

## General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

### Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# INTRODUCTION

## I

The Bodhisattva Ideal is one of the sublimest spiritual ideals that mankind has ever seen. As the literal meaning of the word itself informs us, a Bodhisattva is a being (*sattva*) who has dedicated himself to the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment (*bodhi*) for the sake of the material and spiritual welfare of all living beings, and who is prepared to undergo any hardship, and make any sacrifice, in order to achieve this end. In the more colourful and concrete popular versions of the ideal he is indeed sometimes represented as postponing his own entry into Nirvāna until such time as all other beings in the universe have succeeded in arriving at that ineffable state, wherein all suffering is forever transcended, and perfect knowledge - the knowledge of ultimate reality - attained. Yet although such formulations have their own value they should not be taken as literally true, and it should not be thought that the Bodhisattva Ideal is literally an altruistic as opposed to an individualistic or selfish ideal, or that the Bodhisattva devotes himself to the spiritual good of others to the actual neglect of his own - that he helps others along the path which he himself does not follow. What he does, rather, is to adopt an attitude in which the terms 'self' and 'others' have become meaningless, or rather, in which they have become indistinguishable in the sense of being not ontologically identical but dialectically related, so that in doing good to oneself one does good to others, and in doing good to others one does good to oneself - the one continually passing over into the other in such a way as to suggest a state 'beyond' both self and others.

Bodhisattvas are of four different kinds, which is to say, the Bodhisattva Ideal - or Bodhisattva Principle - manifests within four different contexts, or at four different levels: (1) Ordinary human beings who, even without knowing it, are in search of the unchanging peace and everlasting happiness that cannot be found in any form of conditioned existence, but only in the Unconditioned. Such are Bodhisattvas in much the same way that the foetus is a human being, that is to say, they have the capacity for Enlightenment and will realise it provided the necessary conditions are fulfilled, i.e. provided they come into contact with the Dharma etc. (2) Buddhists, especially Mahayana Buddhists, who accept the Bodhisattva Ideal but who have not made any real progress towards its realisation. They may have received the Bodhisattva ordination. (3) Those in whom the *Bodhichitta*, the supra-individual Thought of, or Will to, Enlightenment has actually arisen, and whose lives are increasingly dominated by, or transformed in accordance with, the Bodhisattva Ideal. Among the Bodhisattvas of this kind are great teachers like Nagarjuna, Milarepa, Tsongkhapa, Hui Neng, and Kukai, some of whom may be so advanced as to be virtually indistinguishable from Buddhas. (4) 'Archetypal' Bodhisattvas like Manjusri, Avalokitesvara, Samantabhadra and Kshitigarbha, who are not historical personages, or even individuals in the ordinary sense, but so many different aspects of the one Cosmic Will to Enlightenment, that is to say of the Buddha-principle Itself as this is present and at work within the temporal process, eternally leading all beings to perfection.

The Bodhisattva Ideal was fully exemplified in the historical life of Gautama the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, who after attaining Enlightenment at Bodhgaya at the age of 35 (or 29 according to some accounts) out of compassion devoted the remainder of his long life to showing the Path to Emancipation to the various people whom he met in the course of his travels throughout Northern India. After the withdrawal of his physical presence, however, there was an increasing tendency, among some of his followers, to concentrate on his Teaching - or certain aspects of his Teaching - at the expense of his personal example, and this eventually led to the goal of the spiritual life, and indeed the spiritual life itself, being conceived of in predominantly individualistic terms. This movement of spiritual individualism comprised a number of different schools, collectively known to their opponents within the Buddhist fold as the Hinayana or 'Little Way', i.e. the way of emancipation from suffering for oneself alone rather than for all. According to the Hinayana the Bodhisattva Ideal had been followed by Gautama the Buddha himself in his previous lives, and could still be pursued by the exceptionally gifted and heroic Buddhist who wished to become a Buddha at some time in the remote future when all knowledge of the Dharma had been lost and then, by his own efforts, rediscover it and proclaim it anew to the world. Ordinary Buddhists (which in practice meant the bhikshus or 'monks') should follow the shorter and easier, but still sufficiently arduous, way of spiritual individualism and aim at the lesser goal of

Enlightenment for self alone, which could be attained within a single lifetime. A Bodhisattva needed hundreds of thousands of lifetimes, spread out over three whole aeons, to prepare himself for his great mission, and in any case within a given world system there was room for only one Bodhisattva - and one Buddha - at a time. The individualism of the Hinayana was countered by the altruism of the Mahayana or 'Great Way', as it styled itself. According to the Mahayana the Bodhisattva Ideal was a universal ideal, and all Buddhists (both monks and laymen), indeed all living beings, should aim at Buddhahood, or Enlightenment for the benefit of all. On the 'philosophical' side the Mahayana consisted of two schools, those of the Yogacharins or 'Practitioners of Yoga' (i.e. Meditation) and those of the Mādhyamikas or 'Followers of the Mean'. Popular Mahayana tended to go as much to the extreme of altruism as the Hinayana had gone to the extreme of individualism. As already observed, the Bodhisattva was sometimes represented as actually postponing his own entry into Nirvāṇa, while doing everything in his power to facilitate that of others. He was represented, if only by implication, as an almost 'Promethean' figure, who aimed at the attainment of Buddhahood by means of an exertion of will power on a gigantic scale, and who saw the great task of cosmic salvation as something which could, quite literally, be undertaken and carried out by the individual.

Thus there were two equally one-sided approaches to the Bodhisattva Ideal. The Hinayana thought that, though the Bodhisattva Ideal was the highest ideal, it was beyond the reach of ordinary Buddhists, and that human effort should therefore be directed to the realisation of the admittedly lower ideal of emancipation from suffering for self alone. The Mahayana (in its more popular formulations) thought that, though the ideal of emancipation from suffering for self alone was well within the reach of ordinary Buddhists, the Bodhisattva Ideal was the highest realisation of Buddhahood for the sake of all. The Hinayana was right in thinking that the Bodhisattva Ideal could not be realised, in its fulness, by the efforts of ordinary Buddhists, but wrong in thinking that the only alternative was to direct those efforts away from the Bodhisattva Ideal towards a spiritual ideal of a lesser kind. The Mahayana was right in thinking that the Bodhisattva Ideal was the ideal for all, and that really there was no alternative to it, but wrong in appearing to suggest that it could be realised by the efforts of ordinary Buddhists, i.e. by ordinary human will power. The Hinayana saw that the means could not work for the goal, so changed the goal; the Mahayana failed to see that the means could not work for the goal, but at least kept the goal. The key to the resolution of the conflict, as well as to a more balanced approach to the Bodhisattva Ideal, lies in the word receptivity. One should neither turn away from the Bodhisattva Ideal because it cannot be realised by ordinary human effort, nor keep to it under the impression that it really can be realised by such means. Instead, there must be a radical change of attitude towards the Bodhisattva Ideal. The Bodhisattva Ideal is indeed a universal ideal, but one in truth becomes a Bodhisattva (in the third sense of the term) not directly but indirectly not by any egoistic exertion of the will but rather by making oneself receptive to the one Cosmic Will to Enlightenment and allowing it to take possession of one, as it were, and work through one. This does not mean that there is no place for the exercise of the will, but only that its true function, in relation to the realisation of the Bodhisattva Ideal, is that of removing the obstacles to receptivity and creating, within the individual life-continuum, the best conditions for the Arising of the *Bodhichitta*.

## II

If the Bodhisattva Ideal is one of the sublimest spiritual ideals mankind has ever seen, Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* or 'Entry into the Life of Enlightenment', is one of the sublimest statements of that ideal. It was to the study of this great work that we addressed ourselves on the first FWBO study retreat in 1973. Since the beginning of the year I had been 'on retreat' in Cornwall, and apart from a brief appearance in the New Forest that summer this was my first extended contact with the Movement for a whole year. The retreat was held in Norfolk, in a rather dilapidated Georgian mansion pleasantly situated amidst magnificent trees on the outskirts of the tiny village of Tittleshall. Attending the retreat, which lasted from 13th to 22nd December, were MahaUpasika Gotami, Upasakas Dhruva, Aśvajit, Subhuti and Vajradaka, Mike Kitching (now Upasaka Devamitra), Gisela Szagun (now Upasika Jinamata), and finally Mary Rawnsley (now Upasika Sulochana), the owner of the Old Rectory (now known as 'Abhirati'), due to whose kindness we were able to hold the retreat there. Every morning after breakfast I left the isolated cottage which Mark Dunlop (now Upasaka Vajrakumara) and I had rented for the winter and set out down the lane leading to

the highroad with a pleasant sense of anticipation. It was a cold winter in Norfolk that year. As far as the eye could see the flat East Anglian landscape was covered in snow, and apart from the vivid scarlet of the rose hips - unusually abundant that year - the only touch of colour was the occasional patch of brown where the snow had melted, or where it had fallen more thinly than elsewhere. Trees and bushes seemed cut out of white muslin, or carved from silver filigree. In the lane the pools of water formed by the tricklings of a nearby spring had congealed to sheets of crystal, and I had to pick my way through for fear of slipping. It seemed strange that I should be making my way through this white frozen world to study a text that had originated amidst the burning heats of India, and which spoke of coral trees, golden lotuses, and jasmine. On mornings when the sky was blue, and the sun shone, the whole landscape - trees, hedgerows and fields - sparkled as though fashioned out of white icing by some celestial confectioner. But more often than not the sky was overcast and snow flakes falling so thick and fast that everything was blotted out. Once or twice the weather was so bad that Mark had to leave his work bench and drive me to my destination. On my arrival there would be a cup of tea and a warm welcome from Mary and the rest of the participants in the retreat, all of whom were staying at the Old Rectory. Then, when logs had been thrown onto the library fire, and everybody had made themselves comfortable with cushions and blankets on the floor, the tape recorder would be switched on and the session - which lasted for three or four hours, and was interrupted only by a short break for coffee - would begin.

The only complete English translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* so far published is *Entering the Path of Enlightenment* by the American scholar Marion L. Matics, and it was this that we studied. Going round the circle in clockwise direction, everybody read from the book in turn, I commented on what had been read, or perhaps somebody asked a question, and in this way a discussion generally developed. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* consists of ten chapters. First we read and discussed a portion of the extremely helpful Guide which precedes the translation and is an effort, so Dr. Matics tells us, 'to comprehend and explain sympathetically the profound and beautiful classic which is the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and to place it in perspective in the evolving history of Buddhist thought' (p.6), then we turned to the corresponding chapter of the text and read and discussed that. On one or two occasions this procedure broke down. Thus the portion of the Guide headed 'Confession of Sins' in fact also deals with 'Grasping the Thought of Enlightenment' and therefore corresponds not with one but with two chapters of Śāntideva's text. Since this was not noticed when the retreat programme was drawn up, and study material allocated to the different days, the reading and discussion of the second of these two chapters, 'Grasping the Thought of Enlightenment: Bodhicittaparigraha', did not take place until after the reading and discussion of a further portion of the Guide, dealing with 'The Perfections' and 'Mindfulness and Awareness'. Moreover, this portion of the Guide, which is quite short, also corresponds with two chapters of the text, i.e. with 'Vigilance in the Thought of Enlightenment: Bodhicittapramada' and 'Guarding of Total Awareness: Samprajanyaraksana'. In this case, the two chapters of the text were both read and discussed in their proper place immediately after the corresponding portion of the Guide. One important section of the Guide, and two chapters of the text, were not studied on the retreat. These were the section and chapter on 'Perfection of Wisdom: Prajnaparamita', and the chapter on 'Consummation: Parinamana'. So far as the Perfection of Wisdom is concerned, the omission was to some extent made good on a Mitra Retreat held at 'Padmaloka' in July 1976, in the course of which the first two chapters of the *Ratnagunasamcayagatha* or 'Verses on the Accumulation of Precious Qualities' were read and discussed. When published in book form the transcript of this retreat will form an important supplement to the present volume.

Despite the fact that we were not able to go through the whole of *Entering the Path of Enlightenment* in December 1973, we succeeded in gaining a better understanding not only of the Bodhisattva Ideal itself but of a number of different aspects of Buddhist thought. At the same time we never forgot that an ideal has real meaning for us only to the extent that it is actually embodied in our lives, and therefore constantly sought to relate the material we were studying to the spiritual needs of the individual Buddhist, especially the individual Western Buddhist, as he strives to develop both on his own and in association with other people. In this way we came to discuss a number of topics of great practical interest. Among them were

the place of devotion in the spiritual life, the difference between disgruntlement and disillusionment, the rival claims of discipline and spontaneity, why people are so unwilling to give, our attitude towards our parents, whether Buddhism is escapism, the value of study, the importance of gratitude, the alleged dangers of hypnotism and the difference between hypnotism and meditation, the value of enemies, and the need for cultivation of the more heroic virtues in the spiritual life. Our discussion of these topics - indeed the fact that some of them could arise at all - necessarily reflected the state of the FWBO at the time, after nearly seven years of existence, including my one year away from London where the greater part of the Movement was still centred. In the course of the four years that followed much happened: the Movement has expanded to an extent that hardly anyone could have foreseen, and changes have taken place at virtually all levels. People are less problem-oriented, and more ideal-oriented, than they were previously. There has been a shift of emphasis from the 'psychological' to the 'spiritual' end of the spectrum of personal development - from the red of mental health to the violet of transcendental awareness. More energy is in circulation, and there is a higher degree of emotional positivity. Nevertheless, the topics that we discussed on that memorable first study retreat at the Old Rectory are still of great practical interest and value, especially to those relatively new to the Movement, and I therefore hope that the transcript of the tape-recording of our discussions will circulate as widely as possible among Order members, Mitras and Friends - in fact wherever there is a desire to grow and a willingness to appreciate the greatness of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

### III

In preparing the present volume for publication, editing has been kept to a minimum. With the exception of only two omissions of any importance, it is a complete and faithful record of all the discussions that took place. The two omissions are (1) the discussion on Dr. Matics' Introduction to the Guide, entitled 'The Rise of the Mādhyamika', which we decided it was not necessary to record on tape, and (2) the discussion on the latter part of Chapter V of the text, 'Guarding of Total Awareness', which was not recorded for technical reasons. So far as Dr. Matics' Introduction is concerned, the serious student of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is strongly recommended to read and study the whole Guide, which everybody on the retreat found invaluable. The only material that has been actually deleted consists of discussions of no general interest, such as those relating to the current functioning of 'Pundarika', the London centre of the FWBO. Originally I had intended to edit the verbatim transcript of the tape-recording of the discussion rather thoroughly, possibly recasting its rather colloquial language in more literary style. On going through the transcript, however, I was surprised to find that despite solecisms and redundancies it possessed a force and a flavour that it would be a great pity to lose. Indeed in the case of some of my own remarks I found that insights which, owing to the nature of the situation, had been expressed idiomatically, could not be communicated in any other way. I therefore decided to confine myself to clarifying obscurities, tightening up sentences that straggled on too long or too untidily, and cutting repetitions. In a few places, where what I had said on a particular subject seemed insufficient, I added an extra sentence or two by way of further explanation. All such explanatory additions have been included in the text of the discussion within square brackets. Even so, involving as it did the writing out by hand of a MS. of some 125,000 words, the work of editing the transcript was sufficiently demanding, and having moreover to be completed in the midst of other work it has taken nearly two years to complete. After being started in Helsinki in May 1975, and continued at Castle Acre in Norfolk in 1976, it was finished on the Isle of Arran, Scotland, only in March 1977. My grateful thanks are due to all those friends who, directly and indirectly, have helped me to bring to a successful conclusion and put in circulation this response to Śāntideva's presentation of the Bodhisattva Ideal. In particular I would like to thank Upasaka Devamitra, one of the original participants in the retreat, who despite other commitments found time to type out the whole transcript twice, once in edited and one in unedited form.

ëPadmaloka', Surlingham, Norfolk.  
August 18th 1977  
(30th Anniversary of ëGoing Forth')



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### **Authorís Note to the Second Edition**

The Endlessly Fascinating Cry appeared in 1978 in a limited, cyclostyled edition, and has been out of print for many years. There has continued to be a small but steady demand for it, however, and I am glad that Dharmachari Sīlabhadra is now bringing out a new edition of the work under the Transcriptions imprint. Since 1973, the year the seminar on which the book is based was held, the FWBO has continued to expand and changes have continued to take place. One such change relates to nomenclature. Since 1985 members of the Western Buddhist Order have not been known as Upasakas (m.) And Upasikas (f.) etc., but simply as Dharmacharis (m.) and Dharmacharinis (f.).

In 1973 only one complete English translation of Śāntidevaís *Bodhicaryāvatāra* was available, i.e. the one by Marion Matics which we studied. Now three more translations are available: Geshe Kelsang Gyatsoís *Meaningful to Behold* (Tharpa 1980) and Stephen Batchelorís *A Guide to the Bodhisattvaís Way of Life* (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives 1979), both of them translations of the Tibetan version of Śāntidevaís work, and Kate Crosbyís and Andrew Skiltonís (Dharmachari Sthiramati) *The Bodhicaryāvatāra* (O.U.P. 1995) The last of these which like Maticsí translation is based on the original Sanskrit text, contains a substantial introduction and many useful notes. Mention may also be made of the fact that an edited transcript of the Ratnagunasamcayagatha the study of which subsequently made up for the omission of the chapter on Perfect Wisdom from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* seminar, appeared in *Wisdom Beyond Words* (Windhorse Publications 1993) along with other material relating to the Perfection of Wisdom.

SANGHARAKSHITA

Madhyamaloka, Birmingham, England  
September 2001



**PRAISING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT**  
**(Guide)**

## PRAISING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

### The Guide

p.31                      Śāntideva's primary subject is the Bodhisattva,  
                              the Enlightenment Being, the ultimate saint  
                              of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

**Sangharakshita:** There's quite a lengthy discussion of the meaning of the word  
Bodhisattva in Har Dayal's *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*  
(London 1932). One meaning is 'Enlightenment Being' [as translated by Dr. Matig] but  
there is another meaning as well. The Pali form of the word, which came before the Sanskrit  
one, is Bodhisatta, and when this is Sanskritised it can become either Bodhisattva or  
Bodhisakta. Bodhisakta means one who is energising for Enlightenment, one who is making  
an effort for Enlightenment, not a Being of Enlightenment, and some scholars think that the  
term Bodhisattva would be more correctly understood in this sense, i.e. as one bent on  
Enlightenment, not as a Being of Enlightenment.

Dayal's book is a very scholarly work containing lots of useful information on the subject,  
but in parts it is terribly unsympathetic to Buddhism. It's a very good book to make use of,  
but not be guided by. Like Waddell's *The Buddhism of Tibet*, or *Lamaism* it is useful for its  
information provided you disregard the spirit in which it is written. [Laughter] Though it's  
not so bad as Waddell, I must say.

p.31-32                In contrast to the ideal of Southern Buddhism, the type of  
                              holy man called an Arhat, who aims primarily at personal  
                              escape from the round of suffering which is common to all  
                              living creatures, the Mahāyāna hero, the Bodhisattva, is a  
                              universal Saviour of all beings.

**S:** As I have said before, this is really an artificial antithesis. You can't really separate the  
paths of the Bodhisattva and the Arhant, i.e. the paths of altruism and self-salvation.

p.32                      He hovers benignly between being and non-being ...

**S:** That's very good, but 'upon a plateau of pure thought', that could be misunderstood. 'Pure  
thought' sounds quite abstract and conceptual, whereas it isn't at all like that. It's a plateau of  
higher spiritual realisation, one could say.

p.32                      ... and from that vantage point reaches deep into the mire and  
                              muck of phenomenality ....

**S:** Mire and muck of phenomenality! The Bodhisattva doesn't really see it like that, because  
since he's above these extremes of being and non-being, *saṃsāra* and Nirvāna, for him  
everything is transfigured, and at the higher stages of his experience his whole life and  
activities and Bodhisattva deeds become a sort of play, a sort of spontaneous manifestation.  
It's the other people who see the mire and the muck, not the Bodhisattva. He doesn't see the  
mire and muck as mire and muck, so to speak. This shows that it's quite difficult to get into  
the Bodhisattva's mind, his inner experience - his heart, as it were - that this text, the  
*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, is all about; but one can't have much more than a glimpse of it.

p.32                      Only when that virtually unimaginable moment  
                              occurs - when concepts of being and nonbeing  
                              no longer can delude, and when even Pure  
                              thought must be left behind as a sham and

illusion - then, and then only, will the  
Enlightened Being, in all of his compassionate  
majesty step forth-from the plateau of thought  
to the Inconceivable.

**S:** Even pure thought! I think pure thought is left behind quite a lot sooner than this.

p.32

At some point in existence, buffeted by storms  
of Karma, the Thought of Enlightenment arises  
and the Bodhisattva vow is taken. The  
magnitude of this vow - that one will not cease  
in continued striving on behalf of others, and  
yet refrain from passing beyond the  
phenomenal world into the ultimate state of  
Buddhahood, determines an obligation of  
cosmic proportions, for the vow is to be in  
effect throughout all succeeding incarnations  
and will not be completely fulfilled until every  
living creature achieves Enlightenment along  
with the Bodhisattva who has taken the vow ...

**S:** This passage gives the impression that the Thought of Enlightenment is a sort of individual experience and that it's you as an individual in the empirical sense who decides as it were to save all beings, which of course is an unthinkable task. But it isn't really like that. I've touched on this before in connection with the Bodhisattva Ordination, when I've said that it isn't really an individual affair, and in the same way the Bodhichitta, or the arising of the Bodhichitta, isn't an individual affair. This is quite clearly brought out in Nagarjuna's little work on the Transcendentality of the Bodhichitta which is quoted at length in Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Chapter XI). Here the Bodhichitta, which is usually translated as 'Thought of Enlightenment', is said to be 'not included in the categories of the five skandhas, the twelve ayatanas, and the eighteen dhatus,' so clearly it isn't the thought that arises in somebody's mind. You may, of course, have a thought of the Bodhichitta, or a thought of Enlightenment, but that is not Bodhichitta in this sense. I usually render it 'Will to Enlightenment', which is a bit better, but even this isn't free from misunderstanding, because it isn't anybody's personal will. The Bodhichitta is much more like a sort of higher power - the power of Enlightenment, if you like - which works through you when you are open and receptive. It's not 'yours' in the ordinary sense - not your thought, your idea, your will. In a sense - though even this can be misunderstood - it's something that takes you over when you are sufficiently ready for that or sufficiently open to that and which as it were works through you: this is the Bodhichitta. In one of my lectures I compared, - though such comparisons have many weaknesses and are unsatisfactory in other ways, - I compared the rising of the Bodhichitta to a Christian parallel, to the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles. It's more something of that sort. It's not the thought of some pious Buddhist who thinks, 'Oh how wonderful! I'd like to become a Buddha and help all those poor people.' Such an aspiration can be quite genuine, but it's not the Bodhichitta and it isn't the Bodhisattva Vow. The Bodhichitta, or the rising of the Bodhichitta, is when something breaks through your ordinary conscious mind and personality from a much, much deeper level - not just deeper in a Jungian psychological sense but in a spiritual sense - and takes over and transforms your whole empirical personality, just like the Apostles were transformed when the fire of the Holy Ghost descended on them: it's more that sort of thing. There is sometimes a suggestion, when we talk about the Bodhichitta, that it represents something that 'we' as we now are decide to do, that it is a thought or an aspiration that 'we' have. It's true that it starts like that, that this is a provisional basis for its emergence, but the real thing itself goes far beyond that. It's more like when you are really happily functioning and don't feel that 'you' are making the effort, when you feel in fact that 'you' are not doing it. Well, in a sense you are, but you don't really feel that you are. It's as though it's all being done through you. - The Bodhichitta, as well as the whole Bodhisattva career, is much more like that. We really do have to watch our language here.

**Mike:** Is the Bodhichitta something which arises suddenly in somebody or is it a gradual process?

**S:** Both. The approach is gradual, but the thing itself is not just instant, it's instantaneous, because it belongs to another dimension and its *ċarisingí* is more of the nature of an irruption. But the build-up to it is quite gradual. Occasionally, there may not be a build-up, even - you can't lay down rules; but the general pattern in spiritual life seems to be a gradual build-up followed by a breakthrough which is not, in a way, continuous with the build-up: the build-up prepares the way, but then *ēthatí* just comes from some different dimension. You couldn't have calculated it into existence by any amount of preparation: it manifests on the basis of preparation, but is not determined by it.

p.32                      ... not only every human being who ever lived  
or will live, but also every animal, bird, fish,  
microbe, flower, tree, vegetable, and whatever  
there is of life to seemingly inanimate matter,  
must be redeemed before the Bodhisattva's  
vow is satisfied.

**S:** This is the way that it is traditionally put, but what does it really mean? We must be very careful not to sentimentalise it, or to seem to sentimentalise it. I might have been guilty a little myself, in the past, in some poems which I wrote many years ago, but since I wrote them when I was quite young I can probably be forgiven. *[Laughter]* But they could not be forgiven me now. For instance, you hear Buddhists, good Mahāyāna Buddhists, say *ēOh how lovely, even a little blade of grass will become a Buddha!* What do we mean by that? Has the statement any meaning in it at all? Do we envisage that blade of grass, as a blade of grass, being an enlightened blade of grass? Or do we envisage it becoming a flower and gradually evolving into higher forms? Do we think of it in those terms or do we just think it's the Mahāyāna being rather poetic and not to be taken very literally?

**Gotami:** Surely a blade of grass is a blade of grass!

**Mary:** Does it mean that it might function like in the Jātaka Tales .... The story about the girl who goes along and sees the tree all withering ....?[3]

**S:** You mean as a sort of object lesson?

**Mary:** I mean the tree was teaching ....

**S:** Yes, but that's the pathetic fallacy.

**Mary:** That's not any good?

**S:** No, I don't think it's that. I'm referring to where the Bodhisattva says that he's going to lead all beings to Enlightenment. You can understand him leading human beings to Enlightenment, and beings in states of suffering. You can even understand him sort of coaxing animals up onto the human plane ... But blades of grass? What do you mean by leading them to Enlightenment? A blade of grass doesn't last long. Is a blade of grass reincarnated? Has it got karma, so that it can develop life after life and gradually become a Buddha ... that identical blade of grass? So what does one mean by the statement that the Bodhisattva leads all beings to Enlightenment?

**Subhuti:** I assume the meaning is that everything which has the potential for evolution fulfils that potential.

**S:** But even that isn't very satisfactory. Is a blade of grass an individual thing? Will it evolve as an individual so that later on, say in a few hundred years' time, you can say, *ēThe being that is now comparatively more evolved was, in a former life, a blade of grass!*

**Vajradaka:** The way I see it the consciousness, or the consciousness that a Bodhisattva comes into ... by him coming into that consciousness he then becomes capable of transmitting that consciousness. Everything he sees becomes part of that consciousness, so then, if he sees a tree the tree is also conscious because he is becoming a transmitter of that consciousness ... if he is allowing, if he is becoming an outflow of this consciousness, then everything he perceives is Enlightened.

**S:** That's much nearer to the truth, I think. Anyway, we'll leave it just there in the air, as it were, for people to turn over in their minds like a koan. All that I really wanted to do was to emphasise two points: (1) That we shouldn't just read things and take them for granted without thinking what they really mean; and (2) That we shouldn't indulge in a Buddhist sentimentalism. As Dr. Johnson said, 'Clear your mind of cant' - including Buddhist cant!

p.33                      Once one has burst those bonds [i.e. the temporal and other bonds of phenomenal existence], the world of phenomenality presumably looks quite otherwise than at present ....

**S:** Once one has burst these bonds, which include all those questions about how the blade of grass gets enlightened, and in what sense, the world of phenomenality looks quite otherwise than at present. You see everything in a quite different way. You don't see these questions and problems in the same way as before - maybe you don't see them at all. Once the bonds have been burst the problems cease to exist, but this doesn't mean that they are not very troublesome in the meanwhile. This is one of the ways of getting things out into the open - you increase the tension until something snaps: that's the essence of the koan method. So if you worry about that little blade of grass for long enough you'll probably have a little breakthrough - if it really is a question for you, that is. If you don't see it as a question, then fair enough; but if you do see it as a question, and it is a problem for you, and you [4]really do think hard about it, then you will get a breakthrough. There's some kind of problem or tension area of this sort for everyone. It differs for different people. - Why should we suffer? That is a sort of koan-like problem for some people. For others it is, How does the blade of grass gain Enlightenment, and in what sense? That's a koan-like problem for them. Others again can stand something completely nonsensical - all that stuff about the goose in the bottle, for instance - because they have been brought up in that sort of tradition, a tradition which to us in the West doesn't make any sense at all: it leaves us completely cold. We just can't worry about how the goose gets out of the bottle. We couldn't care less, in a way. It's not really a conundrum for us. It doesn't seem real. We don't see why we should worry about it. We'd probably have to force ourselves to worry if we were given it as a koan. But a real koan is something which we have a nagging tendency to worry about anyway: it really does bother us a bit. So we build the worry up and go deeper into it, seeing its implications more and more clearly and feeling more and more tension, until one day there's an explosion. And of course we all know what happens then.

p.33                      Once one has burst those bonds, the world of phenomenality presumably looks quite otherwise than at present ....

**S:** If you look at the records of comparative mysticism, whether it's Buddhist mystics or Christians or Sufis there's one thing which is quite common on a number of different levels, though not necessarily very high ones. After a mystical experience, when the particular mystic opens his eyes and sort of looks out, everything seems transfigured as it were, everything seems illuminated or brilliant, or golden. This experience has been described in many different ways. So it's that kind of thing which we are concerned with here. After the bonds have been burst everything looks different. You see it all in a different light quite literally, and things that you saw before you no longer see and things you didn't see before you now see quite clearly and wonder how you had missed them all the time, and so on. Once you've burst through in that way you'll understand all about the blade of grass and the

mystery of reincarnation and karma and all the rest of it - including even the goose in the bottle.

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On the historical plane, however, the difference [between the Arhat and Bodhisattva Ideals] lies in the emphasis of the Arhatís career, the type of life by which he seeks the noble goal of freeing himself from phenomenal fetters, and, along the way, helping others to do the same; whereas the emphasis of the Bodhisattvaís career is upon the noble goal of helping others to free themselves, and, incidentally to find that freedom for himself.

**S:** I agree with that except that Íím not happy with saying that the emphasis of the Bodhisattvaís career is upon helping others to free themselves. Thatís true, but itís not ěheí thatís doing it. As long as it is ěheí that is doing the helping, - in the same sort of way, or in the same sort of spirit, that he might do anything else, - then heís not really being a Bodhisattva at all. At best heís just approximating to it, or just going through the motions in the hope that the real thing will develop. The real thing develops when heís almost taken possession of - though even this language is not very satisfactory - by some sort of spiritual power, a power which is not ěhimí in the ordinary sense, and which carried ěhimí along so that everything is done spontaneously. But if you say, ěOh dear, another lecture, another meditation class, another batch of interviews!Í thatís not the Bodhisattva spirit, even though you may actually do all those things. But when you say, ěAh, a few more problems! Oh yes, a few more things to do! Gosh, another job! Thatís nice!Í thatís more like the Bodhisattva spirit, provided itís not just a purely mundane psychological positiveness, which sometimes you do see. Such positiveness is good, but itís still not the Bodhisattva spirit.

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... the Bodhisattva in the eyes of the devotee merits another kind of cultic attitude than that which is appropriate for the Arhat.

**S:** In practice you find the Arhat receives tremendous respect and veneration, but people are a bit afraid of him - if they happen to find one in the flesh, that is. The Bodhisattva, on the other hand, receives real devotion and adoration and worship.

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The latter receives the great respect due to a virtually super-human teacher, but the former merits the full veneration of a Saviour.

**S:** We have to watch that word ěSaviourí. The Bodhisattva is not a saviour in the Christian sense. Itís more that, being himself so positive, both spiritually and transcendentally, he cannot but have an effect on anyone who is at all open to that kind of thing. Itís not as though he saves them by suffering for their sins in their place, in the Christian sort of way. Itís more an influence that he has on anyone whoís open - and you can close yourself to the influence of a Bodhisattva, if you want to: thatís the freedom of the human being. If the Bodhisattva wants to save you and you donít want to be saved even all the Bodhisattvas put together canít do anything about it. Weíve got the prerogative to shut ourselves out if we want to ... and also to open ourselves up if we want to.

**Gotami:** If someone is able to shut out the influence of the Bodhisattva then, taking that in conjunction with what was said about the blade of grass, the person who is being looked at by the Bodhisattva is as enlightened, presumably, as the blade of grass.

**S:** Yes, you could say that, in the absolute perspective.

**Gotami:** So he is both enlightened and not enlightened?

**S:** Yes. Like everybody else!

**Gotami:** So thereís no problem.

**S:** Who said there was? ... Or maybe there is a problem ...

Itís clear from all this that, as we saw at the beginning, Śāntidevaís great subject is the Bodhisattva - whoever, whatever, the Bodhisattva may be - and that this is the heart and centre of the whole of the Mahāyāna. I think I feel this more and more: That if youíve understood what the Bodhisattva is, then youíve understood practically everything. I think one can speak of the Mahāyāna in terms of the Buddha, the Bodhisattva, and the Bodhichitta. Thereís only really one Buddha, with all the different aspects and archetypal forms of the one Buddha nature just to make it clearer and richer. In the same way thereís only really one Bodhisattva in whom different human beings as it were participate in varying degrees. There is one Bodhisattva Spirit and also one Bodhichitta which descends upon, or manifests through, different receptive individuals in different degrees and in different ways. We shouldnít take it that there are, literally, so many individual Bodhisattvas in the same sense that you have individual people. Though the different Bodhisattvas are, in a way, independent ěentities, they are also all aspects, as it were, of the Bodhisattva, which you could say is the Buddha nature under the form of time, or at work in the temporal process. This of course ties up with the whole ěvolutionary approach to Buddhism and the spiritual life, which some people like and others donít like. Some would rather just stick to Bodhisattvas.

**Gotami:** Even people are not really individual people then?

**S:** They have the potentiality, one can say, to transcend their individuality. They can function, and be seen to function, as individuals, whereas they are actually beyond that. But some just are individuals. They experience themselves as individuals, however others might see them: theyíve got the right to do that. They might even say ěNo, Ím not enlightened. I donít want anything to do with Buddhahood or Buddhism. Theyíve got a perfect right to do that. What they say is correct. If you insist on seeing them as Buddhas, all right, but you mustnít insist on it as your will against their will, otherwise you just put their backs up and they become less receptive than ever. Itís like the Bodhisattva in the *Saddharma-pundarika Sūtra* who went about telling everybody, ěI salute you because you are to become a Buddha. People got really annoyed and upset at being told that they were to become Buddhas. I wonder whether he was really doing a very wise thing, that Bodhisattva.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think that as a frame of mind it could be very useful?

**S:** Yes, Ím sure it could, especially if itís something you keep within yourself; but I think you have to be careful about communicating it to other people, because you donít want to make them feel that you are telling them what they are, or how they should be, which you have no right to do. Itís a rather tricky sort of distinction. Youíve got the right to see them as you see them and theyíve got the right to see themselves in the way that they see themselves. You mustnít assert your way of seeing them over against their way of seeing themselves, even though you think yours is right, or even though yours is right, because if you insist on it in a personal sort of way then you will only create resistance and take them further away from realizing what you think, or even know, they really are. So it wonít be helping if you say, ěYou are a Buddha. I donít care if you think youíre a Christian. I see you as a Buddhist. You are a Buddha, really! ... [Laughter] In that case you wouldnít be really seeing them as potentially enlightened. You would be just putting across your view, which is no better than their view. Itís not a real spiritual insight that you are expressing. You are just trying to put across your point of view in a rather heavy sort of way. We have to be careful of that, too, and keep these more sublime things a bit to ourselves and try and feel [7] them and experience them rather than put them across. Otherwise we just use these quite sublime teachings almost as a means of asserting ourselves.

Any questions on this section?

**Gisela:** I can't really say that I understand it. I understand the words, but I don't feel that I understand the meaning yet.

**S:** Well that might take quite a few years. These are very, very important topics. It's very easy to think one has understood because one has understood the words, but this is by no means the case. There are many scholars who understand the words of Buddhism without understanding its meaning at all. That's why sometimes it's better not to read very much, but just go over the same things again and again. In retrospect, I'm quite pleased that when I was in Kalimpong I didn't have many books - mainly because I couldn't afford them. I had just a few, well, a few by my standards, that is [*Laughter*] - but I used to go over them again and again and I think that, in the long run, it was quite a good thing that I had to do that.

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As Śāntideva undertakes the task of instructing his readers in the moral, devotional, and mental techniques which will transform them into Bodhisattvas, he insists upon two preliminary steps - thanksgiving for the very idea that one might become enlightened, and a full, frank, blunt confession of sins and inadequacies which clutter the path to Enlightenment.

**S:** I think that thanksgiving is an aspect of Buddhism that hasn't succeeded yet in coming across very well in the West. It's also a form of gratitude, and somehow people don't usually seem to feel very much of this. Śāntideva's emphasis, Matics says (i.e. his emphasis on thanksgiving and confession), is fairly original in Buddhist literature, but it certainly isn't absent from Buddhism generally, even though Śāntideva does - quite rightly - make a great deal of it. But even the comparatively little sense of thanksgiving and gratitude which one finds in most Buddhist circles in the East one doesn't find much of in the West. I notice this very much, the absence of this idea - the idea of gratitude for the possibility of treading the path, gratitude for the fact that one can learn about Buddhism and that there are books, lectures and meditation classes ... that one has every opportunity. Most people who come into contact with these things don't seem to feel much in the way of thanksgiving and gratitude. I wonder why that is. It's not a question of pointing it out to them rather sharply, but if one is having dealings with people at all one should be aware of the situation and try to understand how it has come about.

**Aśvajit:** It may be something to do with our Christian upbringing again - with the fact that the Transcendental is regarded as something so far beyond ourselves that it doesn't enter the average person's mind, perhaps, that he might possibly become a manifestation of that.

**S:** In the Churches you've got thanksgiving - you have thanksgiving services of various kinds. You have the idea of praising God and expressing your gratitude for God's gift of salvation and so on. I don't know whether it's as a reaction against that that people reject Buddhist thanksgiving and gratitude. It's almost as though some people [8] don't want to be indebted to anyone for anything or to acknowledge any sort of indebtedness.

**Gotami:** I get quite a bit of it [i.e. gratitude] up in Glasgow, though, when people have been looking for something [like Buddhism] for a long time.

**S:** Well frankly, one doesn't find this down in London. Maybe there's too much going on.

**Gisela:** Yes, because everything is available, and one is used to getting it anyway.

**S:** Also I think with some people there's this idea of playing it very cool and showing that they're not overimpressed and they are taking it all with a pinch of salt and their attitude is a bit ironical. Perhaps it's also an aspect of fear of emotion or of feeling too much, or seeming to feel. One can't generalise too much, but it seems that this sort of thing is much more common among the people who come along, or who are likely to come along, to a movement



like ours, than among more ordinary, more conventional people, where there is still quite a free expression of gratitude. In our own circle, however, and among the kind of people we tend to come in contact with, it often seems very lacking, so that when you do come across it, it really stands out that certain people do express gratitude for what is going on and what they've become involved in. We don't seem to have much, in the group as a whole, of this happy, joyful feeling, which we ought to have really. I think there's more of it now, but maybe not quite in the form of thanksgiving in Śāntideva's sense. "Oh how wonderful! We might have been floundering indefinitely, we might some of us have been in a mental hospital for all we know; but we're not, because we've come in contact with a good teaching that's showing us the right path, so that we can develop and help ourselves." No doubt some people, at least, are feeling in this way. "Maybe we won't gain Enlightenment in this life. We're trying, but even if we don't gain Enlightenment we can take a good few steps in the right direction and be sure that we are doing the right thing. We can spread a little peace and happiness around us instead of inflicting misery and pain on others, as we are likely to do if we are deluded and on the wrong path." One should feel profoundly grateful for all this, and happy. "Thank heavens at least I'm not doing too badly in this life! I'm not doing too much harm to myself and others. At least I'm being a bit positive and doing some good to myself, and some good to others, and it's thanks to Buddhism. If there had not been a Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and a Śāntideva, and a teaching, where would I have been?" Some of us might shudder to think. So it calls for a bit of genuine gratitude and thanksgiving actually expressed.

Maybe it's also that we haven't found a way of expressing it properly just for cultural reasons. It may be just that. People are a bit shy sometimes, especially the English. Perhaps we think others will laugh at us if we express gratitude.

Also I think that a lot of our people have got away from some conventional English modes of behaviour, but they haven't yet found the equivalent Buddhist modes. For instance, when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihāra the people who were coming there were much more conventional, and a lot of them felt very grateful for the teaching that they were receiving, especially some of the older women. But they showed [9] their gratitude in the conventional way: they kept bringing me boxes of chocolates! Now the average Friend wouldn't think of anything as conventional as that. He might feel like doing something, or expressing some gratitude, but he wouldn't think of getting you a box of chocolates - especially not a large expensive box with a big ribbon round it. He wouldn't know quite what to do. If it's not going to be the conventional box of chocolates, then what is it going to be? Nobody quite knows, I think. Perhaps we haven't found the appropriate channels yet.

**Gotami:** I don't know about the channel for the emotion that's excessive, but it seems that the only thing that you can do is put as much effort into the Movement as possible (*tears*).

**S:** Yes, that's the real practical thing to do, and it is happening now. This last year, especially, it's been happening quite a bit. But in the early days I used to feel almost disgusted. It was as though nobody cared a damn about anything. As though it was leaving them completely cold, and you could do as much as you liked for them but they weren't going to do anything for you or for the Movement. Often there was that sort of impression and feeling around. Things are very different now, even though they are not perfect - very different indeed.

**Gotami:** This is probably a projection, but I thought that you didn't want that.

**S:** Well, if you feel grateful you should feel, "I'm going to be grateful whether anyone wants it or not!"

**Gotami:** No .... [*Laughter*]

**S:** Well, I must admit that when I was at Hampstead I did get tired of all those boxes of chocolates; but I certainly didn't object to them in principle, and took them all quite happily.

**Mary:** Often one feels that one can't make or do anything adequate ... It would have to be something so special that perhaps one gets the impression that it's impossible to ....

**S:** Maybe that isn't quite right, though. For instance, there's this question of flowers for the shrine. There was one Wesak when nobody brought flowers for the shrine. Quite a lot of people came along, but Buddhadasa had to pop out and buy some because nobody had brought any. And this didn't happen even at the Buddhist Society. There were plenty of flowers there. No doubt it was done in a more conventional sort of way, but the flowers were brought. Of course it may be a matter of finding the right channel. Perhaps people aren't accustomed to bringing flowers for the shrine. It's not part of our culture. Even in church the flowers are already there on the altar. Usually Mrs. Smith does them: it's her job, and you don't take along flowers for the altar. It's all done by a lady who specialises in that sort of thing. We'll just have to find the appropriate channels. As yet we haven't succeeded in doing that, but surely there must be some sort of feeling for the shrine.

**Gisela:** I think it's a question of being frightened of the emotions involved - and also one doesn't know quite what to do, or how to do it.

**S:** I think one can always find things to do. When I was in Kalimpong I had a very close association with Dhardo Rimpoche and I felt very grateful for all the things I was getting from him. But it was [10] quite clear how I could show that, because his school needed money. So I set to work and got money for the school from the Tibet Society in London, from the Buddhist Society and other friends, and raised quite a bit. I also used to type his letters for him - at least I could do that. It was quite clear what needed to be done and I was quite happy to do it. Maybe we ought to suggest things people can do.

**Mike:** There have been suggestions. There is a notice on the board at the Archway Centre about flowers for the shrine, but as far as I am aware nobody has as yet given any.

**S:** That's interesting.

**Mary:** There's a difficulty about buying flowers because one feels that one should have grown them ... you can't actually give anything because everything is somebody else's, isn't it?

**S:** I don't know whether people really feel that. I'm a bit doubtful.

**Mary:** If I buy a book for somebody, I didn't make the book. I didn't write it. How can you give anything?

**Dhruva:** If you have something of your own to give, then give it. "This is mine and I give it to you."

**Vajradaka:** There wouldn't be much point in cutting off your hair and giving that. Buy the book and it's the same thing.

**Mary:** You must try and find something they need and then ....

**Dhruva:** It's the thought that counts.

**S:** This whole business of giving is very much a part of social and cultural life in the East. Admittedly it does sometimes become a bit mechanical, but not much. There's quite a lot of feeling involved in it. Tibetan friends coming to see you in a place like Kalimpong would always bring something. They'd never come empty-handed. It was always a tin of biscuits, usually cream crackers, this having become the traditional offering. I used to accumulate stacks of such tins, and there was a joke that some tins had been in circulation for years, being presented first to one person, then by him to another, whenever a social call was made, and never actually getting eaten. But all this expressed a sort of goodwill, and certainly helped to

keep things flowing a bit. Such giving never becomes completely mechanical - that's almost impossible; but it does seem to me that somehow - I don't know whether it's general in the West or whether it's peculiar to our little corner of the Buddhist world - there seems to be a difficulty about giving and expressing. Surely the people who come to the Centre do feel something. Is it shyness that prevents them from expressing it, or is it lack of suitable channels, or what is it?

**Mike:** Do you feel that there can be no real *dāna* (giving) without gratitude? Is gratitude the basis from which *dāna* is allowed to spring, as it were?

**S:** It certainly is a very important basis. But the basis differs very much according to temperament. Some people will give because, in their quiet, non-emotional way, they see that there's a need and they are quite happy to meet that need, but without any great overflowing emotion. They just give. It seems the necessary thing to do, and they are quite glad to do it. They do it in a matter-of-fact sort of way, while others will throb and vibrate with emotion and do it like that. It seems to depend a lot on the individual temperament. But I don't feel quite happy about what seems to be all this blocked emotion. I don't like to say that people ought to feel grateful. That sounds quite horrible, and no doubt will conjure up all sorts of unpleasant memories of 'Oh you naughty little boy, you ought to be grateful for all the things you get!' But when people who seem to be getting something out of us, just by being around the Centre, don't feel or express any gratitude, any willingness to give, one rather wonders what's happening. This ties in with the English and their emotional life - with the question of whether they've got a bit tangled and knotted. I don't know. Americans are very good when it comes to giving. I noticed this even in India, when I was leading quite an austere sort of life in Kalimpong, with very little money. American scholars whom I had helped contact people, or for whom I had translated, or procured books and *thangkas*, would always ask 'Were there any expenses? Did it cost you anything? Can I help you in any way? Is there something that you would like?' The English, and other Europeans, hardly ever did this, but the Americans did it invariably, and there was much more goodwill coming from them. I just don't know the explanation of this. You could say, cynically, that the Americans had more money, and sometimes they did have, but it wasn't just that. There was a lot more will to give. It was quite noticeable. If I had to make a special journey over to Darjeeling, the American would always say, 'Let me pay for the car.' The Englishman would never mention the matter. He'd never think of it. This happened to me regularly and one wonders why.

**Mike:** Speaking from my own experience when I was a child, both my parents often said to me, 'I hope you won't turn out to be ungrateful for all that you've received.' This was the one moral issue that was sort of rammed home all the time, and of course in time I began to think, 'Well I won't be ungrateful,' but in fact I don't think I ever experienced that, and I don't think that I ever really gave anything until I came in contact with the Friends.

**S:** This is why I don't like to say, within the context of the Friends, that people ought to be grateful and ought to give. You can't handle the situation in that way. But certainly, if they're not spontaneously experiencing the feeling to give there's something wrong and they are, in a sense, not developing quite in the way that would be expected or that would be best for them. A psychologically healthy person feels like giving.

**Gisela:** I'm sometimes aware of blocking any kind of positive feelings. I'm sometimes very much aware that they are there in me and they come up spontaneously in a situation and then I say to myself, 'Now what do I do and how do I say this and how do I express this?' And then I don't, although I've felt them in myself. That may happen with other people as well. I think it's just blocking.

**S:** I think there's quite a bit of that. As to why we block our positive feelings, that is a big question by itself. If we become aware of ourselves doing it then we have to stop as soon as possible. If necessary we can have recourse to methods that will help us express our feelings more freely, such as *pūjā* and chanting, or the arts, or the communication exercises, or even just singing and dancing.

**Mike:** What happens to positive feelings that get repressed or blocked? [12]

**S:** It's difficult to generalise. There's a lot more positive feeling repressed than we think. We mustn't always think that what is repressed is negative. Quite often we repress the better side of ourselves, not the worse. Some forms of psychology have accustomed us to thinking that whatever is repressed is something nasty and negative, but I don't think this is true at all. There's at least as much good repressed. In some cases, maybe, more good than bad. People are in many cases better than they look, better than they behave. Give them half a chance - as on retreat - and they start coming out. You can see a lot of goodness underneath - not all sorts of nasty, dirty little things squirming underneath that black stone as it were. On the contrary, you can see some very good, beautiful things that don't get a chance to emerge, including the sense of gratitude and thanksgiving.

When he insists on thanksgiving Śāntideva puts his finger on something very important. Maybe there wasn't enough of it even in the Buddhist world of his day and therefore he emphasised it. But of course we mustn't just mechanically recite the appropriate words of the Sevenfold *pūjā* without really trying to feel them in the way that he apparently did. Thanksgiving is an integral part of the spiritual life - thanksgiving for the very idea that one might become enlightened, for the fact that there is such a possibility, even. Perhaps in some cases we don't feel really thankful because we are not completely convinced that there are these glorious possibilities.

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The Sanskrit word for the thought of Enlightenment, Bodhicitta, is a simple compound consisting of *bodhi*, which is Enlightenment, and *citta*, which is thought.

**S:** That's a very provisional sort of definition, as Matsig goes on to say. *Bodhi* means Enlightenment, Awakening, Supreme Knowledge, or whatever else one likes to call the ultimate goal of the spiritual life. *Citta* is thought, though not thought in the sense of abstract conceptual thought. There is also a suggestion of will. So the word Bodhicitta stands for the direction of one's whole being upon the goal of Enlightenment. It is not just thinking about Enlightenment, however philosophically.

**Vajradaka:** Could *citta* be translated as *emindī* in the sense of heart and head together?

**S:** Yes, as for example when we speak of being minded to do something. The Bodhicitta is the Bodhi mind or, as Dr. Guenther translates it, the *enlightened attitude*, which is not bad, though a bit weak perhaps, because *attitude* can be a bit stand-offish and it doesn't have the suggestion of real commitment. Probably Bodhi-mindedness, or Enlightenment-mindedness, would be the best translation.

**Vajradaka:** In a sense it's more than head and heart, although heart does imply a kind of power, I suppose. Is this why in our visualisations most of the emphasis is on the centre here (*touches chest*) and we don't go down to here (*touches navel*) very much, because the result of putting emphasis down here (*touches navel*) would be to stimulate *vīrya*, power, energy, vigour at this level, whereas when one does the visualisation the energy comes from the centre here (*touches chest*) and this sort of pulls everything else?

**S:** Yes, that's right. Most of you are familiar with the theory [13] of the chakras or *wheels*. According to both Buddhist and Hindu Tantric traditions there are seven of these arranged in descending order from the top to the bottom of the median nerve. Each of them represents a centre of energy, and the higher you go the subtler the energy. Buddhist Tantric practices normally concern themselves with either the three higher or the four higher centres. They don't have much to do with the three lowest ones, whereas in Hindu Tantra the idea is rather to start at the bottom, stimulate your lowest energy and sort of work your way up. The Buddhist method is to stimulate the higher centre and let the higher centre transform the lower ones in a natural sort of way. There are some Buddhist practices, in the Tibetan Tantric

tradition, which do actually work directly on the lowest centre, but that is rather exceptional. Usually only the top three or top four are utilised, occasionally the top five, depending on the type of practice, and on whether you want to correlate the centre with body, speech and mind, for example, or the four *kayas*, or the five elements. But usually it is only the top three that are utilised, i.e. the head centre, the throat centre and the heart centre. The head centre is the centre of pure spiritual vision, and represents the perception of subtle spiritual forms; the throat centre is associated with the perception of spiritual sounds and vibrations, or mantras in the archetypal sense; while the heart centre is the centre of feeling and devotion. If these three centres are functioning they quite naturally draw up the energies from all the other, lower centres and as it were sublimates them. This is one of the big differences between Buddhist Tantric practices and Hindu Tantric practices. In the Hindu systems you always get this talk about stirring up the energies down in the *muladhara*, the root centre, and gradually leading it upwards. But this isn't the Buddhist way.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think, then, that if one carries on with one's visualisation and mantra-recitation practice, and experiences a feeling of devotion quite naturally, one doesn't have to go into the visualisation of Buddhas in the chakras and things like that?

**S:** If the heart centre, to use that terminology, is really functioning, and if there's a good strong devotional feeling, then everything will look after itself. It will come up here (*touches throat and forehead*) and also go down there (*touches navel*). In a way the heart centre is the middle centre. It's in between the higher and the lower, and in a way connects them.

**Vajradaka:** And that's why so many different schools seem to be unbalanced - because they put emphasis here (*touches navel*) and get involved with quite coarse energies.

**S:** Or here (*touches forehead*) prematurely and get involved with just mental energies rather than with real spiritual vision. But the centre really to open is this one (*touches chest*). If when you open it you feel it, you feel it here (*touches chest*) quite literally, quite physically. Ramana Maharshi used to say something quite interesting. He used to say that the I-consciousness was located not in the head, nor even in the physical heart situated on the left side of the body, but at a spot corresponding to the middle of the chest. When questioned why, he said, "Well, suppose somebody calls out to you 'Hey, you there!' how do you respond? You respond by saying 'What, me?'" and touching the middle of your chest. You don't touch your head or your throat. No, it's a question of "What, me?" (*touches chest*). This is where you feel the "me". This is where you are. This is where your feelings are; [14] this is where your heart is.

p.34

Each of these words possesses an overwhelming depth and implication of meaning, for Bodhi is the release from suffering which is understood only by the Buddha who has achieved it, and *citta* is any single idea, or the individual mind, or (in some schools of Buddhism) a kind of quasi-universal cosmic mind.

**S:** The Bodhicitta is an individual thing in the sense that it arises in the individual and yet it is supra-individual, supra-personal, in the sense that it is not just the ordinary empirical "you". It's something much greater, much wider and more powerful, that as it were takes possession of you. That is why Matics speaks of it as "a quasi-universal cosmic mind".

**Mary:** Would it be felt in the heart?

**S:** No. You'd begin by feeling something in the heart, but when the Bodhicitta really manifested you'd feel it in the whole being, not just in a particular part. The "heart", we can say, is the starting point of the "real you". It's as though it's at the heart that the breakthrough starts, but it sort of expands and widens until it takes in all the centre and the whole being. If

you imagine that your figure is a sort of cardboard cut-out, and that there is a tremendously powerful cone-like force coming from behind, then the point of the cone will be on the point of the heart and it's there that it starts breaking through.

p.34                      The Thought of Enlightenment is ... (1) the simple thought of idea of Bodhi ...

**S:** Yes. That's how it starts - how it has to start. You just get the idea of Enlightenment. It's just an idea in the completely ordinary sense. You hear about it, read about it - that there is such a thing as Enlightenment - and you recognise the fact and maybe accept it, so that you have in your ordinary individual mind this idea or concept of Enlightenment. This is the Bodhichitta on the lowest level - in the lowest sense: the simple idea or thought of Bodhi. This is the understanding of the ordinary Buddhist before there is any real spiritual experience.

p.34                      (2) the consciousness which is permeated with this idea (of Bodhi), which results in the total transformation of one's personal life because it is so dominated ...

**S:** That's quite clear. At this level one's consciousness is permeated by the idea of Enlightenment, which is now not so much an idea but more of a living experience which, dominating one's personal life, gradually brings about its total transformation. This is the Enlightenment-oriented life, one can say; but there's an even higher stage.

p.34                      (3) it is the force of the thought which thus turns one's life completely upside down (as any thought is a force insofar as it results in action).

**S:** So the Bodhichitta doesn't only transform and transmute, doesn't [15] only re-orient. It turns everything upside down. There's a complete reversal of values. Here it becomes a bit like the *parāvṛtti*, the turning about in the deepest seat of consciousness of the Yogāchāra and the *Awakening of Faith* and the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. Here it's practically synonymous with Enlightenment itself. In fact there is what is known as the absolute Bodhichitta, which is Enlightenment itself. This Bodhichitta is the so-called relative Bodhichitta, the Bodhichitta as manifesting in time, whereas the absolute Bodhichitta is the Bodhichitta viewed as it were out of time. This is quite important, though mentally at least it seems fairly clear.

**Vajradaka:** Could one view the turning of one's life completely upside down as being a complete change in one's psychology?

**S:** Yes, but your external life might remain exactly the same and nobody might know that there was anything different - unless they looked quite carefully at you and knew you rather well. The fact that the Bodhichitta has arisen doesn't mean that you're going to start behaving in bizarre and eccentric ways. You might, but it would be something by the way. The real change is in the psychology or, as they say in the Yogāchāra, in the *viññāna* system or system of consciousness, wherein, on the attainment of Enlightenment, the seven *viññānas* are transformed into the five *jñānas* or Buddha-wisdoms. There might be external changes reflecting inner ones, but not necessarily. The real change is the inner change. You might go off and become a monk; on the other hand you might think, 'Well, well, that's interesting!' and externally just go on as before, because there was no particular reason to change at that moment. There's no use in just turning things upside down for the sake of doing it. You might continue as a completely normal citizen - probably a bit unlikely, but objectively there's no reason why you shouldn't if that seems appropriate. The real turning upside down is in the consciousness, in the psyche. You aren't necessarily turned upside down just because you turn things upside down externally.

p.34

Consequently, Bodhicitta (like *citta*) partakes of a quasi-universal aspect, because in the latter sense, it is a force let loose in the universe to work for the good of all.

**S:** That's quite good: ě... a force let loose in the universe to work for the good of all.í That's what a Bodhisattva really is. He's a centre of that kind of force ... just let loose ... [Laughter]... in the universe to work for the good of all. That's the way you function, if you're a Bodhisattva. He takes it all quite easily and lightly. To him it's all a sort of child's play. He enjoys it. He's just let loose .... [Laughter].

p.34

One would be mistaken to claim that in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* it is defined as an independent entity on this third level of meaning - for there are no entities of any type which are acknowledged in the Mādhyamika school of Buddhist philosophy to which Śāntideva belonged; but in the language of poetry, of symbol, of religion, of the myth which is valid in value if not in fact, Śāntideva is its eloquent champion.

**S:** One mustn't think of the Bodhicitta in the highest sense as a sort of thing, and use it as a philosophical concept, or treat it as a philosophical doctrine. In any case the Mādhyamika doesn't recognise [16] the existence of entities in the ultimate sense on any level. One should take the Bodhicitta as a symbol, as a myth, and regard it as having the truth of a symbol, the truth of a myth. It's not that symbols and myths are untrue, but rather that they have a different kind of truth - if you like, a higher spiritual truth. As a symbol, as a myth, the Bodhicitta has very great value, and it is in this sense that Śāntideva champions it.

**Vajradaka:** It's like the teaching is all the time plugging nonduality.

**S:** Yes, you could say it's plugging that - and relativity: use the raft to cross over, but don't get stuck on it.

p.34

Although the Vijñānavāda school goes even further and makes the Enlightened Thought an object of philosophical speculation, and Tantric groups carry it to the level of deification, Śāntideva is ardent and quick enough to its praise. He cannot be otherwise, since it is because of the arising of Bodhicitta - in the third and quasi-universal sense - that Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are to be honoured.

**S:** In a way Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are subordinate to the Bodhicitta in the highest sense: they're sort of grouped round it. It's on account of the full manifestation of the Bodhicitta that a Buddha is a Buddha; on account of its full or partial manifestation that a Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva. So in a way, the Bodhicitta, in the highest sense, is the centre of everything. It's like the Holy Spirit in Christianity - almost. I'm not saying that they're the same: I'm just looking for a rough parallel that will help stress the importance of the Bodhicitta. The Bodhicitta is not just ěmyí little subjective idea of the goal of ěmyí spiritual life, i.e. Bodhi or Enlightenment. It's very much more than that.

p.35

Without initial Bodhicitta, the Bodhisattva (or even a Buddha for that matter) could not exist. In ordinary human beings the idea of perfect goodness, even for oneself, never occurs; we

would not even dream of such a thing; and yet the Bodhisattva undertakes to create infinite merit. For this reason one can take refuge in the sangha - the noble company of embryo Bodhisattvas (the *Bodhisattvagana*) - the gathering, the flock, the multitude of Enlightened Beings. All this, and more, we owe to Bodhicitta.

**S:** So the Bodhicitta is almost like a power for good working in the universe and manifesting through individuals. Once again we have to be careful not to reify it, or turn it into a sort of entity and speculate about it philosophically. But it is like that, provided you take it in the way of myth and poetry. Such a description does seem to correspond to the facts of the spiritual situation.

**Mike:** If the Bodhicitta is a non-individual thing, but something which is manifested through an individual, at this point in development would that individual be able to kick back against it?

**S:** Yes, very much so. It's only when it has taken more or less complete charge, and the Bodhisattva has become irreversible, that the struggle no longer exists; but in the meantime, even though the [17] Bodhicitta is there, and it's almost impossible to dislodge it, but there can be quite a lot of fighting and kicking against it from other aspects of the personality because the Bodhicitta isn't really an aspect but something much more than that.

**Mike:** How does the Bodhicitta relate to the idea of stream-entry? Are the two in any way synonymous?

**S:** Stream-entry pertains more to the path of the Arahant; it's not a term used in connection with the Bodhisattva. But there is something corresponding. On the Arahant path, if you tread it as a separate path, stream-entry means 'the point of no return' - the point after which you can't slip back. You can slip back before that, even though you've had quite a bit of spiritual experience. On the Bodhisattva path, what corresponds to that is the stage of irreversibility, which the Bodhisattva enters upon in the eighth of his ten stages of progress, so that an irreversible Bodhisattva corresponds to a stream-entrant. It's the same sort of thing in a somewhat different context. But the Bodhisattva can fall back, despite his Bodhicitta, right up to the time that he becomes irreversible. It's only after that, in the eighth *bhūmi*, when he starts no longer seeing any real distinction between *saṃsāra* and Nirvāna that he doesn't - indeed cannot - fall back anymore. This is spelled out in the *Survey*, by the way, in the last section of Chapter IV, as well as somewhat in *The Three Jewels: 'The Glorious Company of Bodhisattvas'*. What it really means, as I've explained in 'The Point of No Return', one of the lectures in the Higher Evolution of Man series, is that when the 'gravitational pull' of the Unconditioned becomes stronger than the gravitational pull of the conditioned, whether in the Arahant or the Bodhisattva perspective, then there is no possibility of regression to the conditioned. But until that point is reached it's a constant struggle. You have to remain alert and aware all the time, because if you stop struggling, or stop making an effort, you will slip back automatically. You never stand still. If you don't keep at it you will slide back. Well, you might stand still for a few minutes, but not much longer. Recently I was reading a selection of sayings from the Khadampa gurus, translated by Geshe Wangyal. One of the sayings is: 'If you do not meditate on death and impermanence in the morning, by noon your mind will be full of desires'. That shows you how quickly it starts. It's quite true, isn't it? It happens exactly like that. So you have to keep it up all the time, otherwise you do slip back.

In other words (to get back to our main topic), what this passage suggests is that the whole spiritual life manifests from the Bodhicitta, is the Bodhicitta at work. It's us in a sense, but it isn't us. It isn't literally an outside force which takes possession of us - we have to be very careful using that sort of language. It is 'us': it's from another dimension of us; but it's so different from the ordinary 'me' that it seems almost like something apart from that 'me', or



even opposed to that ěmeí. In a sense it is apart, but at the same time itís still ěmeí. The nearest we can get to it is when we are ěcarried awayí in artistic creation, if we are so fortunate. Perhaps we write a poem, and itís ěusí writing, but itís not ěusí. The rising of the Bodhichitta is like that, only a million times more so. It is us, but it isnít us.

p.35

The Thought of Enlightenment is the ěgesture  
of Buddhaí (*Buddhānubhāva*) ....

**S:** I donít know why Matics has translated *buddhānubhāva* as ěgesture of Buddhaí. *Anubhāva* is really ěinfluenceí, and is often translated as ěgraceí - though grace has certain unfortunate implications. ěGestureí therefore wonít do at all. The word definitely means ěpowerí or ěinfluenceí, sometimes even ěblessingí. Itís used in Pali as well as in Sanskrit - Buddhānubhāva, Dhammānubhāva, Sanghānubhāva: the good influence, the power, the blessing, of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

**Vajradaka:** I think ěblessingí is quite a good word.

**S:** Yes, though it is more like *adhiṣṭhāna*, which is a very technical word. For instance in the Tantric system in Tibet they make a very sharp distinction between ěblessingí on the one hand and ěconsecrationí or ěinitiationí in the Tantric sense on the other. There are many practices for which you donít need, or donít get, the full Tantric abhiṣsekha, the ěconsecrationí or wongkur. What you get, along with the practice, is the *adhiṣṭhāna* - the blessing - from the guru, and in a sense this is what we get in our own movement with the different visualisation practices. Itís not a Tantric initiation - though it could be one, because even though there is a distinction between initiation and blessing it doesnít necessarily amount to a difference. A Tantric initiation, say for Manjusri, with the full rites and everything, from someone who isnít particularly good at it, is less effective than the simple blessing, with the same practice, of a really good guru. So you have to see not only what you get but who you get it from. Some blessings are more effective than some initiations.

**Vajradaka:** Are you saying, then, that our initiations are blessings?

**S:** Technically, yes, because they are not done with the full Tantric paraphernalia.

**Vajradaka:** The ritual, you mean?

**S:** Yes, and various other things.

**Vajradaka:** Like what?

**S:** There are various meditations which the teacher himself goes through before and while giving full Tantric initiation. That may or may not be the case when only a blessing is given. If the teacher himself has some experience of the specifically Tantric side of things he cannot but impart something of his experience to the disciple, even when technically what he is giving is only a blessing. But if the teacher has no such experience, but has nevertheless been quite sincere and devoted in his practice, then itís just a blessing that he gives. A blessing may, in fact, be all that is required. All the same, Tibetans usually do distinguish quite sharply between ěblessingí and ěinitiationí. Theyíre also quite aware of the fact that to get a practice with a ěblessingí from a great guru is often more effective than a full scale Tantric initiation from someone less qualified. So it does come down to whatís really there rather than to what is ěformallyí there. In Kalimpong it took me quite a long time to work this out. There were several occasions when I thought Íd got Tantric initiation but hadnít: what Íd actually got was a particular practice with the blessing. But I eventually sorted it all out. The Tibetans sometimes refer to these things a bit loosely, and *wongkur*, which really means [19] *abhiṣeka*, when what they actually mean is ěblessingí, the word for which is *adhiṣṭhāna*. Theyíve also got another term which comes some where in between, as it were [*Laughter*]. Sometimes youíre in the position of not being quite sure what youíve got. It seems to be working, but how to identify it technically youíre not quite sure.

**Vajradaka:** Perhaps it's just as well not to know, anyway.

**S:** Perhaps it is. Tibetans themselves don't bother all that much. If the gurus know, well that is enough [*Laughter*]. They know what they've given you even if you don't know what you've got [*Laughter*] ...

Sometimes, of course, we have difficulty in accepting the fact that we have been given something. Perhaps we feel unworthy. I've even known cases where people have just not been able to accept their own spiritual experience. They've been really troubled and worried by it and have tried to forget about it, to put it behind them as it were. In a few cases I've known, not in this country but in India, this has gone on for years before they've really accepted the experience even theoretically. Sometimes an experience of this sort happens quite abruptly, especially when the people concerned have as it were shut that side of themselves off, or when they have repressed their own better side and it has accumulated and eventually burst through, taking their empirical self rather by surprise. But you can't suppress your own better nature indefinitely. I think it's much easier to suppress the bad side of yourself. The good side is much more difficult to suppress in the long run. It'll burst through in a powerful and, in the long run, positive manner.

P.35                      It is not the problem of original sin which Bodhicitta overcomes, but the sorrow of all - the fact and the basic assumption of *dukkha* - suffering that is timeless, that is terrible, that is without known origin. Goodness and evil are equally inexplicable, but there is no question as to which is the most powerful.

**S:** This is, in a way, a very important and basic principle of Buddhism. Buddhism fully recognises *dukkha*. There's a lot of suffering, a lot of evil, a lot even of *äsiní* in the world. But there is also the power of good, positive forces, which in the long run are much more powerful. So Buddhism has got a very full and clear recognition of what it is up against, of what the *samsāra* is really like, but it's at the same time got a very firm conviction that the forces of good, and of Enlightenment even, in the long run are even more powerful. It certainly doesn't minimise the suffering and wickedness and difficulties that there are in life, but it is certainly not going to minimise the potentialities for good that are there as well.

p.35                      ìIndeed, goodness is always weak, but the power of evil is always great and very dreadful.î [I .v.6]

**S:** Goodness in the ordinary sense, that is.

p.35                      ìBy what other goodness could it be conquered if there was not surely Bodhicitta?î [I.v.6]

**S:** Bodhicitta is even stronger than ordinary goodness. It's [20] something transcendental: another dimension altogether. Just ordinary human psychological goodness and positiveness could never overcome suffering and evil, and even *äsiní*. It's only the much higher faculty or more than faculty - the dimension, level, spirit, power - of Bodhicitta which can really do the trick. So this is why in another, slightly different context I sometimes say, "No psychological solution for psychological problems." Psychological energies aren't enough. You've got to invoke some spiritual force which transforms and transmutes the whole psychic apparatus.

p.35                      The text reads *sambodhicitta* ...

**S:** Just as you have Buddha and Sambuddha or Samyaksambuddha, full or complete Enlightenment, so here it's the full, the complete, the perfect Bodhicitta.

p.35

... [the Bodhichitta which] is more than merely thought, but which is an active force, a power that in itself (unless hindered by neglect) makes for positive good.

**S:** This is something about Bodhichitta that very few writers on Buddhism really bring out and it's very good that this particular editor has done that. It's one of the very useful features of this whole work. He's not written all that much about it, but what he has written is very clear and very faithful to the whole spirit of the Mahāyāna. He is, incidentally, a lay member of the Lamaist Buddhist Monastery of America and seems to be a Christian minister of some kind - probably a Unitarian or something equally liberal. His approach is clearly very sympathetic and he has a very good feeling for the whole religious and spiritual side of this text. After all, he has spent quite a lot of time and taken a lot of trouble producing this very useful translation. He seems to really care for the work, and that seems quite significant. Maybe there's a bit of Bodhichitta in him too!

p.35

Goodness (*subha*) is never explained ...

**S:** *Subha* is rather an interesting word. Matics has translated it as 'goodness', but it literally means 'pure', 'clean'. It also means lovely, and can even be translated as beautiful. It's very much like the Greek *to kalon*, which is sometimes translated as 'the good' and sometimes as 'the beautiful', because for the Greeks these two concepts were sort of fused. They didn't separate them as we do. Goodness was something aesthetically beautiful and beauty, or what was beautiful, was somehow good. So in *subha* too you get this fusion: it's the good and the pure, - pure in the sense of purely beautiful, - so that it's not goodness in our rather narrow ethical sense. If you don't mind biblical language, it's 'whatsoever is lovely and of good report'. ['whatsoever things are pure... lovely... of good report' (Philippians 4.8)] It's that sort of goodness: goodness that is very, very attractive - not the harsh, stern goodness, but a very lovely, pleasing, almost seductive sort of goodness. It's so nice you can't help liking it and tending in its direction. It's a very attractive goodness. So you see how Indian Buddhists - and the Greeks too - think about goodness. But the Christian might say, 'Oh, she's such a very good person!' which sounds rather horrible, doesn't it? [Laughter]

**Gisela:** It's like these beautiful Greek figures, statues ....

**S:** Yes. So the Greeks had this concept of *to kalon*, which nowadays has become the name of a face powder! *To kalon* is the good which is also the beautiful, or the beautiful which is also the good. So *subha* is that pure and lovely goodness which is intrinsically very attractive. You see it sometimes in very unsophisticated and very young people. It seems as though they're good, but at the same time there's a sort of loveliness with the goodness, and goodness in the loveliness, and you can't really separate them. It's a bit like the hippy slang 'beautiful people', though this has got horribly hackneyed and you can see some really nasty little specimens who are officially 'beautiful people' [Laughter]. When I was at Yale I attended a big political meeting at which a Black Power leader was introduced. He was introduced by his lawyer, who went on and on about his being a very beautiful person, one of the most beautiful persons he'd ever met, at the end of which this 'beautiful person' popped up. To begin with he was physically unattractive, though that's a bit irrelevant, but he at once started swearing at the audience and directing at it a stream of abusive obscenities. It was a hate-ridden performance, full of denunciation and bitterness, and this was a 'beautiful person'. So the word can get misused a bit. At the same time it's quite interesting that you've got this expression 'beautiful person', and that beautiful does suggest some kind of goodness. Maybe we are trying to bring the two together again and get the idea of 'goodness' away from the harsh and rigorous kind of connotation that it has had. In Scotland they speak of 'the unco guid' or 'uncommonly good'. The 'guid' people are really rather horrible - very narrow and puritanical. But these are, after all, the 'good people', so in comparison with them you can't help feeling bad - that is if you share their wrong idea of goodness.

So, ðGoodness (*subha*) is never explained.í It is, incidentally, the same word as we get in the compounds *subha-bhāvanā* and *asubhabhāvanā*, or what we usually translate as the meditation on purity and the meditation on impurity, or even on the attractive and the unattractive - the truly attractive and the truly unattractive. But the main point is that the ðlovely goodnessí would be ineffective and powerless unless it was supported by this something purely spiritual in the form of the Bodhichitta. Goodness is rather weak. Itís nice, but a bit helpless. What you need behind it is that real kind of strength which comes only from the Bodhichitta. Otherwise the poor nice person, the good person, will have a very rough time, Ím afraid.

p.35-36            There is about this ðdistinctive jewel among beingsí a quality of giveness which is unprecedented in the cosmic cycle. It is ðan intention for the welfare of othersí which even in self-interest is not normally born in oneself or in others, and which forces the poet to ask himself, How is it given birth? The answer is not direct. Undoubtedly it is stimulated - at least nurtured - by the benignly overreaching influence of the Jinas, the Buddha-Lords of infinite universes, yet still it is within oneself. It is the essential, the celestial nature - the Buddha-nature, the Void - clamouring for recognition.

**S:** Thatís very good. I must say that Matics expresses all this very well indeed. Itís very clear and itís very faithful.... Itís the ðBuddha-natureí within oneself clamouring for recognition. Itís [22] ðyouí and itís not ðyouí - a great paradox. Indeed, when you first come upon it, itís more like ðnot youí. Youíve got so far away from yourself, as it were, that you canít recognise yourself when you see it. But it is ðyouí, though another, vaster dimension of ðyouí, which ðyouí have to get used to. Does anyone have anything to say on that? ... Itís quite straightforward, in a way, though very difficult to assimilate.

p.36                            ... it can arise within anyone, almost, it seems, arbitrarily....

**S:** Usually there is a definite build-up, but not always. Sometimes itís very sudden, and the build-up might have been unnoticed, or only half conscious, even unconscious. You see that some quite new element enters into someoneís life. Itís suddenly there, and sometimes itís very difficult for friends and relations to recognise it and accept it and really see thereís a new element in that personís life and take it into consideration. Sometimes your friends and relations even object to your changing so radically, because it means that they have to make a very big adjustment. Thereís a new person to live with and get along with now, and they donít like that. Theyíd got adjusted to the old person and donít want to change. Maybe they donít like the new person very much and feel rather resentful that the old person has changed into the ðnewí one.

p.36                            ... although we know that in the background are light years of karmic preparation ...

**S:** We know that in principle, - we canít say that we really know it, - but anyway there is preparation going on, whether itís light years or in this life.

P.36                            ... and in the foreground is the despair of life ...

**S:** Thereís some sort of rather tense existential situation in the present, and youíre really down in the depths, or really up against it. Sometimes that is a very favourable time for the ðmanifestationí of a higher dimension, even of the Bodhichitta.

P.36                            ... and overreaching all, the blessed influence of Jinas.

**S:** There are always spiritual influences abroad - almost, though I don't like to use the term, vibrations - to which you can, as it were, tune in. Sometimes, even, it seems that one happens to tune in to them, almost accidentally, as when you're fiddling about with the radio, wondering what's on, and you suddenly strike on some beautiful music. Ah! You've never heard it before, never heard of the composer, but there it is. You've got it, it seems by accident. It's a bit like that even with the spiritual life sometimes. You're fiddling around with this, that, and the other, - maybe in a bit of a mess, don't know what to do, - and you suddenly tune in. There it is. You don't know how it's all happened, but it has happened, and you know where that sort of wavelength is. Even if you are prevented from tuning in to it sometimes, you know that it's there. You have established the contact. The blessed influence of Jinas is a bit like that.

**Vajradaka:** Is memory important here? Is there any chance of forgetting that you did get in tune?

**S:** It depends partly on the strength of the impression. Sometimes you can forget - not literally, but in the sense that you deliberately put the experience aside. Thereís part of you that doesnít want it, and you wonít believe that it has occurred. Again, you may simply neglect it, or you may get a bit overwhelmed by other things so that it just fades away. Sometimes, however, the impression left by an experience of this sort may be so powerful that you just canít forget it. Itís difficult to generalise here, but perhaps even in cases of this sort itís best to be careful. If the experience of tuning in is a very profound one, it might be a good thing to dwell upon it in thought or recollection, or even meditate upon it, and try and keep up the contact in that way.

P.36 ... even when one has caused the heresy of individuality to arise as high as [Mount] Sumeru, even then the Thought of Enlightenment can arise ....

**S:** That's very important. It's very unlikely that if you've got this thought of individuality - or ego, if you like - as high as Mount Sumeru that the Bodhichitta will arise; but you don't really know. It can arise. Conditions and build-up do help, but it can also arise without them. It's something as it were unconditioned, not dependent. So one can always be alert and aware, and of course the more you prepare and build up the more chance there is of it manifesting, but it could manifest even without those things. And once it does manifest, it breaks down all the existing conditions. It's something quite different, as it were.

p.36 We might think that such extreme individuality would hamper the rising of Bodhicitta, yet there is the sacred text.

**S:** You can't stop the Bodhichitta as easily as that!

p.36 ... the first glimmer of Bodhicitta is like the cry of a baby sparrow who is still in an egg which is not yet fully broken: ìEven so ... a Bodhisattva wrapt in the membrane of ignorance, without breaking the heresy of a self, or stepping forth from the triple world, utters the cry of Buddha, the cry of void, unconditional and untrammeled.î

**S:** This connects up, rather indirectly, with something very practical with which we are concerned: people's readiness for ordination. You could have people technically fulfilling all the requirements. They've been coming along regularly for years, they seem to be getting on with their meditation all right, they put money in the *dāna* bowl regularly, but still you've got a feeling that they are not ready. Then there might be somebody else who was not even all

that sure about Buddhism itself, in a sense. He might have definite wrong ideas, might not be very regular, but you feel that that person is ready. It's a bit like that. It's as though something like the Bodhichitta has arisen in the case of the person who is ready despite everything - that it's there whatever else may be there. In the case of the other kind of person, the good suitable person, - all the necessary qualities may be there, but there's just something missing which is needed for ordination. So [24] when the question of someone's readiness for ordination arises, we can never, I hope, make it a kind of routine thing, with an examination, and certain definite qualifications which have to be fulfilled. There always has to be a very direct identification through one's personal experience of that particular person, so that you can say, "Yes, that person is ready. I know that they've got such and such a fault, or that such and such is not very satisfactory, but the basic thing is there." With other people you may have to say, "Well, no. They've read all the right books, and done all the right things, but I'm sorry, there's just something missing." This is where the two sponsors [i.e. the two kalyana mitras] will come in more and more. We'll be talking about this at the Order Convention. When we get more Order members, or prospective Order members, than I can personally keep in contact with and handle, what are we going to do? We could draw up a list and say, "Look here, when someone has been coming along for two years, when he's averaged 75% of possible attendances, when he's produced an essay on Buddhism and also delivered a lecture, then he's qualified for ordination." You could do it that way, but a lot of fish would get into the net who had no business to be there and lots who were well qualified to be there just wouldn't get in at all. But if you have the personal contact of two sponsors, going by their personal spiritual intuition, - which they have themselves to develop anyway, - then you are on much firmer ground. Do you see? It's very analogous to this first glimmer of the Bodhichitta. You might see someone with apparently all the virtues, but no Bodhichitta, and another person where the Bodhichitta has arisen under very rough and ready circumstances - indeed, where you'd hardly expect. One might even be rather shocked to find it arising at all in that sort of person, but there it is, you just can't understand how or why sometimes. So there is quite a parallel or analogy here with ordination. We can't really speak of "preparing" people for ordination - that's a bit presumptuous in a way; but something in us recognises something in them and you're sort of joined together.

p.37                      They are swinging on the great illusionary wheel of rebirth and sorrow between the power of Bodhicitta, and thus they can be delayed in their realization of the full impact of the latter force.

**S:** This means that for quite a long time, even after a definite commitment to the spiritual life has been made, there'll be a lot of conflict, at least mentally, and a lot of swaying backwards and forwards, before the Bodhichitta is really solidly established - even though it is there. It's rather like in a battle - the old-fashioned sort of battle: the standard has been planted and the battle has been won, but there's still a lot of skirmishing going on all around. The battle is won, for sure, but the fighting isn't finished.

p.37                      In Mahāyāna thought, at a certain point the falling-back becomes theoretical, but what is important to Śāntideva is not this theory, but that the falling-back should never happen. When it does happen - when Bodhicitta is forsaken, the course of action which can save that Bodhisattva is inscrutable, and is known only to the omniscient (*sarvajña*) [i.e. to the Buddhas] . From the point of view of conditioned reality he is virtually hopeless; his chance is indefinitely lost.

**S:** This reminds me of one of Mr. Chenís vows. He made various Bodhisattva vows on different occasions, and one was that he would establish a connection with those who had no connection with the Buddha-nature. Those who had cut themselves off completely, of their own free will so far as one could see - he would somehow establish a connection with them. This too is an aspect of the kind of thing referred to in this passage.

p.37                      When Bodhicitta arises oneís birth is  
completed, oneís human nature is well-taken.  
one is born into the Buddha-family, and one  
now becomes a Buddha-son.

**S:** Sometimes the comparison is made with someone born into a rich and powerful family, who is very proud of the family and wants to keep up its influence and traditions. In the same way when one is born into the family of the Buddhas by becoming a Bodhisattva, through the arising of the Bodhicitta, one is concerned - in a positive way - to keep up the honour and good influence of the Buddha family and not do anything which might disgrace it. This is a positive kind of pride, though one can obviously see that it can be standardised and institutionalised and become somewhat of a hindrance.

P.38                      ñBodhicitta is the womb of Śūnyatā and  
Karunā.

