

Alavaga Sutta Seminar

Held at: Padmaloka, Norfolk in July 1982

Present: Sangharakshita, Sthirananda, Vessantara, Sumana, Kovida, Vajrananda.

Tape 1 side 1. (SNA Cass 1) Transcriber: Subhadra.

S: Page 29.

Vessantara: "Alavaga. Thus have I heard. Once, while the master was dwelling near Alavi in the haunt of the spirit Alavaga, the spirit approached and said: 'Get out, recluse'

'Very well, sir', the master replied, and went out.

'Get in recluse' said the spirit.

'Very well, sir', said the Master, and went in.

And a second and a third time the spirit spake in like manner. And a second and a third time the master did as he was bade. And a fourth time, too, the spirit addressed the Master, saying:

'Get out, recluse'

'No sir, I'll not go out for you. do as you will'.

'I'll ask you a question, Recluse, and if you don't reply, I'll addle your wits, split your heart, and catch you by the feet and throw you the other side of the Ganges'.

Well, sir, I see no one, in the world of devas and maras, or on earth with its recluses, brahmins, devas and men, who could do any of these things; but ask, sir, as you desire'."

S: This is the introduction, er, according to scholarly research into the structure and the composition of the Sutta Nipata, which is, of course, a composite work, a sort of anthology, even though a very early one. The prose introduction and the concluding verses constitute a framework for the main part of the Sutta which is, of course, you know, the exchange of questions and replies, and probably the framework, the prose introduction plus these concluding verses, is a bit later than the verses themselves. It's highly likely that the little exchange of questions and answers was in circulation first, and it gradually came to be edited in this particular way, that is to say, having the framework supplied.

Nonetheless, in a way, they do sort of hang together, and the framework is certainly not to be ignored, so we're going to take the framework, so to speak, quite seriously too, hm? The principle character, apart from the Buddha himself, is of course Alavaga; the sutta is named after him. Alavaga is a Yakkha, or in Sanskrit, Yaksha. So what is a Yakkha? Hare translates as 'spirit', but this doesn't really help very much. Chalmers translates as 'woodland spirit', but this doesn't help us very much either. So what does one understand by Yakkha or Yaksha? Has anyone got any sort of idea?

Sthirananda: Demon.

S: It's a sort of demon, but necessarily a bad demon?

Sthirananda: Mischievous.

[2]

S: Mischievous. (pause) Not necessarily even mischievous. Some yakkhas are represented as

quite beneficent. But what seems to be most characteristic of a yakkha is that he is a rather awe-inspiring character. We can tell this from the iconography; there are yakkha or yaksha images in existence, statues in existence, from a quite early period in India. I say quite early, but it's still post-Buddhistic, and yakkhas are usually represented in these images, or statues, as very well-built, powerful sort of figures, and a certain kind of Buddha image does seem to have been modelled on these yakkha images or figures; it's a kind of Buddha image that shows the Buddha as a very well-built, powerful figure. So one could probably best say that a yakkha is a sort of awe-inspiring, even sublime spirit, inhabiting perhaps forests or waste places, mountains; not necessarily-mischievous, not necessarily demonic, but quite often so, huh? One has to be quite careful where yakkhas are concerned. You can't be sure whether they're beneficent or otherwise. It's also interesting that among the titles of the Buddha, among the names and terms by which the Buddha is addressed in the Pali canon, is this word 'yakkha'. The Buddha himself is addressed as 'yakkha' in at least one passage that I remember. It's a verse passage, huh? So this suggests the Buddha as conveying an impression of something awe-inspiring, something powerful. Something even you have to be a little careful of, even something terrifying, huh? Something numinous, as if to say that the Buddha is not to be trifled with, huh? He's not so meek and gentle as people might like to think, huh? The Buddha is powerful, the Buddha is spiritually powerful, the Buddha is sublime, and so on, huh? Anyway, that is by the way.

Here we seem to be concerned with a Yakkha who is decidedly of a malevolent turn. By the way, we do find, in Ancient Indian literature, especially in the 'Mahaband' (?) a number of sort of exchanges of questions and answers of this type, where a yakkha, or yaksha, puts the questions, threatening death or some terrible consequences if he doesn't get satisfactory answers. So this sort of type of literature seems to have been known around the time of the Buddha, or shortly afterwards, so it could be that when the compilers of the Sutta Nipata came across this ballad, this exchange, they thought this would fit quite nicely into that sort of framework with which the Indian public was familiar, i.e. the exchanges between a ferocious yakkha and somebody who answers his questions, do you see what I mean?

Anyway, be that as it may, the exchange does tell us something about the Buddha, and of course it may actually have happened exactly as related or recorded here, we don't know. Anyway, 'Thus have I heard': Ananda is speaking. 'Once while the Master was dwelling near Alavi, in the haunt or abode of the spirit, the yakkha Alavaga, the spirit approached and said: 'Get out, Recluse;'. 'Very well, sir', the Master replied, and he went out. 'Get in, recluse!' said the spirit. 'Very well sir' said the Master, and went in.' By the way, the translation, Hare's translation, is very sort of pseudo-biblical, and it doesn't always quite reproduce the Pali. For instance, he translates 'Very well, sir', well, what is that in Pali? It's 'sadhu abuso' (?) 'Sadhu' means 'very good', as when we shout 'sadhu' three times, huh, it's the same word: 'very good, all right, that's fine'. 'Aduso' (?) doesn't exactly mean 'sir', it means 'friend', so it's much more like, 'all right, friend', do you see what I mean, huh? 'And a second and a third time the spirit spake in like manner': here's this pseudo-biblical language, [3] 'Spake in like manner'; in Pali it's quite straightforward and colloquial, hum? 'And a second and a third time the Master did as he was bade. And a fourth time, too, the spirit addressed the Master, saying, 'Get out, recluse!' 'No sir I'll not get out for you, do as you will' So what does one learn about the Buddha from this little exchange?

Sumana: He's quite obliging, up to a point.

S: He's quite obliging, up to a point, huh? So, is there any sort of general message that could be extracted from this? I mean, what does the Buddha not do?

Sumana: Well, he doesn't react, yes.

S: He doesn't react. He goes along with the yakkha, huh?, he's obliging, he does as the yakkha asks him, but as you said, only up to a point. So what do we sort of gather from that, what sort of general principle?

Sthirananda: He's prepared to give the other person the benefit of the doubt.

S: Probably in the Buddha's mind there was no doubt, you could say he knew exactly what the yakkha was up to, hum? It means there's no harm in going along with people, but up to a point. If you've gone along with them, that puts you in a stronger position. You don't have to react, you don't have to assert yourself or your point of view straight away. You're sort of gathering your forces, as it were. You're just biding your time; in the meantime, you just go along with the other people, you just go along with the world, you don't start disagreeing straight off. You just listen, you may nod, you may say, yes, all right, I agree with you, huh? But having done that for a little while, then you start introducing your point of view, your own attitude quite firmly, huh?, and quite definitely. But you don't so to speak weigh in all at once, this is probably a useful strategy in dealing with people, in dealing with worldly affairs.

Vessantara: But there can be difficulties with it, can't there? Sometimes somebody puts across their point of view to you and you say 'yes'; not 'yes, I agree with you', but 'yes, I understand what you've said and I'm taking it in'. Then, when at a certain point you do start to disagree, they are taken aback, because they took your 'yes', which was just an acknowledgement, as a 'yes' of agreement, and then you have more of a difficulty.

S: But you've listened to them, so it's their turn to listen to you.

Vessantara: It reminds me a bit of your interpretation of the Tantric precepts, about not interfering with people's energies: the Buddha sort of lets people act as they want, until there's a definite point where he has to interfere; he allows them the sort of freedom...

S: For them to take a stand, huh? Well, anyway, the Buddha does take a stand. 'The fourth time, too, the spirit addressed the Master, saying, 'Get out, recluse'" This word 'recluse' is [4] 'samana', the Buddha was known to the public as a samana, that is to say, a religious person but not following the orthodox Brahminical tradition, hum? So then the Buddha says 'No sir, I'll not go out for you, do as you will'. And then Alavaga says, 'I'll ask you a question, recluse. If you don't reply, I'll addle your wits, split your heart and catch you by the feet and throw you the other side of the Ganges.' So, what do you make of this? (laughter). Doesn't it seem very extraordinary? He's going to ask the Buddha questions, he's going to ask the Buddha questions about Dhamma, but look how he's going about it. What is his attitude? Is he really in a very receptive frame of mind? What is the purpose of these questions?

Kovida: It does put it on a sort of life-and-death footing...

S: Well, it was certainly sort of life-and-death, so he thinks, for the Buddha, but why should he put it in that sort of way? Is it a proper sort of way, is it appropriate?

Sumana: It's rather threatening.

S: Hm. Well, it's as though there's a complete sort of incompatibility, a complete incongruity between what you are asking about, and the way in which you are asking. Do you see what I mean?

Sthirananda: It's as though he's challenging him to a contest, if I'm not reading too much into it.

S: Well, he's certainly challenging the Buddha, challenging him by asking questions, but is that the right sort of approach with regard to these sort of matters, one might ask.

Kovida: Is the spirit aware that this is the Buddha? From the information we're told, as far as it's concerned this is just a recluse; it doesn't specify, either, what he's going to ask him, it just says, 'I'll ask you a question'.

