

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on
SANGHARAKSHITA: HEDONISM AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

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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 McGearry, Gerd Baak.

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Vessantara: So we start on Hedonism, Bhante. Most of the groups haven't got very far into the text yet, so we'll start with some questions which are really just around the text, just asking for a bit more information on [.. .]

Cittapala: We were just wondering, Bhante, whether you could give us any more information, if it would be useful for us in respect of Bharati's life story. You give a very brief life story in the first paragraph. So the first thing which struck us was: was he actually Austrian or, with a name like that, does he have Indian descent?

S: Oh no, he was definitely Austrian. He has written I think it was his first book, actually an autobiography called *The Ochre Road*, that is quite an interesting book. From a purely spiritual point of view, it suffers from the limitations of the man himself. None the less, it is a very vivid and I would say accurate picture of the Indian religious scene, or at least part of it. Some of his experiences, in fact, seem to have paralleled mine. So I would certainly recommend the book. There is a copy of it in the Order Library. And, as I think I have also mentioned in the article, he is also the author of a book called *The Tantric Tradition*. That is quite a scholarly work and quite useful, though dealing almost entirely with the Hindu Tantric tradition, not with the Buddhist Tantric tradition.

Cittapala: There were a couple of other areas. The first was just that it was rather interesting that he studied Sanskrit and other Indian languages when still a boy.

S: He seems to have quite a gift for languages. He seems to have that sort of mind; you know, some people have it, some people don't, it seems. But he seems to have picked up quite difficult languages quickly and easily, and as a boy, yes, he went into Indian languages. He learned Sanskrit, and Hindi also, when he was in Austria, or perhaps in Germany.

Cittapala: Was there any particular reason why he chose those languages?

S: To the best of my recollection and it is many years since I read his autobiography he had a sort of instinctive attraction to India: Indian religion, Indian culture and so on.

Cittapala: The other area which we were interested in was his participation in Hitler's 'Free India and Egypt'. Was he actually a Nazi, or did he have any particular role in ..

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S: Whether he was a Nazi or not doesn't transpire from his autobiography. He gives no indication of his actual political sympathies. But that particular legion what did you call it?

Cittapala: It was the 'Free India'

S: Yes, the 'Free India' Legion: it had various names at the time. But that was a legion that Hitler tried to form from Indian prisoners of war, because in the course of the war, especially in the Far East, quite a number of Indians belonging to the Indian Army, who were of course fighting with the British, were captured and became prisoners of war. So Hitler, or rather his representatives, tried to form a special legion out of these prisoners of war to fight the British. He wasn't very successful: quite a small percentage of them did join this legion, despite quite a lot of coercion, and a very tiny percentage of the officers. Yes, it was more usually called the Indian National Army, the INA certainly that part of it which operated in the Far East, especially in Singapore. And the leader of that was the famous Nataji Subhas Chandra Bose. (Laughter.) Oh dear! More background information needed! He was originally a member of the Indian National Congress; you have all heard of that, of course? (Laughter.) He was one of the, well, he was a prominent figure in the Indian National Congress; he was president of the Indian National Congress, I think it was for one year, one session. But he didn't get on well with Mahatma Gandhi. Some people consider him a more intelligent politician than Mahatma Gandhi. He was a Bengali by birth, rather fiery; did not disbelieve in violence.

So after, well, to cut a long story short, Gandhi more or less forced him out of the Indian National Congress, and he started his own political movement, which was called the Forward Bloc. This was before the war. And it was much more extreme than the Congress Party, and as far as I remember it openly advocated violence. Anyway, he was tried and imprisoned by the British Indian government of those days, and during the war he escaped and made his way, it seems, to the Japanese and from them he went to the Germans, he went to Germany. He seems to have contacted Hitler personally, and he became eventually the leader of the Indian National Army at the end of the war, he seems to have been killed in an air crash, but there's a lot of mystery surrounding that. The Indian government conducted an investigation and concluded he had in fact died in an air crash, I think in a Japanese plane. But many of his followers in Bengal, at least, to whom he had become a sort of legend in his lifetime, refused to believe that he had died, and are still awaiting his return, in a sort of King Arthurish way. And when I was in India there were all sorts of rumours and reports from time to time that Nataji Subhas Chandra Bose had come back. Anyway, he was the commander-in-chief of the Indian National Army and had his headquarters in Singapore. So it would seem that the young Aghananda Bharati in Germany I believe it was in Germany; when I say Germany I sort of include Austria, as a young man came into contact with members of this Free India legion, who were either a branch of or identical with, I am not quite sure which, the Indian National Army in Europe. And he seems to have acted as a sort of interpreter, because he had this great interest in India anyway. I believe he either had learned or was learning Sanskrit, and he picked up Hindi and I think even other Indian languages very quickly; so he made himself useful as an interpreter. At the end of the war, I believe he tried to pass himself off as an Indian to escape arrest and possible trial by the Allies, but he was discovered. He was detected and simply sent back to Germany or sent back to Austria. From there he eventually

found his way to India, and he became a Vedanta swami and pursued his Sanskrit studies and engaged in culture criticism, as he called it, which made him quite unpopular with quite a lot of orthodox Hindus. He considered himself a very [3] orthodox Hindu, but he was so orthodox in some ways which meant that to many he looked very unorthodox and perhaps in some ways he was unorthodox, that he offended quite a lot of people. And in the end he had to leave India under that cloud I mention. I won't go into the nature of the cloud; that wouldn't be quite fair, perhaps. But anyway, he left, and to the best of my knowledge he is now happily living in the United States of America. But read his autobiography, which mainly deals with his early years in Austria and Germany and his experiences in India.

Cittapala: You mentioned that *Light at the Centre* 'is one of those entertaining and instructive essays in cultural anthropology that over the last two or three decades we have learned to expect from the campuses of North America.' I was wondering whether you could recommend any other entertaining and instructive essays?

S: (laughs) Recommending? Well, the sort of thing I have in mind I am not sure that this came from the campuses of North America was Koestler's *The Lotus and the Robot*. This was very controversial. Then there is another one, oh dear, I can't remember the name of it now: written by a woman anthropologist, Ruth Benedict. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, I think that was. That was about Japan and the Samurai cult and the tea ceremony and all that sort of thing. Those are the sort of works I had in mind. I can't say that I've read many of them myself, but there are quite a lot of them around.

Cittapala: And, following on from that, you also say that, according to the publishers of *Light at the Centre*, Bharati's latest book is an investigation of mysticism in the tradition of Butler, Underhill and Zaehner. I was wondering whether you could tell us a little bit about this tradition and who these characters actually were.

S: When I say 'tradition', don't take me too literally; not that one was a personal disciple of the other, so to speak. Butler is a Catholic writer. I think he is Dom Cuthbert Butler, but I won't be completely sure of that because it's many years since I read him and I can't remember the titles of his writings; but he was quite well known in his day.

Evelyn Underhill was much more famous. She was a high Anglican lady who wrote some classic works on mysticism, the most important of which is one simply called *Mysticism*, which has been reprinted a number of times. It deals mainly with Christian mysticism but in a very comprehensive sort of way, going into virtually every aspect of the subject. It is a very sympathetic and at the same time quite well, one might say, critical, account. She was herself, it seems, so her admirers say, a mystic of some calibre and published some mystical works of her own, I think mainly in the form of letters or something like that.

And then Zaehner is a much more recent figure. He was Spalding Professor at Oxford, and he wrote a very large number of works, especially after his appointment as professor. He was an authority, I think, mainly in the field of Hinduism, but he branched out quite a lot subsequently. He was by faith a Roman Catholic, quite a staunch one, but his ideas underwent a quite interesting development late in life. He became quite interested in Islam and Sufism, and his attitude or his outlook broadened considerably towards the end of his career in the field of mysticism, strictly speaking. I think his very best known and I think most controversial work was called *Mysticism* that was the main title and as a subtitle I can't quite

recollect it was something like Natural and Supernatural.

: Sacred and Profane, I think.

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S: Sacred and Profane, yes. He was a great believer, at that time, in the distinction between natural mysticism and supernatural mysticism. He was quite prepared to accept that there were non Christian mystics, but they were, so to speak, only natural mystics. Their mysticism was not of a supernatural order, as was Christian mysticism. I think later on in life under criticism, possibly he more or less abandoned that rather rigid classification. There was a lot of controversy about it at the time, I remember.

So that's Professor Zaehner. I had some correspondence with him once.

Cittapala: There was one last question. It was to do with ethno-scientific and ethno-semantic tools. I was wondering whether you could give us some examples of this kind of approach.

S: Well, in some ways Bharati's book is an example. He is very fond of these sort of terms, as you can tell from the way I've written I can't take that sort of approach to this sort of subject really very seriously. 'Ethno-scientific' is a ridiculous sort of thing! 'Ethno-scientific' and 'ethno-semantic' I think he also uses that expression is a product of this notorious sort of interdisciplinary approach where you combine two different disciplines and you make a third discipline. So 'ethno-scientific' what does that mean? I suppose it means the scientific study of man and his culture, but can you really have a scientific study of man? In the same way, 'ethno-semantic' is a study, presumably, of the languages of the human race in a comparative way, as revealing something about man. Well, that's not quite so bad, but Bharati is very fond of this sort of approach, and in the course of his book he is always flourishing, as I put it, these ethno-semantic and ethno-scientific tools in a rather ostentatious way, and he is always pausing to explain these terms to the reader as though the reader was quite dim-witted. It's all rather pretentious, so I'm mocking it a little. And, of course, Time magazine takes all this very seriously, as you must have gathered.

Ratnaprabha: Could I ask you about your own language in the pamphlet?

S: Yes, not 'ethno-scientific', I trust!

Ratnaprabha: No; but it's quite tough in places.

S: Oh dear!

Ratnaprabha: I've produced a list of words that I thought some people might not know, which runs to four sides of A4. I've put it up on the board.

S: Surely not!

Ratnaprabha: Some of them only [. . .]

S: Yes: so? I wasn't trying to beat Aghananda Bharati at his own game, but the subject seemed to call for a certain amount of technicality. Or a certain amount of precision, let us

say. Anyway; was that the question?

Ratnaprabha: Yes. I think there is another question [inaudible] [..]

Uttara: Following on from that question. It was in the Newsletter I think I remember reading it; I got the gist of it then, but on reading it again, I just wondered who the review was directed to, or who did you feel was actually going to not so much understand it, but it was very much I thought it was appealing to a certain audience or ...

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S: As far as I remember I did write it a few years ago I was just writing for the readers of the Newsletter, mainly our own Order Members, Mitras and Friends, and perhaps a few others outside. But I thought the subject was of sort of general spiritual interest; that's why I reviewed the book and reviewed it in that way, concentrating on those particular topics in the first place.

Uttara: I think it was more because of what Ratnaprabha says, the actual words, and I wondered who ...

S: I don't believe in writing down to my readers!

Uttara: I think that's the conclusion I came to: that somehow you were trying to get us to do a bit of work.

S: But sometimes, when one discusses certain topics, one has to be a little technical, which means being precise in one's language. Simply that. It's like any other subject. If you, for instance, take up, let's say, something like motor maintenance or what do you call it? Maintenance of radio sets or TVs: you'll encounter technical vocabulary without which you can't understand that particular subject and without which you can't discuss it with other people. So it's just the same in the case of Buddhism or in the case of, say, philosophy or anthropology or physics. There's a technical vocabulary. So, after you get a certain way into the subject, you can no longer, you find, discuss it in ordinary general language; you have to start using a few technical terms. But Bharati overdoes it.

Ratnaprabha: I wonder when we are writing for a general, especially an FWBO, audience, where most people are not selected for their educational [...], whether we need perhaps to prune our language to some extent. I mean it's true, clearly, that in writing about Buddhism, there are certain Buddhist technical terms which we will have to teach people. But if we are writing about Buddhism and anthropology or something, presumably we have to take a little more length in our writing, but try to reduce the vocabulary.

S: I think it depends how far into the subject you want to go. I think if you reduce your vocabulary too much, you will limit your scope for discussion. You will have to decide which of those two things you want to do. I think what is more important is that those who write, especially those who write for the Newsletter, should be as clear and simple as they can and avoid jargon especially FWBO jargon. I think that is even more important. I gave one or two examples the other day, referring to someone who attends a centre regularly by saying 'She's a regular' that sort of language is really quite clumsy. There are other examples you can no doubt think of. And, of course, avoid what I call English humour; we've had to weed out of

the Newsletter quite a lot from time to time. By which I mean a sort of tongue-in-cheek, cynical approach.

: Things like strong understatement.

S: No, an understatement is not necessarily of that kind unless the understatement is rather self-conscious and deliberately so. As, for instance, when there was a quite successful meeting and perhaps quite largely attended, so you say in your blase English way, 'Well, there were a few people there' that's the sort of thing that we should try to avoid.

Cittapala: Just returning to the complexity of your language in this article, do you feel that in discussing hedonism as a subject, perhaps with outside audiences of one sort or another, that one would inevitably need to go to the lengths that you go to [6] to bring out the differences between the Buddhist approach and the hedonistic approach?

S: I think probably not. It's difficult to generalize. It just depends who the people are that you're actually dealing with, actually talking with. You need to know your stuff; you need to have done your homework. But how you put it across in that particular situation with those particular people is entirely up to you. What language you use, how simple you are in your approach, how complex; how far you go; again, that's up to you. The main thing is you must communicate what you have to say.

I think by the time you get to the end of the article, it will be pretty clear what I am actually saying. The basic point will be, I think, quite clear. Perhaps I shall ask some of you to put it in your own words!

Alan Pendock: Bharati defines mysticism as 'intuition of numerical oneness of the cosmic absolute.' What is this numerical oneness? And also, is there any other kind of oneness?

S: I think what he means by 'numerical oneness of the cosmic absolute' emerges in the course of the essay or article. Numerical oneness of the cosmic absolute means that there is, so to speak, an Absolute which is behind this whole universe, this whole cosmos, which is its ground, if you like, which is its basic principle; and that this is what he calls numerically one, that is to say, it is not plural. He believes that mysticism intuits that One.

You ask whether there are other kinds of oneness except numerical I suppose that depends on what you mean by number. 'One' is an essentially numerical concept, one would have thought. Sometimes one uses the idea of oneness not so much to indicate something that is existing singly so much as to indicate a sort of unity or harmony. But even there, there is a something which is One: do you see what I mean? So I suppose one can't really get away from the numerical connotation.

Chakkhupala: On a previous occasion, Bhante, I remember you playfully agreeing 'Yes, it is all one', but then qualifying it by saying 'As long as you understand that it is the non-numerical One.' Do you remember how you distinguished the non-numerical One as you used the term then from the numerical One as you re-establish it now?

S: Well, you can, for instance, have a concept of oneness and you can also have a concept of manyness. And you can also have a concept of a Reality which is beyond oneness and

manyness. But when you speak about that, when you posit that Reality which is beyond oneness and beyond manyness, you appear to be speaking of it as though it was a single thing. So you speak of it as though it is one, whereas it isn't actually one, because it is neither one nor many. I suppose that it is that factor that I was getting at, speaking of the non numerical Oneness.

: Would that be conterminous with sunyata?

S: Conterminous?. I wonder how literally one can take that. I suppose 'yes and no and both and neither' is the only real answer. If you take sunyata literally, well, it's emptiness: well, the opposite to that is non-emptiness, and then, of course, there is a sunyata, an 'emptiness', which is neither full nor empty, which is empty of both those concepts. So you've got a sunyata which is not sunyata, just as you have a unity which is not a numerical unity. It's the same kind of pattern, so to speak. If one isn't careful, one can get lost in words, or lost in thoughts, lost in concepts.

Sumana: Is there a correlation to dhyana in his definition?

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S: You'll find I've gone into that in some detail a little later on in the article.

Vessantara: Bhante, I'm not quite clear from his definition whether he considers that all the various theological and speculative systems of the world lead to the same experience of oneness or not.

S: I don't remember whether he says anything about that, but in any case I don't know whether you've come to this point or not yet he doesn't accept that that mystical experience of numerical oneness possesses any ontological significance. Do you see what I mean? So perhaps the question is really precluded.

Jayamati: Bhante, in the article Bharati states that the mystic takes the thought chain he experiences as meaning that he has achieved oneness with the Absolute. This subjective evaluation of experience I would have thought would surely lead to a subjective evaluation of ethics. Do you agree that this is one of the dangers of the hedonistic approach?

S: You'll find that this point emerges later on, rather dramatically, because he says quite clearly: 'The mystic can be a stinker.'

Jayamati: Oh, yes.

S: You see? So it's quite clear that he doesn't regard the mystical experience or oneness as having any bearing upon ethics. You can have mystical experience, according to him or you can have the mystical experience as defined by him regardless of whether you are an ethical or non ethical person.

Jayamati: Actually, what you have just said has exposed to me that I haven't asked the question I wanted to ask. What I was getting at more was that it seemed to me implicit in that approach that you must therefore end up as unethical, based on the fact that if your thought chain becomes how you are reading the absolute, it's that subjective in the experience that

one's experience of ethics must also be based on one's subjective experiences, so that would inevitably lead to an uncaring other-regarding attitude.

S: I'm not sure that that necessarily follows. I think you would have to argue that more closely.

Jayamati: Now? (Laughter.)

S: No, I think perhaps you would need to think about it a bit first.

Jayamati: Ah, good. We had quite a lively discussion this morning in that area, but I'm not sure how closely it was argued.

S: When I say 'closely', I mean logically. But it's clear what Bharati's position is. He regards the mystical experience as being ethically neutral, one could put it like that.

Chakkhupala: We did have a brief discussion of this when the study leaders met in a group preparing the questions, and I was wondering: if one moved away from mystical experience but just considered the hedonist in general, as to whether one ethical standpoint that he might arrive at would be that of utilitarianism, would you say that is from a positive point of view, at least a natural ethical standpoint to [take]?

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S: One could say that, because the basic principle, in a way, of utilitarianism, as formulated by Mill, at least, is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Now whether one means by happiness quite the same thing as Bharati means by pleasure is possibly debatable, but the formulation is at least cast in those kind of terms. You could speak of the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. There is also the question of degrees of pleasure, degrees of happiness. Perhaps here one could refer to Epicurus, because Epicurus believed that pleasure was the highest good; but he thought of pleasure in quite refined cultural terms, not in gross terms at all.

Douglas Ponton: How would this square with the idea that in Buddhism morality is the basis for meditation, so that blissful dhyana states would only arise on the basis of a sound ethical mind? How is it possible, in other words, for the mystic to remain a stinker and still experience his blissful experiences?

S: As far as I remember, Bharati believes that mystical experience can on occasion arise spontaneously. He also believes, you may not have come to this yet, that it can arise as a result of aesthetic experience and even, I believe, sexual experience. In fact, I think he speaks of the mystical experience as arising in dependence on hedonic rather than non-hedonic experiences or approaches; though, by the end of my article, you will see that he gets himself rather into difficulties because he admits that the traditional approach in India has been not hedonic but ascetic; and he simply says that this is due to certain historical circumstances he can't go into. So I invite him to go into those, because the fact that the approach to the mystical experience in India has traditionally been ascetic rather than hedonic seems to undermine his whole position.

Sanghapala: Was there a reply to that?

S: There wasn't. We did send him a copy of the review. (Voices: Oh!) But one needs, no doubt, to look into this question of the relationship between ethics and even higher hedonic experience, because it would, well, perhaps one shouldn't generalize, because one can have a kind of hedonic experience, you know, an experience of intense pleasure, even bliss, quite apart from ethical considerations. But it would seem that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to sustain that kind of higher hedonic experience except on the basis of an ethical life; and unless you can sustain that higher hedonic experience, especially in its dhyanic form, for some time, it is very difficult, almost impossible, to develop Insight. This is the traditional Buddhist position, what you might call the classic Buddhist position.

Uttara: Bhante, I remember, I think it was at a Tuscany retreat, you did mention as an example, I don't know whether it was higher experience, but the example was that people who were involved in concentration camps would generally go and listen to a piece of classical music, which had no ethical basis, and you could just listen to it and get into an experience like a ...

S: Right, yes. You also are passive, you're not generating that within yourself, as it were, as a result of your practice. You are just listening and perhaps getting into a quite blissful, ecstatic state. But as soon as the music stops, well, you are out of that.

Uttara: There was definitely no ethical basis there.

S: Right, yes.

Vessantara: Would there be a difference in karma vipaka between the sort of experience that you would get into, say, listening to music or a more extreme case [9] would be that you take psychedelic drugs, and you may find yourself in a very positive, clear state, but you haven't actually made the effort, as it were, to reorganize your being in that way? Is there a difference in the - you can get into something which appears to be like a dhyana state. A dhyana, if you can get into it during meditation, is a positive weighty karma. Would similar states which you happen upon through more artificial means without having made the effort to reorganize your being equally be positive weighty karmas, or not?

S: No, they wouldn't, by very definition, you see, because they would be vipakas rather than karmas. They would represent pleasurable sensations, simply; not pleasurable experiences which arose within the context of willing, so to speak. For instance, supposing someone touches you: that's a pleasurable sensation, but it is a vipaka. So the fact that you experience that pleasurable sensation has no karmic significance. What has karmic significance is your reaction to it, whether grasping and so on. So if you take a drug which gives you a pleasurable sensation, that's just a vipaka, so there is no question of that experience, inasmuch as it is a vipaka, having a vipaka of its own. It has only a vipaka to the extent that on the basis of that pleasurable experience you develop a certain attitude in which there is an element of will, and even then it's not the pleasurable experience that is followed by a vipaka but your attitude towards that pleasurable experience.

Vessantara: So when, in Peace is a Fire, you talk about dhyana being not so much a state that you get into but a way in which you reorganize your being, is it actually appropriate to talk in terms of getting into a dhyana state other than by making an effort of will to reorganize your being?

S: You can get into a dhyana state on the basis of an effort of will, but only very briefly. So the fact to which I was drawing attention there was that it's not enough just to snatch at dhyana experiences in a happy-go-lucky sort of way, leaving the rest of your life unorganized, because you will be unable to sustain that experience, and it will be of a slightly schizophrenic character. What you need to do is to reorganize your whole life, your whole way of life, your whole being, your attitude towards life, in such a way that dhyana is the natural result of that, so that you are dwelling in dhyana in a consistent sort of way.

Vessantara: I suppose what I'm asking is whether it's appropriate to talk of, say,

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taking LSD and getting into a dhyanic state.

S: I think it's quite misleading, because the analogy between the two I think is really quite superficial, inasmuch as the dhyana state is one of intense volition, to use that term, whereas the psychedelic experience, the drug experience as an experience, so to speak, is pure vipaka, one might say. Though of course it no doubt very quickly gives rise to various reactions on your part which may constitute karma.

(Pause of a couple of minutes.)

S: How far have we got?

Vessantara: We're almost through what we've got, actually.

Padmapani: Bhante, you were just talking about dhyana as a sort of concentrated act of volition, almost, and not a passive state, not a vipaka, as a result of some [10] outside experience. In my limited experience of dhyana, it often seems to happen quite unexpectedly, obviously, during meditation, yes, but somehow it seems that it builds up over quite a long period, like a long retreat, towards the end of the retreat. Then, without seeming to have put a lot more effort in that meditation than I have [done] in any other one, I sort of find myself in dhyana, and once in dhyana, this is just the first dhyana, it just seems to require a very subtle sort of effort of maintaining concentration to remain in it for a while; but again not a lot of effort. I wonder how this ties in with dhyana being a very intense effort of will [.. .], at least, of volition.

S: I suppose it depends how we think of will. The word will has perhaps the wrong connotations, because we think of something very effortful. But if you are doing something that you very much want to do and which you enjoy doing, you can be putting a lot of energy into it but without any sense of strain or effort or exertion. So the dhyanic state eventually becomes like that, or your experience of the dhyanic state eventually becomes like that, because it becomes so enjoyable that in a sense you don't need to make an effort. But none the less, your energies are going into that, as into any other intensely pleasurable activity, or any activity that you find intensely pleasurable. A bit like being in an aeroplane; you look out of the window and it seems as though you're standing still, but actually you may be going at 500 miles an hour. But have you noticed this, that when you enjoy doing something you are not conscious of effort, in the narrower sense, even though you are expending a lot of energy in that activity? Perhaps only subsequently you realize that you feel a bit tired because, yes, you

have expended energy. You may even feel that you are gaining energy from that activity, rather than expending it, though actually you may be expending energy, at least on a certain level.

Padmapani: So, just to make sure I've got this clear: dhyana definitely cannot be a passive state, that you can be sort of catapulted into by any external circumstances?

S: I must say that some people would disagree with this, because some would say that you can, for instance, be catapulted into a dhyanic state by the touch of some spiritual master. There is no doubt that other people can give you experiences, but whether those are dhyanic experiences I am far from being sure. Drugs can give you experiences of various kinds; alcohol can give you experiences; even a cup of strong tea can give you an experience. But that experience is not necessarily of a dhyanic nature, inasmuch as you are passive in respect of it. In a sense, it is not your experience, it is not an expression of you, so to speak, using 'you' in a purely conventional sense.

Cittapala: Would you say that the effects of using a drug such as LSD could be termed as an altered state of consciousness, and if so is that a higher state of consciousness, or where in the scale of things would it be?

S: I think that depends very much upon the person. I think the term 'altered state of consciousness' is really quite precise, quite satisfactory, because that is what happens; your state of consciousness is altered. Whether it is higher or lower, or whether altered for the better or for the worse, is entirely another matter, and I believe that those who have had experience of such matters, and I have known in the past people who have had several hundred trips, as they used to call them, used to say that what actually happened was that the drug, the LSD, for instance, put your mental state under a microscope; it greatly magnified it, so that you experienced far more intensely, on a far grander scale, whatever you normally experienced, good, bad or indifferent. If you had, for instance, a slight feeling of [11] paranoia, that could be magnified, in the LSD experience, a thousand times into a quite horrific experience. And if you were an affectionate kind of person, that could be magnified a hundred and a thousand times also. That would seem to be at least a leading feature of that type of experience. So that your consciousness was not even just altered but sort of just magnified, sort of blown up so that you could see what was actually there. There were, or are, other kinds of LSD experience, some of them of a more visionary nature, but then again that might well depend, or seems to depend, on the nature of the person taking that particular drug.

Padmapani: Bhante, it does say in the text here that with a certain amount of skill one can experience a zero experience, and I was just wondering what this skill is.

S: Well, this is what Bharati says. He seems to be making of it, and he may be correct here, as far as this experience is concerned, a matter of sort of expertise. In a sense, I feel this almost invalidates the experience itself from a spiritual point of view, if it can be just the result of a certain technique, a certain expertise, irrespective of one's overall attitude, character and so on.

Ratnaprabha: Just returning again to altered states of consciousness from drugs, I remember reading an article by Lama Govinda on these drugs, in which he suggested that they

essentially do sort of expand your consciousness, but without providing any strengthening of it, so it is as if it is shattered into small pieces, there is no integrating factor there to hold it together. And he sort of compares this with meditation, which he says also expands the consciousness but does it in a gradual and regular way, sort of strengthening it as it goes. Would you say that that is a sensible way of looking at the effect of some of these drugs?

S: I suppose it depends what one means by expanding. What I describe as 'blowing up' could be regarded as a kind of expansion. There is no doubt that meditation expands the consciousness. In fact, we have the term in Pali, expanded consciousness, mahagatha citta, which is an Abhidhamma term. Mahagatha means 'become great', i.e. expanded. It is the exact equivalent. And mahagatha cittas are, of course, the dhyanas; the dhyanas are expanded states of consciousness, according to Buddhism.

I am not quite sure what to say about expansion as characteristic of altered states of consciousness in the sense that Lama Govinda seems to be using the term. If there is any element of disintegration or non-integration in respect of that kind of experience, I suppose it is inasmuch as the experience is sort of thrust upon one, is sort of chemically induced, does not grow out of one's personal development and one's personal practice, doesn't grow out of the exercise, so to speak, of one's own will at higher and higher levels. It's something that, therefore, you can't possibly assimilate, so it may even have a disintegrating effect. Well, we know that some people at least who regularly take drugs of one kind or another do almost literally disintegrate; that is not only true of LSD, it is true of alcohol too.

Uttara: I think also in that article he talked about blowing psycho physical energy, in a way; the experience, because it was drug induced, was just like wasting energy, really, whereas he said the dhyanic state was containing it and concentrating it.

S: It seems rather a far cry from the drug culture of the sixties, when one is inclined to think back to what people used to say in those days about those things.

But Bharati certainly seems to regard access to mystical experience, as defined by him, as comparatively easy, a matter of skill and expertise and technique.

[12]

Cittapala: In relation to the dhyana being a karma as opposed to just a vipaka, you say further on in the article: 'It does not take much reflection to see that the type of religious experience that Agehananda Bharati terms mystical coincides roughly with the lower levels of samatha experience.' And then you go on to outline that. I don't quite see how, if mystical experiences are merely vipakas, mystical experiences can coincide with the lower levels of samatha experience, which would seem to be karmic.

