

Sangharakshita in Seminar

The Sutra of Golden Light: Chapter Three: The Chapter on Confession

Second Transcriptions Edition

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Those present: Sangharakshita, Aryamitra, Uttara, Vimalamitra, Graham Steven, Dave Living, Alan Angel, Tim McNally, Phil Shrivell

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

Sangharakshita: All right, we're going to do Chapter Three of the Sutra of Golden Light. It's the chapter on confession. We are going to direct our attention mainly to the confession itself. There will be quite a lot to discuss there. So we'll go through the first couple of paragraphs reasonably quickly so as to get on to the confession itself. Let's read round the circle a paragraph at a time.

Then indeed the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu slept. In the middle of his sleep he saw a golden drum, made of gold, shining everywhere just like the orb of the sun. And in all the directions he saw innumerable, incalculable Buddhas, sitting on beryl seats at the foot of jewelled trees surrounded (and) honoured in an assembly of numerous hundreds of thousands, preaching the Law.

S: I've had something to say about this in the lectures, haven't I? Most of you must have heard those. So we've had some idea of what the 'golden drum, made of gold, shining everywhere just like the orb of the sun' means, and so on. I wonder whether these sentences suggest anything else to anybody - whether anybody has any other associations, any associations of their own. Suppose you had a dream, suppose you dreamt about a golden drum shining just like the sun, what do you think it would convey to you - what do you think it would mean or how do you think you'd take it when you woke up in the morning? What sort of significance do you think it would have for you? Anything special?

Vimalamitra: Something very special - something very important. Something quite vital.

S: And if you saw innumerable, incalculable Buddhas in all directions sitting on beryl seats, what do you think that would convey to you - what sort of feeling do you think you would get? I think you'd probably get a feeling that some extraordinary revelation was about to be made to you, something of that kind. And this is, of course, what Ruciraketu must have felt. All right, go straight on, then. [2]

And there he saw a man with the form of a brahmin, beating that drum. There from the sound of the drum he heard these (and) similar confessional verses coming forth. Then indeed the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu, as soon as he awoke, recollected these verses of confession of the Law. Having recollected them, at the end of that night he departed from the great city of Rajagrha with numerous thousands of beings. He came to Mount Grdhrakuta, where the Lord was, and having approached and worshipped the feet of the Lord with his head, he thrice walked round the Lord towards the right and sat down on one side. Sitting on one side, the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu made the respectful gesture with his hands towards the Lord and uttered these confessional verses that he had heard in the middle of his sleep from the sound of the drum.

S: This is quite straightforward, isn't it? But does the man with the form of a Brahmin beating the drum suggest anything in particular to you?

Vimalamitra: He's the kind of orthodox Indian idea of religion, isn't it? The preacher of the truth.

S: Possibly. A man with the form of a Brahmin but why not a monk?

Dave Living: They didn't have monks in those days.

S: Yes, they had monks in those days. It's a monk who is the preacher of the Sutra later on, we find, so why a **Brahmin**?

Vimalamitra: Maybe it represents the true Brahmin.

S: Maybe it represents the true Brahmin? But even then, why a true Brahmin - why not a true **monk**?

Tim McNally: Maybe it's the archetypal teacher, where the monk is just a monk.

S: A Brahmin is a Brahmin! *[Laughter]*

Tim McNally: But the Brahmins seem more often than not teachers.

S: Yes.

Aryamitra: It's also more traditional, isn't it?

S: More traditional, I think it's more to do with that - that the Brahmin, as it were, is a more archaic image. A monk is something comparatively recent. So in dreams you tend to get more archaic images, don't you, a dream is of that nature. So, for instance, if you were to have a dream yourself, a sort of archetypal [3] dream, the chances are you wouldn't dream about a Buddhist temple, you'd find yourself in the middle of some beautiful **cathedral**. So why is **that**? Because you've been brought up with a cathedral having religious and spiritual associations. That is deeply ingrained in your unconscious mind even though you are a Buddhist, yes? But maybe your unconscious mind hasn't been converted. You still go on thinking in terms of cathedrals and stained glass windows and things of that sort. So it's probably the same with Ruciraketu. Sure he was a Buddhist, he was a Bodhisattva, but his unconscious mind no doubt retained all these archetypal images, as it were. For him a Brahmin was a religious symbol, so when he had a dream it was a man in the form of a Brahmin beating on the drum. Just as if you had a dream, well, you might find yourself in a magnificent cathedral, not in a beautiful Buddhist temple. I think it's something of that sort. The significance is the same but the associations are different.

Vimalamitra: So it's the collective unconscious?

S: It's more like that. In Jungian terms you can call it the collective unconscious. *[Pause]* So anyway, he has the dream and he goes to tell the Buddha all about it. Let us go on to the next paragraph, then, and see what he tells the Buddha.

'One night when I was not tired I fell asleep and saw a gleaming drum with a golden light everywhere. Shining like the sun it beamed everywhere. It glowed in the ten directions. I saw Buddhas everywhere. They were sitting on jewelled trees and on beryl seats at the head of an assembly of numerous hundreds of thousands. I saw one in the form of a brahmin beating the drum, and while it was being struck by him, these verses came forth:

S: So that's more or less a repetition of what was said before. He is just recounting the dream to the Buddha, except that here the Buddhas sit **on** the jewelled trees, which seems a bit odd. But anyway dreams are like that. Perhaps he was sitting on it rather than at the foot of it. So then the verses came forth, these are the famous confessional verses.

Aryamitra: I didn't hear the lectures. Did you go into the [4] fact that he was not tired?

S: I did say something about this a little later on. 'One night when I was not tired' - so what does that suggest, that he wasn't tired?

Aryamitra: Well, it was like he didn't fall asleep. In a way, it was more of a trance or revelation.

S: Yes.

Aryamitra: He wasn't fatigued, necessarily.

S: Yes, so that it wasn't an ordinary dream. It did occur to me afterwards that the dream is a sort of literary convention. For instance Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a dream, isn't it? Then *Piers Plowman* is a dream. I think Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a dream, also. Certainly Bunyan and *Piers Plowman*. So the dream suggests some sort of other level of reality. And very often the person falls asleep during the day, on a pleasant summer afternoon and has the dream.

Dave Living: *Alice in Wonderland*.

S: That's a dream, is it? Anyway, this is one night certainly **when I was not tired** I fell asleep and saw a gleaming drum with a golden light everywhere'. What sort of symbol do you get in association with drum, what sort of shape do you see?

Graham Steven: Cylindrical.

S: Cylindrical.

Uttara: A round one that's small.

S: I think what one is in a sense intended to see is something spherical. Because the drum is suspended, even if it's a cylindrical drum you see it endways so that it looks round to you. Why I say this is that sometimes the setting sun is described as looking like a great golden drum suspended from a thread. So clearly if the drum is cylindrical one sees it endways so that it looks round. And the drum is compared with the sun, isn't it? So this suggests roundness.

Vimalamitra: Is that the kind of shape of drums in those days?

S: Well, I think the drums in those days were shaped the same as they are now.

Aryamitra: They're usually tapered in the middle, aren't they, if they were two-ended they're usually - you see what I mean, if you had the flat drum surface there they tapered and went out again.

S: If you looked at it endways you'd see something round, [5] wouldn't you? That's with the cylindrical drum. I think what they have in mind here is a big sort of kettle drum, quite large and suspended from something.

Dave Living: It's not the same as the Nichiren monks have - like a tennis racket?

S: Ah, that's quite different, yes, that's quite different. That isn't Indian at all as far as I know. I think that is purely Japanese, if not Chinese. As far as I know they've never had that sort of drum in India.

Dave Living: It's the same sort of principle.

S: Yes, in a way, because it's something that you beat, but it isn't hollow like a drum, it's just two-dimensional like a tambourine. [Pause]

All right, let's go on to the confessional verses.

By the excellent drum of golden light let the woes in the triple-thousand world be suppressed, the woes in the evil states, the woes in the world of Yama and the woes of poverty here in the threefold world.

S: So what does that suggest? I mean, 'by the excellent drum of golden light may these woes' of different kinds 'be suppressed' - what does that suggest about the drum itself, and its significance?

Graham Steven: That it has the capability of wiping out those woes.

S: So what does that tell you about it if it has that sort of capability - what does it seem to represent, then?

Graham Steven: Power.

Uttara: Compassion.

S: Well, these are all qualities. But power and compassion of what?

Tim McNally: The Absolute.

S: It's more like the Absolute, yes, more like the Buddha or the Dharma. So you begin to see what the drum of Golden Light represents. 'By the excellent drum of golden light let the woes in the triple-thousand world be suppressed, the woes in the evil states, the woes in the world of Yama and the woes of poverty here in the threefold world.' What are these evil states?

_____ : Well, the six states on the Wheel of Life.

S: No, not all of them. It's the three that are called [6] (vatis?) or ill-farings, *orupayas*, the downfalls. That is to say the world of the *asuras*, the Hungry Ghosts and the beings in Hell - these are the evil states. Ultimately, of course, you have to get out of all five or six, but these are the evil states. [Pause] So 'By the excellent drum of golden light let the woes in the triple-thousand world be suppressed, the woes in the evil states, the woes in the world of Yama and the woes of poverty here in the threefold world.' So as yet the aspiration isn't very high, as it were. Do you see this? There's just an aspiration, just a prayer

that these woes, these worldly woes, may be suppressed. There isn't any reference to the attainment of any sort of higher spiritual state. That would come later. Right, carry on with the next sentence, then.

And by this resounding of the sound of the drum may all troubles in the world be suppressed, may beings be without fear, free of fear just as great sages are without fear, fearless.

S: So it's repeated, as it were, three times '... free of fear just as great sages are without fear, fearless.' So what do you think this is doing, what's the intention here? It's as if to emphasise the importance of fearlessness. I think I've mentioned before now that *abhaya* or fearlessness is mentioned very often in Buddhism, certainly more than you find it in Christianity. Do you get in Christianity, for instance, many references to being fearless, free from fear?

Aryamitra: In fact you get the reverse, don't you, with God-fearing.

S: Yes, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, Yes? But in Buddhism, in the Buddha's teaching, there are quite a number of references to one being free from fear. I think I've mentioned that this is one of the things that the Bodhisattva gives as *dana*, as it were, it's the *abhayadana*, the gift of fearlessness where by his mere presence he creates confidence and removes people's fear.

Dave Living: Is this because fear stops mindfulness?

S: Yes, and after all what is fear basically - what are you afraid of, or afraid for?

Uttara: Afraid of losing yourself.

S: You're afraid for yourself. You're not usually afraid for other people except in so far as you identify with them. [7]

Uttara: Anagarika Dharmapala, I think, in the little book you wrote or the wee pamphlet, he goes into that, when he experienced some ... I think it was at a funeral ...

S: Ah, yes, right.

Uttara: ... and after that he was fearless.

S: Yes.

Uttara: I think it was just an experience of the whole ...

S: I remember an instance in Kalimpong where somebody whom I knew died. It was an Englishwoman, an elderly Englishwoman who had come out to Kalimpong and I got to know her there and she in the end became a Buddhist, and I happened to come back from Calcutta one day and the first news I got on my return was that this lady - Miss Barclay her name was - had died suddenly and that there was a dispute about the body because the local Catholic Christians were claiming it and wanted to give it Christian burial. But my students were resisting and saying that no, she had become a Buddhist. So I hurried straight up to her house and I found several local Christians there, local Catholics, plus a number of my students, all Buddhists, and the police. [Laughter] So as I entered the police inspector said to me, 'Can you tell me what religion this lady followed?' So I said, 'Oh, yes, she was Buddhist.' [Laughter] So my students said, 'There, we told you so, we told you so!' So then the police officer said, 'Ah, but can you prove it?' So there all the Catholics smiled, you see, so I said, 'Yes.' So then the police inspector said, 'Well, can you produce the proof in the police station tomorrow morning?' 'Yes, certainly.' But actually I had an application form from her - we had an organisation called the Young Men's Buddhist Association and she'd become a member and she'd signed the application form and where it said 'Religion' she'd filled in 'Buddhist' and signed it. [Laughter] So I had this, you see, so anyway - to cut a long story short - we claimed the body. [Laughter] We took it from the mortuary at the hospital back to the YMBA as it was then, the Young Men's Buddhist Association, so there was nowhere else to lay out the body except a ping-pong table [Laughter]. So we laid her out there and the funeral had been announced for early that afternoon, so a lot of people came. But the point I want to make was this, she'd known quite a few Christians, including missionaries, in [8] the area and they all gathered in the sitting room and there were many of my students who had also known her. So the local custom is that before someone is cremated you just go and have a last look at them. So all my students who were young Nepalese and Tibetans and Bhutanese and what-not, they were quite keen on having a last look at Miss Barclay. She'd been quite a good friend to them, she'd often invited them for tea, so they were all going into the ping-pong room, into the games room, and having a look at her. 'Oh, she looks OK - quite peaceful, you know ... cremated this afternoon ...' sort of thing. They were quite used to it. But when I

asked the Christian missionaries - they were mostly ministers and, you know, people like that, 'Would you like just to go in and have a look at Miss Barclay?' 'Oh, no, thank you.' [Laughter] They were clearly afraid - they had this fear of death or anything to do with death, and that was very noticeable. Not one of them went in and looked at her. They were just afraid to, but all these quite ordinary young Nepalese and Tibetan students, they went in and had a look without any hesitation. It was all, well, not exactly in the day's work, they were accustomed to this. This is what happened at home if their grandfather died, or their great-aunt, there's always this, go and have a look. Death was a natural thing, it was part of life. There was nothing especially to be afraid of, you all died one day, everybody knew that. But these missionaries, even though they were supposed to be preaching religion, preaching Christianity, they were afraid and this was very marked, very evident.

And whether this is anything to do with Christianity or maybe something more to do with modern life itself, not to do with Christianity as such, it's difficult to say. But certainly there seems to be much more fear in the minds of people in the West in this sort of way. But there is fear in everybody, otherwise Indian Buddhist texts like this wouldn't mention the giving of fearlessness and that '... by this resounding of the sound of the drum may all trouble in the world be suppressed, may beings be without fear, free of fear just as great sages are without fear, fearless.' So fearlessness is considered quite important among Buddhists, and wherever there is the influence of Buddhism it does make in the direction of fearlessness, especially fearlessness in the face of things like death. So it's quite important and very often we don't realise the extent to which we are under the influence of fear and worry and anxiety. Not very many people are [9] completely free from fear, even free from worry. To be fearless is quite an achievement, if you're fearless you're practically enlightened. Not the sort of fearlessness which is simply lack of imagination. I mean there are lots of people - I was reading, or rather hearing on the radio the other day, about wartime pilots, and apparently the ace pilots were all men totally lacking in imagination, the men that won decorations. It's not that they were particularly fearless, they just didn't **know** that there was any danger, they didn't have enough imagination to realise it, apparently, so that isn't true fearlessness. In true fearlessness you see the situation **clearly**, you've no illusions about it, but you don't feel afraid. So that's the more Buddhist sort of fearlessness. But to be free from fear isn't an easy matter. If you're free from fear, then you're practically free from egotism. So it's not surprising that this mention of fearlessness comes quite early in these confessional verses. What are the things you think that people are usually afraid of, or afraid for, or afraid in connection with?

Uttara: Going insane.

S: Ah! Do you think many people are afraid of going insane?

VoiceS: Yes.

S: Well, that's interesting.

Aryamitra: I asked quite a few people this and the most popular answer I got was humiliation.

S: Humiliation. Well, becoming insane is also a humiliation in a way, isn't it? Most people would look at it like that.

Uttara: No control over the situation at all.

S: Do you think for many people fear of going insane is an actual sort of concrete fear - that they might go insane?

Dave Living: When they're under pressure very often they worry about their sanity.

Tim McNally: I think you have to be very close to the borderline before you experience that fear.

S: I feel quite surprised at that. It's as though people are already under quite a strain and that just a little bit more will just cause them to crack.

Uttara: That was one of the things that motivated me into Buddhism - because I felt that I was on that borderline between sanity and insanity and felt I had to do something about it. [10]

S: As though one could go either way. Anybody else have any such feeling, or know anyone that had?

Dave Living: I found when I was teaching there was often the feeling that if you weren't careful, anyone could go under. Someone told a story once in the staff-room about someone who was wearing pyjama trousers, it was a cold day and they were wearing pyjama trousers under their trousers and someone came up to him and said - it was a teacher - and said, '...oh, you forgot to take your pyjama trousers off this

morning ...' or something like that, and the bloke burst out laughing and then he just couldn't stop laughing and he was laughing right away for ages, and they had to take him away in an ambulance. *[Laughter]* And there was a nasty shiver through the staff-room, especially with me! *[Laughter]*

Aryamitra: He didn't die laughing, did he?

Dave Living: No. He never went back to teaching.

S: Like saying the other day that you're just walking along the street and you quite often see people who seem to be virtually insane, and sometimes they're talking to themselves or muttering angrily to themselves as they go along.

Uttara: Well, I lived for years with my uncle who was insane, and it was just touch and go yourself sometimes. He was talking to himself and banging and ...

S: So this is a fear, then, of people that they may go insane. But what about this fear of humiliation?

Aryamitra: I asked quite a few people this and they said in a kind of low voice...

S: What did they mean by that, do you think, or what was ...?

Aryamitra: I think it was a kind of ego thing. The thing that first came to my mind is if you're humble you're not frightened of humiliation.

S: Yes, as Bunyan says, 'He that is low need fear no fall.'

Phil Shrivell: That's if you're rejected by the group, isn't it? Outside it.

S: Well, it's like fear of not being able to live up to what people expect of you, that people have got a sort of false idea of you. Maybe you've got a false idea of yourself and you're trying to live up to that, and people are expecting you to live up to that and you feel quite insecure because you know that it is just something false. There's a sense of strain all the time, so you're afraid you may not be able to live up to it and you may disappoint their expectations and in that way you'd feel humiliated. So if [11] you're humble you can't be humiliated in the sense that if you've no illusions about yourself and don't try to project, or to live up to, some **unreal** image of yourself - I mean if you are a fool and you accept it and everybody else knows it, well, you can't be humiliated by anyone **calling** you a fool.

Aryamitra: Right!

S: If you've always thought of yourself as really clever and everybody else thinks you are really clever, well, you **will** feel humiliated if you're made to look a fool because that isn't the way that you've thought of yourself or the way that other people have thought of you. But if you've been a fool since the day that you were born and everybody knows that and you know too, well, *[Laughter]* you're not humiliated by being shown up as a fool. It's just you.

Aryamitra: Right, you can laugh with them.

S: You can laugh with them, yes. So if a lot of people are afraid of being humiliated, it means quite a lot of people then are living an unreal sort of life and living, or trying to live up to a quite false picture of themselves. So what else are people afraid of, do you think?

Vimalamitra: Being overwhelmed.

S: But being overwhelmed by what - something outside?

Vimalamitra: No, just the struggle itself ...

S: Being unable to cope, just going under. Being unable to survive, almost. But that means, in a way, a fear of a kind of death, doesn't it, in a way?

Aryamitra: It's obvious the basic one is death, isn't it? If you don't fear death, then there's not much else you can fear really.

Vimalamitra: That can be quite difficult at times, because if you feel responsibility then sometimes you don't even feel you can die.

S: You're not even free to die, it's not as simple as that, yes. Or like the song says, the Negro spiritual: 'Tired of living, and scared of dying'. No time to die.

Aryamitra: But getting back to being insane, if, say, you're not frightened of, for want of a better term, the irrational, then you wouldn't be frightened of being insane, or if you had faith, say, in spirit ...

S: Well, again, you know, there is, I think, more fear if not of insanity certainly of the insane in this country than there would be [12] say, in India. In India people aren't afraid of the insane. You get people just wandering about, harmless lunatics, and nobody minds. If a harmless lunatic comes up to you and starts laughing and gibbering, people usually will laugh back. [Laughter] They're not in the least embarrassed or put out, or anything like that. What a joke, an old lunatic, ha, ha!

Vimalamitra: But they're more kind of, you know, they're much more individuals and they say, 'Well, he's insane', or 'He's gibbering but I'm not going to', whereas in the West people, you know, kind of ...

S: I don't think they even think like that. They've just got more fellow-feeling. Or they might think, 'Well, we think he's a lunatic but he may be holy man, who knows?' [Laughter] If he's not actually offensive or harmful they don't really bother very much. I think we'd feel quite ill at ease, possibly, if a lunatic walked in and started acting the fool, as it were, we wouldn't know quite how to take it, but the Indian wouldn't be bothered at all if he didn't do any actual harm. So what is it that we're afraid of when we're afraid of lunacy?

Vimalamitra: Being disturbed. Not being what you regard as yourself, being upset or being ...

Uttara: You know, in terms of an attack on you.

S: Again a sort of death.

Uttara: Irrational.

S: In other words, you identify yourself more strongly, perhaps, with the rational part of yourself than people usually do in India. You think, 'I am rational' and being a lunatic means that my reason is destroyed, and if my reason is destroyed I am destroyed.

Uttara: In terms of the insane that we have here I think they are more violent. We have more violent cases of insanity here than in a place like India.

S: That is probably correct. I think also it's true to say that if a violent lunatic was roaming about in the villages they'd probably just finish him off, the same people. Or if a lunatic molests women or anything like that, that's a point they're very sensitive about, they'd just finish him off, beat him or stone him to death. But if he's harmless, they're not bothered by lunacy as such.

Uttara: I used to have, you know, a fear, when I was at Aryatara especially, each night I would [13] go out to go down to bed and all the time I would have to walk down and each time I would open the door and I would have a witch sitting on my bed. Quite often I had this image of walking in there and have a witch just sitting on my bed and waiting for me. [Laughter]

S: So what do you think that represented?

Uttara: In terms of the fear of the irrational.

S: Couldn't be fear of women, could it? [Laughter] There are all sorts of odd fears, aren't there? Of course, it was a witch, and not a wizard. If, as I said though, as the Sutra says, if you become fearless, well, that is a great achievement, a great accomplishment even from a spiritual point of view. It's only the Buddha, the Enlightened One, who is completely fearless. And that's quite a thought. So Buddhism has always attached great importance to this state of fearlessness so it's not surprising that it comes so early in the confessional verses; that the sound of the Golden Drum has this sort of effect, of removing fear.

Graham Steven: Do you think that this society as it's being created now on the outside is creating more fear by its cocooning of most activities? Travel on public transport, you now go into a bus and they close the doors and open them at the right time, and everything seems to be turning more towards safety-conscious devices.

S: Well, perhaps it makes you less adventurous and less enterprising and less able to think for yourself and look after yourself. You get very sheltered.

Aryamitra: I know that newspapers definitely do this. When I go and visit people they used to read the papers and believe every word. What happens is they read things about muggings and are scared to go out but I don't know about muggings so I don't fear to go out. It's that newspapers can just kind of build up people's fears on certain aspects, fear of anything they like, you know, coloured people, criminals ...

Dave Living: A lot may depend on how you dress ...

Aryamitra: I don't know the ins and outs. I'm just trying to point out that it does induce fear in people.

Dave Living: Someone like you who doesn't look very well off can wander around the streets without being troubled at all. Someone who reads the newspapers and is quite well off ...

Aryamitra: No, they're not well off, these people I'm thinking [14] about. I'm sure it's just purely, you know, you can read or you can see a film and you come out frightened. One of the nicest experiences I had, I went to see 'The Sting' which is a film which is about chasing all the time but it's very light, almost comedy, and all the time through it these people kind of looking over their shoulders and yet it's very entertaining, you can really get absorbed, and when you come out of the cinema you just get an incredible feeling of freedom that you don't have to look over your shoulder, that nobody is chasing you, that you don't have to worry about those things.

S: Malini was telling me that when she was on a solitary retreat a few weeks ago at Tyddern Rhydderch, she went out for a long solitary walk in the nearby hills and usually there's nobody around at all, but a man started walking towards her and met her and he said, 'You're not to be walking around like this. Don't you know there's an escaped murderer, the police are looking for him. You'd better be careful.' So she said she just went back to Tyddern Rhydderch as quickly as she could and shut herself in and she was really scared for the next week.

Aryamitra: But maybe also fear does attract certain things. I know there's a mad dog up Plough Lane near Aryatara. If I used to walk up the road feeling quite fearless he never used to do anything, he'd just sort of look at me in a pathetic looking way. But if I was frightened about something and I could feel this fear, I could feel he was kind of picking up on me and I'd have to walk across to the other side of the road and he'd be really growling, his teeth showing and everything. But I think that does make a difference. People pick up on ...

S: Well, dogs certainly pick up on your smell, and according to your emotional state you do exude a certain kind of smell. You can certainly smell fear. I mean I've known people who simply reeked of fear, you could smell it as soon as you met them. [*Laughter*] Yes, quite literally.

Tim McNally: Do you think solitary retreats seem to promote fear or bring up fear? A lot of people speak about their solitary retreats and they relate experiences of fear and dread.

S: I think this is quite common because what does a solitary retreat do? It deprives you of your external supports, deprives you of your distractions. The things that you cling on to or the things that you occupy yourself with to cover [15] up or to hide from yourself your basic anxiety. Usually, if you start feeling a bit anxious you either go and talk to somebody or you make yourself a cup of tea or you go to the cinema or you read a book or you get together with the group. But when you're on solitary retreat you can't do any of these things, There's no escape from the anxiety, no escape from the fear, so you're brought right up against it. And there is an element of this at least, I'm quite sure, in everybody.

_____ : It's almost as if the fear is a sort of real element.

S: It's as though it's there all the time or much of the time and that we usually distract ourselves from it instead of facing it. On solitary retreat it's difficult to do that, difficult to run away from it.

Vimalamitra: You can still, say, get into your studies. I wondered about that on my solitary retreat. I had plenty to do to occupy myself, but I wondered how I would do if all I had to do was to sit there and meditate.

S: Well, one can gradually try that. And then some people do find that at the beginning of solitary retreat they're quite keen on keeping busy and filling in the day and afraid of getting bored. But several people have told me that as the retreat progressed and they felt quite good, quite positive, they dropped doing quite a number of things, they just didn't need those sort of supports. And conceivably you could end up at the end of a month or two months just not doing anything at all and passing the whole day quite

positively neither being afraid nor empty nor bored nor anything else. So when one is on solitary retreat one should be a **bit** careful that one doesn't use study and meditation simply as an escape from feelings of anxiety. Though on the other hand, quite objectively, you do need to have certain things to do to keep you occupied positively, but one should be careful not to use them just as defences against anxiety due to the fact that you are on your own. So certainly the tendency should be to let up on such things as you get on with the retreat, as the retreat progresses. So relax them gradually, rather than get busier and busier. *[Laughter]* If you feel like meditating all the time, that's fine if it's a spontaneous and natural thing, but not in the sense of meditating so as to keep at bay all the anxious feelings.

Vimalamitra: What do you suggest if you know that's happening? [16] What - just experience that?

S: Well, certainly carry on with some meditation, but in between allow yourself just to feel afraid or feel anything of that sort. Feel alone, or empty.

Aryamitra: Would you say that the feeling it would be the transforming or the resolving it?

S: No, I think one would just have to feel it first and leave the transforming or resolving to a later stage, but make sure that you were feeling it. And if you allow yourself to feel it, it will pass away sooner or later. But then you must be quite willing just to let yourself feel it properly. You might find in the end it's less trouble allowing yourself to feel the anxiety rather than be all the time having to keep the anxiety at bay.

Anyway, that's fearlessness. Let's go on from there.

Just as the great sages who know all in the cycle of existence are endowed with all the noble virtues, so may men be oceans of virtues endowed with the virtues of meditation and the (seven) members of enlightenment.

S: Anybody know what these seven members of enlightenment are?

Phil Shrivell: The seven *bodhyangas*.

S: They're the *bodhyangas*, yes. Do you remember what the *bodhyangas* are?

Tim McNally: Limbs, aren't they? The seven limbs.

S: The seven limbs, yes, the seven limbs of enlightenment they're sometimes called, or seven factors of enlightenment. *Anga* is a member, limb or factor or constituent. So what are they - do you remember?

Vimalamitra: Rapture is one of them.

S: Rapture is one of them, sure.

Phil Shrivell: Awareness of mental states.

