



cultivating the heart  
of patience:  
lessons from the  
bodhicaryavatara

## **preface**

*This seminar took place in 2008 from the 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> of June, on the third reunion retreat of the men ordained at [Guhyaloka](#)<sup>1</sup> in 2005. Thanks to the friendship between Bhante and Nityabandhu (who is now running a [Buddhist Centre in Krakow](#)) we were privileged to have Bhante Sangharakshita come and stay with us for the entire week's retreat at [Padmaloka](#).<sup>2</sup>*

*We asked if he'd do some study with us and he elected to take on the sixth chapter of Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara, on the Perfection of Forbearance (Kshanti).*

*Dharmachari Vidyakaya, 2013*

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## **editor's note**

*As in any seminar, the conversations transcribed here were often off-the-cuff, with quotations and references made mostly from memory. We've tried to make sure that any factual inaccuracies which may have arisen as a result are contextualised and, if possible, corrected.*

*Footnote references for web-linked Wikipedia terms are generally derived from the corresponding Wikipedia entry.*

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<sup>1</sup> Guhyaloka ('The Secret Realm') is a retreat centre in Spain specializing in men's long ordination retreats.

<sup>2</sup> Padmaloka ('The Realm of the Lotus') is a Buddhist retreat centre for men in Norfolk, England.

*Attending with Sangharakshita were: Abhayanaga, Amalavajra, Balajit, Dharmamodana, Dhira, Dhiraka, Dhivan, Gambhiradaka, Jayagupta, Jayarava, Jayasiddhi, Jinapalita, Khemajala, Naganataka, Nityabandhu, Priyadaka, Samudraghosha, and Vidyakaya.*

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## session 1: verses 1-8

(7th june, morning)

Sangharakshita: All right. So if everybody is ready we can begin. I am assuming that most of you at least have read the introductory material so we won't be going through that. We'll start straight off with the text itself, or rather with the translation of the text. I take it you've all got the same translation, the World's Classics one?<sup>3</sup>

So what we'll do, we'll go round the circle, people reading a verse at a time. And maybe I'll comment on the verse and that may, in some cases, lead to some questions and possibly a bit of discussion. So we'll plunge straight in and, as you probably know, we're going to go through the sixth chapter of the Bodhicaryavatara, which deals with the perfection of patience, which is the great antidote to anger. And at least two people, when they heard that we were going to study this particular chapter, said that they felt this was what they needed. And that may be true of course in the case of others - we shall see. So let's start off with the first verse of that chapter.

Dhivan: ***[1] This worship of the Sugatas, generosity, and good conduct performed throughout thousands of aeons - hatred destroys it all.***

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<sup>3</sup> Oxford University Press, trans. Crosby and Skilton, 1995.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Of course, [Shantideva](#)<sup>4</sup> was a [Mahayana Buddhist](#)<sup>5</sup> and of course he believed in the [Bodhisattva Ideal](#),<sup>6</sup> and that meant, of course, that he saw the Bodhisattva career as extending over many lifetimes. So that is the context of this particular verse. Of course one might consider it rather hyperbolic that a moment of hatred or a moment of anger could destroy the merits that you've heaped up over a long period of time, but we can see that that is the case, even in our ordinary, every day lives, especially in our relations with other people.

If you get angry with others, or even if you feel hatred towards them, you may say something that you may regret for a long time and which may disrupt your relationship with someone for years and years. So therefore you have to be very careful what you say when you are angry or when you entertain feelings of hatred.

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<sup>4</sup> Shantideva was an 8th-century Indian Buddhist monk and scholar at [Nalanda University](#) and an adherent of the [Madhyamaka](#) philosophy of [Nagarjuna](#). Listen to talks on [Shantideva's life and work](#).

<sup>5</sup> 'Mahayana' means literally 'Great Vehicle' and is one of the three '[yanas](#)', the great modes or methods of spiritual practice in Buddhism. Listen to [explorations of the Mahayana](#).

