General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

Sangharakshita in Seminar

Perfection of Wisdom: Ratnagunasamcayagatha seminar Held at Padmaloka, summer 1976.

Transcribed by Janet Owen, Terry Richardson, John Wakeman, and Maha Upasika Gotami, and corrected by Ven. Sangharakshita. Words within square brackets are later explanatory additions by Ven. Sangharakshita, except those marked "tr." which are later annotations. Digitized by Diane Hughes. Corrected, copy edited, and annotated by Shantavira, November 2004.

Text: the Ratnagunasamcayagatha, from 'The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary' by Edward Conze, published by Four Seasons Foundation, Bolinas, California.

Those present: Ven. Sangharakshita, Padmapani, Padmaraja, Sagaramati, Vessantara, Alan Angel, Ian Anderson, Mark Barret, Roy Campbell, Kim Catala, Mike Chivers, Peter Cowen, Pat Dunlop, Dominic Kennedy, John Rooney, Graham Steven, Mike Thomsen.

Part 1

Sangharakshita: Today we come to the Perfection of Wisdom, one of the oldest of the Prajnaparamita or Perfection of Wisdom texts. In fact, we come on to what may well be the very oldest of all the Perfection of Wisdom texts, and in particular to the first two chapters, which according to some modern scholars are the oldest part of that text. Dealing as it does with the Perfection of Wisdom, obviously the text is quite profound, but, fortunately for us, it is expressed in relatively simple terms. So we are going to take it quite easily, and go through it bit by bit, section by section, and see what we can get out of it. Let's go round the circle, each person reading a section at a time, beginning right at the top of the page with the homage.

p.9 "Homage to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas!

"Thereupon the Lord, in order to gladden the four assemblies, and to further lighten up this perfection of wisdom, preached at that time the following verses.

"Chapter 1: Preliminary Admonition

"Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended!"

S: First of all, the homage - not simply to the Buddha, you notice, but to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. What does that tell you about the text? What do you know immediately when you see it? [2]

Padmapani: It's the Mahayana.

S: It's a Mahayana text. Does that mean that only the Mahayanists revere the Bodhisattvas?

Peter: No, because the Theravadins revere Maitreya, don't they?

S: Yes, they do. But do they revere any other Bodhisattva, who is now a Bodhisattva?

Mark: The Buddha before his Enlightenment was a Bodhisattva.

S: Yes, they do regard the Buddha as having been a Bodhisattva before his Enlightenment, but he is not now a Bodhisattva. The only Bodhisattva whom they revere who is now a Bodhisattva is Maitreya: they don't revere any other. Bodhisattvas in the plural therefore clearly indicates the Mahayana.

"Thereupon in order to gladden the four assemblies . . . "

What are these four assemblies? (pause) It is the chaturvarga. What is the chaturvarga?

Peter: It is the shravakas and the pratyeka Buddhas.

S: No, no. The four assemblies.

John: Is it the four subdivisions within the sangha?

S: Yes, so what are they?

John: They would be the bhikshus and the upasakas.

S: It's the bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas. The sangha, as made up of these four assemblies, or groups, is therefore called the Chaturvarga sangha, or the sangha of the four divisions. There is probably a parallel intended with the Brahminical Chaturvarna. The difference is of only a single letter: Chaturvarna and Chaturvarga. Chaturvarna means the four colours, or as we would say, the four castes; that is to say, the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Shudra, or the priest, the ruler and landowner, the merchant and trader, and the labourer or serf. These four make up the Chaturvarna of Brahminical society. The four vargas, that is to say, the bhikshu, bhikshuni, upasaka and upasika, make up the Chaturvarga - the four groups or four assemblies - of the spiritual community, the sangha. I don't think this has ever been pointed out by anyone before, this parallel between Chaturvarna and Chaturvarga. But what is the great difference between the varna and varga - between colour and assembly, between a caste, on the one hand, and a group within the spiritual community on the other?

Mark: Caste implies a sort of hierarchy, just a set rule because of which of those you belong to.

S: Ah, but how do you belong to them?

Mark: By birth.

S: Yes, by birth. So the principle of division here is hereditary. But what about the Sangha and the Chaturvarga? What is the principle there?

Alan: The degree of commitment.

S: The degree of commitment. Yes.

Peter: And sex.

S: Yes, and sex too. [3]

Alan: Was that division actually put forward by the Buddha, i.e. the one created between the upasaka and the upasika?

S: As far as we know. It's found in the Pali texts, where mention is made of the four assemblies: bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upasakas, and upasikas. It is a way of saying the whole spiritual community. The Ratnagunasamcayagatha is a quite early Mahayana sutra. In later sutras there is a much more elaborate description of the spiritual community. You not only get bhikshus and bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas, but Bodhisattvas and arhants (Pali: arahats) as well. You get devas, you get nagas, gandharvas - even animals. You get all sorts of beings. In a sense all living beings make up the great sangha, the great community, in the widest sense of the term. The moment they listen to the Buddha they become members of the spiritual community. Thus in the Mahayana sutras, that is to say the more extended ones, you get all living beings - or at least representatives of all the different classes of living beings - ranged about the Buddha in great circles listening to him as he teaches the Dharma, and they all make up the sangha, in the very widest sense. Here in this text the spiritual community consists simply of the four vargas: the bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas, and upasikas. There is no mention of Bodhisattvas, no mention of arhants, though maybe many of the bhikshus and bhikshunis were arhants. There is no mention of non-human beings.

'And to further lighten up this perfection of wisdom.' It's as though the Buddha has lit up, that is to say, explained, the Perfection of Wisdom already on some previous occasion, but is now going to illuminate it, to explain it even further, and so he 'preached' i.e. uttered, 'at that time the following verses'. Thus he preaches, you notice, 'in order to gladden the four assemblies'. We had a touch of that at the end of the Ariyapariyesana Sutta, didn't we, when 'delighted, these monks rejoiced in what the Lord said'. So here also the Buddha is going to teach them, is going to open up the Dharma, open up the Perfection of Wisdom, or as Conze translates it 'Perfect Wisdom' - we can also say transcendental wisdom - in order to gladden them, to give them a special treat as it were. Maybe they have been good bhikshus and bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas, so the Buddha is pleased with them; he wants to make them happy, wants to give them a special treat. For that reason he is not going to talk to them about sila, or even about samadhi. He is going to talk to them about prajna. Not only prajna, but prajnaparamita, Perfect Wisdom. He is going to really delight and gladden them. It's a pity the translator uses the word 'preached', because that suggests

a sermon, and sermons don't usually gladden people's hearts. Rather otherwise.

Follows then a verse of Preliminary Admonition. I take it you all know what an admonition is. This is only the translator's heading. It's like a warning. So

"Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended!"

Right at the beginning, right in the very first line of the verse, the Buddha says "Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith!" What does this signify?

Peter: It's a warning that it is going to be a bit difficult so to have lots of . . .

S: Yes, certainly, there is that. It is going to be quite difficult.

Padmapani: It seems to refer to the fact that it is going to be exceedingly hard to grasp, maybe on an intellectual level, in the sense that it calls for faith. [4]

S: Yes, but faith in what sort of sense?

Padmapani: Presumably it would be faith in what the Buddha's teaching.

S: What I was getting at was not faith in the sense of belief, but faith in the sense of an emotionally positive in attitude, a receptive attitude. Also a joyous attitude. You are asked to "Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith!" In other words, if you haven't got this right emotional attitude - if you are not emotionally positive, if you are not open to the Dharma - then you won't be able to receive it, won't be able to understand it.

Vessantara: There's also the suggestion of the inseparability of wisdom and compassion. The Buddha doesn't say 'Call forth all your intellectual powers.'

S: The verse also suggests that Perfect Wisdom is deserving of love, respect, and faith - that this is the appropriate attitude to adopt with regard to Perfect Wisdom. Moreover the Buddha says 'as much as you can' i.e. don't place any limitations on these positive emotions. And then 'call forth'. What does this suggest? I don't know what the original Sanskrit word is here, as I don't have a copy of the text, but taking the English words quite literally, what does 'call forth' suggest?

Mark: Bring out something that is already there.

S: Yes, bring out something that is already there. The love is there, latent. The respect is there too, and faith, so call them forth. These are natural human endowments. I have spoken about this before, about the fact that we often tend to think that this is only the negative things that get repressed. But there is much in us that is positive that gets 'repressed', that doesn't get a chance to come out, doesn't get a chance to express itself. So if we allow ourselves to open up - if we become less repressed, less inhibited, it doesn't necessarily mean

that all sorts of very unpleasant negative emotions are going to come pouring out; there is a lot that is very good and positive too that is repressed. This particular line therefore suggests that, in addition to all the negative things, the love is there, the respect is there, the faith is there, just call them forth. We find the Buddha saying much the same sort of thing in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta: 'Let them with ears to hear release their faith' or, as you could say, 'call forth their faith', although that is only one of the two possible translations, the other being 'give up their faith', i.e. their faith in what is not the true Dharma. It is as though the Buddha is saying, in the opening verse of the Ratnagunasamcayagatha, 'You are better than you think you are. You do have love, you do have respect, you do have faith. Call them forth, let them express themselves, let them manifest themselves. They are there, and they are the appropriate feelings, the appropriate emotions you should have toward Perfect Wisdom.' I think this is very true of a lot of people who are starved of an opportunity to express these more positive emotions. For instance you find it quite often with people, especially perhaps new people, in connection with puja. I know quite a few people are put off, at least superficially, by the puja and what appears to them to be a lot of unnecessary ceremony; but on the other hand, quite a few new people seem to have the experience of almost relief that they are able to express a bit of devotion, and they find - rather to their surprise sometimes - that a lot of devotion is there ready and waiting to be expressed. Sometimes these are apparently quite intellectual people. They discover that they have got this strong devotional streak, and that they really love offering flowers and lighting candles. Intellectually they think it all a bit ridiculous, but they cannot deny the fact that they [5] really enjoy doing this, and get as much out of it as anything else. Sometimes they say they get more out of it than out of the meditation, more out of it than listening to the lectures. It's almost as if the puja becomes the highlight of the Buddhist week. And they thought that they were intellectuals! Evidently the love and the reverence and the faith were all, as it were, lurking there ready to come out, waiting to come out. In the ordinary way they never get an opportunity, because probably such people no longer believe in Christianity, and so they don't go to church. Even if you go to church, you are not usually allowed to do anything yourself except, maybe, in a Catholic church, light a candle or two. But if you no longer believe in Catholicism, and no longer believe in the Blessed Virgin Mary, you don't get a chance to offer so much as a candle, so that all your devotional feeling remains unused, not to say stifled. Or you might even be ashamed of having such feelings, and in that way too they don't get any opportunity to come out. But they are all there all the same, and if they only get the opportunity very often they come out very easily indeed. The Buddha seems to be aware of this, and so he says

"Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints!"

Now what does that second line suggest?

Peter: Clear away your negative emotions.

S: Clear away all your negative emotions. Yes, he speaks first of calling forth positive emotions, and then he speaks of getting your negative emotions out of the way. Again I am not sure what the original Sanskrit term was in each case. 'Defilements' could well be the klesas, and the 'taints' could well be the asravas.

Padmaraja: ... which could be on the basis of positive emotion. In order to do that, (i.e. get the negative emotions out of the way) you would need to achieve a firm foundation.

S: But you notice that the Buddha here puts the positive before the negative. It's not that you clear away the negative and then develop the positive, but you develop the positive and then, with the help of the positive that you have developed, you clear away the negative. So he says, "Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints!" What do the defilements obstruct?

Graham: Progress.

S: They obstruct progress certainly.

Padmapani: Energy, in a way.

S: They obstruct energy. They misuse energy. They cause energy to leak away. They squander energy.[6]

Mark: The negative things that are present presumably obstruct the positive.

S: Yes, they obstruct the positive emotions, and above all they obstruct insight, obstruct clarity of vision. Hence they obstruct Perfect Wisdom; they prevent you from developing Perfect Wisdom, or even appreciating it. So the Buddha says:

"Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas."

This is all you are asked to do. Just listen, in this state of positive emotion, of love and respect and faith. Listen with all your defilements cleared out of the way. Just listen. Just receive. Just take in. The Buddha is going to speak; the Buddha is going to make it clear. Just be in the attitude of perfect receptivity, and listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas. Why gentle Buddhas in this context? Taking the English word quite literally, why gentle Buddhas?

John: To reinforce the compassionate aspect.

S: Possibly. But why not the heroic Buddhas? Why not the wise Buddhas?

Alan: Wisdom, as well as Prajnaparamita, is depicted as female.

Graham: In the sense of receptivity.

S: Yes, in the sense of receptivity. But you are asked to be receptive to Perfect Wisdom.

Mike Thomsen: In the sense of its being intuitive.

S: Intuitive, yes.

Mike Thomsen: Mature.

S: Mature, yes. But are women mature rather than men? So the question remains: in what sense is the Perfection of Wisdom said to be female? Usually it is said to be female on account of its subtlety and elusiveness. It's difficult to catch hold of, it evades you; you cannot quite grasp it. In the case of women, why is that? Why cannot you grasp them?

Sagaramati: Nothing to grasp! (laughter)

S: That's quite true - maybe more true than you realize. But let's not jump into metaphysics quite so quickly. Why cannot you grasp women?

Padmapani: Because there's an irrational element in them.

S: That's true, but then why cannot you grasp that irrational element?

Padmapani: Well, I cannot. (laughter)

S: Why is it that you can say of women that they are ungraspable? I mean could you grasp them if you tried hard?

Padmapani: No, the very fact of your grasping would prevent you. You would not be able to grasp something if it was ungraspable.

S: Well, no. If it was graspable and you grasped it, well you would have grasped it, wouldn't you? (laughter) But if it was ungraspable, what is it that would have made it ungraspable? Let me put it another way, to make it easier. Why is femininity ungraspable?

Sagaramati: Isn't it because ... Well, when I said that in the case of women you cannot [7] grasp them because there is nothing to grasp, I didn't mean metaphysically, I meant that there is, in a sense, actually nothing to grasp because it belongs to you.

S: Quite so, it belongs to you. Leave aside the metaphysical sense: even psychologically, it belongs to you. You cannot grasp it because it isn't 'out there', it's 'in here'. When you are, as it were, in search of femininity, and trying to grasp femininity, you're in search of a certain quality, are you not? You are attracted by a certain quality which you have got to go in search of. But in fact, it is not 'out there' at all. It's a quality of yourself; but which is potential within you: which you have got to develop. Such being the case you can never grasp it as though it was something outside - never grasp it in the sense of make it truly your own - because it is something to be developed within you. In that sense it is ungraspable. So when the Perfection of Wisdom, or when Perfect Wisdom is said to be elusive, is said to be ungraspable, up to a point it is said to be so in this sort of way, i.e. that Perfect Wisdom is not an object 'out there'; Perfect Wisdom is something to be developed within yourself. To go in search of it in any other way is like looking into a mirror and trying to catch hold of your own face. You cannot do it, because in a way it is not 'out there'. In a

manner of speaking, it's 'in here'. Perfect Wisdom is elusive and ungraspable because it isn't an object standing over against a subject and waiting, as it were, to be grasped by that subject. It's something which is beyond the subject-object distinction altogether. It's not an object; it's not even a subject. Looked at psychologically, it is subject rather than object; but looked at metaphysically, it is neither subject nor object, neither object nor subject. Though you have to think of it as an object, it isn't really an object. When you think at all you make something an object. So Perfect Wisdom is elusive in this sort of way. Therefore the 'elusiveness' of woman, or the 'elusiveness' of femininity, becomes a sort of symbol for the elusiveness of Perfect Wisdom.

There is a connection between this and the description of the Buddha as the 'gentle Buddha'. Don't forget that we have been given the impression that we are about to hear a very advanced teaching. We are about to hear Perfect Wisdom, which is the ultimate teaching, the highest and greatest of all teachings. You might, therefore, expect that the Buddha would hold forth in a thunder-like voice. After all, it is Perfect Wisdom that we are going to hear! So what is the suggestion? The suggestion is that if something is spiritually great, spiritually powerful, it is a bit loud, a bit strong, even a bit violent. But no; it's gentle, it's taught by the 'gentle Buddhas'. It comes very softly, very gently, very quietly, very unobtrusively. We tend to identify what is spiritually powerful with what is, well, even muscularly powerful. We say 'It's a very strong teaching' (laughter) but it's not strong in that sort of sense. Do you see what I mean? It's a bit like that passage in the Bible where there comes first an earthquake, after the thunder and the lightning, there would come a tremendous voice which would drown even the thunder, and that would be the voice of God. But no. It's a still, small voice. It's a bit like that here. You have had this rather dramatic announcement. You have been warned, as it were, what to expect: Perfect Wisdom. But it's the Perfect Wisdom of the 'gentle Buddhas'. The Buddha is not going to shout because he is speaking about Perfect Wisdom; he's not going to thunder forth, as it were, because this is something spiritually powerful, not something intellectually [8] powerful or having a lot of psychophysical energy, or a lot of physical strength. This is something of a quite different character. Thus you see the sort of mistakes we are likely to make, or liable to make. There's a slight parallel here with what happens when we recite the Padmasambhava mantra and try to express the spiritual strength of it by shouting. Do you see the parallel? The spiritual strength is there (in the mantra), the spiritual power is there, but it isn't necessarily to be expressed by shouting. Not that you mustn't shout; shouting might be appropriate, in the sense of producing a great volume of sound; but not forcing it. When we recite the Tara mantra that is very soft, and when we recite the Padmasambhava mantra, that is very loud. But don't think that the Tara mantra is weak and the Padmasambhava mantra strong. They are equally powerful, spiritually speaking. The only difference is that one is soft, while the other is loud.

Padmapani: Would you say, Bhante, that the Prajnaparamita is more synonymous with the devotee type of person?

S: It's usually considered to be more suited to the intellectual; but maybe you are right. Maybe it is more devotional people who should take up the Perfection of Wisdom; they are less likely to think about it, and where Perfect Wisdom is concerned, thinking is fatal - it's like trying to understand a woman. Well, if you try to understand her in a purely logical fashion you will never be able to do so, because according to popular belief, at least, she is a completely irrational being, and you have to be a bit irrational yourself to understand her. Your approach to Perfect Wisdom must be a bit like that; it must be a non-rational approach, a devotional approach. If you approach the Perfect Wisdom with devotion you are much more likely to understand than if you approach it with your keen, penetrating intellect. Therefore again, as we saw that the Buddha said, "Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith," not 'Sharpen your wits,' or 'Go and take a philosophy course'; not that, but love, respect, and faith are what are required. If you have them, then you'll be in a much better position to understand Perfect Wisdom - otherwise it's like trying to get on with your girlfriend better, and understand her better, by going and taking a course in logic. It wouldn't help you at all.

Mark: If the saying that the Perfect Wisdom is like irrational ...

S: Non-rational would be better.

Mark: Well, non-rational ... To get back to the femininity thing, that would suggest that women would be more capable of grasping the Perfection of Wisdom than men.

S: More capable of not grasping it, you mean? Yes, why not? I mean that would be logical, but logic doesn't work here. (laughter) I'm afraid that is your masculine mind at work.... Yes, that is what one would logically expect. (laughter)[9]

Padmapani: This seems almost the opposite of a lecture I heard you ...

S: But that is only to be expected, isn't it? (laughter)

Padmapani: It was on a tape lecture of the Diamond Sutra; it's very sort of vajra-like ...

S: Ah, but don't forget that this quality is in a way a special aspect of Perfect Wisdom. The full title of the sutra is the Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita - the Vajracchedika, the Diamond Cutter, as it is usually translated. Han Shan the Zen master, translates it as, or regards it as meaning, the diamond cutter of doubts. He thinks that here we see Perfect Wisdom in its function of cutting through all doubts, just like the vajra. Here Perfect Wisdom is powerful, and thrusting, and effective. This is a different aspect from the one which seems to be indicated in the Ratnagunasamcayagatha.

Padmapani: So in the Diamond Sutra the Buddha is using skilful means to break through people's ignorance, whereas in this work there is more of a receptive quality.

S: Yes, one could indeed say that. So 'Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas'. Don't imagine that you are going to get a great powerful blast from the Buddha, no, it's going to come very softly, very gently, very unobtrusively. One of the things that we were talking about on an earlier study retreat was that sometimes we speak in terms of things coming from below, sometimes in terms of their coming from above. I think we mentioned this in connection with the second dhyana. You remember the illustration, or then simile, for the second dhyana. What is that?

Peter: Water above the earth.

S: Yes, it's a subterranean spring. I happened to mention that one could speak of this spring - that is to say, the forces of inspiration - as bubbling up from the depths, or as descending from the heights. It seems that either can happen - that both can happen. But then I also said that, in addition to these two alternatives, the bubbling up from the depths and the descending from the heights, the inspiration could come in sideways, obliquely, in the sense that you don't quite notice which direction it's coming from at all. It comes subtly, unobtrusively; it's there, and you hardly have time to notice where it's come from. It comes, as it were, obliquely, slantwise. The Perfection of Wisdom is a bit like that; it doesn't come by way of a great upheaval from the depths; it doesn't descend, as it were, cataclysmically from the heights - it sort of comes obliquely, indirectly.

Thus, "Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended!" "Taught for the weal of the world." What is this "weal of the world"? It's probably lokahitaya. You remember that when the Buddha sent out his first sixty disciples he told them to go forth and preach, or make clear, the brahmachariya, or spiritual life, as taught by him and to teach it to many people (bahajuna) for their weal or welfare (hitaya) and their happiness (sukhaya). So this is quite significant, something, in a way, that we ought to remind ourselves of: that the Dharma is taught - Perfect Wisdom is taught - for the weal and happiness of people. In other words the Buddha wants to make them happy, and he goes about it in the only right way: by teaching them how to lead the spiritual life: how to evolve. You will only be happy if you are evolving; you will only be happy if you are developing. You won't be happy if you are standing still; you won't be happy if you are stagnating. Thus the Dharma is taught, Perfect Wisdom is taught, 'for the weal of the world', to make everybody happy. And it is "for heroic spirits intended". These heroic spirits are probably the viras, the heroes. So why do you think it is intended for [10] heroic spirits?

Padmapani: Heroic spirits conquer.

S: Yes. The teaching of the Perfect Wisdom makes tremendous demands upon one, demands which can be met only by a heroic spirit. And the Bodhisattva, who of course especially practises Perfect Wisdom, is described as the hero par excellence in all the Mahayana sutras. He is very brave, very enterprising, very courageous, very resolute, able to take initiative, able to accept responsibility,

adventurous, pioneering. He has got all these qualities.

Just from this one introductory verse we have already learned quite a bit about Perfect Wisdom.

"Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended!"

There's one point we have not touched upon. Perfect Wisdom is described as 'the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas', so in what sense is Perfect Wisdom 'of the gentle Buddhas'? In what sense does it belong to the gentle Buddhas, or to the Buddhas?

Peter: They have mastered the Perfect Wisdom.

S: They have mastered it, yes. Also, the Buddha is communicating the content of his own spiritual experience, the content of his own Enlightenment. He is speaking out of the depths of his own experience of reality. Therefore, Perfect Wisdom is not a subject apart from the Buddha himself - not even a subject which he has mastered. Perfect Wisdom, you can say, is the Buddha. The Buddha is Perfect Wisdom as well as all the other paramitas. Or you could say that when a Buddha thinks - if a Buddha thinks - then Perfect Wisdom comes into operation.

Alan: How would that tie up with the Prajnaparamita being said to be the mother of the Buddhas?

S: You can think of it as a sort of circular relationship. It is said that Prajnaparamita is the Jinamata, the Mother of all the Buddhas. In what sense is that said? In what sense is Prajnaparamita the Mother of all Buddhas? How do you become a Buddha?

Alan: Through that arising.

S: Through that arising. So what makes you a Buddha? That makes you a Buddha, so that, i.e. Perfect Wisdom, is your mother. But when you speak, what do you produce? What comes out of your mouth?

Padmapani: Sound.

S: Perfect Wisdom! If you are a Buddha, Perfect Wisdom comes out. Therefore Perfect Wisdom is your son, or your daughter. There is a circular sort of relationship. Perfect Wisdom produces you; you produce Perfect Wisdom. That Perfect Wisdom produces other Buddhas; those other Buddhas produce Perfect Wisdom: thus it goes on. This is the circle of the mandala, of course, not the Wheel of Life. Iconographically, Perfect Wisdom is often represented as a woman of mature age, golden complexion, dignified appearance, and so on, as in the famous Javanese figure of Prajnaparamita which appeared on the dust-jacket of the original hard-cover edition of Dr Conze's 'Buddhist Texts Through the

Ages'. There are many reproductions of it in books on Buddhist art, but none of them very good; but this one on that dust-jacket is quite a good one.[11]

"The source of Subhuti's Authority

"The rivers of this Roseapple Island, Which cause the flowers to grow, the fruits, the herbs and trees, They all derive from the might of the king of the Nagas, From the dragon residing in Lake Anopatapta, his magical power. Just so, whatever Dharmas the Jina's disciples establish, Whatever they teach, whatever adroitly explain - Concerning the work of the holy which leads to the fullness of bliss, And also the fruit of this work - it is the Tathagata's doing. For whatever the Jina has taught, the Guide to the Dharma, His pupils, if genuine, have been well trained in it. From direct experience, derived from their training, they teach it, Their teaching stems from the might of the Buddhas, and not their own power."

S: The source of Subhuti's authority. This is of course, the heading introduced by the translator. But who is Subhuti?

Padmapani: Subhuti was one of the Buddha's chief disciples. [12]

S: Yes. He was one of the most prominent of the disciples. He appears in the Pali texts, he appears in the Perfection of Wisdom texts. In the Perfection of Wisdom texts he is especially commended for his wisdom. He also appears, of course, in the Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedika) where he is the interlocutor.

Graham: What was he known for in the Pali texts? Was it purity?

S: He was known as the chief of those living remote and at peace. The Buddha speaks of 'The rivers all in this Roseapple Island'. What is this Roseapple Island? It is Jambudvipa, sometimes translated as the land, or island, or continent, of purple fruit trees. (This is according to ancient Indian ideas of geography.) It means the whole world, but it also means India, because to the ancient Indians India was the whole world. So,

"The rivers all in this Roseapple Island, Which cause the flowers to grow, the fruits, the herbs and trees, They all derive from the might of the king of the Nagas, From the dragon residing in Lake Anopatapta, his magical power."

Here one must bear in mind the geography of northern India. Northern India is dominated, of course, by the Himalayas, and among the peaks of the Himalayas you get Mount Kailash. Have you heard of Mount Kailash? Lama Govinda has given a description of it, as well as an account of his own pilgrimage to the area, in 'The Way of the White Clouds'. Many of you must have read that description. At the foot of Kailash there is a great lake, which, by the way was called Manasarover. Buddhists call it Anopatapta, which means 'not hot', in other words, 'cool'. The rivers of India are all supposed to descend from this lake - to have their head there. In fact they do. There are four great rivers which branch out, or branch off, from this great lake, and which flow through Tibet and then round back into India. There is also the Indus, which rises from the north,

as well as the Sutlej and the Karnali, which rise respectively from the west and the south. Thus there are these four great rivers branching out from this lake in the Himalayas at the foot of Mount Kailash. [This is, of course, geographically impossible. Although the Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, and Sutlej do all rise in this region, only the Sutlej is fed from Lake Manasarover, and this in turn feeds the Indus, tr.] The Indians therefore tend to think of all the great rivers descending from the waters of this particular lake, and in the lake, of course, there lives a dragon, a naga. In fact in all the waters there live nagas or dragons. In the small waters you get little nagas, in the great waters you get great nagas, so presumably, in this particular lake, you get the greatest naga of them all. So what do you think the naga represents? Look at it in primitive, almost animistic, terms? A naga is a sort of spirit of the waters; if you like, the spirit of the depths. The naga is, so to speak, the life of the waters. It's rather interesting that in ancient Indian thought nothing is inanimate, nothing is dead. There's no such thing as dead matter. It's an entirely modern concept, really rather a perverted one, that matter is dead. In Jaina philosophy, for instance - this is very interesting - the elements are regarded as living beings. Earth, water, fire, and air are regarded as living beings. Not even living things, but living beings. The term is jiva, a living being. The earth is a living being. Water is a living being. Fire is a living being. Air is a living being. Consequently you should not harm the elements: not harm the earth, not harm the water, not harm the fire, not harm the air. The Jains have got this particular view very, very strongly, and it is embodied in their philosophy. But it's in the background of the consciousness of all the Indian schools, all the Indian spiritual teachings: that there is no such thing as dead matter, that everything is alive. And that life is personified, as we would say, in these sort of mythological beings and creatures. So the naga is the life of the water, one could say - to take it no [13] further than that. Therefore the Buddha says,

"The rivers all in this Roseapple Island, Which cause the flowers to grow, the fruits, the herbs and trees, They all derive from the might of the king of the Nagas, From the dragon residing in Lake Anopatapta, his magical power."

His magical power is riddhi. This is not necessarily magical power, though, it is just power. Again, we went into this on a previous study retreat. The word riddhi (Sanskrit) or iddhi (Pali) is an ambiguous word. It means power and potency in a very general sense; it means influence; also it means magical power - magical power being a sort of natural extension of the influence of the fourth dhyana. Sometimes you read of the riddhi of the king: the power, the influence, emanating from the king. In the same way there is a power and influence that emanates from your highly concentrated state of mental absorption in the fourth dhyana, and it is by virtue of this power and influence that you work what seem to be miracles, i.e. bring about supernormal happenings. So here the reference is to this magical power, this riddhi or iddhi of the king of the nagas. Here you see the truly wonderful action of the waters, the rivers, of India all traced back to the king of the nagas. It's all his doing. It's the spirit of the waters that is at work through all these different rivers and streams and brooks, causing

everything to grow and to flourish. In the same way,

"Whatever Dharmas the Jina's disciples establish, Whatever they teach, whatever adroitly explain - Concerning the work of the holy which leads to the fullness of bliss, And also the fruit of this work - it is the Tathagata's doing. For whatever the Jina has taught, the Guide to the Dharma, His pupils, if genuine, have been well trained in it. From direct experience, derived from their training, they teach it, Their teaching stems from the might of the Buddhas, and not their own power."

So what do you think this means? Do you think it means that the disciples are just puppets? That the Buddha is making them speak rather like a ventriloquist?

Peter: More like channels.

S: It's more like channels. Yes, but does the Buddha make you a channel?

Peter: No, you make yourself one.

S: You make yourself a channel. And how do you make yourself a channel?

Alan: By having been well trained in ...

S: Yes, by following the teaching, by training yourself, by being trained, and by obtaining, or attaining, the same experience as the Buddha himself. So it is not a question of one personality, or one person, being used by 'another' person. In a sense they have become one person - are one enlightened being, as it were. Or you could say that there are two enlightened beings but, both of them being enlightened, they are in perfect harmony. Whatever the one would say, that also the other would say. They are of one mind, one heart, as it were, one reality.

"For whatever the Jina has taught, the Guide to the Dharma, His pupils, if genuine, have been well trained in it. From direct experience, derived from their training, they teach it, Their teaching stems from the might of the Buddhas, and not their own power."

Now what is meant by 'and not their own power'? What is this 'own power' from which their teaching does not stem?

Padmapani: Power which is derived from the idea that it is you that's doing it.

S: Yes, one could say that, certainly. It's the power of the ego, or the power of the memory, independent of experience - the power of the intellectual understanding [14] divorced from the experience. So when the disciple speaks, when the enlightened disciple speaks, it is the Buddha speaking, because the enlightened disciple has reproduced within himself, as it were, the Buddha's experience. Thus it is not the Buddha speaking in the sense of another person, another individual, speaking through him. But when he speaks it is the Buddha that speaks. This is not to say that his personality is in abeyance and the Buddha takes over; it's only his ego that is not only in abeyance but which has been dissolved completely. And when that happens, yes, the Buddha speaks, and he also speaks. His speaking is the Buddha's speaking, then. It is in a way

quite a difficult point to grasp, that when you give up your own will then you really do have your own will; that when you give up insisting on having your own way, then you really do get your own way; when it is really you speaking it really is the Buddha speaking. Not that you knuckle under to the Buddha, not that you suppress your own thoughts and ideas and let the Buddha just use you. Much less still do you copy or imitate the Buddha. In Christianity you've got the Imitatio Christi, the 'Imitation of Christ', and this sometimes has been misunderstood. And in the same way, in the East, people sometimes try to imitate the Buddha in the wrong sort of way, just reproducing externals, and just repeating what the Buddha said. But this is not the way. What then, do you think is the way?

Alan: You could, say, imitate the internals, reproduce the path.

S: But even so, it is only in a manner of speaking: in a manner of speaking, imitate; in a manner of speaking, reproduce.

Mark: Or just experience the same things as the Buddha.

S: Just experience the same thing, but without thinking of it as a thing to be experienced. It's more like functioning in the same way that the Buddha functions. One must have this feeling very strongly - that it's not you speaking, but it is the Buddha speaking. Not that you stand aside and let the Buddha speak, but your speaking is the Buddha speaking, because you are now enlightened in the way that the Buddha was enlightened. Or, to the extent that you are enlightened, to the extent that you have any real insight, any real experience, to that extent it is the Buddha speaking. At the same time it is you speaking, and it's you in the deepest and profoundest sense. When you really do speak the Buddha speaks. Well, we find that sometimes. When you really say what you think, what you really believe, to somebody, when it really is you speaking, it almost always carries conviction, and they get quite a different impression of it, and of you, than they get on other occasions. Have you ever noticed that?

Mark: Yes, that after you go back from a retreat and you talk to someone about the Dharma you can actually feel what you are talking about.

S: Right. Because you have understood it, or you have even had some insight into it. It's not just an intellectual understanding. At least minimally, you have experienced it, even.

Padmapani: You say that the, well, I mean the power, the riddhi that comes from the naga, it rings a bell with me. Something synonymous with water power: like emotional energy as well. It's emotional involvement, in a way. It's not an intellectual impression - it's a real living experience. It's as though you're immersed in it like in the water.

S: Yes. Right. Like the lotus in the water. And you notice that it is said in verse 2 that the rivers "cause the flowers to grow, the fruits, the herbs and trees", and the Dharma, [15] of course, by implication is compared with the river, or rivers. The suggestion is that, by the power of the Dharma, by the power of the

Buddha's speech, the Buddha's teachings, flowers are springing up all over the place. The same kind of comparison comes again in the (White) Lotus Sutra, where you get the Parable of the Rain Cloud. The Dharma is the great rain cloud that pours down water on all living things, on all the herbs and trees and shrubs and flowers. And they all grow, after their own kind, in accordance with their own nature. Thus you get an impression of a great river flowing through his disciples, and watering all the land, as it were, and making it fruitful and productive, spiritually speaking.

In one of Lama Govinda's writings - I forget which, because I saw it first as an article - there is a very interesting description of the Dharma in terms of a great river flowing down from the Himalayas. Has he incorporated that in any book, does anyone remember?

Alan: In 'The Way of the White Clouds' it is mentioned.

Padmapani: Could you equate the naga's magical power with, very roughly, the Hindu concept of what kundalini energy is?

S: I don't think so. No doubt there is some sort of remote connection, in the sense that everything is connected with everything else; but there doesn't seem to be any very direct connection. Kundalini literally means 'that which is coiled up', coiled up in the sense of latent, you know, like a spring is coiled up, and ready to be released. So 'kundalini' conveys latent energy, energy waiting to be aroused, awakened. But the naga's riddhi is something free and flowing already, and it's in nature rather than in the human being - though again, whatever is in nature is in the human being; the microcosm is in the image of the macrocosm.

Padmapani: I was just thinking of, like, the Indian holy men, the Hindu saints. They talk about the coiled circle which stays sort of controlled and which the latent energy sort of moves up, and it's obviously a completely different system, as though they have derived this.

S: You get this, of course, in the Buddhist tantra, where the kundalini - if in fact the two are identical - is called the chandali, the fiery or blazing one. It's the energy that blazes up.

Padmapani: Tapas - you know, the inner fire or tumo, could that be a sort of offshoot?

S: Tumo is chandali. The Tibetans translate chandali as tumo, or dumo. Anyway, that is the symbolism of fire. This is the symbolism of water. Fire blazes up, water flows. So the Dharma as it were flows on down through the centuries. Its fountainhead is the Buddha, and its conduits are the disciples, and you are all the little pipes (laughter) from which comes out at least a little trickle. Sometimes you have to pump pretty hard, though, to get a few drops out. Occasionally, of course, it dries up altogether, unfortunately. But not for long. (laughter)

Roy: Can you distinguish between the words for the Buddha: Tathagata and Jina?

S: 'Buddha' comes from a root which means 'to understand', so the word means the one who knows, or who has woken up to the truth, or to reality. Jina means the one who [16] has conquered: conquered Mara, conquered the passions, conquered the world. Tathagata means either 'the one who has thus come' or 'the one who has thus gone' - it depends how you divide the word. It's either Tatha-agata or Tatha-gata: you can divide it either way. The Mahayana explanation is that it's both: he comes and he goes, or he goes and he comes. He goes out of the world, he goes from the conditioned to the Unconditioned, by means of wisdom; but he comes back, he comes back from the Unconditioned, back to the conditioned, by reason of compassion. Thus the Mahayana explanation is that Tathagata means the one who goes through wisdom, who comes through compassion. They further say that his going is his coming, his coming is his going. Wisdom is compassion; compassion is wisdom: the two are one and indistinguishable. It is not that he literally goes, or literally comes; but it is just a way of saying that he is supremely wise and also infinitely compassionate. Probably the word originally meant that the Buddha had come to, or arrived at, the state of enlightenment, just as his predecessors, i.e. the enlightened ones of previous ages, had come - that he had come just like that, just as they had. That he was Tathagata, thus come, just as they had come, to the truth; or just gone, as they had gone, to the truth. This is, you know, a bit of Buddhist scholasticism, but it does have quite a positive and inspiring meaning. Tathagata signifies both wisdom and compassion.

Alan: Is there a similar way of seeing the coming and the going in the gate gate mantra?

S: No, that is interpreted only as a going, not as a coming. There are, in fact, several different types of going. Or, rather, it is going deeper each time.

Padmapani: Is it because, Bhante, when we are chanting the mantra, we are in actual fact trying to go, rather than we haven't arrived anywhere?

S: Yes, indeed. One could, really must, look at it in that way. You are still going. We are still as it were on the way. Therefore you think of yourself as going, you feel that you are going - that you are heading for the Further Shore, heading in the Direction of Perfect Wisdom. It is more appropriate to think of it as going, because you haven't yet arrived. Later on you can think in terms of coming back: that is your ultimate aspiration. But you have to get there first, obviously.

Even short of the point of actual realization it is perhaps good to feel that you are handing something on, passing something on, as it were, which is not your own. Do you see this point? When you are speaking about the Dharma - because you cannot as yet speak Dharma - when you are speaking about the Dharma, you can acknowledge, well, 'This is not my own. This is something that I am handing on, something that I am passing on, something which I have received.' Then the 'ego' does not come in.

Padmapani: It is a practice in itself.

S: It is a practice in itself. But on the other hand you mustn't get too far away from your own actual experience. You mustn't present what the Buddha said as though you had fully understood it yourself if, in fact, you haven't. Just say, 'This is what the scriptures say,' or 'This is what I understand of the Buddha's teaching.'

Sagaramati: You often get a case where - this happens quite frequently in Pundarika [an early FWBO centre and community in Balmore Street, north London, tr.] - where people don't want to say anything (about the Dharma) because they feel like they are being fakes. I have found this quite often, you know. [17]

S: Well, it means one must be careful, as I said, not to get too far away from one's own experience. It means one would try to connect up with the teaching, in terms of one's own experience, wherever and whenever one possibly can - even if, you know, your own experience is just a little glimmer, a little reflection, of the Dharma. But at least make the connection or, so to speak, bring the general principle down to a concrete application as quickly as possible. There's no point, really, in going into a lengthy exposition of all the different kinds of karma as though you had them at your fingertips and had looked into every heaven and hell yourself and seen people being reborn there. You can just, I mean, give a very brief outline, or indicate the general principle, and leave it at that. But when it does, you know, come down - or maybe not even down - to something where you do have some personal experience - well, then you can go into it much more deeply and thoroughly.

Graham: I suppose this sharing what is not yours, so to say, on a level like this, is only if you have what you need for yourself, so that the rest may be given to he community, or to people just within the Sangha. Then there is that feeling of giving and taking on whatever level it may be.

S: Right. I think there is a danger - and I think this is what the people you were referring to perhaps feel - of becoming a sort of 'official representative' of something that you haven't really mastered yourself. I think people are quite rightly a bit shy of being in that sort of position, or appearing to be in that sort of position, when they have got very little experience themselves, and maybe very little knowledge themselves. Do you see what I mean?

Sagaramati: People take them as being a spokesman for a . . .

S: Yes. For instance, I have found this from time to time myself, even, especially when people have got wrong ideas about Buddhism. It's as though you are regarded as responsible for those views and, in fact, as representing those views. People might even attack you on the grounds of your supposed holding of those views. They might come up to you and say, 'Why is Buddhism so ascetic? Why do you believe in all this self-torture?' as though you are the representative of the school of self-torture, and you don't feel that way at all. So perhaps one can feel, you know, the same way about being a representative, or being a spokesman, when you're not too much in touch with the Dharma. You feel in

a rather artificial position. So I think one must watch that too. It's all right if you have the Dharma flowing through you, but that means you must have reached and realized the Dharma. Otherwise you feel like the man standing aside and the Buddha is, as it were, speaking like a ventriloquist, and you might feel very awkward. If the Buddha's voice is coming from your mouth, and it's not you speaking, you feel it most inappropriate. Thus you have to keep also quite close to your own experience and speak as much as possible from your own experience, even if you only describe the difficulties that beginners have with meditation. You might be well acquainted with those and can speak from personal experience in a really heartfelt fashion. At least you are on very firm ground there. This also raises the question of whether we do need to consider ourselves as the representatives of doctrines and teachings which don't seem particularly relevant to our own individual spiritual development here and now. I mean, do we represent all the Yogacara teachings, and all the Madhyamika teachings, and do we stand forth as representative of the Abhidharma, [18] etc? Well, we can't do, anyhow, because they don't always agree among themselves: they sometimes adopt quite different points of view. So there is this question of being the representative rather than the channel. I think this is a quite important question: to what extent is one the representative of Buddhism, as distinct from being the channel? If you have realized for yourself, then yes, you are a channel, at least in a measure. But to the extent that you haven't realized, you are only a representative. And how truly can you - to what extent can you - be representative?