S: Yes, or investigation of mental states, *dharmavijaya*. What's the first one, then?

Aryamitra: Is fearlessness one of them?

S: No, it isn't. What's the first one, then?

_____ : Faith?

S: The first one is mindfulness, isn't it? *Sati* or *smṛti* in Sanskrit. Then there's *dharmavijaya*, investigation of Dharmas in the sense of investigation of mental states, and what's after that? Isn't it *virya*, then there's *pamojja* which is delight, and then there is *priti*, then there's *samadhi*, and then there's *upeksha*. I think that's correct, that list.

Uttara: Why does *virya* come along the way instead of at the beginning?

S: Well, you can't sort of divide all these up too much. In a sense *virya* is present all along as in the case of the *paramitas*. But here it's sort of as it were cultivated specially or even exclusively. But without some *virya* how can there even be an investigation of dharmas? But how I look at it is this, that first of all you have the awareness, or the mindfulness. So with that awareness, with that mindfulness you examine all your mental states whether they are skilful or unskilful and so on. So that is the *dharmavijaya*, the investigation of mental states. So having investigated your mental states you act upon

that knowledge, the knowledge gained as a result of that investigation, so you weed out the unskilful mental states, you cultivate the skilful mental states. So for that obviously you need energy, but not only do you need energy for doing that but when you've done it, what happens? You gain **more** energy because, you know, the energy that was, as it were, locked up in the unskilful mental states has now been switched to the skilful mental states. You've suppressed the unskilful mental states so the energy that was locked up in them is released so there's an access of energy, an access of *virya*, so this leads to an experience of joy, and so on.

Anyway, so those are the *bodhyangas* - haven't I mentioned them in *Mind, Reactive and Creative*?

Vimalamitra: Yes.

S: Yes, that's where I speak about them. *[Pause]* What about this expression, '... the great sages who know all in the cycle of existence ..' - what does that suggest? What is this cycle of existence?

Uttara: The *nidanas*.

S: Yes, the *nidana* chain, the wheel of life. So '... who know all in the cycle of existence ...' suggests that the great sages have penetrated it all through insight in all its aspects, in [18] all its forms, they know it thoroughly, understand it thoroughly, have seen through it completely, and they are at the same time endowed with all the noble virtues. So says the text '... may men be oceans of virtues endowed with the virtues of meditation and the seven members of enlightenment.' All right, go on to the next verse, then.

And by this resounding of sound of the drum may all beings possess the voice of
Brahma.

S: What does it mean to possess the voice of Brahma? It's one way of saying may all beings become enlightened, may they become Buddhas, because the Buddha possesses the voice of Brahma. So what is this Brahma voice?

Tim McNally: Is it something like creative inspiration?

S: Yes, it is a bit like that. The Brahma voice is the voice which people hear in different ways according to their different temperaments. If you have the Brahma voice you speak and everybody understands you. It is the voice made up of all possible sounds. Sometimes it's said that the Brahma voice is made up of the sixty-four sounds. There are sixty-four letters, as we would call them, in the Sanskrit alphabet, so to say that the Brahma voice consists of sixty-four sounds means it's the fullness not only of the sounds of those letters, those syllables, but it expresses all the possible combinations and permutations in the form of words and sentences. So the Brahma voice is the voice that, as it were, says everything, but everybody hears what they need to hear. So the Buddha is said to have the Brahma voice, he speaks and everybody understands, as it were, in his or her own way. Do you see what I mean? It's like, for instance, in the case of a lecture, you give a lecture and everybody takes from that lecture what they need. You might ask somebody, 'Oh you went to the lecture, what did he say?' so the person might say, 'Oh, he said something that really impressed me very much, he said something about the Four Noble Truths.' You might ask somebody else, 'Well, what did the speaker say - you were at the same lecture, what did you hear, what did he say?' and that person might say, 'It was all about the life of the Buddha, I really liked that.' So you've got two completely different accounts. No doubt the speaker spoke about both of these things, but in the case of the first person it was what he said about the Four Truths that registered; in the case of the other person it was what he said about the life of the Buddha. Now a [19] lecture is, of course, something that has a certain length and includes different topics but the Brahma voice is the voice, as it were, which is saying all these things simultaneously, if you can imagine. It's as though the lecturer, in this particular illustration, was speaking about the Four Noble Truths and the Life of the Buddha at the same time but one person hears him speaking about the Four Noble Truths and the other hears him speaking about the Life of the Buddha, so the Brahma voice is like that. It's the voice, or the sound of the Buddha's voice, from which everybody picks out, as it were, what he wants to hear or **needs** to hear. In a sense, the Buddha doesn't say anything, but in another sense he says everything and everybody hears in his own way and takes what he needs from that. In an ultimate sense perhaps the Buddha doesn't say anything at all, or in the ultimate sense all these things have the same meaning but people take them differently. So that's the Brahma voice. So to have the Brahma voice, to speak with the Brahma voice means to be a Buddha. So to say, 'And by this resounding of the sound of the drum may all beings possess the voice of Brahma' is tantamount to saying 'May all beings gain Enlightenment', and we see this from the following sentences.

Right, carry on with the next few sentences.

May they touch the best enlightenment of Buddhahood. May they turn the pure Wheel of the Law. May they remain (living) for inconceivable aeons. May they preach the Law for the welfare of the world. May they destroy impurities, annihilate woes, suppress passion, likewise hatred and folly.

S: So clearly what is being said is that may all beings gain Buddhahood, may they all become Enlightened. ‘May they possess the voice of Brahma. May they touch the best enlightenment of Buddhahood. May they turn the pure Wheel of the Law.’ What’s meant by turning the Wheel of the Law?

Aryamitra: Gives Dharma.

S: Yes, giving the Dharma. Why do you think it’s compared with turning a wheel - isn’t this a rather odd expression? Why turning the Wheel of the Dharma - you can understand beating the drum of the Dharma, can’t you, which is also a stock expression, or blowing the conch-shell of the Dharma, which is another expression, but [20] why turning the Wheel of the Dharma?

Uttara: It’s a thing when you start with the Dharma, a wheel starts to roll and it gets quicker and quicker and accumulates ...

S: Yes, it could be that.

Tim McNally: It seems to have a lot of repercussions, turning a wheel.

Uttara: Yes, in terms of production. A wheel is usually, in a mechanical sense, something which is attached to something else.

S: In the way of performing work.

Uttara: Sets rolling other things.

S: There was, of course, the old idea of the Wheel-turning King, the Wheel-turning Monarch, and there may be some inference of that here.

Uttara: In terms of Royalty.

Dave Living: The *dharmacakra*.

Aryamitra: It’s quite often referred to as setting in motion.

S: That’s right. *Dharmacakrapravartana - pravartana* means setting it going forward, setting in motion the Wheel of the Dharma. According to some scholars there’s some solar symbolism here, that the Wheel of the Dharma is the sun-wheel, the sun with its rays.

Anyway, the essential meaning of these sentences is that may all living beings gain enlightenment by the resounding of the sound of the drum. So you can see that the drum is a quite powerful symbol, as it were. All right, let’s carry on.

May those beings who dwell in an evil state, their limbs alight with blazing fire, hear the sound of the drum. May they take up the refrain: “Homage be to the Buddha.”

S: So what does this suggest? It’s speaking about beings in what we would call hell, though the Buddhist hell, of course, is not a permanent state. ‘May those beings who dwell in an evil state, their limbs alight with blazing fire, hear the sound of the drum. May they take up the refrain: “Homage be to the Buddha.” *Namo Buddhaya*.

Vimalamitra: It must be quite difficult to hear anything at all with your limbs alight with blazing fire.

S: But this is why this wish is made. May even beings [21] *in that* condition, it’s such an unfavourable condition, may even they hear the sound of the drum. May they also have some chance to develop, to escape from that state, to become enlightened.

Tim McNally: Does it assume that it’s much more difficult to get through to them ...?

S: It seems to be assumed so, yes. [Tea Break]

May all beings be mindful of their (former) births during hundreds of births, thousands of millions of births.

S: What do you think about this, this mindfulness or recollection of previous births? What do you think would be the point of this?

Vimalamitra: Then they could see their progress, the general direction.

S: General direction, that would be better. We were talking about something of this sort in the morning, but there we were saying that it's just as well that the slate is wiped clean before each fresh reincarnation, as it were, and you don't remember your previous lives. So why do you think that is? We just might be so discouraged to see ourselves making the same mistakes over and over and over again. So I think it is just as well that in our present stage of evolution we don't remember our previous lives. So to say, 'May all beings be mindful of their former births' is, as it were, to wish at the same time that all beings may attain a high level of spiritual development, because it's only **then** that it will be useful, or even **bearable**, to recollect all those previous lives, at present it's just as well we don't know. It would probably be such a sordid and sorry tale. *[Laughter]* I mean, looking back on **this** life is bad enough for some people, there's enough mistakes and foolish behaviour and so on, to say no more than that. But if you looked back, or peeked back into the previous life and it was no better, and the one before that was even worse, and the ten or twelve before that absolutely catastrophic *[Laughter]*, you'd get a bit depressed after the first few hundred, wouldn't you? And you might start thinking, well, you just had no hope. But if you don't know, you've only got this life and you don't even remember the beginning of that, well, that's better. But it does seem a sort of merciful providence, to use that expression, which - as I said - wipes the slate clean every time so you're reborn, you don't remember the past and you can make a fresh start. That's better, but when [22] you have developed spiritually and developed these higher spiritual faculties, well, then it's all right to look back and recollect. It doesn't matter any more, you've gone beyond it all. So even if you do look back upon tens of thousands of wasted lives it doesn't matter because you're on your way now, at least. In fact, you're very near by this time, very near your goal so it doesn't matter. So I think this is how this sort of wishful aspiration is to be understood. It's not just a wish that 'May all beings - as they are now in their present mental state- recollect their former births during hundreds of births, thousands of millions of births.' That would be too much! But later on, yes, you may well be able to bear it and even profit by it.

All right, next sentence.

Continually mindful of the great sages, let them hear their word, for it is noble.

S: Who are these great sages, do you think? It's probably *Mahamuni* which would mean the Buddhas, or even *Maharishi* which probably would mean Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, '... let them hear their word, for it is noble.' In those days, of course, it wasn't so easy to read, you had to hear, you had to listen to somebody actually speaking. So what do you think is meant by being continually mindful of the great sages?

Aryamitra: Recollecting their lives.

S: Recollecting their lives. Recollecting their good qualities. Or if they are alive remembering to go and see them, remembering to listen to them.

You notice it refers to great sages but then the text says, 'let them hear their word, for it is noble.' As though the great sages all speak one word, one noble word. What does that suggest?

Aryamitra: That's the Brahma voice.

S: In a way, but not only that. That they all, as it were, say the same thing. They give the same teaching, at least in essence, if they are really all great sages. Carry on, then.

And by this resounding of the noise of the drum may they always obtain a meeting with the Buddhas.

S: Yes, why is a meeting with the Buddhas so important, eh?

Uttara: Then we're sure we will find the way.

S: Yes. right. So that one can hear the Dharma, so that one can follow the Dharma. All right, carry on with the next few sentences, then. [23]

May they avoid evil action.

S: Well, that's pretty obvious, isn't it?

May they practise meritorious acts of good.

S: That's obvious, too.

For those men, *Asuras*, all beings who have desires (and) wishes, may I fulfil them all by this resounding of the noise of the drum.

S: So how are we to take this - 'For those men, *Asuras*, all beings who have desires and wishes, may I fulfil them all by this resounding of the noise of the drum.' Why do you think *Asuras* are especially mentioned here?

Dave Living: They're very envious.

S: Very envious, yes, very fierce, quarrelsome, competitive. So 'For those men *Asuras*, all beings who have desires and wishes, may I fulfil them all by this resounding noise of the noise of the drum.' So is this to be taken literally, do you think? That may all beings of this kind have their wishes fulfilled?

Vimalamitra: Well, by hearing the Dharma.

Aryamitra: Their real wishes.

S: Do you think it means their **real** wishes? It says, 'I fulfil them all by this resounding of the noise of the drum.' As though that is the true fulfilment of their wishes. I mean, here are these beings who are full of desire and who have wishes like men, *auras*, and others, so, 'May I fulfil them all by this resounding of the noise of the drum.' It's as though what the drum represents is what they **really** want, what they're really after without perhaps knowing it. So by giving them, by granting them the resounding of the noise of the drum, whatever that signifies, then one would in fact be fulfilling what they wish even though they may not know really what it is they wish. Do you see any instances of this at all?

Aryamitra: You mean in concrete terms?

S: Hm.

Vimalamitra: I certainly feel it in myself sometimes.

S: In what sort of way? So when you want something ...

Vimalamitra: Well, food or something like that, I just feel like cramming ... or entertainment or anything, but if I listen to a tape or read a book I just feel I don't want to. Very often when I come back from driving outside there's a great big void which really needs to be filled. [24]

S: Presumably, you know, when you've been out you've seen all sorts of things or certain desires have been activated but obviously there's been no question of satisfying them. You come back with all the desires unfulfilled, or they're desires for things which you thought you wanted, but if you switch to something that you know you really want then all those false desires subside and you experience a true satisfaction. I think many people experience this really much of the time, if not all the time. I mean, they're busy going after things that they don't really want.

Aryamitra: Right.

S: And only too often when you've had it and enjoyed it, if it was an enjoyment, you realise that you didn't really want it, after all. That it was not what you **really** wanted so you're not really satisfied, you've just been a bit distracted for a while, it isn't anything more than that. Or at best a bit amused for a while. But then you reflect, and you think, 'Well, what did I really get out of it - not anything at all, actually. I could just as well have done without it, or I would have been better off without it!' [*Pause*] But on the other hand, it's not easy to remember that at the time, very often, is it? When you think you want something, well, you think you want it. Very often, it's only after you've had it that you realise, 'Well, it wasn't that that I wanted - not really. It hasn't given me the satisfaction that I was looking for, that I thought I could get from this particular thing.' But more often than not you go through the same procedure time and time and time again. Maybe hundreds of times before you **really** learn your lesson and really accept the fact that you're not going to get what you now know you really want from that particular thing, it's not able to give it. But it's very difficult to give up hoping that it might be able to

[Laughter] and trying just once more. [Laughter]. 'I'll give it another chance before trying Nirvana. I'll give it another chance' - but of course it always lets you down.

Aryamitra: But there has to be a middle way here. [Laughter] Not just a middle way, but there has to be slowness. I think that.

S: But why does there **have** to be a slowness?

Aryamitra: Only from my own experience I find that I can't, however much I can rationalise or even think or know that that's not really going to give me satisfaction, it's more like I don't know it in the deeper sense.

S: You have to really wallow in it before you can really know [25] that it's muck. [Laughter]

Aryamitra: So that I can say I really hate it - it was really awful, yeah, and that is the only thing quite often that stands me to go any further. But if I rationalise it I just become more and more frustrated.

S: But it's not a question of rationalising it. It's seeing it as it really is. What is becoming frustrated? If an artificial desire which you know is artificial isn't finding its fulfilment and you're finding fulfilment in something else which is truly satisfying, where does the rationalisation come in?

Aryamitra: If you're finding fulfilment in something which is truly satisfying, yes.

S: I think the rationalisation comes in, probably, simply when you don't really think that that thing is disappointing at all but somebody has told you it is and you think that maybe he's right and you don't actually feel it yourself yet, so you just have to go on. [Pause] And what you've heard has not yet been confirmed in your own experience, or even what you see as quite rational and acceptable has not been confirmed in your own experience.

Aryamitra: But this has always been, I've found, a very tricky one. It's comes to like can anybody be told anything? Does one **only** learn through one's own experience?

S: I think whatever one learns from others or whatever one hears from others, however clearly and however truly you understand it, you have to **confirm** it in your own experience.

Vimalamitra: Well, if someone's told you of it beforehand or you've got some idea about it, even though you know you've got to continue until you are confirmed, when it does happen you know you've got that knowledge behind you, anyway.

S: I don't think you need to try out everything personally. Just as if somebody tells you as a child if you put your finger into the fire it will burn. Well, you don't have to put your finger into the fire to test that, whereas if you put your finger a little bit near, well, you feel it is warm, and a little bit nearer it's warmer still. 'Oh, well, yes, if I put it right in I'll get burned, that's pretty obvious.' You don't actually have to put your finger right in. So I think it is a sort of a *miccha ditthi* to say, well, you have to personally experience everything the Buddha has warned you does [26] not lead in the direction of Nirvana [Laughter] before you can accept his statement, no! Because there are millions of things. I think you have to take the Buddha's word for it in at least certain areas and not insist on a personal confirmation of the unsatisfactoriness of every vice and every sin. [Laughter]

Aryamitra: Well, maybe you can sort of group them into certain groups, and if you've had a taste of one in that group, well, then you can say ...

S: Well, you can group them into one great group called 'worldly pleasures' and if you've just had even a taste of **one** worldly pleasure, well, that should be enough to disillusion you about worldly pleasures in general. Because they're all just worldly pleasures, they all come under the same heading, the same category, same group, they're all conditioned things so they don't really differ in any essential respect from one another. So just to see one falling leaf should be enough. As it was ...

Vimalamitra: Just indulge in one vice! [Laughter]

Uttara: You've said something to the extent that you shouldn't give up small pleasures until you've experienced the greater ones.

S: I think it is, in a way - I said this on a Seminar - quite dangerous to, on the basis of a purely rational understanding of the truth, deprive yourself by an act of will of certain small - small, I said **small**, yes - [Laughter] favours and comforts before you've started getting a real satisfaction out of the Dharma,

otherwise you may feel so bored and so frustrated and find life so tasteless and meaningless that you may just go to the other extreme But this certainly shouldn't be made into a rationalisation for not giving up anything at all.

Uttara: We were talking in terms of the Golden Light, do you think or do you feel that the Golden Light exists, or indications of the Golden Light exist within small pleasures?

S: No, I don't think that at all, actually.

Uttara: In terms of, say, music. Certain people through their insight or whatever ...

S: Well, I would say that maybe, say, in the case of great musicians like Bach you do get, at their very best moments, some maybe distant reflection of something of that kind. But it's not enough just to have a glimpse in the distance in a very indirect remote way, you've got to be making that sort of experience or the [27] Golden Light itself **your own**. And that means a regular, disciplined way of life directed to that end.

Graham Steven: Does this mean in a way that by simplifying your life you are then able to look at things much more objectively?

S: Well, sure. If you don't simplify your life you don't even have time, do you? In the case of music, to take that example, we don't always think of it very seriously, do we? That music is something to be sort of sampled and enjoyed, it doesn't involve us in any responsibility towards it. It's just available, we can use it, we can enjoy it. So we mustn't think of the Golden Light in this sort of way. Do you see what I mean?

Uttara: That it's available to you.

S: In a sort of aesthetic way. You see, we have got in modern times, I think, a bit into the habit of sampling experiences without any corresponding commitment to what the experience is supposed to represent.

Uttara: Ah, yes, I think we were talking about this the other week. People, say the ordinary middle-class or upper-class people who go along to concerts and things like that, they just go along because it is classical music.

S: It's a pleasant sensation.

Uttara: Yes. But whereas the other way would be that you would go along to the concert and you would be really there for ...

S: It would be like a sort of revelation to you and it would make a difference to your life, as it were.

Uttara: Yes, every evening you would go to the concert because Bach is playing one night and Beethoven tonight and I have to go there and then go home and tell the next-door neighbour, well, I'm into that sort of thing, very much so.

Dave Living: Where can commitment and responsibility come into listening to music?

S: Where **could** they come in? In way I don't think they do because it is the nature, as it were, of the aesthetic experience, it seems. You are sort of as it were lifted out of yourself a bit and that is part of its value, but then afterwards you're dropped right back into yourself, you're virtually the same as you were.

Vimalamitra: But it can make you think of what, say, Bach was feeling, what he was trying to convey.

S: But you can't sort of become a musician like Bach yourself, whereas in the case of something spiritual, something [28] is pointed out to you or you experience something very fleetingly and to a slight extent, but then you are in a position, within a spiritual tradition, to make an effort and to reproduce that experience within yourself and experience it fully, and you can become a Buddha. You might never become a Bach, but you **can** become a Buddha.

Aryamitra: So somebody listening to music with commitment, could that be somebody who is also studying music and composing music?

S: Probably only a musician could listen to music with commitment. Otherwise it's like the so-called religious person who sits at home with a box of chocolates in the evening leafing through the *Life of*

Milarepa, and [Laughter] the *Song of Enlightenment* and the *Parinirvana Sutra* and all the rest of it. [Laughter] You see what I mean, it is just an **experience** in a quite superficial sense. Anyway, how did we get round to that - it was via music in some way or other, wasn't it?

Uttara: It was to do with certain pleasures and giving up.

S: Yes, so when I spoke of pleasures I didn't mean, as it were, aesthetic pleasures, but I meant the sort of spiritual pleasure - if you can use that expression - that you get as a result of your commitment to some ultimate value or ultimate ideal. You must begin to **enjoy** being a Buddhist before you give up **too** much, otherwise you will associate being a Buddhist with a dull, dry, painful, difficult, joyless sort of existence. But please don't use that as a rationalisation for not giving up anything. [Pause] If you haven't enjoyed anything at all of the Dharma and get no enjoyment from it maybe it's best to give up a few things and make things really uncomfortable for yourself just to **force** the issue a bit. Otherwise you could remain stuck indefinitely, just being mentally occupied with the Dharma, getting no real pleasure out of it and not willing to give up anything, even small things, because you hadn't yet started enjoying the Dharma - well, you could stay like that all your life.

Uttara: So you'd have to do something drastic.

S: So you'd have to do something drastic - all right, give up a few things, take a risk, make yourself really uncomfortable, get really bored and frustrated so that you **have** to get pleasure out of the Dharma because you're not going to get it from anywhere else!

Aryamitra: But isn't that the whole point of renunciation in the sense that you - besides some more positive things [29] where things just fall away, but you renounce things so that you can find their ...

S: Their positive counterparts?

Aryamitra: Right, yes.

S: I think you don't find any reflection of the Golden Light, to come back to the original point, in ordinary pleasures. I think you only find such reflections in aesthetic experiences at their very highest. As I've said, maybe occasionally in the music of Bach or Handel or someone like that.

Uttara: So it doesn't shine through.

S: I don't think it shines through. This is not my personal impression. Just a distant reflection, I'd say, not shining brightly through, no.

Uttara: I mean, my interpretation was that the Golden Light was something which was creative - well, that is an aspect of it.

S: One could say that. I'd put it, as it were, far beyond that. But certainly if one is weaning oneself away, say, from chocolates and third-rate films, weaning oneself away from those things and taking up the music of Bach instead, well sure, that's very much a step in the right direction.

Uttara: Yes.

S: Even if it doesn't very clearly reflect the Golden Light, but it is a light of **some** kind. [Pause] Or if you can get away from pop music to the music of Bach it's a big step forward, **I** think. Opinions may differ. At least you've weaned yourself away from something relatively coarse and crude to something relatively refined and that's a great step. And you're preparing the ground for the reception of the Golden Light.

Anyway, what's the upshot of this discussion?

Uttara: True satisfaction.

S: True satisfaction. Sometimes the mediocre satisfaction just blocks the path of the true satisfaction. The good is the enemy of the best, and it's not even always the good. I think sometimes one must ask oneself what one **really does want** because very often the things that you think you want are not really the things that you want. You've got into a sort of habit, you're just used to them or you think you can't do without them or you **think** you enjoy them. If you stop and really seriously ask yourself you very often have to admit, I don't really enjoy them but the thing is I don't know what to replace them with, as it were, I haven't yet discovered that. I don't know what I should do instead, [30] I don't know what I should do without them. It's as though you wouldn't have anything to do, you'd be a bit bored and dull

so you do those particular things just to prevent yourself being in a state of having nothing to do and getting, so you imagine, all bored and dull and listless.

Dave Living: You can think sometimes - well, myself when I'm not feeling particularly happy here, I think, well, if I'm not feeling very happy here it's going to be even worse outside. *[Laughter]*

S: That's true - when you say 'outside' what do you mean, outside Sukhavati?

Dave Living: Yes.

S: Oh, yes, I'd agree with that! If you can't be happy here I don't see how you could be happy outside. *[Laughter]* Not in any **real** sort of way, so that can be quite a sensible reflection.

Tim McNally: Does that mean you come up against a brick wall because, as you say, if you're not happy here and you can't easily be happy outside then what hope of happiness is there for you?

S: If you say you can't be happy outside this suggests you can't be truly happy outside so it's a choice of either, as it were, dulling one's perception and going outside and being happy there even though you know you're not going to be really happy, but at least **pretending** to be happy, or staying where you are and knowing that you are not happy but at least having some idea in which direction to **look** for the true happiness. At least knowing where you're **not** going to find it.

Tim McNally: What I've found is if I hit a low point here I'd go outside and this really assures me how bad it really is out there, I'd come back really ... *(unclear)* *[Laughter]*.

S: 'I thought it was bad here but, good heavens, it's much worse outside.' Well, you could say the badness here is a positive badness. It's only the discomfort you feel when you are no longer enjoying the **illusory** satisfactions.

Dave Living: That's maybe what James has found.

S: Yes, he wants to come back, doesn't he? And he's looking much brighter now, much brighter than when he was actually here. That was quite noticeable.

Dave Living: Although he does look down in the mouth when you see him outside.

S: Yes, I met him outside once and he looked very down in the mouth indeed, just been to the doctor, in fact. But whenever I met [31] him here he looked very bright.

But this is what the Hindus call *maya*, which is a sort of magical delusion that you've experienced something and you've known quite definitely it doesn't give you what you were looking for, it doesn't give you the kind of satisfaction you want but you try again! *[Laughter]* And you might even try the hundredth time. It seems like a sort of mechanism, a sort of conditioning that you find very difficult to break even when you **know** quite clearly. It's not that you don't know - you know it very well - you've tried and tested it dozens of times but it's as though still there is this irresistible urge or impulse to do this or to do that which you just can't resist. It's not even that you can't resist it, you don't even **think** of resisting it, you just almost go along mechanically, it just happens as it were, in a sort of slightly unmindful moment.

Vimalamitra: Sometimes I've noticed that happening when I'd wake up and realise I'm going through it all again.

S: Yes. Or what am I doing, what is happening?

Vimalamitra: It's almost that your body is going through all these actions and you think what the hell is going on, you know, why am I doing it?

Aryamitra: But I wonder how much this has got to do with just being caught up in the general mass consciousness or the general kind of mind. I know that on a Saturday evening there's almost a **pull** to go and have entertainment. I feel it in the air almost like I'm going against the stream of everybody else and sometimes when I'm going against the stream I feel it, and I feel almost like out there there's energy going in a certain direction and I'm not going in that direction and sometimes if I actually go and join in in a kind of - I don't know where or what, but I just do it, and I somehow feel more integrated, or... [32]

S: At a lower level?

Aryamitra: Maybe, but....

S: Well, you wouldn't have felt less integrated resisting that stream if there hadn't been something of that stream **inside** you as well. You don't feel unintegrated opposing something that is **outside** you. If anything you feel **more** integrated because all your energies are going into the opposition. But you only feel unintegrated when there's something within you of the same nature to which that outside energy is calling and then it stimulates the corresponding energy in you which then comes into conflict with your, let's say, better energies for the sake of the argument, and therefore you feel conflict and lack of integration. So when you, as it were, surrender to that pull from outside, one part of you has triumphed over another part with the help of the outside forces. That certainly doesn't represent integration. You've merely, as it were, submerged yourself and not resolved the conflict, you've just **drowned** it for the time being. You've just ended the tension within yourself by refusing to fight any more, and yielding to the outside influence.

Aryamitra: The strange thing is it doesn't have to be an indulged thing, like on Sunday there's a certain relaxedness around and to work on a Sunday is a very strange feeling. I don't know if you find this - to physically work...

S: No I can't say I have noticed. *[Laughter]*

Vimalamitra: Well, the outsiders are much more attractive on the weekend than during the week - you've got nothing to do all day Saturday - you've got a great big gap which you've got to fill somehow.

S: Well, several people have told me here that they used to feel really bored on Saturdays and Sundays with nothing much to do, and so their thoughts stray beyond these walls.

