

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on 'Buddha and the Future of his Religion' by Dr B.R. Ambedkar

(Article originally in Maha Bodhi Journal, April/May 1950, reprinted in India, 1981 as a pamphlet.)

PRESENT: Sangharakshita, Vessantara, Uttara, Sudhana, Sumana, Cittapala, Jayamati, Sanghapala, Chakkhupala, Dharmamati, Ratnaprabha, Padmapani, Douglas Ponton, Duncan Steen, Peter Nicholson, Paul Tozer, Alan Pendock, Ben Murphy, Ong Sin Choon, Alan Turner, Kevin Donovan, Derek Goodman, Colin Lavender, Thomas McGeary, Gerd Baak.

6 September 1986

Vessantara: So today, Bhante, we started studying Buddha and the Future of his Religion. I think most of the groups have been partly finding their bearings in the Indian world, because a lot of the questions that we've got are really requests for more information and explanation to help us get into the text as it were. We'll start with Sin Choon.

Ong Sin Choon: As a matter of interest, [I would like to] know whether this article was written before Dr Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism.

S: No, it was written in 1950 and it was published in the Wesak issue of the Maha Bodhi Journal for that year. The mass conversion happened in 1956, so it was written more than five years before that.

Peter Nicholson: Do you know at whom the article was aimed, who it was written for? And do you know what language it was originally written in? Do you know whether it was a translation?

S: No, it was written in English. It was written for the Maha Bodhi Journal, as I have just mentioned, and the Maha Bodhi Journal was and still is the official organ of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, so presumably Dr Ambedkar wanted to reach the readership of that magazine. It was read by those sympathetic to Buddhism in India as well as by English-speaking Buddhists in South-east Asia and even in the West. Inasmuch as it was the organ of the Maha Bodhi Society, and inasmuch as the Maha Bodhi Society had its Buddhist roots in Sri Lanka in Ceylon probably Dr Ambedkar was addressing mainly a South-east Asian English-knowing Buddhist audience, one could say. He hadn't at that time actually said in so many words that he was going to become a Buddhist, and he seems to have been sort of feeling his way and also voicing some of his ideas about Buddhism, also suggesting some criticisms of contemporary Buddhist practice. So that's briefly the background. It will all be described in much greater detail in my forthcoming little book Ambedkar and Buddhism.

Vessantara: Did this article elicit much response, do you know?

S: To the best of my knowledge, it elicited very little response, and that is perhaps in itself significant that the Buddhist world, especially the Buddhist world of South-east Asia, should not really have taken much notice of it, if in fact any notice. I myself took some notice of it, and I wrote to [2] Ambedkar after reading it and we had a brief correspondence, and of course I met him a couple of years later.

Sumana: Do you know whether he was commissioned to write this, or did he just submit it to the Journal?

S: I wasn't editing the Maha Bodhi Journal then, so I can't speak from personal experience. It is quite possible that he was invited to write or submit an article, because, as I mentioned, it was published in the Wesak issue of the Maha Bodhi Journal and that was an especially thick number; and the usual practice was to write around to all sorts of Buddhist scholars and prominent people, asking them to contribute articles to the Wesak issue. It may well be that he had been approached in that way. Or again, he may have just sent it, because he was beginning at that time to express his views about Buddhism and about the necessity of Buddhism in India, quite strongly from various public platforms.

Vessantara: Peter has a question about Dr Ambedkar and the spiritual life.

Peter Nicholson: To what extent do you feel that Dr Ambedkar was himself leading a spiritual life? Do you know if he meditated regularly?

S: This, of course, does raise the question of what one means by a spiritual life. He didn't meditate, to the best of my knowledge, in any formal sense; but despite his intellectuality he seems to have been he was a very emotional man to begin with, and he seems to have had very strong devotional feelings towards the Buddha. Those feelings seem to have been very strong indeed, particularly strong at the end of his life. There is no doubt he led a spiritual life in the sense that throughout the whole of his career he was concerned with the needs of others; there is no doubt about that. In India, politics can be a very dirty game and there is a lot of corruption in politics, but so far as one knows Ambedkar was completely free from anything of that sort. He certainly had a very strong moral sense and very strong ethical principles, and he based his life very much on those. You will get, I think, a fuller picture when this book of mine comes out. I don't want to refer to it too much, because the fact of it coming in hopefully three months' time doesn't help you very much now!

Vessantara: There is a quotation towards the end of the pamphlet which seems to imply that Ambedkar didn't have a very high opinion of meditation. About bhikshus, he says: 'Of these, a very large majority are merely sadhus and sannyasis spending their time in meditation or idleness.'

S: That phrase is ambiguous: 'in meditation or idleness'. It is not clear whether he regards meditation and idleness as the same thing or whether he regards them as two different things. Do you see what I mean?

Vessantara: Yes, I do see that. He also says that they are 'merely' sadhus and sannyasis, which suggests that he does not have a very high opinion of that way of life.

S: Yes, perhaps one must see here the Indian and the Hindu background. I get the impression he doesn't state in so many words that he regarded meditation, in the light of his Indian and Hindu experience, as consisting in a sort of rather selfish self-absorption in, possibly, inner blissful states, [3] regardless of what was happening in the world, especially regardless of the sufferings of other beings. So he was looking at meditation in a way much as a Mahayanist might look at the arhant ideal. These were the associations that meditation had for him, in view of his Indian and Hindu background. He saw it simply in terms of self-absorbed, selfish

mysticism of a sort. And, of course, one must remember that sannyasins in India well, until very recently traditionally have no conception of any concern for society at large. They are definitely doing their own thing and don't consider that they have any sort of responsibility towards society or towards other living beings, so their attitude could be regarded as a complete negation of the Bodhisattva ideal. Ambedkar, one could say, saw Buddhism very much in terms of the Bodhisattva ideal, and though he doesn't speak of the ideal bhikkhu as being a sort of Bodhisattva, that does seem to represent his way of thinking. Sometimes, of course, he did admit that he tends to see the bhikkhu rather too much in terms of the social worker that can't be denied which is, of course, in a sense the other extreme. But at his best, one might say, he sees the ideal monks, or the spiritual life itself, in traditional Buddhist terms in terms of the Bodhisattva ideal rather than the arhant ideal. In view of the background from which he came, one can hardly be surprised at that. I refer to the background from which he came I mean the fact that he came from an Untouchable family and the fact that the Untouchables had such a degraded position in Hindu society at that time and still have.

Vessantara: When you say that 'up until recently' those who take sannyas had nothing to do with the world, are you thinking about Rajneesh people claiming to ?

S: No, I was thinking of the Ramakrishna Mission, to which he refers towards the end of this article. The founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Vivekananda, was of course strongly influenced by the example of the Christian missionaries and also by what he had read about Buddhism and the ancient Buddhist monastic orders.

Dharmamati: In this article, Dr Ambedkar compares Buddhism with three other religions. By him, Krishna is treated as a historical person. Could you say something about how Krishna is seen by Indians?

S: Hindus, of course, do see Krishna as a historical character, but in the form in which they see him he can't be regarded as fully historical. The figure of Krishna seems to be a composite one. There's a Vedic rishi who is called Krishna and who is referred to by the Buddha in the Pali Canon as Kanha. Kanha is the Pali equivalent of Krishna. There is also the Krishna of the Mahabharata, who is represented as the teacher of the Bhagavad Gita. Then, of course, there is the Krishna of the Srimabhagavatan(?), a quite late Hindu scripture, a Purana, which presents a quite different Krishna, not the warrior, not the teacher of Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, but the playmate of the gopis, the milkmaids of Brindaban(?). So traditional Hinduism tends to fuse these three quite distinct figures, none of which may in fact be historical, certainly not fully historical. Hinduism, of course, regards Krishna as one of the incarnations of Vishnu, and of course he is a very prominent figure, one of the two or three most prominent figures in the whole of Hindu mythology. The two most prominent incarnations are, of course, those of Rama and Krishna. They are worshipped all over India; you find their temples everywhere. The Hare Krishna people [4] especially worship Krishna, but in his Brindaban(?) form; they worship Krishna together with Radha, his favourite among the gopis; so that sort of double form is often called Radhakrishna. You must have heard that via the Hare Krishna people? Hare is another name for Vishnu, so Hare Krishna means Krishna who is the incarnation of Vishnu.

Cittapala: Would Hindus see Krishna as a founder of Hinduism or...?

S: No, they wouldn't. Here Ambedkar is taking a semihistorical view. Orthodox Hindus do

not see Hinduism as having any founder at all. Orthodox Hindus believe that Hinduism, to use a comparatively modern term, is based upon the Vedas, and they believe that the Vedas are what they call *aparusha*(?), that is to say they have no human author. So inasmuch as the Vedas have no human author and inasmuch as Hinduism is based on the Vedas, Hinduism has no human founder, or no founder at all, and modern apologists for Hinduism regard this as a strong point, so far as Hinduism is concerned. They say that all other religions, like Buddhism and Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, had individual founders, and in a way stand or fall with the founder; but in the case of Hinduism it is based on the Vedas which are eternal and indestructible, etc. etc., so Hinduism has a much stronger foundation they say. This is one of the current arguments. Sometimes they say that 'Veda' means knowledge and that means that Hinduism is just based upon divine knowledge. It is not based on any particular individual, and that is one of the sources of its strength. From our point of view, of course, Hinduism is an ethnic religion, and ethnic religions usually don't have individual founders; it's only the universal religions which have individual founders.

Ratnaprabha: Would you say that the Hinduism that Dr Ambedkar is mainly dealing with here, that is the Hinduism of the Bhagavad Gita, is an ethnic religion, or is it starting to move in the direction of a universal religion?

S: That raises interesting questions, because it raises questions about the origin and authorship of the Bhagavad Gita. A book has been published recently with the title *Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita*. According to at least some scholars, the Bhagavad Gita in its present form is post-Buddhistic and shows traces of Buddhist influence. So one could say that there are ethnic features to the Bhagavad Gita. For instance, it represents a justification for orthodox Hindu social philosophy. It justifies the caste system. On the other hand, there are other more purely ethical and spiritual features, some of which may be derived from Buddhism. There has been a great deal of discussion and controversy over the Bhagavad Gita. You probably know that it is part of the Mahabharata do you know that? Are people familiar with the Bhagavad Gita? (Voices: Yes.) It's part of the Mahabharata, the Mahabharata being one of the two great Hindu epics, as we call them, the other being the Ramayana. It's clearly later than much of the rest of the Mahabharata. It has been inserted as a sort of episode, one might say, in eighteen short chapters of Sanskrit verse. Some scholars believe that it originally consisted only of two chapters and that these were subsequently expanded; there are all sorts of theories. But it most likely is a quite composite work. But it's a very important and very popular work in modern India. Its real popularity began when Shankaracarya wrote a commentary on it. It is certainly the most popular Hindu scripture today in India, partly because it is quite simple in style, it is quite easy to understand, and also there is something in it for everybody! It is a typical, you could say if you wanted to be unkind or a bit critical, Hindu sort of hotchpotch, and this makes for its popularity; there are elements of Vedanta, [5] elements of Samkhya, elements of Yoga, and also it is written in very simple and mellifluous Sanskrit, the Sanskrit is quite easy to follow. So that obviously helps. The poetry of it in places is of quite a high order, and there are many, many, dozens and dozens of English translations, possibly even hundreds. One of the very earliest was Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial*. That gives a very good idea of its poetic quality because it is in verse. It was one of the very earliest Indian texts to be translated; it was translated by Wilkins at the end of the eighteenth century. It was known to Blake, by the way.

Voice: Coool!

: Does it seem to have influenced Blake at all?

S: I don't think so. Blake was familiar with works about India, I think, works on Hindu mythology containing illustrations, and I think there are one or two engravings by Blake showing a Hindu god, probably Brahma, sitting on a lotus flower. I don't remember anything more than that. You would have to ask one of the Blake experts.

Peter Nicholson: Dr Ambedkar is a bit caustic about it. He says that nobody can say for certain what the Bhagavad Gita actually teaches. Do you agree with that?

S: I think that is fairly accurate, because in modern India there are so many books written on the Bhagavad Gita, so many commentaries, all making out that the Bhagavad Gita teaches different things. For instance, Lokamanya(?) Tilak, a famous Hindu authority, was convinced that the Bhagavad Gita sanctioned violence in a good cause. Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, who was a great admirer of the Gita, was convinced that the Bhagavad Gita taught absolute nonviolence. So you can see the amount of scope to different interpretations which the Bhagavad Gita does give. Some maintain that its predominant teaching is karma yoga, others that it is bhakti yoga, others that it is jnana yoga and so on. Radhakrishnan has given his own interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita; Aurobindo has given another; Tilak has given another. There are dozens of different interpretations. So there is some justification for saying, even if it has an underlying consistent philosophy, that it is not apparent. And there are so many different interpretations, therefore. But there is no doubt that it contains some individual passages which are quite inspiring; one has to admit that, even if one does perhaps believe that those particular passages are probably of Buddhistic origin! There is one particular passage, I think in the second chapter, which has a very strong resemblance to a sutta in the Sutta Nipata a description of the sthita(?) prajna that is the Bhagavad Gita's term that is, the man who is established in wisdom.

Vessantara: Bhante, can you give us some background information about kapilans(?) in the Samkhya system?

S: I think I mentioned I don't know whether it was this year or here last year or somewhere else, some other time I spoke about the six systems of Indian philosophy, haven't I? the six so-called orthodox systems, the six darshanas. There is Samkhya and Yoga, Jnaya Vajlishika(?) and the Purava(?) and Uttara Vimamsa. I have spoken of these, haven't I?

Sanghapala: At the Order Convention ...

[6]

S: Ah, that's right, yes, I spoke there. They all have their individual founders, and the traditional founder of the Samkhya school is Kapila. Kapilavastu, the Buddha's home town, is supposed to have been named after him.

The Samkhya is like the Abhidharma, one might say, a sort of realistic pluralism, and it is nontheistic; and on the practical side it is associated with the yoga system. It has a very loose connection with orthodox Hinduism, really. It doesn't appeal to the authority of the Vedas, it appeals only to the authority of reason and experience. It is probably the oldest system of Indian philosophy. Some of the early Western scholars in Buddhism believed that it had influenced Buddhism, influenced the Buddha himself, quite strongly, and you may remember

that in Asvaghosa's *Buddhacarita* there is a quite detailed refutation of the Samkhya philosophy put into the mouth of the Buddha in his pre-Enlightened days. The Buddha, of course, is represented as having studied that system at that time; though that account isn't contained in the Pali sources. In the Order Library at Padmaloka there are quite a number of books on Indian philosophy; you can easily look up Samkhya if you are interested.

Ratnaprabha: Could you recommend a general book on Indian philosophy?

S: The most generally accessible and readable is probably Radhakrishnan's two-volume *Indian Philosophy*. I'm not sure if we have that, actually, though we ought to have it. But there are dozens of shorter histories. That is very well written and very informative. He is not completely reliable when it comes to Buddhism, though, I have to warn you. Probably the standard work, in a sense, certainly the longest one, on Indian philosophy, is Dasgupta's seven-volume *History of Indian Philosophy*. He is even more learned than Radhakrishnan, in fact much more learned, but he is not such a good or clear writer. I knew both of these gentlemen both, of course, deceased. There is an account of my meeting with the second of them, Surendranath Dasgupta, in the second volume of my *Memoirs*. I met him in 1950, quite a venerable old gentleman.

Derek Goodman: It says in the text here, 'The Buddha made a clear distinction between a *margadatta* and a *moksadatta*.' The question is: is this clear distinction made in the Buddhist scriptures? Is it to be found in them, or is it just ...?

S: These terms themselves are not found in the Buddhist scriptures, to the best of my knowledge, but the Buddha did, of course, make it clear that perhaps not in so many words Enlightenment or salvation or liberation was not something that he could give you, that it was something that you had to achieve by your own spiritual efforts. That is clear. But that particular terminology does not seem to have been used by the Buddha, or to be found in the Buddhist scriptures. But the distinction certainly represents the sense of the Buddha's teaching, one might say.

Sumana(?): What in fact do the terms mean? What does a *moksadatta* mean?

S: They are wrongly spelt, by the way probably in the original. *Moksadatta* is the giver of salvation or the giver of emancipation, *moksa* being salvation or freedom or emancipation or liberation; the Pali is *mokkha*. And *datta*, one who gives. *Margadatta* is one who gives, that is to say gives in the sense of shows, the path or way; and that the Buddha certainly was.

[7]

Cittapala: Are these terms Ambedkar's coinage?

S: They are Sanskrit words, they are Sanskrit terms. But, as I said, to the best of my knowledge they are not actually found in the Pali Canon itself, or for that matter in the later Sanskrit works. It is possible that they do occur, Sanskrit being such a rich language that particular combination of *moksa* and *datta* and *marga* being possible, but they are certainly not used in that technical sense. But the distinction is found in the Buddhist scriptures, even though those particular terms aren't actually used.

Ratnaprabha: Is it d.a.t.t.a. it should be spelt?

S: It should be double t, yes. Datta is one who gives. It is connected, obviously, with the word dana.

Douglas Ponton: Would you explain the terms yajnas and yagas?

S: This simply means they are two different words meaning different kinds of Vedic sacrifices. Vedic sacrifices are sacrifices usually of animals, sometimes of libations of ghee poured into the sacred fire, always to the recitation of Vedic mantras for a particular mundane purpose. These are called yajnas and yagas. These, of course, are mentioned constantly in the Pali texts; especially in the Digha Nikaya there is a lot about the inefficacy, according to the Buddha, of the Vedic sacrifices, which were very elaborate and which involved a vast expenditure, and from which of course the brahmins, who alone were entitled to perform these sacrifices on behalf of other people, greatly profited. In modern times, yajnas and yagas are comparatively rare because, owing to the influence of Buddhism, animal sacrifice virtually disappeared from India and was not revived to any extent, even after the disappearance of Buddhism from India. It is quite occasionally that you find animal sacrifices of the Vedic type being performed in India. You get animal sacrifices of the Tantric type much more frequently, especially in connection with the worship of Kali, the mother goddess you might say; and sometimes of other gods and goddesses. It is one of the things we have had to do among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists weed out the practice of animal sacrifice, because they were in the habit of sacrificing goats and chickens to quite a variety of minor gods and goddesses, and one frequently had to speak against this practice when one explained to them what as Buddhists they ought and ought not to be doing. It is still quite common among those who profess to be Buddhists in outlying villages and so on. Often they are not aware that it is not in accordance with Buddhist religion. They have received no teaching about Buddhism.

: What would be the distinction between Vedic and Tantric sacrifice on ...?

S: The technical distinction is that Vedic sacrifices or Vedic rituals generally are performed with Vedic mantras, and Tantric rituals are not performed with Vedic mantras but with mantras or texts or verses taken from the Puranas or the Tantras. Generally also, the Tantric rituals are more of a sort of popular character, they are less associated with brahminism; you don't necessarily have to have a brahmin to officiate and so on. Probably the most famous centre for animal sacrifice of the Tantric type in India is the Kalighat temple in Calcutta; I visited there, you might remember my mentioning it briefly in *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*. Goats were still being sacrificed there black goats. The Nepalese, of course, are great animal sacrificers, the Hindu Nepalese, especially at the time of Dassera(?) they sacrifice buffaloes, hundreds of them.

[8]

: You are using the term Tantric is that as distinct from Tantric in the Tibetan Buddhist [sense]?

S: Oh, yes, there were at least six different Tantric traditions in India. There is the Buddha Tantra, the Buddhist Tantra. There is the Jaina Tantra, even; it is a very small and little-known one, but there is one. There's the Saiva Tantra, the Tantra associated with Siva; those works are sometimes called agamas. And then there is the Tantric tradition associated with the mother goddess, Kali or Durga, Sridevi and so on that's usually called nigama. And

there's a tantra associated with Ganpati(?), the elephant-headed god; and a tantric tradition associated with sun worship. So there are all these different tantric traditions in India. The Buddhist is only one. But the Buddhist, you might say, is the most highly spiritualized, and it's that, of course, which went to Tibet. Most of the other tantric traditions involve animal sacrifice not the Jaina, of course. Usually Tantric Hinduism means the shakti cult, the worship of the mother goddess as the supreme, all-pervading power, either under the form of Kali or Durga, Parvati or even the local smallpox goddess is widely worshipped!

Vessantara: How much influence do the different tantras have on one another? How much does the Buddhist tantra have on the others and vice versa?

S: It's very difficult to say. One might even say there was a sort of substratum of popular, semi-tantric practice which was sort of worked up by the different religious traditions in various ways, in accordance with their particular principles, and utilized for their particular purposes. Buddhism also made use, so to speak, of that trend in Indian culture and religious life.

Ratnaprabha: Are all six of these tantras associated with sexual practices, which is the association one tends to have with Tantra in the West?

S: To the best of my knowledge, not. To the best of my recollection, it's the tantric tradition associated with the shakti, the female power as you might say, in which those sort of practices are predominant. In that tradition it speaks of what they call the pancamakara(?), the five things beginning with M one of which is maitilina(?) or sexual intercourse. Buddhism has been influenced by that trend the Vajrayana has been influenced by that trend as regards its symbolism, but it is extremely doubtful whether it involved itself in actual sexo-yogic practices, as Western scholars sometimes say, in the way that the shakti tradition did. There is a lot here that needs still to be unravelled, there is a lot that we still don't know about the historical development of these different tantric traditions. There is sometimes quite a bit of overlap between the quasi-Hindu tantra and quasi-Buddhist tantra. The 84 siddhas are claimed as founders by both Buddhist and Hindu tantric systems.

Sanghapala: Would the Hindu tantric traditions that claim the 84 mahasiddhas to be founders of their Tantra movement [claim them] to be the same names and the same stories?

S: Well, there's a traditional list of 84, but there were different versions of those lists, both in Buddhist and in Hindu sources, and they don't always give exactly the same names. This is one of the reasons why it's so difficult to work out their history; but there are certainly some names that are common to both traditions, like Matsindranath(?) he is one of the most famous of all the siddhas but he is claimed both by the Buddhists and the Hindus; so, I believe, is Goraknath. There is a natha tradition you notice that their names end in natha. There is a natha spiritual tradition in India even now, tracing itself [9] back to the siddhas, and that natha tradition has some Buddhistic features. For instance, it is strongly against caste. I think someone, one of our own Friends it might have been an Order Member was travelling around North India some years ago, and entered a particular Hindu temple, which he described to me in a letter, and he said the atmosphere felt just like that of a Buddhist temple; he was quite surprised. But from his description I worked it out that this was a temple dedicated to Goraknath. So that did account for the Buddhistic feeling of it, which was really quite strange in a way.

: I think it was Keva(?)

S: I think it was, yes.

Douglas Ponton: In *The Thousand Petalled Lotus*, you describe, or you hint at, these Indians who seem to be above the caste system in some way. They are a tiny, very select caste. They seem to be almost

S: Oh no, I think you are referring to the Varrier castes. No ha ha! there was this old friend of mine who belonged to this very small caste, and when I tried to find out where his caste stood in the caste system, he said that they were higher than brahmins, which was of course nonsense in Hindu terms. I could only explain it by thinking that perhaps that caste represented descendants of a Buddhist who didn't recognize the supremacy of the brahmins; and he was certainly affiliated to a Hindu tantric tradition. I think I mentioned that he was especially a worshipper of the goddess Rajarajeshwari, which means the lady who is a queen of queens; or the lady of the king of kings, you could also translate it like that. But anyway, a very important Tantric goddess. But I wasn't able to get confirmation of my hypothesis. Because of his Tantric affiliations and sympathies, he may not have been very sympathetic to the claims of the brahmins; it may have been just as simple as that. But I have never been able to find out exactly what this Varrier caste was. It is hardly mentioned in any book that I've come across.

Thomas McGeary: In the second paragraph of his article, Dr Ambedkar makes a statement that Jesus, Muhammad and Krishna all made certain claims. Then he goes on to say that the Buddha was born a son of man and was content to remain a common man and preach his gospel as a common man. He never claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural powers, nor that he performed miracles to prove his supernatural powers. Obviously, you want to get across the Dharma, but I wondered whether you would comment on how helpful or skilful these oversimplifications were.

S: Could you just read that little by little again?

Thomas McGeary: He says that the others after the Buddha made special claims, and then he says of the Buddha: 'He was born a son of man and was content to remain a common man.'

S: I am not sure quite what he means by 'son of man'; perhaps it is just a sort of redundant expression. There might have been some vague idea in his mind of the gospel expression 'Son of Man'; it's applied to Jesus, isn't it? Do you remember? But anyway, he means an ordinary human being. I don't think any special significance is to be attached to that expression. Anyway, carry on.

[10]

Thomas McGeary: 'and was content to remain a common man and preach his gospel as a common man.'

S: Preach this is open to possible misunderstanding, because the Buddha didn't preach his gospel as a common man in the sense of a privajana(?) one who is not Enlightened. The Buddha preached as a Buddha. But I think what Ambedkar is getting at is that he didn't claim any divine authority. He didn't say that people should believe what he taught because he was

God. He only spoke from his own spiritual experience and taught people that if they followed the path that he had discovered they could become Enlightened in the same way that he had become Enlightened. So he did not claim any authority in the way that Krishna, Jesus and Muhammad did.

Thomas McGeary: That's true. 'He never claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural powers.'

S: 'Never claimed any supernatural origin.' This is correct. Not 'supernatural powers'? I am not sure whether Ambedkar was aware of the distinction between supernatural and supernormal. There is a distinction, because we speak, for instance or Christians would speak of Christ having supernatural powers because he was a supernatural being; he was the son of God, so he had supernatural powers. He shared God's own powers. He could raise people from the dead and perform other miracles. The Buddha did not claim supernatural powers, because he wasn't God, nor the incarnation of God. But he did, according to the Pali Canon, claim supernormal powers, that is to say, powers which were extensions of ordinary human faculties. I'm not sure whether Ambedkar had that distinction in mind, but one could make that point. So the fact that one has supernormal powers does not constitute any evidence of Insight or Wisdom of Enlightenment. Devadatta had those powers, or some of those powers. So they are merely supernormal, they do not in themselves have any spiritual, i.e. transcendental, significance. And then?

Thomas McGeary: 'Nor did he perform miracles to prove his supernatural powers.'

S: If miracles are an exhibition of supernatural powers and if the Buddha didn't have supernatural powers in the sense that I have mentioned, then he didn't perform miracles. According to the Pali Canon, he did from time to time exhibit what one might call supernormal powers, but to what extent those are authentic records is another matter. But clearly his overall appeal was to reason and experience. He is represented as rebuking one of his disciples for trying to impress people with his supernormal powers. I have argued in some of my lectures and writings that at least some of the, as it were, supernormal powers exhibited by the Buddha are to be understood symbolically. For instance, the famous Yamakaidhi, when the Buddha rose into the air and emitted fire and water simultaneously from his body is one to take that literally? It does seem as though the compilers of the scriptures are trying to tell one something about the Buddha on the spiritual level. Though the incident is represented as having actually happened.

: I think that must have been it.

S: Sometimes Ambedkar's language is a bit clumsy. He doesn't always make very fine distinctions.

: I get the impression overall that it is not simply a clumsiness of language; in trying to dissociate the Buddha from God, he is [...] regarding him or emphasizing his humanity to a point -

[11]

S: Yes; which in a way is a quite extraordinary thing in the Indian context, because, in the case of the Indians, the last thing that they want to emphasize about any great teacher is his

humanity. They want to make him into a divinity, an incarnation of some sort, as quickly as possible. I have seen this happening with people I have actually known, who have ended up being regarded as incarnations [12] of God, even God himself I have known several such people (Laughter) ... sometimes get literature from people in India and other places claiming to be incarnations of God. I won't say they come every week, but they do come from time to time. The Indian or the Hindu, at least, has this very strong tendency. Ambedkar himself spoke very strongly against what he described as the very unhealthy Indian tendency to hero-worship. He regarded this as most unfortunate. You see, there is this famous verse in the Bhagavad Gita this is, in a way, what it goes back to where Sri Krishna says, 'Whenever unrighteousness prevails, I will take birth to restore righteousness.' Hindus are always quoting this verse. (Quotes it in Sanskrit). The verse that goes like that. 'Whenever Dharma declines and non-Dharma prevails, I, O Arjuna, will descend and put things right' this is paraphrasing. So this is the tendency of the Indian, [to believe] that some higher power will put things right. This is why, if you read Indian newspapers and magazines, you would be really surprised by the way in which current politicians [such as] Rajiv Gandhi and various chief ministers in different states are almost divinized by their followers, the way in which they are treated; it just doesn't happen in the West at all. Even Hitler didn't receive that sort of adulation. It really goes to extremes in India. There is the chief minister of a particular state at this moment; he is governing a state of 60 million people, and he has become a sort of sannyasin, he is going around in sannyasin's gear, with a great turban (Laughter) there are photographs of him in magazines I get, sitting at his desk with this great orange turban and his orange sannyasin's gear, and his fingers like this, and a picture of one of the Hindu divinities behind him, and probably in the next issue I will read that he has proclaimed himself an incarnation. He used to be a film star! But this man is governing a state of 60 million people. Wherever he goes, there are thousands and thousands of people flocking to see him. So the Indian has this tendency, and this is what Ambedkar is protesting against all the time. And, of course, Hindus try to see the Buddha as an incarnation, one of the avatars of Vishnu, the ninth avatars of Vishnu. So this removes the Buddha from the human sphere, and it substitutes worship of the Buddha as an incarnation for the actual following and practice of his teaching. And this is what Ambedkar is really getting at.?

Ben Murphy: Is there a similarity between this tendency of Hindus to regard people as incarnations of divinities and the Dalai Lama being regarded as the incarnation of Avalokitesvara?

S: I suppose in a very general way but on the whole the Tibetans tend to be much more sober and realistic in their attitude towards religion, including this particular question. Hindus really do go over the top and are often totally uncritical; which you couldn't say of the Tibetans they at least scrutinize their incarnate lamas carefully, at least to begin with! But Hindus don't criticize, don't scrutinize critically in that sort of way at all, one could say. I hope I'm not being too unkind, but they really are very uncritical, and very given to hero worship. Ambedkar saw this as a great weakness in the Indian character, and as very dangerous for democracy in India. He believed very strongly in Western parliamentary democracy. He was also a socialist, one might even say a state socialist; and he believed that the Indian attitude of worshipping political leaders and religious leaders as supermen and incarnations of God was very dangerous for democracy in India. He was dead against it, not only on religious but on practical political grounds as well. And his fears seem to have been justified.