S: I think here I'm concentrating on the aspect of pleasurable experience, because Bharati makes the point that the mystical experience is an intensely pleasurable one; and, of course, the experience of the dhyanas is intensely pleasurable. So there is that sort of common factor, that common denominator. So if one wants to establish some sort of connection between Buddhist experience and what he is talking about, it can only be in this sort of way.

Cittapala: So, moving on from that, the implication would seem to be that those mystics, however exalted their pleasurable experience is, are not really in an analogous situation to

somebody who can, say, dwell happily in the fourth dhyana, from the point of view that the person who can dwell in fourth dhyana is much more likely to be able to penetrate through into Insight; whereas the mystic presumably couldn't do that.

S: I wouldn't like to generalize; because someone whom Bharati regards as a mystic may have actually had a genuine dhyanic experience. But he regards a lot of other people as being mystics, not on account of dhyanic experiences but on account of experiences of intense pleasure. That seems to be the common factor. (Murmurs of assent.)

Sanghapala: Bhante, you mentioned a few minutes ago that someone could definitely give someone else an experience. Could you say more about that?

S: I didn't say that I personally definitely believed that, but it is certainly believed by some people, and there seems to be some evidence for it; but then one would need to go into the question of the degree of susceptibility of the person, and whether he was expecting that or looking for that, and so on. There is an analogous case in that of hypnotism: some people can be more easily hypnotized than others, some people can't be hypnotized at all, apparently, they don't have that susceptibility. Others very definitely do have it. But there are, in some spiritual traditions, in Hinduism, for instance, and in Sufism also, I believe, some branches of it, it is believed that a spiritual master can give you an actual spiritual experience, just by a touch of one kind or another or even perhaps just by looking at you. But I wouldn't like to say in any given case what actually happened. I can't say I personally have had any experience of that sort.

Uttara: I have heard of one person having an experience of that sort, by a Tibetan lama, just by his smile he is supposed to have been put it sounded like a dhyanic experience, by the way he spoke of it

S: Some people get that sort of experience when their girl friend smiles at them! (Laughter.) Don't they? Some people do. So I've heard! So one person can influence, can have an effect upon another, but what is one really talking about? In the case of the lama, let us dwell upon him a little bit, there is a certain susceptibility, a certain readiness. So perhaps there is something of that sort also present in the case of the religious devotee. But that does not mean one can perhaps literally speak of an experience [being] sort of transferred, just as you might transfer a material object from one person's possession to [13] another's. In some spiritual traditions, also, they develop this sort of devotional approach to the guru very much on the analogy of the lover and the beloved, so in that sort of situation perhaps intensely emotional experiences, even possibly spiritual experiences, can be very easily induced. Do you see what I mean?

Uttara: The emotion will be freed up, or ...

S: Well, I wouldn't say 'freed up', I wouldn't use that expression, but sort of developed or cultivated to a certain pitch of intensity, where the person concerned would be very susceptible. Yes, I've seen at least one guru operating in this sort of way, playing on the feelings of the disciples and working them up to quite a state, so that, this happened to be a female guru; I've described all this in my Thousand Petalled Lotus, so when she looked at a certain devotee, or just gave him or her something, they would almost swoon with delight. But it was clear she had been playing on their feelings before, whether consciously or

unconsciously, and sort of working things up to this climax. You can do this.

Uttara: I think this was what Divine Light Mission was based on an experience [like] that, they actually got the devotee into a certain state and then somehow, I don't know if it was a breakdown, but at the end of it this ...

S: Of course, sometimes it's done with the help of highly exciting devotional music. The Sufis use music in this sort of way. I am not saying that this is not a legitimate approach or a legitimate spiritual discipline, but I think it can be misused.

Vessantara: So there could be quite a definite and valid spiritual experience produced by this means?

S: Yes, I think so; but it would be a spiritual experience produced by definite means, with the person being as it were worked up gradually to that; not, as it were, something completely unprepared for, as though a spiritual experience was a thing which could be transferred to somebody irrespective of his mental and emotional state.

Padmapani: Bhante, getting back to the zero experience and using a drug like LSD, I was wondering because I had one or two friends who actually killed themselves indirectly because they had one or two bad experiences, and they talked to me before their mental illness got worse that they had this experience which I can only put in the category of vipassana, on a very high level; because they had taken quite a strong drug and they had this sort of experience, it was almost as if a bolt of brilliant light coming out and sort of well, literally splitting them in two. And yet they were still in the body, so to speak. And I was wondering if you can have a bad vipassana experience on that [drug], whereas you don't get that if you are doing meditation, because you have the ability to resolve ...

S: These are the terms in which I have discussed the matter in the past. But I don't think you can have as it were a vipassana type experience of that sort beyond a certain point. I don't think, without a good measure of integration, you can have a genuine vipassana type experience at all. You can certainly have abnormal experiences, which have a shattering effect; but I think not every experience which has a shattering effect is necessarily a vipassana type experience. It just doesn't sound like the same sort of thing at all.

Padmapani: I suppose, then, that leads on to the question of if you did actually have an experience like that, what sort of effect would it have on you?

[14]

S: What kind of experience?

Padmapani: If you did have a vipassana type experience, or rather could you have a vipassana type experience on a drug like LSD?

S: Well, I would say you definitely couldn't; because, by the very nature of the drug experience, it is as it were, as I've said, something passive, something that's almost imposed upon you; whereas Insight is your Insight.

Padmapani: Another question. It seems, from a certain amount of personal experience, that

you just generally read about a drug, this is quite a time ago, that if you don't remain passive in the experience of, say, an LSD trip, the thought forms become horrific. But if you aren't passive, you stop hooking on to the thought forms and you go towards what he calls the zero experience.

S: Yes, this raises a different point. The drug induced experience is as it were passive, but if you as it were remain in control of the situation, you can adopt a definite attitude towards the drug experience, and you can even utilize it as the basis for something further as it were of your own, which can be useful. If you've had previous training in meditation you might even be able to lead it in the direction of vipassana, but that would presuppose you're as it were remaining in control and conscious, and separate as it were from the drug experience and not totally overwhelmed by it. You would be treating it then just as you would treat any other powerful experience, including the experience you had in a dream, while remaining as it were still conscious. But for you to be in control in that way presupposes two things: one, that you already have a strongly integrated personality, which many people who take or took drugs didn't have; and, two, that you didn't take the drug in such a dose that you were completely overwhelmed.

Other drugs can be taken in that way; opium can be taken in that way. You can remain in, as it were, control of the experience.

Ratnaprabha: Can you think of any situation where it might actually be advisable to do so?

S: One can't, because the question is as it were in the abstract, and therefore the answer has to be in the abstract. One can't in human affairs rule out anything, any possibility. But one can't say more than that, because one would have to be confronted by an actual, concrete person, and be asked what one's advice or suggestion would be in the case of that particular person. But I don't think one could rule out anything as ever happening under a particular set of circumstances.

Chakkhupala: In the example you just gave, where if someone uses the effect of the drug but remains conscious enough, for example if you took advantage of being in a serene state and that was magnified by a drug such as LSD, you could retain a degree of conscious control and use that state, as it were, to enhance your ability to meditate, presumably the meditation would then [.. .] be a weighty karma?

S: There's at least three ifs there. I wouldn't like to say. One could also say, I think this perhaps is true, that the drug induced experience often seems to inhibit your volitional faculties, so that even though theoretically it might be possible to make the drug induced experience the basis of a weighty karma, in practice I think it probably wouldn't actually be possible.

Chakkhupala: Yes, I remember you talking about that quite a long time ago. I think you actually mentioned that you felt the LSD experience suspended that process.

[15]

S: Yes, I don't remember talking about it, but that could well have been the case.

Chakkhupala: I know the word 'suspension' of the process [occurred].

S: I think this is many people's experience, as far as I recollect that, yes, your volition is as it were suspended or is in abeyance; just as it is, apparently, in the devalokas!

Chakkhupala: I'll just have another go at that point. You said that it might be possible to take such a drug and to remain in control of it, and that would seem to argue the feasibility of a reasonably integrated consciousness to begin with. With that reasonably integrated consciousness, presumably, then in control of the drug, would it be less likely for the volition to be in abeyance and to be able to utilize the experience?

S: I get the impression that for that integrated consciousness to as it were persist and to be able to control the drug experience, you would have to take a very mild dose of the drug, perhaps so mild that it couldn't be effective for the purpose you have in mind. You see, in a way you are in a cleft stick: if you have the experience very powerfully you are no longer there to control it, and if you are there to control it you don't have the experience, it would seem, so powerfully. This seems to be the position.

Chakkhupala: By extension, would the most highly integrated consciousness suffer very little effect even from a powerful drug?

S: I don't know. Though I know it has been claimed that certain highly developed persons have been given doses of drugs that they have said haven't had any effect on them at all, I've only read such statements; I have no means of knowing whether they are correct or not.

Chakkhupala: (inaudible comment.)

Uttara: I have heard of some people taking [psychedelic drugs] and falling asleep, which is quite interesting, it just had no effect.

S: Yes, one has heard of people taking quite high doses of drugs but just feeling no effect at all. I mean a certain degree of susceptibility or perhaps willingness to experiment and experience is probably a prerequisite. Of course, there are these well-known cases I think they are well-known, I don't think they are just apocryphal, of people getting quite drunk on what they thought was alcohol but which actually wasn't!

Peter Nicholson: You mentioned dreams a few minutes ago, and people staying conscious in dreams. Is the implication that you can't carry further karmic effects in dreams unless you are actually conscious?

S: That would seem to be the implication, yes. Because in Buddhism traditionally you are not held morally responsible for what happens in dreams. For instance, a monk can break all the rules in a dream, but he is not held to account for that when he wakes up.

Peter Nicholson: I believe I read somewhere that in the Tibetan tradition they considered the opposite of that, that you were responsible; even more responsible for what happened in dreams.

[16]

S: Well, you are responsible for your dreams, there is no doubt about that. But whether you are morally responsible for what happens in the dream itself, whether that has a moral

significance, is a different matter. The standard Buddhist teaching is that one isn't morally responsible for what happens in dreams. I am not quite sure how the Tibetans argue this.

Douglas Ponton: Would the question of ethics arise in dreams, in that an ethical situation requires another party apart from oneself? Or would you regard dream manifestations as just part of your own mind?

S: Dream manifestations are regarded as purely subjective, that is to say part of one's own mind, so there could be no question of other-regarding ethics. But it could be debated whether one does not have some kind of moral responsibility towards oneself, at least.

Padmapani: Bhante, getting back to a drug experience like LSD: I've got a question which revolves around people that I have known who have taken this drug and who have a sort of intellectual bent, they are inclined to reason and logic; they seem, if they take quite a strong dose, to get very, very frightened on a trip. And people whose approach is not intellectual don't seem to be so frightened on a trip, if they take an equal amount of LSD; in fact they seem to have a sort of zero experience. I was just trying to work out, is there a correlation between the rational, thinking person experiencing a bad trip because it's a bit like in The Tibetan Book of the Dead, where you actually experience your mind and because you think about it it seems to make it worse. Do you see what I'm getting at?

S: Yes. I think it's very difficult to generalize about LSD experiences. While you were talking, I was thinking of a friend of mine, now dead, who was of a very intellectual type, but who when he took LSD once under medical supervision had an experience that Bharati probably would have regarded as the zero experience; and he was an excessively intellectual person, in fact almost alienated from his emotions. So it's very difficult to generalize. One would need to conduct controlled experiments on thousands of subjects. But in the sixties, and perhaps even in the seventies, one used to meet all sorts of people having had all sorts of experiences and who had friends who had all sorts of experiences, and there were all sorts of generalizations flying around; there was a sort of folk wisdom about the trip and all that sort of thing. Perhaps we need to go back and look at the whole thing more objectively and scientifically. People seem to have lost interest in these things nowadays. There doesn't seem to be much in the way of even scientific study. Also we've been talking about 'drugs' in perhaps a rather loose, general way. Different drugs have different kinds of effects, operate in different ways. You can perhaps compare, say, LSD and alcohol only to a very limited extent. They all alter your state of consciousness; perhaps you can't say more than that, and perhaps one should just stay with that they are all consciousness altering agents. Sometimes they alter for the better, apparently, sometimes for the worse, and the way in which they alter would seem to be related to your basic outlook, your basic psychic constitution.

Gerd Baak: Bhante, I know from experience that in hospitals nowadays drugs are often used for people who are dying, pain killers and very strong drugs, which they often don't choose to take. Do you think as a Buddhist one should take some ...

S: Some analgesic?

Gerd Baak: Yes just protect oneself in some way from being given drugs?

S: I am inclined to think that the person should have the right to determine the kind of treatment he is given. In the case of drugs which are given to the dying, they are usually pain relieving drugs; I think morphine and its derivatives, things of that sort. Sometimes, of course, the pain is very intense and the person is almost insane with suffering, and so the drug is given. But if the person wishes not to be given the drug, I think that should be respected. But I rather think every person's threshold is different, and if the pain passes a certain point I think most people, even the most strong-minded, would wish to be given drugs. But perhaps doctors shouldn't administer drugs before the patient or dying person himself actually says 'I want to be given those drugs.'

I think this is a rather undesirable feature of Western medicine, very often, on the whole, that the patient is sort of handed over to the doctors and has no say in how he is treated. I think it is important that the patient should be consulted at every stage, if at all possible, and should have some voice in what is going on; in other words, that he should take as much responsibility for himself as possible assuming, of course, he has taken responsibility in the past. You can't suddenly take responsibility when you're dying, when you've not been in the habit of taking responsibility during your life. I think we should know what is being pumped into our body, but I think that isn't always the case.

Tape 2

Sudhana: Gerd mentioning hospitals reminded me that, when you do go into hospital and you are given a general anaesthetic, you are also given another drug that affects your respiratory system, so it's in their control, and various other drugs, and if you wake up feeling ill from an operation. I am thinking of an intermediate operation like having wisdom teeth out if you wake up feeling bad, before you know what's happening they've pumped more drugs into you. I actually came out of hospital feeling pretty awful, having gone in feeling quite healthy! It ruined my meditation practice. That has shown me how delicate the meditation practice is and how easily destroyed it can be. I think it took me a week or so to recover anything like a good meditation practice. Have you any advice to offer people who go into hospital and take general anaesthetics and so on?

S: I must say I am not at all well up in these things, despite having a doctor in the Order office at Padmaloka. He does drop bits and pieces of information from time to time; but I think it is good if one has a friend who is a doctor and whom one can consult. When one goes into hospital you know what to say, you know the sort of questions to ask, so that you do remain in control at least to some extent. Of course, one must also bear in mind that sometimes you may not be in a position to be consulted; something may go wrong while you are under anaesthetic, and the doctors then have to take responsibility for perhaps giving drugs of various kinds; you can't be woken up and asked! But I think, as far as possible, you should have a say and should keep control.

Sudhana: Is there any argument for using the forms of treatment [such] as acupuncture? I know very little about it, but it might be more in accordance with the principles of Buddhism.

S: No, I'm not at all prepared to say that. I think the basic principle is: you should try to know and try to understand what is happening to you, what is being done to you. I think sometimes people are very sceptical about allopathy and so on, perhaps rightly, but then they develop a blind faith for some other system, which seems really ridiculous. I think acupuncture, as far as

I know, does produce results, but that does not necessarily mean that the results are the right results. It does not necessarily mean that the acupuncturist knows exactly what he or she is [18] doing. I have a little experience of my own here, as some people know. So it is not that I disbelieve in acupuncture, but I really wonder whether all acupuncturists really know what they are doing.

I think, regardless of the particular system of medicine you have recourse to, you must try to inform yourself about it; talk to the doctor, get them to talk to you, explain what is happening, why they are going to follow a certain course of treatment, why they think it necessary. On the other hand, I can sympathize with the busy doctor, who is perhaps confronted by some anxious elderly person who is asking really foolish questions, and the doctor is very much inclined to say, 'Well, look, just leave it to me, I know what I'm doing.' Do you see what I mean? One has perhaps to steer a middle way between being over-anxious and fussy and on the other hand just allowing oneself to remain in complete ignorance and just handing yourself over to the doctor.

I think sometimes you need to be quite firm, because nurses are sometimes as bad as doctors, and will come marching along and give you something; you say, 'What's this, nurse?' this is what I've heard people say, and they say, 'No need to ask questions, just take it, you'll be all right', in a bossy kind of way; and then you are almost in the position of having to be a bit unpleasant or a bit impolite, and you shrink, perhaps, from that. Maybe the nurse has already gone marching off, you know? So what are you to do? It requires a certain amount of independence to insist on receiving an answer to your question. I think doctors and nurses, perhaps nurses even more than doctors in hospitals, are psychologically conditioned into treating the patients like children. Sometimes they even use sort of baby language in talking to patients, which is quite indicative, perhaps.

Gerd Baak: I'd like to come back to drugs in relation to dying people. If my understanding is correct, I could almost consider my whole Buddhist life as preparation for the moment of my death. Thinking of what Sudhana has just said, that the application of certain drugs has spoiled his meditation practice for a while, how would that go together? You see what I'm getting at?

S: Yes. If at the time of death your mind was clouded by drugs and you didn't die in an aware state, yes, that would have a subsequent effect. On the other hand, the state of mind at the time of death is only one factor. What is of greater importance in the long run is the state of mind throughout your life; so if you've been, say, in a positive state of mind throughout your life, or for the greater part of your life, the fact that you are, say, in a clouded state of consciousness at the time of death is not going to make all that much difference. And if, on the other hand, your mind has been confused and bewildered throughout your life, the fact that you have just refused to be given drugs at the moment of death isn't really going to help very much. So it still really comes back to the general trend of your whole life and your general mental state throughout your whole life.

If you've been a persistent meditator for 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 years, I don't think it's going to make very much difference if, right at the end, you are under the influence of drugs.

Vessantara: So would you say that you have to strike a balance between, on the one side, staying aware, or as aware as possible, and on the other side not becoming so overwhelmed

with pain that it is impossible for you to maintain a positive mental state?

S: I suppose ideally that would be the solution. A lot would depend on how great was the degree of pain, because it could be that it couldn't be alleviated beyond a certain bearable point without actually clouding your mind.

[19]

Vessantara: So it's not that staying aware would have a sort of absolute value? There might even be circumstances where it might be better to have a clouded but rather more serene mind.

S: Indeed, yes. One can't rule out drugs' effect on you altogether, drugs in the sense of pain relieving drugs.

Jayamati: Bhante, could I just go back to the dream? You made a statement which I couldn't quite understand, which was that in traditional Buddhism one is not held responsible for what happens in dreams; and then you followed up by saying 'You are responsible for your dreams.'

S: Ah, in the sense that, well, you can have dreams as a result of over-eating late at night, just before going to bed; and many of your dreams are reflections of things that you've done during the day. You are responsible in that sense, inasmuch as you are responsible for what you have done during the day, you are indirectly responsible for the reflections of what you've done during the day in your dreams at night. I meant simply that. It is an indirect responsibility.

Sumana: This is going back a bit further in the discussion tonight. It's talking more or less about mental states or meditation states. I was wondering whether susceptibility, in the sense of willingness, opening up, and receptivity, whether those two are in some way useful or linked.

S: I wouldn't say that readiness and susceptibility are quite the same thing. Susceptibility suggests a sort of proneness to something, almost an organic proneness, whereas readiness is more to do with your conscious, deliberate attitude. I don't think, therefore, that one should strictly speaking talk in terms of a susceptibility, say, to the dhyanas you could speak of a susceptibility to hypnosis, or a susceptibility to alcohol, but hardly speak in terms of a susceptibility to the dhyanas, though one could speak in terms of a readiness, which would include a preparedness, for the experience of the dhyanas.

Vessantara: When we were talking about dhyanas and drug-induced experience earlier, you were saying that they had certain features in common. In terms of the Abhidhamma classification of factors present in a dhyana state, how can you distinguish between a dhyana state and, say, a positive state derived from a drug? Is the Abhidhamma classification sufficient to distinguish them?

S: I'm not sure about that, because one isn't concerned just with the actual dhyanas but with all the other positive mental events, isn't one? For instance, is faith present in a psychedelic experience? Faith is present in all positive mental events, including dhyanic ones, so is faith present, one might ask, in the psychedelic experience? What about mindfulness? I think it's rather doubtful whether mindfulness is present, at least in some, or many,

psychedelic experiences.

Vessantara: It implies that the Abhidhamma classification of the mental factors in dhyana is rather limited, not adequate, insufficient, not comprehensive.

S: That may be the case. Of course, one mustn't forget that the Abhidharma classification includes also mental states present in the hells, and it could be that some psychedelic experiences correspond to those hell-realm type of experiences. The Abhidharma represents in this respect a sort of schema; it doesn't go into much detail, and it certainly doesn't give many, or any, descriptions. It's as though all these different sort of categories have to be [20] filled in, so maybe one needs to use one's imagination a bit, and that hasn't been done, I think, in the East so far, in that way.

Vessantara: It does seem important. We usually present dhyana, as in the *Mitrata Omnibus*, or at least the earlier version, in terms of what factors are present. It seems as if we need to put more emphasis on things like positive will ...

S: This is perhaps correct, yes.

Cittapala: You say in the article that Bharati says that mysticism is to be sought because it is a skill which inures the practitioner against the vicissitudes of life, against boredom and despair. I was wondering whether actually you felt anybody had exemplified being able to do that in a successful way, for a substantial period of time.

S: I don't know whether Bharati himself has exemplified it. Perhaps he has. I can't really think of anybody doing that. He seems to be describing a rather distractive sort of state. It doesn't really seem to correspond to anything very real, one would say.

Cittapala: In which case, it seems like it's a bit of an empty dream: mysticism as an approach to life.

S: It seems to be a category without content. Perhaps that will emerge as you go more deeply into the article. Perhaps we'd better leave it there for this evening. OK: reasonably good stuff.

Side 2

14 October 1986

Vessantara: We'll start with Ratnaprabha.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, this is a question arising out of the session yesterday. Yesterday you were discussing dhyana and karma and the tradition that dhyana is a weighty positive karma. So there are two questions related to this: first of all, would it be true to say that the devas are normally in dhyana, given that it seems that they are not creating continuously weighty positive karma?

S: Yes, the traditional view is that those in the deva worlds, the so called gods, are not actually creating any karma but are simply so to speak reaping the results of previous karma.

Ratnaprabha: Well, can I just pursue that a minute? Because one normally considers the devas in the rupaloka, for example, to be in mental states corresponding to the state that one achieves that one enters dhyana in meditation. However, if dhyana is a weighty positive karma, that would imply that the devas cannot be in the same states of mind, at least not in all respects.

S: It's not really quite like that. One might say that the devas are not so much in a dhyanic state as in a world to which those who are in the kamaloka have entry through the dhyanic state. That would probably be a more correct way of putting it.

They have, as a result of having practised good deeds and, in some cases, the dhyanas in previous existences not a gross material body but a fine, or even a very fine, material body; and the fact that they possess this fine or very fine material body means that all their experience is correspondingly subtle and delicate and in that sense enjoyable, probably one shouldn't say in the strict sense that they are in dhyanic states. As I said, perhaps it is more correct to say that they inhabit worlds and possess bodies corresponding to those worlds, and that those worlds are accessible by us through the dhyanic state.

Ratnaprabha: So what elements of the dhyana we can achieve correspond to experiences in that world?

S: Say that again.

Ratnaprabha: What elements or, you know, there is a certain list of characteristics of dhyana, which of those characteristics correspond to experience in a deva world? Presumably the ones that are strictly volitional wouldn't.

S: Perhaps we should bring it right down to earth with an ordinary example. You can enter a room as a result of your volition, and when you enter that room you find yourself in the room. You might say the volition which caused you to enter the room is then suspended and you find yourself in the room together with all the other people who have entered it as a result of their volition at some time in the past, but who are not actually now exercising that volition inasmuch as they are in that room.

Ratnaprabha: So does this imply that the weighty positive karma that is associated with attaining dhyana in meditation is due to the volition that gets you into the dhyana rather than volitions which are operating while you are in dhyana?

[22]

S: You can probably introduce a distinction here, corresponding to the distinction between path and fruit in respect of the Transcendental path. There is, so to speak, a volition; having exercised that particular volition, you experience a state which is the result of the volition but which is not in itself a volition. You can sometimes see this actually working in the case of meditation, because you could say that the meditational experience has in technical terms an aspect which is samskaric, not samsaric but samskaric, and an aspect which pertains to vedana. In the case of you entering a dhyana and therefore a deva world, you are experiencing first the samskaric aspect, you could say, and then the vedana aspect or the feeling aspect. Those who are as it were already there are experiencing only the vedana-like aspect. I don't know whether the subject has been discussed in these sort of terms of your questions and my

answers in the tradition, but this would seem to be the position.

Vessantara: Can I just check, Bhante? Are you saying that, once one is as it were in dhyana, you are not at that point producing a sort of positive karma, but it is the volition that gets you into it which is producing that?

S: Ah, you have to very careful drawing lines of distinction, because you can be continuing to exercise volition and to be as it were entering the dhyana or deepening the experience of the dhyana at the same time that you may be as it were reaping the effect in the form of a particular vedana. But a point may also come when you are as it were ceasing to exercise the volition and therefore to generate karma and are simply experiencing the effect of the volition that you have exercised.

Vessantara: So would the weighty karma be the result of the volition that you made, the sort of continuing volition which was present actually in the dhyana state, with all that sort of concentration behind it?

S: Oh yes, it would include that. Yes.

Vessantara: As well as... ?

S: Well, as the volition which actually got you into that state of making t#he volition in the dhyana state, as it were.

Ratnaprabha: I have sorted out a related question which also arises out of our discussion yesterday on karma and dhyana. I think that you talked about drug induced states, for example, not containing all the mental events that correspond to dhyana, probably. I think that one you mentioned was sraddha, because sraddha is said to be present in every positive mental state. Now, as I understand it, again normally the devas are not experiencing sraddha unless they are actually on the Path, so, well, is that the case?

S: Well, this raises the question of what one means by sraddha in this particular context. If the devas are experiencing positive mental events, presumably they are also experiencing sraddha; but then what does one mean by sraddha? I don't know whether this has ever been discussed in this particular connection, but I think one can probably say, putting it very roughly, that sraddha as a positive mental event represents a kind of feeling, a positive feeling, that progress is possible, that you can not only be positive, not only experience positive mental events, but experience them more and more. That this consciousness was absent in the case of the devas, that is to say totally absent, I wouldn't like to say, because if one follows [23] tradition very often devas are well aware that there are possibilities of further and higher development. They may come in contact with a Buddha during the course of his life. For instance, some devas, according to the Pali Canon, do in any case enter the Stream.

But the question is whether an ordinary deva who doesn't enter the Stream and doesn't have contact with a Buddha does possess faith, but as I said I wouldn't like to say that he doesn't inasmuch as faith is present in all positive mental events and inasmuch as the consciousness of the possibility of further progress is probably not absent in the case of the deva. As far as I know, tradition doesn't have anything actually to say about this. One can only draw

conclusions from the material as given, unless, of course, one had the opportunity of interviewing a deva.

Vessantara: Presumably a similar discussion could be had in the case of non-Buddhists who don't have *sraddha* in the sense of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels but can have *dhyana* states if they feel there is a prospect of further development.

S: Yes, there is a sort of feeling, it may not be very developed, it may not be very clear, it may not be very conscious, that there is something more, there are further possibilities of development; and that does seem to be the essence of *sraddha*. In other words, one might even say this is going, of course, way beyond the *Abhidharma* that a positive mental event, a positive mental state by its very nature cannot as it were remain satisfied with itself, cannot remain so to speak stationary.

Cittapala: How is it, then, that devas enter this realm, as it were, or have this *vedana*, and yet also get into a sort of static state and therefore are not going beyond themselves in terms of these positive mental events?

S: Well, one is speaking of devas, so unless one has had some personal experience of devas one has to rely on what tradition says; and tradition says that the reason why the devas don't exert themselves, usually, is that the experience that they have as a result of their previous skilful activities, whether purely ethical or whether meditative, is so intensely pleasurable that their minds are overpowered by that pleasurable experience and they remain quite satisfied with it. This is something which, within the human context, I have touched on often before that if you feel happy, if everything is going your way, if in fact you are intensely happy, you don't think very much about the spiritual life. Happiness isn't a problem; you don't start asking yourself 'Why am I happy? Why should I be happy?' You usually ask 'Why should I not be happy, why should I be suffering?' So it's suffering that makes you think, rather than happiness, unfortunately. Happiness has a sort of intoxicating quality. And this is so, according to tradition, in the case of the devas above all; they only recover from that intoxication when, again according to tradition, it's too late, as it were, and they've already started falling from their deva condition.