Graham Steven: Isn't this why it's important to strike up relationships within Sukhavati with people because it's often, I've felt, where there's been a lack of having a positive relationship at a certain time, or friendship, that I've felt drawn outside the building. That's often it's the lack of...

S: Lack of companionship. Well, maybe sometimes you get a bit bored with the same old faces, perhaps it's because you've allowed the relationship - for want of a better word - I wish we could avoid the word relationship - to remain on a comparatively superficial and therefore not very interesting and stimulating level.

Uttara: Sometimes the experience is that maybe going away from here, or wherever the situation is, just to get away from people. When there's a crowd out there you can just...

S: That's true. Well, that's another thing. I think it's relatively healthy sometimes to be [33] on your own and not to have people as it were pulling at you and all that kind of thing. You can just go out and just be alone in a sense, just because you don't know any of the people around you and I think some people may, in a healthy fashion, feel that, inasmuch as most people, I think, don't have a room of their own they never, or very rarely have the possibility of being on their own. I think most people **need** to be on their own in a quite positive sense, from time to time. So to go out just for the sake of being on your own for a while I'd consider quite healthy and positive. I think to go out and look for company would be the unhealthy thing but not to go out in order to be on one's own in a positive way. I say that to go outside to look for company would be not positive, because really where would you get more positive company than you've got here? *[Laughter]* That would be difficult. I mean **truly** positive. So if you go outside looking for companionship etc., you're clearly looking for something that is really **less** positive. Unless you go, say, to Aryatara *[Laughter]* or somewhere like that just for the sake of a change where it's equally positive.

Uttara: I find sometimes a number of times when we used to go down to the pub - and say you met somebody - you meet him for the first time and sometimes that can be very stimulating experience because you're sharing something with them which you've already shared with other people but you get into conversation and you start to...

S: Someone said to me the other day that they were walking down Bethnal Green Road and they happened to meet an old man, he got talking to them, it was quite interesting and then this person just happened to mention that outside also there are quite interesting people, as it were, that you could talk to. So then I said supposing - it's all right for half an hour - but do you think you could meet and talk with that person in that way every day or live with that person? He said 'No', so that is the difference. You can have an interesting ten, fifteen, twenty minutes', even half an hour's talk with many a person outside, but in most cases you can only have it just for that length of time and just that once. The next time you met them they might say exactly the same things as they said the first time. There wouldn't be any development. But most people are quite interesting to meet ... once! *[Laughter]* A few people are

interesting to meet two or three times but very few people are interesting to meet all the time and it's only interesting then when there's a developing relationship and very deep common shared interests. But I think however superficially interesting they might appear at first sight you'd get very quickly tired of the company of most people you've met outside the Movement. You might find them entertaining and interesting and stimulating for a while but it will very quickly wear off and you'd find there wasn't anything really very **solid** underneath because there wasn't any deep spiritual feeling or spiritual commitment which was important to you.

Uttara: But you know it's healthy in a way to have that contact, to go out - say you're trying to get a Centre started - you make friends who you can see something in - a possibility that they would become interested.

S: Oh yes, there are people and people obviously, and some you might feel are very promising [34] material, let me try to work on them, which is what Devamitra's been doing with quite conspicuous success in Norwich - he picks on this one, that one - they look really promising material and he goes after them [*Laughter*] and he usually gets them and he brings them in, as it were. That's very good.

Anyway let's get back to the sutra.

For those beings who have taken birth in a fierce hell, their limbs alight with blazing fire, and, without deliverance and oppressed with grief, wander about, there will be quenching of their fires.

S: Quenching of their fires by virtue of the sound of the golden drum. If you take this out of its, as it were mythological context what do you think this verse would be saying? Well, just let's think in terms of a state of torment.

Graham Steven: Could be just the sufferings of the human worldly existence?

S: Right, yes.

Graham Steven: The impure.

S: So do you think this does sometimes happen - that you just come in contact with something of a purely spiritual nature and that all at once, it has quite an effect, and you realise that, in a way, all your suffering is unnecessary, you've brought it on yourself? When you realise that, as a result of that contact with some sort of higher spiritual element or spiritual dimension, then suffering as it were just ceases. You realise it's only just your own foolish involvement in certain things. So you can look at it in that way too.

Let's carry on.

Those beings whose woes are fierce and terrible in hells, among ghosts (or) in the world of men, by this resounding of the noise of the drum, may all their woes be suppressed. And may I be for those who are without deliverance, without rescue, without refuge, the deliverer, the refuge, the excellent protector.

S: Ah what begins here in this verse? What is this now?

_____ : 'May I'.

S: So what does that mean. What's he saying? What is he making?

Graham Steven: A vow.

S: A vow. What kind of vow?

Uttara: A Bodhisattva vow.

S: A Bodhisattva vow. The vow to attain enlightenment as a supreme Buddha for the sake and the benefit of all. So 'may I be for those who are without deliverance, [35] without rescue, without refuge, the deliverer, the refuge, the excellent protector.' By the way about this word *protector* - the English word protector is used to translate two quite different Sanskrit words. I should have said something about this in the course of the recent lectures. For instance in the puja, the Sevenfold Puja, we refer to the Buddhas as the protectors, don't we? But we've also got the protectors of the quarters, the four guardian kings, the four great kings. So the word which is generally used in the case of the Buddhas which is also

translated as protector is *nathas*, but the word which is generally used in connection with the four great kings and similar figures is *pala*, the *Dharmapalas* - protectors of the Dharma. The word in the case of the Buddha is *natha* which has got rather a different significance. It can be translated even as 'Master'. For instance an orphan is called an *anatha* - someone without a protector, without anybody to look after him, without parents. So when we're speaking in the puja of the protectors it's the Buddhas - we're not referring to the four guardian kings, the four great kings or any such figures..

Tim McNally: Ruciraketu is already a Bodhisattva,

S: Is already a Bodhisattva. Yes. Another point I just **touched** on in the lectures is chronology - time sense is all askew here. This is one of the instances. Ruciraketu is introduced to us as a Bodhisattva which means he's taken the Bodhisattva Vow. But here we find him or we find the golden drum taking or making the vow as though it hadn't been taken or made before, because, after all this is a dream on a different sort of level, a different sort of time scale. Ordinary time just doesn't go here on this level. Now starts the confession proper. Let's just spend a little while on that and then we'll have to conclude.

May the Buddhas, whose minds are (full) of mercy (and) compassion, watch over me, those best of the two-footed, who dwell in the world in its ten directions. And whatever evil, cruel act was done by me previously, I will confess it all before the Buddhas.

S: Mm. Now this is in a way quite significant - 'and whatever evil, cruel act was done by me previously, I will confess it all before the Buddhas.' Naturally one confesses evil, so it's not surprising that evil is mentioned, but apart from that what kind of act is the very first to be mentioned, the very first to be confessed here?

_____ : Cruelty.

S: A cruel act, yes. Why do you think that is?

Tim McNally: It seems to have particular relevance to a Bodhisattva.

S: Yes. It means cruelty is the action or the behaviour which is most directly opposed to the Bodhisattva vow or the Bodhisattva Ideal, or to the *Bodhicitta*. Cruelty is the direct opposite of compassion. If you are cruel you can't **possibly** be a Bodhisattva. This is [36] perhaps the reason why it says in some scriptures that the Bodhisattva should not keep a cat. The cat is supposed to be cruel, according to Indian ideas, because it catches and even torments the mouse, plays with the mouse. So Indians regard a cat as a cruel creature, a hard-hearted creature. The cat was the only creature of all those gathered together at the time of the Buddha's *parinirvana* who did not weep, apart from the arahants who were enlightened. All the other beings, all the other creatures, all the other animals wept, but not the cat. The cat just sat there quite unmoved. So the cat has got rather a bad reputation in Indian myth and legend. Anyway, this is just by the way, but cruelty - one of the words for cruelty is *niridaya* - absence of compassion it means literally. This is completely opposed to the Bodhisattva Ideal. If you want to be a Bodhisattva the first thing that you have to confess, the first thing that you have to vomit up, is cruelty. The first thing you have to confess is your cruel acts. It's those cruel acts that are going to obstruct your path as a Bodhisattva more than anything else. This is why in the Mahayana they are particularly down, as it were, on all faults, all unskilful actions which spring from hatred. Some Mahayana *sutras* almost go so far as to say that in a sense it doesn't matter if you commit unskilful actions based upon greed. At **least** that shows some affinity for living beings, at least some **inclination** towards them, but hatred shows a different sort of attitude altogether. So a Bodhisattva cannot possibly entertain thoughts of hatred and cruelty. You **can** be a Bodhisattva if you've got a bit of greed still left. [*Laughter*] You **can't** be a Bodhisattva if you've got a bit of hatred left. Hatred is much more directly opposed to the Bodhisattva's life than greed. This is the general, at least perhaps popular Mahayana point of view which is expressed in some of the Mahayana *sutras*. So it's no accident, I think, that cruel acts are the very first to be confessed here.

Vimalamitra: So cruelty is worse than anger, because at another point you said anger is ...

S: Cruelty is worse than hatred. Hatred is worse than anger. Cruelty and malice are the furthest developments of hatred.

Aryamitra: Could you define the difference between hatred and anger?

S: Anger is more like frustrated desire. It's the energy which is in the desire finding an obstacle and just trying to burst through - it explodes. That's anger and it can be very short-lived and you don't really wish the person who is obstructing you any harm. You just want to break through the obstruction. You don't want to hurt anybody. But in the case of hatred you have a sort of fixed idea of some definite person or

thing obstructing you and you just want to go all out to **remove** that thing, remove that person. Even you want not only to remove, but to harm and injure and damage that person, because you are so angry with them for having obstructed you. Yes? Now cruelty is the inflicting pain or suffering on someone beyond what is necessary to get him out of your way. And malice is the positive enjoyment [37] of inflicting suffering on someone who has not done you any harm at all. So you see the development?

Aryamitra: Yes.

Vimalamitra: I'm not quite sure about the difference between anger and hatred.

S: Well, you can't always draw a hard and fast line.

Aryamitra: Because they're mixed. Well, you can have anger with hatred, and you can have anger without hatred, can you?

S: You cannot have hatred without anger having been present on a number of occasions before. If you're in a situation in which you regularly get angry for the same sort of reason with the same person then that anger will eventually, as it were, consolidate into hatred. So you can't have hatred without anger having preceded it but you can certainly get angry with someone without ever hating them, or being in any danger of hating them. You could get angry with someone whom on the whole you quite like, are quite fond of, but you couldn't hate somebody and at the same time be genuinely fond of them - you could certainly hate them and be in love with them - they're two opposite sides of the same thing - but you can't hate someone that you've got a genuine liking for, but you can get angry with them. But even if you were angry you wouldn't do them any actual harm - not intentionally anyway. You'd just explode because they were getting in your way. So you see the difference. So I said therefore there's anger which can be quite positive; hatred ... there's also enmity - enmity is the sort of hatred that pursues somebody and won't let him go, won't let him get away, will not forgive him, and that's connected, no doubt, with revenge. And then of course there is, yes, cruelty. Cruelty is the gratuitous inflicting of suffering, even the delight in suffering, and malice is completely gratuitous without any benefit to yourself or any **reason**. You just enjoy inflicting suffering - that is very very bad. That is probably, from the Mahayana point of view, the most unskilful of all possible mental states, especially from the standpoint of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

The Mahayana attaches far greater weight to unskilful mental states of this sort. An author I was reading recently writing about Buddhism was saying that it's interesting that when Ashoka in his edicts is exhorting the general public to good actions, good deeds, skilful actions, he speaks always of being patient, being gentle, not giving way to anger - this is morality. There's not a word, for instance, about sex. We think in terms of morality and exhorting people to be moral, this is almost the first thing that comes into our minds, that they shouldn't do this and they shouldn't do that. In the case of Buddhism, especially the Mahayana, things like anger and impatience and intolerance and cruelty, these are regarded as immorality.

Aryamitra: A bit of difference between Buddhism and Christianity. [38]

S: There's quite a different emphasis. In our society if someone says, 'Oh he's a very immoral person', what does that mean? But it's not like that in a Buddhist society. If he's a very immoral person there it means he's rude, unfriendly, harsh in speech, impatient, angry - that's the immoral person. Inhospitable.

Uttara: In terms of society, I don't know if you've said anything in your lectures about building a new society in terms of punishment, how would Buddhists go about dealing with crime?

S: Ah well, if it's a Buddhist society you start at the very beginning. You start with the children.

Uttara: Well, what about the already existing ...

S: Well, if you're going to start with a new society that means starting from scratch, then you start with the children, but I think if you wanted to restore order in a society that has fallen into disorder, you just have to start punishing people. I don't see any other way of doing it, you'd have to reverse the process. You shouldn't take it on under any other conditions. You couldn't do it any other way.

_____ : I was reading some book where they say that in Tibet the corrective measures were quite harsh on criminals.

S: Yes and no. It depends on what you mean by harsh. If you stole - I mean this is not recently, this is in the last century or up to the last century - if you stole you were a thief, what did they do? - they cut your hand off and let you go. Everybody would know then you were a thief, you weren't likely to do it

again. But we'd imprison someone, which is **harsh**. Is it more harsh to cut off somebody's hand and let him go free or is it more harsh to shut him up in prison? There was this case in the States recently of a man who wanted to be shot. He said he wanted to undergo the death penalty, he preferred that, he said, to a life sentence. So which is more harsh, the life sentence or the death penalty? Most people would say the death penalty, but that man didn't agree.

_____ : Have they shot him? *[Laughter]*

S: No, they're going to shoot him, apparently in January. But his lawyers appealed against the execution on his behalf without him wanting it, against his wishes. He wanted to accept his punishment, he wanted to die. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life in jail, so which is the harsher of the two penalties?

But anyway, to come back to the text, it's the general Mahayana attitude and maybe, though perhaps to a lesser extent, the general Buddhist attitude that unskilful actions based upon anger and hatred and malice are the worst of all. Certainly the Mahayana Buddhists say that these far outweigh unskilful actions based upon greed. [39]

Vimalamitra: : Does this go for thoughts, kind of violent thoughts?

S: It goes for thoughts, yes. *[Laughter]* I know that there are quite a few of our meek and mild and gentle friends who harbour all sorts of extraordinary thoughts. I'm quite well aware of this. I'm afraid thoughts do count. Let's go on.

Whatever evil I have done by not attending to my parents, by neglecting the Buddhas,
by neglecting the good;

S: There's a whole list of things you confess now. I think we'll just have to stop with the first one. This is quite significant. There's a group of three here. 'By not attending to my parents, by neglecting the Buddhas, by neglecting the good.' Now the first thing to be confessed were these cruel acts, it's quite clear that the Mahayana regards cruel acts as particularly heinous. But immediately after confessing cruel acts you confess the sin or the fault of not attending to your **parents**. You confess that **even** before confessing the fault of neglecting the Buddhas. Now if the sequence here has any meaning at all what does that suggest?

Vimalamitra: Charity or love begins at home.

S: That not attending to your parents is a quite serious matter. Now why should that be?

Aryamitra: Well, I think because a large chunk of yourself, your own conditioning, is in fact your parents, and if you can't love or get on with them you can't get on much with your own conditioned self.

S: Or with other people. In other words, if you are on bad terms with your parents, even your parents, you really are on bad terms and this is why I emphasise or I have emphasised recently quite a bit the importance of people to be at least on relatively good terms with their parents. I don't see how you can really make very much spiritual progress if you are on, as it were, actively bad terms with your parents, because your relationship with your parents goes so deep and affects so large a part of yourself, that if that isn't positive then there's a lot that isn't positive. This doesn't mean necessarily that you've got to have a close relationship with your parents or see eye to eye with them. This may not be possible, they may see things so differently from you that you may not even be able to communicate with them. But at least your attitude has got to be sort of clean and wholesome and one of good will to them regardless. If it isn't, then that's going to make things difficult for you.

Tim McNally: Might you not, though, have to sever the old links, ties, with your parents if you want to grow?

S: Oh yes indeed. You may well have to do that. But that doesn't mean having a negative attitude towards [40] your parents. Supposing that they're stifling you, supposing they're not allowing you to grow up - yes, you must leave, that's absolutely essential, and maybe at first, on account of your attachment, you cannot but leave in a reactive sort of way with **some** resentment maybe. But if you really want to develop, sooner or later you've got to get over that. And even if they never can understand what you've done and why you've done it **you've** got to have a positive attitude towards them, even if they don't have towards you. But so long as you've got a negative attitude towards your parents and feel your parents as very restricting and oppressive and so on and really hate their guts and don't want to go and see them, that's going to get in your way.

Tim McNally: Devotion seems to be hinted at.

S: In what way? Attending?

Tim McNally: Sort of respect for parents [*unclear*], developing devotion to the Buddhas.

S: There's that too because a lot of your emotion is bound up with your parents, and if you're not as it were emotionally positive with your parents the chances are that you won't be an emotionally positive person very much anyway. It's as though if you hate your parents, you're not very likely to love anybody, or be capable of much devotion. There's a saying of Gurdjieff which I've sometimes quoted, he's supposed to have said, 'A good man always loves his parents.'

_____ : There's the Jewish idea of loving your mother, your parent.

S: Well I'm not sure about the Jewish idea of loving your parents, but in the case of Buddhism you love your parent as an individual not just because you're their son or their daughter. It's not just this feeling of the warmth of the blood group. No. You're just objectively grateful to them for what they've done, for having brought you up and so on, sponsored your entry into the world. But you're not sort of clinging, and you don't depend upon the warmth of that cosy family group. I get the feeling - I may be doing them quite an injustice - but I get the impression from literature that I've read and even films I've seen that Jewish family life is a really stuffy claustrophobic affair, and I should imagine it was quite inimical to spiritual development, if there's any truth to that picture. Just like Hindu family life in some respects. It's very difficult to get away from, it's very difficult **not** to belong to the family.

Aryamitra: But on the other hand, because families are together and not this kind of nuclear family, they have a better chance of being able to get on with their parents.

S: There's that too.

But when Buddhism speaks in terms of a positive attitude towards one's parents it means something more like *metta* than love in the ordinary sense. [41] There's passage in - not to speak of Buddhism, even Hinduism too really at its best - there's a passage in the *Manusmṛiti* - the laws of Manu, the laws governing orthodox Hindu society, where it says that when a son reaches the age of sixteen the father should no longer treat him as a son, he should treat him as a friend. Because when you're sixteen, when you're grown up, you are another individual, you're independent. So in a way you start relating to your parents as an individual and your parents should accept you as such and relate to **you** in that sort of way. I think it's only then that you can have a really positive and actively positive mutual relationship between parents and children. When the children have **really** grown up and are **really** independent and the parents have also grown up enough to accept that, and relate to the children as individuals and not just as their children, and then there can be a **very** positive relationship because after all in the child's case you've known one another all your life so it can be very positive indeed.

Uttara: Going back to what you said to Aryamitra about the pull, that thing in you, I found that quite a good point, in terms of just getting drawn towards certain things. You may feel quite positive but you may meet somebody or someone who is really feeling quite negative, so that in a sense just draws out...

S: The negativity.

Uttara: The negativity in you, and you just feel that you've sunk into it, and it's the same in terms of birth. When we die we have to choose. Or whether or not we have any choice in the matter through those elements that exist in us we get dragged back into a situation.

Aryamitra: That's in a way why the so-called enemy is quite often your best friend because if it triggers off that in you, it gives you a chance to resolve it.

S: If you really work on it and try to resolve it and don't just give way to it. If someone comes along and invites you to a party, he gives the opportunity of resisting the temptation. He's brought out into the open your natural inclination to go running off to a party, so you find he's your friend really. But if you just succumb and go along with him to the party then he may be your enemy really.

Aryamitra: I was thinking more in emotional terms, where if you meet someone who's very angry and full of resentment and it triggers off **your** own anger and resentment you're having to work on that. If you want to develop *metta* you're having to work on that in yourself.

S: You have to be very careful that you just stop at the point of recognising that it is there and then working on it instead of not only recognising that it's there but **indulging** it. You have to stop it from going as far as that. Anyway, any more thoughts on parents? If you haven't got any parents then in a way it's a little bit difficult, but at least you can, as it were, feel positively within yourself to the parents [42]

you don't have and say, 'well whoever my parents are, wherever they are now, I wish them well'. Or if you haven't seen them for a long time.

Aryamitra: Very recently I just heard that my father was alive and I've never seen him at all and my first response or reaction was, first of all I cried but then afterwards I suddenly thought, at last I can love my father.

S: In a sense you've got a father to love, as it were.

Aryamitra: Yes.

Uttara: It's a complicated affair, the whole thing about birth and parents.

S: Complicated in what way? *[Laughter]*

Uttara: Well, it seems that it's just a complicated affair in terms of...

S: It shouldn't be but in the modern world it very often is. In India very often it isn't. More often than not it isn't at all complicated. Very straightforward.

_____ : Are you thinking more metaphysically?

Uttara: Yes.

Dave Living: What do you do with a worrying mother? *[Laughter]*

S: I think the first thing you probably have to think is she isn't a worrying mother, she's a worrying woman. She doesn't just worry about you, I'm sure. She probably worries about a lot of things, she's a worrying woman. Stop thinking about her as a worrying **mother**, just think, poor woman, she's a worrying sort of woman. What can we do about it?

Tim McNally: Mothers seem to be particularly concerned about their children's material well-being.

S: Well this is the **function** of mother, after all, isn't it? When you're small if mother doesn't worry about your material well-being you won't live, so this instinct is deeply built into them. It's like the instinct of the hen to spread its wings over its eggs, it's as simple as that, it's quite basic, it's biological, it has an obvious survival value for the species. So you mustn't be surprised if mother sort of fusses and clucks around you. *[Laughter]* It's her **nature**. Just as a hen will go on doing it even if she hasn't got any eggs, or the eggs have hatched long ago, so mothers will go on fussing and clucking long after you've grown up. You just have to realise this, that the poor woman is built this way. She can't help it. [43]

Vimalamitra: That explains the tea and cakes and apples and clothes and so on.

S: It's natural. It's not only natural, it's a good thing from the point of view of the species that it is, I know sometimes it gets a bit much. Well, you just have to understand the situation. Just as they give the poor clucking hen sometimes a few china eggs to sit on, just to keep her happy *[Laughter]*, in the same way you could give a substitute of yourself to mother - buy her a dog or a cat, something to look **after**. They seem to need this, some more than others, of course, and not be too much bothered by this. It's in a way what mothers are for. They're just built like that, they can't help it. But if there is the possibility of a mother also being a human being - because some mothers are human beings or can be human beings *[Laughter]* - if there's this possibility, well, try to **appeal** to that human element and try to convince mother that you're grown up, you are an **adult**, she doesn't have to fuss over whether you've eaten this or whether you've eaten that. You're quite able to look after all those things yourself, yes, and you're quite well aware of whether you're putting on weight or losing weight and she doesn't have to worry about you. If you can get this across to her you can then begin to relate to her as another human being and not just as mother. But if she hasn't got that potential - and some mothers haven't, I'm sorry to say - then you just have to put up with her clucking and not bother too much about them. Just go along with them and if you're going to see her let her stuff you with cakes. Or say, look, I'll take them and eat them at my leisure when I get back to Sukhavati, and then of course you can share them among your friends! But don't expect **too** much of mother. If it's as I say possible for her to develop into a real human being that's fine, but it isn't always possible, unfortunately. Even if she does develop relatively into a human being there's always the danger of retrogression. She may let out the odd cluck from time to time. *[Laughter]*

Tim McNally: They often show some misunderstanding when their children show any spiritual intentions.

S: Misunderstanding? In what way?

Vimalamitra: Someone's taken over their chick. *[Laughter]* Some weird bunch called the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. Bunch of weirdos.

S: Anyway, I think that most mothers who have been along here have been reassured about the home comforts and all that of their little chicks.

What about father? We've said something about mother. What about father? How and where does he come in? [44] Are fathers more difficult to handle than mothers? I think there are probably more possibilities with father, though on the other hand, sometimes in the case of young men there are often more difficulties with father than with mother. Mother's sometimes a bit of a nuisance but she isn't really a problem. But father sometimes **is** a bit of a problem, or at least one feels or felt when one was very young that he was a bit of a problem - a rather threatening figure sometimes.

Vimalamitra: It depends on whether the father's dominant or the mother's dominant.

S: I'm assuming perhaps that father is dominant but perhaps that **is** an assumption.

_____ : *[Laughing]* It probably is.

S: That's the way it was in my family.

Uttara: I think they are two equal... *[inaudible]*

S: They get at you in different ways!*[Laughter]*

Uttara: Both of them were a problem.

Tim McNally: I think in that case the father's particularly happy that their sons are progressing and maybe not getting in the same position that they themselves were landed in.

S: Yes, if father himself has felt, especially consciously felt, a bit restricted and a bit dissatisfied with his whole way of life, then he can very often be rather pleased that his son is not getting into the same kind of rut, that his son has somehow managed to find a way out of the impasse and he'll feel, if he doesn't say, at least not in front of mother, 'Well done, son - I'm glad you've made more of a success of things than I was able to do.' Not just in a worldly way but in human terms. Quite often that can happen. All right, let's leave it there for today.

[NEXT SESSION]

S: All right, we got as far as 'Whatever evil I have done by not attending to my parents, by neglecting the Buddhas, by neglecting the good.' We've got as far as that, haven't we? And we did have quite a bit to say about not attending to one's parents but we didn't say anything about neglecting the Buddhas. So what do you think is meant here by neglecting the Buddhas? [45] How can you neglect the Buddhas?

Vimalamitra: Well, if you're following the worldly life you'll find...*[unclear]*

S: More specifically than that?

Uttara: Is it more in terms of paying homage and reverence to them?

S: Yes, you're not worshipping the Buddhas or you're not recollecting the Buddhas, not meditating on the Buddhas, not listening to their teaching. This would all be neglecting the Buddhas. And what about neglecting the **good**?

Uttara: Forgetting the ideal and cultivation of this.

S: Neglecting to develop all the skilful mental states. Then it goes on:

...whatever evil I have done by being drunk with the intoxication of authority or with the intoxication of high birth or being drunk with the intoxication of tender age;

So what are these intoxications? Sometimes it's translated as 'infatuations'. It's quite important to understand the idea here. There are various lists of these intoxications. This is one. Sometimes the

intoxication of health is mentioned. But what do you think is meant here by this intoxication or infatuation?

Uttara: Pride.

S: It's a sort of pride, a sort of inflation. Let's just take one that is mentioned here. Let's take the last one because this is more obvious - that you're drunk with the intoxication of tender age. Tender age isn't a very good translation. It's 'youthfulness'. When you're young, when you're in the full enjoyment of your youth, in the full bloom of youth, as it were, you can be a bit carried away by that; that you're young and you're carefree and you're healthy and all the rest of it. How will that show itself? You'll be a bit sort of over-confident, a bit inflated. You'll tend to look down on and dismiss those who aren't as you are. You'll be a bit impatient with those who are a bit elderly or are not as quick as you are, not as young as you are, not as strong as you are. So your mind will be sort of intoxicated by the fact that you're young and strong and vigorous and all the rest of it. And that may lead you into all sorts of wild and reckless actions. 'Oh, I can get away with it. I'm young. I can stay out drinking all night. I can stand it. I'm young, my head can take it.' Perhaps it can, perhaps it can't. But this is the sort of way you feel. You're intoxicated with the pride of youth. Do you get the idea? So there are many intoxications of this sort [46] or rather there are various lists. There's the intoxication of authority. You can get intoxicated, inflated by power, you can be drunk with power, as we say. Then you can be carried away by the exercise of your own authority, your own power, your own influence. You can become over-confident. This is the great danger. This is the great weakness of all these intoxications and infatuations, that you become over-confident. Do you see the point? If your intoxication is the intoxication of youth you think because you're young you can get away with it, you can do it. In the same way if you're intoxicated with authority you think you're strong enough, you're powerful enough, you can get away with it. So intoxication leads to over-confidence, and what do you think this over-confidence leads to?

