you see things, as you see things so you are. If you want to see things in completely different terms you must be a completely different sort of person. If you want to see Reality you must be yourself Real. An unreal person can't see Reality. Or a person whose outlook is restricted by unrealities cannot see Reality itself.

Kulamitra: You said more or less something similar about *dhyana* in *Peace is a Fire*. That it's not a state, it's a way of reorientating your being.

S: Right. Yes. Yes,

Kulamitra: Well, how does the reorientation of *prajna* differ.....

S: Well, it's the reorientation which **is** *prajna*. So how does that differ?

Voice: ... from the reorientation which is *dhyana*?

S: Oh, the reorientation which is *dhyana* is only temporary. That's the main difference. *Prajna* represents irreversible, a permanent reorientation. That's why I speak of irreversible creativity. By irreversible creativity, I mean creativity the other side of Stream Entry, the other side of the Point of No Return.

Anyway, any more general point that arises from the ground that we've covered this weekend? We've actually covered, in terms of content, if not in terms of pages, quite a lot of ground.

Voice: One practical point. You were talking this morning, I can't remember in what connection, about urgency in the spiritual life, particularly you found that quality in India, I think you said.

S: Well, at least among quite a number of people. Yes.

Voice: Can you offer some practical advice about how to bring this into one's daily life in terms of practice? [250]

S: Well, a sense of urgency is very often stimulated by remembering the dreadful consequences that will ensue if you don't follow a certain course. Try to think what you might be like in twenty, thirty, forty years' time, if you don't really practise the Dharma vigorously. Perhaps in some cases you might have to think of your parents or at least people you see. Do you really want to be like that in twenty, thirty, forty years time? If not you'd better start doing something about it now, pretty quick. I mean **that** can perhaps give you a sense of urgency. Or maybe realise that the rate at which you are changing at present is very slow. Maybe one has made some fairly substantial progress over the last few years but when you measure it against what **can** be achieved, what **could** be achieved, perhaps progress hasn't been very great. If it means what would you like to be like in say twenty or thirty years' time, how **would** you like to see yourself? Just try to imagine yourself say in twenty-five years' time after say a quarter of a century, a quarter of a century more, not just being around the FWBO but really sort of practising, really trying to develop creativity, what would you be like if you kept it up for twenty-five years? Just try and form an ideal image or figure of yourself - so boundlessly positive, helpful, kind, active, intelligent, aware, always on the ball, never at a loss, relaxed, etc. etc. - and think that to get up to that level in twenty-five years' time, what have I got to do now? What sort of practice have I got to keep up? So I won't get there just jogging along, plodding along a bit half-heartedly as maybe one is doing at present. Do you see what I mean? Giving yourself all sorts of little holidays and days off and weeks off and...

Tape 11

...want to change over the next twenty-five years then you've really got to get down to it, Otherwise you don't want to end up after twenty-five years as a very recognizable, just slightly improved version of what you are now, and, of course, twenty-five years older. *[Laughs]* It would be a pity if after twenty-five years you were just twenty-five years older and a bit improved. I mean, one really expects much more than that.

Ratnaketu: I find recollection of the situation of the world at large [251] is quite an incentive. You see civilisation and culture decaying and you think if you really want to preserve that, if you really want to make things come alive again, it's you that's got to do it.

S: Well, also the fact that in many ways even the best of what we have at present in the way of culture and civilisation is not nearly enough. I mean measured against Buddhist standards and Buddhist ideals, even modern democracy is pretty deplorable. The consumer society is pretty deplorable,

Kulananda: The fact of other people suffering can be inspiring.

S: That's true, yes. This is what one finds in India, that people have suffered under the old system, the old Hindu caste system, and are still suffering, still trying to get free from it, and Buddhism really does help, one sees that. So there is a great incentive there.

Kulananda: That can be a spur to us as well.

S: Here, well, in a way, unfortunately, in a way not, people's suffering is less obvious. Maybe, even, there's less suffering in a way. So we're not so spurred on to try to help to alleviate it. But there **is** a lot of suffering, I think even in modern Britain, A lot of it is hidden away. Hidden away in mental hospitals and other such places. There's a lot of unhappiness, a lot of neurosis, a lot of strain and tension.

Kulananda: A large lack of life.

S: A large lack of life. At least one can say that of people in the FWBO I really thought that, or felt that quite strongly. Well, I feel it quite strongly whenever I give a talk or lecture under the auspices of the FWBO. I mean the sort of people that are there in front of one, the sort of expressions that one sees on all their faces without exception, they are not the sort of people that you see, say, on the tube, if you go on any journey, nor are their expressions the sort of expressions that you see on the faces of people sitting in the tube, especially at the end of a day's work. But we [252] mustn't rest on our laurels, however green and glorious they may be. There's still a lot more to be done. Mustn't confuse the positive group with the spiritual community, which I think sometimes does happen. Or at least, perhaps, the positive group is so positive and the positivity is so good you forget, or tend to forget, sometimes, that there are even higher levels to be attained, something even better to be attained. I do notice a tendency on the part of some people around the FWBO, even around the LBC, to sort of settle down a bit in the happy human healthy state and enjoy it for a bit, without going very much further, or even without thinking of going further, and that is quite dangerous if that lasts too long. Because, ultimately, it is the spiritual that sustains even the positive group.

But anyway, I don't want to give too many words of warning this weekend. And of course it's very important to communicate positivity through the centre, through one's classes. Everything that one does of a public nature especially, it should be really alive. People should be really on the ball, full of energy. No one sort of half-hearted or a bit inadequate or a bit dim or a bit dull. You really must avoid that. Especially in the case of those Order members who lead or who support classes and other public activities. It's absolutely necessary they should be on the ball and full of life, and interested and interesting. Because people are getting very strong, in some cases, first impressions from those people who are taking, who are leading, and who are supporting activities.

It is very important that people keep themselves up to scratch. *[Long Pause]*

And I think, in a way, that what probably, in the long run or in the last analysis, will attract people most to a centre like this is just life. I think it's as simple as that. To begin with they might not bother too much whether it's Buddhist or not Buddhist, or Western Buddhist, or Zen or Tibetan, no, if it's alive, if there's real life there and energy there and joy there, they'll come again. Unless they are so sick that they can't appreciate those things, Occasionally that does happen.

Graham: That was my first impression.

S: And how many years ago was that?

Graham: It could be about eight.

S: Ah. So even then. Even then. *[Long Pause]*

Anyway, any further point? [*Long Pause*]

All right, then, maybe we'll conclude there. [253]

Voices: Thank you. Thank you, Bhante,

End of Seminar

Second Edition completed on 15th January 2001

Checked and corrected against the original tape recordings by Dharmachari Silabhadra

Final checking by Dharmacharini Dhivati

May all Beings be Happy