S: But he knows in his own mind what sort of questions he's going to ask, and even if he doesn't know if it's the Buddha, is that the right way of asking anybody, certainly any samana, those sort of questions? In other words, what I'm getting at is that sometimes people put questions in such a way that any reply is in fact precluded, hum? Do you see what I mean? So what does that suggest, if someone puts questions in such a way that precludes the answer to the question, so in a way it makes it impossible for you to answer the question, well, what does that mean?

Kovida: It's not really a question in the first place.

S: It's not really a question in the first place. Well, not really a question of the type it purports to be.

Kovida: It's more an opinion or a statement...

S: It's an opinion or a statement of view, or an assertion of an attitude, huh?

Vessantara: These sort of questions begin with, 'Don't you think that...!', and then, when you don't think that, you're in trouble!

[5]

S: Very often when people seem to be asking a question, they're not really asking a question at all. A question, formally speaking, implies a desire to receive an answer, but people don't necessarily want to, you know, receive an answer when they seem to be asking a question. Very often they want to make a point of their own, or express a certain attitude towards you, sometimes quite aggressive, even belligerent, as you occasionally do get, you know, in beginners' classes or meetings. Buddhadasa had a few experiences of this sort, fairly recently. In New Zealand he went on a little tour of FWBO Centres, and he said it gave him quite a shock because at one meeting where he gave a talk, and answered questions afterwards, one person in the audience for no apparent reason seemed absolutely to have it in for Buddhadasa, and was asking very, very loaded questions, very very unfriendly, very very hostile questions. I have had a few experiences of that sort when I was in New Zealand, too. So it becomes quite clear that that person doesn't really want an answer to those questions. That person only

wants an opportunity, in the guise of asking questions, to express his hostility to you; perhaps he doesn't dare to do it openly, so he does it in this sort of way. Perhaps he'd really like to give you a really good punch, but he doesn't dare to do that, so he pretends to ask questions, but you can sense, and sometimes it's very obvious, only too obvious, the underlying hostility or even quite overt hostility.

Vessantara: It's as if they see you as some sort of authority, which is why they had to make it a question rather than a statement, but all they're trying to do is enlist authority for their own point of view which they are putting forward.

S: On the other hand, you could say that there are some very mixed-up sort of people; I say people, the actual examples of which I can think are all women, huh?, it's simply perhaps that I remember them more, I don't know, but I remember them from Archway days. In a way they do sincerely want an answer to their questions, I mean, they're asking the questions quite sincerely, but, at the same time, there's such a lot of, you know, deeply-ingrained hostility in their characters, they cannot but ask the question in a belligerent sort of way, do you know what I mean? They don't know how to ask it as it were properly, decently, positively; maybe they just can't ask in that sort of way, so the question comes across, but it's almost as though they don't really want an answer. It's as though they are just expressing hostility, but at the same time they are a sort of mixed character: in point of fact they do want an answer, that's the only way they can find of putting it across; it's just like, in another sort of context, there seem to be some people who don't know how to ask you for something, or to do something, nicely: they can only do it in a rough, gruff sort of way, do you see what I mean? So there are people, you know, with so much negativity in their characters that even when they do want to ask a question quite sincerely, they cannot but put it in an aggressive, or hostile, or belligerent sort of way. So it could be that Alavaga, in a way, represents that sort of character. You know, I've mentioned before about the ambivalence of the yakkha; as a mythologem, as a sort of mythological being, the, you know, yakkha can be beneficent or he can be quite malicious, so perhaps the yakkha stands for that type of person, that type of human being, hum?, who isn't sort of fundamentally bad, not that anybody's fundamentally bad, in the Buddhist sense, from a Buddhist point of view, but a yakkha is not quite like Mara, there's a possibility of a yakkha being good, there's a possibility of a good yakkha, whereas a good Mara would be a contradiction in [6] terms. So a yakkha represents a sort of person in which there is both good and bad, and the bad is quite strong, and the good is always mixed up with the bad and you never quite know whether you're going to be dealing with the bad side of the person or the good side. So that even in connection with religious life, even in connection with spiritual life, even when they've got Dharma questions to ask, they cannot but ask them in a very un-Dharmic sort of way, do you see what I mean? Er, maybe Alavaga or the Yakkha in general represents this sort of character, rather stormy and turbulent.

Vessantara: He obviously, er, I feel there are some people who actually do have a genuine sort of aspiration, but they've tried out various people who supposedly have spiritual answers to things and found them wanting: they could see through them, and from that point on, in a way, they have quite a heavy 'down' on people who do put forward a spiritual answer, because they've tried out other people in the past and they've been no good, and so they're a mixture of this actually quite genuine aspiration and real question, along with hostility because they don't actually expect you to produce any answers.

S: Sometimes, in very extreme cases, they don't want you to produce any answers, they've

made up their minds in advance not to accept your answers; they don't want answers, they only want an opportunity to put questions in a hostile manner. But of course, if that was Alavaga's intention, he meets his match in the Buddha because, as the Buddha says, 'I see no one in the world of devas, brahmas, maras or on earth with its devas, brahmins, recluses and men who could do any of these thing.' So what does this tell you about the Buddha?

Sthirananda: He's not in the least bit concerned.

S: He's not in the least bit concerned huh? He has great self-confidence, no fear; but then he goes on to say, 'But ask, sir, as you desire', which is 'Ask, friend, as you wish'. 'I don't mind you asking me questions, I don't mind answering them'. All right, let's go on to the verses:

"Then the spirit, Alavaga, spake this verse to the Master:

Alavaga: 'What wealth here pray is best for man?
What well-pursued brings happiness?
What taste is sweet beyond compare?
How live the life they say is best?'"

So these are his questions. What is the best wealth, the best riches for man, here in this world? What is it which, when well-pursued, brings happiness? What is it, the taste of which is sweet beyond compare? And what is the best life to live, what do they say is the best life to live? So these are really quite far-reaching questions, er, and the Buddha's answers also quite far-reaching. One might comment at this point that the verses do seem to be quite early verses; I mentioned I think in some other connection that in the Buddha's day there were no books, writing was not used for religious purposes, the Buddha's own teachings were not recorded in his lifetime, they were only recorded several hundred years later. So what happened was, in the very early days of Buddhism, even during the Buddha's own lifetime, certain people composed [7] little poems and ballads, embodying the Buddha's teachings, and these they chanted, huh?, or they sung even, as they went from place to place; they taught them to people, perhaps they commented on them, expounded them, and there are some of these verses, some of these ballads, which have come down to us in a sort of dialogue form. In some recent seminar, I can't remember where, I compared these to Scottish border ballads, do you see what I mean?, where there's a speaker and someone who replies, and where sometimes there's a semi-dramatic character. There's a story told at the same time, as well as a teaching given, hum? This particular ballad, if one includes the framework and conclusion, is sort of moderately semi-dramatic, one might say. And the content, the actual teaching given, is quite primitive in the sense that you don't find all the analyses and elaborations that come with the later versions of the Buddha's teaching. So what is the Buddha represented as saying here, huh?

Sumana: 'Faith is the wealth here best for man;
Dhamma pursued brings happiness,
And the truth is sweet beyond compare;
Life wisely lived they say is best.'

S: 'Faith is the wealth here best for man'. (Reads Pali) Faith is the best wealth for man. Hare's translation is quite literal. So why is this? Or what does one mean by faith anyway? 'Saddha' What sort of faith was the Buddha talking about? In what does faith consist?

Vessantara: It's confidence that you're on the right path.

S: Confidence that you're on the right path, but how can you be confident that you are on the right path?

Vessantara: Through having seen other people on the same path succeeding, and through your own experience of having taken it as far as you've got.

S: But this is dealt with in a verse further down where the Buddha says, 'With faith that Men-of-worth by Dhamma cool attain', huh? So faith consists in the confidence that men-of-worth by means of the Dharma, by pursuing the Dharma, actually do attain to a state of 'Coolness', which is a rendering of Nibbana or Nirvana. So we'll go into that a bit later on, but here, for the time being, means the confidence that there are in the world other human beings who have achieved a higher state of human existence, huh? In other words, faith is the confidence that a higher evolutionary development, so to speak, is possible for man, by means of his own efforts, and that there are actually existing people who have made this effort and achieved that kind of goal, do you see what I mean? Faith is essentially that, faith in the possibility of human development inasmuch as one can actually see examples of it, hum?, that is faith, huh? So that is the wealth that is best for man here; so why should that be? Why should faith in that sense, faith in the sense of confidence, be the best wealth for man here?, the best gain, the best riches, huh?

Sumana: It can't be taken away.

S: Can't be taken away.

[8]

Vajrananda: If you've got enthusiasm and your heart is into that higher evolution, it's quite appropriate to describe it as a wealth.

S: Hum. Because if one is thinking in terms of gain, if one is thinking in terms of wealth or riches, think in terms of spiritual gain, spiritual riches. If you can have the confidence that it is possible to attain these spiritual riches, well, that is the best wealth for you, inasmuch as those spiritual riches themselves in the long run are the best for you. So faith is the wealth here best for man. If you have faith in that spiritual life, you don't feel the need to go out and gather lots of material possessions, in the same way that the rich man has already got them, he doesn't need to go out. (pause)

So then the Buddha says, 'Dhamma pursued brings happiness'. This is quite interesting. (reads Pali) The Pali word translated as 'brings' here is translated by Chalmers as 'leads to', but you'll never guess what the actual meaning is, the literal meaning, huh? The literal meaning is 'marriage'. Now, how does it come about that a word which means marriage literally, is translated as 'brings', or 'leads to', huh? But what is marriage?