_____ : Overstretching yourself.

S: Overstretching yourself - making mistakes, and what does that lead to? That leads to a downfall, a disaster of one kind or another. What's the other intoxication mentioned here? The intoxication of high birth, the intoxication of class. 'I went to a public school, I went to a university, my family's very distinguished etc. etc.' We don't get quite as much of that nowadays as we used to get. We used to get quite a lot of it in this country. We still do get more than enough. But these are just examples. You can be intoxicated, infatuated and inflated and carried away by these things. Not only, say, youth but health and strength and riches. You can be intoxicated with riches, like the frog in the fable I've mentioned before - a frog apparently in a field found a half penny so he was really overjoyed at finding this half penny so he hid it in his hole and became really sort of proud. He was puffing and swelling with importance because it was now the proud owner of a half penny - all this wealth. So as it was sort of puffing and swelling outside its hole an elephant happened to come by and the frog called out to the elephant 'Don't you go stepping over my hole, don't you know who I am? I'm the owner of a half penny.' [Laughter] But the elephant didn't even hear the frog. It just went on its way, stepped over the frog's hole and the frog was so annoyed he hopped along behind the elephant and tried to kick him. [Laughter] So if your mind is intoxicated, infatuated, this is how ridiculous and reckless you can become. How you can lose your sense of proportion and everything. So all these intoxications have this sort of effect. If we reflect, quite a lot of the foolish things that we do, quite a lot of the unskilful things that we do, are done out of this sort of intoxication or infatuation. Just like when you're drunk you don't know what you're doing - you can do anything - anything stupid, foolish, ridiculous, crazy, anything at all that normally you just wouldn't do, wouldn't **think** of doing. When you're drunk you can do anything. So it's just the same when you're drunk, as it were, intoxicated, infatuated, either with youth, [47] your health and strength or else with your riches or your social position or your power or influence. In the same way you behave recklessly and foolishly, and quite a lot of our faults and mistakes are committed in this sort of way, not out of deliberate wickedness but because we get so carried away with ourselves, so inflated, and we start making all sorts of mistakes for which, in most cases, we have to pay sooner or later.

So this is what is being talked about here and this is what is being confessed here. 'Whatever evil I have done by being drunk with the intoxication of authority or with the intoxication of high birth or of being drunk with the intoxication of tender age.' Tender age in the sense of youth or youthfulness. And then:

whatever evil I have done, bad thought, bad word, by an act badly done (or) by not perceiving a mishap;

So what's being confessed here? It's all the evil of body speech and mind. This is a well-known classification. I'm not sure what is meant by not perceiving a mishap. Presumably by not perceiving the disastrous consequences that will come from these things.

...whatever evil I have done by the application of foolish reasoning...

You could say rationalisation.

... by a mind dark with ignorance, under the influence of an evil friend or by a mind distracted by impurities,

A mind dark with ignorance - that's very clear. Under the influence of an evil friend. Well what is an evil friend? It's described in the *Sigalovada Sutta* you might remember. An evil friend is the one who says, 'Come on let's go and hear the singing, come on let's go and join in the dancing, come on let's go and hear the tom-toms, come on let's go and see the (nat?) girls.' According to the *Sigalovada Sutta* that's the evil friend. In modern parlance it would be someone says, 'Come on there's a really blue film on, let's go and see that.' That's the evil friend. [Laughter] The opposite is a good friend needless to say. 'Or by a mind distracted by impurities.' What do you think is meant by **distracted** by impurities?

Uttara: Say enjoying themselves. What we tend to think as enjoyment - you go off at a tangent afterwards.

S: It does seem from this whole passage so far that very few people commit faults or commit evil out of deliberate wickedness; it's more like foolishness, forgetfulness, unmindfulness. This is why I think it's Dr Radhakrishnan says in his lecture on Gautama the Buddha - he says something like this, that the Buddha thought of people as foolish rather than wicked, as ignorant rather than as rebellious. Christianity tends to think of man as wicked and rebellious. Buddhism tends to think of him rather as foolish and ignorant. I think very few people deliberately do wrong. So here it's a question of 'under the influence of an evil friend or by a mind distracted by impurities.'

..under the compulsion of sport (or) enjoyment, or through the influence of anxiety, (or) anger (or) through the fault of unsatisfied [48] wealth;

So 'under the compulsion of sport or enjoyment'. What do you think this covers, this sort of thing?

Uttara: You may want to do something.

S: Sport is more like play - playing around, playing about - you sometimes forget yourself a bit or sometimes you're enjoying yourself so much - you're in such a hilarious state you start doing something really foolish or even really reckless. You get a bit carried away. I remember seeing a very glaring example of this on a retreat, one of the last retreats I took at Keffolds. You know how retreats go or they used to go in the old days. Either people are so mindful they get stiff and self-conscious or they're so spontaneous that they run a bit wild. You have to keep trying to bring them back to the middle way. So at one stage some of them had lost their mindfulness to such an extent - I'm sorry to say it was the women and [drowned by laughter] spontaneity and they were racing, four or five of them, racing up and down the corridor backwards and forwards shrieking aloud. [Laughter] I don't think they do that sort of thing on retreat now. [Laughter] Certainly not on the women's retreats - at least I've never heard. But this is the sort of thing that is meant. That sometimes you are enjoying yourself so much you lose your mindfulness, and this is one of the great problems, as it were; how to keep the enjoyment and the state of positivity and feeling high but at the same time to remain mindful, and on the other hand not to be so mindful that you completely stultify yourself - so mindful that you feel as though you are walking around in a heavy suit of armour and can't move freely - that's the other extreme - but to get into this middle path or middle way of being really mindful and aware, of knowing exactly what you are doing but at the same time being very free and spontaneous and happy and joyful. This is the real art of the spiritual life - to get into **this** state. Very few people are able to get into it for very long. Either you're over-mindful and inhibit your spontaneity or you're over-spontaneous and lose your mindfulness. Usually it's very difficult to keep that middle way.

Uttara: Recently in the summer we went swimming down in Brighton with the Brighton Centre, and we were swimming - it was a day like that where people were feeling high and having a good time but then suddenly someone hurt themselves in the water and [snaps his fingers] it cleared and everybody was...

S: Became sober.

Tim McNally: Generally, though, people are too sober...

S: Generally. [Laughter] [49]

Tim McNally: I wonder where you draw the line between, say, intoxication or like awareness, youth, vigour, health and, for want of a better word, sobriety.

S: You draw the line where you start losing your mindfulness. You can be as joyful as you like provided you don't lose your mindfulness. Once you start losing your mindfulness as a result of the joyfulness then you've overstepped the mark. Or on the other side as soon as you start becoming stiff and self-conscious you're too mindful. That's a contradictory expression - it's not **real** mindfulness. It's alienated because the integrated awareness has become an alienated awareness. I think probably most people, as they start really trying to develop, have to become over-mindful because they start off by being usually completely **unmindful**, so it's as though they've got to go to that extreme for a while and learn to be mindful, but after a while they've got to not exactly forget about the mindfulness but let themselves go a bit and loosen up a bit and just be more happy and joyful and spontaneous; but then again if they're not careful they'll go to extremes, so again they have to try and introduce more mindfulness and awareness. So one just has to see to which of the two extremes one is going currently and correct it by going maybe a little bit in the other direction. If you've become too mindful then loosening up a bit. If you've become too reckless and boisterous then becoming more mindful again, but the aim is to come into that middle position where you've got lots of spontaneous happy energy but you are mindful at the same time; you don't lose your mindfulness.

Uttara: I remember in a recent lecture we were listening to of past seminars and you were talking of the way you would fall into a group consciousness and with individual consciousness that wouldn't happen. You'd very much be over-active in some way and you would lose your mindfulness. So the mindfulness is the key factor for individuality.

S: Yes. Of course spontaneity is also a key factor for individuality but then you can have the sort of 'animal' spontaneity. It's not **that** that you want. You can turn the animal spontaneity into a more truly human and even spiritual spontaneity only with the help of mindfulness. You start off by being more or less completely unmindful, don't you? You just become more mindful by degrees but there's a certain amount of animal energy in spontaneity which is there all the time which just has to be refined and made more aware. I think in the early days of the Friends we found that people tended to go much more to the extreme of over-mindfulness and to be too good - sometimes too good to be true [*Laughter*], and some people had to loosen up quite a bit to get back into the middle path, and a lot of people of course, especially among the men, as a result of their over-mindfulness inhibited some of their, for want of a better term, negative emotions which just got 'dammed up' and the result [50] was that they just became rather stiff and lifeless. I remember an experience that I had down at Aryatara which must have been six or seven years ago. It was when Aryadeva was there, which is a very long time ago, I forget what the occasion was. There was some kind of celebration or meeting or function and I went down there and everything seemed to be quite dead - all the people seemed quite dead, especially the Aryatara people.

Vimalamitra: That was in the days of the sesshins, was it?

S: Maybe. It wasn't that sort of function, but they were having them there sometimes. But everybody was really dead and stiff and joyless. So Kevin Brooks went down with me - that was in his early days, he hadn't been coming along for very long, but anyway he went down with me and so I was sort of looking around seeing what needed to be done, so I saw that some tomato plants needed small bamboos planted by the side of each one so that they could be tied to them and could grow properly, so I said to Aryadeva and Kevin, would you mind just getting those bamboos over there and stick them into the ground, by these tomato plants - the bamboos were all about so long - so they said, yes, all right - a bit dully - so I came back about ten minutes later and what do you think I found? There were Kevin and Aryadeva fighting with two bamboos like sort of swordplay and they were so happy and so joyful [*Laughter*], and at the same time they were really getting out their aggressiveness and their anger - you could see this quite clearly. Though they were enjoying it, these emotions were coming out quite strongly and I thought to myself, 'Good heavens I've never seen Aryadeva looking so happy [*Laughter*] - not in **months!**' [*Laughter*] and as for Kevin he had completely changed [*Laughter*]. So I thought, why is this? I started really reflecting upon this and I came to the conclusion that they'd been over-mindful and had not allowed certain other sides of themselves out and that they needed to do this. So after that I started encouraging people to take up karate. This is why I started this at that time. This was about six or seven years ago easily - maybe a bit more. I started thinking that it would be a good thing, for some at least of the Friends to take up karate. That was the sort of rationale of it, but you see the point, and how easy it is to fall into either of these two extremes. So clearly there are some people who need to check their spontaneity, their animal exuberance and high spirits and practise more mindfulness, and others who need to get their energies flowing much more and express themselves more freely, and if anything forget about mindfulness, relatively speaking, for a little while. Let themselves go a bit, unbutton themselves a bit, let their hair down etc., those that have any. [*Laughter*] It's so difficult to keep to this middle path. You always seem to topple over - one extreme or the other. [51]

Vimalamitra: There must be a definite type of experience which you can recognise as being reckless.

S: Oh yes, surely. It's not just as it were those two things going on side by side at the same time, no. They're really blended. The nearest analogy I can get is when you're deeply into some kind of creative activity. Supposing you're painting and your energy is really going into that, very freely, sort of flowing into it. At the same time you're really aware and you know just what you're doing but you're not stiff. It's all flowing very freely. It's more like that but raised to a much higher level, much higher, a much higher pitch of intensity. Sometimes it happens in an emergency - have you noticed this? When you've got to do something quickly you really do it - all your energy is mobilised but you're very aware, alert, and you know exactly what you're doing. Sometimes in a situation of great danger or maybe just an emergency. You act very quickly, very spontaneously, very effectively, with full awareness of the total situation.

Vimalamitra: It's almost as if you've **got** to push yourself then. Normally you don't.

S: No, and we're cushioned against things like that. Anyway let's go on.

(Or) through the fault of unsatisfied wealth;

What do you think that means?

Vimalamitra: What you will actually do while you make money.

S: Presumably.

... whatever evil I have done by my association with ignoble people, by reason of envy (and) greed, (or) by the fault of guile (or) wretchedness;

Anything that needs explanation there? It's easy to understand why you're likely to do evil by association with ignoble people or by reasons of envy or greed or guile or wretchedness.

..whatever evil I have done through failure to gain the mastery over my desires by reason of fear at the time of approaching troubles;

What's the connection there, do you think? *[Pause]* Well, sometimes you're sort of unmanned, as the old-fashioned expression has it, through fear at the thought of approaching troubles and you just lose control over yourself, including even control over your own desires. You find something like this in wartime, don't you? People are living under conditions of danger. They become a bit reckless. It seems as though life isn't so valuable as it used to be. As though standards don't have to be kept up, including moral standards. Do you know what I mean? You saw this during the war. I don't know if any of you are old enough to remember that. I remember this. Sort of 'What does it matter, you might die tomorrow. Do what you like today', sort of thing. I think it's referring to that sort of thing. [52]

Uttara: Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow...

S: Tomorrow you'll be killed. *[Laughter]*

Vimalamitra: You see a lot of that in films. You see a lot of heroes. Tomorrow there's going to be a big confrontation, a big battle, and they get off with the women and are boozing. I seem to remember a lot of that happening.

S: Ah. *[Pause]* According to some authorities this has a biological significance, that in time of war all the usual restraints are down, especially the moral restraints, because a lot of people are getting killed. So what is nature interested in doing? In replacing them as quickly as possible.

Vimalamitra: Kind of like a connection between death and reproduction.

S: Yes, right. So, true, lots of men are killed but then you get a bigger crop of babies.

Aryamitra: It says out of fear here but I'd thought they'd do it more out of fearlessness. In some ways if you know that you're going to die there's no more fear there.

S: I wouldn't have thought that. You know that you're going to die in a sense, but in another sense you're refusing to face up to it and you're sort of grabbing at life and grabbing at pleasure almost impulsively right up to the last minute to screen that fact from yourself.

Aryamitra: It's an escape. It used to happen more maybe with the soldiers from other countries.

S: It's quite a good thing maybe to ask oneself; supposing you knew or supposing you were told by your doctor that you had an incurable disease and you had three months to live, what would you do? How would you spend it? Would you go on the booze? Would you go away on solitary retreat? Would you read all those books that you'd never been able to but always wanted to? Or would you just carry on as usual? What would you do? What would you feel like doing? What would be the first thought that came into your mind? The first thing to do once you'd got over the initial shock, of course.

Aryamitra: I used to do this in my meditation practice. I used to ask what would be my regrets? What would I regret most? And I'd imagine myself just about to die and here I go - right - what I regret not doing and it's usually a kind of expression, something I wish I'd expressed. [53]

S: It is said somewhere by somebody 'so live so at the time of death and you shall have no regrets' that you have done this or have not done this. So anyway you're confessing all these things.

Whatever evil I have done through the influence of a flighty mind or through the influence of passion (and) anger (or) through being oppressed by hunger and thirst;

So once again it's not deliberate wickedness. It's not out of deliberate wickedness that you've done evil. 'Whatever evil I have done through the influence of a flighty mind'. What do you think is meant by this 'flighty mind'?

Aryamitra: Dispersed and distracted.

S: Dispersed, distracted, scattered. 'Or through the influence of passion' - this is pretty obvious. There's 'anger or through being oppressed by hunger and thirst' - when you have to steal because you're hungry and thirsty.

Aryamitra: But then would that be something that needed to be confessed?

S: Well, yes, if you're going to make a thorough and complete confession, I suppose, yes.

Aryamitra: Wouldn't that be conventional morality, though?

S: I don't know. There would be alternatives, perhaps. Perhaps you ought to have gone and done some work or begged.

...whatever evil I have done for the sake of drink and food,

This might be by way of wrong livelihood.

...for the sake of clothing, for a reason involving women, through the various afflictions of impurities;

So all this you're confessing. I think this is all very obvious. It doesn't need much of an explanation, does it? You can fill in the details for yourselves - each one in his own way.

Whatever evil of body, tongue and mind, bad action accumulated in threefold manner, I have done, together with similar things, I confess it all. Whatever disrespect I may have shown to Buddhas, doctrines, likewise to Sravakas, I confess it all. Whatever disrespect I may have shown towards Pratyekabuddhas or towards Bodhisattvas, I confess it all.

In a way Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Sangha being the *sravakas*, and the *pratyekabuddhas* and Bodhisattvas are mentioned later. How would you show disrespect to Buddhas?

Uttara : Not practising the teaching.

S: Yes, apart from being actually disrespectful in their presence if they were actually alive at your time. What about disrespect to the doctrine?

_____ : It's not listening.

S: It's not listening to them, not considering them properly and carefully. And what about disrespect to *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, Bodhisattvas? Well, if you were a householder, not saluting them

properly. Not providing them with food and clothing or addressing them contemptuously or telling them to [54] pass on and not filling their begging bowl, something like that.

If I have shown disrespect towards those who preach the Good Law or towards other meritorious beings, I confess it all. If I have unawares continually rejected the Good Law (or shown) disrespect towards my parents, I confess it all.

So you come back to parents at the end. 'If I have unawares *continually* rejected the Good Law' the Good Law the Saddharma. How could you unawares continually reject it?

_____ : You might be ignorant to it.

S: It's almost like culpable ignorance. You've got the opportunity of hearing it and knowing about it but you deliberately neglect that. You deliberately don't cultivate that. So in a way you are, unawares, continually rejecting it. Then disrespect towards parents. I think that's pretty obvious isn't it?

(Whatever evil I have done) through stupidity or from folly or through being full of pride and arrogance, through passion, hatred or delusion, -

that is *lobha, klesa, moha*, -

I confess it all.

These are the three roots of all unskilful thoughts, words and deeds.

What's the general impression you get from this confession? Do you think it's pretty comprehensive? Do you think it's balanced?

Dave Living: It doesn't actually go into any concrete examples.

S: It doesn't actually. That's quite a feature of it. Do you think that's deliberate or what?

Aryamitra: I think so, because you know your own faults, if you like.

S: Also perhaps it's more concerned with the laying down of general principles and it realises that actions can be evaluated differently according to circumstances.

Vimalamitra: It seems to come down to a certain level which you **can** translate into your own circumstances..

S: Yes, right. It's not just abstract general principles. It's pretty near to experience. Near enough, as you say, for you to be able to translate into what you have actually done quite easily under all these different headings.

Uttara: In the Christian sense of confession and things like this -they wouldn't have things like having disrespect for the Buddhas and things like that - well, in their terms it would be God. Do they have....

_____ : Ten Commandments. [55]

Aryamitra: Taking God's name in vain.

S: Yes.

Vimalamitra: But there always seems to be something missing. *[Pause]*

S: Also, I've mentioned more than once you get the impression that most of the evil we do isn't out of deliberate wickedness. It's rather ignorance or through a mistake or when you're under the influence of some kind of unskilful mental state. It's not that you deliberately set out to **be** wicked or to **do** evil. That isn't the case at all.

Uttara: It merely starts off as that...

S: Carelessness.

Uttara: ...carelessness, but it does lead to a deliberate action. People have gone past the point of...

S: Past the point of no return, in the negative sense.

Aryamitra: Could that be deliberate evil? Is there such a thing as deliberate wickedness?

S: I think there is. I have come to this conclusion. I think it's comparatively rare but I think there are people who deliberately do what is evil knowing that it is evil. Generally, it seems, on account of malice.

Uttara: ...bombing. People know that by setting a bomb in a train carriage it's going to have an effect and then they put it in certain places where they want it to have that.

S: But then they might say that they're not doing evil. They might say that they're fighting for the right cause, they're fighting for justice and so on. If people have to be killed in the course of that, too bad, they regret it but it can't be helped. They wouldn't say that they were doing evil. They wouldn't admit that they were doing evil, but I have met people, known people, who have said yes, it is wrong and I know it but I'm going to do it. That's what I want to do.

_____ : You can hardly believe it sometimes.

S: That's why I say it's very rare. It's almost as though they're possessed [56] by some demon.

Graham Steven: One thing where a lot of the general public do do that is when you bring up the topic of eating meat. A lot of them would never take the life of the animal even though you're pointing out to them that that's what needs to be done before they eat it. They still go out and buy it even though you paint this true picture of what happens in the slaughterhouse.

Vimalamitra: I think unless he actually does picture it realistically, unless you're sensitive enough to that, or even see a slaughterhouse for yourself, then it takes quite a time for you to come off meat especially if you're used to it, mentally I think it takes quite a while.

S: From what you are saying, then, people are sort of lacking in imagination. If you say, they can't really quite connect this innocent piece of meat that's on their plate with all these sort of horrible pictures you are painting of slaughtered animals.

Vimalamitra: Well, it's also the kind of TV violence, you know...

Aryamitra: Can we come back to people who deliberately do it? Well, surely they have some kind of reason there, don't they, wouldn't they have some kind of ...

S: It does seem to me when I've been in contact with these people that were just completely possessed by the particular negative emotion that was causing them to act in this way - either hatred or jealousy or the desire for revenge of something like that - they were so sort of possessed by it and taken over by it that they didn't really care whether they did evil or not or whether what they wanted to do was evil or not.

Aryamitra: On the other hand is it, you said we all have that in us, we all have the possibility...

S: In a very abstract sense...

Aryamitra: ...we all have the potential of Buddhahood. Do we have the potential of the worst kind of evil as well?

S: It's very difficult to say or to know what any given person may do or not do under certain conditions, but my feeling is that there's quite a lot of people who wouldn't do certain things under any circumstances but others might.

That sounds like the tea bell, we'll just pause until we've had [57] tea because we've come to a new section now.

[Tea Break]

S: We've come from the confession now, I think, to a section of worship.

Tim McNally: Before we close that do you think we could go into the idea of confession?

S: But I have said mainly what I have to say in the lecture. But is there any point arising out of that, anything that isn't completely clear?

Graham Steven: How would you really confess it, just to yourself or...?

S: I frankly don't think this is enough in the case of most people. I answered this in a way in the lecture, that the text says you confess in front of the Buddhas so that suggests that the Buddhas are actually present, so if you have a very vivid sense that a Buddha or Bodhisattva is actually present then by all means make your confession in that way, but I think most people won't have a sufficiently vivid sense of the Buddhas' actual presence so that means making your confession to some other person or persons. In the case of Order members that would mean making your confession at the next Order meeting, and just being quite frank about it - well, look, I did this or I did that, I made such and such terrible mistake. But in the case of Mitras and Friends generally, you could confess to your *kalyana mitras* if you had them or just get one or more Order members together and say, look, I'd just like to get something off my chest which has been bothering me. But I think in practically all cases you'd need to confess to other human beings and you've got to have the conviction that they will take it as a confession, and take it with genuine seriousness, not just some rather interesting little bit of your murky previous career that you have just told them in a chatty way, maybe half boastfully even. Not that but take it in a quite different way and accept that you really do feel genuinely bad about it and you just want to get rid of it, and not do it again, and to help you in that way, to help you cleanse yourself and to confirm your resolution not to do it again, you are just confessing.

Phil Shrivell: Shall we make this an actual practice?

S: In what way an actual practice?

Phil Shrivell: Otherwise I don't really sort of feel....

S: Regular?

Phil Shrivell: Yes, so we're particularly disposed towards it and feel much emotion.

S: If one hasn't got anything on one's conscience, fair enough, all the better. Some people are more sensitive or more scrupulous than others. Some would feel quite bad, feel a need to confess even if they told a small fib, but somebody else might not bother very much.

Aryamitra: Maybe - I don't know if this is what you're saying, Phil - maybe something [58] I've been thinking lately is maybe just to make it formal because sometimes it's difficult to approach other Order members and actually say that this is what you want to do. It can be quite a challenge to do that.

S: But that's good because that means when you get round to it or down to it you really are confessing. It shouldn't become a sort of **formality**. This is what happened in the Buddhist world. This is what happened even in the monastic order. It's more or less a formality now and that isn't a good thing. To be able to do it in a formal manner isn't quite the same as it becoming a formality but there is a sort of connection.

Uttara: If you're not doing it properly, if you're not spewing it up, then it becomes an indulgence in many ways. If it was a formality you would maybe just indulge in the act of confession rather than really confessing.

S: One thing I have suggested which has been acted on by some people, which is half way between confessing to the Buddha and confessing to others - you write it down on a piece of paper and then ceremonially burn it in the context of a puja. You need not even show the paper to anybody but the fact that you've written it down means you've externalised it, you've spoken it out. After all someone might get hold of that bit of paper, who knows? You've taken that risk of letting it out. So that is also quite a good way of doing it. I think at the end of one Order retreat all the Order members did that, didn't they? They all wrote down whatever it was they wanted to confess, those who had anything to confess, and they folded the paper over and over and then all these little bits of paper went up in smoke, didn't they, and they were burned.

Uttara: At the bonfire the air was really black! [*Laughter*] It was something I just didn't want to take part in because it was such a morbid atmosphere and then they'd burned it and - [*snap of fingers*] - it was gone.

S: So that is certainly one way. You could have it at the end of every year. It's quite a good thing, perhaps. Not as a formality but really meaning it, write down in black and white, as they say, all the, not even wicked, you probably haven't even committed a crime, you haven't got the guts - most people [*Laughter*]. All the sort of foolish, mean, silly things that you did or were betrayed into doing or happened to do without thinking.

Aryamitra: Some of us need sheets and sheets of paper.

S: Well, never mind, Write them all down and then burn them and say may I never do these things again in the coming year. May I keep free from all these things. And you'll feel a lot lighter, I'm sure. [59]

Uttara: It would be nice to maybe do that here at New Year. Have a puja and then...

S: Yes, on New Year's Eve.

Uttara: On New Year's Eve have a puja and maybe that can take place.

S: You could burn them all in the courtyard. You'd have to be very careful to keep the fire under control [Laughter]. I don't mean stacks and stacks of papers written on - I don't mean that. We just have to be careful, we don't want the fire brigade rushing up the street as soon as they see a wisp of smoke. But it's a good thing.

Vimalamitra: Does that mean, though, that you could write out your confession and if you actually felt in that way that they were now open to the world that would constitute a confession?

S: I think it would work like that without actually speaking it to others, I think it would, yes. I certainly did hear after that burning of written confessions that at least some people - those who spoke to me about it - felt a lot better. Would you say that?

Uttara: Yes, it had a good result. I was the only one who was really against it. Some people I thought were putting it on a bit that they were clear from that thing, whereas I thought I could see that there was still there certain attitudes which they had probably confessed.

S: Probably. You didn't really know. [Laughter] I think it's good to stick to facts and confess very concrete things and not confess anything too rarefied or unreal.

_____ : Confess things you've actually done?

S: Yes, really small mean sordid things like when you skip your turn at washing up or something like that. There's no need to confess things like you haven't recollected Nirvana every day for the last month. [Laughter] I think that can be taken for granted, but actual unskilful actions of omission or commission. Write them down. The whole value of the practice of confession is that you bring up something, you objectify it and to that extent you get rid of it at least for the time being. So you feel sort of cleansed and lighter than you were before. If you do it really sincerely. This is an aspect of what we were talking about this morning in the other study group. Disillusionment with oneself, when you see right through yourself. When you see that you are not the nice sort of chap that you thought you were. You've got all sorts of mean rather nasty sorts of little streaks in you. Then you just see that very clearly and then of course confess it, own up to it, bring it out into the open. All the little sorts of acts that are the expressions of those various mean, nasty, [60] unpleasant streaks in your character.

Aryamitra: So would this be like in Jungian terms recognising the shadow side?

S: I think it's much more than recognising, you have to sort of feel thoroughly ashamed of it and really want to get rid of it. I think Jung lets you off much too lightly in recognising your shadow side. It's not a shadow - it's a dark smelly stain! [Laughter]

Anyway, let's go on to worship. Would somebody like to read

I will worship the Buddhas in the ten directions in the world. I will deliver the beings in the ten directions from all woe. I will establish in the tenth stage all the inconceivably many beings. And when I have placed them all in the tenth stage, may they become Tathagatas. May I follow my career for millions of aeons for the sake of every single being until I am able to deliver every one from the ocean of woe. May I expound to those beings this profound Confession. The excellent Suvarnabhasa by name causes the destruction of all acts. By proclaiming it once, all the cruel evil one has done in thousands of aeons proceeds to destruction. I will expound this Confession, the splendid, excellent Suvarnabhasa, by which is quickly obtained the destruction of acts (and) hindrances. I will place in the tenth stage choice mines of the ten jewels. I will make shine the Buddha-qualities. I will cross over from the ocean of existence. And I will fill the flood of the Buddha-sea, the deep ocean of virtues, omniscience, with inconceivable Buddha-qualities. May I become an excellent Buddha with hundreds of thousands of

meditations, with inconceivable magic formulas, with the senses, with the (ten) powers (and) the (seven) members of enlightenment.