Padmapani: What is it then, when people come back from a retreat and they really feel, you know, as though they had had a certain insight? They are very energized, and sort of naturally give to the situation - say around the Centre, like Pundarika. But after a week or two various factors creep in and they lose that. It's almost as though their memory of that goes or, you know, they lose that sort of quality. I mean, wouldn't it be a good situation for when people came back, say to a centre, that they sort of gave of themselves, and in a way even took classes during that period, so that real feeling was given to the situation, rather than had appointed charges at certain periods of the week, when in actual fact that insight might have been lost?

S: I think it would be a good thing if there could be more opportunity for people to communicate whatever they've experienced - whatever insight they developed - on retreat. Also, in a way, one can say that by communicating it you strengthen it within yourself.

Padmapani: Because I have been in a situation, Bhante, where I felt very strong coming back from, say, seminars, but I haven't been in a position of being able to sort of express those feelings to people, you know. And I didn't want to go into the Centre and say 'oh look!' I didn't want to plaster it across people's faces. But being in a position of, maybe, teaching the Dharma, one could quite easily put those views across and strengthen one's happiness etc.

S: Well maybe one just has to hope that there is a convenient study group

going on when one gets back which one can join and to which one can truly contribute something. This is ideally the situation: that people come away on study retreats, and even other retreats, and when they go back they've got something which they can give, or at least a bit more than they had before. They've been as it where recharged. If they've been away on solitary retreat they might come back with many insights, and a much better, much deeper, understanding. No doubt one should avail oneself of whatever opportunities there are of communicating yourself, communicating something of that. But it should come out naturally and spontaneously in whatever situation one finds oneself, though no doubt the study situation - you know, in connection with the Centre - does lend itself to that particularly well, because your insight is usually on that sort of level, the level of understanding, that is, understanding a text or a point of the Buddha's teaching. This also raises, you know, the question of to what extent we 'represent' Buddhism, and it links up a bit with what I was saying the other day. I mean we think of Buddhism as being a great monolithic block, and that we represent it. But is this the right way of thinking? Is this a right way of looking at things? It's a sort of ambassadorial way of looking at things. An ambassador represents his country. But do we represent Buddhism in that sort of sense? [19]

You could say that this whole idea of 'representing' pertains to the group, not to the spiritual community. For instance, the official title of an ambassador is Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. (laughter) Plenipotentiary means endowed with all powers. In former times these were the powers, especially, to make peace and to declare war. In other words, the ambassador was invested with the whole power of the king. He was the king's personal representative. In a sense he was the king, and was treated as such. This is why according to diplomatic usage ambassadors take precedence over everybody except heads of state. Thus one individual is invested with the power of the group. The group as it were surrenders their power to that individual, and that individual represents them. He speaks for them and acts for them and they accept whatever he has done and said as their action and their utterance. It therefore seems quite clear that this whole idea of being a representative is connected with the idea of the group. But what about a spiritual community? Can you have the same thing there? Can a spiritual community be represented?

Graham: It can be represented by the guru, and that would possibly be the representative as such.

S: But does the guru represent the spiritual community, or does the [20] spiritual community represent the guru? It would be the opposite way round, I would have thought - if there was any question of representation. But can an individual member of a spiritual community represent the spiritual community in the same way that a member of a group represents the group?

Several voices: No.

S: No. No. So when you as, say, a member of the Order or a member of the

Friends (though the Friends doesn't have members), or as, say, a Mitra, go into some other group, or meet other people, can you be said to represent the Order, or to represent the Friends? Is it possible?

Sagaramati: Well, in a sense, yes.

Mike Chivers: You are a small facet of it, though.

S: Yes, you are a small facet of it. You are it in miniature. When you are present, the Order is present - in miniature. But you don't represent. You are not invested with any power to speak for. You are a microcosm of the Order: you are complete in yourself, but you don't represent. This is why we don't send representatives to international gatherings. I mean, we are sometimes asked, 'Please send a Buddhist representative. There's going to be a Hindu representative, and a Muslim representative, etc.' This is just ecclesiastical politics. It's nothing to do with spiritual life, nothing to do with the spiritual community. So groups can have representatives; spiritual communities can't. Is then Buddhism a group, taking Buddhism in the sense of a spiritual community, a vast spiritual community? Is it a group? No. So can you represent it? No, you can't. To the extent that it is a group it can be represented. Japanese Buddhists can be represented by Japanese Buddhists, etc., etc. The Dalai Lama can represent the Tibetan Buddhists. But to the extent that they can be represented, to that extent they are a group; to that extent they are not a spiritual community; to that extent they are not Buddhists.

Padmapani: But it doesn't work like that.

S: It doesn't. It certainly doesn't. But it jolly well ought to.

John: [It doesn't work like that] because it will be in people's minds that they are a representative.

S: Ah, yes! Just so. Nevertheless, when they meet you, they meet you. They do not meet the Order - except to the extent that you embody the Order in miniature. But they do not meet a representative. The Order is not responsible for what you say, and you are not the spokesman or mouthpiece of the Order. You just stand on your own two feet. You are just an individual Order member. [21]

Alan: That's to the degree that the individual is an individual.

S: Yes. Well, by definition you are a member of the Order as an individual.

Padmapani: This is a two way process, isn't it, Bhante, because even if you didn't feel that you had that tag, or weren't that tag itself, there would be a projection onto you.

S: Oh yes, indeed! I mean, people regard me as representing Buddhism. I am accountable for all the sins of omission and commission of all Buddhists everywhere. Just like when I was out in India in my early days. I had absolutely no connection with the English community out there. I didn't read newspapers.

I did not know what was going on. But if the British Government did something that some of our Indian friends thought it shouldn't have done I was immediately held responsible. People asked me why I had done this, or not done that, whatever it was, and I'd say, 'What? What am I supposed to have done?' 'You've invaded Suez, haven't you?' 'Well, no, not personally.' (laughter) I would be held to account in this sort of way by my Indian friends. Or else it was, 'Why have you said this?' 'Well, said what?' 'Your Prime Minister said such-and-such in Parliament the other day. Why did you say that?' I mean, just because you are supposed to be English you're considered a representative of Great Britain and held to be accountable for whatever Great Britain says or does. The same kind of thing happens in the case of Buddhism. But Buddhism is not a corporate entity of that sort. Neither is the Friends.

Padmapani: Couldn't we say, if we take this conversation further, 'Why bother to wear the kesas?' It's [really a question of] a natural expression of this [or that] channel of energy and naturally it [i.e. the energy] will show itself as individual.

S: That [i.e. the kesa] is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. It's another form of communication. But it is not a badge of group membership.

Vessantara: It seems to be something that people have an awful lot of difficulty with. I certainly spend more time in Brighton evading conversations which start with 'the Order seems to feel such-and-such'. (laughter) It's really exhausting. [22]

S: Well, you can't say 'the Order thinks' or 'the Order feels'. The most you can say is 'There is a consensus of opinion among Order members to the effect that . . . '

Sagaramati: If someone asks you to go along to a group and say a few words on Buddhism, how would you make it clear that you are not a Buddhist representative - that you are going there as an individual? I mean, you will be using terms that they will probably be seeing as . . .

S: You just have to do your best, because, you know, the ocean of miccha ditthi seems without beginning and without end. And you're just afloat on that, paddling like mad for dry land, (laughter) if you can see a spot or a speck of dry land in the distance. You just have to manage as best you can, you know, improvise.

Mark: Can't you just make it obvious that you are speaking from what you think, from what you understand?

S: Even that isn't enough. If you were to do that they would still consider you a member of a group, but as one who happened to have gone astray and lost contact with the group. They would not consider you as an individual Buddhist. In their eyes you would just be an idiosyncratic Buddhist, an eccentric, a black sheep - maybe someone who has been drummed out of Buddhism. (laughter) If you say 'I am just speaking as an individual Buddhist. I don't belong to

anything. Don't consider me as the representative of anything,' they might think you had just been disowned, rather than think you were a real spiritual individual, because they haven't got the concept of real spiritual individuality. So they can take you as an individual in a rather negative sort of sense, as though you were a sort of unfrocked priest or something like that - someone like Father Baker, who had been disowned by the Church, and going on his own solitary, eccentric way. Very often they want to know what Buddhists generally think, not what you think. They want as it were the party line, then they can compare it with their party line and find out whether you can have a common party line.

Mark: Maybe the only way is always to talk about individuality - about people as individuals.

S: Maybe you should not exactly evade the issue but rather sidestep it in that sort of way.

Vessantara: Up until August 1, when Brighton became a [FWBO] centre, I was the FWBO representative. Do you think that is a suitable term?

S: In a way it isn't. We did talk about that at the time. You're the presence of the Order in Brighton. The Order is present in your person, [23] as it were; but it's not that the Order is in some other place and you are representing it. Some days ago I was reading about a religion or sect or school or tradition that made this same point. Yes, it was the Cathars. The Cathars believed that the whole Cathar church was present in the body of the individual believer - and they had all sorts of strange, possibly oriental, connections. (pause) So this is a very important point, if we are to make the spiritual community really distinct from any kind of group. (pause) If you are a Buddhist you cannot represent Buddhism.

Alan: Could you say that somebody who is an individual and a Buddhist is a member of the Order?

S: Only if they were a Buddhist in the sense of Going for Refuge. Yes, you could then say it [i.e. they could be considered members of the Order in the widest sense, though they would not necessarily be members of the Western Buddhist Order].

Alan: It seems to me that we do go out as individuals, but it always seems to be degrees of . . .

S: Well, individuality is quite rare. What you usually get is someone 'representing' some Buddhist sect or school. Maybe one is told that he is very high up in it, which is another form of the same thing. Anyway, where did all this come from? It arose from a consideration of this statement by the Buddha that 'their teaching,' that is to say, the teaching of the disciples, 'stems from the might of the Buddha's, and not their own power.' So do we even represent the teaching? This is what we were talking about earlier on? There's no question of representing Buddhism, there's no question of representing the Order, and no question of a

Friend representing the Friends. But can one be said to represent the teaching? What does that mean? Certainly the teaching can speak though one, to the extent that one has realized it, but how do you stand in relation to that part of the teaching which you have not realized - the truth of which you have not realized - but about which you speak? [24]

Sagaramati: The only relationship you could have with it is a feeling for it.

S: A feeling for it, yes. You're not wholly cut off [from the unrealized truth about which you speak]: there are degrees. You have a feeling for it, at least. Perhaps it would be wise to say, 'If you don't have a feeling for it, don't touch it.' Yes? Because your lack of feeling will come across. How can you communicate [the teaching] if you have no feeling for it? But if you've got a feeling for it, even though you have not realized it, or not understood it very well, or very completely, all right, you are free to talk about it - making it clear if necessary that, though you do have a feeling for it, you haven't fully understood it, and that you are only pointing towards it, as it were, without professing yourself actually to have reached so far.

Padmapani: In the hope that somebody else might have reached.

S: And sometimes the words that you pass on can convey more than is consciously present to you yourself. And when we say words, they are not just words in the verbal sense but the formulation of the teaching, of the [enlightened] point of view. Sometimes the teaching can mean more to the person you are speaking to than it does to you yourself, and in that sense you really are passing something on. Sometimes it can come as a sort of revelation to the person that you are speaking to, but it isn't particularly impressing you.

Padmapani: And you're teaching it.

S: Not you. You are just the mouthpiece. Really it is a sort of ventriloquism of the spirit. The Buddha is just using your namarupa [i.e. your psychophysical organism] as it were. (pause) So even a very poor lecture - you know, a lecture which you haven't prepared, which is based upon quite badly digested material, that you haven't properly understood - even that can create quite an impression sometimes. There is some as it were inherent power not just in the Dharma but in the Dharma as formulated. (pause) Not to speak of the receptivity, preparedness, and readiness to be sparked off of the person or the people to whom you are speaking.

All right. Have we said enough about this particular topic, the source of Subhuti's authority? Just look through the section and see if there is any other point that needs going into. . . .

So, "Whatever they teach, whatever adroitly explain / Concerning the work of the holy which leads to the fullness of bliss" - that is the essential point, just 'the work of the holy,' the work of the Aryans presumably, 'which leads to the fullness of bliss.' That's all they're really concerned with, all they really talk about: the way to Enlightenment; the path of the Higher [25] Evolution. (pause) The

essentials of the scriptures, the essentials of the Dharma, that's what they pass on. Not the unessentials. Not the wrappings, but what is inside the wrappings.

Graham: Would this go back to what you were mentioning about the guru telling people what they should do from his feeling for them?

S: Yes, in a way. But I was thinking more of, say, the texts as we have them. For instance, we could take the Majjhima Nikaya. You could give a very interesting series of talks basing yourself entirely on the Majjhima Nikaya, the Middle Length Sayings, about social conditions in the Buddha's day, about economic conditions, about manners and customs. It would all be from the Majjhima Nikaya, all from the Buddhist scriptures, but would you be communicating with the Dharma? No. Because these things are the wrappings, not the essentials, and in talking about them you would therefore not be transmitting the Dharma. Hence "Whatever they teach, whatever adroitly explain / Concerning the work of the holy that leads to the fullness of bliss," that's the line of transmission, as it were; that's the direction of the flow. To transmit the Dharma - to be talking about the Dharma, or speaking Dharma - doesn't mean that you are concerned with the historical and sociological wrappings of the Dharma. You are concerned with the essence of the Dharma itself, with what the Dharma really is, which is described here as 'the work of the holy which leads to the fullness of bliss.' The teacher [as such] comes in to the extent that he talks to the disciple, not about the social conditions in ancient India, but about what the Buddha said and taught under those conditions. Or, if he does talk about those conditions, he does so only to the extent that it is necessary to provide a suitable framework for the Dharma and a point of departure for the teaching, and to make the whole thing come more alive and more real; but he is not concerned with the wrappings for their own sake. (pause) We notice that the Buddha is called the 'guide to the Dharma.' What does that suggest, the guide to the Dharma? He is showing you where you can go yourself. He's taking you there. The Dharma's not merely to be taken on trust. The Buddha sort of takes you along with him and shows you the Dharma so that you can see and experience it for yourself.

Peter: Like a self-service restaurant where you supply the food.

S: Well here, maybe, you have to cook yourself too. (laughter) There's also this idea of leadership. There can't be a Buddhist representative, strictly speaking. Can there be a Buddhist leader? What do you mean by leader?

John: Principle disciple.

S: No. I'm thinking of leader in the more ordinary sense, as when you [26] speak, for instance, of a political leader. What do you mean by leader then?

Dominic: He'd be the main representative.

S: But is he just a representative? Or is he something more?

John: He'd be the manifestation of charismatic qualities.

Mike Chivers: He'd be establishing a pattern or a route for people to follow.

S: Yes. They entrust him with their power; they entrust him with their will, as it were, with the responsibility that perhaps they ought to be exercising themselves. So in that sense can there be a Buddhist leader? In that sense there can't be, and we find there is a Pali text where the Buddha says, 'The Tathagata does not consider that he leads the Sangha. If anyone considers that he leads the Sangha, let him come forward.' Devadatta, you remember, asked to be allowed to lead the Sangha: he wanted the Buddha to go into retirement; and the Buddha says, 'Not even to Sariputta and Moggallana would I entrust the leadership of the Sangha, not to speak of entrusting it to someone like you.' Not that the Buddha himself wanted to be or to remain the leader, but he thought there shouldn't be a leader at all. If there is a community of enlightened beings, do they need a leader? No, it's unthinkable. A group may need a leader in a situation of emergency where decisions can't be quickly or easily taken by all the members of the group, or even by their representatives - where you need just one man, one extremely capable person, who is able to take those decisions on behalf of everybody else. So perhaps in situations of emergency you do need a leader, but you can't very well have that sort of thing in a spiritual context. Because what are the emergencies that are liable to arise there? Purely spiritual ones. Then you have to keep the responsibility for yourself - you can't hand it over to anyone else. You can ask other people's advice or get spiritual inspiration from them, even instruction from them, but you have to keep your own responsibility ... You can't hand that over. So you can't make anyone [27] your spiritual leader. You can have a teacher, you can have a guide; but you can't have a leader. Not in the group sense.

Mark: Even the possibility of ordinary anarchy in the strictly political sense shows that in that situation you have to have leaders and foremen and things.

S: In a spiritual community you can't have anarchy. (pause) Or, rather, in a spiritual community you do have anarchy. Because anarchy is not necessarily a dirty word. What does anarchy mean? No government. You don't need government in a spiritual community. Everyone governs themself, and inasmuch as they are all governing themselves according to the same fundamental spiritual principles you don't need any external government. We used to have a Friend who in his earlier days had been an anarchist, and who believed that Buddhism and anarchy were basically the same thing, because, he said, anarchy doesn't just mean not having any government, but not needing any government because you're governing yourself. Buddhism, he said, also teaches self-government, teaches that the individual should govern himself, so according to him Buddhism and anarchy were the same thing. We mustn't think of anarchy just in a negative sense. It's the absence of external government, and that can function quite positively and quite creatively. Within the spiritual community, within the Sangha, within the Order, there should be complete anarchy, some of you will be glad to hear (laughter), but of course a creative anarchy, a positive anarchy - a smoothly functioning, a harmonious anarchy - not just everything all over the place and nobody knowing what anyone else is doing. So you can say that the Buddha was in favour of anarchy. He didn't think there should be a leader of

the Order, a leader of the Sangha, a leader of the spiritual community.

Mike Chivers: That's interesting, because recently I was called an anarchist in respect of going to war. 'If the Prime Minister would be going to war tomorrow, what would you do?' seems to be one of the most popular things you ask a so-called Buddhist.

S: You should say that prime ministers never go to war. They send you to war.

Padmapani: You could say actually, Bhante, that unless you did have [28] spiritual anarchy you could have anarchy in the bad sense of the word.

S: What do you mean?

Padmapani: I mean if you didn't have spiritual anarchy, if you had people not being themselves, not being individuals, you would have anarchy [in the ordinary sense of the term].

S: What you are saying is that government is anarchy. Yes, it does seem like that.

Kim: In my country [Spain] that's how it used to be. It was an anarchist country, and that is one of the reasons why they invaded us and got the Spanish fascists to smash it because they were afraid of self-government.

S: People are afraid of anarchy, of positive anarchy.

Kim: Especially, as it worked, for most of the years, so they got really frightened, and the Germans helped Franco. There were the peasants. They took control of the land, and people were farming the land, and at the end of the year they were given their needs. They built lots of railways stations and schools.

S: What people are afraid of is not that anarchy doesn't work; they're afraid that it does work. No doubt there may be confusion at first, but I think people can sort out their own affairs in a practical, creative sort of way. They don't need it all to be done for them by some higher authority, and I think this may be the significance - going a bit off the track - of this present movement of regionalism and devolution and so on: getting down to smaller and smaller units, which means getting away from control from higher and higher up. People say, 'If Great Britain splits up into all these regions, and they are all more or less independent, there will be complete anarchy.' Well sure, it will be. That's the whole idea. (laughter) Anarchy means people governing themselves. It means absence of government from above. It doesn't mean confusion. This is what they call, I believe, philosophical anarchism: absence of government, because people are responsible enough to govern themselves and look after their own affairs. No doubt a certain amount of co-ordination is needed between areas, and even between states, if you still have states, but that presumably could be looked after by international agencies which were not exactly governments.

Kim: Yes, but even they got an anarchist army, which sounds ridiculous. But this army was to be dissolved as soon as they ended the war. But large armies,

they are formed and then they remain. But the anarchist army is only engaged in defence, and as soon as it is not needed it is dissolved. [29]

S: Well presumably Buddhists wouldn't have even that.

Pat: What do you think then if someone - I mean I read somewhere that Gandhi wrote in 1940 that the British people should just let Hitler take over. This seems a bit strong, really. What would a Buddhist country do in the face of an invasion, say?

S: You say Buddhist country, but is there such a thing as a Buddhist country? A Buddhist state would act as a state; it will not act as a Buddhist. What does a state do? It defends itself.

Pat: What would a Buddhist do, then?

S: A Buddhist would make his own individual decision. He wouldn't expect me to make it for him. (laughter) If I made it for him I wouldn't be Buddhist, and if he accepted my decision he wouldn't be a Buddhist either.

Padmapani: He could accept your advice, though.

S: Yes, certainly. I would express my opinion, my individual view, and he might well be convinced by that; but I couldn't tell him what to do, or what he ought to do. I could only clarify the situation as I saw it and leave the rest to him. It would be his responsibility: to fight or not to fight, or find some third alternative.

Pat: He could even defend himself, really, I think.

S: But that would be up to him in the light of...

Pat: But if he did defend himself.

S: Well, you might disagree with his decision. You might think he'd taken the wrong decision. But then you must say, well, he exercised his own freedom of choice, and that includes the possibility of making a mistake, and I just believe he has made a mistake. [29]

Part 3

"5. No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection, No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either. When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious, A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone's wisdom."

S: This is in a way the crux of the whole thing, the crux of the entire Perfect Wisdom: "No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection." We have already gone into that a little bit, haven't we, when we discussed the femininity of Perfect Wisdom. "No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either." One is familiar with the thought of Enlightenment, presumably: the bodhichitta. It's not thought of Enlightenment [in the sense of a mere concept devoid of experiential content], it's more like will or aspiration to Enlightenment - that is to say, to Enlightenment for the sake, for the benefit, of all living beings, and the Bodhisattva is supposed, in the Mahayana, to be the living embodiment of

that thought, that will, that aspiration. Bodhichitta is a fundamental concept, a fundamental experience, of the Mahayana. Bodhi, Buddha, Bodhisattva, Bodhichitta - the whole of the Mahayana, you can say, is virtually summed up in these four terms. So,

"No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection, No [30] Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either. When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious, A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone's wisdom."

But why can we not get hold of these things?

Mark: You can't grasp them as externals because they are things you need to develop.

S: Yes, one can look at it in this way.

Padmapani: In actual fact there's no 'you' to do it either. One has completely eradicated the idea that there is an 'I' that's doing this.

S: As soon as one says wisdom, as soon as one says highest perfection, as soon as one says Bodhisattva, as soon as one says bodhichitta, you as it were refer to - you've named - an object out there. In other words you've posited an object as distinct from the subject. Therefore you are within the subject-object duality. But all these terms [wisdom, highest perfection, and so on] pertain to [ultimate] reality, which by very definition transcends that subject-object duality. Consequently, in indicating that which transcends the subject-object duality by way of an object have you really indicated it? No, you haven't. You've falsified it. You must get away from objects such as wisdom and highest perfection if you want to grasp, as it were, what those objects are supposed to denote, what they are supposed to indicate. So long as you are dealing with the objects of thought, so long as you are dealing with concepts, you are not dealing with ultimate reality.

Roy: Is that like what they call a hand trying to grasp itself?

S: Yes, it's exactly the same. Well, the same to some extent. The hand represents the subject, and it's trying to grasp the object, but it can't do that because grasping the object means grasping itself. It's itself that it has made the object, in a manner of speaking.

Padmapani: Speaking on the level that most of us are on now, Bhante, to grasp this really without having developed the thought of Enlightenment - to approach it in a practical manner - one would have to have a very strong basis of samatha, wouldn't one?

S: One would indeed! Therefore probably the best way of looking at it is, as Mark says, to think of things like wisdom not as objects out there to be contemplated but as something that has to be developed within oneself.

Padmapani: One could even mediate, probably, on this.

S: Indeed one could. So, “No wisdom can we get hold of.” It’s not something waiting out there for us to grasp. “No highest perfection. No [31] Bodhisattva.’ We mustn’t think that there really is a being - an ego, as it were - that is searching for Enlightenment.”No thought of enlightenment either." Even that thought, elsewhere we are told in the Perfection of Wisdom literature, is a no-thought.

“When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious, A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone’s wisdom.”

Why should anyone be bewildered and anxious when told this sort of thing?

Mark: Because you try and grasp it.

S: You’re trying to grasp it. You think that the whole spiritual life consists in grasping it. If I’m not trying to grasp hold of wisdom what am I supposed to be doing? (laughter) If I’m not supposed to be grasping hold of perfect wisdom what am I supposed to be doing? If I’m not supposed to be trying to live like a Bodhisattva, trying to be a good Buddhist, trying to lead a spiritual life, what am I supposed to be doing? At first you need these sort of supports, you can’t help thinking in those sort of terms, that’s your framework of reference. If that framework of reference is taken away you don’t know what to do, so you feel bewildered and anxious - spiritually insecure. But it’s good that it should be taken away. Well, it has to be taken away sooner or later, otherwise you are not really able to continue functioning: you are not able to grow.

“When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious, A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone’s wisdom.”

It’s the coursing, this waking (carya), in the wisdom (prajna) of the Sugata, the one who has happily gone, or gone to a happy state, i.e. the Buddha. In other words, when your props are removed, when your framework of intellectual reference is taken away, and yet you don’t become bewildered, you don’t become anxious, what happens? You just go on spontaneously spiritually functioning. You don’t require all those props and supports at that time, but you need them now at the beginning.

Sagaramati: What about visualizations? Here you have something that means something to you but then you have to dissolve it. In my own case I didn’t like the feeling of having to dissolve, even though I didn’t actually see anything.

S: That’s a sort of subtle attachment, an attachment to meditation rather than to wisdom. You’re happier with the meditation than with the wisdom, happier with the samatha than with the vipassana. Yes, and why shouldn’t one be at first, and even for quite a while? [32]

Padmapani: There’s a very interesting story about a Tibetan yogi who prefers to keep the image [that he had visualized in meditation] and not dissolve it, with the result that he grows the same big stag’s head as the image and can’t dissolve it either. In the end he walks around with it.

Alan: You mentioned the other day that there were three functionings of sila, based respectively on the ego, [the ultimate psychophysical elements or] dharmas, and the transcendental. How would that apply here? As you say, we need this sort of structure, this idea of multiple relation.

S: Here the first two belong to the structure. When you have the third there is no structure; then your sila becomes a spontaneous skilful way of behaving and functioning.

Alan: But do we necessarily have to go through the stage of ego and then through the rest?

S: Well, we start off from the stage of ego. We refine that, and it becomes the stage of seeing everything in terms of dharmas - in terms of the Abhidharma analysis of existence. Then we refine upon that in turn, in fact go well beyond it, and that is the stage of sunyata, in other words the stage of perfect wisdom, when our functioning is quite spontaneous, and concept-free, without any intellectual props. One can say that the first is the common sense approach, the second the scientific approach, and the third the approach of wisdom.

Mark: Ego, dharma, and transcendental.

S: Dharma here in the sense of ultimate constituents of things: that is why I say science. Not Dharma in the sense of the teaching, but dharmas in the plural, i.e. the ultimate psychophysical elements to which the Abhidharma, especially, reduces the so-called individual being, the ego. So first you see things in terms of ego, then you see them in terms of the psychophysical constituents, and finally you see only sunyata. Thus you can have a sila which is based on the first, or on the second, or on the third. That which is based on the third is spontaneous; it's a coursing in the perfection of wisdom manifesting, in terms of behaviour, as sila. But it's not anything over which you are taking thought, or anything you do for the sake of getting to heaven - or for the sake of your own individual enlightenment. You just do it: you just practise sila. It is quite different, though, from the usual way of thinking [that] you just do it, it's all spontaneous. This is on a quite different level.

Padmapani: Bhante, it says here that the Bodhisattva courses in the well-gone wisdom.

S: The Well-Gone's wisdom: the Buddha's wisdom.

Padmapani: But that's not full enlightenment, is it?

S: Depends on what stage or level the Bodhisattva is on. Presumably it isn't. But he is in it. The implication is, or the suggestion is, that the Buddha's prajna - or that enlightenment - is like a great ocean, and that the Bodhisattva has reached that ocean. He has plunged into it, is disporting himself in it: it's his element. (pause) He is living according to wisdom. He is leading a transcendental life. [33]

Padmapani: I was a bit confused at the difference between coursing and the Well-Gone's wisdom ...

S: He is practising perfect wisdom. Coursing is the rather awkward English translation for what is also translated as faring, or walking, as in Brahmacharya, for instance, the Brahma-faring. The Bodhisattva is faring in the Buddha's perfect wisdom. That is to say, he is practising it, experiencing it, living it.

Padmapani: As I see it, 'no thought of enlightenment either' means that one has eradicated the feeling of I in that sense, but one's not fully enlightened, one's not a Buddha, because the Bodhisattva is coursing in the Well-Gone's wisdom.

S: But also the Perfection of Wisdom texts say, elsewhere, that his coursing is a no coursing. He doesn't have the idea, 'Here I am coursing in perfect wisdom.' He doesn't even have an idea that there is a perfect wisdom in which he is coursing. But the Buddha has got to say something somehow, otherwise he remains completely silent.

Padmapani: But why does he mention Bodhisattva?

S: Because he is communicating. But the Bodhisattva doesn't think he is a Bodhisattva, not that he is coursing in any perfect wisdom. It is just like when you are painting: you don't think that you are a painter. In the same way, when the Bodhisattva courses in perfect wisdom he doesn't think he is a Bodhisattva or that there is a perfect wisdom in which he is coursing, just as the painter not only doesn't think that he is a painter but doesn't think, 'Here I am painting.' The minute you start thinking like that you are not really painting [i.e. not absorbed in what you are doing to the point of self-forgetfulness].

Padmapani: I understand that. The thing I am trying to get at is why doesn't he say that the Buddha courses in the Well-Gone's wisdom? Why a Bodhisattva?

S: Because the whole of the Perfection of Wisdom literature is concerned with the Bodhisattva and his career. That's why. It is he who is the subject of the whole literature. The Buddha is teaching his disciples what, according to the Mahayana, they should be. So what they should be? Bodhisattvas. How should Bodhisattvas behave? This is how they should behave. He's proclaiming the ideal. In the Mahayana - and this is a Mahayana sutra - it's [34] concerned with the Bodhisattva: the life, the career, the spiritual practice, of the Bodhisattva. Therefore the Buddha talks about the Bodhisattva.

Padmapani: So in a way the Buddha is on an even higher path than the Bodhisattva.

S: Even the Bodhisattva courses in perfect wisdom, "the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas". It's the Buddhas, because the Buddha is the one who has experienced it and realized it: the Bodhisattva not yet - not in its fullness anyway.

"6. In form, in feeling, will, perception and awareness Nowhere in them they find a place to rest on. Without a home they wander, dharmas never hold them, Nor

do they grasp at them - the Jina's Bodhi they are bound to gain."

S: What are form, feeling, will, perception, and awareness? Have you come across these before?

A voice: The five skandhas.

S: These are the five skandhas. Do you know what the five skandhas are?

Padmapani: Heaps or aggregates.

S: Yes, heaps or aggregates. They are the five classes of phenomena that make up the psychophysical being. So "in form, in feeling, in will, perception and awareness/ Nowhere in them they find a place to rest on." Buddhist teaching traditionally divides the psychophysical being of the individual into these five, breaks it down into these five, which are not five things but five classes or types or process going on, and these processes together make up what we call the individual without there being anything left over in the form of an unchanging soul or self which is not included in these processes. Thus the five skandhas - rupa, vedana, samjna, samskaras, vijnana - occupy a quite important place in Buddhist teaching, in Buddhist thought. But here the Buddha says, "In form, in feeling, in will, perception and awareness,/ Nowhere in them they find a place to rest on." Who are they?

Several voices: The Bodhisattvas.

S: The Bodhisattvas. So what is meant by saying 'Nowhere in them,' that is, in those five skandhas, 'they find a place to rest on'? What would be resting on the five skandhas?

A voice: An idea of ego?

S: An idea of ego. Taking them [i.e. the five skandhas] as [ultimately] real. In other words, the psychophysical being has been divided in this way, broken down in this way - even broken up in this way. It has been seen as consisting of various processes. Those processes have been given certain names, certain labels, but despite all this you mustn't think that when you are concerned with the five skandhas you are concerned with ultimate [35] reality. You're concerned with something provisional, something that is intended just to help you practically. You mustn't think that there actually is some such thing as rupa, that there actually is some such thing as vedana, etc. This is not the ultimate truth. The ultimate truth is sunyata [or 'emptiness'] or the ultimate truth is ineffable, inexpressible. Resting on such things as form and feeling means accepting them, or recognizing them, as ultimately real, rather as in the case of physical science with the atom. We are told that an atom consists of a neutron, a proton, and an electron, and these are described as a sort of little planetary system, with the proton and electron revolving around the neutron - or as little billiard balls arranged at various distances from one another. But then we are told that this isn't really so: it's only a manner of speaking. We mustn't think that there really are these little billiard balls, one a neutron, one a proton, and one an

electron. They're just different forms of energy - neutral, positive, and negative. It's much the same here. We use the term form, we use the term feeling, and so on. We break down the psychophysical being into these things. But we mustn't think that they are really things. If anything, they are charges of energy: they are sunyata. So don't be misled by them. Don't settle down in them taking them for ultimate realities; for actually existent things. This is the general sense of the passage.

John: They're only like temporary condensations of energy.

S: Yes, one could say that. Therefore don't bind your security to them. Don't put your spiritual security into a provisional intellectual structure in such a way that, if the structure is disturbed, your security is disturbed. You find that with a lot of so-called religious people their whole - I won't say spiritual but - psychological security is rested on a particular doctrinal structure, a particular system of belief. If you touch that, if you try to tamper with that or disturb that, they get very upset, very anxious, even angry. This is the case not only with religious people, but with people following different political systems, or different beliefs of various kinds. If you try to upset what they believe, if you question the doctrines that they accept, they get bewildered and anxious, because they rest on them. It's quite a good expression, they 'rest' on them. So when you are resting, what is it that you are not doing?

A voice: Growing.

S: You're not growing, you're not working, you're not developing. So one mustn't rest on intellectual structures - even those of Buddhism - which are merely provisional. Which doesn't mean you reject them. It means that you recognize them as provisional, and use them, but you don't rest on them, don't regard them as final, or ultimate, or absolute.

Padmapani: In other words, to follow this teaching, Bhante, the would-be Bodhisattva must have ceaseless effort, must never stop. He must go out and conquer, so to speak.

S: Again and again in Mahayana, again and again in the Perfection of Wisdom texts, as well as in texts like the Sutta-Nipata, the Buddha exhorts his disciples not to settle down in views - not to settle down in anything whether material, or spiritual. Not settling down is [36] continually emphasized. Having made it clear that nowhere in the five skandhas do the Bodhisattvas find a place to rest on, the verse goes on to say, "Without a home they wander, dharmas never hold them." When the verse says "Without a home they wander" you at once take it literally: they've 'gone forth', they are wanders, they are bhikkhus. But then it says "dharmas never hold them", as if to make it clear that being without a home, wandering without a home, is not to be taken just in the material sense but also psychologically. They've no psychological home. They've no spiritual home. The spiritual community is not their family, because the spiritual community is not a group. You remain homeless even though you belong to a spiritual community. You don't try to turn the spiritual community into your family, or

the place where the spiritual community puts up into your home. Again we are up against the group mentality. "Dharmas never hold them" means dharmas in the sense of the ultimate constituents of co-ordinated existence, according to the Abhidharma analysis: they [i.e. the Bodhisattvas] don't rest in these as final.

"Without a home they wander, dharmas never hold them, Nor do they grasp at them - the Jina's Bodhi they are bound to gain."

In this way the idea of homelessness, of wandering without a home, is given a much profounder interpretation - as indeed it is in the more archaic of the Pali texts. To be without a home, without an abode, being quite free, using all these provisional concepts, all these provisional intellectual structures, using them but not being bound by them, not being enslaved by them - that's the ideal!

Sagaramati: Somewhere or other Guenther calls this the operational concept.

S: Right. That's a very good term. He says Buddhist concepts are operational concepts.

Padmapani: In a way this is a total sort of non-practical doctrine, isn't it?

S: I would have thought it was highly practical. In what way it is non-practical?

Padmapani: I didn't mean in the ultimate sense. I was speaking from the practical viewpoint as far as individuals in the Friends are concerned. They couldn't just be wandering the place without ... well, they couldn't even collect together, because when you do collect together there is a natural tendency for group loyalties or feelings to arise etc.

S: I must say that in the case of most people they have first of all to pass through the stage of the positive healthy group. When people haven't even had that - haven't had that experience - that is the next stage which they have to pass through. What to speak of becoming an individual, they haven't [37] had a chance to be really human yet. They've got to get that first. This is why I sometimes say that the Friends - the FWBO - is the healthy positive group, the Order the spiritual community. When you have for a while been a member of a healthy positive group in contact with the spiritual community then you can think more, yourself, in terms of making that transition from the healthy positive group to the spiritual community, and from being a member of a healthy positive group to being a 'member' of a spiritual community - that's the next stage. But when people come along initially I don't think you can insist on them being individuals. That would mean that they were ready for ordination straight away. They have to be allowed to take the Friends as a group to begin with - but in a healthy way - and to enjoy it as a group, in a healthy way, while remaining open to the possibility of further developments. But the spiritual community is not a group, not even a healthy positive group. The Order is not a group. But the spiritual community needs a healthy positive group on which, as it were, to rest. Not that they actually do rest - not rest in the sense that you mustn't rest, but they need a healthy positive group as a basis, if you like as a recruiting ground, for where will your Order members come from? They won't

come from the world outside [unless you go out into the world and get them, on a person-to-person basis]. They'll come from the healthy positive group with which you are in regular contact, and for which you provide certain facilities that are the means of transition from the healthy positive group to the spiritual community eventually. The Buddhist attitude is very much that of the creative use of concepts, and the intelligent Buddhist uses Buddhism creatively - makes a creative use of Buddhist concepts. He isn't enslaved by them, doesn't take them literally, doesn't make them matters of dogma or blind belief. He uses them creatively - rather like the artist or poet. He uses them imaginatively.

Padmapani: Would that be synonymous with skilful means?

S: Skilful means is certainly involved here. Skilful means usually refer to the skill of the Bodhisattva in helping others in accordance with their particular temperaments and special needs. But even if you [who are not Bodhisattvas] were putting across Buddhism [for want of a better term], or the Dharma, to other people, you would need to do it skilfully [in the ordinary sense of the term]. You would need to do it with imagination, with flair.

John: You incorporate skilful speech and skilful thoughts.

S: Right. Everything must be skilful, in fact, otherwise no communication is achieved. (pause) Think of the Dharma as poetry rather than as science. (pause) When you are trying to communicate the Dharma, or to explain the Dharma, it's more like trying to put across to somebody else the beauty of a poem that you've experienced than like trying to convey a series of scientific facts which you've understood. [38]

5 No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection, No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either. When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious, A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone's wisdom.

6 In form, in feeling, will, perception and awareness Nowhere in them they find a place to rest on. Without a home they wander, dharmas never hold them, Nor do they grasp at them - the Jina's Bodhi they are bound to gain.

7 The wanderer Srenika in his gnosis of the truth Could find no basis, though the skandhas had not been undone. Just so the Bodhisattva, when he comprehends the dharmas as he should Does not retire into blessed rest. In wisdom then he dwells. [39]

8 What is this wisdom, whose and whence, he queries, And then he finds that all these dharmas are entirely empty. Uncowed and fearless in the face of that discovery Not far from Bodhi then is that Bodhi-being.

9 To course in the skandhas, in form, in feeling, in perception, Will and so on, and fail to consider them wisely; Or to imagine these skandhas as being empty; Means to course in the sign, the track of non-production ignored.

10 But when he does not course in form, in feeling, or perception, In will or consciousness, but wanders without home, Remaining unaware of coursing in

firm wisdom, His thoughts on non-production - then the best of all the calming trances cleaves to him.

11 Through that the Bodhisattva now dwells tranquil in himself, His future Buddhahood assured by antecedent Buddhas. Whether absorbed in trance, or whether outside it, he minds not. For of things as they are he knows the essential original nature.

12 Coursing thus he courses in the wisdom of the Sugatas, And yet he does not apprehend the dharmas in which he courses. This coursing he wisely knows as a no-coursing, That is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

13 What exists not, that non-existent the foolish imagine; Non-existence as well as existence they fashion. As dharmic facts existence and non-existence are both not real. A Bodhisattva goes forth when he wisely knows this.

14 If he knows the five skandhas as like an illusion, But makes not illusion one thing, and the skandhas another; If, freed from the notion of multiple things, he courses in peace - Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

15 Those with good teachers as well as deep insight, Cannot be frightened on hearing the Mother's deep tenets. But those with bad teachers, who can be misled by others, Are ruined thereby, as an unbaked pot when in contact with moisture. [40]

What impression does one get, from this section, about the Bodhisattva and his coursing in Perfect Wisdom? The translator heads this section 'the basic teachings'.

Padmapani: Very difficult.

S: Very difficult, yes. But putting it in quite simple, straightforward and as it were down-to-earth terms, what impression does one get? What does it amount to?

John: That the progress into prajna wisdom is not a matter of following logical concepts.