Sthirananda: It's the joining together of two distant objects' (Laughter)

S: You're leaving out of consideration the ancient Indian, even modern Indian cultural context.

Vessantara: It's arranged.

S: It's arranged. (pause) Anyway, I'll help you with this one, one can't guess very easily. The primary meaning of the word is marriage, perhaps I should say the very literal meaning 'to take to oneself', hence 'to take to oneself in marriage', and 'to lead to one's house' i.e., in marriage, hence 'lead to' in Chalmers translation, do you see what I mean? So what is the significance of this sort of word used in this sort of context, i.e., in connection with the Dharma? 'The Dharma pursued brings happiness'. If you pursue the Dharma, if you follow the dharma, if you observe the Dharma, it brings happiness, but the connotation is of bringing a wife into your home, do you see what I mean, there is that sort of suggestion there. So what does that sort of tell you? Or what does that suggest to you?

Vajrananda: Something like, 'happiness is the wife of the Dharma'.

S: Hum, yes, 'Dharma pursued brings happiness'.

Vessantara: Don't you start out pursuing it as if it's 'out there', and then you bring it into yourself, you become it, it becomes you.

S: You sort of bring home happiness to yourself just like bringing home a bride, huh? Because according to Ancient Indian ideas, even modern Indian ideas, that is supposed to be the great day in your life, hum?, as a householder when you bring home a wife, or you take a wife unto yourself, that is a source [9] or cause of supreme happiness, so all these sort of connotations are there. So, if you've pursued the Dharma, it's just like getting married, because you'll be so happy. So that suggests in a way that pursuing the Dharma is sort of marrying the Dharma, do you see what I mean? Because pursuing the Dharma gives you so much happiness, it's just like getting married, do you see what I mean? You espouse the dharma, as it were; practising the Dharma almost means being married to the Dharma, you know, the connection is as close as that. And you get from your marriage to the Dharma the same kind of happiness, in fact infinitely more than you'd get from your ordinary marriage. You take the Dharma to wife, as it were, so you could see how, you know, from this starting-point, in the course of centuries Buddhism arrives at a point at which you get this yab-yum imagery of Tibetan Buddhism; you know, the male Buddha figure and the female Buddha figure in sexual embrace, do you see what I mean? Though it's very sort of remote here, and it's purely literary, so to speak, the starting-point of that line of thinking is there, the starting-point of that sort of imagery. But why is this important? Or, why should one make so much of this? What does it represent?

Sthirananda: It sort of represents a total involvement.

S: It represents a total involvement, and it represents an emotional emphasis: you have to be as much, say, involved with the Dharma as people normally are with their marriage, otherwise your emotions don't get involved, and if your emotions aren't involved you don't get on with it very well. I mean, everybody knows that if there isn't the emotional interest in a subject, whether it's the Dharma or any other, you don't make much progress with it, huh? So, you notice in the first three lines of this verse there's a very emotional emphasis. First of all, the Buddha speaks of faith, which is certainly an emotion; then he not only speaks about happiness but he compares, at least by implication, the happiness that you get from following the Dharma, or practising the Dharma, with the happiness you get from taking a wife unto

yourself, hum? And then he goes on to say, 'The truth is sweet beyond compare'. The experience of truth is compared with sweetness, a sweet taste; this is something very concrete and in a way emotional. So this is quite significant, perhaps, maybe the more especially so inasmuch as the Buddha is addressing Alavaga, this particular kind of yakkha. In other words, you've got to go after the Dharma like a man goes after wealth, you've got to have the same feeling for the Dharma that a man has towards his wife; and you've got to enjoy the taste of truth as much as people enjoy the taste of honey or sugar, do you see what I mean? In other words, the Buddha is saying there's no real progress until you can transfer your emotions, your positive emotions, from as it were worldly things to so to speak spiritual things, otherwise, you don't really get moving, this is more or less what he's saying, or at least implying. And then he says, 'Life wisely lived they say is best'. The life of wisdom is the best life, so they say. So wisdom, at least on the face of it, is prajna or supreme knowledge, which represents a more sort of intellectual approach to things, is mentioned last. The more emotive terms come first: after all, there's faith, there's wealth, there's happiness, there's the [10] suggestion of marriage, there's sweetness, and only then comes wisdom, huh? So that emphasis is quite interesting. But what about this: 'The truth is sweet beyond compare'? In what way is the truth sweet, what does one mean by saying 'The truth is sweet'? How can the truth be sweet? What does one mean by sweetness, anyway?

Sthirananda: Pleasurable.

S: Pleasurable, yes.

Sthirananda: Clear, refined.

S: Truth is the sweetest of all tastes, hum? But, again, there is this suggestion of enjoyment, that you enjoy the truth, huh? But what does that mean, it doesn't mean some big abstract Truth with a capital 'T' that you proceed to enjoy. That does it mean in one's practice, in one's actual experience, 'the truth is sweet', even sweeter than any other taste? Well, you enjoy the truth, but what makes you enjoy the truth, how do you enjoy the truth? What happens when you enjoy the truth?

Kovida: It invigorates you by being in accord with something you believe, and when you actually realize that it's true, it all goes sort of smoothly...

Vessantara: The more you develop, the more you just savour your life.

Tape 1 side 2

S: It's satisfying to understand something, hm? Supposing you're reading something and you don't understand it and you have to think about it, but then you understand it, then you get a great satisfaction out of understanding it. So what is happening there, why is it that understanding something is so pleasurable and so satisfying?

Kovida: Because it connects with you somehow, you relate to it after that because you've understood it, it makes sense to you.

Sthirananda: You've sort of digested it on a total level, rather than on just an abstract one.

S: Yes, but even so, why should it give you such satisfaction, what has happened?

Kovida: You've integrated that bit into you, as it were.

S: Yes, in a way you've grown, you've incorporated something. To incorporate something is always pleasant, as when you incorporate material pabulum. (Laughter) In a way, when you've understood something, you've conquered, haven't you, you've extended your reign.

Kovida: You've increased your wealth.

S: You've increased your wealth also.

Kovida: You've made yourself bigger.

[11]

S: The object has been transformed into subject, one could say that. The subject has been enhanced.

Sumana: Something outside your range has somehow been...

S: Brought within it.

Vessantara: But how does that differ from the sort of appropriation in the negative sense? 'Tarka nagpur' (?), sort of.

S: Yes, yes. Well supposing that one of the truths that you appropriate is the truth of impermanence, or the truth of insubstantiality, or no permanent unchanging self, huh? I mean, how can that be sweet, in a sense you see that there's nobody for whom or to whom it can be sweet, so how can that be 'sweet', or 'sweet beyond compare'? Presumably it can be, this is what the Buddha tells us, at least, so what has happened there?

Vessantara: There's a great relief because there's nobody to defend and there's nobody to make efforts to protect.

S: Well, it's as if the difference between mundane incorporation and what we might call Transcendental incorporation is that in the case of mundane incorporation there is fixed point of reference, one single fixed point of reference; but when you give up that one single fixed point of reference, in a way it's not to discover that you had a point of reference, you discover that you have innumerable points of reference, so that in a way it's a greatly enlarged kind of incorporation that now becomes possible, do you see what I mean?

Anyway, perhaps that's taking it a bit further than we need, huh? But it is interesting that in this first verse that the Buddha speaks there is what I've called this emotional emphasis: The Buddha brings in faith, brings in happiness, brings in sweetness, and only then, afterwards, he brings in wisdom. So he is suggesting that one needs to be totally involved, which means, includes, emotionally involved. (Pause) All right, let's go on.

'How shall man cross the flood,
How shall he cross the sea?

How shall he get by ill
How shall he cleansed be?'

So, four questions here. How shall man cross the flood? How shall he cross the sea? How shall he get by ill? How shall he cleansed be? These are all the same question, one and the same question; what is that question, putting it, you know, more abstractly? What is this flood, this sea, or this ill? What's he referring to, what's he asking?

Vessantara: How can a man go beyond suffering?

S: Beyond the conditioned, beyond the samsara, yes. This is what he's really asking. In other words, he's asking about the spiritual life itself. Anyway, let's go straight on to the Buddha's reply; the questions are really quite clear.

'By faith the flood is crossed
By earnestness the sea.
By vigour ill is passed,
By wisdom cleansed be'

[12]

S: so again faith comes in. 'By faith the flood is crossed'. There's got to be, first of all, the confidence that it can be crossed, the confidence that others have crossed it, that as they are, so you are; what they have done, you can do. So by faith the flood is crossed. Not that only faith is necessary, or you can cross the flood simply by faith, which you can't; but you certainly can't cross it without faith, in other words, without the faith that it can be crossed. I was talking to someone about something like this the other day: this person was saying that he didn't have any friends, that he wasn't able to make friends with people, and they weren't able to make friends with him. So I said that perhaps you don't really believe that it's possible to make friends, perhaps you don't have the faith that friendship between you and other people is actually possible, hm? And I think in the case of this particular person I did put my finger on something. Very often one finds people are unable to do things just because of lack of faith, and they don't always realize that they don't really believe that they can do something, they don't really have the confidence. You notice this, for instance, in the matter of, say, learning languages. I think perhaps the majority of people (and perhaps that isn't an exaggeration so far as English people are concerned) they don't have the confidence that they could learn a foreign language huh? That's why they usually don't learn one, they don't have the confidence that they can do it. So especially in the case of the spiritual life, especially where one's personal development is concerned, one has really got to have the faith that you can do it, otherwise you're left simply going through the motions. If you take up anything you've got to have the faith that you can make a success of it, otherwise you don't get very far. And, of course, one of the things that does help you most is to be in contact with those who have done it and who are doing it, and who can give you the confidence that you can do it too... 'You too can have a body like mine' (Laughter) 'I too was a 7- stone weed at one time'.