S: So what is this paragraph? What does it represent?

Uttara: In terms of vows?

S: Yes. It really represents the Bodhisattva Vow, doesn't it? So first of all 'I will worship the Buddhas in the ten directions in the world.' This is supposed to be one of the chief duties of the Bodhisattva - to worship the Buddhas - and then 'I will deliver the beings in the ten directions from all woe.' In a way this is the essence of the Bodhisattva Vow. 'I will establish in the tenth stage all the inconceivably many beings.' What is this tenth stage?

_____ : Tenth bhumi.

S: It's the tenth bhumi, the tenth stage or bhumi of the Bodhisattva's career in which the Bodhisattva attains full enlightenment. So to say that 'I will establish in the tenth stage all the inconceivably many beings' means that one will lead them in [61] the direction of complete enlightenment. 'And when I have placed them in the tenth stage, may they become Tathagatas.' There's an expression here which could be misunderstood. What is that, can you see?

Uttara: 'And when I have placed them in the tenth stage.'

S: Yes, so how could that be misunderstood?

Uttara: In terms of a Bodhisattva is supposed to... if he believes in any beings at all then he's...

S: No, I wasn't thinking of that but something as it were more practical and straightforward.

Vimalamitra: He can't place you.

S: He can't place you, really. It's like you're just like a sack of potatoes. You'll be lifted up and placed in the tenth bhumi by the Bodhisattva. So can that actually happen? No. So what do you think it means? Why is it put in this way?

Vimalamitra: It's through your influence or through your guidance...

S: Yes, it's through your influence or your guidance, but why do you think it is put in **this** way? Why doesn't the text say through my influence or through my guidance? Why does it say 'I will place beings in the tenth bhumi' when literally that is quite impossible?

Uttara: Is it through certain skilful actions...?

S: It does say 'I will place' as though the beings are purely passive and you, the Bodhisattva, are totally active in the situation, that you do it for them. You **put** them there. So why is it put in this way? Why is it expressed in this way? It seems quite unbuddhistic.

Graham Steven: Could it be to do with *metta*?

S: No.

Vimalamitra: Does it indicate the kind of determination of the Bodhisattva?

S: Yes, it's much more like that. The emphasis is entirely on what you as Bodhisattva should do. So if anything it's all exaggerated. Everything is being looked at from the standpoint of you as Bodhisattva, not of you as the object of the [62] Bodhisattva's solicitude. So all the emphasis is on what the Bodhisattva **does**, the Bodhisattva's energy and heroism and skilful means. So this is why it is put in this sort of extreme way. That you must as it were be **willing** to do everything for everybody, have the heart to do it, though actually you can't literally take any one and put them in the tenth stage. You can't even put them in the first stage, not to speak of the tenth. You can't even take them out of the samsara if they don't want to be taken out of it. Even the **Buddha** can't do that. You can't drag beings out of the samsara by their hair. Even if the weakest and most miserable human being wants to stay where he is not all the Buddhas in the universe could do anything about it.

Graham Steven: It's quite a change from the Christian point of view, isn't it?

S: Is it? I've rather forgotten what the Christian point of view is. I suppose it is. Because to have any meaning, any sort of spiritual act, any sort of spiritual development must be done by you of your own free will. You can't be **coerced** into doing it. It can't be done **for** you by anybody. You, miserable wretched human being though you are, you can defy all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the universe. Say 'No, I'm not going to be good, not going to follow the Eightfold Path, I don't want to, so there!' And they can't do anything about it. They can only persuade you and convince you, they can't **make** you. They can't just lift you up and say we don't care, you're going to gain enlightenment whether you like it or not. They can't do that, they can't say that, they don't attempt to.

Graham Steven: What about the story of the Buddha and Nanda?

S: Skilful means. *[Laughter]* He didn't forcibly... you can forcibly make someone a monk but you can't forcibly make him gain Nirvana. That's what the Buddha did, he forcibly made him a monk but he didn't gain Nirvana until he himself started thinking and feeling and experiencing something. The Buddha certainly helped but he didn't do it all for him.

Vimalamitra: Sounds like a bit of a gamble.

S: Maybe it was, but it paid off, didn't it? It did work in that case. So fair enough. So the Buddha took him away from his wife, so what was the worst that could happen? Well, he'd go back to her, so the situation wouldn't have been any worse than it was to begin with even if the Buddha did fail, but anyway he didn't fail.

So one must remember in many of these Mahayana scriptures that the emphasis is very one-sided, it's exhorting the Bodhisattva to do this and to do that. It rather loses sight of the other side of the question. I will rescue all these beings, I will take them to enlightenment. That should be your attitude but literally you can't do it. You can only advise, you can only help, you can only guide. [63] You can't pick them up by the scruff of their necks and take them there even though you are a Bodhisattva. Even the wicked have their rights. That's a very comforting thought to some people, that even the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can't make you gain enlightenment if you don't want to. You have the last word here.

'And when I have placed them in the tenth stage may they become Buddhas.' Well, the same thing applies there. 'May I follow my career for millions of aeons for the sake of every single being until I am able to deliver every one from the ocean of woe.' What is this career? The word that is translated is *carya* which means course or faring or even life. It's the Bodhisattva course, the Bodhisattva life, and according to tradition it's a life that continues life after life even, as the text here says, for millions of aeons. In other words the Bodhisattva becomes a sort of impersonal cosmic force which operates from age to age. 'May I expound to those beings this profound Confession, the excellent Suvarnabhasa by name causes the destruction of all acts.'

What do you think is meant by the destruction of all acts? What is the destruction of all acts? When are all acts destroyed?

Vimalamitra: When karma is transcended.

S: When karma is transcended, which means when one gains enlightenment. So 'By proclaiming it once, all the cruel evil one has done in thousands of aeons proceeds to destruction.' You notice this expression, 'the cruel evil'; that's the worst kind of evil as we saw yesterday. 'Proclaiming it once', that is by proclaiming the Suvarnabhasa, proclaiming this Confession 'all the cruel evil one has done in thousands of aeons proceeds to destruction.' So 'I will expound this Confession, the splendid, excellent Suvarnabhasa.' Sometimes the text is called *Suvarnabhasa*, sometimes *Suvarnaprabhasa*, sometimes *Suvarnabhassotama* and so on. There are various names. Sometimes it means the whole sutra, sometimes just the confession, sometimes it means the Golden Light. '... by which is quickly obtained the destruction of acts and hindrances. I will place in the tenth stage choice mines of the ten jewels.' What do you think is meant by that exactly? Presumably the choice mines of the ten jewels are all sorts of noble spiritual qualities but it's a bit obscure. 'I will make shine the Buddha-qualities', that is in oneself presumably. 'I will cross over from the ocean of existence.' This is a very familiar sort of idiom. Cross over to the other shore, the shore of Nirvana. 'I will fill the flood of the Buddha-sea, the deep ocean of virtues, omniscience, with inconceivable Buddha-qualities. May I become an excellent Buddha with hundreds of thousands of meditations, with inconceivable magic formulas, with the senses,' - *indriyas* - I don't think *indriyas* means senses here, I think it means the five spiritual faculties because immediately afterwards it mentions the ten powers and the seven members of enlightenment. So after this first confession there comes this as it were Bodhisattva Vow. Do you think there's any sort of reason behind this sort of sequence?

Vimalamitra: Well, after the confession then you're free to take the Bodhisattva Vow. [64]

S: Yes, you've sort of cleared the ground, not to say cleared the decks for action. You've disencumbered yourself of the past. You're free to make a new start so you take the Bodhisattva Vow. Having done that, again you confess. There's another confession. Would someone like to read that next paragraph on confession and we'll go through it sentence by sentence?

May the Buddhas watch over me with minds attentive. May they forgive my sin with minds given over to compassion. On account of the evil done by me previously even in hundreds of aeons, I have a troubled mind oppressed with wretchedness, trouble and fear. With an unhappy mind I continually fear evil acts. Wherever I go there is no enjoyment for me anywhere. All the Buddhas are compassionate. They remove the fears of all beings. May they forgive my sin and may they deliver me from fear. May the Tathagatas take away for me the defilement of impurities (and) acts. And may the Buddhas bathe me with the surging waters of compassion. I confess all the evil previously done by me and I confess all my present evil. For the future, I undertake to refrain from all acts evilly done. I do not conceal whatever evil I may have done. The threefold bodily act and the fourfold with the voice, as well as the act in three ways with the mind, all this I confess. What I have done with my body, what I have done with my voice, and what I have thought with my mind, the tenfold act I have done, I confess it all. May I avoid the ten evil acts. May I practise the ten good acts. I will remain in the tenth stage. I will become an excellent Buddha. What ever evil act I have done bringing an undesired fruit I will confess it all in the presence of the Buddhas.

S: So there's quite a few points to discuss here. 'May the Buddhas watch over me with minds attentive.' What do you think this means? How literally do you think this is to be taken?

Uttara: May the Buddhas always be receptive to...

S: But the Buddhas are receptive anyway, aren't they? It's more like what one is saying is may I remember the Buddhas with an attentive mind. The Buddhas are there, as it were, all the time. If you remember the Buddhas then the Buddhas are remembering you because they are remembering you all the time. You have to become aware of the fact that the Buddhas **are** watching over you. It's more like that. What about this 'may they forgive my sin with minds given over to compassion'? What is this forgiveness of sins? What is forgiveness? Does it really fit into Buddhism? What do you think?

Vimalamitra: May they acknowledge?

S: It's more than acknowledge, it's **forgive**. Take it up on another level. Supposing [65] somebody commits some offence against you and they're very sorry for that and you forgive them. What happens? What does that forgiveness mean?

Phil Shrivell: You continue to have good feelings towards them.

S: You continue to have good feelings towards them.

_____ : You don't hold it against them.

S: You don't hold it against them

_____ : You don't carry grudges.

S: You don't carry grudges.

S: Yes. So what then is the sense of saying May the **Buddhas** forgive me?

Aryamitra: It means then that there's no need to fear whoever you offended. If they've forgiven you...

S: But when you commit an offence, when you perform an unskilful action do you really sort of offend the Buddhas?

Uttara: If you see it in terms of a cosmic scale your actions as having an effect.

S: But would the Buddhas feel offended in the same way that you as a human being might have been offended if someone had done an unskilful action and then you had forgiven them?

Uttara: They would see how foolish you were in committing that action.

S: So therefore what is meant by saying ‘May the Buddhas forgive my sin’?

Uttara: Unmindfulness and stupidity.

S: Yes, but if there was no **possibility** of the Buddhas becoming angry with you or punishing you because of that, well...

Aryamitra: It’s coming back to yourself.

S: It’s coming back to yourself.

Aryamitra: It’s saying ‘may I see this’ and just see it really.

S: Karma will, as it were, punish you, metaphorically speaking. The mere fact that you confess doesn’t mean that you escape the **consequences** of your evil deeds. But the Buddhas are not the administrators of karma. Karma functions as it were automatically. So what do you mean when you ask the Buddhas to forgive you? It really means you’re reminding yourself about the true nature of the Buddhas. The Buddhas are not the ones to punish - I think I mentioned this in the lecture, didn’t I, on confession? [66]

Uttara: Yes.

S: I mean the Buddhas, as I said, don’t administer the law of karma. They’re not going to take it out of you, they’re not going to punish you, but you’ve got a guilty mind, no doubt, even when you approach the Buddhas, you approach the Buddhas with a sort of fear. You think of the Buddhas as sort of punitive father-figures almost, so to that extent you don’t really see them as Buddhas at all. The Buddhas do **not** punish. So you could say that the Buddhas forgive all the time. So this is why the text says ‘may they forgive my sin with minds given over to compassion.’ Their minds are given over to compassion all the time. The Buddhas are never likely to punish you for anything that you’ve done. Their compassion is quite unwavering. So therefore from your point of view the Buddhas forgive you all the time. They never hold anything against you, whatever you have done. They’re in a sort of, as it were, constant state of forgiveness as regards ordinary human beings. There’s no sort of question of **asking** for the forgiveness, the forgiveness is there all the time and this is something which we find very difficult to realise in another human being, even in a Buddha. That the Buddha isn’t like a sort of God the Father figure who might get angry with you or punish you. The Buddha only forgives, as it were. So there’s no need or no reason to approach the Buddha with any sort of fear or apprehension or to confess with any sort of fear or apprehension, and this is also why I said in the lecture that so long as there’s a feeling of guilt you can’t really confess.

Aryamitra: Is it a bit late in the day to go into - I didn’t hear the lecture - to go into a definition of guilt?

S: It is rather a long story, isn’t it? [Laughter] I went into it in the lecture at some length. It’s all spelled out there.

Aryamitra: OK.

Vimalamitra: But in other words, then, the Buddha’s the same all the time. There’s no kind of conditioning.

S: No, there’s the same compassion or you could even say the same *metta* towards you **whatever you do**. That doesn’t mean to say that the Buddha approves everything you do or agrees with everything that you do, but the Buddha does not punish and the Buddha has the same attitude of *metta* and *karuna* towards you whatever you do, but owing to your own mental state and the way you’ve been brought up, if you’re not careful, if you’ve committed some unskillful action, you sort of think, maybe the Buddha will be angry with me. That means you don’t even see the Buddha clearly as the Buddha. [67]

Vimalamitra: You don’t really see the situation clearly.

S: No, you don’t even see that situation clearly. So do you see what I’m getting at? It’s very difficult to see the Buddha as a sort of totally compassionate and therefore, totally forgiving figure who never sort of disapproves of you, though he certainly might disapprove of your actions, and never thinks of punishing you or taking it out of you for anything that you’ve done. The law of karma’s going to look after that anyway. It isn’t the Buddha’s business. So when you say ‘May the Buddhas forgive my sin with minds given over to compassion’, you’re not just sort of begging them to change their minds and to stop being angry and to forgive you as you might in the case of a human being. You’re sort of reminding yourself that they are, as it were, nothing but compassion and nothing but forgiveness. That they forgive you, as it were, all the time. They forgive you even before you’ve committed the unskillful action, not

to speak of afterwards. So in the case of the Buddhas the forgiveness is not a sort of act that begins and ends in time. The forgiveness goes on all the time just as the compassion goes on all the time or the *metta* goes on all the time.

Uttara: It's really hard to conceive such a state.

S: Or such a **being** who is never going to take it out of you, is never going to punish you, and who is only going to point out the right path to you out of compassion. Who is never going to react against you, never be impatient with you. How different from God! *[Laughter]* But we can't **help** thinking of the Buddha - if you don't think of him as an ordinary rather nice human being - we can't help thinking of him as God with all the attributes of God. You offend God; well, he might get angry and send you to hell. The Buddha is quite a different kind of character. It's very difficult for us to dissociate these different functions, but they are dissociated in Buddhism. You can't help feeling if you've done something unskilful and you are feeling a bit guilty - maybe not neurotically guilty but in a quite healthy way guilty - you can't help feeling that other people's attitude towards you has changed - on account of your guilty mind. So if you've done something unskilful, even if you are sort of in contact with the Buddha or with the ideal of the Buddha you can't help thinking the Buddha's attitude has changed somewhat towards you, however slightly, just because you've committed that unskilful action, therefore you look at the Buddha with that sort of guilty mind, that the Buddha's a bit angry with you or he'd be a bit angry with you or a bit displeased at least. You know that Buddhas don't get really angry, you know that but at least the Buddha might be a bit reserved with you or a bit distant, and it's very difficult to realise that whatever you might have done the Buddha's attitude towards you does not change one iota. It's exactly the same as it was. He might even, if he was alive and around, he might even speak some quite stern words to you but his attitude would be essentially unchanged. There would be the same *metta* and the same *karuna*, so this is what you're trying to see when you [68] ask the Buddhas for forgiveness, forgiveness for your faults. It's not a wiping out of the consequences of your actions that you're asking - you know as a good Buddhist that's quite impossible. The law of karma will go on operating. If you've done something unskilful sooner or later you will have to suffer - you know that perfectly well, so you're not asking for forgiveness in the sense of a wiping out of the consequences of your foolish actions. You know quite well that nobody can do that, not even the Buddhas.

So you're just trying to realise for your own benefit that the attitude of the Buddhas hasn't changed towards you because they are **Buddhas**, the attitude doesn't change whatever you might have done. It's just like, say, in the case of a very good friend whose attitude towards you does not change even though you've done something against him. So even if you say, 'I'm very sorry, please forgive me', he might say 'There's nothing to forgive', and this is how he feels. So in the same way the Buddhas might say from their point of view there's nothing to forgive, so far as they personally are concerned. There's nothing that they hold against you. Their attitude throughout to you remains completely unchanged. It's the same *metta*, the same *karuna* before, during and afterwards. So it's very difficult for us to imagine, even, someone like this, because in terms of Christianity we're quite accustomed to hearing God spoken of as getting angry and punishing people, and loving them, of course, just like a human parent, but the Buddha is, or the ideal of the Buddha is, something totally different so there's no need to feel **guilty** in front of the Buddha. When you confess no need to feel guilty. If you're feeling guilty you don't or you can't really confess.

Vimalamitra: In a way if you really believe in karma you can't really feel guilty in that sense.

S: No, because you know that you are going to pay eventually, so that's that.

Vimalamitra: It's more in a way another bungle you've made.

S: It's another of those disastrous errors of judgement. *[Laughter]*

Uttara: In terms of avoiding them. If you change more or less as soon as you've seen you've done something will you avoid that karma coming back on you?

S: Oh no.

Uttara: It will still catch up with you?

S: Even the Buddha didn't avoid. Even the Buddha had to suffer certain things in this last life as a result of what he'd done in previous lives. No. There are certain minor karmas which, if they don't have an opportunity of fructifying within a certain length of time, lose their force as it were and never fructify, but the majority of karmas have sufficient energy in them to fructify. All the major ones, certainly, and you inevitably reap the result.

Vimalamitra: You see in a lot of places, even in the Vajrasattva mantra, [69] where they say purify my karma, may you destroy my karma. What does that mean in that case? Does that literally mean that...?

S: No, it doesn't literally mean that karma is destroyed on its own level, but by virtue of the practice as a whole you reach a stage or you reach a level where even though you're experiencing the results of karma it doesn't affect you, it doesn't matter any more.

Vimalamitra: You're just experiencing a residual karma, you're not producing any more karma.

S: Yes. *[Pause to try and repair tape recorder which is distorting voices - unsuccessful from the transcriber's point of view!]*

So we've really said enough about forgiveness of sins, so let's come on to this next sentence. 'On account of the evil done by me previously even in hundreds of aeons, I have a troubled mind oppressed with wretchedness, trouble and fear.' So this is quite a good description of how you feel when you have committed unskilful actions which you know to be unskilful. Leave aside the hundreds of aeons, even last week. 'I have a troubled mind oppressed with wretchedness, trouble and fear. With an unhappy mind I continually fear evil acts.' Why should one continually fear evil acts?

Uttara: *[unclear]* ... your actions do have consequences.

S: Yes, well, you've already committed some and you know you've got a tendency in that direction, and maybe you've already started experiencing some of the consequences, so you know the danger.

Uttara: In terms of... with karma you come back to the same way like in the sense of the Christian an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. [70] Would it come back in the same way as you performed that?

S: According to many Buddhist sutras, yes, though I think personally one mustn't look at it in a too mechanical or book-keeping way. That if you punch somebody on the nose then in your next life someone will punch you on the nose, it isn't quite so mechanical, I think is the word, as that. Someone may just knock you on the top of the head instead. Or you might have some other kind of suffering. I don't think it is necessarily exactly of the same kind.

Vimalamitra: *[inaudible question - very poor recording quality on this tape]*

S: Well, in some cases you can see that quite clearly, you don't even need to believe it, you can see it.

'Wherever I go there is no enjoyment for me anywhere'. What sort of state of mind do you think this reflects or indicates?

Aryamitra: You cannot distract yourself... wherever you go ...

S: You have the consciousness of having performed these unskilful actions. Maybe you've already begun to reap the consequences, you know that you are in danger due to your past bad habits and performing even more unskilful actions and reaping further unpleasant consequences. So it really is on your mind, you know that under those sort of circumstances there isn't any pleasure, any enjoyment for you really, not true enjoyment anyway. Nowhere to run to, nowhere to turn, you can't escape from the consequences of karma, all you can do is to confess and to make a fresh start.

So therefore 'all the Buddhas are compassionate. They remove the fears of all beings. May they forgive my sin, and deliver me from fear.' So what is important is not to escape the consequences of your unskilful actions, it's just to get rid of your feeling of guilt and fear and worry. And you do that by confessing. So even though you go on experiencing the consequences of your own previous unskilful actions, it doesn't matter any more. You just think, 'All right, never mind, I'm just paying off old scores, I'm paying off old debts, but I'm not accumulating any new ones, now I am going forward.' You are at ease in your own mind.

'May the Tathagatas take away for me the defilements of impurities and acts.' This 'take away' is to be understood in much the same way as we understood the Bodhisattvas **placing** people in the tenth stage. I mean they are taking away all the time, as it were, but we just [71] have to realise that.

'May the Buddhas bathe me with the surging waters of compassion. I confess all the evil previously done by me and I confess all my present evil. For the future, I undertake to refrain from all acts evilly done.' This is very important. It's not just a question of confessing what you have done, it's a question of promising and making a firm resolution to turn over a new leaf, and not to commit those unskilful actions any more.

'I do not conceal whatever evil I may have done.' This is one of the most important sentences here, not to conceal. Why do you think that we do tend to conceal or try to conceal the evil that we have done?

_____ : To protect themselves.

S: To protect themselves, and we try to conceal even from ourselves, not to speak of from other people. We don't like to admit that we have done something really wrong, that we have made a mistake, that is a form of humiliation. 'I have not lived up to my image of myself.' It is very difficult to be completely open about oneself and not conceal anything. I think I have mentioned before somebody's statement that if you sat down to write your autobiography the first thing of which you would become conscious would be the fact that you didn't intend to tell the whole story. You would become aware of what you weren't going to say. 'Oh, I'm not going to tell that, I'll tell everything else, but not that, no, I cannot tell that'. So not to conceal anything, to be happy that others should see you exactly as you are, warts and all, this is quite difficult. Usually there is some little nook or corner of oneself or one's character or one's life or what one's done in the past that you really don't want anybody to know. You keep it to yourself. You don't even think about it yourself too much, you hide it or conceal it **even** from yourself. So complete openness with people is very important.

Uttara and otherS: [*Completely inaudible due to tape quality*]

S: Well, there is this well-known aphorism of Nietzsche's: 'Memory says I did such and such, pride says I couldn't possibly have done it', and then he says 'Pride wins.'

_____ : That's one disadvantage of being an actor.

S: I have seen this in the case of actors. When I was in India I knew several actors quite well, including one very famous one who was the Clark Gable of India, I don't suppose you have ever heard of him, [*Laughter*] called Raj Kapoor. He is very famous now, although a bit past it now, he is my age, but when I knew him about 15-20 years ago he was in his heyday and very very famous. I saw him a number of times in Bombay and he invited me to the studios and so I got [72] to know him fairly well. But I noticed one thing, that he seemed unable to draw the line between acting and real life. He didn't know when he was acting and when he wasn't acting, so he had become all the same; when he was off the set he would still act and when he was on the set he was sometimes, as it were, not acting. So that seemed really strange. He was a very strange man in many ways with all sorts of delusions about himself.

Uttara: I suppose when you play so many parts you don't know what man is really you any more.

S: I mean you can get angry, you can act angry, you don't know whether you **are** angry, whether you are really feeling anger **or not**. But this is a very strange state to be in. Anyway, just to come back to one other point, when or how do we think or feel that we can be open, under what sort of circumstances, what sort of conditions?

Aryamitra: Only with people you can trust.

S: If you feel that they are not going to hurt you, not going to as it were take advantage of your openness. That in a way they are a bit Buddha-like, they are going to forgive you anyway, they forgive you all the time, their basic attitude towards you isn't going to change. There will be the same *metta* for you even after you have confessed. They know the worst about you.

Uttara: [*Inaudible*]

S: So I think what prevents a lot of people from confessing or being more open generally is the feeling that if people knew them as they were they just wouldn't be acceptable. That if people knew what you really felt, what you'd really done, they wouldn't want to have anything to do with you any more. Some people feel that.

_____ : [*Inaudible*]

S: But not within the context of the spiritual community.

Uttara: [*Inaudible*]... group consciousness.

S: I mean **you** are still accepted, though they might strongly disapprove of what you have done and it might be very difficult for you to make that distinction, or even they might find it difficult in practice, but certainly in principle they retain the same *metta* for you even though they are very grieved perhaps at what you have done. For it to be possible for you to be completely open you have got to have that trust

and that confidence in the other people and in their genuine basic fundamental good will towards you which you are convinced will remain unchanged under all circumstances, even though they do tell you off but it will be with basic good will. [73]

Vimalamitra: *[Inaudible]*.

Aryamitra: Can you say something on the advantages of being open?

S: I think you can have a truer relationship with people if you are open, because then they know that you are, and it is surely a strain relating to people with only a part of yourself and keeping back another part which they never are allowed to see. It means that you are never relating to them as a complete whole person, they don't **know** you as you are, at least they don't know the whole of you. That doesn't mean to say that if you have committed an actual crime you should tell it to everybody - that might be a bit unwise - but certainly there should be a few people in your life, a few people with whom you are in contact, with whom you can be completely frank, to whom you can tell everything, by way of confession, and this means a few people of that sort with whom you have a common spiritual basis and a common spiritual ideal. So they are for you the spiritual community in the full sense.

Dave Living: I think it is unwise to be over-open.

S: But **can** you be over-open? A confession is only possible within the context of the spiritual community. You would be able to confess it as a fault and it have it accepted as a fault and to have good will towards you none the less. If you happened to put your fingers in the till and remove something, if you were to go and tell that to people who habitually do that sort of thing it wouldn't be a confession, they would think it rather bright of you. They would be pleased rather than sorry. Even though you had told them and been open it wouldn't be a confession.

_____ : *[Inaudible] [Laughter]*

S: It's a peccadillo.

Dave Living: Sometimes people you don't know very well, they know something about you then maybe you get paid back...*[inaudible]*

S: Well, again, it comes back to what I said about confession being only possible within the spiritual community. But if you don't have at least a few people that you can totally trust, then you are in a rather difficult position. And this means trust in people that you can confess to. It's not pals to whom you can talk about your rather unskilful exploits and they are rather pleased and sort of pat you on the back, not that, but to whom you can confess unskilful things **as** unskilful.

Tim McNally: Just to come back to this sort of selective openness. You can only be open *[inaudible]*...

S: I think in a way that this is true, that the more evolved other people are the more easy it is for you, presuming that you are relatively unevolved, to be open with them. But it should be possible surely for you to lead such a life that you can be completely open with everybody. [74] It should be possible for your life to be an open book, but in the case of the vast majority of people there are at least a few pages, not to say the odd chapter or two, which you'd rather other people didn't look at.

Uttara: *[Inaudible]*

S: It is not only that, but if you just tell somebody else that you feel is more or less rather like yourself, it isn't a confession. But if you tell somebody that you believe is more evolved than you it has to be a confession. It means that you have to see that you have done something unskilful. It's not like telling your pal about something that neither of you think is really that bad, 'it's just the sort of thing that the lads do'. But if you tell somebody whom you do genuinely regard, or believe to be, more evolved than yourself then you have to face up to your unskilful action as unskilful, because otherwise there is no question of confession. Or you know that your action **would** be regarded as unskilful by that person, so you are hesitant about revealing it to him, whereas your friends on your own level as it were let you off more lightly. So with them your confession isn't really a confession. It's simply just talking about something you have done. You might not be very proud of it, but you are not really very ashamed of it either. But even **that** sort of openness is better than none at all. At least you've got the sort of attitude of opening up, provided it isn't a shameless boasting about the unskilful things you have done, like people sometimes boast about the number of times they have been drunk.