S: There is also a strong element of freedom and spontaneity. You're not going by rules. You're not going by thoughts, not going by ideas, not going by concepts, not even going by Buddhist doctrines taken in a dogmatic sort of way. There are several things that require a bit of attention here. For instance, what is this non-production that is mentioned in verse 9? It is a quite important - I won't say concept - of the Mahayana.

Alan: Isn't it referring to the twelve nidanas?

S: Not very directly. (pause) What do you think is meant by non-production? Non-production of what?

Mark: Karma?

Alan: Of causes.

Ian: Things come into existence.

S: But things do come into existence. So how is it said that there is a non-production?

Sagaramati: Nothing real is brought into existence.

S: But is what is not real really brought into existence?

Sagaramati: Well it appears.

S: Ah, it appears. There's not real production. The illustration which is usually given is that of the magician's magical show - the illusion which he conjures up. For instance he conjures up horses and elephants and houses, so that you see these things. But have horses and elephants and houses really come into existence? Have they really been produced? No, not really. There's no production in reality, because it's a magical show. Things appear to be produced, but they are not in reality produced. In reality they are non-produced, [which means that in reality] nothing is produced. There is only sunyata, only the void, in a state of non-production. The Bodhisattva sees all phenomenal things - which appear to arise, appear to be produced - as like a mirage, or like a magical show. They are perceived, they exist in the sense that they are perceived, but they are not ultimately real. Inasmuch as they're not ultimately real there's no question of their actually being produced: they're non-produced. This non-production the Bodhisattva realizes. It is a very profound realization, and occurs in the eighth bhumi. [For the ten bhumis, or stages of a Bodhisattva's progress, see A Survey of Buddhism (ninth edition), p.491 et seq.] If one finds the truth of non-production rather difficult to accept one should [41] not, therefore, be surprised: it only means that you haven't yet reached the eighth bhumi. (laughter) Also, this question of the non-arisen or anutpanna nature of all dharmas is connected with the practice of ksanti or patience [which is the third paramita]. Strictly speaking patience is called the anutpattika-dharma-ksanti or the patient acceptance of the non-origination of all dharmas. This is patience in the deepest sense, as practised by the Bodhisattva in the eighth bhumi. It is the acceptance - the patient acceptance - of the fact that all dharmas in their essential nature are non-produced. They do not really come into existence. Everything abides in a state of quiescence, a state of calm or, if you like, of sunyata, with only an appearance of things being produced - as in the case of the magician's magical display. Dharmas are just appearing, just arising, like a mirage seen in the desert. The mirage is seen, but it is not an actually existing thing, so that there is no question of its really coming into existence, really arising. Thus the Bodhisattva sees and accepts that all things are of this magical, mirage-like nature and this constitutes his patient acceptance of the fact of the non-origination of all dharmas, which is a very profound realization indeed.

Now let's go through the verses of this section one by one. We've gone through the first two already, so start from verse 7.

7. The wanderer Srenika in his gnosis of the truth Could find no basis, though

> the skandhas had not been undone. Just so the Bodhisattva, when he comprehends the dharmas as he should Does not retire into blessed rest. In wisdom then he dwells.

S: Who is this wanderer Srenika? There is a note at the end of the translation to the effect that, according to the Sanskrit tradition, the wanderer Srenika was someone who approached the Buddha and who happened to have a theory of his own. Apparently he identified the Tathagata, i.e. the Buddha, with the true self, or rather, the true self with the Tathagata. The Buddha explained that he was mistaken, and that he himself, the Tathagata, was not to be considered as identical with the skandhas, nor was he different from them, or to be found in their absence. In other words, the Tathagata could not be comprehended in terms of the five skandhas at all. The Tathagata was ineffable, inexplicable. Nonetheless, Srenika took refuge in the Tathagata, took refuge in the Buddha. Is there anything to be learned from that - from the fact of Srenika's taking refuge in the Buddha even though he could not understand him in terms of the five skandhas? What does his action suggest?

Pat: Faith. [42]

S: Yes, faith. So what does it say about faith? What does it tell us about faith?

Sagaramati: It's not dependent on intellectual understanding.

S: Not dependent on intellectual understanding. Don't you think there is a sort of parallel here with one's own more 'ordinary' Going for Refuge - in other words, in connection with the whole question of ordination? (pause) It means you don't have to be able to work things out intellectually, necessarily - don't necessarily have to be able to understand things intellectually - before acting. Does this mean you should act blindly and impulsively, and not think at all? What does it mean?

Mark: In one sense it means that your acting will lead you eventually to understanding. And without doing something you are not going to understand, anyway.

Mike: You're acting, you're going forth, as a result of your intuitive understanding that what you are going forth for is the right thing, the right aim.

Graham: It means you go forth from feeling.

S: From feeling. What does one mean by feeling? (pause) Maybe emotion would be a better word, though it's a word that people usually fight shy of, because emotion suggests movement. It's a sort of movement, [one] that you can't stop. It's the momentum, if you like. Even though you've no reason to go forward, you know, you go forward, because of the inherent momentum that you've generated. That is what is meant by faith, really. (pause) But is this sort of faith anything at all unusual? Is it limited to particular situations or particular contexts?

Peter: We use it all the time.

S: Yes, we use it all the time. Do we ever really work out the pros and cons of a situation fully and completely, without possibility of error, without possibility of mistake - completely exhaustively - before we take any action? Do we ever do this - are we ever able to do this? Is it possible? No. You can do it up to a point, but you can't do it completely. Why is that?

Peter: You can't control all the different things that are going on around you.

S: Right. You can't even know all the different factors that are involved in a particular situation. You have always to take a chance. You have always to act without knowledge. You can never act with complete knowledge: this is quite impossible. (pause) Man really does live by faith. (pause) This doesn't mean that you should live by faith, or act [43] in accordance with faith, it matters where it is possible to find out and to know. That would be foolish, evidently. [Faith is not the only thing.] There is also such a thing as investigating things to the utmost of your ability, and finding out as much as you reasonably can, before making a decision. But you can't ever have all the facts at your disposal before making a decision: you can only have a reasonable number of them. In certain situations, like that in which Srenika found himself, you can't have any facts at all. Then you really do have to take the plunge; you really do have to commit yourself.

You can't really commit yourself to something that you know. To commit yourself to the known is a contradiction in terms. You always commit yourself to the unknown. At least, there is always an unknown element in that to which you commit yourself. It's like getting to know another person. In the case of the person, it's a long, long, time, if ever, before you know them completely. There has to be a sort of act of trust, an act of faith. You can never be absolutely sure of what they are going to do next: not absolutely.

This may be on account of their reactivity, of course - though reactive people are on the whole easily predictable - or it may be on account of their creativity. The more creative someone is the less predictable they are. If you are quite sure, if you know quite definitely what someone is going to do next - what they are going to say, how they are going to respond to a particular situation - you can be pretty certain that they must be highly reactive or that, at least, your own relationship with them had got into a bit of a reactive cul-de-sac. So, "the wanderer Srenika in his gnosis of the truth/Could find no basis", i.e. could find no basis in which to settle down thinking that the Buddha was this or that, or was not this or that, "though the skandhas had not been undone". There, apparently, were the skandhas, i.e. the Buddha's skandhas, his psychophysical personality, in front of him, but he couldn't decide whether the Buddha was to be found in them, or outside them, or in their absence. Thus there was no view in which he could settle down. [Alternatively, Srenika 'could find no basis' because, though the skandhas - whether his 'own' or the Buddha's - 'had not been undone', i.e. had not finally ceased with the attainment of parinirvana, he saw that they were like a magical illusion, i.e. did not take them as ultimate realities.] "Just so the Bodhisattva, when he comprehends the dharmas as he

should/Does not retire into Blessed Rest. In wisdom then he dwells." What is this retiring into Blessed Rest? What is this Blessed Rest?

Sagaramati: Nirvana?

S: It's nirvana. Not nirvana in the ultimate sense but nirvana as seen within the Mahayana perspective as something which the Bodhisattva as it were refuses or rejects. I take it you are familiar with this idea: that the Bodhisattva is one who rejects the possibility of nirvana for himself and aspires to gain full enlightenment for the sake of all. But how do you look upon this 'rejection' of nirvana, this is not retiring into Blessed Rest? Does one take it quite literally, thinking that there is [44] actually a nirvana that the Bodhisattva rejects? Is it really to be looked at like that?

Peter: No. Because he is enlightened, isn't he?

S: Well, look at it another way. Can there be, in fact, such a nirvana? Can there be a nirvana just for me, as it were, ignoring others? The Mahayana does of course speak in those terms. It does say that the Bodhisattva turns his back on nirvana - that he decides not to attain nirvana, not to retire into Blessed Rest. But is that to be taken quite literally, and if not, what does it mean?

Alan: Is it the goal of the Pratyeka Buddhas, which is a stage to Enlightenment?

S: In the Buddha's own teaching the term nirvana or nibbana is a term for the ultimate realization. Would it be possible to speak, at all, of the ultimate realization as being attained just for oneself, ignoring all others? Would that really be possible? Could such a thing happen? To put it in an extreme way, could you as it were 'possess' nirvana in a selfish manner? Doesn't that seem to be a contradiction in terms? Surely in nirvana there is no question of self, no question of ego. So how can nirvana be your selfish personal possession? How can you think in terms of having nirvana for yourself to the exclusion of all others, as it were? Can you really, can you literally, think in those sort of terms? Is it really possible? There's an episode in the Pali scriptures where Sariputta and Moggallana have been meditating all day and towards evening emerge from their meditation. Moggallana notices that Sariputta is looking very fresh and bright, and remarks on it, saying, 'You look as though you've had a good meditation. What happened?' Sariputta replied that the whole afternoon he had been dwelling in the first jhana, 'But', he said, 'never to me came the thought, 'I am dwelling in the first jhana.' [Samyutta Nikaya iii.235. tr.] If with regard to a jhana, even, the thought does not come in the case of someone like Sariputta - that I am dwelling in this jhana, that I have experienced this jhana, that I have attained this jhana, do you think that such a way of thinking or feeling is possible with regard to nirvana - that I have attained nirvana, that I am experiencing nirvana, that nirvana has become my possession? Do you think that is really, literally, possible? We speak in that sort of way, i.e. in terms of attaining nirvana, but is it really possible for the self, or the ego, to feel, well, here I am attaining nirvana? It would seem to negate the very idea of nirvana.

One can only say that when nirvana is attained there's no I-consciousness or ego-consciousness of attaining it. Can one, therefore, even 'reject' nirvana? If there's a question of your rejecting it, it means you are still thinking of yourself as possibly attaining it. If you reject it as an individual attainment, then you are still thinking of it in terms of an individual attainment. So can there really be any [45] question of rejecting nirvana as a personal attainment? Can there really be any question of actually retiring into Blessed Rest? No, because Blessed Rest can't be retired into. If it could be retired into in that sort of way then it wouldn't be Blessed Rest, it wouldn't be nirvana - not if you could feel egotistic or possessive about it in that way. So what does the Mahayana mean by saying that the Bodhisattva does not retire into Blessed Rest? After all, we hear this sort of talk, this sort of teaching, all the time - that the Bodhisattva gives up his self, individual nirvana and resolves to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all. But what does that mean? What is actually happening in the Bodhisattva's experience?

Mark: Compassion is being expressed.

S: Yes, but what is being rejected? If nirvana is not being rejected, if the possibility of an exclusively individual realization of nirvana is not being rejected [because this is, in fact, a contradiction in terms], then what is being rejected. If he doesn't [literally] retire into Blessed Rest what is he not retiring into?

Mark: A heavenly state.

S: Heavenly states are probably left behind long ago.

Sagaramati: Just the idea.

S: The idea, yes. The idea of what?

Mark: Anything.

S: No. What he is rejecting is the idea that nirvana can be, in fact, anybody's personal possession. It's not that there is nirvana, it could be your personal possession, but you choose it should not be, no - the very idea of nirvana being a personal possession, that is rejected. This is what the Bodhisattva rejects. So long as one is on the earlier stages of the path it's all right to think in terms of attaining nirvana, or gaining Enlightenment: you can't think or speak in any other way. But when you actually get there, or when you start getting a bit near, then you see quite clearly that this sort of language is quite inappropriate - does not hold good in reality. This is expressed in the Mahayana in rather a crude, popular way by saying the Bodhisattva rejects an individual nirvana. But what he rejects is that particular way of thinking about nirvana. He's gone beyond that.

Alan: What is the Hinayanists' idea?

S: Actually they say exactly the same. If you read the Sutta-Nipata it's quite clear that they don't think of nirvana as something out there to be grasped in an egotistic sort of way. But the Mahayanists have taken this term nirvana and

in certain contexts, at least, they've chosen to regard nirvana as the object of the selfish quest of the arhants, who are supposed to be concerned only with their own salvation. But really that is a caricature of the original arhants, you may say, even though as a certain stage of their spiritual evolution people may indeed adopt such a position and think of nirvana as something to be individually attained, something to be grasped, even something to be possessed. But the [46] original arhants who lived in the Buddha's own day certainly didn't think in that way. You can see that from the Pali texts. For the later Mahayana, however, the nirvana of the arhants came to represent this much lower ideal, the ideal of separate, individual salvation. No doubt by the time the Mahayana developed there had been some decline in the ideals of the Hinayana itself so far as actual practice was concerned, and maybe some of those who considered themselves arhants, or who were regarded as such, had started looking at nirvana in this sort of way, which the Mahayana then proceeded to correct. But in the Buddha's own day, when the term nirvana originally was used, clearly there was no such attitude. We can see this from the little episode of Sariputta and Moggallana. Sariputta does not even think of himself as dwelling in the first jhana, what to speak of thinking of himself as dwelling in nirvana. This is, of course, one of the great difficulties one encounters in studying the Mahayana. Many of the terms used derive from the earlier traditions, from the Hinayana, and are used in a rather debased sense. No doubt at the time of the rise of the Mahayana they were current in that more debased sense, but one mustn't confuse the debased sense of those terms with the sense which they bore in the Buddha's day. 'Arhant' became debased and devalued. 'Nirvana' became debased and devalued. Therefore the Mahayana put forward its own interpretations, its own teachings. But though the terminology was different, to some extent at least what the Mahayana was doing was restoring the original spirit of the Buddha's teaching. Not only restoring it, but bringing it out even more fully. Thus,

"The wanderer Srenika in his gnosis of the truth Could find no basis, though the skandhas had not been undone. Just so the Bodhisattva, when he comprehends the dharmas as he should Does not retire into Blessed Rest. In wisdom then he dwells."

Why is it he does not retire into Blessed Rest when he comprehends the dharmas as he should? What are these dharmas? These dharmas are the ultimate elements of existence according to the Abhidharma analysis. He sees them as he should. That is to say, he sees them as void; he does not take them as ultimate realities. He sees them only as operational concepts, and because he sees all dharmas as operational concepts - including even the idea of nirvana - he does not take all this talk about attaining or not attaining nirvana, possessing or not possessing nirvana, literally, and in that way he does not retire into Blessed Rest.

Do you think there is a less roundabout way of putting all this? Maybe a less metaphysical way - a less Indian way, if you like?

Graham: That he just keeps on striving.

S: That he just keeps on striving. You mean not being so concept ridden, but functioning freely and spontaneously, without depending upon concepts - making use of them, yes, but not really depending on them, not [47] being limited by them. "In wisdom then he dwells." This gives us an idea of what wisdom is. It's comprehending the dharmas as they are and not retiring into Blessed Rest - wisdom is as it were the spontaneous life, not dependent upon intellectual supports - the life that goes beyond the evidence, as it were. Hence the need for faith. Man cannot be guided entirely be reason, because man is more than reason. Blake makes this point very strongly, doesn't he? He tends to speak in terms of imagination, saying that the true life of man is in the imagination, which he regards as a spiritual faculty, as a sort of spiritual vision, you might even say insight. Reasoning is derived from the senses. The senses give you your raw materials, the mind gets to work on them, and you come to various conclusions. That's your reasoning faculty. But you yourself are much more than that. You're not limited by the senses, not limited by the reasonings of the mind based on sense data. If you allow yourself to be limited by them then you restrict your whole being. You have to go beyond that, and not take it as your basis.

Sagaramati: I find that seems to contradict a lot of things. It always seems to me like reason is a basis, as it were.

S: Ah, you can take it as a basis in the sense of a starting point, but you cannot take is as a basis in the sense of having to find a reason for everything you do before you do it. You are bigger than your reason. You can certainly listen to the voice of reason, but you can't really be guided by it. It's useful as a starting point, but not as a guide all along the way.

Padmapani: What's the difference between a person who thinks in concepts and has a rational mind and a person who's not exactly dwelling in the Perfection of Wisdom but has a rather irrational, erratic sort of nature?

S: Well, that is the difference.

Padmapani: But that person is not dwelling in that [i.e. wisdom], but there is an irrational element. Well, what is that?

S: I don't believe that anybody is completely rational, in fact everybody is guided, more or less, by their emotions. But some people have a greater capacity to dress up their emotions and present them as reasons (laughter) - a greater capacity for rationalization. Some people just don't make any attempt to disguise their emotions, and quite clearly act out of their emotions. Others give you lots of reasons for what they are doing, but behind the reasons there's just emotion.

Mike: Like if you want something emotionally, out of greed, you create reasons to present it in a more acceptable form not just to other people but to yourself.

Padmapani: So a rational person, or a person who thinks that another person is a weak-headed or a weak-thinking person, which isn't really weakness - wouldn't

that maybe, in actual fact, be where a person sometimes thinks rationally, sometimes irrationally.

S: People can of course sometimes think rationally, and most of them [48] do, but I think there is far less rational thinking than we like to think. Most of the time, or at least much of the time, we are in fact dominated by our emotions. Some years ago - it must have been in the early fifties - I started coming into contact with Buddhist scholars, that is to say with scholars in Buddhism, some of them quite well known, even famous. One of the things that I was very surprised to notice was how extremely irrational and violently-emotional they all were. If one of the published a book or an article dealing with some aspect of Buddhist history, or Buddhist thought, other specialists in the field would react most violently and emotionally. They could not react objectively, giving rational consideration to what had been said. They'd have a violent emotional reaction, and would then proceed to do some research in order to refute what the author had said and demolish his conclusions utterly; but the emotional reaction would come first. Not only that. They would often become involved in what one can only call academic intrigue, academic politickings. They would arrange for unfavourable reviews to be published, or pull strings to get the author dismissed from whatever academic post he happened to occupy. All this was going on. There was intense competitiveness, intense jealously, intense fear, and all those sort of emotions, in this so-called objective scholarly field. You could see that they weren't objectively, impartially, rationally carrying out research and trying to add to our scientific knowledge of Buddhism. They were motivated by the most violent emotions. This was really surprising to me in my innocence at that time. I had thought that scholars were objective, impartial, very rational beings. But not a bit of it. Since then I've come to see that most people are like this. We find reasons for doing things but really it is our emotions that are making us do them. What is wrong is not the fact that we are emotionally motivated, but that the emotional motivation is unacknowledged, so that it remains sort of subterranean and indirect and to that extend a bit negative. It would be better for us to clarify the emotions and make them more positive - have them much more out in the open and act from them more directly, if that is what we feel like doing. If we allow the emotions a more free and open play, then they will be more amenable to reason where reason is called for.

Padmapani: Are you saying, then, Bhante, that by letting those emotions come into play the actual reasoning faculty of that person, which may have been dormant, will arise?

S: Well, it isn't dormant because it's constantly employed in rationalization; but if it doesn't need to rationalize then maybe it will get a chance to be truly rational. You all know what I mean by rationalization. You've surely all encountered it from time to time. For instance, when you ask someone why they can't come, or why they can't do something, [49] as expected, they very rarely give you the real reason, which is usually something deeply emotional. Instead, they give you some rationalization or other. This is what I sometimes call the x-factor,

the factor that is always unacknowledged but which is very powerful and very operative.

Sagaramati: The x-factor is the emotion.

S: The unacknowledged emotion.

Padmapani: So it's unconscious to that person.

S: I wouldn't say it's totally unconscious. Very often they sort of know it, but they've got into an absolute habit of not acknowledging it - and they hardly know that they do that either.

Graham: But then going back to what you said a day or so ago, if you do come out with exactly how you feel it's possibly quite a reactive thing and might not contribute to a creative solution.

S: The more you allow it out into the open the more you can see it for what it is and, therefore, take steps either to bring it under control - in an aware sort of way - or to purify it and make it, as it were, more translucent and more refined. It's the unacknowledged emotions, and the pseudo-rationality, that do all the damage. I don't think we can really classify people into (1) the highly rational people who do everything on account of certain definite reasons and (2) the emotional people who are just emotional and do things out of their emotionality. In most cases you find that the so-called more rational people are simply people who have a much greater capacity for rationalization and whose emotions are deeply buried. I think you're more likely to be able to be really rational and do things taking into account the objective facts of the situation if you are also more freely emotional. Then there is a chance of the rationality and the emotionality coming much more together, as they should do in a healthy person.

Padmapani: That is a healthy state.

S: That is a healthy state.

Ian: So it's not as though we aim to act purely on the basis of reason. It's more like a total decision.

S: Yes, that's right: it's a total decision. If your emotions are here and your reason, as it were, there, then it's a question of being guided either by your reason or by your emotions - which means you're not an integrated person. The integrated person acts as a total person. There is emotionality in what he does, and also reason - reason meaning a sort of aware recognition of certain objective facts and circumstances and possibilities. [50]

Ian: So we can't do things when our heart isn't in them, even though we may think that we ought to do them.

S: Right. We may see, as it were, rationally that we ought to do them, but unless our emotions are integrated with that seeing we'll hardly ever get anything done. On the other hand, we have to have a certain amount of clarity of thought and see in which direction we are going, otherwise the emotional remains turbulent,

just circling and swirling round and round and never getting anywhere. When we are totally integrated and our reason is our emotion and our emotion is reason, it's quite difficult for us to say, sometimes, whether we do things on account of certain reasons or just because we feel like doing them. We have become, as it were, one whole.

But in the case of the split and divided person, on the surface there is very sophisticated rationalization going on, but then underneath, quite cut off from it, there are these very powerful emotions that are pulling all the rational strings. You could even go so far as to say that the very rational person is almost sure to be a split and divided person. The more 'rational' you are the more emotional you are, really, in that split and divided way. You can see this in so-called intellectuals. No one is more emotional than the intellectual. (laughter) Intellectuals are very emotional creatures. It's the person who is less high powered when it comes to intellect and reasoning who is, in fact, more reasonable - except when he happens to be under the influence of his emotions. His intellect, or his reasoning power, is much less of a separate thing from the rest of him. At your best, therefore, you would be unable to say whether you were reasoning or emoting or whatever. You are doing something, you are aware of certain reasons for doing it, and you are fully involved in it emotionally: but you can't split and divide all those different aspects. It's all one: they're all integrated. This is a more ideal state.

Padmapani: I'd like to bring up a point here, Bhante, while we're on the subject of emotion. How do you define neurotic in the context of what we are talking about here, i.e. the rational element and the split-off emotional element?

S: If you give to a situation more thought than the situation requires, that is neurotic.

Padmapani: Sorry, can you repeat that?

S: If you give to a situation more thought than the situation requires, that is neurotic. That's worry. That's anxiety.

Alan: And giving less thought would be simple-mindedness.

S: Yes, stupidity.

Sagaramati: Where does intelligence come in here?

S: I would like to use the term intelligence for intellect as fully integrated with the personality. That is intelligence. When it's split off, then we could say it's the intellect. 'Intellect' didn't originally have that sort of pejorative meaning: originally it was a very positive term; but this is how we use it nowadays, so let us use it in that debased sense. [51] When the intelligence becomes as it were split off from the rest of the personality, and is functioning autonomously, and rationalizing, then we can call it the intellect. A healthy person does not have an intellect: a healthy person is just intelligent, in the same way a healthy person

does not have emotions in the sense of something split off from the intelligence. (pause) In the case of the Bodhisattva it's faith, and it's wisdom, all together.

John: So in that sort of sense it's neurotic to be worried about neurotic states of mind.

S: Yes, though of course you can just be neurotic, in the sense of worrying (unnecessarily) about something or other but not actually worrying about worrying. Some people do worry about worrying: that, you could say, is very neurotic.

Roy: Some people are quite happy to go on worrying.

S: Well, 'happy' within inverted commas. It has become compulsive and addictive.

Graham: Does faith help to clear being worried, being happy about worrying?

S: If you've got faith it means you're going beyond the current situation. It means you're not worrying; you're getting along with the minimum of rational, the minimum of 'intellectual', support. Faith and worry are really incompatible. (pause) If you've got faith you can't be neurotic.

S: 'In wisdom then he dwells.' He dwells as a completely integrated person.

"8. What is this wisdom, whose and whence, he queries, And the he finds that all these dharmas are entirely empty. Uncowed and fearless in the face of that discovery Not far from Bodhi then is that Bodhi-being."

S: All these dharmas are entirely empty." What does that mean?

Alan: Realizing that it is all a magician's show, so to speak.

S: Yes. The dharmas are the ultimate elements of existence according to the Abhidharma analysis. The Bodhisattva realizes that, just like the neutron, electron, and proton of modern science, they are not to be taken literally. They're just operational concepts: they're void; they don't denote actual existing entities, or realities. (pause) One mustn't take this term 'empty' too literally, by the way. 'Indefinable' might be better. 'Not completely amenable to logical treatment.'

Ian: Does that mean there is no actual division between one and the other that they are like a continuum; that we choose to make them different?

S: One could look at it like that. (pause) The Bodhisattva is not one who depends on the reason, or who is limited by the reason. He make [52] use of it for practical purposes, but it doesn't limit his vision - doesn't constitute a bounding horizon for him. The text therefore continues:

"9. To course in the skandhas, in form, in feeling, in perception, Will and so on, and fail to consider them wisely; Or to imagine these skandhas as being empty; Means to course in the sign, the track of non-production ignored."

One mustn't even imagine the skandhas as being empty if this means positing an actual entity, or something which the skandhas really are. To say that the

skandhas are empty is just a way of saying that they are not to be taken literally, or at their face value. There's not a thing called emptiness standing behind them, as it were, and supporting them.

Mark: You can't actually imagine it in any way.

S: No, you can't. So don't even misunderstand this talk of emptiness! To imagine the skandhas as being [really and truly] empty 'means to course in the sign,' i.e. means to take something which has only a provisional and relative existence as being ultimately real, 'the track of non-production ignored'. That is to say, you don't see things as mirage-like, as not really having arisen. You think they really have arisen, and you grasp them as such; you take them as signs. Hence, there is no wisdom.

Alan: What do you mean by 'track' in 'the track of non-production'?

S: It means simply path. When you 'course in the sign' you're not following the path of the particular realization - the realization of non-production - that goes beyond 'the sign' i.e. beyond false perception.

"10. But when he does not course in form, in feeling, or perception, In will or consciousness, but wanders without home, Remaining unaware of coursing in firm wisdom, His thoughts on non-production - then the best of all the calming trances cleaves to him."

Once again we find this wandering 'without a home', and it's not to be understood only in the literal sense. It's also to be understood in another, as it were, metaphorical, sense. What sense is that?

Padmapani: The idea that you can, in actual fact, stop, or shelter yourself, in any way, from the path that you are treading.

S: It's not settling down in any particular set of ideas, taking them as representing absolute realities. (pause) What are these trances, these 'calming trances'? What are they, do you think?

Several voices: The dhyanas.

S: Yes, the dhyanas (Pali: jhanas). Unfortunately, Dr Conze uses the word [53] 'trance' for dhyana. The dhyanas are, of course, blissful states of higher consciousness. But as the second half of the next verse goes on to say, "Whether absorbed in trance, or whether outside it, he [i.e. the Bodhisattva] minds not./ For of things as they are he knows the essential original nature." Whether one is absorbed in the dhyanas, or not absorbed in them, doesn't matter so far as the Bodhisattva is concerned, because he understands the fundamental nature of all things, including the dhyanas or trances. He knows them as essentially non-arisen, non-originated. In any case, looked at even from the relative point of view, the dhyanas are part of the phenomenal world and as such should not be objects of attachment.

Padmapani: Does that mean in a sense that the Bodhisattva would not really enjoy those dhyana states?

S: He would enjoy them, but he wouldn't be misled by that enjoyment into taking the dhyanas as things existing as it were in their own right, or as ultimate realities.

"11. Through that the Bodhisattva now dwells tranquil in himself, His future Buddhahood assured by antecedent Buddhas. Whether absorbed in trance, or whether outside it, he minds not. For of things as they are he knows the essential original nature."

'His future Buddhahood assured by precedent Buddhas.' What is meant by that?

Peter: Is that like in the (White) Lotus Sutra, where the Buddha predicts that such-and-such disciples will gain Enlightenment in the distant future, and tells them what their names will be and what their Buddhalands will be like?

S: Yes, his future Buddhahood is assured by precedent Buddhas because what they have attained he too can attain. The fact that they have attained is an assurance that he will attain, provided he makes the same effort that they made before their Enlightenment. In the (White) Lotus Sutra it goes even farther. As Peter said, there is actually predicted that certain disciples will attain Buddhahood - it's as sure as that.

"12. Coursing thus he courses in the wisdom of the Sugatas, And yet he does not apprehend the dharmas in which he courses. This coursing he wisely knows as a no-coursing, That is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

"13. What exists not, that non-existent the foolish imagine; Non-existence as well as existence they fashion. As dharmic facts existence and non-existence are both not real. A Bodhisattva goes forth when he wisely knows this."

S: We mustn't forget that even abstract terms, even concepts like existence and non-existence, are just fabrications of the mind, just operational concepts. (pause) We mustn't be misled by words. [54]

"14. If he knows the five skandhas as like an illusion, But makes not illusion one thing, and the skandhas another; If, freed from the notion of multiple things, he courses in peace - Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

"15. Those with good teachers as well as deep insight, Cannot be frightened on hearing the Mother's deep tenets."

S: Who is this mother?

Padmapani: Prajnaparamita. Perfect Wisdom.

"But those with bad teachers, who can be misled by others, Are ruined thereby, as an unbaked pot when in contact with moisture."

S: Well, these are what the translator calls 'the basic teachings'. Now that we've gone through them verse by verse, at least briefly, what sort of general impression

do you get about the Bodhisattva - about the way in which he is supposed to behave, or the sort of attitude he is supposed to have? What sort of spiritual ideal does he represent?

Peter: The Bodhisattva is a very free and intuitive sort of person.

S: Right. But how would one reduce this, as it were, to ordinary, practical, everyday terms so as to make it useful for people who are trying to develop spiritually, trying to tread the Path of the Higher Evolution? How could one bring the Bodhisattva ideal, as far as one has understood it, down to their level?

Padmapani: By practising the paramitas or qualities of a Bodhisattva on a mundane level.

S: But what about Perfect Wisdom?

Peter: One should always be careful of concepts and realize that they are only concepts.

John: Because of their own nature they just go round in circles.

S: One has to realize the provisional nature of all intellectual structures, including Buddhist ones. [55]

Sagaramati: You could even say in the case of certain intellectual structures that they are used in order to contact the corresponding feelings.

S: You could say that. Or, to stimulate the corresponding feelings.

Vessantara: I was reading a book recently on general semantics and in there it describes some experiments people have carried out. They got somebody to put forward just a very simple concrete sentence and asked him to take one word from that sentence and define it. Then they took one word from that definition and asked him to define that - and so on and so forth. Within about five or six sentences people were having to use words from the first sentence to define the new word, so the whole thing was totally around in circles, by which point they all got very anxious and very upset, angry and disturbed. It just shows, in a simple sort of way, that the whole word structure doesn't actually rest on anything.

S: But it rests upon itself - it rests upon you. You don't rest upon it. For instance, I could say to you, 'Go through that door.' Apart from asking me what I meant by a door, you might ask me to explain what I mean by going. If I explained that going meant moving from one place to another, you might ask me what I meant by place, and so. In the end I might find myself having to define a word I was using in my definition with the help of a word I have been trying to define. In this way we would get into a complete circle. But actually you know exactly what I mean when I say, 'Go through that door,' because if you wanted to, you could carry out the instruction. Meaning has, in fact, been communicated. Only if you try to go into the abstract meaning of words apart from the concrete situation in which they are used do you get yourself

into circles. This is why I say the meaning of the word rests on the person, not the other way round. If you insist on understanding the meaning of the sentence before you carry out the particular instruction you never get around to doing anything. Actually, you understand it sufficiently for practical purposes. You could, therefore, say that statement is meaningless which cannot result in anybody doing anything if that statement was addressed to them. Probably that is an over-generalization, but you see what I mean. Why, then, does one want to know what going out through the door means when all you have to do is to go through the door? Why don't you just go through the door?

Alan: Not enough faith.

S: Not enough faith. So you say, 'Prove to me that the door really is there - that it will actually open when I turn the handle - that there isn't a deep ditch on the other side for me to fall into. Prove all that, then I'll go through the door.' This is what usually happens. This is a sign of anxiety. This is neurotic.

Roy: Fear of the unknown.

S: Fear of the unknown. But you can't know it in advance. You can't know what it is like to go through the door until you have gone through it. [56]

Pat: Probably it would be true to say that language is one of the cornerstones of delusion.

Sangharakshita: It's not language itself but the wrong way of taking language.

Pat: When I'm looking at a tree, for instance, instead of just looking at it I want to name it, and in that way deluded thoughts are produced.

S: This is one of the advantages of periods of silence: [when one is silent] one is not using words, therefore thinking is less and, in a way, you are coming more directly - more immediately - into contact with other things - including other people. You must have noticed this on retreats when you've had periods of silence.

Roy: A period of silence doesn't necessarily mean that there's less communication going on.

S: No, it doesn't. If anything there is even more, because it's more subtle. [57]

Roy: I often find in periods of silence that people tend to become rather withdrawn and non-communicative.

S: Perhaps it's only those who are accustomed to communicating simply through words. Take away their words and you take away the possibility of their communicating. You can communicate with other people by looking at them, by smiling, by little gestures - without resorting to actual sign language, that is. (laughter) Even without your looking at them it can be clear you are aware of them. Because a Bodhisattva is one who is not misled by words, who does not mistake words for things.

Alan: That's a phase children go through, it seems, though. They want names for all these objects. When they've got the names they can use them.

Mike: I find even in silence, sometimes, that I'm actually commenting on things and on the situation - you know, mentally saying it.

Pat: Isn't it the case that most people do that though? Even when I'm thinking, I'm thinking it out. I think 'I mean this man in particular.' I don't have to say it to anybody, but I think 'I like this' or 'I like that'.

S: You actually say the words over to yourself subvocally?

Pat: I think that to reassure myself that I like it I underline something. If I see a nice scene, say, I'm more likely to say afterwards 'I like the scene' just to reassure myself of the fact that I like it.

S: To make sure that you really do like it - to convince yourself that you really do like it. (pause) One can only say that the Bodhisattva is one who tries to see things directly, and not through the medium of words, or even through the medium of thoughts, concepts. You could even say that the Bodhisattva is one who tries to experience things aesthetically rather than conceptually. He tries to get the feeling of things rather than to know them. Do you see the difference?

Graham: Does this maybe go back to the teaching of Milarepa when the novice came along and Milarepa told him to go back and find out what his mind was, meaning by this that the mind in itself was something illuminating, something translucent, that you can't necessarily put into words?

S: Right. You can't grasp it.

Pat: Communication is not only through words, but also through signs and symbols. I'm thinking of motorway signs - of how a driver going along just sees a sign for a place and by following the sign reaches his destination. The sign is only a few square feet of painted tin, but it means something.

S: That's all right: he sees the sign, it registers; he doesn't think about it - he just drives on. But suppose he stops and starts looking at the sign and thinking about it - 'Oh I wonder what it means? Why is it red? Why is it square? Why is there that mark in the middle?' - then he comes to a halt: he doesn't go on driving. That is what the ordinary person does [when following the spiritual path], but the Bodhisattva sees the sign and just drives on. I'm assuming he's on the right road, of course. (laughter) [58] Maybe the sign says 'This way nirvana.' The ordinary person just stops and looks at the sign.

Padmapani: Is that the reason we chant a mantra, Bhante? It seems to go round in the mind, so to speak, and it sort of stops your [reactive mental] mechanism from functioning.

S: Yes. [It can do this] because a mantra doesn't have a meaning [in the ordinary sense]. You can give it a meaning, but that is very secondary. [Primarily] it's a

sound - a sound symbol. It enables you to concentrate on something [i.e. the mantra itself]. In a sense, you think of it without thinking about it.

Padmapani: Sometimes, when doing the walking and chanting practice, I've tried to have a discursive thought, and sometimes it's been quite impossible, i.e. when chanting a mantra.

S: Well, that's quite good.

Mike: You can't think two things at the same time. If you're saying a mantra you can't have any thought, whether its discursive or anything else.

S: Some people do seem to have the capability to carry on two trains of thought [at the same time].

Padmapani: I can do that! I can have two or three going! (laughter) There is one predominant one, and then there are other very subtle ones.

Mike: In that case you're not really into the mantra that you're supposed to be saying. If you're really into it you can't think of anything else.

S: This is why it's very important that, at the beginning of the practice, you make a conscious decision that all your energy is going to go into that practice in a very wholehearted fashion. Otherwise you just sort of drift into it and, since all your energy isn't there in the practice, other trains of thought [are able to] carry on simultaneously. (pause) So you should make sure you really do the practice each time - as you did it the very first time. Very often when one does it the first time one gets excellent results which one doesn't always get subsequently.

Padmapani: Beginner's mind.

S: Yes, beginner's mind. Anyway, these are the basic teachings, and clearly they are quite abstruse in a way, though not intellectually abstruse ... I was just thinking of something which Guenther has written about avidya. Avidya of course means ignorance. It is a-vidya, the absence of vidya. So what is vidya? Vidya is usually translated 'knowledge'. But Guenther says no; he renders it as 'aesthetic appreciation'. Now what is the difference between aesthetic appreciation and knowledge?

Graham: [Aesthetic appreciation is] just accepting a thing for what it is.

S: It's even more than that. It's a sort of relishing it - a being in tune with [59] it, being on the same wavelength as it, being in harmony with it even, you could say: not just knowing it. So avidya is not just ignorance: it's the absence of that aesthetic appreciation. When you are said to know something there is the suggestion that the knowledge is utilitarian: you know what the thing is good for; you know what you can do with it. Let me give you an example. When I was in Kalimpong, right at the beginning of my stay, I was out for a walk one evening when I saw a really beautiful, enormously tall pine tree growing at the side of the road. While I stood there looking up at the tree and admiring it a Nepali friend of mine came along. 'Just look at this tree!' I exclaimed, 'Isn't

it beautiful? Isn't it magnificent?' 'Oh yes,' he replied, 'there must be at least twenty maunds [maund: a large woven basket, tr.] of firewood there - enough for the whole winter.' (laughter) Do you see the difference? Looking at the tree and seeing twenty maunds of firewood in it, this is knowledge. You see its value for certain utilitarian purposes - which also suggests a need - which suggests a craving, or a desire - which suggests a subject - which suggests an object. Do you see the connection?

But when there's only the aesthetic appreciation - and let's take it that I was aesthetically appreciating the tree - there's no utilitarian consideration: you are just appreciating the tree - relishing the tree, delighting in the tree. It's an aesthetic appreciation. Do you see the difference? Vidya is more like aesthetic appreciation than knowledge in the utilitarian sense. The Bodhisattva appreciates things; he has an aesthetic appreciation of them: he's not interested in using them in any particular way or for any particular purpose. He's got no ego, as it were. There's no desire, there's no craving - so there's no subject - so there's no object. [If you were a Bodhisattva] in a way you enjoy the world much as you enjoy a work of art - except that there's not an object 'out there' hanging on the wall, as it were: it's something you're in contact with, something that you feel, something that you experience, something that you enjoy. Therefore one can say that the purpose of the Bodhisattva's life - if one can speak of a purpose, even - is to enjoy the world apart from utilitarian considerations. The attitude of the spiritual person is in a way more like that of the artist ... Though of course only too often the artist, instead of enjoying nature, starts thinking how he can make a picture out of it. (laughter) [60]

Mike: What were the characteristics you defined for the utilitarian perception? Wasn't it subject, object, and desire?

S: You see the use that can be made of something, the use to which it can be put. What does that suggest? That suggests there's a craving, a desire which you have, to be fulfilled. So the tree, for instance, instead of existing for its own sake - on its own account - [supposedly] exists to fulfil a certain desire that you have. Now a desire presupposes a person who desires, i.e. the subject, and then [correlatively] there is the object which is [conceived of as] fulfilling that desire, and so [in this way] you have the subject-object division. If you've got no desire to fulfil, or to be fulfilled, there's no subject and there's no object. That is the state of the Bodhisattva, that is the state of wisdom; for wisdom, you could well say, like vidya, is a state of aesthetic appreciation. This is why Guenther renders prajna (wisdom) as 'analytical appreciative understanding'. The 'appreciative' is to bring out the aesthetic element, and 'analytical' because traditionally, in the Abhidharma, wisdom starts with analysis. Vidya [which traditionally does not contain that analytical element] he calls simply 'aesthetic appreciation.'

Mark: Could that last thing you were saying, all about the aesthetic appreciation, be compared with somebody in a theatre, in the audience, watching what was going on on the stage, and somebody else being so enwrapped in what was going on that they forgot about the existence of the stage, even, and the rest of the

people in the audience, because you're just there amongst it all: just sort of there.

S: I think the two are different degrees of the same thing: they're both degrees of enjoyment, they're both aesthetic, one deeper than the other. The ordinary man who's just sitting there in the stalls watching it and enjoying it, but not all that immersed in it, is just a bit sort of alienated; but the person who is really into it, who is immersed in it, is enjoying it even more, because he's not alienated: [far from being alienated] he loses all sense of himself as spectator and the people on the stage as actors.

Kim: Where does mindfulness come into this?