But this is really quite important, and I think when people don't seem to be getting on very well in any particular field or area or direction they have to ask themselves: 'Well, do I really believe that I can get on, do I really believe that I can do this? Have I got that sort of confidence? Because that might explain the apparent, or actual, lack of progress.

Vessantara: What can one do if you ask yourself that question and the answer is 'no' ?

S: Well, first I think then you've got to ask yourself, well, do I really want to do that, would I really like to have that faith because I really want to do that particular thing. If that is the case, if I really would like to have the faith, perhaps it's a question of developing the faith first, rather than trying to do that particular thing. First of all develop the faith that you can do it, then the question arises: How do I develop that faith? Well, by associating with others who have that faith, preferably with others who have that faith because even if they haven't done that particular thing, they are in process of doing it sufficiently to know that it can be done in the end.

Kovida: You can't really do anything if you haven't got faith that you can do it, it's contradictory...

[13]

S: No, but a lot of people I think are going through the motions of doing things, not realizing that they haven't actually got faith that they can do them, because they can sort of get by doing them in a sort of way, do you see what I mean? It's like people take up Art; they haven't got any real faith in themselves as artists, but they do a bit of art, they go to art college, they produce a few pictures ... they haven't really got that faith in themselves as artists, you can see that, you can tell it by their work, quite often. That's quite different from thinking that they're artists, you can think that you're an artist without having any real faith in your ability as an artist, and there may in fact of course not be anything in which to have faith, or not very much.

Vessantara: Something I find quite often is that I, and I see other people doing it, get stuck when you've got an overall task that you've got to do: you look at that and it seems too big, and you're not very sure whether you can do it, and I get sort of transfixed by that. If I can sort of cut it down, say, writing a 'Mitrata', if I'm worried about writing my 8,000 words I think, well, I'll just do the introduction and then I'll think about...

S: Well, you never write 8,000 words, you write one word at a time, (Laughter) yes, one sentence, but you can make things difficult for yourself by not seeing them realistically. You think, 'Oh' A journey of a thousand miles!' But you haven't got to do it in a day, all you have to do is walk a few miles each day, and keep up steadily. That is why the tortoises always seems to win out over the hares. (Laughter) I think in future the badge of the FWBO should be a tortoise rampant' (Much laughter} Tortoises have faith, they say, 'well, we can get there in the end, it doesn't matter how slow we are, we just have to keep on walking'. They go plodding on, you know, and in the end they do get there, after months or even years, when the hares have been very nearly as far as the winning-post and back again several times' (Laughter) But they never actually get to the winning-post, whereas the old tortoise, he gets there, you know, in the end. The hares are very surprised and sit down and scratch their ears and wonder how it all happened. But the tortoise has faith, so he just goes plodding on. So, 'By faith the flood is crossed, By earnestness the sea'. The word for 'earnestness' is 'upamada'(?), 'non-heedlessness', which is what we usually translate as mindfulness or awareness, it's non-heedlessness. In other words, being constantly awake, aware, alert, mindful, etc., hum? As the Buddha says, in the words we use in connection with ordination, 'Upamadana Sampadetha'(?), 'with mindfulness, strive'. It's the same word, mindfulness is always useful. You have to attend carefully to what you are doing, otherwise you won't be

successful. 'By vigour, ill is passed', Vigour is of course Virya, vigour, energy, even enthusiasm, huh? Dukkha is of course synonymous with the Flood, the sea, the conditioned, etc., etc. The Buddha is saying in this verse you need these three things, you need faith, you need non-heedlessness, you need energy.

Sthirananda: Four of the five spiritual faculties.

[14]

S: Er, yes. I say three rather than four because these three are connected through a common imagery, of crossing, or passing over, or transcending. In the fourth line the Buddha Changes the imagery and speaks in terms of cleansing. Actually it is ('parisujati' ?), which means complete cleansing, all-round cleansing, one might say absolute, total thorough cleansing. So here Wisdom, prajna, is thought of in terms of purification, as in the case of the 'visudis' of the seven stages of purification. It's a cleansing from ignorance, or a cleansing from unawareness. So yes, one has four out of the five spiritual faculties, except that instead of 'sati' one has got ('apamada' ?), though they are essentially the same thing. Which one is left out? samadhi is left out, isn't it? Not for any particular reason except perhaps the verse has four lines so you've only got room for four.(Pause) All right, let's read the next verse, then. More questions.

Alavaga: 'How may man wisdom win?
How may he riches find?
How may he fame acquire?
How to himself friends bind?
How grieve not when hence he to
yonder world hath gone?'

S: Hm, it's quite a mixture of questions, huh? In a way, mostly of a worldly nature; when Alavaga asks about wisdom he's not necessarily asking about wisdom in the purely Transcendental sense. Nor is he necessarily asking about riches metaphorically speaking, and of course he's asking about fame and binding friends to oneself and the possibility of a happy heavenly rebirth: he doesn't seem interested in Nirvana. So, 'How may man wisdom win?' Wisdom is ('panna'?), 'How may he find riches' riches is ('Dana'??), riches, wealth. 'How may he acquire or gain fame?', this is ('kirti'?). 'How may he bind friends to himself', how may he strengthen the ties of friendship; and 'how may he not have cause for grief when he is reborn after death in another world. So these are the sort of questions that serious-minded people might put to any Samana in the Buddha's day, and which of course serious-minded Indians often put to wandering sadhus, you know, even today. So let's see what the Buddha has to say. Read that first verse.

'With faith that men-of-worth by Dharma cool attain,
He earnest fain to hear with wit shall wisdom gain.

S: Yes, this verse is very neatly translated. It's quite accurate also, but it's a bit obscure, even the grammatical structure is a bit obscure. 'With faith that men-of-worth by Dharma cool attain', that is to say, attain the cool state, 'He, earnest, fain to hear, with wit shall wisdom gain'. This is answering the question, 'How may man wisdom win?' You win it in the first place by faith, by means of faith. What sort of faith? Faith that men-of-worth attain cool by Dharma'. 'Cool' is Hare's translation of Nibbana; the text actually says, 'Dhamman Nibbana

patya'?): attain Nirvana. The literal meaning of Nirvana is 'to become extinct', as a flame, you know, when it goes out, and this is of course explained as the going out of the three-fold fire of Greed, Hatred and Delusion. But it's always made quite clear, even in the Pali canon that that does not mean nothing is left. What is left is the Transcendental, but that Transcendental, you know, is not easily expressible.

[15]

Anyway, Nibbana, or Nirvana, is the term used here. So, 'With faith that men-of-worth', er, the text simply says ('arahantam), the arhants, so this word arhant is here used not exactly as a technical term. Later on in Buddhism, maybe even later on in the Buddha's lifetime, the word Arhant came to be used in a rather technical sense, even subsequently in a highly technical sense, meaning one who had gained Nirvana for himself alone, and didn't care much for what happened to other people. This is the sort of view of the arhant or view of the goal of the spiritual life which the Mahayana tended to react against. But, in the Buddha's time, the Buddha seems for the most part, especially early in his career, to have used the word arhant in it's quite general, literary sense. It meant simply someone who was worthy. Apparently it was used as a mode of address, just as we use the expression in England 'Your Honour' or 'Your Worship', say, to a mayor or someone of that sort. So 'arahant' originally meant not very much more than that: someone who was worthy, upright, morally worthy, spiritually worthy. Only then after that did it come to be used as a technical term, i.e., Arhant with a capital 'A', as distinguished from Bodhisattva, do you see what I mean? So the Buddha here is simply speaking about men of worth, worthy people, good people, people devoted to the ethical and spiritual life. So here he speaks of the faith, the confidence, that those who are worthy, practising the Dharma definitely do attain a spiritual goal. By means of that sort of faith, a man, earnest, being earnest, the word is actually 'non-heedless', and 'Pain to hear', means literally - well -hearing, carefully attentive, listening attentively, 'with wit shall wisdom gain', er, (pause) shall gain wisdom. (Long pause) So, once again, as I said, there is this emphasis on faith; in a way it's a bit paradoxical. The question is, 'How do you gain wisdom?'; the answer is, 'By faith' Well, yes, first of all you must have faith that wisdom can be attained, you must have faith that there are people existing who have practised the Dharma and who have attained a higher spiritual goal, so you must have that sort of faith, you must be earnest, you must be willing to listen; if you have those qualities, yes, you can gain wisdom.

(pause) Let's stop for coffee now, shall we? (Break)

All right, then, on to verse 187, someone like to read that?

'Who fitly acts and toils and strives shall riches find.
By truth shall fame acquire, by giving, friends shall bind.

S: The Buddha is still answering Alavaga's questions in the previous verse. He's answered the question contained in the first line, i.e., 'How may man wisdom win?', now he's answering the second question, 'How may riches find?', and the third one, 'how may he fame acquire?', and the fourth one, 'How to himself friends bind?' So it says, 'Who fitly acts and toils'. 'Fitly' is 'patirupa', which is 'suitably, in accordance with circumstances, fittingly; 'toils and strives', er, it's not quite, 'he who behaves suitably', ('Durava'?) means 'who bears the yoke', (Druva?) is a yoke or burden: 'who bears the burden', er, one could say, 'Who is responsible'. ('Utata'?) means something like strenuousness, of aroused energy, firm, all that sort of thing. 'He who has those kind of qualities, he will find'.