**S:** In other words, it is the ñwombí of the total Enlightenment-experience, with Voidness and Compassion as its two main aspects.

p.38                      ... The Mādhyamika school acknowledges no  
validity to be inherent in such philosophical  
fabrications as relative and absolute.

**Vajradaka:** Does this mean that this school is just using the terms absolute and relative as a ñcraftí?

**S:** Yes, right. While the Mādhyamika certainly does use these terms it doesnít say that there really is a relative plane, really is an absolute plane, or that the two really are separate. It says that these terms just represent a certain way of looking at things, a way which is useful, but that when you finally do get through to the Mystery you donít exactly see things like that. You can see that there is a certain validity in the distinction, yet you donít take it as being absolutely true. For the Mādhyamikas the distinction between relative and absolute is, in the ñabsoluteí sense, only relatively true.

p.38                      ... Śāntideva does not indulge in detailed  
analysis of the various stages through which a  
Bodhisattva must pass ...

**S:** I think this is very true. Sometimes in Buddhist writings there is too much analysis of this sort. There are references to the seven stages of purification, the ten *bhūmis*, the thirteen *vihāras*, and various other classifications, and the impression is created that you go through the eight or the ten stages, - or whatever the number may be, - one after the other, in the regular order. But in your actual spiritual experience it isnít like this at all. Sometimes itís very difficult to know what state youíre in anyway, and whether youíre passing from 2 to 3, or from 3 to 4. Sometimes it seems as if youíre [26] going round in little circles, from 2 to 3, then 3 to 2, 2 to 3, with maybe a bit of stage 4 occasionally - and sometimes you slip right back to stage one. Itís not a straightforward progression by any means. So I think itís quite good that Śāntideva does not indulge in detailed analysis of the various stages through which a Bodhisattva must pass. I think heís much more practical than that. It is useful, in a way, to have all the stages tabulated, and in a sense one does pass through them all, but not quite like going up a flight of stairs - thatís taking it much too literally.

P.38

... making the Great Vow (*mahā-pranidhāna*)  
in the presence of a spiritual director  
(*Kalyāṇa-mitra*, literally 'a good friend') ...

**S:** This in a way corresponds to what is usually called Bodhisattva ordination, though unfortunately in many parts of the Mahāyāna world the latter has just become a ceremony with no real arising of the Bodhichitta at that time, or before, or perhaps even afterwards, at all. This isn't really the sort of thing that is to be encouraged. There's no really meaningful Bodhisattva ordination unless the Bodhichitta has already arisen. In most Mahāyāna countries, the Bodhisattva ordination is an individual affair, but if the Bodhichitta isn't individual in that sense one can query whether the Bodhisattva ordination itself can be an individual affair in that sense - in the sense, that is to say, that the Upasaka ordination or even Bhikshu ordination is an individual affair. It seems that the Bodhichitta is something more likely to arise within a community, within an Order of people who are working to allow it to manifest and where it has, perhaps, even begun to manifest in a small way already. Thus it's almost as though the Bodhisattva ordination becomes something 'collective', but I think that's something we'll have to watch and wait for - and also work for. Not just that Upasaka A. or Upasaka B. gets Bodhisattva ordination. It's much more like, in a way, the whole Order getting it - how, one just doesn't know at present, but it is certainly much more like that. It might be focused, as it were, in certain individuals, but it really concerns the Order, even the Movement as a whole. In a way, the Movement embodies the Bodhichitta, or at least is an embodiment or manifestation of the Bodhichitta. If there's no Bodhichitta in the Movement, then it's just another organisation. So to the extent that there is a sort of Bodhichitta at work in the Movement, to that extent it's a real 'Buddhist', spiritual, 'Mahāyāna' movement. Otherwise not. That's really why we have our Sevenfold *pūjā*: the Sevenfold *pūjā* is working up towards the Bodhichitta, as is suggested right at the end. If you do the *pūjā* often enough, and with sufficient sincerity, sooner or later, for all those who do it, the Bodhichitta 'descends' or 'arises' - whatever you like to call it. But I think it's more likely to arise in the case of a number of people working hard together, and stimulating and sparking one another off, rather than for the solitary individual, in whose case it may tend to be more like an individual experience in the narrower sense. At the same time it's not a 'collective' thing in the sense of a product of mass psychology. We don't really have a word for it. It's more a matter of fellowship, or manifestation of spiritual communion.

p 39

... nothing less than total self-effacement for the  
sake of others.

[27]

**S:** Self-effacement must not be taken too much in the orthodox Christian sense of self-crucifixion, of afflicting and even punishing the self. It's more like taking our empirical self up and absorbing it, as it were, in the higher self, - although this isn't the sort of expression Buddhism usually uses, - or like containing it within the wider structure, rather than literally smashing it or sitting on it.

P.39

He cannot rest until the work concludes.

**S:** That's very good, but even so not perfect. He doesn't want to rest even when the work does conclude! In other words, he doesn't have a good rest waiting right at the end, no matter how difficult the whole task is. Not quite like that. But still, Dr. Matics does put it about as well as it could be put.[28]



**PRAISING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT**  
**(Text)**

## PRAISING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

### The Text

p.143

v.2 There is nothing really original here.

**Sangharakshita:** There is no value attached to originality. In modern times, in the West, we seem to have made rather a fetish of originality. Be original at all costs! But Śāntideva is almost boasting, "There's nothing original here. It's just what the Buddha taught, as best I can put it across." Of course the obvious extreme of this attitude is just imitation, or mechanical repetition. One has to find the middle way between a pseudo-originality - originality for its own sake - and just carrying something on in a mechanical, repetitive sort of way. If you do deeply assimilate the Buddha's teaching, or the Buddha's spiritual influence, and be yourself, well you are original then in the best sense. Otherwise, if you take originality as a value in itself, then you are just trying to be different in a rather self-conscious way, as though being different and having something of your own to contribute, was so very important - the own of course being the ego.

**Gotami:** In a sense you know things because you've made them your own. You've as it were rediscovered them for yourself.

**S:** Yes, because if you express it then it'll come out with a definite individual flavour of you. This is why I was quite interested when I read that little article that you wrote for *Magga* and which was sent to me by the editor ... Some of you might not have seen it. It's quite a short article, but the few simple topics that Gotami's written about, in a very suitable way, are standard FWBO fare - I could almost tell which lectures she'd listened to. But the point is that the article is absolutely Gotami. I would never have written it like that, and I think nobody else would. It's her own style because it's assimilated. So in that way it's original. It's faithful, but original. So that's what we've got to be in connection with Buddhism. We've got to really assimilate it - assimilate the spiritual influences - and then we will be in a way original, because we'll be expressing that influence and being faithful to it - but at the same time there'll be a definite flavour of *úsí* too in the good sense. It won't be just imitation .... You're not just trying to copy somebody else or repeat something in the way that they would repeat it. But there's no use trying to be different, or insisting "Oh, I've got to do it in my own way." That's no good. Your own way will come quite spontaneously and naturally once you've really assimilated something and made it your own.

**Mike:** I find it a bit of a barrier recently, sitting down to write. I'll read over what I've written and see your lectures coming out through it, and wonder, "Am I just mechanically reproducing this, or is it really coming out of my own experience?"

**S:** What you have to do is to forget about all the lectures, forget that you've read anything, and just think of a subject and try to express it clearly. Of course if undigested chunks of what you've read or heard come up, it simply means you haven't assimilated and maybe you shouldn't be writing yet. Or if you do write, just do it as an exercise for your own benefit, just to see how much you have assimilated and how much you have not; but don't think about publication at this stage. Just do as Śāntideva says here, "I have composed this with no other thought of any [29] other purpose than to clarify my own mind."

**Gisela:** I find I know quite clearly when it's my own kind of thing, when I've assimilated it. And I find that before that I can't really write anything anyway. Just nothing comes out. I have to feel that it's me, that I know it, otherwise it just doesn't work.

**S:** I can recognise, sometimes, even in the letters I receive, bits and pieces of me that are not really digested [*Laughter*]. It's quite obvious. On the other hand I can read something, say written by Gotami, and this is very faithful to whatever I've said or taught; but at the same time it's Gotami, it's not me. There's not a bit of *émeí* in a personal sense. The personal flavour is Gotami and the style is Gotami, but the content is faithful. Not that you can really

separate content and style. It's a bit subtler than that. There's no undigested chunks of things....

**Gotami:** I was just going to say to Mike that I had a phase when almost every time I spoke on Buddhism someone who had heard the relevant lecture by Bhante would say, 'That's such and such lecture' - part 3 or whatever it was. But you just have to carry on through that.

**Gisela:** It relates to Hindemith's comment that when creating new music, in order to create something new one has to build on something old, by which he meant a particular Bach tradition. But it's in a sense the same thing - that one builds on that, but one creates something new.

**S:** But in the case of Buddhism you don't set out to create something new: you set out to continue the tradition, to be faithful to the tradition. But because you are an individual, and absolutely unique, you also contribute - quite incidentally - something of your own, even if it's only your own personal flavour.

p.143                      v.5     As lightning is seen brightly for an instant in the darkness of a clouded night, so perhaps, for once, the thought of the world may be turned, by the gesture of the Buddha, to good things for an instant.

**S:** This is very feelingly expressed. 'As lightning is seen brightly for an instant in the darkness of a clouded night, so perhaps, for once, the thought of the world may be turned, by the gesture' - the subtle influence - 'of the Buddha, to good things for an instant.' It's as subtle as that!

p.144                      v.10   Having overpowered this impure likeness of oneself...

**S:** This 'impure likeness' is the so-called existing empirical self, which is like you but which is not your real true self as it were - though Buddhism doesn't generally use this sort of terminology. So, having overcome this empirical self, the self as we usually experience it, just here and now -

P.144                      v.10   ...one should create the priceless likeness of a Conqueror's jewel.

**S:** In other words you should 'create' the Bodhichitta, which is your own true self as it were - in a way, your higher self. Maybe we [30] shouldn't be too much afraid of that sort of language. In India it had its dangers - maybe not so much here.

p.144                      v.11   ...the unique leaders of the world's caravan.

**S:** Like the Conquerors mentioned in the previous verse these are, of course, the Buddhas.

P.144                      v.12   All other goodness, having lost its fruit, like the banana tree begins to decay.

**S:** The banana tree doesn't last very long. As soon as it's given its fruit it starts withering away. It only lasts one season.

P.144                      v.12   But that tree which is the Thought of Enlightenment  
                                 begets  
                                 and does not decay.

**S:** It's like the reactive mind and the creative mind. The reactive mind goes between the extremes, between creation and decay for example, but the process of the creative mind is from creation to further creation, - more creation, - better creation. So the Thought of

Enlightenment is like that *par excellence*. ĒIt bears fruit perpetually,í and bigger and better fruit every time.

p.145                      v.15    This Thought of Enlightenment is to be understood as twofold. Briefly, it is the idea of dedication to Enlightenment (*bodhiprañidhicitta*) and then the actual pilgrimage towards it (*bodhiprasthāna*).

**S:** *Prasthāna* literally means the establishment: establishment by regular practice.

p.149                      v.19    ...in spite of sleep and repeated excitement...

**S:** These are the two extreme dangers, especially for meditation: the sleepy, drowsy, sluggish, stagnant, inert state; and the excited, feverish, stirred up, somewhat neurotic state. Sloth and torpor, hurry and worry - these are said to be the two great enemies of meditation practice. On the one hand a sluggish, torpid, dull, stagnant, decaying state, with drowsiness and all that, and on the other a very wild, very hurried and flurried state, with lots of thoughts going through the mind rather feverishly, almost like in a bad dream.

P.146                      v.35    ...an act of evil requires great strength, but goodness to the sons of the Conqueror is without effort.

**S:** Thatís quite an original thought. Itís sometimes quite difficult and troublesome to be wicked, like planning a bank robbery! Itís not all that easy. Itís not as though people just slip into evil sometimes; they take a lot of time and trouble and energy and thought to do harm - to do something that is bad. For the Bodhisattva, in comparison, doing good is something quite easy. So this reverses our usual way of thinking. We tend to think of doing good as something rather difficult, and that itís rather easy to be bad; but it isnít always like that. Sometimes, maybe, we should think, ĒWell, after all, itís quite easy to be good. Itís easy to be positive. Whatís the difficulty?í As [31] we saw earlier on, when we were talking about letting out our positive feelings, itís simple really. The difficult, unpleasant thing is to be negative. To be nice and kind, especially when youíve already got the feelings, is really quite easy. ĒItís easy to be good! Itís easy to meditate! really! Maybe we should think a bit like that, rather than ĒOh itís very difficult! Itís a hard struggle! Itís going against the grain!í Maybe we should think, No, it isnít so difficult, after all! If we really are Buddhists at heart, what could be easier than acting in an enlightened sort of way?í

P.146                      v.36    I reverence their bodies, wherein this most excellent jewel of the mind has arisen, wherein even a sin results in happiness. I go for refuge to those resources of happiness.

**S:** Thatís rather an un-Buddhistic thought: ĒWherein even a sin results in happiness.í Itís a bit like St. Augustineís ĒOh happy sin!í i.e. the sin of Adam, which resulted in Christ coming to save the world. Thereís a little bit of that sort of thought here, but itís worth sometimes reversing the usual way of thinking.

**Aśvajit:** I was a bit puzzled by verse 17 (p.145): ĒThe idea of dedication to Enlightenment brings great fruit even on the wheel of rebirth (*samsāra*), but not the uninterrupted meritoriousness of the mind which is set upon departure.í

**S:** I think departure means departure from the *samsāra* itself in the direction of Enlightenment. I think it also is a reference to the Ēdedicationí in the sense of *bodhiprañidhicitta*, and to the Ēsetting outí, or being set upon departure, which is the *bodhiprasthānacitta*. Even if you have the aspiration towards Enlightenment in a general way, without actually practising the perfections, even that is so meritorious that it brings great fruit even in the course of oneís being reborn, the Wheel of Life. Simply by virtue of that aspiration to Enlightenment for the benefit of all, there will be great benefits in the way of

better rebirth, more happiness, and so on. However, all this falls far short of the uninterrupted meritoriousness which is produced when you're not only aspiring to Enlightenment but actually working towards it by practising the perfections.

**Gotami:** It's a bit difficult to understand how the aspiration can arise without there being an expression of that in action.

**S:** That's true, in a way. Some time ago I was talking to someone about this very matter in connection with vegetarianism. Speaking personally, I was a Buddhist for many years before I even thought of becoming a vegetarian, but when it was pointed out to me that being a Buddhist logically meant being a vegetarian I said, 'Well of course!' But it hadn't occurred to me before that. It's quite strange that practice seems to be in a different dimension as it were - this is what I felt in the beginning. I certainly had my head full of the Perfection of Wisdom and the *Sūtra of Hui Neng* and all the rest of it, but I didn't think very much in terms of actually practising their teaching. Not much of it seemed to percolate through in terms of practice: all that seemed to start later on. I think that may be the case with other people as well. At first you're so overwhelmed by your own ideas and feelings about the Dharma that you almost forget to notice what you are actually doing in day to day life. Did anyone else find this, or was [32]I a rather fortunate exception? I was on my own, of course. Don't forget that! I had no one to point out anything to me or pull me up - not for some years.

**Dhruva:** I found it very hard for some time to relate practical things like the Eightfold Path to me here and now. I knew it, but I couldn't see it at that moment.

**S:** Well, I have to admit that I didn't even think about it! I didn't really take the Eightfold Path very seriously until a bit later on. I was much preoccupied with the Void and all that kind of thing. Practice, or even the idea of practice, came much later on. Ordinary life seemed to carry on just as it was for quite a while.

**Mary:** It came in spasms that I very much wanted to be vegetarian, but everything around.... And then I lost that feeling and it went away again.

**S:** I was in the army when I became a vegetarian, but I didn't have much difficulty. As soon as it was pointed out to me, by Theosophist friends, that I ought to be one, I thought, 'Yes, it's quite inconsistent, my not being a vegetarian and professing to be a Buddhist.' So I became a vegetarian, and that was that. But I'm afraid it had to be pointed out to me.

**Mike:** But isn't it like coming to a point of realisation within yourself as things just slowly fall away when the time is right?

**S:** In my own case I'm afraid this didn't happen. It was only when someone accused me of inconsistency in a friendly, well-meaning way and I saw that it was so - that I was being inconsistent - that the realisation came to me. Someone else once pointed out that I was being inconsistent by being in the army. I said, 'Yes, I realise that already. I'm waiting for the day when I can get out!' [Laughter] But I must say that when I was called up it didn't occur to me that I ought to apply my Buddhism by being a conscientious objector. I just didn't think in that way then. I just allowed it all to happen, even though I wasn't at all happy about being called up. Admittedly I was not happy about it for 'selfish' reasons - not because I thought it would be against my principles. But maybe I was a bit exceptional. I must say that those were the very early days of Buddhism in this country!

**Gisela:** I frequently find that I'm aware of something, but I can't do anything about it or change it. Quite often there is a split between what I feel and what I'm aware of and what I can do - how I can put it into practice.

**Mike:** I think you need a jerk to get you out of it.

**S:** Yes, or sometimes a change of circumstances.

**Mary:** And also it comes as a feeling and you don't always recognise it as what it is. It can come several times and then you begin to recognise the feeling and to see what it's trying to tell you.

**Gisela:** Sometimes I'm very much aware of myself performing a certain reactive pattern that I do and I know that, but I still can't stop it.

**S:** I think that's a lot of people's experience. [33]

**Gisela:** I know even before I start it that I'm doing that again, but I don't seem to have the energy or whatever to not do it. It requires a kind of jerk, yes.

**S:** Or sometimes a change in external circumstances helps. It's easier then to set up new patterns, or better patterns. I had a letter from Mamaki the other day. She had been going through quite a negative phase, she says, and was writing to explain that that was why she had not been seen very much. But she also said something very interesting. She had had to give a lecture, but wasn't very happy about it, and did it at the last minute all in a rush. Having to do it, however, was a real turning point for her, she says, and she's feeling much better now. So we see that it's often the demands of the objective situation that get you out of your own negative subjectivity. Otherwise you tend, very often, just to go on wallowing in it. If you've got to be up and doing something that needs to be done, you haven't got time to indulge in neurotic feelings of self-pity, guilt, gloom, and so on.

**Subhuti:** It puts it in perspective as well.

**Gotami:** And it's not a repressive thing. It's a working of everything out through the action.

**S:** Yes, you're not repressing, you're putting aside for the time being. By the time you come back to considering those negative things you've got a more positive basis from which to consider them. Then they don't seem so important. You feel you can deal with them. You're not overwhelmed by them.

**Vajradaka:** It's almost the positive aspect of someone in the Sangha being able to see someone else's talent even though that person may not feel very talented, at that moment, because they are going through something, and saying to them, 'Well look, you can do it. It needs to be done, do it.'

**S:** Of course you can do it! Not give a lecture? What nonsense! Anyone can give a lecture. Come on...Next Friday! *[Laughter]* I feel this more and more, especially during my last few months in retreat when I've had a chance to look at people as it were from a distance - though in other ways from close up - and I feel much more inclined to say, 'Look, you do this, and you do that. There's no doubt of your ability. Of course you can do it.' People have got lots of talents, lots of capacities. I'm sure of this. I might say almost any member of the Order can do almost anything. *[Laughter]* It can be done by anybody, really. You've just got to go and do it. It's as simple as that, really. There is no one who is crippled or moronic or mentally deprived or emotionally frustrated to that extent. They'll work it all out, to a great extent, just by doing things.

**Gotami:** We've had a practical experiment of this sort in Glasgow, because I said, 'I don't feel like making any more kesas.' *[Laughter]* 'How about you making some?' They replied, 'What, men make kesas?' So I said, 'Why not?' Then I broke the work down into small stages. 'First of all you get your material, then you cut it out in such and such lengths....' And now they're all making their own kesas.

**S:** Well, that's great. Why not? What is there in embroidery that a man can't do it? In the Tibetan monasteries all the embroidery is done by monks. It's a man's work - or a monk's work. Women don't do it.

**Mary:** Why can't women do it? [*Laughter*]

**S:** Because Tibetan women seem to think that they are not clever enough! [*Laughter*] But seriously, it's just that the traditional arts tend to be practised in monasteries, monasteries tend to be stocked with monks, and so the monks tend to get landed with the embroidery and all that - and also women's dress-making. All the best women's dressmakers in Tibet were monks. The ladies used to trot along to the monastery to be measured for their latest *bokku*. This was considered quite an acceptable thing, that a monk should ply a trade, and they were often tailors and cooks - Tibetan monasticism not being what the Chinese propaganda tells us it was. The monks were a very hard-working people, often plying semi-religious trades of this kind.

**Vajradaka:** It's good just to break into a kind of multi-dimensional realm of experience and activity just to discover all the hidden gems that one has.[35]

**CONFESSION OF EVIL &  
GRASPING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT  
(Guide)**



## CONFESSION OF EVIL AND GRASPING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

### The Guide

p.39                      He [i.e. the would-be Bodhisattva] offers ìby  
the power of the mindî (*buddhi*) all the good  
things of this and of all worlds ...

**Sangharakshita:** The word *buddhi* is mind, though ìmindî is often used to render the term *chitta*, which in fact has a much wider meaning - ìheartî, ìconsciousnessî, even ìwillî. *Buddhi* is more like ìintelligenceî, It is the ordinary. working mind, as it were - perhaps even the creative mind.

pp.39-40                      ... flowers, fruits, healing herbs, cooling waters,  
mountains of jewels ... and in the world of the gods,  
all of the wishing trees and lotus lakes - and  
everything desirable that can be found anywhere. He  
beseeches the glorious Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to  
have pity upon him, and out of their compassion to  
accept these gifts.

**S:** The offerings here are mental offerings. You can close your eyes, in a sort of meditation, visualise flowers, and fruits, and heaps of jewels, and have the devotional feeling of offering up all these things. You can also ritually offer actual flowers and fruits at the same time, but here Śāntideva is speaking specifically of a mental offering. Of course he ends up by offering himself, thus giving expression to his personal commitment in a rather concrete sort of way.

p.40                      The effect of this act is fourfold... (3) he  
by-passes former sins,...

**Vajradaka:** What about ìhe by-passes former sinsî?

**S:** I wondered about that. Ím not quite sure what ìby-passesî is supposed to mean. It is, of course, taught generally in Buddhism that karmas can be neutralised or balanced, so I think it must refer to that because how do you by-pass a former sin? Obviously it must refer to the effects of the former unskilful actions you have performed, not to the actions or ìsinsî themselves. So the question is: how do you bypass those effects? The only way in which you can do that, according to the Abhidharma especially, [apart from becoming an Arahant and dying,] is by creating a counterbalancing karma. So I think what Śāntideva is saying is that the good karma created by your *pūjā*, and your positive attitude of self-surrender, is so powerful that it counterbalances quite a lot of bad karma left over from the past and, as it were, neutralises it. I think this is an aspect of Buddhism, or of Buddhist teaching, which is sometimes overlooked. We hear a great deal of, ìOh youíll have to suffer from the results of your previous actions,î and so on, but it is equally strongly emphasised in the Buddhist teaching that you can neutralise and counterbalance the karmic consequences of previous unskilful actions by doing good, and heaping up merit, here in the present. But we donít hear - especially, perhaps, in Western expositions [36] of Buddhism - so much about this aspect. Yet it is one of the reasons why, in the East, much importance is attached, especially by lay people, to making merit, i.e. performing meritorious deeds, making offerings to the Buddha and, especially, to the monks. They have the feeling, ìWe are performing quite a lot of unskilful, demeritorious actions, and no doubt thereís a big legacy of them from the past. Perhaps thereís not much that we can do about them. Some unskilful actions we canít help performing. But at least letís try to perform some skilful, meritorious actions as well. Letís try to equalise the skilful and unskilful actions a bit and strike more of a balance. This is very much the outlook of the layman in many Buddhist countries.

**Mike:** Is this bound up in any way with the idea of the path of purification, that one is doing good deeds purely and simply to purify one's evil in the past?

**S:** No, not quite. The Path of Purification, if you take it in the technical sense, is the path leading out of karma and beyond karma in the direction of Nirvāṇa. But here you are still remaining within *samsāra*, trying to even up the balance within it - within the Wheel of Life, as it were - so that you don't have too bad a position within it when you're reborn. So it isn't really quite the same. On the Path of Purification you're purifying the mind as a stepping-stone to Nirvāṇa, but within this particular context, that of the considerations affecting the average Buddhist layman, the latter is purifying his mind, or at least performing good deeds in order to equalise karmas, so that he has more good karma to his credit than bad and is, therefore, more likely to have a good rebirth. He's usually not thinking directly in terms of Nirvāṇa at this stage.

**Mike:** Is this similar, then, to Milarepa's situation?

**S:** Yes, you could say that, though again, in Milarepa's case he - or at least his guru - was thinking more in terms of ultimate Buddhahood. The reason for this was that Milarepa's situation was extremely bad, because the sins he had committed were so numerous that unless he gained Buddhahood in this life he'd be sure of going to hell as soon as he died. So he had no alternative except to get enlightened in this life, and Marpa had quite a job purging and purifying him so as to prepare him for that. Even Marpa couldn't purify him sufficiently for him not to be reborn and not go to hell, but he could purify him sufficiently for him to gain Enlightenment! Which is quite a thought. By gaining Enlightenment you can escape the consequences of karma, because you're not reborn, at least not in the ordinary sense. There's no compulsive rebirth. It's quite a thought that sometimes it's less trouble just to lead a spiritual life, and gain Enlightenment, than to try to put things right in the world, or even to try to have a successful and happy worldly career. You need less effort, very often, to gain Enlightenment! It's very difficult to be successful in the world, but if you follow the spiritual path you can be sure of success. In the world there are all sorts of factors which may upset your best-laid plans, but that can't happen on the spiritual path.

**Gotami:** Now you're speaking as if it's an inevitable process!

**S:** The results are inevitable once you start making the effort, but if you're thinking in terms of worldly success the results are not inevitable because there are so many factors that you just don't know [37] about that could intervene and ruin your work. On the spiritual path you know that if you make the effort, sooner or later the result will come - that that is inevitable. So it's quite a thought really because, once again, we usually think of spiritual life as something very difficult and worldly life as easy - in a way it is, and in a way it isn't. In a way it's the spiritual life that is easier and this is why, perhaps, Śāntideva says, “The effect of this act, that is, all this giving and pūjā and mental offering and self-dedication, is fourfold: (1) He becomes without fear of being or becoming (bhāva), of which the metaphysical implications are tremendous.” The would-be Bodhisattva has got no more worries - he's just giving himself to the spiritual life. He's not bothered whether he's going to live or die, or be rich or poor, or praised or blamed, or anything like that. He's just on the spiritual path and that's that. That's all he's bothered about - so what a big load off his mind then! “He becomes without fear of being or becoming,” which are the two great extremes. Once your mind is made up, and you're really committed, you're free from worry. But so long as you're dithering and wondering, “Shall I or shall I not?” or “If I did this, or didn't do that, then what would happen?” or “What would be better?” or “Could I combine the two?” A bit of this and a bit of that. So much time for spiritual things and so much time for worldly things - so long as you're dithering around in this way you remain not sure and not clear, and therefore not firm and not confident. Once you've decided and committed yourself, however, that's that. Everything is looked after, in a sense - you've nothing more to worry about.

This is a different way of looking at things, though one with a great deal in it, and it has all come about simply as a result of giving. Yet important as it is, this giving, this making of

offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and dedicating oneself, surrendering oneself, is only the very beginning of the spiritual life. In a way it is an anticipation of the arising of the Bodhichitta - because at this stage, of course, you've not been taken possession of by these higher spiritual forces. But you want to be. So you say to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, at least in your own mind, 'Take me over. Instead of doing the things that I want to do, from now onwards I'll do the things that you want me to do.' At this stage it's still this dualistic kind of dialogue, which is the only way you can put things at this stage; but when the Bodhichitta arises then you are actually taken over - you're taken at your word, as it were, and then, of course, there's no question of 'Shall I? Shall I not?' That's that. You're functioning in a way as an instrument - though that's a rather mechanical way of putting it - of the arisen Bodhichitta. At this stage, however, you are asking for that to happen, or making yourself receptive to it happening, or even trying to help make it happen by giving, first of all flowers and incense and lights, in imagination, and then offering up yourself, saying, 'Take me over. Let me be directed by the Will to Enlightenment. Let that motivate me, let that carry me along, not just my own egoistic will.' In this way *pūjā* becomes very, very important, even the making of offerings and giving of oneself in this purely symbolical and mental and ritual sort of way. *pūjā* is quite demanding, in fact, even at the very beginning. What Śāntideva says also suggests the importance of this kind of simple, maybe mental act of *pūjā* and dedicating of oneself. Perhaps one could use the word 'dedication' for this earlier, more dualistic stage, and 'commitment' for the stage when you're actually taken over, as it were.[38]

**Gotami:** In Glasgow a lot of people find the *pūjā* a very difficult thing to accept, even to the point of not coming along to meditation because of it.

**S:** Do you think that's a genuine cultural difficulty, or is it something psychological or whatever?

**Vajradaka:** I think it has a lot to do with character. For instance, at the retreat I took in Rotterdam there were a few people who had a definite feeling that they wanted to do it and in the beginning did it, then gradually one by one all the others started coming and partaking until in the end everyone did. But in England, on the basic course that I took in London, it was rather different. Everyone seemed to feel that it was necessary for them to do it, and they did it, but sort of half-heartedly, perhaps e.g. by not putting their hands together but keeping them in their laps, by not bowing, by not doing anything they didn't really want to do, but still making a token effort and then finally actually feeling something.

**Gisela:** That would be a cultural difference [between the Dutch and the English].

**S:** There are several passages in the Pali scriptures - or rather a standard passage which appears several times-- where the Buddha is described as sitting somewhere, presumably ready to speak, and people are described as gradually gathering. The passage says that some, out of their devotion to the Exalted One, prostrated themselves on the ground at His feet, some bowed, some respectfully saluted Him with folded hands from a distance, and some merely took their seats. But the Buddha never says anything. He never says, 'O disrespectful man, why do you not salute me in this, that or the other way?' Nothing is said, but the description is very clear, and it may be that the way in which we show respect is a matter of character or temperament.

**Gisela:** Does it make any difference, how you show respect?

**S:** If you'd like to, but can't, I think it does. Conversely, if you're violently opposed to any outward show of respect, I think you should be careful and not force yourself too much. Take the case of Nel, for example. Once, after we had visited a Dutch church together, we were discussing the fact that in the Dutch Reformed churches there is no altar, and she said, 'This is one of the reasons why I had difficulty with the *pūjā* at the first retreat I attended. I was not used to turning in a particular direction and having a focus of devotion there. In the Reformed churches the focus of attention, if there is one at all, is the pulpit, and the minister who is

speaking, but there is no focal point for worship. For this reason, she said, at first it seemed very strange that we all turned towards the *äaltarí*, whereas *weíve* taken it for granted, if not because of our Buddhist conditioning, at least on account of our English Christian conditioning, and the fact that the altarís there.

**Mary:** I used to find it impossible to put oneís hands together. I used to be quite angry at the children at school being taught to do this, because it seemed it was hollow; but it didnít affect me like that on retreat: it seemed quite natural.

**S:** This brings in the whole question of discipline - using the word in a neutral sort of way. When you sit cross-legged, and close your eyes and fold your hands, youíre not in a state of *dhyāna*, but youíre [39] going through those motions to try to get yourself into that higher state of consciousness. In the same way you fold your hands and bow - not, at the beginning, an expression of devotion, but to help yourself to get into that devotional mood because you can see, quite objectively, that that is a necessary thing for you to get into.

It is a strange thing, but here in this country - certainly in our own group - everything concerned with the emotions seems rather difficult and complicated, which it isnít in the East, and this difficulty may be due to reasons which are quite widespread. Some people in the West seem to take very naturally and happily to *pūjās*, though. For instance, when I was at Yale, I had an extra-curricular meditation every week, which was very well attended. One day the question of having something devotional was raised, and this was taken up very, very eagerly by some of the students. They really wanted something like that, and joined in very happily. They were very pleased to help in setting up the shrine and lighting the candles, and these were quite sophisticated - well, maybe not all that sophisticated - American university students, mostly young men who were baseball players and all that. Not all of them were my own students on the seminar I was taking, by any means. There were some who were not on the seminar, but who were very conspicuous when it came to the meditation and the *pūjā*.

The difficulty that we experience with *pūjā* may also be due to the fact that we havenít yet evolved any accepted devotional forms. Bowing in the way we do is perhaps rather Eastern, so thereís a bit of a cultural barrier. The full prostration, especially, is very oriental, although of course there are traces of it in Christianity. For instance, when a priest is ordained he prostrates himself flat in front of the altar, doesnít he? [Laughter]

**Gotami:** Yes, but anything that reminds them of Christianity would probably turn them off anyway - things like icons and crossing yourself.

**S:** Apparently the primitive Christian posture for prayer was standing in the Jewish fashion. Kneeling for prayer came much later. In the early centuries one stood with arms uplifted, in the position in which Moses is often represented in art.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think that actual positions have some value in themselves, in the sense of *mudra*?

**S:** I wouldnít like to stress it too much, but I think for some people they certainly do. Itís not an easy thing to generalise about, or be sure about, but whether or not it manifests in ritual form there must be some aspect of your spiritual life in which you feel devotion, otherwise it will remain a bit sterile and dry. I donít know whether thereís a difference between the sexes here.

**Gotami:** (Breaking in) No.

**Gisela:** No? Well, youíre a more intellectual woman, perhaps.

**S:** (Continuing) - but when I was at Hampstead, where the people who came to the Vihāra were a bit more elderly and conventional, I noticed that many of the women used to bring

along flowers for the shrine (I don't think the men ever did), and it was the women that used to give me boxes of chocolates. Maybe it just isn't the custom for men to do these things.

**Subhuti:** The suggestion is that it's rather effeminate and unmanly.

**Gisela:** Giving flowers isn't a custom in this country anyway, is it? Not very much, anyway. If you go to Eastern Europe, men will give flowers quite happily, quite often, but not so here.

**S:** In England you do take flowers to relations when you go to see them.

**Gisela:** It strikes me as much less common here than, for instance, in Germany, and I know that in Eastern Europe it's even more common.

**S:** I think there has been a bit of a change since the war. Maybe I'm a bit old-fashioned, but I remember that before the war, if ever I went with my father to see his mother he'd always buy flowers for her on the way. If we went to see any other elderly female relative, the same thing was invariably done. I think the giving of flowers in that sort of way was quite common then. It seems less common now - but I'm a bit out of touch with ordinary English social life, so I can't be too sure of that.

Where bringing flowers for the shrine is concerned, it may also be that the idea of the image puts people off. It's not necessarily a question of lurking doubts about idol worship, but of whether, when you've got an image there, you really feel that it is the Buddha, or the symbol of the Buddha, and want to give something to that. Maybe some people find this rather unrealistic, or rather an artificial situation. They could, perhaps, understand giving to a person, who accepts and responds, but putting flowers in front of an image isn't very meaningful for them, maybe, because they can't think of the image as alive in any sort of sense. Maybe a child could, but in the process of growing up we've probably lost that ability - maybe rightly. We should certainly encourage people to develop devotional feelings, but we must, I think, be quite cautious about insisting on any particular channel or type of expression. I think we have to be quite experimental for some time, and maybe not take it for granted that we are going to have a shrine and an image and offerings in the traditional way. We may have them, but not necessarily. Perhaps we should be quite open to the idea that we might not, or that a later generation of Order members might decide to do something else. We might even do something else ourselves, after a few years. Image worship is a very ancient tradition in Buddhism, but the tradition of not having any image at all is even more ancient, because there were no images for the first two or three hundred years. People made their offerings to the stupas. So you can't even argue that image worship was there from the beginning as a really integral part of primitive Buddhism - you can't argue that. Devotion, yes. In the Buddha's lifetime, the Buddha was the centre of devotion. After His *pariNirvāṇa* the stupa became the focal point, and then that gave way to the Buddha image. There's no reason why the feeling of devotion shouldn't find other expressions, but devotion must be there - the faith and devotion, and the feeling to give to whatever you think of spiritual value, or to give for the sake of that.

**Gisela:** Chanting, I find, is quite a good way of developing devotion. This is a possible alternative, because I know quite a few people who are put off by the thought of an image.  
[41]

**S:** This is perhaps one of the things we need to discuss very seriously and thoroughly some time: what are we doing when we have an image? Do we need a focus? Should the focus be of that kind? And so on. Perhaps we shall even have to experiment with other ways of doing things - not giving up our present way, but trying out alternative forms and seeing what happens. It has been suggested, for instance, that we have a circle of people and a symbol or whatever in the middle. We did, in fact, do something like this on one of the retreats, when we set up a mandala with a little shrine on it.

**Mary:** Isn't it like when one values some thing of art and one puts other things round it in one particular place in a room?

**S:** Yes. It is very closely connected with this whole artistic feeling of love of decoration. For instance, at one stage of my wandering career I was staying with a friend of mine in a deserted ashram in South India. It belonged to the Ramakrishna Mission, and there was a little shrine of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. My friend and I thought that as we were staying there it was only right that we should keep the shrine nice and tidy, even though we were Buddhists, not Hindus. It was only a little place, but I would sweep it out every morning and decorate it with flowers. This I found quite a pleasant little job before the meditation, even though my feelings about Sri Ramakrishna were not particularly strong compared with my feelings with regard to the Buddha. I was quite happy decorating the shrine and putting lots of big red flowers around the pictures. As I did so, I experienced quite a happy semi-aesthetic, semi-devotional feeling. Now this friend of mine was a Hindu by birth, though very strongly influenced by Buddhism, and after a while he got it into his head that he ought to do the *pūjā* the proper way. So he wrote off to Calcutta for a manual of ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna that had been drawn up some time after his death by his disciples. It was all in Sanskrit, and very elaborate, with lots of wavings of lamps and other picturesque things. But as soon as this started I found I went completely cold towards it. When it wasn't any longer my spontaneous, happy decoration of the shrine in my own way, when it became a formal ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God, I just wasn't interested any more. I still did my little job, but it wasn't a happy experience any longer. That was how I felt at that time. Similarly, people coming into Buddhism might feel that way with regard to Buddhist worship, even though they might be very happily helping to decorate the shrine for Wesak, and put up flowers, and let off balloons. When it comes to following a prescribed pattern of *pūjā*, however, or actually worshipping the Buddha in a technical sense, they might feel less happy about it. Anyway, this experience of mine made quite an impression on me at the time, and I was quite aware of what was happening, and why. So I think it's something we have to be quite careful about, not pushing people but letting them follow their own feeling. If their feeling allows them to join happily in the *pūjā*, so much the better; but if they just want to sit more or less on the fringes and just be there, without particularly wanting to join in the bowing, or even in the chanting, we shouldn't insist that they do.

p.40                      The act of worship, the act of confession, the  
act of taking refuge, are themselves the causes  
of great effects.

[42]

**S:** This is very important. We mustn't think that worship is just worship - not even mental worship; or that going for refuge is something you simply repeat. These are actions - that is, when they are really sincerely done - and as actions they are karma, which means that they are productive of consequences - and in this case of good consequences, and very powerful good consequences at that, which can even counteract and counterbalance previous bad karmas of various kinds. So when you are creating mental pictures of offerings, and making offerings with heartfelt devotion, you are busy doing something. It is an action, a mental action, and according to Buddhism the mental action is the most powerful of all. Action is not just doing something with the body. So these mental actions of *pūjā*, and making offerings, and going for refuge, of self-dedication and self-commitment, are all very powerful actions which produce great consequences in your own life and in the lives of other people, even karmically considered. This is not any special teaching of Śāntideva's. It is quite in line with the strictest Theravāda and Abhidharma teaching. There's nothing specifically Mahāyānist here. It's just straightforward basic Buddhism.

P.40                      On the plane of partial nonphenomenality,  
wherein there is complete equality of every self  
(*parātma-samatā*), all of the merit of the  
Bodhisattva is interchangeable with the demerit

of anyone else, and all sins decisively are  
by-passed ...

**S:** Karma pertains to the Wheel of Life, to the world of relativity; but when you get beyond that into the higher spiritual dimension, you don't even think in terms of karma any more - don't think of it as cause and effect in a rigid, mechanistic sort of way. On its own level karma is true, and it continues to work on that level. It works for you when you're on that level, but when you're on another level, spiritually speaking, - when you're in another dimension, - you see karma in a different way. It works in a different way, as it were. For you, karma in a sense is no longer karma.

**Mike:** Can you relate this to accepting whatever comes? If whatever comes to you is taken from the point of view of acceptance, then it's almost as if it were karmically neutral.

**S:** That's true. If, as often happens, you think of karma in a rather rigid, literalistic way, then you think of some dreadful punishment coming to you as a result of your bad deeds in the past. Thus karma appears something unpleasant that you've got to submit to, and there's not much you can do about it. But if you accept it and say, "Oh yes, I suppose it was my karma. It's painful, but anyway it's an experience and I'm learning from it, so never mind!" then you transform it so that, in a way, it almost ceases to be karma. If you no longer think in terms of compensation and retribution, then there's no such thing as karma for you, whatever may be happening to you. It's life, it's your experience, and you just accept it as that and make something of it - even transform it.

p.40                      ... on the plane of absolute nonphenomenality,  
Nirvāṇa and *saṃsāra* are identical. the world of  
appearance is illusion, and karma is another  
fraud.

**S:** "Karma is another fraud." "Fraud" is of course rather a strong [43] word, but maybe not too strong from a really spiritual point of view if one can really get to that point of view and identify oneself with it.

P.41                      ... even here. in the heart of the most ardent,  
bhakti-filled, worshipful passages of devotional  
poetry known in Buddhist literature, the phrase,  
"by my own effort" (*atma-sakti*) places the  
essential emphasis of the quest for  
Enlightenment upon nothing more than  
self-help.

**S:** That's what it really comes down to in the end! You can open yourself to all these great spiritual forces, which are there ready to help you, - and they do all that they can, - but they can't do it for you. You've got at least to respond, at least to help yourself, as well. You can close yourself, you can shut yourself off and keep out all these forces, if you want to. Even if you say that nothing can be done unless you give up your self-will, the fact remains that giving up your self-will is an act of tremendous self-will and self-effort. It's not so easy to give up your own will and let somebody else do it for you - it requires a lot of effort! Later on in the spiritual life the distinction loses its meaning, in a way. You do what you can, and these other spiritual forces will do what they can too - there's no doubt about that. Between you, whatever is necessary to be done, will be done.

P.41                      ....Śāntideva describes ... the service which he  
renders to the Great Munis [the Buddhas] . It is  
the worship (*pūjā*) given to the image of a deity  
in an Indian temple; he bathes them ... dresses  
them with fine silk; he offers flowers, garlands,

incense, food and libations, brilliant jewelry,  
parasols with golden handles, music and song.

**S:** In some forms of Buddhism, though not all, and certainly in Hinduism, in the course of ritual worship the deity - the image, or the idol - is treated exactly as a living person. It is very important to understand this, and maybe it's this that we are up against to some extent, in this country, with regard to image worship. In India, the Hindus still keep up this kind of worship. They keep it up more than the Buddhists - though the Tibetans keep it up too, to a great extent.

When the image is consecrated the ceremony is called *pranāpratishtha*, or establishment of the *prāna*, the life-force, and after this ceremony the image is believed to be literally alive. It is therefore treated exactly like a living person, and just as a living person needs a house, and food and clothing, so does the image. Indeed the image, or deity, is treated not like an ordinary person but like a king, and everything is provided for him on the grandest scale. The temple in which he dwells is his royal palace, the altar is his throne, and the stages of the *pūjā* enact the successive events of the royal day. In the morning he is woken up with music. This is why you have pipe and drum music at dawn outside the inner shrine in all Hindu temples in South India. After the deity has woken up he is bathed in perfumed water in the inner sanctuary - because every orthodox Hindu bathes as soon as he gets up. (There's a little bathroom inside the shrine, with special arrangements for the water to run away.) Then the image is dressed in new clothes, flower-garlands are placed round [44] its neck, its forehead is anointed with sandal-paste, and ceremonial umbrellas are held up over its head. Finally, it is seated on a little throne and offerings are made. Food has been cooked in the meantime, and usually it's laid down at the time of the foundation of the temple how much food - how much *bhoga* - must be offered every day to sustain the life-force of the deity. In some cases it's many tons of rice and corresponding quantities of vegetables every day. Hence the temples have got vast landed estates, the main purpose of which is to provide the *bhoga*. On his birthday or anniversary the deity is taken out in procession for an airing, his progress being exactly like that of a king. He also goes on visits to other gods, other temples, and so on. All this seems to have been started by the Buddhists in respect to the Buddha, and from them it spread to other Indian teachers and deities, in the end becoming quite general. Treating the idol or image as a living person is something the Indian can do quite naturally: he does it almost as a small child plays with a doll. Sometimes, unfortunately, the image becomes very doll-like indeed, and very garish. But in this passage, or rather in the corresponding passage in the text, Śāntideva has in mind this sort of tradition.

Whether we can ever bring ourselves to treat the image of the Buddha as a living person I very much doubt. In Theravāda Buddhism they don't regard the image in this manner, even though they have been influenced by these later traditions. The image is there just to remind you of the Buddha - this is what they tell you, and by and large this is their own attitude. I think that apart from the Shingon school this is the sort of attitude that prevails in Japan, and probably China too to a great extent. In Tibet they still very much follow the Indian tradition, though not to the full extent that the Hindus do - though they certainly clothe them and make offerings to them as to a living person. Maybe in our case it's a question of making up our minds which attitude we are going to try to adopt: whether we are going to try to regard the image as actually the Buddha Himself seated there and treat it as such, or whether we are going to regard it as a reminder of the Buddha without identifying Him with it in the Indian way.

**Aśvajit:** There are parallels in Catholicism, or Anglo-Catholicism. I remember going to Walsingham and seeing the image there.

**S:** Yes. There is also Christmas time with the crib, and the child in the crib. If it happens naturally, fine; but I think we have to be very careful about what specific forms of expression we try to adopt.



**Vajradaka:** You know what you were saying about rupas taking on life? Well, when I took the Amitayus rupa to Rotterdam I found myself talking to it as if it was live, and the customs men started doing it too! *[Laughter]* And when I came back to London they remembered the case and said, 'It's the Buddha! Is he all right?' *[Laughter]* 'Did he make it?'

**Gotami:** Ah, get off!

**Vajradaka:** Really! Honestly! It's true.

**S:** It does also make a difference whether you say 'it's' or 'he's'.

**Vajradaka:** I told them it was more an 'it's' than a 'he's'. *[Laughter]*

**S:** There is also the consideration that anything that is the focus [45] of powerful thought, including powerful devotional thought, over a long period of time, does seem to attract some sort of energy. Some of the images I have seen myself - mainly Hindu images in South India - are certainly very odd. You feel that there is something there, a sort of life, a sort of energy - projected from the human beings who worship it. Educated Hindus will tell you that this is in fact the case. They understand the matter very well. Indeed, the whole purpose of the 'life-giving' ceremony is to bring about this kind of effect. There are some images which are made of clay and kept for only three days. They're consecrated, they're worshipped for three days, and then at the end of that time they're deconsecrated and thrown into the river, and no one worships them any more. Even the ordinary Hindu understands the why and the wherefore of this, quite clearly. If he's asked he'll tell you that they are images, and to be worshipped, just as long as that 'life force' is there; but they are no longer images when it has been taken away. You put it there and you take it back. Thus there is quite a subtle philosophy linked with this type of image-worship. All the same, I think it would require a bit of mental acrobatics for us to have the same sort of attitude towards images as the Indians.

**Aśvajit:** It seems to me that they create quite a definite atmosphere. If you go round the British Museum and look at the Buddha rupas there, there is a very definite atmosphere about them.

**Gotami:** I always feel sorry for those things. *[Laughter]*

**S:** Yes. All those poor little Buddhas just sitting around. There are so many of them, and no worship, no flowers, and no candles! *[Laughter]*

**Mary:** They are in large spaces and people do go and look at them.

**Gisela:** Yes, and they've got one another to talk to if they want to.

**S:** Maybe you should think of the Buddha as your baby! In India the Hindus cater for every kind of approach. Just as Christians have got the Bambino, they've got the baby Krishna. So far as personal practice is concerned, any approach is justified provided it represents a genuine expression of devotional feeling. As regards the public *pūjās*, or any other functions to which people come along from outside the Movement, we of course have to be a bit careful, as we don't want to put people off instead of drawing them in.

**Gotami:** I think you've definitely got two types of people: the sort who really find the Indian type of *pūjā* the most attractive and the sort that prefer something much more simple, and you just have to cater for both.

**S:** The middle way seems to be chanting.

**Gisela:** Yes. I found *pūjā* very difficult to accept for a long, long time, but the thing that I could accept, and join in and get feelings in, was the chanting.

**S:** This is in fact more or less the Theravāda approach. They have the image there, and if you ask them why they will say, 'It's to remind us about the Buddha, so that we remember the Teaching', which is perfectly clear and straightforward. They do have offerings, but these are kept to a minimum - just a few flowers and candles. They don't go in for all the offerings to the honoured guest, or anything like that. But they do have lots of chanting. There's a great deal of feeling in the chanting, and lots of lay people like to sit up all night just listening to the monks chanting in front of the image. But there isn't any worship in the Hindu sense - the image isn't treated as a living person. In fact in the Theravāda they probably wouldn't want this, or even agree with it. Perhaps this is the sort of pattern that we have to follow, at least for the time being.

p.41

Then he performs similar *pūjā* to the symbolic manifestations of the Dharma which these Great Beings represent, by honoring the sacred scriptures, *caityas*, images, places associated with Bodhisattvas, great teachers and ascetics.

**S:** The Buddha is symbolised by, or even embodied in, the image, and the image receives worship. In the same way the Dharma, the teaching or the doctrine, is embodied in the scriptures - also in the stupas, considered symbolically. For this you get in Buddhism, especially Mahāyāna Buddhism, not only image worship but a great deal of what we would call 'book worship' - even ceremonial ritual worship. There's a bit of this even in Theravāda Buddhism. Sacred books are bound in jewelled covers and wrapped in silk, and offerings of lights and incense are made to them. This type of *pūjā* has been developed most of all by the Sikhs of India. Sikhs don't have images - they venerate their gurus. They don't have any images of their gurus, though, but they've got the writings of the Sikh gurus and others in the form of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is now regarded as the guru of the Sikh community. They regard the book as the guru and a beautifully written copy of it, wrapped in silk, lies on what we would call an altar, and they perform a sort of ritual worship. Here again you get the prototype in Buddhist literature. In the *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines* there is a description of the ceremonial worship of an enshrined copy of the Perfection of Wisdom itself and such worship is recommended as a great source of merit; but I think it would be rather difficult for us to take part in this sort of thing. Honouring the teaching by showing respect to the scriptures, - even writing and binding them beautifully, and keeping them neatly, - yes certainly, but probably it would be a bit artificial to expect people to worship them ritually. We had a touch of this at the Maha Upasika ordination, though, when there was a flower for the Buddha and a flower on the open pages of the book.

**Aśvajit:** I don't find that very difficult to feel for, actually, because the feeling that I get out of reading a passage out of the sūtras might be the same kind of feeling that I get out of bowing before a Buddha image, or at least comparable with it.

**Gotami:** You may feel tremendous respect for a book, and be terribly glad, because it's the most important book you've ever read - it's altered your whole life. You might feel really very powerfully towards that particular book, but that's different to putting it on a shrine and covering it with jewels and bowing before it. That turns me off completely, but I reverence books very much.

**S:** I think it's a difference of temperament. I don't feel very happy when I see someone turning down the pages of a book and bending the spine back and all that, but it may be a matter of temperament because some people might treat the book like a good old friend and not mind making it a bit dirty, or cramming it into their pocket, yet they could perhaps have quite a strong feeling for it all the same - though [47] personally I wouldn't treat books like that.

**Gotami:** You can treat books pretty well without putting them in a shrine. It's that which makes me feel sick.

**Gisela:** I feel like that too.

**S:** Tibetans always put books separately in the temple. They put them on one side, on a slightly higher level than the images, but they don't really go in for book worship, though they treat books very respectfully and wrap them in pieces of silk and so on. I think that essentially we have to cultivate the feeling, and let it find its own forms. We can't be very specific here. If it means even giving up some of the traditional forms because people's feelings just don't flow into them, well, we'll just have to give up those forms. The feeling's the important thing. I think that actually we can keep quite a few of the traditional forms, though maybe not in their full, very florid oriental expressions. Even the Japanese have toned things down, have made them a bit more aesthetic, a bit more delicate. They probably wouldn't go in for all the things that the Indians go in for, or even the Chinese.

**Vajradaka:** They do it by a token or a symbol. Instead of covering the whole book in silk, they'll just bind it in silk.

**S:** Just like they have the kesa instead of the whole robe, or one flower in a vase whereas the Indian would just fling a big basketful down without bothering to arrange them. You see this in Hindu temples. Yesterday's - and last week's - flowers all trodden underfoot into a sort of mire and no one thinks of sweeping it up. Cows are wandering around - sacred cows - and their droppings are also there. The whole place smells badly, but no one thinks this wrong, or incompatible with the devotion and worship. The Japanese would certainly not allow this - nor would the English, I think. *[Laughter]*

p.41                      His devotion knows no bounds, but it finds its  
fullest expression in the formal taking of refuge  
in the Three Jewels..

**S:** This is quite important. After you've done all your elaborate ritual worship, and bathed and decorated and fed all those images, the greatest expression of your devotion is when you simply say, 'Buddham saranam gachchhami Dhamman saranam gachchhami, Sangham saranam gachchhami'! It all culminates there. That's something more. One could even say that the real devotion is when you go for refuge and that, in a way, everything else leads up to that. If you make all these wonderful and glorious offerings, and decorate the shrine, and raise canopies and scatter jewels, but then don't end up by going for refuge it's all somewhat abortive. This is why in the corresponding chapter of Śāntideva's text - and of course in our own Sevenfold *pūjā* - there's the *pūjā* and the vandana and then the going for refuge. You can have a wonderful and glorious time making offerings, but you may still stop short of actually going for refuge, which means you aren't committed. Thus the devotion and the worship culminate in going for refuge. The going for refuge is therefore the important thing. If you're really sincerely going for refuge, if you're genuinely committing yourself, don't worry too much - or even at all - if you experience any difficulties about making offerings, because you've done the main thing: you've gone for refuge.

P. 42                      ...when he really gets down to it the saint  
usually does not seem to have much that is  
extraordinary or interesting to confess.

**S:** It's not that the saint, when he confesses his sins, has got some really special, colourful, lurid sins that nobody else has. What makes him different is his greater sensitivity to things that we take for granted, or don't take very seriously, or think don't matter very much. He sees with quite terrifying clarity that they do matter that they are keeping us away from Enlightenment. Moreover, he has got some glimpse of how big a thing Enlightenment is and can therefore see how terrible these trivial offences are in the sense that it is they, little as they may be, that are keeping us from realizing something so tremendous, so important, and so much more worthwhile. Therefore the *śīlī* becomes very much more important to him, and also much more terrifying, because it's obstructing so much else that is very, very good. The saint is more *śīlī*-conscious in this sort of way, and accuses himself much more

vigorously. Most people are a bit complacent. If they tell a small lie, or if they slack off a little - well, it doesn't matter all that much, they think. They don't regard it as a sin. But the saint, or the would-be Bodhisattva, sees things in a quite different perspective. He sees much more clearly that these so-called little sins are obstructing something which is of infinite value. So they become really terrible to him. I think that when we read the lives of mystics and saints we have a tendency to think that they were a bit morbid and always going on about their sins. Well, maybe some of them were morbid, especially in Christianity - but not all by any means, not even all the Christian ones. They were just much more sensitive to the whole spiritual situation, much more alive to the magnitude of the whole issue, and had a much clearer vision of what was being missed. Sin is supposed to mean, etymologically, something like missing the mark, and it's just this that you miss by these little misdeeds - it's this that they are keeping you away from. So little as they seem to be, in a way, in themselves, you can't help taking them seriously when you see that they are obstructing so much. The more clearly you see Enlightenment, the blacker those little sins appear. From a purely moral point of view there's not much in them, but from a spiritual point of view there's a great deal. So the Bodhisattva is quite rightly terrified: 'Look at my predicament! I'm heaping up all these sins, all these little offences, and they are keeping me in the *samsāra* and causing me to miss the great opportunity of my life. What a terrible situation!'

You notice Śāntideva doesn't say anything about the therapeutic value of confession: that seems to be quite remote from his thoughts. He's looking at it from a purely spiritual and, as it were, metaphysical point of view. He doesn't say, 'If you confess your sins you'll feel better, and easier in your mind or anything like that. You'll feel worse, in the sense of being in an existentially more acute situation, or even more anguishful situation. But that is a positive thing.'

**Vajradaka:** In the sense of being in the hells, where there are more Buddha seeds?

**S:** Yes. You put on the pressure, in a way. You almost force yourself, or you create a situation in which you've got to do something. Confession has a psychological value, of course, but it doesn't seem [49] to be that which Śāntideva has very much in mind. He wouldn't, perhaps, be in favour of relieving tension. In the spiritual sense, he might be more in favour of letting it build up. Of course again, on the psychological level, confession is important, because you're recognizing a part of yourself - another part and you can't deal with it, or do anything about it, - if something has to be done, - unless at least you see it and acknowledge that it's there. So confession at least drags into the open something that we would prefer to ignore, but about which we have to do something if we are going to make any spiritual progress at all. Confession is good from that point of view in as much as it involves recognition of what is going on - involves seeing ourselves as we really are, on the empirical level.

p.42                      The many dark offences which so trouble [Śāntideva] are the evils of deed, speech, or thought which he had done in various incarnations against the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, Gurus, his parents, and other living creatures.

**Gisela:** I thought one never could do anything against the Buddha. I mean I don't quite understand the 'against'. It sounds very Christian to me, as if one has done something against certain laws.

**S:** There's the case of Devadatta, who tried to kill the Buddha. Being against the Buddha means trying to harm the Buddha personally, or slandering Him.

**Gisela:** Oh is that what it means? But it also says the Dharma and the Sangha.

**S:** If one vilified the Teaching, saying that it was of no value and trying to persuade people not to follow it, that would be going against the Dharma. Similarly, if one tried to disunite the Sangha, or create divisions in it, that would be an offence against the Sangha.

p.43                      Comparison is made throughout the  
*Bodhicaryāvatāra* between the incessant  
increase of decay - the growth of every power  
which destroys happiness and health - and the  
equally incessant waning of all that is desirable.  
The world constantly is running down, and yet  
its sorrow never terminates.

**Gotami:** I don't understand the last sentence at all.

**S:** A particular cycle runs down, but the next cycle repeats the same kind of pattern, so that from one cycle to the next the sorrowful experience just continues. Of course one must not forget that in between the two cycles - if we want to bring it into existence - is the progressive, spiral path. The cyclical pattern is only half the truth. There is this progressive, spiral movement of the individual up the spiritual path too - if that is in fact what he wants to do.

**Mary:** Does it mean also that the effects of the evil will also disappear?

**S:** Yes, but unless one has had a real change of mind and heart, then another set of evils just repeats the same pattern. If one has had a change of mind and heart, and is going up the spiral, it won't matter so much if the pattern is repeated a few times more. You'll just live through it, or even transform it into something good. But if one hasn't succeeded in making a positive, creative effort, the old patterns just go on repeating themselves indefinitely and the old sorrow continues in another and yet another form. In our experience as a whole we can see these two tendencies or movements - the reactive and the creative, as I call them - at work all the time. Here Śāntideva, or the editor, is dwelling more on the purely reactive, cyclical side of things, but in the midst of that there is the spiral and creative aspect, which is the basic principle of the path. To the extent that we identify ourselves with that second trend or tendency, i.e. the spiral one, we escape from the operation of the cyclical trend. We may in a way continue to experience it, or to be in the midst of it, but it won't affect us in the same way. We won't be contributing to it.

P.43                      Fearing sorrow, he reverences the noble  
Bodhisattvas, and he bows down again and  
again: they are the Great Compassionate Ones  
to whom it is suitable to cry for protection.

**S:** This raises the whole question of what one is expecting when one appeals to the Bodhisattvas for protection. Is one really expecting protection from worldly difficulties and dangers? Or is one asking for spiritual protection? If so, in what does that spiritual protection consist? So far as I can see, when you appeal to a Bodhisattva for protection you are putting yourself spiritually in touch with the Bodhisattva, or with the spiritual force which that Bodhisattva represents. You are tuning in to that Bodhisattva's wavelength, as it were, and to the extent that you are tuned in to that you are identified with it, and to the extent that you are identified with it you are protected - not in the sense of being saved from external happenings, though that may happen too in some other way, but in the sense of no longer caring about them, no longer being affected or touched by those things in your heart, in your inner essence. This appealing to the Bodhisattvas occupies a very important place, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, where it is connected with the visualisations too - to the extent that these are spiritual exercises and not just psychological ones. When you appeal, you make yourself open, and you are more receptive - maybe your ego is functioning less - because you can't do it, as it were. The ordinary empirical ego has reached the end of its resources, so you open yourself to higher forces. But these higher forces are spiritual forces, not forces

that will intervene miraculously in the world and do for the ego the things that the ego cannot do for itself, which is how many people think of prayer - clamouring and besieging God with prayers until he gives you what you want. Very often we don't even think of invoking the Bodhisattvas or putting ourselves in touch with the spiritual dimensions which they represent, and which they are, until our actual situation is rather difficult and desperate. Therefore the invocation takes the form of an appeal for help. But this is just one particular form. In principle you could call on the Bodhisattvas when things were really going well; but you are not driven to it then. You're usually driven to it when things are going badly and your tuning in therefore takes the form of an appeal for help, a cry for protection.

**Gotami:** Is there anything different about doing it when positive and things are going well?

**S:** Well, your calling on the Bodhisattvas could be in the form of thanksgiving - that also puts you in touch. When things are going well [51] you can reflect, 'This isn't my own energy, my own strength! It's the inspiration and guidance I've received from the Teaching, from the scriptures, and from the example of the Buddha and all the great Bodhisattvas. I'm very grateful for that. I thank them all for that.' This will also put one in touch. But usually one is more intense when one is troubled and in difficulties, though there's no logical reason why it should be so.

**Vajradaka:** Presumably the mantras at the end of the *pūjā* do this.

**S:** Yes. A mantra essentially is meant to put you in touch with the Bodhisattva form of which it is the corresponding sound symbol. Repeating a mantra is like calling out someone's name - invoking them, as it were. You call the name, and the person appears.

**Vajradaka:** You said yesterday that you hear the sound in your throat.

**S:** It's not that you hear it in the throat. When the throat centre becomes activated then you are more sensitive to subtle sounds such as those of the mantra and can hear them. You don't hear them in the throat, you hear them coming from outside - though you might feel the throat-centre 'tickling', because it had been activated, and there was some energy there.

p.44

...in the Tibetan pantheon, thirty-five special  
Buddhas of Confession are invoked at the time  
of confessing one's sins.

**S:** In Tibetan Buddhism you often get thangkas of these Buddhas - I've seen many of them. The Buddhas are all of the same general type, and there is one very much larger figure in the centre of the thangka with the rest arranged all around. The different Buddhas are supposed to represent, or to be connected with, the different classes of offences, so that you confess one class of offence to one Buddha and another to another. The Tibetans have made the business of confession rather elaborate - such elaboration is characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism.

By the act of grasping the evil, and,  
presumably, by applying the technique of  
exchanging oneself for another  
(*parātmāparivarta*), the Lords eradicate its  
karmic potency.

**S:** It's not, of course, that sins are wiped out on the level of sins, or karma abolished on the level of karma, but when you confess your sins and bring them out into the open you confess them to, and bring them out before, a Buddha or Bodhisattva, and if you do this sincerely you are spiritually in touch with that Buddha or Bodhisattva, - you are on that particular wavelength, - and that has its own effect on you, on your overall attitude, and enables you not only to see, but even experience, your own karma in a different kind of perspective. It changes the whole pattern, in a sense. In other words the karma that you are bearing, and maybe only just bearing, by yourself, is a quite different thing from a karma which you are

still bearing but which you also have confessed to a Buddha or a Bodhisattva with whom you are in touch. The fact that you are in touch with that different dimension, as it were, has its effect even on the karmic level - not that karma on its own level is cancelled out, but there is a sort of change from within. It's not that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas save [52] you from the consequences of your acts, - you'll probably have to experience them in full, as bitterly as ever, - but it's all different now, even though you are experiencing the karmic consequences, because in the midst of it all you are in touch with those higher spiritual forces. So it all has a different meaning. The experience in a way is the same, but the meaning of the experience is different.

**Vajradaka:** It's rather like when you first start meditating and you have a pain in your leg.

**S:** Yes, and you don't know why. It's just a nuisance. You think you ought not to have a pain and you resent it; but when you get into the meditation, and are really enjoying it, you think, 'Well, if just a little pain in the leg is the price I have to pay for this meditation, then all right, the pain is welcome. I'm happy to have a pain in my leg.' It's rather like that.

**Vajradaka:** It seems that to spread out one's attention over a much wider area takes the edge off the pain. If you have a pain in your chest and you spread your attention all over your body then you are feeling your hand, where there is no pain, at the same time that you are feeling your chest where there is.

**S:** We tend to concentrate on the pain. One thing goes wrong in our lives, and all our attention is there. We're only experiencing that one thing going wrong, and all the other things that are going right we're not experiencing at all.

**Vajradaka:** That's quite a profound thing, really!

**S:** There are historical records of Christian martyrs and other people being tortured who, in the midst of it all, felt happy and joyful, and this is not just a later exaggeration: there are actual records of these things. The spiritual experience transforms even the present painful one. You are still being burnt at the stake, but if you really feel that you are with some spiritual presence, you feel what is happening, but in a way you don't feel it. Not to speak of Buddhism, even in Christianity this is well known. It's a sort of general spiritual law that you can transform your present pain and suffering by being in touch with, and experiencing, a higher spiritual reality. This is what appealing to the Bodhisattvas is all about - it's not just a matter of getting saved from painful experiences. On the contrary, you're not saved from anything painful: you have to experience it all - but you experience it in a different way. It's still painful, - you don't escape the pain, - but the pain doesn't matter: there's another meaning to it all. It's not just a question of grinning and bearing it, even - that's stoicism. You could almost say you enjoyed the pain. This reminds me of a little incident in the life of St. Francis. The 'little brothers', as St. Francis' disciples were called, were discussing among themselves - in much the same way as the Buddha's disciples sometimes did - what was the most joyful thing they could think of, or their most joyful experience. One of them says, 'Oh when I'm in an ecstasy of prayer, that's the most joyful experience.' Another one says, 'When I'm preaching the Word of God and people's hearts are really moved and they shed tears of repentance, that's the most joyful experience.' Finally St. Francis' turn comes, and he says, 'When it's a cold, dark, [53] windy, rainy night, and you're miles from anywhere, and you're soaked to the skin, and you've no sandals, and you're shivering with cold, and you feel nearly dead: and then through the trees, right in the distance, you see a little lighted window, and you think, 'Ah, at least I'll get a bite of something here!'; so you trudge on, and knock at the door, and the door flies open, and a woman shouts, 'You rascally, good-for-nothing monk! Do you think you'll find anything here?' and bangs it shut - oh that is the most joyful experience of all!' [Laughter] That was the quality of his joy! It was able to transform even that painful disappointment into joy. There's something of the same kind in Milarepa. It is this sort of thing at which Śāntideva is hinting. This is what he is really getting at. It's not a question of appealing to the Bodhisattvas when you get into difficulties, and asking them to get you out of them, so that you won't have to experience the difficulties - it's not that. It's a

ëtuning iní to that higher dimension which will transmute the pain itself into happiness and joy, without it ceasing to be painful. Youíll still have to experience the pain - thereís no escape from that, at least, not until you gain Enlightenment and are, in a sense, out of the *samsāra* altogether.

p.44

A good part of the cheerfulness of the Buddhist mentality must be derived from the positive and yea-saying attitude of *punyānumodanā*.

**S:** This is very important. The *pāpadesana*, the confession or acknowledgment of sins, is balanced - in fact more than balanced - by the *punyānumodanā*, the rejoicing in whatever is good. You feel happy that there is good in the universe, that there are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, that thereís a Path, that there are good people and good things. Itís not just looking on the bright side, but recognizing quite objectively that there are positive and purposeful and spiritual factors at work in the universe, and in oneís own life, and feeling happy on that account. One isnít just at the mercy of sin, and death, and suffering, and karma. There is something more, which far outweighs all those things, and is far more worthwhile. This is why at the conclusion of a meritorious action everybody shouts ëSadhu!í Itís a form of *punyānumodanā*. Youíre rejoicing that that particular meritorious action is being done, or has been completed, and you feel very happy. In ancient times, theyíd not only shout ëSadhu!í but wave their hands in the air and throw up scarves and towels and, of course, flowers and suchlike things too - all to express their joy that something good had been done. I really think we are getting away from this in modern times, thanks to psychoanalysis, which always suspects peopleís motives. If somebody does something good, we donít say, ëIsnít that wonderful, heís done something good!í We say, ëOh, there must be something behind it,í or ëMaybe Ím projecting a bit, but you canít really take it all at its face valueí etc., etc. Weíve become a bit sick with ëpsychologyí. We canít acknowledge and appreciate a simple good action. Instead, we adopt a very cynical and ironical attitude which is really quite bad and destructive and negative. In fact we canít really appreciate at all. We always have to carp and criticise, or at least qualify. ìOh heís a very good man but...î That ëbutí always has to come in. We canít just say, ëHeís a very good maní, and leave it at that. We have to bring in that ëbutí.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think this is something that can be just grown out of, even though youíve lived with it for several years?

**S:** If youíre a practising Buddhist, yes, but I think probably not otherwise, and even a practising Buddhist has to be really mindful about this and stop himself doing it when he notices that he is doing it. A lot of people feel they show their intelligence more by negative and carping criticism, than by appreciating.

**Mike:** I personally find it difficult to appreciate good things I may have done myself. Ím always dubious about my motives.

**S:** One should appreciate oneís own good qualities just as one appreciates those of other people. In fact, if one appreciates oneís own good qualities, in an objective way, one will probably be more likely to appreciate such qualities when one encounters them in other people. Eastern Buddhists are often very good at expressing appreciation. The Chinese in particular have a number of manners and customs through which they show respect and appreciation for a guest, or a distinguished person, or someone whoís done them a good turn. They bow a lot and usher that person to the seat of honour, etc. Such things are deeply engrained in their traditional culture, and they do them in a very smooth and beautiful way.

**Aśvajit:** I get the impression that they denigrate themselves to some extent.

**S:** Not really. The Chinese, Íve always found, have got great self-respect: they donít really denigrate themselves. They may be a bit humble - itís traditional for the host to be humble, and the guest more humble still - but I donít think they really denigrate themselves, not in



their own minds. When I gave my first lectures on Buddhism, which was in Singapore, in Chinese temples, at the end of the lecture every member of the audience - and it consisted almost entirely of little old ladies in black silk trouser-suits - hobbled forward and bowed, said a few words of thanks, and then went away. Every single person did this after the lecture. At Centre House in London people would sometimes thank me after the lecture, but comparatively rarely - it might have resulted in a bit of a crush if everybody had tried to do it at the same time. The Chinese do such things very naturally and simply: they almost queue up to say their thank-you and make their little bow. It's not perfunctory. There's a nice smile with it. It's a genuine expression of appreciation.

**Gisela:** It also seems that not being able to appreciate anything good about ourselves always goes together with an exaggeration of something good that one has done. Not only are we unable to appreciate the good, but there is also the opposite of that which is a bit like ego inflation. We think, 'I've done this!' There doesn't seem to be just a natural appreciation of something good. There's either the extreme of saying, 'Oh well, it's not really anything,' or the equally bad extreme of taking pride in one's good action in the wrong sort of way.

**Gotami:** I find, quite often, that if you express appreciation the gist of what you get back is, 'I'm suspicious of compliments.' Or else people feel that you're putting an exaggerated emphasis on what they've done.

**S:** Or they sometimes even think that you're being a bit ironical, that you're not being quite sincere. Just look at the state we've got ourselves into!

**Aśvajit:** I think it's often that people find it quite difficult [55] to express their thanks and sometimes perhaps pitch it just a little inaccurately.

**S:** Yes, or they feel a bit self-conscious, and that sparks something off in the other person. I think we have to take things more at their face value and not indulge too much in this amateur psychoanalysis, which is what it really is usually.

**Vajradaka:** It's also very difficult to judge when people are saying something good about themselves. For instance, I've heard people say, 'I've written a really good essay!' or 'I gave a really good talk!' and the little feeling has come up in me, 'Is that ego?' Just to accept what that person says, and be sympathetic with their happiness, is really very difficult.

**S:** It may be tinged with ego, but that's not your concern at that particular moment. You should just respond and say, 'That's great! I'm glad to hear it. That's really good.' If he or she goes on repeating the same thing rather a lot of times, and if you suspect that there's a bit of ego lurking there, then have a quiet talk with them about it some other time. But on the spot give a frank and friendly positive acknowledgement, and just share their feeling of happiness, rather than try to damp it down, which may be simply a case of you being an old sourpuss and not particularly spiritual. We are so lacking in the more positive qualities, and in mutual appreciation, that I think we should just leave aside this ego business and let it look after itself for a time while we cultivate a few more positive emotions. Of course there is a bit of a risk of these positive emotions being tinged with ego - we know that anyway, and we take it for granted; but it's better to have positive emotions tinged with ego than to have a lot of nasty negative ones that are ego-ridden anyway. *[Laughter]* You might as well have a positive, happy ego *[Laughter]* rather than a sour, carping, critical one. Perhaps we should sometimes formalise our appreciation of people. For instance, when Gotami came back from New Zealand I suggested that the Council [of the FWBO in London] should write a proper letter to the New Zealand group expressing our appreciation of the way in which they'd handled Gotami's visit and the welcome that they had given her. Such formal, polite things should be done, not just as an empty formality but because we really do feel, and because we feel we should express, and others should know that we appreciate what they've done. It's not enough to leave it all unsaid, especially when we do feel something: it must be made quite explicit. More conventional people are sometimes better at observing these things than some of us are. They do keep up the little things which are quite meaningful in the ordinary social

context, and even in the spiritual context - things like anniversaries or birthdays, or sending a Wesak card, all of which help in their own way and are not to be despised.

P.45                      Śāntideva.... represents the extreme and terminal statement of awareness of sin and its terrible effects, but in his writings there is no sense of abiding guilt or hopeless depression.

**S:** Thatís very important. Śāntideva really goes to town about death and sin and hell, and suffering and punishment, and all the rest of it, but that is all included in and transcended by an overwhelming spiritual optimism. He really looks at all these hard and difficult facts, really looks them full in the face, without shrinking from anything, but itís all transcended by his absolute spiritual optimism. Reading the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a tonic experience rather than a depressing one, despite the gloomy or terrible things he says here and there.

p.45                      ...by virtue of his knowledge of Emptiness [the Bodhisattva] stifles the consequence of mechanical retribution.

**S:** „Stiflesí is not a good word here. He transforms and transmutes the retribution from within, as it were, without ceasing to experience it on its own terms.

p.45                      ...any incipient feeling of depression is lost in the colourful ceremonies of *pūjā* and in the intellectual delight which one is to find in exuberant appreciation of everything that leads to goodness.

**S:** I donít like „intellectual delightí, but „exuberant appreciation of everything that leads to goodnessí is excellent. This is what we really need - a bit of exuberance. Thereís too much restraint, too much „self-controlí and keeping in of the more positive and better side of oneself. We need to let that better side rip a bit more. [Laughter] Itís not the nasty bad side of us that gets repressed all the time, maybe quite rightly: itís the good side that gets repressed and that ought to be let out much more - the good, happy, positive side. When that side does come out we ought to encourage one another, not wonder, „Whatís she hopping around for today?í [Laughter] Be glad that sheís hopping around!í Hop around with her!

**Gotami:** It brings out other peopleís energies too - rather like when youíre playing with children.

**S:** In some company you get the impression that cheerfulness is almost an offence. You upset people by being a bit cheerful! It seems to provoke gloom!

p.46                      ...the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* relates the concept [of Vigilance] to the Bodhicitta and places emphasis upon...the enormous importance of fulfilling the Bodhisattva vow once it has been taken; not to fulfill it is worse than murder, since the vow affects all beings in the universe, and the karmic demerit of not fulfilling it is unimaginable.

**Gotami:** I thought somewhere along the line I heard, but I canít remember where, that the Bodhisattva vow was in fact irreversible.... Here Śāntidevaís implying that you can, having taken the Bodhisattva now, go back on it.

**S:** Yes, you can.

**Gotami:** You can? So the irreversibility comes a good deal later.

**S:** Yes, you become irreversible in the eighth *bhūmi*, which is quite a way on.

**Vajradaka:** Is that a natural, organic irreversibility?

**S:** Yes. The whole current of your being is so set in the direction of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings that it's im [57] possible for you ever to fall back, - just like the Stream-Entrant in his own way [i.e. within the context of the Hīnayāna], - but until then you can fall back, no matter how great your aspirations and your efforts may be.

**Vajradaka:** However great your efforts?

**S:** Yes - I mean externally. However many lectures you may be giving, or however many good deeds you may be performing, you can still fall back. If the Bodhicitta hasn't manifested itself to such an extent that you are practically there [as you are when you get to the eighth *bhūmi*], the gravitational pull coming from the *samsāra* [as well as the attraction of the lower, Arahant ideal of emancipation for oneself alone] is so strong that, until you get to the eighth *bhūmi*, you have to be really careful.

**Gotami:** How does that tie in with what you said earlier on about it being inevitable once having started the spiritual path? The spiritual path starts before the eighth *bhūmi*.

**S:** It isn't inevitable in the sense of being irreversible until the eighth *bhūmi* is reached.

**Subhuti:** I thought that what you were suggesting was that if you did devote yourself the result was inevitable, but on condition that you did devote yourself.

**S:** Right. Within the context of a particular action and a particular consequence, that is so. If you perform the action, and make the effort, then the result on the spiritual path is inevitable, whereas in connection with worldly affairs you may succeed or you may not. What I was talking about earlier on was the fact that the spiritual path is, in a way, more simple and straightforward than the path of worldly success. If you make the spiritual effort, e.g. if you meditate, there is as it were a spiritual law under which, sooner or later, you get results due to you from the effort that you have made: the results are inevitable. On the path of worldly success, however, you may make all the preparations, lay all the plans, take all the precautions, but it may still all come to naught, because worldly life is complicated and so many factors can intervene and frustrate our best attempts. So here success is not inevitable. Success is inevitable only on the spiritual path.

However, to come back to what I was saying just now, until you've reached the point of irreversibility there's always the danger that you will not make the spiritual effort, but after you've become irreversible you cannot not make the effort - which will bring you the inevitable consequence. Until the point of irreversibility is reached, even though the consequences are inevitable if you make the effort you may not make the effort - it's not inevitable that you should make the effort. It's only inevitable that, if you make the effort, you will get the result. After you enter the eighth *bhūmi*, however, it's inevitable that you'll go on making the effort. You couldn't not make it if you tried, it's now so much part of your nature.

**CONFESSION OF EVIL**  
**(Text)**

## CONFESSION OF EVIL

### The Text

- p.150            30    Whatever wrong I have done to the three  
                         Jewels, or to my mother and father, or to  
                         praiseworthy teachers, by abuse of deed,  
                         speech or thought;
- 31    by many dark offences, by the evil wrought by  
                         me, Lords, whatever violent evil was done - all  
                         that I confess.

**S:** Perhaps we ought to say something here about wrong done to the Three Jewels. In most Buddhist countries any breach of respect for the Three Jewels is considered a serious matter, because the showing of such respect is an important aspect of one's Going for Refuge. In ordinary, practical terms the respect you feel for the Buddha, for instance, shows itself in the way you treat or handle images. Even if you're not actually worshipping them, they should be put in a suitable, clean place, and be kept free from dust. Similarly with the Dharma. One shows one's respect for the Dharma by listening to it attentively. This is considered very important in most Buddhist countries. If someone is talking about the Dharma, or if a discourse on it is being given, you pay very careful attention, you listen respectfully, you try to take it all in. What is more, you don't fidget, or scratch yourself, or pick your nose - all these things are actually mentioned. You behave in this kind of way out of the feeling of respect that you have towards the Dharma that is being declared to you. Similarly in the case of the Sangha. You show respect for the Sangha by paying to monks and to seniors, for example, the respects that may be traditional in your society. The monks themselves respect their own seniors very much. Even though there exists among them a very strong feeling of fellowship and brotherhood, even equality, at the same time a definite respect is given to seniors in the Order, and this respect exercises a very important influence. The junior monks give their respect very freely, and it's quite a pleasant thing to see. You notice, when you are among bhikkus, that the young bhikkus and the old bhikkus are on very friendly terms. There's no formality, or reticence, or anything of that sort. At the same time, the juniors quite happily defer to the elder bhikkus. They give them the best accommodation, and the most honourable seats, and they look after them, even wait on them - bringing them their food and all that kind of thing. But there's nothing subservient in their attitude. It's different from anything in our experience, I think. There is a sort of happy smiling respectfulness, which is something definitely felt and not just put on, and you find it among all monks in Buddhist countries, regardless of whether they're Theravādins or Tibetans or anything else. This is a way of showing respect for the Sangha. Even among lay people, an elderly upasaka who knows more than the rest, who is more pious than the rest, is shown a certain definite respect, and this too is not anything formal or constrained. It's quite spontaneous and natural, almost instinctive. Doing wrong to the Three Jewels consists in not behaving in these ways and not showing respect for the visible symbols of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. For many of us there's probably a certain difficulty in being respectful, or showing respect - for us it's got all the wrong sort of connotations. But in the East people are often happy to show respect. [59]

**Gotami:** Can I say that this is something that I feel already - that there is somewhat of a feeling of respect just to me....

**S:** Well, this is a very good thing if it develops naturally.

**Gotami:** Not that anybody won't say no if I say something which they think is wrong.

**S:** Right. They can disagree with you quite bluntly, perhaps, but there is a certain deference which is due to the individual as such, right or wrong, good or bad.

**Mike:** What does Śāntideva mean by this?

**S:** Well, he's just calling himself a beast. I noticed that Gisela rather muted the word when she said it. She didn't feel that she was an animal, that was quite clear. But Śāntideva is saying, with great sincerity, that he feels he's been not much better than a beast in his behaviour - I think *ēbeastí* would be a better translation than *ēanimalí*.

**Mike:** I didn't realise that he was referring back to himself.

**Gisela:** No, I didn't realise that either.

**Mike:** I thought it was a reference to a previous incarnation or something!

**S:** Another translation is *ēanimal* that I am, *í* which gives the meaning more clearly.

**Gisela:** I don't see animals in that way.

**S:** That is another moot point. Maybe we've not been fair to the animals! We speak of beastly conduct, or we say *ēhe's no better than an animalí* or *ēHe leads an animal-like existenceí*, meaning that a person is very sensual, or worldly, or devoted to the satisfaction of his lower cravings. But, as I said, maybe this is being unfair to the animals. A human being is still a human being even when behaving as an animal, but he has given a nasty twist to his human nature, whereas an animal on its own level is perfectly all right.