Ratnaprabha: So would it be correct to say, then, that the mental events which are associated with *dhyana* don't necessarily sort of club together, so that the *sraddha* and the bliss are quite separate kinds of mental events, and can occur separately, devas can experience bliss without *sraddha*, and by extension hedonism isn't necessarily associated with faith?

S: I think I'd rather say that, in the case of the devas, and again, one is only drawing inferences from traditional material, the pleasurable, the blissful experience very much preponderates and any element of *sraddha* is definitely not exactly in abeyance but is quite weak.

[24]

Cittapala: Maybe I'm taking it too literally, Bhante, but would that then mean that somebody who attained to *sukha*, bliss, on the stages of the Path, was actually experiencing a different series of mental events, even though it was characterized by bliss, from a deva who is also inhabiting the corresponding world?

S: I'm not sure what you mean by a different series of mental events in this connection.

Cittapala: Well, in the sense that presumably in somebody who had managed to attain to that stage of the Path there would be *sraddha*, and there would also be other positive mental events there; but for the *deva* there wouldn't necessarily be any of those other positive mental events, but just the experience of bliss?

S: No, I think, in view of what I've said previously, it wouldn't be a question so much of an entirely different series of positive mental events, but a difference in respect of the relative proportions of those different positive mental events, with the *devas* experiencing bliss far in excess of *sraddha*. Whereas it might well be that, in the case of the person meditating or certainly entering the Stream, the *sraddha* also would be very powerful. In fact, you could even have an experience where bliss was minimal and *sraddha* was far in excess of the bliss; at least for the time being.

Ratnaprabha: I get the impression from this that *sraddha* seems to be the tendency or desire for a higher state of consciousness, in Higher Evolution terms; so ...

S: Yes, I would add to that and say not simply a desire in the sense of a wish that such a thing could be, but a tendency that implies that that higher something or other does actually exist. I would add that qualification. It's not just a wish, it is more like a conviction, though it may be quite incipient, quite vague, quite undeveloped, quite faint. It may even express itself, one could say, though perhaps I'm going a bit beyond my material here, as it were negatively, just in a vague feeling of dissatisfaction and a sense that there must be something more, not that simply it would be nice if there were something more but that there must be something more, that there is something more, if only one could get at it.

Cittapala: Bhante, does that mean, then, that this something could actually be something like the zero experience, or does it have to be something of the order of the Transcendental?

S: I think *sraddha* would represent just that conviction that there was something higher, something further, something more. I think one could only retrospectively identify it as this or that, whether the Transcendental or anything else; at that stage, in principle, so to speak, *sraddha* isn't as definite as that. Or perhaps I should say not so highly differentiated as that.

Dharmamati: Guenther translates *sraddha* as confidence, trust. Would you say that was a reasonable [rendering]?

S: I think confidence is probably rather weak. I think it doesn't do justice to the strong emotive character of *sraddha*. I have discussed this before, probably, in the seminar on the Positive Mental Events. I have referred to the tendency of some Theravada writers on Buddhism to translate *sraddha* as confidence, or even confidence based on knowledge, because they wanted to minimize the whole emotional, devotional aspect of the spiritual life.

[25]

Vessantara: Thinking, Bhante, about the importance of maintaining that *sraddha* once one is in *dhyana*, once one is getting into higher states of consciousness, where presumably your tendency is, the reason why you don't just go higher into *dhyana* is that you do get overwhelmed with pleasure, thinking back to what you were saying a few days back, would I

be right in thinking that it would be a very good idea, if you think you are in danger of getting into a dhyana state, of beforehand really impressing on your mind all this or keeping on going?

S: Yes, this is true. Yes, some people might feel it is premature, but that is a good idea, and we find in this connection that the Buddha in the Pali Canon is often represented as saying, with regard to his own dhyanic experience, that though the dhyanic experience was intensely pleasurable, 'that pleasure did not lay hold of my mind' which suggests that he was as it were detached from the dhyanic experience, detached from the bliss of it, and was therefore able to proceed further.

Jayamati: It's quite interesting, given your definition of sraddha, to think that people come along to beginners' class actually do embody sraddha to some extent, in this belief that there must be something higher; not all, but it's quite common. A phrase that one hears, working with beginners, is 'There must be something else [.. .]' and sort of looking for that.

S: Yes, indeed.

Cittapala: Does this mean, Bhante, then, that there are sort of different levels of sraddha? I suppose, previous to this discussion, I had assumed that sraddha was the emotional response to the Three Jewels which characterized somebody who was effectively Going for Refuge.

S: Well, this is true, this is sraddha in its fully formed, distinctively Buddhist form; but that sraddha, in that fully formed distinctively Buddhist form has its seed, has its origin, in this very faint feeling or conviction that there must be something more. As you approach that something more, in the case of a Buddhist, and it gradually comes more and more into view, you see it more and more clearly, more and more distinctly, then you become conscious of the Three Jewels. So, yes, that would certainly imply that there are different levels of sraddha.

Ratnaprabha: Could one perhaps correlate these levels with the levels of Going for Refuge and the levels of the Dharma Eye and so on?

S: I think one could, yes, one could.

Ratnaprabha: Would you like to speculate a little?

S: No, I think not. I think in a way it's pretty obvious.

Vessantara: Bhante, assuming that one has got into a highly concentrated state, you have said in the past that there are two ways you can go: you can just carry on deepening your concentration, or you can try to use that concentration as a basis for developing Insight. Is there something to be said for as it were making wishes from a concentrated state, if you can produce a very concentrated state of volition 'May I be able to make further progress on the Path', or 'May I stay in contact with the Sangha' or whatever it may be do you think that would have a value?

S: Well, in a way this is a traditional Mahayana practice on different levels, and of course it is known as pranidhana, which in the highest sense is one of the Bodhisattva's Paramitas. I think, in Tibetan Buddhism, making resolutions or good [26] wishes in that sense occupies in

fact quite a prominent place. I think, yes, it is a means of as it were encouraging oneself and motivating oneself, and developing energy and enthusiasm. I think one could certainly do that. In a way, the sort of punyana modana that comes at the end of the Sevenfold Puja is of that character: 'may such-and-such happen,' 'may such-and-such be the case'. Usually it is of a sort of more general import, relating to the welfare of all living beings and so on, but it can have a more individual and more personal reference: 'may I be such-and-such,' 'may I do such-and-such.'

Vessantara: And presumably that would have quite a weighty karmic effect, there would be a tendency for it to be ...

S: To the extent that it was actually a volition; but I think one has to be very careful to distinguish between a volition and a wish, and I mentioned this a few minutes ago. There is a difference between thinking 'It would be really nice if I were such-and-such,' and resolving that 'I shall be such-and-such, because it is such a good thing to be. I am afraid, in much popular Mahayana Buddhism, perhaps even in the West, pseudo-Bodhisattva-like wishful thinking is often mistaken for the real thing, for real Bodhisattva-like resolution and pranidhana.

Vessantara: So, inasmuch as forms of words matter in that sort of state, would it be better to put that sort of volition in the form of a resolution rather than a wish?

S: Yes, it probably would be, though I think it's not so much a matter of the form of words, the form of words may be unchanged, it's a question of the degree of resolution with which you utter those words or repeat them.

Sudhana: Would it be right to call them aspirational prayers?

S: Well, yes, one could call them that.

Sudhana: You aspire to a good rebirth, aspire to noble ...

S: Yes. I forget what the Tibetan word is, but it is usually, or at least sometimes, translated as 'the path of good wishes'.

Uttara: It is obviously better in action, as a practice, rather than just a wish. It would have more effect then.

S: What would be better than a wish?

Uttara: Rather than just you making the resolution, as Sudhana said, it would be better trying to act it out.

S: Well, the resolution is oriented towards action. You are trying to motivate yourself to action by means of the resolution, not that you stop with the resolution any more than you stop with the wish. The resolution should lead, sooner or later, to action.

Uttara: Because I tend to see the Sevenfold Puja like that, even though they are beautiful verses, I tend to see it more like the Eightfold Path, it has to be actually practised.

[27]

S: Well, that is true, but you can't make the transition to action immediately. You have to resolve to act. So the point that is being made is that if you make a point of resolving very strongly you are more likely, in the long run, to act.

Vessantara: Uttara, did you have a question?

Uttara: I think it's been answered. I am trying to formulate it. I think this came up today on what you said last night about the aspect of faith being present, and only being present in a Buddhist but not anybody else.

S: Did I say that?

Uttara: Well, that's how it was interpreted in the study group this morning. So I was wondering where, say, an artist who experiences, say, the second dhyana, as you have equated inspiration with the second dhyana, would an artist, depending on the artist, experience faith or would he ... ?

S: Well, in a way the question answers itself; because if you define sraddha as a positive mental event, and if an artist is experiencing positive mental events, well, he experiences faith. And if faith does imply the existence of something higher, then the artist, inasmuch as he experiences faith among his other positive mental events, also has some inkling at least of something higher, whatever that may be.

Uttara: Well, that's what I thought.

S: Well, in that case the inference was correct! But that 'something higher' intuited by the artist doesn't necessarily have a very definite form. It isn't that he has some kind of understanding, necessarily, of the Three Jewels, or anything as specific as that. And, of course, there are artists and artists, and there are degrees of experience of positive mental events and therefore degrees of experience of faith; and also artists are very complicated creatures. Sometimes they may be experiencing very positive mental events, at other times they may be experiencing very negative mental events. They can sometimes switch very rapidly from one to the other, even apparently mix them all up together.

A poet, just to take an example at random, who does seem to have had, certainly in his early poetry, a very strong intuition of something more, something higher, not limited to the concepts or the categories of the religion in which he was brought up, was Wordsworth. You find a constant intuition of something, well, in Wordsworth's case, it is not so much beyond as behind; something deeper, some other dimension, he doesn't really know what but he is very definitely aware of it there.

Uttara: I think it's in Tintern Abbey

S: Yes,

'a sense sublime,
Of something far more deeply interfused',

he says. He doesn't attempt to define it, perhaps fortunately. He doesn't, as far as I remember, speak of it in terms of God or anything of that sort. So you could say, yes, in Wordsworth faith as a positive mental event was quite strongly present.

Uttara: I think the confusion came that it was just Buddhists who experienced, say, dhyanic states and who experienced faith in that sense ...

[28]

S: No, I think this comes out quite clearly from the article. This is also according to Buddhist tradition: that the dhyanic experiences are certainly not limited to Buddhists, because you may remember, this is just as it were citing tradition or citing Scripture, the Buddha learned the technique, if that is the right word, of the rupa and arupa dhyanas from his two teachers before he gained Enlightenment, before he was the Buddha; so Buddhists have always recognized that the dhyanas are common ground, as it were, as between them and certain other traditions, perhaps not all of them, but certainly some.

Sanghapala: Bhante, have you recently been of the opinion that the arupa dhyanas may be Transcendental? (?)

S: That's quite another story; that's as it were a speculation, because one does find inconsistencies in the records as we have them with regard to these arupa dhyana states. Perhaps I'd better not go into that, because we perhaps would be getting a bit off the track. But, yes, I feel that we need perhaps to take another look at those arupa dhyanas, or at least at what the tradition says about them. It is not completely consistent.

We seem to have got quite a way away from the text. I am beginning to get a feeling that maybe some of the main points of the text, perhaps in the study groups, are not being really gone into; perhaps they are being missed. Or perhaps it is all so clear that you haven't bothered to ask any questions, I'm not sure. Anyway, we can go on.

Vessantara: Maybe we'll go on, and if you start to feel there are definite points that we aren't addressing, perhaps you could tell us.

S: For instance, a point that occurred to me yesterday was this question of conferring ontological status on an experience. I wonder whether this was thoroughly discussed and understood. I think we have passed that particular point in the article, haven't we? I was wondering whether that was really clear to everybody, whether that had been gone into sufficiently. Because, in a way, it's one of the basic points, if not the basic point, of the whole discussion. If one doesn't really clearly grasp that you miss the whole discussion.

Vessantara: I wonder if it would almost be worth your going through those few lines at the bottom of page 2 and the top of page 3 and just expounding them.

S: Where is that? On this little yellow booklet?

Vessantara: Yes, the bottom of page 2. You say: 'Yet, despite its supremacy in its own sphere, the pleasure principle affords us no access to the domain of the Reality Principle. Bharati makes it clear that, while mysticism is the intuition of numerical oneness with the Absolute, it does not follow from this that the Absolute actually exists.'

S: That's quite clear, isn't it? Perhaps it was all so clear you don't think it necessary to discuss it. Is that the case? I don't want to labour the point if it is already clear.

Sanghapala: I am just wondering whether we've got it all necessarily clear until you explain it. (Laughter.)

[29]

S: 'Yet, despite its supremacy in its own sphere,' - the sphere of one could say, dhyanic experience, one could say the sphere of pleasure itself - 'the pleasure principle affords us no access to the domain of the Reality Principle.' The fact that an experience is intensely pleasurable does not in itself tell you anything about the nature of Reality.

'Bharati makes it clear that, while mysticism is the intuition of numerical oneness with the Absolute, it does not follow from this that the Absolute actually exists.' There are many quite ordinary, everyday illustrations of this sort of thing on a very low level, even. We've talked about them at length on a number of occasions. I'll give you just one example: supposing you are having a discussion with somebody, and supposing he accuses you of becoming angry as a result of something that he has said. So you say, 'Well, I don't feel angry at all.' But he says, 'No, I feel that you are angry.' When that happens, you are investing your feeling that someone is angry with an ontological value; you are in effect saying that, because you feel he is angry, he must be angry. In other words, you are unable to distinguish between your feeling that something is so and that it actually is so. And I have found in the course of discussions people have with one another this sort of thing is happening all the time, and it can have very bad, very negative results, because sometimes if, say, you deny, none the less, despite this other person's strong feeling that you are angry with him, if you deny that he will say, 'You're just not being open with me. You are refusing to admit that you are angry. You are hiding from the fact.' One could go on quite a bit about the implications of this, practically and psychologically, but that's enough just to provide an illustration.

You can apply that to what Bharati says. Bharati makes it clear that, while mysticism is the intuition of numerical oneness, that is, mysticism consists in the feeling that things are One, Life is One, existence is One, you feel it very strongly; but the fact that you feel it so strongly does not mean that that oneness actually exists. Do you see what I mean? This is what he is getting at. The zero experience does not confer ontological status on its own content. The zero experience is this very strong, blissful experience of oneness, but that experience does not give to its own content, that is to say that feeling of oneness, any ontological status. It doesn't prove, it doesn't demonstrate, that it actually exists. This is what Bharati is getting at and what I am explaining.

What really happens is that a thought chain occurs which is felt by the mystic as meaning that he has achieved oneness with the Absolute. Perhaps the mystic has got a preconceived idea of the Absolute, so when he has this wonderful feeling that everything is One, he conveys ontological status on that, and concludes that he must be experiencing the Absolute, or that he is Enlightened, or that he is one with God etc. etc. 'From this it follows that the zero experience does not entail a specific theology or ideology or any specific type of action or inaction.' Just because it is not, so to speak, grounded in Reality itself but consists only of a feeling that Reality is of a certain nature. So this is really quite important, because it illustrates the whole point of the difference between samatha and vipassana: a samatha experience, or feelings or subjective ideas associated with samatha experience, tell you

absolutely nothing about the nature of Reality; for that, what in Buddhism is called vipassana is necessary. So the whole discussion hinges upon an understanding of this difference.

So was that all clear, or am I just labouring the point unnecessarily? I'm labouring it, uh?

[30]

Vessantara: Even if it was unnecessary, it's good to double check it.

S: I take it the word ontological didn't trip anybody up, or perhaps Ratnaprabha had explained it in his sheets? Yes; good.

Vessantara: Dharmamati, one about the zero experience.

Dharmamati: In a sense, this might have been answered, by what has been already said. If we take the zero experience as in a sense apart from the argument with Bharati, are all 'zero experiences' devoid of Insight?

S: Well, by definition, yes. It's up to you to apply the term 'zero experience' to anything you wish, but zero experience as defined by Bharati - and we haven't yet given any other definition - is of that kind.

Dharmamati: What I'm wondering is whether a so called experience of nonduality - could you label that a zero experience, or not?

S: A 'so called' experience of nonduality? Otherwise, an experience which is not an experience of nonduality but is only a feeling that you have experienced nonduality? Well, yes, that could be described as the zero experience, or an example of it. I am, by the way, quite suspicious of Bharati's list of people who have had the zero experience, even in Bharati's own sense. I don't really know whether, for instance, Arthur Koestler had this intuition of a numerical oneness with Reality; perhaps he did. He is certainly not well-known for it. I am not sure - so far as I remember, from reading Bharati's book, why there should be some doubt about Aldous Huxley.

Uttara: Maybe he should have gone to Bucke's Cosmic Consciousness, the people there.

S: Yes, right. I mean how strong does the feeling need to be? You might be in a quite good mood, just feel, well, you know, it's all one, a general feeling of oneness and harmony: does that qualify as a zero experience? How strong, how intense, how absorbing, does it have to be? Bharati doesn't go into that in his book.

Dharmamati: This is what I was trying to get to, the intensity of the experience. From what Bharati says, as you say, there doesn't seem to be any ...

S: On the other hand, he does say - I forget his exact words; I have quoted them - that it is a sort of refuge from a bleak world, a sort of only consolation. So that would suggest that he thinks of it as having quite a high degree of intensity, otherwise it could not have that sort of effect, it couldn't be a compensation for all your trials and tribulations. And I don't know that Koestler, for instance, experienced it to that degree.

Vessantara: Chakkhupala is next.

Chakkhupala: It follows, I suppose, on from Dharmamati's question. There was some confusion as to - using the terms - say one [has, not] 'a sort of experience of nonduality', [but] one has a vipassana experience, gains Insight, has an Insight experience. That Insight experience could be described in the words 'an intuition of numerical oneness with the Cosmic Absolute.' Yes?

[31]

S: Well, there wouldn't be, in accordance with Buddhist tradition, because Buddhism regards oneness as a concept and regards therefore that concept as having to be transcended. This point of view is reflected in the famous Zen story of when you reduce everything to the one, to what will you reduce the one? One mustn't stop, as it were, at the concept of oneness. Buddhism I am talking now about, say, Mahayana Buddhism wouldn't agree that Reality can in truth be characterized as one rather than many. The Buddhist term is advaya, which is 'nondual', so that term is used, apparently, to avoid speaking in terms of oneness. Not that even the term nonduality is to be taken literally, but it's less open to misunderstanding, perhaps, than the expression 'oneness'.

Chakkhupala: I suppose what I'm getting into is that some people in the study groups did have difficulty in writing off the whole idea of the zero experience, because it seemed as if perhaps one can have the genuine Insight experience which also partakes of intense bliss, is intensely pleasurable; and one might wish to use words to describe that. So if you haven't actually read the whole of the essay, and you are studying just the first part of the essay, you come to the definition given by Bharati which, in its own terms, doesn't seem that bad. It's only when you point out the inconsistencies of how he further defines the zero experience that one finds it is not in accord with Buddhism. It was that confusion I was hoping to look at. You have said that, from the Buddhist point of view, one shouldn't really call it an intuition of numerical oneness, but, using Buddhist language, could you not call it an intuition of not-twoness?

S: Bharati makes it clear that he is speaking of a feeling. Perhaps there is some confusion in his terminology, because he seems to use intuition in the sense of feeling, whereas intuition can also be used, in a way, as tantamount to Insight. If one is speaking in terms of Insight if one has an Insight into Reality - well, if one wants to talk about that, if one wants to express that, one has got to use language of some kind. What you are probably asking is whether one can legitimately use the language of oneness with regard to the 'Absolute' in the Buddhistic sense. I think the answer to that is yes and no. The Zen story makes it clear that Reality isn't one and nothing but one. It is not a oneness that excludes manyness.

I think the same thing is clear if we look at the four Jnanas embodied by the four Buddhas, because there is the samatha Jnana, which is the Jnana, the knowledge or awareness, of sameness, which you could say is much the same thing as oneness. But it isn't - this is perhaps the important point - the only way of looking at Reality, not the only way of looking at the Absolute. There is also the knowledge or awareness of particularity - what is the Sanskrit word? Pratyeksana Jnana(?), which as it were counterbalances the samatha Jnana, so that, yes, you can quite validly express your experience of or intuition of or Insight into Reality in terms of oneness, but you mustn't really think that it is oneness and nothing but oneness. You are only using the expression oneness or sameness to convey something, some hint, some inkling, of what you have experienced, and you are mindful of the fact that what you have

experienced can no less legitimately, no less correctly, be expressed in terms of manyness or particularity, as well as in terms of oneness and sameness; [not] to speak of it being expressed in terms of the other Jnanas.

So therefore I think the answer is yes, one can use the language of oneness in order to express a genuine Insight experience, provided one uses that language with full awareness of its limitations. And that would not be doing the same thing that Bharati is talking about when he speaks of this intuition or feeling of a numerical oneness. He is speaking just of a feeling, not of an Insight. Though he doesn't seem to have a inkling of the distinction that Buddhism would make between feeling in his sense and Insight in the Buddhist sense. But at least he has grasped quite clearly the point that feeling does not convey ontological status upon its own [32] content; there he is perfectly correct as far as he goes, and it is an important point.

Ratnaprabha: Could you say a little more about the distinction between a feeling and an Insight?

S: Well, perhaps we should go back just to the example I gave. You feel that somebody is angry when he says he isn't; so what is happening, then? What is the difference between your feeling that he is angry and knowing that he is angry? How can you distinguish between the two? This is something that we have to do every day of our lives, perhaps, in one way or another.

Ratnaprabha: You can illustrate it, can't you? You can show by example and prove. You know somebody's angry, surely, because they exhibit external manifestations which are always associated with anger.

S: Well, if they exhibit those manifestations; but supposing you say, to go back to the example 'Look, I'm not angry; look, I'm not speaking angrily, I don't look angry, do I?' and then the other person says, 'You're just very good at covering up, you're not honest; 'I feel' or they might even say, 'I know that you are angry' but it isn't a knowledge, it's only their feeling.

Ratnaprabha: But presumably, if they have a numerical oneness with the supposedly angry person, they would know that he wasn't angry, because they would be totally coterminous with his mind? (Laughter.)

Chakkhupala: They would feel they were.

S: So what is the difference in this sort of case, this sort of instance, between feeling and knowing?

Chakkhupala: (Laughter.) I wasn't going to answer! I was going to ask a complicated further question. Can you - perhaps you can know that another person is angry ...

S: Oh, I think you can, even if they don't admit it. I think that is possible.

Chakkhupala: That's what I was [. . .] might also have a feeling tone, perhaps he might know and feel that - do you see what I mean? That the other party is angry, and they are not conscious ...

S: Yes. The fact that that is possible does not mean that all those cases of feeling that someone is angry are cases of knowing that someone is angry, and it's that particular case that we are concerned with or that I've cited, just as an illustration.

Vessantara: Uttara is next.

Uttara: We are talking about feeling. Do you think metta could be a bridge between the feeling and the Insight?

S: Yes, metta is a highly positive mental event, and, yes, according to Buddhist tradition, those highly positive mental events, whether of the nature of metta or the dhyanas are certainly bridges or launching pads for the development of Insight; yes.

[33]

Uttara: I think I've heard you say that if one was really experiencing metta it would be coterminous with Insight.

S: I'm not sure what you mean by coterminous. Ah, no, I think I know what you're getting at. You can make the experience of metta a starting point for the development of Insight, because you can develop metta, say, towards all equally, and then you can reflect on that equality: 'After all, what is the difference between myself and others?' You see the idea that 'I am I' and 'he is he' and 'you are you' is a delusion; you develop that sort of reflection on the basis of your experience of equal metta. In that way, metta begins to merge into Insight.

Uttara: So, rather than just a feeling and then Reality, there's ...

S: Yes; it's not that you drop the metta and you start developing Insight. It's not really quite like that. There is a sort of continuity.

Sanghapala: I was wanting to answer Bhante's question but I've forgotten what the question was! But I remember the answer! It seemed to me that real communication, Bhante, is the difference between this whole question of knowing or not knowing whether a person is angry or not, whether it is a feeling or a knowing: a failure in communicating and not miscommunicating. Then [. . .] clear.

S: I would say - this is going a little off the track, because I only gave it as an illustration - that if someone feels that somebody else is angry, or is in any other state, but is quite mistaken, there are two elements to consider there. One is that the person who is claiming that he 'feels', i.e. knows, for instance, someone is angry has quite definitely got a predetermined view about the person with whom he is speaking. That predetermined view may go back a long way. And also he is not in communication with that other person. Because, if you are really in communication with another person, you could not possibly negate him to the extent of claiming - certainly claiming forcibly - that you know what he is experiencing better than he knows it himself. I think even where it may be the case, one would be very unwise and unskilful to insist upon that. Unless you know someone very well and have on the whole a good communication with them, the minute that they say, 'Well, no, I don't feel like that,' you should just accept it, and proceed from there. Then there is some hope for the communication, otherwise not. So we do know from our own experience that there is in fact a difference between just feeling something, or feeling that something is so, and really knowing that

something is so, and we can transfer that to another level entirely, that is with regard to our feeling that, say, existence is one and our actual knowledge that it is one, or Insight into the fact that it is one.

Vessantara: Just to double check: is it that because Bharati 'makes it clear that while mysticism is the intuition of numerical oneness with the Absolute it does not follow from this that the Absolute actually exists' is it from that you infer that what he is talking about is intuition in the sense of feeling rather than intuition in the sense of non rational knowledge?

S: Yes, indeed, yes. And, of course - we noticed earlier on that he speaks of the Buddha as a mystic in that sense: in other words, he is in effect denying that the Buddha or anybody else has any experience corresponding to what we call vipassana or Insight. He seems not to recognize the existence of that kind of experience at all. In other words, he limits, rightly or wrongly, mysticism to what we would call the samatha type experience. That is quite valid if you say that is the sense in which you are using the term; fair enough; nobody can quarrel with that. But I think the Buddhist quarrel with Bharati is that he seems not to recognize the whole [34] vipassana dimension of existence at all, and seems to limit the Buddha, by calling him a mystic, entirely to samatha experience. Here we begin to get to the crux, or the heart, of his book and my review of it. In other words, the discussion serves to highlight the nature of the Buddhist distinction and the importance of the Buddhist distinction between what we call samatha and what we call vipassana. Bharati seems to limit religious or spiritual experience or whatever, entirely to the samatha mode, completely ignoring or by implication denying the existence of the vipassana mode.

Ratnaprabha: I am afraid I still don't understand the distinction between a feeling and an Insight. Perhaps I just didn't follow the previous argument, but ...

S: Well, I think one can approach this by as it were consulting one's own experience and just asking oneself: 'Well, when I know something, as distinct from feeling that it is so, what is the nature of the difference between the two?'

Ratnaprabha: (pause) Well, it may be because I have had a scientific training, but I tend to think of it in terms of external science; so if I look at a flower, I say 'Well, I know that that flower is red,' not 'I feel it's red.' But what happens is I have a particular experience ...

S: No, I think you are using the word knowledge here for perceptual experience.

Ratnaprabha: Right.

S: ... because perceptual experience is something of its own nature, so to speak; because if you see red, there is no question of what you see because you see red. It is a percept, it is not a concept. Knowledge, presumably, refers to concepts, not to percepts.

Ratnaprabha: Mm.

Sudhana: I'm sorry, Bhante - doesn't knowledge ultimately pertain to perception?

S: You can have a knowledge of perception, but perception itself is not, as these terms are generally used, the same thing as knowledge - unless you are using the word knowledge in a

very loose sense indeed for any kind of experience.

Sudhana: I was thinking of thinking as the faculty, in order to aid perception.

S: I'm not sure what you mean by knowledge aiding perception.

Sudhana: Er - well, say we perceive what we perceive, if you like, through our senses, but then in order to widen our perception we think something through. Having thought it through, it widens our perception.

S: But can that be spoken of as a widening of our perception itself? What do we mean by a widening of perception? Perhaps we can have an understanding of the significance of our perception.

Sudhana: I think I'd have to go through ...

S: For instance, you perceive the colours of a picture. You just perceive the colours. But then the picture is not just a number of colours juxtaposed on canvas: they all add up to something, they represent something, you can grasp what they represent. There may be certain historical references. You can have a knowledge of [35] those historical references, so that knowledge, though based upon your perception of the colours, is quite distinct from that.

Sudhana: I think I'm using 'perception' in a different [sense].

S: Yes. With regard to knowledge from signs, here you come up against the Vajracchedika Sutra, because it clearly says that the Buddha is not to be known from signs; because the cakravartiraja has the same signs as a Buddha; so if you go by signs, in its technical sense and in the general sense, how are you to distinguish between the two?