The Buddha does seem to be talking about material wealth, that's apparently what Alavaga asked about. But what he says could be applied no less to spiritual wealth. 'Man who behaves suitably, is responsible, strenuous, he finds wealth. (Indistinct Pali phrase), 'one acquires fame through truth.' There are three [16] things to be considered here. What exactly is meant by truth in this context, what is fame and why is it so important, and what is the connection between the two, in what way does truth lead to fame? Take this question of fame first: How is fame important to people?

Kovida: Very.

S: Very, yes. I mean, there is this famous line in Milton, 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise, that last infirmity of noble mind'. It's interesting, er, in Classical civilization, among the Greeks especially, the desire to be famous was held to be a very worthy desire indeed: to perform deeds of valour so that one would be remembered, so that one would be famous, for hundreds of thousands of years, was considered to be a very worthy sort of aspiration. But Christianity didn't look quite in the same way upon fame, tended to depreciate this love of fame very strongly: one should be humble and want to be unknown, it would be quite sufficient if God knew about him, huh?, it wasn't necessary that men knew about him, especially about his good deeds; if anything, they should know about his wicked deeds, he should confess those, acknowledge himself to be a miserable sinner, there was nothing that he could glory in. So this whole idea of fame, the desire for fame in the more positive sense, was thoroughly depreciated, you know, during the Christian period, especially during the middle ages, and revived only at the time of the renaissance, er, but people in the West I think have had mixed feelings about fame ever since. But if you take the desire for fame in the positive sense, in the classical sense, I mean, what does it signify? Some Ancient Greeks seem to have had a positive lust for fame, it was the predominant motive of their lives.

Vajrananda: If you really believe in that which is valued by your country, or whatever, then being of high renown or fame would be synonymous with being a good character.

S: Yes, except that there was something superadded, i.e., the Greeks didn't have a very clear or definite idea of personal immortality, life after death; they seem to have felt, Some of them, that fame was like a sort of posthumous existence, that you would go on living in the memories of other people only by performing some great deed. They thought originally in terms of deeds, not even producing books or literary masterpieces; it was definitely deeds, actions: usually, of course, killing your enemies in battle. But that was a very important factor for them, that fame meant, in a way, immortality. But it's as though there's a very strong sense of inner satisfaction that you achieved something that other people would think so highly of that they'd never forget it, hum?, do you see what I mean? well, that sort of attitude is only possible when there's a very strong rapport, not to say affinity, between the individual and the civilization or culture in which he lives, do you see what I mean? Because fame always depended upon the performance of actions that the community, not only of the present but in the future too, would find worthy of remembrance, which they would admire and wish to remember. What you had done would represent a sort of contribution, you know, to the culture of the community, a permanent contribution; it would represent something of value that they would not like ever to [17] forget. By performing that sort of, let's say, heroic action, you've contributed something to the community.

Kovida: You're also accepted by it.

S: You're accepted, yes. You contribute, say, a heroic example, you're accepted because of that. So, this sort of conception of fame, the sort of conception the Greeks had, implies a very deep harmony, almost, between the individual and the group or community to which he belongs.. So it's as though the Greeks took this whole idea of fame much more seriously than we do, it meant something different. If nowadays we say that someone is famous, what does it mean? It means little more than that his name is in the newspapers, or he's a well-known TV personality. He's just well-known, huh?, or even just well-known for being well-known, not that he's necessarily performed any heroic actions, in fact whatever actions he might have performed will probably have been far from heroic; you become famous by trying to shoot President Reagan, or trying to shoot the pope, without any sort of personal qualities whatever. I think this is one of the great disadvantages of the mass-media, that trivialities can be given an importance that they absolutely don't possess, trivial personalities can be blown up to larger-than-life proportions.

Vessantara: John Lennon before he was shot somewhere made the point that he felt in modern America there was a gap not so much between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', in terms of wealth and riches; there was more of a resentment between those who were sort of known and in some way sort of noticed by the media and those who weren't. That seemed to almost generate more resentment in American society than those who didn't have wealth as opposed to those who did.

S: It's interesting when you see that people who are well-known or who are well-known for being well-known, tend to congregate and form a sort of set or social group of their own. Some are well-known as politicians, others as pop stars, others just on account of their wealth, others on account maybe of their criminal record, but they seem all to belong together, to share a common social life, hum, in a way that would support what you say, they do constitute a class apart, whatever other differences there may be, they are people who are well-known, whether they are an internationally famous orchestral conductor or an internationally-known financial swindler, they go to the same places, they go to the same restaurants, and they are likely to know each other. (Pause) So probably one has to really distinguish between fame in the old Greek sense and this modern simply 'being-well-known', which seems to be quite a different thing and quite unrelated to any personal qualities, very often. But fame can be a very positive quality, as fame, one might say can be connected with this Buddhist quality of 'hiri', you remember, this is 'hiri-ottopa', in the 11 positive mental events. 'Blame and shame' or 'Shame and blame', blame here being self-blame. Hiri is what you feel when you are made aware by the group to which you belong that you have fallen short of the standard that they expect of you, and which you expect of yourself. That you have not lived up not only to their expectations, but even to your own, you experience [18] then shame when this is pointed out, hiri. So one might say a sort of more positive counterpart of that is to do those things which are pleasing to the group, or the spiritual community, not because of any sort of neurotic dependence on their approval for your security, but because there is a harmony between you and you do accept the same values, do you see what I mean? So by doing those things which the group or spiritual community approves of you sort of enhance the group's awareness of those values, you enhance your own awareness of those values, and you tend to create a positive relationship between you and the group, do you see what I mean? There is something quite different, you know, from a weak, neurotic doing of things just for the sake of approval; you don't do the things just because they are approved, you do the things because you believe in them and that they are worthy things, that's why the other members of the group, or the spiritual community believe in them. So by performing

those actions which win approval in this positive sense, you reinforce those values, you strengthen those values for yourself and for the community to which you belong. So fame seems to be related more to that particular set of values, not to our modern sort of hunger for personal publicity. Perhaps we need to rethink some of these virtues, even some of these vices, because it may be that some of the things as Christians we've been brought up to think are vices, like (two words) fame, well, perhaps it's a virtues, perhaps we should consider things more from the Greek point of view, huh? But, we need to distinguish, you know, genuine love of fame as a positive quality, from a neurotic craving for personal publicity. Some people, it is said, will do anything to get their names into the papers, especially if it's the front page. It is said that many murderers, especially in the US., after they've been arrested and spent the night in the cell, the first thing they ask for in the morning is the morning paper, and they look to see if their photograph is on the front page. That is what they really want. (Pause)

So, 'fame is the spur', you can see now why Milton said 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise, that last infirmity of noble minds', it's as though Milton is a bit, not exactly torn, but a bit undecided almost between the classical Greek values, of which he is well aware, and the Christian values, of which he is equally well aware. He recognizes the nobility of fame, but he has to regard it as a weakness, an infirmity, from the Christian point of view, but, anyway, he says it's the last infirmity of noble minds, in a way he tries to synthesize the classical, or the pagan, and the Christian values, which I think Milton does try to do from time to time.

Kovida: It's almost as if it justifies his own attempts, his desire for fame.

S: Yes, he had this desire to produce something that the country, he says, would not willingly let die. He did have a very strong desire for fame himself, which, as he must have realized, was to a great extent inconsistent with, you know, his Christian beliefs. All right, er, in Ancient India in the Buddha's time people did not seem to have such a low opinion of fame, or the desire for fame, as has been the case in the Christian West. Maybe they didn't value it as highly as the [19] Greeks, but they certainly didn't depreciate it in the way that Christianity has often done. Therefore you find the yakkha asking, you know, this kind of question, 'How may he fame acquire?' I mean, he's asked about wisdom, he's asked about riches, he's going to ask about friends, so he's asking about fame as though fame is quite a positive value. How are you to acquire it? So the Buddha doesn't say, 'Oh, no, no, fame is not something you should hanker after, not something you should want to acquire,' he doesn't say that; he says, 'By truth shall fame acquire', so what does that mean? How is fame acquired by truth? What sort of truth is meant here? Well, it's truth in the sense of truthfulness, or being true.

Vessantara: Authenticity.

S: Authenticity; well, first of all no doubt it means speaking the truth, and we know that Buddhism attaches great importance to that. You become known as a man who speaks the truth, a man who can be relied on to speak the truth, a man who keeps his word, a man who doesn't break his promises. In traditional Buddhism the keeping of one's word, the being faithful to one's promise, was regarded as a form of truthfulness, and a great power was held to reside in truthfulness, speaking the truth. You know the story about the people who are crossing over a river in a boat and the act of truth. I hope this isn't one of the stories I've told 6 times already' (Laughter) I'll risk it, shall I? This is from the Pali Canon, or it might be even

the Jataka book: a party of people were crossing over the river in a shallow boat and the boat got stuck on the sand bank and couldn't be shifted. So they all got very worried, and someone on board suggested that they made an act of truth. (Sachi kiria?), there was this ancient Indian belief that truth, spoken truth, was very powerful, it was a sort of force: supposing an ascetic said 'By the power of my meditation, if I have meditated ten hours every day for 100 years, if this is true, then may a shower of gold fall from the heavens'. Well, if he really was speaking the truth, the gold would fall from the heavens.