S: Well, what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is awareness. There can't be any aesthetic appreciation unless you are aware, but it isn't an awareness which is dissociated from feeling. Very often if you use the word awareness it suggests a sort of dissociation from feeling, but this is what I call alienated awareness. Real awareness I call integrated awareness. So awareness is also a part, a necessary part, of the aesthetic appreciation. There's no aesthetic appreciation without that awareness, but it's an integrated awareness. It's not a cold, separate, alienated awareness. You're not sort of standing back from something and looking at it: you're in a sense almost identified with it.

With the help of these sort of considerations we can, perhaps, get a bit nearer to what the Bodhisattva is like, and what this Bodhisattva life - [61] this coursing in Perfect Wisdom - is all about. [One of the difficulties is that] the Indian mode of expression, the Indian mode of communication, is so extremely conceptual, so extremely intellectual - even in these verses, which are much less so than many of the Perfect Wisdom teachings are. It's as though the Indian had to get rid of concepts with the help of concepts - get rid of comparatively gross concepts with the help of comparatively subtle concepts. But the mode of expression, the mode of communication - the medium - is still conceptual. The Indian mind - certainly the medieval Buddhist and medieval Hindu mind - doesn't seem able to get away from the conceptual mode of expression very easily. But when Buddhism 'went' - we mustn't take that very literally - from India to China then the mode of expression was changed completely, as Suzuki has shown very well. The Zen, or rather Ch'an, Buddhists took teachings like this and completely recast them. Instead of disquisitions of this sort you got a shout, or a slap, or someone holding up a flower: something of that kind. It meant the same thing, but the mode of expression, the medium of communication, was totally different. I think that most people in the West, certainly most English people, would not and do not feel at home with this conceptual mode of expression. It is really very difficult for us to 'translate' from this conceptual language into a language which is, in fact, more real. I would even go so far as to say, perhaps, that this typically Indian language, this typically Indian mode of expression, doesn't really suit Buddhism very well - it is not really in accordance with the spiritual genius of Buddhism.

Alan: Are there Chinese renderings of the Prajnaparamita?

S: Yes, there are. They rendered them quite early, and they called the Perfect Wisdom teaching the 'Dark Wisdom.' Again this is typically Chinese. 'Dark' is a very concrete word.

Padmapani: It does seem to me that even a conceptual word like that, as well as sublime stuff like the Zen teachings, can be made much more accessible to people, and that they can understand them with a meditative basis.

S: Because meditation gets you away from thinking. You might think that these teachings were an encouragement to think; but actually they're not: they're a discouragement. They use thought to undo thought; but if you're not very careful you can get caught up in thinking about the ways in which thought undoes thought. This is what most people do. (pause) There are so many books on Zen [written by Westerners] which do just this. They think about the ways in which thought undoes thought, and they don't get [62] beyond thought. But they think they do, because they're thinking about getting beyond thought, and beyond thinking, and they think they've got beyond it because they're thinking about getting beyond it. (laughter) And they go on making this sort of mistake; it's so obvious, but they never see it apparently.

Vessantara: You said that Guenther calls prajna 'analytical appreciative understanding', and that the analysis is the first step towards wisdom. Why should that be?

S: You have this concept of the self or ego as something separate and independent, and in order to get rid of that concept you break the ego down into its constituent factors, its constituent elements. [This the Abhidharma did in great detail.] But then the Abhidharma proceeded, apparently, to take quite literally [i.e. to take as ultimate realities] the different factors into which the ego had been broken down, thus turning them into egos, as it were, in turn. Therefore the Mahayana had to come along and break them down too, and it broke them down by resolving them into what is called sunyata; but it warned you [at the same time] not to take sunyata as a thing into which these elements had been broken down, since otherwise you'd become caught all over again. Sunyata is an operational concept. The dharmas [i.e. the 'ultimate' psychophysical elements of the Abhidharma] were operational concepts originally. Even 'ego' was an operational concept. You could go right back to the beginning and say, 'Let's use the word ego and not be misled by it. Let's use the word self but not be misled by it.' Don't be afraid of the word 'self'! Many years ago, when I was a comparatively young Buddhist, I was very careful to avoid the word 'self', and always put 'no-self' instead. But after a few years I thought, well, what does it really matter? After all, why be so afraid of the word 'self'? Use it when necessary, but use it in a colloquial, poetic sort of way, without taking it literally; otherwise your no-self becomes a self - because you take it so literally and are so scrupulous about using only this particular term.

Padmapani: Some people tend to supplement - instead of 'I' or 'me' speaking,

'we'. Which is just as bad, in a way!

S: Or not any personal pronoun at all. I drew attention to this some months ago, when certain reports appeared in Shabda saying, 'It has been decided that . . . ' So I wrote and asked, 'But who has decided? Where! When?' (laughter) I mean, let's get away from this 'it has been decided'. This is not impersonality: this is imprecision, or vagueness. Certain people must have decided, so let's know who they are, and why they decided; what their reasons were, what their feelings were. But let's not have this abstract, pseudo-impersonal 'it has been decided'. I thought this was really terrible - the beginning of the end, if we weren't careful. (laughter) Of course some people do try to avoid saying 'I': they say 'we' or 'one': 'one sometimes thinks, doesn't one?'

Padmapani: In fact it would be better if instead of saying 'I' you could say your name. [63] Padmaraja could be speaking, and saying, 'Padmaraja says that. . . '

S: Well even that's a bit alienating, isn't it? (protests) Does he really feel that Padmaraja is speaking? No, he feels, 'I'm speaking.' (laughter) Or I assume so. If he doesn't agree, he must say so. [Padmaraja remains silent.]

Padmapani: I should have mentioned 'myself' . . . I did say it the other day. (laughter)

S: Anyway, I think we have got a somewhat better idea now - or at least a better feeling - of what the Bodhisattva really is like, or how he functions, and what is meant by his coursing in Perfect Wisdom. But it does seem to me that there is so much Buddhist teaching that, to the extent that it has been filtered through this [conceptual] Indian medium, will just have to be translated, as it were. This is not so much the case with the rather archaic works like the Udana and the Sutta-Nipata and the Itivuttaka, but you certainly find it with the later [canonical and non-canonical] works, and with the Mahayana philosophy [i.e. the Madhyamika and Yogacara schools] - even with the Perfect Wisdom teachings. They're very abstract, very conceptual; but we mustn't think that this is the standard approach [to be followed by all Buddhists]. This seems to me to be much more the Indian mind at work than Buddhism: the Indian mind understanding things in its own way. (pause) So it's quite a good thing if we think of Wisdom as analytical appreciative understanding and avidya not as ignorance but the absence of aesthetic appreciation. That makes it much more real and much more vivid to us. (pause) This reminds me of something which I was going to say the other day, but it got lost in the course of discussion. It's in connection with metta. We've talked about metta quite a lot, and I'm sure everybody is familiar with what metta is; but when you look at things with metta, how do you see them? Suppose metta is your subjective state, your subjective experience, then when you look at something or someone with metta how do you see it, or how do you see him?

Padmapani: Clearly.

John: As a projection of your emotions.

Mark: Somewhat more optimistically.

S: Yes, you're getting a bit closer.

Mike: You see the more positive side of the object or person.

Kim: More as it is.

Sagaramati: On the intuitive level rather than on the conceptual level.

Ian: You see the metta in that other person, to whatever degree ...

A Voice: With sympathy.

Sagaramati: As actually closer to you, in a sense.

Kim: More beautiful. [64]

S: Ah, more beautiful! Who said that?

Kim: I said that. (laughter)

S: This is what the Buddha says. When you see things with metta you see everything as beautiful. This is a very important point. When the Bodhisattva has this 'aesthetic' appreciation it means he's everything as beautiful. His prajna as it were includes metta, does it not? Or you could even say, if you really wanted to stress the point, that metta is prajna - in a sense, or to a degree. When the Bodhisattva looks at things - when he sees things with wisdom - he sees them aesthetically, he sees them with metta. It's not a cold, detached knowledge. He's seeing them with metta, which means with warmth, with feeling; and therefore he's seeing everything as beautiful. This is a very important point.

Graham: Is that why in early days of doing metta [i.e. the metta bhavana meditation] you use words to bring about the eventual feeling, which in time will take over?

S: Yes, right. And the word for beauty here is subha, and that's again very interesting. I've talked about this word elsewhere, on other occasions. Subha means beautiful and also pure, so you can translate it as 'pure beauty' or 'the purely beautiful.' Now when you, out of metta, see things as beautiful, then again, how do you feel? what is your emotional response? (Voices) You feel happy! You experience joy and delight, again how do you feel? You feel very spontaneous, you feel very free: you feel very creative; you feel as though you've got lots of energy, and again, this is how the Bodhisattva feels. I think we are now bringing the Perfection of Wisdom teaching, and the Bodhisattva ideal, a little more down to earth: making it a little more real. Conversely, if you look at someone with real anger, with real hatred, how does he appear?

Mark: Horrible.

S: Yes, horrible. Really ugly.

Padmapani: It's rather odd, that saying, 'You look awfully beautiful when you're angry,' or something like that. (A splutter of protest.) [65]

S: Well sometimes a person does, now and again. But what does it mean? Why does someone look - if they do look - beautiful when they're angry?

Peter: They're expressing emotion.

S: They're expressing emotion. Not only that, but there's energy there - they're alive; they're not dead. No one looks beautiful when they're dead - not in that sort of way. But when they get angry they come to life: there's energy there, they look alive, and that is beautiful, to see something alive. It's like a horse galloping along, or a lion shaking his mane and roaring. There's a certain beauty in it because there's energy there, there's life there. So when someone gets angry you can enjoy it, just like you enjoy seeing the tiger, or the lion. It also suggests awareness, simple awareness, without any reaction of fear, for instance, on your part.

Padmapani: Would you say that if a person was to see someone who was angry he could rejoice in his anger because energy was being [thereby] released, and anger is, in a way, an expression of energy that is coming out but has not yet reached the stage of metta?

S: You could say that. I think one must distinguish between anger on the one hand and hatred on the other. Hatred is a sort of settled intention to do harm to somebody else, but anger is much more like energy bursting through obstacles, and through, in the course of that bursting through, you may incidentally do a bit of damage, this is not your intention. Perhaps one should distinguish in this way between anger, which is energy breaking through obstructions, and hatred, or energy deliberately directed to someone's harm.

Vessantara: When it's said that anger is totally incompatible with being a Bodhisattva it is more hatred [that is meant].

S: Yes, it is more hatred.

Graham: Could you repeat that, Vessantara?

Vessantara: It is said that anger is the most un-Bodhisattva-like of all qualities, but what it seems is meant when people say this is anger in the sense of hatred rather than just a feeling of annoyance.

S: Why is it [ask some of the Mahayana texts] that indulgence is krodha or hatred is the greatest offence the Bodhisattva can commit? Because it is the direct antithesis of karuna or compassion. He has vowed out of compassion to help others, to do good to them; but krodha or hatred is the exact opposite of that: it is doing harm to them. So krodha or hatred is the most un-Bodhisattva-like of all mental states, of all emotions. Clearly this is krodha in the sense of hatred, not krodha in the sense of anger.

Graham: Can hatred be linked to . . . Well, I suppose it can have a number of links, can't it?

S: Sometimes it's linked with wisdom, actually. Wisdom, it is said, penetrates

into conditioned existence and destroys illusion in the same way that hatred penetrates into things [we dislike] and destroys them, so that there [66] is a sort of analogy. Sometimes it's said that people who are of the hateful [rather than of the greedy or the deluded] temperament have got very powerful intellects, and actually we do find this.

From this general description [given in the section on 'the basic teachings'] you might get the impression that the Bodhisattva was a highly intellectual being and the Perfect Wisdom teaching a highly intellectual teaching. That would be a complete misunderstanding. That's the last thing it is.

Sagaramati: But that is exactly what Conze says it is, in the introduction to one of his texts. He says it's not for the masses, it's for the intellectuals.

S: What does one mean by 'for the intellectuals?' It's speaking the language which intellectuals understand, but trying to communicate a message which has nothing to do with intellect or with anything that the intellectuals understand. If you mistake the medium for the message then you have completely missed the point. (pause) There's no intellectual message here. Just the opposite. But obviously the Perfection of Wisdom teaching does provide - like the Abhidharma itself - a 'feast of delight' for the intellect. You can take it in that sort of way.

While we're talking about metta and subha, friendliness and beauty, it occurs to me that there's another very important [related] aspect of Buddhist life, thought, and experience, and that is the mandala. How do we usually think of the mandala? (pause) There's a very interesting definition of the mandala given by a Tibetan authority [Rongzompa Chokyi Zangpo, tr.]. He says that to make a mandala is to take any prominent aspect if reality and surround it with beauty. Now what does that mean? It's not like the way we usually think of the mandala, or of making a mandala. To take any prominent aspect of reality and surround it with beauty ... Now why does one surround anything with beauty? Why does one decorate anything, as it were?

Padmapani: To give it some meaning.

Alan: Harmony with yourself.

Peter: Because you hold that thing as being precious, perhaps.

S: You hold that thing as being precious. But why should you select a particular prominent aspect or facet of reality? Because you're drawn to it. The relation here is spiritual: you're not selecting out of greed or craving; but you're drawn to it, and because you're drawn to that particular aspect you value it highly, you feel metta towards it or, it may be, an even stronger feeling than metta - though metta is really a fairly strong term. Just thinking of it as friendliness it seems rather weak. So being attached to [67] this particular aspect of reality, what would you like to do to express your appreciation? You'd like to decorate it - to surround it with beauty in a harmonious and patterned sort of way: in that way you make your mandala. To pursue this a little further, your prominent aspect or facet of reality can be a particular Buddha figure - the one you're

particularly drawn to - the one you particularly like - the one that you find the most beautiful, attractive, precious. That's your prominent aspect or facet of reality, and you surround him with beauty, you decorate him, as it were. You put, for instance, another Buddha figure above him, and another below; one on this side, one on that side. Then in between you put the elements, earth, water, fire, and air. You can then use all the other things in nature as materials with which to decorate, to fill in, in a harmonious sort of way, and so you build up your mandala. (pause) It's the same kind of principle at work. Thus we find ourselves in a very different world from the world that we seem to find ourselves in when we read this particular text. I say seem to find ourselves in because we get the impression that the Prajnaparamita teaching is abstract and intellectual only when we pay more attention to the medium than the message. But if the medium is the message then we are in a very difficult position indeed. McLuhan says the medium is the message [In "Understanding Media", 1964, tr.]. If in this case that's true then we won't get in touch with the Perfect Wisdom by reading books about Perfect Wisdom, or even the scriptures of Perfect Wisdom; but let's hope that in this case the medium is not the message - that there is a message which is coming through the medium which is even opposed to the medium, or to which the medium is opposed. (pause) One is, I think much closer to the truth - or can be much closer to the truth - if one thinks of Perfect Wisdom, the Bodhisattva - the Bodhisattva's life, the Bodhisattva's career, coursing in Perfect Wisdom, emptiness, much more in, as it were, aesthetic terms, and in terms of metta - even in terms of beauty and harmony.

Roy: Is the Dharma the medium or the message?

S: It's both. The Dharma as the Buddha's teaching is the medium. The Dharma as truth, law, reality, is the message, which the Buddha's teaching communicates. Or the Buddha himself is the message, and the Dharma is the medium, one could say. (pause) But as the Bodhisattva courses with metta, as he sees everything as beautiful, he is creating a mandala - he just rearranges the whole universe and turns it into one gigantic mandala. (pause) The true cosmos rather than a chaos. (pause) But you notice this in your dealings with things and persons: if you just contemplate and enjoy them, that's wisdom; if you want to use them, that's knowledge. D.H. Lawrence makes the same point in another context when he talks of a workman going for a walk and seeing a beautiful flower and just looking at it, just contemplating it. Then a woman comes along, and she sees the flower. 'Oh I must have that!' she exclaims, and she picks it, sticks it in her hat, or puts it in her bosom, and then thinking, 'How pretty I look!' as she gazes into the mirror. You see the two different kinds of attitude.

There's also a story about the Taoist sage who was fishing. [68] Someone came along and asked him how, being a Taoist sage, he could be fishing. The sage replied, 'It's all right. I'm not using any bait.' (laughter) He was just enjoying the 'fishing'. He wasn't trying to catch anything. That, in a way, should be one's attitude towards life: you're not trying to catch anything, you're enjoying the fishing. (pause) Because to sustain life, you have to engage in a certain

amount of practical activity: you have to think, and you have to know; but that should be within an overall context of aesthetic appreciation, as it were. We usually think of our 'aesthetic appreciation' as a little separate area within a much larger area which is 'practical' and 'utilitarian', but really it should be the other way around. Do you see this? Your overall attitude, and your overall response, should be purely aesthetic: just enjoying things and not wanting to use things; just appreciating things, feeling for things. But within that [there should be] a very much smaller area devoted to the fulfilment of your quite objective, non-neurotic needs and wants, and for this, of course, you require a certain amount of practical knowledge and practical activity. Here the utilitarian is just a very limited sphere. Usually, as I've said, it's the other way around. We live in a world of wants, a world of utilitarian purposes and utilitarian knowledge - of so-called practical knowledge. Within that there's a tiny, isolated area within which we allow ourselves to enjoy things aesthetically. That's the arts. This state of affairs should be completely reversed.

Padmapani: You could say, Bhante, that in that sense Right Livelihood has to be within the mandala [of aesthetic appreciation], rather than the other way around.

S: Yes, indeed.

Padmapani: [What usually happens it that] one has one's job, then goes to the mandala and ...

S: You must think of yourself as living within the mandala, and all your worldly life - your practical life, your utilitarian life - as occupying just a very tiny corner somewhere in the mandala: not think of the mandala as a little circle one foot in diameter within this great big utilitarian world. (pause) The real values are aesthetic values, not practical values. (pause) This gives rise to another attitude: you don't really have anything to do. (laughter) Well, do you? Most of the time you're sitting back, as it were, enjoying the universe. That's your major occupation, (laughter) that's your real work - not to work. Just a small part of your time is devoted to the fulfilment of your very few simple, practical needs. You need a bit of food to eat, and a few clothes to wear, and somewhere to stay - maybe a bit of medicine when you feel sick. What more do you need than that? Maybe a book or two at the most. Maybe a bicycle. You don't need a motor car. And the rest of your time and energy you just devote to contemplation of the universe, simply enjoying it all. This is how you live. You appreciate everything aesthetically, without thinking of using it. Look at the trees: don't think of cutting them down for timber. Look at the flowers: don't think of plucking them and putting them in your hair. Well, you might [69] do that sometimes, if it's just to decorate yourself, without any utilitarian motive, just because you enjoy it. (pause) So that is how the Bodhisattva looks at it. (laughter) Even when he's actively functioning, doing certain things that objectively need to be done, it is within this overall context of the much wider outlook, the much wider perspective, of simply enjoying things, simply contemplating things aesthetically. This doesn't mean standing back from them and looking at them with a sort of

pseudo-scientific objectivity, but being in contact with them at the same time - feeling them, and feeling with them and for them, at the same time. (pause) So if you've got your much smaller circle of practical activities within your much wider circle of aesthetic contemplation, how can you worry, how can you not be relaxed? It's when you try to have this tiny circle of relaxation within a much bigger circle of practical activities about which you're really worried that, you know, you just can't succeed. How can you possibly have just that little circle of relaxation in that way?

Sagaramati: Who's going to run the centres?

John: Who's going to organize retreats?

S: Well, centres will be run, and retreats will be organized, but in this sort of way. It's not that you must stop what you're doing, but [that you must] surround it by an infinitely bigger mandala of contemplation and aesthetic appreciation. Don't stop what you're doing, but just see that it's only a little tiny circle and just see the bigger circle which contains it. (astonishment, laughter)

A Voice: Are you going to play this tape to [naming a very energetic Order member]? (laughter)

S: I hope to play it to everybody. (pause) And yet the fact is that you'll be able to work much better then, because you'll be much more relaxed and you'll have much more energy, and you'll take it all much less seriously in a way - which won't mean you'll do it less efficiently. You'll do it more efficiently: you'll not waste energy in neurotic worry and anxiety. (long pause)

Sagaramati: If we had to take that attitude, it might mean changing the whole structure of the way we do things.

S: It wouldn't mean changing the structure. It might mean changing the attitude.

Sagaramati: Sorry, not the structure. Yes, [on second thoughts] even the structure may need to be changed.

S: Well, maybe. Maybe part of the structure is not really necessary. One has to consider that possibility.

Sagaramati: Usually the attitude is that there are things to do that need to be done. Somehow the criterion is always external, and not in the big mandala. It is a sort of utilitarian criterion that is applied.

S: You see only the little circle, and not the big mandala. This is what [70] happens, isn't it? You think that the little circle is everything: it becomes your whole world; whereas you ought to be living at the same time within the much bigger mandala of aesthetic appreciation and all that.

Vessantara: At the moment we're encouraging people to grow by putting all their energy into the little circle, in a way.

S: No we're not. What about their meditation?

Vessantara: Yes, but even that, in some senses, seems to be made less play of than 'Working for the Movement' - capital W capital M kind of thing.

S: Ah, but what is working for the Movement? Working for the Movement is also, you know, lifting your eyes at that big mandala, or pointing it out to other people and saying, 'Look at the big mandala! The tiny little circle [of our activities] is within that.'

Sagaramati: What I meant was that, to keep more in contact with the big mandala, sometimes you have to slow down in a way.

S: Yes, perhaps you do. Sometimes you get more done that way. I hope I'm not telling tales out of school, but someone visited - let's say Centre X. (laughter) He went there for a quiet sit down, maybe a quiet chat. He hadn't been sat down for more than two minutes, he said, when someone popped in, and then popped out. After a few minutes two more people popped in, had a quick talk, and popped out again. All the time that he was there, in fact, there were people popping in, popping out; and they seemed a bit agitated, a bit worried: talking about this, talking about that - suddenly going into a huddle in the corner, and nipping upstairs for a quiet - or not so quiet - exchange. He got quite an odd sort of impression. (amusement) But put it this way: it's a virtue to be ornamental as well as useful. (laughter)

Padmapani: I think it's a lot to do with the situation. In the city people [who are connected with an FWBO centre] get caught up in a situation where there are noises and distractions which they can't stop. They can't really get into [the spiritual life in] that environment. It seems to be so much easier in the country in many ways. [71]

S: That [apparently uncongenial environment] is one's training ground, as it were.

Padmapani: Do you mean to say that being in a big city, near an FWBO centre, is a good situation for growth?

S: For people whose energies are not very much aroused, and who are really in a rather dull and slothful state, I think it is.

Mark: Can you see the time when everybody who's around at the moment - or, say, all the Order members who are around at the moment - will have to get all they can from the city, or the towns?

S: Or put it the other way around too. Will not only have got all that they can, but will have given all that they can. Maybe it's then that they should move out into the country, either to a country retreat centre, or to a solitary retreat. Later on let them go back into the city, where they will see things in a different way: they will be able to live and work in the city but, at the same time, within the wider mandala. They will be getting more out of the situation, and also putting more back into it.

Padmapani: Have you thought about that deeply, Bhante? Have you thought that it's a possibility that Order members will be coming out, maybe, to live in the country, and moving back into the towns once they've got to such a degree of . . .

S: I wouldn't like to think of any of the people who are helping to run centres in big cities, whether Order members or others, staying there indefinitely, unless they're spiritually very, very exceptional people indeed. They'd have to be real Bodhisattvas to do that.

John: That's why I think that a large place in large grounds out in the country is vital.

S: One no doubt needs quite a lot of such places. But also - this is quite important - you mustn't have only such places. Such places can be very stagnant. Nowadays everybody tries to settle in the country, but you just get into a rut. I think there must be an alternation between city and country, retreat centre and city centre. Both of these are very, very necessary for the vast majority of people, at least within the foreseeable future. Not that anyone is always in the city or always in the country. You can really get into a rut, you can really rot, in the country - even in a retreat centre. You can get into a very dull, stagnant state, and I've seen quite a lot of this in the East, and a bit in the West too. Life in the city does get your energies out, does arouse you, even though it makes you a bit irritable, perhaps, and gets on your nerves at times. But on the whole, people in the city - [72] ordinary people - are more alive than people in the country. I mean the big city, not just the small town.

Padmapani: The small towns are a very bad situation, I would have thought. A small town isn't big enough to have a cultural centre: you haven't got anything of that sort going; and people tend to be very sleepy. Most of the intelligent people, and the lively people, seem to move away.

S: When we were in New Zealand one of the Order members there, a man of about 35, took us to the little village where he was brought up and where he had lived until he was 16 or 17, and near to which he was born. It was so idyllic, so beautiful. The scenery was so wonderful. It was so peaceful, so quiet. But this Order member told us that when he was a kid, and when he was an adolescent, he just hated it. He couldn't get away quick enough - to the big city. He said there was nothing happening there, nothing going on. The place was dead. It wasn't just peaceful, he said - that was how he experienced it - it was just dead; and he couldn't get away to Auckland quick enough, and from Auckland to London, where he spent quite a number of years - in Notting Hill Gate. (laughter) So it's all right to go into the country, into the retreat centre situation, from the city, with your energies [already] aroused; and it's all right also if, when you're in the country retreat centre, you've got something to do - something with which to keep yourself a bit bright and alive. If you can just aesthetically contemplate, and aesthetically appreciate, and be really alive in that sort of way, that's best. But the chances are, if you can do that in the

country in that sort of way, you can do it in the city too. Eventually you must be able to do it wherever you are. But it'll take quite a long time to reach that state.

Graham: I find a lot of what you say [actually] happening at Sukhavati [which was later to become the London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green, at that time being built, tr.]. I was quite surprised there at the amount of work that's done in quite a relaxed atmosphere.

S: That's very true. I noticed that when I went down at Easter [1976]. One is aware that so much is being done - very hard work: sometimes crude work, rough work; but the overall atmosphere is very calm, and gentle, and peaceful, very relaxed. It is really remarkable. (pause) Whereas sometimes you can go into a situation where not much is being done, or else being done very slowly, yet it just feels very tense, and not relaxed at all.

Padmapani: Do you know why that is, Bhante? Or why do you think that is?

S: There may be a conflict of energies.

Padmapani: Sorry, I mean about Sukhavati.

S: The positive atmosphere at Sukhavati is due to three things. (1) There is a common, overall objective which is, for want of a better term, spiritual: an objective towards which everybody is orientated, and for the sake of which everything - directly or indirectly - is done. (2) Everybody is working together, which seems a positive situation in itself. Not just talking together - you know, talking about your problems - but working together, [73] practically. (3) Sukhavati is a single-sex community: it's all men. The positive atmosphere of Sukhavati is due, I think, to these three factors, which between them add up to an almost ideal situation. It's a monastery in the true sense. [As in a monastery] there's a common spiritual objective and a common spiritual practice - mainly meditation and puja, together with study; and then there's the work, the practical hard work together on and for the place as a basis for the practice of those ideals; and then of course there is the fact that it is a men's community. (pause) Everybody's energies are flowing in the same direction.

Peter: I think that's why Benedictine monasticism did so well in the beginning. It was the first to bring in the use of manual labour. The monks did support themselves. There were large chunks of the day given over to communal working. They performed the Divine Office, the chanting of the Divine Office, but at the same time spent a lot of time working together. Of course, that deteriorated in the end, and it became more scholarly, with a lot of teaching; but in the beginning it was purely physical labour, the monks providing themselves with food, and running the monastery - building it and all that. There was vitality there.

Padmapani: It seems to imply, though, that when Sukhavati is finished then somehow that sort of energy must ...

S: Do you think that hasn't been thought of? (laughter) No. Sukhavati is going to be the basis of various business activities [i.e. various forms of team-based Right Livelihood the profits from which will be covenanted to the appropriate centre]. Already there's the press, which will be providing work for at least three people, perhaps four or five. Then there's the wholefood business, which will also be based at Sukhavati and which will provide a means of right livelihood for several people. [As well as being an FWBO centre, with meditation classes, lectures and Dharma study groups] Sukhavati will be the venue for all these sorts of activities. [In the course of the last year and a half, i.e. since these words were spoken, three businesses have been set up at Sukhavati. Friends Foods, Windhorse Transport, and Friends Building Services. (S.)] Not that, when it's completed, they will all settle down in their beautiful Happy Land and have nothing to do. (laughter) Oh no [they will be very busy indeed]. Some of them might be able to come up to Norfolk for the odd weekend, you know, but not much more than that.

What is important is this all-enclosing and all-surrounding atmosphere of, as it were, peace: that the practical takes places within the context of the aesthetic. That is the important thing. In the city there is so much to do. (I'm speaking of the FWBO centres.) There's so much to do that, despite their best efforts, people lost contact with - lost sight of - the greater mandala in the midst of which they're supposed to be functioning. When that happens they have to be encouraged to go away into the country from [74] time to time, to re-establish that contact. They may even have to be stopped from doing anything practical for a while - to be told that they're not allowed to do anything practical for a while, that they've just got to stop and do nothing. That may be necessary sometimes.

When I was in Kalimpong I was in contact with a French Buddhist nun who had come out there. She had been at the Sorbonne, and was quite a scholar - in fact, a very high-powered lady intellectually, with a terrible temper. She was very demanding, very exacting, and was always busy, always doing things. Whenever I went to see her she would be washing and scrubbing, feeding her dogs and cats, cooking and studying (at the same time). Reading, writing letters, rushing off to see this man or that, meeting lamas, going to the bazaar, coming back from the bazaar, building things, knocking things down, chopping them up. (laughter) She never stopped. One day she came to see me and said, 'Bhante, I just can't seem to meditate.' (laughter) I said 'Anila, [the polite mode of address for nuns in Tibetan], you're very good in many ways, but there's just one thing you've got to learn: then you'll be able to meditate.' 'What is it? What is it?' she asked excitedly, getting ready to rush out and do it. I said, 'You must learn to waste time.' (laughter) When I said that she nearly jumped out of her robe. 'Waste time!' she shrieked. 'With so many things to do, you're asking me to waste time! Is that your Buddhism?' 'Yes,' I said, 'So far as you are concerned, that's my Buddhism. Just learn to waste time. You'll get on much better.' But she never did learn, and she [eventually] came to quite a sad and sorry end. If only she'd been able to waste time, it would have done her a lot of good - more good

than a lot of other things she was into. Some people, I know, possess a positive genius for wasting time, and need no encouragement whatever. (laughter) My advice to the French nun should not be taken by such people and twisted [into a justification of their own natural tendency]. They have to be encouraged to do things.

Padmapani: What do you think the opposite is to people who don't know how to work?

S: Well, there are people like this French nun who are just doing too much, and who lose sight of the larger mandala, the mandala of [75] aesthetic appreciation. There are others who lose sight of both. They are certainly not doing anything practical, anything useful, but at the same time they're certainly not aesthetically appreciating existence as a whole. Maybe they have to be got started with doing something practical, and for them the city is quite good. It's a quite good environment: it is stimulating, it does buck you up a bit, does get you going. But you mustn't forget that wider mandala, as I've called it. That is the real mandala: the other little ones are just within it.

We begin to get some idea, now, of what the Bodhisattva really is all about. Don't forget that the Bodhisattva is the greatest worker of all: he's constantly busy, constantly functioning. But he operates within the greater mandala, as I've called it. It's not even as though the sphere within which he is operating is a sphere of 'practical activity' in the real sense, [existing] apart from the mandala of aesthetic appreciation. The mandala of aesthetic appreciation interpenetrates that smaller ['practical'] circle: he isn't sort of absenting himself from the mandala of aesthetic appreciation when he carries on his practical activities. They are an expression of that, within a particular context, for the sake of certain people.

Padmapani: [Generally] you seem to be between these opposites [i.e. negative counterparts] of the smaller mandala, where you lose your mindfulness and [sense of] aesthetic beauty, and this [negative counterpart of the] greater mandala, where there's a tendency to space out and not do any work - practical work - for the Dharma. There seems to be some sort of middle thread - some middle way - through all that, which is like the aspiring Bodhisattva.

S: That is the real Bodhisattva life. (pause) Maybe the two extremes are (1) where you're fully immersed in practical activities, and identified with them, and rather harassed and worried, so that you lost sight of the wider horizons of aesthetic appreciation, and (2) where you are, as you said, spaced out, and can't do anything of a practical nature, and are lost in a state that is positive in a way but very one-sided and not, perhaps, a state of real aesthetic appreciation. (pause) One needs the middle way. You need this smaller cycle of practical activities to which you're not attached, which does not harass you, and over which you don't worry, within the much wider circle of the mandala of aesthetic appreciation - though of course the aesthetic appreciation interpenetrates all your practical work, and you enjoy doing that too. In fact you can be working all the time, busy all the time, but still be in contact with that wider mandala.

But most people would find that very difficult, I think. [From time to time] they would need a rest, as it were, maybe a sojourn in the country, where it is more easy to establish that sort of contact just because you are in the country and, therefore, more tangibly in the midst of nature [which, on its own level, can serve as a reminder of the higher containing reality of the mandala].

John: [In the country you can] re-establish perspectives and orientation, [76] and then you are in the mandala.

Sagaramati: Quite an important phase is when you go from one to the other, as you do when, on finishing a retreat, you go back to the centre where you're working. On such occasions there's quite an important change in one. (murmurs of agreement) Last Friday, for instance, when I went back to Pundarika and started answering the phone, and things like that, I felt real resentment. I really didn't want to have anything to do with it.

S: Perhaps you hadn't had enough of the aesthetic appreciation - hadn't really saturated yourself in it so that, when you came back and had to answer the phone, you could enjoy doing even that. You hadn't restored the balance sufficiently, perhaps. [But, important as it is to go away into the country from time to time,] we also have to restore the balance a bit every day. As you know, we get a chance to do that when we're meditating, or at an Order meeting. For this reason, don't let Order meetings slide into Council meetings: that means the smaller circle encroaching on the greater mandala. Moreover, when you're mediating don't use that quiet hour for thinking out practical problems, otherwise again there will be an encroachment. (pause) An Order member once told me that he did just that, and he seemed to think it a very good way of utilizing the meditation hour - and maybe it is, once in a while - but generally speaking it's quite dangerous to do this.

The Bodhisattva lives an aesthetic life rather than a practical life. He does function practically: he does useful things; but he enjoys them. This is why it is said that the Bodhisattva plays. This concept of the Bodhisattva - even the Buddha - as playing is quite traditional. There is a work called the Lalitavistara or 'Extended Account of the Sports (Jalita) [of the Buddha]' which is a rather late and legendary - and highly embellished - life of the Buddha. But why 'sports'? Because [according to the Mahayana] the activities of his life were not something done compulsively, or carried our compulsively: they were spontaneous and free and natural, just like a child playing. This is sometimes called lila in Indian thought: the play, or the game.

Peter: Lila yoga is the highest yoga, isn't it? [77]

S: According to some [Hindu] schools, yes. In Buddhism - in Tantric Buddhism - it's the sahaja state, the completely natural state, the innate state, the completely spontaneous state. In modern Indian spiritual life the concept of lila is very prominent. In fact, the spiritual life itself is thought of as lila - as a sort of purely spontaneous upwelling of spiritual [78] energy that is, in a way, purposeless. [In Mahayana Buddhism] the Bodhisattva is supposed to function like this. It's what

in Mahayana literature is called the anubhogacarya, the 'spontaneous life' of the Bodhisattva. Thus in addition to the better known brahmacarya, dharmacarya, and bodhicarya, you also have this term anubhogacarya. Brahmacarya is the pre-Buddhist term [which was taken over by early Buddhism]; dharmacarya is the Buddhistic, especially the 'Hinayanistic,' term, [sam-]bodhicarya is the [general] Mahayana term; while anubhogacarya is the later Mahayana term. [The series culminates in the concept of] the spontaneous life of the Bodhisattva. It's also interesting that in Sanskrit fine arts are called lalitakala, the 'playful arts,' because they're not utilitarian. The difference between work and play is that play is not necessary. Play doesn't achieve any utilitarian purpose. It's not harnessed to any goal, it's just play, just a spontaneous uprising - a spontaneous expression - of energy. The fine arts are like that. They represent something over and above what is necessary in the utilitarian sense. You can live without the arts. You won't starve, you won't die, if there's no art in the world, no fine art. It's superfluous. It's a luxury, in a sense. That's why it's so necessary. It's necessary because it's completely useless, you could say. (laughter) So the Bodhisattva's life is like that, and that's the life that is depicted in these [Perfection of Wisdom] texts, really: the useless life. That's why it's so useful. (laughter) You need these useless things.

When you are really happy, and in a way really yourself, and you've got nothing in particular to do, and your energy is sort of surging up - well, you just go and dance around the lawn. (laughter) And that's where all your meditation and study culminates, you know: when you dance around the lawn. (laughter) You're sort of being yourself, as it were. Then someone [comes along and] says, 'Come on, what are you wasting your time like that for! There's work to get on with.' But you know, that's putting the cart before the horse, really [or rather, the horse behind the cart]. Someone was talking to me recently about the fact that he didn't seem to have any particular talent he could use, and which would be useful. Not that he was exactly troubled, but he was certainly wondering about the matter. I told him, 'Think in terms of your being simply an unspecialized human being.' We tend to think that if you haven't got a particular talent, and can't make yourself useful [in some way], then there's something wrong with you: you're useless. You can't type, you can't keep accounts, you can't give a lecture, you can't even paint or draw, and you don't play an instrument: you're completely useless. You can't even make a cup of tea properly. (laughter) But consider: this apparently useless human being is the product of millions upon millions of years of evolution. Why was there this evolutionary process going on for millions upon millions of years? Just so that you could be there and do nothing. You're the result. You're the goal. You don't have to justify your existence by doing things which are useful. You yourself are the justification: the fact that you sit there, or dance there, doing nothing - being completely useless. All that you can really be said [79] to exist for the sake of is some higher form of human life itself. You weren't brought into existence, after all these millions of years of evolution, just to sit down at a typewriter, or to keep accounts, or to go and give a lecture. You are the justification of that whole process. You are an

end in yourself, barring, of course, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that you can develop into. Don't be ashamed of just sitting around doing nothing. Glory in it. Do things spontaneously, out of a state of inner satisfaction and achievement.

Padmapani: In that case, Bhante, you've got to be free from projections, and also guilt.

S: Oh yes. How can you be spontaneous if you're riddled with guilt? That's how people get at you: they work on you're feelings of guilt. You shouldn't allow them to do that. It's emotional blackmail. 'Look how hard I'm working. Don't you feel bad just sitting there doing nothing, letting me do it all?' You should say, 'No, I feel fine.' (laughter) 'I'm really enjoying seeing you do it.' (laughter) You should never work on somebody else's feelings of guilt: that's really very bad indeed. In fact, it's one of the worst things you can do - to manipulate people by playing on their feelings of guilt. If you want to get them to do things, get them to do things by encouraging them and arousing their energies, so that they'll want to do something. Don't try to get things done by making them guilty, so that they feel afraid not to [do what you want], or that they've got to [do it]: then the idea of duty comes in [in a negative sort of way]. Don't take all these [Buddhist] activities too seriously. Suppose you are organizing things - raising funds, running classes, bringing people in, preaching the Dharma. All right: just take it all as good fun. It's your lila: it's your game, your play. Don't take it in such dead seriousness and earnestness that you lose sleep at night over it. It isn't worth it. (laughter) What sort of advertisement for Buddhism will you be, anyway, if you're weighed down with worry and [are] careworn. If you're not enjoying your Buddhist life, others may think that they may not [enjoy it either], and not want to get involved.

Graham: I was quite taken aback by that when I moved to Sukhavati. I had preconceptions of it being quite serious - of having an air of seriousness.

S: Seriousness is all right. They are serious [at Sukhavati]; but they're not solemn. Being serious doesn't mean solemn - that's a little leftover from Christianity, I think. You mustn't laugh in church; but you are allowed to laugh in the temple, or in the vihara. Not while the Buddha's preaching, of course - unless he makes a joke. [When you laugh] it's just an expression of your priti, your ecstasy and joy.

Sagaramati: We tried that last week on our retreat. I mentioned that people were very gloomy in the shrine room, and said, 'Don't be like that. It's not a church we're in here.' After that I couldn't get them to shut up. (laughter) [80]

S: The other extreme. Again, I sometimes wonder why people like to have all the lights out during puja. It's all right sometimes, but it seems [to have become] almost axiomatic that for the puja you have to plunge everything into gloom. Personally I like a brightly lit puja: it seems more appropriate ... that you have all the lights on - if anything, extra lights - and make everything bright and attractive. This gloom is a sort of leftover from the 'dim religious light' [John Milton, Il Pensoroso, tr.] of Christianity - [from the idea] that if there's a

dim light, and lots of shadows, it's more religious. But that isn't the Buddhist view at all. We don't want hilariousness, or anything of that sort. We certainly don't want giggling during the meditation: that means just a loss of energy, with everything leaking away. But there's no reason why you shouldn't be right and positive, cheerful and happy, and joyful, and all the rest of it. Then you'll be much more likely to develop metta. How can you develop metta when you're gloomy? It's not possible. If you develop metta you will see everything as much more beautiful, and you will live much more in the mandala.

Sagaramati: What I meant earlier was that there's a difference in the way of functioning [in the city and on a country retreat]. [When you come back to the city] it's as though you have to start functioning in a way that hadn't been in operation for the last week, and at first it's difficult.