Ong Sin Choon: Bhante, you mentioned prajans(?) earlier on. I just wondered whether you

mean that Jesus, Muhammad and Krishna saw themselves as prajans.

S: Huh?

Ong Sin Choon: Prajans(?), i.e. common folk. I just wondered whether Jesus, Muhammad and Krishna are themselves in that category.

S: Ambedkar himself in many ways was a rationalist. He seems to have regarded Krishna, Jesus and Muhammad as historical personalities, as common men in his terms; but he regards them as having, as common men, made very great claims on their own behalf. He describes how Muhammad claims to be the messenger of God; Jesus claims to be the son and messenger of God; and Krishna claims to be the God of Gods. So he regards them, perhaps rather crudely, as being actually ordinary human beings who made these very exaggerated claims on their own behalf. But again one can find people doing that nowadays in the twentieth century.

Cittapala: Do you think that Ambedkar was really aware of the distinction of an Enlightened being as being different from a human being? Do you think his knowledge of the Dharma was actually that good?

S: I don't think he fully realized the difference. I don't think he did. He had, of course, a tremendous admiration for the Buddha and he had very strong devotional feelings towards him; but I think to go back to terms in which I discussed this whole question years ago traditionally in the West we find it difficult to think in terms other than those of either human being in the limited sense, or God or incarnation of God in the sense that Jesus is the incarnation of God. We don't have a category of Enlightened humanity. So, yes, Ambedkar did believe that the Buddha was an Enlightened human being; he believed that; and therefore that he was higher than any other human being. But I think that his understanding of Buddhism was not such that he could fully appreciate the difference between an ordinary human being and an Enlightened human being. He went some way towards seeing it, but I think not the whole way by any means. I mean it is quite difficult to see that difference, [you need] a quite deep understanding of Buddhism, and some spiritual knowledge and experience oneself. So one might say that, in his anxiety to show that the Buddha was not God, not an incarnation, he probably leaned too far to the other extreme.

Douglas Ponton: I wanted to refer to the Indian tendency to hero worship and ask you how far you felt Dr Ambedkar used that when he was arranging the mass conversion?

S: He himself seems to have strongly discouraged his followers from hero worshipping him. He seems to have disliked it intensely. None the less, they did insist on hero worshipping him, especially after his death, in ways of which I think he would have disapproved quite strongly. None the less, he did do so much for them, and they were quite right to appreciate what he had done for them. But the form it took, I think, sometimes, didn't meet with his approval during his lifetime and wouldn't meet with his approval after his death.

Douglas Ponton: So you don't think that his personal charisma was a major factor in the fact that he managed to arrange for so many people -

S: But in a way he was not charismatic. He certainly had no superficial charisma. He never went out of his way to please people or humour them, or to court popularity. As a person, he was rather grim, rather unsmiling, uncompromising, not particularly friendly. But the ex-Untouchables recognized that he had worked quite selflessly for them over very many years, and they appreciated that and they had the very highest regard for him on that account. But he wasn't a charismatic personality. So he was highly regarded definitely on account of his achievements and his work, not just on account of any superficial tricks of personality. He just didn't have those.

Peter Nicholson: You mentioned that [he was] hero-worshipped after his death. Does that still continue today?

S: Well, yes, that does continue. In a way it has its positive side. It has a negative side, too. The positive side is that people believe very strongly well, they believe rightly that he did the best that he could for the ex-Untouchable people during his lifetime, and he did succeed in raising their, what shall I say? their general status considerably. They still are in a quite bad condition in India generally, but not nearly as bad as before, and they are grateful to him for that. So in a way they do hero-worship him. That has a positive side inasmuch as, out of their regard for him, they have taken to Buddhism and therefore they are very open to Buddhism, out of their faith for him. But on the other hand, sometimes they do follow him, or do follow what they think he thought or think he said, quite uncritically, and they are sometimes very closed if they think that what somebody is saying is opposed to what he said. They very often don't understand really what he said, because many of them the majority are still illiterate; they can't read his writings. They've only got a very general idea of his teaching or his attitude. So the hero worship has its positive and its negative aspects. But if one is skilful one can utilize it in a positive way, and discourage its negative features.

Padmapani: Bhante, how do we as the Movement operate through that process of trying to encourage the Movement out there to spread, using Dr Ambedkar's teachings? Do we encourage hero worship, for instance?

S: Well, I suppose this depends on what you mean by hero worship. Or it depends what one regards as hero worship and just where and how one draws the line between a justifiable appreciation of someone's services and an irrational sort of hero worship. Well, I've met followers of Dr Ambedkar who believe quite firmly that he was the most learned man that has ever lived, for instance, and he almost literally knew everything. Some of them have got that sort of faith in him, and clearly one can't encourage that. But this is in the Hindu rather than in the Buddhist tradition.

Cittapala: I have read one of Ambedkar's I suppose historical accounts of the Buddha's life and teachings. There did seem to be a number of surprising accounts or versions, which I'd never come across, of some of the stories and so forth. What is the TBMSG's line, as it were, on teaching the Dharma in that kind of way?

S: Well, we don't teach it in that particular way, the Order Members don't. The attitude or ordinary followers of Ambedkar, say, outside the circle of the TBMSG, is that Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism is the right one; they just have a blind faith in that. So they will accept any version of the Buddha's life that he gives, and he has his own version, one might say he has his reasons for his [14] version, but it is his version, and it is not one that is usually

accepted by Buddhists whether rightly or wrongly. But so far as the TBMSG is concerned, we encourage people to look quite critically even at what he taught, even at his interpretation of Buddhism. But you have to do that quite carefully, for two reasons. First of all, his followers have got this very strong, even blind sort of belief in him, and if they feel that you are criticizing him or you are against him and often they think in terms of either being for or being against they won't listen to anything else that you have to say. You'll be finished, so far as they are concerned. So you have to be very careful how you put your point, you have to be able to put it across, but very gently at least suggesting that there are other interpretations of the Buddha's life and we have to take those into consideration, too. You can't just say bluntly that you think Ambedkar is wrong. They just wouldn't listen to you again. But the better you know them and the more they trust you and this, of course, is the case with our Order Members well, they can understand these things quite easily, quite clearly.

Cittapala: I have a question which I think follows on from that. He says in here that he's talking about the Buddha 'The Buddha gave liberty to his followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required.' Do you think that Ambedkar does that to the Buddhist Dharma in such a way that is politically advantageous to his way of seeing things?

S: I am not sure what you mean by 'politically advantageous', because it certainly wasn't his conversion wasn't politically advantageous at all; because it meant that well, he isolated himself in a way. But he certainly is concerned to stress the social aspect, or the social bearing, one might say, of the Buddha's teaching, especially with regard to the caste system. Because you must recollect that in India there was a very rigid social structure, and that social structure is characterized by the caste system, one of the logical consequences of which is Untouchability. One of the features, one might say, of Hinduism and Hindu philosophy has been that social life and spiritual life have been kept in completely separate, watertight compartments, and that higher spiritual teachings have never been allowed to influence or affect social life. So that you can have Hindu teachers who profess to have realized the Absolute, but who still strictly observe the caste system as, for instance, I saw myself in the case of Anandamayi and Ramana Maharshi. They claim to have realized nondual Reality and all the rest of it, but in their social life they are observing all these very invidious distinctions. In this way, the so-called higher spiritual life is prevented from having any effect, any ameliorating effect, on the social order. Ambedkar was absolutely opposed to that, and he insisted that in the case of the Buddha, the Buddha had applied his teaching, and applied his spiritual principles and realizations, to the amelioration of humanity generally and the reform, if you like, of society. So he found it necessary to break down that division which is set up in Hinduism between the social order and the spiritual life.

Cittapala: But inasmuch as he does give an account of the Buddha's life, which you just said wouldn't actually be accepted by most traditional Buddhists, isn't he well, isn't he going beyond the Buddha's brief, as it were, in terms of using the Dharma in the spirit of taking what actually works, as a means? It seems to me that somewhere or other he is using it for his own ends to some extent.

[15]

S: Well, in a sense he is, because Buddhism is for human beings' ends. One of the things I have been saying recently is that in the West people seem to suffer more psychologically than materially, so we approach Buddhism from a psychological point of view to give us peace of mind, for instance; at least initially that is the approach. We consider this quite justified. But

in India, in view of the general condition of the ex-Untouchables in the social system, they approach it more from a social than a psychological point of view. So in our case, we eventually balance our psychological attitude, realizing that there has to be some kind of transformation of society too. And in their case they eventually balance their social approach, if they persist long enough, with what we might consider the psychological one; they become interested in meditation and so on. This is what we find with those who become involved in the TBMSG activities in India. But their approach looks quite strange to us; ours looks no less strange to them! They find it very difficult to conceive of the sort of psychological problems that people in the West suffer from. Some of the Indian Order Members reading Shabda and reading the reporting-in of English and, well, Western Order Members, find it very difficult to understand the various problems that their reporting-in discusses. They think it all really rather odd!

Colin Lavender: Do you think Dr Ambedkar's vision of Buddhism and its potentialities was rather limited, perhaps even limited to social potentiality?

S: Well, yes and no; it depends what you mean by social. Because to Ambedkar the social meant the ethical and the ethical meant the other-regarding, and that leads you, of course, straight into the Bodhisattva ideal. Ambedkar seems to have been deeply convinced that the social order had to be a moral order. This, in a way, seems to have been his deepest personal conviction that the social order had to be a moral order, and that society couldn't have a non-ethical basis. It couldn't even have a basis that was ethically neutral. It had to have an ethical basis, otherwise it couldn't exist. A legal basis wasn't enough, a basis of power wasn't enough; it had to have an ethical basis. And eventually he defined ethics in terms of brotherhood, in terms of fraternity, and in terms of love between human beings in the sense of metta. So that was his vision. It wasn't a vision of society in the Marxist sense; he repudiated Marxism. It was a vision of society, a conception of society, which was deeply humanistic, one might say, humanistic in the most ideal sense.

: Returning to the Dharma's chip and chop, Bhante, it still does seem to mean that, in trying to avoid being identified with the views of Krishna and Jesus and Muhammad, Ambedkar has again gone to the other extreme. He seems to be well, he says the Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught. It seems almost as if you could chip and chop any of the Dharma, really, from what he is saying; and presumably that would be going to the other extreme rather than having a sort of fixed, rigid, handed-down type of teaching.

S: Yes, again, those are the two extremes.

Cittapala: Based on this, I don't get the feeling that Ambedkar has actually just on what he says here a very strong feeling for spiritual hierarchy, in a sense; that it's up to oneself as an individual to . . .

S: I think one has to understand that in India, and especially for the Untouchables, or ex-Untouchables, the whole idea of hierarchy is absolutely out, because they have had so much of this quite iniquitous social hierarchy they being right at the very bottom of it and they have been so oppressed in the name of hierarchy, that it is going to take generations before they can think of hierarchy in a positive spiritual sense. I think one has to accept this. I [16] think it is not surprising that they can't think in terms of hierarchy. I think some of our Indian Order Members can just about manage to appreciate the idea, but the masses of

ex-Untouchables well just regard the whole idea of hierarchy as an absolute abomination, because to them it means the hierarchy of brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras, and them as Untouchables right underneath the shudras. I think we can just have no idea of their feelings in this respect. Hierarchy to them is the most negative of negative terms. So it's going to be, as I said, generations before they can have much of an idea of spiritual hierarchy.

: Even though it was presented in those terms to them, they might not like it. I don't get the impression that they suffer particularly from individualism or pseudoegalitarianism. Do they not in a way have appreciation of hierarchy say, would they not appreciate the hierarchy of Order Member, Mitra, sohaya(?)?

S: Ah, you see, we're talking about two quite different things. Because it's quite different within our own Movement. But there are only involved to that extent [there] a few hundred people, and there are several millions who are quite different and whom one would have to get to know individually very well, whose confidence one would have to win, before one could get them to understand things in this sort of way. This is what we are trying to do. But we are dealing with very vast numbers of people, most of whom are illiterate.

: But it isn't the people who suffered in the social hierarchy bringing their fear or hatred of any idea of hierarchy into the spiritual community and refusing to acknowledge spiritual hierarchy within the spiritual community?

S: This does not seem to have happened within the Order or our own Movement in India at all, I am glad to say. If anything, they are less susceptible to reactivity to authority than many, I would say, Order Members and Mitras are in England. Fortunately, yes.

Uttara: Is it more to do with the deities, then? because I noticed in Shabda an Order Member commenting on Manjusri why should we have images of a Buddha (supposed to be) with a sword, you know; to them it would have . . . connotations

S: Yes, it wasn't just that. You must remember that, iconographically, Indian Buddhist Bodhisattvas look remarkably like Hindu gods, and they as Buddhists don't want anything to do with Hindu gods; and they are very suspicious of representations of Bodhisattvas. They certainly appreciate the Bodhisattva teaching and ideal, but those particular representations and pictures to them look so much like Hindu gods they just don't want anything to do with them.

Uttara: So do you see in India, maybe iconographically, the Bodhisattva taking on different forms eventually?

S: It might eventually, yes. It is rather like supposing, in Britain, for instance, you were to be presented with pictures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas which looked exactly like Jesus and the Christian saints you wouldn't be too happy! (Laughter.) It's that sort of thing. But we love to see Indian Bodhisattvas well, they don't have the associations for us of Hindu gods and goddesses. But iconographically it is very difficult to distinguish, sometimes, Bodhisattvas and Hindu gods.

[17]

Uttara: Another question in relation is: some ex-Untouchables came along to the Glasgow

Buddhist Centre and I had a conversation with one of them, and I think we got on to the subject of vegetarianism; I think it was drink, too, but I think the main subject was vegetarianism, and I asked him if he was a vegetarian. He said, 'No, I'm not a vegetarian because Hindus are vegetarian', so as to try and

S: Yes, this is quite true. They are concerned to be as different as possible from Hindus. They want nothing to do with Hinduism, even those areas which Buddhism and Hinduism actually share they don't want anything to do with, because their feeling against Hinduism is so strong quite understandably on account of the way in which they have been treated. They want nothing to do with it. But those who are more, let us say, educated and articulate, and who understand what is Buddhism and what is Hinduism I mean there are still millions of people in villages who haven't a very clear idea still of what Buddhism is all about.

Jayamati: This morning in our study group we formed the impression that Ambedkar was using the language of the populist to try and get his message across, and thereby being quite approximate in his teaching of the Dharma: things like the fallibility of the Buddha and the hierarchy question. Yet, listening to you this evening, you seemed to be warmly appreciative of the emphasis that he was placing, allowing for these slight distortions; which struck me. My question is I suppose it's back to the language point in the middle of

the day, isn't it? evolving a language that actually communicates seems to be, as we were saying this evening, vitally important, even if it does include a certain distortion, if that's the right word re-emphasis, maybe.

S: Yes, oversimplification. Sometimes you have to oversimplify to say anything at all and to make the oversimplification the starting point, and refine upon that more and more until you can say what you really want to say. One also must remember that, as I said, Ambedkar wrote this article in English for an English-language magazine, and perhaps the readership wouldn't have been more than a couple of thousand. He certainly wasn't writing it mainly for his own followers, who wouldn't have been able to read it anyway. Most of his writing was actually in English, though his speeches were mainly in Marathi. But his writings, apart from his own letters, I think were all in English.

Cittapala: Are they of a similar style to what this particular article is written in?

S: I would say that the article is not the best example of his writing. Some of his other writings are much better, from a literary point of view, though he wasn't one of those Indians who handled English extremely well. He can't be compared with, say, Radhakrishnan or Aurobindo or anyone like that. At his best his style is a bit rough, but he is always vigorous and direct; probably those are his greatest merits when it comes to his actual writings.

Cittapala: So would the style of oversimplification that he seems to be writing in here be due to the fact that the audience would have been so small?

S: No, the oversimplification is nothing to do with smallness of audience, because the small audience might have consisted of scholars, and many of the contributions in the Maha Bodhi Journal are very, very scholarly.

Cittapala: This is what confuses me. Why should he want to write in this kind of way for that sort of person? It seems that this is much more of a populist style, appealing to large numbers of people with probably very little understanding, who just wanted to have a very simple case put before them.

S: It could be, of course, he didn't have much idea about the readership of the Maha Bodhi Journal. It could be that he was just airing his own views, just trying them out and perhaps seeing what sort of response or reaction he might get. It could be that he was just unburdening himself. It could be, of course, that he wrote the article very quickly, very hastily.

[19]

Tape 2

Uttara: Do you think the reason, maybe, for the oversimplification and also his own interpretations of Buddhism was that he didn't have well, presumably, he didn't have much contact with other Buddhists say, he didn't have any teachers to go to?

S: This is true, yes. I think one shouldn't underestimate the difficulty that that gives rise to. There were many people in India Indian scholars who had quite a good knowledge of Buddhism in a way but they were mostly, well, almost entirely, Hindus and often brahmins at that, and he deeply distrusted their interpretations, and often with reason. Radhakrishnan is not a reliable interpreter of Buddhism. And I must say that the bhikkhus in India were really just not intellectually or spiritually up to the mark. He did visit Sri Lanka and Burma; he wasn't especially impressed by many of the things that he saw there. So who did he really have to talk things over with? We mustn't perhaps underestimate the difficulty of that sort of situation.

Uttara: So were you one of the first people he came into contact with?

S: I did have some contact with him, but it was quite limited. You mustn't forget that at that time I wasn't particularly well known. I was quite young, not much more than half his age. So perhaps for that reason also, he couldn't take me as seriously as he might have done if I'd been rather older. And also because, by the very nature of his career and achievement, he was a quite independent sort of person, who thought for himself.

: Bhante, do you think he wrote for the Maha Bodhi Journal in the hope that he might stir these supposedly indolent Buddhist scholars and so on to actually do some real social action?

S: There is certainly that possibility, too, yes. He was a bit of a sledgehammer, in a way. He sometimes got very frustrated and very desperate and even very angry, because he was in many ways so much on his own, and battling against this completely indifferent Hindu society. Don't forget, he wasn't very pleased with the Maha Bodhi Society either, because this is all going to come out in my little book in the early 50s the President of the Maha Bodhi Society was an orthodox brahmin. Every president of the Maha Bodhi Society had been an orthodox brahmin since it started, a Bengali brahmin. And this is the Buddhist organization of India; and it's headed by brahmins. So what do you imagine Ambedkar's feelings were? And the one the last of the Bengali brahmin presidents was someone (I mean you really don't know all the ins and outs of Indian life) had been a past president of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. And the All-India Hindu Mahasabha this particular brahmin, Shama Prasad

Mookerjee had been one of his principal opponents in Parliament when Ambedkar was trying to get through the Hindu Code Bill, which would have meant a reform in Hindu personal law. They were his bitter opponents, because they were orthodox Hinduism. And it was one of these people I met him also, Shama Prasad Mookerjee who was president of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. It's almost as though, in England, say, we had, say, as the President of the Buddhist Society not our comparatively innocuous Christmas Humphreys but some scheming Jesuit or someone like that! Do you see the sort of thing Ambedkar was up against? It's very difficult to form any appreciation of it. It's quite surprising, really, that he sent that article to the Maha Bodhi Journal; he was so annoyed about the fact that it had a Hindu brahmin president. And most of the members of the governing body were Hindus, anyway. This is one of the things I was up against. I have a few words to say about [20] that in my memoirs. And, partly due to myself and a few other people, when Shama Prasad Mookerjee died we actually got a Buddhist elected as president, and that was the Maharajah Kumar of Sikkim, who was a friend of mine. And when that happened, we were all accused of narrow-mindedness in wanting a Buddhist as president! This was another famous example of Sangharakshita's intolerance! the sort of way in which he got that reputation, which he still has! So this is the sort of thing Ambedkar was up against. So you mustn't be surprised if he goes a bit over the top sometimes, and he really hammers away in a rather ferocious manner; is even one-sided or even exaggerates a bit. Don't forget all these pressures of Hinduism are still there, and the Buddhist movement is still having to cope with them; in fact, if anything they are stronger than ever. There are some very active, very orthodox Hindu revivalist movements working in India at present. So we really are up against quite a lot, and Ambedkar was up against quite a lot. He really virtually stood alone. He had some lieutenants, as they are usually called in India sort of very junior colleagues but they really weren't up to much. So really there was just Ambedkar and the masses, the vast illiterate masses.

Ben Murphy: Does the Maha Bodhi Society have any contact with the ex-Untouchable movement now, any connection?

S: Not really, no. A few of the bhikkhus, most of whom were known to me, did have some contact with the ex-Untouchables immediately after the conversion; they did move around among them a little bit, but not much. I think at present there is virtually no contact at all. One mustn't also forget that the Maha Bodhi Society is strong not very strong but, such as it is, its strength is in Eastern India, in Calcutta; that's where the headquarters are; and to some extent at Sarnath. And, of course, the movement of the ex-Untouchables is mainly in Central and Western India. There are centres of the Maha Bodhi Society here and there; you've got one bhikkhu there running a centre, and two bhikkhus there. That's how it is, it's a very small body; though it was at one time very well known. We are in contact with one or two of the Maha Bodhi Society bhikkhus surviving from those days, but there are really only one or two of them left, I think. They've all died in the meantime.

Uttara: Do you think there was any significance that this movement came about I think it was at the same time as when India was gaining its freedom? Because I know Ambedkar was involved in it; he was happy enough just to see India free, .. freedom ?

S: There was some connection, because Ambedkar was very worried what would happen to the Untouchables after India gained independence. He felt that the Untouchables were much better off under the British than under the caste Hindus, and he saw quite clearly that when independence came it would be the caste Hindus who seized power; and he was very afraid of

what they might do to the Untouchables. So his long-term strategy the trouble is, he didn't really live long enough was to try to spread Buddhism to such an extent that Hinduism would be completely undermined. Because he felt that the more Buddhist India was the better chance for democracy there was in India, and the better the chance there was for democracy the more likely the Untouchables were to be decently treated. But, of course, he didn't succeed. Towards the end of his life, he realized that Buddhism wasn't going to have the influence in India as a whole that he had hoped, not just yet; so he had better do what he could and at least lead the Untouchables, or at least a percentage of them, into Buddhism. But really, he wanted to revive Buddhism in India not just for the Untouchables but for the whole population, because he felt well, he believed that religion was [21] necessary, that man couldn't do without religion; and he believed that society had to have a moral basis. He had no faith in Hinduism, he was completely against that. He believed it negated all human values. So he really wanted to convert the whole of India to Buddhism. This was really his idea. But it just wasn't possible.

: Bhante, why did Ambedkar leave converting so late? It was virtually his last act.

S: This is a question that people often ask in India, and writing my little book I have come to some conclusions about that. I think he left it so late for several reasons. I think, first of all, he was really hoping to be able to persuade a lot more people to follow Buddhism. He certainly didn't want that Buddhism should be just confined to the Untouchables. So initially he seems to have hoped that the whole of India could be swayed in the direction of Buddhism. Then he seems too have felt, well, at least all the Scheduled Caste communities all the Untouchable communities, that is about 100 million now; nearly 60 million in his day. But then his influence was not so strong with all of them as it was with the community, the particular Untouchable community, in which he was born, that is the Mahar community, which is about 4 to 5 million strong. So I think he held off as long as possible in the hope of bringing more and more people in. But in the end he realized it seems, it is not very clear that it was only in the case of the Mahars that he had sufficient influence to actually swing them right round to Buddhism. He also felt that he was getting old, he was very ill, the last few years of his life; and it was sort of now or never. But it seems that he postponed it as long as possible, basically in the hope that in the meantime he could persuade more and more people to follow him.

Vessantara: Perhaps also his political star sort of waned and so he had less influence and . . . less effect.

S: No, I don't think those two were connected; I don't think his political influence, in terms of the influence he wielded by virtue of his office, had much connection with his influence on the Untouchable masses. The two were quite independent.

Vessantara: Was it to some extent the case that, because politically his career had taken a downward turn, some people could then see his conversion to Buddhism to some extent as a

S: Oh yes, this was definitely said at the time, I remember it very well, by those who tried to minimize the significance of the conversion. But in a way he was trying to operate on two fronts at the same time, because in Parliament he was concerned with legislation which would ameliorate the lot of the Untouchables, and a lot of his time was taken up with parliamentary work, and of course for a time he was a minister first of Labour and then of Law. After he

resigned as Law Minister, when his Hindu Code Bill failed, he was freer to devote himself to his purely religious activities. But I think he really would have preferred to go on in politics, too, if he could have done, because he felt there was a lot of work that he had to do there. But in a sense he was taking on too much. In some ways it is fortunate that he did have to resign, because then he did devote himself more and more to Buddhism and eventually there was the mass conversion in Nagpur in 1956. Also it does seem that there was a quite rapid, serious deterioration in his health the last year of his life. He may have felt that he would have another 10 or 15 years to live, whereas in fact he only had another year to live. And that became more and more obvious to him as the year progressed.

[22]

How far did you get today with the little text?

Vessantara: Well, different groups approached it in different ways. Most of us finished round about the end of the first section, the bottom of page 4.

S: So any other questions?

Duncan Steen: Bhante, were you ever inspired by the scale of Dr Ambedkar's social achievements in India to consider going into politics yourself?

S: I wouldn't use the word inspired in connection with going into politics! (Laughter.) In India, I never thought in those terms, partly because I'd not had a real interest in well, maybe it's not correct to say real interest I never had a real urge to get involved in politics, though I certainly kept myself reasonably well informed. For many years in India, I never looked at a newspaper as a matter of principle. I didn't start reading newspapers in India until the time of the trouble in Tibet, and the Dalai Lama's flight, and I wanted to follow that. After that I thought, well, perhaps I'd better look at the papers sometimes. I don't like doing it, but it is as though one needs to keep oneself a bit informed as to what is going on in the world. But in India, I had no idea of getting politically involved there; I steered clear of politics as much as I could. When I was working among the ex-Untouchables, some of their political leaders tried to involve me and tried to get me on their side against other leaders, but I always avoided that and confined myself to strictly religious activities. But I must say in England I have sometimes wondered whether it wouldn't be a good thing or a necessary thing for us, or even for myself, to get involved in politics; because it does seem that one needs to operate on that front too. But as I looked around I saw that in Britain politics is party politics, and I couldn't see any party with which I really could sympathize. I mean some of the things that some of them did sometimes occasionally one could agree with, but one couldn't say anything more than that. Certainly I couldn't see myself as joining a political party. But then one also has to recognize that unless you belong to a political party in Britain you can't really get anything done. Well, one could, I suppose, start a new party; we've seen that; there are one or two new parties well, there are lots of little tiny parties, the Green Party and well, there are parties that put up a single candidate and he gets perhaps 150 votes and forfeits his deposit. Well, is that really very helpful? But then for some years I've not really thought at all seriously about politics. I've almost given up politics as a bad job. But I have encouraged our Friends and Members to get involved if they can on the local level, because there you can do something. For instance this is at the very lowest level of all, but this is where one has to start at Padmaloka I encouraged Subhuti and Kovida to attend meetings of the parish council, and I think that is a good thing. It helps neighbourly relations, and if you've got a planning

application in it helps to have the parish council on your side. And also in east London, in Bethnal Green, I have encouraged some of our people there, especially the office bearers of the FWBO, to be in friendly contact with local politicians, not necessarily with Members of Parliament but members of the they've changed it recently, haven't they? the borough council as it used to be; I don't know whether they still call it that. And we did have some useful contacts, and that does help. Apparently going a bit off the track, but never mind in Tower Hamlets, I gather, believe it or not, the Liberals have got in, haven't they? and they've got a neighbourhood scheme. They are dividing Tower Hamlets into six neighbourhoods, and each neighbourhood is having an office to coordinate neighbourhood developments and activities. I thought that an excellent thing, so [23] I have urged Tejamati, I think it was, to have contact with the members of that neighbourhood council. We might be able to get, with their cooperation, a pedestrian precinct! In any case it's good that they know who we are and that they can trust us, and we're good people to give grants to, and things like that. So I certainly encourage that quite low-level participation. I think in fact we have to do this if we're going to conduct activities on any scale in a particular area; we have to be on friendly terms with the local borough councils or their equivalents. It's just common sense. But more than that, I really don't know. I think it's quite a shame if idealistic people and let's describe ourselves in those terms just don't see any sort of opening for them in politics. Why should politics just be left to all the power-hungry people? I think this is what it mainly is. I think nowadays it is very difficult to get on in politics, regardless of your particular political predilection unless you've got an absolute lust for power. That isn't very Buddhist, is it?

Anyway, any more questions?

Jayamati: I am getting the impression, Bhante, this evening, listening to you talk about Ambedkar, that he was a man who started with a social vision and then used or applied that vision to the Dharma, which then was able to fuel his work.

S: I wouldn't agree with the word 'applied'. He certainly started off with a social vision, because he saw, one, the state that the Untouchables were in and he saw that something had to be done about it. At first he seems to have thought more in social terms, but then he seems to have seen that his social vision required so to speak a religious underpinning, and he found that religious underpinning in Buddhism.

Jayamati: What's interesting me is starting that way round with a vision, and then finding the principles that contained your wildest aspiration. (S: Yes.) What's exciting about it is that the passions are already engaged in as it were a near vision, and then I can just feel that from reading the article then that passion is carried forward into the sort of wider mandala.

S: That's true. For instance, there are far more people involved on various levels in the FWBO or the TBMSG in India than in Britain. There are far more ex-Untouchable Buddhists in India now than there are Buddhists in Britain, so why is this? It's the same teaching. If anything, it's presented much more clearly and effectively here than it is there; it has been presented consistently for a longer time. But why the great appeal there? Well, the reason is that there it links up with matters which are of very personal interest to a very large number of people; in the person of the Untouchables, a lot of people feel very strongly, because they experience it every day, the injustice with which they are treated, and they see Buddhism as the remedy, and that is their point of contact with Buddhism. So therefore you can have a very large-scale movement. It is as though you need to latch on to a sort of cause, or even a grievance. If you

can't do that, there's no large-scale movement, because you've got to add one person to another till you've got 10, 15, 20, 30 that's a very slow process. It's a very sound process, but it's a very slow one. And sometimes you need to have a large movement to make any sort of impression on society as a whole.

Jayamati: Also, I have heard it reported that you said that it is very difficult to love the Dharma; but one can find an expression for one's love, that is one's passions, in other areas and through that then develop the capacity to well, to bring the Dharma into that passion. What I'm thinking of again is the -

[24]

S: Well, we know it's difficult to love the Dharma. If you can bring your emotions into the Dharma, well, you are then able to go full steam ahead.