End of tape 1 side 2.

Beginning of tape 2, side 1.

S:(Continued) ...boat, so there's a merchant on board and he says, 'If I've always been honest in my dealings and have never cheated my customers, may this boat move off the sand bank. It didn't move. (Laughter) Then they got a woman to say, 'well, if I've always been a true and faithful wife to my husband, may the boat move away'. It didn't move! (Laughter) In this way many people made an act of truth, or tried to make an act of truth, but nothing happened. The last person that no one had taken any notice of was a prostitute, so they thought, let her have a go, so 'if I've always been a good prostitute and I've always done my best to give complete satisfaction to my customers, may this boat move off the sand bank', and it moved! (Laughter). So this is said to illustrate the power of truth, even if spoken by a prostitute about some ignoble matter. It's truth, and it has a force of its own, so this is the sort of (one word), the word truth has such a different connotation in ancient India: it doesn't suggest something abstract and mathematical, it suggests a definite force, a definite power in society, even in the cosmos. huh? So if a man sticks to the [20] truth, if he speaks the truth, he keeps his word, he keeps his promises, he never bears false witness, he's true to his undertakings, true to his contracts, we were talking about this in the study, weren't we, last week. Well, then, the result will be that he will gain fame. To be truthful, to be true, is the best way of gaining fame. Be known to be a truthful, reliable, honest, even authentic person. So the Buddha is taking this sort of value, this ideal of fame, he's not depreciating it as a positive quality and he's suggesting that the best way to become famous is just to be truthful or to be true, to honour your promises, do what you said you would do, etc., etc. So I mean, this is also important, this in a way ties up with faith, because sometimes people make promises without really believing that they can fulfil them. So these people make promises very lightly, they give their word very lightly, which means that they break their word very lightly. So such people are known to be unreliable, they are not famous, they are infamous, one might say, you know, if their unreliability goes to extremes. But it's true, even our society today, if someone is reliable, well, he does attain a sort of good reputation, he does become, so to speak, famous for that.

Vessantara: It allows you to have quite an effect, doesn't it, if people sort of believe what you say, they'll take what you say seriously.

S: Yes, yes. Because if you say some quite extraordinary thing, well, they'll believe it if you say it, because they're accustomed to you really saying what you mean, and acting upon that. I mean, you know, there are some people around who are like that: if they say that they're going to do something, you know you can believe them. Whereas in the case of somebody else you might have just dismissed it as tall talk, just as so much hot air. I mean, this is something that arose in connection with my own coming back to England in '67, because, you know, there was a certain, let me say confusion about my coming back, because I'd spent two years in

England working with Hampstead Buddhist Vihara Buddhist Society and then I decided to go back to India and just go round and say good-bye to people before coming back to England and settling here permanently. (Pause) So everybody knew this, that I was going off to India for a few months and that I was coming back to England, I was going to carry on with my work. And I actually fixed a date for my return, but then what happened, as you probably know, I got this unexpected letter from the Sangha Trust saying in effect they didn't want me back, but they wanted to manage things nicely and they would be happy if I was to allow them to say that I had changed my mind, do you see what I mean, huh? So, I didn't agree with that, as everybody knows and I came back. But one of the things I was saying afterwards was, one of the things that surprised me, I wasn't so surprised to be stabbed in the back, you know, the way I was, because that's what it amounted to, but I was very surprised that people could think that I, having said that I was coming back, would then allow a statement to be put out in my name to the effect that I had changed my mind, when I had not changed my mind, and that would have been telling a blatant lie. I was really surprised that a Buddhist organization, or the trustees of a Buddhist organization, could even suggest this, could even think of [21] this, and another thing that surprised me was that they didn't realize that when I said, you know, that I would do something, when I'd given my word to all the people who were coming to my classes, and so on, that I would come back, that I would not stick to that regardless of all difficulties. They seemed to think that to me the fact that I had given my word or made a promise really meant nothing at all. And the fact that they could think that about me told me quite a lot about them, but this was one of the aspects of the situation that in a way surprised me most of all. That they could think so lightly, first of all of truth itself, and even suggest the putting out of a false statement, and that they should apparently think so lightly of the fact that one had given one's word. The idea that someone could actually stick to what they had said and take a promise seriously, that seemed not to occur to them, even though they were all supposed to be Buddhists. That I found very surprising. So they certainly hadn't imbibed this Buddhistic teaching of the power of truth. But anyway, since I did come back, to their great surprise, and did establish the FWBO, it started dawning on them that what Sangharakshita says, that's to be taken seriously, and that if he says he's going to do something, well the likelihood is, he'll actually do it! So, they do take me more seriously now, they know that we mean what we say; some of them might, anyway. So, 'By truth shall fame acquire, By giving friends shall bind'. Now, how is it that friends are bound by giving? What does this mean? First of all, what does one mean by binding friends?

Vessantara: Making firm friendships.

S: Yes, making friendship firmer; I mean, one doesn't imply it in the literal sense (Laughter), or even with emotional ties of a more neurotic kind. One means strengthening the friendship. So, how does one strengthen friendship? And the Buddha says, one strengthens friendship by giving, by dana. So what does this mean?, how is it that giving strengthens friendship? Is this true? If so, how does it work?

Vessantara: Well, you make your feeling of friendship very clear, you express it very definitely. You open yourself out to the other person by giving, and presumably they reciprocate, if they're open.

S: Yes, yes, right.

Sthirananda: True friendship is essentially devoid of self-interest. You're not actually friends

with somebody because you want to get something out of it yourself, so the friendship the Buddha talks about is identical to that, it's essentially sort of ego-less.

S: Yes, right. Someone wrote to me in a letter a few days ago, I'll try and quote his exact words, 'how exhilarating it would be if one could love without any selfish motive'. You see what I mean, because in a way he's saying the same thing. How exhilarating it would be if one could strengthen friendship by giving, and not be constantly thinking in terms of what one can extract, so to speak, from the other person. So it suggests that friendship sort of reverses our usual attitude towards things.

[22]

Usually our attitude, or the natural attitude I was going to say 'normal', but it's only statistically normal - the normal attitude is to appropriate, to gain for ourselves, to gather for ourselves, so many of our relationships are based on this attitude. In the case of friendship, friendship in the best sense, it shouldn't be like that. You should not be friends with someone, you know, for the sake of what you can get from them; not that you don't get anything from a friend, but you're not friends with them for the sake of what you can get out of them, you're friends with them because you want to be friends with them. You're friends with them because you like them: of course, the whole question of liking needs to be gone into a little bit, but, er, at least there's no overtly selfish motive and, you know, luckily one can go on sort of refining and developing that attitude until there is in fact no selfish motive, there is just sort of disinterested friendship. And the expression of that is that you give. You're not thinking in terms of getting from the other person, you're thinking more in terms of giving to the other person. you're thinking in terms of their happiness, not your own happiness, but, because it's mutual, you're giving to the other person, the other person is giving to you: you think of that person's happiness, that person thinks of your happiness, so in that way it becomes mutual, it becomes reciprocal, and in that way the friendship is strengthened or intensified. You know that someone who is friends with you or feels in a friendly way towards you, because they've expressed it outwardly in a very concrete form. Maybe people don't attach enough significance to this, they think, well, it's enough if friendship is understood, taken for granted, after all these years, so to speak, but there is a saying, I forget whose it was, that one needs to keep one's friendships in good repair, they can get a bit rusty. And that means that, well, one has to give, on the sort of lowest level, material things, but on a higher level, one's time, attention, care, etc. But giving, according to the Buddha, is the key to strengthening friendship. If you don't give, you probably don't have friends. Not that, you know, you make friends in a sense by buying people, some people try to do that, they try to just get friends in a more sort of selfish sense, just by sort of giving them things, but that doesn't really work, because you're giving for the sake of getting, you're not giving for the sake of giving, you're not giving for the sake of friendship, you give just because you like that particular person, and you have a spontaneous feeling to give. If you haven't got that, well, it doesn't really work. In some cultures, of course, they've got occasions for formalized giving, as when you go to visit someone, or it's someone's birthday, etc. But in an unformalized society, an unformalized culture, the danger is that since there aren't the sort of occasions for formal giving we end up not giving anything at all, and that probably doesn't do our friendships any good. you know, if someone sort of gives you something, especially if it's unexpected, it's clear that they have given just because they like to give, they like to give to you, and you definitely feel something that you wouldn't feel if you'd just gone out and bought that thing for yourself, hum? (Pause)

So maybe one could ask oneself, who does one give things to in that particular way, because that will tell you who your friends are, and how you feel towards people. Again, to go back to the Greeks, the giving of gifts was very important, wasn't it? [23] Gifts were usually recorded and were often quite well-known and important objects: bronze (tripods?) and slave-girls and things like that.

Kovida: If you gave certain objects it meant certain intentions as well.

S: Intentions?

Kovida: There were doves and things like that. But it's interesting also, if you give something to people, say, outside the 'Friends', they're very suspicious of it, they think you're after something, I know with, some of my friends, I give them something, they think you're after something.

S: They say it's a sprat to catch a mackerel.

Kovida: Yes, a bit like that, they're a bit suspicious.

S: That's really unfortunate, isn't it?

Vessantara: Why did you say that with this friendship based on liking you might have to go into that a bit?