S: Putting it in extreme terms, this is the opposition or antithesis between aesthetic contemplation and practical activity. It's very difficult to switch from the one to the other. The only way one can resolve the difficulty is by learning to be able to function practically without losing the aesthetic contemplation. That's the only way. So long as you have to switch over from the one to the other, and [so long as] the presence or experience of the one implies the absence or the non-experience of the other, there will always be that difficulty of transition. The only way you can resolve that is by being able, eventually, to carry over the aesthetic experience into the practical activity without losing it. This is exactly what the Bodhisattva does, as depicted in the Perfection of Wisdom. (pause) And it is very difficult. [In the meantime] you can help it by adopting this more light-hearted attitude towards practical things. They're not all that serious. Suppose you don't manage to have that next jumble sale. Well, so what? The world is not going to come to an end, the Movement is not going to fold up, even if you don't get that extra hundred quid. You'll manage, no doubt. You'll get the money in some other way. Don't take it too much to heart. Don't take it too seriously. This doesn't mean acting in an irresponsible way. Again, that's the other extreme that you've got to avoid. [You've got to [81] be sure you're] not being irresponsible or careless or unmindful. [You should be] doing you best, doing absolutely everything that you can, but if it doesn't come off, all right, never mind, don't give it a second thought, you've done your best. But do your best, and then just leave the matter. If it succeeds, it succeeds; but if it doesn't, it doesn't. But [whatever you do] don't lose your overall attitude of enjoyment and aesthetic appreciation of things in general.

Padmapani: Bhante, on the running of centres, and this includes mitras as well...

S: You don't run mitras, do you? (laughter) They do the running: you're sort of just hobbling along afterwards. (laughter)

Padmapani: All right, the Order members hobbling along afterwards. I was thinking it would be a good idea for people coming back from retreat to take over the [local FWBO] centre almost completely, and let the people who'd been

running it for a while move out, so to speak. The latter would go away on retreat and come back refreshed in their turn and take over again. In this way the general energy is [kept] circulating.

S: That's quite a good idea. If you've got people with lots of energy [who are] just back from retreat trying to work with people who, since they've been [working] in the city for a long time, don't have so much energy, that is a very difficult situation, isn't it? [Because you've got] people of different levels of energy trying to work together. If you're all on the same level of energy, then it's quite easy. I mean, if you're all low in energy you can get along together; if you're all high in energy you can get along together - even more so, of course. But if some are high and some are low it's very difficult. If some are high and some are low, what happens? What do those who are low in energy try to do to those who are high in energy?

Several Voices: Bring them down.

S: They try and bring them down. And those who are high in energy, what do they try to do with those who are low in energy? (pause) Well they try, sometimes, to bring them up; but sometimes they just get irritated and impatient. [82]

Padmapani: By even trying you actually drain your own energy in a way.

S: If they're only just a little bit lower in energy then you, yes, you can bring them up; but if they're a lot lower it's quite difficult. It's a drain on you and they resent it, because [in some cases] they just haven't got the energy: they need a rest. It might be a good idea to have half the people needed for running a centre actually there and the other half away on retreat, and to alternate them so that when those who have been away on retreat come back they take over completely. In this way there's no disparity of energy levels.

Padmapani: It has to be done on a regular sort of basis, so that you get a good flow.

S: There are probably enough of you at Pundarika, for instance, to be able to do things in this way. Anyway, it's an idea. It's a good way of doing things - though it would presuppose having quite a few people.

Padmapani: I think that if it was going to function at all on a big scale it would have to be worked out really carefully.

Mike: It takes a lot of the spontaneity out of it, though, doesn't it? I mean, if you don't feel particularly alive, then you mightn't want particularly to do something like going on retreat.

S: When one says go on a retreat, one doesn't necessarily mean an organized retreat, but the opportunity of retiring into the country - to a retreat centre - where you could organize your own retreat as you wanted and either read, or meditate, or sleep, or go for walks, or [have] any combination of these things.

Padmapani: It would be quite a good situation, because the person who didn't want to [go on retreat], whose energy was still there, could still stay [in the city].

S: Yes, they would have the opportunity. No one should feel sort of trapped: 'Oh my god, we've got to be running classes for the next two or three years!' No one should be in that situation. You can't possibly run classes properly in that kind of way.

Anyway, maybe we should wind up this section now. I think we've got a little more closely to grips with what the Bodhisattva is actually like and what he does. We haven't got far away from the text really, though it might have seemed like that. In a way we've gone into it more deeply, but a bit obliquely, as it were, not very straightforwardly - sort of winding into it. Any final questions before we close? (long pause) [83]

The Bodhisattva doesn't worry about Buddhism, you could say. He's not puzzled by technical points of Buddhist thought. (long pause) One could summarize what I've been saying in this way: One should be useful - [but useful] only within the much larger context of complete uselessness. (laughter) The Tao Teh Ching goes into this sort of thing quite a bit, and the Taoists generally. They say that the enlightened man, the man of Tao, is like a great tree, which is so big that it's good for nothing. The branches are too thick for making axe-handles, and so on. It's completely useless; it can't be used. Even so, one should try to be too big to be used. [84]

All right we've come as far as verse 16. Verses 16-21 are headed 'Three key terms defined' Let's read these verses one by one in turn around the circle, then discuss them as a group.

"16. What is the reason why we speak of 'Bodhisattvas'? Desirous to extinguish all attachment, and to cut it off, True non-attachment, or the Bodhi of the Jinas is their future lot. 'Beings who strive for Bodhi' are they therefore called.

"17. What is the reason why 'Great Beings' are so called? They rise to the highest place above a great number of people; And of a great number of people they cut off mistaken views. That is why we come to speak of them as 'Great Beings'.

"18. Great as a giver, as a thinker, as a power, He mounts upon the vessel of the Supreme Jinas. Armed with the great armour he'll subdue Mara the artful. These are the reasons why 'Great Beings' are so called.

"19. This gnosis shows him all beings as like an illusion, Resembling a great crowd of people, conjured up at the crossroads, By a magician, who then cuts off many thousands of heads; He knows this whole living world as a mock show, and yet remains without fear.

"20. Form, perception, feeling, will and consciousness Are ununited, never bound, cannot be freed. Uncowed by his thought he marches onto his Bodhi, That for the highest of men is the best of all armours.

"21. What then is 'the vessel that leads to Bodhi'? Mounted upon it ones guides to Nirvana all beings. Great is that vessel, immense, vast like the vastness of space. Those who travel upon it are carried to safety, delight and ease."

There are quite a number of interesting points touched on in this section though on the whole we don't seem to be going into things quite so profoundly as in the previous section. All right, we start off in a quite simple straightforward, not to say easy, manner. We're concerned initially with the meaning of the term Bodhisattva. "What is the reason why we speak of Bodhisattvas, desirous to extinguish all attachment and to cut it off, true non-attachment of the Bodhi of the Jinas is their future lot, beings who strive for Bodhi are they therefore called." You may remember that when we were going into the Aryapariyesana Sutta we noticed that the Buddha refers to himself before his enlightenment as Bodhisattva. And Bodhisattva clearly meant the Buddha himself at that time, when he was bent upon Enlightenment. So bodhisatta is the Pali word, the Sanskrit form seems to have come later. Now you can take Bodhisatta as meaning either a bodhi-being or one who strives for bodhi. You can either take satta as meaning being or as meaning striving, they are the same in Pali. But they are different in Sanskrit. [85]

If you take Bodhisattva as meaning one who strives for bodhi, you should make the equivalent Sanskrit form Bodhisakta, but if you take it to mean bodhi-being, it becomes Bodhisattva. Actually originally it meant Bodhisakta but they took it to be Bodhisattva, that is how we get Bodhisattva, but strictly speaking it is more likely that the original meaning was Bodhisakta and therefore Bodhisattva means not one who is a being of bodhi or bodhi being, whatever they may mean, but simply one who strives for bodhi, one who strives for the enlightenment of a Buddha. So

"What is the reason why we speak of Bodhisattvas? Desirous to extinguish all attachment, and to cut it off, True non-attachment, or the Bodhi of the Jinas is their future lot. 'Beings who strive for Bodhi' are they therefore called."

Bodhi is defined as non-attachment. The Bodhisattva strives to get rid of attachment, therefore he strives for non-attachment. He strives for bodhi, therefore is he called Bodhisattva, one who strives for the enlightenment of a Buddha. This is relatively simple and straightforward. It's interesting that bodhi is defined as true non-attachment. Why do you think we get that definition in this verse? Why not describe it as supreme knowledge or supreme bliss; why true non-attachment?

Alan Angel: Because it is going beyond even the words, the ideas, the concepts as in a way that was emphasized in the last section.

S: Yes, one could look at it like that. Perhaps that is the force of true non-attachment: not just non-attachment to worldly things, not just knowledge, not just non-attachment to pleasures, but non-attachment to ideas, non-attachment to the teaching itself as doctrinally formulated, non-attachment in that more profound sense. You could take it another way, a more simple and practical

manner in the sense that attachment is what we immediately come up against when we start trying to lead a spiritual life, when we start trying to develop. So inasmuch as attachment is what we immediately come up against, we cannot but think of the goal of enlightenment as a state of non-attachment, a true non-attachment. Probably the best translation of Bodhisattva is one who is bent upon enlightenment, or even one who is orientated in the direction of enlightenment. One could even render Bodhisattva in the sense of Bodhisakta as one who is capable of enlightenment. In modern Hindi for instance, sakta means can. If you want to say I can do it, you say 'me sakta ho'. It is the same word, sakta, which signifies capacity, or energy or power, capability. In the Mahayana of course every Buddhist to use that term is regarded as a Bodhisattva in the sense that every Buddhist, every Mahayana Buddhist, that is to say at least theoretically, at least in principle, accepts the Bodhisattva ideal. So they are regarded as Bodhisattvas. But one could take it in a rather different way and use the term Bodhisattva in a, as it were, non-Mahaynaistic sense, simply to mean [86] someone who is bent upon bodhi, someone who has bodhi as his ultimate goal, someone who is striving to attain bodhi or enlightenment. So if you took it in this very general way, not in any specifically Mahayana sense, then you could very well use Bodhisattva instead of Buddhist. A Buddhist, as we usually say, is simply one who is striving to become Enlightened, and whose Going for Refuge means that. So if one wants to avoid the word Buddhist one might perhaps fall back upon, as it were, a non-sectarian usage of Bodhisattva.

Voice: What does arhant mean?

S: Well an arhant is one who has attained bodhi. In the Pali texts the distinction is sometimes made between the bodhi of the Buddha and the bodhi of the arahat, by saying that the arahat's bodhi is what is called anubodhi, which means after bodhi or subsequent bodhi, in the sense that the Buddha attains first, the arhant attains subsequently, afterwards, by following the teaching of the Buddha, by treading the path shown by the Buddha. But the bodhi is the same. The Buddha gained it by his independent efforts without anyone to show him the way. The arhant attains it after being shown the way by the Buddha, and following that way he attains the same bodhi. So on the early Pali texts there isn't that distinction between the bodhi of the Buddha and of the arahat, which came probably later to be introduced. And the Buddha says, when he sends out the first sixty disciples, 'I, O monks, am free from all bonds, human and divine. You too, O monks, for the weal and the happiness of many people…' etc. So clearly in passages of this sort, no distinction is made between the enlightenment gained by the Buddha, experienced by the Buddha, and the enlightenment gained and experienced by the disciples. But as time went on and there came into existence perhaps an increasing tendency to, as it were, glorify the Buddha, his enlightenment was, as it were, a very special enlightenment, as sort of supererogatory enlightenment, and in comparison the enlightenment of the arhant came to be regarded as something less. So in the end we find the Mahayana saying: don't aim at the lesser enlightenment of the arhant, aim at the superior enlightenment of the Buddha. But that exhortation really rests

upon a false antithesis, because the arhants did aim at the enlightenment of the Buddha in the Buddha's own day, and that apparently is what they attained; they attained anubodhi, which was exactly the same as the bodhi of the Buddha, the only difference was in the mode of attainment - that they attained it by following his instruction, whereas he attained it without gaining instruction about that from anybody.

Voice: Where does the word arhant come from? [87]

S: The word arhant is a pre-Buddhistic term. The literal meaning is 'one who is worthy, one who is worshipful', and it seems to have been used originally as a mode of address, like as we say 'his worship, the Mayor', just in that sort of way. But in the early days of Buddhism it came to mean someone who was spiritually worthy. But it still wasn't using the word in a very precise sense. Later on, perhaps still within the lifetime of the Buddha, it came to have the technical sense of a disciple who had gained enlightenment, though the Buddha himself was still called arahat viz: 'namo tasa, bhagavato, arahato, sammasambuddhasa'. But eventually 'Buddha' came to be very much distinguished from arhant and 'Buddha' was regarded as the higher, and arhant as the lower, ideal. In a way the Mahayana gets back to the original Buddhist position, though by a rather roundabout route that there is just one goal for all, which is simply enlightenment. And this is also what the Saddharma-Pundarika says.

So, "What is the reason why Great Beings are so called?" Great Beings is a synonym for Bodhisattva in Sanskrit, and very often in the Perfect Wisdom texts Bodhisattvas are referred to as Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas as a sort of long compound term. In late Mahayana thought it is very often said that a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva is a Bodhisattva who has attained at least the eighth bhumi. Bodhisattvas are called Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas from the eighth bhumi onwards; that may be a later scholastic refinement. "They rise to the highest place among a great number of people." What does this suggest?

Voice: They are very special.

S: Yes, it suggests that ordinary people are very numerous but that Bodhisattvas are few and far between, that Bodhisattvas are very rare. So this is why Bodhisattvas are called Mahasattvas, great beings, in the sense that they are special, almost unique.

Padmapani: Is there a hierarchy of Bodhisattvas?

S: In a sense there is, you could say there is a hierarchy of Bodhisattvas because there are the ten bhumis, the ten stages of the development of the Bodhisattva, i.e. some Bodhisattvas of the first bhumi, some of the second, and so on. But the Bodhisattvas who have attained the eighth, ninth, and maybe the tenth, because in the tenth you become a Buddha, these are called Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas. So there is a hierarchy of Bodhisattvas, just are there is a hierarchy of the arya-pudgalas, the stream entrant and so on. But at this early stage this distinction does not seem to have been made. So it also suggests that the Bodhisattva is

the individual. The many make up the group, and obviously you have to be an individual to make up your mind to set out for enlightenment. "So they rise to the highest place among a great number of people." The highest place meaning [88] presumably the place of a Bodhisattva or a Buddha. "And of a great number of people they cut off mistaken views. That is why we come to speak of them as 'Great Beings'." So in this particular line, the third line, the "cut off mistaken views" seems to refer to a special function of the Bodhisattva. It is one of the things that makes him a Bodhisattva. And not only helping people, but helping them in this very special way, helping them cut off mistaken views, miccha ditthis, false views, wrong opinions. I take it everybody appreciates the importance of cutting off or getting rid of mistaken views. I think this has been mentioned quite often. And then, "Great as a giver, as a thinker, as a power, he mounts upon the vessel of supreme jinas." So he is great as a giver. This very very much emphasized: the Buddha's, the Bodhisattva's, practice of dana, dana being the first of ten paramitas. Dana meaning of course giving or generosity. So he is great as a giver. Sometimes it is said if you can do noting else, at least practise dana. Even if you cannot practise the precepts, even if you cannot meditate, even if you don't enjoy the puja, even if you don't know anything about Buddhist philosophy, never mind, at least if you practise giving, at least if you can be generous, there is hope for you, in fact considerable hope. Mahayana texts go into this question of giving at great length, great detail. I won't try to do that now. He "great as a giver" and "as a thinker". I wish I had the Sanskrit text to see what the word is, but what do you think it means? He's no intellectual surely?

Voice: He is able on his own to work out the reason for existence, so in that sense he was the ultimate thinker.

Padmapani: Wouldn't that also mean that he'd be intelligent in that sense of applying the right means for the person who you are trying to help ...

S: Could be.

Alan Angel: Fully realize the Dharma.

S: There is the very important aspect: to be able to put the Dharma across you must have some capacity to handle concepts, some skill in the handling of concepts. "Great as a power". What does that suggest?

Voice: Bodhicitta.

Voice: To be able to get things going around you. Spark other people off.

S: Yes, but a power? It doesn't say a powerful person.

Voice: Source of energy?

Voice: Reality, his self is not in the way.

S: Yes, it is in a way an impersonal energy, it suggests that as a power, as a sort of impersonal energy, not [that] it is impersonal in a cold scientific [89]

sense; it is not impersonal in the sense that electricity is impersonal. It is sort of supra-personal, and that is what I've sometimes said in connection with the bodhicitta. I've mentioned that according to some of the texts the bodhicitta is not be included in the five skandhas. That is to say it is not to be included among the constituents of ordinary personality. Therefore the bodhicitta is something transcendental, and the arising of the bodhicitta is not anybody's as it were individual thought, not everybody's individual sort of volition. It is more like, as it were, an impersonal spiritual power or impersonal supra-personal, transcendental energy that as it were manifests through the individual. Though at the same time in a sense it is that individual's trust and deepest nature. So in this sense the bodhicitta is a power, and therefore the Bodhisattva is the being in whom the bodhicitta has arisen is also a power. It is an impersonal energy, it is not egoistic will.

So, "He mounts upon the Vessel of the Supreme Jinas", vessel in the sense presumably of a ship. It is rather like the raft that carries one across the ocean of Samsara, or the Great River of Samsara, to the further shore. He's as it were the captain of the vessel of the Buddhas. "Armed with the great armour, he'll subdue Mara the artful. These are the reasons why Great Beings are so called." The great armour is his fearlessness. This is the usual explanation. So he is also called Mahasattva because he is armed with the great armour of fearlessness. "This gnosis shows him all beings as like an illusion resembling a great crowd of people, conjured up at the crossroads, by a magician, who then cuts off many thousands of heads; he knows this whole living world as the mock show, and yet remains without fear." So this gnosis shows him all beings as like an illusion. We have to be very careful how we use this word illusion. It is an illusion from, as it were, a metaphorical point of view. Everything that you see being there is there, is real in the sense that is it perceived, but it is not ultimately real. It is an illusion in that sense; not that it is like an illusion in the sense that it is a spot before the eye or anything of that sort. It is an illusion from the standpoint of reality itself. In later Yogacara thought, they distinguish three kinds of reality: there is parikalpita, paratantra, parinispanna. Have you come across these? I talked about them at length in the seminar on the Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism. Let's take paratantra first. This means depending on the other. Para is other, tantra is dependent, so it is other-dependent. It is that which is other-dependent. Dependent for what? Dependent for its existence on others. In other words, that which is not self-existent but which is dependent for its existence upon the causes and conditions which bring it into existence. This conditioned reality, or relative reality. Then there is parikalpita, which means that [90] which is imputed, that which is imagined, you could even say, that which is projected. This is what we call, in ordinary parlance, illusory. And then there is parinispanna, which means perfect. So the parinispanna means absolute existence, absolute reality. The paratantra means relative reality because it doesn't exist in its own right or on its own accord, but only when the right causes and conditions are there. Parikalpita is the illusory, that which is only imagined and doesn't even have a relative existence. So a distinction is made between

the paratantra and parikalpita. But from the metaphysical point of view, both paratantra and parikalpita are illusory. But only from the metaphysical point of view. From the common sense point of view, from the ordinary practical standpoint, paritantra is real, not illusory, but not ultimately real.

Alan Angel: I think you've given an analogy: a rope, the illusory is when you see it as a snake.

S: Right. The rope itself is the relative reality because the existence of the rope depends upon the constituent strands.

"Form, feeling, will and consciousness are ununited, never bound, cannot be freed, uncowed in this thought he marches onto his Bodhi, that for the highest of men is the best of all armours." So these are the five skandhas. The five aggregates are ununited, never bound, cannot be freed. The Abhidharma teaching, as it were, is that these have all been brought together by the force of karma, but the Buddha is in this text saying that in reality they are never ununited, never bound, cannot be freed; that one cannot think it that sort of way at all. The skandhas are unoriginated, they do not really come into existence, they are also like a magical show. So "What then" again "is the vessel that leads to Bodhi? Mounted upon it one guides to Nirvana all beings. Great is that vessel, immense, vast like the vastness of space. Those who travel upon it are carried to safety, delight and ease." There is one misunderstanding, as it were, to be cleared up here. You get the idea of the Bodhisattva climbing into this vessel that is presumably going to cross the ocean of birth and death, or the river of Samsara, and arrive at the other shore, and you also get reference to all the beings carried upon it to safety, delight, and ease. So what does that suggest? The Bodhisattva as it were steering, the Bodhisattva as the captain and everybody else like the passengers, what does that suggest?

Vessantara: Passivity, that you don't need to make the effort.

S: Passivity, yes, so in the end you have to think that you are going to be a Bodhisattva, not that you are going to be a passenger. But it has resulted, historically speaking, in the Mahayana countries in those who, as it were, take Buddhism seriously, the monks taking the Bodhisattva vows and the others, the lay people, sitting back and taking things rather [91] easily and being like the people who just sit in the ship and allow themselves to be carried across. They are just the passengers. So strictly speaking in the spiritual life there are no passengers, you cannot be a passenger. I think it may be, though it is very good that that is emphasized, the Bodhisattva helps others, but only too often the impression is left that the others who he helps are completely passive and are just carried across, lifted up by the Bodhisattva and carried into, bodily as it were, nirvana. So this is really not in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism, and not even really within the spirit of the Mahayana. So how does the Bodhisattva help beings, if he doesn't do it for them?

Voice: Skilful means.

S: Skilful means, but he helps them to help themselves. He shows them how they can do it for themselves. He doesn't do it for them, despite whatever impression may be created by passages of this sort. He sets an inspiring example, he leads the way, but they have to follow on their own two feet. He encourages, he exhorts, he helps, but he doesn't do it for them. I think one must recognize sometimes that there is a limit to what you can do for other people. After all, other people, even if they are not fully individual they've got a will of their own as it were. You can put things before them and ask them to consider certain things, think about certain things, you can try to inspire them, but you cannot do it for them. So in dealing with people if they don't do things as you would like them to do, or even as would be good for them to do, which you can see quite clearly, you have to be very careful not to allow that to make you feel frustrated. Otherwise in a sense it becomes a matter of your will against their will and that is not what the Bodhisattva's function is about at all. You often have to leave people free to make their own mistakes. They are mistakes, but if they refuse to heed your good advice and refuse to follow the path that you have pointed out, there is nothing you can do about it. You have to accept the situation. It is not even a question of accepting defeat; you've not been defeated because there is no sort of struggle going on in that sort of way. There is no competition in that sort of way. You're not responsible for other people. You are not responsible for their decisions. You are responsible for what you can do to help them, but in the last resort, the last analysis, they are responsible for their own lives, even as you are responsible for your own life. So even the Bodhisattvas cannot do it for you. You can do quite a lot for another human being, but you cannot do everything: you cannot meditate for them, you cannot develop insight for them, you can provide the right conditions, you can offer facilities, you can encourage, cheer up, you can do all these sorts of things, you can stimulate, spark off, but you cannot do it for them. So one has to accept that. [92]

And sometimes you feel very reluctant to do that, you may sometimes accept that you cannot do more, you've done everything that is humanly possible, but still that person is not accepting and refusing to be helped.

Padmapani: It is almost as if some people, when the pressure is stopped, when you are trying to will yourself to get that person to grow in a situation, when you do stop that pressure, sometimes they just start growing.

S: Well sometimes they may feel that it is your will against their will. And you must be very careful of that: that in the course of trying to help others, and advise other even, and encourage others, that it doesn't become a matter of your will trying to influence, even overcome, their will; because if people start picking up this from you they are going to resist. Do you see the difference? So the Bodhisattva of course, if he really is a Bodhisattva, will not do this sort of thing; that is part of his skilful means. They're very tactful. It's not his will against somebody else's will. This is why I've said recently that it is impossible for one Order member to bully another Order member. Do you remember this? Where did I say this? It was in a fairly recent Shabda or Convention report.

So if one Order member is speaking his mind to another, he is simply speaking his mind. They are not trying to exert pressure, so one should not take it in that sort of way. It is simply someone speaking his mind. So no individual as such can bring any pressure to bear on another individual as such. The fact that somebody is speaking strongly, vigorously, even loudly, saying what he really thinks, is not to be taken as him putting pressure on another individual or bullying another individual or trying to bend another individual to his will. He is just saying what he thinks. So one should not react, as it were, defensively, saying, 'Oh, he is bullying me.' So therefore I say how is it possible for one Order member to bully another Order member? An Order member is an individual by definition. So how can one individual bully another? How can you be bullied by another individual? If you feel that you are being bullied, either he is not being an individual or you are not being an individual or both. But if you are an individual and he is bullying you it won't bother you, If you are bothered it means that you are not being an individual - perhaps he isn't either, but you certainly aren't, if you feel bothered by what you take as his bullying of you. A real individual is not bothered by what seems to be bullying, or what may be bullying, because he knows that as an individual, pressure cannot be put on him. So if someone speaks his mind to you and you get all bothered and say, 'Oh he is bullying me or putting pressure on me, it means you are not really an individual. Perhaps he isn't either, but that is [93] another matter.

Alan Angel: So maybe individuals should be careful when they putting pressure on non-individuals?

S: An individual does not put pressure. That is the whole point. He does not put pressure. It may be felt or experienced as pressure but an individual is just being an individual. He is just saying what he thinks, saying what he feels. If you take that as putting pressure on you, that is your problem. Perhaps he ought to consider that, but that means he ought to limit, as it were, his individuality for your sake and be less of an individual with you because you cannot bear the impact of his individuality. You have to mitigate your individuality sometimes because certain people may be too weak to bear individuality. It may make them feel shaky and uncomfortable. But within the Order this certainly should not be the situation.

Padmapani: Bhante, For the umpteenth time, could you define what the individual is?

S: Well really the individual cannot be defined, because the individual is unique. But broadly speaking the individual is the person who is aware in the sense of self-awareness, who is able to accept and exercise responsibility, who is the embodiment of positive emotion, whose energies are liberated. I think no more need be said than that. That is probably quite enough. That is the individual.

Padmapani: It certainly seems to fit the situation, because if you are those things, then you just don't feel that sort of pressure.

Sagaramati: I disagree, because sometimes if you speak strongly and positively

and you can see another person taking it negatively, as pressure ...

S: Well that why I say sometimes you have to mitigate the force of your individuality. But because the other person is not an individual. So again, this should not be the situation within the Order. The Order is the place where you just shouldn't have to mitigate your individuality, because everybody within the Order should be an individual. So within the Order, of all places, you should feel free to speak your mind as an individual without anybody feeling pressured by that or bullied. Or speak your mind to another individual: you can say, 'I think you are wrong'; that is your conviction as an individual: that you, another individual, inasmuch as you are not perfect individual, inasmuch as you are not a fully enlightened individual, have done wrong in that instance, so I say you are wrong. So the other person, inasmuch as he is an individual, should be able to take that without saying, well, don't bully me, or I'm bring put under pressure and it is not fair, etc. He should be able to stand up to it and say well, no, I disagree. I don't think I did make a [94] mistake. I think you've misunderstood the situation. They should be able to stand up to each other in this way as individuals, without either of them feeling pressured and neither of them feeling bullied, and eventually sort it out: who is right and who is wrong. Maybe it's 50% right and 50% wrong in each case, but they'll sort that out. But not take refuge in this 'Well don't bully me or you're being authoritarian.'

Padmapani: I got a little confused whether in fact one says what one feels, which is in a way reactive but ...

S: When I say 'what you feel', I'm not thinking so much as expressing these split-off feelings, but speaking with the whole of your being, which includes your feelings as well as your thinking. Not just expressing your feelings in the sense of some split-off unintegrated part of yourself which is bound to be if it is split-off and highly reactive. I mean just speaking totally. Again that is a characteristic of an individual. He is integrated, relatively integrated. He's not a bundle of opinions, rather loosely connected with a bundle of emotions with lots of little ends hanging down. "So those who travel upon it are carried to safety, delight and ease". You just have to disagree with the text. No one is carried to enlightenment sort of piggyback on the Bodhisattva. It is quite impossible. There's no ship that is going to take you there. You are all captains. You are, as it were, taking one another.

Voice: Crew only.

S: Yes. [95] We also get this prefix maha or great in another well known compound word. What is that? Not only Mahasattva but Mahayana, also Mahaprajna, Mahakaruna, Mahasunyata: great. I remember my friend Mr Chen used to be quite fond of talking about the significance of maha. According to him maha signified sunyata. It wasn't to be taken in the sense of spatial extension, but in the sense of sunyata. So according to him Mahayana is the yana of sunyata, the Mahasattva is the being who has realized sunyata, and so on. So in the same way mahaprajna - the great wisdom - was not wisdom in the ordinary

way, from his point of view, Hinayana sense, but that wisdom that consisted in realization of sunyata. Similarly mahakaruna was not just our ordinary pity of compassion, that's to say me feeling compassion for you, or your feeling compassion for me, i.e. feeling it within a dualistic framework of subject and object, but a compassion which issued from a realization of sunyata in the sense of the voidness of subject-object distinction. So he always used to explain maha as signifying sunyata in that sort of way. So whenever you find the prefix maha you are to understand sunyata; that whatever followed that prefix, whether it was sattva or yana or prajna or karuna, was to be understood as transformed by the sunyata experience. Or as he used to put it 'as passed through the flames of sunyata'. Mahaprajna is that prajna which has passed through the flames of sunyata and purified thereby. And a Mahasattva is a being who has passed through the flames of sunyata and been purified thereby, and so on. That was his way of putting it.

Alan Angel: Was that just his way of expressing sunyata in connection with fire?

S: I have not come across it elsewhere. Though of course the general principle is of course a traditional one and way of thinking. But at least the expression of 'passing through the fires of sunyata' seems to be his own. At least he never referred to any source. You could also apply that to the great armour, the armour of voidness. Sunyata is the true protection as it were.

Sagaramati: This seems to link with what we were saying about the miccha ditthi, and what we said yesterday about reason, emotion ...

S: What did we say about reason and emotion?

Sagaramati: Well normally miccha ditthis are wrong intellectual views. So a miccha ditthi does have an emotional element.

S: I don't think that you can ever entirely separate reason and emotion. It seems clear from what the Buddha has said in various places in the Pali Canon that a miccha ditthi, a false view, is a sort of, in our terms, a rationalization for a basic attitude, a basic wrong attitude, which is as much emotional as it is cognitive. The wrong or false view is like a [96] symptom from which you can infer the presence of some deeply-seated disease, the disease being the wrong attitude. The Buddha himself seems to have clearly made that connection as when, for instance, the ucchedavada is connected with bhava-tanha. The ucchedavada meaning 'cutting-off-ism' - that when you die you are cut off, that is absolutely the end, nothing survives death - and this connected with bhava-tanha, non-existence. It is a sort of formulation of that basic attitude in conceptual terms, and in the same way the view of sassatavada, eternalism, that I shall go on living after death, that there is something unchanging and immortal that goes on. This is considered to be the conceptual expression of the basic attitude of bhava-tanha, thirst for existence. In other words you believe you will go on because you want to go on, or you believe that you will not go on because you don't want to go on. In this way the Buddha seems to have connected philosophies with emotions. So a wrong view is not simply an intellectual proposition that someone has arrived

at by quite disinterested objective intellectual means and it just happens to be wrong. No. It is the expression in conceptual terms of pseudo-rationality, of some very deep rooted basic attitude of that individual which in the case of the miccha ditthi may be given a purely conceptual expression, purely conceptual formulation. One cannot regard it as a purely intellectual phenomenon. The emotional element very much does enter in. There is a book written by a modern thinker along this sort of line. 'The Psychology of Philosophers' [Alexander Herzberg, 1929, tr.]. It is quite an old book, published at the beginning of the century, and it goes into this in much the same sort of way.

Padmapani: Would you say with the absence of eternalism and nihilism, because that is very much the same thing isn't it?

S: Yes, this ucchedavada is very often translated as nihilism.

Padmapani: One could say that following the middle way in that sense would be like the absence of false views?

S: That is very true, if it is really the middle way. The middle way itself may be held as a miccha ditthi. If you've got a temperamental inclination to compromise, to papering over differences, a reluctance to face up to genuine differences, and you call that the middle way, this comfortable compromise, the middle way of your belief in the middle way, your presentation of the middle way becomes a miccha ditthi. That is not the real middle way, the Buddha's middle way. So I'm afraid very often the middle way is misrepresented in those sort of terms as a way of compromise of half and half. I remember in this connection a question I was once asked in India at a public meeting by some rather clever caste Hindu: he said, 'Buddhism teaches the middle way, doesn't it?' So I naturally agreed. So he said, 'In that case truth is one extreme and untruth is the other, so shouldn't Buddhism teach that you should say something which was [97] neither true not false, a middle way between truth and falsehood? By saying that you should speak the truth, Buddhism isn't in fact being faithful to its own principle of the middle way, it is being one sided?'

Voice: Truth is the middle way, but the other two extremes are untruths.

S: I did in fact say that. The truth itself is the middle way and that the two extremes are exaggeration on the one hand and a minimization on the other. One saying too much and the other too little. And the truth was the middle way. Anyway this is just and example of how people do sometimes try to catch you out. So there are really no disinterested views, no purely objective views. In everybody's thinking there is a tinge of irrationality, there is a tinge of emotion. I don't think you ever get a thought without emotion. If you did you'd be schizophrenic. Or you'd be a human computer. Well I almost met one the other day, I happened to be sitting somewhere, and someone came up and started speaking to me, and we got talking and he seemed really quite odd, and I said to myself, well, in what way does the oddness consist? It seems quite strange, I've not met anyone like this for a long time. It seemed so odd the way he was communicating, and after a while I even got a little bit of a headache. Then it

suddenly struck me he was talking just out of his head, just out of his brain. Inasmuch as I move around within the circle of the Friends, I don't usually come across people like that. It was quite a strange experience. It was really like talking to a brain (laughter) not a human being. I remembered talking to brains before. This sort of strange, bloodless organ, discoursing, no blood, no bile, no guts, just this anaemic grey matter talking. Very weird. But even in the case of that apparently bloodless brain, there would have been very thin tenuous threads connecting it with its very, well probably repressed and stunted emotions. But the connection would probably not have been acknowledged. He was asking me about Buddhism, and he clearly thought that he was asking very objective scientific questions out of a disinterested love of truth.

Graham Steven: How would you get somebody back in touch with their emotions?

S: Well it is very difficult to generalize about this. It seems as though very often they have to go back into negative emotions first, before they can get into positive ones. I mean I won't be completely sure of that in all cases, but certainly in a number of cases that I have seen where people are cut off from their emotions, they have had to get back into negative emotions first.

Voice: Quite often you have to get them drunk or something like that first.

S: That is also not a bad way. (laughter) If people are a bit tongue-tied [98] a bit inhibited. I remember in the earlier days of the Friends, just to make a confession, sometimes people used to come up and see me at number 55 - this was four or five years ago - and maybe they'd been invited up for a meal and a talk, something like that. But sometimes they were so tongue-tied so I used to quietly say to Siddhiratna - who was living there then - 'for heavens sake go out and buy a bottle of something' which he quietly and quickly did and it always worked. (laughter) It was quite extraordinary, it never failed to work, the tongues started wagging and the inhibitions were loosened and people actually started talking and even communicating. It does not seem to be so necessary now. Just one little bottle. But as I said it doesn't seem to be necessary now; it might be with a few new people but certainly not within the regular circle. But I don't think even several bottles of wine would be enough permanently to unblock someone who was very seriously and severely out of contact with their emotions. Communication exercises certainly help, and one sees quite a lot of negative emotion expressed in the course of those, doesn't one, especially with the beginners.

Voice: Do you feel that yoga can help that?

S: I don't think so, no. It doesn't seem to help it in that way, or only very marginally. I think sometimes massage can help because very often people who are not in contact with their feelings are also not in contact with their bodily sensations and don't have much bodily awareness, as it were, don't experience themselves particularly. So sometimes that does help. Perhaps contact with the arts may do it, listening to music, playing a musical instrument.

Padmapani: Do you think sports could help?

S: I just don't know. I will say this, that one's emotions, especially one's stronger emotions, are usually bound up with other people. And it seems that usually one's emotions have to be worked out or brought out in connection with other people and things that you do on your own, not as it were confronting another person, are not nearly as effective. I think this is where the communication exercises are especially helpful. Or just talking with other people, interacting with other people. I think if you really are deeply blocked and very much out of contact with your emotions, it is because there is something quite seriously wrong with your relationships with other people and our whole attitude toward other people. And therefore that is the significant and helpful situation for you being with and working with and interacting with other people. I mean one experiences usually one's most powerful emotions in relation to other people, whether positive or negative. So if you are emotionally blocked, well that is where you are blocked usually with other people. [99] So that is where the damage was done and that is where it is got to be undone. If you have violent feelings of resentment, you haven't got them against nature in general or against trees and flowers; it is against people; it is against individual people that you have met and known and experienced in the course of your life, maybe when you were very young. So that expression of resentment, it seems, has to be experienced in connection with another person, expressed to another person, before you can really get it out and feel it.

Graham Steven: Sometimes it can be quite frightening to want to make that contact and just actually say how you feel.

S: Yes. But it seems without that resentment having come out and been consciously experienced it is very difficult to experience positive emotion. I won't say that it is impossible because if you get very much into meditation the negative emotions can be dissolved as it were without them being consciously experienced in that sort of way, and you can develop metta and relate to people very positively and powerfully without going through that negative phase. But if you are emotionally blocked badly, it is unlikely that you will be able to get into meditation to that extent to begin with.

Voice: There's been a great surge over the past five years ..(unclear).. group therapies ..(unclear).. where their gross emotional blockages can be literally seen in the person. Although I personally feel that some of these group things just add more layers upon the original emotional . . .

S: Well, many of them seem to encourage you to indulge in it. And they call it experiencing it thoroughly, and exploring your negativity, and all that sort of thing. You don't want to explore your negativity, you want to get rid of it as quickly as possible! (laughter)

Padmapani: That is the basis of psychotherapy isn't it? Exploring your repressed parts.

S: Well, it depends what you mean by exploring. If you mean repeatedly going over the same ground again and again, well I'd say that was quite useless. And this is what many of the encounter groups do. But psychoanalysis as such does not really purport to do that.

Padmapani: Is that in a sense a going back, so to speak, in time?

S: Well it is a going back without going forward. Going forward means having a positive ideal to which you orientate yourself. Well what is the purpose of going back and going into all this sort of material if, when you've won free from it, you haven't got any emotional goal to orientate [100] yourself toweards? And this is why many of these people just go round and round exploring it and exploring it. That's all they've got to do, they've no concept of any further step.

Padmapani: Sometimes it is as if every person I've met who's done psychotherapy, some of them for about six or seven years, most people at the end seemed to have decided it was just a waste of time. The only reason they kept it going was thinking that they were going to get something in the end. So it seemed like they come to a point where they realized that it could go on endlessly so they just gave it up.

S: Because it is not going on endlessly in a certain direction. It is going on round and round in a circle. That is what one must understand. It is the endlessness of the circle, not the endlessness of the open road. This is why you feel fed up with it after a while. You go along for a group, encounter-group, therapy session, and you get your anger out, you experience your anger, and then you go back and do the same thing next week and the week after that and the week after that. So what is the use of that? It is all right to do it once or twice and experience it. Yes, but then there is another step to be taken, which is a positive step. But they will meet this objection or criticism by saying, well we want to get it out thoroughly completely, every little bit. But I don't agree that is in fact what they are doing. I think that they are just indulging it and wallowing it in.

Voice: I think it covers up a lot which one doesn't see until you sit down in a quiet room and do a meditation exercise and are able to talk about it with another person and where somebody can see that in you, something that you have never seen before in yourself.

S: And I think also as soon as one can one must get away from the negative and occupy oneself with the positive. And if people are thinking and talking too much about their negative emotions and getting them out, a very odd sort of atmosphere develops which is not at all helpful. It is quite sort of sick and strained. That is why I say sometimes it is not very good to talk about negativity too much, pass on the positive as quickly as possible. But some of these people seem quite unwilling to do that. The positive, once you get to it, is the great dissolver of the negative.

Padmapani: It is very true in one sense, because when you talk to people about indulging in their negative emotion and that you want to stop, break off the

conversation, often people want to go on. They want [101] it is almost as if they will themselves, a process has started which sort of wants to get at something deeper but which is not satisfying.

Sagaramati: I think it is something deeper that wants to express itself. I think when you are being critical and things like that and a group of people are criticizing, often and you have to be very mindful, otherwise these emotions tend to sneak up and try to push themselves in.

S: I also think sometimes the group situation naturally creates the feelings it is supposed to be exorcizing. For instance, suppose people are getting at you, people in the group therapy, they are getting at you, they are telling you how horrible you are, or how ugly you are, how revolting you are, how repulsive you are, etc, etc; and you feel lots of anger and resentment. They say, ah yes, that is the anger and resentment you felt against you mother and father, come on, let it all come out. So they abuse you some more and you get more angry and so they say let it all come out, it is really coming out now! (laughter) But you are just being angry with them for what they are saying now. And they are just indulging and feeding that. That is what happens. I mean maybe there is a bit of residue, some lurking anger or resentment in you, against mother and father, but they take that as a starting point and they seem to build up more in the present situation. And indulging it in that way they say it has got a therapeutic and cathartic effect and is purging you of these old emotions, whereas actually they are producing them, creating them, in the present situation. So of course there is no end, but they can create them every week and you feel them every week, and then you are told, well, this all the past anger and resentment coming up and we are helping you to bring it up and bring it out and get rid of it. But no. They are creating it in you. I felt this quite recently when somebody who had been on one of these sort of weekends came and told me all about it, and it was clear to me that this is what was going on.

Alan Angel: But you think maybe once it might be helpful, if it is very blocked?