Uttara: *[Inaudible comment about trust]*

S: Also it takes time and a lot of effort to get to that sort of stage of confidence. It won't just happen automatically. Not even just because you've spent a long time with them. Not without a bit of effort. I think for most people it comes as quite a relief when you can be genuinely open with somebody and you know that they don't have to keep up any sort of pretences and that you will be accepted basically for what you are. It doesn't mean that every single action of yours will be condoned but **you** will be accepted.

Dave Living: I suppose you only arrive at that stage when you have nothing to hide. *[unclear]*

S: Oh dear! I hope that it wasn't like that. That really is playing safe. It's best to have nothing to confess and it's best to be open with no fear at all because you have nothing to hide, but I think most of us if we had to wait until we'd reached that blameless state before we could be open, it is going to be a very long time before we can be open. I think in a way it's the test of real openness, and you can be open even [75] though there are unskilful things that you would rather not have done. In a way that is the test of true friendship - that you can be open with somebody about even unskilful things, and you know that you still will be accepted and that they will still have the same basic feeling towards you. It's not going to change.

Aryamitra: On the other hand if you do confess I think it would deepen that relationship anyway. The other person would feel stronger as well.

S: I think that is true. The other person would feel that you trusted him and that person might well become more open with you. If you can't be open with him and he can't be open with you then what sort of friendship is that?

_____ : I was thinking that it was fear.

S: I think it's mostly fear simply of what people will think. It is not that they have it within their power to do you any real harm or damage. If you've committed an actual crime for which you would be sent to prison, that is a somewhat different matter. But if it's anything other than that, why shouldn't **everybody** know? What does it really matter? Supposing you did get drunk the weekend before last what does it matter if everybody in London knows, what does it **really** matter?

_____ : It would leave you without defences.

S: Defences against what? *[Laughter]*

_____ : *[unclear]*..... certain charges against you ...

S: As I said, I accept that those criminal matters for which you might be hauled up before a magistrate, but otherwise if it's only your weaknesses and peccadilloes, why shouldn't everybody know, what real difference does it make, what harm can they do?

Dave Living: They could drag your name through the streets.

S: They'll soon get tired of that!

Aryamitra: I think one of the things about holding back is that one feels a certain kind of strength as if they've got something that you don't know.

S: That you are getting the better of him? That they've got a better opinion of you than you really deserve, so you have taken them in, to that extent, so you score over them. 'Little do they know, if they only knew that I had done so and so, but they don't' *[Laughter]*. You do feel a bit like that with your parents sometimes, don't you? You do when you are quite young and you are beginning to feel a bit independent and it's with some glee that you think, 'They don't know, if they did know they'd have a fit but they don't!' *[Laughter]* and you think that means that you are really clever, you have scored over them. It's fair enough with one's parents when one is [76] growing up, but you should grow out of that sort of thing. If you are feeling like that with regard to the whole world, you feel towards the whole world like a child towards its parents. So perhaps you haven't fully grown up.

Graham Steven: I find it a strain sometimes being with people when I have a feeling that I am not being open and they are not being open and there is quite a loss of energy because of that.

S: If you are not open you do block off energy. Communication can be dull, especially if you know that you're doing it, you know that you're blocking.

_____ : *[inaudible]*

S: It's mainly it's simply that we are afraid of what people think of us. It is not that there's any real objective harm or damage that they could do. That means that we are very dependent on what other people think. Perhaps we shouldn't be so dependent.

Aryamitra: It comes back to being an individual.

S: Yes. Really you are conforming...

Graham Steven: You're looking for approval.

S: You're looking for approval or at least you want to avoid disapproval, and sometimes the things that we are not open about most people aren't bothered very much about anyway. Sometimes one can even have the experience of trying to tell somebody something that you think is really awful, and you might have great difficulties bringing it up and bringing it out, and you notice that they're not taking much notice of what you're saying because it's so insignificant to them. It hasn't really registered in the way that you thought. You might have been thinking that you were going to stop them in their tracks and they will let out a gasp of horror but they just say, 'Oh yes, that so?' and go on talking about something else! *[Laughter]* They are not sort of overwhelmed or shocked or horrified at all and you have been just attaching far too much importance to whatever it is that you did.

Vimalamitra: If you're not used to being open any little thing can build up but if you're more open they don't build up.

S: I have mentioned before the instance of one of our friends many years ago who used to say to me, 'If you really knew what I was like you just wouldn't want to have anything to do with me', and this went on for about two years and in the end it came out and he brought himself to confess what it was. It wasn't anything that he had done, it was only something that he had been thinking actually and when he told me I just burst out laughing. *[Laughter]* It was so funny and so ridiculous, but he was [77] utterly convinced for two years that if I knew what he was thinking I'd just never want to speak to him again. Anyway he is still around. *[Laughter]* So sometimes we just attach too much importance to these wretched things, things we've not even **done**, just thought, just imagined. And he thought that I'd be very shocked and not want anything more to do with him. Rather than that I thought it was rather silly or rather funny and just didn't think it was worthy of bothering about. But we build it up in our own minds very often.

'I do not conceal whatever evil I may have done. The threefold bodily act and the fourfold with the voice, as well as the act in the three ways with the mind, all this I confess.' That is to say all unskilful actions of body, speech and mind.

'What I have done with my body, what I have done with my voice, and what I have thought with my mind, the tenfold act I have done, I confess it all. May I avoid the ten evil acts. May I practise the ten good acts. I will remain in the tenth stage. I will become an excellent Buddha. Whatever evil act I have done bringing an undesired fruit I will confess it all in the presence of the Buddhas.'

So this is the second paragraph of confession. You notice any difference between this paragraph and the previous one? It's not so detailed in a way. It's not so varied. [78]

S: All right it's page twelve. Would someone like to read?

Those who in this Jambudvīpa and in other world-spheres do a good act I congratulate on it all. And whatever merit has been gained by me by body, voice or mind, through that merit-root may I touch excellent enlightenment.

S: So there are two sentences here and two, as it were, quite different themes. The first is what we usually call rejoicing in merits and the second is the dedication of merits. So first of all a few words about the rejoicing in merits. What does this essentially consist in, or what does this essentially represent, when you rejoice in merits?

_____: You approve of them.

S: You approve, yes.

Vimalamitra: You associate with them.

S: What's the value of this, as it were?

Vimalamitra: You derive strength.

S: You yourself derive strength, inspiration. Does it counteract any unskilful mental state?

Aryamitra: Jealousy and ...

S: Yes. Envy, greed. It sort of encourages disinterestedness. You're just as glad if somebody else does a good action as if you'd done it yourself. In a way you **feel** that you've done it yourself. You rejoice in it. It's a sort of positive attitude of appreciation.

Tim McNally: It seems somewhat similar to confession in that way.

S: You mean in a sense that it's complementary?

Tim McNally: Yes, it has the same effect.

S: Do you think people usually find it very easy to rejoice in the merits of others?

Uttara (and others): No.

S: What do you think gets in the way?

_____ : Yourself. [79]

S: In what sort of way? If somebody performs a good action it's for your benefit too. After all it's inspiring you and enthusing you. What prevents us from really appreciating them?

Aryamitra: Not being able to appreciate our own qualities.

S: Maybe.

_____ : Maybe you haven't got any good qualities to appreciate.

Aryamitra: Well, if there's something that you're good at then you can appreciate other people's.

S: But isn't that a sort of stop-gap in a way? Because what really makes us uncomfortable thinking about other people's good qualities is that we feel that - not simply that we don't have those good qualities - we feel inferior because we don't have them. I think this is what sometimes riles us. We sort of look at it all in a very jaundiced, prejudiced way instead of thinking, that person's got such and such good qualities, leaving it at that and just rejoicing in them, we start comparing, he's got those sort of good qualities, I haven't. What does that mean? He probably thinks he's better than I am or he probably thinks that I'm worse than he is or maybe other people if they compared us they'd say that he was the better person at least in that respect. So we start feeling sort of put down. It's as though somebody else's goodness and somebody else's virtue makes them superior to us in a way that puts us down, so we resist that and we try to sort of underestimate or depreciate the other person's good qualities and virtues just so as to keep ourselves, as we think, on a level with them.

Vimalamitra: That's due to not putting the value on something that is beyond yourself. That virtue...

S: Yes, it means that you're very much preoccupied with yourself in fact and how you stand in relation to others, and some people seem rather sensitive to this. Rather sensitive to the idea 'He thinks he's better than me' kind of thing, when such a thought may not have entered his head. He may be quite oblivious of your existence. I think that very often **this** prevents us from appreciating the good qualities of others because we feel that those good qualities **lower** us in a way.

Phil Shrivell: It's also the same feeling when we associate ourselves with our country.

S: Yes.

Tim McNally: It seems to be an associated tendency sometimes to depreciate our own values. [80]

S: To not rejoice in our own merits.

Tim McNally: It's like turning it round the other way

S: It may be that if you've got some merits of your own to rejoice in it may well make it easier for you to rejoice in the merits of others, just because you feel, as it were, more on a level with them, but in a way that's a concession to our weakness. You should be able to rejoice in the merits of others quite regardless of whether you have any merits yourself or not. In fact the fewer merits **you** have the **more** you should be prepared to rejoice in the merits of others and think, 'Well, thank heavens somebody in the world has got some merits even if I don't have any', and they accept quite happily that there are some merits around in the world even if they don't happen to be your merits. There are just merits around so you rejoice in them.

Uttara: I get the feeling that if somebody is rejoicing in what actions I have done that I owe them something. They may say something good to you and you feel in a way that you may have to owe them something for that.

S: Oh. I don't quite follow it actually.

Uttara: In terms that you think well they're giving you something so you in return have to give something back.

S: That's when they're doing a good action towards you. Supposing they're just performing merits or producing merits in general, would you feel like that?

Uttara: No.

S: So I think here the sort of merit that the text has in mind is the merit that people are just producing, as it were, without reference to you personally. Not as a result of good actions done with respect to you. Some people do rather resist the idea of others doing good to them because they feel it puts them under some sort of obligation, like the case of the neighbours. The husband says, 'Oh, let's borrow the lawn mower from the people next door.' The wife says, 'Oh no, that means that we'll be under an obligation. We'll have to lend **them** something if they ask.' So you don't want to be under any obligation, which means in the end you virtually cut off the relationship. Because you can't help becoming involved in a sort of network of mutual obligations, in a sense, if you do have contact with people at all. So perhaps when we're unwilling or reluctant to rejoice in other people's merits it's a bit too self-conscious, too conscious of ourselves in the wrong sort of way. We ought to forget about ourselves and where **we** stand in relation to all that and just rejoice in somebody's merits. Just rejoice in those merits in a quite sort of impersonal way just like when you're really happy to see the sun shining. You don't feel jealous of the sun having the light when you don't have it. You rejoice that there is the sunshine around, so in the same way just [81] rejoice that there are some merits around. Somebody's producing some and making the world a brighter and better sort of place. In a way no matter who it is, whether it's you or somebody else or a third party, those merits are being produced. The world **is** a better place by virtue of that.

So that's rejoicing in merits, and then there's dedication of merits in the second sentence. 'Whatever merit has been gained by me by body, voice or mind, through that merit-root may I touch excellent enlightenment.' This is bound up with the question of the three aims: there are three possible aims in life according to some texts. You can either wish for well-being in this present life or you can wish for or hope for a good happy rebirth in some future existence, or you can think in terms of gaining Nirvana or enlightenment. So you can dedicate your merit to any one of these. You can, as it were, say, 'By virtue of this meritorious act may I be happy and healthy and strong in this life,' **or** you can say, as it were, 'By virtue of this good action may I have a happy, heavenly rebirth after I die,' or you can say, 'By virtue of this good action of mine may I gain enlightenment for the benefit of all.' So this is dedication of merits. You can dedicate your merits either to your well-being in this life itself, or to your well-being in a future conditioned realm of existence, or to the attainment of Nirvana. So the Bodhisattva, of course, does the third, and this is the one that is meant here.

Graham Steven: The way you put it just then, Bhante, was that you need to be conscious of the merits that you're doing, and thinking what way do I want them put? Doesn't that bring about a form of self-consciousness?

S: It can do. One just has to be very careful that it doesn't bring it about in the wrong sort of way. You have the ideal, whatever that may be, the ultimate ideal, and you just wish or you aspire that whatever merits you produce or whatever good you are doing may not simply be frittered away in some side result, but may contribute to the attainment of that ultimate goal, that ultimate ideal. But clearly you mustn't do it in a sort of self-conscious way, any more than you do anything else. You might be, for instance, meditating for the sake of ultimate enlightenment but you don't go about it in a self-conscious way. You don't tell people, 'I'm going to meditate now because I want to gain ultimate enlightenment.' You just say, 'I think I'll go and meditate.' But in your own mind you are aware that this is the direction in which you are moving and the goal for the sake of which you are mobilising all your energies and resources,

including the resources represented by your merits. If your good actions do have any results, if you do have any good actions, you just hope that they will redound to the attainment of that ultimate goal. If you like you can put it hypothetically, that 'If I have any merits at all then may they redound to that result.'

Aryamitra: Do you think it would make a difference - an actual real difference which one we chose? Supposing we chose to dedicate the merits to a happy present life or at another time you might have dedicated them to a future life. Do you think it would actually make any concrete difference? [82]

S: Well, the Buddhist traditional view is that, yes, it does make a difference because your own thought is so important. That is the decisive factor.

Uttara: It gives you a direction in some cases.

S: One could also say that the idea of a Bodhisattva's dedication of merits is to help him also eliminate any trace of selfishness, to eliminate the idea of working for himself in this life or benefiting himself in this life rather than others, and likewise with regard to the future life - that whatever resources he has he just wants to dedicate them to enlightenment for the sake of all. In this way he gets rid of all trace of self-seeking, whereas usually when we do good we think of it as sort of going to be of some use to us or some benefit to us personally, and even in a quite narrow individualistic sense. So the Bodhisattva is trying to sort of counteract that which is one's natural tendency, so he says, 'Whatever merits I may produce may they not go to my personal advantage in this life or in the future life but may they just be for the benefit of all. May they help me, as it were, gain enlightenment **for** the benefit of all so I can be of use to everybody.' So this sort of dedication is in a way a means of overcoming the rather individualistic attitude as represented by the other two dedications. The other two dedications are not as it were so explicit. They're more like sort of attitudes that we usually have anyway. It's the third dedication which is, as it were, more explicit, and it becomes more explicit or is made more explicit simply to counteract the rather individualistic tendency of the first two, which of course is quite incompatible with the Mahayana and with the Bodhisattva ideal. It's to sort of counteract that natural tendency that we have to work for ourselves and for our own benefit even on the so-called spiritual level or in the so-called spiritual life.

Aryamitra: I just got this kind of vision when you were saying it of... If you're dedicating for the sake of all beings or for enlightenment I just got this vision that they go deeper somehow, whereas if they were dedicated to something in the future life it would be a kind of - I don't know whether there's anything in this - a more short-lived...

S: Well, the Chinese Buddhists I believe distinguish between two kinds of merit; the, what they call, impure merits and what they call pure merits. The impure merits are the first and second kinds because they're tainted with self-interest and the third kind of merits are the pure merits because they're free of any taint of self-interest. You could say that a pure merit is more powerful than an impure merit. The Chinese also call them colloquially red merits and white merits.

Aryamitra: Nothing to do with communism!.

S: No, nothing to do with communism[*Laughter*] Red being as it were the colour of the earth and white being the colour, as it were, of the spirit.

But one could say [83] it does even make a difference to the merits themselves - how they are dedicated - because it's not that you've got a certain quantity of merits and then, in a sort of rather external mechanical fashion, you sort of either place it here or place it there; the end to which you dedicate the merits should reflect the nature of the merits themselves and therefore, as you say, merits dedicated to enlightenment for the benefit of all are sort of deeper and more powerful than those not so dedicated. It's not that you've got a sort of indifferent heap of merits that can be applied to this purpose or that, just as you can invest the same amount of money in this scheme or that scheme - the money remains the same - no - depending on whether you put it into worldly things or spiritual things the merits themselves change, as it were. Because it's not just merit - it's **you** - your merits are you.

So rejoicing in merits and dedication of merits. We've got those two dealt with in this short paragraph. All right, let's go on then. We come now to the third confession.

In the oppression of existence (or) through foolish thought, whatever severe evil I have done, in the presence of the Buddha, I confess all this evil. And I confess that evil which has been heaped up by me in the oppression of birth, by the various oppressions of bodily activity, in the oppression of existence, in the oppression of the world, in the oppression of the fleeting mind, in the oppression of impurities caused by the foolish and stupid, and in the oppression of the arrival of evil friends, in the oppression of fear, in the oppression

of passion, in the oppression of hatred and by the oppressions of folly and darkness, in the oppression of the instant, in the oppression of time, by the oppressions of gaining merits, standing before and in the presence of the Buddha, I confess all this evil.

S: So as I said this is the third confession but a new sort of element enters in here. Do you detect it, a new sort of idea, if you like? What is that? It comes in quite prominently.

Aryamitra: Oppression.

S: Oppression. What do you think is meant by this? What does it represent?

Vimalamitra: You're under pressure.

S: Under pressure, under duress as it were.

Vimalamitra: What you might normally not decide to do.

S: That is to say what you might not decide to do if only conditions were a bit more favourable. So it suggests that there are all sorts of unskilful acts that one performs, as it were, **under duress**. It's a bit like I said the other day, it's not that people are deliberately wicked. It's more that they are weak and they give in to this pressure. [84] There are so many factors in existence, as it were, that oppress us and make it more likely for us to do something unskilful and more difficult for us to do what is skilful. Circumstances don't favour us - circumstances are very often not on our side. There's a sort of tendency in our surroundings to almost compel us to do what is unskilful, hence these various oppressions. Very often it's not of our absolute free, untrammelled **will** that we do these things but we're sort of pushed into them, forced into them. Not that that's really any ultimate excuse because it's due to our weakness that we are pushed or we feel the oppression as oppression, but this is very often how it is.

Vimalamitra: It seems as though this is how it is most of the time, actually.

S: For instance, in the oppression of existence, conditioned existence **itself** is sort of pressurising you to perform unskilful actions, isn't it? You just go out for a walk and you see all sorts of things; are oppressed by all sorts of things that cannot but give rise to unskilful thoughts, even unskilful activities on your part. The oppression of existence itself. Existence in the world, existence in the samsara, existence as a human being - that seems to be pressurising you in the direction of unskilful thoughts or unskilful deeds. This isn't helping you. City life is an oppression in this sort of way, isn't it, or do you not agree? It is? Really, well does one really feel it or...

_____ : One certainly feels it when you go into the country and feel the contrast.

Uttara: Coming back from a seminar up in Norfolk and it was just like the whole thought of going back into the city - I was hitching and everything was going wrong at that point and I just felt like walking into the woods and never coming back. *[Laughter]*

Vimalamitra: You really have to keep on fighting all the time. It is like a battle, isn't it? Because there are always these pressures around.

S: Yes, it's as though so much of one's energy just goes into warding off these external pressures and just staying where you are therefore, and very often you don't have all that much energy left over to make fresh progress. You have to put so much of your energy into keeping the world at bay so that it doesn't encroach upon what you've won or what you've gained already. So this idea of oppression seems to be quite a valuable and quite a vivid one.

So 'in the oppression of existence or through foolish thought'. How does foolish thought become an oppression?

Dave Living: You get into bad habits and they press you into repeating the same mistakes.

Aryamitra: Well, thoughts lead to actions. [85]

S: It's as though thoughts are running through our minds involuntarily. It's not that we sort of deliberately set out to think an unskilful thought. The unskilful thought just pops into our heads. We didn't **ask** it to come, we didn't particularly **want** it to be there but it keeps coming. This is our experience. It's supposed to be **our** thought but sometimes it seems as though it's coming from right outside - it's **invading** us - we don't want it. We'd rather it went away but it keeps coming in. So this seems to be the oppression of foolish thought.

Uttara: Would it not be in terms of the state of mind or state of being you are attracts certain thought patterns towards you? Is this not the case?

S: It could be that too. I mean after all they are your thoughts. You may feel that they're coming from outside but they are your thoughts. There must be something in you basically with which they have an affinity, but this is how we feel. As though we're being oppressed by all these thoughts which are coming in and which we, at least think, we don't really want. The foolish thoughts oppress us. We're trying to meditate and concentrate our minds, keep our minds clear and pure and all these unskilful foolish thoughts keep rushing in, battling and undoing all our best efforts. So that's also an oppression, the oppression of foolish thoughts. What other oppressions are there? 'Whatever severe evil I have done in the presence of the Buddha I confess all this evil. And I confess that evil which has been heaped up by me in the oppression of birth.' **Birth** is an oppression - do you agree with that? How does that work out? Birth is an oppression. Birth is a sort of heavy experience.

Graham Steven: Do you think it would be possible for a young child to experience birth in itself as quite a heavy thing?

S: Well, according to some psychologists and according to some psychoanalysts, birth as such is a traumatic experience. First of all what is birth - what happens? They say that there you are, you're in the womb before birth. You're warm, you're relatively quiet. You're quite comfortable and suddenly you're sort of squeezed, you're violently squeezed through a narrow aperture. You come out at the other end and you're seized hold of and you're slapped and plunged into water and then there's this bright light that you're not accustomed to. So some psychoanalysts say that birth itself is a traumatic experience for the infant. You're slapped to make you breathe, maybe you're washed none too gently, you're rubbed with a rough towel which is something you've not been accustomed to. You're dressed, you're tied up. Then you start feeling hungry. So birth itself is traumatic they say - so the oppression of birth. Some psychologists say that this is a bit of imaginative reconstruction - the child doesn't take it as seriously as all that, but some psychologists, some psychoanalysts for instance, still very definitely, very strongly believe that for at least the majority of children birth is a traumatic experience. It's not at all pleasant. It seems reasonable, doesn't it? [86]

Uttara: I've seen a cartoon once - where there was a chicken who was getting born and it was going on showing you the shots of movement in the egg and slowly there would be the cracks opening up and then suddenly things were starting to happen all around it. Wars would start to take place, all done in animation and traffic and everything would be going by and the egg would start to crack open and the chicken stuck his head out and he just took one look and went back inside. [*Laughter*]

S: The baby can't do that. So the oppression of birth.

Then 'by the various oppressions of bodily activity'. In what way is bodily activity an oppression or even various oppressions? Some people say it's such a nuisance, it's such a trouble that you wake up in the morning and you've got to get up and you've got to dress yourself and you've got to go and shave and you've got to go to the toilet and you've got to then brush your teeth and then you've got to go and eat. All these are bodily activities which are just needed to keep you going and sometimes there seem to be so many of them, especially the secondary and tertiary ones, that you are sort of forgetting what it is for the sake of which you're supposed to be living. You're so involved with these other activities. Especially this is the case when you become ill and you can't think of very much else, only of your physical state and your aches and your pains and your medicine and all that sort of thing. So all these bodily activities become an oppression, even various oppressions. This seems to be what we're getting at here. Physical existence itself becomes burdensome. It becomes like that when you're old, doesn't it? When you can hardly walk easily, when you can't even get up off a chair without help or can't get on to a bus without somebody giving you a helping hand. When you're young you don't realise all this but you'll realise it one day - with a bit of luck [*Laughter*]. The oppression of bodily activity - and maybe you can't dress yourself without help, can't go to the toilet without help - then you'll really realise it as you sometimes have to when you're sick.

Aryamitra: Unless you do yoga.

S: So in the oppression of existence, we've had that before. 'In the oppression of the world' - you could take that in a narrower sense than existence - it's sort of social life as it were, 'In the oppression of the fleeting mind, in the oppression of the impurities caused by the foolish and stupid, in the oppression of the arrival of evil friends, in the oppression of fear, in the oppression of passion, in the oppression of hatred and by the oppressions of folly and darkness, in the oppression of the instant'. What do you think that means - in the oppression of the instant?

Graham Steven: Something which forces you to do an action.

S: Just on the spur of the moment as it were, yes. And then 'in the oppression of time.' How is time an oppression? Well, you just sometimes do unskilful actions because you think you haven't got enough time to think, and you've got to act quickly, and in that [87] way you act unskilfully. The oppression of time. Well, certainly under conditions of modern life. You're not given enough time, as it were, or at least feel you don't have enough time just to do the thing properly and give yourself enough time to do it in a skilful manner or to give yourself time to think what would be the skilful way of doing it. So you just have to act hastily and the chances are you act unskilfully. So what does this whole idea of committing unskilful actions through these various oppressions convey?

Tim McNally: That they're not deliberate acts.

S: In a sense they're not deliberate acts, not in the sense that there were no external influences at all, of course you are responsible because you should stand up to the oppressions, but it's understandable when you don't.

Aryamitra: It seems there's no escape.

S: Well, there's no escape from the oppressions but you don't have to yield to them.

Uttara: It seems to be just getting carried along with this life.

Vimalamitra: They can be quite insidious too. Very subtle oppression. Things that you think are spiritual become something else.

S: Well, it's in a way quite a significant expression - this word oppression. It's as though there's some force at work in the world almost compelling you to do unskilful things even against your own better judgement and your own wishes.

Dave Living: Does it change as you become more integrated? You feel less oppressed?

S: I think it's not so much less oppressed. It's more like less pulled, because if you're not integrated what does it mean? You're sort of split and divided, so that even when, say, part of you wants to meditate part of you doesn't want to meditate. So if there's any sort of influence, any pressure, not to meditate, that can work quite easily on you through that part of you which doesn't want to meditate. So if you are split you are much more likely to be pulled through that part of you which is in sympathy with what is doing the pulling.

Dave Living: I found before I actually started to take up meditation, before I knew anything about the Friends, I found that life was very overwhelming, but after I'd moved into the Friends life became a lot simpler, so the oppressions there I could see more easily and maybe deal with a but more easily.

S: I think it's much easier to deal with external pressures when there is no conflict **within** oneself, but if you've got a sort of traitor within that is going to co-operate [88] with the enemy without, then you're in a much more difficult position, but if you are yourself relatively integrated, even when the whole of you is under pressure, you've a better chance of resisting. But if in addition to being under pressure you're also divided within yourself, so that there's a part of you which is putting pressure on another part, and that part which is putting the pressure on the other part is in sympathy or in harmony with whatever is outside but it's putting pressure on the whole of you, then you're in a quite difficult position, aren't you? If you, for instance, travel on the underground you see all these advertisements depicting young ladies in scanty attire, well, if there's nothing within you which is susceptible to that they can bring as much pressure as they like on you - those advertisements - but nothing very much will happen. But if before travelling on the underground you have been turning over thoughts of that sort in your mind, so there's already a sort of traitor lurking within, then what with that traitor bringing his own pressure and the ads bringing **their** own pressure, you are likely to be overwhelmed aren't you? So if you're divided within yourself you're more likely to yield to, or succumb to, external pressure, but if you are more united, more integrated within yourself, then you can withstand a lot of pressure from the environment.

Anything there that needs any further comment in that paragraph?

Tim McNally: What about these oppressions of gaining merit?

S: Ah yes. I take it, though it doesn't say so explicitly, that this is the oppression of gaining merit in this life and in a higher heavenly world after death. Even this is an oppression, even this is a botheration. You might just as well turn it all over to supreme enlightenment and forget all about it.

Tim McNally: You'll still experience oppressions if your aim is supreme enlightenment?

S: It doesn't explicitly say so here, but I take it that the oppression refers only to the two lower kinds of merit. I don't see how merits which are dedicated to enlightenment could be an oppression. But that's my own sort of reading of the text.

Uttara: Is there a certain point where you can say for definite you can transfer your merits and make that. The only time is when you take the Bodhisattva Vow. Maybe we go through the motions to some extent with the transference of merit but it's only when the Bodhisattva Vow taken that you're really...

S: Well, the question about oppression only arises, in a way, when you are trying to do something skilful and external factors are getting in the way. So life itself can get in the way, time can get in the way, but merits which are dedicated to enlightenment surely can't get in the way. The other merits might but not **those** merits.

So perhaps it's quite a good thing that we should be aware, or even more aware, that there are all sorts of factors in the world which are almost sort of **obliging** us to behave unskilfully - we don't get much co-operation from the world but there's [89] this pressure brought to bear on us all the time to act in the usual, i.e. in the unskilful, way. We, as it were, live in the midst of a quite oppressive situation.