S: Well, what is 'liking'? I mean, 'liking' is like the word 'love', it's quite ambiguous, where if you like someone it may be because you see your own weaknesses in somebody else and you like them for that reason; maybe you're just partners in crime (laughter). hum? Maybe one should qualify that and call it a positive liking. All right, let's go on then. Next verse. 188.

'And lovers of the home
Who hold in truth these four
Truth, Dharma, firmness, gift
Hence gone, shall grieve no more.'

S: Now the Buddha is answering that last question in that previous verse, 'How grieve not when hence to yonder world hath gone?' So the Buddha says, 'And lovers of the home'; the actual word here is (karmesano?), which means really more like just a householder, 'Who hold in truth these four: truth, Dharma', we've dealt with those, '(dhitti?)', which means something like strength, stability, firmness, and the translation says 'gift' actually; it is not gift, it is (Tiaga?), which is the same as Sanskrit (tisga?), which means giving-up, it's not so much giving as giving up, huh; giving of course also involves giving up, because if you give something to someone else you've given it up so far as you and yourself are concerned, so selfish attachment, possessiveness, you know, this is all lessened. So (tiaga?) is an aspect of dana. 'Hence-gone shall grieve no more. 'So if you want to be sure of a happy heavenly rebirth after death, if you as a householder want that, then have faith in these four things: in the power of truth, in the Dharma, in being firm and reliable and in gifts. The Buddha is, as it were, showing the way to heaven, though these particular qualities can stand as the foundation of more than that. 'Alavaga' has asked about heaven, so that's what the Buddha is talking about. (Pause) All right, let's read the next verse, 189.

[24]

'With Brahmin and recluse pritheer
At large this sift;
Be there better than restraint,
Truth, patience, gift.'

S: The Buddha is saying, well, you can go to any brahmin or sramana you like, you can discuss the matter with them as much as you like, but there really is nothing better than these four qualities. He varies them slightly, you notice, huh? He says now, 'restraint', er, the order in the Pali is different, yes, truth comes first, truth, (Dhamma?), which is literally restraint, self-control; (tiaga?), which is giving up, often translated as renunciation; and (ksanti?), or patience. I mean, the fact that these four qualities are varied suggests that each one is sort of multi-faceted, can be looked at in different ways, you mustn't think of a particular quality in too determinate a way. I've sometimes touched on this in another sort of way: sometimes you can see that a certain quality, a certain psychological quality, even spiritual quality, in a sense, looked at from one point of view is a virtue but looked at from another point of view is a vice, do you see what I mean? But even apart from that, just say sticking to virtues, one can see that, er, dana, generosity and (tiaga?) or giving-up, these are aspects of the same thing, do you see what I mean, it's not that really there are two distinct and separate virtues; what are regarded as different virtues are sort of different aspects of each other, so it's quite natural that the Buddha should sort of ring the changes on his four principle terms, do you see what I mean? (Pause) Anyway, Alavaga replies,

'With brahmin and recluse
Why should I now this plumb?
For I have learnt today
Weal here and weal to come.

Was weal for me the Wake
To Alavi come to stay,
For where a gift bears fruit,
That, too, I've learnt today.

From village to village I'll fare
From city to city thence,
Praising the All-Awake
And Dharmas excellent'

So Alavaga of course is completely converted, from being a yakkha he becomes apparently a human being; in any case, he's going to go from place to place, from village to village, city to city, praising the Buddha and praising the teaching. So he says, why should I bother to discuss this matter, you know, with brahmins and samanas? Today I've learnt what really is good, is weal, (atta?). (Atta?) is a very important word (atta?) is gain. It's gain in the material sense and gain in the spiritual sense, and it becomes in the end a synonym for Enlightenment, for Nirvana, the highest gain. So he says, Today I've really learned what gain is, and it's really for my gain that the Buddha came to Alavi, because I've also learned today how or where a gift bears fruit. What do you think Alavaga's referring to here? 'For where a gift bears fruit, that, too, I've learned today.' How does that come in? Well, perhaps he's referring to the Buddha, because the Buddha is [25] said to be, like the Sangha, a field of merits; he's saying he's

learned to appreciate the Buddha, because according to ancient Indian ideas, according to Buddhist ideas, the greater the virtue of the person to whom the gift is given the greater the fruit in the form of punya. So, to say that, 'today I've learnt where a gift bears fruit' means, 'I've learnt today who is the most valuable person, the most highly developed person, that is to say, I've understood the Buddha to be the Buddha, that also I've learned today.' He's no longer seeing him just as a sramana, he realizes it's the Buddha. So, 'from village to village I'll fare, From city to city thence, Praising the All-Awake', praising the Samma Sambuddha, and 'Dharmas excellent.' The really Dharma-like nature of the Dharma, that is the literal translation, or more literal translation. The Dharma is really Dharma-like and that also is what I should praise, together with the Buddha. So, as I said, Alavaga is represented as having been completely converted. Anyway, any general impressions of this little Sutta? In a way, it's a quite simple little Sutta, but in a way also, some quite important points arise in connection with it, or out of it. In some ways, it's not very Buddhistic, do you see what I mean? Buddhism in the more highly developed sense hasn't yet come into existence, there's no trace of the Abhidharma, for instance, is there? There's nothing very analytical, it's very ethical, spiritual, straightforward, direct.

Kovida: The term 'Dharma', he never questions that at all; I mean, what would he understand by that, because in answer to his first question the Buddha replies in the second line, 'Dharma pursued brings happiness.' But it's never actually described what Dharma is, he just seems to accept that.

S: Yes, probably he would not take it in the fully Buddhistic sense, probably he'd take it in terms of a good life, a righteous life, take it more in an ethical sense, at least to begin with. At this stage it's as though the Buddhist teaching, I won't say the Buddha's teaching, is more down-to-earth than it subsequently became. 'Truth' doesn't suggest anything abstract or any philosophical truth, truth is just truthfulness, truth is speaking the truth, truth is keeping your word. It is, as I said, very down-to-earth, very practical. You could well imagine that there'd be a professor of philosophy at a university, and, you know, very well versed in all the different theories about truth in Western philosophy, but be actually himself quite untruthful. To the Ancient Buddhists this would be really quite inconceivable, quite ridiculous and quite absurd. But one could imagine that sort of situation, that sort of person, you know, in the modern world, hum? He might be quite dishonest, scheming, you know, up to all sorts of little inter-departmental intrigues, but at the same time almost an authority on theories of truth in philosophy. (Laughter) So really he'd know nothing about truth at all. Dr Johnson attached great importance to speaking the truth : I've quoted this before, but he says that if a child says that it saw something looking out of this window, when in fact it saw it looking out of that window, it should be corrected. He though truthfulness was as important as that. He himself was always a conspicuously truthful person. The same with Blake.

Vessantara: On a lower level, I was reading something about Earnest Hemingway a couple of months ago, and his sort of [26] method of writing was that he just sat down and he tried to find one true statement and write that, and follow it by another true statement. If you actually do that it's quite powerful.

Kovida: It's quite difficult sometimes to know what is actually true...

S: Well, very often one has to refer to one's experience, and this is what people don't do; often they don't have much of an experience. For instance, suppose someone goes for a walk, and

when they come back you say, 'what sort of walk did you have?'. They say, 'Oh, a nice walk!' They take this word nice and apply it to the experience of walking, but if they can really describe their walk as nice, well, you start to wonder if they experience anything at all, it's just some vague blur, not anything vivid or clear-cut at all. So you can't, in a way, be honest and truthful unless you've definitely got something to be honest or truthful about, which I think a lot of people a lot of the time just don't have.

Vessantara: What's missing, er, say somebody does (word) come out with 'a nice walk', is it that they were very unaware physically and didn't take anything in, is it that they have no powers to reflect...

S: It could be that it was a completely flat sort of experience they didn't really notice what was happening, they didn't look; they didn't look at the trees on the way or the flowers, or anything like that. It can be that they can't be bothered to tell you, they can't even be bothered to ask themselves, 'well, what sort of walk did I have?' They haven't even reflected on that.

Kovida: It's laziness.

S: It's laziness, yes.

Kovida: I was thinking, you know, in personal relationships with someone, you hear two sides of the story: what one person says happened and what you think happened are totally different. But I suppose that comes down to being clear at the time of the event, at least in your own mind, about what happened. I suppose the more aware you get, the clearer you'll be to the actual objective truth.