Jayamati: I'm just wondering if Western Order Members might profit from reflecting what it is that their vision, outside of ostensible Buddhist vision, could be re-applied to. That's what I'm driving at. It obviously fired Ambedkar enormously successfully to do a lot of very good work.

S: Well, it fires our friends in India; it certainly fires our Indian Order Members. You could say that on the whole our Order Members in India are much more fired, to use that expression, than the Order Members in Britain; there's no doubt about it. There's no comparison. Which, in a way, from our point of view, is rather unfortunate. One very rarely gets the impression in Britain that Order Members are fired. Maybe from time to time, you know, after a particularly good lecture or retreat or meditation, but it's usually not sustained. But there they really are on fire, they really are enthusiastic. Well, yes, there's a bit of fire up in Glasgow I forgot Glasgow. (Laughter.)

Uttara: You obviously had to say that. (?)

S: No, I mean it!

Uttara: In the 60s I don't want to, you know this 60s enthusiasm was weak by comparison, but do you feel that the impression I got in the 60s, you had people who had some sort of, they'd come out of I don't know, social injustice(?) maybe they had some idealism, and the impression I got was that it was some enthusiasm or immature

S: That is true, that is true, I can remember the 60s and at least one or two of you can. It was often very weak and wishy-washy but there was some enthusiasm and some idealism around. Sometimes it took rather odd and strange forms, but that's another matter. But it doesn't seem well, I don't know, I was going to say it doesn't seem to be around any more. But it is, perhaps, in some other forms. I mean, look at the Greenpeace movement. It's there. But perhaps it's not so widespread or so noticeable as it was then. And you could even say that the FWBO when it started took advantage of that wave; most of our original members were drawn from that wave, and some of those who are still with us, and very prominently with us, believe it or not, were hippies. I've got photographs of them to prove it! People like, say, Subhuti; Subhuti was very much a hippie and part of that wave as it were. I don't think Lokamitra was a little bit, not completely. But maybe if there hadn't been that sort of wave, it wouldn't have been possible to make a start with the FWBO. But I mean there isn't all that

much of it around now, comparatively, I think. In those days people did believe that you could change society radically, even if they did believe that the way to do it was by dropping acid in everybody's coffee. (Laughter.) Some of them did! There was a campaign, I think, in the States, associated with the name of Ken Kesey, wasn't it? Before LSD became illegal; I mean that was the way to turn everybody on and change society. It's not to be done quite so quickly as that. Oh yes, those were exciting days, those were! (Hearty laughter.) Some people wanted to change society overnight in that way.

Uttara: I was one of them.

S: But I think, therefore this is certainly one of the things we can learn from the Indian wing of our movement I think everybody who has gone there, certainly every Order Member who has gone there and has seen something of what is happening, is deeply impressed. Nagabodhi has recently written his book, [25] which I hope will be out before very long I don't think he's yet got a publisher, he's trying for an outside publisher but whether or not it meets with appreciation outside the Movement I think it's going to be quite an eye-opener to people in the Movement. Maybe my little book, too, in another way, is providing background information. But after I come back from India, I sometimes find the Movement in Britain really quite dull in comparison, and sometimes it seems so strange that one has to sort of work hard to stir up people's enthusiasm, especially when they are already Order Members. One would have thought, well, they would already be full of enthusiasm, but sometimes they're not. Maybe it's the British, or at least, English, character, I don't know. You can always blame that!

Vessantara: It's getting quite late. Ratnaprabha's next. We'll just take this and stop.

Ratnaprabha: Perhaps I'll leave my question because it could lead on to all sorts of things.

Ben Murphy: I was going to ask if you had considered the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament as an area in which people are enthusiastic in Britain, at least at the moment; and if you had had any response to your lecture on Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War.

S: I got a tiny response to that lecture not much. It's not surprising, there's so much literature and in some ways I haven't said anything new or original; perhaps the newness is the way I've just linked it with Buddhism. Obviously I'm in favour of nuclear disarmament, but then there is the question of how you go about that. There's also the question of whether the particular, the specific steps that you advocate as needing to be taken do in fact contribute to that in the long run or not. That's a very difficult issue. This is why I say in that lecture, do all you can to encourage nuclear disarmament, but I think you have to leave it to individual governments as to the steps to be taken, because there is such a careful balancing of different factors required, because probably no government is just going to unilaterally renounce nuclear power [arms] I don't think any government is going to do that, of any complexion; it probably wouldn't be allowed to do that. So it's a question of the different governments sitting down together and just reducing little by little. I mean we know with regard to recent arms control talks, how suspicious governments are, mainly America and Russia, and how each is apparently trying to get the better of the other. Each is claiming the other isn't playing fair, each is claiming that it is reducing and the other isn't; it's very difficult for the layman to know what actually is happening. You just don't know, because you'd need to understand quite a lot about different weapons and their relevance, their significance, their capacity and in what way one is to be

balanced against another, and whether two or one equal three of another kind or not do you see what I mean? I don't think the ordinary person can form an opinion about these matters. So I think the only thing the ordinary person can do is to insist, and if necessary agitate, for his particular government to sit down with other governments and in some way or other bring about reduction. I certainly don't feel I'm qualified to have an opinion as to how it is to be done, in what stages; especially as you've got not only Russia and America but other countries too with nuclear weapons. There are so many different kinds of weapons not only nuclear weapons; there's chemical and bacteriological weapons, what do you do about those? And then of course you've still got the conventional weapons! But I think the only thing you can do is to insist that your government vigorously addresses itself to this question.

[26]

Ben Murphy: The question I was asking was more to do with whether you thought that was an area of grievance, or an area in which people's energies were engaged, as it were.

S: I don't think in the same way as the ex-Untouchables, because in their case their disabilities are felt every hour of the day, every day of the week. The only comparison in our case would be if we were turfed out of our homes so that some kind of nuclear weapons could be installed there, and if we were reminded of that inconvenience and trouble every day, as it were. Then we'd have a cause, then we'd have a grievance. But so long as nuclear weapons are installed somewhere else, we don't actually see them and it doesn't affect our day-to-day life, we can very easily forget all about them. But that is not the case with the ex-Untouchables. They can't forget their grievances in this easy manner, because they are constantly being reminded of them, by the treatment that they're given.

Padmapani: It's a short question. Bhante, could you see your way to thinking that if Order Members were educated in the way that we were doing things out in India, Order Members en masse could go from England to India to visit the Indian Order Members?

S: I certainly do encourage people to go there. There are, of course, visa difficulties now, and that's quite a consideration. Also I'm afraid not every Western Order Member is suitable for functioning there, or qualified to function there. I think quite a lot of them just couldn't stand it.

Padmapani: I wasn't necessarily thinking about functioning out there. I was thinking about an Order meeting or a Sangha meeting rather than doing the social work.

S: Well, that would certainly be helpful, because Order Members out there just love to have contact with Order Members from this country. But, even so, they need to be people with a bit of understanding of the situation, a bit of sensitivity. Sometimes people have gone out even Order Members and have just been rather a nuisance, because they haven't realized that people there are tremendously busy and they, the visitors, expect to be looked after, and the situation there is so different that they can't expect this. So you have to be quite careful that you are helping and not hindering the work, if you go out. If you really want to help, probably the best thing you can do is to join a door-knocking appeal or send some money, if you have some yourself; but none the less, I would like to see more contact between Indian Order Members and Order Members in the West. I'd like to see, eventually, some of the Indian Order Members coming over here. Some of them could. At present, they just can't be spared; also it's very expensive. Then there is the question of culture shock we experience a bit of

culture shock when we go there, and they would certainly experience a bit of culture shock if they came to Britain if only to see that people weren't so enthusiastic, perhaps, as they were. They would probably find that quite difficult to understand why people take it so easily here and why they are doing so little for the Dharma when they've got such enormous resources and facilities and have such an easy time on the whole. That might be quite a shock to them. I think in many ways Order Members in the West have got more to learn from Order Members in India than vice versa. I know that's not the way people usually think, but that is my quite settled conviction. But I think it's quite good that people know something about Ambedkar and what he did, because if it wasn't for him and his work we wouldn't probably have any movement out there at all. On the other hand, it must also be said that one of the things he wasn't able to do was to leave a team of people behind him to carry on [27] his work, especially his religious work. He did have some very junior colleagues; they soon started quarrelling among themselves after his death, and his movement really split. And for years and years there was no real Dharma teaching; so we've taken on that job. The bhikkhus weren't equal to it, and nobody else was equal to it. Well, we've taken on that job, as it were, and those people we've been able to contact have responded very warmly, very enthusiastically. We are getting impatience from all over Western and Central India to send people, to establish viharas, to establish hostels; people are offering us land; but we don't have enough Order Members to do the work. And we need Indian Order Members; it's very difficult for Westerners to work out there, quite apart from the problem of visas. But there's a lot of people who just want to know more about the religion that they are supposed to have accepted. o I think it's quite important that we know something about the background of people who come into our Movement in India. And no doubt it's important they know something about the background of people here, too. Because I think it is quite important, again, that we should have a Movement which does transcend national and cultural barriers. If it doesn't, if we are still limited to our own particular cultural context, it means we haven't fully appreciated what it means to be an individual and to lead the spiritual life. It's not easy to transcend these national and cultural barriers. Even in Britain we are quite conscious of the differences that exist, say, north and south of the Border there are certainly differences of approach; and, if you go, say, from Britain to India you will be struck by even greater differences of approach, but people have to be able to transcend those differences and recognize that they are following the same Dharma, and not identify themselves or overidentify themselves with a particular culture or nationality or whatever it may be. Anyway, leave it there for this evening?

[28]

TAPE 2, Side 2

27 September

Vessantara: So we'll be carrying on studying The Buddha and the Future of his Religion and the field of the study groups seems quite strung out now through the text. So the questions come from different parts of the text. We'll start with Sanghapala, a question left over from last night.

Sanghapala: Bhante, we're told that the Buddha was born from his mother's side rather than in the usual manner. Are we supposed to draw any symbolic conclusions from this, or [was he born by] Caesarean section, or ?

S: Recently in the Order Office we had an interesting correspondence with a doctor who is doing research, apparently, into the history of the Caesarean section operation, and he was inquiring whether there was any evidence that this legend about the Buddha having issued from his mother's side was in fact relating to a Caesarean section operation. To the best of my knowledge, there isn't any such evidence in the Buddhist scriptures, but we did point out to him that it was quite common in ancient Indian mythology to represent heroes of various kinds as having been born in abnormal ways. There are quite a number of examples, for instance, in the Mahabharata and the Puranas of different heroes being born from the thigh and the knee and so on. This would seem to be, retrospectively, a sort of testimony to their heroic status, as it were. You may remember, those of you who have read Asvaghosa's Buddhacarita, that in speaking of the Buddha's birth from the side of his mother he refers, as far as I remember, to some of these instances from Indian mythology, some of these parallels. So I don't think it can be regarded as any sort of evidence that the Buddha's birth was surgically assisted or anything of that sort; I think it is the usual Indian attempt to glorify a great man or to indicate his greatness by suggesting that his birth was not a normal birth. I think it's really no more than that.

Derek Goodman: I just have a question arising out of that. Do you think, Bhante, that it would be more useful for us to regard the Buddha as being born a normal human being in the usual way?

S: Well, I think one is concerned in this sort of matter with what the facts might have been, useful or otherwise. It might be more useful to regard the Buddha as having been born in the way that he was born according to traditional legend; it would be very inspiring, it would really show how unusual he was! But that isn't really the point; the point is, what are the facts of the matter? We have to admit that the legend of his birth from his mother's side doesn't appear in what seem to be the oldest records of his life, in fact the oldest records contain very little about his early life and nothing about his birth at all. So I think it's probably safer to assume that he was born in the usual manner.

Vessantara: Ratnaprabha also has a question left over from last night.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, could you explain the doctrine of the gunas?

S: The gunas. Yes, briefly, this is part of the Samkhya philosophy, as you may have gathered from the article, but it has entered into general Indian thought. According to the Samkhya philosophy, there are two ultimate principles, one of which is called purusa and the other prakriti. Purusa means something like well, it literally means person or even male, but the real meaning, roughly speaking, is what we would call Spirit with a capital S. Prakriti is Nature with a capital N. And [29] prakriti is supposed to consist of three gunas; the three gunas being sattva, rajas and tamas. It is very difficult to translate these three terms, because they have a number of different meanings or connotations, but sattva is roughly sort of peacefulness; rajas is sort of energy and activity and fieriness; tamas is darkness, sloth, torpor, ignorance and so on. So, according to Samkhya philosophy, to begin with these three gunas are in a state of equilibrium, but under the influence of purusa who does not himself or itself actually move but under the influence of purusa, or as a result of the influence of purusa, the balance of the gunas is disturbed and the whole process of evolution takes place, subsequent to the disturbance of the equilibrium of those three gunas. The connection, in the case of the Bhagavad Gita, is that in the Bhagavad Gita the different castes are described on the basis of

the amount of the presence of particular gunas in them. For instance, the brahmin is supposed to be the embodiment of the sattva guna, the best of the gunas; the kshatriya, as far as I remember you'll have to check me here is a combination of sattva and rajas. The vaishya is rajas, as far as I remember, and the shudra is tamas. So the Bhagavad Gita seeks to justify the caste system on the grounds that it represents a natural division of people in accordance with their gunas, and their karmas in accordance with those gunas. There is a well-known verse where Sri Krishna is supposed to say: ['Jati .. ., Guna .. .'], which means that 'The caste system is of my creation, in accordance with the difference of guna and karma' that is to say, the gunas and the actions which are the results of the gunas. So Ambedkar therefore strongly disapproves of the Bhagavad Gita. He regards it as giving, among other things, a sort of pseudo-philosophical basis to the caste system and therefore as justifying it. This particular verse I quoted is in the mouths of Hindus all the time, along with the other one I mentioned yesterday. So I have just given a very brief summary, but that is what the guna doctrine is all about.

Peter Nicholson: What [would the gunas of] an Untouchable be?

S: Well, they don't really enter into the picture. They don't enter into the Bhagavad Gita, because it's as though the Untouchables are so low they can't even be mentioned, they're below even the shudras. Again, according to Ambedkar in one of his books one called *The Untouchables* untouchability in the full sense originated only [between] about 200 and 400 AD. And the Bhagavad Gita, of course, is probably somewhat prior to that. It is thought untouchability was completely unknown it's mentioned in the Pali Canon, the Buddha himself came up against instances of it but the systematic treatment of whole communities of people as Untouchable came some hundreds of years later.

Ratnaprabha: How is it that the Hindus are able to use the guna theory to justify the fixed nature of the caste system?

S: Well, this is a point that Ambedkar himself raises, isn't it, in the article, because he says that to use the difference of gunas as a sort of basis for a justification of the caste system assumes that people's natures remain unchanged, which he says is not the case. But of course, the Hindu theory assumes that you are born with one or another guna predominating, and that determines your caste. It's because that guna predominates that you are born into that particular hereditary caste. But one of Ambedkar's arguments against that is that you can't regard people in this very cut and dried way, that in this person such-and-such a guna predominates throughout his life and in another person another guna predominates throughout his life and so on. He regards that as completely unrealistic.

[30]

Ratnaprabha: Would traditional Hindus seek the gunas or the proportion of gunas in a particular person as determining their character in some way?

S: Oh yes, indeed. I mean, the Bhagavad Gita goes into this. It describes the different lifestyles, as we would say, of the different castes according to the gunas that predominate in them. In ordinary everyday language in India, the terminology of the gunas is often referred to. For instance, the Bhagavad Gita refers to the kind of foods that are liked by sattvic people, rajasic people, tamasic people. Sattvic people like sweet, oily foods; rajasic people like hot, pungent dishes; and tamasic people like rotten things. I suppose ripe cheese would be

included in that category! So for instance in India you may be told, 'Oh, this food won't do you any harm, it's very sattvic,' or 'He's a very sattvic sort of person,' or again, 'He is very rajasic' this sort of terminology is quite commonly used, it's entered into everyday speech.

Jayamati: Is there any similarity between that thinking and the thinking of the Elizabethans with the humours?

S: There is some similarity, one could say, yes.

(?)Vessantara: So presumably Ambedkar himself would be a living contradiction of the gunas?

S: Yes, indeed. It does even now influence ordinary Hindu thinking very strongly. Hindus regard this, as I think he mentioned, as a very logical explanation of the caste system. They would probably say it was highly scientific!

Cittapala: I was just wondering, if Ambedkar was a living contradiction of that, how do they set about trying to refute it? Or don't they bother?

S: They don't bother. When custom is strongly established, you don't have to defend it, even if it is attacked. If you see that a certain tradition is very strongly established, you just have confidence in the fact that it is so strongly established it can't really be shaken, so you don't bother to reply to criticism. In this connection I'll give you an example just recently there was published a book called Mahatma Gandhi and his Critics, written by an Indian scholar and published in England, I think it was. So this is supposed to be an account of Mahatma Gandhi and his critics. Who was Mahatma Gandhi's strongest critic? It was Ambedkar! There is only a brief mention of him and the Poona Pact. One of Ambedkar's major works, called What Gandhi and Congress have done to the Untouchables, is not even mentioned. It is a devastating attack on Gandhi and his whole attitude towards the Untouchables. It is not even mentioned. It is probably the most damaging of all the attacks, the biggest of all the criticisms, the strongest of all the critics; it is not mentioned. It is a thick book, very well documented, to show exactly what the Congress and Gandhi did to the Untouchables! It is not even mentioned! You see, this is one of the things.

Ratnaprabha: Going back to the doctrine of the gunas. Would the Hindus say that one's actions during this life modify the proportion of gunas with which you are born in the next life?

S: The standard Hindu doctrine is that your gunas determine your position in the caste system, and if you want to improve your lot and be reborn in a higher caste, the only way to do that is faithfully to observe the duties of your caste in this life. So if you are born as a shudra or as an Untouchable, you should accept that, [31] accept that status and faithfully discharge your duties as a shudra or as an Untouchable, and then you may be reborn in a higher caste. There is no other way.

Ratnaprabha: So presumably the proportions of the gunas would be modified in some peculiar way after your death by the accumulated actions that you

S: Yes, they would be modified by your fidelity to your caste dharma. Dharma, don't forget,

in the context of the Bhagavad Gita, means your duties in society as determined by your caste. This is the general sense of the word dharma in India, not the sense of righteousness or religion, as we would think. Your dharma is your social duty as prescribed by the caste into which you have been born.

Vessantara: So that would override any sort of minor considerations of whether you had

S: Oh yes, indeed, because as Ambedkar pointed out in several places not in this article, I think there are criminal castes and criminal tribes, whose dharma is to steal and even to murder. Don't forget the thugs who were suppressed by the British, whose dharma was to assassinate people. Yes, they assassinated, I think it's estimated, many tens of thousands before they were stamped out by the British. They were devotees of the goddess Kali. And Sri Krishna even says in the Bhagavad Gita, 'There is danger in the duty of another.' That is in a way the whole point of the Bhagavad Gita, because Arjuna, who was a kshatriya, was unwilling to fight I won't go into the reasons now but the whole thrust of the Bhagavad Gita is to convince him that he should perform his dharma as a kshatriya, and fight. In refusing to fight, he was in a way wanting to change from the dharma of the kshatriya to the dharma of the brahmin, and he should not do that. He should Sri Krishna says act in accordance with his dharma as a kshatriya and leave the results to God, as it were, just do his duty.

Ratnaprabha: And in doing that, presumably, he is some sort of agent of karma as it were?

S: One could put it that way, though I think the Bhagavad Gita doesn't actually do that. The Bhagavad Gita does make the point, in one of its later chapters, that in any case Arjuna is deluded in thinking that he acts in any way; it is really only God who is acting, only Sri Krishna himself who is acting through all these various forms. So Arjuna should not have the deluded idea that he is killing anybody. He isn't, it's God who is killing them. And then, of course, in the eleventh chapter there is what is called the Vision of Universal Form, the Visvarupa(?) showing Sri Krishna as the All-Destroyer, Time, who swallows everybody. So Arjuna should just fight and kill, knowing it isn't really him who is doing the fighting and killing, it is God himself who is doing it. You can see the social implications of these teachings. I think Christmas Humphreys was a bit influenced by these sort of ideas, he being basically a Theosophist, because when he was questioned about his activities as a criminal prosecuting lawyer and a judge when he was a prosecuting lawyer, he used to demand the death penalty and on several occasions, some of the quite famous ones, he got it, and the person was executed. So he was sometimes asked how he reconciled his Buddhism with his activities as a lawyer as a barrister and as a judge; and he stated many times that he believed that he was an instrument of karma. He seemed to believe that the law of karma was reflected in the British judicial system and that he was just the humble instrument of karma. He was asserting this almost up to the last year of his life. I heard him once being interviewed on the radio, and he spoke very strongly indeed in these sort of terms. Anyway, that's slightly off the beaten track.

[32]

Vessantara: Just coming back very briefly to Samkhya philosophy, if it sees the gunas sort of starting off evolution, where is that evolution tending? Is there any point to it?

S: As far as I remember, the Samkhya does believe in cycles, that having reached a certain point the whole process reverses itself. The Samkhya stresses, though, that the purusa does

not do anything; it is the mere proximity of the purusa to prakriti which sets it in motion. For instance, there is the famous analogy which the Samkhya always gives: it's like the master of the house; he doesn't do anything, he just sits in the house, but the mere fact of his presence means that all the people in the house go about their respective duties. That's the illustration which is given. Also the Samkhya teaches that some of the qualities of purusa are as it were reflected on to prakriti, and that the two get as it were apparently mixed up not in reality mixed up, but they appear to be and they regard salvation as consisting in the dissociation of purusa from prakriti and realizing that those qualities reflected in prakriti do not belong to prakriti but to purusa. So the Samkhya is therefore a completely dualistic system; and the state of liberation, which they usually call kaivalya(?), sort of freedom or detachment, consists in the complete dissociation from nature.

Ratnaprabha: So it's a little like the Gnostic system in that sense, is it?

S: It might seem so in view of my highly simplified account, but there are many differences. One would need to read a proper account of the Samkhya and then perhaps begin to make comparisons.

Vessantara: Does it tend to lead them in an ascetic direction?

S: Yes, definitely, yes.

Ratnaprabha: What is the difference between the Hindu and Buddhist ideas on the workings of the law of karma?

S: The Hindus don't seem to have a very systematic account of the workings of the law of karma in the way that Buddhism does have, especially in the later Abhidharma-type works. Hindus very often identify karma with fate or even with the will of God; it's what sort of happens to you. In theory it's the result of your own actions, but very often it's spoken of as though God brings those results upon you. In some systems God is regarded as the administrator of results of karma, in a rather Christmas Humphreys-like sort of way, if you see what I mean. And Hindus don't have that philosophy of the niyamas, the different orders of cause-effect relationship, of which karma is only one. They tend to think that everything that happens to you is the result of karma, whether that is reflecting the will of God or not. But Buddhism never teaches that everything that happens to you is the result of some karma that you individually have committed in the past. So one might say that the Hindu doctrine of karma tends to be fatalistic.

Padmapani: Bhante, do you think there is a connection between this fatalistic attitude, the Hindu karma, and the hero-worship you were talking about yesterday?

S: There must be, at least psychologically, because in each case there is a certain passivity. There is a certain abdication of responsibility.

Sanghapala: Ambedkar points out in his pamphlet that the basis of Hinduism is not morality. If that is the case, what is the basis of Hinduism?

[33]

S: What is the basis of Hinduism? Well, what is the basis of ethnic religion generally, one

might say? The basis of Hinduism, as is the case with all ethnic religions, is social, it's the group; it's concerned to maintain the group, to protect the group. This is really the basis, I think one could say. So the group, like the ordinary individual not individual in the spiritual sense but in the sense of a social unit is just concerned to preserve itself in existence. This is why ethnic religions don't usually favour celibacy because they don't make for the perpetuation of the group. Though one could say that Hinduism, considered in this very broad sense, is a social system rather than a religion in the sense of a universal religion, and all its customs, beliefs, practices are concerned, except in very marginal instances, with the preservation of that particular social order, especially as exemplified in the caste system. I think I relate in *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus* the discussion I had in South India with an old brahmin as to what was Hinduism or who was a Hindu. Do you remember that? And what it really came down to was that the Hindu was one who believed in the caste system. So, in other words, the caste system really is the basis of Hinduism. You can't say that a Hindu is one who believes in God, because you can be a Hindu without believing in God; but you can't be a Hindu without believing in the caste system or without having a caste.

Sudhana: If a European took to one of the Hindu cultures, such as one that respects gurus, it doesn't follow that he would have to adopt the caste system, surely, in order to practise that guru's teaching?

S: Well, it depends on what level. There is this story about Akbar the Mogul emperor, who was a very broad-minded man and wanted to become a Hindu, and he sent to the pundits of Benares to inquire how he might become a Hindu. And the pundits of Benares sent back a donkey and said that, in the same way that this donkey can't become a horse, you can't become a Hindu! They were saying that jati, which is caste in Sanskrit or, as we say, caste also means species. It is the same in Pali, which is rather significant, perhaps. So what happens? I have met in India a number of Western disciples of orthodox Hindu gurus. If you're a sannyasin, there's no problem, because a sannyasin, a monk or ascetic, is outside the caste system. So most people who become sort of Hindu disciples evade the problem, really, by being sort of monastic disciples. But supposing, as a non-Hindu disciple, you wanted to live the life of a lay person and you wanted to marry. Well, you couldn't marry into any orthodox Hindu family. Supposing you could find a Hindu family that was sufficiently broad-minded to accept you, say, as a son-in-law, they couldn't do it, because supposing they accepted you as a son-in-law they'd be excommunicated by all their caste fellows. They wouldn't be able to marry their daughters to anybody; no one would want to marry their daughters. So it wouldn't really be possible for a European disciple to marry into a family of people following an orthodox Hindu guru. Of course, there are some Hindu gurus who aren't orthodox and who don't follow this sort of system, don't accept the caste system in some cases, or at least don't accept it to some extent. But then they tend to create a new caste this is what happens of people who only marry or intermarry among themselves. I have mentioned instances of this sort in my *Thousand-Petalled Lotus*. For instance, I have mentioned that some of the Ramakrishna Mission sannyasins are discriminated against by orthodox Hindu sannyasins because Ramakrishna Mission sannyasins are known to eat with Europeans. I have mentioned this in connection with my encounter with Anandamayi's ashram. If you go through *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus* again, after studying this article, you'll see quite a few illustrations of this sort of thing that Ambedkar is getting at and I have been talking about. For instance, in Anandamayi's ashram there was a very devoted Austrian woman, but she was treated as an Untouchable. The others wouldn't eat with her, she had to eat separately. [34] And when Anandamayi wanted to drink a glass of water, non-brahmins were asked to leave

the room! And in Ramana Maharshi's ashram I am sure that some of you seem not to have read *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus!* in Ramana Maharshi's ashram he sat in a hall, the dining hall; there was a big screen down the middle, brahmins on one side and non-brahmins on the other. And he was a teacher of the purest Advaita, nondualism! This illustrates what I said yesterday about Hindus keeping their social system completely separate from their philosophy and not allowing their philosophy to influence their social system. Very few teachers have been able to break through this. Anyway, perhaps you begin to see what Ambedkar was up against.

Vessantara: Kevin, you have a question about Eastern Buddhist emancipation.

Kevin Donovan: Following the death of Ambedkar, which left millions of newly converted Buddhists without spiritual leaders and teachers, the Buddhist world as a whole seems to have responded very poorly, and still, with the exception of the FWBO, doesn't seem to be helping much. Why was this and still continues to be the case?

S: I have touched upon this in my new little book. I'll give you just a little anecdote I have mentioned this anecdote in the book. I talked once with some Thai bhikkhus, trying to encourage them to come to India and work among the ex-Untouchables. So one of them said: 'Well, why should we? We're quite comfortable in our own country!' That was the attitude. So it's not quite as simple as that. A very few did try, a very few bhikkhus did try. Some of them were known to me. The majority were quite indifferent. I must admit that some South-east Asian bhikkhus weren't too happy with the idea of all these Untouchables joining Buddhism. They thought it would sort of lower their prestige. Yes, there was that sort of feeling, especially in Sri Lanka, where they aren't completely devoid of caste feeling. There was that, unfortunately. Also these people are poor and wretched, and well, that's not the sort of person they were very keen on welcoming into Buddhism. They want well-to-do, highly intellectual Europeans, with plenty of money. So there was that aspect, which I don't want to overemphasise but the few bhikkhus who did get to India found it almost impossible, or perhaps impossible, to work among the ex-Untouchables; one, because their approach was very rigid, that of the Theravada bhikkhus; they expected just to be able to say 'Buddhism is this and Buddhism is that,' and everyone accepting it. They are not used to being asked questions or challenged or asked for further explanations or anything of that sort. And many of them, of course, just couldn't put up with the low standard of living, because most of [them] all the bhikkhus in South-east Asia, probably have a far higher standard of living than do the ordinary ex-Untouchables. They couldn't eat the food, it was too coarse; they couldn't live under those simple conditions. They were accustomed to a quite comfortable, easy sort of life. Also the ex-Untouchables didn't treat them with the sort of respect that they were accustomed to. They treated them with respect, but not in the full sort of formal way that they were used to back home. And many bhikkhus, if they are not treated in that way, just don't know how to behave, as it were, they are completely thrown, thrown off balance, almost. And it was just too big a job for them, they hadn't the imagination or the adaptability. That is the sad truth. Tibetans, of course, have flocked to the West. They've not bothered with the Untouchables at all, even though many of them are living in India. They've not wanted anything to do with them, though they know perfectly well that they are there.

[35]

: I have a supplementary question. It made me think a bit about organization, so I wondered if you thought it would be good if as it were the Buddhist world became more organized if there

were, say, a federation.

S: Well, we've got one. We've had one since 1950 you know, the World Fellowship of Buddhists. It's never I mean, it's useful, it's a place for meeting other Buddhists, but I never attended when I was in India, I used to think it a waste of time. It's all right for meeting people, but it never actually gets anything done. Ambedkar attended the first meeting in 1950, and he said it wasn't enough to have a World Fellowship of Buddhists, they needed an actual programme of action. But it's never happened yet. But they meet every two years in one Buddhist country or another. It is certainly a useful venue just for making contacts. I have encouraged Lokamitra to attend the Poona FWBO is a member of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, actually, and, yes, there are some useful contacts in that way. But it has no activities really of its own. So, yes, we've got a world Buddhist federation, but it isn't at all active.

: What is its basis, then? Just to establish and encourage communication rather than to ?