Sudhana: Bhante, what was your original question before we went off? You were going to say 'How do you know what knowledge is?', was it?

S: Within our own experience, I think we are able to distinguish between a feeling that something is so, and knowing that it is so. All right, suppose - to give you another example - you say 'I feel quite definitely that it was last Thursday that I went out for a walk with So-and-so; I feel quite sure.' You consult your diary, and you find that it was Friday. You then know that it was Friday, even though you felt that it was Thursday. Do you see what I mean? Because maybe this links up with Ratnaprabha's sign you have left some evidence of the fact that it was Friday in the form of the record in your diary, which you could not possibly, even unconsciously, have falsified. So you correct your feeling by your knowledge. So you are able to distinguish between the two.

: I'm getting a little bit perplexed, I'm sorry.

S: You could, of course, claim that the whole thing is a hallucination, but that is to - it's like when you are playing chess and you get into a tight spot, you just overturn the board! But it isn't ...

Jayamati: (starts to speak)

S: But it isn't - just to interrupt Jayamati for a minute - Bharati's whole discussion, and the whole discussion about Bharati's discussion, depends on the fact that a feeling can in fact be distinguished from a genuine intuition or, to use the more general term, knowledge. He himself assumes that that kind of distinction is possible, when he says that mysticism is a matter of feeling.

Ratnaprabha: Oh, but surely, although he makes the distinction, in a sense he denies the existence of knowledge. At least, except perhaps in the Vedas ...

S: He does make that point, but then you might argue with him: does he know that his feeling is a feeling or does he only feel that it is a feeling? He would, I think, say that he knows that it is a feeling.

Ratnaprabha: Perhaps not if he was very careful!

S: You could say there are feelings which are feelings, and then there are feelings which you only feel are feelings. So it would still leave you with a distinction between some kind of feeling that was not knowledge, and some kind of knowledge that was not just feeling.

Ratnaprabha: So. Bhante, do you think that certainty is any more than a feeling?

[36]

S: Well, it depends how you define it. You can have a sense of certainty as a result of your feeling, which can be subsequently shown to have been quite mistaken. So certainty is a feeling, which may be adequately or inadequately based, it seems.

Padmapani: So, Bhante, what's the difference between what you have just said - a feeling is a feeling and feeling which might not be a feeling but which you think is a feeling - is that right?

S: Hm!

Padmapani: ... and what Vessantara said, which was intuitive, non rational?

S: No, I think Vessantara was talking about something different; or, at least, if I'd been using that language I would have been talking about something different. Sometimes people think that they are in love, or they feel that they are in love, but some time later they realize that they weren't actually, they were mistaken about their feeling; they felt that they felt in love, but actually they didn't feel in love, and subsequently they realize that.

Padmapani: Bhante I'm sorry to ask this question; in a way it's quite obvious how does a Buddha know he is Enlightened?

S: Well, I suppose this raises the question of what you really mean by knowledge. And it also raises the question of how you judge or assess Insight as distinct from really theoretical knowledge. I think I have said before that, as far as I can see, there is only one satisfactory criterion, and that is in altered behaviour. Because Insight is basically insight into non-self; so the only really cogent evidence that someone has had some degree of Insight is that they, in ordinary everyday life, in ordinary everyday terms, behave less selfishly than usual, or less

selfishly than before. You can't really believe that someone has had an experience of the truth of non-ego if he is just as selfish, just as greedy, just as self-centred, as before; or, at the very least, you can say that his experience has not been sufficiently strong for it to influence his behaviour. I can see no other criterion, other than the direct cognition of one, say, Enlightened mind by another Enlightened mind, which is, of course, non-demonstrable to the non-Enlightened mind. So, to the non-Enlightened mind, the only criterion is the manifestation of the [.. .] Insight in actual life and practice and behaviour. I think here one is on quite firm and quite safe ground.

Chakkhupala: [Going] back to your example of the person accused of being angry by the other person: if the one who makes the accusation does in fact know the other person to be angry, rather than just feels the other person to be angry, that knowledge is again not demonstrable and can only be seen, presumably, in retrospect?

S: I think it is demonstrable, but indirectly. It is demonstrable by his forbearing and emotionally positive treatment of the person who is denying that he is angry. If he goes on insisting, 'No, you are angry; no, you are angry,' that really demonstrates that he has only a feeling and not knowledge. If he has real knowledge and as it were insight into that other person, he will treat that other person with sympathy and forbearance.

Jayamati(?): Bhante, could we apply that as a rule of thumb, then, as a difference between knowing and feeling? If you know something, then, that would be demonstrable in the sense that it affects your action.

[37]

S: Yes, indeed. And in this particular case, your knowledge that someone was angry when he said he wasn't would not be demonstrated by your insisting that he was angry even though he isn't admitting it. That would, in fact, I would say, much more likely demonstrate that in fact you had only a feeling and not a knowledge. Because, if you knew that someone was angry, even though he didn't admit it, it would suggest a degree of empathy with that other person and therefore a degree of feeling for him and a wish, therefore, not to put him under pressure or to insult him, in a way, by directly contradicting him and virtually calling him a liar. That is not a demonstration of empathy. So you would demonstrate your knowledge that he was angry by very gentle and sympathetic treatment, not by insisting on your point as though it was important that you were right and that he has got to be shown to be wrong. And if you treated that person in that sympathetic and gentle way, in the long run, if there was a reasonable communication between you, he would come round and he would admit that actually, yes, he was feeling angry. But the more you insist that he is, in a way that suggests that you have only a feeling, the less likely he is to admit it anyway.

Jayamati: So, in terms of the reactive behaviour, it would seem from that that if you know something you are less likely to be threatened and therefore react, because of the security of the knowledge; if you are basing your reading of any situation on feeling, it is more likely to create a reaction when you seek certainty out of that feeling to be acknowledged or to be [.. .].

S: Yes, yes, indeed. I think if you just feel something to be so, rather than knowing it, you are much more likely to insist upon it. Actually, if you have any experience of people, you know it at once - a certain tone creeps into their voice when they are just insisting on their feeling

and investing their feeling with a sort of ontological status. You can pick it up quite quickly and easily.

Jayamati: Just to refer back to the half-baked question that came out yesterday in terms of subjectivity and ethics, this was the area that we were trying to reach in our discussion group: dealing with the fact that, if one is basing one's evaluation of experience upon one's subjective experience of it, then, as in this case of reactivity, you seem to set up the possibilities for an unethical way of carrying on.

S: Yes, that's true. (Brief break.) So where did we get?

Vessantara: We've been talking about knowledge and feeling. Ratnaprabha would like to pursue it a bit more.

Ratnaprabha: Do you mind if I pursue this difference between knowledge and feeling a bit further?

S: You admit there is a difference? (Laughter.)

: Game, set and match!

Ratnaprabha: You talk so far about as it were the objective way of distinguishing in terms of looking at the behaviour of the person.

S: This is with respect to Insight?

[38]

Ratnaprabha: Yes. Well, we also did mention it even in terms of a mundane experience of knowing that somebody is angry will affect your subsequent behaviour - or were you referring to Insight?

S: I was referring to an Insight experience, because someone can disguise the fact that he is feeling angry; but I doubt if you could disguise the fact that you had had an Insight experience, in the sense that it would alter your actual behaviour, your way of relating to other people and so on. Anyway, let's have the question.

Ratnaprabha: But I'm thinking of the mundane knowing as opposed to Insight. So, from a subjective point of view, I can't quite see that knowing something is any more than having a feeling which is associated with a feeling of certainty: for example, having a feeling 'I went for a walk last Friday' which is associated with a feeling of certainty which perhaps has been successively increased by you referring to certain items of evidence, like your diary.

S: I would say that that knowledge is not simply based on or the product of a feeling of certainty, but it is also based on actual evidence, in the form of the diary and so on.

Ratnaprabha: But the subjective effect of that evidence is to give rise to certain mental events, and those mental events themselves - are they distinguishable in some way from feelings?

S: They may or may not be distinguishable from feelings but, distinguishable or not, they still

arise out of evidence which has a sort of objective character. For instance, if you were asked in a court of law where you were on that particular Friday, you could produce your diary and presumably your diary would be accepted as evidence; it would be regarded as a source of valid knowledge.

Ratnaprabha: So it seems that, in a way, we are referring back to sense experience as a source of your valid knowledge?

S: Yes, we are referring back in this case to sense experience as a source of valid knowledge, and that knowledge can be communicated and there can be mutual agreement because that sense experience is mutually accessible; that is to say, I can show you the diary, you are not dependent merely on what I say is my feeling or my subjective conviction. If you doubt whether it was Thursday or Friday, I can just show you my diary and, on the basis of that, you can have the same knowledge and therefore the same certainty that I have. In other words, I have convinced you.

Ratnaprabha: It seems somehow unfortunate that one has to rely on the sense level for one's knowledge. Presumably on higher levels there is a certain degree of inter-subjectivity (S: Yes.) but in general your experience outside the sense sphere will be almost entirely a subjective experience which can't be verified in this way.

S: Well, as I've said, there are only two ways of verification. One is the direct cognition of a similarly experiencing mind, which is not demonstrable to third parties of another kind, and [the other is] the manifestation of your experience or knowledge or Insight or whatever, in your actual behaviour. I see no third means of, so to speak, demonstrating it. That is why I feel it is quite ridiculous, say, for anybody to claim to be Enlightened or to claim any degree of Insight or to advertise it, as you sometimes see is the case with certain people.

[39]

Uttara: Where would the Buddha's four confidences come in?

S: Well, the Buddha states that he has those confidences, but the fact that the Buddha states them does not in itself convey any proof. To know whether the Buddha is justified in his statement with regard to those four confidences, you either have to be a Buddha or you have to be in a position to actually observe the Buddha behaving in the way that you would expect a person having those confidences to behave. If you saw, for instance, that despite his declaration of those four confidences the Buddha was behaving in an uncertain, unsure way, you would conclude that he did not in fact possess those confidences; and vice versa.

Uttara: There is an incident in the Pali Canon where Uttara actually goes to see whether he had the marks, and he stayed with him trying to assess them.

S: The Buddha has said also, in another passage in the Pali Canon when he was asked how to know an arhant, or whether someone was an arhant or not, that it is not easy to know another person. One knows another person only after living with him for a long time; and even then, he said, it takes a wise man to know another person, not a fool.

But I think if you live with someone a long time and there is mutual confidence and sympathy, if someone says that he knows something you will be able to know that in fact he

does know it. There is no need for him to insist on the point, or to emphasize the point. There is that almost sharing or overlapping of minds.

Side 2

So, in a sense, the question of knowledge is an artificial one. There is this old couplet:

'A man convinced against his will
Remains of the same opinion still.'

Unless someone is really very honest, you can't convince him against his will: very few people are prepared to follow logic wherever it leads. So there needs to be some sort of empathy for you to be able to convey conviction to another person. So if that empathy is not there, your insistence upon your truth, even though it may be truth, is counterproductive.

Jayamati: Given that feeling is not demonstrable ...

S: Ah - not that feeling as such is not demonstrable, but if you feel that something is so in the as it were ontological sense, that feeling is no demonstration of the fact that it has that status.

Jayamati: Yes. And it won't necessarily affect behaviour?

S: Well, it will not necessarily affect behaviour in its alleged status as ontological fact. It may affect it as feeling of ontological fact!

Jayamati: I was just going to set up - ask if in fact the impression whereby the nature of feeling requiring confirmation, whereas knowledge does not require confirmation - I just wondered if that was ...

S: Confirmation by whom or under what circumstances?

Jayamati: I mean seeking confirmation; so that if it's ...

[40]

S: Ah yes, subjectively.

Jayamati: If it's a feeling it seeks confirmation subjectively to quantify it or make it a little more certain; because knowledge doesn't have the same inbuilt ...

S: I would even go to the extent to saying that real knowledge seeks refutation.

Jayamati: Refutation?

S: Yes; because if you are really concerned for truth, you will be very concerned to consider all the evidence against what you think is the truth. You will not be seeking for confirmation. This relates to Karl Popper's - what does he call it?

Ratnaprabha: Falsification principle.

S: Yes, falsification principle - that if you have a hypothesis you shouldn't look around for instances that prove it, you just have to find one instance that disproves it. If you can find no instance that disproves it, your hypothesis is likely to be true. So if you are genuinely in search of truth you should be looking for what disproves your hypothesis. If you, for instance, believe in rebirth, don't go looking for evidence supporting your belief in rebirth; go looking for evidence which tends against your belief in rebirth, and examine that and see whether there is anything in it. This is the sign of one who is really looking for the truth and not really for confirmation of what he already believes. This is why I say in *Peace is a Fire* - I am paraphrasing myself now - that if you go looking for proofs of the existence of God you have already admitted that God doesn't exist!

Jayamati: Sorry, Bhante, just one final word on that. Would you then say that this idea that feeling seeks confirmation is current(?) I mean is ...

S: I think it can be said broadly that feeling, in the sense that we have been using the term in this discussion, does tend by its nature to seek confirmation, which means confirmation from other people; and is insistent by nature.

Jayamati: I pursued it because I am interested in the dangers inherent in communication that is too reliant on feeling, or feelings - what Bharati calls intuitions. Valid as they are, if it gets too reliant it just seems to break down the possibility of healthy disagreement.

S: It breaks down the possibility of communication.

Jayamati: ... of communication; yes, right.

Gerd Baak: Going back to Karl Popper: taking the fact that verification is not possible, is it true that all conceptual forms in which the Dharma is expressed are not to be falsified? That one can't falsify any conceptual expressions of the Dharma?

S: I don't think, logically, one can say that something cannot be falsified. I won't be sure about this; I think I'd need to think about it a bit more. I think probably what one could say is that a certain principle or statement has not so far been falsified; but I think, subject to further reflection, that you cannot say that any particular principle cannot be falsified, because that would imply a knowledge which ex hypothesis you don't already have. So I think I would say, with regard to the principles of Buddhism - which are said to be sanathana(?), one mustn't forget - eternal - that they have not so far been falsified! For instance, the teaching [41] that everything is impermanent; it has not so far been falsified. I think, though, probably, it would be incorrect to say that it could not be falsified, because that would be tantamount to claiming omniscience. But I think we can safely say it has not as yet been falsified, though perhaps, if we want to be real Buddhists in the best sense, we should be open to the possibility that it might be falsified one day; or perhaps I should be more precise: that all conditioned things are impermanent - because unconditioned things aren't.

This is one of the secrets of the Buddhist's tolerance. If his formulations are challenged, he doesn't mind stopping and thinking, 'Maybe there is something in that,' whereas the orthodox Christian or Muslim very often can't adopt that sort of attitude. Of course, admittedly, some Buddhists aren't so truly Buddhistic as they should be in this respect, but I think that on the whole Buddhists are far better in this respect than followers of other religions. They are

prepared to listen to criticism of their religion, even of its fundamentals, without reacting. There is this famous story - it is a true story of the Christian monk; I think it was a Jesuit priest, actually, who reached Lhasa. I think it was in either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. And he settled there for a while and the Dalai Lama gave him a place to stay, he learned Tibetan and he studied Buddhism, and in the end he produced a book refuting Buddhism. And all the Tibetan monks in Lhasa were very interested; there was a stream of visitors saying, 'Could we please borrow your book? We'd like to read your book.' No reaction at all, just interest to see 'What sort of arguments has he produced? What has he got to say? How are we going to reply to him?' It was all good fun. But you can imagine what would have happened if a Tibetan lama of that time had gone to Rome and studied Catholicism and produced a book refuting Christianity! But that is the Buddhist [attitude]: 'Let's listen to the point of view, let's hear the argument, let's think about it, let's discuss it, let's try to arrive at the truth.'

Sudhana: You said that if someone is Enlightened - or words to that effect - it would be followed by a kind of activity that has changed, a sort of Enlightened activity or behaviour, the person would be changed. That suggests that an emotional change has taken place in the person before he has changed his behaviour.

S: Well, to the extent that one can distinguish emotion and behaviour, yes. There will have been an inner change before there is manifested an outer change, yes.

Sudhana: Which would suggest that, preceding the emotional change, there would be a kind of perception.

S: Well, yes, in traditional Buddhist terms, the Enlightened person has seen the truth; that transforms his entire inner nature and that inner transformation is manifested in an external transformation.

Sudhana: Would it be that Bharati was thinking of a sort of jump in the perception altogether, and by feeling trying to change the emotion, as it were, but not quite somehow ...

S: I don't get the impression he was trying to do anything of that sort. He seems to have just had the limited field of reference. But though limited - though he sees only within that limited field of reference - up to a point he does see quite clearly; he does see quite clearly that what a Buddhist would call a samatha-type experience does not change behaviour, at least not change it permanently, not modify it permanently. So therefore the mystic can be a Buddha or he can be a stinker, they are both equally mystics. Yes; we can accept that.

[42]

Sudhana: So there would have had to have been perception taking place for the emotions to change in order for that ...

S: Well, you are using the word perception, which is a bit ambiguous. There will have to have been, in Buddhist terminology, on the basis of the samatha experience, an experience of Insight before there can be any radical change in the individual himself and in his behaviour.

Jayamati: I was interested in the comment you just passed that the Muslim and the Christian might - I'm not quoting you accurately, but - react and feel threatened when their views had

been challenged or questioned, as opposed to the lamas you cited in Lhasa. Again, following this theme through, would this imply, then, that the teachings of Islam and Christianity appeal more directly to feeling [while] in the Buddhist case [the teachings] would appeal more to knowledge, and because of that you get that kind of reaction?

S: I think one could, very broadly, make that distinction; not that there isn't feeling in Buddhism and not that there isn't knowledge in these other religions, but it would seem that, yes, the appeal in Buddhism, at least, the initial appeal, is much more to understanding, intelligence, reason; whereas in the case of the theistic religions the appeal is much more to feelings of one kind and another. I think that, though it is a very broad generalization, it is none the less quite valid.

Jayamati: Because there is a moral, in that even the [. . .] teaching of Dharma, aren't - one is very clear that one is not in a sense trading on feeling or inducing certain feelings in excess of that path of knowledge. (?)

S: Another interesting point is that I have found, in the East, that Buddhist lay people are generally a bit less tolerant than the Buddhist monks. The monks usually have a better knowledge of the Dharma, but in the case of the lay people they generally have not such a good knowledge but they have got quite a strong feeling, a sort of devotional feeling; so you can upset them much more easily than the monks. The monks usually are quite imperturbable in the face of any criticism with a few exceptions. The lay people are not quite so. Presumably, that is because of the relative predominance, in their case, of feeling over knowledge.

For instance, in Sri Lanka, fairly recently, there was a very famous scholar called A. P. Buddhadatta Mahathera, and he was well known to be a Pudgalavadin; though he was born and brought up as a Theravadin, as a result of his study of the Pali Canon - and he was one of the best scholars of his time - he concluded that the Pudgalavadin position represented what the Buddha really taught. But no one bothered; he was never persecuted, nothing untoward happened to him. It was just known, well, another little quirk of this particular bhikkhu was that he was a Pudgalavadin; well, so what?

Also, in this connection - it's a little bit off the track but I'll make the point - it is rather interesting the response that Subhuti's first book met with. In that book, Buddhism for Today, he has criticized all sorts of points of view and attitudes, either implicitly or explicitly, but the two criticisms that people - by which I mean many Buddhists - have reacted to most strongly have been his criticism of the family and his criticism of Christianity, which is rather interesting. It seems you can criticize any of the doctrines of Buddhism the anatta doctrine, the sunyata doctrine - Western Buddhists don't seem to bother, but if you criticize the family, or if you criticize Christianity, they get quite upset. So what does that mean? (this is just by the way). It suggests that a lot of their emotional energy is still invested in those two great institutions, and that [43] much emotional energy is involved in the doctrines of Buddhism. Anyway, that's by the by. How are we getting on with these actual questions?

Vessantara: We've done three out of seven.

S: Ah. Perhaps we'll have one more, then. Or there was a subsidiary question, I think?

Vessantara: Not from myself. Sanghapala.

Sanghapala: Just a comment, Bhante, on the point you have just made. When the criticism [appeared] of Subhuti's book, we were handing it around the centre team for a laugh it was mostly Order Members and also it was seen by some Friends, i.e. what we called regulars up till two days ago! The Friends [. . .] were quite annoyed. And I realized that was the response - we found it quite amusing and ...

S: Well, one would expect that, wouldn't one? A difference of response as between Order Members, Mitras and Friends. Most Order Members aren't unduly disturbed if one criticizes the family; even if they've got families of their own, they don't seem to mind at all!

Sanghapala: Bhante, this was criticism of Subhuti and the Western Buddhist Order, so it was the newspaper cutting that was criticizing [a letter in?] The Guardian was criticizing Subhuti and the book, and there was comment within the Order, it was a bit of a joke really, and with Friends they were actually incensed that their institution, the FWBO, should come under such criticism.

S: I think one could look at that in two ways. One should take criticism seriously. I think one would be quite wrong to regard outside criticism as a bit of a joke, because that might mean that you had the wrong sort of security; because one should always be open to the possibility that the criticism coming from outside has some point in it or some validity at least, however slight or however distorted. It's all right to dismiss it after examining it carefully, but we have to be very careful we don't dismiss criticism before we've examined it. It might be - I'm only suggesting this - that one or two Order Members might take such criticism a bit too lightly - do you see what I mean - as distinct from taking it objectively? And, in the case of some of the Friends, they may not have just been reacting in the ordinary sense, they may have genuinely felt 'This is really quite unfortunate that the FWBO should have been criticized so unfairly,' which would perhaps prejudice it in the eyes of people who could otherwise have benefited from it; and that would be a serious matter. So I think one has perhaps to recognize that there are different shades of reaction or response in this sort of way. Perhaps one or two Order Members took it a bit too lightly, and perhaps some Friends were right in taking it a bit seriously.

Vessantara: A question from Duncan, I think?

Duncan Steen: No, I don't think so.

S: That was a quick one.

Vessantara: ... one about Bharati's statements about hierarchy undermining his position?

[44]

Ratnaprabha: No, it was a question from Paul, but I've got it here because Paul has [. . .] In Bharati's article, he talks about the mystic arranging his deeds and thoughts in a hierarchy, with the zero experience at the top and the rest in a descending scale of importance below; and you suggest that this concession undermines his whole position. When we discussed this in the study group, we weren't quite sure exactly how this concession undermined his whole position.

S: Yes, perhaps I'll touch on it just briefly. I think I've mentioned at some point - I don't know whether you've come to it yet - that he regards bliss as bliss - have you come to that point - that he doesn't distinguish, say, between sexual experience and mystical experience per se because both are bliss? So in that sense bliss is just bliss, and apparently all blissful experiences are equal. But if you envisage a hierarchy of blissful experiences, well, that is a quite contradictory position; and, apart from it being a contradictory position, the fact that you are able to distinguish between degrees of bliss would seem to introduce an objective principle of evaluation which invalidates the purely subjective feeling criterion for the mystical experience.

Ratnaprabha: So does this mean that, in order to produce an evaluative scale, one would have to have assigned an ontological status to one's experience?

S: Yes, if one made a distinction between them other than the fact that they were blissful, which is what he seems to do. Because he says that, inasmuch as they are all blissful, they are equal; but none the less he introduces a hierarchy of those blissful experiences. So he could not have done that without introducing - on his own premises - a principle which was not simply a feeling principle.

Ratnaprabha: I'm sorry, I don't quite understand that. Can you not say that certain experiences are more blissful than others, and thereby arrange them in a hierarchy, without having any ontological basis for that at all? - just say that ...

S: Yes, you can certainly do that, but he seems not to do that. He seems to equate all experiences inasmuch as they are blissful; at the same time, he seems to posit a hierarchy of those experiences, the hierarchy being in a sense objective.

Ratnaprabha: I wonder if that was the point you were trying to make at this point in the article, though? Because you don't mention the fact of him regarding all the experiences as equally blissful until after you have said he has undermined his position through this hierarchy. I wonder if perhaps there was another point you were trying to bring out.

S: Not that I recollect, no.

Ratnaprabha: You have only just been talking about the zero experience not conferring ontological status on its own content, and you have - or Bharati has - defined the zero experience, and you go on to say it doesn't entail any specific theology or ideology nor change the mystic; and then it's very soon after that that you say: 'He does, however, concede that the mystic arranges the deeds and thoughts in a hierarchy, with the zero experience at the top,' and you say that this undermines his whole position.

S: Why should the mystic arrange his experiences in a hierarchy, because he has only got blissful experiences, if they are all as it were the same? He seems to regard the blissful experiences as being merely blissful. So if they are merely [45] blissful, then what is the principle of differentiation, if you come to organize them into a hierarchy? I think this is what I'm getting at. In other words, I think I am trying to say that he can't help some sort of ontological reference creeping in.

Vessantara: They seem to contain a value judgement now, don't they?

S: Yes. Supposing you say that one kind of blissful experience is higher than another; well, even if one is more blissful than another, how can you evaluate it as higher because it is more blissful, without a principle of evaluation other than bliss itself?

: Or even, I think, in the case of Bharati's argument, what he seems to be suggesting is that blissful experience becomes the zenith of the sum total of all experiences, so that places 'bliss', as opposed to any other feeling, at the top. That immediately implies a value judgement.

S: Yes, one could look at it like that.

: It is worth something more than not being blissful, for example. That's the point I wanted to ...

S: Yes. Why should something which is more blissful than something else, one might argue, be more valuable?

Ratnaprabha: Isn't it more just a pragmatic criterion? If one has decided that bliss is it, is the good, you have decided on that because you are a hedonist. Then, surely, you would put the most blissful experience at the top, and the least at the bottom, without any ontological analysis at all.

S: But what makes the hedonist a hedonist, one might say? Is a hedonist a hedonist before he decides that pleasure is the most important thing? Or, if you say he is a hedonist first and then as it were rationalizes that, the mere concept of rationalization implies a sort of objective criterion. Anyway, shall we sleep on that one, and see whether any further answers come up? All right, then.

[46]

Tape 4

6 October

Vessantara: This has been our penultimate day's study on Hedonism and the Spiritual Life. We'll start with Paul.

Paul Tozer: I've got a question which is in four parts. In the lecture 'The Path of Regular and Irregular Steps' you talked about how a person could raise himself to the level of Reality by a force of will. I've got a quote from it. You said: 'By sheer force of the egoistic will, one may succeed in holding oneself just for an instant at a level of concentration where one gets a glimpse even of the Perfection of Wisdom, even of the Void.' But you can't hold yourself at that level. So my first question is: Is this the sort of Perfect Vision experience which can start you off on the Path, on the spiritual life?

S: I think I have mentioned before that there is insight with a small i and Insight with a capital I. I think it is quite certain that, by sheer force of will, you can sustain yourself at a level of concentration just for an instant where you do get a glimpse or experience of insight with a small i. I wouldn't like to say that you definitely couldn't get, under those circumstances, or in that way, a glimpse or experience of Insight with a capital I; but I would consider it extremely

unlikely. As I said, I think, a few evenings ago, I find it quite impossible to exclude any human possibility, but when that possibility is very, very rare and very exceptional, one must be very careful not to build any sort of generalization on it; much less still to take it as some sort of norm for oneself.

Paul Tozer: But, presumably, this sort of experience could, though it is not real Insight, be the thing that starts you off on the spiritual track?

S: Well, again I say I don't want to exclude any possibility of human experience, but if that could happen, it would happen so rarely and under such unusual circumstances, that probably, from all practical points of view, it is of no relevance. In other words, one shouldn't take it as giving any sort of guidance to oneself personally and one's own spiritual life, in the sense of thinking, well, you might as well just make that sort of effort and try to develop Insight in that sort of way. Do you see what I mean?

Paul Tozer: Yes.

Ratnaprabha: I think, when we were discussing this in our study group, we were thinking of possibly some similar experience, not necessarily attained so much by forcible act of will, but of the nature you talk about in the first of the 'Noble Eightfold Path' series of lectures, which I think people sometimes call the Path of Vision Experience, where, through a bereavement, for example, or some shock, or something of that sort, you have a very profound insight with a small i, and it is this that makes you decide to search for real meaning in your life, and in that sense, perhaps, starts you on the spiritual path.

S: Yes, because bereavement or something of that sort is something which happens to you, whereas the question was about an actual effort of will. So that is rather a different matter. But certainly experiences that befall you can have a quite profound effect.

Paul Tozer: That does rather undermine the rest of the question, really.

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S: Well, let's have it, anyway.

Paul Tozer: Well, the next part of the question was: could you continue to use this experience as a reference point and to derive inspiration?

S: I think in practice - just going from any of these quite rare and almost unheard of experiences - it would be very difficult; because, if you'd only sustained the concentration by an effort of will, just for an instant, and had the barest glimpse, I think it would be very difficult for you even to remember that, to the extent that would make it possible for you to make it any such point of reference.