S: I think for an ordinary conventional person who is quite blocked to go along to an encounter group situation a few times could be quite positive and quite liberating. But then you have got to get away from it leave it behind and turn to something positive. So such groups and such activities do have their place, do have their function, but those who are engaged in them and those who are running them - and very often it is their way of life, even their livelihood - certainly do tend to overvalue them and very often not see beyond them. They have got a sort of stake in your negativity. [102]

Padmapani: I should imagine that could be quite difficult for those people who had broken through their negative emotions and you had a group built up with these sort of people. Because I've experienced this when I went along to a group, a so-called spiritual group, and I found that in the preliminaries the bigger blocks were being broken up, but there was a lot of sort of sexual play, a lot of flirtation, going on, flirtation using techniques such as massage, therapy, acupuncture,

(?)Aricha and similar ideas. And on one level I could see it could be healthy for people who had gone through big blocks, but then everybody was a bit sort of happy and peaceful and a bit stupid in a way, and did not have that clarity or that energy, that 'go'. And I could see that in a group situation that a person who was aspiring to try and get out of it could find it quite difficult. The group situation might pull you down in that level.

S: I noticed a few years ago [when] someone gave me a book about Esalen [the Esalen Institute, centre of the 'Human Potential Movement', in California, tr.], which is where a lot of the group therapy, and gestalt therapy in particular started. [Gestalt therapy was developed by Fritz Perls about 20 years before Esalen was founded in 1962, tr.] There were many illustrations and pictures of people doing exercises together and I noticed, in every single case, the people doing the exercises together were paired off, one man and one woman. So it seems to me that though they were in a way doing or trying to do things that liberated you from convention, etc. [but] they were still doing it within this very conventional framework. That you always have to have a partner of the opposite sex. So something much more radical is needed. I mean no doubt they break down certain conditionings, but the really deep-seated and deep-rooted ones they don't seem to touch at all. One of the conventions is of course that the nasty negative things are repressed, and what has to come out must be rather unpleasant; not love or joy or peace but resentment and anger and hatred, fear and depression. That seems to be a pure assumption. This is why I often say that it is the positive things that are repressed in fact, as much as the negative things. There is a lot that is positive in people that just doesn't get a chance to be expressed. But these sort of therapists seem to proceed on the assumption that what comes out, what has been repressed, must be negative.

Voice: I don't really know much about the groups but from what you've been saying, dwelling on the negative etc, it seems that they could hardly have any idea of growth whatsoever. And just this fact [that] there is this norm, which everybody is trying to attain...

S: Well they do call themselves growth groups. And it is called that: growth movement. But I think you are right, they don't have any conception of what growth is. It seems to me that people who go along [103] are mostly quite conventional people who want to let their hair down for a weekend and then go back to their ordinary jobs. So it is sort of adjustment therapy in a way. You don't break through because there is nothing to break through into. What if you want to give up your ordinary job etc, what can you do? You can only become a group therapist yourself. That is all you can do. Anyway it is quite an unpleasant subject, so let's leave it. If you don't know much about these groups, that is jolly good: 'where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' [Thomas Gray, 1747, tr.] and I am sure that you don't need them. Right let's go on to 'The transcendental nature of the Bodhisattvas'. This is quite a different subject and read round in the same way, verse by verse and then we'll discuss the whole of it.

The transcendental nature of Bodhisattvas

"22. Thus transcending the world, he eludes our apprehensions. 'He goes to Nirvana,' but no one can say where he went to. A fire's extinguished, but where, do we ask, has it gone to? Likewise, how can we find him who has found the Rest of the Blessed?

"23. The Bodhisattva's past, his future and his present must elude us, Time's three dimensions nowhere touch him. Quite pure is he, free form conditions, unimpeded. That is his practice of wisdom, highest perfection.

"24. Wise Bodhisattvas, coursing thus, reflect on non-production, And yet, while doing so, engender in themselves the great compassion, Which is, however, free from any notion of a being. Thereby they practise wisdom, the highest perfection.

"25. But when the notion of suffering and beings leads him to think: 'Suffering I shall remove, the weal of the world I shall work!' Beings are then imagined, a self is imagined - The practice of wisdom, the highest perfection, is lacking.

"26. He wisely knows that all that lives is unproduced as he himself is; He knows that all that is no more exists than he or any beings. The unproduced and the produced are not distinguished, That is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

"27. All words for things in use in this world must be left behind, All things produced and made must be transcended - The deathless, the supreme, incomparable gnosis is then won. That is the sense in which we speak of perfect wisdom.

"28. When free from doubts the Bodhisattva carries on his practice, As skilled in wisdom he is known to dwell. All dharmas are not really there, their essential original nature is empty, To comprehend that is the practice of wisdom, perfection supreme." [104]

S: So these verses are concerned chiefly with the transcendental nature of Bodhisattvas. When you say that the Bodhisattva is transcendental, you mustn't think you've understood what the Bodhisattva is like. When you say that the Bodhisattva is transcendental, it means you cannot understand him at all. "Thus transcending the world, he eludes our apprehension." You mustn't think we've understood him because we've understood that he transcends the world.

"'He goes to Nirvana,' but no one can say where he went to. A fire's extinguished, but where, do we ask, has it gone to? Likewise, how can we find him who has found the Rest of the Blessed?

"The Bodhisattva's past, his future and his present must elude us, Time's three dimensions nowhere touch him. Quite pure is he, free form conditions, unimpeded. That is his practice of wisdom, highest perfection."

I think one can bring this right down to earth rather quickly and say that not only is the Bodhisattva not apprehensible, the individual as such is not apprehensible. To the extent that someone is an individual, to that extent you

cannot apprehend them, cannot understand them, in a way cannot know them, What do we mean by knowing another individual?

Sagaramati: Seeing them in terms of oneself?

Voice: It is more being able to predict.

Voice: In terms of your experience.

Kuladeva: Wouldn't you be then seeing yourself through someone? You wouldn't be seeing them as they really are.

S: Yes, it would be seeing them as they really are. When you really see an individual as an individual you are seeing him as he really is. Is it possible therefore for someone who is not an individual to see another person who is an individual? Not really. So if someone is more of an individual than you are, to introduce the notion of degrees, is it possible for you to know him fully as an individual? So therefore if you are not a Bodhisattva, even though you may be well on the path you cannot know a Bodhisattva, who is the sort of individual par excellence. There's another way of looking at it: What is knowledge? When we say that we know something, what do we mean?

Voice: We've experienced it before. It fits in with our conceptions.

S: Yes, but what are these conceptions? These conceptions are usually categories. If we say that we know something, we usually mean we can categorize it. Suppose therefore you say: What kind of flower is that? If you can refer it to its genus and its species, botanically speaking, you are said to know what sort of flower that is. So that knowledge is the classifiable. If you can clarify something, you've known it. But to be able to classify something, what does that imply? [105]

Kuladeva: You've just slapped a name or conception it.

Alan Angel: It would have to be a unique classification, in which case you couldn't classify it.

S: Things which can be classified - and there are certain things that can - are things which are one among a number of other similar things. So if something is classifiable, it means it belongs to a class. You can assign it to its class; knowing it means knowing which class it belongs to and which sub-class. In this way you are said to know it. But suppose it doesn't belong to any class? Can you know it in this way?

Voice: You can create a class especially for it.

S: But that is a contradiction in terms. To have a class consisting of only one thing. This is what called the infamous species. There is that idea in logic of things of which there are only one; the species is conterminous with the class. So an individual, by definition, is unique. He's unrepeatable. So how can you classify him? How can you classify an individual? You can only classify him to the extent he is not an individual. So his individuality as such eludes you. So if knowledge means being able to assign something or someone to a caste an

individual cannot be known, because an individual cannot be classified. So if an individual cannot be known in this sense or in this way - which is the ordinary sense of the term knowledge in the scientific sense - how is an individual to be known? Or can you know an individual?

Vessantara: Through direct experience.

S: Through direct experience one could say. But how do you experience an individual?

Voice: Emotions.

S: Well perhaps one could say one needs to experience an individual through one's emotions in a way. [106]

Voice: You only experience an individual by becoming an individual yourself.

S: Yes. First of all you have to be an individual yourself, otherwise you just don't see the individual at all. I'd say the most necessary thing was awareness. Knowing another individual means being aware of that individual, and that means looking and seeing. It means also emphasizing, not just a cold, clinical but, as it were, a warm feeling look; in other words an aesthetic look; in other words it comes back to what we were saying the other day: you must regard the other individual with metta, you must delight in the other person, that is the only way of knowing another individual. So a Bodhisattva can know another Bodhisattva, a Buddha can know a Buddha, an individual can know an individual, a non-individual cannot know an individual.

So "thus transcending the world he eludes our apprehension, he goes to nirvana, but no one can say where he went to.' If you are not an individual how can you know or understand the individual at all? To begin with you don't even see him, so how can you understand what he is doing? Or why he is doing it? He is just completely beyond your ken. So the Bodhisattva is like that. He is a superior individual; how can an even ordinary individual see him or know him or understand him? Or understand what he is doing or where he has gone? Or hasn't gone? Or will go or won't go? You know. You cannot understand at all."A fire is extinguished, but where, do we ask, has it gone to? Likewise, how can we find him who has found the Rest of the Blessed?" This point is brought [out] very strongly in the Pali texts with regard to the Buddha, the Tathagata: that he cannot be known, he cannot be fathomed, he cannot be classified, cannot be categorized. He is not a deva, not a gandharva, not a yaksa, he is not even a human being. He is just the Buddha. You cannot even say a Buddha, even that relegated him to a class. He is the Buddha. So there is only even one Buddha, you could say. How can there be two Buddhas? That would mean that the Buddha wasn't unique. He'd belong to a class, he wouldn't be an individual. So there is only one Buddha, really, in this sense, or rather, when you speak of plurality of Buddhas, you are not speaking of a numerical plurality, but of a metaphysical plurality, which is quite a different thing, whatever that might be. (laughter) I mean the Neoplatonists went into this: that the one as they called

the Absolute was not a numerical one. It is not the one that is distinguished from a two. Even our ideas of number are not to be applied to the Absolute. Even the very idea that Reality is one or many are that [there] are many Bodhisattvas, one or many Buddhas; these categories are quite inapplicable. So the Bodhisattva is unique. This is why the Buddha even says to somebody that it is inept to say of the Tathagata that after death he either exists or does not exist or neither or both, and then he went onto say that even in this life itself the Tathagata is unfathomable, not to speak of after death, that is to say when the physical body is no longer there. Even during his life it is not apt to say of him that he exists or does not exist, or both or neither. [e.g. Samyutta-Nikaya iii.118, tr.] Individuals cannot be categorized. And the Buddha is as it were the complete individual. So the more individual you are, the [107] less you can be categorized; the less you can be classified, the less you can be understood, the less you can be known in the ordinary way. So the more unpredictable you are, the more spontaneous, the more unreliable in a sense, because when you are being unreliable you are not necessarily being Bodhisattva-like, you may be being just reactive. So the transcendental nature of the Bodhisattvas is to be understood in this sort of way, not in the metaphysical way as one might think reading these particular verses. "Wise Bodhisattvas, coursing thus, reflect on non-production." Do they? Who says they reflect on non-production? How do we know? What does it mean to reflect on non-production? Really these words mean nothing to us at all. "And yet, while doing so, engender in themselves great compassion." Well luckily the text goes on to contradict itself, so you have got a paradox. So they reflect on non-production and at the same time they produce great compassion. In other words the paradox is warning us not to take these statements too literally. "Which is, however, free from any notion of a being. Thereby they practise wisdom, the highest perfection." This is only really saying 'You don't know what a Bodhisattva does, you cannot possibly hope to understand.' This is what it is really saying. I mean don't take it literally, that what he does is reflect on non-production and because he reflects on non-production he produces within himself a great compassion that happens to be free from any notion of a being, yes? Don't take it literally.

"Thereby they practise wisdom, the highest perfection" and you think you've understood all about it and all about the Bodhisattva, well of course you haven't at all, you've got no idea about it all at in the least. This is the danger of these sort of conceptual ways of putting things: you think you've understood because you understand the words. I remember quite a few years ago, a woman came up to me after a lecture and she gave me quite a shock, she was quite a good friend of mine, quite an elderly woman, and she said 'Bhante, I really did enjoy that lecture, but,' she said, 'in your lectures there is a great danger for people like me: you put it so clearly we think we have understood.' So this is very, very dangerous. If you can read and understand something and it is clear, and because it is clear you understand it, you think you have understood, but it is only the words that are clear, even the ideas are clear, but that does not mean that you have understood. So the Perfection of Wisdom texts are like that, you

can understand every word, you can understand all the ideas, though they are quite abstruse, you can work them out or you can get Dr Conze to do it for you, or Dr Suzuki or Dr Guenther, and you will think that you have understood, but actually you have not understood anything at all. When you have understood THAT, well then you are getting somewhere, but not before.

"But when the notion of suffering and beings leads him to think: 'Suffering I shall remove, the [108] weal of the world I shall work!' Beings are then imagined, a self is imagined - The practice of wisdom, the highest perfection, is lacking."

Can you really understand the Bodhisattva understanding that? Really, you cannot, well you think you do, that the Bodhisattva shouldn't think in this way or in that way, and if he does he won't really be practising wisdom; you think you've understood this and therefore you think you have understood how the Bodhisattva should behave, what his attitude should be, but actually you haven't. You are doing exactly the same thing that the Bodhisattva is, we are being told; not SUPPOSED to do, that by thinking what the Bodhisattva is SUPPOSED not to be thinking you think that you have understood what the Bodhisattva is not supposed to be thinking, which is completely ridiculous. (laughter) It is really quite absurd.

Sagaramati: (inaudible)

S: Well that is what is happening, but sometimes there is more pointing needed than you think. There is as it were a counter-pointing because you're taking the original pointing too literally so then there has to be a counter-pointing: pointing out [that] what has been pointed out has not to be taken literally, and it can go on like that to a third and a fourth time.

Voice: Like the old Zen story of the finger pointing at the moon.

S: Yes, except that you've got another finger saying, 'Don't take that finger pointing at the moon literally.' ..(unclear).. the finger is the teaching and the moon is the enlightenment and the finger is pointing to the moon, don't take the finger for the moon, and you take it all literally, that there is a moon which is ..(unclear).. and a finger which is the teaching, two separate things; and then it has to be pointed out [that] it is not to be taken literally at all. And so on, and there may have to be a third pointing out and a fourth. But it gets progressively more subtle. In the Buddha's own day, a very simple pointing out was all that was required, in later times they seem to have become much more subtly minded and a more subtle pointing out was required, which often took the form of a negation of the literal understanding of the original pointing out. And we see this happening again and again. And in this way Buddhist thought, or the history of Buddhist thought, goes on, So when we come to study it, we've got pointing out that a certain pointing out that a certain pointing out etc - about twenty times - is not to be taken literally, and we have got to go through all this. We're weighed down with all this. But actually it is not necessary; we can sometimes go right back to the Buddha's own original teaching, the first pointing out, and be quite contented with that, that may suffice, that may work for us.

We may not need to go through the whole course of Buddhist thought, [109] because maybe our minds aren't as subtle as medieval minds were, luckily. We don't need all that, we are much more simple minded, we are practical like the Chinese were. The Chinese got rid of all that, they swept it all away, especially in the form of Chinese Ch'an. The brought everything down to earth with a bump, you may say.

"He wisely knows that all that lives is unproduced as he himself is; He knows that all that is no more exists than he or any beings. The unproduced and the produced are not distinguished, That is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection."

Now we come to a verse which probably sums up the whole matter.

"All words for things in use in this world must be left behind, All things produced and made must be transcended - The deathless, the supreme, incomparable gnosis is then won. That is the sense in which we speak of perfect wisdom."

That is the sense in which we speak of Perfect Wisdom. So all words for things in use in this world must be left behind. All the words that we use - all the words of human language - are derived from sense experience, from reasoning upon sense experience, generalizations from such reasonings, but the transcendental is something by very definition completely beyond, so no words can apply to that. If you want to approach that, reach that, you have leave all words behind. So we may be applying words like wisdom, transcendental, Bodhisattvas; but they don't apply, they all just pointers, they are all just fingers, and sooner or later they have to be left behind. One might even have sometimes this experience that words don't mean anything at all in the ultimate sense, words have no meaning, they just not applicable. Well you cannot even say they not applicable, they are totally irrelevant. They have no meaning, you cannot attach any meaning to them, so how can you possibly apply them to anything ultimate? So all things produced and made must be transcended, the deathless, the supreme incomparable gnosis, is then won. That is the sense in which we speak of Perfect Wisdom. So while you are still talking about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and coursing in Perfect Wisdom and the non-produced etc etc, then you are still preoccupied with words and those thoughts purport to indicate, nowhere near at all. Not that you're only a little bit near but one could say that you are not near at all. There are no degrees, no gradations; to drop the thoughts and words completely is what one has to do.

"When free from doubts the Bodhisattva carries on his practice, As skilled in wisdom he is known to dwell. All dharmas are not really there, their essential original nature is empty, To comprehend that is the practice of wisdom, perfection supreme."

So when free from doubt the Bodhisattva carries on his practice. That is very relevant at many levels. You only carry on your practice when you are free from [110] doubts. He carries on his Bodhisattva practice because he is free from those particular special doubts to which Bodhisattvas are liable, doubts about

non-production etc. So we on our level, our own level, carry on our practice only to the extent that we are free from doubts. This is quite simple, quite blatant, quite elementary. Doubt inhibits practice, doubt inhibits energy, and the energy turned to doubt is of course faith, which stimulates the flow of energy.

Alan Angel: Doubt and indecision is one of the five hindrances. What is the cultivation of faith? Faith is the counterpart, so how does one cultivate faith?

S: Well, first one can say that faith is at least to begin with a form of an emotion. It means, therefore, that if one wants to cultivate faith, one must be in touch with one's emotions, and one must direct those emotions - or the whole emotional side of one's nature, or oneself one may say - towards those objects or those things that are the objects of faith. And faith essentially means Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. So you develop faith by as it were contemplating Buddha, Dharma, Sangha - by dwelling upon their positive qualities, as it were taking delight in the those qualities, admiring those qualities and as it were yearning for them. And so in this way you develop faith. Faith is always faith in or for something. Or you just think of something higher, something nobler, something more sublime and get a feeling for that. That is faith. So this section reminds us in a way not to be misled by words, not to take words too seriously, not to be misled by our own knowledge. You cannot know the Bodhisattva in the ordinary way, you cannot know what the Bodhisattva is like. He transcends all that. You could have a feeling for it, which would mean something like a direct awareness. But not to speak of the Bodhisattva, as I have said you cannot even know another individual in the ordinary way. So this brings us back to what we were talking about yesterday, this aesthetic appreciation as it were. You cannot know another individual but you can as it were aesthetically appreciate another individual - which of course implies contact and communication and awareness. You might remember that when we were talking about awareness, I have spoken about the four dimensions of awareness. Awareness of things, of nature, of objects; awareness of people, of other individuals; awareness of self; and awareness of reality. So again it is not a cold clinical awareness but this participatory awareness, as one might call it, an integrated awareness that can know another individual in this sort of way, it being assumed of that you yourself are an individual. This is why - in the case of the communication exercise - the first exercise is looking. How can you communicate with someone if you don't even [111] see them? But most people don't even think about that. You must first look and see, only then can you communicate.

Voice: Is physical contact a good form of communication?

S: I think probably one could say that physical contact isn't communication itself, but physical contact will very often break down the barriers to communication, especially when those barriers are emotional. This is why I mentioned the massage. But at the same time there must be the awareness that through the physical contact you are coming into contact with another individual, that you are becoming aware of another individual. It is not just one body coming into contact with another body, it is essentially one individual becoming aware

of another individual. Some people don't even feel themselves physically, not to speak of another person. Though I said that one cannot know another person unless one is oneself an individual, but it isn't necessary to take that as meaning that you have to become an individual yourself and then get to know an individual. The two can go on together, one individuality can as it were sharpen itself against another individuality like two knives against each other, one knife against the other. Your awareness of another individual will help the other individual not only to be aware of you, but also to be more aware of himself.

Voice: That awareness could be self-conscious.

S: Self-consciousness is quite a different thing, self-consciousness in the ordinary colloquial sense, that is to say self-consciousness and the sense of a kind of embarrassment. Why does one become self-conscious and what is self-consciousness, in a more colloquial sense? And how does it differ from the ordinary self-consciousness?

Voice: Guilt.

S: Guilt? How is that then? What would it actually mean? That you felt uncomfortable [with] someone looking at you as if they were seeing something wrong that you had done. So maybe your embarrassment is due to that. You become conscious of them seeing something that you would rather it is not seen. Do you think there are any other factors involved in self-consciousness?

Voice: Fear. Again when you are projecting yourself, others are looking at you and you are frightened of your impression, the impression that they are assessing.

S: That it might not be the right sort of impression? You might of course be afraid of them seeing something that you didn't want them to see. Fear could come in like that. Again that would be tied in with guilt.

Voice: It could be that you half realize that: that those things that you don't realize, you don't want other people to realize. [112]

S: Also it sometimes happens that someone seeing you will have a certain effect on you even in the present, and you may not exactly welcome that effect. For instance like in the communication exercises, someone really really looks at you - that may make you angry, but you may not want them to see that anger. You try to hide it, and try to hide it by looking away or by putting on a smile, the smile very often conceals anger. People who smile a lot are not necessarily people who feel happy and cheerful and well disposed. A smile very often unfortunately covers up anger, it becomes a sort of grimace, the person doing it has anger in their eyes but they have got a big smile.

Padmapani: You could say that a person who was self-conscious or who was developing a certain amount of mindfulness and who came into contact with a person who was just looking at them, it could be a good situation for breaking

down inhibitions, because it is very much like the other person acts as a mirror of your own.

S: Indeed, this is a very positive thing at the level of individuality itself when blockages are out of the way. This is why I say when you see another, your seeing of the other individual not only helps them to see you as an individual more clearly, but also to experience themselves as individuals more intensely. So it is like two mirrors, as it were, facing each other. So there can be an enhancement of mutual individuality which helps you to experience your individuality in this way. But you have to be careful here when you are communicating with members of the opposite sex and gazing into the eyes of the members of the opposite sex: it can take on a pseudo-romantic tone which can be a misuse of communication. I have seen this happening sometimes on retreats when we have done these exercises. It becomes even just a form of flirtation.

Padmapani: It is like when you come back from retreat and misuse the energy that you have accumulated on the retreat to go out for sensual gratification.

S: Right, but this is again something which happens very often after not only the retreat situation but any sort of positive situation: that if you are not careful, the energy that you have accumulated in the positive situation will leak away in various negative ways, like you may put it into anger even, something like that. The energy is there, but it does become important - once the energy is liberated - that it goes into the right channels, positive channels.

Padmapani: That is why I think that when people come back from retreat they should go straight into centre activities.

S: Right, because then your positive energy goes into a positive [113] situation, meets a positive need.

Padmapani: And the general level of communication goes up and up.

S: Yes.

Voice: I think that this thing about self-consciousness, Christianity has an awful lot to answer for because if you have a God who is omniscient and is going to judge you for all your ...

S: Who is all-seeing, then you are permanently exposed. I remember reading in the Reader's Digest about an American preacher who had a tape recorder, and he had tape recorded certain verses from the Bible, and he used to go around town and all those places that were known to be frequented by courting couples, and play these verses, and he would play the verse: 'And the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good'. [Proverbs 15:3, tr.] And in this way he would startle the courting couple with verses if this sort. And then there was a little story I read somewhere about a Catholic nun in America who told the interviewer that the nuns had to take their bath fully dressed, they couldn't ever appear fully naked, and they said they shouldn't ever appear naked because it wouldn't be right to appear naked in front of God. So the interviewer said

that he got the idea that they genuinely believed that God could look through the bathroom walls, but he wasn't able to look through the robes they wore while bathing. So there is this preoccupation with the idea of God watching you, seeing everything, and even I believe sometimes Christians are told this: 'Don't do anything naughty, God can see you. Even if Mummy doesn't see you, Daddy doesn't see you, God will see you and he will punish you.' So you get this feeling that there is someone always watching you, you look over your shoulder to see if he is watching you, to see if he is looking, see if he is watching. And this must surely make you if not embarrassed, if not self-conscious, certainly reduce you - if you take it very literally and seriously - to quite uncomfortable sort of states. I didn't personally have this as a child; maybe some of you did?

Padmapani: When I was a little child I had this book, given to me by my mother, Rumplestiltskin. It was a story out of a book published in Germany and it was a person who - if you had dirty fingernails - and it had very vivid illustrations - if you grew your fingernails long and you got dirt under them, this person would come in through the door with flaming red hair and chop off your fingers. And I used to be really terrified because at the bottom of our garden we used to have starlings and they make this noise just like this ... (laughter) and I used to think I would get my fingers cut off. And God seemed to work his way through these figures.

Alan Angel: In Buddhism, isn't there the concept of contemplating the [114] the supernatural? It is in the Garland of White Lotus Flowers [by Lama Mipham, in Golden Zephyr, Dharma Publishing, tr.]

S: The contemplations are the anusatis, that is, the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, punya or goodness, the devas, and one's breath; these are the six anusatis. Maybe it means the gods, a translation of devas, the supernatural, possibly. But it is concentration and recollection of the gods. So the gods have got where they have by practising good deeds. It is that sort of reflection. Therefore one should practise good deeds.

Voice: Going back to this thing about God being all-seeing, as far as I can remember it was equally applied to the devil.

S: Ah. Well again, he was, as it were, God's agent.

Voice: What are your impressions of the ingredients of ... why does self-consciousness arise?

S: I don't think it is just a question of guilt and fear, though I think that these play an important part. It is more as it were a sort of division in consciousness. That you are not experiencing yourself fully, you are sort of alienated from yourself, and in an alienated sort of way you are standing apart form yourself and looking at yourself. You are seeing yourself like a third person, which suggests a lack of integration, a certain degree of alienation. I think self-consciousness is basically this, but I think that it is maybe a necessary transitional stage from un-self-consciousness to self-consciousness in the true sense. I think it is really

more like this, so therefore in a sense self-consciousness can be quite healthy and positive, but when guilt comes in then that sort of rather rudimentary self-consciousness becomes unhealthy, even maybe neurotic. You get this at the time of adolescence, when people are self-conscious. They have lost the un-self-consciousness, the sort of rather mindful spontaneity of childhood, they haven't attained to the mature self-consciousness of the adult. Though very often the so-called adult doesn't achieve it; they are sort of halfway between, they are neither sort of mindlessly spontaneous not are they to act as mature self-consciousness in the higher sense. So they have got this sort of uncomfortable, awkward self-consciousness when they don't feel themselves completely, they stand aside a bit from themselves, because there is some other consciousness developing, and this sort of rudimentary self-consciousness sort of looking down or back as it were at the old spontaneous self which they are no longer able to be. When very often you are self-conscious you are aware of your awkwardness and your clumsiness and your inability to do things spontaneously, so this sort of self-consciousness seems to arise when you are beginning to outgrow the old childlike mindless spontaneity but haven't yet grown into the more [115] integrated self-consciousness, mature self-consciousness, of the true adult.

Voice: That seems to point to the importance of sixteen-year-old people coming into the Movement.

S: Yes indeed, I think they probably start going through all this about fourteen, or even younger.

Sagaramati: (unclear: some personal reminiscence about when he was six ?teen)

S: Yes, you are trying to be different, you are trying to be an individual.

Voice: It is interesting to see how other people will use or tamper with other people's self-consciousness in an argument, so that they deny that person's ... undermine their confidence by abusing that person just to push that person back into themselves. The upbringing I had at school, it was terribly like that, especially when teachers would make you do ludicrous things in front of the whole school to provoke that.

Padmaraja: So to overcome self-consciousness you have to learn how to trust yourself and your experience of yourself.

S: It means bringing together your old animal spontaneity and your more truly human awareness, When you are self-conscious, it is, as it were, the two are divided, they are in conflict, there is a gap between them.

Padmapani: In this Christian sense one could say, quoting from one of your lectures: if one goes back to one's pagan roots. [Altruism and individualism in the spiritual life, Bodhisattva Ideal lecture series, tr.]

S: But you must also go forwards to your spiritual flowers.

Padmapani: It is in the pagan roots that one taps that energy.

S: Which can ascend.

Danavira: I think maybe that we are brought up to aim for that halfway stage between the two.

S: Well of course some people just never even develop self-consciousness in the ordinary sense, they just remain in their animal spontaneity. I don't know whether I dare say this, I think women tend to remain in this [more] than men do. Which is perhaps to some extent partly the reason for their appeal to men. An adolescent boy is usually much more self-conscious than an adolescent girl. Adolescent girls are often quite confident and lacking in self-consciousness.

Sagaramati: They are often more like animals than little boys. But perhaps the truth of the matter is that in a sense they don't grow up, in a sense.

Voice: They've got more of a group consciousness, not only younger girls [116] but younger women in respect of fashion and cosmetics and things like that. It is a huge industry.

Padmapani: Don't you think a lot of that has got to do with women seem to develop quicker than men do and that having that natural confidence and men being not so mature in that way ...

S: What does one mean by develop? Biologically the two sexes seem to keep in step, but maybe in psychological ways they don't because certainly the male goes on developing longer than the female.

Padmapani: I think I've heard it said that women between 15 and 20, they are psychologically maturing faster than the male is.

S: But what does one mean by maturing psychologically? There is the physical maturity, that the female is able to conceive, to give birth etc, then there is the male maturity in the sense of being able to inseminate, but these usually occur at about the same time.

Voice: I have heard it said frequently that the female matures one to two years earlier.

S: So what would be the corresponding psychological maturity or immaturity.

Voice: (inaudible)

S: What are these emotional changes? I think in the case of the male an additional factor which is part of the cultural maturation is the taking on of responsibility. Because if it is a question of marriage, usually in our society, in our culture, it is the male who takes on the responsibility, and maybe therefore the young boy, the adolescent, is not as prepared for that as the girl is because he has greater responsibility than she does. So there is a sort of cultural imbalance as it were. But whatever the reason may be, one doesn't see this break or hiatus in the case of women or girls as they grow up. A boy may be clumsy and awkward for several years, but very often or usually you don't see this in the case of girls, if anything the opposite.

Vessantara: But girls can be self-conscious about their development, can't they?

S: It is [117] more like it's consciousness rather than self-consciousness if you see what I mean. For instance they might be conscious that they've got straight hair instead of nice wavy hair, but they're not self-conscious about it. They might not be happy about it.

Voice: What do you mean by mature self-consciousness?

S: By mature self-consciousness I mean something more like individuality. When you are aware, when you feel responsible, when your energies are free, your emotions are positive and so on, but especially perhaps in this context is this feeling of being able to take on responsibility and the sort of confidence that that gives you. Taking a responsibility for yourself, maybe for other people too.

Vessantara: In conventional Christianity there's an age called the age of responsibility at which point you're considered responsible for your own actions. Which means that you can then commit a mortal sin and go to hell. Before that you can't, and if you do you're not considered to be fully responsible.

Voice: In a lot of people who've had certainly a Catholic upbringing there's a direct association between feeling responsibility and being responsible for your own actions and the possibility of being condemned ..(unclear).. for ever.

S: Oh dear.

Voice: I certainly found in myself a distinct reluctance ..(unclear).. to take on responsibility because of that.

Voice: They have a ceremony to confirm it as well. They call it confirmation.

Voices: That comes later.

Jyotipala: Confirmation comes later. We're talking about the first communion and the first confession. Confirmation comes later.

S: I don't know about the Catholic church but in the case of the Church of England you can't communicate until you've been confirmed.

It's interesting because when you are seven, according to some biologists, every cell in your body has changed. It's supposed to change every seven years. And in Buddhism also you can become a novice monk when you are seven or eight, and also there are seven-year-old arhants, but you never read of six-year-old arhants, its always seven-year-old arhants. Maybe it has some significance.

Voice: There are some psychologists who say that boys are more self-conscious than girls because society expects more of them, expects them to play a more important role [118] traditionally. This is stated as one of the reasons why boys have more stamina than girls.

Voice: Expected to be a man.

S: Well girls are expected to be women.

Voice: To become a man you've actually got to do something.

S: Yes, it's a cultural as well as biological category.

Voice: Men are meant to be more kind of mental, and women have a body and the body is really meant to show off and be conscious of, but they ..(unclear).. being animal where we would just be more sort of mental ... (unclear)

Voice: It seems in that context that women have to attract in order to procreate.

S: No. Men procreate, women conceive.

Voice: Does that mean then a split between us and our sex role in a sense? Where if we are supposed to [have] the mental faculty. [Does this mean that we develop a split between] out mental faculties and our sexual? What I mean is that if women are after men to conceive ...

S: I think in the case of men there is more of a conflict, because there is on the one hand the sort of sexual pull and all that that [entails] but on the other hand there is another pull too which is to develop in the higher sense, and very often the two experiences are definitely in conflict.

Voice: I'd like to know more about women's place in the spiritual path.

S: But can you talk in those terms literally? What is one asking when one is asking that? One has to ask what does one mean by women. That might seem obvious but is it really obvious? Everyone thinks they know what a woman is, know what a man is, but do they? Everyone thinks they know what a human being is but do they? Everyone thinks they know what an individual is but again do they? I think one should start right at the bottom and say what is a woman. Don't assume that you know.

Voice: Fully integrated female characteristics.

S: Well what is integration? [119] Usually it means that, though that isn't necessarily correct. I think the important point is that it does seem that in the case of the development of the young man there is a sort of schism - or break if you like - which does not seem to be there in the case of women. It may be due to biological factors or cultural or a combination of these, but this does seem to be the case: that women's development is more, as it were, more continuous and perhaps stops short whereas in the man's development there is more of a breach and a definite transitional period after which - circumstances being favourable - he is able to pass on to a higher phase of development. And this phase of being self-conscious is that transitional phase or stage, no doubt exacerbated by cultural factors.

Voice: In actual fact you're saying that it's a lot more difficult for a woman to develop in a spiritual sense.

S: It seems to suggest that.

Voice: (unclear) sexual discrimination. People are just people. ..(unclear).. by their sex. (unclear) a lot the same really.

S: I don't know.

Voice: Everything is just cultural.

S: I don't think that everything is due to culture. I think that the biological differences themselves are quite important. They have got all sorts of emotional and psychological ramifications. I don't think the differences between the sexes is, as it were, just technical. (other voice: unclear) I've observed also the behaviour of very small children - they were children of my friends - and the psychological differences between girls and boys from infancy are quite amazing. Whereas the parents even have not wanted to sort of bring them up differently, but you can see that they are definite personalities at a very early age, with quite marked characteristics of either boys or girls and psychological differences. They seem to go so deep, as it were definite and striking, that you can't possibly attribute that to the way that they've been brought up. It's as though it goes back to before conception. Ss this is the impression one gets: that they were boys or girls before they were born, before they were conceived. It almost suggests that it does go back to a previous life. It's as strong and as striking as that. This is the impression I've got just studying small children, but not that those sort of psychological differences were just the product of cultural conditioning. I think this is something which just isn't so. I don't think there's any evidence for that. (break in recording) [120] ... in very primitive lands.

Uttara: (unclear) [An indication] of that may be that women find a lot of their fulfilment just in bodily physical activity and to let them do all the work as children is probably doing them a favour.

S: Well in the primitive societies the men have got two or three functions only. They go off hunting, they do a lot of dancing and singing and playing of musical instruments, and they look after the cultural and religious activities. Though you may say that this is completely unjust, it's based on discrimination etc etc, but this is what we do find in primitive communities very often.

Voice: It is perhaps a manly (?)facet that has called all the talk about equality of the sexes because it's a kind of a (?)anthropological (?)nettle.

S: Yes, right. I think this is correct. In the last [i.e. nineteenth, tr.] century the great proponent of women's rights was John Stuart Mill. It wasn't a woman.

A: Yes, but we say a woman in primitive countries [does a lot of the work so they don't see any life.] In civilized countries too in the war, I mean not all, but they [didn't stop working], but because men are paid and they get special security well then they see that as proper work, but I mean women staying at home and raising the children and the other stuff is secondary. They've got to buy, cook, and everything.

Jyotipala: A lot of that's a myth actually. Looking at it objectively - being

married - I think that women spend most of their time during the day wasting their time. The work they could do they could do it in an hour, but they spread it throughout the day slowly. They could do it in about an hour.

A: But you do have children too.

Voice: That's why they say a woman's work is never done.

Jyotipala: Because she makes it so it's never done. She carries it on all the time.

S: Well why does she do it? She presumably does that because she likes working. She spins it out. She likes being busy. It's work in the sense of bodily occupation.

Jyotipala: There's no work there for her actually to do in the home. It's very simple to run a home. Cleaning and cooking and that.

A: Well if you've got no children maybe, but I don't think you'll do it in one hour - all the jobs in one house. You have to clean and do all the washing and do [121] the cooking.

(General hubbub about how long people take to clean their houses and cook.)

Jyotipala: I've done it. I've done it for myself.

S: Well, I've done it for myself. I mean earlier this year I was living on my own for a while. I think all these sort of things like cooking and keeping the place clean did take about an hour a day - without children; I had a cat that needed looking after (laughter) which I had to feed and amuse sometimes. But anyway all this started from this consideration of self-consciousness and the point that I was making, the basic point, was that self-consciousness in the ordinary colloquial sense seems to be a transitional stage between the un-self-consciousness and also natural spontaneity but animal spontaneity of the child, and the mature self-consciousness of the true individual as an adult, and it further did seem that boys, that young men, tend to go through this stage of self-consciousness whereas women do not. This may be due to biological and psychology or it may be due to cultural factors or a combination of the two. But it suggests in that case, whatever may be the explanation, that there is a greater likelihood of men either being arrested at the stage of self-consciousness or going on to true self-consciousness, and similarly a greater likelihood of women remaining in the stage of the animal un-self-consciousness but spontaneity, and this seems to correspond to the facts as actually observed. Whatever may be the actual explanation or reason.

Voice: But ..(unclear).. sees the value of the spontaneity.

S: Oh yes ..(unclear).. certainly does but this is the spontaneity of the individual who has reconciled his spontaneity with his awareness and self-consciousness. And this is what we find usually very often on retreats - that there is a conflict between the more animal spontaneity and the awareness. And I've remarked on this many a time: that on retreat when people come along for the first few days of the retreat - these used to be the old general retreats, mixed retreats - the

first few days they were a bit stiff and just recovering from their life in the world. Then they start sort of relaxing. But usually, when they relaxed and became a bit free they get a bit mindful, they'd be, yes, spontaneous, but there's a lot of sort of animal energy and not much of mindfulness, so you start introducing say maybe periods of silence and a bit more meditation so people would become more mindful, but as they become more mindful they become less spontaneous. Their energies started being damped down a bit. So then you had to maybe let up on the silence and mindfulness and let the energies come out a bit more, but the aim would be to get the energies and mindfulness together, and this is what the true individual has and this is very difficult.

Voice: And it's an individual affair. [122]

S: And it's an individual affair. Very often the liveliness is a sort of group liveliness.

Voice: How could you combine the two, because, well, I know I don't understand it properly but in my way of thinking it's kind of that one contradicts the other almost. I mean if you are spontaneous it means you're unconscious of what you are doing, and if you're self-conscious you'll be watching that you are doing this and suppress the spontaneity.

S: Yes, so you have to begin with, as we used to do on the retreats, to alternate between the two and try and refine each one until when they've reached a state of sufficient refinement they can be brought together, and this is actually possible, and especially if one has very positive emotions, then they are, as it were, the link between the more sort of crude animal vitality and the awareness and mindfulness on the other hand.

I mean, for instance, the artist when he's creating he's spontaneous, but he is aware and mindful. He knows what he is doing. He may not be thinking but he is aware. At the same time the spontaneity and creativity are there so that sort of state one should be able to experience all the time. You're always lively, always full of energy, but you're always aware, always mindful, whereas most people if they get a bit lively they start forgetting things and being unmindful, or if they get very mindful they become inhibited and unspontaneous. But eventually you have both together, not side by side but integrated as a sort of total experience. So this is another aspect of saying one of these well worn old things that have been said often in the past in the Friends - but some have been completely misunderstood - that man must develop his feminine side. If it means anything, and sometimes it just doesn't mean anything at all, it means that the self-consciousness must reunite with the animal vitality. At least it's that, and the two should be fused together into the true self-consciousness which is awareness and energy both.

Voice: Can women be helped our way from just being purely animal consciousness?

S: I think they can but they've also got to want that and respond to that

possibility. I used to think that women could come to this more easily when they'd been through their family life and had children and become mature by age of about forty or forty-five, but in recent years I've lost my faith in that. I don't see it happening. Even with a lot of help and encouragement. So [I sometimes wonder] if there is a best age in that respect or in that sort of way. Or maybe perhaps you ought to try and catch the women young as well as the men. It's difficult to say. But I used to think, I used to hope, that by the time a woman was forty or forty-five they'd been through all that and had had her children, had her married life, then she would be a mature human being and ready to think about spiritual life, but I've not found this in practice so far.

Voice: Could it be made by setting up a mixed community for people who want to be ..(unclear).. so that perhaps women could have a child? An extended family. [123]

S: I mean it's very difficult to generalize without seeing the actual person before you. I mean you could also say it might not be fair on the men because a man who wanted to develop would not find that sort of situation very positive or encouraging. So I don't know the answer. This is something I'm still thinking about. Perhaps there isn't an answer. I mean there aren't answers to everything you know. (laughs) Especially sometimes if the question is wrongly put.

Voice: Can we get back to the text here, Bhante? At the beginning we talked about the irrationality of women and that sort of quality. My notes say there's a quality ...