**Gisela:** I think there's a projection on to animals.

**S:** Could be.

**Mike:** Isn't this again something more Indian? Apart from the sacred animals, animals aren't generally treated with the same kind of affection they receive in the West.

**S:** In Hindu India animals are generally treated very badly - even the so-called sacred animals, very often. Hindus are almost cruel to animals. They look down on animals. They've no pet dogs - orthodox Hindus won't even have a dog in the house, in fact. The dogs are just scavenger curs, and they look really horrible - lean and covered with sores. You don't get nice-looking dogs in India, - you just don't see them, - unless they belong to English people or very westernised Indians. You don't even get cats very often. Hindu Indians have no idea of making pets. They do give a pat to the old cow occasionally, but even she's treated pretty badly, even though she's worshipped. This is [60] rather a weak side of the Indian character, I'm sorry to say. They're certainly quite cruel to animals in a number of ways. They twist the tails of the bullocks when they're ploughing, and punch the udders of the cows to make them give the last drop of milk - which really hurts them.

**Gotami:** A phrase which keeps on coming up is *ēlittle sonsí*. What does that mean?

**S:** I'm not sure about that. The phrase does not in fact occur in this chapter, or the previous one. In Chapter VI, verse 13, there is a reference to *ēthe little sons of Durgai*. The *putras* or sons are of course the Bodhisattvas, but where the translator gets *ēlittleí* from I'm not sure.

**Mike:** It's reminiscent of *ēlittle brothersí*.

**S:** Yes. In the Mahāyāna the expression *putra* or *Buddha-putra* is used especially for the Bodhisattvas, whereas in the Pali canon the ordinary monks are called *Sākiyaputta sāmanas*, monks who are sons of the Sakiyan, i.e. the Buddha - it's quite a common expression. The

idea is that a Buddhist is a son or daughter of the Buddha. You all belong to the same spiritual family. The Buddha is your spiritual father, the Dharma is your spiritual mother, and the Sangha consists of your spiritual brothers and sisters.

**Mary:** Does "Whatever wrong I have done to the three Jewels, or to my mother and father" refer to that kind of mother and father, or to an actual mother and father?

**S:** To an actual mother or father, whether in this life or previous lives. I don't know whether you could say it was just cultural conditioning, - personally I think there's more to it than that, - but Indians regard it as very important to be on good, positive, friendly terms with parents. If your emotional relationship with your parents has gone a bit wonky, it probably affects your whole emotional life. An offence against father and mother, indicating as it does a ruptured emotional relationship, is usually regarded as more serious than a similar offence against some other person. If you as an adult strike your mother this is considered far worse than striking anybody else, because it indicates the rupture of something quite positive. In other words you have to be in a much worse state to be able to hit your mother than to hit anybody else. So a right relationship with one's parents, - an emotionally positive relationship, - is considered quite important. The same is the case with praiseworthy teachers - though you notice (p.150,v.30) that mother and father come before the praiseworthy teachers, immediately after the Three Jewels. It's as though in the long run the right relationship with the parents is considered quite important even spiritually. If you can't sooner or later get things straightened out with your parents - assuming that there's equal goodwill on their side - you're in a pretty bad state. Even if the difficulties are coming from their side, you should at least have a good, positive mental attitude towards them and do whatever you can to help them or please them - provided it is not against the Dharma. From a traditional point of view the sort of alienation between the generations that one sees nowadays, particularly between parents and children, is quite an unhappy thing even from a spiritual point of view - taking "spiritual" in a very wide sense. If you're trying to lead a spiritual life it doesn't help if you're on bad terms with your own parents, or don't have a good [61] emotional relationship with them.

**Gisela:** It seems to be largely the case in the West, doesn't it?

**S:** I don't know. We tend to get the misfits in our sort of group. In any religious movement, in fact, many of the people who join are impelled by some kind of suffering, often within the family. I'm sure there are quite a lot of normal, happy, healthy families around. We shouldn't just extrapolate from our own limited experience, and think that the vast majority of the inhabitants of Great Britain have quarrelled with their parents and are not on speaking terms with them. This may be the case with many of our own members and friends, but I don't think it holds good generally. I think there's quite a lot of quite warm, healthy family life around. It doesn't get into the newspapers, of course!

In a way one's spiritual life should be retroactive. You shouldn't cut off from the past. Because you can't really cut off, especially in the case of parents. You can cut off externally, of course, but not emotionally and psychologically, so that you've either got to create a better relationship or leave things the way they are, which - assuming they were not very good to start with - isn't particularly helpful. If your relations with your parents are good from the beginning, that's fine. Psychologically, you start off with a decided advantage. But whichever the case may be, I think that as a result of one's spiritual life, of one's life as a Buddhist, all one's worldly relationships should start getting sorted out a bit - at least from one's own side. If your goodwill is not reciprocated, you can't do anything about it, but at least there won't be any negativity on your part to hinder your own spiritual development.

**Gotami:** What does "places associated with Bodhisattvas" (p.149 v.25) refer to?

**S:** These are the places where the Bodhisattvas, and especially Gautama the Buddha in His previous lives, have performed certain great heroic deeds. There's often a modern memorial there to mark the spot. In this particular verse you honour such places and such shrines.

**Gotami:** Itís terribly hypothetical so far as Ím concerned. I donít know any such places.

**S:** They were well known in medieval India, though we would regard them as legendary. Among them were the shrines which the Chinese pilgrims visited, such as the famous spot where the Bodhisattva sacrificed himself to the starving tigress. These things were regarded as quite historical by the Buddhists of those days. There are similar spots in Nepal, I found, associated with the Buddhaís previous lives as a Bodhisattva - though again we would describe them as legendary.

**Gotami:** Manjusri striking through the hills?

**S:** Thatís a bit different. Itís more a local myth that got connected with the Bodhisattva Manjusri, and which explains the direction of the river and so on.

What weíre really concerned with here is a sort of respect for holy places - with the fact that places can have a particular ësacredí significance. Maybe on the highest transcendental level this is not so, but weíre not on that level, and therefore can take advantage of any help we can get. If you go to Bodh Gaya, of course you canít help feeling a bit moved, thinking that here the Buddha attained Enlightenment, so you try to turn that to your spiritual advantage. You try to remember the Buddha a bit more, and dedicate yourself a bit more seriously to the spiritual life. Of course you could have done it anywhere else, logically, but psychologically itís much easier at Bodh Gaya.

p.150                    42      When one is seized by the envoys of death (*yama*), what value is a relative? What value is a friend?

**S:** The friend referred to here is the ordinary worldly friend, not the spiritual friend. To have a spiritual friend with you at the time of death can of course be a great help.

p.151                    44      The one who even today is carried off for the sake of a mere amputation withers away...

**S:** Amputation was an ancient Indian punishment.

p.151                    46      With despair, and with eyes directed to the four quarters, I look for projection.

**S:** ëDirected to the four quartersí does not mean looking in all four quarters simultaneously, but looking wildly up and down, and from side to side.

p.151                    50      Trembling with fear, I give myself to Samantabhadra, and again  
                             51      I give myself, by my own action, to Manjughosa;  
                             51      and to the Lord Avalokita, who is entirely  
                             occupied with the practice of compassion, I,  
                             who am terrified, cry aloud a cry of suffering,  
                             ìMay he protect me, a sinner!î  
                             52      To the noble Akasagarbha and Ksitigarbha, and  
                             indeed to all the great Compassionate Beings, I  
                             cry aloud, looking for protection.  
                             53      And I worship the Lord of the Thunderbolt.  
                             When they have seen him, the messengers of  
                             death and the other evil beings are frightened  
                             and they flee to the four directions.

**S:** He goes for refuge to all these different Bodhisattvas, but obviously there are not as it were a multiplicity of refuges. Itís all really one refuge, because the Bodhisattvas themselves are so many different embodied aspects, as it were, of the same Bodhi or Enlightenment, or Buddha nature, or Buddha experience. So heís going for refuge to all the different aspects of this one



experience, this one reality - in other words going fully for refuge in all possible ways, but not going to a number of different refuges. We mustn't think of it too literally in terms of going for refuge first to this Bodhisattva and then to that.

**Gotami:** When they have seen him, the messengers of death and other evil beings are frightened and they flee. What does this mean? Presumably if the messenger of death is coming then he's coming!

**S:** Well, he comes, but he doesn't come. Vajrin is of course the [63] Lord of the Thunderbolt, Vajrapani, the fierce Bodhisattva, or the Bodhisattva nature or the Buddha nature in its wrathful aspect as destructive of everything conditioned and mundane. As I said earlier on, in connection with appealing to the Bodhisattvas for help, when you go for refuge you get into, or you establish contact with, a higher spiritual dimension, - with whatever it is that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas represent, - and it is this that saves you. Not that you are delivered from the actual experience on its own level, but the nature of the experience itself, the meaning of the experience, is changed, so that - for this is after all poetic language - the fleeing away of death is the fleeing away of the old meaning of death, not the fact of death, not the fact of pain. It is their old meaning that is banished. I think this is how one must take it - though of course the text does say that death goes. [Actually it is messengers of death that go, but these are the symptoms of approaching dissolution, and as such can be identified with death itself.] Well, maybe it does. From the highest spiritual point of view there is no more death. You're being born and reborn and dying, but there is no death. In Christian terms, O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? But you're still being born and reborn and still dying. You're able to experience all that, but at the same time you experience the eternal life of Buddhahood itself, so that like the Buddha at the time of the *parinirvāna* you are not moved by all the little ripples on your phenomenal surface. I think it's in this sense that the passage has to be taken. After all, as I said, this is poetic language.

**Gotami:** What about the evil beings? Are they active evil forces or something like that?

**S:** I don't think that there's any such suggestion here in this particular verse. I think they are simply the personifications of negative mental states. Taking the question of evil beings on its own merits, however, I have a definite feeling, quite often, that there are evil forces that can even be described as evil beings, around, and that one can sometimes even open oneself to them if one isn't careful. Though I wouldn't like to dogmatise about the matter, I certainly do get definite feelings of that kind. I've even had one or two experiences which I've written about in my memoirs.

p.152                      58      I will stand with extreme care upon any other precipice; why not, then, upon that precipice which is a thousand worlds in depth and of immense duration?

**S:** He means the *samsāra* itself, or conditioned existence itself.

p.152                      66      May the Leaders accept my sin and transgression! That which was not good, Lords, will not be done again by me.

**S:** It's very significant that this is the last word. You see what you were doing, which was not good, but having seen it, having felt remorse and sorrow for it, you say, "Well, I won't do it again, and that's that." You put it out of your mind, and the next verse, at the beginning of the next chapter, is "I rejoice in exultation at the goodness..." This is very significant, and very Buddhist. Certainly [64] you recognise fully all the evil that you've done, and you really do regret it, - but having made that confession and acknowledgment, you cut the evil off. That's that. I'm not going to do it again. Then, "I rejoice..." This is the very healthy and realistic Buddhist attitude. It is certainly Śāntideva's attitude, which seems very faithful to the Buddhist tradition. We don't know much about the life of Śāntideva, unfortunately, but one gets the feeling that he must have really gone through it at some time or other. In a way he seems quite modern in his mentality, rather like an existentialist become Buddhist. There's

nothing ěnamby-pambyí about his piety. He seems to have had a lot of rather strong and painful experience of one kind or another. Who knows what he might have gone through! Anyway, the result of it is his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. [65]

**VIGILANCE IN THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT &  
GUARDING OF TOTAL AWARENESS**

**(Guide)**

# THE PERFECTIONS

## TO COVER:

### VIGILANCE IN THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND GUARDING OF TOTAL AWARENESS

#### The Guide

**Sangharakshita:** I don't know whether Dr. Matics chose the term accidentally, but 'The Great Work' [the title of the previous chapter of The Guide] is also an alchemical term. It's the term used for the production of gold, for the transmutation of a lower element into a higher one. So it's quite suggestive, isn't it?

P.47            Buddhist tradition is greatly complicated by an abundance of such lists (often overlapping) [as that of the Six Perfections] which have been devised for the systematisation of many subjects. Created by the monks as aids to memory, they vary from school to school and from text to text.

**Gotami:** Why did the monks need aids to memory?

**Vajradaka:** Because there wasn't anything written.

**S:** There was no written material. Is this fact clearly in people's minds? Have they got a clear picture of the development of Early Buddhism from this point of view? What really happened?

**Gotami:** Well, the Buddha would go around and say certain things in certain places, and people would memorise them.

**S:** Especially Ananda, it seems!

**Gotami:** But also the different people in different places would maybe put together different versions of what the Buddha had said. Later on they tried to get together and somehow systematised the teachings.

**S:** Right. They did this in the Sangitis, which were not councils, as we usually translate the term, but 'chantings together' where the Buddha's followers, the monks especially, pooled all that they recollected hearing from Him.

**Gotami:** Then the different bits which the Buddha said concerning certain topics were put together and these were summarised in the form of numerical lists, i.e. lists of the main headings under which He had spoken, or the main aspects of the topic with which He had dealt.

**S:** It seems the Buddha himself also had a few lists of His own. The Eightfold Path is almost certainly one of these. He also seems to have had certain standard discourses which He repeated in different places. For instance, in the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*, a very ancient and composite work which describes the last three or four months of the Buddha's life, there is an account of His last tour from village to village, from one little group of followers to another. Everywhere He went He gave a certain standard discourse which the text summarises. According to this summary the gist of His discourse was 'Great is the benefit, great is the good, of *śīla* which is set round with meditation; [66] great is the benefit, great is the good, of meditation which is set round with wisdom.' In other words on His last missionary journey, when He gave His final exhortation to His disciples, what the Buddha actually did was to speak on the triad of *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*, or Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom, giving in

each of the places He visited a brief discourse under these three great headings. In the Pali Canon there are, of course, very long and elaborate treatments of all three members of this ancient triad, but even in the Pali Canon itself the treatments sometimes differ from place to place. The underlying structure of the triad, however, is always completely clear. This is a simple example, but you also get doctrinal lists like the five skandhas and twelve *nidanās* and then, again, more practical lists like the Five Spiritual Faculties. These were the skeletons not only of the Buddha's discourses but of those of His disciples. I would say that there is a slight modification of Dr. Maticsí statement to be made here. It wasn't that all the lists were created by the monks after the Buddha's death, to help them deal with the material He had left them. Some of the lists at least were created by the Buddha Himself as a sort of outline of a standard discourse on a particular topic

Many of the lists were taken over by the monks from the Buddha Himself for preaching purposes. Especially in the case of monks who weren't particularly bright compared with others in this respect, it would be very useful to have a little outline that they could just fill in. I know this myself from what used to happen to me in India. If I was pressed at very short notice for a discourse - well, you've got by heart a list of five, or seven, or 10 topics, so you start talking about the first, and when you can't think of anything more to say you pass on to the second. In that way you can give quite a well constructed little discourse along traditional lines. So the numerical list is quite clearly useful. I don't think Dr. Matics quite realises that, because he says 'Buddhist tradition is greatly complicated by an abundance of such lists' (p.47). But it's only complicated from the point of view of present day study. The fact is that the lists are still very useful, and still very much in use in Buddhist countries.

**Gotami:** It also seems that if you think logically and clearly, and someone presents you with a problem, you say, 'Well, here's so and so, here's such and such, one, two, three and then following on from that, one two three...' You do this naturally when you talk to somebody.

**S:** A lot of people do, maybe, but not all. Some just give an exclamation or perform some action - that's the Zen style, I suppose. The Indian monks certainly tended to reply in a very ordered, analytical way. In fact the Buddha described Himself as a *Vibhajyavadin*, which literally means 'one who analyses,' and He says that there are four different ways of answering a question. There is giving a direct reply; there is putting a counter-question; then there is analysing the question, and lastly there is remaining silent and refusing to answer the question because it is wrongly put. The way that the Buddha adopted was that of analysis: if your meaning is so and so, then the answer is such and such; if on the other hand you are asking so and so, then the answer will be such and such. He says, 'I am one who analyses (*vibhajyavādin*), not one who dogmatises.' This is quite clearly mentioned in the Pali scriptures, and *Vibhajyavāda* is an alternative name for *Theravāda*. In some *Theravāda* texts the followers of this school [67] p.47 refer to themselves as *Vibhajyavādins*, or analysers, though in the course of centuries the word acquired a somewhat different meaning and came to refer to analysis in the more technical *Abhidharma* sense. Originally it meant not so much 'analysing' as 'distinguishing' - one who sorts out the different strands in a question before replying and who gives his reply in accordance with the strands he has sorted out or 'distinguished'. Such a person therefore rightly calls himself a *Vibhajyavadin*.

P.47 [The lists] were prepared to meet specific problems and to correspond to particular stages of religious development, [and] they are generally more pragmatic than carefully comprehensive in character.

**S:** I'm not happy about that antithesis. The lists are certainly pragmatic, but from the pragmatic point of view they're often very comprehensive indeed. Maybe they don't meet the requirements of the modern scholar, but they serve their own purpose.

p.47 Among the most popular is the list of the Six Perfections (*pāramitās*), which are: (1) charity

(*dāna*); (2) moral conduct (*śīla*); (3) patience (*kṣānti*);  
(4) strength (*vīrya*); (5) contemplation (*dhyāna*); and  
(6) intuitive wisdom (*prajñā*).

**S:** Perhaps a few words are needed about the terms themselves and their translations. *Dāna* is just giving - *ēcharity* has probably got the wrong sort of connotations. It is a quite simple and straightforward and relatively neutral thing: just *ēgiving*, or even *ēgenerosity*. *Dāna* is also *ēthat which is given*. The word thus has a double meaning. It is the act of giving, and also the object or service given. Next is moral conduct or *śīla*. Dr. Guenther discusses this very well in his *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*. He usually translates *śīla* as *ēethics and manners*, which in a way is quite right because *śīla* includes what we would call good manners and good manners, in Buddhism, are recognised as an extension of ethics. In the Penguin Classics there is a Renaissance book of etiquette called *Galateo* written by an Italian cardinal who, like many of the Italian cardinals, was quite a character. But whatever he may or may not have been, he certainly had good manners and he wrote this quite beautiful little book which in parts is very Buddhist. In fact he wasn't an orthodox Christian at all. According to him the fundamental principle of good manners, by which all manifestations of good manners, - or so-called good manners, - must be judged, is that one should not do any harm, or cause any annoyance or inconvenience, to other people. This is the fundamental principle of good manners and he links it up with ethics in a humanistic sort of way. The whole tone of the work is more humanistic than Christian. This linking of ethics and good manners is very Buddhist. The Mahāyāna certainly does it and the Theravāda too for that matter. Your ethics and your manners, even your social customs, are eventually quite closely connected. Good manners is an extension of ethics or morality itself. Buddhists traditionally attach some importance, - not tremendous importance but certainly some importance, - to good manners and good behaviour in the ordinary social sense because it is a manifestation of consideration for other people - of consideration for their feelings and their convenience. [68]

**Vajradaka:** The word *ēchivalry* conjures up a great deal of caring. When one is chivalrous with a person then one is caring for that person.

**S:** Though of course *ēchivalrous* has got a rather definite sort of ring to it, and chivalry belongs to the context of knight-errantry and romantic devotion and all that kind of thing. You usually speak of chivalrous behaviour towards women, not so much towards men, unless it's the enemy you've just defeated. If you let him get to his feet before knocking him down again, instead of just stamping on him as he lies there, that's chivalrous behaviour! But it is a word which has, in a way, the right sort of sound and the right sort of feeling. So let us remember that *śīla* is not just morality in the somewhat narrow sense that the word morality bears today, but that it does include good manners, and even deportment. Buddhists are usually quite particular about these things. I think this is an aspect of the Teaching that hasn't been discussed at all, or even thought of, in Western Buddhist circles, certainly not in ours, and I think most of our friends would not consider manners, or good manners, very important from a Buddhist point of view, or very relevant. They might even think it all rather stuffy and middle class, as it were, but it isn't so really. There's a lot of sheer rudeness that goes in the name of freedom of behaviour and spontaneity and that certainly isn't desirable.

**Aśvajit:** I think there is a point, though, where very excessive good manners can lead to a kind of masking of one's conditionality, or the conditioned nature of one's behaviour, where you're speaking or acting not out of real gratitude or consideration but just out of habit.

**S:** That's true, but so far as the *ēFriends* are concerned we are not in danger of that: we've gone a bit to the other extreme. For instance, people coming to the Centre for the first time say that they are not welcomed. No one actually says, *ēWe're glad to see you. Come in*. Buddhadasa was particularly good at this sort of thing, but for quite a long time a lot of Friends weren't. In the past I've heard it said by quite a few relatively new people, *ēNobody spoke to me*. This is, in a way, a lack of good manners. Someone has come to your Centre but you don't even welcome them! We tend to think of ourselves as a nice friendly bunch of people, but that isn't always the impression that outsiders get. Their impression is that we're a

bit cliquey and just like to talk with one another. It may be quite different now, but this is what has been said. So even if you don't have the appropriate feeling, you should just quite objectively recognise that you ought to behave properly when people come. Even if you're not overflowing with loving kindness at that particular moment, or feeling very enthusiastic about their arrival, at least say, 'Come in,' or 'We're glad to see you.'

Of course some Buddhists go to extremes in this matter of good manners. One of my friends in Kalimpong was a Tibetan aristocrat descended from the families of two Dalai Lamas and he once told me that in the late forties or early fifties he had become involved with Lhasa politics and had been arrested. It was before the Dalai Lama took over power, and when a regent was in charge, and he was accused of plotting to overthrow the regent. So he was imprisoned for three months and actually tortured - mildly - and a certain official who was his personal enemy rather gleefully supervised the torture. But anyway, in the end he was cleared. Two days later he met that official at a [69] party. The official said, 'Oh hullo! How are you? Where have you been all this time? I hope you are well.' And my friend had to go through the same social motions just as though that episode in the dungeons had never taken place! This is very characteristic of Tibetan officialdom. They really are like this. [Laughter] We don't want that sort of 'good manners' here!

*Kṣānti* or patience. This means of course much more than just patience. It is also acceptance, receptivity.... I've gone into this in the course of the lecture on "Masculinity" and "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life, in the series entitled "Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal". It is especially receptivity to higher spiritual influences, higher spiritual truths.

Strength or *vīrya* is energy, determination. 'Strength' is not really good enough. Energy is probably best, or vigour.

*Dhyāna* is of course the higher meditative experience.

*Prajñā*, intuitive wisdom - yes, we can call it that.

Among the translations of these terms the only one that's definitely 'out' is charity for *dāna*. That's definitely misleading. The others would more or less do, though they might need to be supplemented by quite a bit of explanation.

P.48                      The virtues of charity and moral conduct are more or less consolidated in suggestions for the control of the mind and the body, since ultimately all troubles of mind and body appear to Śāntideva to be derived from a narrow and troubled mind (*citta*), and thus the control of thought is basic to the discipline of each.

**S:** It also occurs to me that Śāntideva might have treated the subject in this way and said very little about *dāna* and *śīla* as such because these two topics, the first and the second *pāramitās*, are very well discussed by lots of Buddhist authors and there are very exhaustive accounts of them. Śāntideva might have thought it unnecessary to go over all that well-trodden ground again. He therefore discusses *dāna* and *śīla* more in terms of mindfulness and awareness, both of these being necessary to the practices of those two *pāramitās*.

p.48                      All evils are controlled by the subduing of the mind, and it is impossible to become a Bodhisattva without first quieting the pool of troubled thought which is the mind.

**S:** From this we can also see the interdependence of the Bodhisattva ideal and the Arahant ideal. 'Quieting the pool of troubled thought which is the mind' is what the person on the Arahant path is trying to do all the time.

p.48

The ideal is to be ìlike a piece of woodî in response to external stimulation: to be an ascetic who walks undisturbed and unbefuddled among the many distractions of ordinary existence.

[70]

**S:** This can of course be misunderstood. One should be ìlike a piece of woodî in respect of èreactiveí reaction, not of spontaneous, creative reaction. Very often the mistake is made of confusing the two. You donít just shut yourself off and not respond at all. Itís the reactive response, if I can use that expression, with regard to which one is ìlike a piece of woodî. Though of course it may well be that, when you are still really struggling along the path, all your reactions are èreactiveí and thereís very little spontaneity emerging. For a while you may become very much like a piece of wood, before your spontaneity and creativity start coming up a bit, but that is of course ultimately what is needed. Ultimately, the bare wood has to start putting forth some real flowers. This is in fact quite important.

p.48

It is to achieve this end that the innumerable regulations of lay and monastic discipline are provided, for meticulous self-control is the key to success.

**S:** Thereís probably quite a lot that could be said about this question of discipline and the need for discipline. For many of the Friends it is another dirty word, and perhaps it need not be, at least not to the extent that it is. We do need, certainly at some stages of our spiritual life, to make up our mind: ëÍm not going to do that, Ím going to do this. If necessary, Ím going to make myself do it.í Of course this has to be done wisely. One doesnít want to make the whole spiritual life a sort of forcing process all the time, but sometimes you have to be a bit strict and stiff with yourself because the tendency to backslide is so deeply ingrained - the tendency to take things easily and to think youíre being spontaneous when youíre just being reactive. Sometimes you need a bit of discipline to curb your natural reactivity, to check it so that later on the creativity - spiritual creativity - can come out. Even though some of the monastic rules became - what shall I say? - rather pedantic later on, basically this is the principle behind it all: to help people be more mindful and to prevent backsliding. ëInnumerable regulationsí - well, thatís a bit of an exaggeration. For monks there are only 227 if youíre a Theravādin. Of course if youíre a Mahāyānist there are the Bodhisattva rules too, but they are not quite rules in that sense.

**Gotami:** Itís very difficult to get the right balance, and the right motive for keeping the rules.

**S:** I think most people need to go through a period of quite strict discipline even if itís only for a few months. I think this is a quite healthy and positive experience, especially for the more ëhappy-go-luckyí types. As for those who like the rules and regulations, maybe they should just be sent away for a holiday! *[Laughter]*

p.49

...We must not waste any of the advantages which could be of benefit to others if they were properly utilised.

**S:** Generosity, however reckless, must also be wise. You shouldnít just yield to an impulse and give without being really aware of what you are doing and whether your gift is really going to benefit the other person, and whether that is in fact the very best use of those particular resources. Śāntideva wouldnít favour a purely impulsive blind giving, which might even be tainted with feelings of guilt and [71] so on. Quite a lot of people in this country give, when they do give, out of feelings of guilt. Itís interesting that the people who devise posters to make you give for certain worthy causes seem nowadays to play very much upon the publicís feelings of guilt, rather than appealing to anything more positive. I remember a Salvation Army poster which I used to see quite a lot down in London when I was waiting for



buses. It showed a rather stern looking Salvation Army officer holding in his arms the body of a child wrapped in a blanket. You didn't know whether the child had had an operation, or an accident, or was dead, - the poster said, 'Now will you care!' In other words, you've killed this child, or damaged this child, so you've got to pay. Clearly the poster was designed by a professional advertising agency, probably working for a fee, and was deliberately playing on people's feelings of guilt and in this way making them give more. Maybe there's a sort of justification for it, but it's not the best way of giving. If we are trying to get people to be generous for any reason, then we should appeal to something positive in them rather than to something comparatively negative. It seems the advertising agencies, especially, tend to play on all our negative sides - on our greed and craving, our feelings of guilt, competitiveness and even aggression, not on our better, happier, more positive side. So Śāntideva does make this point: don't just give impulsively. Surely give, give to the limit, but whatever you are giving make sure through wisdom and mindfulness and awareness that you are deploying those particular resources in the best possible way, for the benefit of others - if possible, for the benefit of all. Throwing away is not giving - not in the Mahāyāna sense.

p.49                    ....we are not to speak the words of the Dharma to a person  
who is without dignity, or who finds himself to be  
self-sufficient, or who carries upon his person the insignia of  
arrogance - an umbrella, a rod, a sword, or head covering.

**S:** This is not just Śāntideva. It is part of the monastic rule of the Theravāda, as of the Hīnayāna generally, that a monk is not permitted to teach the Dharma to someone who is not behaving properly. The Mahāyāna would, at a pinch, modify this - or a Bodhisattva would - because even though a person was behaving disrespectfully you might say something that might linger in his mind and, later on, bear fruit: you don't know what the effect of your words might be. But generally speaking it is very much the Buddhist tradition that people who listen to the Dharma should pay respect to the Dharma by listening, properly and in a humble, receptive manner, not arrogantly and, as Śāntideva says, not carrying a sword. An orthodox Hīnayāna monk, whether of the Theravāda or any other school, is not permitted to preach the Dharma to anyone who is behaving in any of the ways described, or who is seated on a higher level, or not attending properly. This restriction arises out of respect for the Dharma and is very much observed in Buddhist countries.

**Gisela:** What does the umbrella signify?

**S:** Originally it was a symbol of royalty - of the rich and powerful and well-to-do. For a layman to keep up an umbrella in front of a monk or while listening to the Dharma, would therefore be very disrespectful. When I was in Kalimpong, I remember, Tibetans who had only recently arrived from Tibet, and who were still very much under the influence of Tibetan traditions and customs, would lower their umbrellas as they passed me in the bazaar, even if it was raining heavily. After they had been in India for a few years all these things were of course forgotten, but at first they always behaved like this. It was the result of the same Buddhist influence.

**Gotami:** What would be a similar sort of thing nowadays?

**S:** People putting their feet up on the mantelpiece, and things like that! I've also noticed people sometimes being very studiously 'informal'. This doesn't seem to happen much now, but in the early days, with certain people, I had quite a lot of it. They would say they wanted an informal discussion about Buddhism and then proceed to demonstrate how 'informal' they were by either lying on the floor in a certain manner, or sticking their feet up on the mantelpiece, or looking out of the window while you were speaking. They disliked formality, they said. I don't know what is behind all this: it seems very strange, but such behaviour was very marked with people that I knew in the early days. Has anybody got any thoughts on this studied informality, this resentment of that they call formality, that is, sitting in what a Buddhist would call a proper dignified manner and listening attentively, or paying respect, to what was being said?

**Mike:** It sounds like an attitude of *ëcoolí*.

**Mary:** Or something perhaps to cover up the fact that they really care quite a lot.

**Gisela:** Itís really closing oneself, in a sense...not showing that one is opening oneself.

**Subhuti:** It seems to be a part of the same thing we were talking about with reference to devotional attitudes. Itís not the done thing to be respectful.

**S:** Or to be impressed: *ëLook at me! Ím not being impressed in the least!ë* But maybe they are impressed and, as you say, they donít want to show it.

**Gisela:** Itís keeping up all oneís defences.

**S:** Yes. Terrible, isnít it? But as Íve said, with a few people that I knew in the early days, this was quite marked. When I was at Hampstead, for instance, theyíd make a point of asking for an *ëinformalí* discussion. We had the same sort of thing at one or two of the very early FWBO retreats. People would deliberately adopt a very *ëinformalí* attitude - only half listening, or playing with the dog, and so on, in a very studied sort of way. But Buddhist tradition is otherwise.

**Gotami:** Would you say that even now we shouldnít discuss the Dharma with these people?

**S:** The whole cultural situation in modern times is so chaotic that people donít know where they are. There are no generally recognised standards of behaviour. I think one has to use oneís discretion and try to see if underneath the apparently flippant behaviour there isnít some seriousness and that one is, in fact, justified in speaking under what seem to be unfavourable circumstances. Maybe we have to rely more on the Bodhisattva spirit than on the mechanical application of Buddhist tradition.

**Dhruva:** Thatís also what Gampopa says in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*: size up the situation first and when youíre clear, teach.

**S:** Yes, but as people get more deeply into the spiritual life, especially within the Order, they should definitely try to apply the traditional Buddhist norms of conduct as best they can. Certainly there shouldnít be any crude or unmannerly behaviour at, for an example, an Order meeting, though in the past, Ím sorry to say, there occasionally has been. In the course of discussion there should be no rude contradictions, or anything of that sort. Maybe you do sometimes need to *ëlet things outí* in this sort of way, - Ím not altogether sure about that, - but keep it for some sort of encounter group on the side. Keep it out of the definitely *ëBuddhistí* framework and recognise it as a weakness to be overcome, not as a sort of virtue.

**Gotami:** What, that one shouldnít disagree?

**S:** No. Disagreeing in a particular manner. Disagreement is all right - itís inevitable sometimes - but not being nasty about it or rude. Again, rudeness is sometimes considered a virtue - I donít know why. Sometimes, at universities, students invite a speaker and then are just rude to him, which is really very bad indeed. I suppose it means something.

**Subhuti:** There seems to be a confusion of two different conceptions of hierarchy or equality on a psychological level. People are determined to show that theyíre equal to everybody else, and so they canít recognise any hierarchy of spiritual attainment or even intellectual attainment.

**S:** Yes. For instance, when we first had the *ëFriendsí* this idea of spiritual hierarchy some people just couldnít swallow. I know that one person in particular had great difficulty with it for several years: he just couldnít accept it. He did accept it in the end, though. I remember on one occasion there was a rather strong discussion and this person said, *ëWell, it isnít very*

democratic,í and I said very strongly, òThereís no democracy in the Western Buddhist Order!í And that is about it. Itís a hierarchy, but a spiritual one, and sometimes even the spiritual hierarchy isnít clear. Itís not a question of grading everybody, with someone at the bottom and someone at the top. Itís not nearly as simple as that. In certain situations one person may appear as the òsuperiorí, for want of a better word, while in other situations that person may not be òsuperiorí. Things may fluctuate like that quite a bit, but there might be a general, overall recognition that certain people, though they might have glaring weaknesses too, were more experienced and, perhaps one could say, more evolved than the others. This would be something that was broadly understood or felt, but not a thing that could be insisted upon and embodied in ranks and little badges and things like that. It is the broad feeling that there is in someone, or in certain people, something higher and better than yourself to which you can look up - not the wanting to equalise everything and have everything on the same level. In a way, in another sense, youíre on the same level, but thatís not the whole story. Itís a good, positive thing to be able to look up to someone! If you canít, youíre in a pretty difficult position. Youíre in a sad state - just unlucky, like a child that hasnít even got a mother and [74] father to look up to. A child needs that, when itís a child. But this sort of assertion, that youíre just as good as anybody else in the egalitarian sense, is really sick.

**Subhuti:** I suppose itís because people donít really feel that they are equal.

**S:** I suppose so. If youíve got certain good qualities yourself, or if youíre well qualified in a certain subject, you respect others who are qualified in their particular subjects - maybe better qualified than you are in yours - because when youíve got at least something you can appreciate others whoíve got even more.

**Gisela:** I remember that when I was an adolescent I very much wanted to look up to somebody, but I couldnít find anybody. I could only find people in books, but nobody living around me, and I think it may be as a result of that sort of experience that one thinks there is nobody to look up to. I remember really looking around for people for years. That may happen quite a lot too.

**S:** Well, I was on my own in my early years as a Buddhist. I had no one to look up to at all. As in Giselaís case, there were only books. Even when I did start meeting Buddhists - among them Christmas Humphreys - I canít say that there was anyone I could really look up to for several years. Sometimes you start looking up to people but then you find, rather regretfully, that theyíre not quite what you thought at the beginning. You find that theyíre no better than you are, and then you feel quite sad. In the Pali scriptures there is a stock passage in which the Buddha describes a good, devoted householder before he actually comes in contact with the Buddha and His Teaching. Among other things he has the faith that there are in the world righteous beings, and people who have realised the Truth. This is very important. He believes that somewhere there are people more evolved than himself, even though he isnít as yet actually in contact with them. He has the faith that there is, as it were, a general spiritual evolution, or higher evolution, and that there are some people around, somewhere, who are further on than we are, and that if only we were in contact with them weíd have something, - someone, - to look up to. Far from being something we should resent, this is something we should really welcome. If weíve got nobody we can look up to thatís not a very happy state of affairs! Again, thereís the account of the Buddha after His Enlightenment, even when he was a Buddha, asking Himself, òNow that I am Enlightened, who is there that I can look up to and defer to?í And He looked around and there was nobody. Then He said, òI shall look up to and defer to this Dharma that I have realised.í Itís as though even the Buddha felt a sort of need to look up to someone: but He found what He wanted only in the Truth itself, not in any person, because there was no person more highly developed than Himself. So He looked up to the Dharma, the Truth that He had realised. In a human being itís both a psychological and a spiritual need to be able to look up. If you havenít got a person to look up to, there must at least be a principle, or a truth, or an ideal. But for most people the ideal does need to be embodied in a person, and if you canít find a person who is really higher than you, you tend to fabricate one, to project one - to turn somebody who isnít really òhigherí than you into somebody who is higher. Itís a sort of craving, almost, to set him up on a little pedestal,

which sometimes heís only too happy to occupy, even though he is not qualified to, and thereís quite a bit of danger in this. There are [75] quite a lot of people who would like to be looked up to even though theyíre not worthy of it, and this again is something to watch. If one has something or someone to look up to then one is very lucky.

p.49                      The sacred words of the Dharma...never should  
be spoken to a woman without a man present.

**Gisela:** I think thatís very unfair!

**S:** Why? What makes you think itís unfair?

**Gisela:** I donít really understand why.

**S:** What do you think is the reason?

**Gisela:** I mean just statistically [i.e. if a man had to be present when the Dharma was preached to a woman, but a woman did not have to be present when the Dharma was preached to a man, women would have relatively fewer opportunities of hearing the Dharma than men].

**S:** The idea was that in the case of the monk....

**Gotami:** (*Interrupting*) But it doesnít say monk.

**S:** No, but that is to be understood, because there is a monastic rule to that effect, - that when a monk preaches the Dharma to a woman he must not do so in private, - and the reference is to that. If a monk does preach the Dharma to a woman in private, in a secluded place, then there must be another man present, preferably a male relation of the woman he is addressing. This is an obvious precaution. There are all sorts of terrible stories of monks being seduced, youíve no idea! [*Laughter*] You have to guard against that! Sometimes from the scriptures you get the impression that the poor monks were really beleaguered at times, and presumably thatís the background of the rule.

**Gotami:** I remember the monks in Thailand. When I was learning my Buddhism from Jinananda he would talk to me on my own, because I was a foreigner, but he would make sure that it was outside on the verandah and that there was a table between us.

**S:** Also you must bear in mind that in India it was not the custom for a woman, especially an unmarried woman, to speak with strange men at all. In modern India women have got more freedom to talk to monks than to talk to any other men outside the family because on the whole monks are trusted. Iíve often been to strictly orthodox families, where the women were kept in seclusion, and after weíd had a little discussion the master of the house would say, Would you mind coming into the womenís apartments?í and he would take me through there, even though normally no other man would be permitted to enter. They make quite a few exceptions in the case of monks but thatís because the monks on the whole have got a fairly good reputation. But the Buddhist monks, especially in the Theravāda countries, are really careful, almost over careful in some respects. Many of them go into the Sangha quite young, and frankly some of them are quite inflammable, and they need to keep at a good distance from women - itís just common sense. On one occasion, when I was in India, a Thai bhikkhu friend of mine was coming to England and I teased him a bit. Be careful when meeting English ladies,í I said, theyíll want to shake you by the hand.í Oh no, Bhante!í he exclaimed, starting back in horror at the idea, I [76] should be on fire with passion! [*Laughter*] So youíve got to see it from the poor monkís point of view too!

**Gotami:** What about this in connection with ourselves?

**S:** I think things are a bit different in a Western cultural context. If we are over-insistent about such rules, as I think they tend to be in some Theravāda countries, it could create a rather artificial kind of situation. We must just use our common sense.

**Vajradaka:** When I read this passage I found it very useful when I was taking the beginners class, because what I found was that sitting in the front, in that position, is like being plugged into a cosmic light bulb. *[Laughter]* I had to be really careful, I found, because after the class women were just coming up to me and saying, 'I really feel like sleeping with you now' *[Laughter]*

**S:** Understand the reason for the table now? *[Laughter]*

p.49

One should not respect equally the Lesser and the Greater Vehicles of the Dharma, or attempt to explain the one by the other.

**S:** This is from the Mahāyāna point of view: the Mahāyāna is to be respected more than the Hīnayāna - though I'd say we have to be very careful about this. Respect each as fully as you feel that respect. If you feel a great and genuine respect for the Hīnayāna, well feel that - don't try and limit it; and if you feel a great respect for the Mahāyāna, feel that too. But the Mahāyāna being, as far as I've understood, more profound than the Hīnayāna, there is in fact more to respect; but I don't think one should try to apportion one's respect. Feel the respect that you do feel.

**Gotami:** I thought that respect meant 'seeing the value of'.

**S:** Really, yes, and the behaviour that follows from that seeing. As I used to say sometimes, comparing the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna is like comparing Kanchenjunga and Everest. We say - sometimes maybe too loosely - that the Hīnayāna is the 'lesser' vehicle and the Mahāyāna the 'greater' vehicle, or that the Hīnayāna is 'lower' than the Mahāyāna, but it's lower only in the sense that Kanchenjunga is lower than Everest. You look up to both of them and maybe from where you stand you can see hardly any difference between them, because both are so sublime. When you get to the top maybe one is higher than the other, but when you're right down in the valley there's no practical difference between the two, and who are you, standing on the plain, to look down on Kanchenjunga because it's a few hundred feet lower than Everest? It's ridiculous! So even one who's following the Mahāyāna should respect the Hīnayāna very profoundly indeed, because it's a very great and sublime teaching - the teaching of the Buddha, for that matter. Yes, the Mahāyāna does go beyond the Hīnayāna, - I believe that, - but only in the sense that Everest goes beyond Kanchenjunga. We have to look up to both, not say, 'Oh I'm a Mahāyānist!' and look down on the Hīnayāna. That's ridiculous! You can only do that if you're a Bodhisattva in the tenth *bhūmi*. I therefore think we should be careful how we use such expressions as 'greater' and 'lesser', or 'lower' and 'higher'. As for not attempting to explain one *yāna* by the other, that's fair enough. When you explain the Hīnayāna you explain it on its own terms, and when you explain the Mahāyāna you explain it on its own terms.

[77]

p.49

Likewise, we are not to accept sūtras and mantras, although they have their uses, as substitutes for intelligence and practical good conduct.

**S:** I think he means just recitation of sūtras and mantras - though this has its uses too. Śāntideva is very down to earth.

Sūtras and sastras are recommended for our study, but they do not replace Mindfulness and Awareness.

**S:** How far can one get without study? How necessary is study? A lot of people ask this question.

**Mike:** So far as it has had value for me it's been that it's modified misunderstandings. I've felt this very strongly during the last two or three days, actually, because I've misunderstood so much and study just clarifies things.

**Gisela:** I feel often that people who've read quite a lot of books on Buddhism come out with a lot of words on the subject but I feel that often it is just words and I feel that in that sense it might be better to read less.

**S:** Perhaps one should distinguish between reading and studying. Earlier in the history of the ÆFriendsí very few people were interested in study, or even very much reading, but recently I have noticed a change. Some people have become more interested in study in the real sense. This interest has grown out of their own practice of the Path, or effort to practise the Path. They have wanted to know the answer to certain questions from a purely practical point of view and have become really interested in getting into study for this reason. This seems to have happened with at least three or four people that I can think of.

**Mike:** It's very useful to be able to relate what you've experienced in this context. At first I didn't feel inclined to study anything. There was nothing I could relate that study to, but having experienced an attempt at practising it becomes necessary to have a framework within which you can relate that experience, and study is one way of doing this.

**S:** This more practical approach seems to be characteristic of the ÆFriendsí. Before we started up, the Buddhist movement in this country was a rather bookish movement. Most of the people that got involved in it, and that one met - and I remember this from my own earlier days, and also from my time at Hampstead - were people who read a lot and their ÆBuddhistí life was mainly reading and sometimes going to lectures. But the pattern of the ÆFriendsí is rather different. If anything it was the other extreme to begin with: perhaps that's better. With us, people gradually get into study - not just reading - in response to their own spiritual needs. I think we have got a few bookish people in the ÆFriendsí, including me, but I don't think that's on the whole the best approach. It might have been necessary in the past, but I think not now. Now it's very much like it was in the Buddha's day. I keep thinking this - that the way the ÆFriendsí is developing is very much like what happened in the early days of Buddhism. You did not get bookish people coming to the Buddha. You got a bereaved mother; you got a man who was fed up with home life: someone who was looking for the truth; a king who was remorseful for the sins he'd committed; a businessman who was fed up with making money. These were the sort of people who came along. They hadn't studied anything - there were no books in those days anyway. They'd had a certain experience of life, they were thinking of asking certain questions, so they came along; they heard a discourse or two; they went away and thought about it; it impressed them; they took refuge, started practising mindfulness of breathing, *mettā-bhāvanā* - simple things like that; started having spiritual experiences, wanted to know a bit more, so asked a senior monk, asked the Buddha. Later on they'd have quite a little stock of lists they'd committed to memory, pondered on, maybe repeated for the benefit of others. This is how it went on. There was no study, no libraries, no books - nothing of that sort at all. Our pattern seems to be more like that than like ÆOh I'm interested in Buddhism!í so you go along to the local library, get all the books on Buddhism you can get hold of, and once a year you go along to the Wesak celebration - which lasts exactly one hour! - and listen to three short talks. That's what it used to be. There's a few people that I know from those early days who follow this pattern still. They're very worthy people, but they haven't changed, some of them, in all the time that I've known them, which in some cases is now well over thirty years.

**Mike:** I think it's probably a definite advantage now not to be in any way Buddhistically inclined, so far as you are aware, when you first become involved with the Movement, because then it's like something you can discover within yourself.

**S:** Right. And again, in the Buddha's day, a lot of people came in by seeing monk So-and-so. They'd see monk So-and-so walking along the road. "Monk So-and-so looks very mindful and serene and happy!" they'd think, so they'd ask him, "What are you into? What are you doing?"

"I'm a disciple of the Buddha."

"Buddha? Who's he?"

"He's an enlightened teacher."

A little talk develops, and, "Could I come too?"

This is how it happens with the "Friends" very often. People say, "So-and-so's changed a bit lately. What's happened?" So they ask him, "What are you doing these days?"

"I'm going along to the "Friends". Why don't you come along one evening?"

That person might not have thought about Buddhism at all, or anything like it, but he goes along to the "Friends", he finds out that they're a nice lot of people, and he thinks, "They seem to be into something. Their lives seem to mean a bit more than mine does. OK, I didn't think of ever meditating, but let's try it, let's see!" Very often that's how it develops.

**Dhruva:** This has happened in Art school. The students have been impressed by the way in which the model, Jim, could sit quietly for [79] such a length of time, and quite a few people asked why.

**Vajradaka:** The way I see study - because I'm not one of those people who are really into books - is that it's just like a catalyst opening up a "sphere of seeing" that hadn't been available to me before, or another facet of the jewel which I hadn't seen before...another direction.

**S:** There are so many books these days! Even ten or fifteen years ago there wasn't that number of books on Buddhism and those that we have are not all very good from the spiritual point of view, though some are really excellent. You can in fact get by with very few books, and with very little reading - as distinct from study. Most books on Buddhism you'd be really very little better off for reading anyway. A few selected ones are much more useful. There are lots of people who just buy every book on Buddhism that comes out, and read it, and never get round to practising meditation or anything like that.

**Gotami:** I think it's as well, though, to know which are the useful books on Buddhism, because people come along and say, "Oh I've seen such-and-such a book! Is it useful?"

**S:** Yes, if they have to read, they might as well read good things.

**Subhuti:** It seems to me there are two ways in which you can read: one is just for the acquisition of facts and information, and the other is for the contact with another mind which is possibly more evolved than your own, and that contact seems to be the one that I value in study. It's a sort of stretching process...you have to enlarge your own being.

**S:** In a way this is true of reading - really reading - all good literature. I have said much the same thing in my essay on "The Religion of Art", where I quote someone who says that art in the widest sense stretches the mind - he uses that word - because for the time being at least you have to have an imaginative and sympathetic identification with a consciousness which is

rather larger than your own. So your mind is stretched, your own consciousness is enlarged. Great art can do this; really great art, and spiritual scriptures even more. This is why people enjoy reading the songs of Milarepa - they're in contact with Milarepa's mind, in a way, which is much greater than their own mind.

**Subhuti:** When I was studying philosophy, I suppose that was what I was looking for in philosophy, but they all seemed to be expanding in a linear way rather than in a vertical way and things I read about Buddhism seemed to provide that extra dimension.

**Mike:** On the few occasions in my work when I've had to study a particular play with a really creative director, it's been as though an experience was written down in a certain form and you had to search for the corresponding inner experience within yourself and give expression to it in the actual performance or the rehearsal. I think of study in that kind of way too. It's like identifying your own experience through somebody else's expression of it.

**S:** Something like this happened about four years ago when we had a little group meeting every fortnight just to read Yeats's plays. Some of the plays we read three or four times, with different people taking different parts. Every time we read them we discovered that there was so much more in them. People were really astonished, even though they had started off with quite a respect for Yeats. So much came out simply from this rather amateurish reading. How much more would it be the case with scriptures and things of that kind! I think that we shall spontaneously make our own selection of scriptures which we actually find, in practice, spark off something for us, and which lend themselves to that kind of study. Some scriptures do, some don't - for certain people, anyway. Those that do act in this way will become, I suppose, our favourite scriptures, you may say.

P.50                      Charity [*dāna*], giving, in turn is superior to  
any form of rigid discipline or structure of  
morality, but nothing is more important than  
mind-control.

**S:** There are two points that need underlining here: (1) That *dāna*, giving, or generosity, is superior to any form of rigid discipline, and (2) that nothing is more important than mind-control. I think we have to be a bit careful about how we understand mind-control, though. It's not just the suppression of our darker side, but something much more than that, in a way more positive than that. Essentially it consists in creating a really positive attitude of mind - not just checking negative tendencies.

**Gotami:** Like riding a horse.

**S:** Yes, that's a very good analogy. There is the expression 'windhorse' or 'energy horse'. As on the dust-jacket of *The Three Jewels*, *vīrya* or energy and *prāṇa*, the breath, is symbolised as a horse. This is the Tibetan *lungta*, the Windhorse, and he symbolises free but controlled energy. You're not just checking the horse all the time, even though he has got a bridle. You're directing him as he gallops along.

**Mike:** There is the question of control, and the disciplines - like Hatha Yoga - which are very much based on control. Do you have any thoughts on how these fit in with our own practices, particularly when you get into more advanced yoga and start *prāṇayama*, where you're definitely controlling the breath, and the mind through the breath?

**S:** I think you should be very careful here. Your control should not be just suppression, so that a lot of suppressed energy builds up and bursts out later despite all your efforts to control it. I think this is what one has to be careful of. One should think of control in more aesthetic terms, more artistic terms, as when you speak of an artist having control over his material. He's utilizing it all fully and perfectly. One should think of control more in that sense, not in the harsh, repressive, forcible sense. Control means control. Repressing now and being unable to do anything when as a result of that repression things start breaking up later on, that isn't



control. That's unwise damming up. So with regard to the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, if the desired results are achieved, and you are able to control the breath without producing undesirable side effects, that's all right, that's breath control - though sometimes, when speaking to beginners in meditation, I have used the term in a somewhat negative sense. Simply controlling the breath in such a way that it becomes forcible, and energies are dammed up and start breaking out in negative ways that you didn't intend, that's not real control, and it isn't advisable. But if you're practising with a teacher, then presumably he knows when it's safe for you to do certain things and when it isn't. It's no use controlling [81] today and going haywire tomorrow. That's not control.

P.50

It is a pathetic, yet a beautiful thought, that is found in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, which laments the inevitability of injuring dumb creatures

**S:** It's rather a dilemma, in a way: you cannot be objectively perfect, you can only be subjectively perfect. There's a little book by Enoch Powell, in which he seems to be rather troubled by this dilemma, though he puts it in rather different terms. You can't be objectively perfect. With the best will in the world, you can't not do some harm somewhere. It's only your will not to harm that you can make perfect, but your performance will always fall short just because you are an embodied being in the *saṃsāra*. The Jains try to make practice perfect, especially as regards non-violence, by multiplying regulations. The Buddha did not agree with this. He said that it was not the way. According to Him, the mind, the attitude, the intention must be trained and cultivated more. The Jains, for instance, thought it sinful to take life even unintentionally, and even now the Jain ascetics carry a brush with which they brush the path in front of them as they walk so as to brush away any ants or other little creatures they might have trodden on. They also wear a mask over their faces so that they don't inhale any little fly and in that way destroy it. But of course, what about the microbes? They didn't know about microbes in those days. But you can't help destroying life. If you take medicine you destroy. Even if it's only bacteria or whatever it's still some kind of life. Every time you breathe in you're taking life - you can't help it. In that sense your practice can never be perfect. But your will can be perfect. Only after you've perfected your will to the point of Nirvāṇa, and are no longer re-embodied, do you no longer do any harm. As long as you are in the world you can't help doing some harm, at least indirectly and in small ways - not with the best will in the world. So it's the will on which you have to work: the will not to harm, the will to be perfect - the perfection of your own state of mind. [87]

# **GRASPING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

**(Text)**

## GRASPING THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

### The Text

- p.153            8        With rains of food and drink may I dispel the anguish of hunger and thirst. In the famine of the intermediate aeons between the world cycles (*antarakalpa*) may I be food and drink The abandonment of all is Nirvāna, and my mind (manas) seeks Nirvāna. If all is to be sacrificed by me, it is best that it be given to beings.

**Sangharakshita:** You notice that the first few verses of this chapter deal more with thanksgiving and rejoicing in merit, after which Śāntideva comes on to a general consideration of *dāna*. In the section of the Guide which we've just read we were informed that he doesn't deal with *dāna* and *śīla*, the first two *pāramitās*, quite in the ordinary way, but more in terms of mindfulness and awareness. These are dealt with in the next two chapters of the work. Meanwhile, in this chapter, he deals with *dāna* in a rather general way for which there is no corresponding discussion in the Guide. What Śāntideva seems to be getting at is that the real *dāna* is giving oneself. I've quoted once or twice in the past Walt Whitman's famous line, "When I give, I give myself." The real giving is that: not just giving things that belong to you, but giving yourself. So Śāntideva makes quite a point of this, and he starts off in a more ordinary sort of way: "With rains of food and drink may I dispel the anguish of hunger and thirst." That is, may I give the material things that people need. But then he says, and this is I think quite unique to him, "The abandonment of all is Nirvāna." That's one way of looking at Nirvāna: the giving up of everything, of all selfish craving; not keeping anything for yourself. This reminds me of a quite interesting point. In the *Sutta Nipāta* especially, there is an early term for the Arahant which seems to reflect a very early stage in the development of Buddhism - indeed, the very early days of the Buddha's own career as a teacher. This term is *ākiñcaṇa*, and it's translated by Hare as "man-of-naught". He is the man who has nothing, the man who is completely "poor" in the Franciscan sense, the man who has achieved complete poverty - who has nothing, owns nothing, claims nothing, on any level. It's this sort of spiritual or transcendental poverty that the Arahant - and even the Bodhisattva - represents, and it's this sort of poverty that you try to achieve by giving - by giving away and, Śāntideva says, by giving yourself. So, "The abandonment of all is Nirvāna ..." When you give up everything, give everything away on all levels, even your thoughts and opinions and ideas, that's Nirvāna. "... and my mind seeks Nirvāna" - that's what I want to achieve. Then Śāntideva says, and this is his own distinctive contribution, "If all is to be sacrificed by me, it is best that it be given to beings." It's all too easy to sacrifice to God and say, "I've given everything to God. It all belongs to Him." What in fact happens is that you continue to hang on to it all, and just say that it belongs to God. Śāntideva says, in effect, "That's not good enough. I'll give everything to beings." That means not just giving money and property but devoting "myself" to other beings, as it were, giving "myself" to other beings. Thus he puts it in this rather extreme way. In a later verse, indeed, he goes so far as to say that he would be a slave, and even though this must be read in accordance with what he's also [83] said about making the best use of his own Bodhisattva resources and deploying them in the best possible way, that's the principle - that he's giving himself up, giving himself away, as it were, to all beings, because he's working as a Bodhisattva for the sake of all. So he's really putting his finger on the essence of *dāna*, rather than reproducing all those meticulous lists as I've in fact done - it was necessary then - in the lecture on *dāna* and *śīla* in the series "Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal". He says giving is total, complete, and is the giving of yourself - that's Nirvāna, that's what the Bodhisattva's really after, that's the *dāna pāramitā*, that's the transcendental perfection of giving. He hits the nail right on the head. He doesn't bother with elaborate scholastic explanations.

**Dhruva:** It's like the pouring of the water in the wedding ceremony.

**S:** Yes, it's giving, total giving, not a drop left behind, every drop to be poured.

**Gotami:** Thereís nothing here about not giving oneself to people carrying umbrellas and things. *[Laughter]* Can you point out to me the thinking?

**S:** Well, you must think whatís best for them. You wouldnít stand on your dignity as a preacher of the Dharma, but there might be occasions when you do actually see that their own behaviour is obstructing their receptivity to what you have to say, and therefore you might not say it. You wouldnít be not giving yourself then: they wouldnít be allowing you to give yourself, and you would just not see any way of getting round that - maybe because you were not experienced enough. If you were a great Bodhisattva with magic powers you could perform a miracle which would draw their attention, if you thought that the best thing to do, but if you canít perform miracles and if you see that, as far as you know, theyíre just not in a very receptive state, then wait till next time, maybe arrange to see them later. Or just keep in contact with them, and when you do see an opportunity, say something. In the West, and in these times, we have to interpret the bit about the umbrellas and swords quite liberally. B[ut not necessarily quite literally. People carrying umbrellas can be understood as those who deliberately protect themselves from the influence of the Dharma, and people carrying swords as those who adopt a hostile attitude towards it.] If people are being deliberately rude you might have to be a bit rude in return, provided you could do this without it backfiring on you subjectively, or at least be a bit firm. Show your Buddha pride, as the Tantrics would say! Though one has to be very careful about it, in principle such a thing is not ruled out completely. You might say, quite sharply even, ìLook here, you say that you want to hear something, but donít you realise that youíve got to be a bit receptive? Are you being receptive? Do you really want to hear? Iíd like to tell you, but if you donít really want to know, what can I do about it? Youíre not allowing me to speak!í Sometimes you may have to say this quite sharply, if youíve judged that it is the right thing to do in the circumstances, and it may be that at first you sometimes misjudge, so that far from creating a good effect and bringing people round you must antagonise them still more. It canít be helped. You have to be prepared for mistakes like that sometimes until you develop more finesse and sensitivity, and a better power of judgement.

**Dhruva:** This developing the ability to judge is the Perfection of Patience, isnít it?

**S:** Yes, that also - and not being impatient with yourself, accepting your own mistakes. Youíre just a little budding Bodhisattva. You misjudged the situation and made a mistake. Never mind. Think it over, learn the lesson, but if you really did do your best donít let it upset you too much. You certainly will make mistakes sometimes. Even the Buddha did, and this is to my mind very, very illuminating. Even the Buddha, after His Enlightenment, misjudged! Even an Enlightened being requires experience sometimes! I donít know if you remember the episode. The Buddha had some disciples, and after teaching them the meditation on impermanence and death He went away for a while, leaving them meditating. It so happened that while He was away they all committed suicide, because the meditation made them feel so depressed - which wasnít what the Buddha had intended at all. The episode shows that even a Buddha has to be careful where people and their reactions are concerned. Itís very difficult even for a Buddha to fathom the human mind to its depths: this is something which comes only with experience. If youíre not careful, youíll make many mistakes to begin with. In fact you will make at least some mistakes however careful you are, but those you will just have to accept. Your situation is like that of a young doctor. He does his best, but he isnít an experienced doctor and he has to learn. Sometimes he makes mistakes for which he is very sorry, but it canít be helped. Thatís the way he learns and, in the end, he benefits all the more people for having committed such mistakes in his early days.

p.154                      17      I would be a protector for those without protection, a leader for those who journey, and a boat, a bridge, a passage for those desiring the further shore.

**S:** There are all sorts of echoes of Buddhist literature that we may not be aware of in these lines. One that occurs to me is the Jātaka story in which the Buddha, as Bodhisattva, in a previous life when he is king of the monkeys is literally a bridge for his followers. Heís the

biggest and strongest, and they have to cross a river at a certain point to escape from their foes; but the creeper they have tried to throw across isn't quite long enough to reach to the other side, so he grasps hold of it with his hind feet and with his paws takes hold of a creeper coming from the other side and in this way fills the gap with his own body. He then tells his followers to walk over him, which they do, so that he's quite literally the bridge for them all. One of his less pleasant followers jumps on him as he goes over, so that the monkey king's back is broken and he dies. This particular monkey, we are told, was Devadatta in a previous life, mischievous even then. Thus for the Buddhist reader who knows these stories every phrase of the verse has an echo of this kind, reminding him that in the course of his successive lives the Bodhisattva helps people by being literally a leader, a boat, a bridge, and so on.

p.154-55            19     I would be for creatures a magic jewel, an inexhaustible jar, a powerful spell, an universal remedy, a wishing tree, and a cow of plenty.

**S:** These are all genuine mythological motifs, and all have the same meaning. They are all ĒAladdin's lamps. Śāntideva would like to be an Aladdin's lamp so that anybody who just touched him got [85] whatever they wished. There's a Jewel of this kind, the *chintamani*, there's the Jar (*kumbha*), there's the Spell (*mantra*), the Medicine, the Wish-Fulfilling Tree (*kalpavrkṣa*), the Cow of Plenty (*kāmadhenu*). There's a whole lot of these motifs in Indian mythology, so he invokes them all.

p.156                32     For the caravan of humanity moving along the road of being, hungering for the enjoyment of happiness, this happiness banquet is prepared for the complete refreshing of every being who comes to it.

Now I invite the world to Buddhahood, and, incidentally to happiness. May gods, anti-gods (*asuras*), and others, truly rejoice in the presence of all the Protectors.

**S:** In these last two verses Śāntideva comes back to the rejoicing in merits.

**Gotami:** I like that phrase, Ēand, incidentally, to happiness. [Laughter]

**S:** There's a practical yogic application of verse 32 in Tibetan Buddhism in the Chöd rite, the famous practice of self-sacrifice and self-offering which was introduced into Tibet in the 11th-12th centuries by the South Indian master Phadampa, the founder of the Zhiche or ĒPacification' school. In the course of this practice one goes to a lonely spot and invites the ghosts and demons there to come and feast upon one's flesh and blood, so it's directly connected with this little passage in Śāntideva.

**Aśvajit:** There's a much more joyful ring in this verse than in the description of the rite itself.

[86]

**VIGILANCE IN THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT**  
**(Text)**

## VIGILANCE IN THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

### (The Text)

- p.157                      2        Whatever is undertaken in haste, whatever is not properly considered, may be accomplished or it may not be accomplished, even if a vow has been taken;
- 3        but that which has been considered by the Buddhas, who have great wisdom (*prajñā*); and by their sons; and even by me, according to my ability - how can that be neglected?

**Sangharakshita:** ë... That which has been considered by the Buddhas ... and by their sons; and even by me, í that is, which has been considered properly and thoroughly, in the right spirit, ëaccording to my ability - how can that be neglected?í In other words, how can I even think of leaving it aside and not putting it into operation, not doing it and not being successful? I think that what Śāntideva is talking about in verse 2 refers to worldly matters, and even spiritual matters wrongly approached, whereas verse 3 refers to spiritual matters rightly approached.

- P.157                      5        The man who, having mentally reflected, will not give again [and again], will become a hungry ghost (*preta*), so it has been said, even if the matter is trifling.

**S:** The man referred to here is the one who has reflected that he will give, but then doesn't. Such behaviour is considered very demeritorious. It represents a stifling of your own good impulse, or a failure to keep faith with yourself. You say to yourself, ëI'll do such and such, I'll give such and such,í and then you don't. This is considered quite bad, ëeven if the matter is triflingí. So keep faith with yourself, with your own better self - that's what the verse really means. If after proper consideration, not just out of blind impulse, you decide to do something, - in this context, decide to give, - and then afterwards you don't do it, and instead find excuses not to, or are just lazy and neglectful, then that's quite a serious matter.

- p.158                      8        Every transgression of the Bodhisattva is of extreme gravity, since, as he transgresses, the welfare of all beings is destroyed because of it.
- 9        Anyone who creates an obstacle to his [i.e. the Bodhisattva's] merit, even for an instant, has no limit to his misfortune; because he destroys the welfare of others.

**S:** In Indian thought generally, as well as in Buddhism, you've got this idea - rather unfamiliar to people in the West, perhaps - that the offence is all the more serious according to who it is committed against. For instance, striking your mother or father is more serious than striking somebody else; striking a saintly person is more serious than striking a worldly person, because in order to do either of these things you have to generate, as it were, a greater opposition to what is good, or to overcome your own natural good tendencies to an even greater degree, than is usually the case. The Bodhisattva being a highly developed spiritual being, at least in intention, to do anything against him is considered a more serious offence than doing it against [87] one who is not a Bodhisattva. One therefore has to be particularly careful, and Buddhists traditionally are particularly careful in the way that they behave with people whom they believe to be more spiritually developed - especially of course the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas - because the resulting demerit when you misbehave with them is more than in the case of misbehaving with other people. On the list of sins, the greatest sin

is to wound a Buddha. It's not possible to kill a Buddha, according to Buddhist tradition, but you can wound him. You can kill an Arahant - that comes next on the list, and so on down a descending scale of offences, each one less serious than the last. It's rather an unfamiliar idea to us. Śāntideva therefore points out not only that a Bodhisattva commits a very grave offence if he goes against his own Bodhisattva intention or potential, but also that people who obstruct a Bodhisattva, or who hinder him in his work, commit a quite serious offence as well.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think that that can be taken literally?

**S:** Oh yes, why not? At the same time you'd better be careful not to say, 'Oh I'm a Bodhisattva. If you get in my way it's much worse than getting in anybody else's way.' Be very careful not to take it like that! Perhaps it's not good to insist upon it, or even to think about it, too much, especially with regard to oneself: just be more careful how you behave with regard to everybody else. If you are at all sensitive to any degree of Enlightenment in others, you will quite spontaneously behave more carefully and mindfully towards them.

p.158                    10        Indeed, the one who has smitten the benefactor  
of even a single being, will be smitten. How  
much more when he smites the beings who  
dwell throughout the immensity of all space?

**S:** That is, through the Bodhisattva, the smiter injures so many others who would have benefitted from the Bodhisattva had the Bodhisattva not been injured. You could of course argue that the person might not know anything about that, and didn't intend to injure all those other beings, or even the Bodhisattva as Bodhisattva. He might not know that he is a Bodhisattva. But Śāntideva isn't considering that point at this stage. In this and the following verses he is, after all, trying to exhort himself, presumably so that he himself should not get in the way of more developed spiritual beings.

p.158                    15        When shall I obtain the arising of a Buddha,  
faith, humanity, and a condition suitable for the  
practice of righteous actions? These are  
requirements very hard to obtain!

**S:** That is, 'I've got them now, so why don't I make use of them? I've got the arising of a Buddha. I'm living in a period in which the Buddha has appeared, and when the Buddha's teaching is still known. I've got faith in that. I've got humanity. I am a human being able to practice, and there are also suitable conditions and facilities for my practice. These are very difficult to obtain, so why don't I make use of them?' In the following verses he goes on in this vein.

p.158                    17        In failure to achieve the human state, there is  
evil.

**S:** Traditionally, Buddhists regard the human state as very [88] important and valuable, and not to be treated at all lightly. The traditional belief is, of course, in many different states of existence, as represented by the Wheel of Life, and amongst all these states the human is definitely the best and most fortunate. So they use this to emphasise the fact that if you are, here and now, a human being, one relatively free from pain and suffering, intelligent, not mentally defective, with a certain amount of leisure, and if you've heard the Teaching and have, already, a certain amount of faith in it - then what a wonderful opportunity! Don't throw it away! don't waste it! You may not, under the law of karma, and in the cycles of rebirth, have that opportunity again for a long time. Don't count on having it indefinitely, again and again. You've got it now, so make the best use of it. This is very much the traditional Buddhist attitude towards the opportunities of human existence in general, and it can be applied within the context of the present life. Even on retreat, sometimes, people don't seem to realise that they might not have that opportunity again. Here they are in the country for a



week, or two weeks, or even a month, whatever the period may be. They haven't got anything to think about except meditation, listening to the Dharma, leading a quiet life, being contented; but it's almost as though they don't realise the usefulness of the opportunity - that they may not get it again. They might fall ill, or not have the money or something else might happen. It might be that there's a real possibility of that week, or those few days, being a turning point for them, but they don't make the best use of the opportunity. This doesn't necessarily mean going all out in a very forcible kind of way. It just means being very mindful, and doing whatever you can, and the best you can, in those exceptionally favourable circumstances. You might not have the opportunity of going on retreat again. You hope you will, but you don't really know. It's the same within the wider traditional context of birth and death and rebirth.

p.158                    18     If I do not do good when I am capable of  
   goodness, what will I do when I am stupefied  
   by the sorrows of an evil destiny?

**S:** Yes, why not practise when it's easy to practise, when you've got good health? You're free from disease, free from pain - why not practise then? It won't be easy when you're suffering, when you're old, weak, miserable, maybe bedridden, or if suddenly you have an accident, and maybe lose the use of a limb - it won't be so easy then. It's easy now, so why not practise now? That's what Śāntideva's saying to himself.

**Gotami:** It's very like Gampopa.

**S:** Well, that's not surprising. If anything, Gampopa's more detailed.

p.159                    19     Because of the lack of good actions and,  
   indeed, the accumulation of evil, the very idea  
   of an advantageous condition of life is  
   destroyed for hundreds of aeons.

**S:** Śāntideva is speaking, of course, in the traditional context, and laying it on rather heavily, but if one does accept all this quite literally what he says is literally true. He is trying to bring to bear quite a bit of spiritual pressure and impetus, because people are [89]so sluggish, and so under the influence of the gravitational pull.

p.159                    20     Therefore the Blessed One said that the human  
   state is exceedingly hard to obtain; it is like a  
   turtle inserting his neck into the cleft of a yoke  
   in the great sea.

**S:** I suppose everybody knows this little parable. There's a turtle that pops up to the surface of the ocean once at the end of every thousand years, and also a wooden yoke floating on the surface of the ocean with a hole in it. What are the chances that, when the turtle pops up somewhere, he happens just to pop his head through the hole in the yoke? They are very unlikely. In the same way, the Buddha said, the chance of human birth is no more likely than that. The parable is meant to bring home the fact that you've got a human birth now, and it's a unique opportunity. You don't know when it's going to recur. We could even say in the West, especially if people don't believe in rebirth, that we don't even know whether we're going to have a human birth again at all - we can't even be sure of that. So utilise your life to the full. Get really above and beyond everything and be able to look down and see for yourself whether there is any rebirth, or whether there would have been any rebirth or not anyway. You'll know for certain then!

p.160                    29     Pitiful is this unseasonable patience!

**S:** Yes, all that we put up with, and have patience for, are our own faults and imperfections - our own sort of little domestic devils. We put up with them all right. We are very patient

where they are concerned. But Śāntideva says, 'Pitiful is this unseasonable patience! You ought to get a bit impatient with yourself sometimes and your own backslidings and weaknesses.

**Gotami:** Do you think it should be unreasonable?

**S:** No, the meaning is that such patience is misplaced, that it is out of time, out of season, or wrong. It's unreasonable too, of course.

p.160                      30     If all gods and men were my enemies, they  
                                      would not be capable of pulling me into the fire  
                                      of the Avīci hell ....

**S:** That's quite a thought! Nobody else can put you into any of these unpleasant states, whether in a future life or here and now in this life. Often you hear people say, 'Oh he made me so angry,' or 'They put me in such a bad frame of mind,' or 'She really upset me,' but it's not like that at all. You put yourself in those frames of mind. You do it; nobody else could do it. 'If all gods and men together tried to put you into a bad state of mind, or into hell, if you didn't want to be put into it you couldn't be. But there's a silly little something inside you that agrees as it were with the bad mental state and so you inflict pain and suffering on yourself by indulging it. We can all see it afterwards, but at the time it's almost impossible to see, or to do anything about even if we do see it. You're a bit wise only after the event.

P.160                      32     None, of all other enemies, is endowed with the  
                                      long life, without beginning or end, which is  
                                      the great length of life of my enemies of  
                                      passion (*kleśa*).

[90]

**S:** It's like the man in Kalimpong who became an enemy of mine because I spoke frankly to him. Well, he died and I was relieved from all the trouble he had caused me. I only had to put up with it for a few years. That's what external enemies are like. Sooner or later they die off, or they get tired of it, or they go away; but the enemies within are there all the time - they're the longest lived of all. They're with you until you actually take steps to get rid of them, so they're the worst enemies.

p.160                      35     If these guards of the prison of being, the  
                                      executioners of those to be slain in hell and  
                                      elsewhere, stand in the house of the mind, in  
                                      the cage of greed; how can I be happy?

**S:** Śāntideva is suggesting that all the phenomena of hell according to the legendary or mythological accounts are, in fact, in one's own mind, created by one's own mental states - and of course not only after death but here and now.

p.160                      36     Indeed, I will not be free from their torment  
                                      until these enemies are slain before my eyes.  
                                      Proud men, when concerned with even a very  
                                      slight offender, are dominated by anger, and  
                                      they will not sleep until the enemy has been  
                                      destroyed.

37     The strong are able to ignore in violent battle  
          the aforementioned death, suffering and  
          ignorance. The incalculable suffering of  
          wounds caused by arrows and spears does not  
          bring about such aversion as those enemies  
          who are still to be overcome.

- 38 How then can there be despondency and depression, when I have begun to strike these natural enemies, the continual causes of all sorrow! In spite of hundreds of misfortunes, what could be the excuse?
- 39 Others bear the wounds of enemies, although they are useless, like ornaments upon their bodies. So why should I, who am engaged in the accomplishment of the Great Work (*maharthasiddhi*) be oppressed by sorrows?

**S:** What Śāntideva is saying is that when we take up spiritual practice, and start leading the spiritual life, it's often very difficult and uncomfortable, even painful. But we shouldn't worry. We're bearing this little temporary sorrow and difficulty in order to get rid of the great sorrow and the great difficulty. We should be just like the heroes in the battle, who disregard the wounds that they receive because they are so intent on victory and because victory means so much to them. In the same way we are fighting our own passions so as to gain, in the end, Bodhi or Enlightenment, and we shouldn't bother about the little sufferings and inconveniences, and even the negative phases, that we have to go through in order to do that.

p.161 42 To the extent that I am not turned around, I will always be bound by passion.

**S:** This being turned around is the basic spiritual revolution, the *parāvṛtti* or turning about in the deepest seat of consciousness of the Yogācāra. Until that happens, until there has been this real reversal, or conversion in the true sense, within me, I will always be bound by Passion.  
[91]

p.161 44 Although my bowels ooze out and my head falls, I will not bow before my everlasting enemies, the passions.

**S:** This is a bit reminiscent of the Buddha's famous words, according to one account, when He took His seat on the heap of grass under the Bodhi tree and said, "Flesh and blood may dry up, and the body may wither away, but I will not move from this seat until Enlightenment is attained." It's this sort of spirit that Śāntideva is inculcating here.

p.161 46 I am stupid only because I make no effort. It is by the perception of wisdom (*prajñā*) that the vile passions are to be subdued.

**Gisela:** It's interesting that Śāntideva says this. The passions are to be subdued by insight into how stupid it is not to do anything right!

**S:** Yes. In other words, there is no purely psychological remedy. Even meditation in the more limited sense isn't enough - that is, meditation in the sense of experiencing higher states of consciousness, which according to Buddhism are still mundane. It's only intuitive insight into the whole process, or seeing through it in a very effective, thorough-going manner, that can bring about a permanent change, or a permanent transformation or transmutation, in the human individual. This is, in a sense, the basic point of Buddhism: it's only Wisdom which really cuts through everything - not even higher spiritual experiences in the purely meditative sense.

**Subhuti:** So that in fact even the higher spiritual states are cultivated as a means to gaining that insight.

**S:** Yes, as a basis for it, because in those states thereís great concentration, thereís tremendous energy accumulated, and that concentration and that energy can then be put behind the insight [i.e. behind the initial conceptual understanding of reality which, with the support of the higher meditative consciousness, is transformed into insight or wisdom].

Does anyone want to ask anything on this chapter? Or is it all quite - maybe too painfully - clear?

**Subhuti:** Itís really a good chapter, this!

**S:** It is. Itís rather stirring, isnít it? We ought to read it out at retreats sometimes, or have it nicely written out and pinned up somewhere.

**Aśvajit:** I find it a little depressing, I must say.

**S:** No doubt itís to be read in conjunction with the rejoicing in merits. If one finds the idea of hells a bit too much, just transfer it to painful experiences in this life itself which youíve brought on yourself just by your own foolishness or your own tendency to ěwallow in ití and not want, almost, to get out. Itís also a question of temperament, as the Buddha found with those disciples who became depressed by meditating on impermanence and death. Some people need a more lively, positive and happy form of teaching, while others need - I wonít say an unhappier but - a much grimmer and more terrible presentation in order to shake them out of their lethargy. [92]

**Subhuti:** The suggestion of a struggle, of a battle, appeals to me.

**S:** It seems to have appealed to Śāntideva.

**Subhuti:** Sort of heroic! Sword in hand ....

**S:** Well, traditionally heís supposed to have been a rājaís son, so presumably kshatriya by caste like the Buddha Himself.

**Gotami:** It seems to be time that spurs me on.

**S:** Not much time left, you mean?

**Gotami:** Yes. I must admit I donít have a feel of there being many lives. This is all that I know that Íve got.

**S:** I think thatís probably a safer attitude. Even if you do have lots of other lives ahead, if you behave as though you have only one life it will conduce to your good even in the lives ahead. This is one very good point about the Zen tradition: they do concentrate very much on practice in this life, and thereís not much reference to future lives and opportunities. For all practical purposes itís just this life that matters. Itís the same even in the Buddhaís own teaching according to the Pali Canon. He mainly concentrated on ědoing it nowí and spoke comparatively little, or only in passing, about rebirth and karma and all the rest of it. If you are capable of realizing Nirvāna in this life, or have the intention of so doing, karma and rebirth become of very secondary importance. For this reason there are comparatively few references to karma and rebirth in the Suttas of the Pali Canon, in the Buddhaís own discourses, but lots and lots of references to practising here and now, gaining Enlightenment here and now. If that is your perspective, then karma and rebirth, and even the Wheel of Life, become, I wonít say redundant, but thereís not much emphasis on them, if any emphasis at all.

**Gotami:** But if one sort of arrives there and finds that thatís what actually happens, that there is such a thing as karma and rebirth, then one can accept it because one has looked and seen for oneself that it is so.

**S:** Yes. This is what the Buddha did when He became Enlightened. According to the scriptures He saw that this is what happens. He saw beings being born and reborn, deceasing and being reborn again. But we don't have that experience. All we know is this life itself, so you might just as well get down to it in this life itself. When we wake up to the Buddha knowledge you may think, "Oh yes, if I hadn't got it now there would have been all those extra lives to go through! Just as well I have got it. [Laughter] Gosh, what I was heading for! What a narrow squeak!" [Laughter]

p.161                      47      The passions are not in objects, nor in the complex of the senses, nor in any intermediate place, nor elsewhere. Where are they, then? - these that torture the whole world! They are simply illusion (*māyā*).

**Gotami:** Where do the passions come from?

**S:** Well, they are described as *māyā*. Where does the magical illusion come from? Śāntideva really answers the question in that sort of way. *Māyā* is a sort of magical illusion which a conjuror produces. He makes you see the little boy climbing up the rope whereas the little [93] boy actually isn't there. It's what we would call mass hypnosis, perhaps, or it's the magician's magical creation. So where did it come from? You perceive it, you see it; it looks real, you take it for real. The passions are like that. It's an answer and, in a sense, it's no answer. Like the magical illusion, the passions are there, but they're a bit of a mystery. So the Buddha, especially the historical Buddha, as in the Parable of the Man Wounded by the Poisoned Arrow, would say: Don't speculate where the passions come from. Your job is to get rid of them here and now.

**Subhuti:** Except that your understanding where they come from will affect the means by which you get rid of them.

**S:** That's true, if by "where they come from" means where they've come from just now, the particular set of conditions from which they've arisen in the present. If you mean their ultimate first beginning then you're getting a bit -

**Subhuti:** (*Interrupting*) If you understand their nature, then you are able to get rid of them.

**S:** Yes. Especially if you understand that they're like magical illusions. [Laughter]

**Aśvajit:** I don't think that helps at all, actually. It's more like getting to know what they feel like and to feel them approaching almost.

**S:** The Indians, apparently, didn't have much trouble in feeling them or experiencing them. They believed in magic anyway, and the reference to the magical illusion is a very popular one, and presumably it did help the Indian. But maybe we have to feel the passions first, or feel them approaching, and really feel that they're there and that they are something to be got rid of somehow or other.

**Vajradaka:** I think it takes a concentrated effort to actually put one's mind into the frame of actually seeing things as an illusion, as a magical play that is happening all around. One has to say, "Well now, I'm going to try to see things like that."

**S:** It's a form of insight, so it's difficult.

**Subhuti:** I suppose when you say that it's a matter of feeling the passions you have to really feel them, which involves an understanding of their nature. You don't just see the surface of them, you feel them all the way round, as it were - three-dimensionally.

**S:** The point of the comparison with a magical illusion is that they're experienced, but are not absolutely real. You're not denying the experience, but you're denying the ultimate validity of the experience - the ultimate validity.

**Vajradaka:** They're sort of transparent, you can see through them; like the boy climbing the rope isn't solid, you can see the sky behind him.

**S:** He looks solid. But when you know it's a magical illusion you see that it's just not really there. You've got your perception, but at the same time you know that there's nothing on which your perception is based - that even though you are perceiving the object it is not in reality there. To the Indian this way of thinking and illustrating seems very natural. I don't myself feel any difficulty with it, but [94] it's not very much in accordance with the usual Western ways of thinking and explaining, so perhaps it isn't very helpful. Perhaps if we were to see a magical illusion one day, this sort of comparison would mean more to us. 'I could have sworn it was there! I saw it! I could smell it!' Yet it disappears. The passions are like that, Śāntideva says. Perhaps we can get closer to an understanding of the matter by recalling what happens when we've been in a really bad mood. Once the bad mood is over there's absolutely nothing left. It wasn't about anything at all. It was a storm in a teacup, and we think, 'Why did it affect me so strongly? Why did I get so upset? It was nothing really. Even the feeling I had was nothing.' Sometimes we do reflect like that, or feel like that, and I think it's that sort of thing that Śāntideva is getting at - only we should try to see through the passions and realise their illusory, magical nature, at the very time that we are experiencing them, and in that way dispel them. What usually happens is that we see it only afterwards, in retrospect. It's difficult to see it at the time.