Aryamitra: That's why retreats are so ideal.

S: Yes. I think when people go away on retreat they feel as though the pressure is off and that's why they feel much lighter and happier and gayer in every way.

Uttara: In terms of openness, yesterday I wrote down something after this about openness along these lines. That so often we're not on our own and maybe when you're on retreat it's good, as you said before, to be on our own. When we're on our own we come more into contact with how we're feeling and so it's easier, in a sense, when you meet other people you're centred in a way. If you've had time on your own then you can be stronger and be more open with other people but if you're constantly...

S: Under pressure.

Uttara: Under pressure, then you put your mask on as defences.

S: Yes, it's difficult to be open with others if you feel under pressure from others.

Dave Living: You find that in business. It's very difficult to be open with people whom you're paying money to or you want a good job from.

Vimalamitra: Yes, you can't really tell your client what you really think of them even to their own benefit.

Aryamitra: I usually find that quite refreshing. I used to quite enjoy the fact that being open with other business people they wouldn't be expecting it, especially salesmen. To be very, very direct with salesmen who had an incredibly built-up mask and I found this quite refreshing in a way. Maybe mischievously.

S: What, telling him that your product was really rotten? *[Laughter]*

Aryamitra: Not necessarily, because it wasn't, but being quite straight.

S: Telling them that it wasn't first class.

_____ : Shall we pause for a while?

S: Yes.

Uttara: To see the positive side, it's even an oppression to make the effort to see the positive side. [90]

S: Well, that's a positive oppression! *[Laughter]*

Tim McNally: So, in effect you have to block out a lot of these just to survive the day.

S: I think you do. Even blocking out requires some energy, doesn't it?

Vimalamitra: Isn't it better to look at it as you've seen through it? You've seen through all these kind of mumbling suggestions that are coming at you.

S: I think it depends very much how they are coming at you. I mean there could be a terrific noise outside while you're meditating or trying to meditate - you can certainly see through it - you can certainly see the futility of it quite clearly but it doesn't help you to meditate because that sound is still there, isn't it? You're still being bothered by it.

Aryamitra: Surely it's by having to deal with oppressions that one becomes strong.

S: I don't know. I'm not sure about this. I think there's a point, a line after which that doesn't work any more. A certain amount - supposing - take an analogy with weightlifting - well, yes, certainly, not speaking as one who has done very much weightlifting [*Laughter*] in his time, but supposing you have to lift a weight. Well, that can certainly strengthen you, but supposing you're very small and very young and very weak and you're made to lift great heavy weights all your life, what will happen then? You'd kill yourself, wouldn't you? So I think it's much the same psychologically. Having to put up with a certain amount and bear a certain amount is strengthening, but there's a limit to what you can bear. That doesn't mean the more you have to bear the stronger you become, no; there's a point beyond which you can't go without the whole thing reversing.

Aryamitra: So it's a bit of a balance you need.

S: Well, no, not just that. You must know how much you are able to bear and if it's more than you can bear then say, 'I can't bear so much that it will destroy me if I carry on, I'll just have to withdraw from the situation.' I think sometimes one has to just do that and say that.

_____ : And also be aware that your ability to take certain strains varies. Sometimes you're weaker than others.

S: For instance, you might be living with someone with a terrible temper and you might be able to bear that for a while, but suppose another person of that kind came to live with you, you might have to admit, 'I just can't bear two people of that sort. This will just get me down. I'll just get lower and lower and lower and more and more depressed and that's not going to help anybody, and you withdraw from the situation. You refuse to accept that situation, if in fact you are in a position to do that. [91]

Dave Living: You have to in the end.

S: It's better to get out than to go under. So one shouldn't be ashamed to admit that one's resources are limited.

Vimalamitra: That's quite interesting, because I've often felt in situations that maybe I couldn't take it and I would go under, but I felt at the same time a kind of pressure that you couldn't.

S: Well, in a way one **should** be strong but one just has to estimate one's own strength and what can reasonably be expected from one. There's no point in sort of killing yourself. Usually we can manage a bit more than we think but at the same time we have to be quite realistic and not destroy ourselves through false ideas about what we ought to be able to put up with. Some can put up with more than others.

Graham Steven: There's also the oppression of not necessarily accepting all of yourself.

S: Sometimes there are certain parts of oneself which **shouldn't** be accepted or at least not agreed with.

Uttara: Do you mean in terms of seeing the positive side? You would keep that down but that's repression not oppression.

S: No, that's not exactly oppression. Oppression seems to involve some external factor which is either external socially or psychologically, which is exerting pressure on you to be more unskilful. We need not start feeling too sorry for ourselves, but just recognise quite realistically that in the world we are in a way really up against things, and only too often the world's far from co-operating with us in our efforts to be more skilful. It is almost sort of pressurising us in the other direction.

Vimalamitra: There's often the temptation just to gain peace just by kind of going along with them.

S: Right.

Dave Living: Do you think it could be selected out? Especially because [*unclear*] some force at work selecting out people who are highly positive and giving them an especially hard time.

S: I must say from my own experience it sometimes seems like that. If you feel sort of positive and cheerful it almost annoys some people and they just want to try to make you less cheerful and less positive. *[Pause]* Has anybody else ever found that? [92]

Aryamitra: Some people just look at you very oddly. I know in the place where I'm staying in a big squat up in *[unclear]* quite obviously I'm feeling quite happy a lot of the time and yet I get the most strange looks as if I've blocked their communication because they're lonely or something like that, and a really odd feeling.

S: They get a bit resentful - You can't have a good moan together. I hope they're ~~not~~ like that in this fifty-man and more presumably squat.

Aryamitra: No, they're not.

Dave Living: So far we don't seem to have had any real trouble with the area. We seem to quite lucky in our block.

S: I know one or two people were a bit apprehensive at the beginning that we might have trouble but I personally never felt that we would. This is what I told Subhuti at the very beginning. I'm not in the least surprised really that we haven't had any trouble.

Dave Living: Why is that? Do you think there's a good lot of spirit in the area or something?

S: No, I don't think that particularly. I think here in this sort of area, as in most sort of working-class districts, if you don't interfere with people or bother them they don't bother you. There's a sort of live and let live attitude. I know when I came here first to look at the place - I think that was with Surata and you, wasn't it? - the area seemed quite all right. I didn't pick up anything negative or dangerous or sinister in the least. It seemed quite healthy and friendly. No worse than any other part of London certainly, and better than quite a lot I could think of. So I have no qualms about us being here at all.

Dave Living: It seems to be better than Archway.

S: I'd certainly rather we were here than an area like Hampstead which I consider personally rather pretentious and a bit insincere.

Graham Steven: Yes, you feel that when you get off the tube, especially if you've been to areas like that or the West End, that somehow you've come down to earth as soon as you step out of the tube station.

S: I think that is much better.

_____ : It just feels a bit more real. [93]

S: It may not be more real in an ultimate metaphysical sense but it's more real in ordinary human terms, I think. There's less social artifice.

Vimalamitra: It's really rather good, actually, in one way. Going out on Christmas Day or Boxing Day and just seeing people who have been out drinking, obviously been sloshed the night before, and realising how good I was feeling. *[Laughter]* You hear all the noise at night of people who are drunk and are trying to insist that they're happy, but they're really pretty miserable.

S: One can reflect, there but for the grace of Buddha or grace of the Three Jewels go I. Let's go on to the next section. We then come on to a worship section. Maybe someone could read this straight through - the whole paragraph - and then we can comment on or discuss anything that needs to be discussed. I think most of it is pretty straightforward and self-evident.

I worship the Buddhas, who are like oceans of virtues, mountains gleaming with the colour of gold like Sumeru. I go for refuge to those Buddhas and with my head I bow down to all those Buddhas. (Each one is) gold-coloured, shining like pure gold. He has fine eyes, pure and faultless like beryl. He is a mine blazing with glory, splendour, and fame. He is a Buddha-sun removing the obscurity of darkness with his rays of compassion. He is very flawless, very brilliant, with very gleaming limbs. He is a fully enlightened sun. His limbs are as prominent as pure gold. He refreshes as it were the blazing fire of those whose minds are consumed by the fire of impurities with the sage's meshes of moonbeams. His sense-organs are beautiful with the thirty-two excellent major marks, his members greatly gleaming with the very brilliant minor marks. With

meshes of beams full of glory, merits, and splendour, he stands amid the darkness like the sun in the three worlds. Your members resembling silver, crystal or copper, with the various pure, magnificent colours of beryl, with meshes of rays manifoldly and variously adorned, coppery and red like the dawn, you shine, great sage, like the sun. For one who has fallen into the river of the cycle of existence, in the midst of the flood of disaster, afflicted with anxiety, in the water of death, in the billow of old age, dry up completely with the meshes of rays of the Buddha-sun the ocean of woe, whose current is extremely harsh and cruel.

S: So what sort of impression does one get from this section?

_____ : Rejoicing in the Buddhas now.

S: Yes, one could say he's rejoicing in the Buddha's merit. He's delighting in the Buddha. What about the imagery here?

Tim McNally: It's very sort of precious and it's wealthy. [94]

S: It's all sort of solar imagery - the comparisons are with gold and light and jewels and precious metals of various kinds and this all creates a particular kind of effect, doesn't it? There's something very brilliant and beautiful, and there is this explicit comparison of the Buddha with the sun. 'He is a Buddha-sun removing the obscurity of darkness with his rays of compassion', and 'he is a fully enlightened sun.' And of course at the very beginning there is the refuge. 'I go for refuge to those Buddhas and with my head I bow down to all those Buddhas.' Each one is such and such. Do you think this is a sort of literary style which is very appealing to people in the West or does it seem rather oriental?

Aryamitra: I think this particular one is quite appealing but some of them are very oriental.

S: Yes, well, the imagery is really quite universal, isn't it? Things like the sun, the mountains, moonbeams, beryl, silver, copper, crystal, dawn and the billow of old age, the water of death - these are rather universal symbols. There's not anything very specifically Eastern, is there? Maybe ~~exuberance~~ exuberance is Indian, the lavishness, the lushness is rather Indian. There isn't much form in all these sort of epithets and comparisons. They are heaped, as it were, on top of one another pell-mell. There's no form, no arrangement, no symmetry. This is rather Indian, but otherwise the imagery itself is, as I've said universal. Maybe we should let ourselves go a bit more in this country - be a bit more exuberant, a bit more lavish, even a bit more lush.

Vimalamitra: It's quite good. You can conjure up this kind of treasure chest.

S: Right, yes, all those merits, like a great plum pudding of merits. *[Laughter]* Well, it's much better to think in those terms than in pale attenuated terms. The whole passage, like so many other passages in other Mahayana sutras, really does give the idea of the inexhaustibility and abundance and richness, and it's this that one needs really to understand. It's not that the Buddha's got just two or three pale anaemic little virtues or anything like that, is it? It's as though the Buddha is quite sort of literally, as you said, a sort of treasure chest or treasure house of all these virtues and merits.

Vimalamitra: You'd kind of exhaust everything worthwhile in the world.

S: Yes. Right. I rather like these sort of hymns, as one might call them, in the Sutra of Golden Light. It did occur to me while I was preparing the lectures that it might be quite a good idea to arrange a Sevenfold Puja taken from the Sutra of Golden Light. The same structure but arranged in that sort of way, selected verses.

Dave Living: There is something in the old puja book, isn't there?

S: I already did that in respect of the confession, but I think you could do it in respect of all the seven items of the Sevenfold Puja and have a separate independent [95] Sevenfold Puja for special occasions taken from the Sutra of Golden Light, because the language is very beautiful, very glowing as it were.

Graham Steven: It would be quite nice to read out that passage tonight.

S: That's true. You mean this particular one, yes.

Surata: I think this sort of lavishness is something that at first is quite hard to take. I know I've found it so. It's taken quite a long time to get used to this sort of thing. I mean I really enjoy it now - I love it now - but initially it was just too much. All this fancy...

S: Well, some people prefer as it were the more sort of Zen approach. Just one little tiny flower, one little blade of grass in one little pot [Laughter], but the Indians like to sort of heap up hundreds of flowers, heaps of flowers all over the place all, as I said, pell-mell, with no particular arrangement at all. Maybe you can get, if you're of that type, just as much out of the one little bud arranged with one little blade of grass in one little pot, but quite a lot of people will get quite a lot out of the Indian approach.

Aryamitra: I find it very pleasing because I'm a Buddhist, but I wonder what a non-Buddhist would feel. It's like a positive emotional response to it so these images come up as really fresh.

S: Well, there are analogues in English literature - Thomas Traherne in his *Centuries of Meditation* goes on a bit like this. Shelley in his poetry tends to go on a bit like this. In his *Ode to a Skylark* all those comparisons of the skylark one after another. According to some purists all those are a bit redundant but I used to teach this poem to intermediate students in India who used to really love all these reiterated comparisons of a skylark - it was like this and was like that and like something else, but a little footnote by the English editor sometimes informs you that some of these were a bit unnecessary and the poem could have very well been made shorter with some of them cut out, it would have made it more compact and more of a unity, but the Indians certainly wouldn't think like that. From the Indians' point of view it could go on as long as it liked.

Aryamitra: Are Indian films like that?

S: I haven't seen very much. They certainly do go on and on [Laughter] Shelley compares the skylark to a high-born maiden in a magic bower - something like that. Well, most English readers of literature will think that's going a bit too far - 'A skylark is like a high-born maiden in a bower'! [Laughter] Or he compares the skylark to a glowworm. [Laughter] Shelley goes on happily with all these comparisons, some are [96] really a bit far-fetched. [Laughter] The Indian mind really enjoys all these things.

Vimalamitra: It sounds a bit like the difference between the greed type and the hate type.

S: It's more likely the heaping up type and the eliminating type. It's the Gothic and the Classical almost, or maybe it's the Gothic and the Neoclassical. For instance, look at a Quaker meeting house - how plain, how bare, unadorned, then you look at a typical sort of post-Reformation Catholic church - all the odds and ends and bits and pieces or tinsel and velvet and lace and all the rest of it. Sometimes a bit tawdry-looking.

Or the Tibetan approach and the Sinhalese approach. The Vajrayanic approach and the Theravadin approach. They've both got their merits and you can appreciate both. While the English people tend to shy away from exuberance, don't they? In the arts, and lavishness. So maybe that's something we've got to get over.

Vimalamitra: It's devotional, really. It seems like a lack of kind of emotional openness.

S: Here in Sukhavati in the shrine, of course, we're going to steer a cautious middle way. It's going to be rich but a little austere, if you know what I mean. I don't think there's going to be anything heaped up pell-mell - not in the public one anyway.

Uttara: Yet again that can become an oppression, with the one vase and the flower and that, but if there's so much in a room it just does become an oppression.

S: I certainly used to find that with some of the Tibetan temples. I mean so many people have given so many things none of which could be thrown away or even given away so every nook and corner has an image in it or a thangka and umpteen sets of seven water bowls and umpteen lamps. It sometimes looked really crowded, especially as things were often put in glass-fronted cases against the wall, and it all tended to look a bit museum-like and a bit dusty and a bit moth-eaten, but it all had to be kept because some pious soul had donated it to them. Sometimes you really did wish that you could just throw away a few things and sometimes I felt that Tibetan Buddhism itself was like that - a bit museum-like. There's too much of it, too many things in it. So a middle path is probably needed. Every now and then, all right, go in for the bout of real richness and exuberance and lavishness. I don't think you can live with that all the time. On the other hand occasionally, yes, just be very austere and very simple but I don't think you can live with that **all the time**. I think on the whole for what you're living with all or much of the time, you need to follow a middle way. Have it reasonably rich - not too rich. A bit austere but not very austere and maybe at festival times then go in for real lavishness. Lots of decorations and lots of lamps and lots

of candles and really lash out on the flowers. Spare no expense. [Pause] You get this impression among all the Buddhist texts - maybe leaving aside some of the Mahayana Sutras - you [97] get this impression of lavishness and exuberance along with joy and devotion and positive emotion in the *Mahavastu*. I think I mentioned this on one of the previous seminars. The *Mahavastu* is a very sort of joyous text especially when it deals with the life of the Buddha. Very lengthy descriptions and very lavish descriptions. It all seems very alive and very glowing.

Uttara: In the *Precious Garland* seminar you were talking about that.

S: There are three volumes of it, by the way, if anyone's thinking of reading it. Certainly last you over the Christmas holiday. It's simply called the *Mahavastu*. It literally means the great relation or the great event or great occurrence but the translation is entitled simply the *Mahavastu*.

Uttara: Is it a Pali text?

S: Yes. It's very well translated. It's quite readable, most of it.

Vimalamitra: A Pali text and yet it's quite exuberant?

S: No, it's not Pali. The Pali Text Society has published a few translations - like it's been responsible for this. It's the 'Sacred Books of the Buddhists' series but the Pali Text Society now runs it and publishes them. It's the same series as this. 'Sacred Books of the Buddhists', but it's published by the Pali Text Society now. So any particular points here that aren't clear? This is fairly straightforward, isn't it and intelligible?. Let's go on. The next paragraph also is a paragraph of worship.

I worship the Buddha, whose members shine like gold, whose members gleam with the colour of gold, a mine of knowledge, chief in all three worlds, beautiful, whose members are adorned with very brilliant marks. Just as the water in the ocean is immeasurable, just as the earth is endless with its particles of dust, just as Meru is endless with its stones, just as the sky has an endless limit, so indeed are the Buddha's virtues endless. Even all beings cannot know them. If one should weigh and ponder them for numerous aeons, one could not know the last virtues. The earth with its rocks, mountains, and oceans, it is perhaps in aeons possible to count and know, and the water (in the ocean) may perhaps be measured to a hair-point: it is not possible to know the end of the Buddha's virtues.

S: Why is that? What does one mean by Buddha?

Dave Living : The unconditioned.

S: The unconditioned - the Buddha is the one who has reached or realised the unconditioned so the unconditioned is not really accessible to thought. It can't really, it can't fully be [98] expressed. So it's the same with the Buddha. The Buddha's virtues are immeasurable, cannot be measured, cannot be expressed. So one can just make the statement, 'the Buddha's virtues cannot be expressed', or you can just sort of exhaust yourself trying to describe them, which is what the previous paragraph, as it were, does. The method of the previous paragraph probably gives you a better idea or better impression of that inexhaustibility than the bare logical statement.

Uttara: Just thinking in terms of not being able to fathom the merit and things like that but that still has the idea of seeing the unconditioned in terms of Buddhas and Buddha-fields and everything's still rational. You still relate to it on rational terms.

S: Is it rational, do you think? It's more in terms of images, isn't it?

Uttara: Yes.

S: Well, traditionally in several spiritual traditions there are said to be sort of two main avenues of approach to reality. One is called the negative way and the other is called the affirmative way. So the negative way consists in denying of the unconditioned everything that is conditioned. That's one way of approach - the negative way. That is to say you say of the unconditioned, 'It isn't this, it isn't that, it's nothing to do with space, it's nothing to do with time, there's no beginning, no end, it's neither light nor darkness, neither good nor evil, neither existence nor non-existence it's beyond all that.' This is the negative way. But then the affirmative way consists in saying the unconditioned is light, not any ordinary light, it's the absolute light, the brightest light, the purest light, the greatest light, or in saying the unconditioned is beautiful but not any ordinary beauty, not any worldly beauty. It's far more beautiful than even the most beautiful thing that we see and experience. It's beauty itself. This is called the

affirmative way and both are considered to be ways. So this is more like the affirmative way. Both are relative, yes, but how else would one point in that particular direction? You either point in the negative way or you point in the affirmative way.

Uttara: In terms of something like Orpheus in the Underworld things are all very illogical and just don't fit. Nothing fits together.

S: I don't quite see the connection.

Uttara: That's just my understanding of it. Trying to think of reality in those terms. That you have a particular idea or experience of...

S: Strictly speaking, you can't think of reality but for, as it were, practical purposes you **have** to think about it. You're **forced** to think about it. So basically there are only these two ways in which you **can** think about it. You can either think of it by negating - with regard to the unconditioned everything that is conditioned. Or you can [99] think of the unconditioned in terms of the conditioned at its very height, at its very best - beyond what you ever actually experience of the conditioned or within the conditioned. If you are to approach it at all, to try to think it at all, there are really only these... well, there are other possibilities. There's also the approach through paradox. The forcible juxtaposition of contradictory terms. As when you say it's light **and** darkness, or it's dazzling darkness, as one of the mystics said. It's a contradictory expression. That gives, at least for some people, some hint of what it is really like.

Vimalamitra: Is there any Buddhist text that goes into paradox?

S: It's the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts mainly - sort of conceptual paradoxes. We were talking about that quite a bit this morning. There's quite a bit of discussion about it on this morning's tape.

So clearly the Sutra of Golden Light favours the affirmative approach. There's very little of the so-called negative approach such as you find in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. There is that one chapter on *sunyata* but it's a very short one. It's almost a sort of clumsy version of the Perfection of Wisdom teaching. It's quite an odd chapter, in fact. I didn't go into that at all in the course of the lecture series. It wasn't necessary. I mean just apart from that it's entirely the affirmative approach in the Sutra of Golden Light. In terms of images and pictures and lavish descriptions.

Uttara: Would it not be given in the light of the Heart Sutra to approach it in the positive way? When we read out the Heart Sutra it is quite negative but more in terms of us seeing it in the light of the positive.

S: That's true. Yes, right. Some people take more easily to one, some more easily to the other. Right, let's go on. We'll try and finish this chapter today. If we don't finish it today we won't finish it at all, at least as regards this week.

May all beings be such in virtue, appearance, fame, glory, with body adorned with the beautiful major marks (and) decorated with the eighty minor marks. And by this good act, may I ere long become a Buddha in the world; may I preach the Law for the welfare of the world; may I deliver beings oppressed by many woes; may I overcome Mara with his might and with his army; may I turn the Wheel of the excellent Law; may I remain for inconceivable aeons; may I satisfy beings with the water of nectar; may I fulfill the six unrivalled perfections just as they were fulfilled by previous Buddhas; may I smite the impurities; may I destroy woes; may I extinguish passion, likewise hatred (and) folly. And may I be continually mindful of former births for hundreds of births, thousands of millions of births. May I constantly recollect the great sages. May I listen to their speech, for it is noble. And by this good act, may I always find a meeting with the Buddhas; may I utterly avoid evil action; may I practise the good acts, mines of excellence. [100]

S: So this paragraph starts off with a sort of aspiration on behalf of all beings, but then it modulates into a sort of Bodhisattva Vow. Do you see? The Bodhisattva Vow starts with the words, 'And by this good act, may I ere long become a Buddha in the world', and so on. Anything there that requires any explanation?

Tim McNally: What does he mean by 'and by this good act, may I always find a meeting with the Buddhas'?

S: May I always be reborn in an age, in a place, where Buddhas are active. According to general Buddhist teaching there are some ages where there are no Buddhas, so one as it were aspires to be born at a time and in a place where Buddhas are extant, where they are teaching, because that makes it much

easier for one. 'And may I always find a meeting with the Buddhas' means, as it were, in every one of my future births may I be born in a country where a Buddha is living and teaching.

All right, let's go on then.

Everywhere in the spheres of all beings may all the woes in the world be extinguished. May those beings whose senses are defective, whose limbs are deficient, all now become complete in senses. May those who in the ten directions are diseased, powerless, whose body is injured, and who are without salvation, all be delivered quickly from their disease, and may they obtain health, strength and senses. May those beings who are in danger of being threatened or killed by kings, thieves, or scoundrels, who are troubled by hundreds of different fears, may all those beings who are oppressed by the advent of troubles be delivered from those hundreds of extreme, very dreadful fears. May those who are beaten, bound and tortured by bonds, and situated in various troubles, distracted by numerous thousands of labours, who have become afflicted by various fears and cruel anxiety, may they all be delivered from their bonds; may the beaten be delivered from the beaters; may the condemned be united with life; and may all those who have come upon troubles become free from fear. May those beings who are oppressed by hunger and thirst obtain a variety of food and drink. And may the blind see various forms, the deaf hear delightful sounds, the naked obtain various garments, poor beings obtain treasures. And may all beings be blessed with abundant wealth, corn, and various jewels. May the experience of woe harm no one and may all beings be endowed with good fortune. May they have beautiful, gracious, auspicious forms and continually have a heap of numerous blessings. As soon as they think of them, may there be for them food and drink as they desire, great abundance, and merits, lutes, drums, (and) pleasant-sounding cymbals, springs, pools, ponds, (and) tanks. As soon as they think of them, may there be for them lotus-ponds of blue and golden lotuses, food and drink, likewise clothing, wealth, gold, ornament of gems and pearls, gold, beryl, and various jewels. May there be no sounds of woe anywhere in the world. May there be not one being of opposing mien, and may they all be of noble aspect, creating light for one another. Whatever success there may be in the world of men, may it arise for them at their thought. As soon as they think of them, may all their desires be fulfilled through [101] their merit (and its) fruit. May there rain down three times from the trees perfume, garlands, unguent, incense, powder, various flowers. May the beings accept them (and) be joyful. May they do honour, inconceivable, to all the Tathagatas in the ten directions, to those completely enlightened, to the Sravakas, to the pure, flawless, firm Law. May beings avoid the low states of existence. May they avoid the eight evil instants. May they obtain the supreme, chief instant. May they always obtain a meeting with Buddhas. May they always be high-born (and) have their treasuries replete with abundant wealth and corn. For numerous aeons may they be thoroughly adorned with beauty, complexion, fame (and) glory. May all women constantly become men, strong, heroic, intelligent, and learned. May they constantly proceed to enlightenment and be active in the six perfections. May they see the Buddhas in the ten directions, comfortably seated under excellent jewelled trees, sitting together on seats of precious beryl. May they hear them expounding the Law. The evil acts obtained by me, what I obtained previously in the oppressions of existences, whatever the evil acts bringing undesired fruits - may they all without remainder be destroyed. May all beings who dwell in the bondage of existence, bound with firm fetters by the fetters of the cycle of existence, be delivered from their bondage by the hands of wisdom. May they be delivered from their woes. May they become Buddhas.

S: So what is this paragraph essentially? It's a sort of general good wishes. You very often have this at the conclusion of a puja or even the conclusion of a Mahayana Sutra. It's just an expression, as it were, of good will towards all living beings - that you wish for all living beings all these good things, both material and spiritual. Anything that requires any particular discussion?

Vimalamitra: What are the eight evil instants?

S: Ah. The eight instants are those instants which are not favourable to spiritual development. Eight times at which you are not born with a human body, with a male body. Not born when there is a Buddha around; not born at a time when the teaching is known; that you're born in a border country among barbarians. There's a standard list of these eight instants. You'll find it in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* - Gampopa.

Tim McNally: Is this a random thing not dependent on merit?

S: This is said to be dependent on merit, so really you're aspiring for the merit to cause you to be reborn in a favourable way.

There's quite a good expression here which I haven't come across anywhere else where it says, 'May there be not one being of opposing mien, and may they all be of noble aspect, creating light for one another.' What do you think that expression means - creating light for one another?

Uttara: They're all developing individually. [102]

_____ : They're helping each other.

S: It suggests communication too, doesn't it? Sort of creative communication helping both parties to move forward. Each shedding light on the path for the other.

But this paragraph too is rather lavish, isn't it? He might just as well have said may all living beings win or experience all happiness both mundane and transcendental. You could have said it quite succinctly in those words and left it at that, but the Mahayana likes to enumerate things very concretely, very particular, very vivid which no doubt is much better, at least for the majority of people.

Aryamitra: It seems to actually conjure up the state it wants to ...

S: Right.

Aryamitra: It produces the emotional state quite often. I find the beginning of it seems to be more towards compassion. 'May those who are beaten and bound' kind of conjures up an image of at least sympathy towards other beings.

S: What about this 'may all women constantly become men' - are you surprised by this? You find this sort of prayer or aspiration in many Buddhist texts. Why should it be? Why should you pray that all women may constantly become men? What is the reason for this?

Tim McNally: Presumably that doesn't mean in the same lifetime.

S: Presumably not. No. [*Laughter*] From one life to another. Though instances are known, though not of complete and perfect change. But why do you think there is this prayer or aspiration in Buddhist texts?