Paul Tozer: Thirdly: does this experience confer ontological status on its own content?

S: Does it confer ... ? Well, it depends whether it's insight with a small i or a capital I, so to speak. If it is Insight with a capital I, the experience is of such a nature that it discloses Reality. So one could say, using the language which is used in this article and which Bharati uses, that ontological content is conferred on it; not that it is conferred in the literal sense, but

the experience itself is of such a nature that it possesses, we may say, an ontological status or ontological value.

Paul Tozer: But that would only - you are saying that it only confers ontological status on to its content if it is Insight with a capital I.

S: Yes.

Paul Tozer: ... not if it's insight with a small i, but ...

S: No. You could actually, if it was insight with a small i, think of it as possessing ontological status, but that would be quite another matter. It would not actually possess it for you as a matter of your personal experience.

Padmapani: Could you explain that a bit more? I don't quite understand. It wouldn't be part of your experience, did you say?

S: Mm; because there is a difference between insight with a small i and Insight with a capital I. In the case of insight with a small i, you frame or you form a concept about Reality, as you think - though at that stage, so to speak, Reality itself is only a concept - but you don't have any actual, direct personal access to or experience of Reality. Do you see what I mean? So therefore your insight is not Insight with a capital I.

Paul Tozer: Do you think there is a difference between this insight with a small i and what Bharati is talking about, the zero experience?

S: There may be a connection inasmuch as, in connection with what he calls the zero experience, various trains of thought may arise, and some of those trains of thought may be of the nature of insight with a small i. I think we did go into that, didn't we, a couple of evenings ago?

Paul Tozer: Yes, but I think at the time you said that there was no case for [calling it] a vipassana or Insight experience as such. You didn't think it was possible ...

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S: No; what I said was that it would not be wrong, it would not be illegitimate to think of Absolute Reality in terms of numerical oneness, but one has to be aware that it was a way of speaking about Reality, and one was not to think that Reality was numerically one and nothing but one. And I referred to the samatha jnana and the praksa [...] (?) jnana in this connection, didn't I?

It is perhaps not easy to draw the actual line of theoretical distinction between what I've called insight with a small i and what I've called Insight with a capital I, because in a sense the conceptual content is the same. The only way, from a practical point of view, in which one can see any difference, or the only way in which one can determine whether the insight in question has a capital I or a small i only, is by observing its effects on one's individuality, on one's behaviour and so on. Otherwise you may not be sure yourself. You may have a quite powerful, a quite overwhelming experience, you may for the moment sort of see or understand something, but whether it's just an intellectual understanding, just a conceptual

understanding, just insight with a small i of a quite intense nature, or whether you have really broken through and it's Insight with a capital I, you may not know until you start observing its effects on your own character, your own behaviour, your whole being; and that may take some time.

s that all the questions?

Paul Tozer: Well, no, the fourth part I think you have just answered. It was: could this experience be a zero experience as initially described by Bharati? I think that's what I was asking.

S: It's not so much a question of whether it could be a zero experience; because, according to Bharati, the zero experience is simply a matter of feeling. Vipassana experience cannot be just a matter of feeling, inasmuch as it does have a genuine ontological content. But one could say that the terms which Bharati uses to describe the zero experience, namely that it is a feeling of numerical oneness, could be used to explain at least one aspect of the Insight experience, though obviously it would not in that case be just a feeling, but an actual Insight experience; namely, you could speak of it in terms of oneness, provided you qualified that statement sufficiently and didn't take it too literally, and didn't make it a basis for attachment.

Paul Tozer: So do you think, Bhante, that when he says a stinker can remain a stinker, he means that - well, I'm thinking that if one falls from that position or that small insight which one has experienced but one doesn't have a vehicle to work out one's vision in a way a Path of Transformation then you will fall from that position and will remain a stinker, whereas you might not actually be a stinker if you ...

S: I don't think he thinks in terms of one being a stinker on falling from that experience, but he believes it's possible for you to be a stinker while having the experience; because it is only a matter of feeling. And he says quite clearly that it doesn't make any difference; all sorts of people can have the zero experience as defined by him, by having recourse to various hedonistic methods. His point of view is rather peculiar, actually. You are probably finding it quite difficult to conceive of it. Yes, it is really a quite weird point of view. It takes a little getting used to.

Sudhana(?): Bhante, in the 60s you talked about a lot of people taking drugs ...

S: Well, in the 60s a lot of people did take drugs. I'm not sure how much I talked about it!

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: Do you think their various experiences helped to set up the Movement in the early days? In other words, it gave them a certain vision which actually helped them?

S: I think I have said that some people who had drug experiences - and this applies not only to those who came into contact with the FWBO but also to others had an experience of an altered state of consciousness. What particular way it was altered we need not go into, because different people's states of consciousness were altered in all sorts of different ways; but at least they came to understand that the state of consciousness which you normally experience wasn't the only one, that there were others. So this gave them a rather broader conception of the nature of mind, and even made them think of the possibility of other modes of existence, and in that way became a sort of introduction to the spiritual life.

: Is that what you meant when you said the FWBO took advantage of that period?

S: I'm not sure what I was referring to then. I suppose, thinking back, if one did meet someone who had reached this particular point, then one said, 'Well, what you need to do is to put your experience on a much firmer basis and to try to achieve through meditation, based upon an ethical life, something more than you have as yet experienced. Of course, if one thinks of it, it's really quite ridiculous that you need to take something like LSD to be convinced that there are other modes of consciousness possible, open to you; because what about your dreams? Your dreams tell you exactly the same story. Some people's dreams are more vivid and powerful than other people's LSD experiences. I would say, if you had to take LSD to be convinced that there were other states of consciousness apart from your normal waking one, you were probably rather obtuse! Because every day, every night, we are having - well, some people have a very rich and wonderful dream life, so doesn't this tell you something? Of course, there were quite a few people whose lives were wrecked by drugs, including LSD. One mustn't forget that. And perhaps some people who started off with some sense of spiritual life, some sensitivity to it or some awareness of it, lost that on account of their having recourse to drugs.

I sometimes used to tell the story in this connection of how the Chinese discovered roast pork. (Laughter.) I thought everybody knew that story. (Voices: No.) Well, apparently what happened - in ancient China there was a man who ate pigs - apparently in those days they ate the poor creatures raw. It was in very primitive times. But anyway, it so happened that there was a fire; the farmhouse was burned down, the pigsty was burned down, so raking around among the ruins the farmer came across the half-charred body of a pig. And he thought, 'Well, it's a pity to waste a good pig, there are still bits and pieces left,' so he ate some of these bits and pieces and to cut a long story short that's how they discovered roast pork! So what happened after that was that all his friends and neighbours to whom he imparted this discovery started burning down their farmhouses! (Laughter.) to get roast pork! So I used to say, well, taking LSD to get a mystical experience is rather like burning down the farmhouse to get roast pork; there is a much better way of doing it, namely doing meditation. So I think, though it may well be the case that some people were made to think in terms of spiritual life as a result to some extent of taking drugs, one mustn't forget that that didn't always happen, and there were many others on whom drugs had a very different effect.

Cittapala: So can you see any justification for advocating the use of such drugs as LSD to aid people in their quest for the spiritual life?

[50]

S: I've known it hinder people. I knew somebody once who had had - I think I mentioned him the other day - an experience of what he felt was the Clear Light of the Void as a result of taking LSD under medical supervision; but as a result of that he was quite unable to practise meditation, because the returns, the short term returns from meditation were so meagre as compared with that particular experience [that] he just wasn't interested in meditation. So in a way that experience prevented him from actually getting on to the spiritual path.

Again, you see, I am not excluding any human possibility, but I am at the same time not actually, specifically, recommending anything in this case. If somebody comes to me and says, well, as a result of taking LSD I did get on to the spiritual path, well, fair enough; I am not going to deny that that happened in their case. But that doesn't mean that I am going to

generalize from that, even to the point of saying it might be a good idea in some cases for people to take LSD to help them get on to the spiritual path; because you can imagine how that might be taken, in the wrong sort of way.

Cittapala: Given that a number of people had strong visionary experiences with LSD and subsequently referred to those as - I'm not quite sure what the right word is: almost incitements, to greater efforts in their pursuit of the spiritual path, do you think there can be any ...

S: Well, did that happen? Look at someone like Alan Watts, or like Leary; did they get very far on the spiritual path? I met Alan Watts, for instance, not very long before he died. By that time he had become an alcoholic, and his hands were like this. I'm not sure about Leary; what happened to him? And what about David Cooper, what happened to him? He ended up in rather a mess.

Sanghapala: Kerouac ended up in a mess as well.

S: But anyway, what actually is one trying to establish? Because I have said that I exclude no human possibility, so I think probably it's best to leave it there, otherwise one appears to be in the position almost of recommending a particular course. To give you, for instance, a parallel example, because this is something which comes up from time to time. Take the example of abortion. Somebody might ask: should I have an abortion? All right, the answer is no, from the Buddhist point of view. But supposing somebody has had an abortion, it may be years ago, and then asks you, well, is it possible for me to make spiritual progress? So one might say, well, yes. But supposing, again, somebody asks you, well, I'm thinking of having an abortion; could I still make spiritual progress after that? Do you see what I mean? So if you've taken LSD, I would say OK, you can still make spiritual progress; but that doesn't mean I'm going to say, well, if you take LSD, you can still make spiritual progress.

Padmapani: Bhante, do you think the reason why people did take a lot of drugs [was that] there wasn't any basis in society for them to sustain that experience? What I'm trying to say is that there was no WBO, there was no FWBO, and ...

S: To what experience are you referring?

Padmapani: The drug experience. What I mean is, people were looking, they were seeking for something, and they took drugs and they had an experience.

S: Well, that's true of some people; I'm not so sure that it was true of all, or even of many. Some people, I think, just took casually, they just took it because other people were taking it, it was the thing to do and they did it at parties. I [51] think a lot of people just didn't think very seriously about it at all, especially very young people. That was my experience and my observation. I think very few people actually took it in a spirit of hoping that it might put them in contact with some higher dimension or higher reality. I think a lot of people, to the best of my recollection, certainly quite a few that I knew, took it even, I would say, quite frivolously. But also one must be careful not to commit that old logical error of 'after, therefore because of'. Anyway, let's pass on.

Ratnaprabha: This is actually returning more to Paul's original question, and away from the drug [experience], but in our discussion, when this question arose in the group, we were talking about, as I say, what I think you called the Path of Vision experience that somebody has, that is these profound experiences that people may have that do give them the impetus to look for something and starts them on the spiritual path. And we discussed a little bit Bucke's book called Cosmic Consciousness. Now the experiences that Bucke recounts there - in fact, usually, he uses the actual words of the people who have had them - do seem, in this description at least, to be very similar to Bharati's so-called zero experience. Would you agree with that, before I go any further?

S: I am not sure. I remember - well, I haven't read Bucke's book for many years - that the experiences were of quite a wide variety. Some were very striking, others were comparatively trivial. So I don't know, going by my recollection, I'm not sure that I could generalize in that way. I'm not sure that they all did have an experience of numerical oneness. Some experiences were experiences of brilliant light, for instance; others were experiences of peace.

Ratnaprabha: Bucke does make a generalization at the beginning of the book, where he sort of tries to list the common attributes of the experiences; and some sort of vague feeling of cosmic unity seems to be one that he feels is there in all the strongest experiences. So my own feeling from the book was that it seemed to be something rather similar, at least, to what Bharati is talking about in terms of Bharati's original description, although not, of course, necessarily in terms of what Bharati says later.

So what we wondered from this was whether Bharati was quite simply wrong in saying that the zero experience - that is, an experience which one calls numerical oneness - usually doesn't really change one, because the experiences recounted in Bucke's book do seem to have wrought certain changes on the people involved. It seems to have marked a watershed in their lives, usually.

S: Well, there are several points to make here. First of all, as I've said, numerical oneness can be a legitimate way of actually describing a transcendental experience, under certain conditions. Also, one can be changed quite considerably even by a strong experience of the samatha type, as a Buddhist would say. The point in question was the nature of the change, how deep or how far it went, whether it was a change, so to speak, in your whole ego structure, even a dismantling, in effect, of your whole ego structure. So you could have a samatha experience which could quite impress you and could make you perhaps a much happier and a much nicer person; but if it was not an Insight experience, you would not be transformed, in the sense of your ego so to speak being at least partly dismantled, as I've put it: your ego would simply have been expanded or refined.

So I don't exclude the possibility that some of the people whose experiences are contained in Bucke's book had an experience of genuine Insight.

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Ratnaprabha: One person he mentions is the Buddha, so ...

S: Well, he mentions, for instance, Walt Whitman, doesn't he? who is perhaps rather a marginal case, and quite a few other sort of anonymous people.

Ratnaprabha: But for Bucke Walt Whitman is his archetypal example of cosmic consciousness. He is the one that impressed Bucke most, presumably because he met him, I think.

S: Well, no doubt if you meet someone personally, that makes an impression on you which it is difficult to get from the written word. I think Bucke uses the expression 'oceanic consciousness', doesn't he? A sensation of sort of losing yourself in something greater, a sort of 'dewdrop slipping into the shining sea'. Anyway, what was the actual question?

Ratnaprabha: Well, we were getting quite impatient with Bharati, because we felt that a lot of the points he was making were irrelevant, in the sense that - at least, judging by people's individual experiences of something like the zero experience, and the ones that Bucke recounts, it seems that it is not just a feeling that has no strong effect on people, but a profound experience in a lot of cases that does alter their lives: not necessarily in the sense of Insight but in a sense of, as you say, making them happier and nicer people.

S: Well, one mustn't forget that Bharati does say quite distinctly that he is discussing a feeling of numerical oneness, and he makes it quite clear that it is only a feeling. So he automatically precludes any such possibility of a vipassana type experience, whether of the Buddhist type or even of something of that sort in the sort of terms that Bucke discusses.

Ratnaprabha: I think that's why we were impatient with him, because we felt that if these were mere feelings he was restricting his attention to a relatively insignificant class of experiences, and the more interesting ones to go into would be those that really did change people.

S: Well, you see his general point of view. He is interested in the hedonic; he is interested in hedonism, and he is concerned to show, therefore, that mysticism is essentially hedonic - even though that lands him into certain contradictions with regard, say, to the Indian ascetic tradition and so on. But his whole tendency is towards the hedonic. And he believes, of course, that in India, and no doubt in the West, there is a sort of prejudice against the hedonic, a prejudice against pleasure, and he is concerned to emphasize that. He no doubt over-emphasises it, but, as I have mentioned at the end of the article, even his over-emphasis is quite useful as perhaps correcting a tendency in the other direction. And simply that euphoria is not the same thing as Insight. Bharati says there is just euphoria; there is no such thing as Insight. The Buddhist doesn't deny euphoria, but he insists that there is also such a thing as Insight. He might even go so far as to say that euphoria is an integral part of Insight.

Ratnaprabha: This is about the levels of bliss, or even the levels of the Spiral Path up to concentration, and whether there are any qualitative changes that occur, any qualitative gradations that occur in this process. Bharati clearly says that there are merely quantitative changes, but I wondered whether ...

S: In a sense, he doesn't even say that, but anyway, let that pass.

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Ratnaprabha: If we consider the twelve positive nidanas and compare, for example, joy, pramodya with sukha, which is much higher up, it would seem that the second one is a non-sensual experience of bliss which seems to be something quite distinct from the first one,

the pre-dhyanic experience of joy; and I wonder if one could even go so far as to say that there was a genuine qualitative difference between the two?

S: There has, of course, been much discussion in all sorts of contexts about quantitative change versus qualitative change. I think in this connection one has to be quite clear what one means by a qualitative change as distinct from a quantitative change. I think one needs to get that clear first, or even to ask whether that is a valid distinction. For instance, supposing you have a good meal, you enjoy that good meal; it is an experience of pleasure. All right, you go and meditate, you enjoy that, it's a pleasurable experience. So is the pleasure of the meditation experience simply greater than the pleasure that you had eating your meal, or is it a different kind of pleasure? Is it qualitatively different? Or does the distinction not really amount to a difference? We all know that the experience of pleasure in meditation isn't the same as the experience of pleasure in eating; perhaps even a different term from pleasure is appropriate. So we can recognize the difference, to the extent that there is a difference, but what do we add to our knowledge or our experience by saying either that it is simply a quantitative change or a quantitative difference, or that [the difference] is qualitative? Do you see what I mean? Can anyone give an example of a qualitative change, generally accepted as such?

Ratnaprabha: There is one which is [. . .] because of this book I'm writing on higher evolution, which is the arising of a reflexive consciousness, which I think is usually considered to be as it were a new event in the evolutionary process: something which in a way couldn't be read into the previous evolutionary process but was quite new, and therefore a qualitative change.

S: Of course, in a way, that only pushes the question further back - what does one mean by 'new'? In what sense, to what extent? One could say, for instance, that someone who has only eaten before but has not meditated before, his experience of the pleasure of meditation would be a new experience; he would be experiencing a new pleasure. But that doesn't really answer the question as to whether a quantitative change has taken place or a qualitative one.

Sudhana: Bhante, could you not use the same criterion as you used before for Insight that is that a qualitative change has taken place if it actually changes you as a person?

S: Well, of course, it depends in what sense or to what extent. In the example that Ratnaprabha has given of the two particular nidanas, they are both mundane, so there wouldn't be any question of Insight with a capital I; on that basis of yours, the change would be purely quantitative.

Sanghapala: Is there not a qualitative change in the dhyanas, say from the second to the third dhyana, or more markedly from the first to the fourth?

S: What makes one conclude that?

Sanghapala: Well, in the lower dhyanas there's much bliss, and later on the bliss subsides to something that is qualitatively different.

[54]

S: Well, perhaps one shouldn't have said it is qualitatively different, but a new factor enters, a factor which was not present before. Not that there is a complete change; some factors which

were present before are still present; but there are other factors which were not present before, which are now present. So is that what makes a qualitative change?

Sanghapala: (inaudible.)

S: I'm merely sort of inquiring whether to discuss changes in terms of quantitative and qualitative is very helpful.

Sanghapala: Perhaps they are usually thought of in a more colloquial sense than you have in mind in your definition. Perhaps they should be abandoned for that very reason.

S: Take the notion of quantity. What does one mean by quantity? Quantity is a mathematical concept, isn't it? But is quality a mathematical concept?

Sanghapala: It's a value.

S: It's a value, isn't it? So supposing you have a sort of sequence of events - I am only thinking aloud here, so don't go scribbling it all down! Supposing you have a sequence of events. You could only speak in terms of a change from quantitative to qualitative if there was a change within that sequence from events that could be measured mathematically, so to speak, to events which could only be evaluated. Does that make sense?

Sanghapala: Yes.

S: Yes; because if you speak in terms of quantity, that means amount. It [may] mean from two pounds to four pounds in weight, or from two inches to four inches in length. These are quantitative changes, they are changes which are measurable, they are as it were mathematical changes. They are chemical changes; chemical changes are measurable. Physical changes are measurable, aren't they? But qualitative changes can't be measured in that way, can they? They can, as I've said, only be evaluated. Can you measure an emotion? You can't really, I suppose. Can you measure an insight? Well, we say one insight is greater than another, but this is purely metaphorical language. Literally, one insight is not bigger than another; one uses these terms in a purely poetic sense. So therefore it seems that there is a change from quantitative to qualitative, or in other words a qualitative change, when a series of events which hitherto it has been possible to measure ceases to be measurable, a continuity being maintained, and it becomes only evaluatable, to use that expression.

To, to go back to Ratnaprabha's nidanas, can you really speak even of a quantitative change in respect of emotions, in a literal sense?

Vessantara: Presumably you can say more intense and less intense, for example.

S: Ah, but what is intense? Can one take that literally? What is intense? Doesn't that refer to degrees of resistance? Isn't it really a material concept? Doesn't it refer to the amount of pressure exerted? And isn't that concept applied or transferred metaphorically to mental or emotional states?

Vessantara: For the brightness of a light you'd use the word intensity.

S: Mm.

[55]

Sanghapala: Couldn't it be seen - I don't know whether Ratnaprabha is meaning it in this sort of way - say you have an empty jug and you pour a certain amount into it; then you evaluate the experience of bliss in that way, so therefore you pour another little bit into it, and so there's more in the jug, so to speak. Is that not the way Ratnaprabha's trying to see it?

S: Well, Ratnaprabha will have to say.

Ratnaprabha: I suppose when one talks about one's experiences in meditation or something, one asks [a question] like 'How much bliss was there there?' Fortunately, I don't have to ask this question very often, but if you had to ask how much bliss was there, in a way you have no choice but to use metaphorical language, derived from lower areas of experience.

S: Right, yes. This we are doing all the time.

Ratnaprabha: Some of that language is definitely quantitative language, and in some cases, however, you decide to bring in a new term. You say it's no longer rapture, it's now bliss, because the physical manifestations have died down, and a new kind of feeling seems to have entered. It seems to be something that you haven't experienced outside meditation at all, so you sort of say, well, there's a qualitative difference now in the kind of feeling I am experiencing.

S: So the qualitiveness consists in its unprecedentedness?

Ratnaprabha: Yes.

S: But it could be, say, unprecedented for one person and not for another, so that would make the quantitative change a purely subjective one, presumably.

Ratnaprabha: Well, no, when I say new, I mean it's new in the sense that it's present in one mental state but not in another.

Side 2

It might not be the first time you've experienced it, but you say 'Each time I sit down to meditate and succeed in attaining a degree of sukha, then as I rise through a series of mental states, at some point a new mental factor enters, and at that point I say that there has been a qualitative change in my mental state, rather than just an increasing intensity of rapture, for example.'

S: So it would suggest, in that case, that a qualitative change consists in the incorporation of a factor which was not present before?

Ratnaprabha: Yes.

S: Though the language is still material, isn't it?

Ratnaprabha: I suppose so.

S: For instance, you spoke of 'arising', 'entering', 'incorporating' - these are all highly metaphorical expressions, or perhaps you could even say - again, I am only thinking aloud - that a qualitative change occurs when the terms in which you have hitherto been describing the changes can no longer be taken literally but have to be taken metaphorically. One could perhaps say that?

: Would you say that again, Bhante, please?

[56]

S: That you can speak of a qualitative change taking place when the terms which you have hitherto been using to describe that particular sequence of events can no longer be taken literally but have to be taken metaphorically. That is a new idea; I have only just thought of it. It may be right, it may be wrong.

Sanghapala: That would also apply to gourmand and gourmet.

S: (pause) I don't follow you.

Gerd Baak: A gourmet is a person who ...

S: Oh, I see! You could say that; yes, indeed, because you are no longer concerned so much with the quantity of food that you eat but the quality, yes. Possibly, yes.

Uttara: Bhante, by calling Nirvana the highest bliss, is that qualitative or quantitative?

S: The language is certainly to be taken metaphorically. I think it is Buddhaghosa who makes the point that nirvanic bliss differs from ordinary bliss; so, in a way, it isn't the highest ordinary bliss. It isn't just - to use this language or these terms - it isn't just a quantitative difference, because all ordinary bliss, all mundane bliss is a result of the contact of a subject with an object on one or another level. According to Buddhaghosa, nirvanic bliss is not the product of any such contact, so it is in that sense that it is paramount, supreme. But anyway, how did we get on to this whole question of quantitative and qualitative change?

Sanghapala: Bharati's sloppy language.

Ratnaprabha: My original question was actually of this very nature, it was to do with the difference whether between joy and bliss, as an example of the sort of scale of bliss whether there was more than just a quantitative change, although Bharati claims there is only a quantitative change. But I am suggesting that new factors enter, so therefore it is appropriate to call it a qualitative change.

S: It does seem that new factors do enter, and it would seem that the entry of new factors would be acceptable as a definition of qualitative change. Though it may be that others define qualitative change differently. One would also have to be careful, no doubt, to define exactly what you meant by 'new factor'.

Uttara: Are those factors not categorized as mental states?

S: Well, in this particular case, and in the case of the example that Ratnaprabha gave, they were mental states or mental events.

Ratnaprabha: Could I pursue you a little on the point you've just made, about how you would decide whether a factor was a new factor?

S: I don't say that because I have any particular ideas on the subject, but only that one should, as a matter of course, be careful about the definition of your terms and be quite clear about the sense in which you are using them.

Ratnaprabha: The reason I was trying to pursue this is that I do find it very difficult to comprehend, in respect of, say, the Lower Evolution. It does seem that, when a certain level of consciousness is achieved, something new has entered, but I find I am tying myself in knots and wondering where this new thing has come from, [57] if it wasn't there before and it can't be explained in terms of a rearrangement of existing parts ...

S: Well, that's a pseudo-problem, isn't it? We went into this at the recent - I don't know whether it was Study Group Leaders' retreat? Were you there?

Ratnaprabha: No, [. . .]

S: I gave that hoary old chestnut of an illustration, which everybody ought to know, but perhaps they don't. The illustration which is traditionally given is that, supposing you clap your hands (you should be able to tell what I am going to say now). Well, where does the sound come from and where has it gone? You heard it, but you don't hear it now, where has it gone? Where is it? (Silence.) Well, the Buddhist attitude would be that it is quite inappropriate to say that it was anywhere before you heard it or is now anywhere after you have ceased to hear it; the correct way of stating the situation is that in dependence upon the two hands coming together a sound arises. So it's a question of in dependence upon a certain combination of factors, a new factor emerges, but the question of where it was, so to speak, before it came into existence, according to Buddhism, is an entirely artificial question. So Ratnaprabha can safely conclude that you just don't have to bother about it!

Ratnaprabha: It still does worry me, though.

S: That's probably force of habit. (Laughter.) So, all right, you say mind emerges; mind emerges in the course of the evolutionary process; where does mind come from? there must be some sort of great reservoir of mind lurking somewhere, from which this mind comes. But, from the traditional Buddhist point of view, this is entirely a wrong way of thinking. It is in dependence upon that particular complex of circumstances represented by a certain stage of evolution, a certain stage of development, a new factor emerges.

Sudhana: I am just wondering whether it is a sort of Christian conditioning to think in terms of 'where has it come from?' One says, 'Where did this earth come from? Well, God made it, of course.' That is the Christian answer. They say, 'Who brought all these beautiful things into being? God made them.'

S: I think it's really a question of not realizing when language is essentially metaphorical. For instance, 'God created the earth.' to continue [.. .]; 'God created the universe.' Well, what did

he create it out of? Obviously, one is thinking of God as a sort of potter or carpenter. A potter makes pots out of clay, the carpenter makes furniture out of wood; so God created, God made the universe; well, what did he make it out of? Well, there are three answers. He made it out of something different from himself, which existed alongside him. Or he made it out of himself, that's the second answer. And the third, the very ingenious Christian one: he made it out of nothing. (Laughter.) Do you see what I mean? Anyway, let's perhaps pass on, if Ratnaprabha's got to the end of his question.

Ratnaprabha: Yes, I think I'd better.

Vessantara: Uttara, did you have a question?

Uttara: It's been answered. It was to do with dhyanic samatha experience, about expanding - do people relate the same experiences?

Vessantara: Gerd, has your question been answered?

[58]

Gerd Baak: Maybe not, not fully. Do zero experiences of the samatha type predispose one to be more open to the Dharma?

S: I wonder whether one can generalize. In some cases it might be so, in other cases not. I can imagine that in the case of some people it wouldn't, because they would be convinced, perhaps, even that they were Enlightened, and that would close them to the Dharma. In the case of others, it might be different. So I think it isn't easy to generalize; both cases are possible. One has found in the past that people who have had an experience of a limited nature can be very attached to that, and can base a lot on it and it can be very difficult to move from that. They are very unwilling to doubt it or question it or to recognize that it has any limitations at all. And I've met people who believed that they were in touch with God or inspired by God or were the mouthpiece of God; you just can't move them. So the answer is: it depends.

Dharmamati: This is really just the definition of three terms that Bharati uses. The first one is: What does he mean by 'the Hindu renaissance'?

S: Ah, yes. By 'the Hindu renaissance' he means the sort of Hindu revival movement that took place mainly towards the end of the last century. He is thinking of the figures, say, of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Perhaps he is thinking of Aurobindo, too; perhaps he is thinking of Radhakrishnan. He is thinking of all those people who were responsible, in the last century mainly and the beginning of this, for instance, for a sort of revival or, as he says, a renaissance, of Hinduism, in the course of which an attempt was made to restate Hinduism in somewhat more contemporary terms, or at least in the English language, and very often for the benefit of Westerners as well as Western-educated Hindus. Bharati doesn't think much of the Hindu renaissance.