**Mary:** There must be some reason for it to be seen ... I mean, how?

**S:** This brings up very fundamental questions, but the Buddha, on the level that they arise, refuses to go into them. He thinks it's side-tracking the real issue. Śāntideva does however give us a hint when he refers to the magical illusion: it has all come out of the magician's mind. It comes out of your own mind, you could say. So just look into your own mind and see what is happening there. In a way, and from another point of view, this is a bit like Ramana Maharshi's technique. He used to say, 'Look into your own mind. First of all experience yourself as *īlī*, *īlī*, *īlī*, then look and try to see where that *īlī* starts. Try to see the point at which it originates.' You could say the same thing with regard to the defilements or *kleśas*. They are yours. Sometimes they're there, sometimes they're not there. So just try to see the point where they begin and then, perhaps, you'll see through them all. Sometimes we know we are free, at least from a particular *kleśa*, but at another time it's there. Where has it come from? Try just to see the actual origin, the real point of origin. Then, apart from being able to check its developing more easily, you can see what is really happening. Ramana Maharshi of course applies the technique to the *ēlī* feeling itself, which in a way is the biggest defilement, the biggest *kleśa*. Where does that *ēlī* feeling come from? How does it originate? Since even the sense of time is bound up with that feeling, it's really a question of finding the point at which time itself originates. In a sense, there is no time before the *ēlī* was - time originates with the *ēlī*. So when you see the arising of the *ēlī*, you see the arising of the whole phenomenal structure - the point on which it hangs, as it were, from the Absolute or the Unconditioned. That was his technique. It was a very simple one, and it worked well for a lot of people: just try to see the point of origin. First experience the *ēlī*, then ask, 'Where is it coming from?' One could do the same thing with a *kleśa*. First experience it, then ask, 'Where is it coming from?' and just try to see that. One could even ask where thought in general was coming from.

**Aśvajit:** I've asked myself that question before, and it seemed that it comes from a kind of clinging. Clinging to what, I can't say... Just clinging.

**S:** In that case one simply stops with the clinging. 'Clinging, clinging. Where does the clinging come from?' That's the next step, just trying to see the point of origin, where it starts. Of course in this way you can go back through the whole chain of conditionality. This

is what it really amounts to. This is what the Buddha did: you just see how one thing depends on another - thereís a sort of chain of links - and then you also see how the chain can be broken. But, you can either run through the list of links in a book, or you can really feel it, and see it, and experience it, which is much, much more difficult. When you do the latter then you are cultivating insight, even if itís only a little glimpse of reality. Thatís a particular form of meditation, by the way. Weíve never done it, but we could do it: the meditation, link by link, on the chain of Conditioned Co-production. Perhaps we should do it sometimes. Itís an insight exercise, not just a meditation [i.e. *śamathā*] exercise.

**GUARDING OF TOTAL AWARENESS**  
**(Text)**



## GUARDING OF TOTAL AWARENESS

### The Text

- p.162            1        In order to observe a rule of life (*śikṣā*), the mind (*citta*) must zealously be guarded. It is not possible to observe any discipline without guarding the quivering mind.
- 2        Unsubdued and overwrought elephants do not effect that damage here which the unrestrained mind, an elephant roaming wild, does in the Avici hell and elsewhere.
- 3        If this elephant of mind is bound on all sides by the cord of mindfulness (*smṛti*), all fear disappears and complete happiness comes.

**S:** This is very reminiscent of the Dhammapada, in which thereís a chapter on Mindfulness, and a chapter on the Elephant. Very likely Śāntideva had these chapters in mind.

- p.162            4        All enemies : tigers, lions, elephants, bears, serpents; and all the keepers of hell: the demons (*dākinīs*) and the horrors (*rākṣasās*)....

**S:** You notice *ēdemonś* is the translation of *dākinīs*. It should be *ēdemonessesś*: itís a non-Tantric usage of the word. In the Tantra, of course, *dākinī* means something quite different.

- p.163            8        All that, taught the Sage, was produced by the evil mind.

**S:** Just like a bad dream, or a nightmare.

- p.163            10       Yet by the mere forsaking all of our possessions for the sake of all creatures, along with the [consequent] merit of this great act, the perfection of charity is proclaimed. It is thus only mental (*citta*).

**S:** *ēMentalś* (*citta*) of course means much more than our understanding of mental. Not just a thought in our own subjective mind. According to Buddhism, a thought is a kind of force let loose in the universe. Consciousness is a sort of power.

- p.163            13       Where is the leather which will be able to cover all of the earth? The earth is covered by the amount of leather in a sandal.

**S:** Weíre always trying to put the world right. Itís much easier and simpler to put ourselves right.

- p.163            15       ... the nobility of the Brahman resides in the industrious and the single-minded.

**S:** *ēBrahmanś* is used here in the general sense of *ēholy manś*. [There is no reference to a particular caste.] [97]

p.163 17 To destroy sorrow, to obtain joy [creatures of a sluggish mind] wander in vain through space  
....

**S:** That is, they are ěreincarnatedí,

p.164 22 Let my possessions be lost - love, respect, the life of the body. Let any other happiness be lost to me, but never [mastery of] the mind.  
23 For those desiring to protect the mind, I fold my hands in prayer: With all zeal protect both mindfulness (*smṛti*) and total awareness (*saṃprajanya*).

**S:** Throughout the whole of the first part of this chapter itís as though Śāntideva is saying, ěThough the real subject of discussion is *dāna* and *śīla*, the first two *pāramitās*, even more fundamental than these two, in a way, are mindfulness and total awareness. Without mindfulness and total awareness I canít practise those *pāramitās*, anywayí. Thatís why heís spending such a lot of time and energy discussing and explaining them.

p.164 26 Many who have been instructed, who are faithful and intent upon zeal, become sinful and impure because of a lack of awareness.

**S:** Itís very easy to fall away: everybody whoís been on retreat knows that. While youíre at the retreat you get very inspired; you experience a higher state of consciousness; you feel as though youíll never get off the path again. But after two or three days back wherever youíve come from itís all lost, and you forget, you slip back. This is what so often happens.

p.164 29 ... mindfulness ... once gone, it should be restored by full recollection of the pain of hell.

**S:** Or by general meditation on the impermanence of life, on death, and so on.

p.165 30 ... mindfulness is easily generated by living with a master (guru).

**S:** Because somebody else will keep you up to scratch, more than you will be likely to keep yourself up to scratch.

**Gotami:** Why does he call the passions ěa monastic brotherhood of thievesí (v.28) rather than just an ordinary brotherhood of thieves?

**S:** ěSanghaí doesnít necessarily mean group of monks. In Sanskrit and Hindi it just means group. Sangha is the ordinary word for an association or society. I think the translator has understood the meaning of the word as though Śāntideva had said, ironically, ěthe monastic order of the passionsí, as if to say, ěTheyíre a brotherhood too!í But I think this is a little far-fetched. Itís the gang, almost, of the passions. ěThe passions, a gang (*sangha*) of thieves, seek this incarnation (*avatāra*). Having seized this incarnation they rob and they destroy oneís happy state of lifeí. Yes, Iíd translate the phrase as ěgang of passionsí.[98]

p.165 32 After meditating on these matters, one should be filled with shame, with reverence, with fear. Remembrance of the Buddha should return to one again and again.

**S:** Remembrance of the Buddha, or Recollection of the Buddha, is one of the ten *anusatis* or specific spiritual practices (literally, ěrecollectionsí) of the Theravāda and, in fact of

Buddhism generally. It is considered to be a very good antidote for the passions. You always bear in mind the Buddha, or a picture of the Buddha - perhaps via the visualisation exercise - and try to think of Him as being actually present. Or you at least try to recollect the ideal of Buddhahood. In this way you have before you all the time something higher on to which to latch the mind. It's not just a question of fighting with the passions on their own level. If you can keep the mind occupied with a higher ideal, or a higher thought, very often that will automatically keep the passions out. Sometimes, of course, they become very clamorous, and you have to take stern measures against them on their own level; but very often that isn't necessary if you do something like the Recollection of the Buddha, or the repetition of a mantra. It might be relevant to recall here the four right efforts with regard to unwholesome or unskillful states of mind. (1) The cultivation of the opposite. In other words, if you are invaded by the *kleśa* of anger or hatred, you set about cultivating *maitri*, loving-kindness. Then there's (2) Just watching it, as you watch a cloud passing through the sky. You don't enjoy it, or gloat over it: you just keep an eye on it and let it float away. Another method is that of (3) Forcible suppression. You just say, "No!" to the passion. This is a conscious **process**: it's not repression in the Freudian sense. (4) Looking at the consequences of the passions. Śāntideva mentioned this earlier on, in the form of the reflection, "I'm heading for hell if I'm not careful." From this list of the four right efforts - which are not always enumerated in this order - we can understand that simply fighting with the *kleśas* on their own level is not the only way. If you can somehow get your mind on to something better and higher and more "spiritual", where the *kleśas* aren't very active, that will very often keep them away, or discourage them from approaching.

p.165                      34      I should ever remain passive as a piece of wood.

**S:** I've commented on this already: it could be misunderstood. You should be like a piece of wood only with regard to reaction, but not with regard to creativity or real response. For a while, though, you may be incapable of any response, and may be just having to check reactions: you may appear very wooden, even stupid. Some people do go through a definite "stupid" phase in their spiritual life, when they appear very stupid to others. This is because they are inhibiting all their mechanical, reactive processes, but their real spontaneity has not yet developed. People therefore find them quite odd and strange and even stupid. They're not so quick and smart as they used to be, or so bright; but that was all reactive, and now they've succeeded in getting rid of it, but as yet there isn't anything to take its place. When people go through this "stupid" phase it's a bit difficult for their friends to understand what is happening, but it's a genuine and positive thing to go through, and sometimes quite necessary.

**Vajradaka:** Does it sometimes last a very long time?

**S:** That varies. It could be a few days, or a few years. Sometimes people think that you're really stupid because your mind doesn't work in the slick sort of way it used to work. There's a poem by Gary Snyder along these lines, in which someone is supposed to be addressing the "stupid" person and saying, "What's the matter? You used to be so great; you used to be such good fun. What's happened to you? You're not like that any more!" All the previous qualities which ordinary people appreciated so much were just manifestations of the reactive mind, and you are no longer able to function in that way. You find it difficult to talk very much, and go all dumb and stupid, just like a block of wood; but that's quite good. Don't feel unhappy about it!

**Vajradaka:** Lao Tzu comments on that as well.

**S:** Yes, in a very positive way. According to circumstances, you may seem like that to other people, though quite happy within yourself, almost indefinitely. Or you might seem like that only in certain situations. Suppose you were feeling very quiet and meditative, but you found yourself at a party, you wouldn't be able to join in, you wouldn't be able to tell any stories. You might just sip a few drops of something, but you'd be quite with yourself, and certainly

not the life and soul of the party. If people noticed how you were behaving they would think that there was something wrong with you. You'd be acting a bit dull and stupid - that's how it would strike them. They'd say, 'Oh you used to be such fun - so bright and gay! What's happened to you? You used to be so cheerful, but since you took up with Buddhism you've become really stupid. What's it done to you?' I hope no one is hearing that sort of complaint, but it's quite possible.

p.165                      35      The eyes never should be directed to and fro without purpose.  
The vision should be directed downwards as in meditation.

**S:** This seems to be addressed more particularly to monks. According to the monastic code, monks, when walking out, should direct their gaze about six feet ahead, and down, and not look around, because - this is the usual warning - you might see things that you ought not to see, that would not be good for the monkish mind. We can understand the meaning and importance of the practice, but we also have to be a bit careful. If you were to try and behave in this way in the streets of London, or when crossing the road, it might be rather difficult. But there is some truth in what Śāntideva says. When you're in a weak mental state, as most of us are at the beginning, don't deliberately expose yourself to distraction and temptation. If necessary, shut it out: that may be necessary for a while. Don't look at all those glossy ads - they might stimulate all sorts of cravings. That's what they're meant to do. Highly paid people are doing their best, with the help of all sorts of skilfully contrived means, to stimulate your *kleśas*, because it brings in money. If you live in a city, and see many advertisements, your *kleśas* are constantly being stimulated in this way. It's therefore wise to know the point beyond which you ought not to allow yourself to go with regard to outside stimulation and distraction. There's just a certain amount that you can cope with and no more. After that you are all at sea and have lost your inner direction and awareness. It really is quite difficult in a city. [100]

p.165                      37      On the road and elsewhere one sometimes may look to the four  
   quarters in apprehension. Having rested and having turned  
   around, he may look to the region behind.

   38      After observing that one may proceed forwards, or that one may  
   proceed backwards, having been thus enlightened, one ought to  
   perform his duty in all circumstances.

**S:** This is mindfulness of the body and what it's doing.

**Gotami:** 'One sometimes may look to the four quarters in apprehension.' Why apprehension?

**S:** I think the word is used in a quite neutral sense. It means seeing if something is coming from anywhere, as when you're looking out for oncoming traffic. Even in India you can get run over by a bullock cart! *[Laughter]* It's anticipating that something might happen and just being on the alert for that. The translator is very good in many ways, but his language is sometimes a little wooden, as it were. It's not quite lively enough, and I think that shows itself here.

p.165                      40      The mad elephant of the mind (*citta*) must be  
   watched zealously in order that his bonds be  
   not released from that great pillar of reflection  
   which is the Dharma.

**S:** Tie your elephant mind - your mad elephant mind - to the pillar of the Dharma. That's what it really means. There's also the mad monkey of the mind. [Comparing the mind to a mad elephant brings out its strength and unruliness; comparing it to a mad monkey, its restlessness and fickleness.]

- p.166                      42     Although one is powerless to act for the best when bound by fear, agitation, and so forth, still, on an occasion of charity (*dāna*), the overlooking of conventional morality (*śīla*) is advised.

**S:** Presumably the text just says *śīla* (morality) but there is a distinction in Buddhism between *pakkati śīla*, which is natural morality, and *paññati śīla*, which is conventional morality. This distinction is made quite clearly in the monastic rule and in Pali literature generally. If a monk happens to break a *śīla* which is connected with natural morality there is a karmic consequence, but not - all factors being equal - if he breaks a *śīla* which is a matter of conventional morality. For instance, that you should not steal is a matter of natural morality, because stealing is based on craving; but if you happen to wear a robe of the wrong colour it's an offence against the monastic rule, but only against something conventional, so that there are no karmic consequences - unless, of course, you've worn that particular colour out of strong feelings of greed and attachment. If you just happen to have worn the wrong colour, you are technically in the wrong, but there are no karmic consequences. Quite a lot of things that we think of as natural morality are, in fact, just matters of conventional morality, and even in its Theravāda form Buddhism makes this distinction quite clearly. In the case of the present verse I'm not sure whether the distinction is really to be understood as implied or not. Perhaps the verse goes a bit beyond it.[103]

- p.166                      43     Whoever, having been enlightened, commences to act, ought to think of nothing else. Insofar as this can be accomplished it is by means of applying one's whole being.
- 44     This way everything is well done. Otherwise, both of the conflicting interests of *dāna* and *śīla* may not be achieved. And the flaw of non-awareness (*asamprajanya*) will attain further development.

**S:** Śāntideva is on the whole just stressing the great importance of doing everything mindfully, with real thought, real reflection, real care, real awareness. If your awareness and mindfulness is strong enough any conflict between the respective claims of *dāna* and *śīla* will be resolved almost automatically. Suppose a monk encounters a woman who is seriously ill. Suppose he wants to give her medicine and look after her: that's *dāna*; he wants to practise *dāna*. But after all she's a woman, so he ought not really to have anything much to do with her: that's *śīla*. Thus there arises, within the context of his monastic life and practice, a conflict between *dāna* and *śīla*. But never mind. If the monk really keeps up his awareness and mindfulness all the time, whatever he does, he'll resolve that conflict just by being very aware and very mindful. This is the sort of situation that Śāntideva seems to have in mind. He's saying, as it were, 'Leave aside *dāna*, leave aside *śīla* (the first two *pāramitās*). Be mindful, be aware in everything that you do, and then everything will work out all right with regard to these two perfections and everything else, even.' Historically speaking it does seem that, in some sections of the Sangha, a certain tension was experienced between the demands of *dāna* and the demands of *śīla*. Some of the monastic rules were quite strict and seemed to get in the way of the Bodhisattva's activities, if he was a monk. For instance, there are the rules about not preaching the Dharma to people wearing turbans or swords. The Bodhisattva, out of the strength of his feeling for giving the doctrine, giving the teaching, might well disregard these rules. Technically he would be breaking certain *śīlas* of the monastic law, but Śāntideva is as it were saying, 'Such conflicts may arise (perhaps they did arise in the monastic and spiritual life of his day), but never mind. Keep up your mindfulness and awareness and they will sort themselves out.' This is certainly what I found when I was going around among the ex-untouchable Buddhists in India, especially when I went with my Thai bhikkhu friends, who were normally very strict in their observance of the monastic rules. Often there was a genuine conflict between the monastic rules and the requirements of the situation. For instance, some good people would arrange for you to give a lecture, but they'd arrange the meeting for 10 o'clock in the morning and it couldn't possibly finish before one - so when are you going to eat? You are not supposed to eat after 12 o'clock, and for a strict

monk this is a very important point and he feels very bad about eating after 12, thus breaking a rule. So we would discuss the matter among ourselves, because within the terms of that particular tradition, or convention, there was a definite conflict. Should we cancel the meeting so that we could observe the 12 o'clock rule, or should we have the meeting and ignore the 12 o'clock rule or even, maybe, fast until the next morning? Some very strict monks were quite prepared to fast, though others - healthy young monks - didn't feel very happy about it. After quite a bit of discussion, we did sometimes all agree that we'd take our meal an hour late, and the Thai bikkhus themselves said, 'Never mind, it's for the sake of the Dharma!' Though they were strict Theravādins they [102] adopted the more Mahāyānistic approach, and I'm sure this sort of thing happened quite a lot in India as social conditions changed and the Mahāyāna ideal arose and as, maybe, some of the monastic rules became a bit too strict or were interpreted a bit too narrowly. I think it was this sort of situation that Śāntideva was concerned with, and so he says, 'Be sincere, be mindful, and everything will be all right.' In this way you resolve the conflict, and I think that this is what my Thai bhikkhu friends and I did on that particular occasion. At other times we had to ride in bullock carts, which again is against the monastic rule, but there was no other means of transport. We could of course have walked, but then we would have got to the meeting too late to give our lecture. Quite a few Theravāda monks in modern times experienced a conflict between their desire to propagate the Dharma and the requirements of the monastic rule, which sometimes gets in the way of their Buddhist work. Śāntideva, however, is reassuring, and says that provided we are mindful and aware at all times such conflicts will not only be resolved, they won't be conflicts in the same way.

*(The rest of the commentary on this section was not recorded)*

[103]

**THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE**  
**(Guide)**

## THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

### The Guide

p.50                      When one walks with the arrow of hatred within his heart no happiness is possible for him.

**S:** It has been said by one Buddhist author, I forget who, that there is this difference between indulging craving and indulging hatred: in the case of indulging in craving, at least you get some pleasure out of it usually, whereas in the case of indulging in hatred it is not only unpleasant for others but quite unpleasant for you too. Nevertheless there is something perverse, as it were, in us that makes us go on indulging in the hatred even though it is quite a painful experience for us, as well as for the people towards whom it is directed. In the case of those who indulge greed and craving there is in a way a sort of excuse. At least they are enjoying it. But you can speak of enjoying the indulgence of hatred only in a very twisted and perverted sort of way. Very often it is a completely painful experience, with nothing positive in it at all. But we still go on doing it.

p.50                      Even those who are free from the possibility of criticism in other respects, may be defeated by this greatest of enemies.

**S:** I've seen this quite a bit in India, even in some Buddhist circles. Anger is the one thing that is permitted to the ěholy man. It is very strange! You can find very good people leading very strict, virtuous, puritanical lives, who are very conscientious and so on, but as the text says, they're quite often defeated by this particular enemy: they give way to anger. In some circles it seems to be regarded as excusable. The Hindus have legends of the bad-tempered Vedic sages always cursing people when they were offended, and the Burmese seem to go in for this too. Burmese monks are well known for their hot temper, or even bad temper, as I've seen myself, but it seems to be regarded as almost acceptable. It is the one loophole left, as it were. Maybe psychologically speaking such a loophole is a bit necessary sometimes, but from a spiritual point of view - especially from the Mahāyāna point of view - it is very bad indeed. In fact according to the Mahāyāna, hatred and enmity are the greatest of all defilements and most obstructive of the Bodhisattva's career. One Mahāyāna Sūtra says that in a Bodhisattva craving is to some extent forgivable, if not understandable, since at least it indicates an affinity for other people; but in the case of hatred there is no redeeming feature whatever, especially in the case of a Bodhisattva, because it cuts you off from other living beings, and a Bodhisattva is supposed to be working for the benefit of other living beings. So the Mahāyāna is particularly down on hatred.

P.50                      The Noble Lord whose dependants benefit from the property and honours which he bestows upon them, if he is cursed with hatred, is unpopular and subject to their vengeance.

**S:** A man in a position of authority and power may be very generous and very good, objectively, to his dependants, but at the same time he may have a really bad temper and be angry with them quite frequently. Such a man won't be so popular as someone who is actually less generous [104] but who is a bit more friendly in his manner, and better spoken and more smiling. This is a simple fact of ordinary, everyday psychology.

p.50                      The angry-minded man has no way whatever by which to be happy.

**S:** This quotation from the text gives us a great deal of food for reflection!



p.50

If the lack of patience is destructive of all merit, it is only pragmatic, good, common sense to destroy hatred by the practice of patience; otherwise, the evil effects of hatred will be suffered both here and in all the worlds to come.

**S:** Śāntideva quite clearly considers patience (*kṣānti*) as primarily the antidote to, and positive counterpart of, anger, hatred, aversion, and so on.

**Gotami:** This reminds me quite a lot of a passage in the Pali *suttas* where there's a list of all the things that will happen to you if you practise this or that kind of unskillful behaviour - things that your enemy might wish upon you. If you indulge in anger you become ugly, for instance. Do you know the passage I mean?

**S:** Perhaps you are thinking of the *Kamma-vibhanga Sutta*, or of a passage in which the Buddha speaks of the evil-doer as making himself that which his enemy would wish him to be. There is, of course, a whole section on anger in the *Dhammapada*, and in the Abhidharma especially it is said that one of the karmic consequences of anger is to make you ugly, because the emotion of anger distorts the face. Whether or not such statements are to be taken literally I'm not sure, but it certainly is said in the scriptures that you can be reborn ugly and ill-featured as a result of indulging in too much anger in previous existences. That's quite a thought! It's also said that people who are born in this life very beautiful are people who have been, in previous lives, good-tempered and happy-natured and so on, and not prone to anger. Certainly you do find that people who have a certain softness of disposition have a certain softness of expression too which is quite distinct from formal beauty in the sense of well-cut features. Somebody who isn't technically very good-looking can sometimes have a quite pleasing appearance and expression, just because they've got such a nice disposition, whereas someone who's always angry can really distort their face - even permanently - and look quite unpleasant, even though they started out having good features.

**Gotami:** I thought that, traditionally, *mettā* was the antidote for anger, whereas Śāntideva suggests patience.

**S:** Yes. Because he is, after all, dealing with the traditional list of the six *pāramitās*, patience is already included. As I said in the lecture on 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity' in the *Spiritual Life* in the 'Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal' series, patience includes *mettā*. As far as I remember, I said that there are three main aspects of patience: tolerance, receptivity, and love. It's perhaps not easy to be sure where one begins and the other ends.

p.51

They endure great pain heroically, whereas the practice of patience call[s] for only moderate pain which wanes after repetition. [105]

**S:** Śāntideva points to the example of some of the worshippers of the goddess Durga, who torture themselves quite severely and - from the Buddhist point of view - quite mistakenly, in order to attain spiritual emancipation. He says, 'Look at these people! Look at the pain that they undergo! The practice of patience isn't even as difficult as that. It means a comparatively less amount of suffering which you get used to or which in the end, perhaps, you even enjoy in a way because of the great spiritual benefits involved.' In this way he exhorts the people of his day, who presumably were quite familiar with the spectacle of these worshippers of Durga torturing themselves.

p.51

... all pain can be overcome, whether it is of the body or spirit, if the mind is brought to tranquillity

**S:** This is what we were talking about a few days ago.[see pp 52-54] If you are immersed in, or absorbed by, a higher spiritual experience, it is possible for you to go on feeling the pain,

in a way, but in another sense you don't feel it. It doesn't throw you off your balance. It's just sort of over here in one corner of your being, and the rest of your being is filled with something quite different, something much more positive, so that the pain becomes less troublesome. It doesn't absorb all your attention, as usually is the case.

p.51                    It may be inconvenient to renounce hatred, but whatever inconvenience is involved is trivial when the moral contest is seen as warfare with the deadly passions (*kleśa*), of which hatred is the chief ...

**S:** That is very much the Mahāyāna point of view: hatred is the chief. Usually, of course, it is said that *mohā* - ignorance or bewilderment - is the chief, but in the Mahāyāna they usually put hatred as the chief, whose only aim is the torment and annihilation of beings.

You can see why, because the Mahāyāna is especially oriented towards the helping of other living beings - being kind, being compassionate; but hatred just wants to destroy, to wipe out. That, in fact, is the chief characteristic of hatred: to destroy the object, to annihilate it, to stamp on it, to reduce it to dust - which is the complete opposite to what the Bodhisattva wants to do.

I don't know if any of you have seen it, but there's a little essay by Dr. Conze called 'Hate, Love, and Perfect Wisdom'. It was originally contributed to the *Maha Bodhi Journal*, in the days when I was editing it, and I think Dr. Conze has reprinted it in *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*. It's a very interesting little essay. One of the points made in it is that according to the general Buddhist teaching, especially as expounded by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*, the 'Path of Purity' or 'Path of Purification', there is an affinity between hatred and wisdom. Is anyone familiar with this idea? Hatred tries to destroy its object. Wisdom also tries to destroy its object. It tries to pulverise conditioned existence - to see through it, to break it up, to destroy it. Thus there is an analogy or parallel, or even an affinity, between hatred and wisdom. This affinity is not only metaphysical but psychological. It is said - and I must say I've seen this borne out in many individual cases - that a person who is characterised [106] by hatred rather than by greed or ignorance usually has got a rather strong, powerful intelligence. The two seem to go together. A person who is mild and amiable and so on, whose good qualities are all of the gentler sort, doesn't usually have that powerful and penetrating intellect. It may be subtle, or quite refined, but not with the same power and thrust, the same intellectual penetration, which one finds in the other kind of person. I must say that, in my own experience, I've noticed this kind of psychological tie-up quite a lot, especially with some of my monk friends in the East. Perhaps it's not surprising that in Burma, where the monks are known for their bad temper, they're very good at Abhidharma studies, which require tremendous intellectual penetration, whereas in Ceylon and Thailand, where the monks are usually very amiable, they don't go in for the Abhidharma at all, even though in theory they do respect it very highly.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think that it's possible for a person with a nice, friendly, amiable character to develop, not necessarily the negative aspects of hate, but the power?

**S:** Yes, I think so. I mean I can think of exceptions to the rule. There was one of my own teachers, Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap, from whom I learned Pali, Logic and Abhidhamma. He was the mildest person imaginable, but when he got down to the Abhidhamma he had a really sharp and penetrating mind. This goes to show that though such a combination may be quite exceptional, it's not impossible.

**Gotami:** Presumably it's also possible to start off with the anger and lose the anger, work on the anger.

**S:** Yes, presumably.

**Gotami:** And keep the intellect.

**Subhuti:** I suppose somebody who was really wise would do that.

p.51                      Compassion and pity for others is matched by the inescapable need of the individual to preserve inner tranquility, no matter what happens.

**S:** This is very, very important. When you are being kind and compassionate, you are not just thinking of other people, you are also thinking of yourself, because nothing could trouble your mind more than anger and hatred. If you are able to keep your mind free from anger and hatred by practising *kṣānti*, you are not only benefitting others, you are also benefitting yourself tremendously, by maintaining your own inner peace and tranquillity and harmony. Therefore the editor says, 'Compassion and pity for others is matched by the inescapable need of the individual to preserve inner tranquility, no matter what happens.' There is no excuse for not practising *kṣānti*, because the maintenance of your own inner tranquillity is so important - and of course others are benefitted too. So how important this virtue is! It benefits you: it benefits others. How foolish, therefore, it must be to give way to anger, which harms and upsets you - sometimes even more, if anything! Other people are sometimes really hard, you know. If you get angry with them they just shrug their shoulders and go away. But you can't go away from yourself. You are left with it. You are stuck with your anger. You are left steaming - yes, left to stew in your own juice. There is a traditional list of 10 or 12 benefits which accrue from the [107] practice of *mettā*, and one of them is that you sleep happily. The angry person can't even get to sleep sometimes! He is kept awake by his own anger. But the loving and kindly person has a good sound sleep.

P.51                      The fulfilment of each of the motives demands absolute tolerance of abuse.

**S:** The motives are those of pity and compassion for others and inner tranquillity for oneself, both of which require the tolerance of abuse from other people. I don't know why Śāntideva brings abuse in particularly here, but anyway, according to him, whatever people say to you, or about you, don't bother. This is very difficult to practise, of course.

p 51                      Many dramatic legends and other stories which are illustrative of patience are found in the Jātaka and elsewhere. When Sakyamuni, in one of his many incarnations before full Enlightenment, was the King of Snakes, he was captured by a group of thoughtless boys from a nearby village. They made holes in his body with sharp spears and inserted thorny vines into the wounds, and, with a tight string through his nose, they dragged his body along the ground. It is said that so great was his accumulation of merit at this time that he might have reduced all of his tormentors to ashes by a mere glance, but when he did open his eyes, there was not the least trace of anger within them. Clearly, patience overlaps the perfection of heroic strength, for the ultimate courage is demanded in its practice. It is the old theme of 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And just because they think that they know what they do, makes no difference; their confidence only augments their ignorance.

**S:** Any comments on this, or any questions?

**Gotami:** It strikes me as rather ironic that in speaking of something which is newer than Buddhism [i.e. Christ's words from the cross according to St. Luke] Dr. Matich says 'It is the old theme.'

**S:** That is true. Since he is a Christian, maybe Buddhism strikes him as very fresh and new. If so, that's good. Or perhaps he just wasn't very mindful when he used that expression. Perhaps he should have said that it was what to us Westerners is the old theme of "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

**Mary:** "They made holes in his body with sharp spears and inserted thorny vines into the wounds ...." Can it be the result of previous actions if one is treated like that?

**S:** According to the traditional teaching, yes. If you believe in that teaching, and remind yourself of it, then it's an additional help. The pious Buddhist, or the traditional Buddhist, will very often say, "Well, this is a result of my previous karma, of evil deeds I've done in the past, so I must bear it." In this way he is able to be more patient. But thinking like this only helps if you actually do believe quite firmly in karma and in rebirth. If you don't, that sort of reflection will perhaps even irritate you. When it really does seem to be the foolishness and wickedness of other people in this life that is [108] responsible for your troubles it's rather difficult to convince yourself that it's a result of your own karma, of things you've done in previous lives. It doesn't seem to be like that at all, as far as you can see, unless, as I say, you are a very convinced and believing Buddhist. I don't know whether people in this country could really adopt that attitude: it might be rather difficult. In the East they very often do, quite sincerely, but I don't know whether belief in karma is ingrained in us deep enough yet for us to be able to say, with real conviction, that our sufferings are the result of our own previous actions.

**Mike:** I find that outside the situation I can feel that way, but not when I am actually confronted by it, as I was at the Centre the other day with Paul. Then it was "No! No! All I could feel was this tremendous fear, and I wanted to get out. I just couldn't accept it then."

**S:** You couldn't say to yourself, "Well, here's just another instrument of my past karma. All right, let me expiate it!" [Laughter] Sometimes people can, but in the midst of the situation, obviously, it's always more difficult. One might even say that in the East, very often, they go to the other extreme. They tend to think everything is their past karma and do nothing about improving anything. But that certainly isn't the Buddhist view. It's more the Hindu view. The Untouchables, for instance, were told by the orthodox Hindus, "You're born as Untouchables because of your previous bad karma." Whack! Whack! "We'll whack you because that is the result of your previous bad karma." They were told this for centuries. When I used to talk about karma from a Buddhist point of view, among the ex-Untouchables, I had to be very careful what I said. Otherwise it would sound very much like what the Brahmins used to tell them: that you're poor, and you're downcast and untouchable, because of all your sins in previous lives. There's also the corollary: you shouldn't try to change your status. You should remain as an Untouchable and suffer that. In that way you will expiate your sins and you may be reborn in a better state in your next life. But in this life you must just suffer and expiate. This is what they were told. So you can see the sort of twist the doctrine of karma can be given and how it can be used to justify the social status quo.

**Gisela:** The mediaeval Church did this. Even though it's a different religion. This is exactly what they did.

**S:** Yes. There are some Buddhist texts where it actually says you are born high or low according to previous karma, but I think one should handle these very carefully.

**Gisela:** If that's not the Buddhist view, what is the Buddhist view on changing one's condition if one is in that sort of social situation - if one is an Untouchable, for instance?

**S:** The Buddhist would say that the particular state in which an individual finds himself may be due to karma or may not: not everything is due to karma, according to Buddhism. There's a classic example that is given. Suppose you fall ill. Is that due to previous karma? Traditional Buddhism says that it may be, and it points out that, according to the Abhidharma, there are five types of conditionality or - taking the term very loosely - of

causation operating in the universe at different levels or in different contexts. These five are: (1) *utu-niyama*, the physical inorganic type, or what we might call the [109] physico-chemical order of existence; (2) *bija-niyama*, which is the physical organic, or biological; (3) *citta-niyama*, which is mental or psychological; (4) *karma-niyama*, which of course is the level of karmic retribution, and (5) *dharmā-niyama*, which is the purely spiritual level. There's a good discussion of these in Mrs. Rhys Davids's book *Buddhism*, originally published in the Home University Library series. While I'm on the subject, and since this is a study retreat after all, let me just digress from the digression and say one or two words about Mrs. Rhys Davids. Has anyone ever read any of her books?

**Gotami:** You've recommended her very much.

**S:** They are remarkably good. I don't know why, but she's completely out of favour now: no one quotes her or refers to her. She was the wife of T. W. Rhys Davids. Like him she edited and translated many Pali texts and wrote many books. Some people thought that in her old age she just went a bit bonkers and they wouldn't take her interpretations seriously, but her work is very, very interesting. She really delved into Early Buddhism and tried to find out what the Buddha was trying to say and why. What were the circumstances? What was it all about? What did it really mean? With the help of her tremendous scholarship she really tried to bring it to life and to get to grips with it in, I think, a very genuine sort of way - but no one seems to have taken her work seriously. She produced dozens of books, almost, especially in her old age (she died in the '30s, I think). Some of her interpretations were admittedly a bit off-beat, but she was certainly the most imaginative and penetrating writer on Pali Buddhism that we've yet produced in the West, and well worth studying. I've been picking up secondhand copies of her books whenever I could. There are now five or six of them in the Order Library at Sarum House. If you are ever down there look into them. They are rather formidable. She's got a rather odd, heavily 'Anglo-Saxon' style. She tends to eschew words of Latin origin and use rather grotesque, or at least odd, Anglo-Saxon compounds, and her whole style is rather knotted and convulsed. But at her best she's very, very good indeed, and well worth reading. Her life in a way was rather sad. She had an only son who was killed during the First World War and that upset her very, very much. Then she became a Spiritualist. She tried to get in touch with her son, I don't know with what success, and according to some people this affected her interpretation of Buddhism. But we have to take her interpretation on its own merits. Sometimes she's very good indeed, especially her whole treatment of the idea of growth and becoming, and that what the Buddha was talking about was not just cessation, and the waning out of the unskilful, but growth and development in the skilful, in the good, right up to the point of Nirvāṇa, which was the culmination of the whole process. Thus from several points of view her work is very valuable indeed. I just mention this as a digression.

Now what was the digression from? Yes, the five *niyamas*. Buddhism would say that, supposing someone falls sick, it can be due to the operation of any one of these five kinds of causality or conditionality. For instance, there might be some purely chemical change in your body: you might have been exposed to a draught, or something of that sort, so you fall sick - that's *utu-niyama*; or you might have picked up a bug: again it's nothing to do with karma: you just happened to be exposed to one - that's *bija-niyama*; or it might be psychosomatic - that's *citta-niyama*; or it might be the result of previous karma - that's [110] *karma-niyama*; or it might be the result of certain spiritual experiences you were undergoing, the manifestations of which could be very much like the symptoms of illness - that's *dharmā-niyama*. There are all these possibilities, and only a Buddha can know whether, in any specific case, the illness is due to karma or not. In practical terms, if you apply all possible treatment and there is no reason why the sick person should not be cured, - if everything that is humanly possible according to the best available medical knowledge has been done, - then if there is still something resisting, as it were, you may conclude - leaving aside the possibility that your medical knowledge is not complete - that the illness is due to karma. If something resists all your efforts. This is the principle, and it can be applied in other situations as well. Suppose you are trying to do something, and everything goes wrong every time, again and again and again. Well, you can assume that there's some karmic factor at

work. This would be the Buddhist view. But if things go just a little bit wrong at the beginning, and you at once raise the cry, 'Oh it's karma!' then this is bad, this is wrong. You can only say it's karma if you've exhausted all the other possibilities, have dealt with them all, but are still not able to put that particular thing right or do that particular thing. There seems to be some irreducible, unknown, mysterious factor at work frustrating you. Well, it may be karma.

**Gisela:** Yes, but you would use whatever scientific knowledge you have?

**S:** Right. You don't assume it's karma. But in India they often do, among Hindus. 'Oh, he has fallen sick, it's his karma,' they say, 'We can't do anything about it. Don't interfere with his karma. Let him die.' But the Buddhist would say, 'Apply all your medical knowledge, but if you come to the end of that, and still you are being frustrated by some x factor, then it may be karma: very likely it is karma. Even so you can't be absolutely sure, because your medical knowledge is not absolute. Only in certain cases, where the situation is more straightforward, you can sometimes be reasonably sure that something like karma - or rather the results of karma - is getting in the way.

**Aśvajit:** It seems like a very deep and irreducible conditioning. Is there no way out of that?

**S:** Well again the Buddhist would say, 'You can neutralise karma. If you've done something negative, something bad, then you should generate some good karma - make some *punya* - as soon as possible.' Once this is understood, the spiritual guide, or whoever else is concerned or consulted, will say, 'Make merit, and perhaps that will help. Perhaps that will restore the balance [between good and bad karma] and remove the obstruction. So make offerings, do *pūjās*, meditate. All these produce positive karmic consequences even in this life.' That would be the traditional Buddhist attitude. That's why the average, sensible Buddhist, in a Buddhist country, will apply ordinary medical remedies, whether Eastern or Western, and if still there's no hope of cure they'll go to the monks and say, 'What do you think we should do?' The monks will usually say, 'Make some offerings.' That's usually the simplest way of making merit. Those concerned will then make the offerings as directed and hope that by this means they can neutralise the bad karma that is causing the illness by 'counterbalancing' it with good karma. [111]

**Gisela:** This would apply to, for instance, improving one's social conditions?

**S:** Oh yes, very much so. The Brahmin will say to the Untouchables, 'Your condition is just due to your karma.' But that's not the Buddhist view. There might be certain individuals among the Untouchables who, when you'd made all efforts, remained just as they were. In their case you might conclude that their being in that lowly condition was due to their past karma; but you wouldn't be justified in drawing the conclusion until you'd made all possible efforts to alleviate their condition.

**Subhuti:** I don't really understand how karma operates as a causal principle.

**S:** Well, we're using the word rather loosely. Strictly speaking, karma is only the cause: the original cause, the action, whether of body, speech, or mind. But we can also speak of karma in the looser sense meaning the cause and its effect. When we speak of the law of karma we mean that particular type of conditionality under which skilful action produces pleasant and unskilful action produces unpleasant consequences, whether in this life or over a series of lives.

**Subhuti:** In the case of somebody falling ill, and that being the effect of karma, what would be the causal link between the initial action and the effect?

**S:** One could say - and this is what is usually said - that by your original action you modify your consciousness in such a way that it becomes susceptible to that particular kind of happening - that is, to whatever experience corresponds to what you've actually done. A

complete set of correspondences has been worked out, some of them admittedly a bit fanciful. For instance, if you are constantly getting angry you will be reborn with an unpleasant countenance. This is the way in which the causal link between karma and the effect of karma is usually explained. In some cases, though, it isn't very easy to see exactly how the mechanism works, how it actually happens that a particular cause is followed by a particular effect. Therefore it is sometimes said that only a Buddha can fully understand the workings of karma; but one shouldn't invoke that too early and should make an honest attempt to understand on the basis of whatever evidence one has. I've heard, myself, some very odd stories of karma and rebirth - apparently well authenticated.

**Subhuti:** I was particularly puzzled by the application to an illness, because an illness is a physiological occurrence, and so presumably two forms of causation are in operation.

**S:** Well, it must all be through the mind in any case, because the body is not continuous from one life to another. If anything is continuous - using the word continuity in the Buddhist sense - then it's only mental. Therefore the usual explanation is that what you do modifies your consciousness and according to the way in which the consciousness is modified you tend to attract certain experiences to yourself. I think I can say I've seen this at work too. Some people are accident-prone. I knew one particular woman in Kalimpong for whom things always went wrong in a most extraordinary way. It wasn't that she had an unconscious self-destructive tendency, though that does sometimes happen. It was simply that, despite all her precautions, in the case of that unfortunate woman things always went wrong, and I saw this again and [112] again. There really did seem to be a karmic factor at work. For instance, she'd arrive home late at night and find that her key had gone: she'd definitely put it in her purse, but it had disappeared. Even when she did somehow manage to get in she'd find that the cat had upset something and that this had fallen over and smashed something valuable. And it would go on like this day after day, week after week. It really was extraordinary. Everything going wrong, as though there was a curse on her. It was very strange indeed. I've seen other examples of this kind of thing too, and one can only wonder, 'Well, maybe it's karma.' There seems to be no other explanation. It was as though the person was attracting that kind of experience. The woman I knew in Kalimpong certainly had that sort of temperament. You could well believe that, in a previous existence, she had given a lot of trouble to other people, and was now being troubled herself: she had rather a stormy kind of temperament. But even so, I must confess I don't myself quite see how it happens, how the mind as it were attracts experience, though I can certainly see the thing itself happening with certain people, who seem to draw experiences according to their own nature, which presumably has been determined by all the things you've thought and said and done in this life and, we assume, in previous lives. You tend to be a sort of magnet, drawing to yourself karmically appropriate experiences.

As I've indicated before, there's a lot of work still to be done on this particular topic, i.e. of karma and rebirth. In some ways it's the most unsatisfactory aspect of Buddhist teaching, from a Western point of view. Of course in the East karma and rebirth are just taken for granted; they're not discussed, which is all right if you really do believe that the Buddha is all-knowing and that He taught karma and rebirth out of that all-knowledge. In that case you just accept it, and that's that. But for us that's rather difficult. I think a lot of further investigation needs to be done. It [i.e. karma and rebirth] is connected with all sorts of other questions, like the nature of consciousness, the relationship between mind and body, and time. There is also the whole question of the assessment and evaluation - not to say collection - of the empirical or alleged empirical evidence for rebirth itself. Perhaps, in the Order, we ought to start collecting all the books which have been published dealing with cases of alleged reincarnation and so on, because sooner or later some of us will have to get down to this and really try and study and sort it all out and put it in a satisfactory form. As I've said, this seems to be the least satisfactory aspect of Buddhist teaching in a way. It's internally consistent, what Buddhism has to say about karma and rebirth, and it's consistent with the rest of the teaching, but for the rather empirically minded Westerner it all seems to hang rather in mid air.

**Gotami:** But why bother about it?

**S:** As a skilful means. I never bothered in India. I just accepted the Buddhist teaching. I found it quite convincing. But here we will be asked about karma and rebirth and will have to explain it, perhaps, in a closer and more logical way.

**Gotami:** But it's not necessary to prove rebirth, or not prove it to work for Enlightenment.

**S:** That's quite true. [113]

**Subhuti:** Why it bothers me is that it implies a conception of the universe which I just can't get inside. I don't understand it at all. First of all it questions the basis of my own conception, which is not a bad thing, but it seems that it's within the context of that conception that I must work out my Enlightenment if you like. Unless I can understand that, I can't really understand what I'm doing, or who I am, or ....

**Gotami:** (*Interrupting.*) So it's sort of like your koan?

**Subhuti:** It's one of them!

**S:** It's rather interesting, in a way. I remember Christmas Humphreys saying that when he started the Buddhist Society the teaching of karma and rebirth, which he was personally very keen on, was what really brought people in, but he commented - and I had this conversation with him about eight or nine years ago - that the people who now came along were not in the least interested in karma and rebirth and didn't want to hear about it. There had been quite a big change within 30 years. I can't say that I've often been asked about karma and rebirth, but sometimes some people are very interested in this and want to know what Buddhism really has to say about it. We can tell them what Buddhism has to say, but if they ask, 'Well, what is the proof?' that is very difficult to say. We can of course say that the traditional Buddhist attitude is that the Buddha was Enlightened, and that the Buddha looked out over the whole of existence with His Enlightened mind and saw what was happening, including how beings are born and reborn, and die and are born yet again, according to karma. He saw it all with His divine eye. The Buddhist is prepared to accept this, but you can't offer this as an argument to the non-Buddhist. The non-Buddhist will usually say, 'Ah well, it's just the same as Christianity! It just comes down to faith. In the same way that Christians believe in God, Buddhists believe in karma and rebirth.'

**Aśvajit:** There is, of course, the Tibetan tradition of 'proving' reincarnations, where they take a small child and show him quite a large number of objects, and he selects - apparently from a quite large selection - what were his objects in his previous life.

**S:** This is part of the empirical evidence, which has not yet, I think, been properly collated and sorted out. Maybe not enough cases have been investigated, so perhaps at least one or two people within the Order should concern themselves with this material, even perhaps make a special study of it, and write an essay and report back in what sort of state that evidence is, and whether it seems very convincing. I must say that this is a field which I've not myself explored, because I've never experienced much difficulty about karma and rebirth, or even bothered about it particularly. Personally, I don't think in terms of future lives practically speaking: I think in terms of this life; but I do accept karma and rebirth, though it's somewhat of a side issue for me practically and personally. I'm not consciously planning for my next life. I'm planning for this life - which as I said, is also the Zen attitude. Enlightenment is to be attained here and now. Yes, there is a future life if you don't happen to gain Enlightenment: I believe that. I can't say that I feel personally, or have ever felt, that the issue of karma and rebirth is for me a very urgent one. I accept the traditional Buddhist teaching, but for practical purposes I base myself on the path here and now in this life.

**Gotami:** This sort of attitude does come out, hearing people say, [114] 'Well, I was born that way and I can't do anything about it, so I'm not going to do anything about it.'



**S:** What can be born can be deborn as well as reborn .... By the way, has this point arisen in the classes while I've been away? Has anyone asked awkward questions about karma and rebirth, or is it not an issue?

**Vajradaka:** I think that there's a tendency [to ask about karma]. It's on people's minds. But when that happened I wasn't at all sure [what to say]. I sort of spluttered, 'Er ... ah ... What was that?' [Laughter]

**S:** I must confess that some people within the 'Friends' even suggested once that I was tending to avoid the subject of karma and rebirth, which is why I gave that lecture on the subject - to have it there, so that I could point to it if necessary. Perhaps I did in a way avoid the subject. Not that I'm unsure in my own mind about it; but I realised that what I had to say - which was quite satisfactory for me - might be very unsatisfactory for other people. And it isn't what we base our spiritual lives on anyway. There has even been some doubt as to whether the Buddha Himself taught karma and rebirth in the fully developed later sense. There's one scholar at least who thinks that all the references to karma and rebirth are later additions (I won't go as far as that!), that's the editor and translator of *The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha*, Ivor Jennings.

p.52                      A proper attitude of tolerance is more easily attained if one understands the pattern of causation which creates sorrow. All beings are meshed in an enormous network of causation, each cause being related to other causes without end; and the result of this is that responsibility and blame may not be accurately pinpointed. One ought not to be irritated, that is, one's emotions ought not to be involved, in a situation of mere physical discomfort. No one can be angry at the parts or at the organs of the body because of their malfunctioning, since everyone understands that the malfunctioning is blindly determined by causes. Sentient beings are comparable to the organs of the body in this respect, for they, too, become the causes of further disturbance.

**S:** this again is in a way based on the 'philosophy' of karma, and it's convincing if you can accept that philosophy. The idea is that you should see all beings as interconnected, or even interrelated, almost like the different limbs of an organism. You don't get angry with your own limbs when they start functioning wrongly or fall sick. In the same way you shouldn't get angry with those other limbs which are the beings connected with you - or belonging to the total organism to which you also belong - when they happen to cause you some inconvenience. See them as all interconnected, all parts of one another, and you should no more get angry with them than you get angry with your own stomach when it starts aching. You could say, 'I'm angry with my stomach. It's giving me a lot of trouble,' but that would be unreasonable. In the same way you say, 'It's unreasonable for me to be angry with old So-and-so, just because he's giving me a lot of trouble. [115] He's just like my stomach - just another organ in the same great big body.' If you believe in the fact of interconnectedness, this becomes a very reasonable and convincing reflection.

P.52                      With a philosophy which interprets existence as an illusion of universal causation, it will be seen that the Bodhisattva's ideal of total compassion for all beings is doubly justified. On the one hand, there is nothing to excuse, because cause and effect are illusory in character and there is no relation or connection between them. And yet, on the other hand, on a lower level of consideration, all beings are to be excused because they are immersed in the terrible mesh of

interrelated causality which is the illusionary world of everyday perception in which all things are relative in character to all other things. Anger or any emotional reaction is foolish, since nothing exists but illusion (*māyā*). How absurd to be angry with beings who are to be compared only to magical creations.

**S:** We mustn't forget that Śāntideva's purpose here is all the time practical. He's not just philosophising. He's trying to provide us - within the context of his own world view, which is the traditional Buddhist world view - with arguments for not getting angry, so that when you do start feeling angry you can say to yourself, 'I shouldn't be feeling angry, because of such-and-such.' But the effectiveness of the remedy depends on how convincing you find the arguments, and how valid you find the general philosophical framework within which those arguments have their place and meaning. Śāntideva's arguments may not be very convincing for us. For us, possibly, the more psychological arguments like 'When you indulge in anger, you only upset yourself' will be sufficient. That's quite convincing and quite obvious. It doesn't even need to be proved. We may find it rather difficult to believe that creatures are, in fact, a magical illusion, so that when you get angry with them you are just getting angry with a magical illusion, which of course is ridiculous. Do we really believe they are magical illusions, or is it even intellectually acceptable to us? If it isn't, if we can't believe that, then this argument loses its force for us.

**Vajradaka:** But isn't it a method to help us see in the magical illusion?

**S:** Certainly. But the efficacy of the method here depends upon your ability to accept that particular philosophical position which is the starting point of the whole argument. If you can't, then the argument doesn't mean much to you; it doesn't convince you. For instance, suppose you say, 'You mustn't be angry, you mustn't commit actions based on anger, because if you do you'll be reborn in an unhappy state.' If you can't accept rebirth, well, the argument falls to the ground for you. Or suppose someone says, 'You mustn't get angry because God has prohibited that. He'll be displeased with you.' If you don't believe in God the argument is not convincing. It's the same if you don't accept the general Buddhist world view, the traditional intellectual framework. Some of Śāntideva's arguments for not being angry will not strike you as being very convincing. So I think that if we are dealing with people who haven't yet come to accept Buddhist teaching on these matters, we should be rather careful about invoking [116] those arguments which are based on such an acceptance. That would be a lack of skilful means. It's best just to stick to simply psychological facts. The arguments are all extras, in a way, additional reinforcements, because, after all, anger needs quite a bit of handling. But I think most people would find it sufficiently convincing to be told, 'When you get angry, whom do you afflict? You're afflicting yourself - if anything, worse than others. Why be angry? Just in your own self-interest, you're better off without it, calmer, more peaceful. So why be angry?' I think this is quite enough, really, for most people anyway. But Śāntideva also introduces these various additional arguments derived from general Buddhist philosophy and the general Buddhist world view. So they are an additional reinforcement if one accepts that world view.

p.53                      If they destroy themselves because of passion, how can they be expected to spare others?

**S:** That's quite a point! It's not surprising that people do harm to others. Look-at the harm they do to themselves!

p.53                      If it is the nature of the evildoer to do evil, says Śāntideva, it is no more appropriate to be angry with him than to be angry with fire because it burns; or if the evildoer is good and beautiful by nature, and his evil is accidental or exterior to himself, anger is still inappropriate in exactly the same way that it would be

inappropriate against air, because the air might happen to be filled with irritating smoke or acrid mist.

**S:** If the person who is harming you just can't help it, why be angry? He can't help it! But if he can help it and it's something accidental that he just happens to be doing, - if it isn't really him, - again, why be angry? Of course when people really do feel angry these arguments don't help much: if anything, they just irritate them. But afterwards they can reflect on them and find them more convincing.

P.53                      Such is the power of understanding which accounts for the continual happiness enjoyed by the Bodhisattva.

**S:** Śāntideva is of course concerned just with the purely practical issue of helping the Bodhisattva to maintain his own peace and equanimity and stability of mind. And all the arguments that he's produced can help to some degree - in--the case, that is, of the Bodhisattva, who of course does accept the overall Buddhist philosophy of life.

P.53                      It is only karmic justice, after all, that the evildoer should suffer evil; no tears are in order.

**S:** Yes. Where, of course, it is the result of karma. As I mentioned a little earlier, one has to be quite sure of that, especially when other people's suffering is concerned.

P.53                      Whatever happens, one deserves it; and if he deserves it, it is going to happen. [117]

**S:** This of course must be said with that all-important proviso: if one deserves it. Not everything that happens to you, according to Buddhism, is in fact a result of your karma - not of your individual karma, anyway.

pp.53-54              Another consequence of understanding the origin of sorrow is the development of a humble feeling towards one's body and towards one's self. The enemy's sword and one's body are equated as a double means of making sorrow, both for one's self and for others....If this body is disturbed, it is not the agent of disturbance, but one's karma, which is to be held responsible.

**S:** These are further reflections that one might find convincing or not according to one's personal temperament and inclination. Even though a particular experience of suffering may not be the direct result of karma it can be considered as, in a way, an indirect result, because you experience the painful sensation through the body, and you have certainly taken the body as a result of karmas committed in the past. So indirectly, at least, karma is involved. You should therefore reflect, "Someone has struck me, but what has he struck? The body, with which I'm identifying myself. But how have I got this physical body? Because the karmas I've committed in the past are of a type which eventuate in the acquisition of a physical body. I have become embodied on this particular level of existence due to my overall karma in the past. Because I have got a body, I am susceptible to suffering through that body; so it's my own fault. If I hadn't been born as a result of karma - and rebirth is due to karma - then I would not have had a body and there would have been no question of anyone beating my body. My sufferings really are my own fault, after all." For one who believes quite firmly in karma and rebirth, this is a quite convincing argument.

**Aśvajit:** The way that I experience my body is that it sometimes seems to exist very solidly and painfully and at other times not at all. [*Laughter*]

**S:** Thereís a great deal of truth in this. Often oneís friends give one far too easy a time and itís only the enemies who bring out the tougher streaks in oneís character.

p.55                      Śāntideva...will have us be proud of our enemies and make good use of our enemies and make good use of their injuries. [119] They are, in effect, good to the one whom they injure, because they give him the chance to practice patience, while, at the same time, they send themselves to an evil destiny.

**S:** Itís a bit like St. Paul, who is rather unpleasant in the same sort of way when he says forgive your enemy, because in this way youíll be heaping coals of fire upon his head. Śāntideva doesnít, of course, mean what he says to be taken in that sort of way, but it is true that people who are against you can sometimes help keep you up to scratch. I know-this from personal experience! For instance, one develops a great deal of resourcefulness if people are against you and trying to harm you. In this way they are indirectly keeping you up to scratch, which of course is not what they intend to do, yet this is what happens very often. Provided their enmity doesnít go beyond a certain point, though probably Śāntideva wouldnít add that qualification - itís not too bad. At least youíre kept from going to sleep and from being too sluggish. As I said, friends are often too indulgent, and will let you off too easily, whereas enemies arenít quite like that.

**Aśvajit:** Iím not entirely sure about that, actually...I think friends can be very good critics of oneís behaviour.

**Gotami:** If youíve got a really good enemy, theyíll really sort of.... [*Laughter*]

**Aśvajit:** If they are really good enemies, they are not an enemy.

**Mary:** Thereís an Irish story, isnít there?...About two great friends who were taught by the same teacher to fight, and then later in their lives found themselves on opposite sides and had to fight to the death....They didnít recognise one another until too late.

**S:** There are several stories of father and son like that, like Sohrab and Rustum in the *Shah Namah* and Finn and Cuchulain in Irish mythology. But of course, this again presupposes that your enemy is not just some mean, despicable, carping person, but a really capable person who, for some reason or other, has really got it in for you - perhaps quite justifiably. One could even say that a real enemy whoís out to harm you can do more for you than even a guru, because a guru may put you really through it and make you suffer, but you know all the time - or at least you try to tell yourself [*Laughter*] - that itís for your own good. You know that he doesnít really mean to hurt you, so to be [truly patient under that provocation is much more difficult because it is not really felt as a provocation]. Even a guru canít do that for you [i.e. canít make you practise patience]. For this reason enemies are really valuable. Itís quite a line of thought of Śāntidevaís - and of Nietzscheís, who said one should choose oneís enemies with care - that an enemy is a quite positive and valuable element in life, and that you very rarely get on without a few good enemies to spur you on and keep you stirred up and prevent you from stagnating. In a way, as for instance in Goetheís *Faust*, this is the function of the Devil. Mephistopheles is to keep prodding Everyman [i.e.] Faust, and stirring him up, and tempting him, and all that sort of thing, because otherwise heíd just stagnate. Thatís the Devilís function in the universe: not to give man an easy time. God and the angels are too indulgent; but not the Devil. Thatís why he is very often called the Enemy: the Enemy of Mankind. And very useful he is too. [120]

p.55                      The poor enemy is essentially a helpless creature: He cannot injure the mind, because he cannot touch it; and the body, which he can touch, is only a thing which does not matter.

**S:** Thatís quite a neat, logical little thought which really disposes of everything! *[Laughter]*

p.56

If the Buddha had not been opposed by Devadatta [in previous lives], he might not have developed the character which made possible his Enlightenment.

**S:** Iíve often thought that if it had not been for the ill-will of a certain person I wouldnít have started the ãFriendsí. *[Laughter]* He really went all out to finish me off and to stop me coming back to England in 1967 as I had promised. But of course I came back. I felt quite amazed when I heard what was happening and said, ãThis means we shall have to have a new Buddhist movementí...And thatís how it all started. Of course it wasnít only that person, it was two or three others as well; but he was the one whose antagonism was to be least expected. But there it was. Otherwise I might still have been at the Hampstead Vihāra, giving sermons every Sunday afternoon!

**Gotami:** I doubt it! *[Laughter]*

**S:** So do I, actually! *[Laughter]* But that person gave me an excuse, you see. Had I said, ãIím not happy with the way things are at the Hampstead Vihāra, and at the Buddhist Society, letís start a new movement,í even my friends, I think, would not have supported me. They would have said, ãWhy divide? Why have a separate movement? Why have another group? Thatís not good. Letís try to include the old one.í But I was convinced that the old one could not be included, and that what Buddhism in this country needed was a completely new start, and the fact that certain people, especially the one Iíve mentioned, tried to stop me coming back gave me the opportunity I wanted. I was on my own. I had the loyal support of a few people, so we just started up the ãFriendsí. That was that! Weíve never looked back since. So I sometimes reflect on how well it all turned out, - how very, very much for the best, - and Iím very glad that with such a little trouble - just a few hot words, which I wasnít even there to hear - we could get started. Everything happened in my absence, anyhow. I was completely peaceful and undisturbed. *[Laughter]* While they were all fighting and shouting at one another in the Hampstead Buddhist Vihāra, I didnít even hear a murmur. I was in India sitting and writing letters saying, ãIím coming back, anyway. When I come back we shall see what happens.í What happened, of course, was that soon after my arrival we started up the ãFriendsí - which I think was quite a traumatic experience for the person I mentioned, who was not accustomed to having his authority flouted in this way. Still, I feel quite thankful to him now. I think he did very well, you know, and I think we ought to celebrate his birthday *[Laughter]* in sincere thanksgiving, because if it hadnít been for his action there probably wouldnít have been an FWBO - not at that particular psychological moment, which seems to have been the right one. Perhaps one day I ought to write him a ãthank youí letter out of sheer gratitude. Because quite literally, without any exaggeration, we do owe a lot to him. [121]

p.56

The enemy is only the opportunity for the exercise of virtue.

**S:** Often you say, ãHow can I practise patience? Heís making me impatient.í But no! Heís giving you the opportunity of practising patience. He isnít making you impatient. He isnít making you angry. Heís giving you the opportunity of practising love. If someone troubles you, to say that heís preventing you from practising patience and love is just like having a beggar standing in front of you and saying that he is preventing you from giving alms. How illogical we are!

p.156

A genuine enemy, one filled with aggressive hatred and malicious hostility, a bearer of poison who honestly seeks to do injury without subterfuge or excuse, a serpent who acts without feeling of mercy, is like a rich treasure that one discovers by accident.

**S:** You must admit that a real enemy of this sort is very difficult to find. Very few people go to this extreme. I must say quite frankly that I've met three or four of them in the course of my own life - not including the person who tried to stop me coming back to England. His enmity was comparatively mild and short-lived, and perhaps even based on a misunderstanding. He certainly didn't go all out to injure me in the real sense. Perhaps he thought he did, but I think I was much tougher than he thought I was, so I survived without any difficulty at all. But I've known such people in India. In Kalimpong there were two or three who really did go all out to destroy me. They didn't succeed in doing very much, but people like that are quite rare, and if one never meets even a single one in the course of one's life then one really is unlucky. Having a person like that around who's really trying to hurt you and injure you all the time makes you really alert, it makes you very resourceful, and I'm afraid I must also say it makes you cunning. You develop a sort of sixth sense for danger, just like the Zen master or Karate teacher going through a door. He knows there's somebody behind that door waiting with a sword: he senses it. You do develop that sort of sense when people are really against you and trying to do things that will harm you. A little bell rings. You think, "That's funny! Something odd is going on - I know it." I had a friend in Kalimpong. She was a very good friend of mine, but she was a really good enemy for certain other people, and she had an extraordinary sixth sense. Her husband was a politician - he's now the leading politician in Sikkim - and sometimes someone would come to see her in connection with something or other, and she would say to me afterwards, "Bhante, I don't trust that man. There's something wrong; I don't know what it is. Everything seems all right, but I don't trust him." And she'd warn her husband. Her husband is a very open, friendly, frank person, though pretty shrewd, and he'd say, "Don't talk nonsense. I know that person. I know his father. There's nothing wrong." But she always turned out to be right - in every single case. Strange to relate, this woman had once met the person who, subsequently, tried to stop me returning to England. When she knew that I was coming to England in '64, she was very pleased, and hoped my work would be successful. But when I said goodbye to her she said, "Bhante, there's one thing I want to tell you. I've met him only once, but one thing I beg of you, don't trust that man. I don't know why it is, but I've [122] got this strong feeling that you should not trust him." But I did trust him, and of course I suffered: but never mind: it was all in a good cause in the long run. This friend of mine had a very difficult and stormy life in politics and journalism, and perhaps this is why she had this sort of intuition - this sixth sense for the possibility of any kind of treachery or enmity. I think I've got a bit of it myself now, but the way things are going at present, and the sort of people I'm in contact with, there doesn't seem much occasion to exercise it. But who knows? In the future it might be useful.

P.57

He [the enemy] teaches us to accept the inevitable; it is almost as if he were  
 'authorised' by the Buddha (*Buddhadhiṣṭhāna*)  
 to do a few little things to us (steal, lie, murder,  
 cheat, and other trivia) as lessons which help us  
 to face the truth of our misery.

**S:** I would most certainly say this was true in my case because I think I started life even more innocent and unsuspecting than most people. It was a genuine surprise to me, in my earlier days, that people were unpleasant or could want to harm you. Probably this was because I had a quite happy early life, so that I tended to think that the world was a pleasant, happy place where everybody was friendly and everything was nice and easy and went smoothly. I was genuinely surprised when I started finding it wasn't like that at all, as when certain people started misbehaving or being difficult, though it wasn't until I was in my twenties that I came across any glaring examples of this. Even in the army I had a quiet time, comparatively speaking. But when I did come across them I started thinking that maybe life wasn't quite so simple and straightforward and uncomplicated and pleasant as I had supposed. My natural tendency was to take it for granted that everything was pleasant and happy and amiable, and that people were always kind and helpful. I was only gradually disillusioned. The process of disillusionment went on for quite a number of years, and then I realised that life wasn't as I had thought it was originally.

...besides valuing enemies for the injury that they do, one should take pleasure in every good quality which he can find in them.

**Mike:** Do I misunderstand, or is Śāntideva suggesting that one just looks for the positive aspect of even the most dire enemy?

**S:** Yes. He is behaving as an enemy. He is trying to harm you. But you should appreciate that and realise that it does you good. At the same time, one must be objective. Someone who is an enemy may have many other good qualities too. You shouldn't just see him as your enemy. In other relationships of life he may be a very worthy person. So you should see these other good qualities in the enemy. After all, why not appreciate your enemy? If you're a Bodhisattva you want everybody to gain Enlightenment, and if even your enemy is cultivating good qualities - apart from his enmity for you! - and getting on well, you should be happy, because presumably in principle you are desiring that he should gain Enlightenment and be highly honoured by everybody. Why, then, should you look down upon him in any way or be pleased if anything untoward happens to him? That would be against your Bodhisattva Vow.

**Mike:** That isn't quite what I meant actually. What Śāntideva says seems to suggest, to me, that you should see the positive side and only the positive side of his actions.

**S:** It's not quite like that. It's not as though there really is a negative side. Śāntideva is saying that if you look at it rightly the whole situation is in fact positive: there isn't a negative side. If there's any negative side, it's only in your own mind. That's the only negative side you have to concern yourself with. Everything else is positive so far as you are concerned, including the so-called enmity of that person, because it's helping you. All your sufferings are positive: they are helping you. The only negative thing that you have to deal with is your own foolish mind. Everything else is helpful. The whole universe, all your friends and enemies, are helping you, so everything is positive. It's more than looking on the positive side; it's seeing that in fact there isn't a negative side - not so far as outside things are concerned. Everything is conspiring to help you, but you are resisting that. People are hitting you over the head, helping you to become patient! *[Laughter]* Foolish person, you insist on being angry, even though it's going to harm you! How ridiculous! He's trying to help you, and you're not allowing him to help you! This is Śāntideva's attitude. People are depriving you of food and drink, but you're not grateful, even though they are doing you such a great deal of good. *[Laughter]* They rob you, taking away from you money that you'd only spend on worthless trash *[Laughter]*, and you're angry with them! All these good deeds are being done to you and you misunderstand and think it's all bad, and you get angry and upset, just dragging yourself down. This is how he looks upon it. It seems quite reasonable and logical.

**Gisela:** I find really that that has an energising effect on me. It's much more fun if there's an enemy around! *[Laughter]* It's so boring if everybody's good and lovely!

**S:** It's like a bout of karate. It's much more interesting if the other chap is a little better than you. Then you really have to keep alert. But if it's just a beginner, who couldn't even push you over, what fun is there?

In the *Lotus Sūtra* a fascinating account may be found of a certain Bodhisattva who was named Sadaparibhuta....His particular merit was that he respected everyone. He spent his life wandering about the earth, approaching all kinds of people - whether he knew them or not - and telling them, 'I do not condemn you.'  
*[Laughter]*

**S:** I don't think he was a very good psychologist!

All were irritated and annoyed to the extreme by this procedure, and frequently people retaliated with abuse and insults, but he continued unperturbed.

**S:** One could say that if one tries to be really positive on every [124] occasion, this will really upset some people, because they are often looking for an opportunity to be negative. If you don't give them that they become more negative than ever. Maybe sometimes, as a little skilful means, you should, perhaps, very cautiously, just let them be negative, or even give them an opportunity of being negative. It's a bit too much for weak human nature if someone is always good and nice and kind and you never get an opportunity, never get an excuse, to lose your temper with them. It's very, very frustrating! You might even end up hating them.

**Subhuti:** You can give them an opportunity to be positively negative - to have a little scrap which has got a sort of warmth to it.

**S:** Any general comments on this section of the Guide? It all seems pretty clear to me. In fact, this teaching on patience is one of the most original parts of Śāntideva's whole work and, I think, quite attractive. Even existential, in a way.

**Gotami:** It's an extremely difficult attitude to cultivate.

**S:** Yes, it's quite difficult; one must confess that....But practising patience, in Śāntideva's sense, is not just looking on the bright side of things. It means seeing that what seems to be a negative situation is actually a positive situation. Such a situation challenges you. It's an opportunity.

**Gisela:** It's an opportunity for growth, really. If everything is kind of peaceful and happy there's less growth, in a sense.

**S:** It seems like that, unfortunately, and therefore the Buddha says, in the sequence of the 12 positive *nidanās*, that dependent upon suffering (*dukkha*) arises faith (*saddhā*). It's some unpleasant, negative experience that brings out from you that more positive and spiritual response that is what we call faith, that leads you in the right direction. It's just the same in other ways. If you're taking a class, for instance, it's the tough questions that are interesting and helpful to you, not the easy, innocuous ones that you know the answer to already, and which are asked in a very inoffensive sort of way. It's the challenging, even slightly rude, questions that stimulate you.

**Gotami:** If people are asking those sort of questions it means, usually, that they really want to know.

**S:** Very often, yes. On the other hand, beneath apparent submissiveness and friendliness you can sometimes detect an undercurrent of hostility that isn't being allowed to come out into the open, and that also is a positive kind of situation, especially for the person who has got that feeling underneath and is not really letting it out.

**Aśvajit:** It's very difficult to answer a question effectively in such a case.

**S:** Yes, it is. Because in a way you have to be the same. You might detect that current, or undercurrent, of hostility and be a bit annoyed yourself, but because the person is speaking in an apparently mild and submissive way you are forced to reply in the same sort of way, - or that's how you feel, perhaps, - whereas you don't really feel like [125] replying in that kind of way at all, because you feel a bit annoyed. Sometimes in the past, maybe two or three years ago, when discussions have become a bit dull, it's been, perhaps, when people have felt that they ought to be very sweet, asking questions in a nice, gentle, friendly way, when they've not really been feeling like that at all. You can sometimes see it in their faces. They're not conscious of it, but they look a bit grumpy and fed up. They'd like to be a bit angry, or a bit



aggressive, but they feel it's inappropriate and all that sort of thing and so the whole situation goes rather dull.

**Gotami:** And you're not giving them anything to disagree with, because what you are saying is so clear and logical they can't.

**S:** Yes, and they're feeling more and more annoyed because of that perhaps.

**Vajradaka:** A friend who came to the ÆFriendsí recently noticed immediately. He said that there wasn't this kind of lovely atmosphere. It was very much business.

**S:** I must say this is a recent development, comparatively. There was a lot of lovey-dovey cover-up going on some time ago.

**Gisela:** There still is. I sometimes get the feeling that one mustn't disagree - I mean honestly disagree - if one has a different view, one mustn't attack, because that's regarded as not being pleasant. One has to be all sort of nice.

**S:** That might be true of the ÆFriendsí as a whole but -

**Vajradaka:** (*Interrupting*) I don't think that's true of the people who are more involved, you know, Order members and old type Friends. I think that there are a few of them, but I think that on the whole most people now are not frightened of allowing this kind of sharp exchange.

**S:** I had a talk, by the-way, yesterday with N----. It was quite interesting, inasmuch as this is the first of the new lot I've seen. As a matter of fact, he asked me, "Do you often see people like me?" I said, "You're the first new person I've seen for a whole year. I've been seeing only close personal friends and Order members, and even then not very often." Naturally, I didn't tell him what my impressions were, but seeing him was quite interesting. There was a certain sharpness, even perkiness, about him. He wasn't afraid to ask questions, and he was quite friendly, but at the same time that sharpness was there too, and that was very good. There was certainly no veneer of pseudo-Buddhist niceness. That wasn't there at all. If he's representative to any degree, that's very good.

**Mike:** I think he seems to have got involved at a much quicker rate than the average person that comes along.

**S:** Well, that's been happening all the time. You got involved at a quicker rate than others who'd been coming along before, so did Vajradaka. But right at the beginning it was much slower, wasn't it? Very much slower. It's quickening up all the time. I'm just wondering where it's going to end. [*Laughter*] You'll have people being ordained the day after they've been on their first weekend retreat - that's the way it's going at the moment. I almost feel as though I was running [126] along behind trying to catch up, trying to keep abreast of current developments, trying to stem the tide of ordinations and calling out, "Wait a minute, wait a minute! I'm not quite ready for you!" This is a bit how it's becoming at the moment, which is very good, and very different from before. Well, growth is growth. Things get better as time goes on, otherwise, there's no growth. The fact that there is growth means that things weren't so good earlier on - or perhaps one can't even say, "Not so good." Without that, this wouldn't have been.

[127]

**THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE**  
(Text)

## THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

## The Text

p.173                      2                      ...no austerity is equal to patience (*kṣānti*).

**S:** The *Dhammapada* says this in different words: *khanti paramam tapo titikkhā* - ěPatience and forbearance is the highest asceticism.Ě Itís as though the Buddha is saying, ěIf you want to lead an ascetic life, all right. Engage in ascetic practices; give yourself a tough time: thatís very good. But donít forget that ordinary, everyday life provides you with the same opportunities. Just practise patience when things go wrong - thatís the best, thatís the highest asceticism. You donít need to devise special forms of asceticism for yourself. The whole process of living provides you with opportunities for practising asceticism in a natural way, and thatís the best form of asceticism.

p.174            10    In this way, if there is a remedy, what then is unhappiness? If there is no remedy, what then is unhappiness?

**S:** If there is a remedy for unhappiness, why worry about being unhappy? If thereís no remedy, again, why worry? Youíll just have to bear it! *[Laughter]* Thereís nothing to worry about, because you know exactly where you stand.

p.174      14      There is nothing whatever which is difficult after repetition.

**S:** It's really amazing what you can just get used to. I sometimes quote a Tibetan proverb, which says, "You can make yourself comfortable even in hell, if you know the right way to go about it." Human nature is highly resilient, even under very difficult circumstances. You can get used to doing without certain things. Take smoking, for instance. At first you might think it really difficult, even impossible, to give up, and you might suffer for two or three weeks; but strange to say, after a while you just don't notice it, and you're really surprised, perhaps, that you can get on without that particular thing. One can apply this in all sorts of ways, and at many different levels. After a while it becomes easy, it becomes part of your life and you no longer notice that a particular thing is missing or that you are doing something extra. You just create another pattern and get used to it. One can use this principle, and work with it. In this way one can change oneself little by little; it isn't really so difficult.

p.174      One is not to be made tender by cold and heat, rain and wind, travels and disease, imprisonments and beatings; otherwise, pain will be increased.

**Vajradaka:** I don't understand that.

**S:** You shouldn't over-react and become very tender and sensitive when you have to endure extremes of cold and heat, and wind and rain, and so on, - you shouldn't shrink back from the experience, - because that will only make things worse. If you endure it boldly and bravely, then it's easier. Śāntideva goes on to give an example.[128]

p.174      17      Some fight all the more when they see their own  
blood; but some, when they have seen only the blood  
of others, become faint.

18 This has come from the strength or the weakness of the mind (*citta*). Therefore, one ought to be invincible to overcome pain.

**S:** Some people are stimulated by opposition. 'Oh, so they think they can stop me doing it? All right, we'll see!' That is their attitude. In fact, the more opposition such people encounter the more determined they become, whereas others will give up if they encounter even a little opposition.

p.175                      25      Likewise, offences and sins of various types, all arise from the power of causation (*pratyaya*). Independence is not known.

**Gotami:** What does that mean, 'Independence is not known'?

**S:** There is no such thing as independence so far as offences and sins are concerned, because they arise in dependence on conditions. The translation is not very idiomatic. I would have translated, 'There is no such thing as independence.'

p.175                      27      The primary matter (*pradhāna*) which is so desired, and the self (*ātman*) which is imagined, are not produced by thinking 'I become'.

**S:** *Pradhāna* and *ātman*, or *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*, are the two main principles of the Sāṃkhya system of Hindu philosophy.

p.175                      29      And if the Absolute (*ātman*) is like the sky, eternal and unconscious, it is clearly inactive. If it is in a state of non attachment among causes (*pratyaya*), how can the changeless act?

**S:** Here Śāntideva is objecting, it seems, to the Vedānta philosophy.

p.175                      30      In regard to the Ātman, what does it do in the time of action which connects it to action? When there is a relationship based on the notion that the Ātman acts, where is the connection? How can there be a relationship between the two?

**S:** These objections all relate to various arguments put forward by the Vedānta system of philosophy - arguments which have to be understood, perhaps, from other sources. Śāntideva concludes that the whole idea of the Ātman being present and somehow originating things without itself acting is fallacious. In the following verse he therefore comes back to his own position, 'Thus all is subject to a cause.'

p.176                      33      In this way, when one has seen either friend or foe behaving improperly and has understood that there is such and such a cause for this, he will remain happy.

**S:** In the simpler and more familiar words of the French proverb, 'To understand all is to forgive all.' Suppose someone is very upset, [129] or behaving unreasonably and outrageously. If you can see why they are behaving like that, - you can't feel so angry with them. This is all that Śāntideva is really getting at.

p.177                      43      His sword and my body are the double means of making sorrow. The sword is seized by him. the body by me: Against which is one angry?

**S:** Suppose someone attacked you with a sword. It isn't just him attacking you. Śāntideva says, 'He's taken up the sword, yes, but you've taken up the body. It is these two things, coming together, that produce sorrow and suffering. He produces one, you produce the other.'

Heís no more to blame than you are, you are no more to blame than he is. Why be angry just with him?í

p.177            44     It is a boil, shaped like a body, unable to bear being touched, which has been seized.

**S:** That is to say, seized by me in the process of rebirth.

p.177            47     Since sorrow comes from my own offences, why should I be angry elsewhere?

**Vajradaka:** What does it mean by elsewhereí?

**S:** With others...with those outside yourself.

p.177            47     Those who injure me have been prompted by the impulse of my karma, because of which they go to hell: Surely they are destroyed by me.

                    48     By recourse to them, my great evil is destroyed through being patient. By recourse to me, they go to the long anguish of hell.

                    49     I am injurious to them and they are good to me. When this situation is reversed, why are you angry, you who are foulminded?

**Mike:** Ím a bit confused here. It seems like a contradiction. Your being patient and showing forbearance is almost a selfish action in that it causes the other person to suffer in hell or whatever. Is that actually what Śāntideva is saying?

**S:** No. You donít really cause the other person to suffer, because, even if you were angry with them, theyíd still go to hell on account of their own anger. What Śāntideva is doing is drawing our attention to the side of the situation we donít usually see. We usually think that we are good and they are bad, and that they are doing harm to us, but Śāntidevaís asking us to look at it the other way round. If someone is doing harm to you, as you think, they could, in fact, be strengthening you, - drawing out your sterner qualities, - which is good for you. But look what happens to them because of their anger: they go to hell. In a way you are responsible for that. Youíve got in their way, as it were - in the way of the anger. As the editor says, Śāntideva is not propounding a self-consistent philosophy here. There are paradoxes at every turn, almost inconsistencies. Heís trying to get the reader to see things in a different perspective and not in the old [130] habitual way - especially not, òHeís wrong and Ím right. Heís hurting me. Itís not my fault.í Heís trying to get the reader out of that sort of attitude.

p.177            50     If I do not go to hell it will be because of my reserve of good qualities.

**S:** Not on account of my present actions, which are quite foolish.

p.177            53     That hoard - humiliation, harsh language, and disgrace - does not trouble the body. Why, O mind, are you angry because of it?

**S:** If you think that the mind is not touched when people abuse you, then you will not become angry. In fact, their abuse does not even touch the body. So why get angry? Itís only words; itís only empty air...but sometimes itís words that upset us more than anything.

**Gotami:** Itís like the old saying, ¨Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words they cannot hurt me.í

p.178                    57     The one who has enjoyed pleasure for a hundred years  
in sleep is awakened; and another who has been  
happy for an instant is awakened.

**S:** The suggestion is that the two people have been asleep for the same length of time in both cases. They might actually have been asleep for only five minutes. One dreams that he was happy for a minute. When they wake up they both find themselves in the same position. Itís like that when you die. Life itself is like a dream. Whether youíve lived in happiness for a hundred years, or whether your life has been very short, it comes to the same thing in the perspective of death.

p.178                    58     Surely the awakening destroys the pleasure of both.

**S:** For instance, suppose someone enjoys something for a certain period of time and then loses it. You try to comfort them. You say, ¨Ah well, you had it for four years,í or, ¨You had it for two years,í or whatever the length of time may have been. But this means nothing to them. The loss is equally painful whether theyíve had that thing for a hundred years or whether theyíve had it for ten minutes. In fact if theyíve had it for a long time they might have got more attached to it and therefore feel the pain of losing it even more. So if you try to argue, ¨Oh well, youíve had it all these years. Why should you be upset because youíve lost it?í youíre really rubbing salt in their wounds sometimes. Peopleís minds donít work like that at all.

p.178                    63     You have patience towards those who criticise,  
whenever the criticism is directed to others: But you  
have no patience with one who raises the question of  
your own shortcomings.

**S:** This is very, very true. We really often find this. We can listen to any amount of criticism of others quite objectively - agree with it, nod our heads. But if someone says, ¨This applies to youí itís very difficult to bear. This is really strange. If criticism [131] is a good, healthy thing, why not be equally happy when itís directed towards you? But we arenít. So what is the reason for this?

**Vajradaka:** Itís easier to associate yourself with someone else. If someone else is being criticised, or qualities in someone else are being criticised, you can maybe associate those qualities to yourself much less painfully than when itís actually direct.

**S:** Right. then the criticism is aimed directly at you, then youíre being put down, and you think ¨Why should he say this to me?í etc. - even though in quieter moments you may acknowledge that the criticism is well founded. But even in such quieter moments, itís often very difficult to accept criticism gracefully.

p.179                    68     Why did you previously act in such a way that you  
are oppressed in this same way as others? All are  
dependent on karma. Who am I to alter this?

**S:** In other words, why did you, who are blaming the other person now for doing what heís doing, in a previous life perform karmas which were bound to reap this sort of retribution, later on? ¨All are dependent on karma.í You are supposed to be a Buddhist, believing in karma, why are you surprised? ¨Who am I to alter this?í That is, why should I be the exception? Iím supposed to believe in the universality of the law of karma, so why should I be surprised if I suffer under the law of karma?

p.179                      75      This is not such a sorrow, and it will create great benefit.