S: Yes, yes. Even sometimes so-called 'facts' are difficult to pin down. Sometimes it isn't clear whether at the end of a meeting a decision has been arrived at or not, even when minutes are kept. Some people are under the impression, some people actually present, that a decision was arrived at; others are under the impression that a decision was not arrived at, and the matter is held over. You even hear of this sort of situation arising in Cabinet meetings, with regard to quite important matters; even in international gatherings, summits of top politicians and statesmen: There's not always agreement at the end whether anything actually was agreed or not, or whether a definite conclusion was arrived at. This really does seem extraordinary. So even to ascertain the facts is not always easy. Even who was actually present' (Laughter) Yes, sometimes this isn't clear, even, you know, things like cabinet meeting, [27] whether someone was actually present or not, it's sometimes difficult even to find that out, and that's before you start examining different versions of the events, hum? So, you know, to speak the truth is not such an easy matter, it presupposes a certain clarity, a certain definiteness of experience, a certain vividness, a certain willingness to ask oneself what happened, and try really to find out, and then try to communicate that; otherwise, how can one speak the truth? You need to make effort. (Pause) And, of course, you know, often people don't speak the whole truth, that's sometimes very difficult, in fact, I mean, when you're asked about something, it's not just one isolated thing or object, it's really very often a very complex situation you're asked about, about which you could perhaps make many, many statements, but you're asked for just one and it's quite impossible sometimes to encapsulate all your impressions just into one neat statement, which is apparently very often what you're being asked for. I really sympathize with Princess Anne as reported in the newspapers recently: the headline was 'Princess is rude to reporters', and she probably had reason for being and I'm

glad she was (Laughter), they asked her silly questions like 'what does it feel like to be an aunt?' (laughter). She might have all sorts of complex emotions about that, she might not have time to sort it all out. In a way she snapped back something like, 'I don't think that's really anything to do with you', she was in fact quite rude, well, by journalistic standards, and there were several questions like that and she snapped back at them and more or less told them to mind their own business' They thought this was quite surprising, she wasn't behaving like a princess. Clearly, they had the idea of a princess as always gracious and kindly and, you know, giving very nice, correct, expected answers to stupid questions; but she was snapping back at them, and leaving them in no doubt at all that she thought their questions pretty stupid and she thought them pretty impertinent for asking them, so she was described as haughty.' (Laughter) But, you know, even with a comparatively simple thing like that, you might not be able to see very easily how you do feel, you know, now that you've got a new nephew, now you've become an aunt. So how can you just sort of give a journalist something that he can quote, and still be truthful, huh? And, you know, they don't seem to want the truth, they just want some acceptable, palatable sort of statement, not to say sentiment. If she said 'oh, it's wonderful', that would have been all written down and published. If she used some stupid cliché like, 'oh I'm absolutely over the moon about it', that would have been taken as a very intelligent comment, and again, it would have been reported by a thousand reporters, probably! (Laughter) I think also, if one wants to speak the truth at all, one has to learn to distinguish between fact and evaluation, do you know what I mean? Often, even in the 'Friends', people don't do this. For instance, you know, one hears things like this, somebody says, 'I told him such-and-such, but I got a very negative reply.' Now, they think that is a statement of fact but actually it is a judgement, because probably what he says, for instance let's presume what he says was, 'I do not agree with you'. So instead of saying, 'I said such-and-such and he said he didn't agree with it', you get, 'I said such-and-such and I got a negative reaction from him', which is very, very judgemental indeed, very evaluative indeed. But you're obviously seeing it as a fact, and then the person to whom you're presenting it is expected to take it as [28] a fact and reason upon it and act upon it, perhaps, as though it was a fact, when it is not a fact at all. It's just an interpretation, it's just an evaluation, possibly a completely false one, do you see what I mean? I see instances of this sort often in reportings-in when I read them in the pages of Shabda, which is rather sad, as though people can't make this distinction between a statement of fact and a statement which is in fact an evaluation of a fact. So very often you perceive facts, or you're allowed to perceive facts through a sort of thick fog of somebody's evaluation of those facts; you're not presented with just the facts.

Kovida: In fact it makes it clear that truth is simple, because you've really got to go quite slow to pick your way through the maze of conflicting items.

S: Yes

Kovida: Because when you're talking to people you can be making those sort of value-judgements all the time, without really thinking about it, and end up with a conclusion at the end of it that's actually miles from the truth, but you actually believe it's the truth.

S: well, you're not even considering the truth, you're mistaking your own subjective, in fact highly subjective value-judgements for the factual, objective truth about something.

Kovida: When you're faced with that it makes you want to throw it all up and do nothing, you

know' That's how it strikes me, sometimes.' (Laughter)

S: Or not say anything at all, remain completely quiet! (Laughter) You hear a lot of this pseudo-factual talk on the radio on the news, especially in the case of interviews with politicians, trade-unionists and so on. They are all sort of past masters at this sort of thing; sometimes they know what they're doing, too, or half-know. (Pause) I mean, I heard, not so very long ago, a trade-unionist interviewed, and apparently the fact was that some wretched employers had just made some small suggestion, so this was rendered as, 'they're hell-bent on confrontation!' (Laughter). If it's a slight disagreement with the Union, well, you know, the employers are 'hell-bent on confrontation', this was a favourite phrase for some weeks.

Kovida: Yes, it's interesting how often a phrase is taken up. I noticed in 'reporting-in', er, I used to notice it, it was much more apparent with women, I think, but it did go round a lot this week-end: 'the high spot of the weekend' or, 'the high point of my month or week'; it's amazing the number of people who use that, it's become cliched.

S: Well, an Order member's month should be a whole series of high spots, there should be so many of them that it shouldn't be possible to enumerate them.' (Laughter).

Kovida: But that phrase became so cliched by the end of reporting-in it was almost exhausted.

S: But a few months ago there was a lot of rejoicing in merits, which became a bit mechanical at times.

[29]

Kovida: Yes, the women tend to do that a bit more.

Sumana: It's a bit of a change, but one thing in this, Alavaga is spirit and he's asking questions about men, what's best for man, and so that seems interesting, that a spirit should do that.

S: Well, you can look at this in several ways; first of all, it is very easy to ask what is best for other people' (Laughter). And secondly Alavaga represents not a yakkha in the real mythological sense, but a particularly aggressive and hostile type of human being. After all, the Buddha came to his haunt, his abode, his dwelling, he must have had some sort of local presence. Perhaps he was just a demonical man. I've met people like this, but as I say, I can only actually think, as regards actual examples, of women; I remember some of them quite clearly, two or three that used to be round the Archway centre, with this sort of ferocious attitude, even when asking questions about the Dharma.

Kovida: I remember an incident in Glasgow; there was this woman after 'Buddhism and Blasphemy' came out, these two women came to the centre hell-bent on asking you questions about it.

S: Oh, and they found you? (Laughter)...oh, when I was there? Yes, that's right.

Kovida: We were waiting and expecting this, but they never asked the questions'

S: No, no, they'd had a look at me by that time, hadn't they? (Laughter)

Kovida: I was thinking about that when you were talking about that earlier.

End of tape 2 side 1.

Beginning tape 2 side 2.

S: But I think, you know, just to come to a conclusion, I think people like you to say what they want to hear. I mean, I can think of quite a number of truths that if I was to speak out, well, even say at the LBC, I'd make myself very unpopular, with some people anyway, because people, very often, they don't want to hear the truth or at least what you really and truly think and believe, they want to hear something else. They try to head you off from speaking the truth, at least, what you believe is the truth.

Kovida: Ah, that's an interesting point. I mean, if you believe something to be true, I mean, it raises the question of there being an objective truth. I mean, if you believe something to be true it's a bit like having faith in yourself.

S: Well, at least you should be allowed to speak the truth about your own feelings, because if you can't be sure about how you feel, well, what can you be sure about? For instance, I'll give you another example from my own experience, even though I've mentioned it before, yes, you might have heard this. I'd had a conversation with someone, this was a few years ago, an interview maybe, and someone asked me afterwards, well, how did it go, how did you get on with that person, and I said, 'Oh, [30] it was really boring, I felt quite bored'. So a good woman sort of sprang up and said, 'Oh, Bhante, but you never feel bored, do you?' (Laughter). I said 'Yes, I felt really bored' (More laughter) As if, oh, no, no, you can't feel bored; she thought Bhante couldn't possibly be bored; she wanted to think that, so she wanted me to deny my own feeling, in other words, she wouldn't allow me to speak the truth about my own feeling. I wasn't allowed to say that, well, yes, I felt bored' (Laughter). That wasn't permitted, so I had to struggle to insist that yes, I did feel bored, do you see what I mean, yes? If you can't even speak the truth about your own feelings, well what can you speak the truth about. I mean, at least you can be sure of that: I was dead sure I felt bored (laughter), you couldn't talk me out of that' (Laughter). So especially when you're young when your feelings can be confused: mummy says, 'oh, you don't really like that, do you? You don't really want that ice-cream', when you do. You're not told, 'No, even though you want it you can't have it', which is fair enough, but 'You don't really want it darling, do you?' That's just sort of messing about with a child's feelings, it's alienating him from his feelings in the long run if this goes on. 'You don't really feel like that, you don't really want that, do you?' It's very insidious, even adults do that, don't they? People say, 'Oh, you don't really mean that, do you?' You do, but they try to persuade you that you don't mean it, in other words, they don't want you to speak the truth, the truth is not permitted. 'Truth May Not Be Spoken Here', (Laughter). Anyway, perhaps we'd better close there.

Vajrananda: Just a couple of questions I want to ask, er, the first one, it's translated from Pali, is it?

S: Yes.

Vajrananda: Why is Dharma 'Dharma', and not 'Dhamma'?

S: I suppose because the translator feels that Dharma, as distinct from Dhamma, has become an English word. I think you will find it in the English dictionary, like Nirvana. 'Nirvana' has become an English word, whereas 'Nibbana' hasn't. I think it's simply for that reason.

Vajrananda: And the name of the spirit, does it mean anything?

S: Not that I know of; Alavaga, er, no, I haven't got a dictionary of Pali proper names, but it probably does mean something, er; oh, it's from Alavi, Alavaga means simply one who live at Alavi, Alavi being the village, but then, what does Alavi mean, one could ask that, but I don't know what Alavi means; it probably does have some meaning.

End of tape 2 side 2.

End of Seminar.

Spellchecked and put into house style Shantavira December 1998