Sometimes it's regarded as including people like Dayananda Sarasvati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, Bisha(?) Chandra Sen, the founder of the Nav Vedan(?), the New Dispensation; also the Brahma Samaj(?), to which Rabindranath Tagore belonged, his grandfather having founded it. The Hindu renaissance is very often traced back to Raj Mohan Roy; you must

have heard of him? He was a Bengali who was born, I think, about 1770, died about 1830 in Bristol. He was a sort of Hindu reformer who wasn't a brahmin, he was of a lower caste, as far as I remember, but anyway he learned Sanskrit and Persian and English, and he tried as it were to bring Hinduism up to date. He wrote in English. He was very much influenced by Unitarianism. He had Unitarian contacts in England. It was he who was mainly responsible for persuading the British Indian government to abolish sati - sati being the custom of the widow immolating herself on her husband's pyre when he was cremated. So he is often regarded as the earliest figure. I think he was the original founding father of the Brahma Samaj, actually. So all these figures make up the Hindu renaissance. And a few others. Perhaps the most famous of them all, especially in the West, is probably Vivekananda, who was the disciple of Ramakrishna. Vivekananda represented Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, where Dharmapala, the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society, also appeared. That was the first time that people in the West, especially in America, came into contact with representatives of Eastern religions in the flesh to any great extent.

Dharmamati: The second term is: what does he mean by 'latent Hindu fascism'?

S: Oh. Fascism is rather an unpleasant word, isn't it? It can often be used just as a term of abuse. I suppose 'latent Hindu fascism' really goes back to the tendency of the Hindus to look to heroes, to look to divine incarnations to save them. We did touch upon this when discussing Ambedkar's article, didn't we? The [59] orthodox Hindu has got a tendency, say, to worship authority, to submit himself to authority, and to believe that others should submit themselves to authority. It is very interesting, for instance, to see the way in which Pandit Nehru was succeeded as Prime Minister by his daughter, eventually, and how she was succeeded by her son. Indians have this sort of dynastic way of looking at things. They think this is perfectly right and proper, and they invest even political leaders with a sort of halo of semi-sanctity. They are very unwilling to listen to any criticism of their heroes; they react very strongly, very violently, they can be very intolerant and have recourse to violence very easily to suppress criticism and opposition. So it's all these sort of tendencies that Bharati has in mind. They have certainly emerged more strongly since he wrote that book - much more strongly.

Dharmamati: So they're not so latent any more?

S: They're not so latent as they were, unfortunately.

Sudhana: Bhante, that tendency to hand on, as the Nehrus did and now even some of the guru figures do too - does this relate back to the caste system - you know, keeping it within the caste and now in families as well?

S: Not so much, because you can keep things within the family even when there is no caste system - look at the Kennedys in America; they've been trying to keep the Presidency within the family, they had a good shot at it. They haven't quite succeeded, not so well as the Gandhis and Nehrus have succeeded. There seems to be a sort of tendency in America to create dynasties; there are certain old families that occupy quite important positions.

One example of latent, or not so latent, Hindu fascism is that many orthodox Hindus are great admirers of Hitler. They thought that he had the right idea about the Jews. And some Hindus

have even been heard to say - I have heard them myself - that it is a pity that in India they couldn't get rid of, say, some 250 million of the poorest people, including the Untouchables, just liquidating them just like Hitler liquidated the Jews. They say India would be much happier without those people. This is the attitude of some caste Hindus. I have heard them myself express these sort of views in a quite casual sort of way. And orthodox Hindus are intensely chauvinistic - that India is the leading nation of the world, the guru nation of the world, and that other nations should listen to India; they have got these sort of views very strongly. Every nation likes to think that it's best, that's expected; but Hindus think of India in that very special way, India as the holy land, India as such; it's the *punyabhumi*. So there are very dangerous tendencies in Hinduism. It is therefore not surprising that some of the Hindu guru figures manifest these same - as Bharati calls them - fascist-like tendencies. It is not at all surprising. It is not surprising that some of the gurus have their bodyguards and their strong-arm men and their intimidating tactics and all that sort of thing, and their self-advertisement and their rallies and all the rest of it.

Anyway, what was the third term he used?

Dharmamati: It's to do with puritanism. You say that the Hindus refer to *ananda mimamsa* and expatiate on it *ad nauseam*. And yet Bharati says that they have a puritanical attitude towards pleasure. Where do you think he has gained this idea?

S: I think I mentioned this - that Bharati is not in favour of asceticism; asceticism seems to be rather a dirty word for Bharati. He is definitely a hedonist in theory and in practice. But the *ananda mimamsa*, the beatific calculus, suggests that hedonism and asceticism can in a sense be reconciled. You can recognize [60] different degrees or levels of bliss or pleasure, from the lowest to the highest, and you can progress from a lower degree or lower level to a higher. So in a sense that is ascetic, because you renounce the lower level, but you renounce it for the sake of the higher level of bliss; so there is hedonism at the same time. So Bharati seems to be critical of this whole notion of beatific calculus inasmuch as it contains, apparently, this element of asceticism. So he is not happy with these people who talk for instance, (quoting): 'What Mehta and others who think like him reject is, so it appears, not the euphoric content of the mystical experience, as Bharati alleges, but the suggestion that a lower degree of bliss, e.g. sexual pleasure, is *qua* bliss identical with a higher degree of bliss, e.g. the bliss of Brahman.' So he regards them as puritanical because they recognize a difference of degree as between one type of bliss and another, even, one might say, a qualitative difference. He doesn't like that. So in effect he interprets puritanism as not recognizing all kinds of bliss as being, so to speak, on the same level. That is his quarrel.

So, according to him, people like the gentleman - what's his name? Dr Mehta - are puritanical, but actually they are not so. They only insist on a series of grades of bliss, whereas Bharati does not accept that.

Jayamati: Is it more that he objects to the idea of any kind of denial or renunciation of any form of bliss?

S: It would seem - he doesn't state that in so many words, but it would seem that that is his position. He seems to - well, he does - believe that all hedonic experience, when sufficiently intense, is a means of access to the feeling of numerical oneness; not that you have to get up to a higher kind of bliss to achieve that feeling, but you can achieve it from any kind of

hedonic experience.

Jayamati: That would explain why he chooses the word puritanical, then?

S: Yes. Though I also point out that he is really applying the term quite uncritically. I make this point because he makes himself a great point of being very critical in his attitude, you see? But I show in several places that he is not really so critical at all, not when it comes to his own use of concepts. Puritanism is a term with a very definite Western, even Anglo-Saxon, English and American, context. You can't just uncritically transfer that to Indian philosophy and religion, which is what he does - which is really surprising in such a highly critical and self-conscious person.

Uttara: Bhante, I don't know whether this is to the point: what is a Dionysian approach to ...

S: Do I use that word here?

Uttara: No, no, no. I am bringing this in because of Bharati's attitude towards bliss: it was the Dionysian approach ...

S: Well, you're a little bit off the track; not too much. I think what you probably have in mind is Nietzsche's distinction between Dionysian art and Apollonian art. And that distinction has been applied to other fields. It roughly corresponds to Romantic and Classical - very roughly. Apollonian art is the art of balance and control and harmony and restraint. Dionysian art is the art of emotion, especially powerful and turbulent emotion, of ecstasy and unbridled passion and all that sort of thing. You see what I mean?

Uttara: Yes. Maybe I was getting mixed up with the Bacchanalian ...

[61]

S: Yes: Dionysian is roughly synonymous with Bacchanalian; the Bacchae being the followers of Dionysius.

Uttara: I know they used to get into ...

S: Yes, the Apollonian art is sane, and Dionysian art is insane, it's a bit mad.

Uttara: I wondered whether Bharati is coming from that angle or not.

S: I don't think so. He doesn't seem temperamentally like that at all. I get the impression, actually, of a very cold person - that is my personal impression, reading his books - not of a warm-hearted [person], not hedonistic in that way, a rather cold hedonism, almost calculating. That may be quite subjective and others may not get that impression.

Sudhana: I just wondered: what gave you that impression?

S: Well, what does give one impressions? Just reading the book. Perhaps the language; perhaps his choice of words. There is not much sensitivity to the feeling of words; well, there isn't any, really. He uses language in just that sort of scientific or semi-scientific, quasi-scientific, way. I think this is quite an important point: the use of language by people

who write about religion and philosophy and literature and so on. Do you understand what I mean by saying that the use of language is sort of scientific, as it were? There is no feeling quality to the language. Do you of course, yes, you haven't been actually reading anything by Bharati, but I have certainly got that impression from all his books. You can use a word like a counter - do you know what I mean by a counter? a sort of token, just a metal disc. You can use it like that, or you can use a word with some sensitivity to its feeling, its texture, if you like. We did talk about this quite a lot on one Study Group Leaders' seminar - that we should try to be sensitive to the quality of words, the quality of language. So it is Bharati's language, I suppose, basically, that gives me the impression that he is a cold sort of person.

: He does use words like experiential, maximization, as a rule you know.

S: Yes, indeed.

Uttara: Yes, it really seems he was using things in terms of objects ...

S: Yes, indeed. That is the sort of quasi-scientific approach, a sort of alienated objectivity.

Peter Nicholson: I was just wondering if that was necessarily a fair comment, given that, I assume, he is not writing in his native tongue, he is writing in English ...

S: Yes, one certainly could say that, but then he seems to have a good command of English. Yes, he does have a good command of English; he doesn't make any mistakes, his use of idiom is quite correct, grammar is quite good, sentence construction quite good, vocabulary quite extensive, though on the scientific side. So I think that if he had had any emotional sensitivity, he would have handled the English language, even if it wasn't his own language, in a different way. One can think of people who have written English without it being their mother tongue with a fairly great degree of sensitivity to its nuances and to the feeling of words. For instance, Joseph Conrad is a very good example; Tagore.

[62]

Uttara: Lama Govinda.

S: Lama Govinda, yes.

Sanghapala: Bhante, do you think he is just reacting against his perhaps Austrian Catholic background?

S: He doesn't go into all that in his autobiography, so one perhaps shouldn't speculate. We mustn't forget that Vienna produced Freud! I am told that the Viennese - the Austrians, rather - are very different from the Germans. They are said to be much more frivolous than the Germans! Anyway.

Ben Murphy: This question is about Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission. Bharati is very disparaging [. . .]. I was wondering if you could give us some background information about Vivekananda and about the Ramakrishna Mission, and perhaps comment on why Bharati is so disparaging.

S: Ramakrishna is usually described as a mystic, though not in Bharati's sense. He was a yogi

and a spiritual teacher in the last century. I think he was born about 1830 and lived for about 50 years, as far as I remember; I may be a little out. Vivekananda was his chief disciple. They were both Bengalis, both lived in Calcutta. And Vivekananda, of course, preached Vedanta and Hinduism in general in the West, very successfully, and started various Vedanta groups and societies; and of course he started the Ramakrishna Mission in India, which, apart from teaching Vedanta, ran all sorts of social institutions like schools, hostels, hospitals and so on, and in India the Ramakrishna Mission is mainly known for its social work, not for its religious work nowadays so much. Ramakrishna taught a sort of species of universalism, which Vivekananda also taught, and Vivekananda placed great emphasis on Advaita Vedanta; he regarded that as the highest form of Hinduism, and it is that especially which he taught in the West.

Bharati, I think, rather looks down on the Ramakrishna Mission, especially on Vivekananda, because he believes that Vivekananda popularized Hindu teachings, especially Vedantic teachings, in a rather crude sort of way. I suppose he believes that Vivekananda vulgarized them. And what he says about the present-day Hindu swamis, as they operate in America and even in England, is, I think, really quite correct. They do purvey a rather watered-down version of Vedanta, and they function in a very conventional way.

On the other hand, one could also argue that religion and philosophy, in a sense, have got to be popularized, and you can't avoid, in a sense, oversimplification, vulgarization; it's a quite fine point. Perhaps in some ways Bharati is too much of a purist. Probably Ramakrishna Mission followers would argue in that way. So it's not really easy to decide on the rights and wrongs of the matter. Maybe they do sometimes over-popularise or perhaps they are sometimes over-conventional. On the other hand, perhaps Bharati is over-rigorous and over-academic.

Ben Murphy: What about their activities in India? Are they quite different in India?

S: In India they are, as I said, best known for their social work. Their social work is quite widespread and they are quite highly respected for that, but I don't think they are taken very seriously from a purely religious or philosophical point of view. They haven't contributed anything at all original to Indian thought, to Hindu thought or religious practice, really. Though Vivekananda has been responsible for spreading or popularizing a lot of sort of general Hindu ideas. He is also responsible for a few myths. He is responsible for the myth of the spiritual East and the materialistic West; that seems to have started with him. [63] You'll find something about this in Lal Monijoshi(?)'s book on *On Discerning the Buddha*. Vivekananda was a great admirer of the Buddha in a way, but he was responsible also for spreading some very confused ideas about the Buddha and his teaching; and Lal Monijoshi goes into these in some detail in his book.

Vivekananda was a greatly admired figure generally in India, regarded as a sort of champion of Hinduism in the days when Hinduism was much vilified by Christian missionaries.

Ben Murphy: What was your own experience of the Ramakrishna Mission? You seem...

S: Yes, in my earlier days in India I had on the whole quite a good experience of it. But I subsequently found that they were really in many ways very narrow, because they professed to be universalist - that all religions were equally true and all religions led to God - but they

didn't like it if you became a Buddhist. You see what I mean? There is going to be something about that in the next volume of my Memoirs; that will come into the story.

Ratnaprabha: On page 5 of the text - that's the yellow one - you give a quote from the Upanishads which speaks of 'The man well versed in scripture is not smitten by desire, attaining a subsequent level of bliss as a result.' This quote seems to imply a recognition of the danger of attachment to one level of attainment, a danger of preventing one from achieving the next level. So what I am asking is: do Hindus apply this principle at all levels, and if not, why not?

S: There's an awful lot of Hindus, you know! (Laughter.) It is difficult to generalize about them. I think informed Hindus are quite well aware that there is a danger of remaining, as it were, stuck in lower spiritual experiences; but to what extent they apply that understanding, and how systematically, it is very difficult to say. But the idea that if one is over-attached to lower degrees of spiritual experience that will prevent one from progressing and experiencing higher degrees - I think that idea is certainly current in, as I've said, informed Hindu circles. You come across the idea in the biography of Ramakrishna. He started off, so to speak, by being a great devotee of Kali, and he was very attached to his visions of Kali. Then he met an Advaitic sannyasin who told him that he really should not be so attached to those visions; there was another experience, a nirguna(?) type experience, beyond that. At first Ramakrishna found it very difficult to give up his visions of Kali, but this Advaitic teacher insisted that he should, and eventually he did. So that sort of pattern is not unknown in Hinduism; at least in theory. But, as I say, to what extent and how systematically it is applied in practice, it is very difficult to say.

Ratnaprabha: The basis of my question is that I think you have said in the past that Hinduism and other religions often contain certain basic micchaditthis that prevent progress beyond a certain level. Well, a principle of this sort, which you might even call something like the principle of self-transcendence, would seem to be a good safeguard against such micchaditthis. So, presumably, the principle is not being applied throughout Hindu teachings. I am wondering why it is that a Hindu wouldn't say: 'But, hang on, this teaching - the teaching, for example, of Brahma as being ultimate - seems to conflict with this teaching of giving up a lower level for the sake of a higher.'

S: Well, one might ask the same question of traditional Buddhists; because in Buddhism it is very clear that you shouldn't be attached to a lower degree of experience, and you should go beyond it; but lots of Buddhists don't do that. [64] There are quite a few Buddhists who are very much attached to purely external, almost mechanical, rules, and seem unable to go beyond those. So what is it that makes anybody remain on a lower level of experience when they know in theory that they shouldn't, that they should relinquish that lower level and try to rise to a higher one? One can only say it's our old friend the gravitational pull, which is as good a label or as good an explanation as anything but perhaps doesn't really in a way tell one very much. Or why does one not actually practise something in which one theoretically believes? I mean all Hindus would agree that all paths lead to God, and they would agree that Muslims also were on the path, or a path, to God; but they still fight with the Muslims and still kill them sometimes for being Muslims. So why do they do that? In a way it is the mystery of basic primordial human ignorance, that makes them act against their own expressed or professed convictions, or at least beliefs.

Tape 5

One could also say that Hindus, on the whole, tend to be really quite uncritical, and perhaps attach too much importance to experience as such, so that if somebody has an experience, especially an experience of a rather unusual character, or rather out of the ordinary, they will take that very often more seriously than is really warranted; despite whatever awareness there may be in general Hindu tradition, they may find it difficult to think in terms of going beyond, or trying to go beyond, that particular experience. In some way, it is almost a general human failing, I suppose. Most people are quite satisfied just to be ordinary, unenlightened human beings; even in those cases where they do admit some further or higher possibility, they don't make a very determined effort to realize it.

Ratnaprabha: This explains why the individual Hindu resists operating on the basis of this principle; but there is also the question of institutionalized micchaditthis which exist in Hinduism and other religions, which seem to contradict this principle. Would you say that Hinduism does contain institutionalized micchaditthis which contradict the principle of self-transcendence?

S: I don't think there are any institutions which as such contradict it, but I think any religious institution will always be in danger, in practice, of contradicting it. Because every institution involves a specific form, and you can in all cases, if you are not careful, identify the form with the spirit, the spirit with the form.

Just to give you a concrete example, though it seems pretty obvious supposing you've got a temple devoted to the worship of Rama; every Hindu will agree that, whether it is Rama or Krishna or the Buddha, it's all the same. But if you have actually got a temple of Rama and the image of Rama is enshrined there, and only Rama is being worshipped and people are going to that, they will get into the habit, so to speak, of thinking just in terms of Rama. They may even develop a dislike for Krishna, just because they are so accustomed to worshipping Rama. And they may even, on occasion, fight with the devotees of Krishna; I mean you do sometimes find that. Because, if something is localized, as, say, the worship of Rama is localized in this case, it is bound to become almost a centre for people's attachment as well as their devotion, so they lose sight of the wider perspective, even though it is present in their particular religion. Do you see what I'm getting at? (Murmurs of assent.)

Well, you've got it in Christianity; you've got it in Catholicism, you've got quite a lot of it, I believe, in Italy. What about all these Madonnas the Madonna of this place and the Madonna of that place? It's all the same Madonna, but there can be intense rivalries, apparently, not between the Madonnas themselves, one hopes, but between their followers. 'The Madonna of this place is better than the Madonna of that place', and so on. How can that be? It's all the same Madonna, [65] presumably! And sometimes people even abuse the Madonna of some other place because they are so devoted to the Madonna of their particular home town. How many more have we?

Vessantara: Three.

S: And do we have another session?

Vessantara: Tomorrow night.

S: I think perhaps we'd better leave it there, then. OK? Good.

[66]

Tape 5, Side 2

Vessantara: We've had our last day on Hedonism, and we have seven questions for tonight.

S: Including some left over from yesterday?

Vessantara: Including those left over from yesterday, yes. We'll start with Chakkhupala.

Chakkhupala: This goes back to a question that was asked three days ago. I didn't understand the answer, so I'm asking it again. You say that Bharati makes a concession to his argument that the zero experience doesn't change the mystic in any way. The concession he makes is that he arranges his thoughts and deeds in a hierarchy, with the zero experience at the top. You say this undermines his whole position. I don't understand how that undermines his whole position; presumably his whole position being the statement that the zero experience does not confer ontological status?

S: No, that isn't the connection there. His whole position - though I've also said somewhere that his thought isn't very clear, so one mustn't expect complete clarity, especially as I'm giving also just short quotations from what he says. But his basic position seems to be, at least by implication, non-hierarchical. I think we did touch on this yesterday. Because he makes it clear that the zero experience can be achieved by, say, aesthetic experience, meditative experience, sexual experience; it would seem that all these experiences are on the same level inasmuch as they all can confer the zero experience. So this suggests, in fact - I think he even makes this point in the book - that he doesn't accept a hierarchy of experiences. He doesn't even accept a hierarchy of blissful experiences, it would seem. So when he says that the mystic arranges his experiences and deeds and so on in a hierarchy with the zero experience at the top, he would seem to be contradicting his own basic position; because on the one hand he is anti-hierarchical, but on the other hand - well, he suggests that the mystic does this; I don't recollect that he suggests that the mystic does it either rightly or wrongly. If, of course, he was to say that the mystic did it wrongly, he wouldn't himself be guilty of inconsistency, he would merely be accusing the mystic of inconsistency. But I think the basic point is that, broadly speaking, Bharati's position is a non-hierarchical position. So that whenever he makes, as it were, a concession to any sort of hierarchical way of looking at things, especially experiences, he is, it would seem, contradicting what appears to be his basic position.

In some ways it is one of the strangest things about his position, or what appears to be his position this non-hierarchical attitude that he adopts. But that does seem to be his leading position.

Chakkhupala: Following on from that, then, I am now rather confused as to what his attitude is to the ananda vimamsa.

S: That attitude, to the ananda vimamsa, doesn't seem quite straightforward. I went yesterday into how it is he brings it in. He is basically, of course, hedonist in his approach, and his point of departure seems to be that, according to him, contemporary Hindus don't take the ananda

vimamsa sufficiently seriously, because they are puritanical. But that, as I think I tried to show yesterday, is actually Bharati's misunderstanding or confusion. It is not that contemporary Hindus take [67] the ananda vimamsa not seriously but they understand it in such a way that hedonism and asceticism are as it were united; and Bharati seems to be objecting, really, to the introduction of any kind of ascetical element at all.

Chakkhupala: But presumably he accepts the fact of the scale as the scale of pleasure, as the hierarchy of pleasure?

S: No, he doesn't seem to accept the scale of pleasure, even, because - again as I have pointed out he seems to regard pleasure as pleasure. He isn't completely clear about this, but this would seem to be his position: that pleasure is pleasure. So that, if he was pressed, he probably would have to admit that there isn't any real ananda mimamsa at all, unless he abandons his original position. But, as I've said, his position in the book as a whole is not completely clear. He may not have realized fully the implications of some of his own statements.

Chakkhupala: So his confusion over the place of hierarchy is carried over into how he considers the ananda vimamsa. He should refute it completely rather than just dispute one aspect of it.

S: Yes. Of course, it could be he hasn't given the matter sufficient thought, but if that isn't the case it could be that he doesn't feel able to refute the ananda vimamsa because it is mentioned in the Taittiriya Upanishad. The Taittiriya Upanishad is part of the Vedas, and how can he refute the Vedas? Do you see what I mean? None the less, he doesn't seem completely happy with it.

But, as I say, I think the main thing to bear in mind is that his basic position is anti-hierarchical.

Vessantara: The next question arises out of a passage on page 8, I think, of the yellow version. We were talking about how in Buddhism ontology is distinct from epistemology. You say: 'Vipassana does not reveal an object, even a Transcendental object, as distinct from a subject, but it reveals an Ultimate Reality which, when made the object of thought and speech, when brought within the dualistic framework of the subject/object relation, can be regarded only as object as opposed to subject.' Based on that, we have a question. Do all forms of thought and speech imply a dualism of subject and object? which seems to be what is implied in what you have put here.

S: Say that again.

Vessantara: Do all forms of thought and speech necessarily have in them a dualism of subject and object, since you can have statements which are well, [...] probably exists, I suppose - doesn't appear to be dualistic in terms of subject and object as a dualism of existence and non-existence. Could you say that in language the dualism of existence and non-existence is more fundamental than the dualism of subject and object?

S: There are all sorts of terms here which require definition or explanation. What does one mean, say, by fundamental, or more fundamental? Can there be any duality or any structure,

so far as ordinary everyday experience is concerned, more fundamental - taking that word in its ordinary usage - than the subject/object duality?

Vessantara: Well, I think, usually, underlying the subject/object duality (OK, we'll have to ask what 'underlying' means!) is the assumption of the existence of a subject of existence, as it were.. ..

[68]

S: But is that not an artificial question? Because is there an entity called existence or being, underlying particular existent things, as we may call them? Isn't that a metaphysical fiction, according to Buddhism?

Vessantara: I suppose I'm trying to get at whether one metaphysical fiction is more as it were deep-rooted in the human psyche than another.

S: Ah, well, I think that Buddhism would say that, for all practical purposes, it's the subject/object duality which is more deeply rooted than anything else.

But I still think that the question begs all sorts of questions, so in a sense it can't be answered satisfactorily until all the assumptions underlying the question are quite thoroughly investigated. Do you see what I mean?

Vessantara: Yes.

Ratnaprabha: When we were discussing this, I think it arose because we sort of tried out forms of speech, and we weren't very familiar with philosophical techniques and the subtleties of this. But it did seem that certain sentences could be constructed which didn't imply, in the form of speech, a subject/object distinction. This may just be because we couldn't recognize it, but this seemed to be the case, and ...

S: Ah, but here there is a big assumption that you can abstract the speech or the form of speech from the actual context within which it occurs. For instance, you can say, 'Alas!' Well, that is not, linguistically speaking, actually addressed to anybody; but in context, as it were, it is addressed to somebody, if only to yourself. So that there is a subject/object reference.

Vessantara: Assuming that you make yourself an object to be addressed?

S: Well, no, not even that, because if you say 'Alas!' you are aware of yourself saying 'Alas!' and also aware, so to speak, of yourself hearing 'Alas!' so that you are saying 'Alas!', and you are saying 'Alas!' also to yourself; so there is a subject/object division within your experience.

Ratnaprabha: Is this true even if you are not suffering from alienated awareness?

S: What would be the connection?

Ratnaprabha: Well, I was just thinking, if a thought train occurs to you, you can as it were produce the thought train and listen to it, if you have got a sort of psychic split. But it does seem, at times at least, as if one can just be aware of a thought train occurring without feeling that you are sort of watching it separately, as a separate object to which it is as it were

addressed. So I don't quite see why the fact of a thought train going on in your mind implies the existence of a subject and an object.

S: But you will always be aware of it as your train of thought, as a train of thought occurring in your mind and not in somebody else's; you will never, surely, even in a sort of schizophrenic state, think of it as somebody else's train of thought.

Ratnaprabha: No, but you will think of it - I mean, if you think of it, that will be another train of thought later on, where perhaps you do think of it as being your own thought train; but, as it occurs, I don't quite see why there is both a subject and an object there.

[69]

S: I doubt whether you could be alienated to such a degree that you were unaware, even to the slightest extent, of a train of thought as your train of thought.

Ratnaprabha: But why does that imply subject/object distinction? I don't follow that. The fact that you are aware ...

S: Because the train of thought would be as it were addressed to somebody, even if it was only to you, the same person who had had that train of thought; because you can have a subject/object distinction within your own experience, as it were, as well as, you know, as between yourself and another person [whom] you think of as separate from yourself. In fact, perhaps, logically, you can't really distinguish between the two. That could be argued.

Ratnaprabha: In the pamphlet, the situation that is being talked about is vipassana, the vipassana experience, and it's to do with vipassana revealing an ultimate reality which, when made the object of thought and speech, i.e. when brought within a dualistic frame of the subject/object relation, can be regarded only as object as opposed to a subject. So, in this case, we are talking about someone who has Insight and who has it in themselves, to some extent transcended themselves ...

S: Yes, this is a concession to language; you can't talk about it in any other sort of way if you are to talk about it at all. Strictly speaking, one could say, one cannot speak of anybody as having a transcendental experience, because that is bringing it within the subject/object duality. But if you regard a Transcendental experience as not to be attached to any particular individual subject, well, from a practical point of view, you are saying that no Transcendental realization is possible. So the reflection that no Transcendental realization is possible can be a means of Transcendental realization only at a very high level of spiritual experience, and not at that of the beginner; so, for the beginner, that statement isn't in the least useful!

I think one point that emerges is that language used in this as it were qualitative way, this non-literal, metaphorical way, cannot be made the subject of investigations which assume a literal meaning or literal understanding of language. If you speak, say, of realizing the Transcendental, you have to take the spirit of that - not raise questions which are based on a literal understanding of it; because it is assumed to begin with that the statement is not to be taken literally. In other words, all metaphysics in a way is poetry, so you can't analyse it. Perhaps it is in a way quite unsatisfactory, but you can't really analyse it in a literal or as it were scientific way. As, for instance, if one asks what do we mean by fundamental? Well, 'fundamental' has a definite literal meaning; what is one trying to do when one applies that to

something which is not of a material nature, doesn't belong to the material order? So where does that leave us?

Ratnaprabha: Wouldn't I be correct in saying, then, that - to go back to the subject/object distinction in speech or thought - that it is not that forms of words themselves necessarily contain a subject/object distinction, but the very use of words, whether in thought or speech, implies somebody producing the words and somebody listening to them?

S: I think that would be closer to the truth. Except that I would say, perhaps, that the subject/object distinction or duality is not necessarily explicit in particular forms of speech.

Ratnaprabha: The point about the person being addressed and the person producing the train of thought or form of speech - that is not really at all clear to me. I can't quite grasp it, perhaps; but I suppose - I do know the situation where I'm [70] thinking sometimes, where it does actually feel as if there was a sort of part of me which is addressing another part of me. But there do seem to be situations where it doesn't feel like that; it feels as if there is simply a train of thought occurring, and I don't experience it as ...