**S:** That is, the pain I am having to bear now as a result of somebody else's action. This is not such a sorrow.

p.179                      75      One should be glad of the sorrow which takes away the sorrow of the world.

**S:** That is, the sorrow by means of which one gains Nirvāna for the benefit of all living beings.

p.179                      76      If joy and happiness are obtained by praising the good qualities of others, why, O mind, are you not gratified?

77      Here is delight and happiness for you, an upswelling of pleasure without reproach, and it is not forbidden.

**S:** Think of that! So many good, pleasant things are forbidden in your spiritual life - all things that you enjoy, and like, and revel in. But here's something very pleasant, something that you can enjoy, which is not forbidden but actually recommended. Why are you so unwilling to indulge in it - this pleasure and luxury of praising others and thinking well of them?

p.179                      77      Because of these good qualities, this is the best way of attracting others.

**S:** In many cases, if you have the good quality of praising others you attract people, you are popular and well-liked. Why, then, are you backward in acquiring this quality? [132]

p.179/80                  78      But if the thought is not pleasing to you that another is happy, then one ought to abstain from wages, gifts, and so forth, and reject both visible and invisible [rewards].

**S:** Applying to yourself the same treatment that you give to others.

p.180                      80      After you have cultivated the Thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), because of desiring happiness for all beings, why are you angry when beings seize happiness by themselves?

**S:** As a Bodhisattva you take a vow to give all beings happiness. Why then, when they seize hold of happiness for themselves, do you get upset, even though their action means a bit of trouble for you? Is this not what you are supposed to want for them, that they should be happy?

p.180                      83      Where is his Thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) who is angry at another's success?

**S:** Another's success doesn't take anything away from you, and in any case have not you, as Bodhisattva, wished for others the greatest of all successes, i.e. Enlightenment?

p.180                      86      Not only do you not grieve for the sin which you yourself have done, but you want to be envious of others who have acted meritoriously.

**S:** That's very strange. Sometimes we're even a bit annoyed with others because of the good things that they do, and in a Bodhisattva that's stranger than ever. There's a little poem I've referred to, I think in my *Survey*, by Robert Browning, called *A Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, about a monk who's jealous of another monk and tries to put a spoke in his wheel. It's a very odd, sick little poem - or rather the state of mind it describes is really sick. It's quite a common sort of attitude, especially with so-called religious people. You say that you want to help others tread the spiritual path, but sometimes, if they get on too well on the spiritual path without you, you're not too happy, or you start even envying them their successes, and carp at them. This is really strange and odd.

**Gotami:** Could you suggest an antidote to this?

**S:** A more deliberate cultivation of the rejoicing in merits and reflecting, as Śāntideva advises, that such rejoicing is going to help you too. Rejoicing in the merits of others is, in fact, a very pleasant and positive mental exercise, so why not enjoy it? You only afflict yourself by being jealous and envious and all the rest. Do you really want to afflict yourself in this way, quite apart from your jealousy and envy not helping other people? Don't you really want to be positive instead of negative, and happy instead of miserable! It's rather strange, but perhaps one can stir oneself up to overcome jealousy and envy by giving the argument a more selfish twist: 'If others are getting on well, that will help me in the long run. There will be fewer people for me to worry about, at the very least. If they are positive, if they are getting on well, some of it may rub off on me. It's all for my [133] good too, not just for theirs!'

p.181                      92      For the sake of honour they annihilate well-being,  
they destroy both well-being and the self (*ātman*).

**S:** Here the term *ātman* is used in the popular rather than in the metaphysical sense. The meaning is that such people destroy themselves.

p.181                      93      As a child cries in pain when his sand castle is  
broken, so my own mind (*citta*) reacts at the loss of  
praise and fame.

**Vajradaka:** The word *chitta* seems to have a really broad meaning.

**S:** It really does. Mind, heart, soul, consciousness, will - it seems to cover all of these.

**Vajradaka:** But it seems to even have a personal meaning and a cosmic meaning as well.

**S:** Well, *chitta* with a capital ċ in the translation is the ċuniversal mindī, the ċconsciousness-stuffī - cosmic Mind if you like.

**Vajradaka:** So there's a kind of ċcapitalī and ċdiminutiveī meaning.

**S:** If there's a capital, then *chitta* has the more ċmetaphysicalī suggestion or connotation of ċthe One Mindī.

**Vajradaka:** Does the same apply to other words like Dharma and so on?

**S:** Yes, certainly. Dharma with a capital ċdī means the Truth or reality, or the Teaching. Dharma with a small ċdī is a phenomenon, an event - where they are consistent in their use of capitals and so on. The same with *vijñāna* or consciousness. With a capital ċvī, this can be the *Alaya Vijñāna*, the Absolute Consciousness, literally the Store Consciousness. With a small ċvī it is the eye-consciousness or ear-consciousness or nose-consciousness and so on. Not all languages have, in their written or printed form, both upper and lower cases, so we are fortunate in being able to distinguish different shades of meaning by using a capital or a small letter as the case may be.



p.181                      98     The acceptance of praise destroys my security and my desire for emancipation....

**Gotami:** How does the acceptance of praise destroy my security?

**S:** You become dependent for your feeling of happiness upon others or upon what they say.

**Gotami:** I understand that, but does acceptance imply that?

**S:** It's not just the acceptance of praise, it's the dependence on it. In the previous few verses Śāntideva has been talking about feeling happy because others praise you - presumably in an egoistic, self-satisfied sort of way. If your happiness and peace of mind become dependent on that, then you are in a very insecure position, because at any time it can be withdrawn. I don't think Śāntideva is referring to a sincere acceptance of someone else's genuine appreciation. I don't think he's referring to that at all. That sort of acceptance is, of course, possible - you know, feeling quite sincerely, in a good way, [134] that others are appreciating something. Not that they are necessarily appreciating you, even: they are simply in that happy state of *appreciating*. But clearly Śāntideva isn't referring to anything of that sort.

p 181                      102     Anger is not excused by thinking that another person has created an obstacle to one's merit. There is no austerity (*tapas*) equal to patience (*kṣānti*). Surely, now is the occasion for it.

**S:** No one ever prevents you from doing good. They might prevent you doing good in a particular way, but even in doing that they're giving you an opportunity for practising patience, and that's the greatest of all virtues. So what can you lose? They've not done you any harm at all. - It's all very logical, but not so easy to accept or even, maybe, really to believe.

**Gotami:** It seems to me, the way to work at it is to really want to achieve the state of mind when, as it were, you've already got the patience and use it as a jolly good means of....!!

**S:** Yes, of reminding yourself, and giving yourself a bit of support. But if you don't really want to practise patience, these arguments, logical and ingenious as they are, will never convince you. If anything, they'll irritate you a bit because they are so ingenious. You'll feel as if you're being trapped into something. You haven't got enough logic to refute Śāntideva, but you are not really convinced by what he says. Quite clearly, you've got to want to practise patience first.

**Subhuti:** What strikes me about the whole thing is that he's got antecedent reasons for being patient and these are just secondary proofs.

**S:** Yes. It's even a little bit sophistical in a way. If you were an even better logician than Śāntideva, you could probably counter all these arguments.

**Subhuti:** I find this particular section rather unsatisfying.

**S:** In a way the logic is far-fetched, though at the same time one appreciates the spirit of it.

**Aśvajit:** Maybe he's gently trying to irritate us! [*Laughter*]

p.182                      103     It is my own fault that I am not patient here. Moreover, it is I myself who create the obstacle when an occasion for virtue has arisen.

104 If something does not exist without something else in which its existence is discerned, the latter is its cause. How can it be called an obstacle?

**S:** Patience is a virtue. It really helps you. But patience never arises without someone to be patient with. Hence that particular person is the cause of your virtue. How, therefore, can you call him an obstacle to your virtue? Heís making you patient.

p.182 109 If the enemy is not to be honoured because he does not intend the achievement of patience, how then can the true [136] Dharma - a mindless cause of accomplishment - be honoured?

**S:** You pay respect to the Dharma, or even to an image of the Buddha. Thereís no mind there, but still you honour and respect them! In the same way you should honour and respect the enemy, even though he has no mind to help you, or intention to help you, because in fact he actually does help you - just like the ãmindlessí Dharma or the ãmindlessí Buddha image.

p.182 110 It is said that he is intent upon harming me, but if the enemy is not honoured, as if he were a physician who sought my health, how else is there patience?

**S:** After all, itís really patience that you are concerned with, howsoever itís created or caused to arise, and so you should be grateful for the opportunity of practising it.

p.182 111 Thus, contingent upon his evil intent, patience arises and thus he is the cause of patience and he is to be honoured by me as the true doctrine itself.

**S:** Because he ãteachesí you just like the Dharma.

p.182/83 112 Because of this the Sage has said, ãBeings are an opportunity (*kṣetra*); Conquerors also are an opportunity.î And so, by honouring both, many have gone far towards perfection.

**S:** The word translated here as ãopportunityí is *Ksetra*, which literally means a field, i.e. that in which something is sown - and of course from what is sown, something is reaped, and that is the ãopportunityí. ãConquerorsí of course means Buddhas.

p.183 117 If an atom of virtue, from the multitude which is the sole quintessence of virtue, is seen in anyone, the worship of the three worlds is not sufficient for such a one.

**S:** You should pay the greatest respect to even the slightest manifestation of something spiritual, something good and positive, because itís like a seed: anything can grow from it. So no amount of worship is too much for that, - you canít over-appreciate it, - and everybodyís got something of that kind in them somewhere.

p.183 119 And what of those immeasurable Benefactors and Friends without disguise?

**S:** That is to say, the Buddhas. Others are friends and benefactors in disguise. The Buddhas are benefactors and friends without disguise. Directly or indirectly, everybody is a benefactor.

p.183/84            122    The great Sages are joyful when others are happy. They are concerned when others are in anguish. The satisfaction of all the great Sages is from that satisfaction. Also, in injury the Sages are injured.

**S:** When you hurt beings, you hurt Sages, the Buddhas, because they become unhappy and sad, as it were, when they see others suffering. If [136] you afflict beings, therefore, indirectly you are causing sorrow to the Buddhas Themselves, or even injuring Them.

p.184                127    Let this, then, be my vow (*vrata*): The honouring of the Tathagata, the complete fulfilment of my own well-being, the destruction of the sorrow of the world.

**S:** Here we have a sort of threefold Bodhisattva Vow: to honour the Tathagata, i.e. to worship, and look up to, the Buddha; to completely fulfil my own individual well-being in the way of spiritual progress; and then to make others happy by the destruction of the sorrow of the world.<sup>1</sup>

p.184                129    ...one should not dishonour any evil person who has offended...

**S:** Because he is, as it were, under the protection of the Buddha. The Buddha is his ěmasterí. For this reason you shouldnít dishonour him, because in so doing you would be dishonouring the Buddha. It is like a single soldier, whose master is the king, controlling a great crowd of people. Out of respect for the king they do nothing against him.

P.184                130    ...because both the guardians of hell and the Compassionate Ones are his power.

**S:** The evil person has two masters, in fact - not only the Buddhas, who are the good masters, but the guardians of hell, who will punish you if you offend against him.

p.185                133    Let one be a source of honour to beings that Buddhahood may result. Also, in this world, why will you not realise fortune, fame, and good position?

134    Abounding in the joy of the universal monarch (*cakravartin*), the patient man obtains beauty, health, rapture, and long life in the world of rebirth (*samsāra*).

**S:** If you practise patience and forbearance, leaving aside any spiritual results there will be extremely positive karmic consequences - even up to your becoming, or being born as, a universal king.

That, then, is the Perfection of Patience. In a way I think the Guide is even clearer than the actual text. It certainly makes the text very much easier to understand - at least the general drift of it, and what Śāntideva is really getting at. He is a rather condensed and cryptic writer, and sometimes the links of his argument arenít altogether clear. They are there, but they are suppressed. I think this chapter can be summed up by saying that your enemy is your friend - in disguise. It all boils down to that. [137]

**THE PERFECTION OF STRENGTH**  
**(Guide)**

## THE PERFECTION OF STRENGTH

### The Guide

p.59

[Western writers] often are conditioned to think of Eastern religion in stereotyped forms. It is a cliché to assert that it is quiescent and soporific, world-denying, dominated by lazy monks who beg for a living, and whose greatest activity is to stare at their navels.

**S:** I wonder to what extent that idea is still predominant. Has anyone any views on this, or any impressions?

**Vajradaka:** I think quite a few people feel that anyone who follows a spiritual life is just running away - I don't think they quite know what they mean by 'running away'.

**S:** I sometimes meet this objection head on by saying, 'Well, why not run away from danger? If the house is on fire, why not get out?' It seems rather strange, this sort of objection. As though if the house is on fire the right thing to do is to stay in it and be burned to death! It's not a question of running away blindly, but of definitely getting out of a situation which you see you ought never to have allowed yourself to get into. Saying that religious, and especially Eastern religions, are escapist, is therefore not really saying anything at all. 'Escapism' can be a quite neutral word, the use of which is quite justified, and we could quite happily accept it. You could say, 'Yes, we are escaping.' Putting it in starkly Theravāda terms, we don't want to be here. We want to get into a higher state of being, into a more satisfactory kind of consciousness. We want to escape from our present consciousness. The only objection that can validly be made is that you are not going the right way about it, and that your struggles are so blind and reactive that you only tighten your bonds, so that you don't get out anyway. That's the only objection that could be made: that it isn't the right way to escape, but I think the ideology of escaping is quite defensible. What, then, are people doing when they make accusations of this sort, saying that you're escapist, or that religion is escapist? They are trying, in reality, to make you, and make religion, just as worldly, and just as much involved in worldly things, as they are themselves.

But how do you think people in the West got the idea that Eastern religions were 'Quiescent and soporific, world-denying, dominated by lazy monks' etc?

**Gisela:** I've heard quite a few people criticizing the Indians for not changing, let's say, their social conditions and living in poverty and not doing anything about it, and asking whether that was what Buddhism taught or thought was all right. I've heard that argument brought up.

**S:** One can meet this argument on its own level and say India is not a Buddhist country. It was prosperous when it was Buddhist. The Buddhist countries of Asia are prosperous countries, maybe not in terms of modern consumer goods, but they are, even now, predominantly agricultural countries where everybody has enough to eat and where there is very little degrading poverty, if any. Burma and Thailand, for example, are very well-off countries. Everyone may not have radios and television sets, but they've got plenty of rice and vegetables, [138] and decent houses to live in, leaving aside modern technological developments, they have a very good time and a very good standard of life. They live happily, and are well fed and cheerful. If, therefore, you are going to talk about the Buddhist countries like Burma and Thailand, they come out quite well on the whole. The entirely Buddhist countries which are Theravādin and really strict Buddhist in many ways, have got a quite good material standard, certainly better than that of India, and in some ways better than that of some Western countries. What we fundamentally have to be on our guard against, in dealing with this sort of criticism of Buddhism and the other Eastern religions, is accepting the standard of values, or the judgements, of the critic or questioner.

**Subhuti:** I do think that people do have a tendency to maybe not really adopt a spiritual path, but to play with one as a sort of psychological defence, and I think this is what's often taken up [by those who criticise Eastern religion as escapist].

**S:** Well, you can play in that sort of way with anything. Anything can be used in an escapist manner, i.e. used to avoid facing your problems and actually escaping from them. Religion certainly can. You can take up the arts, too, in this way. You can take up social life in this way. You can take up sex in this way. You can take up anything at all in this way - to help bury your head deeper in the sand.

**Aśvajit:** It seems to me very often that what people are saying when they say something like that is, in effect, that they don't want to relate to you on this level at all! 'I don't want to talk about religion! I don't want to discuss it! I don't want to have anything to do with it!' It's a fear of the kind of standards that religion implies.

**S:** I'm reading at the moment a book by Enoch Powell called *No Easy Answers*. He seems to have gone into these things from what is, in a way, a very orthodox Christian point of view and had quite a few debates with alleged Christians who thought that what Christians really ought to be doing was working on race relations and social improvement and so on. Enoch Powell says that those things are good, but they are not specifically Christian. Christianity is concerned with the salvation of your soul and getting to the Kingdom of Heaven. Christianity as such is not concerned with social service. He's very uncompromising about this, and really upsets some socially minded alleged Christians by this sort of outlook. But I think he really does have a point, a point which we can perhaps express in Buddhist terms as well. You mustn't be deflected from the main thing by other things which, though good in themselves from a social point of view, are not what we are really about. People have said, 'Why aren't the Friends out helping old people, and raising money for beggars, and doing work for Shelter?' Well, these are all good things, but they are not the main thing. The main thing is the development of higher states of consciousness within yourself. If you can help others too, so much the better. But that's the main thing. Enoch Powell quotes a really horrible statement by a trades union Christian who said that what Christians really ought to be doing is attending trades union meetings. That is even more important than attending Holy Communion. Enoch Powell comments, what sort of Christian is this, who thinks that a trades union meeting is more important than Holy Communion? He was so deeply shocked, in fact, that he wrote to the man about the matter, and the man withdrew his [139] statement and apologised for it. Attending a trades union meeting, he said, was only equally important to attending Holy Communion, not more important. This is the sort of ideology which, in a very widespread and diluted form, is behind such questions as, 'Why are Buddhists escapists?' or 'Why are you running away from it all?' The truth of the matter is that if we are real Buddhists we are not running away from anything. We are really facing up to what human life is all about and what is the real purpose of human life. We are not escaping: we are trying to face up to these things. Usually you find that the person who puts questions about escapism and so on is, from our point of view, leading a very escapist life himself.

**Mike:** An attitude that I came across, from another actor, was that Buddhism was purely an elaborate form of self-indulgence, especially in relation to meditation which he and many other people I've met seem to think is a sleepy, dozy affair.

**S:** Again, you should meet the objection head on, and ask, 'Do you really believe that self-indulgence is wrong?' They believe it's all right to indulge in - as distinct from gratify yourself with - food and drink and pleasure and sex, and the poor religionist, who just happens to indulge in and enjoy religion, is made a scapegoat for everybody else. You should ask, 'Well if you really are against self-indulgence, what way of life are you following? If you can show me that you are indulging yourself less than me, I'll follow whatever you're following. Why are you so against self-indulgence? Are you really practising abstinence? If you honestly think that self-indulgence is wrong, all right, I agree with you, and if you can show me that my Buddhism is self-indulgence I'll give it up. But what about your life? Show me that you are not self-indulgent. What is it that you are not indulging in?' Put it like that. I

think we shouldn't be too much on the defensive in the face of modern, so-called liberal, secular thinking. In fact we shouldn't be on the defensive at all.

**Mike:** I find it very hard, especially with this particular individual, who was very forceful, and I just didn't at that time have the answers, you know. It was when I first got involved with the Movement.

**S:** Well, you've got them now! *[Laughter]* You should say, 'Éilíve got a friend Íid like you to meet. Come and see him. He'll tell you what it's all about.'

**Mike:** It's funny, but what I have said in the past was, 'ÉÍm incapable of really convincing you. I don't have that degree of articulateness. Why don't you come along and listen to a lecture?' and immediately the other person would say, 'Oh well ... I don't know about that.' They just don't want to know then.

**S:** Yes. But one should not be tolerant of sloppy thinking, and most people's thinking is sloppy, especially when they say things like 'Buddhism is escapism.' As though their whole life wasn't just one long escape!

**Gisela:** I find it quite difficult to find answers to arguments brought up from a Marxist point of view. Mainly because I myself was very involved with it and accept some of those arguments. Very much so.

**S:** Marxists on the whole seem to be much more thinking and serious opponents.

**Gisela:** Because they have clearly thought out things, and I find it quite difficult to answer them.

**Mike:** Actually, some of their ideals are quite close to ours.

**S:** This is what Vajrabodhi has been finding in Finland, and he sometimes wonders how they can be so near and yet so opposed.

**Mike:** Some of my really good friends from the acting profession, whom Ím still in contact with, are very involved with Marxism, and somehow I feel there's a point where we can meet, but just can't see where it is and how we can sort of come together.

**S:** When I was in Paris and gave some lectures there many people in the audience ( I got about a hundred people each time) who were Marxists. That was quite clear from their questions. But the questions were of a very high standard intellectually, considerably above what we usually get in London. They were quite tough questions, but not particularly hostile. Indeed, they were not unsympathetic, - some of them were just requests for further clarification, - but the questioners clearly were not going to swallow whatever you said. They had really thought and studied, and had good minds, and were people of some intellectual integrity. There were quite a few Marxists of this kind. What we are usually up against, however, is really sloppily thinking people who are in a mess themselves, who have got hold of a few catchwords, and who try to get at you with the help of those catchwords. Such people should be dealt with - I was going to say quite ruthlessly ... not really without 'ruthí, i.e. without pity, but you shouldn't be on the defensive with them. One shouldn't let them get away with it. This is not difficult, because they're usually not very intellectual people - otherwise their thinking would be clearer. They are usually just sloppy thinkers, though they might have a lot of self-confidence, especially on this question of escapism. So don't let them get away with it at all.

**S:** It must be said, frankly, that in the East there are many lazy monks. I don't think we should try and evade that issue. Buddhism having been an organised religion - and to that extent not Buddhism - for quite a long time, there are lazy, or at least easy-going, Buddhist monks in lots of Buddhist countries. On the whole they are pretty inoffensive, and lead quite harmless lives: at least one can say that. They do no harm to anybody, and sometimes they are quite kindly and helpful - very often so. True, not many of them are making an all-out effort to develop. We need not be afraid to admit that. Just say, 'Buddhism, like any other great faith, has its organisational side, and quite a lot of people are there taking it rather easily. But that isn't the Buddha's teaching, and we don't defend it.' After all, we are not out to defend organised Buddhism. We are concerned with the Buddha's teaching, and with the practice of that teaching. Let us be quite honest about this.

p.59                      The Perfection of Heroic Strength means, in effect, that the practice of every perfection is of such difficulty that the quality of character which prompts the undaunted practice of any one of them is itself to be listed among the perfections.

**S:** Even the readiness to practise *dāna*, - to practise it, that is, [141] on the Mahāyāna scale, - is itself a *pāramitā*. The readiness to practise any *pāramitā* is a *pāramitā*, and that *pāramitā* is *vīrya*.

p.59                      To attempt the achievement of Bodhisattvahood is an undertaking well described as heroic.

**S:** This heroic aspect needs stressing, - that's why I gave the lecture on 'The Heroic Ideal in Buddhism,' - because too little attention is directed to this aspect. More attention is directed to Buddhism being meek, gentle, humble, submissive, quiet and calm etc., but it's also vigorous, energetic, inspiring, heroic, self-sacrificing, strong. It's equally all these things. So we mustn't forget that *vīrya* aspect. Even as regards our behaviour, most people seem to think that being a Buddhist means being very gentle, very meek, not contradicting anybody, being very humble. That's of course one aspect, but it's no less Buddhistic to be firm, sure, determined, and confident. There must be no one-sidedness. If you've got a natural courage, and confidence, and generosity, don't curb it under the mistaken impression that to be a good Buddhist you've got to emasculate yourself spiritually and psychologically. I wrote much the same thing to Lama Govinda recently in a long letter which I wrote to re-establish contact. Let me read you that part of it. 'Since settling in England I have naturally continued to think a great deal about Buddhism, particularly Buddhism in the West. The views which I have expressed in the past, and with which you are familiar, continue unchanged.' I'm referring to my emphasis on the Mahāyāna and all that kind of thing. 'The only difference is that I feel much more radical about them and less inclined to compromise, especially where the pseudo-Buddhistic orthodoxy is concerned. Looking back on my career as a Buddhist monk, I feel that I have often been much too meek and forbearing, and that I have sometimes bleated like a sheep when I should have roared like a lion.' I think this is true of our Movement as a whole. We bleat a bit too much to people instead of roaring at them, at least occasionally. I think a lot of people would appreciate such treatment.

p.59-60                      To even dream of such an achievement requires the kind of dedication which does not falter when asked to move mountains.

**S:** If I was to say, for instance, 'Gotami, go and move that mountain,' she'd say 'O.K.' and go off and do it. That's the Bodhisattva spirit. *[Laughter]*

p.60                      If someone comes and tells you that the price of Enlightenment is to take Mount Sumeru and to shatter it, and this prospect fills you with thoughts of personal limitation, or possibly of fatigue, then you are affected by indolence.



**S:** When people are given even a little job to do, what's their first reaction very often? "Can I do it? Will I be able to succeed?" etc., etc. Most people, I'm quite sure, - and especially most people in the "Friends", and most Order members -, can do much more than they think they can. I mean this quite literally. When we were in the New Forest recently Ananda, I think it was, asked me what I thought was the percentage of their potential that most people were actually using, and I said that I thought most of them weren't using more than 5 - 15% of it. This is people generally. I think that in the Order people are [142] using a bit more than that, but there's still tremendous room for improvement. Every single person, probably without exception, could do very much more than they think they are able to do - at least four or five times as much, if not nine or ten times as much. This should be taken quite literally. It's not just hyperbolic. Even the average person's capacity is much more than he thinks it is. This comes out in situations of stress, danger, and emergency, as in time of war. People win V.C.s who would never have dreamt of doing anything heroic. In ordinary life they don't do anything more heroic than plant a cabbage or mend a puncture on their bicycle, but in time of war they are saving lives under fire and performing all sorts of other deeds of heroism. They are capable of doing that. In the same way, Order members can do very much more than they think they can, in many directions.

p.60                      But if you are mindful of the dangers inherent in the situation....

**S:** That is, if you are not just recklessly self-confident. You see all that needs to be done. You see the difficulties, the dangers - but you are not put off by them. You know quite well you can cope, but you don't ignore the dangers, you are not blind to them. You don't rush ahead out of foolish self-confidence, with closed eyes. You keep your eyes well open, and though you know what you are, in a sense, up against, you know that you are more than equal to the situation.

p.60                      Otherwise, we are lost.

**S:** That is, from the Bodhisattva point of view. You might be a very good bumbling kind of Buddhist, but not much of a Bodhisattva. *[Laughter]*

**Gotami:** Do you think that everyone has that courage - even those people who seem to be very gentle?

**S:** Yes, I think they do. Courage is not necessarily dissociated from gentleness. There are some meek-looking little people who are really quite bold when it comes to the point, but not in an aggressive or assertive way. Such people are quietly bold, quietly courageous. They just sort of very quietly walk into the lion's den, - quite mildly, as it were, - and get away with it. Women are usually better at this than men. I've seen some women in India who were quite good examples. Mahatma Gandhi was a bit like this. Though very humble and meek in outward appearance, he was really very bold. I think that generally speaking we can, as a movement, now begin to be on the offensive in a positive sort of way. Which of course means individual members, especially individual Order members, being a bit more on the offensive than before and taking much more initiative with people - not just sitting back answering questions and being a bit on the defensive. Or even not necessarily waiting for people to come along. If you see some person who looks pretty decent and seems to be looking for something, well, don't even wait for him to approach you. You go out and tackle him and have a talk. Invite him for a chat and put it to him fair and square: "What are you doing with your life? Don't you think you could do something better? Come and see what we are doing." I think some people respond very well to this sort of approach and would appreciate it. The Buddha didn't always wait for people to come along to Him.

**Gisela:** I think you have to be very careful here. You can otherwise [143] be a bit like a Christian missionary, which achieves the opposite.

**S:** No. I don't think any Order member is likely to behave like a Christian missionary. Not even if they tried. *[Laughter]* Christian missionaries don't invite you for a drink round at the local, and a bit of a chat. They just shove things through your letter-box, put their foot in the door when you open it, and tell you all about Jesus. Well, we are not going to do that or anything corresponding to that. But there should be a little more initiative, and a little more thrust, even, without it being in any way aggressive, or anything of that kind. Time is short. The world, and society in general, seems to be in a bit more parlous state than the old *Samsāra* usually is, in certain ways, and there's a much greater need for something which people can really dedicate themselves to, and get on with, and benefit themselves with and benefit others. It isn't the time for us to be sitting back in any sense.

p.60                      He rubs death and hell into our faces ...

**S:** I think we can get on even without hell these days because there's quite enough of a terrifying nature going on around us in the world.

p.60                      ... the delight of the Dharma is the most noble  
course of endless delight, there is nothing to compare  
to it.

**S:** Even if there isn't any such thing as Enlightenment at the end, and no such thing as hell nor any rebirth to be avoided, the sheer delight of studying the Dharma, here and now, just goes beyond any other kind of pleasure that we could experience. At least three or four people in the Movement have told me lately how much pleasure they get out of study now, which they didn't before. They'd no idea that it could be so interesting and so delightful. Not people who were born readers, as some of us are, but people who hadn't thought much in terms of study before. Yet they find now that they get really a great deal out of it and that it's a real joy to be able to study the Dharma and understand it.

p.61                      Many who are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas today were  
once gnats, flies, mosquitoes, worms, and other such  
lowly creatures.

**S:** We might not find that very convincing, but we've got examples like Milarepa, who led a very terrible life for about forty years and then swung right round and gained Buddhahood in one life. We can see this sort of thing in the case of quite a number of people that we've heard of or read about, or even met. Tremendous changes are possible in the course of one life - changes as it were from one extreme to another. So there's no reason for us to despair. However neurotic or problem-ridden we may be, however weighed down by this, that, and the other, we should never forget that people in a worse condition than we are have made a success of the spiritual life, and even gained Enlightenment - all in one life.

**Mike:** If you've been in one extreme, you're more likely to swing to the other.

**S:** I said it was because it isn't in a sense an extreme. [144] You're not just going to the opposite extreme. It's more like going not to the opposite corner of a triangle but to the apex. For this reason I use the language of extremes rather cautiously. But what you say is true. A person who goes to extremes in any way at least is a person with a certain amount of energy, and it's sometimes said that a real sinner is much more likely to become a saint than is an ordinary, good, decent person. He's much more alive, very often.

p.61                      Gods and *āsuras* are too happy to see the desirability  
of release ....

**S:** That's not quite correct. That applies to the gods, not to the *āsuras*. The latter are too highly competitive, and too much engaged in warfare and strife, - too jealous and possessive, - to be happy. It has sometimes been said that our modern, technological civilisation is very *āsura*-like, and that it has, therefore, become somewhat more difficult for a man to realise the

Truth within such a civilisation. It's become much more like the life of the *āsuras* than like the life of real human beings. There's too much strife, warfare, competition, arrogance, jealousy, hate, and so on.

**Aśvajit:** In a way the scientific view of life is rather *āsurā*-like in itself. This idea of 'conquering nature'.

**S:** Yes, indeed. It's rather interesting that some Tibetan artists instinctively seized on this. I've seen quite a lot of Tibetan frescoes and *thangkas* of the Wheel of Life, but when they depict the asuras attacking the gods they give them modern weapons. They've got little rifles, and primitive cannon, and that's quite interesting. You might remember that in Milton's *Paradise Lost* it's the rebel angels who invent artillery, with which they try to attack heaven and are, in fact, successful for a while - almost like the *āsuras*.

**Mike:** I would have thought that in a highly competitive environment there's obviously going to be a lot of people who can't achieve the end of the competition, as it were, and that therefore it would be more likely to be productive of somebody seeking a way out.

**S:** Possibly. But it seems that a lot just fall by the wayside in a society of that sort. There has to be someone going round, not exactly picking them up, but at least encouraging them, otherwise there's a lot of human waste, it seems ... and the weakest go to the wall. In a more 'primitive' type of human society the weak are cared for, or at least are given alms, but it's not quite like that in the more competitive society. If you're poor, if you haven't succeeded, and if you're not a typical *āsurā*, there's something wrong with you. You're even considered wicked sometimes. We have got quite a touch of that in the Western technological civilisation.

**Mike:** I was thinking this specifically in relation to the acting profession, where there's 90% of the profession out of work at any given moment and a lot of people fall by the wayside. It seems to me that, potentially at least, they are the kind of people that could get involved in seeking something higher.

**S:** One could take a broader view of the matter and ask, 'What makes someone want to be an actor, rather than a stockbroker or mechanic or whatever?' It presumably indicates some sort of aesthetic sensitivity, or something a little out of the ordinary - leaving aside, of course, [145] purely negative psychological factors, possibly, like exhibitionism. I dare say something that we ought to consider, some time, is whether certain 'classes' of people are likely to be more open to whatever we have to offer than others. Are you suggesting that actors might be more receptive than people usually are? Or looking for something, even, in a way that people don't usually look?

**Mike:** Not specifically actors. I was thinking more in terms of the competitive environment that they experience, which is such that, in a way, it destroys a lot of them, and they look for other things. This is why so many of them have got involved with Marxism, I feel, and it seems like the next step if you become disillusioned with that.

**S:** I think there are two kinds of disillusionment. One is genuine disillusion where you see the falsity or unreality of your former goals. The other is not so genuine. You've tried, but you've not succeeded. You would like to have succeeded, and would still like to succeed, and have just become disgruntled with the system, as it were, because you can't grasp the goodies which the system is dangling in front of your nose. But you would like to be able to grasp them. You're not dissatisfied or disillusioned about the very idea of a system dangling those things in front of your nose and you grasping them. Sometimes it's not easy to see in which of these two categories a person falls, or falls predominantly. But disgruntlement is distinct from real disillusion. We are not necessarily disillusioned when we are disgruntled.

**Subhuti:** Nonetheless, probably quite a few people come into the spiritual movement because of disgruntlement.

**S:** I think most are disgruntled rather than disillusioned, though disgruntlement may grow into disillusion, but not necessarily.

**Subhuti:** I would have thought that inevitably, if the impetus from being disgruntled made you practise regularly, eventually it would grow into disillusionment.

**S:** It could do, especially if you had the right sort of environment and contact.

**Vajradaka:** Does the word *ëgruntledí* ... [*Laughter*]

**S:** It's a nice, piggy sound! I don't know the etymology, but I don't think it has anything to do with grunting. [According to the dictionary, *gruntle* is an obsolete dialect word meaning *ëto gruntí* or *ëto complainí*.] But the word I am using is *disgruntlement*. It's quite a good word. So the next time someone comes to your class saying, *ëOh Vajradaka, Ím really disillusioned with this life,*Í ask, *ëAre you disillusioned, or are you just disgruntled?*Í You get a lot of this sort of thing in India, where the path to becoming a *sadhu* is broad and easy. Íve often had people come to me and say, *ëOh Bhante, I want to give it all up. Ím so fed up with the saṃsāra,*Í and so on. So you let him stay at the Vihāra for a few days, or for a week or two, and you find that he's quarrelled with his wife, or his son, or his grandfather, and he's got a bit fed up with it all and really thinks, therefore, that he's disillusioned with *saṃsāra*. But after he's been with you a few days he gets quite fed up with *pūjā* and meditation, and having nothing particular to do. [*Laughter*] He misses his wife and kids, and so back he goes. This is quite clearly just a momentary disgruntlement, not any real disillusionment. And it happens quite often. Quite often people become monks out of disgruntlement [146] rather than disillusionment. Ideally, the conditions in the monasteries, when they become monks, should be such that disgruntlement can be developed into disillusionment, but I don't think that always happens - quite often it doesn't happen. Then you either start becoming bored or you start trying to have satisfactions which are essentially worldly, but in a *ëreligiousí* shape or form.

**Vajradaka:** That's more or less what happened to me. When I started meditating at the temple in Japan it wasn't because I wanted to give up, it was just that I was fed up with, you know, fast cars and eating well and all the rest. Íd just tried everything, in a sense.

**S:** Do you mean you were disgruntled or disillusioned?

**Vajradaka:** I don't think it was either! [*Laughter*]

**S:** Perhaps you were fed up.

**Vajradaka:** It wasn't really even [a feeling of being] fed up.

**S:** You just wanted a change.

**Vajradaka:** Yes.

**S:** Something different ... something a bit more stimulating. Well, you looked in the right direction, anyway! I think this may, in a way, be quite a practical problem, or at least something that we have to deal with if we find a lot of people coming to us who are disgruntled rather than disillusioned. We have to ask ourselves whether there isn't an element of disgruntlement even in our own attitude - whether we really do see through whatever we purport to see through. Are we just fed up for the time being and would go back to it if only we could get it on our terms, as it were?

**Gotami:** It's a lot easier to work with people who feel they are quite confident and can make a success of anything they turn their hand to, but they don't really see much point in it.

**S:** I think one has to be a little bit cautious about people who've been failures in the world, really, and who turn to religion because it can, very often, be compensatory. Of course even such people can develop the right approach, and we know that there's a mixture of motives with everybody to begin with, without exception, but it would be difficult, I think, if we were to have too many people who were just looking for a compensation for lack of worldly success. I also think we should be careful about assuming that people who are just a bit disgruntled because they can't get on and get all the things they want are particularly suitable material for the higher evolution. I don't think that that is necessarily the case at all. They are only 'material' - to use that not very good term - for the higher evolution if they are really disillusioned, and a capable, successful person who says he's disillusioned is more likely to be disillusioned than one who's failed. 'I've done it. I've built up my business. I've had a happy family life. I'm proud of my children. But it's not enough. I want something more than that.' That's the man who's likely to be really well and solidly committed, not the timid person who's been afraid, almost, to go out and be successful, or who thinks he can't be, or who's made a little effort and not succeeded and has lost confidence. This is why the Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna scriptures - how is he usually described? He's a wealthy person with plenty of business activities and contacts with the king, a large family, - a wife and lots of [147] children and many other dependants, - and plenty of corn and plenty of gold. His store-houses are full, and he's happy and confident, with lots of friends. He's definitely a successful person, not an unsuccessful person. This is really stressed in some of the Mahāyāna scriptures, because that's the ideal, as it were, that's the best sort of position from which to take up the spiritual life, though we don't often find it - a position of strength.

**Gotami:** Do you think this could be one of the reasons why Buddhism gets the name of a runaway religion, because it's people who've been failures who tend to become Buddhists?

**S:** I don't know. I think it's more because of the fact that their impressions were derived from the East at a time when the East was completely non-industrialised and everything seemed sort of lazy and easygoing. I think it's a left-over from that period, essentially.

**Gisela:** I've been asked this, though, about people in the 'Friends' - whether the 'Friends' does attract people who are, as it were, unsuccessful.

**S:** I think that there is that danger, quite frankly.

**Gisela:** I've often been asked that question from people who are kind of interested: 'What kind of people go there?'

**S:** I think I'd feel happier if we had a few more mature, somewhat older successful people - successful in the worldly sense - who now feel the need of being something more than just successful. I think it would be quite healthy if we had a few more such people. They would be in a position to give a lot of good backing, and practical help and advice, to those who had, perhaps, been in the Movement, and spiritually committed, from a much earlier age, and who had not needed to go through that phase of worldly success. It seems that the Buddha Himself had quite a few people of that sort around, people like Anathapindika and Visakha, who were very successful in the world, who had lots of influence and money, and who could do quite a few things for the Order. One shouldn't go after this, of course, - that would be dangerous, - but it is quite useful to have a few of such people to help doing things that need to be done on a practical level where, sometimes, resources are needed, and a certain amount of worldly know-how.

**Subhuti:** Isn't that one of the conditions for the survival of the Order, that there are wealthy lay followers?

**S:** Yes. If you have an Order which is entirely devoted to spiritual things, and not concerned with anything economic, then you need wealthy supporters.

**Gisela:** I've talked to people in the ðFriendsí about this, because I've had, and still have, the feeling that it's quite possible to do something in the world, so to speak, and at the same time be active in the ðFriendsí, but some people in the ðFriendsí don't agree with me. They say one can't do this, one has to give up work or whatever.

**S:** Well, it depends on their degree of commitment. What I have in mind is something different. I'm thinking more of someone who, before coming in contact with the ðFriendsí, has made his pile. He's already a successful, prosperous person when he meets you, but he feels the need of going beyond all that. This is the sort of person I have in mind. But for the comparatively young Friend who is really disillusioned, and [148] who wants to commit himself fully, a worldly life in the ordinary sense of a full-time job and all that is, I think, virtually an impossibility, - probably a psychological impossibility, - because he wouldn't be able to give all the time that he wanted to give. I think a really committed person can't be satisfied with going along once a week to a meeting, however intense that may be. Not to speak of the young Friend, even the successful, prosperous person of, let us say, 40 or 45 or more, who had come in contact with the ðFriendsí and was helping in its work, wouldn't be functioning in quite the same way as before. He might start wanting to give things up --not give up all his riches, as it were, but certainly spend more time with the ðFriendsí than with his business activities or whatever. He might even be retired by the time he came in contact with us, in which case he would be very favourably placed. But I don't believe in encouraging people to give up their worldly commitments - though, on the other hand, I do think that if, within the context of the ðFriendsí, one is really involved, it probably is practically impossible, psychologically at least, to continue with a full-time job and so on. One does so much need - and want - to give a great deal of time to the ðFriendsí, and to spiritual things generally - to meditation, study, and so on. But everyone has to decide for himself. You can't push people in this respect. Of course, you also have to watch out for people just wanting to have an easy little time and find a nice place in the country, and just go away and stay there, and sort of hibernate and stagnate in the country. I saw that when I was in Millbrook. I don't mean that I was hibernating and stagnating myself, but I had a few friends around in the village who clearly were doing just that.

**Mike:** I want to ask something about the whole question of giving. When I go to see my friends outside the Movement, I find they have this impression, which I don't think I've cultivated in them, that if you get involved in the way that, say, I've done, it involves giving things up all the time, and the whole point of ðgiving upí - well, how do you explain it? I just find it very difficult to explain what happens.

**S:** Well, it does involve ðgiving upí, but you don't force yourself - though sometimes you might, if you've got a definitely bad habit that you see is doing you harm and to which you're still attached. Usually you just lose interest in things and don't bother about them any more.

**Gotami:** It's like giving up leeches [that are sucking your blood] or playing games on the floor with bricks and things. You're not interested any more.

**Subhuti:** They drop away.

**S:** You must be careful about applying that analogy, because if people think that you're looking down on their serious activities, and thinking that they're no better than little kiddies playing with bricks, they'll really feel it. They'll feel that you're despising them. So you have to be careful about using that analogy, though of course it's strictly true.

**Mike:** But it is very difficult to convince people that things do just fall away and that this is the process that takes place once one becomes seriously involved.

**S:** Perhaps the best way of putting things is to say that you don't have to give up anything. Tell people that they should look at it in [149] positive terms - that all they have to do is start practising, and just meditate. If they don't want to give up anything it's up to them: we don't insist. The main thing is to meditate. Or you could say, ðIn my case, I'm not interested in this,

that and the other, and so I don't engage in it, but if you find that you're happy with the meditation and so on, but want to keep up your other interests too, that's fine. We've nothing to say about it.<sup>1</sup> The thing that matters is to get someone started, and then he himself will find certain things dropping off, but I don't think you can convince him of that intellectually in advance, especially if he's rather attached. The main thing is just to get him started and coming along. One can, therefore, say quite truthfully that we don't ask anyone to give up anything. That's left to him. If the giving up happens, O.K. If it doesn't, and he's still getting on well with his practice, that's fine. Let him enjoy both worlds! Why not? Then see what happens. As a matter of fact you can't enjoy both worlds, because you'll always be losing out on one or the other, but there's no harm if someone wants to try. There is however an intermediate stage when you're getting on well with spiritual things and also having a reasonable amount of worldly pleasure too, but gradually you begin to see you enjoy the spiritual things more and so you start shifting your energy and attention much more onto that side. Nevertheless, it's certainly not wise to talk to just newly interested people too much in terms of 'giving up'. If you see that they're of a naturally heroic temperament, and that the idea of giving up appeals to them, then of course you can speak to them in those terms. But I don't think there are too many people of that sort around.

p.62

At the beginning the Lord compels only the alms of vegetables and such. Afterwards he gradually forms one who will sacrifice even his own flesh.<sup>1</sup>

**S:** We find this even in our own movement on a small scale. You start off by asking people to do little things like help with making the tea, or do a bit of washing up, or distribute a few notices, or bring something along for the jumble sale. You get them giving in that sort of way! But after a while they may be giving a lot of time and energy, and even going to a great deal of trouble to do things for the Movement, whereas had you asked them to do those things at the beginning they might have been put right off or even stayed away. It's very much a matter of getting people into things gradually, especially with regard to this question of giving. Śāntideva puts this in quite an extreme fashion. He says that at the beginning all that the Buddha requires of you is that you should give a few vegetables when someone comes begging at your door. A stage may come, however, when He demands the sacrifice of life and limb. It's a question of taking you there step by step: not all at once.

**Vajradaka:** There are some people who don't like to make the tea. They just want to get down to larger things.

**S:** That's also good, if they think such things are really trivial - though perhaps, later on, they have to learn that even little things have their value and shouldn't be looked down upon. But fine ....get them started on the big things if that's what they want, though of course one should be careful that they are not satisfying some sort of worldly ambition of just being prominent and active and so on. An element of such ambition is perhaps inevitable, but one has to watch out that it [150] is not the principal motivation. That's why we have framed our constitution in the way that we have done. You can't be a member of the FWBO in the legal sense unless you are a Buddhist, i.e. unless you are a member of the Order. That means you've really been sieved a bit. Otherwise there might be active, energetic people coming straight in without even knowing much about Buddhism, or where we're at, or anything spiritual, and quite happily taking over the secretaryship, for example, and running things. Sooner or later there would be a real clash, because such people wouldn't be running things in the right way, however capable they might be. There are people who work with and for organisations simply because they like that sort of work - almost without bothering what the organisation is doing, or what it's all about, or what it's for. Our constitution prevents that. If you suspect that the people who want to get down to larger things are of that kind you have to handle them quite carefully. Give them things to do, certainly, but make sure they are not doing it too much out of worldly, ambitious motives.

**Aśvajit:** I think it's a very good test to ask them to do something little, just to see what their reaction is. The other day I asked somebody if they would go upstairs and get the bell. He

was really quite offended at first. He said, "Can't you do it yourself?" I said, "Yes, I can, but I've asked you, [Laughter] and he went up and got it and he said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "Well, you start off by doing little things." He said, "Yes, I see the sense of that."

**S:** Good. I remember a retreat at which I asked one young lady to go and get some flowers for the shrine, and she told somebody afterwards she felt like hitting me. She was a girl who had a problem about being a woman. She didn't want to think she was a woman, and she thought she was being asked to do a silly, girlish sort of thing. That was the sort of thing girls were always asked to do - to go and pick flowers. She would have really resented it, she said. She felt like hitting me on the spot ... She would have been quite happy if she'd been asked to move furniture! [Laughter]

P.62                      The rightness of the demand varies from time to time,  
place to place, life to life; but the stringency of the  
demand does not vary, and the aim of the demand is  
always the same.

**S:** This is a very important Mahāyāna principle: the stage by stage teaching. You begin by doing little things, and then things which are progressively bigger and more important. That's the general approach, the general technique.

**Gisela:** For me, making tea at the Centre would be something far greater than typing out the eight lectures on "The Tantric Symbols of the Buddha's Path to Enlightenment". It's not the same for everybody. Making tea isn't necessarily a little thing. For me that would be a very big thing.

**S:** When we say "little thing" we mean something that involves comparatively little expenditure of time and energy, regardless of what the thing actually is, and comparatively little in the way of sacrifice.

**Gisela:** That's what I mean. Typing eight lectures certainly takes up more time, but making tea would be more demanding. I feel more inclined to sit down and transcribe lectures. It comes easily to me. But making tea at the Centre is very difficult for me, and in that sense [151] it would be a big thing for me.

**S:** Because you have to put more energy into it, really, to overcome your resistance.

**Gisela:** Yes. But from the point of view of time it would be a small thing.

**S:** Some things will involve more time, others less. What is important is the energy and self-sacrifice that is needed. Some people can do very easily something which another person can do only with great difficulty. What is easy for one isn't easy for another. You have to see what is little for that particular person. If I was to ask Gotami to go and give a lecture, that would be asking a very little thing, because she can do it easily; but if I was to ask another person to do the same thing they would say it was a very difficult sort of thing they had been asked to do. You just have to see the individual. But the principle is the same: from something which is little to something which is comparatively big.

pp.62-63                      Someday, when one realises that his own flesh is no more  
important than mere vegetable matter ....

**Mary:** Is that what is meant by flesh?

**S:** Most people would find it more difficult to give their own flesh than to give vegetables, so I think that can be regarded as the norm. There might be some quite exceptional people who found it quite easy to give their flesh, but more difficult to give vegetables growing in their own garden. But the principle is the same. You start people off with just giving things that they find it easy to give, and then giving things that they find a bit more difficult to give, and



so on, until it all becomes easy and they can give practically anything they've got. One could put it in another way and say that it's a training in non-attachment. You start off by being attached to all sorts of things. We cling and hang on to all sorts of things. The Buddha or Bodhisattva is trying to rectify it - trying to get us to develop an attitude of non-attachment, and be ready to just give away anything that usually people are attached to. But you're not going to get people to give up everything all at once. If you start talking about giving up the world and going into a monastery they'll react very sharply. They don't want to give up. So you ask them to give up, or to do, just little things that they think aren't very difficult. When they get used to that, and find it easy, then you ask them to do something a bit more difficult, or to give up something that they value a bit more; then they find they can do that. If they are led gently, step by step, they end up by giving up, or being able to give away, things which usually people are very attached to, including even their own needs. In this way they progress, and become less attached, and more generous and so on. This is all that Śāntideva is really saying. Moreover, one becomes more able to put energy into the *śpiralī*, and less and less goes into the *ēcycleī*, or the *ēcircleī*. It's a gradual course, and a gradual training, as the Buddha says repeatedly, especially in the Pali scriptures. He says it's like taming a horse. You do it bit by bit. First of all you get the horse used to you - let it see you, and give it a bit of a pat. Then you put on the bridle. When he's used to the bridle, you put on the saddle. When he's used to the saddle you get into the saddle, and when he's used to you sitting there you start him trotting. In that way you [152] tame the horse. Getting people to give up things is a bit like that.

**Mike:** When I first became involved with the *ēFriendsī*, I was under the impression that the whole emphasis of the spiritual life was on the practice of meditation and self-development. It never occurred to me that the other perfections were part of the practice as well. This is what I seemed to pick up from the lectures.

**S:** In the earlier days of the *ēFriendsī* there was certainly more emphasis on meditation and self-development, because that was necessary for the people coming along then. Now, of course, many of those people are able to go out and do something meaningful for others, which perhaps they weren't ready for, or even able to do, earlier on. The original emphasis is reflected, to some extent, in the lectures which I gave at the time - though on the other hand there is the whole series on the Bodhisattva Ideal, including *vīrya* and the other *pāramitās*, which was also given then. Later, as the Movement itself became more expansive, I added the talk on the Heroic Ideal, and so on. Still, one must never forget the aspect of self-development. What one does outwardly in the form of *ēgood worksī* is an aspect of self-development, and grows out of that. It's not something you do instead of developing yourself. It's another way of developing.

**Mike:** I still get a little confused, though, even now. I can grasp in an intellectual way how it all works, but I can't quite see each in the perspective of the other. I don't know whether I'm doing too much of one thing and not sufficient of the other and how you find the balance of getting on with your own meditation practice and developing *dāna* and the other perfections.

**S:** I would say with regard to most of the people involved in the Movement, it's a question of phases. Not psychological phases, but spiritual phases. I don't think you can *ēbalance outī* on a day to day basis, i.e. equalise your meditation, your study, and your external activities every day. That's practically impossible for most people. When you get really into meditation you don't want to bother with other things for a bit. When you are really involved with activities it's almost a nuisance to have to stop every couple of hours and meditate. You're on a different wavelength. I therefore think that things should be allowed to go in natural phases of, perhaps, a few months at a time, until you can bring together internal and external activities and have *ēbothī* going on at the same time. If you're involved very much organizing things and going about lecturing and teaching, all right! Do it for as long as you feel like it: a few months probably, then just stop maybe entirely for a few months and be a bit quiet. Study and meditate. Don't see many people. Then, when you feel that the time is ripe for the other phase to begin again, go back into it. This is what I was doing in Kalimpong. Usually I had my quiet, retreat-type periods during the rainy season retreat. I'd stay in the Vihāra, not go

out, not see people, meditate more, read, write, and then, when the rains were over and it was autumn - the best time of year in many ways - I'd feel like going out, and going down to Calcutta and Bombay, and seeing the ex-untouchables, and giving lots of lectures. I'd do that for a couple of months, and then it would start getting really hot, and I'd get tired of going from place to place so much, and giving so many lectures. I would think, 'It'll be nice to go back to Kalimpong and be a bit quiet for a while,' and go back there. I think that for many people in the [153] Movement this is the best pattern, rather than trying to balance out on, as I said, a day to day or a week by week basis.

**Mike:** I think I've been trying to do this on a day to day basis and just got into a hell of a mess. I got frustrated because I couldn't get as much meditation done as I wanted to and couldn't get as many of the other more practical things done as I wanted.

**Aśvājī:** I find that my whole rhythm and mental state changes according to whether I'm working or whether I'm staying at home one day. I've experimented with working three solid days in a week and then having one day off etc., and I've noticed that, generally speaking of course, I feel much better when I'm at home, and when I'm not working, but sometimes there is a very positive effect that seems to result from work. I've not been able to decide what is the best pattern. Perhaps there isn't a best pattern, and it changes from time to time. So I just follow my feelings, and if one day I feel very strongly that I really shouldn't work, well, then I say, 'I'm not going in.' But it's very difficult to lay down any general rule what is best.

**S:** This is, in a way, at least part of the reason why I took this year off. For nearly ten years, I think, I'd been taking-classes and giving lectures and dealing with people, so I felt it was time I indulged in the other phase, which I have now been doing. In a way, having done that I feel that I'm quite naturally getting, I won't say involved again, but there's a definite outward-going tendency. This is why I felt like taking a study retreat. It was not simply that I thought it was necessary and would be good for people, but I myself quite definitely felt like doing it, and I think I shall probably feel like this for some time at least.... For most Order members the most helpful pattern will probably be a few months - say three months, or even a year - of active involvement in comparatively external things, and then at least a few months of retreat, study, quiet country life. This would be a very healthy and balanced sort of life for most people. But gradually you must fuse the two though this may not happen for a very long time. It may take the rest of your life, because if you really fuse the two then, to all intents and purposes, you really are a Bodhisattva. If you can really be meditative while doing work, and if you are doing work while meditative, - if you do this at least sometimes, adding the two together, - then you are quite Bodhisattva-like.

**Gisela:** I'm getting a bit confused now. What is meant by external activities? I think we started off by talking about organisational work in the 'Friends'.

**S:** I'm talking about Order members, and I'm assuming that Order members are mainly involved in 'Friends' activities. I'm not talking now about livelihood in the ordinary sense, though it might include a bit of that, part-time, just to make both ends meet while you're carrying on your other activities as well.

**Subhuti:** I find that I'm going into a more active phase, but that unless I do quite a bit of meditation each day I become uncentred and it just becomes very much of an ego-game, I suppose.

**S:** Your phases probably need to be shorter then. Whereas some people could involve themselves in activities for a year or two, others need a sharp reminder in the form of meditation rather more frequently.

**Subhuti:** Daily, I think.

**S:** Maybe. In that case you should limit your activities each day so that you do leave yourself sufficient time, - in fact, plenty of time, - for your daily meditation. If while involved in the

activities you find yourself becoming definitely uncentred, and not doing them in the right spirit, then just stop. Have some time off and do some meditation. If on the other hand you've spent some time meditating and find that you're becoming a bit stagnant after a few weeks, and not really getting on with it, you can sometimes buck yourself up with a bit of practical work, even if it's only digging the garden or something like that. The ideal, - the Bodhisattva Ideal, - is to have both together, as I said, but it will be a long time before one can achieve that even for certain periods. Until then you just have to have them alternating. The only point is the way in which they alternate, or the length of time after which they start to alternate - whether you have comparatively short or comparatively long phases. Some can cope best with one, some with another. I think in the case of most Order members it's a question of a few months of one and then a few months of the other. This seems to be the most positive kind of pattern. Both fairly intense, I would say. Not just a quiet jogging along with a little bit of activity, and then a quiet jogging along with a little bit of meditation. Both fairly intense, with a lot of meditation involved in their own ways. One will be expecting more from Order members in both respects. One is going to expect them to be much more meditative - perhaps developing their higher consciousness much more vigorously - than before, and also much more active, and doing things more than before.

p.63

In addition, it has not been generally noted that in Buddhist texts there is a whole theology of pride to be found latent and awaiting construction. In Śāntideva's writings this factor is particularly evident, since an important ally of heroic strength is *īpride*, as it may be properly utilised for the furtherance of the Bodhisattva's career.

**S:** This is quite significant. You find this especially in the Tantra. There's a great deal of talk in the Tantra of the Buddha-pride, and you are advised to cultivate this, especially in meditation. You belong to the family of the Buddha! You belong to Amitabha's family, or to Akshobhya's family, or to Ratnasambhava's family, and so on! How can you do any ignoble thing? How can you not make an effort? It would be unworthy of your spiritual family if you behaved in an unspiritual way. This kind of pride is said to be very spiritual, and very positive, and obviously it is very much in line with the Bodhisattva Ideal and the whole conception of *vīrya*. Perhaps it is better psychologically to deal with pride in this way, rather than insist that pride must be completely removed and that we should never feel any pride but always be very humble and self-effacing, etc., etc. Sometimes this self-effacing attitude just suppresses a lot of useful energy. There is a bit of difference to be noted here. In the case of worldly pride you're usually proud of just *you* in the ordinary mundane sense, but here you are proud of what you are associated with, and belong to, in a good spiritual sense. You've got something to be proud of. If you're going to be proud of anything, well, be proud of the fact that you're a Buddhist. Be proud of the Buddha. Most Buddhists feel a little bit ashamed of the Buddha in the West. People start asking about Him and His life and you feel a bit apologetic and say, "Oh well, after all, there's a lot of Eastern myth and legend in it. We mustn't take it all literally...."[155]

Yes, it's true He left His wife, but He didn't advise everybody to do that, etc., etc., instead of saying, "Oh it's really a wonderful life, a grand life, a really inspiring life!" You very rarely hear Western Buddhists talking in this way. Yet the Buddha's life is a very inspiring life indeed, and something that we should be very proud of that there was such a person.

P.63

The word pride (*māna*) has a double meaning with which translators find it difficult to cope. It is pride in the sense of lively spirit, respect, regard, honour, consideration of oneself and others: it is what [the French translator] Poussin has called *ila fierté*, *ihTroisme robuste* ...

**S:** In its more positive sense *māna* is akin to the word *chivalry*. It's a bit of the chivalrous spirit, the knightly spirit.

... it is closely associated with *sthāman* - istation, seat, place; strength, power, a word widely used in Buddhist Sanskrit texts in its second meaning as strength or power. In the latter sense it even overlaps *ṛddhi* - unusual, supernatural, magical strength ...

**Vajradaka:** What does *ṛddhi* mean?

**S:** It's supernatural power in the sense of clairvoyance, clairsaudience, and so on. The corresponding word in Pali is *iddhi*.

**Vajradaka:** Isn't it also sometimes *śiddhi*?

**S:** Yes, sometimes. Siddhi literally means success or perfection and there are two kinds, one worldly, i.e. the so-called supernatural powers, the other spiritual, i.e. Enlightenment. A Siddha is a sort of Tantric sage, or a Tantric initiate, in a sense, who has the spiritual Enlightenment, but there is also the suggestion of supernatural powers, which gives a definite sort of flavour to this word Siddha - or to the conception of a Siddha. He's got the double siddhi. He's enlightened, and also he's sort of magically potent.

**Gisela:** It's a little bit like dignity, pride in the good sense.

**S:** Yes, that's true. It's a sort of self-respect. Perhaps we need to stress these positive, heroic aspects of the spiritual life much more than we do, or than we have done, or even than contemporary Buddhism itself does. It's all there in the scriptures, but it's got a bit watered down. Buddhism has become a bit milk-and-water-like.

**Gisela:** I feel there is a lack of these qualities, and the feeling of them, in one anyway. Usually I think of pride only in the negative sense, like arrogance, and it's like that with some of the other positive qualities we've referred to.

**S:** Like practical efficiency. Some people almost seem to regard practical efficiency as unspiritual.

**Gisela:** Well, because usually it's something obsessional that people rush around doing.

**S:** Some of our Friends say *örganisation* is a dirty word, which is just taking things too far - really throwing away the baby with the bath water. It's only too easy to react from one extreme right to the [156] other. That's no use at all. One needs to follow a real middle path.

p.64

In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* reference is made to pride in each of its two uses; and the confusion wrought by the contradiction within its meaning is made the subject of a sort of philosophical pun ... Beings who have been conquered by pride (*māna-vijitās*) are not the proud ones (*māninas*) .... The truly proud are those who destroy pride .... The pun works out in English as well as in Sanskrit ....

**S:** Be proud of nothing except destroying pride. Don't hate anything except hatred. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* Śāntideva is trying very hard, in a number of ways, to make a positive use of *önegative* things. Very often our negativity is all we've got to start with: we haven't got much else than that; so that's the raw material. Desire to get rid of desire, etc., etc. The fact is that there's a great deal of raw material. There's a saying in Japanese Buddhism, *öThe bigger the heap of mud, the bigger the Buddha.í* When you are making a clay Buddha image, the bigger the heap of clay you've got to start with the bigger the Buddha image with which you finish up. In the same way, the bigger the heap of passions you start off with, the greater your realisation when you do realise. You've got lots of raw material! That's one way of looking at

it. Hence the sinner who becomes the saint very often. The meek and mild, tepid, ordinary, decent, God-fearing person doesn't become a sinner - that's true; but he never becomes a saint either. The sinner is much more likely to become a saint. He's more heroic, in a way. Even one's own internal enemies are useful. They represent so much raw material that can be utilised and turned to good purpose, made good use of. But one must really do this, of course - not just leave them as they are.

p.65                      ... proper pride is in the knowledge, it is to be done  
by myself alone.†

**S:** There is, of course, the connotation or suggestion, 'I am able to do it'. That's the Bodhisattva Spirit and the Bodhisattva Pride, as it were.

p.65                      ... one must be quick to take remedial action  
whenever danger threatens.

**S:** This idea of promptness is very important. Taking action when action is necessary - not just waiting, or letting things slide. Not hasty action, of course, but prompt action. I think that in the Movement as a whole there has been a lack of promptitude of action. Often in the past we've tended to let things slide and just not do them when they really needed to be done. That applies to almost everything, from holding council meetings to meditating. Especially, perhaps, it applies to dealing with people. Sometimes prompt action is needed, especially when you hear someone is in difficulties, or going through a bad phase. Sometimes you need to go along promptly and just see what's happening, and whether you can do anything - not just put it off day by day, because the chance of doing something helpful may then be lost. It may mean people going through things that they need not have gone through had you been a bit more prompt. [157]

p.66                      Elephants are strong; they are intelligent; they are brave and  
fearless: they can be trained: and they respond to discipline. In  
the forest the elephant is independent and carefree: in the world  
of men he is industrious and helpful.

**S:** Elephants are very playful, by the way. They love playing about in the water with one another, and squirting water over one another, and trumpeting joyfully.

p.66                      *Vīrya* is the warrior's strength and the elephant's determination  
which will storm the citadel of Enlightenment.

**S:** That's very important indeed. There are several expressions in Pali and Sanskrit describing the Buddha. For instance He's called *ñarasingha*, which means lion-man, or lion of a man. Or *ñarapungava*, which means a bull-man, or a man like a bull. There's no equivalent expression, so far as I recollect, for the elephant, but it is often implied that the Buddha is elephant-like. It's rather significant that these animals are used for purposes of comparison. Also, of course, the stallion, the horse, the fiery steed. The Buddha is compared to these animals, as is the Bodhisattva - not to the sheep, lamb, goat, or dog, but to the elephant, or to the royal snake: the king cobra with his seven hoods, or to the horse, or the lion. He's compared to all these noble animals. That's quite significant. Then there's the rhinoceros. The Arahant of course is compared to the rhinoceros. There's nothing weak or sentimental about Buddhism - one can see that! - though it has sometimes been made to seem a bit like that, which is rather unfortunate. We don't want Buddhism for little old ladies. Even little old ladies have to become lions in Buddhism. There are people with lots of energy and self-confidence, and they won't feel quite at home in what seems to be a group of rather meek, submissive, easy-going people. [158]

**THE PERFECT ION OF STRENGTH**  
(Text)

## THE PERFECTION OF STRENGTH

### The Text

- p.186            1        Thus having become patient, one should become heroic (*vīrya*), for Enlightenment is gained by standing strong. Without strength (*vīrya*) there is no merit, as without the wind there is no movement.

**S:** It is no use staying with patience. That is not enough. Having become patient, it says the text, which means that patience is not underestimated, one should become heroic.

- p.186            3        Because one is unconcerned with the sorrow of rebirth, sloth arises through inertia, relish for pleasure, torpor, and eagerness to be protected.

**S:** Sloth arises through inertia. This is quite important, from a practical point of view. The enemy of *vīrya* is sloth which has just been defined in verse 2 as attachment to contemptible things, despair, self-despising. How does sloth arise? It arises primarily because one does not reflect on the undesirable nature of ordinary, conditioned existence, especially by way of rebirth on the wheel of life, and also because of inertia, relish for pleasure, i.e. ordinary, worldly pleasure, torpor and an eagerness to be protected, looked after, made comfortable, cherished, and so on. Rather than yourself doing things and looking after other people, even, you want to be looked after. These are all things which go against *vīrya*, by nourishing sloth.

- p.186            5        Do you not see those of your own group dying according to their turn? And yet sleep is to you as the buffalo to the outcaste (*caṇḍāla*).

**S:** And yet sleep is to you as the buffalo to the outcaste, i.e. very dear to him, because the buffalo is not only the outcaste's very own, but his sole wealth, as it were, on which he depends for his livelihood.

- pp.186/87       6        Being observed by Death (*Yama*), paths blocked in every direction, how can you enjoy eating? sleep? sensual pleasure?
- 7        As soon as death has assembled his tools he will come quickly. Having then forsaken your sloth, what will you do at that unseasonable time?
- 8        This remaining unfinished! this begun! this half done!  
- suddenly death appears. Thinking 'Alas I am smitten,'
- 9        beholding your relatives in despair, their eyes red with tears, swollen by the shock of grief and [beholding also] the faces of the messengers of death,
- 10       tortured by the memory of your evil, hearing the roarings of hell, the shaking body smeared with the excrement caused by terror: What will you do?

**S:** I remember in this connection a poem by George Crabbe, who wrote *Peter Grimes*. His is a very powerful, grim and bleak, rather than subtle and gentle, poetic talent. The poem is about a woman who, many [159] years earlier, was left a widow. She has got several grown-up sons, all of whom are completely under her control, and she is a very strong-minded,

energetic, organizing sort of woman, always getting things done and making money. One day she has a stroke, apparently, and that's the end. But the way Crabbe depicts it is very, very powerful indeed, and very impressive, with real spiritual insight. There's one line in particular that I remember, which describes her when she's just about to die. She's rather mean and grasping and keeps everything locked up, so Crabbe says of her at that moment, "Heaven in her view, and in her hand her keys." It's a very powerful line, coming as it does at the end of a long passage in which he builds up a picture of this woman. And it really does illustrate what Śāntideva is talking about. I sometimes think that we should make use of those passages in English literature which are really very apposite from a Buddhist point of view and which very often contain what may be described, without any exaggeration at all, as the same kind of insight. Crabbe, a country clergyman, really does see very clearly what death is like. He sees how suddenly it comes, and what a shock it is, and how it interrupts the ordinary course of life. There's no way out - you're just caught in the midst of it all. Widow Gow hasn't even got the hay in, and she's got to die! It comes across very powerfully indeed. It's not as though she's sick or ill. She's about sixty, but she's still strong and vigorous, and never expected anything like that to happen. But it does happen. She has a stroke, and that's the end.

**Mike:** It's reminiscent of John Donne, Send not to know for whom the bell tolls.

**S:** Yes, it is.

p.187                      16      Self-mastery: aiming at courage and achievement of power, identity of the self and others, and likewise, exchange of self and others [are aspects of *vīrya*].

**S:** Identity of the self and others, and likewise exchange of self and others [are aspects of *vīrya*]. Here you consider that, objectively speaking, there's no real difference between yourself and others. For instance, you feel hungry, he feels hungry; you need clothing, he needs clothing. So objectively there's no more reason for giving oneself food, or clothing, than there is for giving him - that is, if you act really objectively, which is how the Bodhisattva should act. You are placing yourself in the position of another, and another in your own place. There's this sort of exchanging. You see the two as equal, and so seeing you should act in a completely objective manner, as it were, and not give to you, feed you, clothe you, just because it's you. Looking at it objectively, there's no more reason why you should feed and clothe yourself than someone else. Śāntideva goes into this more thoroughly later on under the heading of contemplation. Here he's just referring to it, in anticipation, as an aspect of *vīrya*, of strength and self-confidence. It's a sign of strength that you're able to be objective with regard to people. Consider yourself too, but no more than anybody else. Don't just pay attention to you because it's you and for no better reason. The Bodhisattva has got this attitude of heroic objectivity and impartiality.

p.188                      28      The body is happy by means of merit the mind (*manas*) is happy by means of learning: What can hurt the Compassionate [160] One as he remains in the realm of rebirth for the sake of others?

**S:** Because in a sense he's not in it - not on ordinary terms. If one is in the *saṃsāra* out of compassion, one in a way doesn't experience *saṃsāra* as *saṃsāra*. In the higher stages of Bodhisattva development the *saṃsāra* itself becomes, as it were, even nirvanic. He's in Nirvāṇa, as it were, even when, so far as other people can see, he's in *saṃsāra*. - So what can hurt him?

p.188/89 30      Having obtained the chariot of the Thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), which removes all depression and fatigue, going from happiness to happiness, who that is intelligent would be despondent?



**S:** This very well describes the path of the higher evolution and progress up the spiral. ĀHaving obtained the chariot of the Thought of Enlightenment, which removes all depression and fatigue, going from happiness to happiness, Ā in other words going up the scale, up the spiral - experiencing in that way Āwho that is intelligent would be despondent?Ā

- p.189
- 33 I am to destroy immeasurable hatreds, both of myself and of others, and in this task the waning of a single ĀhateĀ requires oceans of aeons (*kalpas*).
- 34 In beginning the waning of hatred, however, the smallest particle [of strength] is not to be observed in me. Destined to immeasurable pain, why does my breast not burst?
- 35 Many are the virtues, both of myself and of others, which are to be acquired; yet the adding of a single virtue will not occur until after oceans of aeons (*kalpas*).
- 36 Never has any increase in virtue arisen in me - even the least virtue. How this birth, so marvellously acquired, was uselessly obtained by me!
- 37 I have not experienced the happiness of great festivals for the worship of the Blessed One. The teaching has not been praised, nor have the poor been satisfied.
- 38 Security has not been given to the fearful, happiness has not been granted to the afflicted. As an arrow from the womb of my mother I have merely shot to sorrow.

**S:** Here Śāntideva seems to be reverting to a kind of *pāpadeśanā* or confession of faults and then linking it to the non-practice of *vīrya*. Why do I remain in such a state? Why do I have so much reason for remorse? Why have I made so little use of my opportunities? Why have I done so little, achieved so little, spiritually? Itís all due to lack of *vīrya*.

- p.189
- 40 The Sage (*muni*) has said that zeal is the root of all goodness; and that its root is constant meditation on the maturation of the fruit [of action].

**S:** Sometimes itís said in the Mahāyāna that *vīrya* is, in a way, the foundation of everything. If youíve got that then everything follows, but if you donít have that then nothing is possible at all. Vigour (or zeal) is one of the five spiritual faculties and when these faculties are cultivated as successive stages of a path the order is as follows. [161] First of all one develops faith, i.e. faith in the Buddha, then as a result of your vigour you cultivate that which you have faith in. You actualise it, put it into practice. Then you develop awareness and mindfulness to safeguard your gains, as it were, and not slip back. Mindfulness leads quite naturally into meditation, and that eventually gives birth to wisdom. Thereís an illustration given of the man who jumps across the river. First of all heís got the faith and confidence that he can do it. After that he collects his energies, gathers up his loin cloth - thatís the *vīrya*. Then very mindfully he makes the jump; and presumably when heís flying through the air, thatís like *samādhi*. He lands on the other shore and heís there - thatís wisdom. Here the cultivation of the five spiritual faculties is a serial thing even though they do at the same time co-exist. When the spiritual faculties are enumerated as co-existing, you usually get the pairs first. First faith and wisdom as a pair, then *samādhi* and *vīrya* as a pair, then last of all mindfulness, so that those faculties which are members of the same pair balance each other.

**Mike:** I find it very difficult to see them as successive stages and as co-existent limbs.

**S:** Well, the sense of the terms differs slightly in the two arrangements, as a series and as co-existent. It's not the five spiritual faculties, exactly as they are when arranged together, which are then strung out in a line as it were. Though the words remain the same, they take on a slightly different meaning when treated serially. For instance, as the counterpart of faith, wisdom means a more or less intellectual understanding of the Dharma, but as the culmination of the serial arrangement it stands for complete insight into reality, i.e. for Enlightenment.

**Subhuti:** Presumably, in a sense, you'd also go through them several times; just develop them to certain levels and then have to go right through the series again.

**S:** Yes, this applies to every formulation of the path. First, in a sketchy sort of way, you traverse the whole path. Then you go back, as it were, and do it all over again more thoroughly, and then, perhaps, go back once more. But the initial stages get consolidated first. Where there's the kind of natural sequence that we get with the five spiritual faculties, you don't perfect the later stages before perfecting the earlier ones.

**Mike:** So they are necessary as a fundamental basis in some kind of form.

**S:** Yes. You can have a sketchy practice of later stages before you've really got into the earlier stages at all, but you'll never perfect those higher stages before you've perfected the lower ones.

**Dhruva:** One finds that in day-to-day practice. One may come into Buddhism having taken an interest in Zen or Tantra or something, but you can't really get anywhere in that until you've actually come right back and understood the basic teachings.

**S:** Yes. In my own case, when I was in my teens I knew all about *śūnyatā* or voidness, and was very much impressed by it, but it wasn't until several years later that it occurred to me that I ought to be a vegetarian. That's really going back to the beginning - to the first precept, in fact.

p.190            44    Having entered the wide, sweet-smelling, cool womb of the Lotus; having fed upon the kindly words of the Conqueror; having issued in pure beauty from the Enlightenment-Lotus created by the Sage (*muni*) - those who prosper and advance as a result of their good works, appear as Buddha-sons before the Buddha.

**S:** Here Śāntideva is apparently making reference to rebirth in the Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha, where beings who have led a spiritual life on earth are reborn from lotus flowers.

p.190            45    But howling with suffering - the whole skin removed by the demons of Death - poured into liquid copper, heated in the fire - fragments of flesh cut off by the hundreds of blows from burning swords and spears - one falls, because of evil works, again and again upon the beds of well-heated iron.

**S:** The two extremes! On the one hand not just heaven - it's more than heaven, it's the Pure Land of Amitabha. On the other hand, hell.

p.190                      50      This world, self-bound by passion, is not competent for the accomplishment of its own welfare . Therefore I am to do this, since unlike [most of] mankind I am not powerless.

**S:** This is very much opposed to the ordinary attitude: 'Why should I do it? Why me? Why not somebody else?' The Bodhisattva's attitude is quite different: 'Why should I not do it? I am able to do it. Others are not as capable, so let me do it. Why should others have to do it when I am able to do it, when I am capable of doing it?' That's more the Bodhisattva's attitude. He doesn't look for the other fellow to start first or for him to do something before he can do it. He takes the initiative. He feels quite capable of himself doing whatever needs to be done.

**Gotami:** Going back to verse 47, Śāntideva says 'One should begin or not begin, for indeed, not-beginning is better than having begun and turning back.' This surely doesn't just refer to someone who's perhaps beginning a meditation class or something like that?

**S:** He's thinking more in terms of making the vow 'I will do this' and then not doing it and in this way not being true to himself. That's much worse than just happily not doing that particular thing (i.e. without having made any vow), because in breaking your vow you've gone against the mature, total decision of your whole nature. You have not remained faithful to that, which indicates almost a state of schizophrenia - that you are not able to devote, or decide to devote, your whole self in that way. In other words it indicates a much more serious condition if you really have made that vow and then you can't keep it. It shows that in reality you're going back on what you decided to do with, presumably, your whole being.

p.191                      52      Encountering a dead lizard, even the crow is a Garuda. The slightest misfortune oppresses me if my mind (*manas*) is weak.

**S:** The Garuda is a mythological bird that feeds on dragons. An enormous bird. 'Encountering a dead lizard, even the crow is a Garuda.' [163] The crow is rather despised in Indian folklore and mythology. It's considered a really despicable sort of bird, really mean and nasty.

p.191                      53      When one is made powerless by lassitude, injury easily occurs; but the one who is alert, active, and proud is invincible to the greatest foe.

**S:** Often, if people know that you're alert and capable and on the lookout for danger and able to deal with it, they'll think twice before doing anything to you, or trying to do anything to you, so that in the long run you probably won't have to deal with the situation anyway. But if you're always meek and humble and submissive, then they feel that you'll let them get away with it and that they can walk over you and kick you without fear of retaliation, with the result that they are much more likely to do it to you, at least in some cases. Probably they'll jump on you too.

p.191                      54      With resolute mind (*citta*), therefore, I will injure that which is injurious. If I desire the conquest of the three worlds, is it not laughable that calamity conquer me?

**S:** The three worlds are the three places of being, i.e. conditioned being: the world of desire (*kāmaloka*), the world of pure form (*rūpaloka*) and the formless world (*arūpaloka*).

p.191                      57      They [the proud] have been brought by arrogance to misfortune; even in the human condition their joys are lost. Eating the ritual rice balls of others: slaves, stupid, ugly, weak,

58      despised on all sides, stiffened by arrogance;  
these are the wretched ones. If they are among  
the proud, then tell me what kind are  
miserable?

**S:** The ritual rice balls are offered to the dead in after-death ceremonies. Usually, out of superstitious fear, or fear of ill-luck, people won't eat them. Only the poor and miserable and really badly off would go so far as to do such a thing.

Pp.191/92      62      The one who rushes to an activity will be one  
who is too fond of that activity. insatiable in  
devotion to that activity, like one striving to  
win the joy of a prize in sport.

**S:** *Vīrya* is not just inability to sit quiet. A man who's got *vīrya* is not just a man who is unable to refrain from action, who's got a sort of neurotic craving for action: it mustn't be confused with that. Neurotic activity is very common, but that's not *vīrya*.

p.192      66      Rather, when one has endured to the end of his  
strength, he should retire in order to act again;  
and having accomplished much, he should rest  
from activity because of [the danger of]  
ever-increasing thirst.

**S:** Thirst for activities for their own sake, that is.

**Gotami:** In verse 65 he's saying that the [overheated] elephant [who plunges into the first lake he can find and to whom Śāntideva compares the overactive person] isn't doing a terribly wise thing, isn't he? [164]

**S:** Yes. Another translation which I've seen renders it rather differently. According to this rendering, the Bodhisattva plunges from one activity into another, joyfully, like the elephant lotus pool after another. But of course it depends on which sort of activity is meant. If it's the real *vīrya* of the Bodhisattva, yes, plunge joyfully into one activity after another; but if it's just restless activity, then it is to be checked. If the elephant is used as a comparison for the second kind of activity, then he's an unwise and foolish elephant; if for the first kind, then he's a wise one. It depends on what sort of energy is being used: whether it's real *vīrya* or just its neurotic imitation. In the case of the beginner, he would be wise not to get too involved in external activities, even so-called religious and spiritual activities like going round giving lectures, organizing things. After being involved in this way for a while say to yourself, 'I must be careful. All right, I'll cut the external activity off. I'll go away and be quiet and meditative for a while.' If you find it very difficult to do that, and if you find you have become attached to activity for its own sake, then whether it's really necessary or not it's time that you had a spell off, even though you don't feel very happy about it - or even more because you don't feel very happy about it.

p.191      68      When one becomes fearful, he ought to seize  
his discarded sword; and so also, remembering  
hell, one should seize the lost sword of  
mindfulness (*smṛti*).

**Gotami:** Does that mean that if you become fearful, you have *per se* lost your mindfulness?

**S:** No, I don't think it means that. It's just a comparison. Śāntideva is saying that suppose you are in battle and are afraid, and your sword, having been knocked out of your hand, is lying on the ground, what should you do? Pick up the sword and carry on fighting. In the same way you are being buffeted by the passions, and you've lost your mindfulness, so what should you

do? Pick up your mindfulness again, just like the hero picking up his sword once more, and fight.

p.192                      70     Like the bearer of a vessel of oil, who standing in the midst of naked swords fears death if he stumbles, so is the one who has taken the [Bodhisattva] vow.

**S:** In other words he should be very mindful and careful. This is a well-known Indian illustration. A man is carrying a bowl of oil filled to the brim, and all around there are men with drawn swords, and he knows that if a single drop of oil is spilled they'll kill him instantly. So how carefully he will go! One who has taken the Bodhisattva Vow should go as carefully and mindfully as that.

p.192                      71     Just as one immediately leaps up when a snake is in his lap, he quickly should resist the approach of sleep and of slothfulness.

**Aśvajit:** Presumably this is referring to a sleepy state, not actual sleep.

**S:** Yes, a sleepy state of mind. Certainly one should not try to get rid of sleep itself, which is necessary for the preservation of health and strength. [165]

p.193                      73     For this cause he will wish to obtain proper companions and activity, thinking, 'In what circumstances may the practice of mindfulness exist?'

**S:** This is very important and refers, in effect, to our retreats and our whole way of life as followers of the Buddha's teaching. 'For this cause,' that is to say in order to ensure that he does not do again the unskilful things that he used to do and which, for the time being at least, he's stopped doing, 'he will wish to obtain proper companions and activity, thinking 'In what circumstances may the practice of mindfulness exist?'' In other words he will ask himself, 'Well, what about my job? Is that helping me or not? What about my whole way of life? What about my present companions, friends, the way I spend my time? Is this helping me or not? Do I need a different situation, a different environment? Do I need to give up certain things? Dissociate from certain things?' The practice of mindfulness raises all these sort of questions.

P.193                      74     As he ought to make ready the self, remembering the Speech on Heedfulness (*apramāda*); so at the approach of action, before its coming, he turns in every direction. As cotton is obedient to the coming and going of the wind, so one should proceed in obedience to his resolution; and thus power (*ṛddhi*) is completely triumphant.

Śāntideva's touching here on a quite important practical situation. You come to see that certain states of mind and certain actions are unskilful and with great difficulty you start bringing them under control, even getting rid of them. But that's not enough. You have to think, 'What can I do to ensure that these states are not able to arise easily again? What sort of situation would be best for me? What way of life? So that I don't have to keep paying direct attention to these things all the time. So that the way of life that I'm leading will take care of them and be favourable to the living of a better kind of life, a life with more skilful actions, more skilful thoughts.' This is the sort of situation that Śāntideva seems to have in mind: that it isn't enough to think of the present situation. Think of the future too, he says. Think of how you're going to live and try to create circumstances which are favourable rather than unfavourable for your spiritual life. For example, at the end of a good meditation the mind is in a very positive state. But it's not enough to say 'That was a nice meditation,' and then rush off and do something unskilful. One should think, 'Ah, this is very good! I'm very

lucky. I've got into a positive state of mind. How am I going to stay this way? Are any changes in my way of life necessary so that I can have a better chance of remaining like this? This is how one should reflect - and then take whatever steps may be necessary, once you've found what does suit you, what does help you. Don't be afraid to apply your understanding and carry it out even if it means quite a few rearrangements and readjustments in the ordinary way of living.