Aryamitra: Because men have a better chance than women.

S: In a way you're wishing the women, or the individual who happens to be a woman, a better chance in the next life. How do you think most women would react to this? Do you think they could accept it?

_____ : I think they do actually.

S: You think they do. A lot of them do. But for a spiritual purpose or just because [103] they think men have a better time of it? [*Laughter*]

Uttara: ... [*unclear*]... pressures on them if they were men.

S: Well, the pressure often comes from their own biological make up. There certainly wouldn't be that. I wonder what would happen if we included this verse of the Sutra of Golden Light in our new Sevenfold Puja.

Aryamitra: You'd get a lot of reaction.

S: It basically means accepting that the female psycho-physical constitution is less conducive to enlightenment than the male psycho-physical constitution, and many women, I think quite unnecessarily, will consider that or take that as a sort of put-down of themselves, but really it's just like a man, say, praying may I be reborn at a time when there is a Buddha around and not at a time when there is no Buddha around. He's not putting himself down in any way. He's just aspiring for more favourable conditions. Oh yes, another of these eight instants: 'May I be reborn as a **human** being', to begin with, 'with all your senses intact'. Not deficient in any way either physically or mentally. So supposing a man was born, let's say, deaf or dumb or blind and he prayed or aspired to be reborn as a man who was not deaf or dumb or blind - with all his senses intact. He wouldn't be putting himself down. He'd just be recognising realistically that he just didn't have certain advantages.

Aryamitra: But that's the thing, isn't it? A woman's got to recognise that ...

S: That she is disadvantaged.

_____ : Presumably there are some people in the Order who decide to settle for less [unclear] enlightenment than a woman.

S: Well, if a woman really makes a strong effort in this life as a woman to gain enlightenment the Buddhist view is that the chances are that she'll be reborn as a man anyway, because in a sense mentally and spiritually she would have transformed herself into a man in this life even though still with the woman's body as a sort of hangover from the last existence. So a woman who seriously takes up the spiritual life is in fact psycho-spiritually, in a sense, a man. So it doesn't mean a woman can't make any spiritual progress in this life - she's got to just pray to be reborn as a man and then make a start - no. If a woman is very determined of course she can make a start in this life. It's simply that she's got as a woman more of a handicap than a man, though heaven knows men are handicapped heavily enough - not that it's easy even for them.

Aryamitra: What would you say the main handicap is?

S: Well, the whole sort of biological constitution. She's built to produce children [104] and usually isn't happy unless she's doing that or having something to do with that process.

Aryamitra: So one would argue then that a woman who's had children will be better off.

S: This is what I used to think. I used to think and I used to say that a woman who'd been through married life and had children and seen them grow up and was now free - let's say the age of forty or forty-five, but still was sufficiently young and vigorous - had a wonderful opportunity for spiritual development, but I've not seen any such women really coming forward. We've had some of them in the Friends but they've done absolutely nothing really for the Movement. I must say they've been to me personally a great disappointment. I did have this view originally that they would be very favourably placed but it hasn't worked out like that so far. They seem to get side-tracked into careers. That seems to be the near enemy as it were. So I mean we don't have in the Movement any woman who is now playing a prominent part and making a really positive contribution who falls into this category, that is to say a married woman who's enjoyed her married life, produced her children, satisfied that part of herself and having satisfied it now sets out on the path of the higher evolution and makes a good effort in that direction and is really a source of strength to the Movement - we don't have a single woman who falls into that category.

Dave Living: Mind you, getting involved in a career could be a good thing if it was done under the auspices of Buddhism.

S: Yes, but in all these cases it isn't.

_____ : Maybe they'll be reborn as men.

S: Maybe they will.

Aryamitra: Thinking of some of the ones that I think you're thinking of...

S: I won't say any names at all!

Aryamitra: I think they will be reborn as men.

S: But that isn't good enough. If one is involved in the spiritual movement one must be making an effort here and now whether one's a man or a woman or whatever.

Aryamitra: So there's another factor, then. It's not just the biological drive for kids. There's another factor. You found also that married women who've had children don't intend to have... [105]

S: I'm not sure about that. I think - this is a conclusion I've sort of tentatively come to - I think it's much more difficult for women, on account of their whole sort of set-up and structure, to envisage something, as it were, beyond, something purely transcendental, and orient themselves in that direction.

Aryamitra: It's possible for them to do it - is that what you said?

S: They seem to find much more difficulty in seeing that there is some sort of transcendental factor so that they can think - OK, in terms of further psychological development - but they seem to find it very difficult to think in terms of actual **spiritual** development. So that even in the case of those women who

are relatively free, who've had their family life and who've brought up their children, I think the fact that they don't devote themselves to spiritual life is that their sort of female conditioning is still very strong and limits their horizon and that they're unable to see beyond a sort of worldly career. They don't really seem able to see that there is something, for want of a better word, transcendental, and they don't seem to have much **feeling** for that. That's certainly the impression that I've got so far.

Vimalamitra: Is that why women seem to be in a way much more practical and often seem to be much more there really sometimes?

S: Where?!

Uttara: ... males are more practical in the sense of getting on with Sukhavati - that's more of a practical nature.

S: I know what you mean. Women very often are much clearer about what they want and go to it much more directly than men do just because, I think, of this greater limitation.

Dave Living: That being the case, why is it that there are practising women in the first place, if they presumably are ill-equipped for it and don't have any transcendental aspirations?

S: Well, how does the Movement present itself to most people? Well, most people - men as well as women - see it in the first place as a group of relatively healthy happy people who seem to be getting on with things, and many of the people that get attracted are people who are on their own, especially in a big city like London, who are comparatively isolated or uprooted people, and they tend to gravitate towards other people. Also there is this idea around currently of personal development and so on, and some - both men and women - are quite involved with this and think of Buddhism in those sort of terms at first, and get involved with it and sometimes stay involved [106] with it in that sort of way, with only a very vague realisation that there's anything beyond that sort of purely psychological development. In a way they come along under a sort of misapprehension almost, which is all right up to a point because in a way **everybody** comes along with a misapprehension. But I think in the case of women, if I'm not generalising too much, it seems much more difficult for them to get this purely transcendental dimension into view. This is what I find just talking to them individually. I'm speaking within the context of actual experience of people in the Movement. It's as though when one talks about that it's very difficult for women to follow what you're talking about.

Tim McNally: I can accept that if it wasn't for the fact that a lot of them do study it and have some definite faith. Surely you can't discredit that.

S: No, I don't, but I don't mistake what I call devotion for what I call commitment. I think women can be very devoted, but I think it's very difficult for them to be committed, and they're usually devoted to the group, or devoted to certain people within the group but not committed in the sense of seeing a sort of transcendental factor over and above the mundane and the psychological and being oriented towards that in the sense of making that their personal aim. But it's true they're very devoted, if anything more devoted than men, but I think the possibility of **commitment** to something transcendental is less, due to their heavier biological conditioning.

Uttara: In terms of when you were saying that they're not receptive to something higher... [*unclear*]... information that there are more women who are mediums who are more receptive to ...

S: I'm not saying that they're less receptive to something higher. I'm saying they're less receptive to what is **highest**.

Aryamitra: So maybe you've got to distinguish between the spiritual and the psychic.

S: For instance, I mentioned in one of the previous study-retreats about it being said that women are more receptive than men. I doubt this. I don't agree with this. I think really men are more receptive than women.

Uttara: That's confusing women with the quality of receptivity.

S: When I say women I mean biological females. The fact that within a sexual context they are physically receptive shouldn't lead one to think that they are necessarily psychologically and spiritually receptive. A woman, for instance, will, say, take on the ideas of the man that she's associated with more often than not. It doesn't [107] mean that she's receptive to those ideas. She doesn't **care** very much about ideas. If her husband votes Labour, well, she'll vote Labour, if he votes Conservative she'll vote Conservative, not because she's receptive - because she doesn't bother very much about politics and just

follows him. That is not receptivity, is it? Receptivity means taking in and assimilating and really making your own. So women can take on ideas very easily especially from men but that doesn't mean that they're receptive **to** ideas. I've known women within the Movement who will repeat to my face whole chunks of my lectures almost word for word as though it was their very own without realising what they were doing, so they do take on in that sort of way but taking on is not taking **in**.

Graham Steven: They also seem to lack imagination as well. Thinking in terms of great artists and poets and just general inventors of the past. Very, very few are women.

S: Well, the standard feminist reply to this is that women have not had the opportunity. It's a reply I don't personally accept but this is the one that you will hear. I think it's nonsense actually. Most men who became creators didn't have a real opportunity. They had to fight and make their own way. Anyway, that will lead us much too far afield. I won't say on to controversial ground - I don't think it's controversial at all, actually.

Aryamitra: Do you think that it might be something to do with the fact that the maternal instinct, whether in male or female - do you think that's one of the things that hold you back? So after a woman might be married and had children -

S: Wants to go on mothering things.

Aryamitra: Yes. Do you think that's it?

S: In some perhaps, but I don't think in all. I think a few women might even be quite fed up with motherhood. Some women are more motherly than others. One clearly sees this.

Aryamitra: Do you think, then, it seems more like they just haven't got what a man's got?

S: I've been very sort of conscious more recently, talking with individual women within the Movement and trying to sort of stir them up etc., at how limp and lifeless most of them are. Now I don't want to generalise about this. I've only been dealing with women within the Movement. I'm quite sure that outside the Movement there are women who are more lively - whether in the right sort of way I wouldn't care to say, but my own experience within the Movement is on the whole that women are very limp and lifeless and lacking in the spiritual drive that at least some of the men within the Movement have. I really do feel this when I'm in contact with the women. But I wouldn't like to generalise from this about women **in general** though I suspect that there's a definite connection, and that probably one could generalise, but my own major [108] experience in connection with the Friends is so narrow that I don't feel justified in making a firm generalisation. I can certainly speak, say, with regard to those with whom one comes into contact within the context of the Friends. They don't have that transcendental *oomph*. They might have other varieties of *oomph* in some cases but not the transcendental variety. You know what I mean, that sort of real zest and enthusiasm and drive and thrust, as it were? They don't have that. So that's what you need for spiritual life and a man seems to have that more readily than a woman. And this is why I'm sure in many Mahayana Sutras there is this aspiration 'may all women become men'. In other words may that particular individual in her next existence assume a psycho-physical constitution more suited to the attainment of enlightenment. You're wishing that being well just as you wish that **you** may be reborn at a time when there are Buddhas and the Dharma is extant. You're not putting anybody down. It can be twisted like that but that will be quite perverse. There's no point in putting women down but on the other hand there's no point in refusing to recognise facts.

Graham Steven: Do you think it would also lead to a higher state of consciousness?

S: One would like to think that, but men are also pretty raw and rough material sometimes. I think the potentiality is there more - the concrete potentiality is there more in the case of men.

Aryamitra: In that sense the man himself has got to recognise his own masculinity.

S: Not only got to recognise his own masculinity. I think he's got to recognise that he's in a more advantageous position than a woman, which doesn't mean that he's got to crow over them but just be more responsible towards them also. There's no point in sticking out his little chest and saying 'I'm superior to women.' It's a fact but there's no point in sort of making a great issue of it. It's not necessary - or making women feel it in a negative sort of way. That isn't very masculine - that's just mean, but certainly recognising that you are more advantaged.

Uttara: We had a discussion like this on one of the other retreats came up out of communities and mixed communities and what is better - male or female communities.

S: Well, it's obvious, isn't it?

Uttara: It came about that it wasn't obvious. You may live with males. You may live with seven or ten males or whatever number of males. That doesn't necessarily mean that that would be a better community than a community which was mixed.

S: I think it would, other factors being equal. You could certainly get a community of ten men together that didn't add up to a spiritual community at all, but I think, [109] other factors being equal, there's a better chance of a community of men being a spiritual community than a community that was mixed.

Uttara: In terms of going towards something. If they started off with the exact same ground, women and men mixing and getting on with a certain job - the same job - and males working together and getting on with the same job and moving towards something.

S: I think if you have a mixed community you almost always get a sort of polarisation into couples which detracts from the forward thrust of the community as a whole.

Uttara: Isn't it in terms of because we were weak we couldn't relate to females?

S: That's emotional blackmail. That is absolute rubbish. It may be true of certain individuals but to try and use it as a sort of general argument, I think that's just sort of female blackmail.

Uttara: Yeah, if you just couldn't relate to them and couldn't get things on. I'm thinking very much in terms of Siddhiratna. He was getting on. He was moving or he felt he was moving further ahead because he was relating to a female, whereas he had lived in other communities, other male communities, and he didn't seem to be getting...

S: He's an exception, I would say. I know him pretty well.

Aryamitra: He's Siddhiratna!

S: Frankly, I think within the whole movement, or let's say within the Order, there are only two men that I would be quite confident could move forward in a mixed situation, and he's one of them. I won't tell you who the other one is but there's two. Not more - not more than two - not even you. *[Laughter]* So one mustn't generalise just from one or two cases. They are exceptions. But I think even someone like that would move forward more quickly if they were with other men because no doubt those individuals could move forward on their own despite being in a mixed community. But if they were in a men's community they could move forward more rapidly because they have the co-operation of the others who are also moving forward. Whereas the women, I feel, are moving forward, if they are moving forward at all, at a much slower rate, so they would tend to slow down the men who were there with them in the mixed community situation.

Uttara: I think the big factor is if there is co-operation.

S: Yes, but you can be held back by the people you're in a community with if they're not evolving at the same rate that you are or are not trying to evolve. It's certainly pretty clear within the Movement as a whole with regard to the people who we've actually got that the men move forward more quickly than the women. [110]

Dave Living: (*unclear*) two centres like Norwich and Brighton. Brighton seems to predominantly attract females and Norwich seems to predominantly attract males.

S: No, Norwich isn't predominantly attracting males at all. Devamitra is quite consciously selecting them. Those who he sees have got some potential, he just goes all out to get them. It's as simple as that and I think that's a very good way of going about it. You just don't wait for people to drift in. People do come along in one way or another, and if you see they're particularly promising you devote extra time and energy to them and therefore he so far has had a very small turnover. Those who've come have tended to stay because he's worked very hard on and with them. It's too early to generalise because Norwich has not even been open a year, not even six months, but that is the sort of set-up at the moment. There are more men and some of them are already asking for ordination. That's such a quick development. Down in Brighton there are certainly more women and the tempo seems a bit slacker or at least it was until Mangala went down. I think things are moving a bit more briskly now.

Tim McNally: Could you see mixed communities being staffed by exceptional men who might use their more advanced spiritual resources to help the women?

S: Oh yes, I do, but I'm not going to let anyone use that as a get-out for rationalisation. Yes, maybe there are some Bodhisattva-like men who sort of stay behind and help the women, fair enough. I don't think we've got any of them at the moment amongst us. Let me make that clear, but I see that as a possibility. That's what happens every time a man gets married, in a way, isn't it? In a way. [*Murmurs!*] This is what I sometimes said paradoxically but truly, that I recommend marriage for all women and for no men.

Uttara: ... Beginning to see women as an oppression...

S: Well, in a sense, only in the sense though that if they are around one has, as it were, to hang back for them and sometimes one doesn't want to have to hang back.

Uttara: In terms that they haven't anything to offer you. You don't need...

S: I think that's true. I think that's the situation in which it becomes very difficult for the woman because women seem to derive so much of their worth from their value for somebody else, especially for some man rather than from their own estimation of themselves. But if they are to evolve as individuals then they have to have that self-respect and value themselves and not wait for men to value them. They've got to be real individuals and some of them see this quite clearly and are really working on it but it isn't easy. So one should have real sympathy for them and certainly not succumb to their wiles when they're behaving just as women, but as and when they do behave as individuals do all that one can to help them and make it easier for them.

Uttara: (*unclear*) in terms of dakinis and things like that, in terms of femininity as a dakini. [111]

S: When I had the seminar with the women I talked quite a bit about dakinis because it seemed to be quite positive for them. On the other hand I don't want them to start thinking of dakinis in the sense of just a glorification, a pseudo-spiritualisation of their existing femaleness and a sort of justification for remaining female in a sort of non, or even anti, spiritual sense. I think it can be misused in that way just as the Tantra generally can be misused as a justification for almost anything.

Uttara: And the female Bodhisattvas too.

S: That can be misunderstood and misused. I mean essentially a Bodhisattva is no more female than male or no more male than female but having a female Bodhisattva doesn't just mean putting a halo around the head of ordinary untransformed femininity. That's the great danger.

Graham Steven: What is transformed femininity?

S: What is **transformed** femininity? I use femininity in that sort of way as just representing the more as it were soft spiritual qualities, that is to say the tenderness, gentleness, compassion etc., etc., though of course again in Buddhism very often compassion is considered masculine and wisdom is considered feminine. These are just sort of poetic symbols. One can't take them very literally. I said a little while ago that I didn't think that women were more receptive than men. I don't think also that they're more sensitive than men. I think men are more sensitive than women, but the popular myth is that **women** are more sensitive. I don't think they are at all.

Aryamitra: Is it meant to do with getting confused with men and women and masculinity and femininity?

S: To **some** extent.

Aryamitra: Because then would you say that femininity is the receptive aspect?

S: Well, that means you have to say then that the majority of women are not very feminine and that quite a lot of men are feminine. If you're prepared to speak in those sort of terms then fair enough.

Tim McNally: So sensitivity and receptivity are aspects of transformed femininity?

S: It's transformed femininity - not transformed femaleness I would say. I don't think femaleness **can** be transformed. I think it has to be abandoned.

Aryamitra: How would you define femaleness?

S: Oh this earth-mother reproductive sense-oriented quality. Female is a biological [112] category. Feminine is a psychological category.

Aryamitra: This is then where the confusion comes in.

S: You confuse between the literal and the metaphorical. Because a female in a sexual situation is literally receptive you therefore transfer that as it were to the psychological plane and say that women are more receptive psychologically, but I just don't think that they are. They're not more receptive to ideas. They sometimes seem to be because they don't bother to argue - they're not interested enough to argue - they say, 'Oh yes, dear, that's right', and they haven't really accepted or really taken in. They just can't be bothered to argue. They don't consider it **important** enough to argue about or think too much about so they just accept what you want them to accept.

Vimalamitra: That's quite good - you get a really good idea of ...(*unclear*) ...

Aryamitra: There is this psychic receptivity in the sense that you get a lot of women who are spiritualists, mediums, and maybe that's confused with the spiritual.

S: I think it is sometimes. This usually indicates a lower degree of integration, whether in men or in women - this sort of mediumistic receptivity. You're more, as it were, open to invasion from psychic content which is just sort of floating around, as it were. You've no, as it were, personality of your own. It is women rather than men who become mediums although there are quite a few male mediums too.

Aryamitra: I don't quite understand what a lower stage of integration means.

S: Well, when the bits and pieces that make up you are just sort of hanging all loose and don't add up to a harmonious sort of total psycho-spiritual organism.

Aryamitra: At the same time you call it an integration - a lower level of integration.

S: Integration is on a lower level when it incorporates elements which belong to that lower level. So you can have an integrated person who is on the whole a low-level person and an unintegrated person whose total unintegrated being involves elements which are, as it were, higher than any included in the integrated lower-level person. So sometimes quite gifted and richly endowed people can be quite unintegrated. When they **are** integrated - when they do become integrated eventually there's a far richer synthesis and a far sort of richer and more highly evolved person. An **animal** is quite integrated but it's only an animal. There are lots of people who are quite integrated people on their own level as it were - animal-like, sometimes - but someone who is capable of much higher experiences, much deeper insight, is relatively unintegrated and in a way the greater the range of your experience and the further it goes the more difficulty you have in being an integrated person. You've more to integrate.

Aryamitra: Sorry, could you say that again? The range of your... [113]

S: The range of your experience and the depth of your experience. The greater the range and the extent of that, the more difficult it is for you to integrate.

Vimalamitra: How do you integrate it if you're on a different level?

S: Well, you can only integrate around the centre. You've got to fix what your centre is, what your ultimate aim is, and gradually get everything working towards that. In that way you integrate yourself. The average man is probably relatively integrated. The great genius may not be at all integrated - he may be a quite disorganised sort of person, but as and when he does become integrated he'll not only be more integrated, he'll be integrated on a much higher level in a more comprehensive way and be an altogether richer sort of individual.

Graham Steven: That's why it's so important for us to get hold of children into the Movement.

S: I think it's more important for these sort of rather more richly endowed people to have an ultimate goal or ideal that they can be working towards. Otherwise they've no means of integration. The ordinary person will survive without that just because they are integrated on their own level but the more gifted person really needs some centre around which, or in relation to which, he can integrate himself. Otherwise he'll sort of go to pieces or sway from one extreme to another. Do you see this? Or he might disintegrate into some kind of madness.

Aryamitra: Van Gogh.

S: Yes, possibly. And also - to go back to the male-female business - biologically speaking, men are much more variable than women. Woman is more stable, in a way more integrated but on a lower level. Women don't go and commit crimes like men. They don't go mad like men and also are not geniuses

like men. They're not as good or as bad, but man's range is much wider. The prisons are mostly full of men not women. They're monasteries. Prisons are also single-sex communities.

Aryamitra: And there's not one woman in Sukhavati. *[Laughter]* Biologically speaking.

S: Biologically speaking. We don't want either men or women at Sukhavati - we want angels, a higher category altogether.

Let's finish off because we're right near the end of the chapter.

Whatever beings here in Jambudvīpa and whatever also in other world-spheres perform various, profound merits, I congratulate them all on this merit. By this my congratulation on their merits (and) by the (merit) obtained (by me) through body, voice or mind, may there be fruitful success for my resolve. May I touch supreme, flawless enlightenment.
[114]

S: So another rejoicing in merits and another Bodhisattva Vow. Read on.

Whoever worships and praises the Buddhas continually, with mind believing, pure, spotless, by means of this (Confession), which is praised (as a cause of) ripening, and abandons the evil states for sixty aeons, and whoever, men, women, brahmins, warriors, with these celebrated verses, will praise the sage, standing with hands in the gesture of reverence, recollecting births in all existences, he will have his body adorned with all members and with all senses, endowed with various merits, with virtues, and he will be continually worshipped by kings among men. Such will he be in each place (of birth).

Not under one Buddha have they performed good, nor even under two, nor four, nor five, nor ten, but they in whose ear this Confession will have sounded have performed good under thousands of Buddhas.

So (ends) the third chapter, the Chapter on Confession. in the excellent Suvarṇabhāṣa, king of Sūtras.

S: In other words, in order to meet with the Sutra you must already have accumulated quite a few merits.
[Laughter]

Uttara: It says, 'Not under one Buddha have they performed...'

S: Mm, yes, in previous lives they've come into contact with a number of Buddhas. In different lives, that is to say, because you only get one Buddha at a time. According to tradition the earth could not bear the weight of more than one Buddha at a time. You can see the meaning of that, can't you? It would be too much to have more than one Buddha at any given time.

Tim McNally: *[unclear]* ... full of praise?

S: Do I think that it's full of praise? It's very high praise, isn't it? It probably isn't full. In the Mahayana Sūtras in general going very very much for this very lavish praise and rejoicing and everything is on a grand scale and everything is sort of multiplied by thousands and by millions. Mahayana Sūtras always try to give you an impression of vastness and infinity, multiplicity and abundance and all the rest of it. Try to widen your perspective. It must have been very inspiring for the people who took it perfectly literally. Perhaps it's only in this sort of way that the compiler of the Sūtra can express what he really feels. He couldn't do it in a more sober fashion. Anyway that's the chapter. We've fortunately been able to get through it all. So what sort of general impression are you left with after going through the whole chapter? Confession, rejoicing in merits, worship, Bodhisattva Vow.

Vimalamitra: Opening up.

S: Opening up. [115]

Tim McNally: It's very devotional.

S: Very devotional. There's a tremendous surge of energy behind it, isn't there?

_____ : Joyful.

S: Joyful, yes. It goes with a real swing. It's very exuberant. It sort of bubbles up.

_____ : Very positive.

S: Positive, yes. Even though there's so much said about faults and evil, but the overall impression of the whole chapter is very positive. There's nothing morbid about it. There's no atmosphere of sin and guilt.

Aryamitra: It's a kind of rebirth.

Graham Steven: In some ways it's quite matter of fact.

S: Well, it's stating the spiritually obvious.

_____ : It's very cleansing.

S: It's also not abstruse, it's not abstract. It's quite easily understandable really, isn't it?- quite straightforward in a way.

_____ : It doesn't get into any complicated arguments.

S: No, it's very non-conceptual. Very direct, very immediate in its appeal. It isn't difficult to understand. You just have to allow yourself to be carried along by it.

_____ : Emotionally powerful - overwhelming...

S: Well, the *Mahavastu* is even more like that, in my opinion, and there's three volumes of it. Three stout volumes. You seem to get this sort of atmosphere, this sort of air with much of early Buddhism. I've spoken about this before. This sort of tremendous rejoicing and jubilation and exuberance and people sort of tossing their scarves up in the air and clapping their hands and all that sort of thing. It comes across very strongly in the *Mahavastu* and in quite a number of the Mahayana Sutras. Everybody is so overjoyed that a Buddha has appeared and there's the Dharma to be followed and there's a Sangha to make offerings to and there's stupas to worship and everybody is sort of absolutely overwhelmed with joy. They think how lucky they are and how wonderful it is. You very much get this sort of attitude. [116]

_____ : It's much more clear.

S: It's very clear, very clean, very pure, colourful, innocent, child-like in a way though without any suggestion of immaturity or anything of that sort. It's certainly the sort of atmosphere or the sort of spirit that we could do with a bit of here in England. It's joyful and exuberant and very emotionally positive. So it gives you quite a different impression of 'religion' - inverted commas - from what one usually gets. For the average man in this sort of milieu religion means something very colourful and very joyful, exuberant, happy - that's what religion means. Being involved in a practical way with something of that nature. Very generous, outward-going, hospitable, kind, affectionate, welcoming, open, clear, joyful - it suggests all those sort of things. Gratitude, thanksgiving. Well, what Christmas is supposed to be like but which usually isn't. How can you have this sort of atmosphere, this sort of spirit, when you're dining on turkeys? How is it possible. Plum pudding, yes, but turkeys, no. Not to speak of roast beef and all the other abominations, or alcohol.

Well, it's true, isn't it? You don't get merry in this sort of way on alcohol, do you? This is a very innocent, happy sort of joyfulness, very light-hearted, very pure and innocent and natural.

_____ : I think what has killed Christmas is the television.

S: I think what has killed Christmas is Christianity! Television... you don't have to watch it, do you?

Uttara: Just forget about Christmas.

Aryamitra: It's funny how it seems that alcohol is the drug at Christmas time, which is a kind of depressant really.

Uttara: Maybe in the past alcohol wasn't such a depressant. When you drank you may have been quite stimulated but I think what gets into the stuff nowadays. [Laughter] It's just how you take it -

_____ : Otherwise you can refuse to admit it's a depressant.

S: It depends on the individual temperament. It releases what's there. Some people literally become cheerful and happy when they've had a drop. They become communicative, garrulous. Others become rather bad-tempered and want to fight with you and quarrel with you. Others become weepy and sentimental [*Laughter*] and cry on your shoulder and tell you how much they like you etc., etc. Others, of course, it's affection in another way that we won't go into. [*Laughter*] So I don't think you can say that alcohol has such a particular psychological effect. It brings out what is below the surface in you. Too much of it of course isn't very good for anybody but a little of it will just [117] remove your inhibitions and release whatever it is you've been inhibiting, whether something negative or something positive. Some people are much nicer, much better to know when they've had a drink or two. They loosen up a bit and become a bit more friendly, a bit more open, a bit more outward-going. They need that to sort of unbutton themselves sometimes. Some people are much better fun drunk than sober. [*Laughter*] One can really get on with them when they've had a few drinks.

_____ : I keep a bottle in my room.

S: Should it be necessary at Sukhavati? [*Laughter*] At Sukhavati we have other nourishment. A little bit of communication exercises will do the trick. That's much better besides being cheaper. Anyway I think it is - oh it's a quarter to six - maybe we'd better conclude.

All: Thanks, Bhante.

_____ : It's certainly been one of the best Christmases I've had.

S: Oh, good.

End of seminar

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