S: Well, perhaps it's an Insight!

Ratnaprabha: I doubt it!

S: Well, we have to be open to all possibilities!

Ratnaprabha: But, even if it were an Insight, it seems that when it is made the object of thought and speech, then it is brought within a dualistic framework of subject/object relation, according to the pamphlet. Not that I think it was an Insight.

S: Well, give me a few days to reflect upon that, and I'll try to see whether I can have a train of thought which I can't refer to myself as subject.

Ratnaprabha: It may just reflect my lack of awareness of myself!

S: Well, there are degrees of awareness. We don't always fully see what is going on in our own minds. Actually, I find it quite difficult to imagine a train of thought - apart from one constituting an Insight experience - which one did not, at least in a subtle way, refer to oneself as the thinker, or recognize or know as one's own train of thought.

But anyway, perhaps we'll leave that and reflect on it.

Vessantara: And then, Bhante, on the top of the next page, you were saying that 'Buddhist ontology is a pseudo-ontology, or rather a symbolical ontology, in a mathematical rather than a Jungian sense.' Could I first ask you to explain what you meant by a mathematical rather than a Jungian sense?

S: Yes; I'm using these terms in a quite rough and ready way. Just repeat the sentence again.

Vessantara: 'In the same way, Buddhist ontology is a pseudo-ontology, or rather a symbolical ontology, in the mathematical rather than in the Jungian sense.'

S: Yes, it is the word 'symbolical' which I am describing as either Jungian or as it were mathematical. In mathematics, a symbol is merely a sign; whereas in Jung's thought, a symbol is not merely a sign; a symbol is the centre of a whole complex of meanings and feelings and experiences. So in the case of Buddhism - just read that bit again. In the case of Buddhist ontology?

Vessantara: 'In the same way, Buddhist ontology is a pseudo-ontology, or rather a symbolical ontology'.

S: Yes, in other words, when Buddhism speaks in terms of something being or existing, the concept of being or existing is not a symbol in the sense that it has any real meaning that can be as it were delved into; it's just a sign, in the mathematical sense, for something which is really quite inexpressible. Do you see what I mean? (Murmurs of assent.)

[71]

Vessantara: So when you talk of it not being a symbol in the Jungian sense, one of the things I seem to understand by 'Jungian symbol' is that, in a sense, it partakes of the reality to which it points ...

S: Right, indeed. But this is not the case with the mathematical symbol, whether it is x or anything else of that sort. Similarly, in the case of the Buddhist symbol, ontology is the science of being; a Buddhist ontology has to be a pseudo-ontology, because the ontos, the concept of being, has no real connection with what it is supposed to be representing or indicating or pointing to. For instance, I can use my finger, say, to point to the wall, so my finger indicates the wall, but there is nothing in common between my finger and the wall; my finger is a finger and the wall is a wall. You don't say that they are both material, because then you'll be understanding a comparison literally. But, yes, the finger can point to the wall even though it has nothing in common with the wall. And, in the same way, the Buddhist ontology, though a pseudo-ontology, can indicate practically, can point one in the direction of Reality, even though it has in a way no connection with Reality and is not, so to speak, of the same nature as Reality.

Vessantara: So, with a mathematical symbol, if you have, say, an algebraic expression say, $x = y^2$ - where the letters stand for numbers, and in a way it wouldn't matter what expression you used to stand for those numbers, within language it does seem as if certain words are at least less open to misinterpretation than others. Does that not imply that in some way there is more than simply a sort of mathematical symbolism involved? Do you see what I'm getting at?

S: Yes, I would say that, yes, that is the case. I have spoken in the past, I think even here itself, in terms of existence being metaphorical. Just to make things a little more difficult, in this particular article I have adopted a somewhat different point of view, because with regard to the Transcendental, even contradictory views can all be true - not true in a literal sense, but in the sense that they do point you in the same direction, whatever that direction happens to be. When one is speaking of Buddhist ontology being a pseudo-ontology, etc. etc., one is adopting a point of view or position of strict transcendence; but, of course, that is not the only point of view one can adopt. One can adopt a point of view, for instance, of immanence, or of mutual interpenetration. But here, because of the context, I am adopting this point of view of radical transcendence, which is the point of view of

Nagarjuna and the Madhyamika philosophy, if one can call it that, or the Sunyata philosophy.

Vessantara: Sanghapala; a question about a quote, I think.

Sanghapala: Bhante, it's about your use of language in the text. We were curious in the study group about this question and wondered if your language in some parts could be construed as uncharitable by some people

S: Quite likely!

Sanghapala: ... and we thought the danger of this might be that, being as you are a figure with disciples who very often copy what you do and say - which is generally a very good idea - is it not the case that they might also, take up this style and come in for a bit of trouble with the outside Buddhist world or with the world at large?

S: Oh, yes, there is certainly that possibility. There is also the possibility that others will be misled by some of my milder expressions and take up a much more meek attitude than they really should! Because some of my expressions, yes! can be [72] construed as uncharitable; others might be construed as over charitable. So those who are of that nature will fasten upon my uncharitable expressions, and those who are of another nature may fasten on my expressions which are over charitable. Do you see what I mean?

Sanghapala: Yes.

S: One just has to hope that people will be sufficiently aware of their own particular weaknesses and [of] which way they are likely to incline.

Sanghapala: Bhante, we are mystified to hear the rumour that you said that you had decided that this style was no longer a good idea, due to the fact ...

S: Decided that what?

Sanghapala: This style was ...

S: Which style?

Sanghapala: The style of being a trifle scathing or, you know, direct.

S: Oh no; the rumour is without basis. Such a mode of speaking or writing may be appropriate on occasion. One can't discard it altogether under all circumstances. Obviously one must be careful in using that particular kind of language, as in using any kind of language; not just allow one's feelings to carry one away.

Vessantara: What sort of guidelines would you - how would you decide on what occasions it's appropriate to engage in that sort of personal criticism?

S: Well, it depends what you mean by personal criticism. Inasmuch as any particular view that you are likely to criticize will be held by somebody - if it wasn't held by anybody, what would be the point of criticizing it? So inasmuch as a view is held by somebody, somebody

who identifies himself with that view will feel criticized, even though you yourself may be concerned simply with the view. You may not have heard of that particular person who identifies himself with the view, but when you criticize his view he may feel that you are criticizing him and retaliate accordingly, even though you have never even heard of him and had no idea of his existence. You can't really avoid that sort of situation if you are to criticize any view, however mildly you may do it. You may well upset somebody who identifies himself with that view.

Sanghapala: Bhante, it was tending to focus on the - you know the one about the outsized genital organs - surely that must always affect the ...

S: I think in the case of Bharati he would be rather amused, if not flattered! (Laughter.) He has written about himself - you haven't read the book - about himself and his activities quite frankly, and it is not as though I have sort of superimposed that sort of idea upon the book. But I must say that that image did spring to my mind quite spontaneously when I was writing the article. If I had felt that it would actually have upset Bharati, I would have suppressed it; I would have sacrificed it, even though it was quite a good image; but I certainly didn't feel that he would be in any way upset - if anything, rather amused.

Sanghapala: I think that's [...] the way you seem to know and have an understanding of the man which we don't have.

[73]

S: Mm. Well, I have read - I don't know him personally, but I have read his books. I've heard quite a bit about him, and I don't think he is the sort of person who would be upset by a remark of that sort. Especially as it comes at the end of quite a chain of argument.

: Do you think he would have been upset if Gerald Scarfe had actually done the drawing?

S: I really don't know, it's difficult to say. Gerald Scarfe does some pretty devastating drawings of everybody, from Mrs Thatcher downwards. I know politicians are a bit thick-skinned about such things. I imagine Bharati is a bit thick-skinned, too.

Vessantara: I still don't feel very helped in [.. .] Whilst undoubtedly you can't separate out a person from his view, there still does seem to be a distinction between criticizing a position that somebody holds to and, if they're identified with it - and that's when unfortunately they are going to be upset - there's a difference between that and - I'm not quite sure how I would define it, but basically criticism which is directed, as it seems, more at the person - it may be for the sake of polemical argument, but in some way you may ridicule them or make fun of them as opposed to simply making fun of their position. Do you see what I mean? And you have just said that, if you thought that your ridiculing of Bharati upset him you would withdraw it. I was sort of looking for some ...

S: I mean because that particular image only illustrates my argument. I wouldn't sacrifice my argument, but I'd sacrifice that particular image or illustration if I thought that that, as distinct from the argument, would upset him certainly.

Vessantara: So, taking the example of Subhuti and his recent difficulties and his Old Net for New Monsters, it seems that in that case the person, or at least one of the people that he is

criticizing, obviously is very defensive and there are dangers almost whatever one says that he will be upset; but none the less some of the ways in which Subhuti expresses himself do rather seem to be ridiculing people as opposed to simply ridiculing their views. Would you agree?

S: I'm not sure. For instance, when he says that somebody is muddled or not clear?

Vessantara: I wouldn't necessarily - I think that can be quite legitimate. But when he is talking about the chairman of the Scientific Buddhist Association, in a way just making fun of him for putting on airs, he is sort of calling him Chairman Such-and-such ..

: 'Chairperson' - 'the good Chairperson.'

Vessantara: Yes. Maybe I'll have to talk about specific examples, find some that ...

S: Well, first of all, one thing, it depends on the spirit in which it's exactly done. Knowing Subhuti - since you've mentioned Subhuti's name - I am quite sure from my personal knowledge of him that there was no malice in anything that he did, and I also wonder whether good-natured ridicule isn't a legitimate mode of refutation or exposure of anything which is false or anything which is untrue. For instance, one thinks in this connection of Voltaire. Voltaire was famous for wit and irony directed against, say, the Catholic Church and so many abuses in the Catholic Church. So I think perhaps one needs to be open to the possibility that even ridicule, even personal ridicule, is perhaps a legitimate method of argument. Because it would seem that there are certain points that it is rather difficult to [74] make in any other way; because if you treat what you are ridiculing sufficiently seriously it becomes all so heavy-handed that your point doesn't get across. And perhaps for certain foibles, at least, or weaknesses, the most effective remedy is just some good-natured ridicule.

You sometimes find that, even talking with people personally, sometimes there is no point in having a long, serious argument with them, but you need just to make them aware of how ridiculous their position is, and almost laugh them out of it. But obviously you need to exercise a certain tact in that connection. I think personal abuse should always be out, I mean of the sort that Milton used in some of his controversial writings. I think that really is quite - well, it would be against the speech Precepts. But, you know, if someone does give himself airs and graces beyond what is really justified, that it is really so ridiculous and absurd and he is trying to put across something on that basis, a serious logical refutation would itself almost be an absurdity.

Cittapala: Surely, if one is going to print replies [to be] disseminated in public media of one sort or another, one has to take into account the reaction, or what one might assume to be the normal reaction, of the general public. And I must say that my own response, which may just illustrate a particular weakness of mine, is that some of the recent articles and so on that I have seen published on our behalf in response to criticism of the FWBO would elicit the kind of response from the general public which would not go in our favour; we would be seen to be going over the top or being officiously aggressive in trying to redress the balance. Even though what we might say was factually accurate, nevertheless the tenor of our remarks is not, er ...

S: Well, probably this is something quite difficult to judge, because very often we don't know

what the reaction of the general public is, because the general public has given no sign of its reaction; we don't even know whether the general public had a reaction in these cases or ignored it all - we have absolutely nothing to go upon. In fact, we do know that some people who read Subhuti's first book have written to us and been attracted to the FWBO by it on account, partly, of some of its more controversial elements.

Cittapala: Yes, but it's not so much the actual controversial points which most people might or might not agree with; it's actually the manner in which one attempts to establish one's position.

S: I'm not sure exactly what you mean by manner.

Cittapala: Well, the particular choice of phrasing and language which, again ...

S: Are you thinking of anything in particular?

Cittapala: Er well, again, I suppose - yes, I suppose I have to refer to some of Subhuti's replies, firstly in the Old Net for New Monsters and also one or two of his replies printed in newspapers, all of which I'm afraid have produced within me a reaction of sort of 'That was rather unfortunately phrased,' and which I would have anticipated would not be received favourably by people that I know in the general public.

S: Well, one doesn't really know.

Cittapala: No. (Pause.)

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Sanghapala: If one doesn't really know, it seems to me (?) if we seem to get this feeling, I'm just trying to work out where it may come from. I feel it's the language I recognize as belonging to - sometimes coming from more political quarters, seems to be the language of people not very skilful or friendly or positive in outlook. If they are all maybe used in a positive way and are making use, instead of Voltaire, of a positive manner, if it seemed to come from that sort of milieu, then perhaps this is what we are talking about, perhaps it is what actually I am recognizing ...

S: I think one has to recognize that if you are replying to a criticism, you are replying to a criticism. In other words, you are refuting somebody. And if you are going to refute somebody, well, in a sense that is negative; and those who don't agree with your refutation, perhaps, will experience that as expressing hostility when in fact it doesn't express hostility. I think it is very difficult to express a definite difference of opinion or divergence of views in a mild sort of way. Even if you don't use strong or offensive language, the mere fact that you have got a different point of view, however abstractly or neutrally you express it, will be felt by some people as objectionable or offensive.

Tape 6

But it is probably difficult to say very much without going into very concrete examples, and having sufficient evidence, and we don't have any concrete examples at the moment.

Uttara: (inaudible) In Buddhism and Blasphemy and 'The Path of Regular Steps and of Irregular Steps', and ' Enlightenment as Experience and as Non-Experience', I definitely felt you were making strong statements against opposing views, and without using necessarily the symbolic language that was inherent, but still then that would be taken as offensive - so it doesn't necessarily - people won't just be offended by images; they will be offended by your point of view too.

S: Well, there are people who will be deeply offended by the fact that one is a Buddhist.

Uttara: Right.

S: I have had the experience myself [..] of telling someone in response to an inquiry that I was a Buddhist, and I have been looked at with absolute horror, merely because I have stated that I was a Buddhist. So I think one can't avoid the fact that, however meekly one expresses oneself, where meekness is possible, if you are expressing a difference of views or disagreeing with someone's cherished convictions, it is going to be offensive.

For instance - I have had so much experience of this sort of thing myself - in India more than in Britain, I must admit - I was always a vegetarian; I used to go out of my way to almost not exactly conceal the fact but soft-pedal it, because so many other Buddhists I knew, especially Bhikkhus, were non-vegetarians, and they didn't like vegetarians. So I would never say anything, I'd just eat my own vegetarian food, but not try to advocate vegetarianism; but I deeply offended quite a few people by being vegetarian, and was criticized and attacked for being vegetarian, as though simply by being a vegetarian I was casting some slur on those who were not vegetarians. Whereas I made a point of never advocating vegetarianism unless somebody actually asked my position and really wanted to know.

And then again, in India everybody believes that all is one; and I usually tried to avoid getting involved in arguments about whether Buddhism and Hinduism are the same thing; I didn't believe that they were the same thing, but there were [76] people, some of them sincere, some apparently not so sincere, who liked to believe or say that Buddhism and Hinduism are the same. So sometimes I would be directly challenged, but I would just say as quietly and meekly as I could, 'Well, no, I don't think they're quite the same' but I'd be taken up on that at once, sometimes, in a quite offensive way.

So I don't think you can avoid upsetting people, however mildly and meekly you express yourself. I think we are deluding ourselves if we [think we] can live in the world inoffensively - that is to say, without giving offence to people unintentionally and against our own will. This is not to say that we shouldn't try as hard as we can not to give offence, but I think we are really deluding ourselves if we think it's possible for us, if we are careful enough, never to give offence to anybody. I just don't think it's possible.

So I think quite a lot of the criticism that Subhuti has received from within the Movement has been based on the assumption that, if only he had been a bit more careful, he need not have given offence; but I think offence, so far as some people are concerned, is inherent in his position well, it's inherent in the Buddhist position. I don't think one can escape that, however meek and inoffensive and conciliatory one is, one is going to upset some people, unfortunately.

Ratnaprabha: I have talked to a few people at various levels in and outside the Movement who have read some of the more strongly worded articles in the Newsletter as it was then, by Subhuti and so on. My general impression is that the problem doesn't usually seem to be that there is concern about the offence one may give to the objects of the articles in other words, the people to whose criticism the articles are replying; it is more the effect of the general tone as perceived, whether or not correctly perceived, on the general reader. I don't know how seriously one can take this, because often the person will say, 'Of course, I found it all right, but I think that the general reader will not like this.'

But what occurs to me, for what it's worth, is that the use of personal ridicule is something which has to be done very carefully, because not all of us are as good at writing as, say, Voltaire was.

S: Hm, hm! I thought you were going to say 'as good as I was'! (Laughter.)

Ratnaprabha: Or as good as you are, Bhante, yes! I think it takes a lot of skill.

S: Yes, it has to be done delicately; I quite agree, it can't be done in a clumsy way or it just misfires.

Ratnaprabha: My own personal feeling is that Subhuti hasn't yet developed that skill sufficiently, and it sometimes can almost seem not just like gentle ridicule but like a sort of sneering or something like that, which really gives a very bad impression.

S: Mm. Well, perhaps it's a question of literary style, more than anything else.

Padmapani: Bhante, would you say whenever possible it would be good for the person - I know Subhuti in this case went to see the person who actually wrote the article in The Observer about his book, I think it was - I can't remember the exact one now ...

: About the family, in The Guardian.

Padmapani: About the family, yes. And Subhuti went to ...

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S: Which one are you referring to? Are you referring to an article, or a letter?

Padmapani: It was a letter to The Observer or The Guardian.

S: Well, Subhuti did go and see that person.

Padmapani: Yes, I'm just saying don't you think it's a good idea whenever possible for the person who is taking up the matter with the other person to see them personally?

S: Oh yes, I think that's a good idea, yes, indeed. In fact, I urged Subhuti to do that, and he did it.

Padmapani: It seemed to have done the trick.

S: Yes, in this particular case. Another person that Subhuti has tried to see refuses to meet him. Subhuti is only too willing and happy to meet people. He has no unfriendly feelings towards them, he just wants to discuss things with them and if possible convince them. I'm afraid, you know, some people are quite backward in coming forward, so to speak. I've always been willing to discuss anything with anybody, but usually - I'm speaking of the general Buddhist world - people aren't willing to discuss things with me.

: Sounds a bit like Vimalakirti!

S: (laughs). Yes, while we're on the subject, I think that quite a lot of people in the FWBO, not excluding the Order, still lead very sheltered lives, especially as in the case of many of them their lives are lived mainly within the Movement itself; and I think sometimes they lose sight of the fact that conditions outside are very, very different. And we have been very fortunate, the Movement having started and being strongest still in the United Kingdom, inasmuch as we have encountered no real opposition or persecution or anything of that sort. We have yet to come up against that sort of thing, I think really anywhere. I think, therefore, that we haven't, or many people haven't, perhaps got much of an idea of what they could be up against. Maybe because we are quite small still, and we aren't perceived as a threat by many people, or maybe we have just escaped so far; but we are beginning to be a little well-known, and I think perhaps it's not surprising that some of the things that Subhuti has written have annoyed a few people. We mustn't exaggerate: he has only seriously annoyed two or three people, not more than that. But we mustn't think it's just Subhuti's style and that if he just moderated his style we wouldn't have had any trouble, and we'd never have any trouble if everybody wrote in a nice, moderate style; this is just not going to happen.

Vessantara: I think personally, Bhante, that it's not so much that I feel it's possible not to upset people - I'm sure we will - it's just a question of [that] one wants when one reads something that is written as it were on behalf of the FWBO to feel personally that one can support it and the tone in which it is written; and then, if someone is reacting to it and is upset, that their reaction is quite unreasonable and unfortunate.

S: Well, you will have to give, then, those who do write more feedback; because, as far as I remember, when Subhuti delivered his Old Net for New Monsters as a talk, afterwards those who did speak to him at all congratulated him. I don't remember that any criticism was expressed at that time by Order Members. I know that some, at least, congratulated him heartily on his talk.

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Ratnaprabha: I did say a few things to him.

S: And perhaps also one shouldn't just leave it to Subhuti. When a certain letter appeared in The Guardian - well, a Mitra wrote from, I think it was Harlow, and then later on Subhuti's letter was published, after a lot of difficulty - we had actually quite a lot of difficulty getting a reply published at all, which was significant. It might have been a good idea if others had written in, not just left it to Subhuti to do so.

Cittapala: Sorry, Bhante, can I come back once more on that point, because recently a circular was sent round the centres by the Order Office saying that correspondence with the press should actually be referred to the Order Office, or any dealings with the press or ...

S: Ah, yes, this is with regard to centres. But it's up to any person to write in an individual capacity.

Cittapala: Ah, I see.

S: That's a quite different thing. You're not writing on behalf of the FWBO, you might not even use your Order name; you just write as an individual. Well, you're entitled to write anything you please as an individual. But if correspondence is addressed, say, by TV people and so on to a centre, which is acting as it were officially as an FWBO centre, then I want to know about that. But what people write off their own bat as individuals is entirely up to them. If someone appears on TV just as themselves, well, that is up to them; but if they're speaking on behalf of the FWBO or the Order, then clearly they ought to consult with us.

Ong Sin Choon: Does that apply to overseas centres as well?

S: Yes, if it is sufficiently important, or if they feel there is a possibility of misunderstanding or they are not quite sure of their position. It means a lot of extra work for me, but I think it is probably necessary. But I mean people in different centres, including those overseas, just have to use their own discretion about referring things, not just to refer every trivial thing to me; but certainly things which are of some importance. Especially if they are asked for views on some controversial subject, and they are going to be quoted as the views of the FWBO. For instance, if you are asked as, say, a representative of the FWBO, whether in the FWBO we regard meditation as important, well, yes, you can say we do; you don't need to ask anybody about that. But if you are asked about the view of the FWBO on some political or economic question that you are not yourself sure about, or which hasn't been discussed, it would be wise to refer that to me, seek my opinion. In some ways, it is a pity that that is necessary, but the fact is that many people in the Movement - I am not excluding Order Members - are quite badly informed about all sorts of matters, even directly relating to Buddhism itself; and, in a sense, cannot be relied upon to represent the Dharma, or to represent the FWBO's understanding of the Dharma, correctly.

Padmapani: Presumably that's why there aren't many letters or articles written.

S: I'm not sure about that. I would hope that there are a few people who would be able to write a letter to a newspaper. But maybe I overestimate people, because I remember that, years ago, it took me several years of repeatedly explaining and emphasizing before I could get clear to Order Members - this is 10, 12, 15 years ago - the distinction between being a Member of the Order and being a member of a particular FWBO. You wouldn't believe, perhaps, some of you, the amount of [79] difficulty I had in getting the distinction, the difference, across, even to Order Members in those days. Now I believe it is clear to everybody, at least in theory. So I think it really adds up to Order Members especially acquainting themselves much more closely, not just with the Dharma but with the particular understanding of the Dharma that we have in the FWBO and the way that it applies to different areas of life.

I think perhaps people give far too little thought to all these sort of matters, and perhaps even allow themselves far too little time to give thought to these matters. You should really, as an Order Member - at least, after you have been an Order Member for two or three years - be able to stand up and answer questions of this sort with confidence, whether from the general

public or the press or whatever. But actually sometimes I would be on tenterhooks if some Order Members, I'm afraid, were interviewed by a reporter or someone on TV. There is almost no knowing what sort of impression they might give. This is one of the things that struck me about the film about the preordination course last year: some Order Members were interviewed, but they were so inarticulate as though they couldn't really express themselves or what they felt. They came across as decent enough people, you know, positive sort of bloke, but terribly inarticulate: at least, I thought so. And imagine putting someone like that in front of a TV camera or handing them over to a newspaper reporter! This is mainly the reason why I have insisted that inquiries about the Movement, even inquiries about Buddhism coming from the press and TV and so on should be referred from the different centres to the Order Office and to me. But it really means people have got to do a lot more homework and think about things much more seriously. At present there is only a handful of relatively senior Order Members who have got much of a grasp of things. Most just jog along in their own little way, in their own particular corner of the Movement, without much awareness of wider issues.

Kevin Donovan: Are you saying, then, that as a general principle Order Members should maintain a sort of active interest in political and economic affairs, and particularly those areas that may relate to Buddhism?

S: I think it's not so much that - I think one's understanding of Buddhist principles should be so strong and so clear that when some particular political or economic problem is presented to you you can apply those principles quite confidently. I don't think that every Order Member needs to follow the world news, or national news, even, in detail; but certainly they must all be well grounded in those principles which will have to be applied to particular specific situations.

Kevin Donovan: The point of that question was - I have noticed in myself and I have noticed in other people that when an individual becomes involved there is a tendency to drop things like political interests and become, as you said earlier, quite sheltered in a way, just moving in a little circle

S: Well, in some ways that is natural to begin with, because in some cases people have had a rather unpleasant, rather bitter, even, experience of the outside world. It is a great relief to get into something positive like the FWBO and the Order. So it may well be that, for, say, a few years even, they need just to lick their wounds and build themselves up spiritually within this more supportive environment. But I think, sooner or later, in their own interest, in the interests of the Movement and in the interests of the outside world, they've got to start looking beyond and taking some interest - a sober, aware interest - in at least some of the things that are going on.

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Uttara: It seems that the policy has changed. I don't know whether the policy has changed or whether it was - but I thought that we didn't actually have any representatives for Buddhism in a way. I particularly remember ...

S: I'm not quite clear what you're getting at.

Uttara: Well, in the sense of you were saying that we have to be prepared to represent -well,

go in front of a camera; it would be an individual, so to speak, who got in front of that camera speaking as a Buddhist.

S: Well, there are both possibilities.

Uttara: ... so can you represent, can you say, 'Well, here is a Buddhist point of view'? Isn't that a contradiction in terms?

S: I'm still not clear what you're getting at. (Pause.) Are you perhaps thinking about what I said about it not being possible to represent love whereas power can be represented?

Uttara: No, I think it was in terms of having representatives for the Movement or something like that. I think I remember a few years ago.

Ratnaprabha: Representatives for the Order, wasn't it? I seem to remember something about it not being possible to claim to represent the whole Order, to set ourselves up as representing the whole Order.

S: I think it depends what you mean by represent. Because there were certain basic things that everybody in the Order would be agreed on, say the importance and centrality of the Going for Refuge. So if you were asked about that you could say with confidence that that was the view of everybody in the Order; so to that extent you could represent at least that particular view of the Order. But if you were asked something more peripheral and controversial, you wouldn't be able to represent the Order, perhaps. If you were asked, for instance: 'What is the ...' - I have been asked things like that - 'What is the Order's opinion on Keats?' Well, I don't know; do you see what I mean? Some like him, some don't; others have never heard of him! Don't forget there are Order Members in India; they probably haven't heard of Keats! So you couldn't represent the Order on that subject.

And also 'represent' means speaking for, it can also mean acting on behalf of. So no individual can act on behalf of the whole Order, cannot commit the whole Order to anything without consulting it. Do you see what I mean?

Uttara: Yes. [Are you saying], Bhante, that if there are representatives maybe for the Order, you are talking maybe in the sense of the FWBO too more as a public front, in a way? (?)

S: Well, you may be invited, sometimes centres are invited, to send a representative along to a particular meeting, and they may accept that, and they may represent the point of view of that particular centre or of the FWBO in general in that particular context.

Uttara: So that person maybe gives over a certain image of the Movement in a way, you say this is the responsibility we have ...

S: For instance, if a centre is invited to send a representative to a meeting, say, a representative of the centre or a representative of the FWBO, they would have to be very careful whom they select; even, for instance, if a speaker is asked for.

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Because that one person will give an impression of the whole Movement to that particular

group of people or that particular audience. So you have to consider, if a centre is asked for a speaker or a representative, the council (as it should be) has to consider very carefully who should be sent. For instance, if you are invited by some rather intellectual body, well, perhaps you need to send along an informed and articulate person, not someone who is just a good chap, however positive he may be.

Uttara: I was sort of wondering whether or not this presents a false image of the Movement ...

S: You cannot but present a false image of the Movement. How can you possibly present an adequate, multi-faceted image of the Movement as it is to anybody? Does even any Order Member have a fully adequate view of the Movement? I mean, there are Order Members who haven't even seen the majority of our centres. All those in Britain - most of them haven't seen the centres in India, or New Zealand, or Australia, or America. So it's going to be very difficult for anybody to present the Movement as a whole. For instance, in the case of Order Members, they know from, say, reading the pages of Shabda, that you can go through all the reportings-in in Shabda and get a very odd impression of the Movement, from some issues of Shabda, indeed, which would be very, very misleading. So it isn't just that it's just this odd person going from a centre to some outside body or group that might give a misleading impression of the centre or of the FWBO, or not an adequate one - who could give an adequate picture? It's a question of degree.