S: In theory I mean, it's got a constitution and in principle it's supposed to be propagating Buddhism and doing all sorts of things. But in practice, in effect, it is mainly this meeting every two years. This year there's one in Nepal, and Lokamitra is hoping to go if he has no visa problems, with a couple of the Indian Order Members.

Thomas McGeary: I was thinking would it not be possible for us to actually just go and take over under the guise of the World

S: It's not so easy. They publish a magazine, which is not bad; it contains some news of Buddhist activities all over the world, but the literary standard and spiritual standard is quite low. I'm afraid it's really in a way quite disgraceful, the way that the Buddhist world, the Eastern Buddhist world, failed the ex-Untouchables when they became converted to Buddhism. A few individuals or organizations have sent images, or they have invited a few young Untouchables to Ceylon or Burma and made them into monks for a while, but that's about all they've done in 30 years!

Sudhana: You haven't mentioned the Tibetans doing work among the ex-Untouchables.

S: Well, I said they haven't done any.

Sudhana: They haven't done any at all?

S: No.

Sudhana: That's surprising.

S: It is surprising, because they have managed to get to every other part of the world, but not among the ex-Untouchables. One can't help wondering why all that Bodhisattva spirit, all those incarnate lamas why they couldn't help these very poor people who needed the Dharma more than anybody else were begging for it.

Uttara: Did they come out of Tibet just at the same time as the conversion?

[36]

S: Roughly, yes. They are well established now, aren't they? So I'm afraid to me it was quite an eye opener, in a way, that there should have been such a lack of response from the rest of the Buddhist world. Suppose they had become Christian, you would have had Christian missionaries and money pouring in from all over the Western World. It's really quite ironical that the organization, the Buddhist movement, that has done most for them though that is really so far a drop in the ocean is the FWBO, based on England, of all places! It's really absurd! There is a great lack of human sympathy and imagination, I'm afraid, on the part of a lot of Eastern Buddhists.

Uttara: I suppose, if it wasn't for yourself, Bhante, then possibly even in England there wouldn't be any response.

S: Oh, I'm sure there wouldn't have been. How would people have known about it? They wouldn't have done, in all likelihood.

Tape 3

Different Buddhist groups, in different Eastern Buddhist countries, have built quite a lot of temples and so on in India over the last 20 or 30 years, mainly in the Buddhist holy places, but they are mainly to cater to the needs of their own pilgrims. They don't think of them as centres for working among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists.

Sanghapala: Bhante, with the help of a whole lot of us, would it do that? (?)

S: It depends on who you were and how well you were prepared and all that sort of thing. Also on visas there's the question of visas, which makes things so much more difficult now. It would certainly help if suitable people did go, from time to time, even to spend three or six months at a time. But they would have to be prepared for a lot of culture shock and be prepared to adapt and do whatever was needed, not go with too many ideas of their own. But if you did, probably Lokamitra would knock them out of you pretty quickly, anyway, but he would just have to spend time, you know, which would be a pity!

Sanghapala: . . . if people would just get themselves to practise as it were for three months or six months and put themselves under the direction of Indian Order Members and Lokamitra.

S: Well, you'd have to be young and healthy, and pretty resilient. But there's a lot that could be done, indeed. You'd have to know your Dharma fairly well, and also know the background, because otherwise if you go there not really knowing what the caste system is or what an Untouchable is, you can't really function. You'd just be so out of touch with the situation there, you wouldn't be able to speak to people in the way that they understand. Padmavajra's going out at the end of this year, I am glad to say. He's got a three-month visa, and he hopes to extend that while he's there and stay altogether for six months. But of course he has been before. But it does need relatively experienced people who have got a bit of stamina, and who are quite adjustable, reasonably robust. Asvajit did quite well there, too; he's now in Sri Lanka, of course. Jyotipala's still there.

Uttara: They're crying out for people . . . in Poona, but I get the impression in the Punjab too. One of the people who used to come to Glasgow centre said -

[37]

S: There's nobody, really. Also in the UP, and in Agra there's a whole lot of Buddhists; we're trying to well, I've had contact with them in the past, but we're trying to link up with them now. We've invitations from all over Central and Western India. There's our work in Gujerat, too: we've recently gone down Hyderabad way. We cover quite a big area. We're getting more and more well known. So it would be good if people could go out from time to time, if Order Members could go out; but they need to be people who can really help and not be a hindrance.

Cittapala: What do you think is the best or most effective thing which Western Members of the Western Buddhist Order can actually do, then?

S: Well, I think first of all the mere fact that people go is encouraging to our Indian Buddhist friends, because don't forget they feel very isolated. They are isolated as Buddhists among the majority Hindu population they feel that Hindus are very much against them, so they feel isolated in their own country. They feel that the Buddhist world doesn't care too much about them. So they are very happy to see Buddhists from overseas. Recently, one of our Spanish Friends turned up, someone called Charbi(?), whom I met in Spain when I went there. He's a quite enthusiastic Buddhist, a follower mainly of Tibetan Buddhism, but he's become very friendly with Subhuti and he interviewed me and published the interview in his Spanish Buddhist magazine. So he went out there and they were very glad to see him, and he met Lokamitra; he seems to have done very well indeed. He gave some talks. And so the ex-Untouchables are just desperate in a way for contact with other Buddhists, do you see what I mean? So it's a great encouragement to them to feel they're not alone, that there are other Buddhists, including, say, Buddhists in the West, who know about them and who sympathize with them, and who have some sort of fellow feeling for them. So the mere presence of a Western Order Member conveys that sort of message, so they are naturally quite encouraged and even inspired just to see a Western Buddhist among them. And if he can go around giving talks and lectures, that's even better and have personal contact, exchange ideas.

Cittapala: But given that, perhaps, the majority of us in the West can't do that, have you any further suggestions?

S: Well, you could do a bit of door-knocking, or something of that sort; help financially. They still need a lot more money, especially for their Dharma work, which is of course not financed by Aid for India. I don't think everybody realizes that. I mean Aid for India can finance only the educational and medical work, not the Dharma work; that has to be financed separately.

Cittapala: Do you see that money is actually the crucial bottleneck which is holding the development of Buddhism in India back?

S: That is quite difficult to say. Lack of money is holding it back to some extent, but I think actually lack of Order Members even more when I say Order Members, I mean Indian Order Members. We've got work for probably a thousand Indian Order Members, already. We've only got about 40. You see? I think it's probably personnel even more than money, though money comes a good second! And money is easier to find, in a way, than people. But there's a whole new batch coming up for ordination, so Lokamitra tells me. I think in a few years' time we may well have more Order Members in India than in the UK in, say, five or six years; that is quite possible, the way things are going.

Cittapala: That was the question I was going to ask you last night what kind of effects do you think that that will have on the Movement as a whole, if, say in 20 [38] years' time we have very large numbers of Order Members, Indian Order Members, in comparison to [the West]?

S: That's very difficult to foresee. I hope to see some of them come over to the West, even though they are badly needed in Britain [India], but still we need to keep up our contacts. And I'd like to see a sort of two-way traffic, some of them coming over to England, or other countries where we are operating, as well as Western Order Members going over there. It would broaden their outlook, no doubt.

Padmapani: Bhante, do you think it would be a good idea to have the twenty-first anniversary of the Order convention in India?

S: I really don't know. People have already raised this question, but I don't know. There's the visa question, for one thing. And also there's the expense. There's the fact that the majority of people fall ill on arrival; it is usually quite a shock to their system. I'm not sure I'd like to see a lot of Order Members travelling by air all at the same time; one has to bear that point in mind, too. It would need very careful consideration. Perhaps the best thing we could do would be to send a sort of deputation or delegation from the Western wing of the Movement to the Indian wing; maybe send six very good people to just travel around giving talks and so on. Even that isn't very easy, though, officially, because you realize if you go you normally have a tourist visa and you're not strictly speaking supposed to do anything except look at ancient monuments. If you said you were going to give lectures on Buddhism, you probably wouldn't get the visa.

Uttara: Would you be telling others about the Buddhist monuments?

S: Pardon?

Uttara: Would you just happen to be telling others about Buddhism?

S: That's right!

Uttara: or asking questions about the Buddhist monuments?

S: 'How did these historic monuments happen to be here?' (Laughter.)

: It would be marvellous to have contact with all those Buddhists, though.

S: It would indeed. It would be quite a change to have an audience of, say, 5,000 people instead of just a couple of hundred, wouldn't it?

Vessantara: It would be quite a change to have an audience of a couple of hundred!

S: And even they have cold feet.

: I was just thinking, though, Bhante, that the effect could be very positive on people when they got back to England from visiting India.

S: It usually is.

: If it was done en masse, all those Order Members coming back to England, the whole feeling -

[39]

S: Well, it would have to be sustained. Because, for instance, having these Tuscanies year after year has made quite a big difference to the Movement in Britain, but not so big a difference as one would have hoped or even have expected. Because, after a while, it seems the Tuscany effect starts fading away, sometimes even quite quickly after a few months. And also you'd have to know a bit about their manners and customs; you know, there are certain things you can't do. You can't speak freely to women, for instance, in India; it isn't done.

: So I found out.

S: You couldn't go with a woman, you couldn't take your girl friend. People wouldn't take you seriously as a preacher of the Dharma.

Vessantara: Presumably we could set up a sort of training course if there were Order Members who were potentially going to be useful but didn't understand the Indian background

S: Oh yes, indeed.

Vessantara (continuing): There are Order Members in the West who could brief them; and maybe they could give a few talks that they were going to give in India in the West, and get feedback on them, so they could be useful from the time they went.

S: Yes, it would be good if people could be briefed. Sometimes they are informally briefed by people who have already gone. Sometimes I brief them a bit myself, give a few major dos and don'ts. But in some ways it's easier operating among the ex-Untouchables than it is among caste Hindus, because they don't observe the sort of taboos and so on that caste Hindus observe. For instance, there's a very big thing in caste Hindu circles of not using the left hand to eat with; but if out of inadvertence you do that in an Untouchable home, they just wouldn't bother. But caste Hindus would be seriously upset. So they are socially much more relaxed, so to speak, than caste Hindus are. And they are a bit rough and ready, as we say; they respond very much to good will, they don't care too much about manners, they're not bothered about those things to the extent that the more highly cultivated caste Hindus are.

Sumana: What sort of cultural life do they have? I sometimes read the Order Members'

S: Well, they are in some ways in a difficult position, because in India culture is steeped in Hinduism, and they just don't want anything to do with it. Hindu music, even, has got a sort of semi-mythological basis that they don't really want to have anything to do with. Some of our Indian Order Members, believe it or not, have actually started appreciating Western classical music, and two or three of them are listening to Beethoven! It seems incredible, doesn't it, but this is what is happening. There has been, over the last few years, a very interesting literary movement developing among some of the ex-Untouchables called Dalit(?) literature, Dalit(?) meaning oppressed. And Dalit literature mainly consists of poetry, short

stories, a few novels. But it is a quite distinctive form of Marathi literature and has begun to be recognized by the Marathi literary scene generally. Some of these stories and poems have been translated into English. But the ex-Untouchables formerly didn't really participate much in Hindu cultural life, they were excluded from that. They had a bit of folk culture of their own, though again that is also tied up with popular Hinduism. They have all sorts of dances. I tried to encourage them to keep up their dances, which were sort of folk dances mainly; for instance, if [40] you arrive at a village and you are welcomed, very often there's a troupe of young men with sort of castanets and drums, and they dance you in, and they are very wild and very vigorous it's quite savage, in a way, but very energetic, and there's no obvious link with Hinduism, so I tried to encourage them to keep up things of that sort. But many of them, those who are a bit educated they are, of course, a tiny minority especially those who are in the Order, they have some interest in Western culture. Because it's not Hindu, do you see what I mean? They just don't want anything to do with Hinduism, and one can understand that.

: Would there be room for cultural exchanges?

S: What do you mean by cultural exchanges?

: I was thinking of performers or I don't know what that would be, maybe drama or musicians, poets

S: I don't know; because, don't forget, most of them don't know English. There's one of the Order Members, that's Dharmarakshita, who's quite keen on cultural activities, and he's quite a good singer and likes to put on dramas and things like that. They had a cultural programme at Bhaja on one occasion, I think for their anniversary or something like that there was a discussion about it I don't know if it was in Shabda or somewhere else. (Somebody supplies information); (S. agrees.) So they are quite keen on all those sort of things, but they will probably have to develop their own cultural forms. A few of them, no doubt, are interested in Western culture, but how many of them really would take to that I'm not sure.

: Just sort of talking, hearing about the Order in India, it seems that the Indian Order Members are obviously in a very different position from the Western Order Members, and thinking about the way the Movement will develop, I just wonder if the Order couldn't become split you know, because of the difference between the Indians and the Westerners so I was wondering how to avoid that.

S: I think the only danger is that the two wings are not in actual contact. One thing that struck me when I paid my first visit to India, just after Lokamitra got things started there, was how there was already a sort of FWBO atmosphere. It's quite unmistakable. And now, of course, it's very much stronger than it was then. In a way the lifestyle of many Indian Order Members is different from that of many, say, British Order Members, because the majority of them are married and they've got children; but more and more of them are working full-time for the Movement and being supported, and they are often away from their wives and families, some of them, for months on end. But more recently, the last couple of years, we've had quite a few young men coming forward who have miraculously escaped being married off and who don't want to be married. This is a recent, fairly new development. And there's a community of them living in Poona, about 10 or 12 of them, living together including now some Order Members. But quite a lot of Indian Order Members, though married and with families, don't

actually live much with their families; just pop home and see them, in some cases every two or three months!

Ong Sin Choon: A bit personal, Bhante. I feel like I don't belong to either Westerners or Indians, so I just wonder where I was sort of left, coming from Malaysia and being Chinese, and not in this category, so I feel a bit left out . . . and I was wondering -

[41]

S: Well, I suppose you would be the Far Eastern wing. We'll have to see what happens, and how many more Members of the Order we get from Malaysia or Hong Kong or Singapore and so on. It will be quite interesting if we do get some Order Members from South-east Asia going to India. I wonder how they will get on. In some ways, the difference is even greater. I mean Lokamitra really noticed an enormous difference between India and Malaysia when he visited it; the standard of living is so much higher, everything is so neat and clean. The same with Thailand, and the same I think with Burma, even; a tremendous difference between those countries and India. Kulananda was talking about what apparently are now called the Four Dragons of the East have you heard about the Four Dragons of the East? The Four Dragons of the East are supposed to be let me make sure I've got it right Singapore, I think Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. These are the Four Dragons of the East in terms of their economic prosperity. Not Malaysia, I'm afraid, it doesn't quite come into that league. But their economies are, or were until recently, really booming, and if we were to establish ourselves in that part of the world, well, a lot of help no doubt would be forthcoming for our work in India. Lokamitra has had a small tour in Malaysia, and he wrote to me very recently that ever since his tour quite a bit of money has been coming in from Malaysia. Only a couple of weeks ago he got Rs.9,000, and he has had a number of donations from Malaysian Buddhists. Though Malaysia may not be one of the Four Dragons, it is quite well-to-do compared with India.

Uttara: To do with Sin Choon's possible feeling of isolation, there may be other Order Members in other countries. I think there was talk of changing the name of the Movement from the Western Buddhist Order to the They still haven't. I don't know whether that's been swept under the carpet, or whether we haven't found a name as yet; what shall we be? . . . so maybe if there was a name it would tend to help people to identify more.

S: I think we have to be quite careful, because one of our big selling points in the West is that we are Western, you see? I think we have to be quite careful of that. In India, of course, we are not known as the Indian or Eastern Buddhist Order, we are known as the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Trailokya meaning 'Of the Three Worlds', which one can take in various ways. Anyway, let's get back to the actual questions. How many left?

Vessantara: One, two, three, four, five.

S: All right.

Colin Lavender: Bhante, in his article Dr Ambedkar says that Hinduism had to make many changes in its doctrines as a result of an attack made by the Buddha. It gave up himsa

S: Himsa is violence.

Colin Lavender: Right, yes. Firstly, in what way did Hinduism practise himsa, and, secondly, was its giving up a direct result of the Buddha's attack?

S: Ah; himsa here means the sacrifice of animals in Vedic sacrifices, and certainly there is no doubt that Hinduism gave up those as a direct result of criticism from Buddhism and from also, say, Jainism. They did a complete about turn. In the Buddha's day, as you can tell from reading the Pali Canon, especially the Digha Nikaya, sacrifice occupied a central place in Hindu religious life. That isn't the case now.

Those Vedic sacrifices very rarely take place. And Hinduism has [42] become almost a religion of nonviolence, which was by no means the case before. So that is definitely due to the criticism of Buddhism and Jainism. The Hindus found the brahmins especially found that if you wanted to beat the Buddhists you had to join them; which they did. So we use the term Hinduism, but it's a complete misnomer because there's a definite break between what we should more accurately call brahminism and modern post-Buddhistic Hinduism. Hinduism is really the product of the influence of Buddhism on brahminism. For instance, before Buddhism there were no temples or image worship in Hinduism. Religious life revolved around those very elaborate sacrifices, at which sometimes hundreds of brahmins officiated and thousands of animals were sacrificed.

: Was vegetarianism [practised] at that time?

S: No, Ambedkar shows this in his book on the Untouchables. In the Buddha's day, brahmins ate meat. They ate even beef. Again, vegetarianism came under the auspices of Buddhism and, again, Jainism. That was another of the things that the brahmins took over, or Hinduism took over from Buddhism. There was cow slaughter. If you speak to a modern Hindu about killing a cow, he's deeply shocked, but in the Buddha's day cows were regularly sacrificed, and brahmins partook of them after they had been sacrificed. Modern Hindus don't like to be reminded of these things. Scholarly Hindus know that this is what happened, but ordinary Hindus, if you say that their ancestors in the Buddha's day ate beef, they would just deny it, point blank. It is only scholarly Hindus who know the facts. So actually Hinduism, or brahminism, was greatly modified under the influence of Buddhism. Again, Ambedkar goes into all this in his book called *The Untouchables*. I have gone into these things in my own book.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, you say that Hinduism adopted vegetarianism as a result of the influence of Buddhism and Jainism. Does this mean that in those days I'm not quite sure what period you are talking about but in those days vegetarianism was either widespread or universal among Buddhists which it doesn't seem to be nowadays?

S: Indians on the whole, in the Buddha's day, were non-vegetarians. Bhikkhus were permitted to be non-vegetarians because they were dependent upon alms. They used to beg their food. But they were only allowed to eat the flesh of animals that had not been killed especially for them, and which they had not seen killed for them nor even heard or suspected had been killed for them. But the whole thrust of Buddhism was most definitely in favour of vegetarianism, and eventually Buddhist India did become predominantly vegetarian. There is, for instance, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, with its chapter against meat eating. The Sarvastivadins and even the bhikkhus seem to have been strongly in favour of vegetarianism. So the whole trend of Buddhism was against the slaughter of animals, especially for sacrifice, and against

meat eating. That tendency seems to have become stronger as Buddhism itself became stronger in India. It is rather unfortunate in the Buddhist countries of South-east Asia not in China, for instance that bhikkhus are mainly non-vegetarian and don't want to be vegetarians; in fact, will strongly defend non-vegetarianism. The strange thing is, I've been told myself by Burmese monks that if you're a vegetarian you're not a Buddhist, you're a Hindu. It seems amazing, doesn't it? In Burma and Thailand, the bhikkhus are definitely anti-vegetarian, quite strongly. In Sri Lanka, there are some vegetarian bhikkhus, and they are generally quite well respected by the lay people. In Sri Lanka the bhikkhus are not against vegetarianism in the way that bhikkhus are in Burma and Thailand, but the majority of them are not vegetarians.

[43]

Alan Pendock: How do the bhikkhus justify their meat eating?

S: Oh, they say that the Buddha has permitted meat eating, and who are you to change the rules? They've got various rationalizations. They say, well, if you're a vegetarian you're picking and choosing and as monks we mustn't pick and choose. Oh, they've got plenty of answers, you can be sure of that! Many of them will say: 'The lay people give us meat and we can't refuse.' So I would say this is mainly talking to Thai bhikkhus; with Burmese you can't even discuss the matter, they just get angry but talking to Thai bhikkhus I'd say: 'Well, look, Thailand has been a Buddhist country for hundreds of years, look at the different things you've taught the lay people. You've taught them to bow down to the bhikkhus in certain ways, to offer things to the bhikkhus in certain ways. You've taught the women to offer everything on a cloth so that their body doesn't come into contact with the body of the bhikkhu. Could you not have taught them to give you vegetarian food?' said: 'Who are the teachers? You're supposed to be the teachers; you should teach them what they should give you.' So then they used to end up by saying: 'Ah, well, we have been brought up as meat eaters, we can't change.' So I used to say: 'Well, I was brought up as a meat eater; I was a meat eater until I was 20, and then I changed when I was in the army. So if I can change you can change, too.' So then they just used to laugh weakly and say, 'Well, your mind is very strong!' I used to say, 'Nonsense! I don't accept that at all!' I have had many a friendly argument with Thai bhikkhus on this subject. This was one of my difficulties with the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, when Thai bhikkhus were staying: I didn't allow meat on the premises, but if ever I was away for a few days I'd come back and there'd be chickens in the fridge (horrified laughter) and worse. Even, once, I went away just for ten days on a retreat, and during my absence there was a single no, two Sinhalese bhikkhus staying there this was in 1965 and they ran up a bill at the local delicatessen for \$90, in ten days \$90 in those days! It must have been \$200, well, \$300 or something like that now; and I had to pay it from the vihara funds when I came back. I don't know what they could have eaten! Oh yes, and another little experience of mine: one of the first experiences I had at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, a few days after my arrival, there was an American bhikkhu there who had been trained in P .. (?) he had been there for two years and he had two or three samaneras with him. One of the samaneras was housekeeper. And I was going up the stairs one day and I heard him phoning the local fishmonger, and I heard him say: 'Oh, you've only got two kinds of salmon? You'd better send the best!' Yes! [I thought] 'What have I come back to?'

: Didn't want to pick and choose, eh? (Laughter.)

Sanghapala: Bhante, with regard to dana and eating meat, I know this is something to do with the transference of consciousness practice. But I was wondering, is that all that can be said

about it? Because

S: Well, I think the Tibetans have got their own philosophy in this respect. They believe that if you have to eat meat and they maintain that in Tibet they can't grow much in the way of vegetables, which is probably the case it's better to kill one large animal than a number of small ones. That's why the Tibetans don't eat fish, because fish are very small; and they don't eat birds. But they eat the yak and they eat the sheep. They say, well, if you just take one life, that will feed a large number of people; that is less of a sin. But the big difference between the Tibetans and the South-east Asian Buddhists is the Tibetans will say it is better to be vegetarian. They will always admit that. 'We should be vegetarian, but due to conditions in Tibet we're not able to.' I met one Tibetan bhikkhu who was a vegetarian M. . D. . (?) he was an old man [44] of about 70. He was very, very thin, but he was very active and healthy. So he maintained you could be a vegetarian even in Tibet! He came out as a refugee. But I believe it is quite difficult because they don't have vegetables and they have very little fruit hardly any fruit. So they subsist mainly on barley flour and meat. But they will always admit that it is better not to eat meat. They will never argue with you about that.

Sanghapala: A great many Tibetans in India and Tibetans in the West will hold on to meat.

S: Yes, that is unfortunate. I don't see any reason for that. When the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama came to India, they were strongly criticized by Hindus in Indian newspapers for eating meat, and I think later on the Dalai Lama gave it up for a while, but I believe after a while again he returned to meat eating. I won't be completely sure about this, but I think he said that he just couldn't manage on a vegetarian diet. But he was certainly vegetarian at least for some years. I mean Tibetans say they find it very difficult to live on vegetables. I can remember some of them trying I could tell you all sorts of stories, but I'd better not! But at least they do accept vegetarianism in principle; they won't argue against it in the way that the Burmese and the Thais do. And if you are a vegetarian, they are very happy; they will rejoice in your merits quite happily.

Gerd Baak: Bhante, Hinduism is said to have survived by its ability to take in competing religious beliefs. We have already mentioned that Dr Ambedkar talks about Hinduism giving up himsa, violence, under the influence of Buddhism. Can you think of more examples where elements of Buddhism have been incorporated into Hinduism?

S: Well, there's image worship, which seems to have started with Buddhism. There was no image worship in Buddhism for a couple of hundred years: the Buddha was represented by a symbol. And then it was the Buddhists who introduced the installation of images, and temples and pujas. Before that, Hindus had the Vedic sacrifices. That was their form of ritual. You could say the Puranas are modelled on Mahayana sutras; they are a mixture of myth and legend and ethical and spiritual teaching. And there wasn't even much monasticism in Hinduism before the time of Buddhism, and one must also mention Jainism. Broadly speaking, Hinduism isn't really in favour of monasticism. The brahmin is usually a householder. One could even say that the teaching of karma was taken over to some extent from Buddhism, though in a garbled form. There are only one or two references to karma in Vedic literature. There may even perhaps be only one, in one of the Upanishads. There's no detailed teaching about karma at all. Lots of philosophical teachings were taken from Buddhism by Hinduism, especially in the form of Vedanta the doctrine of the two truths, the doctrine of Maya, the doctrine of the beginningness of samsara; these are all generally

admitted to have been taken over from Buddhism.

Alan Turner: Going back to the earlier part of Dr Ambedkar's article, he talks of the claimed infallibility of Jesus and Muhammad, and then goes on to say: 'The Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught.' However, did the Buddha not claim infallibility, for example in the Lion's Roar Sutta?

S: I suppose it depends on what you mean by infallibility. The Buddha didn't claim omniscience. Actually in the Pali scriptures there's no discussion of infallibility; the discussion is on omniscience. According to the Pali Canon, Mahavira, the Jaina leader, claimed omniscience, all-knowledge, or at least it was claimed on his behalf, [45] in the sense that he would know, for instance, the exact number of leaves on a tree. But the Buddha never claimed omniscience of that sort. He did not claim omniscience with regard to any mundane fact; he only claimed to be omniscient with regard to Nirvana and the Path to Nirvana. So one could say, using the language of infallibility, that he professed to be infallible in that respect; because Nirvana was a matter of his own experience, and the way to Nirvana was a matter of his own experience. So he was infallible with regard to those matters inasmuch as they were for him matters of personal experience. But in the case of Muhammad, the position is not quite as simple as it would appear from what Ambedkar said. The Koran was revealed to Muhammad, and of course the Koran is regarded as infallible inasmuch as it is the word of God. And the Christians regard the Bible as infallible in the same way. They don't regard just the words of Jesus as infallible, but they regard the whole of the Bible as infallible inasmuch as it is the word of God though what exactly that means, of course, has been discussed among Christians. But certainly the record of the Buddha's teaching is not regarded as the word of God. I have discussed this issue again in my little book. In Buddhist religion the discussion really is in terms of omniscience, not so much in terms of infallibility. But one I suppose could say that infallibility follows from omniscience. The Buddha did not claim complete omniscience, and therefore didn't claim infallibility in those matters which fell outside his own direct experience.

Alan Turner: Would you say, then, Bhante, that inasmuch as the God, as it were, behind Jesus and Muhammad operated sanctions, the infallibility of Jesus and Muhammad was based on the power mode?

S: One could certainly say that, yes.

Ben Murphy: Bhante, this question isn't directly related to the [article?]. Why did the Buddha predict the halving of the life of the Sangha upon the admission of women? Surely, in the world of today, Buddhism will only be accepted if it isn't patriarchal . . . (inaudible)?

S: 'Why did the Buddha say' [what?]

Ben Murphy: He predicted, as far as I understand, a halving of the life of the Sangha or the Dharma being present.

S: I can't remember the exact passage, but from what I do remember, I think he said, in the case of Mahaprajapati's admission, that if he had not made those particular rules then the life of the Sangha would have been halved. And one of the purposes of the rules he did make would seem to have been to keep the women's wing of the Sangha, so to speak, separate from

the men's wing. Presumably he had in mind the fact that mixing them both up together would be undesirable and would convert the spiritual community into a group a hereditary group, like the brahmin caste. I think probably that is what he had in mind.

: It does strike me that at the moment that's one of the strengths of Buddhism that can be put forward. I mean, when you see the Christian church in difficulty over women's ordination.

S: Well, the Christian church has a lot of difficulty over ordaining women; we have a lot of difficulty over getting them! We are ready to ordain them if they come to that point. But they seem, with a few exceptions, to take a very long time about it, and that does give one food for thought. It is something that has been [46] discussed quite a lot in the Movement and in the Order: why have we so few women Order Members, even though ordination is open to them in exactly the same way as it's open to men, and they are given the same encouragement. If anything, they are given more.

: What conclusions have you reached?

S: I haven't really reached any. There doesn't seem to be a proper answer. The only tentative conclusion I've reached is that women are by nature slower and more cautious. But then that still raises the question: why are women by nature slower and more cautious? So it remains an open question.

Sudhana: With respect, Bhante, and purely for the sake of clarifying that particular piece of text, I think with Woodward's translation at least he says that in spite of those rules the life of the Order would still be halved, not even if [there were not] those rules which makes it a little bit more complicated. I believe that it's

S: We don't, as a matter of history, find that the presence of women in an Order or branches(?) of Order of their own had anything to do with the decline of Buddhism anywhere, because we see that the bhikkhuni sangha seems to have died out pretty quickly, and it seems to have had very little influence on the course of Buddhism at all. Which, in a way, seems rather odd, in view of the fact that there was the possibility of women becoming bhikkhunis.

Vessantara: When you say 'pretty quickly', do you know how fast, or by what period ?

S: Well, the bhikkhuni sangha seems to have got to Sri Lanka and got to China; it didn't get to Tibet. There are references to bhikkhunis by, for instance, the Chinese pilgrims, but it is clear that there were very few of them. For instance, we don't have any works, any texts, written by learned bhikkhunis, we just don't have them. I mean bhikkhunis played some part in Chinese Buddhism, but I think probably China is the only country where they really contributed, and there were a few prominent bhikkhunis in the Zen school in China not in Japan, because there they didn't have either bhikkhus or bhikkhunis.

: I was under the impression that there was quite a lot of tension at the moment in Sri Lanka regarding the ordination of women, and how they do . . . a lot more people for social reasons that I can't actually recall at the moment, women pursuing the spiritual life, but they were up against this difficulty of not really being acknowledged by the monks there.