S: I'd like to add to that that I think men are irrational too. Men only possess a greater capacity for rationalization. In some ways I think women are less irrational than men. Men are more irrational because they often disguise their irrationality under a layer of rationalization. So I think this could be argued. I don't necessarily go along with the idea that all women are more irrational than men. I think that's maybe a bit of popular mythology. I mean very often women are quite easy to deal with and quite rational and practical. It's men that sort of fly off at a tangent and get all irrational - which has been my experience - more so than women. Women only appear to be irrational if you ignore certain things that are important to them and don't acknowledge them and their irrational behaviour is because they are motivated by those things which are important to them which are sufficiently obvious. So their behaviour only appears irrational if you close your eyes to those factors. Perhaps they're not any more irrational than men are - if anything less I'd say. I personally find men more irrational, more likely to fly off the handle or react in a highly emotional way. It has its positive side as well as its negative side of course. Women can be frustrated when certain deep rooted desires and things are not satisfied, but that's not being irrational. Everybody is irrational. I mean nobody is guided by objective logical considerations whether men or women, but men certainly do rationalize I think more than women and disguise their irrationality more.

Voice: So the less dualistic conceptual thinking we do, the better it is.

S: What do you mean by that?

Voice: Not to stick to rigid boundaries and classifications.

S: Well as I said there are all sorts of intermediate degrees. You do have men who are one hundred percent men in the ordinary conventional sense, women who are one hundred percent women, but there are all sorts of intermediate degrees. So one just has to look at the particular person and just see where they come. When one is talking about men one is usually taking about those who are definitely at one end of the scale and when one is talking about women usually those who are at the other end of the scale. But there are sort of intermediate types that when one is generalizing can be more or [124] less ignored. For instance you can say, well, men are taller than women. Well, as a statistical generalization that is correct, but there's no point in saying, 'Ah, such-and-such woman is taller than any man I know.' Well that may be, but that doesn't upset the fact that broadly speaking men are taller than women.

Voice: Russian women (unclear) between ten and eighteen stone.

S: Right. But still it holds good that men are taller and heavier than women. There's a statistical generalization. Anyway what were you going to say about irrationality?

Voice: Yes, at the beginning of the text. We were talking about the Prajna-paramita Sutra. I can't find the line now, I just remember it. Can anyone remember it? We were talking about the irrational quality in a woman.

S: This was when we were talking about the Prajnaparamita as mothers, as feminine - the elusiveness - and that something is elusive because it's not really there in the object - you can't grasp it - because it's in you or has got to be developed within you. So you can't grasp at femininity because it isn't something existing out there to be appropriated. It's something to be developed in here. Anyway perhaps we'd better end it on that note. It's very nearly time.

(next session)

S: All right, chapter 2, which is page 14. Where a Bodhisattva can stand. Let's read down these three verses one by one and look at them generally and also in ..(unclear)..

"Where Bodhisattvas stand

"He does not stand in form, perception or in feeling, In will or consciousness, in any skandha whatsoever. In Dharma's true nature alone is he standing. Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection. Change or no change, suffering or ease, the self and the non-self, The lovely and repulsive - just one Suchness in this emptiness they are. And so he takes not his stand on the fruit which he won, which is threefold - That of an Arhat, a Single Buddha, a Buddha fully enlightened. The Leader himself was not stationed in the realm which is free from conditions, Nor in the things which are under conditions, but freely he

wandered without a home. Just so, without support or a basis a Bodhisattva is standing. A position devoid of a basis has that position been called by the Jina."

S: Just an inverted construction. That position has been called a position devoid of a [125] basis by the Jina. So "Where Bodhisattvas stand: He does not stand in form, perception or in feeling. In will or consciousness. In any skandha whatsoever." So what is meant by that? That a Bodhisattva does not stand in any of these? What is this standing in?

Voice: (unclear)

S: What does it mean to stand in form, to stand in perception? We have really come across this before but the terminology was slightly different.

Voice: The same as resting on.

S: It's the same as resting on or settling down in. Do you think there's any subtle shade of difference? How do you usually feel when you are standing?

Voice: As if there's something to stand on.

S: As it there's something to stand on. So what does that suggest?

Voice: He doesn't see the skandhas as being real.

S: He doesn't see the skandhas as being real certainly. If you talk of someone standing, what sort of feeling do you get from that?

Voice: Security.

S: Security. Yes, but is there a subtle difference between settling down in, or resting on, or standing in?

Voice: 'Standing in' is more of an active pose.

S: It's more of an active pose isn't it? So what would be the difference between, say, settling down in say form, and lying upon form, and standing in form?

Voice: Standing you feel like you've actually got there.

S: Yes.

Voice: It's a more confident sort of ...

S: It's a more confident attitude yes. So perhaps this is why the slightly different term is used. Actually you're standing on this ice but you don't know it. You think you're standing on solid ground but the ice is very thin and it's melting all the time but you go on standing. So form is like that. It's like the ice. Feeling is like that. You [126] take your stand on these things as though they were permanent realities, as though they were never going to change, and you feel quite confident in your position. You stand there. When you stand you're erect. It suggests not only self-confidence; it suggests you've got a certain pride; you're a bit stiff, upright, erect.

Voice: Standing in also suggests that you are encompassed by something.

S: Yes, that's true. "He does not stand in form, perception or in feeling. In will or consciousness. In any skandha whatsoever." Then "In Dharma's true nature alone he is standing. Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection." So what does it mean to stand in the true nature of the Dharma?

Voice: Sunyata.

S: To stand in sunyata. To stand in reality. But what does one mean by that? After all that's a phrase, it sounds very nice, but what does it really mean to stand in? Is there perhaps not a better way of putting it? More real, more concrete, more vivid way of putting it? To stand in?

Voice: To embody.

S: To embody yes, but retaining this image of the perpendicular as it were. What is it that stands, that stands very firmly?

Voice: (unclear)

S: No, I'm thinking now more poetically. Just drop the metaphysics.

Voice: A victor.

S: No, I'm thinking in more simple primitive terms than that. What just stands? What is noticeable for standing as it were?

Voice: Trees?

S: Trees. Yes, a tree stands but why is it able to stand?

Voice: It's got roots.

S: It's got roots. So one could perhaps speak in terms not just of standing in the Dharma but being rooted in the Dharma, being rooted in the true nature of Dharma. This would perhaps give one a better feeling. The Bodhisattva is rooted in reality. The Bodhisattva is rooted in the true nature of Dharma. So when you are rooted in something [127] what does that suggest?

Voice: You draw your ..(unclear).. from it ...

S: Yes, you draw from it. You draw your nourishment. You draw your substance from it. So you could pursue that and say that ordinary people, that is non-Bodhisattvas, stand but they stand precariously. They're rooted in very sort of shallow, stony soil that is perhaps shifting all the time. Maybe they're rooted in sand, they can be blown over very easily. In the Dhammapada you get this image of a tree with shallow or weak roots that can very easily be blown down by the wind. [verse 7, tr.] In the same way the person who is not rooted in the spiritual life can be blown over by Mara. But if you are rooted in reality your roots go down much deeper. You draw your nourishment, you draw your sustenance, from a much deeper level. So you therefore stand much more firmly; you grow much more strongly. So something like this perhaps is to be understood of that: that the Bodhisattva is rooted in reality, his roots go very deep down, as deep as existence itself you could say, and beyond. Or you could say that when we stand

in form, etc, we're not even rooted at all; we're just very precariously balanced on a surface which is shifting and moving all the time. But when you stand in reality and you stand in the true nature of the Dharma then you really are rooted and therefore nourished and therefore you can grow. So the Bodhisattva stands in the true nature of the Dharma in the sense of being rooted in it. No doubt that's a better way of looking at it.

"Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection." I think if you think of the Bodhisattva standing in the true nature of Dharma in terms of his being rooted in the true nature of Dharma then the last line becomes more intelligible. "Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection." If you're rooted in reality you don't need to think about practising anything. The nourishment naturally flows to you, into you. Do you see that? If you are rooted in reality you don't need to think about practising this or practising that. The fact that you are rooted in reality will mean that you've practised wisdom, I won't say automatically, but naturally and spontaneously. You cannot do anything else.

Voice: Doesn't that imply that the Bodhisattva is not a Buddha but in actual fact is coursing in this wisdom, and yet they also find that there's no effort.

S: There is no effort in the sense of no ego-directed effort, but he draws his nourishment, he draws his sustenance, from a deeper level. Of course, yes, he makes an effort because he's practising virya, but it's not this sort of ego-based effort that we are usually acquainted with. There's no question of will. It's power ..(unclear).. It's something that flows naturally just as the sap flows up through the tree naturally.

Voice: How does the energy flow through him, so to speak? At the same time he will be developing it without an ego [will]. [128]

S: Right. Now he'll be making himself more and more open to it. At first maybe it flows up through a very tiny narrow pipe. His job is to broaden the pipe so that the energy can flow through more freely, more abundantly. But it's really an artificial distinction because you're distinguishing between him and his energy, and actually there is no such distinction. Such as when you're painting a picture or you're writing something. You and the energy flow are one. You're not as it were manipulating the creative energy. So the Bodhisattva from the point of view of this verse is someone who is rooted in a deeper level of reality, rooted even in ultimate reality, and who acts from that; and his acting from ultimate reality is his practice of the perfection of wisdom, his practice of perfect wisdom. (pause)

So form, feeling, and so on, these represent phenomenal reality, a lesser degree of reality, a lower level of reality if you like. So he's not rooted in them. He does not take his stand in them. He's rooted in a much deeper level than that. So you could summarize it by saying that the Bodhisattva is one who lives from a deeper level of reality, and it's this living from a deeper level of reality which constitutes his practice of wisdom. (pause) It's very important when dealing with perfect wisdom to get away from the conceptual mode of expression. You

could even say that the conceptual mode of expression is totally foreign to the content of the expression. The medium directly contradicts the message here and one must really be on one's guard against that. So try to translate the perfect wisdom teachings immediately into concrete terms, metaphorical terms, poetic terms. So if you can think of the Bodhisattva as a tree rooted very deep in the soil that gives you a much better, a much more correct, idea about the Bodhisattva's life than if you take it much more abstractly as in standing in the true nature of Dharma and that being his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

I think it's quite important to understand this idea of living from a deeper level of reality. This is what the Bodhisattva does. When you live, as it were, from the deepest level of reality then that is your practice of wisdom. Your whole life is the expression of that, just as all the leaves and flowers on the tree are the expression of the sap which is coming up through the tree from the earth. So it means in a way draw your nourishment from a deeper level, not from a relatively shallow superficial level. Don't draw your nourishment from form, perception, feeling, will, or consciousness. Don't draw it from any aspect of your conditioned being, but draw it from the depths, draw it from the unconditioned, draw it from the true nature of the Dharma which is also in a sense your true nature. If you do that everything that you say, everything that you do, and everything that you think will be your practice of wisdom.

Voice: Would thangkas be a more ..(unclear).. paintings.

S: Yes, this is what has been called visual Dharma. Anything concrete. You know the concrete world and the abstract. (pause) In the Bhagavad-gita there is the image of the great banyan tree with its roots in the sky. Have you come across this? Have your read the Bhagavad-gita? The great banyan tree. So it reverses the image in a way. Its roots are not in the earth, its roots are in the sky. What does that suggest?

Voice: Higher consciousness. [129]

S: Higher consciousness is growing downwards rather than upwards so it's a quite interesting way of looking at it. So have your roots in the sky, you could say, don't have them in the earth. Go even further: don't just be deeply rooted, no; reverse the image altogether and have your roots in the sky, hanging head downwards from reality, which means you have to turn yourself upside down - another good Buddhist way of looking at things. Or be like William Blake in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', hanging head downwards in the abyss from the roots of a tree.

Voice: I think with those symbolic ways of looking at things you can have different symbols for different personalities. It seems like that's more appropriate for somebody who's very sort of earthy and rather sort of stolid sort of person. But the person who's very volatile and got a lot of energy but it's all a bit sort of flighty, then maybe they need the opposite, they need their roots in the earth. [130]

Voice: Just now you used the two words 'concrete' and 'abstract'. Were you saying take things, like sort of inspiration, from the concrete?

S: Yes. Not only that: I said you can only take your inspiration from the concrete.

Voice: In what way do you mean concrete and abstract?

S: Abstract means in the sense that a general idea which has not corresponded to anything you actually encounter and experience, whether a sense experience or a spiritual experience. For instance, truth is an abstraction, reality is an abstraction. You never encounter a thing which can be labelled as reality; that is an abstraction, it's a concept, it's something that you can think. Rather it is in fact no object corresponding to that thought really. For instance if you want to look at it from another point of view, you can form the idea of blue but do you ever see blueness apart from concrete blue objects? You don't. You can form a concept of, say, circularity, but does circularity exist apart from specific concrete things which are circular in shape?

So concepts and abstract ideas are quite useful for purposes of general communication and conveying information, and issuing instructions even, but they don't give you any idea about reality as such, though again I use the word reality which is itself an abstraction. You have to get back to concrete things, back to what Blake called the minute particulars. Buddhism says very much the same thing. So if you think that when you're dealing with abstractions you're dealing with reality and understanding reality through the abstractions then you're making a very big mistake. You're only in contact with words and abstract ideas. If you try to see things in terms of images, as it were, pictures in terms of myths and symbols, then you're much more likely to get close to and in contact with reality - for want of a better term - than you are with the help of these abstract expressions and conceptual angles. Do you see that? I take it for granted and I've said it's obvious, but I think I haven't explained it in detail for a long time.

Sagaramati: Where would the imagination ...

S: Imagination yes. Imagination is that - well I was going to say faculty, but I've just been reading Blake who says imagination is not a faculty: it's the whole man. Imagination is the whole man operating. When it's just reason or just emotion it's only part of you operating, but imagination is the whole man operating with reason and emotion fully integrated. So it's the imagination - and you when you imagine - which apprehends and realizes, experiences images, symbols, myths, metaphors. So it's as though - through the image - that the imagination, i.e. the whole man, is able to apprehend or respond to or experience reality in a sense of minute particulars in their totality, not just one aspect. Not just this aspect or that aspect but all aspects. Not just certainties but depth. [131]

Sagaramati: Presumably abstract ..(unclear).. Surely they can spark off as it were images ...

S: Oh yes, if you take them properly, yes. This is what we're trying to do. We're

starting from the abstract ideas and sort of using them to spark off images and metaphors, symbols and so on. But if you just stay with the concepts you don't get very far. The mode of expression of the Perfect Wisdom texts is almost exclusively conceptual, so you can make the mistake of thinking, well, Perfect Wisdom teaching is a very intellectual teaching, or it's addressed to the intellectual. That's complete nonsense. It's nothing to do with the intellect, nothing to do with the intellectual: he's the last person likely to be able to understand it! This is the Indian mind at work you see. This is the Indian temperament if you like, or one of the Indian temperaments, expressing things in this particular way, which in a way is a very unfortunate way. It is quite inappropriate to the actual material really, so you have to translate it, just as the Chinese have to translate it. It's translated in the most part into what we would call Ch'an or Zen, though that developed in its own way can be quite ..(unclear).. translation. We're on much safer ground - if you ever are on safe ground in the case of Buddhism - if we translate it in terms of images, myths, and symbols and metaphors: into the concrete.

Voice: Could you give some fairly short definitions of concrete and abstract?

S: The abstract is the general which isn't anything in particular. Concrete means ..(unclear).. to the individual. He actually exists and ..(unclear).. or state of feelings. The concrete is also the unique, you could say.

Sagaramati: I just wondered if you could talk about the universal and the particular.

S: Yes the universal is also the abstract and the general.

Sagaramati: Some people treat it in terms of the universal, as though it's actually real.

S: Well this is in a way ..(unclear)..'s teaching though it's not really quite that. What he meant was not quite that. Not that his universals were simply these abstract ideas, though sometimes he does speak as though that was what he meant.

Sagaramati: Because when I read that I'd always imagined them as being sort of having the appearance of these things.

S: Almost like archetypes. He seems to realize, almost to feel, the experience in that sort of way.

Voice: Do you think that's why people, talking about the abstract, are attracted [132] to such a sort of popularity of things like movies and films and things?

S: I think there's a counterbalancing thing. I'm sure there is, yes. The visual.

Voice: And the aural.

S: Yes indeed. We're told, for instance - I'm not sure how true this is or how much of a generalization - that scientists and physicists and mathematicians

go very much for music. It's their principal source of emotional, even spiritual, nourishment: classical music.

Voice: Even some of the things you see on a computer, they're quite sort of attractive in a sense. Twitch a knob and you get a one dimensional plane moving into a three dimensional plane on the two dimensional screen.

S: I remember Vajrabodhi telling me in Helsinki that when he got a bit bored he used to go along to the University, that is to say, the technical university where he worked, and play with the computer for an hour. (laughter) And he really used to enjoy playing with the computer. It used to really buck him up. He used to bring back stacks of sheets which the computer had spewed forth - yes it was statistical - but he used to play with the computer in such a way that the statistics it produced made certain patterns on the paper. Spirals of statistics weaving in and out of blocks of statistics and things like that. He used to be quite fascinated by all this. He really was playing with the computer - apparently it was a very big computer. Speaking personally I just wouldn't know how to play with a computer.

Voice: Well your mind's a computer isn't it?

S: Your rational mind is a computer but you're not a computer. So to come back to this question of temperament: as you said, a person with one kind of temperament may be very much inspired by thinking of the Bodhisattva as rooted in reality. 'Rooted' - it conjures up the association with earth. Down to earth, and even mother earth, and something nice and solid and sticky and smelly even: very tangible, very much there. Your roots going right down into it and you're standing there all sort of solid and firm. They may like this sort of image and it may mean a lot to them but, as you said, another sort of person may prefer a different sort of image. They might like the idea of having its roots in the sky. Maybe that's more refined. It's also a bit more paradoxical. But if you wanted to do it in terms of the elements how would you bring in the element fire and express the same sort of thing? How would you do that? You can be rooted in the earth, but what about fire? How would the Bodhisattva stand in relation to fire?

Voice: Ritual? [133]

S: No, just in a phrase as it were.

Voice: Feeding the fire.

S: Feeding the fire. He'd be feeding the fire? It's not quite enough is it, because in the tree simile he is rooted in the earth. Can't we bring him into a similarly intimate relationship with fire?

Voice: Burning with fire.

Sagaramati: He'd be on fire.

S: He'd be on fire yes. On fire with reality. He'd be like a sort of burning bush.

(laughter) He'd be blazing, he'd be incandescent. In fact there is a Bodhisattva stage which is called arcismati, which means blazing and on fire. It's the fifth or sixth. I forget which, it doesn't really matter [it's the seventh, tr.]. And you can be on fire with reality as well as rooting in reality. What about air? We've had rooted in the sky but that's space, it's not really air. How could you translate it in terms of air, wind?

Voice: Blown by the air.

S: Blown by the air ... well the divine ..(unclear)... How would you put that in a more poetic way?

Voice: Borne on it.

S: Borne on it, yes, like a cloud. We can get nearer to it than that I think. Milarepa was supposed to be as light as thistledown. It's a bit like that: he sort of sat on a thistle and it didn't even bend, or sat on a blade of grass and it didn't even bend. He was so light. Even more than that: blown by the winds of the spirit as it were. Can't we get closer to it? Rooted in reality, on fire with reality.

Voice: The breath of reality.

S: The breath of reality, yes, that gets very close to it. That reality as it were breathes into you. That reality is your life-breath. Perhaps we can't get any closer than that. That's as close as out current ..(unclear).. permit. But you get the idea. What about water then?

Voice: Going with the flow.

S: Going with the flow. Flow with a capital F though.

Voice: ..(unclear).. you could say it's the blood in the Bodhisattva's veins. [134]

S: Right, yes indeed.

Voice: Flowing with reality in his veins.

S: That's sort of also good, and earthy as it were. So you're saying the same thing in all these different ways maybe to appeal to different temperaments - that they're rooted in reality, or the Bodhisattva's rooted in reality, or on fire with reality, or reality is the breath in his lungs or the blood in his veins. It all conveys the same sort of thing, but one image or one metaphor will mean more to a person of one temperament than for a person of another. So this is the sort of thing that we must do. I have of course given a lecture on this question of temperament. I think it was called that wasn't it: the question of temperament?

Sagaramati: A question of psychological types.

S: A question of psychological types, that's right. I was thinking about that again recently. I don't remember very well what I said in that lecture, but I gave a summary I think of all the different classification of psychological types, such as Buddhaghosa's, Jung's, and so on, but more recently I've been thinking about it again and thinking that the whole question of psychological types is quite

important in spiritual life, and perhaps we should reconsider it from a slightly different point of view. I was thinking especially about it when I spoke in the way that I did at an Order meeting that we had here a few weeks ago which was reported in the latest Shabda. I take it that the Order members who read that will know what I'm talking about, but briefly - for the benefit of the others - I was talking about, for want of a better term, the organized type and the non-organized type. I think you know what I mean by the organized type. The organized type is usually the organizing type, and the non-organizing type they are the organized. But they're organized by the organizing type, and sometimes they don't want to be organized. So this is what I was talking about. That those who didn't want to be organized and didn't function in that 'organized' - inverted commas - way weren't to be regarded as necessarily less committed and even as doing less than those who were 'organized' - inverted commas. It does seem as though there's a difference of temperament here for which one must allow. So there was a bit of discussion about this at other times too, and the interesting suggestion was made - I'm not sure now whether I made it or Vimalamitra - but it came up in the course of discussion mainly between us that maybe we should have non-organized retreats from time to time. Has anyone heard about this yet? This is to say, suppose you think in terms of this place that we have a week which is like a sort of Dharma holiday, you could say. That people come for the week but they find all the structure: food and accommodation. There's books on Buddhism available, tapes to play, there's the shrine so they can use all these facilities for a week, but there's no programme. Self-service, as it were. If they want to listen to a tape they can listen. If they want to go and do some yoga they can do it. Or if two or three of them want to get together and do things jointly well they can do that too. If they all decided that [135] they want to have a programme and elect a leader, well they can do that even, but nothing will be, as it were, organized for them, so if they want to have a non-organized retreat - a Dharma holiday as I've called it - well they could do that, because at present it seems that we tend to cater more for those who like being a bit organized or who are a bit organized and very often those whose temperament is otherwise get roped in in a rather compulsory sort of way. So I was thinking, as I said, in connection with this whole question of temperament, that we have perhaps to allow much more than we have done in the past for the non-organized person. Of course when I say non-organized I mean non-organized in the positive creative way. If you're just lazy or you're not well organized you're merely lazy. Maybe you have to be made to do things. But there is a non-organized type, as it were, which functions quite positively and creatively, but in a way that is almost anathema to the organized type. Do you see what I'm getting at? So even our activities I think should take this into consideration. They shouldn't all be geared to the needs of the organized type or reflect their general attitude or way of doing things exclusively. Any comments on this?

Voice: I think I want to do that for the rest of the retreat. (laughter)

Voice: Does that mean you lay in bed or ...

S: Well on a Dharma holiday you could sometimes, if that's what you wanted to do, and that you shouldn't just get in the way of other people.

Voice: That's what I was going to say but if it was going to be like a Dharma holiday and you were seriously having one then in actual fact it wouldn't really be a good idea in that sense, having people that were lazy, but people who were positive and creative even though they weren't organized.

S: Oh yes, because it's a Dharma holiday. It would be a non-organized retreat. It would still be a retreat. It wouldn't be a non-retreat. It would be a non-organized retreat. So that would have to be made clear. If of course you come from a centre and have been working very hard, and you quite mindfully and positively decided that the very best sort of Dharma holiday that you could have, the best non-organized retreat, was to take it easy, get up late and sit out in the garden, well fair enough. You should be sufficiently responsible to be able to take that sort of decision in a positive way, not out of laziness but quite objectively because that is what you actually need; that possibility not being excluded. But you spend your entire Dharma holiday doing nothing: that can be quite positive too. For some people it would be quite difficult.

Voice: It reminds me of a videotape machine - you have one in your room - I think David Hockney had one - and I saw it in this film 'A Bigger Splash' and he watches himself, his motions, and his painting, and he sees how he is through the film, but it gives you such a lot of feedback on how you are yourself. I think it would be quite good to [136] have one of those.

S: Well there are further possibilities aren't there? They're quite expensive by the way. (laughter) But you see what I'm getting at throughout all this discussion: that it's not only important to translate abstract expression into concrete terms and make the teaching come alive and have reference to people's actual situation, but you have also to take into account this question of temperament, take into account the fact that people are of different temperaments, see things in different ways, appreciate things in different ways, and even do things in different ways. All right then, let's go on.

"Change or no change, suffering or ease, the self and non-self, the lovely and repulsive - just one Suchness in this emptiness they are."

So there are two points here to be dealt with. Firstly these four sets of two terms and then the question of suchness. "Change or no change, suffering or ease, the self and non-self, the lovely and repulsive." These are the viparyasas. Do you know what the viparyasas are? They're the upside-down views or, if you like, the topsy-turvy views. Seeing things wrongly in terms of their opposites, or the other way round from what they really are. For instance if you see that which is liable to change as changeless, that is a topsy-turvy view. If you see that which is essentially painful as pleasant, that's a topsy-turvy view. If you see that which is devoid of real selfhood as possessing real selfhood that's a topsy-turvy view. If you see that which is repulsive as attractive and lovely, that's a topsy-turvy view. So these topsy-turvy views feature very prominently

in early Buddhism and they reappear of course in the Mahayana as here; that is to say those characteristics which are truly characteristics of the unconditioned you wrongly and falsely apply to the conditioned. The unconditioned, yes, is changeless, the unconditioned is supremely blissful, the unconditioned possesses - at least according to the Mahayana - true selfhood. The unconditioned is truly beautiful, but instead of seeing the unconditioned as such you see the conditioned as such. You wrongly apply what are in fact attributes and qualities of the unconditioned to the conditioned. So these are called the topsy-turvy views, the viparyasas. Seeing the conditioned as changeless rather than seeing the unconditioned as changeless and so on.

So you might say, 'it's ridiculous, we never regard anything conditioned as changeless,' but in practice we do. This is our emotional attitude, that it's not going to change. This is for good, this is for keeps, this is for ever. Our emotional attitude is that we take something which is liable to change as changeless. So these are the topsy-turvy views. So in the Hinayana, in early Buddhist teaching, and in much of the Mahayana, great importance is attached to this particular teaching of the viparyasas, great importance is attached to seeing the conditioned as conditioned, and the attributes of the conditioned as attributes of the conditioned, and seeing the unconditioned as unconditioned, and seeing the attributes of the unconditioned as the attributes of the unconditioned not the conditioned. In western philosophy there is something which is sometimes called the error of misplaced absoluteness, but here it's misplaced changelessness, misplaced blissfulness, misplaced selfhood, misplaced loveliness. [137] You see or try to see these things or insist on seeing these things in the conditioned instead of in the unconditioned, in the world rather than in nirvana. But on what basis does this whole practice rest, or this whole way of looking at things? That is to say seeing things rightly, seeing the attributes of the conditioned as attributes of the conditioned and attributes of the unconditioned as attributes of the unconditioned. What sort of basis - almost metaphysically - does this rest upon?

Voice: Insight.

S: Insight, yes, but what is the framework of that insight? What sort of framework has it got?

Voice: They are essentially different.

S: So they're essentially different. It's a dualistic framework - conditioned and unconditioned. The unconditioned has some of those attributes, the conditioned has some of those attributes. Now a dualistic framework is essential for all spiritual development, but the Mahayana does not regard dualism as the last word of Buddhist thought, as it were. The Mahayana has - don't forget - the sunyata teaching, so it would [not, tr] regard even this dualism of conditioned and unconditioned - though necessary for practical spiritual purposes and necessary for a very long time - it would not regard it as ultimately valid, and it would seek to resolve it, to dissolve it, in the sunyata experience. You remember the different

kinds of sunyata? There's the emptiness of the conditioned, the emptiness of the unconditioned, and the mahasunyata, the great sunyata, which is the emptiness or non-validity: of the distinction between conditioned and unconditioned. But obviously you can't enter upon that or try to practise that prematurely. To begin with the basis of your spiritual practice is necessarily dualistic. You're trying to get from A to B, from a lower state of consciousness to a higher state of consciousness, from the conditioned to the unconditioned. You cannot but be dualistic. You can't afford to be a non-dualist. Non-dualism has no meaning for you at the beginning of your spiritual career; it's only words; at best it's an abstract idea, not anything concrete or anything real. But the Bodhisattva has to rise to that higher level - the level of mahasunyata - because he's a Mahasattva and he's following the Mahayana. So he has to rise to that level, and this is what this verse depicts him as doing.

"Change or no change, suffering or ease, self and non-self, the lovely and repulsive - just one Suchness in this emptiness they are." So what about this word 'suchness'? Suchness -tathata - is a very interesting word and we get it in the Perfect Wisdom sutras. Tathata, we may say, very provisionally, is the positive counterpart of sunyata. Sunyata of course is not negative really; it's only negative in form. When you say something is empty it suggests something else is not there, not in it, but this is only as regards the word really. The actual spiritual content of sunyata is positive or, rather, neither positive nor negative. But sunyata as a word is a negative word, as a term it's a negative term. So tathata is the positive counterpart, it's a more positive term and it means exactly the same [138] thing or indicates the same thing, the same reality as sunyata. So 'tathata'. It means thusness or suchness, and it points to the inexpressibility of reality, which means if you like the inexpressibility of individual things, the inexpressibility of the minute particulars. So if you really want to describe something you can only point to say it's just like that. Suppose you've seen a really beautiful sight and you want to describe it to a friend: you can describe it but you won't be able really to communicate the essence of your experience; there'll be something incommunicable. You will only say well it was just like that. So when you want to describe anything you can't really describe it - you only point to it and say it's just like that, it is as it is, it is such as it is. It's thus so, thusness. So the thusness of things is the unique, ineffable, incommunicable quality of things. That is what the Mahayana means by the thusness of things. Things have certain qualities or things have a certain quality, but that quality is unique therefore it cannot be described, therefore it cannot be communicated; it can only be pointed to. One can only say it's as it is. It's just like that. It's thus or it's such as it is - thusness or suchness.

So the term thusness or suchness - tathata - points to the fact that things cannot be described. Things in their reality cannot be described, they can only be experienced. So tathata is a very, as it were, positive term, the positive counterpart, as I said, of emptiness. So the Bodhisattva sees that change is change. It's such as it is. The changeless is such as it is. He sees that suffering is suffering such as it is. Happiness is such as it is. Everything is as it is such

as it is. It's just thus. So everything is just one suchness, one thusness. Of course in a way it means reifying a concept which really you mustn't do, but only in a manner of speaking. You mustn't take suchness or thusness as an abstract idea; it's an operational concept. It means that the essence of things is unique, incommunicable, inexpressible, only to be experienced, only to be touched. You only point to things; you can't really describe them. So that suchness is one suchness. All things are equally indescribable. Not that there is a sort of stuff or material called suchness out of which they're all made, no. When you say that things are of just one suchness it means they're all equally indescribable, equally incommunicable, equally simply to be pointed at, indicated to. So the Bodhisattva rises to this higher level where there is non-duality, but even when you say the Bodhisattva rises to this higher level you're discriminating between a lower level and a higher level. You can't help doing that; the dualistic framework is the framework within which you think of and describe your spiritual life. But he rises, as it were, to this higher level where he sees everything possessing one suchness, everything as being of one suchness. Everything as equally unique, equally indescribable, equally incommunicable, and equally only just to be pointed at. So that with regard to everything that exists you can only say - everything in its reality - you can only say it's thus, it's such as it is. You can only indicate its thusness or suchness. You can't indicate its whatness.

So this is also quite important even on a much lower level. It means we should always ask ourselves whether we really have communicated. You can't really communicate the abstract ideas. To some extent you can communicate through images because an image may spark off in the other person the same experience that you've had originally and which made you think, as it were, of that particular image. But much of the time, much [139] of our experience is incommunicable. We can only point to the suchness of it, as it were.

Voice: Is it possible in actual fact? How can one communicate the power of something, of that suchness, to the person and which has an effect on that person? Would they see that suchness as being one experience as it were, or would in actual fact they see it in another way because they're on a lower level so to speak?

S: You could say that somebody else cannot experience something as you experience it. In fact you mustn't think of a sort of object existing apart from your experience of it as though that object is natural so that another person can relate to that object exactly as you relate to it. That's impossible. You, as it were, to use that sort of language, modify the object by virtue of your very experience of it. So another person can have an experience, as it were, parallel to yours, or similar to yours, or corresponding to yours, but can't have the same experience.

Voice: I meant it more in the sense of when one has an experience, and the experience one has has an effect which is not necessarily - in that sense - all that positive to the other person, although it's very positive to you.

S: Yes. Well can you sort of take the experience out of that context which is you having the experience? Can you really lift it out of the context in that sort of way? When you say experience, which is an abstract term, you're talking of another person, say, having your experience, having the same experience as you, but can you in fact lift that experience out of the context of you having the experience? Isn't the experience a sort of integral part of that context itself? So that the other person can have an experience which is analogous, but he can't have the experience which you had because he is not you.

Voice: So he can never experience the same experience as you?

S: In that sense, no. You don't experience his experience, though between persons [it] is sometimes a bit different, but I'm thinking more, say, of the experience of something in nature. For instance suppose you experience a flower. Suppose you want another person to have the same experience of the flower as you had. Well strictly speaking that is impossible. You may experience the flower and it may be the same flower in a sense, broadly speaking, but he won't experience the flower as you experience it because he's not you. For instance, the flower may be a rose. Roses may mean something to you that they don't mean to him. It may be a red rose. The colour red may have a significance, even unconsciously, for you that it doesn't have for him and so on. There may be a personal association with roses for you that may not be for him. His association may be quite different. A rose for him may spark off the memory of his father's funeral because there were roses in the wreath. A rose for you may spark off recollections of your early girlfriends because you took a bunch of roses one day. So when you experience a rose you don't actually experience it in a scientific way - there are all these which are in inseparable part of the experience which you call your other [140] associations which are an inseparable part of the experience which you call your experience of the rose. Give that rose to another person and they won't have your experience. He'll have his own experience of the rose which is subtly different from yours. So he can't have your experience of the rose. He may emphasize with your experience of the rose if you tell him about it, but that's a different thing. Just give him the rose and his experience of the rose will be his experience of the rose, not yours.

Voice: Unless you're aware of that in actual fact you will get an experience from him experiencing the rose which you would experience yourself in a different way.

S: Yes, but it's the same thing with a book. You might be so impressed by a book and get such a lot out of it. You give it to another person thinking they'll automatically have the same experience because it's the same book, but no, they get a totally different experience. It's the same book yes but it's a totally different person.

Voice: Like the roses on the [?Yorkshire-Lancashire, tr.] borders separate one person from another.

S: Yes.

Voice: So skilful means could be a sense of in a way knowing that person - I don't mean in a reactive sense but sort of had an experience and knowing that person to a degree your experience and how he sees you, from feedback so to speak, then you could hand your experience on to that other person knowing that he's going to receive that experience similar to your experience. Therefore he might sort of raise up presumably.

S: To take an extreme example, when you look at a rose you might get a certain experience. You might want another person to share that experience, but you know he's very different from you so you don't give him a rose, you give him a lily, because you know the same sort of experience you get from a rose he'd get from a lily. If you gave him a rose it would give him a quite different experience from yours.

Voice: Ah, I see, so in a sense - taking this on a different level - you could say that in actual fact with the disciple and the guru the disciple rises up to the experience or the level of the guru and then the guru gives him the experience or in a sense a non-experience. It's a similar sort of thing. A sort of transmission.

S: Sort of, in a manner of speaking. But I was thinking of something rather different. Well something different was sparked off by what you said. I thought that you were going to say it, or that you might say it, that is, that a disciple might seem to teach in a completely different way from his own teacher or might seem to be giving a completely different teaching, because he'd be in contact with people who are quite different from the sort of people that his guru was in contact with. The superficial observer might think [141] the disciple is being unfaithful to his guru's teaching - he's giving a quite different teaching. So he may, be but he'll be producing the same effect or the same kind of effect. The guru might have been giving red roses but the disciple might be giving white lilies. So the superficial observer might say, look, he's being unfaithful to the guru's teaching, look, he's changed all the red roses into white lilies. But another person might see that, no, he's producing the same effect with his white lilies as the guru did with his red roses, because he's dealing with rather different sort of people. One mustn't be misled by externals. One has to take temperament again into consideration. So sometimes - I can't think offhand of any actual example - maybe there's Milarepa, yes, Milarepa and Marpa. They lived very differently, their lifestyles were very different, but one was the faithful disciple of the other, one was the guru of the other. So a disciple is not necessarily more faithful to his own guru or teacher and his teaching because he closely resembles him outwardly. He may be completely different in style, temperament, manner of teaching, but be completely faithful to the teaching. He has not got to be a carbon copy of the teacher. This is very important.

Voice: In a way you could say that in most cases that would be an indication that they were not really able to carry on themselves.

S: Yes, if the disciples are carbon copies of the teacher be very suspicious. This is one of the quite laughable things I used to observe in some examples of modern

Thai Buddhist paintings of the scenes from the life of the Buddha. You get the Buddha depicted with his disciples, maybe twenty or thirty disciples, and they were all carbon copies of the Buddha. Except that the Buddha might have a few black curls but exactly the same kind or robe, exactly the same kind of attitude, exactly the same kind of bowl, exactly the same kind of shoulder bag. So is not this symptomatic of a certain kind of attitude of imitating, of copying, externals? Perhaps this has got nothing to do with the essence of the matter, therefore you might have, for instance, a teacher, a guru, who is a strict monk, who is living in a monastery, living a quite sort of disciplined life, who has a quite hare-brained sort of disciple, or that's what he looks like, who doesn't live in a monastery, doesn't bother about the robes, and who just sort of roams about, but he may be a faithful disciple and faithfully transmitting the teaching. He's not necessarily closer to the guru, not necessarily, because he has got the same lifestyle or teaches in the same kind of way. Not necessarily. He may be but not necessarily so.

Voice: It's like that thing about the ventriloquist's dummy.

S: Indeed yes. So after all what is the teacher being? He's being himself. So how do you best imitate the teacher? By being yourself. What does it matter? You're equally [142] sunyata. You're equally suchness, equally unique. If you deliberately try to copy the teacher in externals what does it mean?

Voice: You're unsure of yourself.

S: You're unsure of yourself. But can it be said to be 'being yourself' when you're unaware of yourself? So this is why I get a bit suspicious when I see photographs of teachers and gurus with groups of disciples all dressed in the same sort of way, identical suits, identical robes, except that maybe his are a little but more lavish than theirs. I think one has to be quite suspicious of this sort of thing from a spiritual point of view.

Voice: Do you think that Buddhism where it becomes well founded it becomes institutionalized and where that happens there's a lot of this that creeps in?

S: Of course it does. This is what I've said in some of the lectures on the higher evolution of man. This is exactly what happens. I've put it in these terms: that the universal religion becomes transformed through force of the gravitational pull into an ethnic religion, and this has happened with Buddhism even in the East, though not in the really catastrophic way that it's happened with Christianity in the West. Christianity too in many ways was a universal religion originally.

Voice: Cliff Richard's still . . .

S: What is the significance of that allusion may I ask? (laughter)

Voice: (unclear)... I get the impression he's trying to create a new Christian movement and he's one of the young bright men who's trying to do it. (laughter) [Cliff Richard was a 1960s pop singer, tr.]

S: Well we'll leave it at that shall we? (laughter) We've strayed quite a way from the text. I think we've strayed to some purpose, So "Change or no change, suffering or ease, the self and the non-self, the lovely and repulsive - just one Suchness in this emptiness they are." This really means we should strike a note of warning: don't try to see things in that way prematurely, everything as one. I'm sure you know what I mean. I've gone into that on other occasions; I'm not going into them all now. "And so he takes not his stand on the fruit which he won, which is threefold - that of an Arhat, a Single Buddha, a Buddha fully enlightened." What does that mean? Not taking his stand on the fruit which he won?

Voice: Resting on his laurels.

S: Resting on his laurels. But even supposing there's nothing more to do because if you've become a Buddha fully enlightened why shouldn't you rest on your laurels? There's nothing more to do, so what does it mean in that context, in that case? [143]

Voice: It's not a static thing.

S: It's not a static thing really. I mentioned the other day that we talk about enlightenment as though it's something you achieve and then you as it were settle down in it, you are there; but it isn't really like that. It's difficult to say what it is, but one can perhaps think of it as the spiral just going on and on, and up and up, in ever wider and wider circles to infinity. That would be perhaps a quite fruitful way of thinking of it. So you are said to attain enlightenment, and that process passes a certain point and becomes utterly irreversible and ever expanding as it were. It's the continuity and irreversibility of a process rather than the attainment of a fixed position in space as it were.

Voice: An ongoing process rather than he comes back in the world as a Bodhisattva so to speak?

S: Yes, that could be said to be part of it. (pause) "The Leader himself was not stationed in the realm which is free from conditions, Nor in the things which are under conditions. but freely he wandered without a home. Just so, without a support or a basis a Bodhisattva is standing. A position devoid of a basis has that position been called by the Jina." Who is the leader?

Voice: The Buddha.

S: The Buddha. "The Leader himself was not stationed in the realm which is free from conditions." What does that mean?

Voice: He's transcended that duality.

S: Transcended that duality. He was not stationed in nirvana, not stationed in the unconditioned as distinct from being stationed in the conditioned. The Mahayana distinguishes two kinds of nirvana from this point of view. Nirvana which is established - patishta - and apatishta nirvana, the non-established nirvana, the nirvana which cannot be located in any particular spot as it were.

So we must not think of the Buddha in the ultimate sense as being stationed in the unconditioned, nor of course as stationed in the conditioned either. The Buddha, if he's stationed anywhere, is stationed in the mahasunyata, the Great Void, where that sort of distinction is transcended.