**Mary:** Is it possible to have mental energy without any thought arising?

**S:** Well, meditation in the sense of the actual experience of *dhyāna*, or state of higher consciousness, in the Abhidharma especially is said to be a state of pure mental energy without thought. It's sometimes [166] described in terms of pure will or pure willing. That's why it's karmically so powerful and why it produces, according to the Abhidharma, such positive karmic consequences. So in meditation you've got energy without thought. Not when you're just trying to meditate, of course, but when you do actually achieve that higher state of consciousness. What you experience then is pure mental energy, but no thought. In that state the energy is not going into thoughts. Thoughts are, in a way, a lower form of energy. It's energy more broken up, less together, less concentrated. When you are really meditative, you're experiencing pure mental energy. That's why it's so delightful. You experience your own mental and spiritual potency, as it were.

A lot of the things that we do and say are not expressions of energy, but losses of energy.

**Aśvajit:** How can you do or say anything without loss of energy in a sense. One transfers energy from an inner state to an outer state.

**S:** I can only say it must be part of a spiral process and not part of a cyclical process.

**Dhruva:** With my speech impediment, I find that talking when I'm stammering is very hard work indeed, but when I hit a pattern where I don't stammer it's like building up energy.

**S:** I think most people who've been on retreats and had silence have found that ordinary talking simply exhausts energy. Whereas if you have a real communication with someone it can tend to heighten energy. Though a real communication can very quickly become just talking if you're not very careful.

**Gotami:** I've found that one of the things that's enabled me to have a lot more energy is getting rid of doubt in what I was doing. If there's any niggling doubt about something you're doing (maybe you don't want to be doing it), then you've got half your energy somewhere else.

**S:** Yes, you're not really committed to that particular thing.

**Gotami:** But if you're wholeheartedly in favour of that and you can say, "This is what I really want to be doing, just for myself, for this particular momentary situation", so then you have no problem at all about energy.

**S:** Right!

**Gisela:** How do you get rid of doubt?

**Gotami:** In a way, by starting just to say, "Well, what do I really want to do? Am I doing what I really want to do?"

**S:** It's a question of decision. If you don't wholeheartedly want to do it, why do so? Say, "O.K., I'm not going to do it." You just stay still until there's something you really want to do, whether it's the same thing that you were doing before or something different.

**Gotami:** You can try things out, even saying, 'I will try this for a certain amount of time and see what happens.' Then one can discover what one is able to do.

**S:** If you've a lot of things to do and don't know where to start or what to do and so on, I think it's best just to stop doing anything. In fact the best time to stop is when there's really a lot to do. Just [167] sort of cut it all off and remain quiet for a while. After some time you'll start feeling that you want to do a particular thing. It may be one of the things you were doing before or it may be something quite different. All right, go and do what you want to do and then in that way, eventually, everything gets done - if it really needs to be done.

**Vajradaka:** I think that the question, 'What do I really want to do?' is very important.

**Aśvajit:** Very often when I ask that question, the answer is 'Absolutely nothing.'

**S:** Then do absolutely nothing.

**Aśvajit:** I do, and then after a while I want to do something else.

**S:** Yes. You need that sort of break to give your energies a chance to go where they really want to go. Otherwise you get a little bit trickling here, a little bit trickling there, and so on, so that you don't really know where you are or what you want to do.

**Mike:** I remember someone talking about decisions which were made with 60% of your being, whereas the other 40% of you doesn't want to follow them through. They seemed to think that in that situation, where perhaps only 60% of you was behind a decision, then that you should be aware of that other 40% as it were, but still go through with what you had decided.

**S:** I think that's quite bad. Too much compromise and half-heartedness and only 60% heartedness. I think it's best to stop even if there's a lot to do. Never mind, just stop. Forget all about it, at least for the afternoon. Do nothing and next do what you just feel like doing. It might not even be a very important thing, in a way, but just do that and then you'll feel like doing something else, and after that something else. That way it all gets done.

The time to take a holiday is when there's really a lot of work to be done, in a way -

**Aśvajit:** That's what Ananda does!

**S:** - but that does not include resiling on things that you've promised to do. You shouldn't promise in the first place.

**Gotami:** It's much easier in the long run to say you really don't want to do it, than to promise and then have to say you can't do it.

**S:** Right. We know that your wants may not be reasonable, or even right, but you have to recognise that they exist and you have to take them into consideration to some extent if you're to function smoothly. Sometimes you can see that certain things in a way ought to be done, but if you don't feel like doing them it's best that you shouldn't - unless it's a matter that really involves some other person's life or health or safety or something like that.

**Gotami:** You discover that sometimes what you feel like doing is far more in line with your original decision than in fact your conscious thought is. This sort of going on a whim to see somebody and you just happen to be in the right place at the right time.

**S:** Yes.

**Vajradaka:** It's like you get more in tune with that previously [168] unconscious flow of feeling if you just relax and don't say, 'Now I'm going to do this because I have to do it.'

**S:** My going to Holland was not much more than a whim, really. Originally I decided to go because Nel was feeling quite bad and negative and couldn't come over here and I wrote to her accordingly. However, after receiving my letter she got better, so that there was really no need for me to go, but I thought 'Why not go anyway?' So I wrote again saying that I would come, not with the intention of doing anything, or giving any lectures, but just to see her and meet her friends. That's all I did, acting on a whim as it were, but a lot seems to be coming from that whim, which is quite interesting.

Looking back over the years, I think I can say that I tend now to do what I feel like doing, or what I want to do, much more than in my earlier days, when I tended to have a much stricter sense of duty, and nearly always disregarded my own feelings or wants or desires; which no doubt was right at that time: probably the wants and desires weren't very healthy. But I tend now to do much more what I feel like doing and things seem to work out all right. Or rather, I tend not to do what I don't feel like doing. It seems very often much more like that! I think that what Gotami said about whims and fancies sometimes being more in accordance with your real underlying purpose, even in a spiritual sense is very true. I think that the rational, conscious mind doesn't always know, and that there is a sort of larger wisdom on the loose, or at large, somewhere within you, which sometimes works through these whims and fancies. Even so, one must be very mindful. You know the different stages of Confucius's life. 'At 15', he says, 'I was devoted to study. At 30 I stood firm - and so on, decade after decade, until he can say, 'At 60 I could follow the desires of my heart without fear.' In view of what I've just been saying, that's very interesting.

**Aśvajit:** He was 60 before he could do it.

**S:** Yes, right. At the beginning I suppose you do need more of discipline, strictness, sense of duty, but after a while I think you can trust yourself and let yourself go more.

**Gotami:** I sometimes think about this to avoid confusion, especially when talking to another person. It's like having the desire to be a musician, so you play around on the piano and nothing happens - in a way it's all discordant and doesn't make anything. Then you settle down to the discipline and grind, etc. Once that is over you've sort of got music in your bloodstream, so that whatever you do with your hands will be musical. So the second stage of just playing around is very different from the first stage.

**S:** And you might, as a skilled musician, play around when you were trying to compose something - which you couldn't have done as a beginner. But it's a different sort of playing around then.

**Gotami:** But in a way almost anything you do then will be a composition because you will in a way be music.

**S:** Yes.

**Gotami:** That seems quite a good analogy to explain the difference between doing what they feel like doing and -

**S:** You mean the difference between doing what they feel like [169] doing and doing what they feel like doing. I think very often one doesn't know what one feels like doing, and that's quite a sad state. We've blurred the issue with so many sorts of duties and objective necessities and calls and requirements that you have to stop sometimes to even know what you really want to do or what you really feel like doing. Because unless there's some sort of feeling in what you do, it doesn't really get very far. It doesn't really do much good. At the same time, the distinction has to be made between the two kinds of playing about. One doesn't want the second to be used as a justification for the first.



74 As he ought to make ready the self, remembering the Speech on Heedfulness (*apramāda*); so at the approach of action, before its coming, he turns in every direction.

**Gotami:** This sounds very much like, in the foundation of mindfulness, the gap before something happens. That space when you can actually decide what to do.

**S:** So thereís a little gap in between the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end. When youíve finished with something, but havenít really begun anything else yet, thatís the point where youíre really free. You donít have to think about the old thing any more, because thatís done with. At the same time, nothing new has started up, so you can look around. Then, when the whole situation is open and fluid, your feeling can very often tell you which direction you - well, not should, but - are going in, or are about to go in, but you must stop doing things for a while first, and remain in a state of non-activity long enough for the ãcreative gapí to occur. [170]

**THE PERFECTION OF CONTEMPLATION**  
**(Guide)**

## THE PERFECTION OF CONTEMPLATION (DHYANA)

### The Guide

p.67

Some of the regions discovered there [i.e. beyond thought and sense perception] are exceedingly strange, and all are strange enough. Indeed, the one outstanding difficulty in any treatment of Eastern religion is the attempt which must be made to understand and evaluate these discoveries [in the realm of *dhyāna*] along with the techniques which lead to them; and many a clear-headed scholar has stumbled at this obstacle.

**S:** This reminds me of a passage in one of Mrs. Rhys-Davids's works.

As I mentioned yesterday, she was a really remarkable scholar and unearthed many interesting things, but when it comes to meditation she goes completely wrong. For instance, she translates *dhyāna* or *jhāna* as *ëmusingí* and she seemed to think of it as just a gentle turning over of a particular subject in your mind. In the introduction to one particular volume of translations she's discussing a certain passage where the monks are described as practising *ānāpāna-sati*, or mindfulness of breathing, and raises the question, Why did they do it? She says in all seriousness that they had to pass their time somehow! [*Laughter*] She considered that a quite sufficient explanation, and she was a very thoughtful woman indeed and had understood much that perhaps others had not understood. That's just one example of how many a clear-headed scholar has stumbled at that obstacle.

P.68

*Dhyāna* (Pali: *jhāna*), is meditation, thought, reflection, especially profound and abstract religious meditation, is derived from the verbal root *dhyai*, which means to think of, imagine, contemplate, meditate on, call to mind, recollect, and which often is used with terms referring to the mind or thought processes.

**S:** *Ādhyāna* (Sanskrit) and *ĵhāna* (Pali) are the same word. It comes from a root which does mean to reflect, but it later developed a quite different meaning. I think the editor in a way has put his finger on it when he says (p.67) that the goal of *dhyāna* is to pass through the door of the mind to other regions of experience than those provided by the common faculties of thought and sense perception. This is a good general definition - or description, at least. This is what does happen in *dhyāna*. One enters another region of the mind, another dimension of experience distinct from that of sense perception, distinct from that of ordinary egoistic consciousness and the rational mind. One enters another terrain altogether.

p.68

Two of the secondary meanings of *Dhyāna*, are insensibility or dullness ...

**S:** Insensibility with regard to sense perceptions especially, or what Christian mysticism sometimes calls *holy indifference*.

p.68

... and the mental representation of the personal attributes of a deity.

[170]

**S:** That is, visualisation.

p.68

Both the Upanishads and the Epics ...

**S:** The Upaniṣads are of course Hindu works [traditionally regarded as appendices of the Vedas] and the Epics are the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

P.68 For practical purposes, we may take Edgerton's definition of *Dhyāna*, 'meditation ... contemplation; mystic trance' or, quoting Levi, 'extase'.

**S:** None of these are very satisfactory. We just have to go further than that. 'Extase' is presumably the French equivalent of the English 'ecstasy' - Levi was a French writer - and *dhyāna* in a way is that, but the word has got all the wrong sort of connotations.

p.68 The ecstasies mentioned in Pali literature are usually four in number ....

**S:** I think it's quite misleading to call the four *jhānas* the four ecstasies, because ecstasy - if you are to use that word at all - corresponds to *prīti*, and that is just one *jhāna* factor. There are others. That particular *jhāna* factor isn't even present in all the *jhānas*. So to refer to the four *jhānas* as the four ecstasies is quite misleading and we should certainly not do that.

p.68 ... Edgerton draws our attention to a long ancient passage .. found with hardly a true variant, in both Pali and Sanskrit literature. In abbreviated form it is found in the *Dharmasaṃgraha*: 'The first is satisfaction and bliss, reflective, considerate, and born of discrimination. The second is satisfaction and bliss, caused by the escaping from personal exhilaration. The third is bliss, which has equanimity, mindfulness, and awareness. The fourth *Dhyāna* is the perception of neither bliss nor sorrow, because of having equanimity, mindfulness, and complete purity.'

**S:** These are the four superconscious states illustrated by those four similes of the soap powder and the water, the subterranean spring, the lotus flowers immersed in water, and the man who has wrapped himself in a pure white sheet after taking a bath. It's rather difficult to recognise them from this description, but that is in fact what is being talked about.

pp 68/69 The first *Dhyāna*, which follows intense meditation on the rational level, is marked as concentrated attention upon one subject.

**S:** That's not really quite right. It's a state of meditative absorption which arises when you are entering upon some higher level of experience, - something more blissful, peaceful, integrating, - but there is still a vestige of rational activity, particularly with regard to the object - or subject, that is - of your actual practice. This is something which I expect everybody has experienced anyway. Beginners, even, usually experience it without much difficulty. You are absorbed. [172] You're not just in your ordinary state of mind. You do feel a definite peace and purity pervading even the body. You are definitely more concentrated, in the sense of being more 'together'. Your energies seem to be flowing together more. You're more harmonious, more integrated. But the discursive activity of the mind is still continuing, at least intermittently. This is the first *dhyāna*.

p.69 The attention is detached (*vivekaja*, 'born of discrimination'), but fully aware of what is happening, and *vicāra*, 'going around and around the subject'. Satisfaction is felt that one is able to achieve this state, and bliss is the result.

**Vajradaka:** What's that?

**S:** *Vicāra*: ögoing around and around the subjectí. That means, reflecting on it.

p.69                      The second *Dhyāna* discards both conscious attention (*vitarka*, it is usually called), and the constant examination (*vicāra*) of the object of oneís attention. This amounts to a renunciation or transcending of discursive reason.

**S:** This means that discursive mental activity (including mental activity in the ordinary sense with regard even to the method of practice itself) ceases. The remaining factors remain the same, but more intensified on account of the cessation of that kind of discursive mental activity. Again this is something which probably everybody has experienced a number of times. In the third *dhyāna* the more ecstatic type of experience calms down. Itís not so bubbly. Itís not so exhilarating. It becomes much calmer and steadier, though the actual joy not less, but youíre containing it more, containing it better. Itís not sort of splashing up or splashing over any more. Itís much more solid, itís much more serene, though still, of course, intensely joyful. And again the mindfulness and awareness are heightened.

Dr. Maticsí descriptions of the *dhyānas* are not all that satisfactory. Heís done his best as far as words and ideas go, but perhaps he hasnít actually practised meditation. The best way to think of the *dhyānas* is in terms of the four illustrations [of the ball of soap powder etc.]. They make them much clearer - or their nature or content much clearer - to someone who hasnít practised meditation than do the more analytical and psychological explanations. One gets from them a very definite impression of progressive harmonisation, integration of energy, heightening of awareness, elimination of activity of the discursive mind, and an intense joy which is a bit bubbly at first but gradually becomes more and more serene and harmonious as the mind becomes more and more full of equanimity.

p.69                      In addition there are four more advanced states ....

**S:** He says ömore advancedí but this is not necessarily so from a purely spiritual [i.e. from the transcendental] point of view. The states in question are more like passages that open off from the fourth *dhyāna* rather than actual further stages beyond. In many passages in the Pali scriptures these additional four arenít mentioned: you go straight from the fourth *dhyāna* to Nirvāna. It seems the two sets [173] were put together [so as to form a continuous series] somewhat later. I therefore tend to regard the second set of four as dimensions of the fourth *dhyāna*, dimensions which you may or may not explore, just as you choose, rather than as literally higher stages which you have to pass through.

**Vajradaka:** Íve got a misunderstanding in my mind. When I was reading the *Survey*, in the section on meditation it said, or you said, that the point of wisdom was secondary concentration - not primary concentration but the second stage of concentration when one gets a subtle counterpart of the thing on which one is concentrating. In that case how is it that, as you have just said, you gain Enlightenment from the last of the four *dhyānas*?

**S:** These statements mustnít be taken too literally. What happens is that you soak yourself as it were in the four *dhyānas*. Having done that, and with your whole being under the influence of those four *dhyānas*, you allow that subtle mental activity with regard to the path to Nirvāna to arise. Technically youíve come back to the first *dhyāna*, or to a state just above it, but behind all that is the sort of saturated influence of those *dhyānas*. In a sense youíve come down; in a sense, though, youíve gone on. This is one method. The other method is simply to remain in the non-discursive, non-reasoning state indefinitely, or as long as you can, keeping yourself completely receptive, and then just öwaití for the even higher, transcendental experience to come. But to encourage it, as it were, to stimulate it even, - to stir oneself up, - you can if you like - having gone through the *dhyānas* and having saturated your being in that type of higher experience - deliberately allow a subtle, completely öobjectiveí mental activity to arise, i.e. a mental activity which is just what is necessary for that particular purpose [of

developing wisdom]. That's rather a different thing from engaging in ordinary discursive mental activity, and it's that which can spark off the insight and wisdom. According to some, I won't say schools of thought - it's more like trends of thought - you can develop *prajñā* or wisdom without ever going through the *dhyānas*, by sheer force of intellectual penetration, almost, backed up by a very strict and regular life. This is sometimes referred to as dry insight, that is, insight which has not been saturated in the moisture, as it were, of higher dhyanic experience. There's a great deal of discussion going on, even at present, as to whether a strictly *dhyāna*-less insight can arise. It seems to be felt, by some at least, that there must be a modicum of *dhyāna*, even if it lasts only an instant; but the difference really lies between that insight which arises without prolonged experience of the *dhyānas* and deliberately starts up objective mental activity to orient oneself towards that still higher, transcendental - as distinct from purely dhyanic - dimension. The standard path, as it were, is very definitely to go through the *dhyānas* first, because though they are not transcendental, though they are just higher states of consciousness, they do modify the whole being very, very strongly indeed and make it much more open and receptive to the Transcendental. In fact in most cases, if that sort of preliminary work hasn't been done you may have a flash of insight but you won't be able to catch it. The being won't be able to take it over and absorb it and develop it into wisdom because it [i.e. the being] is too gross; but the *dhyāna* experiences refine the whole being so that insight is able to develop and one tries, in a sense, deliberately to spark it off by allowing the discursive mental activity to start up again. But when one does that [174] there's no distraction: it [i.e. the mental activity] is just purely what is necessary to form the conception, as it were, of Nirvāna, impermanence, lack of self, voidness, and so on. No more than that. And that serves as a support for the development of the insight or wisdom.

**Vajradaka:** Is it possible just to sort of jump stages ... for moments.... ?

**S:** Do you mean in general or just as regards meditation?

**Vajradaka:** As regards meditation.

**S:** Sort of. This raises, really, the whole question of 'jumping' in spiritual life when following the path, and no doubt what is true in that sense [i.e. in that context] is broadly true with regard to meditation practice. I've referred before to that Chinese classification of the three methods of progress, or modes of progress. There is progress by regular steps, as when, for instance, there are ten stages of the path and you go through them one by one. First you perfect stage 1, then you perfect stage 2, then you perfect stage 3, and so on. This is progress by regular steps. Then there's what they call progress by irregular steps. You start off happily tackling stage 3 and you get into stage 4. Then it occurs to you that you haven't done anything about stages 1 and 2, so you go back and do a bit of work on stages 1 and 2; but you get a bit tired of that: they may be a bit boring; so you think, 'Well, stage 4's more interesting,' and you work away again at that. In this way you might even get up to stage 5, but then you find you can't get any further, so you go back to stages 1, 2, 3, and that's the way it goes on. This is progress by irregular steps. The only point to be made here - though it is made not in this particular teaching, but elsewhere - is that though you can proceed in this way you cannot perfect a later stage before you have perfected the earlier stages. You can have some experience of it, but you can't perfect stage 5, say, until stages 4, 3, 2, 1 have been perfected. But you can have some experience of stage 5 even when stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 are quite shaky. One can apply this to meditation. Sometimes you may have - almost spontaneously - quite advanced experiences, but you can't sustain them or do very much with them because the experiences pertaining to earlier, lower, stages have not been thoroughly activated, have not been consolidated; so you have to go back. This is how progress can take place by way of irregular steps with regard to the *dhyānas* too. Of course there is a third method of progress, or mode of progress, and that is instant attainment, where there aren't any stages at all; but that depends on very special factors and obviously, since there are no stages one can't do anything about it. It either happens or it doesn't happen, so if it hasn't happened as yet, well, you just have to follow either the path of regular steps or the path of irregular steps. I don't know if I've mentioned this threefold classification before - if I have it was only in discussion, I think, not in a lecture - but it is a teaching of the Tendai School.

**Aśvajit:** Is this what is sometimes referred to as instant Enlightenment?

**S:** Presumably, yes.

**Mike:** You've mentioned earlier that you would like our own movement to be in many ways like the Tendai School. Is there any good literature that one could look into?

[175]

**S:** Not much. There are chapters in Yamakami Sogen's *The Systems of Buddhistic Thought* and Takakusu's *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*, as well as in the third volume of Sir Charles Eliot's *Hinduism and Buddhism*. But the school was very synoptic in character, in fact all-embracing. In a sense it was just Chinese Buddhism and it was only later that the various schools - especially the Zen and Shin schools - became differentiated from the parent body and from one another. The outlook of the Tendai School was very comprehensive and has remained so down to the present day.

**Gotami:** In your lecture on meditation - I think it was the one in the Eightfold Path series - you divided meditation into three stages: *śamathā*, *samāpatti* and *samādhi*, and there *samāpatti* isn't what it says here. *Samāpatti* was described in terms of the various supernormal experiences that can arise in the course of the practice of meditation.

**S:** Yes, these are also called *samāpattis*.

**Gotami:** So there's two uses of this word?

**S:** Yes. *Samāpatti* is a term which is used both very broadly and also in a more restricted sense. If you go to the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*, which has been translated by Charles Luk, you will find there many different permutations of *samādhi*, *śamathā* and *samāpatti* - so many, indeed, that it becomes almost scholastic. My hermit friend Mr. Chen used to go into this quite a lot. He was very interested in the subject, and I often discussed it with him. Let's go into it a bit now, because these terms are used. Sometimes you get the expression *śśamathā* meditation. For instance, I saw on the notice board at the Centre an announcement for a little group which has been started somewhere and it says *śśamathā* meditation. Now what do you all understand by this? There is this notice up in your own centre, and some of you are council members who are responsible for whatever is put up there. So, do you know in fact what is put up there - what that is all about?

**Vajradaka:** Yes.

**S:** Well, what is it?

**Vajradaka:** It's the mindfulness of breathing, basically.

**S:** Yes, that's the method, but what is *śamathā* meditation?

**Vajradaka:** Concentration.

**S:** In what sense?

**Vajradaka:** In the sense of the mind being fixed on an object, whatever the object may be.

**S:** Has anybody else got any views, or what did anyone else understand when they saw this?

**Dhruva:** Well, I thought *śamathā* meditation was the whole practice of quietening the body and everything mental, as opposed to *vipassanā* which I've understood as a bit higher than that.

**S:** Yes, there is some truth in that. Strictly speaking the basic, central meaning of *śamathā* is meditation practice pertaining to the four *dhyānas*. Any meditation practice which aims at no more than the achievement of the four *dhyānas* is a *śamathā*-type practice, i.e. one that does not aim, at least for the time being, at developing insight [176] or wisdom. Unfortunately in modern times the two types of meditation have become much too sharply differentiated, with the result that one has *śamathā* without *vipassanā* and *vipassanā* without *śamathā*, whereas really the *vipassanā* should grow quite naturally out of the *śamathā*. You even get *vipassanā* or insight meditation teachers who don't bother about *śamathā* at all. They just give you what are, in fact, psychological exercises, and a lot of strain and tension develops, and they then tell you that you have developed insight into the truth of suffering! The classical Buddhist method - whether in the Theravāda or the Mahāyāna - is to have quite an extensive experience of *śamathā* and then gently go on to *vipassanā*. *Śamathā* meditation is what I call simply meditation. *Vipassanā* I usually now call contemplation. Or sometimes, if I use three terms, I say concentration for the preliminary stage, the stage of getting started, meditation for the middle stage when you are actually getting some dhyanic experience, and contemplation when insight starts to arise. What we teach in our meditation classes - our mindfulness of breathing and our *mettā bhāvanā* - is *śamathā* meditation. So if anyone asks you 'Do you practise *śamathā*?' that's the answer, 'Yes' - though it's not *śamathā* as sharply distinguished from *vipassanā*. Sometimes *vipassanā* may arise quite spontaneously without your knowing it in the sense of being able to describe it correctly in the traditional Buddhist terms.

**Aśvajit:** Could you say a bit more about the development of insight? I'm very hazy about it.

**S:** In terms of very basic Buddhism - which ought to extend right into the Mahāyāna - insight means the understanding of the unsatisfactoriness, impermanence and selfless (or un-ensouled) nature of conditioned existence. It means seeing through conditioned existence as it really is. Not just as a mental idea, but as an actual living experience. This is insight or *vipassanā*. For instance, if you see that everything is impermanent - if you really see that you are going to die - and if this is not just a little idea that means nothing to you but something that you really see, something that you feel and experience to such an extent that you cannot but act upon it, that is *vipassanā*. As I have already indicated, *vipassanā* has three major forms. When you see that everything mundane is unsatisfactory; that try as you might, you are never going to lead a completely satisfactory worldly life, - there's no happiness on that level, - when you really see this and are utterly convinced of it, and really behave in accordance with it, this is insight into *dukkha*. The same with impermanence and with regard to no separate self-nature - which is much more difficult and abstruse and leads on into the Mahāyāna *śūnyatā* or voidness. When insight is developed in any of these ways, there you are in the transcendental dimension.

**Mike:** Is insight sudden or gradual, or can it be both?

**S:** Well, it can dawn on you gradually, as it were. I think it depends on temperament. Or, you can have a sudden terrifying flash which may or may not be repeated but which is in any case quite a shattering sort of experience. It's like a flash of lightning on a dark night which shows everything, and then there's darkness again; but you've had that glimpse. That is insight as a sort of flash. *Prajñā* or wisdom is the same sort of thing, only it's daylight, as it were, and you just see steadily and clearly all the time, or most of the time. [177]

**Mike:** In my own experience, I wouldn't ever claim to have had specific moments of insight, but at the same time, my entire attitude towards living and life and what it is, has definitely altered over the last eighteen months in a very subtle way. I wonder if this is a kind of gradual process of insight?

**S:** In a way, yes. Insight can be very diluted and general, rather than concentrated in these short, sharp, powerful flashes. It depends partly on the method of practice as well as on the surroundings and so on - maybe even on karma. But if one practises much meditation, then there will be a definite subtle reorientation, which is not transcendental, but which



predisposes one to, and as it were softens the impact of, the insight. If your life is rather uneven, and sometimes you're rather spiritual and sometimes not at all spiritual, then the impact of whatever flash of insight you do get might be almost unpleasant, because there is a lot in your life which is completely discordant from that. However, if you are more meditative, if you're leading an ethical life, - practising right livelihood and observing the precepts, - and if you are filled with devotion, then when the insight *ĕhĩtsĩ* you it's a softer impact and it's spread through the whole being, and absorbed easily. In a sense you don't notice it very much, but if you look at yourself you certainly see that changes have occurred. The insight was there, but it was present in this diluted, gentle sort of way, because that's the way in which you happen to be developing it. Other people might have a rather terrifying *ĕRoad to Damascusĩ* type of experience which was quite catastrophic.

**Gisela:** I find it quite difficult to use these words or concepts because I have no experience of them and I sometimes wonder whether there's any point in using them at all.

**S:** Using them in what context?

**Gisela:** Well, like talking about it or reading about it because - but I suppose it works in that way. One gradually gets a feeling for it. You know, as I am now it's just a complete blank. I just don't understand it at all.

**S:** One has to wait until one's experience catches up and then you say, *ĕAh yes, that's what that doctrine's talking about!ĩ* or *ĕYes, that's what that illustration means!ĩ* When I first mentioned the illustration to the second *dhyāna* (the subterranean spring bubbling up inside the lake) I could see the little smiles appearing on the faces of several people. *ĕOh it's that!ĩ* they seemed to say. They recognised it and could link up their own experience with what the text said, what the scripture said. This is what happens. And it all becomes much more meaningful then. Your experience in a way becomes clearer, at least rationally speaking. You know a bit more definitely where you stand, and also, when you read the text it means much more to you, because you can now see it in the light of your own experience. I'm sure you've all experienced this to some extent.

**Aśvajit:** I've found great reluctance to go very deeply into these categories because, I think now, of a reluctance to find out where I really am, because I've been involved in it myself in such a competitive kind of education and so I'm not interested in that at all.

**S:** There's a saying of Oliver Cromwell to Cardinal de Retz, a saying that is quoted by Nietzsche, *ĕA man never flies so high as when he doesn't know where he's going.ĩ* There's a great deal of truth in [178] this from a Buddhist point of view, because your sense of direction, - when there's still somewhere further to go, - is determined by your lower mind, and if you abandon all that, well, you don't know where you're going, and then, of course, there is the possibility of going higher or further. In the same way, the instructions are all there these lists of stages and experiences - and it's quite useful to compare them sometimes with our own experiences, but I think we need not ever bother very much where we are, provided we know that we are going in the right direction and are doing what we have to do. But which milestone we've got to, if any, I think we need not bother very much, if at all. Whether you're in the second *bhūmi* or the third or the fourth - I won't say it doesn't matter, but it doesn't help to think about it particularly. Otherwise you become like the athlete who's always measuring his biceps, and weighing himself, and all that sort of thing. Your spiritual life becomes competitive, even if you haven't got other people in mind. It becomes ego-centred, ego-oriented. So press on. Make sure you make some progress every day, but don't bother too much exactly where you are. It sounds a bit paradoxical, but it is really like that. Sometimes, in a way, you may feel you've made good progress throughout the last year, but you couldn't say whether you're now at stage 3 rather than stage 2. It might even seem that, in some odd manner, you've slipped back to stage 1; but on the whole it might be clear that progress had been made. At least so your friends tell you, and they can't be wrong, I suppose.

Anyway, get very clearly in your minds what *śamathā* traditionally means, - what I have called the classical meaning of the term, - and also what *vipassanā* means. *Samāpatti*, as the text here says, is used sometimes for the four higher (formless) *dhyānas* plus a fifth even higher experience than that, and sometimes it is used to cover all the *dhyānas*, that is, the 4 or the 8 or the 9. I don't nowadays generally use that term. In fact in my last classes at the Centre I was simply using the English words and speaking in terms of concentration, meditation and contemplation - concentration and meditation covering *śamathā* and contemplation covering *vipassanā* (insight) and *prajñā* (wisdom). Probably that is the most straightforward usage. If we can avoid using Sanskrit and Pali words it is better, and I think we can here. But if later on we ever are asked by someone who has gone a bit more into things, and who is familiar with the Buddhist texts, "Where does *śamathā* come in? What does it correspond to in your system of teaching?" then you can say, "That is what we mean when we talk about concentration and meditation, and when we talk about contemplation that refers to *vipassanā* and to *prajñā*". *Samādhi*, which is another term, is ambiguous. Sometimes *samādhi* means concentration and meditation, sometimes it means wisdom in a definitely Mahāyānist sense. I've gone into this in one of the talks in "The Essence of Zen", where I've spoken of Mahāyāna *Samādhi* as Enlightenment in its "subjective" aspect of personal realisation ...

**Mary:** Does it mean that *samādhi* in that particular passage meant *prajñā*?

**S:** The hyphenated *Samādhi-prajñā* meant a unified experience of *samādhi* and *prajñā* which went beyond *samādhi* and *prajñā* as separate things. It was *SAMĀDHI-PRAJÑĀ*. In the first edition of this little book there was a dash instead of a hyphen between the two words, which meant that the meaning didn't come out so clearly, though a very careful [179] reader would have seen that, judging by context, the dash was a hyphen, or should have been a hyphen. If people are doing any teaching, especially teaching of meditation, they should be quite clear about these terms - or at least as clear as they can be in view of the nature of the subject, and in view of the fact that they are not used in Buddhist literature itself, or in modern Buddhist practice, at all consistently. The principal terms used in connection with meditation are *dhyāna* or *jhāna*, *śamathā*, *vipāśyanā* or *vipassanā*, and *samādhi*. These are the main terms. When it occurs in the triad of *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*, *samādhi* means concentration and meditation, but in other contexts, of course, it sometimes includes *prajñā*. Another term that is used in connection with meditation is *bhāvanā*. The texts speak of *śamathā-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. *Bhāvanā* means development or cultivation or, more literally, "making to become". Thus *śamathā-bhāvanā* means development or cultivation of calm, *vipassanā-bhāvanā* the development or cultivation of insight. Sometimes in Buddhist countries they use the word *bhāvanā* to mean just meditation in the very general sense. It is a "bringing into existence" of higher states of consciousness, i.e. the *dhyānas*, and possibly, of *vipassanā* or insight.

p.70 ... having been thoroughly warned of the danger and the signs of self hypnosis ...

**S:** I wonder about this. No one ever warned me about the danger of self-hypnosis. It does not seem to occur in the East and no one else seems to fall into this as far as I know. What is self-hypnosis? Writers on Buddhism are very often rather worried about this. I wonder why it is. We take it for granted that the monk at least is lucid at all times, even if the unfortunate layman can't be. But self-hypnosis? Is this something which is possible? Does it ever actually happen, and what is it?

**Gotami:** Yes. One of the Friends has experienced this. She was used as an experimental patient by someone who was teaching hypnosis and she decided to see if she could do it for herself, and, in fact, she did that, and she said that she remained lucid all the time.

**S:** Then it wasn't self-hypnosis, or hypnosis of any kind, if she was lucid.

**Gotami:** But she said that when you are hypnotised you are lucid all the time too.

**S:** Then what is this state of hypnosis in which you are not lucid and against which, apparently, one has to be warned?

**Vajradaka:** (To Mike) It would seem to correspond with the story that you were told about those people in the United States.

**Mike:** Oh yes, shall I tell you about this?

**S:** Yes, do.

**Mike:** A certain Buddhist friend of ours was in America last summer and he was conducting classes - Zen classes, I think - every morning between 5 and 9. A group of people had apparently asked him to do this. One day one of the girls who was attending asked him if he would like to come along to another meeting that evening. It was a similar kind of thing, she said. When he got there, however, he discovered it was a black magic rite in which they were going to get involved. So he [180] said, 'Look, I don't really feel I can take part in this, but if nobody has any objections I don't mind sitting and just being a spectator.' The other members of the group were a bit unsure about this, but after discussing it for a while they agreed to let him sit in and watch. They then went into a sort of phallic worship with a *papier mâché* phallus, an enormous thing, and I think the whole ritual was performed in a state of nudity. After an hour or so the pitch of the thing intensified and the leader of the group, who had originally brought the *papier mâché* phallus into the ritual and who had been wearing it, took it off to reveal this enormous penis of his own. The whole ritual was then repeated, but this time for real, and it involved a great deal of sucking and massage and general worship of the penis. Strange to relate, the girl who was the most taken up with the entire thing was this girl who had been coming to his sittings in the morning.

**S:** But where does the hypnosis come in?

**Mike:** Well, at the end of all this, the girl came up to our friend and asked him if he would like to go for a cup of coffee. Over the coffee she said, 'Well, what did you think of all that?' He said, 'I can't quite make it out. How do you relate what you are doing with me for four hours in the morning to all this sucking-off that you've just been doing?' She replied, 'Oh, but it was only symbolic. It was only a *papier mâché* ritual implement.' Our friend was astonished. 'No, no!' he exclaimed, 'You actually were sucking that guy's penis!' The girl objected to this quite strongly. 'No of course I wasn't,' she insisted. 'You're quite mistaken.' She genuinely believed, afterwards, that it had only been a ritual using a *papier mâché* ritual implement. She was completely unaware of the fact that she'd been actually sucking this guy off.

**S:** I wouldn't say that there was any question of hypnosis here. I would say it is a quite ordinary case of a woman, one half of whose mind refused to let the other half know what she was doing. There are several well-known literary examples of this in Henry Miller's writings, for instance in *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. Some people just have a great capacity for deceiving themselves. In this particular case, there was another side of the girl's mind or being or psyche that she just wasn't able to recognise or accept, and which she was quite able to shut off. I don't think there's any question of hypnosis involved here at all.

**Mike:** It's interesting that when our friend described her actual behaviour at the ritual to her this girl also said, 'My boyfriend's asked me to do that and I won't do it.'

**S:** Well, that gives the game away, doesn't it? [Laughter] Just read Henry Miller. It's very clear what is happening. It's simply that an ordinary decent girl just won't recognise - or at least her ordinary decent mind won't recognise - that she's got this other side. She's able to separate it off completely and sort of pretend to herself - almost - that she hasn't done certain things that she has, in fact, done. This happens all the time in small ways.

**Mike:** But is this an actual pretence?

**S:** She's not consciously pretending, though at the same time she isn't completely unaware of what she's doing. This is not an unusual thing at all, but I would say that it is not a question of hypnosis. She'd not been hypnotised. Of course, if the whole thing was exposed [181] in the newspapers, or if the police came along and she was arrested, she'd be quite capable of putting in a plea through her lawyer that she was hypnotised by the leader of the group and didn't know what she was doing and wasn't responsible - and could believe it, even, at least with half of her mind.

**Gisela:** But we can. I mean, one can pretend some things. When you start off you know that you are pretending, but after a while you don't know it any more. I mean, it can happen. Maybe not to such an extreme, but ...

**S:** Henry Miller gives some very extreme examples indeed. I think in this particular aspect of life, the sexual, the sort of thing that this friend of ours was describing can happen quite easily and does happen, in fact, quite a lot. Certain things go on and people act and pretend afterwards as though it all just never happened, and keep up that pretence. This is quite ordinary. But hypnosis? I'm still wondering where this kind of warning against the dangers of self-hypnosis really comes from. What is it, in fact, that people are warning you against when they say, 'Don't practise meditation or you'll hypnotise yourself. You'll get into a hypnotic state'? Does that in fact happen?

**Aśvajit:** I've had no experience of it and have never been confronted with anyone who has succumbed to it.

**Vajradaka:** Perhaps it could be mistaken for catatonia?

**S:** Well, that's a very extreme sort of thing. It occurs to me that if the warning against the danger of self-hypnosis has any sort of validity at all - and usually it hasn't, being the outcome of a sort of irrational fear - then this is based upon, I think, two possibilities. One is that as a result of practising meditation, - possibly practising wrongly, - and in the case of a person with a certain kind of psychic structure, alienation may occur. This can happen if, in the course of the meditation, something comes up which the person just can't accept, with the result that they cut off and shut off from it rather sharply. When this happens they can get into a sort of alienated state and can seem very distant and 'away', as it were. That could perhaps be looked on as a kind of hypnotic state, or state of self-hypnosis, because they would give a strong impression of being estranged, and not in touch, and away from themselves. The other possibility is with regard to the kind of person whose psychic contents are scattered and unintegrated and whose 'ego' is not properly formed. They could practise meditation and relapse into a sort of pre-ego state, and that would appear very much as though they were under hypnosis. I've seen one or two examples of this with young children. That's why I'm not at all happy about allowing very young children to try to meditate: because this could happen. You might even have heard me discouraging parents who wanted their children to take up meditation, saying, 'Just let them sit with you when you meditate and do a little bit, but don't think in terms of definite sessions, or of getting them definitely practising meditation.' I'm thinking of children under 7 or 8. These are the only two possibilities that I can think of that people might be referring to when they warn against the danger of self-hypnosis.

When I arrived on the scene in 1964 there were constant dire warnings being given at the London Buddhist Society against the danger of practising meditation, and they allowed only me to take classes [182] there - apart from Mr. Humphreys' Zen class. I remember Mr. Humphreys himself telling me, 'Oh I never encourage people to meditate longer than five minutes. That's the most that they can stand.' Now the Society has its own meditation classes, I believe, and presumably people meditate much longer, which they weren't allowed to do before. Though there was quite a lot of talk in those days about meditation being dangerous, and how you could easily go off your head if you meditated too much (i.e. more than five minutes a day), it seemed to be mainly Mr. Humphreys' personal scare. At any rate, warnings appeared in *The Middle Way* and a bit of controversy developed. The whole thing might have

arisen because of a rather extreme form of *vipassanā* meditation that was fashionable at that time. At least 11 or 12 people who had practised it turned up at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihāra after my arrival, and I found they were very badly affected mentally. Three more people were in mental hospitals. The latter must have been in a pretty bad state even before encountering *vipassanā* meditation and should never have been put on to that sort of practice in the first place. All this had created quite an atmosphere in Buddhist circles in London in 1964 and 1965 and the Buddhist Society tended to discourage meditation quite strongly. Meditation was *dangerous* - a word that one often heard. Things are a bit different now, I believe, and I think this is due, directly or indirectly, to us: to the *Friends* and, maybe more, to me personally.

**Gotami:** What are the dangers of meditation?

**S:** Really, none at all. The only dangers are wrong kinds of practice. I don't think there are really even any wrong methods. The main danger, or the main difficulty, is just trying to do too much too soon and thinking of meditation as a sort of achievement, as something that, if you work at it, you must automatically get such and such a result from. This egoistic, grasping sort of attitude is, I think, the greatest danger, because it builds up tension, but I don't really see any serious danger apart from that - except in the case of a person who is what they describe as schizoid, whose latent schizophrenia could, perhaps, come out as a result of practising meditation. But I'm not even quite sure what *schizophrenia* is, or how it arises, or how we ought to deal with it through meditation or in any other way. I must say that, in the whole time I've been taking meditation classes, I never knew anybody who was ever the worse for practising meditation, even in the case of those who overdid it a bit. But I certainly know there were a few, especially in the earlier days, - people with rather rigid personality structures, and somewhat emotionally repressed, - who tried to do more and more hours of forcible concentration and just landed up with severe headaches. But that's the kind of attitude I was referring to: straining, and making an egoistic sort of effort. Otherwise, I don't see any danger except, perhaps, if you have a prolonged experience of meditation on retreat and then let yourself go back into the hurly-burly too quickly. That can have a rather unpleasant effect, even quite a bad effect, but it isn't the meditation itself that is responsible, it's your own lack of caution in making the transition to a different kind of life. Really there are no dangers in meditation at all.

**Aśvajit:** Would those remarks apply also to the cautions that are sometimes directed to so-called Tantric meditation? Even the Dalai Lama in his speech said that unless one does these things under the right circumstances, with full facilities, then it can be dangerous.[183]

**S:** I wouldn't agree with that as a blanket statement. To the best of my knowledge, the only actually dangerous practice - and it does occur in some branches of the Tantra - is breath control, or *prāṇāyāma* in the strict sense. There, certainly, one needs a teacher and one needs the right sort of environment. Apart from that I don't think there is anything that is actually dangerous, though there are many things that you could do wrongly and then not get any particular results from. The only danger there is lies in a sort of general misunderstanding of the Tantra in such a way that it's detrimental to your whole spiritual life, as when people think of Tantra in terms of sex, so that getting into the Tantra means getting into a more and more active and variegated sexual life and dignifying that with the name of Tantra because, apparently, you need some sort of excuse to whitewash the whole thing, at least in your own mind. There is that danger, but then that's just part of the general danger of slipping back. There's no specific danger in the form of madness or anything like that. I think *prāṇāyāma* is the only really dangerous thing, i.e. *prāṇāyāma* wrongly practised, without a teacher. That Tantric exhibition in London created several misleading impressions, though it was a very good exhibition, because they just included, as Tantric, anything that was remotely erotic, whether it was an illustration of the Kama Sūtras or Moghul pornography: if there was anything of sex in it, it was automatically Tantric; which is very misleading. There are four great divisions of the Tantra, and three of them don't even make use of sexual symbolism, what to speak of sexual practices. Only one out of the four does, which is the Anuttara. So I'm still a bit puzzled as to why all these warnings against the danger of self-hypnosis ... *Oh*

be careful, if you meditate. You might end up in a hypnotic state.<sup>1</sup> What is this hypnotic state? Is it so undesirable? And are you so likely to fall into it when you start meditating?

**Gotami:** Even in hypnosis you're not likely to suggest to yourself anything that you're not normally going to do anyway.

**S:** We might even have to consider the perhaps extraordinary suggestion that the hypnotic state is in fact a quite healthy thing, and somewhat analogous to the meditation state in its early stages. After all, what is hypnosis? It's a sort of sleep, a state of lucid sleep.

**Aśvajit:** Or a non-reactive state, perhaps?

**S:** Yes, and so not unlike meditation in its early stages in some ways.

**Gisela:** It was used as a kind of positive state originally by Freud, wasn't it?

**S:** Yes, it was. Maybe we're approaching it the wrong way round. It may be simply that hypnosis itself, or the hypnotic state, has got a bad name. I rather suspect it was given a bad name 150 or so years ago by the Church and other such authorities on account of the fact that the people who got into hypnosis and mesmerism were not very orthodoxly religious people and were suspected of being in league with the Devil, etc. But they might have just got into something a bit like a meditative state. Who knows?

**Aśvajit:** Perhaps achieved a degree of clarity and understanding of the real situation, that it made others feel uncomfortable. [184]

**S:** Yes, because 'hypnosis' is a dirty word, in a way, isn't it?

**Aśvajit:** Implying power of one person over another.

**S:** Yes, though it seems really never to happen like that. Some people are very suggestible - but you find that in ordinary life with nothing of hypnotism coming in.

**Gotami:** I think perhaps the fear comes from the fact that it's usually done by somebody else, on you, and that having once been hypnotised by that person it's very easy for you to be put under hypnosis by him again. Someone that I know and who used to take a group for hypnosis said that there were some people in the group that he had hypnotised who, after a few sessions, even if they were only in just an ordinary social setting, if he did certain things, associated with the technique, would become hypnotised quite easily. So perhaps people are afraid of coming under the control of another person in this way.

**S:** I don't believe this, though on the surface, as it were, it may well be true. My guess is that, in that sort of situation, someone who is very easily hypnotised by a particular person, or very easily brought under his or her power, wants to be hypnotised, wants to be under their power, and this is just a way of achieving that end.

**Gisela:** I would say that that fear is much broader. It's just the fear of not being in what we would call 'normal' states of consciousness. That's what I'd say all this reflects - a clinging to what we call 'normal'. Anything that's not a normal state of consciousness we're just frightened of.

**S:** Yes. And the so-called hypnotic state of being mesmerised, may well be actually a quite positive, healthy and normal thing.

**Gisela:** Well, psychoanalysis has used it as such - Freud did to start off with - to achieve a cure of certain neurotic symptoms.

**Vajradaka:** One of the criticisms that I've heard against hypnotism is that it makes a time lag between the body and the mind, because for the time that one is hypnotised one is away from the body and out of contact with it, so then, when one comes in contact with the body again, they are not in synchronicity, and that when one is crossing the road, for example, one's mind and one's body can be separated by as much as five minutes and of course that can be very dangerous.

**Subhuti:** Doesn't sleep do the same thing?

**S:** (To Vajradaka) I'm not quite sure about that, whether such a time lag does actually happen.

**Vajradaka:** The person that told me this said that it happened over a long period of time, with hypnosis, and it sort of built up.

**S:** I wonder if this has been actually verified. It seems a bit odd, because it could apply to the sleep state, and to meditation too. Meditation does, of course, slow down your reactivity, that's true, and that makes life a little awkward sometimes, because one's conventional life, and one's relationships with other people, are just sustained by reactivity so that, when the reactivity collapses, it's as though there's nothing left, and you're in a rather odd and uncomfortable state, sometimes, until your true spontaneity builds up a bit and starts functioning. The kind of 'time lag' you mention might amount to no more than that. You certainly wouldn't be well advised to start crossing a busy [185] road just after meditating, when your mind is rather quiet and you don't find it easy to react quickly. There may be an element of truth in what you heard in the sense that eventually, if you are saturated with meditation, - or even with a little hypnosis, - you must refuse to function in the old way. You say, 'My mind is not going to catch up' with my body. It's just an old reactive body anyway. The body's got to change, my life's got to change, - the whole pattern's got to change, - according to my new state of mind.

**Aśvajit:** It's quite possible to cross the road without reacting, actually, although that is quite difficult. [Laughter]

**S:** On my last visit to London I stood on the Archway Road waiting to cross and it was quite a horrific experience, after being away in Cornwall so long. I crossed successfully, but I didn't enjoy it.

**Dhruva:** This is one of the things you can see in London, the difference between those who are experienced in road-crossing and those who aren't. Actually, it's quite easy just to slide in and out of the traffic. You can go at the same speed, and you're not reacting violently to anything, just joining the flow.

**Aśvajit:** But there are so many currents going on, cross-currents in fact. That's the difficult thing.

**S:** Some time ago, when I was going around London with Mark, he commented one day that I never looked both ways before crossing the road. I said, 'I know; I don't need to: I'm a Londoner.' [Laughter] It isn't really necessary to look both ways. You can see things out of the corner of your eye, as it were, and you just cross straight over.

Anyway, all this talk about the danger of self-hypnosis sounds quite reasonable, but I just don't think there's anything in it at all, really. The only danger that may arise in connection with meditation is of someone getting a bit alienated when, in the course of their practice, emotions start coming up which they find frightening, and, therefore, difficult to accept. Even this is not a danger in the long run, because sooner or later it will be dealt with. It is more the symptom of changes taking place than anything actually dangerous, and, as I said, it can be dealt with.

The first *Samāpatti* (and fifth *Dhyāna*) is a consciousness of the infinity of space. The second is a consciousness of the infinity of consciousness itself. The third is realisation of the total unreality of all things; that there is nothing at all. The fourth is consciousness of unreality as an object of contemplation; that is to say, it is the *Dhyāna* of neither nothing nor something. The last *Samāpatti* - the summit of consciousness - is the cessation of all conscious perception.

**S:** Let's discuss these briefly, whether usefully or not so usefully. Consciousness of the infinity of space. This is not just a looking and seeing infinite space. It's also a feeling of not being obstructed - a feeling, as it were, of freedom and expansion. Space is the condition for things existing in space, and it's because things exist in space that you can be obstructed in your own expansive movements. This experience of the infinity of space is not simply a visual experience [186] with you here but looking out over the infinity of space. It's an experience of one's whole being sort of expanding indefinitely, just as though you were in infinite empty space and your body, let us suppose, swelled up like a balloon and it went on expanding and expanding, - the balloon getting bigger and bigger, - and there was nothing to obstruct it at all and it went on expanding to infinity. If this was to happen you'd get a definite feeling, a definite sensation, and this is the sort of thing that the expression 'consciousness of the infinity of space' is getting at. It's not just a visual experience of looking out into infinite space from a certain point in space.

**Aśvajit:** Is it perhaps, also, when you think of a point out there and suddenly realise that you are out there?

**S:** Right, or again, it's a bit like a bird which can fly anywhere in the sky: it can go in any direction whatsoever. It's a bit like that, too - except, of course, that when the bird is in one particular point in space it isn't in another. But here it's not like that. So this is the infinity of space. It's an experience of the unrestrictedness of mind, of being even, and/or consciousness.

Next, of course, is the consciousness of the infinity of consciousness itself. You are aware of this. You are aware of this unrestrictedness - of the fact that you are unrestricted, that there is no limit to your expansion in any particular direction.

The third *Samāpatti* (and seventh *Dhyāna*) is the realisation of the total unreality of all things; that there is nothing at all. No, it's not quite like that. Not that the words are incorrect, but if you are expanding infinitely, and can be in this place as easily as in that, then what's the difference between one part of space and another, one place and another? There's no thing in particular, no question of this place and that place: there's nothing at all. In a sense it's all the same, though not the same one particular thing. The third *Samāpatti* is more like that.

With the fourth *Samāpatti* (and eighth *Dhyāna*) one's experience becomes rather rarefied, so that we need not linger over it. It is the *Dhyāna* of neither something nor nothing. Here the subject-object relation is wholly transcended.

The fifth and last *Samāpatti* is the cessation of all conscious perception. Not that you go into a dead state, though it often has been understood as such by scholarly writers on Buddhism. Rather, it's as though even the subtle potentiality of subject-object relation is transcended. In Yogācāra terms, you've reached the *Ālaya*, which is a pre-subject state altogether.



**S:** This is the great difference between *dhyāna* and *prajñā*, or between *śamathā* and *vipassanā*. In the *dhyāna* experience - especially higher *dhyāna* experience - there can be an abeyance of thought activity, of the rational mind: there can be an abeyance of the empirical self. But when you come out of the experience, you come back to the self; you find him waiting for you, ready to take over - ready, even, to appropriate your so-called spiritual experience. The only way you can get [187] rid of him is, of course, through insight and wisdom. That's the difference. Only *prajñā* brings permanent freedom and peace, which is to say, only the understanding - not just conceptual understanding - of *śūnyatā*. Thus Buddhism makes quite a lot of this distinction between *śamathā* and *vipassanā*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*. You can have many delightful experiences of abeyance of the ego, but from those experiences you come back to the ego, and your ego even tries to take over your experiences of non-ego. It's only *prajñā* which finally undermines the ego and the whole ego-based superstructure of psychic experience.

**Gisela:** What is the difference, if any, between the ego in the psychological sense and the ego in the Buddhist sense?

**S:** In a way, not much difference at all. Paradoxically, you can't get rid of the ego until you've got an ego to get rid of. It's as though the individual consciousness is the next stage up from the pre-individual consciousness, but from the individual consciousness the next stage up is to what we can only describe as - not even the higher *dhyāna* consciousness but - the *ĕtranscendental* consciousness, as I call it in one of the lectures, and that comes about by way of the negation of the individual consciousness as a self-contained entity, complete and sufficient in itself. It's not that that particular structure of consciousness is broken down, but rather that a different sort of energy now works through it: it's no longer working under its own steam. But so long as you are an embodied being you've got to have the structure there for the higher energy to work through, as it were. Otherwise you just couldn't function. Consequently it's a healthy, positive thing for that psychological ego, i.e. that ego-structure, to be there, but not for it to be trying to function under its own steam. When it's trying to function under its own steam, that's the metaphysical ego [i.e. the ego wrongly conceived as a real entity rather than as a provisional psychic structure, not the ego as an actual metaphysical existent], but the psychic apparatus or ego-apparatus being there, - in other words, the psychological ego being there, - that's all right. All we have to do is to make sure that the higher consciousness, - the transcendental consciousness, - functions through it. Even after His Enlightenment the Buddha still functioned, apparently, as an ordinary human being. The ego-structure remained intact, but the Enlightenment-experience was functioning through it, was taking it over. Just as in the case of the body. After Enlightenment, the body's still there, but it becomes an instrument for Enlightenment. Similarly with the ego-structure. It thinks, forms ideas, philosophises, etc., but all under the direction and inspiration of the Enlightened consciousness. You are not out to smash the ego in that sense. All you are out to do is to change its present state of functioning under its own energy, its own power. Hence paradoxically you have first of all got to build up your ego and then go beyond it.

p.70                                      Inwardly [the fifth *Samāpatti*] seems to correspond to what other mystical traditions know as the ineffable awareness of Naked Contemplation .... (Conze)

**S:** This is not contemplation in my sense of the term. So far as Buddhism is concerned, it's still meditation [i.e. not insight]. Dr. Conze's description of the last *samāpatti* is quite vivid, and, as Dr. Matics says, eloquent, but I think a lot needs to be sorted out here before one could make the kind of comparison between Buddhist meditation [188] and Christian mysticism which the passage quoted seems to imply - and I don't think we'd better do that now.

p.71                                      Speaking for the Mahāyāna, Dr. Suzuki tells us that *śamāhita*, *samādhi*, *samāpatti*, *ekāgra* may be understood as synonymous, denoting a state of consciousness where the mind is most intensely concentrated on one thought.†

**S:** *ĕEkāgrāí* means one-pointedness. But ĕconcentrated on one thoughtí? Itís not really that, or rather, it is that, but one must be careful not to misunderstand. Itís not a forcible fixation of attention. Itís a natural flowing of all the energies towards a single point. Itís an overall orientation of the whole being, therefore a state of integration and harmonisation of psychic energy, - this is what it essentially is, - and you feel that process beginning when you get into the practice of meditation. You feel the energies all coming together. You feel that they are not divided any more - not fighting among themselves. Theyíre all made harmonious. This is *samādhí*.

p.71                      ĩIt is the receptive state of intuition, rather than the active state of thinking.ĭ (Suzuki)

**S:** ĕReceptive stateí, ĕintuitioní, etc. These terms are all right, but they donít really convey very much. They are not nearly powerful enough.

p.71                      It is the in-between state - between reason and intuition ...

**S:** This is not incorrect, but again itís much too weak and feeble. The words are OK, but they wouldnít convey very much to someone who didnít have actual experience of meditation.

p.71                      Sometimes the Nine *Samāpattis* are interchangeably called the Nine *Samādhis*, and above and beyond the traditional list of nine, many, many other *samādhis* are mentioned.

**S:** This brings us back a little to my usage of the word *samāpatti* in the lecture that Gotami referred to. Itís as though, when one gets away from the ordinary rational mind and into these higher states, but still short of *prajñā* or wisdom, there are all sorts of ĕdimensionsí of consciousness. Some of these are reflected in the four *dhyānas*, which seem to be the more standard pattern for these experiences, and the one more directly linking up, later on, with wisdom. Others are reflected in the five *samāpattis*, as well as in various later lists. All represent these very very rich and varied dimensions of higher consciousness. Perhaps we touch upon the fringes of some of them in the course of ĕpsychedelic experienceí and so on. Thereís a whole vast range of experience here that, in all probability, has never been fully and systematically explored by any one person, though different people might have explored different sections.

**Mike:** Can insight arise in any of these?

**S:** It can arise after an experience of any of them. When the insight arises there is, in a sense, a subtle mental activity which as such is incompatible with the *dhyāna* experience. In a sense the insight can come without that activity - but then you wouldnít know it. You would have nothing to grasp it by, as it were. But Enlightenment - or [189]a *satori* experience, to use the convenient Japanese term - can also occur in sleep. It doesnít even have to be in the waking state.

**Mike:** Does the Bodhichitta arise as the result of insight or is it of the nature of insight?

**S:** Ah, youíve got into quite a different track now! The term Bodhichitta is part of a different set of categories, and occurs within what is, in a sense, a different context. All the same, one could say that the Bodhichitta is, quite definitely, of the nature of insight and wisdom, though in the more Mahāyānistic sense of these terms. It isnít just of the nature of a *samādhí* experience, or a *satori* experience: it goes far beyond that. It is definitely of the nature of an insight, however germinal. In a sense itís more than an insight - it embraces the whole of oneís nature. Itís more ĕvolutionalí, whereas insight is more cognitive, at least as a term.

**Mike:** So that insight is just a sort of fragmentary aspect of the process of Enlightenment?

**S:** Yes, one could say that. Generally, the word insight is used more for the preliminary flashes. When those flashes consolidate, they become wisdom, and beyond that the Mahāyāna has Great Wisdom, which is the understanding of the Void in the profounder sense. But the Bodhichitta in a way is the initial, first experience of wisdom and compassion as one, not two. It's the germ of that experience, or the germ of what culminates in that experience. Insight is, in a way, one-sided.

**Mike:** It's just operating very much on the wisdom side.

**S:** Yes.

**Mike:** I did wonder, though, if there is, in fact, an emotional equivalent to insight.

**S:** There is faith, in the later sense. In some forms of early Buddhism, for example in the Theravāda, faith is something very subordinate and inferior, but as Conze points out, and as I think I have mentioned in the *Survey*, later on faith becomes co-ordinate with wisdom, especially in the devotional schools of China and Japan. But the Bodhichitta is the point at which wisdom and compassion start coming together. They may both be very germinal indeed, but they've at least come together, and to the extent that they've come together it's the Bodhichitta. However rudimentary and undeveloped it may be, it's there.

**Mike:** I find relating the whole idea of insight to my meditational experience very difficult, but on the other hand, I've had a number of - for me at least - quite profound emotional experiences.

**S:** The Theravāda - indeed the Hīnayāna generally - does tend, at least theoretically, to underrate faith. Yet there are passages in the Pali scriptures - usually explained away by latter-day Theravādins - which quite clearly speak of liberation by faith. Such-and-such a person, we are told, was liberated, gained Nirvāna, through faith. If one accepts that quite literally, then faith clearly is an emotional equivalent of wisdom. One could therefore even say that, for some people, what arises is not penetrating insight but an overwhelming emotional experience of faith and devotion which is equivalent to insight.

**Mike:** How does this relate to the teaching of the Five Spiritual Faculties and the necessity of balancing faith and wisdom - one's intellectual capacity with one's emotional? [190]

**S:** This is a structure that applies more on the ordinary psychological level, and with regard to the spiritual life as a whole. But the point at which you contact ultimate reality, or Nirvāna, cannot be referred to either as a thought or a feeling, etc., but it can be spoken of analogically as any. It isn't a thought, but you can speak of it in terms of insight as though it was a thought, because you've got no other language; but its content is not thought-like really. In the same way you can speak of it as an emotional experience, in terms of faith and devotion, but actually it's not faith and devotion in the ordinary psychological sense: the content is transcendental. Again, you've just got to find some words. Do you see what I mean? You can even speak of it in volitional terms, but that is rare. Usually it's spoken of either in intellectual terms or in emotional terms. So insight is not really just *intellectual* as opposed to *emotional*. Real devotion is not just *emotional* as opposed to *intellectual*. And real insight or real understanding, real wisdom and real faith and devotion, tend to coincide. You find this in the devotional schools, where their faith ends up by being something very much like wisdom, and in content, I'm sure, the same as real wisdom. It's just a question of either a predominantly cognitive or a predominantly emotional mode of expression - or even of experience; but the one is as valid as the other. Early Buddhism, in its mode of expression, is predominantly cognitive, in fact very much so, and the emotional mode of expression developed only later.

**S:** This includes all the so-called supernormal faculties: e.s.p. phenomena and everything of that kind, clairaudience, clairvoyance, acting upon things at a distance, thought reading and so on. But traditionally, in Buddhism, they are not regarded as very important, except in the Tantra. The Tantra regards them as rather important and a useful piece of equipment, as it were, in difficult and dangerous times. This, again, was something that was very much in the air when I arrived in England in 1964 and made my first contacts at the Hampstead Vihāra and the Buddhist Society. There was a lot of talk about being very careful not to hanker after psychic powers, because it was very dangerous. Christmas Humphreys, I remember, told me to be sure to warn people at the beginning of my meditation classes that they were on no account to try to develop psychic powers. I think this was all a left-over from Theosophy. The general impression seems to have been that most of the people who came along for meditation were looking for psychic powers and that this should be discouraged. Has anybody actually found this? because I didn't. It was never even mentioned by any of the people coming along, and they didn't seem to be hankering after psychic powers at all.

**Vajradaka:** People seem to be quite turned on by the idea of magic. I don't know that they particularly want it, but if it was a by-product they'd be very happy. *[Laughter]*

p.72                      In general, the practitioner passes through three stages: ìmomentary contemplationî, which is virtually indistinguishable from mindfulness; the stage of ìaccessî, wherein one is said to stand on the threshold of the transic experience; and [191]îecstasyî, the experience of *Dhyāna* or *Samāpatti*.

**S:** Very broadly speaking one can say, with regard to these three stages, that in the first one's mind is concentrated - maybe with a little effort, or even force - on the level of one's ordinary consciousness. It's concentration in the most ordinary sense. You are concentrating on your breath, for instance, much as you might be concentrating on the book you are reading or the meal that you are cooking provided, of course, that you were doing this really well. Access concentration is when you start getting somewhat beyond that. You are not fully and definitely in the first *dhyāna*, but you are sort of halfway between your ordinary mental state - when you are concentrated - and that higher state. In the state of what Dr. Matics calls êecstasyí, which is not a very good word, you are fully in the first *dhyāna* state. This is the classification which is usually given. Out of the 40 topics of meditation enumerated in this tradition - and not everybody agrees that the list is exhaustive - there are some topics which are able to lead you through all three stages, while others can take you only part of the way.

p.72                      The subjects are chosen with extreme care, in accordance to the individual's need: Whichever is his greatest problem, greed (*lobha*), hate (*dvesa*), or delusion (*moha*), that is the aspect of his character which is considered to be in the most urgent need of treatment.

**S:** Very often it's difficult to tell what an individual's greatest problem is. The classification presupposes that you are predominantly greedy, predominantly hating, or predominantly deluded, but usually it seems that all three are there in full force, and it's very difficult to see which one is preponderating. It's a question of just tackling the one that it seems most convenient to tackle at the moment, and gradually getting round to the others.

p.72                      Only friendliness and the remembrance of death are said to be universally applicable.

**S:** So you're quite safe with these two, regardless of temperament. [People who are liable to depression, however, should be careful about practising the remembrance of death.]

**Aśvajit:** What is ělimited apertureí?

**S:** Thatís a particular limited space that you concentrate on without there being anything in that space to which you actually direct your attention.

**Aśvajit:** Like the limits of the room, for instance?

**S:** Yes ... Youíll find all the 40 topics of meditation described in great detail in the middle section, or middle volume, of the *Visuddhimagga*. Itís quite useful - especially for anyone teaching meditation - to know this material. Though itís not all equally relevant, some of it is very useful indeed.

At this point it occurs to me to say something about books on meditation. Every now and then, in the past, Íve been asked if I could recommend a good book on meditation, and Íve said, ěWell, there just isnít one.í The nearest to a good book on meditation, as far as [192] I know, is Chih-Ís *Dhyāna for Beginners*, which is in Dwight Goddardís *A Buddhist Bible*. Thereís another translation - though perhaps not so good, in a way - by Charles Luk. *Dhyāna for Beginners* is a very useful work indeed. Chih-I, who lived in the sixth century, was the virtual founder of the Tíien-tai (Chinese) or Tendai (Japanese) School, and this little book was compiled from lectures given to disciples.

**Mike:** Is the translation in *A Buddhist Bible* complete?

**S:** Not quite, unfortunately. In one chapter various quasi-magical methods of dealing with *dhyāna* illnesses are described, and the translator has left all that out as out of date. Luk, I think, hasnít, but his translation for some reason or other doesnít read very satisfactorily.

p.74                      Even the fifth *Samāpatti* (the ninth *Dhyāna*) which is almost indistinguishable from Nirvāna, is still this side of Enlightenment.

**S:** Probably this isnít anything that we need to stress too much at this stage, though itís certainly stressed very much in principle in Buddhism: that you mustnít come to a stop at any particular stage of the path. One is traditionally warned that you mustnít, especially, get over-attached to higher meditative experiences, but while one is struggling for those higher meditative experiences this has a faintly ironic ring! So I think we need not say too much about it. Itís rather like exhorting people not to slip back into the Hīnayāna, not get stuck in Nirvāna! Itís a bit unreal for us at this stage, so weíll take it as read, as it were, that even when you do get these higher meditative experiences you mustnít be attached to them, but pass on to the next and ultimately to Nirvāna itself.

p.74                      By the power of *Dhyāna* ...

**S:** One has to be quite sure what is meant by this. Itís as though the practice of meditation consolidates behind a single point the entire thrust of oneís psychic energy, and that it does this at higher and higher and more and more refined levels, so that one is able to penetrate through, as it were, by way of intuition and insight, into something unconditioned and beyond. At present, our energies are scattered over scores and hundreds of different objects, but that same energy, - stepped up from level to level, - can break through the veil of illusion - if you want to use that expression - and land us in another dimension altogether: a purely transcendental one. This is ěby the power of *Dhyāna*í in that sense. *Dhyāna* provides you with the thrust. You could also use an illustration from rocketry. Itís rather like the first stage of the rocket ( I hope Íve got my facts right here!) which carries you beyond the gravitational field of the earth and then, once youíre free of that, the second stage goes off and carries you straight towards your destination, outside the gravitational field. The second stage of the rocket is like *prajñā* or insight; the first stage like *dhyāna*.

p.74

He dwells among them as father, mother, wife, or child. He may be a master or a servant ...

**S:** This has a double meaning. It can mean that a Bodhisattva is voluntarily reborn in a certain state, as this or as that kind of person, [193] or that he adopts that sort of position in the course of his day-to-day life in this birth in order to bring himself into effective contact with people.

p.74

... if one is satisfied with mere tranquility, he is reborn in the world of the gods; he loses, at least for a time, the chance of attaining Enlightenment ....

**S:** We don't have to worry about that just yet, but there is something analogous to it in the lives of some Friends and Order members. Suppose you go away to a nice quiet retreat centre in the country. Everything is so peaceful. There are only cows and sheep around, and you browse through your Buddhist scriptures, and do just a little bit of meditation in the morning. Apart from the odd visitor there's nothing to bother about, and you think, "Oh this is so nice and peaceful! I don't want to go back to the city and give lectures and help raise funds and all that sort of thing." On its own comparatively lower level that would be equivalent to the temptation that faces the Bodhisattva - of staying in higher meditative realms, rather than coming down to earth again and moving about helping people.

p.75

Loved ones are no less the cause of disappointment and sorrow than the world at large.

**S:** This whole passage raises quite strongly the general question of the value of personal relationships in connection with meditation and, in fact, with the spiritual life generally. Śāntideva doesn't seem to take a very favourable view, and we have to think about the matter quite carefully. We have to distinguish between spiritual friendship in the sense of *kalyāṇa mitratā*, on the one hand, and on the other hand a personal relationship - even with someone also committed to the spiritual life - the basis of which, however, is in fact purely mundane or, perhaps one had better say, reactive. It is, of course, this latter kind of relationship which Śāntideva is indicating as a hindrance to meditation and to one's spiritual advancement generally. Especially within the "Friends" and within the Order we have to be very clear that in the name of *kalyāṇa mitratā* we are not cultivating just the same sort of personal relationship as anybody else. This means, I think, really a rather radical evaluation or revaluation of personal relationships. We hear a lot of talk about "relationships": I've certainly heard a lot of talk about them. This is an idea that we've taken over from psychology, perhaps: that there's something intrinsically valuable in personal relationships. But I think we have to question this. E. M. Forster writes somewhere that individuals matter but relations between them don't, and there's a good grain of truth here. I think that we tend to sentimentalise - when we don't romanticise - personal relationships. Very often there's nothing personal in them at all. They are so reactive that you can't really speak of them as anything genuinely personal or genuinely individual. That comes out much more, I think, when the relationship is a definitely spiritual thing (not to make too much of an antithesis between the mundane and the spiritual, though) and you are walking side by side with someone on a definitely spiritual quest. You might even find that you have developed a real spiritual relationship with people of whom you had not thought in those terms. Whereas, perhaps, your other relationships had been experiencing all sorts of extraordinary ups and downs, the real, spiritual relationships [194] had been quietly maturing, and you'd hardly noticed it. Sometimes one finds this happening.

**Gotami:** It's not always clear when the relationship involves attachment and when it is truly spiritual.

**S:** Śāntideva gives a clear indication of the criterion: "He is frustrated when the other is absent; he is confused and perturbed when the other is present." If you have that sort of experience, well, it's attachment and not spiritual fellowship. On the other hand, you can

sometimes see that it is, in fact, a spiritual fellowship that is developing because on a purely mundane level you never would have become friendly with that person. You just wouldn't have liked them. You don't find anything attractive about them in a personal sense, but spiritually you can feel very close and very warm towards them; but had it not been for the spiritual bond - that you belong to the same Order, make the same commitment, are interested in the same spiritual path - you might never have cared to know that person, or even to speak to them. There is nothing in their mundane, relative, reactive personality to attract your mundane, relative, reactive personality. All the same, if you are very strongly attracted by someone within the Movement, say, or within the Order, don't take it for granted that it is because of the common spiritual element. It might be reinforced by that, but I think it is very unlikely that it is due just to that. It is much more likely to be reactive, and simply mundane. The spiritual fellowship type of relationship takes a long time to develop and to mature. It is a matter of years, I think. It becomes very, very strong, but by quite small degrees. This seems to be the way in which it develops - probably with some exceptions. But the more reactive type of relationship very often is much more quickly begun and much more quickly over.

p.76                      When one associates with fools, he suffers through  
the sharing of their false values.

**S:** One need not label everybody else fools, but most of the people that one is likely to meet in the course of ordinary social life definitely entertain what we would regard as false values and it is very difficult, when you're with them, not to share their false values, not to share their valuations of things. We were talking about this the other day in connection with people thinking that Buddhism was escapism. When you are with people who feel very strongly that religion is escapism, and who discuss it in these terms, it is very difficult not to participate at least to the extent of sharing their language, - of having to speak their language, - the language of escapism, which is not your language, and the ideology of which, - the basic assumptions of which, - you don't accept. But there is this difficulty, that when one associates, we won't say with fools, but those with different values, it is very difficult not to take on those values to some extent, and you suffer from that. Has anybody experienced this?

**Gisela:** Yes. I found it very disturbing, and I didn't quite know, really, how to handle it. Exactly as you said, I found myself faced with the choice of either using the same language, and the same values, as other people, or not communicating at all.

**S:** Following Śāntideva, Dr. Matics goes on to say, "When he differs from them he loses popularity and respect." You can make enemies by just insisting on speaking your language. When you are in society, and [195] mixing with people, it is very difficult to avoid speaking their language and, therefore, implying that you accept the values of that society. Having to do this is very hurtful to you. You are going so much against the grain of your own nature and destroying, almost, something that you are carefully trying to develop and nurture.

p.76                      They are untrustworthy, and their friendship can  
change to hatred in a moment's time.

**S:** If you stop speaking their language and insist on speaking yours.

p.76                      The superior man they envy.

**S:** One finds a lot of that. They envy the superior man almost to the extent of denying that anyone could be really superior at all - that there is any such thing as a spiritual hierarchy. Such an idea is, indeed, very distasteful to many people.

p.76                      The equal they hate. The inferior they despise. Praise  
infatuates them. Blame causes anger. Self-exaltation  
and tawdry pleasure are all that interest them.

**S:** This raises, in a way, quite a problem. If one does accept and try to follow the Bodhisattva ideal, how is one to live in the world, in society, and mix with other people, yet not be affected by it? Not only not be affected by it, but put across whatever you have to say? It isn't at all easy. Even to survive seems difficult sometimes - just to keep your own end up and not be submerged. You probably can't do it all the time: you need periods of retreat - either being by yourself or in the company of people who share your ideal and valuations and speak your language. Otherwise you can hardly survive - and things are getting worse rather than better, as regards society in general.

p.76                      ... anyone this side of Enlightenment is something of  
a fool according to Buddhist principles ...

**S:** Something of a fool? Completely a fool, or mad even, according to another verse.

p.77                      ĨCut off your affection ....Ĩ

**S:** Affection in the sense of *sneha*, which of course has a strong connotation of attachment. It's not affection in the sense of *maitri* or *mettā*. Buddhism has quite sharply distinct words for these two different things. We tend to confuse the issue by lumping everything together and calling it all love, but in Buddhism it's either *pema* or *sneha*, on the one hand, or *mettā/maitri* on the other, and the two are very sharply distinguished - *pema* or *sneha* being an infatuated, deluded, attached, projected kind of ěloveí, and *mettā* being the calm, friendly, ěimpersonalí feeling that really does desire the other person's genuine well-being and is not just trying to exploit and use. I think a great deal of harm is done by the fact that, in the English language, we've got this very ambiguous word love. A great deal of misunderstanding is created.

p.77                      [The king who preserved his sanity] quickly found  
that being the only sane man in a country is no bed of  
roses, and that [196] if he wanted to keep a crown on  
his head, he had to go crazy with all the rest of the  
citizens. Otherwise, they would think him mad,  
instead of themselves.

**S:** That's the situation you often feel yourself in, in society. So you think, ěI'd just better go mad with all the rest of them, otherwise they'll just turn and rend me - send me to the stake or tear me to pieces. It's safer just to go mad and accept their valuations and their judgements. Why just cling on to my sanity and give myself all this trouble? Let's go mad with the rest of them.í Sometimes you get this sort of feeling.

p.78                      The layman, of course, is too confused for trance, but  
even in his troubled life, preparation is being made for  
the experience at a later date. All, to a greater or lesser  
degree, can practice some form of detachment.

**S:** The general Buddhist view, especially in Theravāda countries, is ěThe layman ... is too confused for tranceí, that is, for the serious practice of meditation. By layman, of course, is meant one who is full-time involved with his domestic and social affairs, and his duties as a citizen and so on, and who has no time or respite for other things. It would seem quite definitely that, if one is to take up the practice of meditation to any degree, some withdrawal from that full engagement in worldly life is essential, even though, technically, one remains a layman in the sense of not being a monk. If one can go out and about doing this, that and the other, - keeping up all one's worldly responsibilities and contacts, - and still preserve peace of mind, one is already a Bodhisattva. But very few people start off as Bodhisattvas. Most have to practise a measure of detachment and noninvolvement, first, and gradually try to increase that. We should be very careful not to delude ourselves here and think that we can, in fact, lead a very active social life, with lots of parties and plenty of personal contacts, and still keep up our meditation. It's really very doubtful if you can.



**Gotami:** What if one is involved in religious activities on a full-time basis?

**S:** One just has to be careful that so-called religious activities don't, in fact, become mundane. But even if one does this, however, there is still a special question with regard to meditation. As I've said in the *Survey*, in the case of the Bodhisattva, even, when it comes to meditation his arrangements for leading a double life break down. He has actually to withdraw, when he wants to practise meditation. So even though one is giving lectures and organizing meetings in the real Bodhisattva spirit, even so, if you want to practise meditation, you have to cut down even on that kind of good work. It's just a question of deciding which you need at any given moment, or whether the needs of others are not greater than your own.

**Gotami:** But then you would never get down to meditation.

**S:** Well, if you could indefinitely bear it, and indefinitely go on engaging in activities in the right spirit, you don't really need meditation. But most people, after a while, will need it, and so should give up the activities, because, if you're doing them in a tired sort of way, without the real, living inspiration, they're not going to be [197] of much use to others anyway. So you might as well get back to some meditation, and resume your activities when you've recharged your batteries, as it were. For quite a few people it will be like that. If however, you are able to recharge your batteries while in the midst of activities, fine! But if you can't do this, then you have to stop, because you've got nothing left to give any more, even though you may be going through the motions.

**Mike:** It would seem that, if one had to go off into retreat every now and then, it would be a little disruptive of the flow of the Movement as a whole.

**S:** I'm afraid that's so - unless you can recharge your battery as you're going along. But it's better that the whole Movement should come to a halt for a while, if that is really necessary - I mean, come to a halt externally. Better that there are no meetings and classes and whatever until everybody's recharged their batteries. A lot of exhausted people, flogging themselves as it were, and having to force themselves to take classes, are not going to do much good anyway. It would be much better if we all stopped, and started again after six months. No classes, no lectures. Nothing for six months: we stop - all going into retreat. Flow is not just continuity of external activities, it's continuity of the spirit of the thing. So, if everyone comes to the end of their spiritual resources, in this sense, at the same time, then we all just have to stop, and close down for six months. Why not? Apparently much better than carrying on in the wrong sort of way! I hope that it will never come to that, because I hope that different people are doing things on different time scales. Some people's phases of withdrawal and engagement are longer or shorter than others', and so on. But if it ever did happen that everybody came to the end of their phase of activity at the same time, then we'd just all have to take time off together - go away to different nooks and corners. We'd have Order members scattered all along the coast of England in little caves! We mustn't think in terms of having to keep the activities going at all costs. We haven't to do that. Even if everybody did go into retreat at the same time and came out six months later, well, what an explosion there would be then! You might have lost a few threads, or a few people have dropped out or drifted away in six months - that's quite possible. But you'd probably find most people came back again quite quickly. You might even find that your pupils had been carrying on on their own in the meantime and meeting in one another's houses. It might be quite interesting. But if everybody is mindful of what is going on in the Movement as a whole, - if, when you see that other people are on retreat, you wait a few weeks, or a few months, before dropping out and having your own period of retreat, - things can certainly be adjusted. People simply have to be aware of what others are doing and what is the situation of the Movement as a whole. In any case, I think it's quite a good thing that everybody who is actively engaged should, periodically, drop out and go on retreat, and then come back. I think this is a very good arrangement. But I don't think we should have one body of people always engaged in activities and another body of people always in retreat. I don't think that's desirable - unless of course, some of the people who are always working are able to recharge their batteries as they go along - some

can do this - or unless those in retreat are sending energising waves out in the direction of those who are actually doing the work. That also is possible. [198]

p.78                                    ì... one should turn his thinking upside down.î

**Aśvajit:** Is this referring to the *parāvṛtti*?

**S:** It is analogous to it in a general way. In the Yogācāra tradition the term *parāvṛtti* is used in a quite technical sense.

p.78                                    Without isolation, the process of turning upside down one's habitual views is impossible....

**S:** This is very important. Such turning upside down is impossible because your contact with society all the time consolidates your non-turned-upside-down state. You can't realise the relativity of your reactions and thought processes unless you get away on your own, or go into a totally different environment. Yes, that's another way of doing it: immersing yourself in another country, another language, another culture. But going into isolation is probably much better. I've been thinking, in the course of the last few months, that every Order member should be encouraged to spend - in the course of, say, the two or three years following his or her ordination - at least a few months in solitary retreat. This would be an extremely valuable experience. Buddhadasa is doing it at this moment. He's not completely cut off, but he has very, very few visitors. I think you get something in that way that you can't very easily get - perhaps can't get at all - in any other way. This is why the practice is very much to be encouraged. It's somewhat the same when you're just a wanderer and have no regular social contacts or relationships, and no position of responsibility. The wandering monk in India has very much that kind of experience. As a wandering monk you do see people, but very often you see different people every day, and in this way you are isolated, in a very definite sense.

**Mike:** You get this a lot with travelling. I've had the experience of feeling pretty isolated from people when travelling around.

**S:** In books of reminiscences, and in novels, there are often descriptions of the terrible desolation of the hotel bedroom when you are going from place to place - maybe as a commercial traveller, maybe as some other sort of traveller. It's just one hotel after another for weeks on end, and almost every night a different hotel bedroom - empty. There's nothing that you can feel is a bit homely. It's bare and impersonal, and the usual impulse is simply to get out, to leave it as quickly as possible, - to go to the bar, go to the pictures, - not stay in that dreadful hotel bedroom. But if you could stay there, - if you could say, "OK, here I am. I'll just sit here and experience the aloneness and the isolation", - it could be a very good thing. But most people just flee from it.

**Gotami:** It's much different in the countryside.

**S:** It is. It's less lonely.

**Gotami:** In a way it's all around you, - it goes on for ever, - whereas in a bedroom you've got four walls, and outside there's noise and so on. It's quite a different kind of feeling.