S: I think there's some confusion here, because monks by themselves, bhikkhus by

themselves, can't make bhikkhunis, according to the Theravada Vinaya. Bhikkhunis have to be ordained by bhikkhus. So if the bhikkhuni sangha dies out, according to Theravada tradition or according to the Theravada Vinaya, bhikkhus cannot revive it. (: I see.) So that the bhikkhus would argue, well, women allowed the bhikkhuni sangha to die out; well, that was their responsibility and we are not in a position to revive it. In some Buddhist countries, women have gone to South Korea, where the bhikkhuni sangha does survive, and they have gained ordination there. That seems to be the present source of bhikkhuni ordination. But, in fairness, one can't blame bhikkhus for not recognizing women as bhikkhunis, because it's not their responsibility. They are not able, according to the Vinaya, to ordain bhikkhunis. They can recognize them after they've been ordained by other bhikkhunis, but they can't themselves ordain them. So it's quite unfair to the bhikkhus to say they won't accept women as bhikkhunis, they won't [47] ordain bhikkhunis. According to the Vinaya, they can't do it, any more than bhikkhunis can ordain bhikkhus. But, in most Buddhist countries, at some time in the past, the bhikkhuni lineage died out. It seems to have survived longest in China, and from China to have gone to Korea. So some women from other Buddhist countries have gone to South Korea China being out of the question and have got bhikkhuni ordination there. But even that raises some questions, because supposing a woman from a Theravada country went and got bhikkhuni ordination in Korea, it wouldn't be Theravada bhikkhuni ordination, it would be a branch of the Sarvastivada. So Theravada bhikkhus might not recognize that not because they were women but because the ordination was that of a different school. But in the Western Buddhist Order we don't have all those complications because we've got one simple ordination, based on the Going for Refuge, which is the same for men and for women. But even so, the women don't come forward in such numbers as the men do, which is to say the least quite interesting. But perhaps it's premature to jump to any conclusions about that. The situation could change.

Cittapala: Bhante, do you think the same principle as in the Theravada Vinaya will apply to those considering women or men respectively for ordination in future years?

S: In what way?

Cittapala: That is, that men should only consider men for ordination and women should only consider women for ordination.

S: You're talking about the Order? (Cittapala: Yes.) This is more or less what happens at present, because in the case of the women, the women Mitras have their closest contact with the women Order Members, just as men Mitras normally have their closest contacts with men Order Members, especially in the case of those who live in communities. So at present, in the case of women Mitras who ask for ordination, it's the women Order Members who have the biggest say, just because they know them best; but sometimes a male Order Member happens to know that particular woman Mitra also, in which case his views ought to be taken into consideration. think there's a difference between taking people's views or opinions or assessments and actual responsibility for ordination.

Vessantara: If at some point in the future there were women Order Members who were sufficiently developed to perform the ordination ceremony, do you think it best that women should ordain women, and men should ordain men?

S: I think probably I haven't made up my mind finally about that but I think probably that

would be the case. But I think one would still have to make sure that the Order did remain one Order and didn't drift off and, you know, the two wings separate you know, two separate Orders. But I think, yes, because obviously it's better to be ordained by someone that one has had some contact with. And normally it'll be the women Order Members that women Mitras have had contact with, and men Order Members that men have had contact with certainly close and deep contact, spiritual contact. In India, of course, we have only had one women Order Member so far, and there are two who seem to be getting hear. That is probably due to special circumstances in India, because women are much more housebound there, a lot of them have had large numbers of children, and that does obviously make a difference. Any more?

Vessantara: Just one: about a passage on page 10, where Ambedkar gives a sort of assessment of the position of or the attitude of Hindus, and he says that Hindus [48] today fall into two classes those who are holding that all religions are true and those who are saying: 'Why bother about religion at all?' Would you agree with that assessment of Ambedkar's, or do you think that is ?

S: I think that's broadly true still. I think those who say, 'Why bother about religion?' are mostly the Marxists, a very small minority compared with the others. But the general Hindu attitude is that all religions are the same. And this is, of course they are only concerned really to keep their social structure intact; so long as you follow the caste system and so long as that is your effective religion, it doesn't matter what you believe. So is that it? I mean, there are still some more pages that some of you at least have to go through.

Vessantara: Yes, and the groups haven't got very far at all yet.

S: All right.

Vessantara: So we'll meet, not tomorrow night, but on Monday night.

S: So do people feel that a little light is being shed in dark places? (Murmurs of assent.) I must say, I am a little surprised that people didn't know more about the background of our Indian Buddhist Order Members and Mitras. Though maybe it isn't surprising. It is good that people should have a better knowledge. Anyway, let's see how we get on.

[49]

Tape 4

27 September

Derek Goodman: We got on to the subject of Theravadin bhikkhus. It was said that you have stated that nowadays generally Theravadin bhikkhus do not believe that it is possible for them to gain Stream Entry in their present lifetime, so can they be said to be effectively Going for Refuge?

S: One has to be careful here not to over-generalise. It would seem, as far as I have been able to make out, that the belief developed in Sri Lanka that the last arhants died some hundreds of years ago. I think I am correct in saying it was the fourteenth century, but I may not have recollected it correctly; but, anyway, some hundreds of years ago. That belief seems to have

spread to the other Theravada countries, and to have become quite widespread and quite common. But it would seem that in very recent times that has undergone some modification, especially in Burma, and particularly in connection with the various vipassana groups, who seem to believe quite definitely that Stream Entry and so on are possible even today; but they would seem to constitute something of an exception, and even in the Theravada countries themselves there are many Buddhists many bhikkhus who believe that the followers of the different, modern vipassana traditions haven't got it quite right. But anyway, at least in theory, there is that exception: at least there are some people who, rightly or wrongly, believe that it is still possible to gain those stages of development in this lifetime. But it must be said that the majority of Theravada bhikkhus, as far as my own experience goes, seem rather sceptical about the possibility of attaining even Stream Entry in this lifetime. So, in terms of the Going for Refuge, they seem to believe in effective Going for Refuge but not real Going for Refuge. But I don't see how you can even effectively Go for Refuge unless you believe that real Going for Refuge is a possibility. If you don't believe that, then your so-called effective Going for Refuge really becomes a provisional or ethnic Going for Refuge. So I think for your effective Going for Refuge to be really an effective Going for Refuge, you have to believe that a real Going for Refuge is possible for you in this lifetime, and you must be prepared to make an effort to transform your as yet effective Going for Refuge into a real Going for Refuge. I think this is very important. You can't just coast along, so to speak, on a purely formal Going for Refuge.

Peter Nicholson: Do they give any reasons why they think it's no longer possible to gain Stream Entry?

S: Well, there are the various traditions in late Pali texts, non-canonical texts, about the disappearance of the Dharma. For instance, reference was made to the according to the Pali Canon alleged shortening of the life of the Sangha due to the introduction of women into it. But even apart from that particular factor, there seems to have been a general belief that the Dharma would gradually, so to speak, run down. The first thing to disappear would be the Transcendental attainments, including Stream Entry; and then the formal teaching; and then the relics of the Buddha. Some Buddhists believe that this process will be completed within 2500 years following the Buddha's death, and then there will begin to be a revival, culminating in the advent of Maitreya Buddha. Some believe that that will take place 2500 years later. There are different beliefs. But there has grown up a tendency in Theravada Buddhist countries to believe that you can't attain any of the [50] transcendental states any longer, and the best thing for you to do is to try to accumulate merit and to be reborn when Maitreya Buddha is on the earth, when it will be possible for you to gain Stream Entry and even arhantship as a result of listening to his teaching. I would say that this whole emphasis on the gradual running down of the Dharma, as though it is sort of inevitable as though the Dharma is a sort of piece of clockwork that is wound up and then has to run down I would say that this is quite contrary to what seems to be the general trend of the Buddha's teaching. You may notice that Dr Conze, in his *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, rather harps on this theme, I think quite mistakenly. Well, perhaps he does reflect a Buddhist tradition, but he seems to accept that, and I feel it should not be accepted. I don't feel it is in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism. After all, one does still have the Teaching, and there is still surely a possibility of human effort to practise and realize that Teaching, so why should not higher spiritual attainments still be possible?

Uttara: Bhante, do you think it is caught up with the ideas of the Kali Yuga age, and things

like that?

S: That is possible, because that is the Hindu belief that there are these four successive yugas. Sometimes late Buddhist literature does mention these and speaks of the Kali Yuga. The Tibetans speak of the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age. But there is no teaching about the Dark Age in the Pali Canon, at least, or what seem to be the earliest records of the Buddha's teaching. It seems a rather defeatist sort of attitude.

Cittapala: Bhante, do you think that means effectively that there haven't been any Stream Entrants since that time because, presumably, if there had been they would have insisted in some

S: Well, one has to make two points here. One is: is one talking about the Theravada Buddhist world or about the Buddhist world as a whole? And, two, one mustn't forget that, in the Mahayana Buddhist countries, the ideal of arhantship was replaced by that of the Bodhisattva; so in Mahayana countries they would not be thinking in terms of attaining Stream Entry anyway, rightly or wrongly, because they would regard that as pertaining to the path of the arhant, not to the path of the Bodhisattva. Whether they attained or achieved a state or stage corresponding, within the Mahayana context, to Stream Entry, is of course another matter. But nowadays when I say nowadays I mean within this last 20 years certainly one does hear reports from the Theravada countries that such-and-such a person is believed to have attained Stream Entry and even arhantship. But this is usually in connection with the modern vipassana tradition usually.

Cittapala: I suppose my point was that presumably the Theravada tradition must have got into a pretty low state if it wasn't giving rise to enough people who have had any significant attainment, because presumably they would wish to correct such a micchaditthi from developing.

S: It's not easy to see how this original rather defeatist tradition arose. It may well have arisen at a time when Buddhism was at a very low ebb, and we know that it was at a very low ebb in Sri Lanka, for instance, on a number of occasions, and had to be revived. And, of course, we know that in India itself Buddhism gradually died out and was eventually extinguished. So perhaps some of the so-called prophecies which are found in late Buddhist works, prophesying the decline of the Dharma and even its disappearance, are based on evidence of contemporary decline.

[51]

Uttara: Do you think it is probably more to do with resistance, because I'm thinking of Anagarika Dharmapala and his attempts to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka and it seems that there was quite a resistance there.

S: Yes, that's true. Not much of this comes out in my little biography, but if one reads extracts from his diary which were published in the Maha Bodhi Journal, it seems he met with a lot of resistance in Sri Lanka to his efforts to revive

Uttara (interrupting): You would think they would welcome hearing somebody who maybe was a Stream Entrant; that they'd think, 'Ah, here's somebody who is a Stream Entrant', so they should be rejoicing.

S: Of course, no one believed that Dharmapala was a Stream Entrant. He certainly didn't claim so. But it is significant and I have mentioned this fact in my little biography that he couldn't find anyone to teach him meditation in the whole of Sri Lanka. It's different now, there are meditation teachers in Sri Lanka, but mostly teachers who have been trained, if that's the right word, in Burma, usually. Now, of course, we have our own Anagarika Asvajit teaching meditation, so at least there is something of that sort now in Sri Lanka.

Uttara: What about the forest monks Deladuk(?) where are they based?

S: There are little groups of forest monks in different parts of Sri Lanka. They seem not to be concerned, usually, so much with meditation as with asceticism and leading a quite ascetic life. There is that book about them, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, which we had a seminar on. Anyone who is interested can refer to that. That is, or was, a quite interesting development. But they clashed quite often with the established monastic order not that they themselves were necessarily aggressive or quarrelsome, but the fact that they were making such strenuous efforts to lead a strict ascetic life didn't always meet with the approval of the non-ascetic monks, let us say. I think, in some respects, in some of the Theravada countries, over the last 20 or 30 years, there have been some signs of spiritual revival here or there. One must say that. They seem to have recovered from their lowest point. But even so, not very much has happened.

Vessantara: Kevin has a question about laziness.

Kevin Donovan: It's around this area. You say, in *Peace is a Fire*, that the besetting sin of Buddhism is laziness and indifference, and it's difficult [to know], particularly in the light of the Buddha's exhortation to the arhants to go forth and spread the Dharma, why this should have become the case.

S: It's very difficult to say. But this is what I have thought, because Buddhists aren't usually fanatical or intolerant; they don't persecute. Those are the characteristic weaknesses if that is the word of certain other faiths. But it does strike one that Buddhists time and time again have been guilty I'm talking about Eastern Buddhists of just laziness and indifference and neglect, those sort of weaknesses. I can't even begin to think why. Perhaps it's a question of the near enemy. Indifference is the near enemy of tolerance, you might say. And laziness might be the near enemy of placidity, peacefulness.

Kevin Donovan: It seems very strange, in a doctrine that's encouraging the development of compassion, to observe such a lack of it.

[52]

S: I suppose one can only conclude, in very general terms, that the gravitational pull is very strong. And in some ways it's not surprising that people shouldn't practise the spiritual teachings that they profess to believe in. In fact, if you look at the FWBO itself, even look at the Order, there are the teachings clearly known to everybody, but does everybody really live up to them? (Murmurs of agreement.) There's the answer: why doesn't one? Why isn't one full of enthusiasm for the Dharma? Why does one bother about trivial things? Why does one want to watch TV or go and see some third-rate film? Even some Order Members do sometimes. Why does one want to waste one's time reading detective stories? Why does one want to waste one's time in the pursuit of members of the opposite sex? Or why does one perhaps

quarrel with a fellow Mitra or a fellow Order Member? Why are there misunderstandings? Why does not everybody succeed in attaining dhyana states when they meditate? Everybody knows exactly how to do it! Why are people unmindful? They all know, they've all heard apamadana sampada... [oh dear!], hundreds of times, even if they haven't been ordained; they know exactly what it means. They could probably give an excellent lecture on the four stages of mindfulness, or four dimensions of awareness. But you still find them forgetting to keep appointments or forgetting to turn up for chapter meetings or council meetings, or forgetting to post letters! So it shouldn't really cause us great surprise that Buddhists throughout the ages have not succeeded in practising the Dharma, because even though we ourselves are very aware of the fact that they haven't succeeded in practising the Dharma always, it doesn't seem to help us to practise the Dharma to a greater extent. So it's just a case of asking ourselves if you want to know why the Buddhist world hasn't succeeded in practising the Dharma to the extent that it might have done, just ask yourself why you haven't practised it to the extent that you might have done. I suspect that the answer is exactly the same in both cases! You might even say there's less excuse in the case of Members of the WBO, because it's all been spelled out to them so clearly at least, I trust it's clear. I've always been under the impression it was clear; everybody has always told me that it was very clear! Some people can't even get up in the morning and meditate, I believe extraordinary as it may sound! Even in communities!

Ratnaprabha: Going back to some of the other religions where they do have intolerance and so on but do sometimes seem to be able to put a lot of energy into spreading the creed, I wonder first of all what the difference is from Buddhists that gives some Christian missionaries, for example, a great deal of fervour.

S: I think it isn't easy to generalize, because some of them followed the flag. I think it's very difficult for us to realize now the extent to which the nations of the West in the last century believed that they represented a superior civilization, and that they had a God-given duty, a God-given mission, to civilize the rest of the world; whether it was through their trade or whether it was through their culture or whether it was through their religion, they really believed that they were superior, and the missionary movement was very closely associated with this. Many people genuinely believed that the West had attained its position of supremacy and superiority because it was Christian, and because God had blessed it. I have heard, myself, Christian missionaries in India in Kalimpong, in fact speaking to local people in exactly this way, speaking to ignorant and illiterate Nepalese. They say, for instance, or they used to say: 'Well, look at England; look at America; look at Germany; how wealthy they are, how prosperous, compared with you. And why is that? Because God is pleased with them, God has blessed them, God has given them all that wealth, all those riches. Why? Because they are following the right path, because they are Christian God is pleased with them, and you are so poor, you are so miserable. Why is that? God is angry with you, because you are worshipping idols. That's why you are so poor. If you want to be [53] well off, if you want to be rich, you should become Christian. God will be pleased with you and he will bless you, and you'll have everything that ' I have heard these things with my own ears. But this was, of course, the last little sunset glow of Western imperialism, you might say, and Western cultural superiority. I doubt if probably well, there might be missionaries in remote Indian villages still singing the same tune, for all I know. But I don't think in the same way as before. I think the missionary movement, in the main, especially in the last century and early in this century, was one aspect of the dominance of the West and, of course, there was in Christianity itself an inherent sort of proselytising zeal which lent itself to that sort of movement.

Ratnaprabha: But in a sense there does seem to be an inherent proselytising zeal within Buddhism. It is there in the scriptures, at least.

S: Well, there were Buddhists who did travel thousands of miles under difficult conditions, to propagate the Buddha's teachings. But it was usually individual monks, just going because they were individually inspired to go forth and spread the Dharma. There was nothing very organized. But they must have gone forth in considerable numbers for Buddhism to have spread so widely at all.

Kevin Donovan: Could it also be related to in terms of, say, Christianity and Islam it's more like a group and defence of the group, coming from that sort of motive, whereas in Buddhism it's more a religious choice, it's more left up to the individual? So it's not

S: This is one aspect of Christian proselytising, or at least was until very recently that they seem to attach some value to the fact that someone even professes to be a Christian. They seem to believe that people can actually be coerced into being Christians; and in the past kings have even coerced whole populations into being Christians, in a way that you never found with Buddhism. This does seem to suggest that Christianity has no respect for the responsibility of the individual. But sometimes Christians, including Christian missionaries, can take a cynical view of this. I know that again, to refer to Kalimpong Catholic missionaries in Kalimpong used to gain converts by all sorts of devious means. For instance, they used to lend money they were registered moneylenders, some of the missionaries and sometimes when the people they had lent money to couldn't repay, they'd say, 'Well, if you'd been Christian we could have forgiven you, we've got some provision for that in the case of Christians, but since you're a Hindu or a Buddhist we can't help you. But if you were Christian, well, we could help you, perhaps.' So in that way, about 100 people in a village near Kalimpong were converted to Christianity, to Catholicism. So one of my friends talked with the Catholic priest concerned. He said: 'Look, these people aren't real Christians, don't you realize that?' So he said: 'Oh, we realize that perfectly well, but their children will be real Christians!' You can't imagine a Buddhist working in that sort of way. One of my friends, an Indian Buddhist, not an ex-Untouchable, actually an ex-Brahmin, was the chairman of a famous committee or commission called the Niyogi(?) Commission after him, which investigated the Christian missionary activities in what was then called Madhya Pradesh, the Central Province; and he uncovered all sorts of misdemeanours, all sorts of things that the Christians were doing to secure converts. And his report was published, and created quite a furore in India at the time. I have a copy still in my study in I was going to say Kalimpong! in Norfolk.

[54]

Ratnaprabha: This question is combined with something we were talking about earlier, where you suggested that, for example, for Buddhism to become a mass movement it needs sort of a cause or a grievance that it can latch on to. Now I was thinking back to successful mass religious movements in this country [UK not Italy], which I am pretty ignorant about, but I was thinking of things like nonconformism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where Methodism for example gained an enormous number of converts. I wonder if there is anything we can learn from the methods or accidental successes that these movements had.

S: I must say not long before I left India in 1964, I happened to read a book on Methodism, and I must say I was quite impressed by the personality of John Wesley and his methods. First

of all, he really did function as an individual, in the sense that he went around on horseback all over Britain, just preaching until he was I think about 80, 85, or something like that; and he usually preached three or four sermons a day. And he went especially to Cornwall I say especially; not that he necessarily spent more time there than anywhere else, but he seems to have been unusually effective in Cornwall and of course the Cornish miners at that time, I think it must have been the tin miners, were living in quite dreadful conditions and were totally neglected by the religious authorities of their day. From Wesley's point of view they had relapsed into paganism and worse; they apparently had hardly heard of Christianity, didn't know the word God or Jesus or anything of that sort at all, and often were illiterate. But through the sincerity of his preaching he managed to have a tremendous effect upon them and produced what was called, I believe, the Cornish religious revival, and Methodism became very strong in Cornwall. He had a very strong reforming ethical influence on many of these people. He was also something of an organizational genius, because he used to organize his followers into cells, and they used to have weekly meetings; and each person had to pay a penny a week into a sort of fund. And he organized these weekly meetings, as they were called, into sort of groups; there was a district and there was a sort of local chapter, as we would call it, and then there was a district and then there was something else, I forget what they called it. But he built up a very systematic organization. He used to ride around on his horse inspecting them from time to time, and if anyone was backsliding, he just struck their names off the register without any hesitation. And of course he was always preaching at them, or to them. He does seem to have been a very kindly old gentleman with great sincerity and enthusiasm. So he did achieve in that way quite a lot, and the Methodists eventually became one of the biggest and most successful of the nonconformist denominations. It did rather harden at the arteries later on, but it is still one of the larger Christian churches in the United Kingdom and, of course, in the United States and elsewhere in the world. So what was the question? How did Mr Wesley come into this?

Ratnaprabha: Well, I wondered if given that you suggested that perhaps for Buddhism to be a mass movement, it might require a cause or a grievance can we learn anything from mass religious movements in this country?

S: I think one thing that one can learn from Wesley, or his life or his example, was that he directed his attention to people whom everybody else neglected; well, in the industrial slums also. He directed his attention to those people whom the ecclesiastical authorities just didn't want to have anything to do with, for various reasons. They were just beyond the pale, they weren't respectable. People were even perhaps afraid of them, and Wesley himself was often threatened with violence and had to face hostility to the point of violence many a time. But he seems to have been able to overawe people by sheer force of his personality - not that he [55] was a strong person or an overbearing person; no, he was a very kindly, gentle old man; but it seems he was able to communicate something of that sort to people, or something of his sincerity, so that he could even have a positive effect on quite wild and violent people. He was never actually injured, as far as I remember. He kept a journal of his tours. There was a multi-volume edition of his journal, which is quite interesting. I think this is at least one lesson of his life, that he directed his attention in Britain to people who were neglected, because at that time there had been shifts of population and there were vicars and bishops where there weren't many people, and where there were tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people, there weren't any vicars and there weren't any bishops. And he went where there were people, and there was a response, because people appreciated his sincerity and the fact that he had gone out of his way to approach them when nobody else would. Well,

I suppose we don't really have people like that in this country, in the United Kingdom, any longer: people really living in degradation and thoroughly neglected by all the powers that be; not on that sort of scale.

Sudhana: Just to comment I believe he wasn't just sort of church teaching, he actually rescued them from poverty by his organization.

S: That is true. He was very concerned about the ethical aspect of life. He was very much against drunkenness and he favoured virtues like thrift rather unimaginative virtues in a way, but quite useful ones! He was very much in favour of literacy, and he published a lot of quite simple books for newly-literate people to read; some of them he wrote himself. So he was concerned with social and educational work as well. Again, in modern Britain, we don't need perhaps to concern ourselves in that way; we don't have mass illiteracy or well, there is a problem of alcoholism, of course. I suppose one could have a mission to alcoholics.

Uttara: It seems that drugs are becoming a problem in . . . in Glasgow and . . .

S: Yes. It would seem that the problems that people suffer from in modern Britain, and perhaps in the modern West, are not material problems, not problems of poverty or material deprivation, but psychological problems. So perhaps if we are to have a mission of this type, it's more to people who suffer psychologically. But of course, you can't get them together in great masses; you have to approach them individually by virtue of the very nature of the problem. must say I am a bit surprised sometimes that I am thinking mainly of the LBC some of our centres don't take more interest in the local community. I think this applies more to the LBC, because there we are more in the midst of the local community and there are perhaps possibilities of contact and so on. I think we should try to do more in this way. Not necessarily as a sort of method of spreading Buddhism and making converts, as it were, but just as a question of human concern, or basically Buddhist concern.

Alan Pendock: There's something which I've heard you say a number of times, and that is it takes a lot more effort to for instance, to take drug addicts to bring those out to a human stand (?) than it would to put that effort into a beginners' class, for instance.

S: That's true, yes. Well, yes, there is certainly that to consider. Of course, I have myself said that if you're just one solitary person, rather than, say, trying to treat patients yourself say, assuming you're a doctor it's better for you to train up the doctors so that in the long run the sick people get more attention. So this has been the policy of the FWBO so far. But I think we begin to reach a [56] point where we have got quite a few doctors, so to speak, and perhaps we should start

spreading ourselves more widely in the community. Not everybody, perhaps, but some. I think also it's a sensible thing to do, because I think, looking at it from another point of view, it's not really very wise, not very politic, not to be on friendly terms with the non-Buddhist people in whose midst one is living and functioning. I think it's prudent to be on friendly terms with them or to have friends amongst them.

Derek Goodman: There seems to be one move I can think [of] in that direction, that's two or three people have been on the course for bereavement counselling.

S: Mm, quite, yes. Well, this is certainly a helpful thing. If people have taken the bereavement counselling course, it would be good if they could help not only people within the Buddhist Movement but people outside, too. But people outside the Movement who happened to be bereaved would have to know you, perhaps, so that they could call upon you when the time came. I think it's unlikely that people especially the sort of people, say, you get in Bethnal Green would phone up some impersonal bereavement counselling agency and ask somebody to come along. I think that is highly unlikely. But if you were in touch with them, and if it was known that 'The Buddhists at the Old Fire Station are helpful in these sort of situations' I think word would very quickly get around. You'd find people perhaps calling on you, or perhaps friends of theirs would ask you just to call, something of that sort.

Uttara: Bhante, couldn't we have something similar to citizens' advice bureaux?

S: I think one could. Because, for instance, there is talk of a sort of health centre in East London, and if that did develop, various ancillary services could be grouped around that, quite easily. I think word would get around if people were really helpful. Anyway, we're getting a long way from Ambedkar, aren't we?

Douglas Ponton: It's just a question about Marxism, whether Marxism fulfils Dr Ambedkar's four criteria for a religion, which it did seem to; so why Ambedkar decided not to adopt Marxism.

S: I think I've actually given a lecture on this in India which is published as a booklet. I can't remember its title at the moment.

: Dr Ambedkar's

S: Dharma Revolution. That's right. Ambedkar wasn't at all happy with Marxism or with communism, let's say, taking communism as meaning Marxism in action. At one stage of his career, Ambedkar was a labour leader in Bombay, because many Untouchables worked in the mills of Bombay, Bombay being a big industrial centre with lots of mills cotton mills and various other factories. And during that period he learned to distrust the communists, because he found that the communist leaders who were working in the factories and trying to organize the workers were not really concerned with the improvement of their conditions, but were concerned with using them for political purposes of their own. So he felt that the communists didn't really have the interests of the workers at heart. This was his conviction. Also, of course, he didn't believe in violence as a means of achieving social and political ends. He didn't believe in nonviolence completely; he believed that a nation, for instance, a state, had the right to defend itself against attack. But [57] he certainly didn't believe that social and political objectives could be achieved by means of violence; and, of course, Marxism does believe that that is in the end the only way. So he rejected Marxism, mainly on those grounds. Also, of course, that Marxism wasn't strictly speaking a religion and he believed that religion was essential to human beings. He believed that it was essential to the individual, and it was also essential to the state. It was essential to society, because society couldn't be held together by force, it couldn't be held together by law; it could only be held together by ethical principles which in the last resort had a religious basis. Also, of course, Marxism was foreign, and one of the reasons why Ambedkar preferred Buddhism was that it was an indigenous religion, and this of course was, so far as his Indian followers were concerned, a strong point for them. Centuries ago, India had been Buddhist, so they had Buddhistic roots, as it were,

which meant that they had a strong feeling for Buddhism in a way that they didn't have for a teaching or a system that had originated outside India. In a way this was an appeal to something ethnic. But he was after all dealing with very large numbers of people. But I think his real objection to Marxism was that it advocated violence as a means of social revolution, and he didn't believe that social revolution could in fact be brought about in that way.

Uttara: Bhante, I think that Herbert Read, the anarchist that was his quarrel (S: Hm?) Herbert Read, the art critic, I was reading his quarrel with Marxism was that they didn't believe in religion and felt that they had left it out, and man needed a religion. This was his criticism of Marxism, too.

S: Some people have claimed that Marxism has certain features of a religion. In some ways it does, but there isn't the Transcendental dimension, which is perhaps the most essential element of religion, at least of universal religion. It certainly has missionary zeal! It even has a prophet, it even has a bible! But, throughout his career, Ambedkar was strongly opposed to communism, though it must be said that nowadays some of his followers are attracted to communism. Some, especially, in places like Bombay.

Douglas Ponton: Some of Ambedkar's language in the pamphlet, where he speaks particularly of modern Hinduism sitting on a volcano which is bound to erupt once these downtrodden depressed castes gain consciousness, come to realize the degradation it has a certain sort of political, even a Marxist, flavour.