"Freely he wandered without a home." Again a very concrete image. We've had this before, wandering without a home, being homeless. He doesn't make his home either in the conditioned or in the unconditioned. He's free from all concepts, all dualistic ways of thinking. "Just so, without a support or a basis a Bodhisattva is standing. A position devoid of a basis has that position been called by the Jina." In other words his position is a non-position. His basis is no basis. His support is not having any support at all. It also suggests an attitude of faith and trust towards life as a whole doesn't it? Some people - almost by nature - have more of this than others. They're less anxious, less worried, less bothered. Planless, plotless, [144] organizeless maybe. So that's where Bodhisattvas stand; they don't stand anywhere at all. But let's be careful not to get intoxicated with words and abstract ideas and try to bring the whole thing down as much as possible to earth and place in into concrete terms. All right, let's go on to the next section.

Wherein Bodhisattvas Train

Those who wish to become the Sugata's Disciples, Or Pratyekabuddhas, or likewise, Kings of the Dharma - Without resort to this Patience they cannot reach their respective goals. They move across, but their eyes are not on the other shore.

Those who teach Dharma, and those who listen when it is being taught; Those who have won the fruit of an Arhat, a Single Buddha, or a world-saviour; And the Nirvana obtained by the wise and the learned - Mere illusions, mere dreams - so has the Tathagata taught us.

Four kinds of person are not alarmed by this teaching: Sons of the Jina skilled in the truths; saints unable to turn back, Arhats free from defilements and taints, and rid of doubts; Those whom good teachers mature are reckoned the fourth kind.

Coursing thus, the wise and learned Bodhisattva, Trains not for the Arhatship, nor on the level of the Pratyekabuddhas. In the Buddha-dharma alone he trains for the sake of all-knowledge. No training is his training, and no one is trained in this training.

Increase or decrease of forms is not the aim of this training, nor does it set out to acquire various dharmas. All-knowledge alone he can hope to acquire by this training. To that he goes forth when he trains in this training, and delights in its virtues."

S: So "Those who wish to become the Sugata's Disciples". The Sugata is of course the Buddha, 'Or Pratyekabuddhas, or likewise, Kings of the Dharma - Without resort to this Patience," that is, patience in the sense of the acceptance of the

fact that in reality nothing arises because things have no objective existence which can arise. So "Without resort to this Patience they cannot reach their respective goals. They move across, but their eyes are not on the other shore. Those who teach dharma and those who listen when it is being taught; Those who have won the fruit of the Arhat, a Single Buddha or a world-saviour; and the Nirvana obtained by the wise and the learned - mere illusions, mere dreams - so has the Tathagata taught us."

So there are two things really being said. First is the fact that patience is necessary, patience in the more general sense, that is to say that you patiently accept the fact that in reality nothing arises, nothing comes into existence. Everything is unborn, unoriginated; and secondly in the sense that even when you yourself have gained nirvana nothing has happened, nothing has arisen. The ego has not gained anything, not come into possession of anything. It's just like a dream. Just like attaining in a dream. So what does this suggest, putting it into much more down-to-earth terms? Well don't take your own attainments, your own accomplishments, too seriously. Take it naturally or take them naturally, take them in a matter-of-fact sort of way. If you're getting on very well with your meditation, if you're having very positive experiences, don't get all [145] excited and start telling people all about it. Take it in a very matter of fact sort of way and certainly don't become proud and puffed up on account of those experiences.

Voice: In a way isn't this protest really at the beginning one usually does that and over a period of so-called time that one slowly sort of modifies that and one can eradicate . . .

S: Right, well you mature.

Voice: It seems to be related to mindfulness in the ..(unclear).. emotions here. If you have an experience you get excited about it and that will mean you tend to overemphasise it. If you're mindful you're much more like ..(unclear). . .

S: So not less [intensity].

Voice: This idea of patience could it be looked at in as far as the path is the goal.

S: It could be.

Voice: Patient on the path.

S: Of course in very general terms it means receptivity to higher spiritual truths that go completely against the grain of your natural being and your natural way of looking at things and thinking about things. This is what it means in the broadest sense. You patiently accept the unacceptable. This is what patience really is. If you accept what is acceptable where is your patience? It's in the acceptance of the unacceptable that you show your patience. If someone is nice to you of course you can put up with that. It's when they are nasty to you that the question of putting up arises. We went into this on the Bodhicaryavatara

seminar. For instance somebody says 'he made me impatient'. Why do you always think someone made you impatient? No - he gave you an opportunity of practising patience. It's like criticizing the beggar for getting in the way of your giving alms. The person that is [misbehaving here] is not taking away your patience. He's giving you the opportunity of practising it. So you say 'he made me impatient,' - no - he was doing his best to make you patient. It's you who made yourself impatient.

Voice: Which means you were impatient in the first place really.

S: Yes, really you never were patient. (pause) But don't take yourself too seriously it means, also. If you take your accomplishments and your attainments and spiritual possessions generally too seriously, well, you take yourself too seriously. What do we mean by taking yourself too seriously?

Voice: Taking yourself abstractly.

S: Not only abstractly. [146]

Voice: Losing your sense of humour.

S: Yes, losing your sense of humour. What is a sense of humour?

Voice: Realization of the absurdity of the ego.

S: Yes right - in this context. The incongruity of the ego claiming anything at all for itself. So taking yourself seriously suggests a sort of ego sense doesn't it?

Voice: (unclear) ... insecurity.

S: Insecurity. Yes. Feeling inadequacy. You pride yourself upon your achievements. (pause) "Four kinds of person are not alarmed by this teaching: Sons of the Jina skilled in the truths; saints unable to turn back, Arhats free from defilements and taints, and rid of doubts; Those whom good teachers mature are reckoned the four kind." It's very easy to be shaken by the teachings of Perfect Wisdom. If you're not it means you probably haven't understood them. But when you do begin to understand a bit you can't help being shaken, unless you are one of these four kinds of persons.

Voice: How are you likely to understand if you aren't one of those?

S: Well perhaps there's an intermediate type of person who understands them well enough to be shaken by them, but not well enough not to be shaken by them. Many people would be completely impervious to them, not understand in any real sense, and therefore not be shaken by them, but someone a bit more sensible, a bit more advanced, a bit more intelligent, a bit more aware, would understand them sufficiently to be really shaken by them, and this no doubt would be the majority of people who are making a sincere effort to develop. But it's only those who are quite advanced spiritually speaking who would be able to understand - and understand fully - and not be shaken. One might say here even the spiritually advanced, that is in the ordinary sense, would be quite shaken by these teachings. They cannot but be. They go against all one's assumptions,

go against one's whole being, as it were, one's whole conditioned being. So how can you not be shaken by it?

Voice: The fourth of those classifications points out the utmost importance of having somebody to mature you.

S: Well sometimes you do find that you read a book or you hear something and you are really shaken by that. It has a sort of existential effect on you. You are not the same afterwards or you are never the same afterwards. You're really shaken up, really disturbed; [147] in a very positive way though. It may not feel very positive for a while; it may feel very painful and unpleasant and uncomfortable. "Coursing thus, the wise and learned Bodhisattva, trains not for the Arhatship, nor on the level of the Pratyekabuddhas. In the Buddha-dharma alone he trains for the sake of all-knowledge." In other words the Bodhisattva is represented here as rejecting the lower goals - or supposedly lower goals - of the arhat and the pratyekabuddhas and aiming for the samyaksambuddha, a perfect, fully enlightened Buddha. "No training is his training, and no one is trained in this training." This is from a very lofty point of view indeed.

"Increase or decrease of forms is not the aim of this training, nor does it set out to acquire various dharmas. All-knowledge alone he can hope to acquire by this training. To that he goes forth when he trains in this training, and delights in its virtue."

He doesn't set out to acquire various dharmas, various qualities, various attributes. He doesn't set out to gain anything, to attain anything. This is very much insisted upon in the Diamond Sutra isn't it? That when the Bodhisattva has attained, nothing has been attained. The idea of attainment itself is rejected, but again from a very lofty point of view. One shouldn't, in fact one cannot, go into this prematurely.

Voice: What do they mean by increase or decrease of form?

S: Form is of course the first of the five skandhas, presumably it means increase of decrease of the conditioned, even increase or decrease of birth. One can't even think in that sort of way. You're not trying to make the unconditioned more or the conditioned less. You don't distinguish between them for one thing, and also the very idea or increasing or decreasing is transcended just as you transcend the idea of attainment or non-attainment or both or neither, just as the Heart Sutra says.

Voice: I suppose that when you start out on the spiritual life as it were you've got your own very fixed ideas of what you want to attain. But as you evolve a little bit further you come in contact with the real spiritual ..(unclear).. it will really shake your ideas up.

S: This is a very important and also a very dangerous transitional stage. In fact this sort of thing may happen all along the way. It cannot but happen. Your ideas change, your way of life will change, your way of looking at things may change, but the direction remains the same, in fact the direction becomes more

and more certain and your momentum in that direction becomes more and more powerful. Many people have the experience of being in Buddhism, for want of a better term, or remaining in Buddhism, for very different reasons from those on account of which they entered it - at least very different formulated reasons or formulable reasons.

Voice: I suppose it works both ways as well. Some people might come along because ..(unclear).. and realize that there's something more and the opposite. . .

S: Yes, it is not just changing their ideas but it's seeing more and more truly and getting [148] rid of your misconceptions about it all. Not that you were completely wrong in the first place because even your wrong views are responsible for your doing the right thing basically and essentially. You might have come in for entirely the wrong reasons but you've come in. So could those wrong reasons have been entirely wrong, in the long run?

Voice: It seems to me that it's entirely up to the Order. It's the Order which has become more committed in their own individual selves and then the level of commitment goes up in the Order. Therefore one can say that people who are entering into the Order have a much higher level of . . .

S: A clearer idea. A truer idea. For instance if others see Order members all working like mad at least they won't want to become an Order member with the idea that they're going to have an easy time.

Voice: Though presumably though there is room within the Order for a person that's in a way so lofty that maybe yourself might be able to see that but the other Order members couldn't see that.

S: Oh yes, this is quite possible. One notices even sometimes that there are certain people who are not appreciated, who are maybe on the fringes of the Movement or among the mitras, not appreciated as much as they might be. There are certain things that other people don't see. Not even Order members see. One must be quite open to this sort of possibility. I know it's has happened at least in one of two cases, that sometimes you just can't see. Some person's light may be very much hidden under a bushel. [a reference to Matthew 5:15, tr.] It may not be your fault that the bushel is there, it may be his fault, but the light's there too and one should be able to see that despite the bushel.

Voice: But for general purposes wouldn't you say that the Order's a good screening process (laughter) if people want to commit themselves.

S: A good screening process? I'd rather if possible put it a bit more positively than that in terms of getting the right people in, rather than keeping the wrong people out. (laughter) It's the right sort of magnet, a sufficiently powerful magnet, for those that are capable of being magnetized. Those who really are iron filings and not just dust.

Voice: (unclear)

S: Maybe you're thinking of making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. (pause) All right, let's continue then with the next section. The facts of existence - the facts of life - let's find what they are.

Voice: "The Facts Of Existence [149]

"Forms are not wisdom, nor is wisdom found in form, In consciousness, perceptions, feeling, or in will. They are not wisdom, and no wisdom is in them. Like space it is, without break or crack.

"Of all objective supports the essential original nature is boundless; Of beings likewise the essential original nature is boundless. As the essential original nature of space has no limits Just so the wisdom of the World-knowers is boundless.

"'Perceptions' - mere words, so Leaders have told us; Perceptions forsaken and gone, and the door is open to the beyond. Those who succeed in ridding themselves of perceptions, They, having reached the Beyond, fulfil the Teacher's commandments.

"If for aeons countless as the sands of the Ganges The Leader would himself continue to pronounce the word 'being': Still, pure from the very start, no being could ever result from his speaking. That is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection."

S: "Like space it is, without break or crack." What do you think is meant by that? What is being described? What is like space, without break or crack? Well it's wisdom isn't it? So why is wisdom said to be like that? Why is it said to be like space without break or crack?

Voice: It takes in everything. Nothing is outside its scope and there can be no crack or break in space.

S: Yes. All cracks and breaks or divisions are conceptual only. Wisdom is absolutely continuous, or it's a continuum one could say. It's not made up of parts. It's wholly present everywhere. You can't be sort of partly wise and partly not wise, or even partly enlightened and partly not enlightened, not really.

Voice: Could you say it was omnipresent then?

S: You could, but the comparison with space is quite explicit, so you can say space is omnipresent but when you say that wisdom is omnipresent you're saying that wisdom is like space. Then in what way is it like space or why are you saying it's like space? According to the text here it's without break or crack, there are no divisions in it, it's total, it's everywhere totally present.

Voice: It's the primal void in the Heart Sutra.

S: Yes. "Of all objective supports the essential original nature is boundless; Of beings likewise the essential original nature is boundless. As the essential original nature of space has no limits Just so the wisdom of the World-knowers is boundless."

So here you've got the idea that everything is boundless. Objective supports are boundless. That is, the skandhas, one could say, are boundless in their essential original nature. Beings are boundless in their essential original nature and likewise space and wisdom. So what does [150] one mean by this - boundless - that everything is boundless in its essential original nature?

Voice: No limits.

S: No limits, but what does that mean? Boundless means no limits, but what does no limits mean?

Voice: It cannot be defined.

S: Cannot be defined, cannot be grasped, cannot be comprehended, cannot be analysed, cannot be classified. Just like space. You can't really divide space can you? Not really. You can sort of draw lines in the air but you don't really divide space. You can't really cut up space. So you can't really cut up being, can't really cut up wisdom. They don't consist of parts.

Voice: It's like that thing about a straight line. It's an abstraction. It relies on whatever's either side of it to define it.

S: Maybe the best way of putting it would be to say everything in its essential original nature is indescribable. "" 'Perceptions' - mere words, so Leaders have told us; Perceptions forsaken and gone, and the door is open to the beyond." What do you think is meant by perceptions? Presumably experiencing things in terms of the subject-object duality. When perceptions are forsaken and gone the door is open to the beyond. "Those who succeed in ridding themselves of perceptions, They, having reached the Beyond, fulfil the Teacher's commandments." I'm not quite sure what word this word commandments is meant to translate.

"If for aeons countless as the sands of the Ganges The Leader would himself continue to pronounce the word 'being'. Still, pure from the very start, no being could ever result from his teaching." This is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection."

So even though the Buddha himself said that beings as such existed in reality, no beings would exist. Even if he kept on saying it, even if the Buddha said it - and for a Buddhist you can't put it more strongly that that - even if the Buddha said that there were such thing as beings in reality, even that wouldn't make it true.

Voice: That cuts through the idea of God as the creator.

S: Yes, right, no creation, how then creator? Nothing has really come into existence. That's a very profound metaphysical thought.

Voice: But it has been, trying to see a positive side of (the) ..(unclear).. conceptual framework that the Christian thing to have a God was almost due to their own limited powers of reasoning. But the ..(unclear)..

S: Yes, right. Maybe that sort of framework works practically for many people, or did work. The reasoning was very simple: well here's the world, someone must have made it. It's [151] as simple as that, the reasoning. If you see a pot then you infer the potter, well someone must have made it. (unclear).. but modern evolution theory says, well, it evolved. Even that doesn't really solve the question. That would be unsophisticated. Well evolved from what? Why? Whereas the ordinary man in the street does not put forward this argument: well someone must have made the world, someone must have made the universe, or something must have made it, so whatever made it, whoever made it, that's God. One can't really argue with that. It's such a basic way of thinking for that person. He'd have to go outside his whole mental structure to be able to see things differently, and that he can't do. The Indian minds are very very subtle indeed. They took a lot of undoing. Our minds aren't as subtle as that. They don't recognize the amount of undoing.

Voice: That thing about God. Even as a kid I would never say no ..(unclear)..

Voice: It's almost as though God is given [as] an X-factor. It's a thing that they can't sort out and which lets them get on with the boring trivialization of the week. You know, rice pudding on Sunday and things like that.

Voice: There's also something else. If it is a sort of X-factor there must be some insecurity there because you don't know. Therefore a lot of sort of emotional energy goes in towards this X-factor. It becomes a being.

S: Sometimes a very strange kind of being.

Voice: They get in such states that they'll be so dependent on this being and their interpretation of it that they'll sort of go as far as killing to maintain it.

S: Oh yes. Or even maintaining a particular view about it.

Voice: ... a time in India when there was ..(unclear).. some characteristics ..(unclear).. Vedanta of that period.

S: You mean monotheistic. The belief in God - theism - was know in the Buddha's day but it doesn't seem to have been a very prominent line of thought. The Buddha refers to it sometimes but not all that often. It seems to develop much more strongly later on in India, during what we call the Indian Middle Ages when you get the devotional theistic cults arising and what is called the Advaita Vedanta. Then there's the teachings of Rama..(?) which is a sometimes more qualified non-dualism which does teach a creator and creation, and many other similar such schools later on. This was from about the tenth century onwards.

Voice: I thought that perhaps religion evolved, in that perhaps god concepts came to religion as a necessary stage for where people who had decided to go through.

S: Because Christian students of comparative religion say the god concept came last, and [152] that that, therefore, must the most highly developed of all. But actually modern researches have shown that monotheism comes quite early on.

That tribes considered from various points of view as very primitive in their social organization and way of life and so on have got very definite and clear monotheistic ideas. They believe in one god who has created the universe. This would have been a bit disconcerting to those who regarded that way of thinking as the culmination of man's spiritual quest and coming relatively at the end rather than at the beginning.

Voice: This says something then about the way it's found in the West, because if it is this process of evolution then some higher process is still going on in things ..(unclear)

S: I think one has to be very careful how we use the word evolution. I don't think there can be an evolution of ideas. How can there be, if that is the way individuals evolve apart from the sort of biological use of evolution? It's one of the expressions used a lot without really thinking much. You say development of ideas: what do you mean by that? Do you mean that ideas themselves develop? What do you mean by development of ideas? In what sense is one idea regarded as the development of another idea? Is it suggested by, logically results from it, or merely comes after it? Or what?

Voice: So you say one individual has thought about the previous idea and went against it, so you come up with another idea.

S: Or taking it further within the same direction. But you don't get a sort of abstract development of ideas dissociated from individuals who have those ideas. So in a sense there's no development of religion. Different people have ideas and you can arrange them in a sequence historically and regard one person's ideas as having been inspired by, either positively or negatively, ideas which preceded him. But religion itself doesn't develop. Philosophy itself doesn't develop. It's just a manner of speaking.

Voice: The ideas can become more abstract but they don't develop (unclear)

S: Yes, this is true. One could say there are certain basic positions, certain basic attitudes, existing in varying degrees of refinement. You have the monotheism of a primitive man living a tribal life and the monotheism of Saint Thomas Aquinas and those subtle arguments to support it. Both the same basic monotheistic attitude. The degree of intellectual sophistication associated with us shouldn't be allowed to mislead us. This is why very simple people, who are not able to articulate their beliefs very well, or to communicate them intellectually, they have the same basic attitude and beliefs as others who are able to articulate and communicate. They're not necessarily less developed or with more primitive attitudes. [153]

Voice: ..say, the early Greeks. We can never understand the early Greeks because of their primitive minds. That doesn't seem quite right.

S: No.

Voice: Maybe you can't understand the early Greeks, but that's not because

they've got primitive minds.

S: It's because we've achieved a higher degree of intellectual alienation that they had attained. So we have to put things in an intellectually more sophisticated form. It's not necessarily a more intelligent form or a more developed form. We're not necessarily more developed than the Greeks, the ancient Greeks that is.

Voice: Like a feeling of feeling god from right up in the sky from a really simple ..(unclear).. and using a sort of intellectual ..(unclear).. and building a scaffold to try and get back to it.

Voice: Would it be a totally wrong view to give any correlation between God and sunyata-sunyata?

S: I think such a correlation would only be misleading.

Voice: I think Thomas Aquinas, if he ever came to that conclusion, would be ..(unclear)... Everything he's written - without going into some of the theological arguments - was all a load of straw and you can't really posit anything about God ..(unclear)... So in a sense it was ..(unclear).. the absolute, sunyata isn't it? To an extent they're not the same because he had an idea about God which is not the same as our understanding of sunyata but it's something similar.

S: Generally he felt a general intellectual inadequacy in the face of reality. Perhaps but he wasn't able to come to terms with that inadequacy as the Mahayana at least was. Certainly the Perfection of Wisdom was, and to accept it positively and creatively he'd just make the end of his life work and he died shortly after. Not a new start, not a fresh beginning, not a more creative upsurge.

Voice: Could you briefly give an idea of what is the difference between monotheism and the belief in a god as such?

S: Well God implies monotheism almost always, but monotheism literally means one god. If you say belief in God well you assume it's one god. This is theism. There are two different forms. Usually it is said Deism and Theism. Deism is more the idea that God has created everything and then leaves it to look after itself, but Theism suggests that God not only created everything, not only is he the creator, but he watches over, guards, and [154] protects and is provident also. So usually these two things are distinguished, but both are monotheistic in the sense that both posit one god. Sometimes a distinction is made between simple monotheism like that of Judaism and Islam, and the non-simple monotheism like that of Christianity, because in the case of Christianity you've got within the unity of godhead a trinity of persons, which is not of course accepted by Islam or Judaism. So this is a quite important difference between Christian monotheism or Christian theism and non-Christian theism.

Voice: When you say that the Buddha looks over us and guides us ...

S: Does he? In what sort of way? What do you mean by Buddha? Is it Sakyamuni? I mean the Buddhahood or Buddha nature which Sakymuni fully

realized, that is present everywhere as it were waiting to be realized, waiting to be contacted, that is ever-present, not limited to space, not limited by time. So accessible from any point in space, accessible from any moment in time, and therefore in a sense constantly exerting an influence to which one can open oneself. But not that the Buddha is to be conceived of as a person, not even a person who didn't create the universe, but is nonetheless watching over us.

Voice: (unclear) in some ways the guru watches over his disciples so to speak.

S: Well yes, one can think in those terms. Even in terms of after death, that there is as it were something that survives and that continues to exert an influence. Yes one can say that.

Voice: Some people's idea of God is similar to what you've explained about Buddhahood.

S: In that case they're getting away from the traditional meaning of the word God and it would be better if they just dropped the term. Otherwise it creates confusion if they go on using the word God but the meaning they attach to that word is not the traditional meaning.

Voice: I've come into contact with various people who have got quite strong Christian Catholic upbringings and they've got into Buddhism but they're now trying to get a correlation between them. I'm unclear about it.

S: I'm a bit dubious about this trying to get a correlation between religions, because it means you're trying to keep a foot in each camp. You're not really committed to the path of the unknown. You're not satisfied with the old but you're not really prepared to give it up. (unclear).. you have to do that. You have to give up, you have to make the leap in the dark. If subsequently you discover, yes, there wasn't all that much difference, well fair enough. But your hanging on to the old is usually on account of some insecurity, unwillingness [155] to commit yourself and take a chance and launch out into something new, something fresh. If Buddha means God, well why give up God? If the Sangha is the Church, OK stay in the Church. You don't think about Buddha or Sangha. If the teaching of Christ is exactly the same as the teaching of Buddha, OK stay with the teaching of Christ, why not? Why do you want to establish these correspondences and equations? If you don't want to change your religion until you've made sure that the new religion is the same as the old one, what's the point of changing? (laughter)

Voice: It's like going to a foreign country and saying, oh this is five francs, how much is that in English money? So you buy it without realizing that whatever it was in England you still have to pay that price in a foreign country.

Voice: Couldn't the concept of God have arisen from attempts to communicate the sunyata experience or something like that?

S: No. According to what the Buddha says in the Pali texts it arose from the attempts to communicate the experience of another order, an experience of the

Brahmaloka, but not the experience of anything higher than that. This is one way of looking at it, and the Buddha seems to suggest that even theistic beliefs are the outcome of a spiritual experience of a kind, but limited.

Voice: Certain temperaments would be drawn both to monotheism and Buddhism and (unclear)

S: I wonder if one should speak of a temperament that is drawn towards monotheism, or a particular kind of weakness that is drawn to monotheism.

Voice: I went to see Sri Chinmoy [controversial Indian guru, b.1931, tr.] when I visited Glasgow recently and I felt that a certain kind of person would be attracted towards (unclear)

S: That's a different thing. If there's a particular teacher who puts the teaching in a certain way it's quite likely that that particular way of putting it may appeal to people of a certain temperament, but whether the monotheistic doctrine itself fits a certain temperament that's another matter. If for instance a teacher is very devotional and very friendly and very warm and all that sort of thing, well certainly that will attract one sort of person who is very non-intellectual and so on and so forth. It will attract one temperament and put off other temperaments. But one has to be careful here because in more real terms if one has anything to communicate it's something that goes beyond temperament and is not conditioned by temperament. You have to be very careful that you're communicating the truth through your own temperament or appealing to or through somebody else's temperament, and what you have to communicate is not merely an expression of your temperament simply. Do you see the difference? I do feel this certainly with some of the people I met in India, the so-called ..(unclear).. just an expression of their temperament or an extension of their temperament in a very ordinary sort of way. Not that through [156] temperament they're expressing something that transcends temperament or through your temperament appealing to that in you which transcends temperament. If you've got a very devotional sort of guru surrounded by a lot of devotional-type disciples you must be very suspicious. Maybe they're just getting together on the basis of a common temperament and it's no more than that. It becomes sort of gregariousness. Do you see the difference between these two things? Temperament is important, but if you put the teaching in a certain way, a way that appeals to a person of a certain temperament, it's not merely to satisfy and please the temperament but so they can accept it, and the teaching can go right through the temperament into the person itself. This is where you may find, as I've mentioned before, a certain teacher may have a disciple, a faithful disciple, of a completely different temperament from himself. That's more reassuring in a way. It means that difference of temperament has been transcended; something has been really passed on; it's not just one temperament getting together with another. The Buddha had disciples of many different temperaments. If they'd all been like Sariputra or like Moggallana that would have been suspicious.

Voice: What do you think it is then - how it does seem to work - when you

get a number of people under a guru figure who appear devotional, they are devotional themselves, and it does seem to sort of work. There is some sort of energy passed on through the guru through his disciples. What do you think that is, if there's like a personal god at the top? The guru says just devote yourself up to this deity or something, and he devotes himself up, and the energy comes through him to his disciples. What do you think is happening? Is it a matter of just temperament?

S: No, I wouldn't say that was necessarily a matter of just temperament. There are so many different levels of spiritual experiences and attainments and realization. Something may be coming; in traditional Buddhist terms it would probably be said that it's coming from a dhyana level but there wasn't any insight there. The dhyana levels can be very powerful quite apart from any question of insight.

Voice: In Indian philosophy or in Indian religion you talk about what we call the dhyana level in terms of knowledge.

S: No, the Indians on the whole, the Hindus on the whole, do not make this sort of distinction that Buddhism does. If you encounter ordinary religious or spiritually-minded people in India they think only in terms of dhyana or samadhi and that if you reach a dhyana or samadhi state you are spiritually enlightened; you've realized god. They usually talk in that sort of way, and one can sometimes see even quite easily that the particular person concerned has just had a dhyana type experience and has thought of that as an experience of god or in terms of god realization. They use this sort of language very easily and very loosely. One can see this very easily today in India. And especially if the person has got a rather outward-going, rather exuberant, personality it's very easy for him to convince himself after some dhyana experience that he has realized god, and other [157] people start believing it, and something is built up, and an element of self-satisfaction creeps in. One sees all this, I have seen it many a time. Some of these teachers and gurus are my own friends, that is non-Buddhist friends. Buddhism is much more critical, much more aware, than Hinduism; there's no comparison at all. They're much more spiritually self-aware, much more self critical, and much much less likely to fall into this sort of trap. It hardly ever happens in Buddhism anyway, but in Hinduism it's very very common. You can realize what the Buddha was up against in a sense - why the Buddha adopted the attitude that he did. In India people are very very ready to claim god realization, and others are very very ready to credit them with it. You can very easily set up as a guru on this sort of basis in India especially if you have a rather exuberant, lively, communicative temperament. It's then said to be the overflow of the divine bliss that you've realized.

Voice: Just like a market crowd (unclear)..

S: Right, indeed.

Voice: Can I ask you about your experience when you were staying at the ashram of Ramana Maharshi? Could you say what sort of experience you thought he had or if he worked for realization from his experience?

S: It seems to me that, in Buddhist terms, he had an arupadhyana experience, an experience of the formless dhyanas. That was the impression I got quite distinctly. I think I've mentioned this in the book. [The Rainbow Road (formerly in The Thousand-Petalled Lotus), chapter 39, tr.]

Voice: Ah yes I see. It was sort of on the mythological level of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva.

S: No no, that was just in a manner of speaking. That was by Swami Ramdas [not to be confused with 'Baba Ram Dass', tr.]. Well one noticeable thing was the absence of compassion in the ashram and the caste divisions were still maintained and allowed to be maintained. A Buddhist would say this is quite incompatible with compassion. If there's real wisdom there must be compassion. Buddhists would look at it in this sort of way, a quite simple way. I certainly got the impression that Ramana Maharshi had reached a very high level of meditative attainment and perhaps even was established in that, but that there wasn't wisdom in the full Buddhist sense. That's my overall impression.

Voice: There's nothing innate in the actual dhyana, rupa, and arupa state to lead you on to think there's something more.

S: No, there's something innate in you to lead you on to think there's something more. This is what the Buddha experienced. There's no dhyana state apart from a dhyana person. A dhyana person in a dhyana state is not satisfied unless he has this egoistic tendency to settle down. He's not really satisfied even then. [158]

Voice: With Hinduism what would seem to happen is that people get very satisfied with intermediate states.

S: Yes and also Indians. Hindus actually, to give them their due, are comparatively quite familiar with these states. They've had an actual experience of them and they are, as it were, so seducing. It's quite easy for one without much experience of such states just to criticize the Hindus for getting stuck in them, but they are very seducing, they're very seductive, and it is very easy to think that you are really there when you're overflowing with bliss, and you feel very uplifted and very happy and joyful, and you feel sort of carried along by some divine wind as it were, and you can be quite intoxicated by it. And people start telling you, oh, you're so different, and you start speaking and giving lots of discourses and sermons, and people say how wonderful it is and you start expounding Bhagavad-gita, and lots of people start flocking in. You become very popular and they want to build you an ashram. And they say, well you must have realized god, you're a god-realized self. The shramana starts thinking, well probably he is, (laughter) and then he gets a few Western disciples and then he's really made. You're not a real guru any longer unless you've got a few Western disciples. (laughter) Then you have a world tour and then you collect a lot of money and you build a big ashram and there you are. This is the story of dozens upon dozens of them nowadays, even hundreds of them. They're not fakes, no they're certainly not. They're very often sincere men and very good men, and they do

a lot of good according to their like. But to realize wisdom, from a Buddhist point of view, is quite another matter. Some are very likeable, very helpful, very positive, yes, lots of emotional positivity in them very often, but a Buddhist would not regard them as enlightened. It's very good to have them around. It's good that there are such people, certainly.

All right, the last verse. I'll read that.

"And so the Jina concludes his preaching, and finally tells us: 'When all I said and did at last agreed with perfect wisdom, Then this prediction I received from Him who went before me: 'Fully enlightened, at a future time thou shalt a Buddha be!' "

So the Buddha is saying that when he himself was a Bodhisattva it was only when everything he did was in accordance with Perfect Wisdom that then it was predicted by the Buddha of those days, who was Dipankara, that yes, you too one day will become a Buddha. So he concludes by emphasizing in this way the importance of wisdom. It is wisdom that makes Buddhas, not just meditation in the narrower sense. One must also say - just adding to what I've said earlier on - that in the Vedanta's position, especially the Advaita Vedanta, there's certainly a tradition of jnana - knowledge - as well as of samadhi. They certainly are quite aware of the fact that it's jnana or knowledge gnosis which gives ultimate realization, but it seems, according to my experience and contact with them, that it is almost always an intellectual knowledge and very rarely backed up with dhyana. You seem to get this rather strange division of those who've got some actual experience of dhyana but no knowledge, and those who just have a theoretical, intellectual knowledge not backed up with dhyana. Maybe sometimes the two do come together but I think very rarely. In my 'Thousand-Petalled Lotus' [later included in 'The Rainbow Road', tr.] I've given the account of the visit by my friend and myself to the swami on the banks of the [159] River Ganges who got really upset and angry when what he believed about everything being Brahma was questioned. [Rainbow Road p.375, tr.] It's not an uncommon type in India among these sort of people: a purely intellectual understanding of these things strongly insisted upon and apparently in some case mistaken for actual realization.

Voice: I've got this vague analogy forming about light. You can sort of see it was emanating from a source or you can have the wisdom as being the source that emanates from you. And then on a higher level there is no you that it's emanating from.

S: Just the light.

Voice: Going back to the Greeks, Plato definitely defined different levels of knowledge ..(unclear)..

S: Yes indeed. Reading Plato's dialogues one sometimes does get the impression of something actually experienced of a higher nature, and not that Plato was simply an intellectual in our modern sense. He was also something - for want of

a better term - of a mystic as well as of course a poet and artist.

Voice: Did Plato go for the pantheistic tradition?

S: No he didn't.

Voice: In the ..(unclear).. you said something about it is wisdom that makes ..(unclear)...

S: Wisdom backed up by samadhi or backed up by all the paramitas. Therefore wisdom is said to be the mother of the Buddhas. It gives birth to Buddhas, wisdom that make Buddhas.

Voice: It reminds me of the section in Hui-neng, the Platform Sutra, I think it's the essence of compassion is prajna and the essence of prajna is compassion.

S: Yes, it says that about prajna and samadhi. Like the light and the lamp or the lamp and the light. He uses samadhi in a rather different way though, as was pointed out in our discussion on the Platform Sutra.

Voice: In this context you say wisdom backed up by the paramitas.

S: Yes in the sense that what transforms your purely intellectual understanding into an actual experience. It's the concentrated energies, positive energies, positive emotions, that comes from the practice of dhyana and so on.

Voice: Up to samadhi it's samatha practice.

S: Oh yes. Samadhi itself in the non-Hui-neng sense is samatha. Dhyana is samatha. So [160] in the course of the practice of samatha, of dhyana, you integrate all your energies, you reach a high level of emotional positivity. You become a very integrated, as it were, powerful individual and then you put all that unified energy, integrated energy, into penetration into the truth with the help of certain intellectual supports, as it were, derived from the tradition. Then you are able really to see, really to penetrate. That gives birth to wisdom, or first of all to insight and then gradually to wisdom.

Voice: Wisdom in a sense is the practice of insight.

S: Yes. Sometimes prajna and vipassana are sort of equated, sometimes vipassana is referred to as the sort of flashes of insight that comes intermittently and prajna as the sort of permanent faculty.

Voice: So in a sense one could say instead of penetrating into prajna, in a way isn't it penetrating into you?

S: Yes. Though actually the Perfect Wisdom texts speak of the Bodhisattva penetrating into prajna. Prajna being feminine in gender and therefore the analogy being quasi-sexual as it were. The male penetrating into the female. The Bodhisattva who is an active agent penetrating into prajna. The Bodhisattva of course being feminine as when he practises ksanti, patience. He patiently accepts the unacceptable, he allows himself to be raped by reality as it were, you could say. Another way of looking at it.

Voice: You could really be seduced by it couldn't you?

S: Well if you looked at it like that I suppose in the right sort of way you could. This is one of the four functions of Buddhahood according to the Tantra, to seduce, to fascinate, to attract. If you develop metta you see everything as sukha, as purely beautiful, you'll be attracted by that. Buddhism hasn't developed this line of thought much, but the Hindus have: that you're attracted by and seduced by reality. Reality is something sort of fascinating. It's personified in the figure of Krishna and there is the account where he's armoured with the gopis, the fascinating. He can very easily be taken a bit too literally, as you can imagine, but the idea is there and for many people this is a path. It's not excluded even from Buddhism, that you could be seduced by reality, that you were ..(unclear).. to lay yourself open to the possibility of ..(unclear). You can be raped by reality as when suddenly an experience comes upon you which you never had anticipated. Why has it come? Well you could say it's from the result of something done in previous lives but you don't ..(unclear). It's as though something happens to you, some experience occurs out of the blue as it were. Maybe reality is raping you. Maybe reality has got an eye on you. Maybe reality fancies you. It doesn't want you out wandering in that samsara any more. (laughter) Who knows? One must be open to all sorts of possibilities of expression. Don't forget the Bodhisattva is represented in Tantric Buddhist iconography with his hook of compassion to hook you, to pull you in. He is also [161] depicted with his lasso, he's going to lasso you and haul you in like some reluctant steer being lassoed by a cowboy.

Voice: It would be a cowgirl wouldn't it?

S: No, a cowboy. (laughter) So this also is connected with something I was talking about a few days ago about taking initiative. Was it on this retreat? About taking initiative. Not just waiting for people to come to you - you going out to people. If you see someone passing by or someone around who looks likely, he seems a positive sort of person, could well set his foot on the spiritual path: go and talk to him. Go and have a friendly exchange and see what happens. This is you taking the initiative. You as it were see if you can ..(unclear).. spiritually speaking, transcendentally speaking. You are taking the initiative. Not just waiting for that person to come, just sitting there hoping that he will come in your little centre. So one mustn't think that the only way of getting in touch with people is by opening a centre, having a regular programme of lectures and classes, and hoping that people will come. No, just sally forth and seek out people. That may be an even better way. You take your pick then.

Anyway we've come to the end of those two chapters now, which conclude our study of the Perfection of Wisdom for this retreat. So just look through quickly and see if there's any final point to be dealt with because come tomorrow it seems we'll be dealing with Milarepa: breaking into fresh terrain. What sort of general impression do you get from these two chapters? First of all as regards style and then as regards content?

Voice: It seems to go over the same sort of theme again and again.

S: Yes, though it is quite short. As with the not settling down in, not resting on and not standing in. Not taking appearances for reality.

Voice: Is this a recent translation?

S: It's very recent.

Voice: Because the ..(unclear).. seems a bit archaic ..(unclear)..

S: Yes. But I think that is deliberate on the part of the translator.

Voice: Coming into Buddhism for the first time you could read this and say 'oh I couldn't possibly, it's not for me. Too dry and abstract.' I think a lot of people would feel that.

S: Also this draws attention to the fact that traditionally one never reads the texts by oneself; one always studies it with a teacher. And one can perhaps see why. Texts are not meant to be read by the uninstructed person by himself. There cannot but be misunderstanding. [162]

Voice: I can never read any.

S: Well this is what I sometimes have said in the past, that one might be better off reading the classics of English literature rather than reading books on Buddhism on your own. Better off from the Buddhist point of view. I think probably by the time we get through a few more texts it will hardly be necessary for the average Friend, Mitra, or Order member to go through or to know or to be acquainted with any book other than those which have passed through a study retreat and been transcribed, edited, published and put in circulation. Let's hope we can get through a sufficient number to provide everybody with what they want. Though what you want and what you need is really very very little indeed. I sometimes quote what Ramakrishna used to say: that if you want to conquer an army you need thousands upon thousands of weapons and much equipment. If you want to commit suicide a single pin will do. In the same way if you want to convert and teach others you need to know thousands of books, but if you just want to get on with your own spiritual practice and gain enlightenment yourself then one single mantra is sufficient. So it is very much like that. So perhaps you should read books after you're enlightened. I've known gurus who have done this. Just read more after their - maybe enlightenment, maybe not enlightenment - but certainly some higher spiritual experience, just so as to help them to communicate with people. They've not got any need for it themselves.

Voice: Do you think it could be quite a good practice for people to read texts and books and the same texts and books which are going to be studied on a retreat because in a way it could be quite good feedback for yourself seeing how you relate in relationship with the teacher and ... (unclear)

S: One could do that. Some people do get together and study texts which have

not been studied in a study retreat, but they get together and go through it themselves. This also is very good. Much better than reading on one's own. You've done that haven't you?

Voice: In a way there's the little you and then there's the teacher, and you see your relationship with the teacher so to speak, and you can sort of develop your style or your literal style of how you see the interpretation of the book in relationship with the teacher and then from him understanding.

S: Yes, you can see what you've missed.

Voice: Or maybe not missed but also where you've gone wrong.

S: I think very often it's not seeing connections and not seeing the full implications of a certain statement or passing it over thinking you have understood it when in fact you haven't.

Well these are the first two chapters and these are supposed, according to Dr Conze, to be the original two chapters. Others having been added subsequently. So [163] they do reflect a very early stage in the development of the tradition of the Perfect Wisdom.

Voice: If these are meant to be verses in the poetical sense then the actual prose text must be even dryer.

S: Maybe. You'd have to read and see. This is one of the texts I'm hoping to go through in full. The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines is in my opinion the richest of all the Perfection of Wisdom school, and I hope sometime to finish the verses too.

Voice: Are there more chapters?

S: Yes. There's altogether more than thirty. There's thirty-one chapters of the verse covering some seventy pages. We've done fourteen pages and two chapters. But these two are the basic ones, the most important.

Voice: Has this been written down by Subhuti ..(unclear).. of Subhuti's authority?

S: No, presumably it was to him that the Buddha spoke and he no doubt taught others according to tradition. Ananda isn't mentioned. Subhuti according to the Mahayana tradition is particularly associated with Perfect Wisdom. It's to him particularly that the Buddha [gave] this sort of teaching.

Voice: The way the chapter is constructed it starts off introducing the Dharma and then goes on to develop the Bodhisattva ideal at the end, sort of culminating.

S: Well Perfect Wisdom deals with prajna. Prajna is the sixth of the Perfections and the Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva by virtue of his practising the Perfection especially of wisdom, therefore an exposition of prajna is almost automatically an exposition of the Bodhisattva's way of life, how the Bodhisattva courses in Perfect Wisdom, so it's as if one is unable to separate the two.

All right, let's leave it there for today and tomorrow we go on to some of the Songs of Milarepa.

end of seminar

(Corrected by Sangharakshita, digitized by Diane Hughes, further corrected, copy edited, and annotated by Shantavira, November 2004)