**Mary:** You can feel alone in a room full of people too.

**S:** You're alone then in the sense of being cut off, and having nothing much in common with people. [199]

**Gotami:** The thing I really enjoyed, though, was not having anything to do.

**S:** Well, that's very pleasant when one has been leading a busy life. Anyway, work permitting I would definitely like to see every Order member, not too long after his or her ordination, go off at least for a month, preferably even up to six months, - three would be a nice average, - but at least one month - alone.

**Gotami:** I think it takes the best part of a month to settle into it.

**S:** Maybe you ought to have a year off then!

p.79                      In the cultivation of indifference, there is no end to the removal of distraction and the quieting of agitation, this side of Enlightenment.

**Aśvajit:** Why this side of Enlightenment?

**S:** Presumably because, until Enlightenment has been attained, you'll still have to concern yourself with cultivating tranquillity and getting rid of distractions. To the extent that wisdom is developed, you can permanently remove some distractions even before full Enlightenment is attained, but others will remain. Consequently, until Enlightenment has been attained you've always got to be vigilant, and always leave some provision for withdrawal and retirement and quiet.

p.79                      ...the cultivation of indifference.

**S:** *Upekṣā* is much more equanimity than indifference. Indifference has a somewhat negative ring, whereas *upekṣā* is really a very positive peace and tranquillity. In fact sometimes it's used as a synonym for Nirvāna itself.

**Vajradaka:** I sometimes feel that my whole body is like a great big quivering want.

**S:** The body is a want, in a way, to the extent that it is a body. If you don't give it enough food, and enough sleep, - enough exercise, even, - what happens? It starts clamouring 'I want food; give me food, etc. The body is just that, and so is the mind, both to the extent that it reflects the body and, very often, on its own account.

**Gotami:** I find myself wanting in a different way. For instance, for meditation. It can be a bit of a hindrance, I suppose.

**S:** It's a hindrance to something even higher, but until you've achieved that you've got to cultivate it. When you are trembling on the threshold of Nirvāna, OK, you can discard your meditation, - it would be a hindrance then, - but not before. It's a stepping-stone, you have to reach the stepping-stone that lies ahead before you can leave it behind to get on to the next one.

p.79                      The Perfection of *Dhyāna*, along with *Prajñā*, is ultimately achieved in solitude.

**S:** Because otherwise, apparently, it would be, to some degree, subject to limitation and to phenomenal conditionality. This isn't really quite correct. One shouldn't understand this passage as meaning [200] that *prajñā*, especially, can only be attained in solitude, because this would make it a conditioned thing, almost, a thing that was absolutely dependent on certain mundane conditions, which *prajñā* isn't. *Prajñā* can arise, at least initially, under any circumstances whatsoever, though admittedly - especially because it's associated with *dhyāna* - it is much more likely to arise when one is in solitude, but not necessarily so. You can, in some circumstances, have a *prajñā* experience, or a *dhyāna* experience, under conditions very different from those which prevail when you are in solitude - though usually that does not happen. One must be careful not to make *prajñā* dependent upon a definite set of special conditions, because then one might say, even, that it wouldn't be *prajñā*. You find this

illustrated very well in the lives of some of the Chían monks. Some got Enlightenment sitting alone in the forest - or in the toilet. Others got it in the meditation hall, with other meditating monks all around them. Some having been unable to develop it in a meditation session, went wandering off to do, maybe, some shopping or begging in the bazaar, and suddenly got a flash of insight there. One must therefore beware of limiting *prajñā* in this kind of way, even though, admittedly, solitude is a much more likely environment for the development of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*.

**Gotami:** I must admit that, on reading this passage, I understood it to mean ěby oneselfí, not in the sense of oneís being in isolation but of making oneís own effort.

**S:** Either interpretation would be correct. It would be by oneself, i.e. by oneís own effort, that one gained Enlightenment, whether one was alone or with other people.

**Gotami:** Nobody can gain Enlightenment for you.

**S:** Right. Yes.

**Gotami:** What about ětrees make much better companions than peopleí?

**S:** I think Śāntideva is being poetical. This is hyperbole. In a way itís true, but not in a literal sense. Trees certainly donít trouble you, or talk to you when you donít want to be talked to. In that sense, I suppose, trees can perhaps be regarded as better companions than human beings. But a tree canít be a *kalyāna mitra*, not in the real sense - again only very metaphorically can you make the tree a *kalyāna mitra* and say, ěOh itís teaching me wonderful lessons by standing there all straight and steady!í etc., etc. But thatís just you telling you, using the tree as a hook to hang all these observations on. If you get into real trouble, and need someone else, a tree canít do very much.

p.80

Somewhere there may possibly be a Bodhisattva of limited achievement who is a householder. Śāntideva mentions the type twice in the *Śīksā-samuccaya*, and the concept is not unknown to other Buddhist writers; but the prevailing ideal of both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna is celibacy and solitude. The man who has succumbed to the attachments of the householderís life must purify himself by living alone in the forest for a while, realizing that lust is no more than a fire of cow-dung, and that sons and wives are chains of entanglement. Kingship itself is to be renounced like a snot of phlegm, because supreme Enlightenment cannot be achieved by those who are subservient to illusionary value. [201]

**S:** This may sound a bit uncompromising, but perhaps itís good to be like that sometimes. On the whole the passage is a very fair statement of the general Buddhist position, and, as Dr. Matics points out, it represents both the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna tradition.

**Mike:** Since that degree of emphasis is placed on solitude, how would this fit in, say, with our own Movement, and life in a place like London? I mean, how regularly is it necessary to have the complete solitude that heís suggesting?

**S:** Well, the last sentence of the paragraph says, ěIsolation for limited periods appears to be always desirable.í Even when one is engaged in highly worthwhile general spiritual activities, and engaged in them in the right spirit, an occasional bout of solitude for purposes of refreshment, or for a periodic check-up on oneís motives, I think is - this is the orthodox ideal - to wander about for the greater part of the year, wandering from place to place, doing his daily practice, begging his food and, also, preaching to people. But for the rainy season he

just holes up somewhere and stays in one place, and that is often treated as a sort of special retreat: extra practice, extra self-examination, no contact with people. There is this sort of pattern. In the case of an Order member engaged in full-time Dharmaduta activities (the correct term, Dharmaduta meaning ěmessenger of the Dharmaě), if they are so engaged for nine months of the year, and kept fairly busy, - even if it is with conducting retreats for other people, - then ideally three months should be spent for their own personal, private retreat - relatively in solitude. I don't mean that absolute physical isolation is necessary. It could be in the same building with a couple of other people - provided it was quiet, and they didn't have to have contact with the other people, or do very much in connection with them. For the average Order member that would be the correct proportion, I think: nine months of activity and three months of retreat. After all, even though one starts off with the best of motives, and the best of intentions, one gets very subtly involved. In the case of the poor householder, well, he should just get away whenever he can: maybe for the odd weekend or week. Otherwise, modern life being what it is, if he is sincere in his practice and has a full-time job at the same time, without these occasional retreats he can hardly keep his head above water spiritually speaking. We all know that. Even when you are engaged in so-called spiritual activities - especially when it is in connection with other people, and there are lots of practical things to be done that sometimes results in a bit of wear and tear on you, even though you are working with the best of motives and what you are doing is a genuinely good and positive thing. Consequently you need that period of retreat and relaxation - spiritually speaking. Just doing nothing. Maybe a little quiet study, your own meditation, and so on. Just giving yourself time to breathe.

p.80                      ... the Ten Impurities, the ten aspects of a decomposing corpse ... seems to be a favorite of Śāntideva.

**S:** I wouldn't say that the subject of the ten impurities was a special favourite of Śāntideva's. He doesn't go into it in all that detail. If you want to read a really thoroughgoing account, read the one in the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa. He really does go to town on this and seems to put much more zest and enthusiasm into his description of this exercise than into his descriptions of some of the others. It's [202] a very lengthy description. Śāntideva's is only a few verses. One should also realise that it's a matter of degree. You must estimate how much you can take, as it were. For many people, sitting in a cemetery in this sort of way would be quite a negative experience. It would really put them off, or frighten them and have an unwholesome effect. If one reflects on death and impermanence without going to the cemetery - of course in Indian cemeteries you've got half-burned or -decayed bodies all around - then that's quite enough. Or one can keep a small piece of bone in one's meditation corner, or even a skull - just to give yourself a taste of the impurity meditation, and to act as a sort of *memento mori* reminding you that one day you will come to this yourself, like everybody else. But one shouldn't be unnecessarily horrific, because that just produces the opposite effect and drives one, in some cases, into a reckless and despairing hedonism. Meditation on the ten impurities is just a quiet, almost gentle, seeing of the facts as they really are. It's not a question of curdling your blood with horror or anything like that. But the facts of life are horrible, even when looked at in this more objective sort of way.

p.81                      The physical body is only a loathsome thing of many loathsome parts....

**S:** One should mention that this type of reflection is especially recommended to those in whom craving and desire - especially craving and desire for sense experience - is present, and who are very much attached to the physical body. In strict objective terms, the physical body is neither loathsome nor attractive. It's made up of parts which are bits and pieces of ěmatterě and which, in themselves, are neither loathsome nor anything else. They are whatever they are - just chemicals and so on. But the monk, or the practitioner, reflects on the body in this way [i.e. reflects on it as loathsome] to counteract his purely one-sided attachment and craving [which is due to seeing the body only as desirable]. He tries to see the other side of the picture - tries to get things more in perspective.

**S:** I don't quite agree with that expression 'melancholy common sense', because the actual experience which results from these practices is certainly not one of melancholy - a very ego-centred emotion. The experience that arises is very much one of exhilaration, and zest, and enthusiasm for getting on with the spiritual life, as well as a very positive kind of detachment. It's certainly not a dull and depressing experience. If you think that it's likely to be that, then that type of practice isn't for you. You should feel exhilarated after visiting the cemetery, not depressed. If it makes you depressed, don't do it. Depression isn't very helpful. In Tibetan Buddhism, especially, we find that they engage in these practices in a very positive spirit, and make use of human skins and human skulls with a kind of glee. They're not at all depressed, or sorrowful, or melancholy, because they really do rise above the ego. They really do get a much loftier perspective on things - really do see the whole chain of birth and death, and feel themselves a bit detached from that, and really rising above it and getting on to the spiritual path that leads beyond reincarnation. Thus it's all very, very positive, and very inspiring. There's nothing [203] morbid or melancholy about these practices - not when they are done in the right way, and by the person to whom they are suited.

Another consideration occurs to me. I'm not quite certain what is happening, and I have to use the word 'vibration' which I'm not very happy about - but I haven't found a substitute, or a better word. It's as though for psychological health each person needs a certain space around himself or herself, even quite literally speaking. It's been noticed in zoos, for example, that animals kept in cages which are so small that their aura, so to speak, is left partly outside the cage, where it can be 'invaded' by human beings or other animals, suffer very much, and even get quite neurotic, as it were. It's as though the cage has to be big enough to accommodate the whole aura, so that it is not trespassed upon. Now if you are living with other people in such a way that your auras are overlapping - and perhaps some people have bigger auras than others - then you feel very uncomfortable. A lot of tension builds up, a lot of pressure, and you may even become rather savage and aggressive - just as animals do when a lot of them are kept together in a very confined space. Human beings do seem to need a certain space around them, quite literally.

**Gotami:** There's a particular sort of feeling, when you get that, and if at that point you do just reveal yourself, and let people know that they're trespassing, then it's OK; but by ignoring that you can allow a lot of tension to build up in yourself.

**Dhruva:** I know there are some people I can stand closer to than others.

**S:** Well, there may be people whose auras, as it were, - or vibrations, to use that horrible word, - are more harmonious with yours. Perhaps that is the explanation.

**Gotami:** I find that there are some people - very few, actually - with whom I really don't want to be in the same room. They just feel very, very agitated. It's not even that they're particularly aggressive ... yet there's an uncomfortable feeling. Even if they're coming up the stairs they can disturb your meditation.

**S:** Their aura comes ahead.

**Vajradaka:** It just shows how big the aura is! When I was at Quaesitor there was a woman who could sense auras, and she said that most people when they were relaxed and there was no tension, and when they were quite centred, had an aura forty feet wide. She said that's why she could sense most people a block away, because she'd walk into their aura. She said that it could definitely expand and contract.

**Mike:** At No. 5 I'm generally aware who's in the house and who isn't, whether I've heard any doors banging or not. I just kind of feel it ... I know that Jerry's in, or Paddy, or Jim. It's a very confined area that we live in.

**Vajradaka:** It's interesting to watch different races and their relationship to the space around them. If you go into the Tube in London, most English people require about three feet around them - maybe a little less. If others start coming into that area they get a little bit nervous. In Japan people can be right up, six inches close, before they get nervous, but in America, I'm told, it's about six feet, and if people come into that space they get quite paranoid.[204]

**Gisela:** I think it's about ten miles in London. *[Laughter]*

**Vajradaka:** It's quite noticeable, the difference between Japan and England, though.

**S:** Probably the fact that the Japanese have got used to that - they've probably had to get used to it - cannot have had a very healthy effect on them. They're about the most neurotic people in the world, apparently, and have the highest suicide rate, I think. There's a lot of psychic pressure when so many people are so close, and this is why they sometimes explode - there is this aspect to the question too. Sometimes you need to relax and let your aura expand to its fullest capacity.

**Vajradaka:** That brings up an interesting point. If you're in a cave, and you're surrounded by rock, can your aura then actually spread out, or is it bounced back by all the rock on to you?

**Dhruva:** From what you were saying earlier on, if you can feel people coming a block away, how is it that the aura can penetrate walls and buildings but not rock?

**S:** I would say that your aura is limited by or feels pressure from other living beings, mostly from human beings, much less so from animals, and even less from, say, vegetable matter - though I remember that when we were staying at Broomhouse Farm I could definitely feel something coming from all those trees, something not particularly pleasant. I rather wondered about that.

**Vajradaka:** The elves there are pretty militant.

**S:** Oh, have you seen any elves?

**Vajradaka:** I've not actually seen them, but I've had the impression of spiky spears, and bows and arrows, and gaunt faces.

**Gisela:** Broomhouse Farm? I've felt it there too.

**S:** I went for several walks [in the plantations] there, and I definitely felt, coming from the trees and the vegetation, something quite hostile.

**Subhuti:** They're so regimented and strictly laid out, I wonder if it isn't just an impression of nature congested and confined.

**Mary:** They're probably neurotic.

**S:** Yes, that's right. Neurotic trees!

**Mike:** When I was on the last men's retreat there the Phantoms at the air base nearby were revving their engines at the end of the runway. Suddenly they'd cut off, and you get this tremendous kind of kick-back in the woods - a kind of clapping sound. That to me was very threatening - much more so than the aircraft themselves. You know, the echo ... I had an image of the ringwraiths in *The Lord of the Rings*.

**S:** Maybe all that revving, and all those vibrations, shake the trees up quite a bit, and maybe they just don't like it. It could be that.

**Vajradaka:** Maybe when they were young - when they were in their nurseries - human beings didn't treat them very well! *[Laughter]*

**S:** There is an analogy, actually. All living substance feels and is sensitive, and every living thing is connected with every other [205] living thing. You must have heard about the experiments conducted in America. Plants apparently react to what is going on in the neighbourhood. For instance, if you kill a chicken in the backyard the effect of that action on all the vegetation in the neighbourhood can be registered. It reacts in a particular way to the fact that something is losing its life and is terrified. You can even affect plants by thinking about them. A lot of tests have been conducted on this. They've even sealed the plants up in lead boxes, and still the thought has penetrated. If all life is interconnected in this way on a purely biological level, which seems to be the case, you can clearly speak of plants and other living things as suffering, or being upset, or even as being neurotic, provided you don't speak too anthropomorphically. There would be definite truth in that, even scientific truth. You could have a forest of angry trees. There is certainly something there - I've felt it myself very tangibly. I've also felt that if I let my imagination loose a bit I could quite easily start seeing things if I wanted to: Pan-like figures among the trees, and so on. It wouldn't be very difficult to persuade yourself that you had seen them! There's something you could quite definitely call hostile, or at least inimical. So trees aren't necessarily better companions, you see! I don't know if Śāntideva knew about that, but if you had contented trees - happy trees in nice friendly little family groups - then there might be a quite different sort of atmosphere.

**Mike:** When you can pick up on something in the environment in that kind of negative way, could it be a hindrance to one's practice?

**S:** It could be if you let it worry you, or if it was affecting you objectively in any way. Ideally you should respond with positive vibrations, but then that means work on your environment, and you may not be wanting to do that. You may want an environment where you can ignore what's around you and just work on yourself, in which case you'd be best advised to change your environment.

**Mike:** Why is the cave regarded as such an ideal place to meditate?

**S:** Just because you really are alone there, and can't be seen. There are no distractions, and it's also practical. It's a ready-made shelter.

**Mike:** I just wondered if there was any deep significance.

**S:** Well, you could give it one. It's womb-like, and in it you are being spiritually reborn. You could bring in the symbolism of the Cave of Bethlehem, the Mithraic Cave - the Cave of Initiation, etc. Originally, it was probably just a practical convenience: a hole in the rock that you could creep into and be all quiet and safe from the rain. But this whole question of sensitivity is very interesting. As you practise more, especially as you practise meditation, you do become more sensitive and more aware and you have to take that fact into account or be able, perhaps, to devise your own counter-measures and *mettā* practices. The latter, of course, would be very useful here.

**Vajradaka:** Do you think we come across people who are more susceptible to the influence of, say, hungry ghosts? For instance, the hungry ghosts are sort of attracted to those people and try to get into their bodies....

**S:** This can happen only when you've got yourself into a very negative state. It seems that there are three really negative states [206] which can lay you open to possession - that's the only word for it - maybe quite literally: intense fear, intense craving, and intense hatred. Perhaps the last is the most common.



**Mike:** What should you do if you found yourself in that situation?

**S:** If you're in such a negative state as to be 'possessed' by something or other you've really sunk very low, and there's little you can do about it. Traditionally, you just run as quickly as you can to the Sangha and be with them. Go to some holy place where there are very positive people and maybe get them to chant for you. You can't do much else at that stage.

**Mike:** I was referring to something that happened to me, in fact to when I became intensely afraid while sitting in the shrine room at the Centre one night on my own. I felt that I was being stalked by something or someone. I could hear noises around me, and I could also feel a rhythm beat out on the shrine room floor. I rationalised it in the end by saying that it was only my pulse in my leg, but I don't think it could have been that. I had a very definite feeling of presence and I felt that if I moved or did anything I would somehow be lost. I just had to sit right through it, but it was a very intense experience of fear.

**S:** There are two quite distinct things here. One is the intense experience of, in this case, fear. If you are able to sit it out that's fine. In a way that's best, because you have, as it were, conquered it. It can't get back at you. What I have in mind is an intense state of this kind not only experienced for some time but also indulged in and surrendered to. When that happens then you are definitely open to some influence from outside.

**Mike:** What do you mean 'surrendered to'?

**S:** You give up fighting it or struggling with it. You are unable to see that it's something that ought not to be allowed to happen, ought not to be cultivated. Thus it becomes almost a permanent state, and then you are liable to a sort of possession. I had an experience once, in this connection, which was really odd. It was when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihāra, and it concerned a friend of Terry Delamare's. Terry had a friend from his advertising days with whom he still kept up some contact, and this chap fell violently in love with a girl whom Terry knew, who worked in the same agency. For some reason or other, she wanted nothing at all to do with him. She was totally unresponsive and uninterested. This state of affairs continued for some time, and it really played upon this fellow, who really was violently infatuated. He started trying to talk to the girl, though she didn't want to talk to him, - wouldn't talk to him, - and even accosted her in the street. In the end she had had to complain to the police, and he was warned not to interfere with her. The result was he not only became more infatuated than ever, but gradually got into a more and more negative state of intense frustrated craving, anger and so on. Anyway, Terry kept in contact with him, and tried to talk to him sometimes. But it was quite useless. One weekend, when Terry was at the Vihāra and this chap had gone home to his mother's place, which was about fifty miles from London, Terry said to me, 'I have a feeling this chap's in a really bad way, so I've given him the Vihāra telephone number and told him I'll be here in case he feels the need to ring me.' That evening Terry got a phone call from this chap and he said, 'I'm going to commit suicide. [207] I can't stand it any longer.' That was at 7 o'clock. Terry was talking to him on the phone for about two hours, trying to dissuade him, but it was such a heavy sort of situation that at the end of that time Terry was nearly collapsing. He put his hand over the mouthpiece and said, 'Can you talk to this chap?' I'd never met him, and didn't know him, but I said 'If you like, I will; but just say a few words of introduction first.' So Terry said, 'Look here, Bill, I've just got to go somewhere for a few minutes, but I've a friend here who'll talk to you. He's a good friend of mine. He's a Buddhist monk. Just listen to what he has to say.' I took the receiver from Terry, who almost collapsed that very moment, and I talked to this fellow for quite a long time. As soon as he started speaking, however, I had the definite impression: 'He is possessed. I am not talking to a human being, I'm talking to what has possessed him,' a sort of demonic entity. There was that definite perception, and I at once thought to myself, 'It's hopeless. It's too late. He's lost.' But I did my best. Taking it turn and turn about Terry and I were talking to him on the phone till 2 o'clock in the morning. We then thought - Terry especially thought - that the immediate danger had passed, so we sort of drew a long breath and had a cup of tea, and then I went to bed and Terry went home saying he would be back early in the morning. He came around, feeling a bit uneasy, at 7 o'clock, and just after he

arrived there was a ĕphone call from the chapís mother. It was to say that at 5 oíclock heíd committed suicide. Iíll never forget the strong impression I had that I was not talking to a human being any more. Whatever it was had taken possession of him had been given an opening by the negative emotions - and the chap really was in a state. This is the kind of thing I have in mind. Heíd indulged the craving. Heíd surrendered to it. He hadnít tried to do anything about it. His attitude was, ěI have a right to this girl if I want her. Why doesnít she respond? I must have her,í and so on, over a long period.

**Vajradaka:** Then this means that in any place where craving or fear or hatred are usually felt thereís the likelihood of - whatever they are - *pretas*, being there: pubs, army camps, public schools ... [*Laughter*]

**S:** Brothels too. This is why it is sometimes said that, as a matter of spiritual hygiene, one should be very careful not to associate with prostitutes. Not only not associate sexually, but even socially, because the circumstances under which they usually contact other people, i.e. men, are - from the spiritual point of view - very negative indeed, and thereís a sort of aura of negativity clinging to such persons. The same with slaughterhouses, and people connected with the meat trade. Of course this is a marginal sort of thing, and one mustnít make too much of a point of it, but it is something which does exist. You can ěpick upí things from other people in that way.

**Vajradaka:** I think that gaming parlours are particularly like this.

**S:** Maybe. Iíve never been in one, but I should imagine so. Craving again!

**Mary:** In some houses you can feel this if you just go in.

**S:** Yes, you feel the unrest - or the peace, sometimes. Speaking from personal experience, I would say that when you live in a place like London your perceptions may get a bit blurred, because thereís so much coming at you. You lose your sensitivity to a great extent. But when you go away into solitude you get it back, or even develop it and become more sensitive than you were before. [208]

**Mike:** How does something like possession relate to somebody who is psychologically disturbed in the more conventional sense? Are the two states related in any way?

**S:** I donít really know. The state of what I call possession is quite an extreme one. I think weíve had the odd person around, in the course of years, who might have been in a state of that sort, but it is quite rare. When I use such terms as ěpossessioní and ědemonic entityí Iím just using certain terms. Iím not committing myself to any particular theory. All that I am doing is describing the impression made upon me, and I find that the language of ěpossessioní and ědemonic entityí is the most suitable for this purpose. Iím not saying that I literally do believe in such a thing as a demonic entity, or in demonic possession. There may be such a thing: I donít know. But that sort of language certainly fits the facts as experienced. Of course it may be that, in the last analysis, the demonic entity is a sort of broken-off fragment of the personality of the person who is supposedly being possessed - that is also quite possible. But the effect on him is very definitely that of an entity of a diabolical nature that has come in from outside. Thatís certainly the impression you get, whatever the actual facts may be. There must be something pretty seriously wrong to produce that sort of impression so powerfully - regardless of the actual nature of the disturbance, or however it is to be really explained.

**Gisela:** I got that feeling with a disturbed person one day when I saw him at Community Stores and he started fighting and hitting people. When he appeared it seemed to me that his whole body was quivering with something - you know, that had possessed him.

**S:** I saw a man like that once. It was not long after my return to England in ě64. I was on the Tube, sitting down, and there was a man standing in the doorway [on the other side of the

gangway, ten or twelve feet along], waiting for the next stop. He was a quite ordinary sort of chap - rather a rough, working-class type of about 30 or 40. He had his back to me, more or less, and as I looked at him I got a peculiar impression: 'That chap is possessed. That's not a human being, that's a little devil!' So I kept my eye on him. I was quite interested, and he must have felt this - well, he did feel it. He didn't turn round, or do anything like that, but when the train stopped at the station where he wanted to get down, he turned round very deliberately, gave me a very diabolical grin, sort of thumbed his nose at me - and was off! (*Astonishment.*) Yes! It was really quite odd - and I knew at once that it was not a human being but some entity in a human body. I have had two or three experiences like that in the course of my life. It's something quite different: definitely non-human, even anti-human. I don't know what it is, but he knew that I was watching him, and he knew that I recognised him for what he was. He knew that - and he showed that he knew I knew, but that he wasn't bothering too much about me. 'Now I'm off!' he seemed to be saying, 'Do what you can!' It was a bit like a challenge.

**Vajradaka:** There's a reference in *The Precepts of the Gurus* to spiritual armour.

**S:** That sort of language - the armour of *kṣānti*, the sword of *vīrya*, and so on - is used in a very general sort of way, but it can also be taken as having reference to psychic entities. You have to beware, however, of becoming a bit fanciful and imagining things that are not really there. But there's certainly a residue of rather odd [209]experiences, such as I myself have had, and - explain them as you may, - I don't insist on any particular kind of explanation, - I do find that the traditional language of 'possession' and so on does correspond with one's actual impression, even though 'possession' may not be the real explanation. All the same, I don't want to have people feeling a bit precious about auras and atmospheres, and walking into a room and saying, 'Gosh, some beautiful thing must have happened here last week!' or enquiring whether a murder hadn't been committed there. We don't want people behaving like that.

**Gotami:** It doesn't seem a particularly relevant thing to do.

**S:** It's usually best to keep your impressions to yourself and, if you feel that something needs to be done, just do it quietly, without saying anything to anyone.

**Subhuti:** It does seem to be necessary to be aware of this dimension of things, because I find it very difficult to accept; but I can think of experiences that I've had which are not really intelligible in any other terms and which at the time I was completely confused by.

**S:** At least, one shouldn't hesitate to use the appropriate language, or the language that seems appropriate, even if it is a bit odd reserving one's judgement about the meaning of the actual facts until later.

**Mary:** Is it possible for these entities to be exorcised, as in some of the stories that one reads, so that they leave a human being?

**S:** There are two different things here. One is the idea of exorcism as a forcible expulsion. The other is that of 'converting' the entities. The first is more Christian, though the Tibetans also go in for it a lot. The second seems more Buddhist.

**Mary:** Does this mean the entities are transformed?

**S:** Yes. You send out such positive vibrations, as it were, that they not only protect you, to begin with, from those negative forces, but if you can keep them up they have a transforming effect on the negative forces themselves. You don't just throw the latter out to cause trouble somewhere else, but finally convert them by your powerful thoughts and vibrations - 'powerful' in the sense of being very positive. It's not that you try to exorcise them by means of a stronger psychic counter-force. That might expose you to them a bit more, actually, if you weren't careful.

**Vajradaka:** When they are converted you could always ordain them! [*Laughter*]

**Gotami:** Use them as dragons to ride on! [*More laughter*]

**Subhuti:** A psychologist friend of mine did some work with a Nigerian tribe who exorcised schizophrenia by having a massive party. The whole village goes into a sort of festival, which is centred on the - in Western terms - schizophrenic person, and the effect is that he accepts that [split-off] part of himself because it's accepted by the others.

**S:** It's not even just that. Quite recently I was reading a book called *Ecstatic Religion*, which is a study of spirit-possession in certain African tribes. According to the author of this book, research has shown that such possession is in some cases quite clearly explicable in ordinary psychological terms. A woman becomes 'possessed' and [210] a spirit speaks through her, very angrily abusing certain things and certain people. In this case too the treatment is often a big feast, of which the woman is the centre. I forget the details, but the author shows, very convincingly, that the usual pattern is that the possessed person is in a position of inferiority and is suffering in some way. Tribal custom doesn't permit her to speak openly about her grievance and it gets repressed, so the spirit speaks, because if it's the spirit speaking that's OK. In other words, the woman becomes possessed, and then, of course, she becomes a centre of attention, with everything happening around her. A lot is done for her, a lot of money is spent on her, and this has a very positive effect. Since what she's usually clamouring for is attention, or some sort of restitution of rights, things usually work out quite well, but it's not a genuine case of possession, apparently, but a sort of psychological mechanism, almost one of self-preservation. It's usually women who become possessed, because they are more likely to suffer from deprivation of certain rights, or from lack of consideration. They don't have much voice in social life, but the spirit will always be taken notice of. People won't usually take notice of the women, but they'll take notice of the spirit! It's as though the only way in which a woman can get herself taken notice of is by becoming 'possessed'. This is the mechanism that had developed. Cases of possession often occurred in families in which there were several wives, including a chief wife, and in which a younger or a junior wife was very much repressed by the older ones. The basic psychological pattern is very clear, but the mechanism by which the balance is restored in a situation of injustice and suffering is 'possession', and so the spirit speaks, saying, 'I want this. You must give me that.'

I must say quite frankly that some of the leaders of the women's liberation movement seem possessed. I've heard one or two of them. They really do seem possessed. I heard one at the Roundhouse, at the end of the 'Dialectics of Liberation' congress. It really was extraordinary. She was shrieking and howling about the way in which women were suppressed exactly as though an evil spirit had got into her. I noticed the same sort of thing in the United States with some of the Black Power activists. In a very strange sort of way, they too seemed possessed.

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The principal aim of the discipline required for the achievement of the first five perfections is the quieting of the turbulent *citta*, so that intuitive Wisdom, the sixth perfection, may be achieved.

**S:** In other words you can regard the first five *pāramitās* as all contributing to *śamathā* in a Mahāyāna sense. Between them they represent a sort of calming down of the whole conditioned nature, as well as a refinement of it, a bringing of it to the ever higher levels of experience and sensitivity comprehended under the term *samādhi*. In this way that nature is prepared for the descent, as it were, of *prajñā* or transcendental wisdom, which is the remaining *pāramitā*.

Solitary places help in the quieting of superficial disturbance, although such disturbance is ultimately mental: and they provide opportunity for disciplining the mind in deeper depth. [211]

**Gotami:** I think the great advantage of going off on your own is that you are liberated from the thought of anything else.

**S:** If you are a normally healthy person you just become naturally concentrated and naturally peaceful when you are left on your own.

**Mike:** Would you say it is, perhaps, almost enough just to be completely alone for a period?

**S:** I think it very often is.

**Mike:** Better than getting on with a particular practice very intensively?

**S:** People's experiences differ, but I think that with some people at least - people whom I regard as really normal and healthy - when you get into a situation of bodily isolation, - you know, not meeting other people, having nobody else around maybe for miles, and having nothing to do, - you quite naturally and quite spontaneously go into a state equivalent to that of meditation. There's no reason why you shouldn't do. It may not be necessary, - or there may not be very much point in, your actually doing certain exercises. You may do them, further to enhance that state, but you could very profitably just be like that, simply performing your chores every day, and have the same benefit that you get from a bout of meditation. That's quite possible. You don't have to be engaging in exercises, and keeping yourself busy. That could, in a subtle way, be a running away from the experience - having something to do so that time passes more quickly. "Gosh, I'm half an hour behind with my *asubha-bhāvanā*!" But just being by yourself, if you are a normal, peacefully-minded person, is experience enough, very often, under those sort of circumstances: you don't need to meditate, in a way. There's only one thing you must watch. If you find the mind looking round for something to do, - if you pick up a book in an idle sort of way, or if you start wondering what's in the newspapers, - then you ought to take up specific exercises. But if you can remain quite happy having nothing to do, just enjoying the isolation and the sense of your own existence, that's quite enough. You don't need to meditate in a formal way. You sit quietly down, you look out of the window - you're meditating. As I've said, this is what happens if you're a normal, healthy, peacefully-minded person. For some people this kind of thing wouldn't be good at all. Terrible mental conflicts would arise. They might get extremely agitated. Such people might be better advised to have actual practices to do. There's quite a difference between going into solitude to work on your own mind and going into solitude to enjoy your naturally blissful mental state. The latter is quite often possible, and in a way it's very much the better of the two, but it is something that either happens or doesn't happen.

... [the Bodhisattva] is able to enter into meditation with a certain object in mind, remake the universe into that object, and then return to phenomenality as the object of his meditational experience.

**S:** In the paragraph which concludes with this sentence Dr. Matics is obviously having to feel his way among experiences that he knows about only from his study of Buddhist texts, and he clearly isn't altogether at home - though he has done, in a way, quite a good job simply presenting the traditional material. [212]

**Aśvajit:** I'm not quite clear, actually, about the last few lines of this passage, or how he is able to enter into meditation with a certain object in mind, remakes the universe into that object ....

**S:** He gives an example, immediately afterwards, involving Vimalakirti. The Bodhisattva, for instance, in his meditation at the time of death, at the end of a particular life, meditates on say a child - he in a sense creates the child - and when he emerges from his meditation he is the child. This is not just given as an example. One may take it literally or not - it's all connected with the question of how rebirth takes place. But it's given as an example of the kind of power that the Bodhisattva can exercise dwelling, as he does, upon that *éplateau* - as the editor calls it - which represents the highest level of phenomenal existence, immediately *ébelow* Nirvāna - a level where the mind is in a very highly developed and potent state and where it can even exercise what are usually regarded as magical powers. Perhaps it's not necessary to dwell upon this too much, but sometimes, when the mind is highly concentrated, things sort of happen. However one shouldn't bother too much - or even at all, maybe - about trying to make things happen, because playing around in this way can be a distraction.

**Gotami:** Is this in any way connected with the Bodhisattva creating another body?

**S:** Yes, this is said to be one of the powers achieved at this level. I have known at least one person about whom there were strange stories of him appearing in different places at the same time. This was Swami Ramdas, about whom I've written in my memoirs. It was definitely established that at the very time he was with a number of disciples in one place other people had seen him and spoken to him in another. This is an example of the kind of happening to which I referred. This sort of thing does seem to occur. The Buddhist explains it as a faculty which can be exercised when, with the attainment of that very high level of concentration and consolidation of *chitta*, the power of *chitta* is also attained. This is a state short of Nirvāna itself. After that, there is only Nirvāna. The Bodhisattva is, in a manner of speaking, suspended on that plane. He's well in view of Nirvana, but he doesn't actually enter into it. He remains skilfully poised or balanced on that *éplateau*, with one eye as it were on Nirvāna - he never loses sight of that - but at the same time engaging in activities for the benefit of other people, and using there the power which he generates on that higher plane of concentrated *chitta*. That's one way of looking at the Bodhisattva ideal.

**Gotami:** If I understand correctly, it seems that you are saying that one should not even think about it but just carry on and let happen what happens.

**S:** Yes. Not to make it too much a subject for speculation or theoretical working out, and not to just play around with it in an experimental way. For instance, there are many people - in the *éFriends* also - who know that there is such a thing as telepathy. There are all sorts of odd little experiences, all sorts of things that happen, even with the Movement itself, that one can't explain on any other basis. But most people, I think, simply accept that telepathy is just one of those things that happen. No one thinks in terms of subjecting it to experiments and playing around with it in that sort of way [*Laughter*] - not so far as I know! Personally, I find no difficulty in accepting [213] the fact of telepathy, because I've seen so much of it, but I don't have the least inclination, - perhaps I'm not scientifically minded enough, - to investigate it from that point of view. I'm not particularly interested in proving that telepathy does exist to someone who doesn't believe in it.

**Gotami:** But might not that particular faculty be quite a useful one to develop?

**S:** I think it develops when it's really useful. That seems to be what happens. If you really need a degree of it, then it will be there. When I was living at No. 55 I had some odd experiences with Kevin. Whenever he came back from work, I knew at once what mental state he was in, whether positive or negative. I knew it as soon as the front door opened, even though I was in my study right down the corridor.

**Subhuti:** But I've noticed that you can tell that with Kevin, from the way he turns the key. [*Laughter*] It needn't be a mental transference.

**S:** I thought of that, actually, but I found it worked even when I hadn't heard him open the door. There really is a dimension that you become more sensitive to, especially if you go into

solitude and don't have much to do with other people's vibrations. Then, when you do come into contact with people, you are much more aware of them and pick up much more quickly on where they are at and what sort of mood they are in.

p.85                      Isolation of the body is entirely secondary: a mere aid  
for the weaker brethren ...

**S:** I think we have to be careful about this talk of 'the weaker brethren', because practically everybody is included in this category. We should be really careful not to automatically exempt ourselves.

p.85                      ...he must keep a 'cave-and-forest mind'

**S:** This is of course quite difficult. Real solitude is admittedly a mental state, but for most people this is practically impossible to achieve without some degree of physical isolation too, at least to begin with. So we shouldn't hesitate to include ourselves among the weaker brethren. Neither should we rationalise and think, 'Ah well, what does it matter if I'm living in a city? It's detachment of mind that really matters. What does it matter if I don't attend classes? I'll be mentally present.' There can very easily be this sort of false reasoning, and we have to watch it. But equally, of course, there's not much point in living in a little cave and wondering what's going on in the world outside all the time. In our case we are very unlikely to do that. Our danger lies much more in the opposite direction.

**Aśvajit:** It only takes a day or two by oneself to realise to what extent one can deceive oneself as to the degree of one's detachment.

**S:** Yes. Also convince oneself how much one has been missing! That also becomes very obvious sometimes.

p.85                      ...Śāntideva pays particular attention to the false  
claims of love (*kāma*) and of general prosperity  
(*artha*). [214]

**S:** These are the first two out of the four aims of human life according to orthodox Hindu tradition, the other two being *dharma* and *mokṣa*. *Kama* is satisfaction of the senses, especially through sex; *artha* is wealth and economic prosperity; *dharma* is religious merit, in the more conventional sense; and *mokṣa* is spiritual liberation.

p.86                      ...separation from the underlying bases of continued  
existence will have even greater and more devastating  
effect than isolation of either body or mind.

**Gotami:** I don't know that I could explain to anybody what was meant by that.

**S:** Well, 'the underlying bases of continued existence' are, especially, those conditioned mental activities - the *saṃskārās*, in terms of the twelve *nidanās* - which keep the whole process going from life to life and from one moment to the next. They represent the deeper level that you've got to get at, - the root of the conditioned or reactive mind, - it's separation from that which is essential. But first comes physical separation, being quietly by yourself, and then separation from the different activities of the mind itself: fantasies and imaginations and distractions. Finally, going even deeper - and this is possible only with the help of wisdom - one cuts through the very root of the reactive mind, so that there is no further rebirth - no further conditioned existence. Obviously the last is the most difficult of all, but that's the real separation: the separation from 'the underlying bases of continued [conditioned] existence.'

Pp.85                      ...now [the lover] cannot stand the sight of the thing  
which so fervently he wished to behold.

**S:** There are lots of stories in Buddhist literature illustrating this point - like the famous one about the nun Utpalavanna (I think it was). While trying to get on with her meditation in the forest she was accosted by a young man who was infatuated with her beautiful eyes and who started praising them to her. Utpalavanna said, "Oh it's my beautiful eyes that you want, do you? All right, you can have them!" Thereupon she tore them out and placed them in the young man's hand. He was really horrified, of course, was converted to the spiritual life, etc., etc. *[Laughter]* Do you get the idea?

**Vajradaka:** Needless to say the Buddha gave them back to her.

**S:** It was Indra, I think, actually. He gives in to his feelings at such times. *[Laughter]*

p.86

He is terrified by a harmless skeleton ...

**S:** That's quite a point. It's even a rational point. After all, what is the difference between the living body which you were so attracted to, and after which you really hankered, and that same body now that it's dead? "The spirit or consciousness has left it," you may say, "and it's that which makes all the difference." Well, if it was really the spirit or consciousness that you were interested in, why were you so preoccupied with the physical body? On the other hand, if it was the physical body that you were after, even when the spirit or consciousness was there, why aren't you interested in the physical body now that the spirit or consciousness has departed? It's a rather [215] horrible sort of paradox. If it's the spirit that you like, you shouldn't bother about the body (when the body is alive, that is), if it isn't the spirit you should be equally attracted by the body whether alive or dead.

**Subhuti:** Perhaps it's a combination of both that attracts you. *[Laughter]*

**S:** Perhaps it is, but then where does that leave you?

**Subhuti:** Well, it by-passes those arguments of Śāntideva! *[Laughter]*

**S:** That might lead you into an even more paradoxical situation. Why should something be attractive to you in combination and distasteful separately? It seems rather odd, because there's no change in the physical body at all - not immediately after death, anyway. In any case, you could imagine the spirit or consciousness still being somewhere around, so that the two things, the spirit or consciousness and the physical body, would still exist, even though not combined in the way that they had been. What, then, was the precise nature of the combination, if it was in fact that which attracted you?

**Vajradaka:** When two people are attracted to each other there is a kind of almost magnetic energy produced, so that when they touch each other there is a certain feeling, but you don't get that feeling with the dead person because the energy force comes from the life.

**S:** Do you mean the life, the consciousness, the mind? Something that's no longer there?

**Vajradaka:** Right.

**S:** Presumably, then, you could contact it during the lifetime of the physical body without touching that body. Presumably you could contact it directly.

**Vajradaka:** Yes, that too.

**S:** Even if you start off contacting it through the body you ought to end up being able to contact it directly, as it were, mind to mind. But of course that isn't usually what happens.

**Vajradaka:** No.



**S:** It also raises the question of rebirth, because the spirit or consciousness is then associated with different bodies. If you are in contact with someone only through the body, then, on the death of that body, you can remain in contact with them only by being in contact with their new body. But if the contact was mind to mind, or spirit to spirit, or consciousness to consciousness, you transcend all these considerations. Anyway, Śāntideva is just being deliberately difficult. He's trying to reverse our customary modes of thought and feeling and decondition us - though at the same time there is, no doubt, in certain contexts at least a lot of objective truth in what he says. Some people, of course, are not afraid of corpses. Perhaps if your ěloveě hasn't been of a possessive and cloying nature you won't be put off by the sight of a corpse. I've seen quite a few corpses, having been called in on these occasions, and I can't say that I have ever really been put off by a corpse, except once, when it was in an advanced state of decomposition, which was a bit unpleasant; but normally there's nothing in it. It's not that the dead person looks as though they are asleep. No, they are not asleep, because they are not breathing; they are quite [216] still ....

**Dhruva:** My experience has been that I recognised the form, but not the person.

**S:** Also the person doesn't recognise you.

**Dhruva:** Yes, though in a completely different way. As you said, it wasn't as if they were asleep. One recognises someone who's asleep and feels something. With a corpse it may look physically as though it's asleep, but there is something that isn't there at all.

**S:** Several times I have had the definite experience of the person being present after their death. I've had this very strongly twice with people that some of us knew. One was Sumedha's mother. I had met her once or twice, and when she died I was invited to the house for the funeral. As I entered the sitting room I felt her at once, and though I hadn't been to the house before I knew at once which chair she usually occupied, because there she was sitting in it. The experience lasted several minutes, and it was definitely that she was saying hello and then after a while she went away. The same thing happened with Violet Wragg, who was the Secretary of the Brighton Buddhist Society, and whom I knew quite well. As soon as I entered the room, there was Violet sitting in her chair (I knew that it was her chair in this case) and she was saying hello and after a few minutes, as she usually did, she just went away. This was quite definitely what happened and I'm sure I wasn't imagining anything. On other occasions I've had more complicated experiences. These were both quite simple, straightforward ones. So when you are in contact with the physical body, you are not in contact with the person. When the dead body is there, you don't feel that that is the person. But when only the consciousness is there, that is the person. It's quite odd, but I'd say, on the basis of my experiences, that the person is not the combination: the person is the consciousness.

**Mary:** When my father died I remember feeling as if it was necessary to have good thoughts about him, and that those thoughts would somehow help him, as if he was conscious of them.

**S:** This is the principle of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The departed consciousness - to use that expression - can be helped by the positive thoughts of the living. When Terry Delamare died I not only felt him but could hear him quite literally calling me, and this went on for about two and a half days. In this case, the circumstances were rather special, as like his friend Terry eventually committed suicide. There was another friend whom I saw after death, and that was very odd indeed, but that's a long story, and I'll have to tell it some other time. The basic point here is that as far as one can identify a personality - and even that is not ultimately real according to Buddhism - it seems to be the consciousness and not the body. The consciousness uses the body, moulds the body, even creates the body (under *karma*), so that during life you are not really fused with the body. When you're in contact with another person, therefore, you're in contact with them to the extent that you're in contact with the consciousness, not with the body. If it was the body, then why is it, Śāntideva asks, that the body loses its attractiveness when the consciousness has departed? It can't be the body at all

that we want: really it's the mind, and we could say that the sooner we get to the mind-to-mind relationship the better. [217]

p.86                      Perhaps no other nonprimitive religion or philosophy  
has made so much of excrement as has Buddhism!

**S:** I'm not so sure about that. I didn't notice it particularly when I was in the East.

**Mike:** Perhaps he's confusing it with Hinduism, because a lot of Hindu ascetics besmear themselves with excrement, don't they?

**S:** No, not many. I don't think I've ever actually met one. There are some who smear themselves with ashes made of cowdung, but cowdung is quite a wholesome thing - quite pleasant-smelling even. But I never met an ascetic who smeared himself with human excrement, not one. I'm sure there are some who do, but they are definitely a small minority. Orthodox Hindus don't usually touch excrement at all, except for the cowdung, but that's quite a different matter. It's a nice colour, rather like a sort of ochre, and is used to plaster the floor. It also contains a small quantity of carbolic, so that it is a mild disinfectant. Tibetans, who live in a colder climate than the Hindus, with no germs, are less particular about touching human excrement, but I don't know of any Tibetans actually smearing it on themselves. No, I don't think Buddhism makes as much of excrement as Dr. Matics thinks.

p.86                      They are all completely loathsome to the  
Bodhisattva....

**Gotami:** I don't like that word 'loathsome'. It would seem that the Bodhisattva would just see them as they are: neither loathsome nor attractive.

**S:** Śāntideva goes into this in the next paragraph. He says it is a medicine for a certain disease. If you've got strong craving and attachment to the body, then this kind of reflection - seeing things in this different sort of way - can help you to overcome that. But in reality, for the Bodhisattva, it's neither loathsome nor anything else. He sees all bodily states and processes with complete equanimity. But if the would-be Bodhisattva, the aspiring Bodhisattva, happens to be attached to the physical body through strong craving, these reflections are likely to help him. Maybe in modern times we are in such a parlous state because we find it difficult to take these things literally, or in the way that they are intended. Sometimes, therefore, we are left without medicine, as it were, for our strong cravings and attachments.

**Subhuti:** Surely the best medicine is to see them for what they really are: not to see them as either loathsome or desirable, but to see them with detachment.

**S:** I don't know about that. Certainly the actual psychological/ emotional experience of disgust and loathing is not the ultimate state by any means. It's intended as an antidote, and you swing back, eventually, to a state of complete equanimity. But it's difficult to get to that as it were directly: the pendulum has to swing a bit first. Or it's like trying to straighten a bent bamboo. You bend it in the opposite direction for a while and then it gradually becomes straight.

**Gotami:** It works from the other side as well. If you really see what you've been doing for what it is, then an attitude of disgust does arise. You know, 'My God! Is that what I was really doing?' And then you don't want to touch it for a while.

**S:** Sometimes it's a bit difficult to be sure whether you are [218] seeing things as they are, or whether you're just putting it on a bit heavy in order to counteract your own previous one-sided state. The line of demarcation may differ with different people, but where one should be ending up is pretty clear. If you can end up in a state of equanimity, by whatsoever means, then you are all right. That is what really matters - not whether you have gone through the

rather terrifying exercises or not. None the less, there are some people who are very strongly attached, and they may have to go through some quite heavy experiences, - may have to practise exercises of this sort, - before they can wrench themselves away from the objects of their attachment and get into a state of genuine equanimity. After that they could, perhaps, allow themselves to have a modest contact with them, but before that it would be dangerous.

p.87

Śāntideva forces the really interesting question, why flesh is an object of passion. Why feel impelled to touch, embrace, and caress a covering of bones when that flesh-covering is without thought? And if one claims the motivation to be somehow psychic, that it is the *citta* which is sought, not the crude flesh. then the lover is all the more absurd, because clearly no one can touch the mind or anything psychic.

**S:** One often hears the lover saying, "Oh I really do love you! I really do admire your marvellous mind! It's your soul that I'm really after!" When it comes to the point it seems to be something quite different that they are after, and sometimes the poor beloved feels a bit upset by this, and even a bit exploited, as though what the lover had said was all just flowery talk.

**Gotami:** There's something I can't quite understand about bodily contact. It doesn't really matter with whom, but it seems that after a while, if I haven't touched a human body for a long time, there is a need to do that - even just to hold hands.

**S:** It may be connected with what Vajradaka was saying about magnetism. That may be the explanation. On the other hand, a child thrives more with bodily contact. An infant who is deprived of that just doesn't thrive, - this is quite definite, - and maybe it extends even into adult life - though some people seem to need much more contact than others, so far as I have observed. Some seem to be able to get along practically without it, quite healthily, but others seem to need rather a lot of it rather frequently.

**Gotami:** I don't really feel that it's an adolescent thing or a childish thing.

**S:** With a lot of people it has a mildly tonic effect. In India, for instance, they go in for a lot of massage. People seem to feel it as a necessity - it's almost a daily thing in some families. The younger women massage the legs of the older women, almost as a regular procedure. Indians are very much into this. It may be partly because their sex life is very strictly controlled - and people generally get their bodily contact in the course of their sex life, though the two things are really quite distinct. If your sex life is restricted you need more of the simple bodily contact, and so in India you get a lot of massage. Very often the barber, after trimming your hair, automatically gives you a massage round the back of the neck and the shoulders. There's also a lot of hand-holding among Indians - among Indian men, that is. [219] This is quite a normal, healthy thing, but in the West it has become a little suspect because here physical intimacy generally goes along with sex.

**Gotami:** I find it's very definitely different from that. It doesn't matter who it is, or what is happening, and massage is obviously a very good way of doing it.

**S:** It is different. That's why I think there is a need to separate the two things more. Sometimes, I'm quite sure, when people think that they want sex what they really want is just the bodily contact.

**Gotami:** What would you recommend, then?

**S:** I think that if this is so we have to cultivate the social customs, and the manners, which make bodily contact an easier and more accessible thing and less invariably connected with sex. I think sex just complicates the matter. People ought to be able to embrace one another,

and hold hands, and rub one another's backs, without the spectre of sex always rearing its ugly head - either in their own minds or in those of other people.

p.87                      ...the variety of meditation which stresses the alleged loathsomeness of our physical nature generally is reserved in its most complete form for the special type of personality which may find it beneficial.

**S:** This is very germane to what we've been saying. "The variety of meditation which stresses the alleged loathsomeness of our physical nature generally is reserved in its most complete form for the special type of personality which may find it beneficial." There are many qualifications here, and I think they are quite rightly introduced.

p.87                      ...all eventually come to the swallowing of the bitter pill....

**S:** Ah, but for many, when they come to that point of equanimity, it's no longer a bitter pill! It's just something they see the need for and quite happily accept.

p.87                      ... the Buddhist laity cannot live for pleasure any more than Christians can live for sin.

**S:** The attitude of the average - relatively pious - Buddhist layman in the East is quite healthy. He says, "I recognise that there is a higher spiritual ideal. I recognise that the life of a monk is more advanced. I recognise that pleasures keep me down - but I'm not able to give them up yet." He doesn't "sin bravely" in quite the Lutheran manner, as Dr. Matics suggests. He simply says, "I'm not ready to give them up yet," and he enjoys them. He doesn't feel all neurotic and sinful about it, but he quite objectively recognises that some time or other he'll have to get round to giving them up - giving them up quite happily - and doing without them. He recognises that stage as coming sooner or later. Many laymen of course put it off to a future birth, or rebirth, but even so the general pattern is the same: "I'm not yet ready to give up worldly pleasures. I'm not feeling sinful and apologetic, but I do recognise that there are higher stages of the spiritual path, stages beyond the one that I'm on now, and I recognise and accept [220] that sooner or later I ought to be getting on to those stages." That's the attitude of the average pious layman - the so-called "born Buddhist" - in the East.

**Gotami:** If it's done in this kind of way, you could never go back to the stage you were in previously, because you just wouldn't want to ... The temptation would just cease.

**Gisela:** It's an organic growth, really - a natural process.

**S:** It's quite interesting to see the attitude of the monks also, especially in the Theravāda countries. The monks are quite definitely leading a stricter life, and doing without many things that the lay people enjoy, but there's no question of their looking down on "the wretched, miserable laity." On the contrary, their attitude towards them is very positive and friendly. They bless the lay people on certain occasions. They bless them that they may be prosperous, and have a happy worldly life - that they be happy with their wives, happy with their children. They don't minimise all that. At the same time they quite clearly say, "There is something beyond." But they don't try to exalt the spiritual by doing down the mundane in a nasty sort of way. That isn't done - not as a general practice, certainly. You may find the odd rather extreme writer who does it, but the general attitude isn't like that at all. The general attitude towards worldly life is that it is good, and that for the average person it can very often be a happy thing, something that he can enjoy - but that even he recognises that there's something more satisfying beyond. That's the general attitude. If anything goes wrong the monk will say sadly, with a little smile, "Well, what did you expect? After all, that was a worldly thing. You enjoyed it while it lasted, but you can't expect it to go on for ever. That's the nature of *samsāra*." In this way the lesson is quite gently pointed out.

p.87

After having renounced the tender lotus,  
radiant with the rays of the sun in a cloudless  
sky, what joy is there for the mind to be drunk  
with excrement in a cage of feces?

**S:** In other words, if your development is a process of real natural growth, you can't very easily fall back. You are more likely to be forced back if you are pushing and forcing yourself - then you fall back just by way of reaction. If you grow in a natural, opening up kind of way, you are much less likely to fall back - though of course you may fall back even so, but I think it much less likely.

**Vajradaka:** This whole section just seems to be a sort of pulling one away from the world.

**S:** Well, we are dealing with *dhyāna*, - that's the *pāramitā* that we are still concerned with, - and this does involve at least a temporary and partial literal getting away from the world, so that pulling away from the world is inevitable in connection with this whole subject of discussion, this whole practice. Admittedly the final detachment is in the mind, but it is difficult to detach the mind unless one is a bit detached physically, too, and unless physical conditions are a bit favourable to mental detachment. This is why we have retreats. Otherwise we wouldn't go to all that trouble. We could all sit at home and do it - but that's easier said than done. We know we can do it if we get half a chance, a decent retreat, a weekend away, or even a quiet evening at the Centre. [221]

p.89

He falls back upon the ancient Buddhist  
doctrine of *anātmavāda*, the teaching of  
no-self....

**Vajradaka:** Is it usual to put *ēvādaí* at the end of *anātmavāda*?

**S:** *ēVādaí* means doctrine or teaching or even something like our modern *ēismí*. *Anātmavāda* is the doctrine of no-self, Theravāda the doctrine of the *theras* or elder monks, *āchāryavāda* the doctrine of the *āchāryas* or learned teachers. It's quite a common sort of suffix. You also have Sarvastivāda, Mādhyamikavāda, Vijñānavāda, and so on. Generally it refers to a doctrine or teaching as formulated in a systematic, philosophical manner and upheld by a particular school.

p.89

Buddhism ... contains two ready-made areas of  
tension: a conflict of intention that exists between the  
claims of compassion and of renunciation ... and a  
comparable tension of technique ... between the  
experts in contemplation and their brothers who  
specialise in intellectual or intuitive wisdom.

**S:** This is quite important. As I pointed out some days ago, in the life of the modern *ēmissionaryí*, Dharmaduta monk in the East there is quite often a sort of tension between the requirements of the monastic rule, literally interpreted, and the claims of his *ēmissionaryí* activity. This broadly is what the author is referring to here: the conflict between the claims of compassion and renunciation. To renounce everything - to get away from the world, to live in isolation, to develop *dhyāna* - is very necessary, but what about other people, what about your wish to help them in whatever way you can? Sometimes there may be a conflict, at least a tension, of this sort - a conflict that is allegedly resolved, he says, in the doctrine of *sūnyatā* - a doctrine according to which wisdom and compassion, the two aspects of *sūnyatā*, eventually coalesce in the perfect Bodhisattva life. But until that perfect Bodhisattva life is achieved there is quite a bit of tension, even conflict. Similarly, in respect of vocations within the Sangha there is a sort of tension between the contemplative type of monk and the studious type. We find this in the Theravāda, especially where there are distinct terms for the ideals: *ganthadhura* and *vipassanādhura*. *ēDhuraí* means burden, so that there's the *ēburdení* of study (literally, *ēbooksí*) and the *ēburdení* of developing insight. In some Theravāda

communities a monk has virtually to make a choice at the beginning of his career. It's as though you can't combine the two vocations. You are either going to be a yogi monk and go into a cave - or into the forest - and contemplate, or you're going to be a studious monk and study the scriptures, and teach and expound and all the rest of it. Many, of course, do combine - or try to combine - both, but this means tension. In many parts of the Buddhist world, therefore, you get monks who've never meditated, even for half an hour, all their lives. There are lots of such monks - in other Buddhist countries too. On the other hand, in some areas you get yogis, and people who are very good at meditation, but who know very little indeed about the more doctrinal side of the teaching and certainly nothing about the historical development of Buddhism. There are a few monks who are thoroughly experienced in both fields, and they are usually very highly esteemed indeed - like one of my own teachers, Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche. He was famous both as a great yogi and as one of the greatest scholars in Tibetan [222] Buddhism in modern times. But that's fairly unusual. Generally, there is tension between meditation and study. For this reason I suggested, the other day, that one should devote specific phases of one's life to a particular type of activity, instead of trying to do a little of everything every day - maybe devoting a few months to study, with less meditation, and then having a lengthy meditation retreat and doing much less study. One should not try to maintain a balance all the time, in respect of each individual day. That is hardly possible, because you can't get deep enough into anything. No sooner have you got a bit into meditation than you have to come out of it and get on with your study, and just when you begin to get interested in your study it's time for meditation. That's no good. Phases are much better. One should therefore try to follow the rhythm of one's natural interest. As a matter of fact, I would say that there are three *eburdensí*, not two. There's practical activity, including physical work, or what is called *öorganisationalí* activity, i.e. activity for the benefit of other people in general; then there's study, including teaching and writing and discussion; and finally there is meditation. I think there should be phases in one's life when one or another of these definitely predominates, and when one is much more into that one thing.

p.89                      Even Ananda, great friend of the Buddha that he was, and almost incredibly learned, is said to have been excluded from the council of Arhats because he had not attained to Yogic contemplation.

**S:** Ananda seems to have been a bit of a scapegoat, both for the early Sangha, and also for Buddhist historians. There's some evidence to suggest that he might have been a rather early *ëMahāyānisticí* type of monk, or Buddhist - an interesting thought. At the time Yuan Chwang visited India, Ananda was regarded as the special patron of the nuns, the *bhikkhunis*, and it was his image they carried in procession, because it was at his intercession that *bhikkhunis* had been allowed to come into existence at all, and that again seems a bit *Mahāyānistic*. If it hadn't been for Ananda there wouldn't have been any *bhikkhunis*! From the point of view of some of the strict *ëelder monksí*, this was something to take him to task for; but of course the *bhikkhunis* themselves didn't think so: they carried his image in procession.

p.90                      The key to his emphasis,[on the moral implications of *Dhyāna*] is succinctly given in Śāntideva's first *Karika*: 'Since fear and sorrow are pleasing neither to me nor to another, what, then, is the distinction of the self that I protect it and not another?'

**S:** This is the point that eventually comes out. The general feeling in Buddhist countries, or among Buddhists, is that people are equal in respect of suffering: that everybody is equally susceptible to suffering. A dog can suffer, just as a human being can. In respect of suffering, the dog is the equal of the human being. One should therefore be as considerate to a dog as one is to a human being, and not be unkind to it, not maltreat it. Śāntideva however goes further than this. He argues that if we all suffer equally, - if we are all equally sensitive to suffering, - there is no objective reason why I should be more concerned about my own suffering than about somebody [223] else's. I should look equally upon the sufferings of all,

and try to relieve them all equally - not just concentrate on the relief of my own suffering. This of course links up with the Buddhist teaching of the non-reality, in the ultimate sense, of the separate, individual self. You regard your own suffering as being of particular importance, rather than that of others, only because the illusion of *ĕself* is there. Once that is gone, or weakened, you begin to see that you ought just as well to devote yourself to relieving the sufferings of others as to relieving your own suffering. I think this sort of objectivity is something that the mature person tends to develop to some extent anyway - even though not to the extent that Śāntideva or the Bodhisattva develop it, or suggest it should be developed. We do feel somewhat sympathetic when others are suffering, and give the matter at least some attention, even though, if it came to a real decision, you'd probably prefer the relief of your own suffering to the relief of somebody else's. Nevertheless, one is able to see what Śāntideva is getting at. In a way, it's a question of imagination. Very often we can't really imagine, - can't really feel, that somebody else is feeling just what we would feel under similar circumstances. But if you are able to feel it, are able to imagine it vividly, you are much more likely to empathise with that person and act to relieve his or her suffering just as you would act to relieve your own. You feel that suffering in a way as yours. The classic example is, of course, that of mother and child - only you should be able to extend the kind of concern that a mother has for her child to everybody.

p.91                      The cause of this cosmic sorrow is attachment to the  
self (*āṭma-sneha*) ...

**S:** One could also say self-love. Sneha is literally *ĕlove*.

... ĩall sorrows, without distinction, are ownerless.ġ

**S:** That is, are not anybody's in particular. So there's no question of my sorrow or your sorrow. There's just sorrow that we all ought to be doing our best to remove, without distinguishing my sorrow from your sorrow. Here of course Śāntideva - in a way typically - is being intensely metaphysical. But I think that it perhaps isn't necessary, at least not in this country, where people aren't very metaphysically inclined, to argue ourselves into that state of mind with rather highly metaphysical arguments. Rather is it a question of a sensitivity that develops alongside our spiritual practice. As a result of such practice we do become much more sensitive and much more aware, generally; much more sensitive with regard to other people, much more responsive to their sorrows and troubles, and less and less preoccupied with our own individual miseries. I think this can be expected to happen quite naturally, and probably we don't require these rather abstruse metaphysical arguments to *ĕconvince* us that sorrows are ownerless, etc. It is a sort of instinct, so to speak, that most people develop as a result of their spiritual practice - their heightened sensitivity and broader imagination. Some people seem to be born with this instinct. It's strange, but you can sometimes see it even in children. Some seem almost naturally to feel the sufferings of others, and to sympathise with them and try to do something about them, whereas others seem relatively impervious. It's as though people start off on different levels in this respect, as far as one can see. [224]

**Mary:** Is it possible there are kind of *ĕclouds* of sufferingġ that float about and that one might happen into one? Clouds that were separate from oneself?

**S:** Yes, I think so. Maybe that isn't literally what happens, but certainly one's experience is sometimes like that. It's as though somewhere or other someone, or some beings, have as it were discharged or sent forth a whole mass of really suffering vibrations, and that these are floating around and you pick them up. Yes, I'm quite sure of this. I don't know whether this is in fact what happens, in the literal sense, but certainly the experience is very much like that.

**Vajradaka:** They built a toilet on a ley line in Crouch End and it has a really strange feeling. [*Laughter*] It's got so much pain in there it's really awful, much more than any other place. If you're at all sensitive it really hurts.

**S:** That's very odd.

**Gotami:** I sometimes feel there's big, thick and dense clouds of it hanging over cities.

**S:** Over cities, presumably, just because there are more humans congregated there.

**Mary:** It seems quite unrelated to one's own particular reactions.

**S:** Yes, it is very much like walking into a cloud. You do feel unhappy - or feel unhappiness - but there's nothing in your own life, your own situation, as far as you can see, that's responsible for that. There's not even anything coming up from the unconscious. It seems definitely to be coming from outside, and sort of floating in - or you get into it.

**Gotami:** Sometimes it gets very, very thick and heavy, and everybody you meet starts going through painful experiences and things like that, and so you feel it lighten, and then gradually, over the next week, everyone comes into a solid state. The only way that I could explain the feeling that arose is that it's like a big heavy cloud which just gets thicker at times. It's very difficult to put up any resistance to it.

**S:** I was aware of this very much when I was down in Cornwall [at the beginning of the year]. It went on for about three months, from shortly after my arrival, and at first I really wondered what was happening. But then it could be seen in the way that Mary describes, as a cloud, and a lot of it seemed to be quite definitely coming from the Order members, as it were collectively. It took about three months, I think, to work through. There are still bits and pieces of it around, but it seems largely to have gone now.

**Gotami:** You had a cloud?

**S:** I could feel it, and sometimes I could feel the direction it was coming from - the direction of space. But it was coming from outside - that is, the actual experience, and I did eventually come to the conclusion that this represented the actual facts of the case.

**Gotami:** Just because it comes from outside, it does sound as if it might be possible to do something about it.

**S:** Oh yes, indeed you can do something, though here it is a question of direct mind action - maybe supported by other things, but [225] primarily of mind action. Sometimes you have to take things in and absorb them, as it were, and get through them that way: but that might be very uncomfortable for you.

**Vajradaka:** I think there are certain times of day which are clearer of this cloud than others. I've noticed that at about 4 o'clock on Hampstead Heath. During the day, the cloud seems to cover the Heath to some degree, but at night, the Heath seems to clear itself in some way. Sometimes when I myself felt very clogged and cloudy, I just had to go up on the Heath at night and it was a great help.

**S:** I also noticed, after going to the chalet in Cornwall, that on the rare occasions when I ventured into Plymouth I was very aware of the atmosphere. This sort of thing had been going on even in London, to some extent - even at Muswell Hill, though of course it was a bit blurred then, because I was living there all the time. Consequently there was nothing with which I could compare my experience in Plymouth. In places like stores and supermarkets, especially, there was such an odd atmosphere of sort of heavy greed. Not active, grasping greed, but heavy, dull, almost reptilian greed. It was quite definitely like a thick, heavy cloud. You could almost walk through it: you could almost cut it with a knife, as the saying goes, especially in the sort of places I've mentioned: it was really dull and heavy. It was once symbolised for me by something that happened as I was coming out of the Sainsbury's at Muswell Hill. There was a great queue of shoppers. I'd just done some shopping, and in front of me there was a very stout, dull, elderly woman. We stood there for about ten minutes, waiting to be checked out, and all the time her dull, slightly glazed eyes were fixed on a box of chocolates - you know, the things they keep in racks on the left hand side to tempt you as



you go out. When her turn came to be checked out, her hand very slowly went out and grasped the chocolates. The atmosphere of the stores in Plymouth was just like that. It was the same dull, heavy greed - not the active grasping greed, but something really stagnant, and really very strange. Afterwards I stopped going to such places for a while. The atmosphere there was very, very heavy indeed. So the vapour that hangs over big cities is the cloud of greed, the cloud of sorrow - and you can get other clouds too, as in wartime you get clouds of hatred and aggression, and notice the fact. When you are part and parcel of the cloud, of course, you don't notice its presence: you are sharing in it: but when you are more aware, and as it were separate from it, you experience it much more.

**Mike:** I remember coming back from a Summer retreat once, and going into a laundrette. By mistake I picked up the wrong packet of washing powder, and I'd no sooner touched it than the woman sitting next to me jumped up with an "Ah!" in a state of absolute panic. I just dropped the packet! *[Laughter]* I couldn't believe that that kind of reaction had taken place. It really was so extreme.

**Gisela:** What can one do about it? I felt it recently just going into a hospital to listen to a talk, and I came out feeling really sick. I had a headache, and I felt just completely sick for several hours.

**Aśvajit:** I noticed this in Gisela when she came back. She was completely transformed. It was really unpleasant.

**S:** It's a bit of a problem, in a way. I stopped going into shops, so Mark was going and doing everything. After a few months he started feeling the same sort of thing, so it became quite difficult. This can [226] happen to anybody living quietly in the country, doing some meditation, and not meeting people. You really do have to cut down on the shopping days, or go just to certain places which are quieter, and where the atmosphere is not so heavy, even if it means driving a little further on. Plymouth seemed to be a particularly bad place in this respect, I don't know why. Perhaps it's all that modern development.

While we are on the subject of "heaviness" in the atmosphere, one of the questions that people sometimes ask is whether we tend to feel duller and more sluggish at certain times of the day than at others, and whether therefore it would be better not to meditate at such times. There is no need to be too precious about this of course, and in any case the experienced meditator should be able to meditate at any time, but generally it's not good to meditate in the afternoon. According to the Ayurveda, the Indian "Science of Life", the psycho-physical energies are in the ascendant from dawn up to midday, but from the late morning onwards they are in decline until the evening. If you try to meditate in the afternoon, therefore, you're going against the current. It's not just a question of having food in the stomach. I've noticed this on retreats. From 1 o'clock till about 3 is definitely the most sluggish time, regardless of what the eating arrangements are.

**Gisela:** In fact modern medicine says that too: that between 1 and 3 particularly it is the lowest time for the body and that one should rest, really, rather than do anything.

**Subhuti:** I've noticed that quite strongly myself with my own energies. The best meditation is the first one in the morning, particularly if it's a long one and can build up. In the afternoon it's hopeless, and then at about 5 o'clock it really starts to pick up again.

**S:** I also think that from 12 midnight till 2 o'clock in the early morning are hours of lower vitality. Isn't that the time when the majority of old people die, or at least a higher percentage of them?

**Mike:** I wonder what effect the weather has on meditation too. Relating this to the question of dying, apparently a lot of people die when it rains, more so than if the weather is really fine. A lot of people die in the winter too.

**S:** In the case of winter it may be due to lower vitality, less resistance, and so on. But rain, that's quite odd. Rain is somewhat depressing for some people, I don't know why. Maybe it's a question of magnetism and of the particular degree of atmospheric pressure. Anyway, I hope we've got our facts right to begin with, and that people do actually tend to die in the early hours of the morning!

**Mike:** As regards rain, a friend of mine used to work in a cemetery in Kensington. He used to say that if there was a spell of really good weather there'd be no work to do, but that when there were suddenly two or three days of rain they'd be inundated with work and have so many graves to dig for the people who'd died when it was raining.

**S:** Sunshine of course is vitalizing. You could say that the rain is screening it off from you, and having a negative effect in that way.

**Dhruva:** In Cornwall I found that some days would start off bright, and I felt bright: but then suddenly I'd become aware that I was feeling very heavy, and I'd notice that it was overcast. Then when the sun came out I felt myself pick up again.[227]

**S:** There are other factors, too, like nutrition. Then what about the ancient Greeks? They're a good example. They were an active, intelligent people, and happy so far as one knows, and they lived in a nice sunny climate!

**Mary:** There are also the different cycles, aren't there, such as those of the moon - the lunation cycles? If the low points of three different cycles coincide, that's apparently a bad time.

**S:** About a year ago I met a woman who was doing a systematic study of lunar influences on trees, plants, metals, wood (the wood used in building), human beings, and so on - everything. She said that some of the results she'd already arrived at were quite amazing, and that the moon had a very definite effect on all these things.

**Gisela:** I have sometimes thought the same thing in relation to people. For instance, people are affected where everything is relatively mild and where there are really no great extremes as between winter and summer and so on. In such places the people are mild too, and don't seem to go to extremes. But take a country like Russia, which has extremely hard winters and beautifully warm summers, - where you really have extremes: the people are much more extreme too. This is what I've sometimes thought, though I don't know whether it's quite relevant here.

**S:** On my way back from India in 1967 I spent five days in Cairo with an Indian friend. Naturally I went out and about a bit, and I noticed how smoothly flowing everything was compared with India. Motor cars seemed to go along not very quickly, though there was a smooth flow of traffic, and people walked slowly and smoothly in the streets - mostly men: you saw very few women around. There was nothing in the least hurried or jerky about their movements. There seemed to be a great deal of psychological stability. I discussed this with the friend with whom I was staying, who was very much into Indian philosophy and yoga, and he said that he'd noticed it too. In his opinion it had something to do with the regularity with which, for centuries, the Nile had functioned. In India, he said, people were always anxious about the rains, as there are great variations from year to year. Sometimes the rains come on time, and fall in sufficient quantity, and you get good crops, and sometimes they don't. In Egypt the situation was quite different. The Nile always rises at the right time; there's always enough water, always enough food - you don't have to worry about that. In his opinion this had had a definite effect on the whole national character. But I certainly noticed this calmness, this smooth way in which everything flowed, and in fact was quite surprised, because what one read in the newspapers, even at the time, would not have led one to expect it. It was quite remarkable. The whole of life seemed a nice, smooth flow there - even the traffic. For instance, when you crossed the road the traffic would come to a halt smoothly and gently and let you cross. No one had to brake suddenly or anything like that. It was all very

smooth. Moreover there didn't seem to be much noise, certainly not compared with India. Even in the streets it was quiet.

**Aśvajit:** I think I noticed something of this kind in Prague, where of course they have a very strong, steady-flowing river.

**S:** India too has strong-flowing rivers, but they change their course every year and whole villages are washed away. There's also a Penguin book I have on the seasons. It's a detailed study of the [228] seasonal rhythm of life and it's very interesting indeed. It really does illustrate how the law of cycles is at work in nature and in human life in so many different ways. Apparently the seasons are not such a straightforward or limited business as we suppose. On certain levels of existence the principle of cyclical change, of seasonal alternation, is all-pervasive, and operates in a number of different ways. This very well illustrates the Buddhist conception of the cyclical type of conditionality, the conception of the *saṃsāra* as a beginningless succession of recurrent phases. When we are trying to make our way through these phases and to maintain a constant rate of progress in terms of the spiral type of conditionality, we can sometimes take advantage of a particular point in one of these phases. When we are meditating, for instance, and trying to develop a positive mental state, there are some parts of the quotidian cycle, say, which are more favourable to such a development than others, and so we cunningly take advantage of them. We make the *saṃsāra* work against itself. We attack it at its weaker points. I mean, in the case of meditation you are trying to get on to the spiral, but there are certain times of the day which are more favourable to this than others, and so you save your energy for those times when the *saṃsāra* is a little less unhelpful. Thus you work when your natural energy cycle is at its peak, not when it's at its lowest. A wise Buddhist looks into these things a little, at least so far as his own experience is concerned. In a way it's a question of going with nature rather than directly against her. In a way it's against, of course, but you mustn't let nature know that!

**Subhuti:** You still have to understand these things, because if you're not aware of them being at work then you may misinterpret them and see them as something other than what they are - something psychological or whatever.

**S:** Yes, that is so. There is very definitely a lower level of vitality in the afternoon. It's not due to having eaten or anything like that, and it seems to be the least favourable time for meditation. This is why on retreats we used to have discussion then, but even that doesn't keep some people awake! Maybe we ought to have a compulsory afternoon siesta - like they do in a kindergarten - and get up earlier in the morning for meditation!

p.92                      ñNameless are all the conditions, but illuminated by  
name ...î

**S:** This is the essence of the whole passage from the lost *Lokanāthavyākaraṇa-sūtra*, ěSūtra of the Elucidation of the Lord of the Worldí, quoted in the *Śikṣā-samuccaya* and taken from there by Dr. Matig: ñNameless are all conditions, but illuminated by name.í Names are useful for certain practical purposes, but no ultimate validity attaches to them. This is all that is really being said. Perhaps we shouldn't allow Śāntideva, or rather his sources, to be too metaphysical. The Indians were rather fond of the metaphysical mode and we are not too fond of it in this country, - whether rightly or wrongly, - and the Chinese weren't particularly fond of it either. They tended to put things in a rather practical, earthy way. Probably that's what will happen here.

**Gotami:** I don't think that that's metaphysical. It's practical, the way things are. I mean things haven't got names, but one uses names in order to live.[229]

**S:** Yes, that is the gist of the matter. But if you say, ñVoid are conditions and namelessí, as the passage quoted does at the beginning, it does become somewhat metaphysical, because this isn't the sort of idiom to which we are accustomed. If you were giving a talk to a group of people who hadn't heard much about Buddhism, you wouldn't speak in terms of the

emptiness of names, or anything like that. If you mentioned the matter at all, you would say, "Things like names have their practical uses, but don't take them too seriously."

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Between Ratnacitra and Ratnottama there is no more difference than between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and that a false and perverse *il* claims one name or another has no bearing on the problem in any real sense. Facing a choice between self-protection and protection of another, there can be discerned no unique quality (*viśeṣa*) which can be asserted of the *self* in such a way that the interests of this *self* must be respected in preference to the interests of another. A choice may and must be made, of course, but it will not be in the interest of *self*: That choice must be decided by absolute preference for the other. It is in the interests of Dharma - of becoming a Bodhisattva, which is not self-interest, but self-emptying - that the other is to be preferred so drastically. Otherwise, since the other and the *self* are by definition equal, there would be no basis at all for the choice.

**S:** It's a little bit like the position with regard to contemplating the loathsomeness of certain things. It's not that things are really either loathsome or attractive: they are just as they are. But for the practical purpose of getting rid of your craving you concentrate on that loathsome or repulsive aspect, because this is helpful. In the same way, when both you and other beings are suffering, since there's no absolute self there's no reason why you should help one rather than another, - no reason why you should prefer yourself to him, or him to yourself; but the fact is you do have the illusion of self (that's your natural tendency), and in order to counteract that, whenever you have to make a choice you choose his welfare rather than yours. Thus you eradicate your own natural egoity and attachment. That's an integral part of the Bodhisattva ideal. It helps you get rid of your false sense of self. Of course Śāntideva is being really extreme here, but one can see the sense of it.

pp.93-94

The fundamental reason that sorrow is to be prevented is simply that sorrow is unpleasant, and everyone agrees that this is so; but since there is no differentiation between either selves or sorrow, all sorrows are to be extinguished, just as all selves are to be extinguished.... But the point of attack... is the sorrow of the other. On the level of *parātma-samatā*, we are to be our brother's keeper to the maximum degree, and the sacrifice of martyrdom, which is easy for a Christian in that he only has to die once, may be demanded of the Bodhisattva again and again in countless incarnations.

**S:** In this passage Śāntideva is looking at the ideal of the Bodhisattva from a slightly different point of view. Going back to what Mary was saying a short while ago, it's as though the Bodhisattva [230] sees this enormous cloud of suffering, which is the suffering of all (perhaps even including his own), and he can't go on sitting there happily while it is, at least, impinging on him. It isn't his suffering. In a way he doesn't feel it; but also, in a way, he does. There's a line in Tennyson which says, "A painless sympathy with pain." It's rather like that. He can't be completely happy, or completely undisturbed by suffering, so long as that cloud is there; so even in his own interest, - his own interest in the long run, - he works on that cloud. Most of that cloud is emitted by other people (maybe just a bit of it by him), but in order to get rid of any egoistic feelings he may have he works on that part of the cloud which belongs to other people, not on that part of it which belongs to himself. In this way, with the

help of many Bodhisattvas, the cloud is eventually dissolved. Thereís no question of the Bodhisattva being able to sit somewhere and never be touched by that cloud. Thereís a passage in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* where Avalokitesvara, on the threshold of Enlightenment, hears in the distance a confused medley of sounds and cries. He turns round and listens, and itís the cries of all the beings who are suffering in the world. Moved by compassion, he turns his back, as it were, on Nirvāna, and remaining on the éplateauí - as Dr. Matics calls it - between the conditioned and the Unconditioned, *saṃsāra* and Nirvāna, continues to work on that cloud, the cloud of suffering. If all sentient beings are interconnected, then existence is like a vast spiderís web. You canít really sit comfortably in your own little corner if, on the other side of the universe, someone else is a bit uncomfortable in theirs. A little tremor will come along the filaments, and that will, in a way, disturb you. Not that it will disturb you in the usual way, of course, but because you can feel it your peace and tranquillity will not be absolutely complete. Even in your own interest, therefore, - your own interest narrowly considered, - you have to work on that cloud and help others. This is very much the general Mahāyāna attitude. Strictly speaking, thereís no such thing as individual liberation, individual happiness: you either all have it together, or you donít have it at all. You can say that youíre fairly happy, fairly contented, but you canít say that youíre completely happy until everyoneís happy.

**Subhuti:** Because the process of becoming sort of individually happier is also one of becoming more sensitive, and so you canít escape.

**S:** Right. The more sensitive you become, the more open you are to other peopleís feelings, other peopleís sufferings. Paradoxically, if you go off to a cave and meditate, you become even more sensitive to the suffering of others, and feel like doing something about it. Either you come back into the world, therefore, or, if you are able, you do something on a purely mental level, - telepathically, as it were, - even if itís just carrying on with your own meditation so powerfully that the meditation itself becomes a cloud - a positive cloud - acting on that negative cloud.

**Aśvajit:** Milarepaís practice!

**S:** Yes, indeed. In a number of different spiritual traditions there are legends that the world continues in existence only because, in different parts of the world, there are seven or eight sages just carrying on with their meditations. Otherwise the world would have come to an end in a catastrophic manner. The Sufis have legends of this [231] sort, and so does the Greek Orthodox Church. Whenever things get really bad, the masters say, éCome on, up into the mountains! Meditate like mad, otherwise we wonít get through this crisis.í Thereís a great deal of truth in this - well, more than a great deal: itís literally true, and in fact, follows logically as soon as you admit the interconnectedness of all forms of life - and that seems to be demonstrated quite scientifically. If little plants can feel an unkind thought and wilt, then what about human beings?

**Subhuti:** I remember the Pope talking about the contemplative orders and saying that they in fact kept the whole Catholic Church going, by their own practice.

**S:** Itís the same kind of idea. Of course if they are really contemplative they might be undermining it too, in a way! [*Laughter*] Thatís why the Catholic Church has always kept a very sharp eye on the contemplatives and why it sometimes discourages them and has them out of the monasteries doing something really useful. But at least they recognise that there is a power there.

p.94

Thus they plunge into the worst Hell like wild geese  
into the lotus pond.

**S:** Legends like that of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbhaís descending into hell represent this sort of occurrence, when a Bodhisattva-like being deliberately goes into the cloud, even into the heart of the cloud. Heís not afraid. He knows it wonít harm him. If anything, he can melt that

cloud, at least a little bit, just by being in the midst of it - but obviously that isn't something that everybody can do. Maybe there are very few Bodhisattvas, even, who can make the descent into hell, who can venture to go right in the cloud and even live in the midst of the cloud, quite deliberately.