S: Yes. I suppose in a way it's a statement of fact, because at present there are 100 million Untouchables or ex-Untouchables; so if all of them, even though they are in a minority, 100 million even in a country like India is quite a lot of people; so if they did all suddenly realize how they had been treated, and also had the means to put things right, there could be an upheaval which really was volcanic. I doubt whether that will happen in that way. I think if it happens at all it will happen quite gradually, and therefore not volcanically. Why there hasn't been an upheaval is partly because these people don't all live in one area. They are divided, because many Untouchables are sort of village servants. So, say, to 100 caste Hindu villagers you might have five or six or ten Untouchables to perform certain menial services, so everywhere they are in a minority. Not only are they in a minority, but they are also poor, they have no economic strength. They are also pretty illiterate. So they are at a disadvantage in every way; they don't even possess weapons. The only places where they've got any strength is the big cities, to which they've emigrated to get away from their position of slavery in the villages; even in the big cities they are still in a minority. So the 100 million are sort of split up, and you don't get lots of them, as compared with members of other castes, just in one place. And they are still [58] on the whole uneducated and economically backward, so they are still dominated and bullied by the caste Hindus. But things are gradually changing; in some areas, they have begun to make a stand and to resist the caste Hindus and refuse to be oppressed, refuse to perform those menial services without proper pay, and so on. So a very slow, gradual change does seem to be taking place. But even now, every year, some hundreds of Untouchables are killed, usually because the caste Hindus think that they are

getting beyond themselves; and tens of thousands are beaten and so on, and their houses burned down, every year, still; there are accounts in all the Indian newspapers, almost every week there are reports. Caste Hindus still can't accept that the Untouchables are bettering themselves, because, you see, the background of their attitude is that if you're born as an

Untouchable, you've been born as an Untouchable because of sins committed in previous lives, so if you try to better your condition which means if you try to increase, say, your economic prosperity you are going against the law of karma. You are being sinful, you're not accepting your punishment, as it were. And caste Hindus believe very strongly that you must accept your punishment, if you're born in a low caste, and even seem to think of it as part of their religious duty to keep the Untouchables in their place. For instance, supposing in a village there's a marriage ceremony of, say, the Untouchables and you know Hindus always like to celebrate marriage ceremonies on a grand scale. There have been examples, for instance, where the Untouchable bridegroom has ridden in the marriage procession on horseback, which is the caste Hindu custom, and he's been assaulted because he is behaving in a way that is not proper for an Untouchable to behave. He is getting too big for his boots, people say. There have been other cases where an Untouchable has been thrashed for daring to wear his sandals when walking through a caste Hindu street, showing disrespect to caste Hindus. There are hundreds of things of this sort. If he's not sufficiently polite or obsequious to the caste Hindus he can be thrashed. There was an example well, there are several examples of Untouchables being thrashed for turning the ends of their moustaches upwards, because that is supposed to be the prerogative of the Rajput. If an Untouchable wears a moustache, he must turn the ends of it down. So sometimes Untouchables have been thrashed and half the moustache shaved off as a punishment. These things happen; they are probably happening today. These things are still going on. And there are far worse things than that going on. Sometimes as a punishment their wells are polluted. It is happening all the time. But gradually, here and there, Untouchables are resisting, especially those who have converted to Buddhism; but sometimes they are punished for resisting. Often, of course, the police are caste Hindu, so if they report incidents to the police, nothing happens. Only if by chance a police officer happens to be a non caste Hindu, maybe a Christian or Muslim, they may get some sympathy. Occasionally, a caste Hindu who is a bit liberal indeed may do justice to them. And, of course, sometimes if they refuse to behave as they are supposed to behave as Untouchables they are not given work. Don't forget most of them are landless labourers, so they are boycotted. The caste Hindus, the well off class, refuse to give them work. Or sometimes they give them work and won't pay them, so what are they to do? They have no money to go and engage a lawyer to fight their case. If they go and complain to the police, nothing happens. And they are a minority, they can't even do anything by force. And these things go on all the time. So this is the background of some all our own Friends, Order Members and Mitras in Poona and other places; they've all got a background of this kind of experience. Nagabodhi's written about one or two of our Order Member Friends in India with this kind of background, men of his age and he's what? about 35 who have been treated like this in their younger days. To us it's really quite incredible. So Buddhism to them represents a liberation, or at least a way out of [59] all these sort of things, this sort of treatment. Because they can take a stand on the fact that they are Buddhists, they are outside Hinduism, therefore they are Untouchables, and therefore they refuse to be treated as Untouchables. This is what Buddhism means to most of them.

Alan Turner: Bhante, do the caste Hindus take any action against the ex-Untouchables practising Buddhism in any way?

S: Sometimes they do. They are not so much well, it depends what you mean by the practice of Buddhism. If by practice of Buddhism you mean that the Untouchables try to better themselves, they will often take action against that. It has been, there are many cases of caste Hindus smashing Buddha images and so on, and even worse things than that, which I won't

mention; not because of direct religious antagonism but more because they've been annoyed by the Untouchables getting above themselves, as they see it, so they want just to humiliate them in every way. So they'll do it by assaulting them, by raping their women sometimes, burning down their huts, and smashing images of the Buddha and Dr Ambedkar. This is a fairly common sort of thing. I've got some statistics in Norfolk listing the different types of atrocities perpetrated by caste Hindus on Untouchables, about 1200 different types of atrocity, I think, from murder downwards. And still, Untouchables are refused to be served in village cafes and so on. Sometimes there are various degrees; for instance, there might be a tea shop in the village, well, an Untouchable won't be admitted but they may give him tea in a special cup which is kept for Untouchables, standing out in the road. But they won't allow him in or allow him to use the crockery which is used by caste Hindus. And, of course, a barber won't shave an Untouchable; and in India, of course, you don't usually shave yourself, especially in villages; you always get the barber to do it, the barber goes round from house to house. But he won't shave the Untouchables.

: Bhante, do you think any of the AFI projects would be at risk from his sort of attention from caste Hindus?

S: I haven't been aware that there is any risk to any of these projects. Most of them are in predominantly Buddhist localities, anyway, or at least where there are substantial numbers of Buddhists. But it's very difficult to say, because with a large scale riot, if the caste Hindus started attacking the Untouchables our properties and so on might be involved, it's not inconceivable. But there haven't, as I say, been any signs of that. Poona is a relatively peaceful place. Poona that's where, of course, we mainly function so far Poona is not a place that is given to riots and so on; even when there are riots in Bombay and Ahmedabad and so on, very rarely does anything happen in Poona. There have been small riots there, but it's always been between caste Hindus and Muslims. You might be surprised, but usually in places like Bombay and Poona, the Buddhists, Christians and Muslims are all on quite friendly terms. Yes, oh yes; it's partly because Untouchables don't have any restrictions about interdining, whereas caste Hindus wouldn't invite a Muslim or a Christian into the house to eat or to drink tea; whereas Christians, Muslims and Buddhists interdine quite freely, and often invite one another to their weddings and other social events. This doesn't happen with caste Hindus. So usually Buddhists, Christians and Muslims are on personally quite friendly terms, despite the religious differences, which don't seem to trouble them at all! It seems rather odd in a way, doesn't it? They all regard themselves as oppressed minorities! One of our Order Members sends or did send his son to a Muslim school! Anyway, let's move on. Before we go on to that one, all this arose out of what was it?

[60]

: Marxism.

S: Ah no, this ties up it didn't arise out of but it ties up with something that was mentioned before, that is to say, finding a grievance. Because the Untouchables certainly have grievances, to say the least, and they, at least those who take Ambedkar seriously, do see Buddhism as the solution ultimately to those grievances. They certainly don't believe that if they become Buddhists they will at once become more prosperous, etc. etc.. Nobody believes that. And of course it hasn't happened. And certainly the Buddhist countries of the East haven't rushed to help them. But once they say that they are Buddhists, they feel that they are not Hindu, they feel that if anyone treats or tries to treat them as an Untouchable, with all that

that implies, they can then say, 'No, I am not an Untouchable, because I am not a Hindu; I am a Buddhist, and I refuse to be treated in that way.' And this gives them a great feeling of strength. I remember when I was moving around amongst them, shortly after the conversion, I used to ask them, 'What difference does it make to you now that you have become Buddhist?' And I always got the same reply, even from the most ordinary illiterate person in the village: they'd always say, 'We just feel free.' And that sense of liberation from the caste system and from the tyranny of the caste Hindus has released a tremendous amount of energy, which shows itself in all sorts of fields.

Peter Nicholson: Are they able or would they want to take advantage of the positive discrimination practised by the Govt. on behalf of ex-Untouchables?

S: Oh yes, they would, definitely.

Peter Nicholson: Are they able to, despite calling themselves Buddhists? Are they still considered as ex-Untouchables?

S: Ah, that's a very big question. This was one of the biggest problems that they had to face, because after the conversion, the central government withdrew all those concessions from those who declared themselves as Buddhists. One can only say that that was a move on the part of the caste Hindus in the government to block the process of conversion. They stopped all their concessions. The state governments also stopped [them] because there are two kinds of concessions: There were those given by the central government and those given by the different state governments. You probably realize that India is divided into states, and there is a government at the centre but there are also separate governments for the different states. The states have their legislatures also; mostly they have an upper and a lower house just like the central government, and they have cabinets, and they have not a prime minister but a chief minister, so there's a quite big legislative and governmental apparatus for each state, apart from that at the centre, which is even bigger. So in India, you've actually got tens of thousands of legislators, because you've got oh, I forget how many states it is now; I think it must be getting on for 20. Anyway, there are concessions given by the central government and concessions given by the state. So after the mass conversion, both the central government and the different state governments declared that those who became Buddhists were no longer eligible for those concessions which were given to members of the Scheduled Castes, which included the Untouchables. So if they wanted to become officially Buddhist, they had to sacrifice those. I remember there was quite a big attempt on the part of the Untouchables themselves and some of their friends to get the government to reverse this decision; I remember there was correspondence on the subject in old numbers of the Maha Bodhi Journal . In the end, only one state government rescinded its decision and gave back those concessions to those Untouchables who had become Buddhists, and that was the state government of [61] Maharashtra. Some people believe that is one of the reasons why Buddhism prospers more in Maharashtra than anywhere else one of the reasons. That may be so. But elsewhere, if you declared yourself a Buddhist, then you or your children ceased to be eligible for those concessions. So sometimes, I'm afraid, it happened that people actually took the Dharma diksa, as they call it, they actually became Buddhists, but they didn't become Buddhists officially in the census; they returned themselves as Hindus, so that they could benefit from those concessions. So this created a certain amount of uncertainty and well, obviously, it wasn't quite straightforward or quite honest. They were well aware of that, and they weren't happy with that, those who did it, but on the other hand they felt they had no

alternative, because their economic position and so on was so very weak. I was asked dozens of times hundreds of ` times by people in the course of my tours what they should do.

: What advice did you give them?

S: Well, I said that if they possibly could they should definitely not only become Buddhists but declare themselves as such, and take the consequences. But I said if they didn't feel able to do that, I certainly wasn't going to criticize them for that. Of course, the riots that have been going on in Ahmedabad during the last year are riots well, the riots originated from caste Hindu students who were demonstrating against Scheduled Caste students being given special places in a medical college. So it became in a way a riot and there was quite a loss of life a riot of caste Hindus against the Scheduled Castes not specifically Buddhists but against the Scheduled Castes, including Untouchable people, many of whom were killed. There is still tension there. Some caste Hindus deeply resent that Scheduled Caste people are still being given some of these concessions.

Peter Nicholson: I read or heard somewhere that a lot of the antagonism against "the ex untouchables in these sort of cases is actually from people in the shudra classes, because they feel the ex-Untouchables have got an unfair advantage on them now. Is this the case, do you think?

S: I think sometimes that is the case, because sometimes the people who are just above you, not those who are very much above you but those who are just above you, resent you coming up more than do those who are very much above you. Yes, in some areas the shudras are quite well to do, often well to do peasants and farmers and so on, and they often resent the fact that the Untouchables are improving their position, no less than do the Mahratas or the brahmins, perhaps even more than they do. In politics, of course, strange things happen. In Maharashtra, some years ago, there was a sort of political alliance between, believe it or not, the Untouchables and the brahmins; because in Maharashtra they were both minorities. The majority caste there is the Mahrata caste, and on the one hand they are anti brahmin, the brahmins being above them, and anti Untouchable, the Untouchables being below them. So the people at the very bottom and the people at the very top, both being in the minority, made certain political alliances! That's why they say in politics necessity makes strange bedfellows. This didn't mean, of course, that the brahmins relented socially; it didn't mean that they interdined with the Untouchables or anything like that, but they were prepared to have political alliances with them. Anyway, that's all by the way.

Duncan Steen: Bhante, in our study group we had quite a long and to me very confusing discussion about karma, and the question that I made up out of this was: Would you say that the loss of awareness or a slip of mindfulness [62] carries negative karma vipaka , whether or not any being suffers as a result? And would this be a separate kind of karma from the volitional karma associated with greed and hatred?

S: I suppose there is such a thing as wilful negligence.

Duncan Steen: Well, I was thinking of just negligence that is, someone who is generally fairly aware

S: This question did arise in the Buddha's own time, at least there is a text or passage to that

effect. I believe it's in the Vinaya Pitaka that a bhikkhu went into somebody's house, a layman's house, I think it was in quest of alms. There was nobody about, so he just sat down on a chair. The chair was covered by a white cloth. He didn't realize it but there was a baby under the cloth. And by sitting down suddenly on the cloth with the baby underneath it, he killed the baby. So the matter was referred to the Buddha, who said that he had not been guilty of deliberately taking life; it was not his intention to kill the baby; so he would not have to suffer, therefore, the karma vipaka of deliberate taking of life. But not that there would be no karmic consequence at all, because he should have been more mindful. In the first place, he shouldn't have sat down without being invited to sit down, and seeing that the seat was covered with a cloth he should have checked whether or not there was anything under the cloth. So he was certainly guilty of unmindfulness. And that constituted an offence, that constituted the creation of unskillful karma, but not to the extent of actual murder or even manslaughter.

Duncan Steen: No, quite. But that would be only in the case of where some actual being, in this case the baby, suffers, [but] if you are just unmindful generally, if you were a monk and you sat down and there wasn't a baby underneath, there would presumably not be the same karmic

S: There wouldn't be the same there would still be a karmic consequence, because you were unmindful, and what does unmindfulness mean? That you are a lesser human being than you would be if you were mindful. Everything you do, therefore, is out of that less mindful state, and therefore has less and less positive consequences. So I'm not sure whether this statement is actually made in so many words in Buddhist tradition, but it would seem, therefore, in view of the general trend of the teaching, that unmindfulness certainly what I called deliberate negligence has karmic consequences, if you are unaware in circumstances in which you can reasonably be expected to be aware. Because why are you not aware when you should be aware? You don't care, you don't bother. That would suggest lack of care for others, where others are involved, even a subtle antagonism to others; and that surely would be productive of karmic consequences.

Duncan Steen: I was thinking of someone, say, getting into a car and driving off here [Italy] and driving on the left and side of the road, because they happened to be thinking of something else, and one tends to drive not in a very conscious way, at least in England; that is, you tend to just drive automatically, go into automatic. And it has just occurred to me that, well, quite often driving on the continent, I have found myself going on to the left and side of the road, and I've been lucky on some occasions

S: But then I think in that sort of situation, when one knows that one is going, say, from England to the continent and you know that there is a different highway code on the continent, you have to impress that upon your mind very strongly before you set out, otherwise you will forget. I think if one is sufficiently [63] conscious of the seriousness of a particular situation, you can impress it on your mind in advance in such a way that you will remember, that you will not forget. But you must be very conscious of the need to do that. It applies, for instance, to drinking and driving. Some people drink and drive, they don't even think about it. But if you are really aware of the danger of drinking and driving, you won't do that, you'll either not drink or if you have drunk you won't drive. But I think it is one of the essential ingredients of the ethical life not to say the spiritual life that you are aware of situations of that sort into which you are about to enter, and you give yourself strong advance

warning, and impress upon yourself the need to behave in a particular way. You need to think ahead. If you've developed reflexive consciousness, you are able to think ahead. For instance, to give you the kind of instance that you will be confronted with, at the end of three months you will be going back some of you, at least to the big city, so you have to tell yourself very strongly in advance: well, look, this is what is going to happen, I've got to be very careful in such and such respects. If you tell yourself that sufficiently strongly, you won't forget when you do reach the big city, and will behave in accordance with the awareness that you had beforehand, before you reached the big city. But I think you can't expect to reach the big city, or to start driving in a different country, say, in Europe, without making mistakes, unless you survey the situation in advance and tell yourself in that way that you do have to be mindful, that you do have to behave in a particular way when you enter into a particular new situation; because you can be so easily just swept away, so easily be forgetful. Do you understand the general principle? Or if you know you are going to be meeting somebody whom you don't like, with whom you often have arguments or with whom you lose your temper, you have to say to yourself in advance, well, look, I'm going to meet that person, I've got to be very careful what I say. I've got to watch myself. I've got to make really quite sure that I don't lose my temper. I've got to watch out for the signs of that beginning to happen. If you impress this on your mind very strongly in advance, then there is much less likelihood of your actually losing your temper with that person as you have done in the past. But if you know that you are going to meet that sort of person, and you know what has happened with that person in the past, it's foolish not to stop and impress certain things of that kind on your mind in advance. Otherwise, once again, you will be swept away, just as you were before. So this is an aspect of mindfulness; sort of thinking ahead in that kind of way.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, going back to the karma of unmindfulness I think it's slightly theoretical first of all, would you think it would be sensible to say that this unmindfulness having karmic consequences relates to karma which as it were springs out of a mental state of ignorance, while perhaps the more usual kind of karma springs from a mental state of greed or hatred?

S: You could certainly say that, because unmindfulness in this sense is a form of ignorance. Yes. I mean all the unskilful mental states can be classified, at least according to the Abhidharma, under either greed, hatred, or delusion or ignorance. So unmindfulness, I think, clearly comes under ignorance.

Ratnaprabha: How does this fit in with the equation between karma and cetana? Where cetana is usually translated as volition, and karma as being a volitional act? When I sort of slip from my usual state of awareness to a lower state of awareness, it very far from feels like a volitional act, in fact it feels like quite the reverse.

S: I suppose it depends what we mean by volition. I don't think cetana really corresponds very exactly to volition. I think it's more like the whole forward [64] movement of our being; and I think the more conscious that is, the more it becomes intensified.

Duncan Steen: Can you say more what you mean by 'the whole forward movement of our being?'

S: Well, we are so to speak embodiments of energy; you know, we do things and, as a result of that, we are reborn; so if we persist in being human beings and behaving as human beings

in the ordinary sense, we are reborn as human beings, 'even though we may not have had any very strong or clear human volitions, as it were; but the whole thrust of our being has been just to be human, to behave in the way that human beings usually do behave.

: I don't understand . . . karma . . . In order to karma is usually said to be a volition, in the sense of choice, a decision that you take.

S: I don't think it's necessarily quite like that. This represents what I would call the more intensified form of that sort of forward thrust of the being. It can take that form, but then I think it is intensified, so to speak, and the consequences, whether positive or negative, also become intensified, become more dramatic, if one likes. In a way, one is willing all the time, because you are sort of willing to persist in your own mode of being, with varying degrees of awareness of consciousness.

Uttara: It's a bit like you it's the same with mindfulness, you impress something on your mind so that you will be mindful, and it seems in a way that, say, last year, I had impressed on my mind that I might well stop acting in a certain way. Do you think that sort of stops the wheel, in a sense?

S: I don't quite see the connection.

Uttara: Rather than moment to moment, these decisions, it's

S: Ah yes, this is what would be called habitual karma: the fact that you do something over and over again, perhaps of a relatively insignificant type, whether positive or negative. The effects of that build up and determine one's future; or you bring about a karma vipaka in the future. But this would be called habitual karma. These are the karmas that people normally do perform. Perhaps you could say that this does correspond, to some extent, to what I've called the forward movement of one's whole being, because one is doing certain things all the time. They are usually ethically coloured, karmically coloured, at least to some extent, in varying degrees. For instance, you are looking at things all the time during your waking state, and that sort of awareness or consciousness with which you look at things is usually faintly tinged with greed or faintly tinged with antagonism. It is not that you have a very strong or very clear sense of craving or antagonism, but it is there, it tinges the mental state, and you repeat those mental states time and time again. So there is a sort of weight of karma being accumulated in that way, which has its effects later on.

: Could you just underline that, Bhante? What you now called habitual Karma you are saying approximates closely to cetana?

S: I don't think I said 'closely'; to some extent, yes. 'Approximates' means to some extent.

[65]

: Could you differentiate them, then?

S: I'm not so sure that I could at this moment. I'd have to check and see exactly what the Abhidharma says about habitual karma and then see whether it does really in detail correspond to what I've described as the forward thrust of one's whole being. What I'm trying to get at is that the creation of karma doesn't necessarily consist in the performance of very

distinct, separate, as it were dramatic individual acts of volition. It's usually more like the numberless little increments of acts of consciousness or volition, you could say, just very slightly tinged with greed or hatred or whatever it is, gradually accumulating and giving a definite direction to one's whole existence, and resulting in certain definite consequences. Of course, from time to time there may be some dramatic outstanding karma, like entering the dhyanas, or taking life. Perhaps we don't realize the extent to which we are embodiments of, well, to use a more general term, will. We are always looking for something, always seeking something, or searching for something, without fully registering that. One notices this especially, perhaps, especially when one is young, in connection with sex. For instance, you go into a mixed gathering, and at once you react to everybody present in sexual terms. Say, if you're a man, the men present leave you indifferent, they're neutral; then among the women, there is a definite difference of response; some attract you, some don't attract you, some attract you quite strongly; and usually what will happen is, without being very aware of it, you will move if you're an ordinary young man towards those who attract you a bit more, without being fully conscious that this is what you're doing or what is perhaps at the back of your mind; but you move in that direction. And you're aware, you're conscious of this sort of sexual selectivity that is going on all the time, when you're young; whether you're walking down the street or whether you're at a party or whether you're watching a film or reading a book, it's there all the time, you're constantly making this sort of selection, constantly moving in this direction towards those particular people or that particular person and not towards others. And this is all the time a karma that you're creating, because you're dominated by a particular kind of greed. But usually you're not really aware of it; but it's there.

Tape 5

And it works out in other ways, because you might have the same sort of unconscious tendency to dominate everybody you met; every time you meet someone, you are experiencing them in terms of domination. You are always on your guard against them dominating you, and always trying to get the better of them or to go one up on them. You may not be conscious of it really at all, but it's there and you're vaguely conscious of it; but only quite vaguely, usually, unless some more dramatic situation arises. But, again, this represents a sort of karmic tendency; you're creating karma of this sort all the time by means of all these tiny increments. But I think we don't realize what is happening all the time, that we are embodiments of will, and that that will is sort of coloured with various skilful and unskilful mental factors usually unskilful; and therefore that we're creating karma all the time. And that there will be consequences.

Ratnaprabha: Do you think you could try to tie in these slips into unmindfulness with this continual habitual creation of will? Would you say that in a sense that's a wilful or volitional process?

S: I think there are levels of volition, or levels of will, probably corresponding to levels of consciousness. Usually, if someone points out to you what you're doing, you may not have been really aware of what you were doing at the time, but [66] when they point it out you can recognize that, yes, actually you did know what you were doing. Do you see what I mean? You were certainly not fully conscious of it, or not conscious of the significance of a particular action at the time you were performing it, but when it's pointed out you can recognize well, yes, this is actually what I was up to, but I didn't really so to speak recognize it or admit it to myself.

Derek Goodman: I've got a question about your use of the word will there. Am I right in assuming that you are using the word will in [the same] way as you always use the word will? Because I think I've heard you talk about the will as being like part of someone's consciousness which kind of polices all the parts into doing something? Is this you're not talking about that just now, are you?

S: I'm in a way distinguishing will and volition I don't know whether this corresponds to a dictionary distinction but I'm using 'volition' more for a higher or more intense level of will, corresponding to a much higher degree of consciousness or self-consciousness. I'm using 'will' for a vaguer and more general trend or tendency, which is not really very conscious. Perhaps I'm using it more in the Schopenhauerian sense, Schopenhauer's will. I'll have to check on Schopenhauer to be quite sure of that.

Uttara: So that tendency would only be broken on Stream Entry, then?

S: It wouldn't be broken; you'd make a pretty big dent in it.

Uttara: You'd be turning over from just the reactive to the creative

S: That's right, yes.

Uttara: How would this tie in with ways of relating on an everyday basis? I think you have said before that, in the Going for Refuge, that sets up some very strong karmic volitions (S: Right, yes), so how would that come into play with one's everyday

S: Well, you would have, to begin with, a much more constant sense of direction, because you would be, one could say, constantly Going for Refuge. You wouldn't be able to help it, you wouldn't be able to stop it. You'd never forget it, you'd always be doing it. Whereas usually we drift this way and that, very easily distracted. The whole current of our being can be switched on to a completely different track, quite quickly and suddenly, violently. But if one achieves Stream Entry, then it means there is a certain general overall direction to your whole life which doesn't change, which doesn't deviate. Perhaps we don't always realize the extent to which we are tossed from this side to that.

Uttara: So you have an effective individual who's Going for Refuge?

S: Right, yes, yes.

Cittapala: Bhante, when one sort of slips back from a more conscious state to a less conscious state, does the weightiness of that karmic propensity decrease, r ?

S: It would seem like that. The more deliberate [your acts] and therefore the more conscious, the more reflexively conscious, they are, the more intensely karmic they are, so to speak; whether for good or for evil. This would seem to be the general Buddhist position.

[67]

Cittapala: So, just to clarify that, taking Duncan's example of sort of forgetting which side of the road one's on, or perhaps driving from A to B and not actually realizing that one has really done it in a sense that's a less weighty karmic action, even though it's unmindful, than actually

deliberately doing something which is unskilful?

S: Yes, that would seem to be the case. Though there are other Buddhist teachings which do say the opposite: that, if you do an unskilful action mindfully, the mindfulness with which you do it negates the otherwise unskilfulness of it. But perhaps that is to be understood in a paradoxical sort of way. The illustration which they give is that if you try and snatch something out of the fire, if you do it very carefully and with great mindfulness you are less likely to burn your fingers. I'm not sure that that's a very good analogy. I think one could say that the more mindful, or the more deliberate the action, whether for good or for evil, the more drastically it modifies one's being. If you generally have very little awareness, you'll be operating on a low level of being anyway. But if you perform an action, whether skilful or unskilful, with a high degree of awareness, or a high degree of deliberation, let us say, that will have a much more drastic modifying effect on your being, whether that being is on the whole on a lower level or whether it's on a higher level.

Ratnaprabha: I'm sorry to keep harping on this. I may be wrong, but if I equated ignorance with unawareness, it then seems rather odd to say that ignorance could be a basis for a karmic action, like greed or hatred can be; because the greater the level of unawareness the less karmic the action, from what you've just said.

S: I don't think that necessarily follows. I think also it's not that [un]mindfulness is synonymous with avidya or ignorance, but that it is a particular form of it. But I think perhaps the solution is to be found in the distinction I've just made. Let's take a concrete example. Supposing there is a person living on a very low level of consciousness; well, everything that they do is out of that low level of consciousness. So they are creating, one might say, a mild sort of karma which sort of sustains them on that same level of being, corresponding to that particular level of consciousness. They'll be reborn, so to speak, more or less as what they are at present. But supposing, from time to time, they achieve a higher level of consciousness, of reflexive consciousness, and with a much higher degree of deliberation they perform, say, a skilful action. The fact that they perform that skilful action with that higher degree of deliberation and consciousness will mean that their overall being is dramatically modified, or drastically modified, with corresponding karmic consequences.

Cittapala: Does this mean, then, that maybe this is too crude an example an Order Member going to have a drink in a pub has a sort of weightier karmic consequence for him than your average bar prop who drinks ten pints a night?

S: Yes, it has a more disastrous effect upon him, yes indeed. Because the ordinary bar prop is already at that level, so it's not a question of being brought down to that level; but in the case of the Order Member, let's say, the average Order Member, the ideal Order Member! he is brought down to a level lower than that which he normally occupies. So the effects in that sense are more disastrous.

Uttara: Does this tie up, Bhante you have said that it is better to eat a beefsteak mindfully than to do a puja unmindfully is that a similar ?

S: Ah, this of course ties up with what I was talking about before, which I said was probably to be taken as paradoxical. It depends, I suppose, who is eating the [68] beefsteak. If it was the someone who normally ate beefsteaks and normally ate them unmindfully, to eat a

beefsteak mindfully would be an improvement! But if it was an Order Member who normally quite mindfully didn't eat beefsteaks, but ate vegetable cutlets, then in his case it would be an unskilful action, wouldn't it, relatively, to eat a beefsteak, even though he did eat it mindfully? So you also have to inquire, perhaps, who is doing the eating or who is doing the acting. Anyway, how did we get so much on to karma from Dr Ambedkar?

Vessantara: Out of Duncan's study group discussion. I don't quite know how it came up.

Duncan Steen: Well, there was a passage in Dr Ambedkar's article which did go into karma to some extent. He was talking about nitya(?) karmas and namitic (?)...

S: Well, that's something completely different.

Duncan Steen: Yes, but this led to a general discussion.

S: Karmas in that sense have nothing to do with karmas in the Buddhistic sense. Those are ritual actions. (Duncan: agreeing.) Ah well, let's get back to Ambedkar, then. How many questions have we got left?

Vessantara: We are almost all the way through, actually.

S: It does seem, incidentally, that perhaps I need to give another lecture about karma, or write something about it. I've given a lecture and I have spelled out the traditional Buddhist doctrine, but I have indicated at the end that there seem to be quite a few loose ends not tied up. It may be partly due to a lack of clarification of terminology, for one thing. So perhaps I'll have to give that some thought.

: It would be very useful. (Voices agreeing.)

Ben Murphy: Dr Ambedkar gave eight(?) things he wants to put in a Buddhist library, and mentions the Chinese Dharmapada rather than the Indian Dhammapada. There was a question about the Chinese Dharmapada.

S: Ah. The Chinese Dharmapada has as part of the text, it would seem, so far as we can judge from Beal's (?) translation, various illustrative stories, that is to say stories giving the circumstances under which the Buddha gave those particular teachings embodied in the Dharmapada verses. But actually in Pali there is a similar work which does that for the Pali Dhammapada perhaps Ambedkar wasn't aware of that that's the Dhammapada attakatha(?), the Dhammapada commentary, which has been translated into English in three volumes. But in the Pali tradition, that commentary is kept quite separate from the Dhammapada verses, whereas it seems, as far as we can tell, in China the verses and the stories got I won't say mixed up, but the stories also came to be regarded as part of the canon. The stories in the Pali commentary on the Dhammapada are quite long and elaborate well, as I mentioned, they are contained in three quite decent-sized volumes. Sometimes when Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese, the translators didn't always distinguish between original text and commentary; they regarded it all as scripture or as canon or sutra. Ambedkar was concerned that there should not be just dry precepts but also something a bit interesting, something story-like.

Vessantara: That's about it for tonight.

[69]

September 1986

Vessantara: So today, Bhante, we finish the Dr Ambedkar booklet, and questions are a bit thin on the ground; we've got about half a dozen. We'll start with Ratnaprabha, who has a question on karma following on last night.

Ratnaprabha: This is connected with the question last night rather than directly with the Ambedkar pamphlet, and it's another question on how and whether a slippage or lapse of mindfulness itself is a negative karma.

S: I think one has to ask oneself, then, what that slip represents. What does one mean by a slip? Are all slips of the same kind? Are there different kinds of slips?

Uttara: Bhante, is it that in the first place you were mindful, and through not maintaining the effort to be mindful, that is a slip in a way? It's in a sense you have, whether decided or for what other reason, you've lost that awareness?

S: But is that actually so to speak a positive decision, or is it a decision by default? That is perhaps the question.

Ratnaprabha: It seems to vary according to circumstances. Sometimes you can almost deliberately, as it were, lose your mindfulness and be aware that there is something slightly unskilful which you would quite like to do; almost as if you were allowing yourself to in a sense become unmindful so you can do it. There seem to be other times when you as it were just seem to have run out of steam behind your mindfulness; in meditation you can be practising trying to do the mindfulness but then you just find you have lost the breathing.