Uttara: I tend to see that there are certain things that people send to these conferences and so forth, and so I tend to think that they seem to be the representatives of the Movement; but it's sort of like, well, we'll have people like Subhuti and Nagabodhi and so on, and they are the people the general public are going to see, 'Oh, this is the FWBO; these are the types of people' ...

S: Well, this is inevitable, because you can't send everybody. You are going to have to send one person. And the particular audience is going to get an impression about the Movement as a whole from that particular one person. So that particular person always has to make sure that his personality doesn't get in the way and that he is genuinely a medium, so to speak, for the Dharma and for the FWBO.

Uttara: Mm. I have heard you say that maybe - I don't know how serious you were, this was years ago - you talked about maybe somebody going to Cambridge, somebody who is sort of completely opposite, like somebody like Canda(?) - I don't know whether you could mention it - going to Cambridge.

S: Well, that is a possible approach. It would put quite a lot of people off (Laughter.), but you might attract two or three. It is very difficult to say. It is in some ways a very unknown factor, the personal factor. Some people will succeed and attract people that you might not have thought would have done so; and vice versa. But, anyway, we are getting a little off the track. Which question did that arise out of?

Vessantara: That came from Sanghapala's question about your reference to Bharati.

S: Ah, yes, right. Oh, I think my watch has stopped.

Vessantara: It's ten to nine.

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S: It has stopped. How many questions have we got left?

Vessantara: Just a couple.

S: All right, let's have them, then.

Ratnaprabha: This is a question on the pleasure principle and the reality principle, which are terms that you use on page 2 of the yellow version of the pamphlet. You say: 'The pleasure principle affords us no access to the domain of the reality principle.'

S: Though, of course, one must also be careful not to separate those two principles too much. I don't think you ever have an experience of the pleasure principle completely divorced from the reality principle with a small r; in other words, there is never a complete absence of objective reference. And probably it is impossible to have an experience of the reality principle without the pleasure principle. It's a question of degree of emphasis.

Ratnaprabha: Well, you making this distinction between the reality principle with a small r and with a large R may answer the question. As I understand it, these terms were coined by Freud.

S: Yes, they were, and I have quite consciously as it were taken them from Freud, but I am using them in a quite approximate way. I am not using them, I think, in a strictly Freudian manner.

Ratnaprabha: I think - do correct me if I'm wrong - as I understand Freud, and I speak very approximately as well, what we want, which is the pleasure principle, is according to him being constantly thwarted by a stern, objective reality, which is the reality principle; and the two are ultimately irreconcilable, according to Freud.

S: Well, Freud is, I think, referring to the pleasure principle of, so to speak, the ordinary person. In Buddhism, for instance, your desire, which represents the pleasure principle, that something which is intrinsically impermanent should be permanent is brought up against the reality principle in the form that the impermanent is not permanent, again and again. But you can modify, so to speak, your pleasure principle: you can transform your craving into positive emotion, and you can unify that and integrate that with your approach, so to speak, to Reality itself in the higher sense. So Buddhism would not see a completely irreconcilable conflict, not in the case of the person who was committed to a spiritual life. In the case of the person who was not so committed, yes, there would be an irreconcilable conflict; he or she would be constantly brought up against the fact that their desires were in conflict with the very nature of existence itself: the fact that they wanted to go on living for ever, perhaps.

Ratnaprabha: I think that, in the way the question has been asked, I just wanted to clarify your usage of the terms pleasure principle and reality principle. So Reality principle with a capital R would refer to sort of Ultimate Reality?

S: Right, yes.

Ratnaprabha: While the reality principle with a small r would that be ...

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S: The facts of existence in the ordinary sense. Not that, from a Buddhist point of view, one can completely separate even those two, but it is useful to make that rough and ready distinction between relative reality and absolute Reality.

Ratnaprabha: So this is the same kind of thing: the reality principle with a small r is what you call 'objective truth' in your Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War?

S: That's right, yes. When I'm talking about 'objective truth', I am concerned with objective truth in the quite ordinary, common-sense way, not something mystical or Transcendental as some people seem to have thought.

Padmapani: Bhante, it seems that what you have just said [gives a very good idea] of the difference between person in a worldly sense following a hedonistic lifestyle, and one following the spiritual life, whereby you are transforming that craving into you could say bliss and higher levels of bliss. It's a very good way, I think, of presenting that in terms of people coming along to centres.

S: What would you actually say?

Padmapani: Um well, in a way, it would be very attractive - I suppose I'm really thinking about the craving person rather than the hateful person.

S: 'Buddhism satisfies all your cravings'? (Laughter.) Well, it does - after transforming them.

Padmapani: Yes; maybe I - it's really...

S: But I think you do have a point. It is important to emphasize that a Buddhist life is a happy life, and it isn't just a question of giving up things. Yes, you do give up things, but you give them up because you've got something better which you enjoy even more. This is one of the main points of the latter part of this article: that pleasure, or even, if you like, the pleasure principle, is an inherent aspect of the spiritual life, and to be integrated with it more and more.

I have been touching on this quite a bit recently, that you must take delight in the Dharma, take delight in the spiritual life. You can't go along just out of an abstract, rather arid sense of duty for very long. You've got to enjoy what you are doing, otherwise sooner or later there will be a reaction. So it's very important to catch hold of something in the spiritual life that you enjoy; whatever it is, it may be meditation, it may be Puja, it may be just communicating with friends, it doesn't matter - something that you enjoy within the general broad framework of the spiritual life. Otherwise you are really lost, because it seems the human organism can't sustain itself without some kind of pleasure, some sort of enjoyment, some sort of delight. So you must communicate to others that sense of enjoyment: that you are enjoying the Dharma, that you are enjoying being a Buddhist, that you are enjoying taking the meditation class, that you are enjoying giving the lecture. It doesn't have to be sort of effervescent or bubbly, necessarily, but just a sort of serene happiness, at least, or at least some enthusiasm and inspiration. That is extremely important, that you don't throw away the hedonistic baby with the unskilfully hedonistic bath water if you see what I'm getting at.

But this is one of the two most important points in this whole article - one being the

distinction between samatha and vipassana, and all that that implies, and the other, as I've just said, the importance of enjoyment, of euphoria, as an integral part of the spiritual life. And it isn't self-centred and egoistic and individualistic to want to have something that you are doing, within the context of the spiritual life, which is enjoyable. You shouldn't present things to people just in terms of duty, in the ordinary sense of the term. Well, some people enjoy doing [84] their duty - but not everybody does. [Unless] people enjoy doing something because it's a duty, you mustn't present things in terms of duty.

I mean why do people go looking for distractions? Why are they pulled outside the Movement? Why do they spend hours watching TV sometimes? Well, they are not finding enough pleasure and enjoyment in the spiritual life. I really am surprised sometimes [to see] why so many people want to go to the cinema people living in a community when Mitras are crying out for contact with Order Members, and there are the Order Members marching off to the cinema! It may be that it's a vitally important film I wouldn't know! It could be that it's got great spiritual inspiration; again, I wouldn't know, I rather doubt that there are many such films. But usually, if you go looking for something outside, you don't really know quite what, it's because you are not enjoying the spiritual life sufficiently. Well, there may be reasons for that, you may be going through a difficult patch through no fault of your own, dealing with something left over from your childhood, perhaps; but you've got to get through that as quickly as possible and establish contact with something within the framework of the spiritual life that you really enjoy doing; otherwise you are going to have a very difficult time, and you're going sooner or later to have a big reaction.

Sudhana: I was just wondering, Bhante, whether some films in the cinema aren't a valid form of sublimating - you know, you feel you can't really relate to Puja tonight, but to go and see a film that can be quite beautiful and be an art form.

S: Well, some films are art forms. I would think that if you felt in that sort of mood, the best thing to do is just to stay put. All right, don't force yourself to go into the Puja, if you really don't feel like going, though sometimes it happens you give yourself a bit of a push and when you get there you find actually you are enjoying it. But if that isn't the case, I think the best thing is just to stay with your feeling of boredom, or whatever it is, and just experience that, and not allow yourself to be distracted or to seek distraction.

Sudhana: Are you suggesting that you don't go out and look for art forms in order to sort of - you know, just for sublimating purposes?

S: Well, it depends what sort of art, and most films, including TV films apparently, have a very strong effect on one; so you have to be very careful what you see. Some people have had quite unpleasant shocks, I know, going to see things which turned out to be a little different from what they thought they would be. Someone was telling me not long before I came here that, almost by accident, he had seen a film on TV and night after night horrific images from this film were repeating, he just couldn't get rid of them; it was still going on when I left. So one needs to be very selective. What does Marshall McLuhan call it? Is it a hot or a cold medium, TV? I always get them mixed up. (Silence.) I think it's a hot medium; anyway, it's one or the other. But the meaning is, it has a very strong emotional effect upon you. So you have to be very careful how you expose yourself to it, or the extent to which you expose yourself to it.

Sudhana: But in the case of music, it is just that if you didn't feel like doing the Puja tonight, but perhaps thought you would go down to see a Mozart concert which you think might make you feel a bit more human - would you suggest you sit with that or go down to the Mozart concert? It's really discriminating ...

S: It's difficult to generalize. It depends on the sort of person you are what you eventually do. Going to the Mozart concert isn't just going to the Mozart concert; you've got to get there, maybe you've got to get on to the tube with all that that implies, etc. etc. I won't say there may not be occasions when listening to a little [85] music of a positive kind couldn't have a good effect on you, but I would imagine, if that was the case, you would probably be better off just sitting quietly in your room and putting on a record, a carefully chosen one. I think, especially in a place like London, people are so exposed to distractions and respond to them so almost automatically, I think one needs to watch this all the time; especially when one thinks that there are so many other things that Order Members especially need to do. Often their meditation is so weak, their Dharma knowledge is so inadequate, their contacts with other people are so occasional, they've got so much to do in these sort of fields.

So I don't exclude the occasional well selected film, even, occasionally; but I think one has to be very careful it doesn't get out of hand or exercise an undue influence upon one. Seeing the wrong sort of film, I know in the case of some people, can spoil their meditation for days on end, maybe for the whole week. Is it worth it? Is it worth even taking the risk? How seriously do people take their meditation, or take their state of mind, or how concerned are they to maintain themselves all the time in a positive state of mind? Not just positive in the sense of 'sort of all right', but very dynamically positive.

And then there's the pub: some people still go to the pub. I can't rule that out absolutely, because I don't rule anything out absolutely, but I think people who make any sort of habit of it will really need to look at that very carefully, and ask themselves what effect does alcohol have on their minds, what effect does being in a pub have on their minds? Are they really going as Bodhisattvas, trying to help sentient beings, or are they just drifting along because they feel they have nothing better to do? And what an admission is that for an Order Member or even a Mitra or even an ordinary Friend: that they have got nothing better to do than just go along to the pub? I can remember a case where - I'm not sure whether - yes, it was a Mitra - turned up from New Zealand. The very first evening he was in London, the first words which were addressed to him by two Order Members were an invitation to go along with them to the pub; and he was really quite shocked. So one has to think about these things quite seriously.

I have been also talking recently [about]

Side 2

the need for a more positive social life within the Movement. Well, perhaps there isn't enough, so that people get involved in unskilful forms of social activity. I don't think - did I talk about it here or was it in England? Here, wasn't it? How you could lay on a farewell dinner for someone or a dinner of welcome and rejoice in their merits, have more of this sort of thing within the Movement, so that people who are, perhaps, a bit sociably inclined don't feel the need to go right outside into some relatively unskilful situation.

Cittapala: Bhante, in that respect, some of the Order Members around the LBC have been

talking about the possibility - I don't think it's actually a concrete suggestion - of setting up a sort of men's um club, I think that is the right word - a sort of place where you go and ...

S: I thought you were going to say 'non-alcoholic pub'.

Cittapala: Yes, well, not a place - a place where you can get coffee and a cake, something of that nature - do you think that would be the right sort of thing?

S: Well, it has been talked about at least for three or four years, to my knowledge. I think it might be a good idea. It might be, especially, say, for Order Members who live in smaller communities, maybe only two or three of them, or even Mitras. So if one or two people are away on, say, holiday, well, they haven't got any [86] company, they might feel like some positive, skilful company in the course of the evening. Yes, probably around the LBC is the only place where one could do this, because that is the one that has the most people. It might well be worth considering. You could even have, you know, non-alcoholic refreshments, you could even have non-alcoholic beer. I wouldn't object to that. (Groan.) I believe they have non-alcoholic beer down at Hockneys. I've tried it; you really can't tell the difference! (Laughter.)

: Try giving it to an Australian!

S: Well, we'll convert even the Australians!

Sanghapala: Bhante, if you can't tell the difference, it could be served if you wanted to as well as the real thing.

S: Well, you can't tell the difference as regards the taste. You can tell the difference the next morning! But this is again another aspect of positive emotion and enjoyment and pleasure. It's really quite a shame when people have to go outside the Movement to enjoy themselves, and it does sometimes happen. So I think there need to be more conscious, skilful arrangements, even, for one to enjoy oneself within the Movement, in a way that is in harmony with one's overall spiritual life. Sometimes you need to relax. I am not saying that you have to be on the stretch the whole time; sometimes you need to relax. And also I think man is, from an ordinary point of view, a social animal, a political animal, as Aristotle said; and I think if we are not careful our social instinct, or our social need, if you like, doesn't get properly satisfied. We do have a certain gregarious, social side that we need to take into consideration, so that it doesn't just wander off for its satisfaction outside the Movement, but finds its satisfaction inside the Movement. You might find it difficult to relax with people that you are working with, say, in a co-op, because you have got into a way of relating just through work. If you talk, you talk about work. But sometimes, however good work may be, you just feel like getting away from it and forgetting about work for a while, talking about something quite different. And so a sort of club of the sort you mention might be a way of doing that. The sort of relaxation I think one should avoid, normally, is the mixed party. They do occasionally take place even around the LBC, but I'm afraid not with any very warm feelings so far as I am concerned. They seem not to have a very positive effect. In fact, I believe that I did hear that members of the LBC team made a resolve not to go to any parties because they recognized the unfortunate effect that they sometimes had.

Jayamati(?): In fact, it was the Sukhavati community. Order Members in the community.

S: Good, yes. So that almost means the team, doesn't it, in effect?

Jayamati: I think it does, yes.

Padmapani: Bhante, I remember when Sukhavati was being built, and it was a very sort of dynamic situation, and it was rather crude work [..], that what we used to do was somebody, I think it was Vajradaka, would organize soirees; and I thought they were very good, and I remember a mitra gave a really good - was it Tam O'Shanter? It was very good.

S: I think I was there on that occasion. I think communities are doing this more and more. They are a bit shy about it in a way. I think another aspect is, we are quite accustomed just to being fed with our entertainment, just switching it on or [87] just going to see something, or just sitting and watching something or listening to something. There's far too little creation of our own entertainment, as it were; as there was, say, in the Victorian period.

But I was thinking just a minute ago, when I spoke about the frustration of the societal instinct, of D. H. Lawrence; because I have mentioned in my review of that biography of Lawrence - or rather I quoted Lawrence about the absolute frustration of his societal instinct, as he calls it. And that seems to have played a very big part in embittering Lawrence. He seems to have had no positive group to belong to, and he was just landed with his wife, Frieda, and just friends they made from time to time. He didn't belong to any sort of community. And he recognized that he needed that, but he never found it, even in the form of a moderately positive group. So I think this is a deep human need, to belong to a group.

'Group' shouldn't really be a dirty word; we know that the group isn't the spiritual community, and we must never confuse the two, but the group, none the less, for the evolving individual with a small i, is absolutely necessary. We must never forget that. So it's very important that we provide or create a positive group, with sort of free access as it were into the spiritual community, for those who want to take that step. I have said sometimes in the past that the Order represents the spiritual community and the FWBO represents the positive group, with, of course, a certain amount of overlap.

Derek Goodman: I was just wondering, both tonight and last week or the week before you were mentioning this kind of thing. You gave a few examples of - you mentioned festivals as one, dinner parties and so on. Had you considered whether I was wondering whether it mattered - whether they would be single-sex situations or mixed, that they would both be valuable in different ways, or whether one was more valuable than the other?

S: I think single-sex situations are definitely more valuable. In a way it's a pity that one has to say that, but I think that is the fact. Not that single-sex situations are necessarily, automatically, positive, just because they are single sex. That also doesn't follow. But you have a much better chance, I think, of making it a genuinely positive situation. But, of course, one has to bear in mind that, if you are dealing with people straight off the street, absolute beginners, you can't always introduce the separation of men's activities and women's activities straight away. You have to exercise some caution. But I think one mustn't rationalize that, and use that as an excuse, almost, for extending mixed activities beyond their legitimate sphere.

Derek Goodman: What would be the general [..]? Maybe someone has been coming along for a year or more. I was just wondering if we ought to try to introduce more social activities

into that sphere; would you think they should be ... ?

S: I think festivals would be good, because there you've got a definite spiritual orientation, and it's quite clear that there is that spiritual orientation. None the less, there is scope for people mixing freely and talking together and having a cup of tea together and all that sort of thing.

Padmapani: Bhante, what do you think is the single most difficult point about the single-sex community? Do you think it's distraction outside, or do you think it's men trying to develop friendship with men

S: Say that again.

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Padmapani: What do you think is the most difficult, the most distracting situation in trying to form a very positive situation, say, at a place like Sukhavati? Do you think it's people going outside and their energy going outside (mind you, they're all tied together, I suppose), and men actually trying to form friendships with each other, inside the community itself?

S: As you say, they are interconnected. But I think one of the big difficulties is that quite a lot of men in their heart of hearts don't really believe that they can have a close friendship with another man. They don't really believe, in their heart of hearts, that they can get as close to another man etc., as they can get to a woman. They feel there is always going to be something missing or something lacking. They may not express that openly, but I think very often that is what they really think, in many cases. So they are not prepared, very often, to make the same effort in connection with their friendship with a man. I'm not thinking of the sexual factor, because - all right, accepting that that won't be satisfied, so to speak, in the context of friendship with another man; but it's the emotional factor that very often they sort of really feel is not going to be satisfied or fulfilled, they are not going to get the same kind of emotional fulfilment through their friendship with a man. So they don't really think it, very often, worth while to put much effort into it. After all, there are so many men living in spiritual communities, but how many really strong friendships are there? Really strong friendships in the almost old classical sense? I'm not thinking of any sexual element, because sometimes that is a binding factor, but that is not really what one is thinking about.

Padmapani: Because a frank response to what you are saying seems to be that - and I've always found this personally very difficult, living in one, that is - the environment is just so important. For instance, here, in this immediate environment, it is just so positive for the conditions for friendship to develop more, whereas in London, because you have got distractions - no matter what you try to do, they are out there, even looking out the window you can actually see them.

S: Well, you can look out the window here! (Laughter.)

Padmapani: Yes, but somehow [words drowned] and in a way ...

S: You've just got to feel that developing friendships within your community, and having a very positive, happy community life is very, very important. I think you've got to acknowledge that, at least in theory, to begin with, and just stick to that. Constantly remind

yourself of it. Otherwise, you can visit some men's communities and there's a very half-hearted atmosphere there, very lackadaisical and you don't feel that there's much life and energy and enthusiasm and inspiration within that community. So if the members want a bit of excitement, well, they tend to look outside; if they want a bit of stimulation, they tend to look outside, in various ways.

I notice on this retreat itself - I don't know whether any of you have, or whether you have even discussed it; you might have done - but I notice, over the last week or ten days, more of people's energies seems to be going into the retreat itself, in the sense of the community itself. I don't know if anyone has noticed that? (Voices: Yes.) It's as though energies which formerly might have been directed outside, since they can't be directed outside here, are gradually being fed into the situation itself, especially into the interrelationships between people. At first, it seems, at the beginning of the retreat, a lot of those energies were just in abeyance, but it does seem, I have noticed, that after a week or ten days they have tended to percolate or feed into the community that you've got here for these three months. Some of you might well have become aware of that. But this is a [89] natural development: the outlets are sort of blocked, so the waters as it were are accumulating within the lake; and perhaps there are also some subterranean springs!

Sudhana: So maybe it ought to be that before people actually go out, they have to really think about why they're going out no, that's obvious, but ...

S: Or why they are living in the city? Sometimes, at the end of Tuscanies, I feel really sorry for young, newly ordained Order Members going straight back to London - or even Glasgow. I really feel quite sorry for them, because sometimes I think that in a sense it's the last place they should be going back to. It would be really a great thing if they could just stay on for two or three years, or for two or three years at least go to a quiet country centre, and just consolidate themselves, get more deeply into their meditation, study more, cultivate their spiritual friendships, and not at once be plunged right in the midst of all these distractions. I think in the long run we need to reorganize the whole Movement to make that possible; at least, now people are going to have three months away, which they couldn't have before. So those who are going back to country retreat centres or whatever are really very fortunate. But those who do go back to city centres should be very, very alert and on their guard, and not dissipate whatever they might have gained here. I have known new Order Members go back, or even old ones, from Tuscany, and within two months they have just [blown] whatever it was they had gained, very often through carelessness.

Anyway, I think we have one more question left, haven't we, or even two?

Vessantara: I think Sanghapala had a question. It was about a quote about the Pure Land.

S: That's a nice note to end on.

Sanghapala: Oh yes,

S: Is that the last question?

Vessantara: Yes, and I'd like to just check whether you had any other points which we hadn't raised, which you thought would be worth going into.

Sanghapala: Bhante, Bharati states that 'In the Pure Land school of northern Buddhism, the Buddha is a giver of grace to those who worship him faithfully, with very little attention to the highly individualistic, speculative and [.. .] meditation system which both the Theravada and many Mahayana schools.. .' You go on to comment about these individualistic, speculative and [.. .] systems. You don't make any reference to the first part of the quote: 'In the Pure Land school of Northern Buddhism, the Buddha is a giver of grace to those who worship him faithfully.' Is that incidental? It is just at the first part of the quote ...

S: Well, I suppose he is so obviously wrong there I didn't think it necessary to go into it. If you want to sort of check what the position of the Pure Land or True Pure Land School is, there is the relevant section in the Survey. This clearly isn't just a question of giving something out of grace, it is a quite different point of view. Bharati, in a sense - well, really he doesn't know what he is talking about here. It's perhaps uncharitable, but I'm afraid it's true.

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Sanghapala: But it is unusual for you, Bhante, because was this pamphlet not addressed to the general public at large, despite the fact that it first appeared in a Newsletter.

S: I can't remember for sure because I wrote it well over ten years ago, I think; but I think I had in mind mainly the regular readers of the Newsletter, and they would be mainly Order Members, Mitras and Friends. But don't forget I was very conscious that it was quite a long review, and really it was too long for the Newsletter, so there were quite a few more things I could have said than I did in the course of the review. I didn't say them, just because I felt, well, I've already taken up quite enough space. That to some extent accounts for the condensation of the whole article. I was always very aware that I had, not exactly Nagabodhi breathing down my neck, but that I had to be mindful of the limitations of space.

Vessantara: Lastly, Bhante, were there any points which come out of the text which you wanted to raise which haven't come out of our questions to you?

S: I think not really, now, because I have managed to get one or two words in about the importance of the pleasure principle in the spiritual life, even: we branched off on to various practical considerations. They have been in my mind in recent months, especially the importance of the whole sort of 'social' aspects of FWBO activities.

Vessantara: Do you get the impression, in our actual presentation of the Dharma in the centres, that we stress the enjoyment side of the spiritual life sufficiently?

S: Well, in a way I wouldn't know that, because it's years since I took a class at a centre. I have to rely on people giving talks and leading classes to give the necessary emphasis on these things.

Vessantara: It's interesting, in our study group today, we were talking about the extent to which we felt we had more self-denying and a more hedonistic approach to life, and there were, I think, a couple of people who felt that, to the extent that they had been out of balance, they had erred more on the side of self-denial; and they felt that to some extent that was because they had picked that up coming into contact with Buddhism in the FWBO; it seemed as if there was a certain possibility of - well, it seems quite clear that things such as going to a

disco and so forth are antithetical to the Dharma; but there are [...] circumstances, but it seems easier to justify the more self-denying attitudes. Let's say you have certain Christian guilts in some areas and are very hard on yourself, you set very hard standards for yourself, in a way it seems easier to justify those ...

S: Or to rationalize them, even.

Vessantara: In a way.

S: Yes, you are taking into account the needs of the objective situation, and all that kind of thing, and not giving way to individualism.

Vessantara: So you are (?) the near enemy as it were of the actual Dharma.

S: Yes, right.

Vessantara: Can you see ways in which we can avoid or guard more against the possibility of people misunderstanding like that?

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S: I think probably - I won't be completely certain of this - the most important thing here is that one must make sure that people are actually in contact with their own feelings; because, if they are in contact with their own feelings, they will know whether they want to do something or not, or enjoy doing something or not. But if you just present something to them as a good idea, a good thing to do in the abstract, and they just do it - not because they have any genuine, positive feeling or enthusiasm for it but just because it has been presented to them as a good idea, and if they get involved in it and it is very demanding, then they may end up in a quite difficult position, experiencing the spiritual life, or one aspect of it, as a comparatively negative thing. Do you see what I'm getting at? Is it clear without supportive examples?

I am thinking, for instance, of the sort of co-op situation. Say someone is needed in a co-op, maybe someone has dropped out or gone away; so you look around, obviously, whoever is responsible for running the co-op, and maybe there is some quite new person come along and they are free, and you put it to them what a wonderful thing it is to work in a co-op. But you don't take the trouble to check whether that person is really in contact with their feelings and is able to put themselves, with their feelings, into that situation in a wholehearted, enthusiastic way. They might, on your advice, put themselves into that very demanding situation, simply because they thought it was a good idea or could see that it was a good idea to work in a co-op, and someone was needed in that particular co-op. So it's your responsibility, say, as the Order Member concerned, or whoever concerned, to make sure that that person is sufficiently in contact with his or her own feelings really to be able to commit themselves to that situation happily. Is that clearer? (Murmurs of assent.)

Vessantara: Presumably that's a continuing responsibility in the co-op?

S: Oh yes, indeed, right. Because very often we know people do come along to the FWBO, not very much in contact with their feelings, and sometimes they are quite overwhelmed by what they have found, and very grateful, and very sort of susceptible and even receptive, or

perhaps just passive, and very willing to do what is suggested. So one has got to be very careful what one does suggest to them.

So this seems to be quite basic, this sort of thing. Otherwise, if you are not in contact with your own feelings, you can get involved in a particular demanding situation of one kind or another, and just be vaguely unhappy and frustrated and really not understanding what's happening; and eventually, perhaps, suffer some kind of reaction or even a breakdown; or even fall ill, by way of unconscious protest.

Sudhana: Say you haven't been very skilful and you have let people into the co-op who constantly seem to moan about the situation, that would indicate that they have now come into contact with their feelings. Would you say that (I know it's pretty general) that it's better for them to stay and work with that, try and make the best of it, or say 'Look, go; if you don't want to be here, just go'?

S: I think you've got to make it clear to people that they are free to go. It's up to them. It's a sort of day-by-day choice. They mustn't feel any compulsion, because that is quite different from quite objectively recognizing, being in touch with your feelings, that 'Well, there's a job to be done; it's not the job you would have chosen, but all right, you will put yourself into it.' This you can do. But just to be in a situation and just moan about it is really quite unacceptable. It is better to say, 'Well, look, you can go if you want. It's your free choice. So if you are here on account of your own free choice, why are you moaning? What are you moaning about?' Of course, it could be, if you are not doing your part, supposing you are the manager or the man who's running things, that they've got some cause [92] for complaint, but it should be brought out into the open, especially if it's a co-operative situation, and it should all be discussed and thrashed out. But just to go on moaning is really quite unacceptable. It could be that there is some more deeply rooted problem that they've got; well, then it's your responsibility to help them to see that, identify that and deal with it.

Cittapala: Bhante, my experience with Transcriptions has led me to believe that people commit themselves to doing something, on the basis of some enthusiasm to start with, but because the agreement hasn't been actually worked out in detail as to what is expected and the possibility that they may actually find out that they don't want to do whatever it is that they've agreed to do, clearly stated, that they then find themselves two or three months later not having done what they said they wanted to do, and the manager - in this instance, myself - getting in touch with them and saying, 'Well, you're perfectly free to give me the tape back, you don't have to do it,' and they won't let go of it. They hang on to it. And it has sometimes taken me up to a year to get a tape back off somebody and get them to admit that they don't actually want to do what they set out to do.

S: Yes, you will come up against all things of this sort, yes. (Laughter.)

Cittapala: So what I was going to suggest was that there is a need for much clearer criteria right at the outset on the part of people say joining co-operatives or whatever, so that everybody knows exactly where they stand.

S: Including trial periods. Yes, I think that's absolutely necessary. Anyway, perhaps that is all? OK, then.

Vessantara: Thank you very much, Bhante.

[end of transcript]

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