**Gotami:** Do you feel that people normally are aware of their own limits in this way?

**S:** Sometimes, not always. Sometimes they underestimate and sometimes they overestimate. You have to strike a balance. For instance, take the case of people living in the city: there is a cloud there to a great extent. When you yourself are part and parcel of the cloud, and contributing to it, you hardly notice, but when you go off, say, for a retreat, then you're out of the cloud and you really feel free. On going back to the city you notice the difference. After a few days, perhaps, you are for all practical purposes absorbed by the cloud - maybe not when you are actually meditating, but certainly when you are moving around. For the first two or three days, even, you can move around and not be affected, or not very much: there's still something of the retreat with you: but after that you really do need to get away regularly. This however increases your sensitivity, so that when you come back into the cloud you feel it still more. You then just have to estimate your own strength, and what you need to do every day just to keep a bit out of the cloud, or your head a bit above it, as it were. Of course you can have a little retreat-like oasis in the midst of the cloud - if, say, you've got a little community, and if you keep up regular *pūjā* and meditation and so on. There can be little holes in the cloud, but they are not easy to maintain, because sometimes, if [232] you leave the door too wide open, little bits of cloud will drift in even into your little oasis.

p.94                      When a being has been released, an ocean of joy has arisen for everyone, since pleasure (as well as pain) is without discrimination.

**S:** This is a bit like the transference of merit. When someone gains spiritual emancipation, it affects everybody: it's as though he creates a cloud. Interestingly enough, the tenth and last stage of the Bodhisattva's career is called Dharmamegha, 'Cloud of the Dharma', so that it could be interpreted in this way (usually it isn't) - as if it brings into existence a great cloud of spiritual substance, almost, which affects everybody to some extent. Just as you can have clouds of sorrow drifting around, you can have clouds of joy drifting around too, generated by Bodhisattva-like people.

p.95                      [Śāntideva's] stress is fervently moral, rather than transic, and it is carefully integrated into the overall pattern of the Bodhisattva's character and career.

**Vajradaka:** What does *ētransicī* mean?

**S:** *ēTransicī* means pertaining to or connected with trance, which is the editor's word, following Dr. Conze, for *dhyāna*: not a very happy word. Here it means pertaining to the *dhyānas*. Dr. Conze always uses *ētranceī* for both *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. This is one of his least fortunate translations. But Dr. Matics mentions the Brahma-Vihāras. Does anyone want to ask anything about them?

**Vajradaka:** I was just wondering whether I was under an illusion when I felt that the Brahma Vihāras were, in just a very ordinary sort of way, permeating into my life. I wondered whether they were specifically very high, metaphysical spiritual states, or whether they could, and actually do, just sort of filter into one's everyday life and whether one should actually feel them.

**S:** It's a question of degree. Certainly if one practises them, and especially if one does them as a definite exercise, it is to be expected not only that you should feel them at the time of meditation but also that something of them should percolate through at other times as well. This is what should happen with *maitri* especially, that being the really basic Brahma Vihāra.

**Mike:** Until this retreat it never occurred to me to categorise any of my own experiences in terms of such high spiritual attainments as the Brahma Vihāras and the four *dhyānas*. To what extent can one do this?

**S:** Sooner or later it all ought to tie up, that's certain. There are also many different levels. You can have a full-blown experience of the Brahma Vihāras, with feelings of overflowing love and compassion for all, and you can also have feelings of strong goodwill in the ordinary human sense, - that's also *maitri*, - and work on that comparatively lower, though still very worthwhile, level. Even if one were to think in terms of the Brahma Vihāra-type experience percolating down, as it were, and of oneself as beginning to be in touch with it in that way, one wouldn't be wrong. Certainly, the Brahma Vihāras are very [233] lofty experiences, but it's not that there's just one level. There's a whole series of levels - right down to one's ordinary human feelings of goodwill and kindness towards others. They are the link, - the bridge, if you like, - and it is to be expected that, if one has practised the *mettā-bhāvanā* meditation, it should make some difference to one's ordinary outlook on life, as well as to one's behaviour with, and attitude towards, other people. You should be just a bit more friendly, a bit more kindly. If you're not, it's a bit surprising. You don't keep it all shut up in the meditation hour.

**Mike:** I was wondering, though, if the use of Sanskrit terms for these higher attainments might inhibit people relating their own experience to them. This is something I've just discovered in myself. Perhaps it would be useful to have a set of terms which one could use - and identify with - more easily.

**S:** I think such terms will develop, because if sufficient people need them they will come into use. This will happen naturally as we try to talk about our experience in plain, straightforward terms. There will be a few scholars around to tell us what it all is in Pali and Sanskrit, so as to link up properly with tradition, which is also necessary, but not everybody needs to know what the terms for certain experiences are in those languages. In some Buddhist countries in the East, such as Ceylon, the situation is easier. Pali words like *mettā* have become part of the Sinhalese language, so that Sinhalese-speaking people can use words like *mettā* in a quite natural way. They can say, "Oh I feel a lot of *mettā* for that person." It isn't a jarring word from another language: it's part of their own language. In this way the word develops all sorts of nuances, even social nuances, in addition to the full-fledged religious or spiritual meaning. This is the sort of thing that can happen. We too may absorb some Pali and Sanskrit words. Friendliness is quite a good word: maybe we should take that up and promote it: give it a capital 'F' in the same way that we have Friends i.e. members of the FWBO with a capital F. We should speak of a Friendly attitude, with a capital 'F': "You're not being very Friendly today." You can hear the capital.

**Gotami:** There does seem to be one slight danger, which some people fall into when they come to relate their own experience to the words in the books: they may collect a label for what they experience, but they may think that because they can label their own tiny little touch, or spark, of a feeling they are way beyond the point at which they actually are. I think this should be taken into consideration too, because people can then sometimes have a very inflated idea of where they are on the path and go around thinking they are Enlightened.

**Mike:** Well, that's the other extreme.

**S:** We tend not to encounter that, though, on the whole. We don't seem to have had many inflated people around. I've certainly seen them in other groups, but not in the "Friends".

**Gotami:** When it does happen, it's pretty inflexible.

**S:** Oh yes! I've heard Burmese Buddhists say, "My *mettā*? My *mettā* is very good!" in just that sort of way.

**Vajradaka:** Long before I came to the ðFriendsí, I once really believed that I was Enlightened, and it was really useful to me, because [234] after six weeks I really wanted to talk to people, and listen to music, and then I realised I wasnít! [*Laughter*] But for six weeks, anyway (I was in the jungle), I thought I was, and then, when I realised I wasnít, - that I was nowhere near it, - it was quite a good thing and quite useful.

**S:** The danger is that, during that six-week period, you start collecting disciples - disciples who tell you that you are Enlightened, and who need to believe that you are. Itís then rather difficult, because they wonít let you get out of it. Theyíll say, ðOh no, you are Enlightened, donít think that you are not: you are mistaken! We KNOW!í

p.95                      The Mādhyamika, in particular, is especially reluctant to speak of the X-factor that remains after phenomenality is dispersed, and it shies away from an Absolute even more vigorously than other Buddhist schools. Yet Nagarjuna himself is able to say ðOf the essential non-difference between the Buddhas and all beings, of oneself and others, is the Equality (*samatā*) taught by you.í This can lead us in three directions (perhaps - although not necessarily all at once) away from the subject in hand. Such an attitude can bring us to believe in a Vijñānavadin-type Absolute (the cosmic *citta*), or to the Mādhyamika belief that *saṃsāra* and Nirvāna are identical (which identity transcends all conceptions of *citta*), or, perhaps, even to a third view which no Buddhist would accept: the quasi-cosmic man.

**Vajradaka:** Ím confused! [*Laughter*]

**Mary:** I didnít get it ... itís just words ...

**S:** No, Itís not just words. It has a meaning, actually. Letís go back to, ðNagarjuna himself is able to say, ðOf the essential non- difference between the Buddhas and all beings, of oneself and others, is the Equality (*samatā*) taught by you.í He starts off with the fact of oneself and others being equal: there are no ðselvesí; thereís just [impersonal] suffering, or else [impersonal] joy. The whole idea of selfhood - of ðyouí and ðmeí - is illusion or delusion. We may speak of Enlightened selves and un-Enlightened selves, but if you follow the implications of the *parāṃśa-samatā* and the Brahma Vihāras to their logical conclusion, the Enlightened selves are really all one and the same: ordinary beings are the same as Buddhas, Buddhas are the same as ordinary beings. Nagarjuna explicitly says this: ðOf the essential non-difference between Buddhas and all beings, of oneself and others, is the Equality (*samatā*) taught by you.í According to Dr. Matics, ðThis can lead us in three directions (perhaps - although not necessarily all at once) away from the subject at hand. Such an attitude,í i.e. the attitude that self and Buddhas are the same, or that ordinary beings and Buddhas are the same, can lead in the direction of, for instance, ða Vijñānavadin-type Absolute (the cosmic *citta*)í, that is to say, can lead to the belief that there is just one mind - to the belief that what we regard as selves, or beings, or Buddhas, are all different expressions of one mind, - that there is one cosmic mind underlying everything, manifesting in everything, - and that itís this One Cosmic Mind that you have to realise. That is in fact [235] Enlightenment; that is in fact Enlightenment; that is in fact Buddhahood. This is the teaching of the Vijñānavāda or, more correctly, of the Yogācāra school The Mādhyamika goes, in a way, even beyond that. The Mādhyamika says that if beings and Buddhas are identical, then the conditioned and the Unconditioned, *saṃsāra* and Nirvāna, are all non-dual. That non-duality is the supreme Voidness which is beyond even Chitta, beyond even the Cosmic Mind, and itís in the realisation of that that Enlightenment consists.



Or, you can go in another direction, to a view which according to Dr. Matics is not very Buddhistic, though I don't altogether agree with that. Here too there is no such thing as *ëyouí* and *ëmeí*, *ëselvesí* or *ëbeingsí* and *ëBuddhasí*, but here it's not even a question of just one Mind, or one Void. For this view, ultimately it's one person - an all-knowing, omnipresent person - manifesting in all these beings. In fact the whole universe is one *ëpersoní*. Dr. Matics is of course thinking of early Indian beliefs such as that of the cosmic Purusha, the archetypal man, whose dismemberment resulted in the creation of the universe, and he therefore goes on to suggest that perhaps behind the Buddhist teaching of the non-difference of beings and Buddhas *ëwe* detect this cosmic gentleman lurking ... and we retreat in confusion. The confusion is due to the fact that the *ëcosmic gentlemaní* bears some resemblance to God, and Buddhists aren't supposed to believe in God. Dr. Matics is making a little scholarly joke here, in case you haven't noticed. *[Laughter]* But actually you can - and in some places the Mahāyāna does - think of the whole of existence as one great Buddha, of whom the different Bodhisattvas are manifestations on one level, and ordinary people manifestations on another level. The Tendai School follows this line of thought to some extent, as do some forms of Tantra, especially the Japanese Shingon School. Earth, water, fire and air are the manifestations, on their own particular level, of this or that Buddha. Everything is interconnected. The entire universe is the *ëbodyí* of one gigantic Buddha. Thus one can see that the idea of the Cosmic Person, who is the Buddha, is not quite so un-Buddhistic as Dr. Matics seems to think, though admittedly it is on the fringes of Buddhism, metaphysically speaking.

From the fact that beings and Buddhas are identical - because self and others are identical ultimately - you can therefore proceed in these three different directions - perhaps even at the same time. You can think in terms of the One Cosmic Mind embracing everything: or of the Void which is beyond everything, and which Buddhas and ordinary people equally are; or you can think in terms of a Cosmic Person, omniscient and omnipresent. This last is what Buddhists would call a Buddha. It isn't God, because according to Buddhism he doesn't create the universe. As we have seen, Dr. Matics thinks this line of thought rather un-Buddhistic and therefore doesn't follow it up (he comes back to the subject later on, however), but you can see the interesting metaphysical perspectives that begin to open up. Incidentally there's one useful book where one can read up about the Buddha as Cosmic Person. It's a very old book, though a good one: *The System of Buddhistic Thought* (Calcutta, 1912), by Yamakami Sogen.

**Gotami:** Would you say that any one of those theories was more useful than any other?

**S:** I don't know. [It's not so much a question of different theories, as of different approaches to a reality that transcends [236] thought.] Some people find it easier to think in terms of Cosmic Mind, others in terms of the Void, and so on. Personally I think these are all quite valid approaches.

**Gotami:** Even this one of being, as Dr. Matics says the Mādhyamika in particular was, reluctant to speak of an X-factor and shying away from an Absolute or anything like that?

**S:** Sometimes it seems that, from a practical point of view, the Mādhyamika position is a bit unrealistic, even academic: *ëPhenomenality* has been dispersed, but you mustn't think of what remains as an Absolute. The fact is that you need an Absolute most of the time, that is, until you really come to the point where you can do without it, otherwise your premature rejection of Absolutes becomes a sort of relativism in the ordinary intellectual sense. I rather think that for practical purposes either the Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda *ëOne Mindí* approach or the Tantric *ëOne Buddhaí* approach, as it eventually becomes, would be more helpful. But I wouldn't like to dogmatise about this. Certainly the Mādhyamika standpoint (if you can call it a standpoint) does represent the ultimate X-*ëviewí* in strictly orthodox Buddhist terms; but for that very reason, perhaps, it's the least useful. It's so advanced that you can't do very much with it until you are very advanced yourself.

**Aśvajit:** It seems to me that those three views can all be useful from time to time according to different circumstances. One may feel that getting too involved in the theoretical approach is not being helpful, so this is why one goes over to the ěOne Buddhaí kind of approach, which is much more feelingful; but then, having got into that, you get a bit lost in feelings, and must begin to clarify your thought again.

**S:** Yes, you have to become a bit more ěaustereí. In Zen thereís quite a lot of the ěOne Mindí Yogāchāra type of approach, particularly that of the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*, with which Zen is historically connected. We also found this type of approach in *The Awakening of Faith* when we studied it some time ago.

p.96                      In Buddhism there is an axiomatic and cosmic law to the effect that when one does something for others, he benefits himself on the phenomenal plane, although the benefit may not be immediate or direct; but self-benefit in any real sense, regardless of this law, is a misnomer forced upon us by the limitations of language, and it is better described impersonally as pertaining to the approaches of Enlightenment.

**S:** We often have to speak in terms of self-development, - in terms of controlling your own mind, devoting yourself to your own good, etc.; but this is only a manner of speaking. If you really and genuinely do that, you are benefiting others too. Similarly, if you really and genuinely devote yourself to helping others, you also benefit yourself. As you progress in the spiritual life, you are less and less able truly to discriminate between the two. Suppose you spend the morning in your room, meditating for your ěowní benefit. Well, when you go out and meet others you are in a much more positive state of mind, and this affects them positively, so that indirectly your meditation benefits them too. On the other hand, if you sacrifice your own time and convenience in order to do things for other people, then, if you do it in [237] the right spirit, it benefits you as well. At least youíve overcome sloth and torpor. At least youíve been active and busy in some good cause.

p.96                      One is not to seek self-benefit when practicing the Supreme Mystery, since he has no self to benefit (although benefit will come); and at all times he is to direct his effort to the other.

**S:** There is this very strong sense, in the Mahāyāna, of devoting oneself to the promotion of good, and getting rid of sorrow and suffering, without so much of the personal reference. In a way it doesnít matter whether you call it mine or yours: there is this mass of suffering to be got rid of; there is this mass of joy which can be brought into existence. We are all affected by the ěcloud of sufferingí, so letís all get rid of it, without bothering too much which bit is ěmineí and which bit is ěyoursí. In the same way with the cloud of joy, and even with the cloud of Enlightenment; just try to bring it into existence. I might do a bit more than you, or you might do a bit more than me, but we all benefit in the end: we all share it; we all enjoy it. Thereís a little story in this connection about Sariputta. He had been meditating in the forest one day, and when he came out his friend Moggallāna asked him how it was that his face was shining with such unusual radiance. Sariputta replied, ěAll day Íve been meditating in the forest, but there never came to me the thought ìl am meditatingí. Itís a bit like that. In this little episode thereís a bit of the ěMahāyānaí spirit. Meditation is brought into existence, but it isnít anybodyís property. Itís just as much yours as mine. ěA higher state of consciousness has been brought into existence. Ím not saying itís mine: itís yours too. Thatís the spirit of the Bodhisattva also, at his own much higher level. ěSome good is being brought into existence, - some higher states of being, some happiness, some joy. Itís not mine - itís everybodyís. Thatís the attitude behind the Bodhisattvaís so-called ěrenunciationí of a personal Nirvāna. He knows it isnít ěhisí, anyway. Itís there to be shared by all, so to speak.

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... one views himself as full of faults and others to be oceans of virtue.

**S:** Of course it isn't literally that others have got all the virtues and you've got all the faults, but we usually tend to look at things the other way round. We usually tend to see our own virtues more quickly than our faults, and the faults of others more quickly than their virtues. So let's turn the whole thing round. Let's concentrate on the good side of others a bit more, and on our own weaker side a bit more also. In that way we shall redress the balance and, in the end, see everything as it really is.

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...there is a sense in which anything is an ocean of virtue if rightly understood ...

**S:** Just like the enemy being really a friend.

... and there is another sense in which everything is an ocean of faults, and (here is the puzzle) either view may lead to Enlightenment.

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**S:** When you see conditioned existence as a whole as full of faults, that leads to detachment from conditioned existence, and thus it is a way to Enlightenment. Similarly, when you see conditioned things as oceans of virtue you will be strongly attracted to the virtue and, to that extent, move away from the *saṃsāra*. So that method works too.

There's something much more elementary than viewing others as oceans of virtue, and that is, being much more appreciative of their good side. We should have a much more definitely appreciative attitude towards things and people. A lot of people are lacking in the quality of positive appreciation, and the expression of that appreciation. This is something I've been talking about rather a lot lately, because I've been rather strongly aware of it. People don't appreciate enough. Goethe mentions this here and there, and also Rilke. In some of his poetry Rilke goes quite deeply into the matter, which is also linked up with the idea of thanksgiving and rejoicing in merits. The fact is that we should have a much more positive and appreciative attitude. Only too often we don't give appreciation, or else we give it halfheartedly, and that creates a lot of frustration and disappointment. We should express our appreciation much more than we do - not only see the good side of things, which is sometimes difficult enough, but also express it, and let people know we appreciate the things that they do. We are often very deficient in this respect. Yet even from a practical, psychological point of view (leaving aside spiritual considerations), appreciation is very important. If you say to someone, 'Well, that was really good. You've done it really well', - if they have done it well, of course (and if you sincerely feel they have why not say it?), - then it sets up good vibrations, as it were. It's not a question of a bit of backslapping, or back scratching, but of genuine, heartfelt appreciation. Such appreciation is a very useful thing, and moreover good in itself.

**Vajradaka:** Very often it can be the key to a natural, positive flow between people.

**S:** Yes, right. Absence of appreciation can often obstruct the flow, especially when it is withheld in situations where it would be quite natural and appropriate. Some people find it very difficult to express their appreciation. They just don't know how to do it.

**Vajradaka:** It seems to come up so quickly and go so quickly. If you're not right on the ball it's gone, and you've missed it. Really it's a matter of training yourself to do it.

**S:** Yes, training yourself not to withhold the appreciation that is due.

**Mike:** It comes back to promptitude of action.

**S:** Yes, indeed. In the case of one's feelings, especially, one has to be quite watchful about that, because unless you express a feeling on the spot it doesn't get expressed at all and usually goes a bit sour. Positive feelings in particular should not be left unexpressed, because there's a natural urge to express them. Even if you feel you might be making yourself a bit ridiculous, never mind, say [239] what you feel. Rilke is very much concerned with this question of praise. He's always saying that praise is the great thing: you should praise everything and adopt an attitude of praise towards it. Quite a few of his poems touch on this. Praise is the great word, as it were, the word that is wanted. Rilke is rather against anything negative or dispraising. Praise nature. Praise a tree for being a tree, a human being for being a human being. Praise is the great word, and that should be the attitude. It's very much the Bodhisattva's attitude. It's also, in a way, the attitude of the Christian who praises God for the beauty of creation though here, of course, there is a theological difficulty, in that there are certain unpleasant aspects of creation, and if you believe that God is all good you wonder how he could have created those aspects too. But leaving that aside, praise is very much the attitude of, say, St. Francis when he sings his Canticle of the Sun - when he gives praise to Brother Sun, and praise to Sister Water, and so on. That seems to be his attitude. It's not just sentimentality; it goes much deeper than that. St. Francis gives praise to Brother Fire too, even when he burns him.

**Vajradaka:** There's such a strong tendency amongst people to run themselves down!

**S:** And run others down - run life down, run everything down. You notice it in politics. Nowadays politics is mainly just *eknockin'g*. There's rarely anything positive or constructive about it. It's all grumbling, whining, complaining and finding fault - all prevaricating, carping and criticizing. There is hardly anything strong, constructive and inspiring. Where, indeed, do you find this in politics? You find plenty of fine words and flourishing phrases, but they are empty and hollow and the people who use them don't mean them - you know that from their past behaviour, and from the way that they say them. It's just propaganda and hasn't anything real in it. Then there is misattribution of motives, one politician trying to make whatever the other one has said sound worse than it really was, or misinterpreting it. This goes on all the time. There's nothing positive or constructive, not to mention creative. A great deal of our life seems to be of this captious nature. You can't even praise anything wholeheartedly, or approve of anything wholeheartedly. We seem to have got into a very negative syndrome. This is what I feel. I've felt it even among the *ĕFriends* at times, except that they, being good Buddhists, can't be openly negative, so that if they haven't anything positive to say they just keep quiet and go all dull.

**Mike:** What should one do if one feels really negative and seems to be behaving in a rather dull way?

**S:** For one thing, you mustn't inflict your negative states on others. Sometimes you may be entitled, in the positive context of friendship and mutual help, to let out negative things with people, but you must be very careful not to overdo this. Some forms of modern psychotherapy seem to encourage this sort of *ĕletting out* to a greater extent than is justified. People should be encouraged to be much more positive. If they can be more positive then, even though there may be the occasional outbreak of negativity, the negative states will be dealt with automatically. A lot of our troubles are due to the fact that we are not allowed to be positive. Only too often it is our positive feelings, not our negative ones, that get repressed by the way in which we live. A [240] lot of negativity is positiveness just gone a bit sour: it hasn't had a chance to express itself. I'm very suspicious of the whole ideology of: You must let all your negative emotions out. You can go on like that for years, because the energy is there, but you just keep on giving it a negative expression.

**Gisela:** It's self-stimulating.

**Subhuti:** This is because negative emotions aren't primary. There's usually something underneath.

**S:** Right. Something which is either positive or at least neutral. I don't think there is such a thing as negative energy or negative emotion as such. It's just that a negative twist has been given to that basically positive - I don't think I'll even say neutral - energy. You can very easily just turn the valve a bit this way, or a bit that, and it's surprising how quickly the so-called negativity turns positive - or vice versa, in some cases. Just give that tiny little twist, and it makes all the difference in the world.

**Gisela:** It does have a lot to do, I think, with expressing it promptly. I've observed that in myself quite a lot. When I've wanted to express something positive, but hesitated and didn't, then it just kind of grew in myself. At first it just became dull and in the end it came out in something negative.

**S:** In its most widely current form, - which may not be the real thing, - *ö*psychologyí always stresses the negative emotions. It tells one to let out the negative emotions, but says nothing about letting the positive ones out. It's almost as though whatever was on the surface was positive and all that stuff hidden down beneath must be negative. But I just can't agree with this. I think that there is, if anything, more positive emotion - or potentially positive emotion - than there is negative.

**Gisela:** I think this way of thinking is inherent in Freud. Maybe that's where it comes from.

**S:** Perhaps also from Christianity - your natural impulses being sinful. In Buddhism your natural impulses are *samsaric*, but that's different from being sinful.

**Aśvajit:** I remember one master at the school I went to giving a little sermon once on sin, and he pointed out that sin spelled backwards was *n-i-s*, which he pronounced *ñiceí* - which is significant. *[Laughter]* It was the most unpleasant sermon I think I've ever heard. But it represents the Christian attitude.

**Subhuti:** I've been thinking about my conditioning, and I've been conditioned to feel that to be positive is to be silly.

**S:** This applies to men more than to women, I think. Women in this respect are less repressed, less afraid of being silly, and often they are more positive than men emotionally: more happy than men, more cheerful.

**Gisela:** I think that's part of our conditioning. Men are not supposed to show any emotions or feelings.

**S:** Not in this culture, at any rate.

**Mary:** I thought women were brought up like that too! *[Laughter]* [241] At school it's *ë*Don't speak. Don't move. Don't do this.í

**S:** To some extent this is a class thing. *ë*Working-classí women, as they used to be called, aren't brought up in this way. They aren't really brought up at all. They just behave naturally, very often. But *ë*ladiesí are rather different.

**Mary:** You used to have to sit on a chair all dressed up and wait to go and say *ë*How do you doí!

**S:** I remember a passage in the life of Florence Nightingale, who came from a wealthy upper middle-class family. Her mother and her elder sister used to lie on divans all day, beautifully dressed, telling each other not to do anything in case they got tired! *[Laughter]* She wrote about this in a letter and said it was driving her mad, because she didn't feel like lying on a divan. *[Laughter]* That's how she took up nursing, when she was in her late thirties, I think: having been completely frustrated. That's how well-brought-up young women were supposed

to live - just lie on divans until someone came along and said, 'Will you marry me?', and you said, 'I'll ask papaí, [Laughter] and that was that. Otherwise you just lay on the divan.

But to carry the discussion a bit further. It's not just that our positive emotions are repressed, but that we are repressed: it's our whole being. As a result of this we tend to withhold our total ěselvesí, so to speak, and are not fully into what we are doing and what we are saying. We enter only with a small part of ourselves - just the tip of the iceberg, as it were.

**Gisela:** It just occurred to me that being in negative emotions is very unliberating: one stays in fear. Things like this whole idea that man is bad, - this Christian concept, - keep putting fear into man, which is the opposite to making one free.

**S:** Well, if you are bad, so what? It's you. What can you do about it, at least for the time being? That's what you are now, so that's where you have to start from, however far you may eventually go. But basically, I think, it's a suppression of being. It's not even just a question of suppressing positive emotions: it's the suppression, literally, of the human being - with the emphasis on the being, in the dynamic sense. That gets suppressed. We can't fully be ourselves. I don't want to give this too many psychological overtones, because it can be understood in a very silly sort of way, and in any case it's much more than just psychological. It's much more existential, as it were. In any situation, we are unable to mobilise our total human resources. This is what happens - whether we are doing something, or talking, or behaving in a certain way: there's at least three-quarters of us - usually nine-tenths - completely left out of the transaction and not operative at all. Most people - almost everybody, in fact - are in this sort of condition.

**Subhuti:** Most of the energy is involved in suppressing the other part of the energy.

**S:** Yes, right. It's as though out of our total energy there's only 10% that we use. Of the remaining 90%, 45% is being held down, and 45% is doing the holding down. This is what happens much of the time: we function on 10% of our energy. When the suppressed - and suppressing - energy starts coming up it's as though, with very little [242] encouragement, you could almost blow your environment to smithereens. Maybe some people are afraid of that. If you had a few dozen people with their energies totally mobilised, there'd be no holding them. But there aren't many people like that.

p.97                      Śāntideva asserts that the aspirant on the path of the Bodhisattva is far from achievement until he learns to make an exchange (*parivarta*) of his own infinite happiness for the infinite sorrow of another.

**S:** This is reminiscent of orthodox Christian teaching about Christ taking on himself the sins of the world, which could be regarded as a sort of ětransferenceí between Christ and all beings. As Dr. Matics pointed out earlier on, however, in connection with the Bodhisattva's practice of *parā́tma-samatā́*, it is the ideal of every Buddhist to get rid of the idea of possession with regard to merits and goodness, to ěexchangeí himself and all other beings, and to contribute impartially and objectively to the increase of the sum total of good and happiness in the world and the decrease of the sum total of misery. Thus every Bodhisattva, and every [Mahāyāna] Buddhist, is a sort of Christ, you can say. There's not just one Christ.

Pp.98                      The principle is a little like some Christian conceptions of the treasury of merit acquired by the Son as he lay upon the cross....

**S:** In Catholic teaching there is the conception of the treasury of merits of the saints, that is to say, of merits which are the product of works of supererogation. The saints have led lives of extraordinary holiness, and the merits which they accumulated were more than they actually required for their own personal salvation, so that the balance left over accrues to the Church collectively and the Church has that treasury of merits at its disposal. That is the doctrine

behind the sale of indulgences, because if the Church has such a stock of merits at its disposal it can give them to individual members or - this is where the doctrine becomes very crude and materialistic - it can even sell them. This is how the sale of indulgences began, which Luther protested against. Though the doctrine of the treasury of merits can be abused, you can see that there is an element of truth in it, i.e. that the holy life of the saint, or the Bodhisattva, isn't something which benefits him. It's a sort of treasure, which is available to all who participate in that particular ěspiritual body' or, as Buddhism would say, all sentient beings: directly or indirectly. It's quite interesting to see these little reflections and quasi-adumbrations of Buddhist teachings in other religions. In the present instance, it's as though there's some vague realisation that the saint couldn't be a saint just for himself - though of course, in the Catholic teaching a saint gets salvation and there's literally a balance of merits left over, like a sum of money. In this way the doctrine does become a bit materialised, but there's still some correspondence with what Śāntideva says.

**Gotami:** You've said in a lecture when talking about *dāna* that the greatest thing you can give is yourself. It's very difficult to get a feel of this. Could you give an example?

**S:** Let's put it in a different way. In the lecture I put things more in the traditional Buddhist way, but in terms of our present [243]discussion it's being fully present in any situation where other people are involved: not keeping any part of yourself back, but having all your energies, - the whole of you, - fully mobilised in relation to the person or persons with whom you are dealing. That's the giving of yourself. What is happening now, I think, is that we are in a somewhat transitional period as regards expressions and terminology. In the *Survey* I stuck strictly to traditional Buddhist expressions, and explained everything in those terms as best I could. The same - more or less - in *The Three Jewels*; the same in most of the lectures. But now I begin not to do that so much, and to speak not so much with reference to tradition, and the scriptures, but just from the way I see things myself here and now. Since I'm communicating, on the whole, with English people with a European cultural background, etc., it comes out a bit differently. What is said does square ultimately with tradition, there's no doubt, - otherwise the ěFriends' wouldn't be a Buddhist movement; but there's certainly a way of putting things which seems more ětrue', even, and more relevant to us as we are here and now, than some of the traditional ways. It's exactly the same thing that is said, but there's more impetus to it, and more resonance, when it's put in our own idiom. Speaking in this way means being fully mobilised where you are. It means giving the whole of yourself to the discussion, or action, or whatever it is - not keeping any part of yourself back. That's giving yourself. It's not giving yourself away as when you sell yourself into slavery. Maybe the original Indian idiom suggests that, or sometimes even states it quite explicitly, which is quite misleading. We are really having to do - and this is happening spontaneously - what the Chinese did when Buddhism came to China. They transformed, eventually, the typically Indian modes of expression into something more Chinese. That's one of the great factors in the rise of Ch'án. It wasn't a separate school. It was much more like the whole spiritual life of Buddhism translated into Chinese idiom - and, when it went to Japan, into Japanese idiom. But some people want to insist on our talking this idiom here. Well, you can't help it at first, and personally I speak the Indian Buddhist idiom, and enjoy speaking it; but I'm beginning not to speak it. I'm almost beginning to forget it, in a way. Sometimes I have to look it up in the *Survey*.

**Gotami:** I find that when you really give, it's as if energy is coming in, which is rather strange.

**S:** That's because you can't separate giving from receiving - self and others. You're doing it to others, but also it's being done to you. It's not a literal giving in the sense that what you give you've lost, because he's got it now. It's not like that at all. The more you give, the more you've got. That's exactly what the Mahāyāna sūtras say about the Bodhisattva.

**Aśvajit:** I notice this very much at work. I often go in in the mornings and find that the people are rather dull, but perhaps I'm a little bit cheerful and I make a joke here and there, and after an hour everybody else in the office is laughing and joking and then I feel much

better. Funnily enough, it's much more difficult to generate this positive attitude among the ĒFriendsí sometimes, I find.

**S:** Now why do you think that is? I'm sure you're right, but why is it?

**Mike:** I think there's quite often an element of mistrust, almost. People are trying to work out your motives all the time.[244]

**S:** Too much psychology.

**Mike:** Definitely!

**S:** They can't take something positive at its face value.

**Mike:** It's always, ĒWhy is he doing that?í

**Vajradaka:** I also feel quite strongly it's a matter of preconceived ideas of how one should be. People are coming into the ĒFriendsí now and we've been training to be mindful. So, ĒBe mindful.í and that excludes bouncing and saying, ĒWatcher!í

**S:** In other words mindfulness is understood as just alienated awareness, not as real awareness along with the action and the feeling.

**Gotami:** You very often say that bounciness and happiness means loss of mindfulness.

**S:** In practice it does - but that doesn't mean you should go to the opposite extreme. There are two extremes: (1) bounciness, etc., without mindfulness, and (2) mindfulness without feeling, which is the alienated type of awareness. You've got to have both. Sometimes you may have to go to one extreme, as it were, in order to balance the other, but sooner or later you have to get back to the middle position where bounciness and mindfulness are not only fully developed but thoroughly integrated with each other.

**Subhuti:** I wonder if one doesn't perhaps have to be not too concerned with mindfulness for a limited period in order to allow something [repressed] to emerge.

**S:** Indeed,. Maybe even mindfulness has to have its phases. You are very mindful for a few weeks, say, after which you allow yourself to get more into your feelings. Not that mindfulness is completely neglected, of course, but during that period you let your feelings rip and sort out the question of how mindful you were afterwards.

**Dhruva:** You'd get a much clearer picture of what mindfulness is if you just let yourself do what you want to do and just watch it.

**S:** That's why it can be very useful, in-the early stages of one's development, to get drunk just once or twice. A lot can be learned from this, and in any case you don't ever completely lose your mindfulness.

**Gisela:** In the fairy tale of Snow White the Queen looks in the mirror and asks it to tell her who is the most beautiful in the land. It's a bit like that: ĒWho's the most mindful of all?í [Laughter]

**S:** Again it's like the story about the different orders of Catholic monks. They had a meeting, and a Franciscan monk got up and said, ĒIt's true that the Dominicans are the most learned, and the Jesuits the best educated and most resourceful, and of course the Benedictines make the best wine, but when it comes to humility, we Franciscans are tops!í [Laughter]

**Dhruva:** I've had this pointed out to me on a number of occasions by people who've observed Order members being Ēgood Buddhistsí and not just being themselves.



**Vajradaka:** Yes, but that can be a load of rubbish too. *[Laughter]*

**S:** I think I summed it up a few minutes ago, actually, in 'Too much psychology'. We've got a bit sick with psychological analysis. [245] I really feel this. We've had so much of it pumped into the Movement from various sources. There's so much of it in the air. It does lead to this distrust and doubt, and always trying to find a murky motive, because that's more likely to be the true motive. In other words, someone's much more likely to be, at bottom, negative in what he's doing rather than positive, so try and find the negative motive, because then you'll understand what he's really about. This is all rather twisted and perverted. Tutored as you are by psychology, you find it difficult to believe that he's behaving in the way he does because he's happy, or because he feels friendly. You feel that you won't really understand him until you've got to the murky motive. Maybe there should be a bit more bouncing around and general jubilation. It would be good if we could find ways of being happy and joyful, and even dancing around, with mindfulness.

**Gisela:** Maybe that's the next step, or a phase that people have to go through after being alienated.

**S:** Yes. But watch that overdose of 'psychology'. Since I've been away from that kind of atmosphere, and thinking things over on my own, I've almost come to feel that analytical psychology does more harm than good.

**Subhuti:** Perhaps it's the wrong sort of psychology that does the harm. There do seem to be more positive ways of looking at psychology.

**S:** Well, Buddhism has got its own 'psychology' in the Abhidharma and the Yogācāra. Perhaps we ought to rely more on that.

**Gisela:** It's a weird brand of psychology that we now have in the West!

**S:** A sort of popularised and oversimplified psychology?

**Gisela:** Yes.

**Vajradaka:** It's very easy to get sucked into. I've been feeling the same way that you do for a long time, but just found I got sucked into it more and more and was thinking in that way even though I really don't agree with it.

**S:** Right. Or talking in that way, sometimes, for purposes of communication.

**Subhuti:** I think we ought to take the premise that positive energy is primary and that negative energy is always a repression or a twisting of positive energy and, therefore, secondary. Negative emotion is always an expression of tension, of an inability to be positive and natural. We ought not to see it as primary.

**S:** You definitely get the impression, from some forms of psychology, that the deeper you go, the worse it becomes; not the deeper you go, the purer the energy - nothing like that. The deeper you go into someone's mind, the nastier will be what you find: automatically. Anything that appears nice is superficial, and not to be taken seriously. Friendliness is not to be taken seriously: it's probably a form of submissiveness, with lots of anger lurking behind, so you look for the anger and dismiss the friendliness as not really very relevant even.

**Subhuti:** I can think of only two psychological viewpoints which do express that: those of Reich, and of Janov in *Primal Therapy*.

**S:** It's very strange, but in the *Vimalakirti Sūtra* I found a [246] Bodhisattva who let out a great scream that was heard all over the universe, which I thought quite odd. And then I thought of that book.

**Gisela:** I think that psychology is largely misunderstood. It would probably do people good to actually go to the sources and read Freud and Jung and the others. They might well get a different perspective.

**S:** I usually find among the ÆFriendsí that the most theyíve read is just a few passages of Jung, edited by somebody else in a very popular way. Or maybe theyíve learned verbally, just picking things up in conversation without any serious study at all. I doubt if a single person in the ÆFriendsí, with one possible exception, has done any serious actual reading in Jungian psychology, say, or in any other.

When I was in India, I was completely innocent of any psychology except Buddhist psychology, but on coming back to this country I found psychology very much in the air. Many of the people I met at Hampstead, and at the Buddhist Society and elsewhere, were very much into psychology. Fromm, especially, was very popular; Jung was popular too, Freud less so. Reich was a little bit popular, and after a while became very popular indeed, at least in some circles. In the course of my first two or three years back in England I read all these authors, and several others as well, and I found some of their books very good and very useful, but a vague, popularised, Æcrudifiedí psychology seems not to be helping the ÆFriendsí at the moment.

**Aśvajit:** It may be that talking about negativity has, for a very long time, hopefully been a method of promoting mindfulness; but itís a very unfortunate mindfulness - just keeping peopleís attention, yet culturally speaking, no satisfactory substitute has been found.

**Gotami:** Iíve found that the most useful way of bringing people back to mindfulness, and getting down to this Æprimal energyí, is just to say things like, ÆDo you really mean that? Do you really want to do what you are doing?í In this way, you get them down to what it is that they may want to do, and whether they really want to do it, and also to being mindful. Gradually they begin to be more at home with themselves. Itís quite simple: ÆAre you really being honest? Do you really want to sit and meditate?í and so on.

**S:** Right. You may well come to a balance and say, ÆWell, I donít, actually. Thereís quite a big part of me which just doesnít want to, but my overall Æobjectiveí judgement is that meditation would be good for me and that therefore I should do it, so on balance I meditate.í Often you have to proceed like that for quite a long time, your attitude to things like meditation being ambivalent on account of your dual nature.

**Gotami:** Thereís no need to go into all this psychology. If only people will say to themselves, ÆI donít really want to do this,í then, when theyíre in the opposite kind of situation theyíll notice that too. In this way theyíll gradually become aware of who they are and how they work just quite simply, and get down to their energies and their mindfulness at the same time.

**S:** Itís significant that there is a lot more energy flowing round in the ÆFriendsí than ever before. It isnít just the bigger number of people. A lot seems to be coming out which is very positive. [247]

p.99                      In a specialized and technical use of the word,  
*ṛddhi* is a by-product of trance, but any trance  
is *ṛddhi*, because it is a supernatural  
transcendence of phenomenality

**S:** *Ṛddhi* is energy or potency in general, especially the very refined and powerful Æmagicalí energy generated by the meditation experience. [The transcendence here spoken of is, however, supernormal rather than supernatural.]

p.99                      The Bodhisattva is a white magician ....

**S:** This comes out very strongly in the Tantric form of the Bodhisattva ideal.

A saint like Francis of Assisi could pronounce the Bodhisattva vow and appropriately undertake *parāṭma-parivartana* as a symbolic expression of his moral intentions: but as a mere humanitarian, however holy, he cannot really even begin to try, for these are things which can be accomplished only on the level of trance. *Rddhi* is required.

**S:** In other words the practice of meditation generates what we can only call a tremendous *ē*thought-powerí (though it isn't thought in the conceptual sense), and this is a very real and positive and concrete thing. One who wishes to be a Bodhisattva has to develop this. A lot of things that we may just think impossible become capable of achievement when our aspirations are backed up, as they are in the case of the Bodhisattva, by the tremendous thought-power generated in meditation. A humanitarian is all right. He's working on the ordinary level, doing his best to help people; but his *ē*thoughtí is comparatively feeble. It's not been concentrated by meditation. His energies have not been integrated. He hasn't been able to generate the higher degrees of *ē*thought powerí, isn't able to operate on the higher dhyanic planes, and therefore isn't really able to substitute another for himself. This has been well put by the editor, and shows the difference between the Bodhisattva ideal and simple humanitarianism.

p. 100                      Nirvāna itself is abandonment, and abandonment is limitless as Nirvāna. In the course of countless time cycles, all give and give until there is nothing left to give, and that state is *nivṛta*, the condition of being satisfied, happy, content, emancipated, extinguished.

**Vajradaka:** Is the state of *nivṛta* just before Nirvāna?

**S:** No, it's just a different grammatical form. *Nivṛta* is the state or condition of being that, or rather of having become that. Nirvāna is the particular state itself considered as a *ē*thingí. (The Pali terms are *nibbuta* and *Nibbana*.) *Nivṛta* is literally *ē*blown outí, while Nirvāna is the *ē*blown-out-nessí, or that which is left over - whatever it may be - when the *ē*blowing outí is finished.

pp.100-101                ... the Bodhisattva gives his body for the pleasure of other beings, inviting them to strike it, to revile it, to cover it with refuse, to laugh at it, to maltreat it in every way. [248]

**S:** What is really being inculcated here is a detached and objective attitude towards the body, though this isn't quite what the actual wording of the text suggests. The Bodhisattva deploys his body for the greatest benefit of all - he doesn't throw it aside and leave it there for anybody to do what they like with. Written as it is in a fervent, hyperbolic sort of style, the text does in a way say this, but the statement is to be taken in conjunction with other things that Śāntideva has said earlier on.

**Gotami:** If you look at the body as a bag of tools which has been loaned to you for use, then you can get whatever use from it you need.

**S:** Right, and you don't leave your tools lying about for children to play with and spoil, or even hurt themselves with.

p.101                      They belong to the other, and the other can do with them as he pleases without fear of karmic reprisal. The reason for this stress upon the physical is, perhaps, because the physical is immediate and near-at-hand ...

**S:** In India there is a greater understanding of the idea of personal serviceability. People serve one another much more. Juniors serve elders. Younger brothers and sisters serve older brothers and sisters. Wives serve husbands. Children serve parents. Pupils serve teachers. They have this idea of doing things for other people, and spending yourself in the service of others, much more than we have it here. We tend to stand on our rights more: 'Why should I do it? Why shouldn't he do it himself?' Indians don't feel like that. Even among brothers, for instance, who are separated by only a few years' difference in age, there's a definite hierarchy, and the elder brother is almost in the place of a father to the younger ones. They are quite aware of the difference, and the younger brother really does defer to the elder, and the elder really does take a positive, quasi-fatherly interest in the younger. This happens all the way down the line - and sometimes there are ten or twelve sons. (Sons and daughters have separate little hierarchies.)

**Vajradaka:** It's really beautiful! In Japan all old people, men and women, are called Grandfather and Grandmother in a kind of respectful way. *[Laughter]*

**S:** In India, if you call anyone Grandfather, it's definitely intended to be respectful, and is not necessarily an indication of age. Once I was talking with some of my Nepalese students in Kalimpong about the different attitudes of people to one another and to me. At that time I must have been about 35. I asked one young man of about 20 how he regarded me. In a quite heartfelt sort of way he exclaimed, 'Oh sir, you are just like our Grandfather!' He didn't mean that I was as old as his grandfather, but that he had the same sort of feeling towards me. I was someone senior and protective.

**Gisela:** The Russians do that a bit too. They say *babushka* to show love and respect for a person, and it can be anyone. It doesn't have to be your own grandparents.

**S:** In several Indian languages, grandfather is *dadaji*, which is very affectionate and respectful. It doesn't sound at all like our English grandfather, or even grandad. It's got a quite different sort [249] of ring to it. Like *babushka* it's affectionate as well as respectful. This again is something which is common in India, but which we find it difficult to understand: strong affection with real respect, both together. We tend to separate the two. If there's a lot of respect there's no affection. If there's a lot of affection there's no respect. But in India, and in other countries with strong traditional cultures, they come very much together. You feel strong affection, but also very definite respect. This is very much the case among monks in the East, especially Theravāda monks. The elders are treated with great respect and deference. They are given first place, fed first and served first. All this is observed really strictly. At the same time there's very strong affection. There's nothing hard, no invoking of authority or status - nothing like that at all. They are completely free from that, and I've met hundreds of monks. They are very, very friendly and affectionate, but at the same time very respectful within the hierarchy.

**Gisela:** I think it may have come from Protestantism, this kind of authority and crushing of warmth.

**S:** Be that as it may, the separation between respect and affection is there. Many people (especially young people) seem to think it axiomatic that you should dislike your parents and not get on well with them. The idea of being fond of your parents, or actually respecting them, is considered almost laughable. I'm sure there are many young people who would be ashamed to say that they respected their parents - but in the East it's still taken for granted. With us, respect is now almost a dirty word: go out of your way to be disrespectful, show that you don't feel respect even for teachers, certainly not for secular teachers. If, within the Movement itself, we could only bring respect and affection together again it would be a very positive development. I think I can see the germs of this already in the attitude of newcomers to the Movement towards Order members - especially those who have been Order members for a few years. There is, at least here and there, a definite feeling of warmth towards the Order members, as well as a quite definite degree of respect.

One gives the body or does not give it, whereas a gift of intangibles, psychic elements, virtues, pleasures, etc., easily could lead us into mere verbalisation.

**S:** This applies to money. It's very easy to give verbally, but when it comes down to concrete things you can very often see what a person's real attitude is. You can certainly see whether or not he's prepared to give money. This is why, in the Tantra, they always insist on an offering in gold or hard cash, as the case may be. Their reasoning is very clear: If you really care about the initiation you'll be prepared to pay. This is very much the Tantric attitude, which is not the case with regard to the other *yānas*. I was a bit surprised the first time I came across it, when I had my first Tantric initiations. It isn't really a payment, but an offering of something as solid and substantial as cash is expected. That's the tradition, and it sometimes calls for quite severe self-examination, especially when they say, 'Give whatever you think appropriate.' So you think, 'Does he mean 50 rupees, or 100 rupees?' Or you think, 'Can I afford it?' Or, 'Does it really matter whether I can afford it or not?' And so on. This is a very good index. It's very easy to say, 'Oh yes, I give my support. I'm with you, and all that, but when it comes to something solid and substantial, [250] which you actually have to give, like your own physical body, your own time, your own energy, your own money, then it is that it really tells. That's a very good indicator! I think that in a way - without overstressing the point - the condition of the *dāna* bowl at the Centre is a very reliable barometer for ascertaining the state of the spiritual weather.

**Subhuti:** A heavy depression! [*Laughter*]

**S:** I think Kevin was one of those who were genuinely puzzled, about two years ago, when we were having our beautiful meetings at Centre House once a week. We'd lost our old Centre, 'Sakura', and hadn't yet found the one at Archway, and were trying to raise some money to pay for the new centre when it was found. Kevin constructed, very laboriously, an enormous and quite marvellous lotus. People would be so entranced by this lotus, he hoped, that they would put money in the slot which he had made in the calyx and it would go sliding all the way down the tube-like stalk into the collection box at the end. He used to go around wagging this lotus, which was about six foot long, under people's noses, and in this way collected quite a bit. But at the same time he did encounter, among quite long-standing members of the Movement, a definite reluctance to dig into their pockets. When we got back to Muswell Hill he'd be quite troubled by this, and wonder why it was that people were not more generous. Verbally, everybody would be with you: 'What a wonderful thing, a new Centre!' Yes, everybody should give as much as they can. But when it came to the actual giving, it was sometimes difficult to get even sixpence. Kevin felt that in the case of quite a few people he was having almost to extract the money from them. There was no spontaneous flow of giving.

**Mike:** What can we do about encouraging people to give?

**S:** Apart from general exhortations, and little stunts and tricks like Kevin's with the lotus, I just don't know. Maybe it's an indication of the general state of things, so that it's on the general state of things that you have to work. When I was at the Hampstead Vihāra I did, once or twice, say a lot about *dāna* in the course of a lecture, and it was noticed that the *dāna*-bowl was remarkably full afterwards. Perhaps we ought to have occasional talks on these things, even a lecture on the Perfection of Giving, or the place of *dāna* in the Buddhist life. It's not just a question of giving money, though often people think of it in that way: it's a question of *dāna*, which is part of your spiritual life. Certainly a general attitude of generosity, of being willing to give, must be strongly encouraged in the people who attend classes and lectures, because if they are not giving, - not giving themselves, - they will simply be stagnating, and staying where they are.

p.102

It has been noted already, when dealing with the Perfection of *Vīrya*, that Buddhism attempts to make good and profitable use of this powerful source of emotional strength [i.e. pride].

**S:** This is another example of a kind of pseudo-negativity. Don't suppress your pride, but let it have a natural healthy form, a natural healthy outlet. Be proud of Buddhism; be proud of the Buddha himself, and so on.

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The Bodhisattva is allowed to hate, and there is no blame attached, because he has first achieved the realisation that [251] all selves are equal, and he has exchanged, literally, his own self for the other. After having established *śelfhood* in the most lowly and the stranger in the *śelf*, both envy and pride may arise without scruple of the mind.

**S:** Because envy and pride will then be directed quite objectively, according to the needs of the situation. If you really have succeeded in exchanging yourself and others, you can let yourself get as it were angry. Obviously this can be misunderstood. If the anger is going to have a particular effect on a certain person, and really conduce to his or her good, then you must first have made the transference, and as we have seen this can be done only on a very high and powerful level of meditation. Otherwise, your anger is no different from anybody else's. One must therefore be very, very careful in applying this teaching.

**Mike:** Is this anything like antinomianism?

**S:** If it was misunderstood it would be. I've referred to this once or twice in the *Survey*. The antinomianism would consist in your claiming to adopt this sort of attitude, this sort of philosophy, when you are, in fact, no better than anybody else, and in using it to justify your unskilful actions.

**Mike:** Doing it on a lower level of consciousness.

**S:** Yes, doing it on the ordinary level of consciousness, which is lower in relation to the level on which the exchange of self and others takes place. If one had really made the exchange, and really did make no distinction between self and others, you could allow your so-called *śelf* to get angry with another *śelf* in order to spur him on, or check him - it wouldn't matter. But only if you've made the exchange first. That's the really important thing. For the vast majority of people it's much better to assume that one hasn't yet reached that level. It's so liable to misinterpretation! One should keep a very close eye on people who profess to have reached this stage and to be behaving in this way. It may not be so at all. They may be simply deceiving themselves. Someone who is really able to do this, really able to behave like this, is very rare indeed. I think one can take that absolutely for granted. Even among spiritually advanced people, there would be very few who could really adopt this attitude, and maybe one is unlikely to meet even one of them. But if one does meet someone who professes to behave like this, keep a very sharp eye on them. It may not be that at all. You do find in India, unfortunately, that this has become rather a general sort of thing. Spiritual personalities are very quick to claim that they are exhibiting anger, for instance, only to test you, or to strengthen your faith, or to help you, when it seems pretty clear to you that they are just giving way to ordinary human weaknesses and passions.

P.103

The self-interest of the Self-anti-self is totally in the interest of the other: The other cannot be praised too highly, and the poor old self that we started with cannot be too severely condemned or abused. He is literally a hateful tool.

**S:** This is to be understood spiritually and not psychologically. When expressions of this sort are used in Eastern texts the danger is that we take them psychologically and fall into self-hatred in a purely psychological sense. Such passages are therefore to be used with caution.

p.103                      Honor, wealth, praise, happiness, ease, and greatness -  
these are to be the destiny of the other: dishonor,  
poverty, blame, misery, ceaseless labor, degradation,  
and shame - this is the portion allotted by the  
Self-anti-self to the self.

**S:** One must bear in mind that most Indians in ancient time were people relatively free from personal psychological problems. They did not suffer from purely psychological feelings of guilt and self-hate, or anything of that sort. In other words they were psychologically quite healthy people. They could therefore take this sort of treatment. I think most people in the West couldn't: it would have a bad psychological effect on them.

The earlier part of the paragraph in which this passage occurs, in particular, is very definitely to be taken in a spiritual sense. It is directed against the *ě*spiritual egoí, or the fundamental delusion of *ě*selfí, not against the empirical self in the ordinary psychological sense. If you take it as directed against the latter, you will just start feeling really bad.

p.103                      ìMay my virtues become manifest everywhere  
in the world: but whatever virtues he may have,  
let them not be heard anywhere.î

**Vajradaka:** I don't understand this. He seems to be saying the opposite of what he said before.

**S:** It's the Self-anti-self speaking. He's identified himself now with the other. When he speaks of *ě*Whatever virtues he may haveí he's referring to the old self, the self that he has abandoned. This is because, as the editor points out immediately before quoting this verse, *parā́tma-parivartana*, or the exchange of self and other, is now complete. You are on the other man's side now, against *ě*youí, because you've identified with the other.

**Vajradaka:** Could you do this just in ordinary everyday life, or does it help to be in meditation?

**S:** It's the editor's contention, and I think he's basically right, that you must generate this sort of attitude in meditation and leave it to percolate through into everyday life, otherwise it becomes a very difficult and unreal situation indeed. But if you practise and reflect on it in meditation, and generate that particular energy in meditation, - maybe have some realisation on that level, - then, just like the *mettā*, it will naturally pervade one's behaviour. One will become what is usually called unselfish. But I don't think one should stage elaborate enactments of this by sheer force of will. That would be undesirable. You couldn't do it, anyway, and there'd be a strong rebound sooner or later. You could get into situations of intense mental conflict.

**Mike:** Is it, then, that the content of this particular passage - even of the whole *Bodhicaryāvatāra* - is something which one contemplates until the whole feel of the thing comes through? One doesn't actually try and make a deliberate effort in one's day-to-day life.

**S:** Yes, that is true. There are cases where you need an actual [253] day-to-day effort, backed up by your meditation and contemplation, but there are certain rather extreme things like the substitution of self for others which you can't do in that sort of way. It would be too clumsy and artificial. You therefore try to experience the substitution in deep meditation and let it percolate through. Some things, of course, you may have to take action upon on the practical plane itself. Suppose you want to give up smoking. You won't simply meditate on the evils of

the habit in the hope that this will eventually percolate down into your personal life and bring about the desired change. You decide once and for all: 'Smoking is not good. I'm going to give it up' - and you give it up. The matter is finished with. Quite a lot of things can be dealt with in this way. The substitution of self for others is something rather special. Here one first has the experience, the understanding, the insight, - especially at the time of meditation, - and this gradually percolates through to the level of actual behaviour.

**Mike:** Is there a specific practice related then to *parātma-parivarta*?

**S:** I've not come across one, but Śāntideva appears to assume that one should just reflect vigorously in this manner. It is an example of, in a way, *vipassanā*. First you have the *dhyāna* type of experience and then, quite deliberately, you let the rational mind come to life again, put it to work, and develop insight into the truth of *parātma-samatā* and, in that way, bring about a change in the very substance of your being. This change finds outward expression, your behaviour is transformed.

**Mike:** Would this be a practice which one would not do until one was quite advanced?

**S:** I don't know. What is important is that it shouldn't be just a process of mental reflection, but should be backed up by really solid meditation. The assumption therefore is that you are getting on fairly well with meditation.

**Mike:** Perhaps it's something one could do in solitary retreat?

**S:** Yes, that would be very good.

**Mike:** If one went into solitary retreat, would it be a good idea to have a particular theme?

**S:** That's certainly one way of doing it. One could even have different themes on different days. Go through the 6 or the 10 *pāramitās*, for instance, reflecting on the first today, the second tomorrow, and so on. One could do the same thing with the steps of the noble eightfold path. In the case of the *pāramitās* it's lucky that there are seven days in a week. Some people make a special effort to practise *dāna* on Monday - that's a good start to the week. If you happen to meet a beggar, you give something extra on that day. If you are asked to help someone, you do so. On Tuesday you make a special effort to practise *śīla*. You are particularly scrupulous about your moral behaviour - more so than usual. On the third day, Wednesday, you are very patient, and very tolerant, because on that day you practise *kṣānti*. In this way it proceeds. On the seventh day, Sunday, you try to practise all 6 *pāramitās* together. This is a quite useful way of practising the *pāramitās*. Six of them all at one time is rather a lot, so you concentrate on one each day - you make a special point of it.

The main thing is to start actually practising, and that's the most [254] difficult thing of all. If there's too much to practise you just end up not practising anything. That's why people are sometimes really stunned by lectures on the 40 topics of meditation. They just don't know where to start. One of my Sinhalese monk friends once told me about a monk they knew who had spent his whole life going all over Ceylon, up and down the country, giving lectures on the 40 *kammaṭṭhānas*. He'd never done any meditation, but he was well known for his lectures on the 40 *kammaṭṭhānas*! No doubt he was doing something useful, but you see the sort of thing that can happen. In the same way, a lot of people are confused by all the different books on Buddhism - all the different Buddhist scriptures. Where should one start? Which would be useful? What should one read? There are almost too many books now.

**Mike:** Would contemplation in this manner, on this kind of theme, have the same kind of effect that visualisation is intended to have in the long run? Is it a different approach to the same end?

**S:** Of course there are two aspects of the visualisation. One is the simple visualisation, which belongs to the *śamathā* type of meditation, and the other is reflection on it, which is more of



the *vipassanā* type. When you conjure up the visualised form [of a Buddha, Bodhisattva, etc.], and see it clearly, with a steady consciousness, and enjoy what you see, - when you're in a highly concentrated and blissful state - this is *śamathā*. But if you start up mental activity and reflect, "This form was created by my own efforts; it is impermanent; all things are impermanent like this", and if you really see that - that is *vipassanā*. Thus there is a connection between one aspect of the visualisation and the *vipassanā* type of meditation. But simple visualisation is a *śamathā*-type practice, it belongs to the realm of *dhyāna*. Of course people sometimes quite spontaneously start up their own reflections, thus developing a degree of *vipassanā*. This can happen too. You can't separate *śamathā* and *vipassanā* absolutely sharply: the one does sort of shade off into the other.

**Vajradaka:** In the transference of oneself to another person in meditation, do you think there's any particular value in transferring oneself to an enemy, or to someone who isn't on the spiritual path, or, let's say for the sake of example, to a spiritual teacher?

**S:** With regard to spiritual teachers there's a different practice, the Guru Yoga, which comes at the end of the four "foundation practices". This is something which I have so far gone into, to a slight extent, with one person. In the Guru Yoga one places oneself in alignment with the whole lineage of gurus. It is a form of transference, one could say, but one which takes place vertically rather than horizontally.

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... the self is full of faults. and even, if among those faults there should be the least little fragment of virtue ... do not praise the self. Keep that virtue hidden, lest it become the occasion for self-pride ... let your happiness be renounced and resented ... Like a helpless bride who is to be abused, who has been purchased and now is to be frightened, ordered, punished, and restrained, so let the self be treated. Like a slave with no self-interest, whose convenience is not considered, who is bought and sold, so let the self be treated.

**S:** Again it's important not to take all this just "psychologically" - and I think that with certain people it would inevitably be so taken. [255] This way of looking at things has to be presented with extreme caution.

**Aśvajit:** I don't understand the distinction between spiritual and psychological in this sense.

**S:** When I say psychological I mean the level of one's ordinary experience of oneself, as when we have the experience, "Here and now, I am I." But Buddhism says that in the ultimate sense there's no "I". How, then, does one reconcile that with the experience of oneself as one actually is? In terms of one's experience here and now, one can't. One therefore takes it on trust, - or maybe one has had a glimpse of it in meditation, - that there is a higher state, at least a more expanded state, which is greater and more comprehensive than the state which one experiences as being oneself. When Buddhism speaks of dissolving the self, or the "I", it does not mean simply negating it on its own level, the level of ordinary experience itself, - the experience of selfhood, - but rather cutting the illusion at its very root. One denies one's own experience not on its own level, but in a more ultimate sense. It's not that you try to destroy yourself psychologically, but that you "cut the root" in such a way that the psychic structure - the so-called ego structure - remains the same but it's sort of illuminated. It functions, but no longer in the same way. It's then an instrument, as it were, in the hands of the Bodhicitta - not functioning under its own steam, which is what it usually does at present. Until we've got a fairly consolidated experience of something which is "not the self", or a state, of "not-self-hood", it cannot but be more or less just words, and difficult even to form an idea about - not to speak of actual insight. Even to understand mentally is difficult. But we should be careful that people don't try to apply directly, on the psychological and practical level, something which is meant to be taken spiritually.

**Vajradaka:** Maybe this was the danger that the Dalai Lama meant in that talk at the Buddhist Society when he said that Tantric practices could be dangerous.

**S:** In a way, though in a different way. You could apply artificially, on a lower level, what was meant to be realised on a higher level and then allowed to trickle down to the lower level, as it were, and transform it in a natural manner.

**Gisela:** I must say I've long puzzled over the distinction between psychological and spiritual. I've understood it now since you've explained it.

**S:** It's a distinction I've introduced myself, or had to introduce, just to prevent misunderstanding. Because I saw people were misunderstanding. I saw this in my Hampstead days, before the Friends was started. Suppose you say 'The Christian Gospel says, hate yourself'. I would say that this is absolutely metaphysically correct, but not to be understood psychologically. It's not that you should feel an actual emotion of hatred against your own self - against Mr. So-and-so or Mrs. So-and-so, - but rather that you should see through your experience of selfhood and see it as something not ultimate and absolute. The injunction doesn't refer to the psychological emotion of hatred, seeking to turn this against yourself. Christ did say quite clearly 'Unless a man hate himself,' but though his words are not easy to understand I assume he didn't mean it in the psychological sense.

**Aśvajit:** The difficulty I experience is, when you use such words as hate that refers, so far as I can see, to a very strong positive [256] negative emotion.

**S:** Yes. For instance, when it is said that you should hate the world, this means simply that you should see through the world, not that you should have a horrible grudge against the world or anything like that.

**Aśvajit:** But why use such words at all? It seems very unskilful.

**S:** It seems to be a question of idiom. Apparently that was the suitable idiom for Christ to use when talking to people in Palestine and for Śāntideva to use writing primarily, I suppose, for Indians; but in view of our present psychological background maybe it's not the idiom for us. I don't myself use this idiom when giving lectures - only when there is something to be explained in traditional sources which themselves use it. When one sees so many people who actually do hate themselves, and who need to get out of it, one doesn't want to encourage them in that attitude by using the language of self-hatred. I therefore think that such language should be avoided, on the whole, and that if anything the other language of praise and appreciation and admiration should be used instead. That's more skilful in this situation.

**Vajradaka:** On the psychological level?

**S:** Yes, on the psychological level. From the spiritual point of view self-hatred and self-praise ultimately come to the same thing [because both presuppose the existence of the empirical self, which ultimately has to be transcended]. It just depends which is needed at the moment, or which would be the more skilful attitude to encourage. Here in the West, with our background of sin and guilt and so on, I think we need much more praise and appreciation.

**Gisela:** Except that we also have a background of reward, but that's probably not so strong.

**S:** Even thinking in terms of reward isn't too bad, because a reward is something pleasant and positive, something that you can enjoy, at least for the time being. In the case of meditation, for instance, it's 'Practise meditation, and there will be a reward for all your effort and struggle. You'll enjoy peace of mind, and happiness.' That's all true, you will. There's no harm in using that language as far as it goes. When people are actually experiencing peace and happiness, as a result of practising meditation, then you can start talking about other things. But with so much psychological negativity around we have to be very careful not to increase it by using language which might have been all right in some other cultural context,

but which has perhaps for us a rather negative ring. It might encourage that psychological negativity. I certainly wouldn't advise you to talk to beginners' meditation classes in the way that Śāntideva talks. It would be most inappropriate. People might not even come again.

**Subhuti:** Most of the stuff in this book is like that. Some pieces have been quite depressing to me, even though I've known what they [really] mean, what the [true] significance is.

**S:** Perhaps Śāntideva is especially good for the strong craving type. Perhaps he was a strong craving type himself, who knows? He was a poet, so it is very likely. Asvaghosa doesn't have this 'negative' attitude at all [even though, according to tradition, he also was a [257] poet, and the author of the *Buddhacarita*]. Does anyone remember *The Awakening of Faith*, which we studied at Order meetings some time ago? It was much more 'metaphysical' than the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, but also very 'positive'.

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There are thus in Buddhism three distinct and specific types of pride: (1) false pride ... overweening arrogance regarding self, (2) useful, healthy, wholesome pride in the right use of ambition (here defined as ultimate Enlightenment and the salvation of all beings), along with pride in *vīrya*, the confidence which one should have that he can achieve this ambition, and the pride of belonging to the Sangha, the body of those who are co-sharers of the ambition; and (3) the completion of pride, the pride of the Self-anti-self, which is taken in the achievement of the other.

**S:** This last 'pride' in the activity, in the world, - in the universe, - of the Bodhichitta itself. Here the Bodhichitta is not regarded as you or yours, but as in a sense everybody's.

**Vajradaka:** So the first type of pride is negative and the other two are positive.

**S:** Right. The first is negative, spiritually speaking; the second is psychologically positive, and the last is spiritually positive. The psychologically positive can be the stepping-stone to the spiritually positive. [One could also say that the false pride is both psychologically and spiritually negative, useful pride psychologically positive but - in the ultimate sense - spiritually negative, and complete pride both psychologically and spiritually positive.]

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The greatest paradox of Buddhism is that all is renounced for others, for the purpose that all, including others, may be renounced.

**S:** One ends up, as very often one does in Buddhist literature, with a paradox. But one mustn't puzzle about it too much, or try too hard to sort it out intellectually. The best way of looking at all this is the most concrete - that is to say, thinking of it in terms of the 'cloud' about which we spoke, and of everybody working on that cloud regardless of whether it's one's own cloud or other people's: it's just a cloud of suffering, or a cloud of sorrow, and one wants to replace it with a cloud of joy, and happiness, and illumination, for everybody. That's the best and simplest way of looking at it, I think, and in any case that's what the Bodhisattva is really trying to do. What this whole section, in fact, is really saying, is, 'Be more objective. Don't be so influenced by purely subjective considerations. Be less selfish.' This is what it really boils down to. 'Be more imaginative. Empathise more. Be more aware of other people, and of how they feel.' This is what it means in plain practical terms, in terms of everyday life. And if you do meditations like the *mettā-bhāvanā*, that will help. When one goes to Chinese Buddhism from Indian Buddhism one can really see very clearly what the Chinese did. They made it all much more simple - less abstract, more concrete and, in a way, more practical. In other words, they made it more suited to the Chinese mind. Probably people in England - I

don't know about the West as a whole - are going to do something very similar with Buddhism. Perhaps the process has already started. [258]

**THE PERFECTION OF CONTEMPLATION**  
(Text)

## THE PERFECTION OF CONTEMPLATION

### The Text

p.196                      28      When shall I dwell without a resting place, following my own inclinations, in broad natural places without attachments?

**S:** That's quite interesting. It's as though you've come now where you can let your *enatural* desires flow quite freely because they've become quite wholesome and skilful. There's no question of conscious, deliberate checks any more. Obviously it's a fairly advanced stage, this stage of *en* attachments.

p.199                      58      If you do not wish to touch the earth, and so forth, because it is smeared with excrement, how can you wish to touch that body from which the refuse is cast out?

**S:** This reminds me of a passage in my memoirs, describing how I went to a town called Tinnevely, in South India, where there was a river. In South India they don't have toilets inside the house, - they think this very disgusting, - so they all go to the bank of the river in the early morning. My companion and I spent the night at somebody's house, and at 5 o'clock the next morning our host took us with him down to the river. Each of us carried a little pot of water - that's the Indian custom, toilet paper being considered an abomination. When we reached the river it was still dark, and as the dawn came the river, with the mist on it, was a beautiful sight. As it became brighter, however, we saw all along the broad sandy bank thousands of people squatting. It was such a horrible contrast, especially just after the dawn. They were thoroughly polluting the whole place, and they did this every morning! When I asked our host the name of the river, he said, 'the Golden River!' It seemed so incongruous, but the picture remained with me ever since and I've given a description in my memoirs. Such scenes are very characteristic of South India. The reason why I've referred to the incident is because, if you are walking about in India, especially in places like the bank of the Golden River, you have to be very careful where you tread, so when Śāntideva says 'If you do not wish to touch the earth, and so forth, because it is smeared with excrement,' he presumably has in mind the sort of scene I have described. You have to be careful even if you walk along the edge of the road. That's the whole point of Śāntideva's (rhetorical) question. When you are out walking, for instance, you are very careful just where on the earth you put your feet, because you have no wish to come in contact with excrement. On other occasions, however, you behave in a quite different manner: you gleefully clasp the whole bag of excrement, i.e. somebody's body. Such behaviour, Śāntideva points out, is thoroughly inconsistent.

p.199                      62      When dainty foods, the seasoning of boiled rice, camphor, and so forth, are thrown from the mouth and spit out, even the earth becomes impure.

**S:** This reminds me of something said by George Bernard Shaw: it's not only Śāntideva who entertains these feelings. Shaw says a human being is a machine for turning good food into bad manure. This is [259] quite a Śāntidevian kind of sentiment. This is what Śāntideva is getting at.

p.199                      53      If you do not admit the excrement, [of your own body], although it is before your eyes, then observe the horrible bodies of others who have been thrown into a cemetery.

**S:** An Indian cemetery is not a place where people are buried - or very rarely so. In old times they were either cremated or, if they were too poor to afford the cost of the wood, - or if their families were too poor, - the body was simply flung into the cemetery, where it just rotted and was picked at by vultures.

p.199                      64     When the skin splits open great fear arises as a consequence. How indeed can joy ever arise again after one has known what it is like to be in that place?

65     The perfume which pervades the body [of the corpse] is from sandalwood and not from anything else. Why are you attracted elsewhere because of the perfume belonging to another?

**S:** With regard to the cemetery, Śāntideva does tend to dwell on its loathsome aspects, rather than on the inspiring ones, and yet there is a quite different side to it. I've been in these places myself, and actually you don't notice the loathsomeness, and the smell and all that, so very much. This might sound strange, but at night, and especially if there's moonlight, the whole place becomes quite *enaturalí* and what you are much more conscious of is a sort of mystery and awe, and a strange vibration in the air. It's not quite like being in a butcher's shop; in fact it's very different. Śāntideva seems to stress the loathsome aspects of death, and the cemetery, but not the inspiring and invigorating ones, which are very definitely also present. In that respect he's a bit one-sided, I think.

p.200                      70     Having seen many skeletons, you might find that a cemetery is disgusting to you: But you delight in a village, which is a cemetery filled with walking skeletons.

**S:** This is, of course, a classic monastic exercise. When you go into the village for alms, and your attention is attracted by the delightful young maidens who are carrying their pitchers to the village well, this is how you are supposed to reflect. Clearly it is a medicine intended for a specific ailment, and one shouldn't universalise it into a general philosophy of life. It's a medicine to be used on certain occasions, as need arises.

p.200                      72     The child has not the ability to earn: What pleasure is there in Youth? Youthfulness passes in earning. Grown old, what is done for pleasure?

**S:** That's a summary of ordinary, worldly life, if you like!

p.200                      73     Some, who have evil desires, are thoroughly worn-out at the day's end because of their occupations. Coming home in the evening they lie down as if they were dead. [260]

**S:** It's not even as though you enjoy worldly life. If you got a kick out of it there might be some reason for engaging in it, but eventually you get thoroughly fed up with it and find that it simply exhausts you.

p.201                      78     Some who are victims of desire are thrown on spikes and pierced ....

**S:** That was the punishment for adultery in ancient India.

p.201                      79     Fortune, because of acquiring, protecting, and despairing of hope, is the most endless misfortune.

**S:** When I was in India I knew lots of Theravāda monks, and we often used to talk about the lay people (no doubt the lay people talked about the monks!), and the monks used to say, “Just look at these poor lay people! They are supposed to be enjoying all sorts of worldly pleasures, and having a good time, whereas we are supposed to have given up everything and they feel rather sorry for us, thinking that we don’t have this and don’t have that. But look how miserable they are!” It was, in fact, quite noticeable that the lay people were much less happy than the monks - always. You hardly ever saw a sad monk - the breed was practically unknown. Monks were usually cheerful, happy, lively, friendly, with lots of energy and so on. This was particularly noticeable if you saw a group of monks and a group of lay people side by side. The lay people were often tired, depressed, worried-looking, haggard, exhausted, etc., and they would often say (the men especially), “Oh you monks are so happy! How I wish I could be like you!” But strange to say they didn’t really want to lead that kind of life. They saw quite clearly what it was like, and they envied the happiness of the monks, - not that the monks were highly spiritual, even: they were fairly ordinary people for the most part, despite the fact that they weren’t leading a worldly life, - but if you were ever to say, “Well, what about becoming a monk and living in a monastery, then?” the reply would be, “Oh no, I couldn’t do that!” Even though they were so miserable, and knew it and recognised it, they couldn’t give up the world, couldn’t give up their domestic pleasures. This was very noticeable, and my monk friends commented on it again and again. It’s not that you very often have a good time in the world. Some monastic authors write as though the worldly person was revelling in pleasures all the time, or as though his whole life was one hectic round of enjoyment; but to the layman actually living that life this might have rather an ironic ring. At the same time, that very life is difficult to give up, even though it isn’t very happy. It’s easy enough to say, “Well, yes, the monk is much more happy than we are,” but it’s still almost impossible for you to become a monk - you don’t think that life very attractive either. In a way you’d rather remain as you are.

p. 201                      83      But Buddhahood is obtained by even a fraction of the effort required in hundreds of millions of years in the realms of rebirth.

**S:** If you accept the idea of rebirth, and it is this idea which is the context of Śāntideva’s exhortation, then think of all the effort you have to put in just to earn your living and maintain your family, and survive such disasters as war and famine, not just for one lifetime but life after life for thousands of years. With just a fraction of that energy and effort you could gain Buddhahood. For one who believes in rebirth this is surely a most convincing argument.

p.201                      86      Fortunate are those on delightful rock terraces, broad as palaces, cool as sandal and moonbeam; their minds are fanned by noiseless, delightful forest winds.

**S:** He must be thinking of the wonderful cave temples of Western India. Śāntideva himself belonged to that part of the country.

p.202                      98      Surely it is a false calculation to think that there is an *ihī*, because it is another who has died and it is another who is born.

**S:** This is the way Śāntideva puts it, but strictly speaking this is not the Buddha’s teaching. The Buddha quite clearly said that the *“self”* that is reborn is neither the same nor another. It’s wrong to say that it is absolutely the same self persisting unchanged into a future existence; it’s wrong to say that a completely new self arises. Neither identity nor difference is the truth but continuity, which is the middle term between the former two. Śāntideva is trying to close the gap between self and other by pointing out that we have just as much reason to protect the neighbour from injury, even though he is different from ourselves, as we have to protect our own future self from injury (by not performing evil actions) even though it is different from the present self. The present and the future bodies are of course different.



p.203                    100    Even if unrelated, [sorrow] arises from the Ego-maker (ahamkāra). Whatever is unrelated, both to one's self or to another is to be annulled with all one's might.

**S:** It's that impersonal cloud of suffering. It's not *ëyourí* suffering, it's not *ëmyí* suffering, it's just suffering. There is suffering unrelated to any real self. We think of the suffering as related to me - as *ëmyí* suffering, or related to you - *ëyourí* suffering; but actually there's just suffering and no *ëselfí*, and so we just devote ourselves to getting rid of that as it were impersonal mass of suffering without bothering to think of it as *ëyoursí* or *ëmineí*. What is to be annulled, whether in the way of painful experiences or unskilful mental states, is simply that which is in reality *ëunrelatedí* - in other words the whole impersonal mass of suffering which does not really belong to anybody but which in a sense belongs to everybody.

p.203                    102    All sorrows, without distinction, are ownerless; and because of misery they are to be prevented. Why then is restriction made?

**S:** Sorrows are *ëownerlessí* because they are not in reality either yours or mine. They are to be prevented *ëbecause of miseryí*, i.e. simply on account of the fact that they are sorrows, or in other words because [262] unhappiness is something to be got rid of anyway. It doesn't matter whose it is: it's just something negative. *ëWhy then is restriction made?í* That is, the restriction of *ëThis is my sorrow, that is your sorrow.í* It's just sorrow, and sorrow is something that needs to be got rid of regardless of whom it pertains to.

p.203                    103    Why is sorrow to be prevented? - all are without disagreement [on this point]. And if it is to be prevented, then [let it be done] completely. Not just in myself. Everywhere!

**S:** There's absolutely universal agreement about this. Everybody wishes that unhappiness could be removed. Unhappiness may mean different things for different people, but the actual experience of pain and suffering, everybody would agree, is something that should be removed, by whatsoever resource.

p.203                    107    Consequently [the Bodhisattvas, the compassionate], having transformed their mentalities (*saṃtana*), delighting in the tranquilising of another's sorrow, plunge into the Avici hell like wild geese (*hamsa*) into a cluster of lotus.

**S:** You have to be really a Bodhisattva to be able to do that! For it's very difficult even to enter into a relatively painful and negative situation in a positive manner, not to speak of plunging into Avici hells as though they were beds of lotuses. We can't think of these things for quite a few lives to come.

p.203                    108    When beings are delivered it is for them an ocean of joy which overwhelms all: What good is the insipid deliverance [of an Arhat or a Pratyekabuddha]?

**S:** This is again a question of Kanchenjunga being a bit lower than Everest. It's all right for Śāntideva to make these remarks, but not for us to feel any superiority to Arahants or Pratyekabuddhas. [Such an attitude would be totally inappropriate. On the contrary, we ought to feel the utmost reverence for Arahants and Pratyekabuddhas, thinking how immeasurably greater their spiritual attainments are than our own.]

p.204            112    So why should the body of another not be taken as my own? It is not difficult, because of the remoteness of my own body.

**S:** Your own body is an object to your mind just like the bodies of others, so it shouldn't be very difficult to start treating the bodies of others in the same way that you treat your own.

p.204            115    Since the thought of 'self' habitually is located in one's own body, although this has no selfhood, then why is selfhood not habitually conceived to be in others?

**S:** It sometimes helps when we happen to have had an experience of being 'out of the body,' because then you realise that the body isn't you. It's just an object 'out there,' and it's related to you in much the same way that the bodies of other people are, so that there doesn't seem to be any real reason for preferring your own body 'out there' to [263] other people's bodies 'out there.' Ideally, you should look after them all equally.

p.204            118    Thus the Lord Avalokita has given his own name to protect a man from even the fear of being timid in the assembly.

**S:** This I assume means that he has given his mantra for repetition. [A mantra is regarded as the name of the Buddha, Bodhisattva, etc., concerned because it is by repeating his mantra that the devotee invokes his 'presence,' just as it is by calling out somebody's name that we cause him to come to us.]

p.205            125    One thinks, 'What shall I eat if I make an offering?' 'For the sake of the 'self' he becomes a demon. One thinks, 'What shall I give if I eat?' 'For the sake of another he becomes the King of the Gods.

**S:** The offering referred to is a food-offering. The selfish person is concerned about making an offering in case he should have nothing left to eat himself. On account of his selfishness he is reborn as a demon in hell. The unselfish person is concerned about eating in case he should have nothing left with which to make an offering. On account of his unselfishness he is reborn in heaven as the King of the Gods.

p.205            126    Having injured himself for the sake of another, he is endowed with all prosperity.

**S:** 'Injured himself' mustn't be taken too literally. In Buddhism you are not advised actually to injure yourself in any way, but rather to look after yourself objectively, without attachment.

p.205            130    But why so much speaking? Let the difference be seen which is between the fool who is concerned with his own benefits, and the sage (*muni*) who creates benefit for others.

**Mike:** Is that another dig at the Hīnayāna?

**S:** I don't think so. It could be, but I think Śāntideva is concerned simply with selfish and unselfish people in general. The term *muni* is, if anything, rather Hīnayānaic.

p.207            148    May my virtues become manifest everywhere in the world; But whatever virtues he may have, let them not be heard anywhere.

**S:** Śāntideva has now thoroughly identified himself with the other. His own former *ĕselfĩ* becomes the other to him and the former *ĕotherĩ* becomes his own self.

p.208                      158    Therefore, as You located the Ego-maker (*ahamkāra*)  
in drops of sperm and of blood, in things belonging to  
another, so now let it be found in others.

**S:** Before rebirth [i.e. at the time of conception] your consciousness identified itself with the semen and the blood - or, as we would say, with the spermatozoon and the ovum - of the future parents, even though [264] the semen and the blood were then objects which had nothing at all to do with you. Yet your consciousness regarded them as *ĕmeĩ* and in that way you were reborn. You should now do the same thing with other people: you should transfer your consciousness to them and as it were become them. Regard yourself as being them, and turn against your so-called former self. In this way, get rid of your selfishness. This is Śāntideva's rather subtle argument.

p.209                      171    Indeed, if heedlessly I do not give you to beings, you,  
without hesitation, will deliver me to the guards of  
hell.

**S:** He puts himself in an existential position: Either I get the *ĕselfĩ* or the *ĕselfĩ* gets me. That's the sort of position he's got himself into. Those are the alternatives. If the *ĕselfĩ* gets me it will drag me, as it were, off to hell, so I've got to get the *ĕselfĩ* before it gets me.

p.209                      173    The *ĩselfĩ* is not to be loved if the *ĩselfĩ* is loved by  
you. If the *ĩselfĩ* is to be protected it ought not to be  
concerned with its protection.

**S:** It's a paradox. If you really love yourself, don't love yourself. Selflessness, or unselfishness, is the best way to happiness for you - for the self. We don't usually realise that, but that's our delusion.

What the whole section, - indeed the whole *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, boils down to is this: With the help of urgent expostulations and rather subtle arguments Śāntideva is trying to talk us into being at least a little bit more unselfish - into considering the sorrows and sufferings of others as our own, and being sensitive to them as we are to our own. In other words, he is trying to talk us into devoting ourselves - in the Bodhisattva spirit - to helping relieve the whole mass of human suffering without going too much into whether it's your suffering, or my suffering, or anybody else's suffering. There's a big black cloud hanging over the whole human race, and it needs to be dispelled by the united efforts of us all.

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