S: Yes, as though the gravitational pull is just too strong for you at that moment. Because if the karma is a volition, then a slip in mindfulness, presumably, also cannot be a karma, bad or otherwise, or unskilful or otherwise, unless it is in a sense deliberate. In itself, I think it cannot be positively unskilful, if you see what I mean, but the unskilfulness is the sort of general unskilfulness into which you sink back, mindfulness having lapsed. It's not so much that the lapsing is itself unskilful, perhaps, but the lapsing makes it possible for the residual unskilfulness that is there to manifest, or to manifest more strongly. I think that would perhaps be a correct way of putting it, or a correct way of seeing it. Do you see what I mean?

Ratnaprabha: I do.

S: Was that the whole of the question, or just a part?

Ratnaprabha: No, it was just a preamble. It's sort of going back to the example of the monk who inadvertently kills a baby. It would seem that a similar lapse of mindfulness might have disastrous consequences on one occasion for example sitting on a baby and no obvious consequences on another occasion for example, if there was merely a pillow under the cloth. Will both instances produce equally unpleasant karma vipaka in the long run?

S: If one takes the traditional story at its face value, it would seem that the karma vipakas are equal; because in neither case was there any intention to take life. At the same time, in both cases there was an obligation to make sure that [70] one

is not actually doing any harm or causing any harm. In both cases one didn't; in the one case, unfortunately, there were untoward consequences, in the other there weren't. But it would seem that the karma vipaka again, taking the story at its face value or reading it quite literally would be the same. If you put it the other way round or look at it in a slightly different way: the fact that you did not intend to take the life of the baby would mean that you didn't suffer the karmic consequences of taking life, but inasmuch as you were unmindful in a situation in which you ought to have been mindful and should have reminded yourself to be mindful, there are some untoward karmic consequences for you, but short of those for killing. In other somewhat parallel instances, that might not be the case; for instance, supposing you drive when you know that you are really quite drunk. You would then, I think, be much more culpable if you happened to take life as a result of an accident. Because if you knew at the beginning of the evening that you were going to have to drive, it was your responsibility, then, when you did have your mindfulness, not to get into an unmindful semi-drunken state.

Ratnaprabha: It would seem that, from an experiential point of view going back to the example of the monk the consequences of his action in actually killing the baby, as far as he is concerned, are going to be far more serious and more unpleasant than if he just sat on a pillow and perhaps even didn't notice the fact that he had been unmindful. In the first case, he has the presumed distress of realizing that he has been to some extent responsible for the baby's death; he also has the humiliation of being rebuked by the Buddha; and perhaps he also has to face the anger and distress of the parents, and so on and so forth. But, in the second case, there seem to be no immediate consequences at all, and

S: Ah, but the immediate consequences, of course, are different from long-term consequences under the law of karma. Yes.

Ratnaprabha: So one can assume that the long-term in a sense, in the first case, his karma has been reaped very rapidly and he has had to suffer these consequences; in the second case, the karma will be reaped over a much much longer period, or perhaps delayed?

S: I suppose you could regard, say, the anger of the parents, assuming that they inflicted some suffering on him, as representing a karma vipaka. On the other hand, though, you could, for instance, look at it another way. Either the anger of the parents or the rebuke of the Buddha could cause him to become in future so mindful that he attained arhantship quickly. In which case, could you say that the scolding or the rebuke or the anger was a karma vipaka in a negative sense? The karma does become a little entangled, doesn't it?

Duncan Steen: Surely one may often benefit spiritually from all kinds of suffering that has presumably occurred as a result of unskillful actions. Could it just be that when you have an accident like that, which does produce such appalling results, that might be the result of a whole lot of unskillful lapses of mindfulness which just, in the end, ?

S: But that is very often the case, I think. Not that we suddenly fall from grace; we've been paving the way to that for a long time, in many cases.

Uttara: It isn't just a case of bad luck?

[71]

S: Well, in Buddhism, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as luck, bad or otherwise! Because in a sense there is no such thing as pure chance or no such thing as fate.

Dharmamati: It seems that on this point this is where the Buddhists fell out with the Jains. Would you say a little bit about the Jains' point of view on this?

S: Well, very broadly speaking, the Jain point of view as represented in the Pali scriptures and I must emphasize this, because the Jains might not nowadays agree with this interpretation of their teaching the Jains do have themselves, unlike the Hindus, a quite vast and elaborate teaching about karma. I remember years ago I visited a Jaina monastery; it must have been in Ahmedabad. I met there a very old, 84 or 85-year-old Jaina monk who had spent the greater part of his life writing in Sanskrit a great treatise on the karma doctrine of Jainism, and volumes were shown to me I think he had reached the fourth volume or something like that; each volume nearly 1,000 pages so they clearly have quite an extensive teaching about karma. But the Jaina teaching about karma as represented in the Pali Canon makes the Jainas teach that all actions bear karmic consequences, as one might say, regardless of the mental state with which they were performed, regardless of whether they were deliberate or intentional, or not; and the Buddha explicitly says that he differs from that Jaina or allegedly Jaina view. So therefore there would have to be some instances where you did something which had unfortunate results but on account of which you experienced no karma vipaka because there was no karma in the Buddhist, as distinct from the Jaina, sense. So the episode of the monk and the baby would seem to be an instance of that kind. Of course, that leaves aside the question of varying degrees of culpability in accordance with whether you might have been expected to be more mindful or not. It probably isn't a question of total absence of responsibility or total responsibility; there are no doubt various intermediate shades of responsibility. But the Buddhist position visavis the Jain position seems quite clear from the Pali Canon though there may be further difficulties or complications that may be brought up later on in the retreat!

Ratnaprabha: A slightly different area does occur to me. I'm not quite sure whether this is the appropriate time to go into it, but I recall that, in one of the Sutra of Golden Light lectures, I think you talk about the Dharmaraja as it were governing by righteousness, which means in a sense that his legal structures and his enforcement of them correspond as closely as possible to the working of karma. Do you feel that this is in any way a practical proposition, since karma does seem to be so extraordinarily convoluted? Is there any way in which one could run one's course, as it were, [...] karmic ?

S: I think so, because if you take, for instance, the question of killing, I think it is broadly the position that killing is unskilful, and that therefore a legal system should reflect that fact; even though there may be certain cases in which killing takes place without ethical, and therefore without legal responsibility. But, all human institutions being imperfect, it is doubtful whether they could reflect in this case the law of karma quite perfectly. It does occur to me in this connection that one might say that the difference between the Sutra of Golden Light's approach and Mr Christmas Humphreys', which I referred to the other evening, is really in accordance or according to Christmas Humphreys, one might say, really, karma reflects law; but the Buddhist position is that law should reflect karma! He thinks of karma in terms of

law, but one should really think of law in terms of karma. Or he says if it's law it must be karma, whereas Buddhist tradition would say, well, if it's karma it ought to be law too.

[72]

Uttara: As you say, in different countries where they have different laws for different crimes in France to do with, I think, murder, to do with one's lover, say, [that is] a crime of passion how would a Buddhist look upon that? in terms of mindfulness, or is it just ?

S: Well, whatever French sentiment may say, the crime passionel is still a crime! I'm afraid the French are a little astray here. It really isn't an excuse to say that you committed a crime out of craving rather than out of hatred not to speak of ignorance. But it is really quite interesting in this connection I have thought about it from time to time that the majority of murders, ordinary murders, are committed within the family circle. And I think this is something to ponder upon. We can ponder on it, perhaps, in the course of the retreat.

: Presumably if you're trying to work out a legal system that accords with karma, you can decide fairly easily on Buddhist principles what is culpable, but how do you decide what degree of punishment, for want of a better word, to mete out for any particular [crime]?

S: I think it depends very much on one's notion of punishment or whether one has a notion of punishment at all. I think the modern possibly, I only say possibly pseudo-liberal tendency is to abolish the conception of punishment altogether and to think in terms of re-education or rehabilitation, or something of that sort. I am not sure, personally, about that. I won't say that I've made up my mind about it, but I'm not sure that you can altogether dispense with the notion of punishment. But before you could think in terms of what 'punishment' should fit what crime, you'd have to be clear in your own mind as to what you were doing or what you were seeking to do in 'punishing' that particular person. At the very least, you might have to restrain him or her, so that they didn't repeat the offence or be a public menace in any way. There have been many cases recently of people who were released from prison and almost immediately committed the same serious offence again; and there seem to be quite a few people who believe that prisoners should be released notwithstanding the risk that they might repeat the offence, which seems to me really quite terrible, because quite innocent people are put at risk, or even do actually suffer, even lose their lives. But that is perhaps a separate question.

: I suppose in a more abstract way I am asking if there is any way in which one can judge what the karmic consequences are actually going to be, on what sort of scale they are going to be. It's a subject

S: I suppose that whatever you do is a karmic consequence except of course that you have originated it, and there is a little verse in the New Testament which might cover this: 'Woe to him to whom the offence is due; but woe to him by whom cometh the offence.' [It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Matt. xviii, 7.] In other words, translating that into more straightforward and intelligible language (Laughter) not to speak of twentieth century idiom it may be his karma that you're going to hit him, but if you hit him you are creating karma for yourself at the same time, for which you will have to suffer. I won't try to unravel the karmic complications that that position represents, but this is roughly what it is.

Cittapala: Bhante, does that actually mean that officers of the law such as judges put themselves in a rather perilous position with regard to karma?

S: Oh, I think they do, yes! This was again Christmas Humphreys' position: he seemed to believe sorry to harp upon the gentleman (Laughter) I'm not [.. .] [73] It is just a convenient illustration, and I happen to have known him and am quite familiar with his views. He seems to have thought that, in being the instrument of karma, you yourself did not become responsible for generating any further karma on your own account. That, I think, was mistaken. I don't think you can say you are acting on behalf of society and are therefore free from all karmic taint, because it is your free choice to act in that way, otherwise you can claim that you are acting on behalf of God, as some people do, and that you are the instrument of God and are free from all personal moral responsibility. So I think it is quite dangerous to claim to be the agent of karma, yourself being exempt from the operation of karma to the extent that you are the agent of karma. You see the point?

: If you see yourself as the sort of agent of society I mean you may .. .] a murderer, say, and you feel it's necessary to prosecute him is your state of mind in doing that necessarily going to be unskilful and therefore ?

S: It may well be. I think there again there are degrees, there are gradations. You may plunge into the task of prosecuting and sending him to gaol with real zest and enjoyment. On the other hand, you may calmly and objectively present the evidence of his guilt. There is probably a big difference between those two attitudes. I think probably to be a successful lawyer, a successful prosecuting lawyer, you have to really throw yourself into the task; the competition is so keen. It's just as you can hardly be a successful politician, hardly get to the top, without actually a very strong desire, to say the least, to exercise power.

Uttara: You have to be dishonest, really. In some cases you will; you know that your client is guilty but you still somehow defend him.

S: Well, this is something that has been discussed very much among lawyers or as between lawyers and the laity, so to speak. The lawyer's position is that he does not know, as it were officially, whether his client is guilty or not. That is for the court to decide. He is only making the best of his client's case. And even if his client had confessed that he was guilty, I think the average lawyer would, so to speak, disregard that in defending him, and get him off as lightly as he could. Again, there are degrees of honesty. Some few lawyers, perhaps, would not touch such a case. Others would be quite glad of an opportunity to exhibit their virtuosity and boast afterwards of getting somebody off whom they knew to be guilty, and in that way build up their reputation. Again, you can take another instance: make it more complicated. Suppose there is the death penalty for murder. The lawyer may know that [his client is] guilty. He may have admitted that he committed the murder. But you as his lawyer will still try to get him off, because you know that if he is found guilty he may well suffer the death penalty, and you do not happen personally to believe in the death penalty, so you might consider yourself justified in defending him even though you knew he was guilty. The law is a very complicated thing. If you really want to exercise your brain, just for the sake of exercising it, study a little bit of law, even a tiny little bit. The law is not an ass! Well, it sometimes seems like that, but if it is an ass it is a very intelligent ass!

Cittapala: I know in a way you have actually answered this, but if a judge then issues the

death penalty, is he actually committing a karmic action which is as weighty as well, murder, I suppose?

S: I wouldn't say it's as weighty as murder. But I feel there is a degree of responsibility which perhaps he shares with society as a whole, because ultimately [74] the whole society is responsible to perhaps an infinitesimal degree, but still each individual member of society presumably has some responsibility.

Paul Tozer: Presumably it depends on the mental state of the judge?

S: That will be a factor. But even if the judge pronounces sentence in a perfectly calm, judicial frame of mind, he still has some responsibility for the death of that man. So in some ways responsibility is a very heavy thing. It may be that that particular unskilful action, to the extent that it is unskilful, is counterbalanced by other skilful actions that you perform, even as a judge, as well as in other respects. But I don't think a judge, in this particular instance, can entirely escape karmic responsibility, though the exact degree of it is of course quite impossible to ascertain.

: Are you saying, Bhante, that a judge could not condemn somebody to death without some degree of unskilfulness in his mental state, and therefore he will suffer the consequences? Or you seem to be introducing responsibility as a sort of separate criterion for karma, aside from the mental state

S: No, I didn't mean to do that, that was just a question of language. The Abhidharma does quite explicitly say, rightly or wrongly, that you cannot take life in any form without there being present some degree of vyapada. This is disputed by some people, but this is the Abhidharma position, and presumably the authors of the Abhidharma had pondered the question quite carefully. So one would need to take their views into consideration, at least.

Vessantara: (starts to speak)

S: Again let me no, you carry on, perhaps I was going to go a bit off the track.

Vessantara: I was going to follow up this idea of responsibility, because you also earlier were talking about culpability; and you were saying that there were degrees of culpability, depending on the extent to which one might have been expected to be responsible [.. .] being mindful. Can you tie that up for me with seeing things in terms of the mental state with which things are performed?

S: For instance, supposing the judge has to sentence somebody and perhaps to decide whether the death sentence is to be given; because the judge has the responsibility, to use that word, to award the sentence in accordance with the law, but he has sometimes a certain amount of leeway. He has to abide by the verdict of the jury, so presumably before he gives his verdict [sentence], the judge has the responsibility of making sure that he is in a very calm, balanced and judicial frame of mind, not biased in any way for any reason as of course sometimes judges have been biased in the past and are even today; because sometimes you get exactly similar cases and the same verdicts, but judges giving different sentences; some judges giving, say, three months for an offence and others giving six months. So clearly the personal factor does come in to some extent, even perhaps in a way that it shouldn't. Or, if you want a

really notorious example, what about Judge Jeffreys? That's a very extreme one, isn't it? All right, perhaps we should press on, then. Another karmic question?

Sanghapala: Bhante, so far as I am aware, the Tibetan position it's a sort of karmic question the Tibetans say the guru is always right and all one has to do is do as the guru says and no matter what happens it will be OK, and if he is in any way [.. .]. then it's him who reaps the [75] negative karma, and [to] oneself who has followed those teachings and path no negative karma accrues. But [from] what you have been saying, it's as though I'd just like to ask if there is any degree of culpability on the part of the person who just gives his responsibility over to the guru ?

S: I don't think you can or you should. I know this is what some Tibetans at least believe, or what they say. I don't think this is really a genuinely Buddhist position, or genuinely Buddhist attitude. In any case, of course, who decides which lama to follow? You pick the lama that you're going to obey! But anyway, leaving that aside that perhaps is an unnecessary complication I don't think as a Buddhist you can completely hand yourself over to another person, not even to the Buddha. And I think the Buddha would not wish you to do that. Because if you were just to follow implicitly whatever the Buddha was to tell you, I think it would make it impossible, paradoxically, to Go for Refuge to the Buddha. So I think if you have any sort of spiritual adviser or guide or guru, it is your responsibility as a disciple to pay most careful attention to what he says; but not to follow his instructions just because he's given those instructions, but you should follow them because you understand and accept them. Because sometimes you may not always be able to understand fully the reasons for his saying certain things; but even then, if you follow, it is on the basis of confidence which you have gathered as a result of contact with him in the past, not blindly following in the past but finding in the past that actually his advice was worth following. But I don't think you can hand over responsibility for yourself to a guru. Some gurus do seem to accept disciples in that way; very likely they do bear the karma of their disciples, but I would say that the disciples have to bear it too. But if you look into it closely, what does it mean, to accept responsibility for someone? Can you actually decide for them? You can tell them what to do and they can obey, but that's quite a different thing. So I think one has to be very careful of any teaching or tradition which seems to say that somebody must surrender completely and just be an instrument in the hands of the guru. I think it is said in some Christian monastic and ascetic writings I think one of the sayings of the Jesuits; I think it's the Jesuits, if not the Jesuits another Christian order is that the monk should be like a corpse in the hands of his superior, with no will of his own. I think that is not the Buddhist position. Let me make a distinction. You can sort of sacrifice your likes and dislikes to those of the teacher, as a sort of training in non-egotism or something of this sort, but you cannot hand yourself over lock, stock and barrel so that if the teacher commanded you would even perform an action which you otherwise would have considered immoral or unethical. Do you see the point? (Pause.) In The Thousand-Petalled Lotus, I've related an experience of my own in connection with Kashyapji, haven't I? Do you remember this was of the first kind that I started thinking that Kashyapji was so good-natured he always did what I wanted to do; he'd ask me 'What would you like to do?' He never said what he wanted to do or what he would like to do. He always went along with me. So I thought, well, this isn't really proper, he's too good-natured, so I should find out what he would like to do and I should do that; which I did, so long as we were together. But supposing of course, it was inconceivable but supposing he'd asked me to do something unethical, I wouldn't have done it. If I'd thought he was mistaken, I would have argued the point with him, either until he convinced me that it wasn't unethical or I convinced him that it

was! With Kashyapji you could do that sort of thing. So that illustrates these two different kinds of surrender, as it were. You can surrender your whims and fancies to a teacher, but you can't surrender your ethical responsibility.

[76]

Dharmamati: Where do you think this idea of surrender to the guru has come in from Tibetan tradition? Because I've just been reading the Life of Naropa, and in that he seems to be Tilopa does make him do some quite apparently unethical things; it's like he's put himself totally in the hands of his guru.

S: Well, we don't know how literally those sort of biographies are to be taken. I think our only safe guide is our own ethical sense. And if we are not to act in accordance with that, we have to be really convinced. And that's why I think we have to beware of the charisma of some pseudogurus who are around. I mean look at some of the things that have been done by some disciples of some modern gurus you know, quite unethical things. But they believed, apparently, that they were carrying out the guru's instructions. So both the guru and the disciples have a very heavy karma to bear.

Sudhana: I think in discussion where Order Members have talked about it it seems as if you don't tell many Order Members what to do, and it's not that that interests me, but it's the assumptions as to why that I've often wondered about. Some people assume that you don't tell them what to do because they couldn't take it if you really told them to 'Go and do this'; or another assumption is that it's because you allow them to make up their own minds because that's good for their individuality. Is there any basis for these assumptions, or does it depend on the person each time, or do you ?

S: Well, it does depend on the person, because supposing someone has got, so to speak, a weak will and not too much confidence. You should be very careful not to take decisions out of the hands of that person; even in quite insignificant matters you should encourage him to decide for himself, so that he becomes more self-reliant and more independent and more genuinely responsible. Sometimes it might happen that you would like a certain person to do something very much, something that really needs to be done, but you know that there's no point in asking him; he just couldn't do it, he just couldn't rise to it.

Dharmamati: So both the assumptions are right?

S: Both are right, depending on the particular person concerned.

Sanghapala: Bhante, I understand that you would like to be able to tell every Order Member what to do. Is that correct? (Laughter.)

S: Well, it depends what you mean by you know, tell what to do. I'd like to be able to sort of point out things that need to be done, which perhaps Order Members had not realized needed to be done, and have the confidence that they themselves could see also that they needed to be done and that they had the ability to rise to the occasion quite willingly and voluntarily and do those things. I think that probably sums up the position. (Laughter.)

Jayamati: Bhante, could you just expand slightly on this [idea] that it's OK for people to surrender their whims and fancies to their teacher? What did you have in mind when you said

whims and fancies?

S: (laughing) Well, can anyone give any examples of whims and fancies in this sort of connection?

Uttara: One's distractions from the Path, in a way.

[77]

S: Yes, one could say that; yes, it certainly includes that. Or even quite neutral things.

Uttara: Certain views which [.. .] you?

S: Well, not so much views. I was thinking more in terms of things actually done. It's not only with regard to a guru; one can do it in respect of friends. For instance, you go out for a walk with somebody, and they say, 'Oh, let's do it this way' and you say, 'No, no, let's go that way!' There's no reason. Even supposing you've got a definite preference for that way, well, just give in to the other person why not? He is a friend. Why not sacrifice your particular preference or whim for your friend? Or if he says, 'Let's go out at two o'clock,' don't say, 'No, let's make it 2.30.' Some people sort of differ just almost for the sake of differing, sort of asserting a pseudo-independence sometimes. Just go along with your friend; let him decide. There's no ethical issue involved, not in these sort of instances. If he says 'Let's go and burgle that house tonight,' well, don't agree because then it would be unethical. Little differences arise in all sorts of ways, and sometimes people can have even quite serious differences of opinion and quarrels over quite insignificant things whether to put the vase of flowers here or whether to put it here these are the things that people often argue about; but just give way; what does it matter? You might think it looks better there, but OK, he thinks it looks better there, just give way: just an exercise in giving way, non-assertion, non-egotism. am sometimes surprised, even within the Movement, how petty people can be in this sort of way, insisting on their own way, doing it their way. Just give in; what does it matter? Well, I say 'What does it matter?' it's a very good thing to give in in these sort of areas. Do yourself a world of good. (Someone laughing.) Not just you I ought to look at everybody at the same time! (Laughter.) You happen to be sitting opposite me. I'm not picking on you. I've no reason at all to pick on you! One often finds that someone's ego assertion, for want of a better term, finds expression in these apparently quite insignificant incidents. Though I think one needs to be very careful in this kind of area: it's not so insignificant as it looks.

Derek Goodman: An ideal example is that you want to go to a certain film, somebody else is coming along too but then they want to see another film, so they say, 'I'd like to see this one,' and you say, 'No, [I want to] see this,' and that's happened a few times, and it just becomes tainted(?) in a way.

S: Right. I have heard that this sort of thing is a frequent cause of marital disharmony. I can't speak from experience, but I have heard that that is the case!

Derek Goodman: I think the television probably has a lot well, I won't say a lot to answer for, but in terms of homes, it seems to create a lot of [.. .], choose what channel to watch!

Sanghapala: Bhante, surely lack of assertiveness is rife these days, as people who are [.. .] standing by can always be taking advantage when they are strongly [assertive].[.. .] Given

that there's all these assertiveness training courses, there aren't many [. . .], so I suppose we just see this as applying to all persons?

S: One can also say that people who are not assertive in any ordinary way assert themselves in all sorts of small, sneaky ways. (Laughter.) Do you see what I'm getting at or what I'm referring to?

[78]

Vessantara: Are you thinking of any particular sneaks?

S: Well, the sort of things I mentioned. You may be afraid to confront someone or disagree with him or her on some matter of principle, but if it's some little matter, like putting the flowers here or putting them there, you feel as though you've got a right to assert yourself there; your opinion is as good as anybody else's. You often find that people assert themselves most strongly in those situations where there is least reason to assert oneself strongly. But this question of assertiveness in general well, what does one mean by this? What does one mean by assertiveness in the context of assertiveness training? I know one or two people who have had assertiveness training, and it seems to have had a positive effect, but what exactly is it? What does one mean by 'assertiveness' in this sort of context? Is assertiveness the right word? For instance, if there's a group of four or five of you and something has to be decided, and you, like the others, speak up and say that you think should be done; well, in a way that is assertiveness. Some people can't do that; they have to be trained to do it or helped to do it. But that isn't assertiveness in any negative sense, it's contributing your experience or your opinion to the discussion; a discussion in which you might be expected to contribute in that way. So this is not necessarily assertiveness in an egoistic sense. It's just functioning as a member of a particular group or community, functioning adequately.

Sudhana: It just occurred to me that perhaps it's a sort of near enemy of initiative. What happens is you start a relationship, or you're with someone, and you take the initiative to decide to do something, and they start looking to you to take the initiative, and that falls into not really initiative but an unconscious kind of assertiveness.

S: Well, here assertiveness would seem to mean, in the sense you give, taking over responsibility for the other person instead of allowing him to take responsibility for himself, and on the basis of that to cooperate with you in what you are both doing together.

Sudhana: So in that case it's not really good to take the initiative too much.

S: Well, it's not good to take the initiative if that is the right word for it to such an extent that other people are prevented from taking the initiative. So you have to consider whether someone's assertiveness is weak or strong. If someone's assertiveness, to use the term, is quite weak, you have to make allowances for that and be careful not to take too much initiative, to coach them and encourage them to take a bit more. Ask them even if you know quite well what needs to be done just ask their opinion, so that they have some practice or experience of expressing their opinion and feeling that they're contributing to the situation. Sometimes you have to hide your light under a bushel a bit. So I think very capable, confident people have to be very careful if they are working along with people who are not so confident and not so capable, otherwise you can make them less confident and less capable than they were to begin with. Some people, unfortunately, enjoy the sensation of being more confident and more

capable than the other people around; that is very dangerous. You never help people to grow and develop in that way. And they may eventually build up quite a lot of resentment against you. So you may be leading, but just be a little way ahead; don't get too far ahead. And constantly consult others, even if in a sense you don't need to consult them, or even if you're convinced you don't need to; but do consult them, so that they get into the habit of expressing themselves and making a contribution. and sometimes it may happen that they see something that you don't, for all your experience.

[79]

Uttara: I was told to learn to lead from behind, rather than always trying to be in front, somehow trust to give other people space, just to be there and if anything does happen maybe they can cope with it. It seemed good advice.

S: But they shouldn't feel that you're a back seat driver, just waiting to take over.

Uttara: Right.

S: How are we getting on?

Vessantara: We've done one question so far.

S: Oh!

Vessantara: It doesn't feel like it.

Cittapala: Bhante, we were discussing the topic of common ownership, which Dr Ambedkar mentions in relation to the bhikshu sangha. In *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, you also mention common ownership in relation to the observance of the Second Precept. You say that it is widely accepted that within the spiritual community common ownership is the ideal, and [that] within the Order itself there can be no question of taking the not-given. I was wondering firstly, to what extent you feel that Order Members are taking practical steps to practise common ownership, and secondly, whether members of established communities within the FWBO could not be encouraged to practise common ownership by voluntarily giving their resources to an FWBO charity that would administer these resources in relation to its members' needs.

S: I think in that passage I'll get you to read it again the emphasis is 'ideal'. It is something to be worked towards. Whether we are actually working towards it, or working towards it sufficiently rapidly, is quite another matter. So just let's hear that again, bit by bit.

Cittapala: In *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, you also mention common ownership in relation to the observance of the Second Precept. You say that it is widely accepted that within the spiritual community common ownership is the ideal

S: Yes, the ideal. Perhaps that should have been printed in italics: 'is the ideal.' All right, let's carry on.

Cittapala: and that within the Order itself there can be no question of taking the not-given.

S: Yes, because if everything belonged to everybody equally, who would be taking from whom? You can only take what is not given if there is something that belongs to somebody else and not to you. But if it belongs to you [and] equally to him, and vice versa, how can you take the not-given?

Cittapala: Could you expand on that a bit? Does that actually mean that everything one possesses, as it were, as an Order Member, belongs to everybody else? (laughing.)

S: No, if you did actually practise common ownership that would be the case. But we don't practise common ownership. It's the ideal, and there is common ownership to a very limited extent, just in respect of certain things: perhaps in a community [80] the furniture is common property, the cooking utensils are common property and so on. But there are a lot of other things that are not common property. Anyway, carry on.

Cittapala: I was wondering, firstly, to what extent you feel that Order Members are taking practical steps to practise common ownership.

S: I have heard of small communities that have instituted a common purse, I believe one or two women's communities; I don't know how long the experiment lasted I think it was just an experiment that didn't last very long, but I think on the whole no actual steps are being taken. I think it would be good if steps could be taken, though I think to have full common ownership is quite a difficult matter. I think the people concerned have to be really quite close to one another spiritually. It might be a good thing to start in very small communities. I think it would be very difficult to have a large community straight off where there was full common ownership. I mean usually, the only situation in which you find at least a measure of common ownership is in that of marriage, isn't it? Or at least usually nowadays husband and wife own the house etc. etc. in common, or all the money which they are earning goes into a common bank account from which both of them draw. That obviously means there needs to be full communication between people, in this case husband and wife, because supposing there's only \$500 in the kitty, he goes out and buys a new car, she goes out and buys a new fur coat on the same day well, you're overdrawn by \$500! So you can't have a common purse or have property in common unless there is very intimate communication between the people, and a very strong positive feeling. So I think one would have to be very careful how one went about this, but it certainly is the ideal, and perhaps we ought to work towards it more than we do, and perhaps people should be encouraged to place extra resources that they have at the disposal of the Movement as a whole.

Uttara: I suppose in a situation like, say, members of a coop who live together, who are receiving more or less the same, in that sort of situation you could see possibly

S: Yes, but then that's not a self-contained situation. Supposing one of them has, say, a rich mother and she sends some money every now and then; what do you do? Do you share it around? In principle you should, just to even up the situation, or at least if you don't think it should be spent, well, just tell the community: 'I've got some extra money, just let's put it in the kitty and decide what to do with it.' I think this is an aspect of sharing and I think one should make a practice of sharing, so much as one possibly can. But, on the other hand, there's the question of responsibility of everybody in the community. You know what happens sometimes if you share your books or your records: your books get dog-eared and your records get scratched. So it's not that you mind other people using them, it's not even that you

think they're yours in a very positive or strong sense; but you don't like books becoming dog-eared and you don't like records being scratched, because that spoils them for use by everybody. So in a community, unfortunately, sometimes it happens in any community what doesn't belong to somebody doesn't belong to anybody, and nobody takes proper care. You find that with a car; I've certainly found it from time to time. If a car belongs to the whole community, it doesn't get properly looked after. It doesn't get properly serviced, almost always. It only gets properly looked after if it's someone's property and he takes pride in it. So to have a common purse and have property in common means a very strong sense of responsibility for the common property on the part of every single member of the community, and that's not easy to achieve. That's why I say common ownership is an ideal. But yes, perhaps we could work towards it a bit more actively than we have been doing.

[81]

S: Was there anything else?

Cittapala: No, I think you've answered the question. It just struck me that it required quite a high degree of integration, really, to be able to practise common ownership to any satisfactory degree, but then on the other hand we didn't seem to have actually provided many opportunities to encourage people to try and

S: What do you mean by opportunities?

Cittapala: Well, I was talking this afternoon with Paul about it, and it seemed that if, say, communities had a charitable structure, when you entered the community you could actually hand over part or all of your resources to the community and then they would be administered communally and, when you left, the community would consider what your needs were and give as appropriate to you. But it doesn't seem that communities actually have that structure at present to

S: Yes, that is quite a point. This assumes, of course, a relative stability of the community; because, for instance, the members of the community at present might put quite a lot of money into the charity, the community charity; but supposing they all left and were succeeded by a number of quite irresponsible people who proceeded just to blue the resources. So it would mean that if the responsible people left, they'd still have the responsibility for making sure that the people who replaced them were also responsible, and they might find that they were thereby tied down somewhat to the old community or having to remain nominal members of it, or something a bit anomalous like that. But, if there was a very stable community with people wanting to be members of that community and live together for some time, I think it would be a very good arrangement. Also you would have to decide whether the community is a community in the sense of people who want to be together, or whether it is a particular place or property do you see what I mean? Because sometimes a community has to move community in the sense of the members to another building, for obvious reasons. Yes, I think that should be considered [we should] give a lot more weight and importance, perhaps, to communities. Because there could be communities that were not centres, that were not coops, that were just communities, but none the less had an FWBO-type structure. It also occurs to me that you might consider other kinds of structures, not charities; because you might be able to get a mortgage for buying a property in that case.

Sudhana: That seems to suggest a kind of it sounds a bit Christian, but a sort of community

father, as it were, or something like that, a head of a community, being nominated and that be

S: Why should a community have a father?

Sudhana: I mean, well, a community convenor or somebody who makes sure this gets done, the most senior and responsible person.

S: But that assumes that some people are less responsible. I don't think that assumption is a very good basis for a community, at least initially when you are founding it. I mean, if you can't fully as it were trust somebody they should just enter on a provisional basis, for a trial period. But I think it's accepting defeat from the beginning if you accept that not everybody is going to be equally responsible and therefore you need a sort of community father almost to tell you what to do and keep everybody else up to scratch. I don't think that's a very good recipe for a community, even though that may be the situation in some communities at present.

[82]

Sudhana: But isn't it the case, Bhante, that people you are dealing with will be less experienced (S: Yes), and they grow and develop because they are in that situation?

S: Yes, but therefore I suggest that they should be given a trial period. There is a difference between inexperience and irresponsibility. Inexperience is OK; but lack of sense of responsibility towards the community as a whole, or towards the other members of the community, that's another matter. So the trial period would be to ensure that that particular person was able to be a responsible member of the community. All right?

Cittapala: Yes, thank you.

Sumana: In the text, Ambedkar says the Buddha taught as part of his religion social , freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. The question is: are there suttas or particular teachings of the Buddha which bring out these aspects?

S: I don't think we can say that the Buddha taught that in so many words. This is a modern terminology. But his teaching does seem to assume that. He assumes that man, the individual, is a free agent in all the spheres of life. Which spheres does Ambedkar mention? just run through them again.

Sumana: Social.

S: The social, yes.

Sumana: Intellectual.

S: Yes, obviously; one must think for oneself. That means one has the freedom to think for oneself.

Sumana: Economic.

S: Well, yes; the Buddha does seem to believe or seem to teach that you should have the

freedom to better your economic condition. That's quite clear from some texts.

Sumana: And political.

S: Mm. That's not so clear, because in the Buddha's day there was no politics in the modern sense. In the Buddha's day, the government had much less to do than it has today. The king kept up a certain amount of state, he administered justice, he punished criminals, and he defended the country from outside attack. And to meet his expenses, he gathered taxes. That's about all. He didn't have anything to do with health or welfare or education, or anything of that sort. Many of the cities, the guilds, ran their own affairs. So the king had very little to do compared with what a modern government has to do. And ordinary people, it seems, didn't participate in the government, if one can call it that; the king, with the help of his ministers, and his army, and his police did everything. Rich men seem to have exerted a certain amount of influence; wise men, too, sometimes, in the guise of advisers. But most people didn't participate in politics at all, as far as we can see. The so-called republics were not republics in the modern sense; they were oligarchies. It was the aristocratic or well-to-do minority that governed, not a single individual not a king, not a monarch. So there wasn't full political participation in the Buddha's day and therefore, in a sense, there wasn't political [83] freedom, just because they didn't have that type of political structure. It's very different from, say, the Greek or at least the Athenian democracy, where everybody every adult male, that who was free born and a citizen participated in the administration. You didn't have that sort of pattern in ancient India, as far as we know, at all. But then you had political freedom in the sense that you were free to live your own life almost completely, without governmental interference; or at least there was far, far less governmental interference than there is today. So in a sense you had more political freedom in the Buddha's day, one might say.

Sumana: My feelings on this I feel that it is so, what he's saying here but for some reason it doesn't seem to be emphasized, in my experience in the Friends. But it does seem to me as though it would really work.

S: What hasn't been emphasized?

Sumana: Well, some of these, I would say economic, political freedom, intellectual freedom, social freedom; in the sense I don't mean personally I mean as a force of change. It seems to come out more in the Friends' activities in India.

S: I suppose it depends what one means by freedom. But in any case it would seem that in India, in effect, the ex-Untouchables have less freedom than other people, partly because they are so poor, partly because they are oppressed on religious grounds, partly because they are uneducated, and so on. If, for instance, you can't read and write, do you have the freedom to study? The law may say that you are free to study, but if you can't read and write you can't take advantage of it. in a modern society say, in Great Britain does one feel that one is free, or at least sufficiently free, for practical purposes? Does one? Or is one merely unconscious of one's unfreedom, or has one merely got used to it? I mean, do you often find there are things that you want to do but you can't do because of the political, social, economic, intellectual conditions? Or have you just perhaps got used to limitations and you don't think about them any more?

Sumana: I've seen one argument a friend of mine was saying that because we didn't have any

freedom to control the kind of advertising we are exposed to and that kind of thing, it represents a lack of a certain freedom and the necessity of change.

S: When you say 'we', what does one mean? Because after all, one lives in a democracy in Britain, at least in theory; so if the people wanted it, if people as a whole felt strongly enough about advertising, presumably Parliament, representing the people, would pass laws accordingly. But perhaps however strongly you as an individual may feel you ought to be free from advertisements, the majority of the population doesn't share your feeling. They are quite happy to have the advertisements, they rather like them; probably think they are the highest form of art. Well, perhaps they are the highest form of modern art! Well, they are intelligible, well put together! They communicate their message quite clearly! Do you see what I mean?o if you live in a democracy and if you accept that what the majority says has to go, so to speak, then you may not as an individual very much in the minority be able to enjoy a certain freedom that is of, say, motoring around or walking around and not seeing advertisements. It would be lovely to see no advertisements on the tube, for instance. But they are sometimes useful if you want to know what concerts are on, or what museums are open. Perhaps you should just have cultural advertisements. Cut out all the ladies' underwear and all that sort of thing, and abortion services.

[84]

Jayamati: Just in response to your question, Bhante. It seems to me that, well, my experience is that we have sufficient social, economic and political freedom, which enables us to survive; but going back to your lecture that you gave a little while ago about one can motivate oneself if the need for survival is strong, but it seems to me that we have now the added difficulty, because we have social, economic and political freedom enough, to start motivating ourselves on the cultural and spiritual levels that you mentioned in that lecture. That seems to me the hiatus that we're caught in.

S: Then, of course, we have to motivate ourselves, largely. You can't expect the government to do that. You have to motivate one another. OK?

Ratnaprabha: This question comes out of a chance remark or passing remark that Dr Ambedkar makes about

S: In the booklet?

Ratnaprabha: In the booklet, yes about religion being the opiate of the people, which is a quote from Marx, of course.

S: Often people don't quote the whole of that passage from Marx. It's only the first half of a longer sentence. 'The opium of the people the last hope of a despairing world', or something like that. In other words, what he says about religion as the opium of the people isn't as negative as it might sound. He almost says, well, under certain circumstances people have simply the consolation of religion. Don't forget in the last century opium was widely taken in Britain, in the form of laudanum, wasn't it? And it was a universal sort of panacea; they used to give it to babies to keep them quiet. So opium, in that particular Victorian context and don't forget Marx was one of the great Victorians in many respects doesn't have quite the connotation that it has for us today. Religion helps to keep the people quiet, it helps to keep them satisfied with their lot. Marx didn't consider that a good thing, but he didn't seem to

think that it was altogether a bad thing that they should have some consolation in the midst of their trials and difficulties. Anyway: What's the question?

Ratnaprabha: The question is: has the taking up of the spiritual life this is rather a complex question, I'm afraid, I apologise

S: Ah, excuse me, I've just thought, I think, of what the actual quotation really was but you'll have to check this still. 'The opium of the people, the heart of a heartless world.' I think this is what he said. But, again, check it; don't take it as gospel. That does suggest that he wasn't using that expression, 'opium of the people', in entirely a negative sense.

Ratnaprabha: Has the taking up of a spiritual life, in its early stages, at least, an , opiate effect on many in the West, causing them to focus in on their personal problems and to retreat into the almost exclusive company of a few like-minded people, at the expense of an awareness of social problems and at the expense of an urge to remedy them?

S: Is your community an opium den? (Laughter.) What are the effects of opium? Has anyone ever perhaps I shouldn't ask you this! don't all put your hands up at once! It gives sort of hallucinatory dreams, doesn't it? according to de Quincey, at least; that's as near as I've got to opium, I'm afraid. Nodding of heads there! It does provide relief from physical pain, this is initially why it was taken during [85] the Victorian period. Morphine is a concentrated form of opium, isn't it? And it does relieve pain, but it is addictive, in the strict sense. Opium is addictive in the strict sense. And it does give extreme apart from relieving pain, it seems to give intensely pleasurable sensations, including intense visionary experiences and so on, in a self-indulgent, self-centred sort of way, which no doubt did alienate them. That reminds me just before I came away to Italy, I read that quite well-known book on Coleridge and opium, I forget the title of it

Ratnaprabha: A Bondage of Opium, by (?) Lefebvre.

S: That's right. I found it very interesting indeed, and the author of that, who has some knowledge, some considerable knowledge, it seems, of poisons and their effect on people, shows quite clearly that Coleridge's bondage to opium resulted in him becoming alienated from people, especially those who were nearest and even dearest to him, particularly the members of his family. That seems to be one of the side effects of opium. So one might say that perhaps there is a sort of analogy, and perhaps religion, wrongly understood, or an Eastern or spiritual tradition wrongly understood in the West, would separate one, would alienate one, from other people, and one would perhaps have to be mindful of that possibility. Sometimes you need to separate from people, you need to withdraw, to intensify your experience of yourself which might have been crushed, rather, in the group. But there mustn't be an emotional alienation from other people.

Uttara: I think my experience, when I was getting interested in Buddhism, was definitely well, I felt alienated from my friends, because they weren't experiencing what I was experiencing, they weren't interested in something else other than what I'd read about [?], and therefore I did feel sort of

S: Are you using the word alienation in the strict sense? Because you aren't alienated from your friends unless you cease to feel for them. I mean you may be separated from them, or

your interests may diverge, but if you still feel friendly towards them, even though you have no longer any common interest, you are not alienated from them in the strict sense. That usage of the word alienation is a bit loose, as it were.

Uttara: I think it was because I had no longer the same interests as them; maybe the interests were the bonds rather than the actual friendship, sort of thing; take away one's common interests, then what does show up is just how much your feelings are actually there. So in that respect you can say you've no feelings for somebody. All the time you have been alienated from them. This was, funnily enough, during my drug time, so in a sense probably everybody was alienated, to a greater or lesser extent, from each other. This is why I think paranoia was a thing in the drug, you know, people suffering from paranoia, so I think that's a symptom of alienation.

S: I'm not so sure about that. I don't know whether we can generalize to that extent. Sometimes, perhaps under the influence of certain drugs, you realize that the world is in fact a very dangerous place, which it is! Yes, I was going to say that within the Buddhist context the so-called vipassana meditation, as taught certainly by certain teachers and certain groups, can have an extremely alienating effect. Anyway, was that all Ratnaprabha's question?

Ratnaprabha: Well, there was a little more behind my question. I think that what we noticed in studying this text was the great difference in Dr Ambedkar's approach as compared with our approach and the usual approach of new and old religions in the West, which was that Dr Ambedkar was taking up a social dimension, if you like [86] of religion, and he was approaching it much more from the altruistic point of view than from the individualistic point of view. So I wondered whether we had fallen too far the other way in the West, and religion or even Buddhism, to some extent had become for us a little bit of an opiate in that we could retreat into our positive group; become more positive, yes, and enjoy ourselves, but to some extent ignore the real social difficulties that the majority of people were experiencing. This is what I meant by it being an opiate.

S: I think that is possible, but I think one is justified to some extent in withdrawing into the positive group, if the group is genuinely positive, and trying to transform that into a spiritual community as a basis for operations later on, when you are bigger and stronger, in society as a whole. I think you need to have a basis of operations, and we still are as yet very tiny indeed we being the FWBO. But we need a sort of launching pad, as it were. But I think there is a tendency on the part of some people not excluding even Order Members, perhaps to as it were take refuge within the Movement, not with a view to qualifying themselves for moving outwards later on within the wider society, but just as an escape from the wider society almost in a sort of self-indulgent way. I think there is that tendency here and there. I was reflecting on this some time ago or a little while ago, in fact. I happened to read one of Dickens's novels, and also to read the life of Dickens. One thing that struck me, with regard to both his novels and his life and the society of his time, was the great importance of the family and the group to which one belongs, society. In Dickens's time, of course, being the Victorian period, the family didn't mean a tiny little nuclear family; it meant quite a large, extended family, very often not just mother, father and 10 or 12 children, but lots of aunts and uncles and cousins and second cousins and all the rest of it, quite a network of relationships. And it does seem that on that particular level, within that particular context, there was quite a lot of quite warm intercommunication. though that does pertain to the group, it does seem to represent, that kind of group membership, quite a necessary stage of development in the development of

the individual using individual with a small i. We nowadays don't have that very much. Some people are being brought up in one-parent families, which is really ridiculous; no brother, no sister, nobody else in the house or the flat or room, even; with very little contact, only intermittent contact with other relations, perhaps no contact at all. And, as people grow up, a sense of alienation perhaps from social life in the wider sense, from the political structure, the political life of a country, the economic life of a country. Perhaps they are out of work, for instance. So we grow up with a very impoverished experience of the group. So very often what happens, when we come into contact with something like the FWBO, we see it as a group, because that is what we need, perhaps. We may even use the right spiritual language and talk about the spiritual community, but what we really want is a group. I think, in some cases, what people are even looking for is a family. And on its own level, that is quite legitimate. The only thing is that you mustn't get stuck there, you must go beyond that. But in itself it does represent a legitimate level or stage of development. I think we have to bear in mind that people often come to us come to the FWBO, or join the spiritual movement which is the FWBO in a rather battered and abortive condition; the group does not present to us as fully fledged and developed members of a positive group, far from it. So sometimes, within the spiritual movement itself, we have to complete the work [.. .] group that society should have done.

Cittapala: In that respect, I was wondering whether we do enough to create enough of a positive group in the FWBO. My experience around the LBC has been that quite [87] a large numbers of people are attracted initially to the LBC. We have large beginners' classes, and they seem to be very successful, but building up a large, wide basis of regulars seems to be quite a difficulty, and I have often wondered whether it's just that we fail to provide the right sort of things I'm not quite sure what things but

S: I see what you're getting at.

Cittapala: for a positive group atmosphere to develop.

S: I think one has to be very cautious here, because I think there is a certain amount of social life around the LBC. I think that very often it isn't of a very positive nature. And I'm quite happy about there being, especially for very new people, more in the way of so to speak social activities, but I think we have to be very cautious, because often they can take such a direction that they cater simply for people's weaknesses, or even the negative elements in them. I think it's also quite easy, even for Order Members, to get sucked into these sort of things to the detriment of their spiritual commitment, which is sometimes admittedly a bit weak and needs strengthening, and needs the support of a spiritual community, more than involvement in purely social activities. So it isn't an easy matter to settle. But so far as Mitras are concerned and they are a special category; I think I've mentioned before Devamitra's recent investigations show that most Mitras complained I think three-quarters or nine-tenths of the Mitras in the whole Movement in the UK complained not of any shortage of social activities, but a shortage of kalyana mitrata with Order Members. So, if Order Members have got free time, perhaps that's where they ought to put their energy rather than into social activities. At least, that's the next circle outwards, it's the Mitras. But yes, I think nine-tenths, if I'm not mistaken, of Mitras, did make this complaint; men rather than women; the women seemed to be better catered for by the women Order Members. But men Mitras usually had only this real complaint; which seemed rather sad. There was only one centre, I think, where the men Mitras were reasonably satisfied with the (Voice: Which?) I'm not going to say! with the

amount of Order contact they received, and it was not one of the biggest centres; perhaps significantly. But I think perhaps there need to be semi-social occasions; I think people really enjoy the big festivals, they enjoy Wesak, they enjoy FWBO Day. It is in a way social, but it's not completely social. I don't think you would help the FWBO, or help anybody, by running bingo or a disco or anything like that. I think that's really quite out of the question. But there need to be certain occasions when there is a social element, as it were. Again, reading the life of Dickens, one thing that struck me was the number of dinners they laid on for one another. They were always entertaining one another at great dinners, with speeches and words of congratulation and presentations and if somebody left to go away to Europe for a while, there'd be a great dinner to see them off and when they came back another great dinner to receive them. We do so little of that sort of thing. You see, this is not just a weakness of the FWBO, perhaps it's a weakness of our whole social life in Britain. Perhaps we should make much more of these sort of occasions. In a small way, in some communities I notice in the case of Padmaloka we've started celebrating birthdays. I think that's a good thing, though it's only [88] on a small scale and within the community; even with little speeches and presents and all that sort of thing. But I think there should be more occasions when you gather together and you give recognition to people for what they've done, and all within a definitely, well, generally spiritual context. It shouldn't just degenerate into some kind of party. I really think that parties as usually understood are one of the real enemies of spiritual life. I'm really sorry to see sometimes that these still are held around FWBO centres. It's nearly always, I'm afraid, the women that organize them, and I really wonder about this. Anyway, that's by the by. (Laughter.)

Cittapala: Do you think that the positive group necessarily has to express itself through what you would call social occasions? I mean, are there not other activities which they might well, such as going away on some weekend retreats, perhaps not of a very intensive nature, or other

S: Well, what would you do. I suppose you could go away on a climbing retreat or something like that.

Cittapala: Yes, that's one thing. The other thing which occurs to me is that there does seem to be a quite strong desire from people at this level of involvement to look into their psychology. Now I know that that can be unhealthy, but there also seems to be a sort of need to talk about themselves, disclose themselves, look at themselves in that kind of way. And I think that is sometimes the attraction which competes as it were with FWBO activities, that people then go off to other groups which are running and provide those kind of facilities. So I'm wondering whether there's not more occasion as it were to provide

S: Well, that could be looked at. I'm not too sure about it myself, but it could certainly be looked at by FWBO councils. Though I sometimes wonder whether a good beginners' retreat might have a much more positive effect on people than, say, a therapy retreat of some kind. I'm not sure, I must say, but one needs to be quite careful and perhaps have a few small pilot projects first, and monitor them closely and know what you're doing and be quite clear about the results and discuss the results, and so on. But there's a lot of these sort of peripheral activities, around the LBC, at least; there's lots of massage, there's counselling, there's Alexander technique, homoeopathy; apart from more standard things like yoga and so on. We do have quite a few of these sort of things under general FWBO auspices, don't we?

Cittapala: Yes, we certainly do, that's true.

S: And even massage weekends, aren't there? I'm not too sure about massage about people's motives. I just wonder. Anyway. Perhaps it is because this is me just speculating now, or thinking aloud; don't take it as gospel I sometimes wonder whether the massage is a substitute in a way for the wider sort of social or group contact people should be having. But, anyway, that's just a thought. But when I spoke a little while ago about the social activities, I was thinking of something which was just so to speak for the sake of enjoyment and good fellowship. I wasn't thinking of something which had a definite sort of spiritual purpose; though that does in a way have a spiritual purpose, at least in the long run or indirectly. Perhaps there should be more occasions when you just get together to enjoy one another's company and celebrate something or give recognition to somebody without the aid of alcohol. I think you can do it. In Dickens's day, well, the amount of meat and alcohol they consumed was extraordinary! One particular critic drew attention to the fact that if you read Pickwick Papers you quickly become aware that everybody is always drinking brandy; whatever they do, [89] wherever they go, they call for brandy. Well, things changed during Dickens's lifetime, and that went out of fashion a bit. But at these festivals, the menus were extraordinary. The amount of drink they got through was also extraordinary. I think we can enjoy ourselves without those things. I remember years ago it is years ago, I'm afraid, now there was a sort of great send-off dinner for Subhuti when he went off to Greece to write his first book. That was a very happy occasion. I seem to remember a few other occasions of that sort since. Say, if someone goes off to India, well, give them a good send-off; have quite a good dinner party, let there be speeches and maybe a presentation, something of that sort. Or if someone returns from somewhere, or someone achieves something in some way. Maybe the tenth anniversary of their ordination well, show your appreciation of all that they've done during those ten years. I think people really enjoy festivals, but they must be really well planned and organized, everything must go smoothly and people who are organizing them must know what they are doing. It mustn't be sort of aimless with people wandering around and wondering what's happening, as has happened sometimes in the past. So I think if people haven't satisfied this need for the experience of group membership in a happy, healthy, positive way, they'll be looking for it when they should be involved in other things of a more specifically spiritual nature. Or they'll try to find it with just one other person, usually of the opposite sex and completely inadequate for that particular purpose. You put all your social eggs into that particular little tiny basket. Anyway, perhaps I've wandered off the track a bit.

Uttara: Is it not that, in the case of a large centre like LBC, people do find it difficult to identify with the centre, so therefore if somehow they felt that they actually could contribute, not just at the end of the evening by giving dana but some I think this is another aspect of the same thing; people just know, they sort of see well, maybe they assume that everything is run by other people and they don't actually feel they belong to the centre, it's all been set up, so they don't

S: I'm not sure about that. Some people don't want to belong in that way or to help in that way, at least for a while; they want just to come along and take advantage of the facilities.

Uttara: I was thinking, say, in terms of jumble sales, because you know the jumble sales used to be quite a good way of getting people together

S: Yes. Well, perhaps people have begun to scorn the humble jumble sale. They think more in terms of getting grants from different bodies today. Perhaps one shouldn't overlook the jumble sale, even though it doesn't raise very much. If it raises so little, and the centre doesn't

want the money, all right, never mind, send it to India instead. Translated into rupees, it's not a bad little sum. Anyway, let's carry on.

Peter Nicholson: A couple of questions about your forthcoming book on Dr Ambedkar. Can you tell us about who you've written it for, or what it's going to be used for?

S: Oh dear! I must admit I didn't write it with a very clear idea of who I was writing it for. To some extent, I wrote it for my own satisfaction. But if I was pressed, I would say that I wrote it certainly for the Movement in the West, to inform them more about our wing in India, to give them a better understanding of the background of many of the people who come into the Movement, in India especially, who have become Order Members. And I also hope that people outside the [90] Movement, who have some interest in India, possibly some interest in social conditions there and therefore in the Untouchables, or people who are interested in the revival of Buddhism in India, may also find this book of interest. I think it will also be of interest to the English-knowing Members of the Order in India, English-knowing Mitras and so on. It might be of interest to English-speaking Hindus, but I think it would upset quite a lot of them. Not that that's necessarily a bad thing. I'm not sure how it will go down with Marathi-speaking Buddhists, Marathi-speaking followers of Ambedkar once it's translated, as it probably will be. It's very difficult to say. But I'd like it to be translated. But beyond that, I can't really say in a sense for whom it's intended. Perhaps that's enough to begin with, and we just hope that more and more people do find the book interesting if it comes to their notice. The more people do know about these things, the better. I think in a way it's quite shameful that so few people in the world know anything about the position of the Untouchables in India. Everybody knows about the blacks in South Africa, and the Prime Minister of India goes on about that at great length. But you never hear a word, hardly, about the plight of the Untouchables, which is in many ways worse. There's 100 million of them now.

Uttara: Does Gandhi support what's happening in South Africa or is he against it?

S: Against what?

Uttara: South Africa, the oppression of the blacks?

S: Oh, he's quite against it, of course, yes, and very outspoken about it. But they just don't they're so used to having the Untouchables that even though Untouchability is illegal I mean Ambedkar made it illegal, or put it into the constitution when he framed the constitution it's virtually a dead letter. So at least I hope that more people, as a result of reading this book, will become aware of the situation. But there is a Minority Rights Group in Britain, which brought out a few years ago a booklet on Untouchability. There's been a new edition of that issued quite recently. And a couple of months ago they brought out a book of selections from material bearing on the Untouchables and by the Untouchables, quite a good publication. I have asked Nagabodhi to notice it in the magazine. So those people will be quite interested, I'm sure, those people and their supporters and they've got some quite influential supporters would be quite interested in the contents of this book. But more than that I can't say. It's a bit of a shot in the dark.

Vessantara: Is there any particular reason why you are unsure how it will go down with the Marathi speaking ex-Untouchables?

S: I must say that one of the reasons is that their attitude towards Ambedkar is one of undiluted hero worship, and though I've been extremely careful in what I've said, I've not been able to refrain from at least some mild criticism, or at least mild disagreements with some of the things that he has said, even though I have expressed myself very tactfully; and some are very, very sensitive to any kind of criticism of Ambedkar. But in view of the overall spirit of the book, they may be able to accept it. That remains to be seen. And if, for instance, we have any enemies you know, outside the FWBO in other ex-Untouchable groups, there are certainly some things that they could blow up out of proportion and on the basis of which they could say that Sangharakshita is not really very sympathetic to Ambedkar though that would be quite unfair they might be quite capable of doing that kind of thing, with what result it's difficult to say. One is treading on quite delicate ground. But I felt obliged to tread, none the less! [91] But I think the majority of Marathi-speaking Buddhists, or the majority of Ambedkar's followers, will be very pleased that I have written something on Ambedkar and Buddhism, almost regardless of what it contains, because they are so appreciative of any sort of recognition given to him. I think many will know about it, or see the book, or appreciate it, without reading it. Just that the book is there and that I've written it will be quite enough. It will be quite interesting to see what the reactions are. For instance, Subhuti didn't know what criticisms he might receive in respect of his first book, Buddhism for Today, and nearly all the critics concentrated on just two points: Subhuti's criticism of the family, and Subhuti's criticism of Christianity. They fastened on those two points. And more recently I have found that I have been getting reviews of The Eternal Legacy. The only criticisms are of my criticism of the narrow attitude of the Theravadins towards the Buddhavacana. So sometimes people react where they've a sensitive point this is what I'm trying to say and just pick as it were on some quite incidental point, perhaps, or just on one point among so many others, because that's the one that particularly concerns them or that they particularly feel. It might happen with this book, too. I don't expect much in the way of appreciation from caste Hindus, I'm afraid. Not real caste Hindus. No. Or Gandhiites, come to that. Anyway, there was another bit to your question?

Peter Nicholson: I think you've actually answered the other bits of the question, thank you.

S: I must say I conceived the idea of writing the book on last year's retreat here, and I just jotted down the titles of the nine chapters and thought what I'd put in each chapter, and I carried out that plan without any deviation. I think it's partly also a sort of peace offering for not going to India, if you see what I mean! I haven't come, but at least I've written a book!

: How long do you think that will last?

S: Oh, a few months! It's like throwing a sop to a wolf that's chasing you. Anyway: is there any other question?

Derek Goodman: Have we in the FWBO inherited the connection with Mrs Gandhi ?

S: Pardon?

Derek Goodman: Have we inherited the connection through Mrs Gandhi's son that was enjoyed through Mrs Gandhi herself with regard to political manoeuvres for the benefit of the FWBO ?

S: What connection was that with Mrs Gandhi?

Derek Goodman: Oh, I thought there was one, wasn't there? There was somebody ?

S: In India? I think we did have friends who had friends who knew Mrs Gandhi. I think we did. But I think Rajiv doesn't inherit all his mother's friends. Some he definitely discarded. I'm not quite sure what the present situation is. But I believe we do have friends of friends of friends of Rajiv Gandhi. In India this is usually the case!

Vessantara: Do we know what his attitude is to the ex-Untouchables?

[92]

S: He's trying to get their vote! But actually in some states the Congress is losing the Untouchable vote. Mrs Gandhi was very careful to keep on the right side of the Untouchables. She seemed to have had some genuine feeling for them, to give her her due. She seems to have been quite well disposed towards them, and to have done what she could for them without actually offending the caste Hindu majority. He doesn't seem quite so concerned about them as his mother was, as far as one can gather, and in some areas the Congress party has lost a good part of the Untouchable vote.

Vessantara: Lastly, Bhante, are there any other points arising out of that booklet which haven't come out of the questions and answers, which you wanted to make?

S: I can't think so. I don't think I had in my mind points that I particularly wanted to make. I think I was mainly concerned just to try this as an experiment, just to see how big the gaps in people's knowledge were in this particular area. They do seem to have been pretty big in some cases; but maybe they are not quite so big as they were. And after all, we have got this little book of mine coming, so you'll be able, hopefully, to fill in a few more gaps. But I think it isn't very healthy if one wing of the Movement remains in very great ignorance of another wing. It is quite a big wing, the biggest wing outside the United Kingdom, and it is growing quite fast. So I think it's important that people in Europe and in America do know what's going on in India, and what sort of people are coming into the FWBO there, from what sort of background. And also, obviously, it helps people to rise above their parochialism, and that's always a good thing. Sometimes you don't realize how parochial you are until you either go to some other country or live in some other society, or at least read and hear about them. I had a letter not so long ago from Ajita, and he spoke about his experience in Germany. One thing that struck him, he said, about the Germans was how much harder they worked than the British! Apparently, it seems to have been quite an eye-opener to him. And also that you have to do some work there to get dole money. Yes, I must say I didn't know that. I think it's a very good idea. So he is working in a graveyard and loves it, twenty hours a week. And he meditates during his lunchtime, beside a grave. He thinks it's great! So let's leave it there. Do you know what we're going to be studying next?

Vessantara: 'Hedonism and the Spiritual Life'.

S: Oh, hedonism! That's a dangerous subject, isn't it? So when do we start?

Vessantara: On Friday. We've got a work day.

S: Yes, today is Tuesday. We start on Friday. So I'll have to get myself into a hedonistic mood! (Laughter.) I might even have a biscuit with my morning coffee! On second thoughts, I'd better not! (Roar of laughter.)

Voices: Thank you, Bhante.

Spellchecked and put into house style Shantavira November 1998