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, a Bodhisattva is anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated [bodhichitta](#), which is a spontaneously arising, sustained wish to attain [Buddhahood](#) for the benefit of all [sentient beings](#). Listen to talks on the [Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva Ideal](#) as a path of practice.

I remember in this connection there's a very beautiful passage in - some of you will know it - Coleridge's 'Christabel'.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning, where the lady in the story meets with another lady, and their fathers have been friends, or were friends, in their youth. And Coleridge describes very beautifully how they had a quarrel, they had an argument, and each spoke very painful and cutting words and that resulted in their being separated for the rest of their lives.

And Coleridge gives a very beautiful simile, a very beautiful image. He said, it is like when there is some geographical upheaval and the earth divides and there are two cliffs, one on one side, one on the other, confronting each one, separated. So the two erstwhile friends, for the rest of their lives, were like that, permanently separated.<sup>8</sup>

So we know from our own experience that harsh words, or words spoken in anger, or out of hatred even, really do rankle and can lead to an estrangement for years upon years, sometimes to our very great regret. But once we've said something it can't be recalled and its effects remain. So, in this first verse, Shantideva seems to be cautioning us against these sudden outbursts of anger or hatred. We

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English poet, literary critic and philosopher of the 18th/19th C. who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets.

<sup>8</sup> *'Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;  
A dreary sea now flows between;—  
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,  
Shall wholly do away, I ween,  
The marks of that which once hath been.'*

say something which perhaps we do mean at the time but on reflection we wish we never had said that. So this is one of the reasons why we should be careful to watch our speech.

And it is not a question even of estranging friends but we may have got ourselves into a good mental state, calm and peaceful, which a sudden outburst of anger will destroy all that, and leave us feeling quite uneasy and upset and ashamed of ourselves, maybe for weeks later. So all the more reason for being careful. So this is a very important first verse of the chapter, which strikes a very important note. So let's have the next verse.

Nityabandhu: ***[2] There is no evil equal to hatred, and no spiritual practice equal to forbearance. Therefore one should develop forbearance by various means, with great effort.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. There one might think that this a bit of an overstatement. No virtue greater than forbearance... and no non-virtue... what's the expression Shantideva uses... no 'evil', no 'papa', greater than hatred. Of course, again, it's the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal and the Bodhisattva, of course, has taken out of compassion a vow to help all living beings. So it's not really easy to help them if you keep getting angry with them. So it's in the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal perhaps that Shantideva is saying that hatred is the greatest of evils and forbearance the greatest of virtues.

Another translation I've been following, because it's available as a spoken word book, seems always to translate hatred as *anger*, so

maybe we bear that in mind. 'Dvesha', can be translated, I suppose, as either 'anger' or as 'hatred'. Anger seems to be the outward expression, especially in speech, and hatred the mental state. So are there any questions about that particular verse?

Priyadaka: Something that has made me curious is that with the [six paramitas](#)<sup>9</sup>, the first one is generosity, implying that that's a greater spiritual practice than forbearance. But I'm wondering if generosity is a counter to forbearance or a way of expressing forbearance?

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well I suppose if you're feeling in a generous mood towards other people... Again, it is very difficult for you to be angry with them, so to that extent, yes it helps you to prevent falling into 'dvesha' and anger.

Samudraghosa: Is it not said that the perfections are kind of... that the later ones have a higher priority than the early ones?

Sangharakshita: Yes, that is also sometimes said. But also of course I said, in another context, that there is only one paramita, and that is

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<sup>9</sup> 'Paramita' means 'perfection' or 'completeness.' In Buddhism the paramitas refer to the perfection or culmination of certain virtues. These are usually given as lists of six or ten perfections. Listen to [an introduction to the paramitas](#), and explore talks on the [Six Paramitas](#).



[prajna](#)<sup>10</sup>, and that the others - [dana](#)<sup>11</sup>, [sila](#)<sup>12</sup> and even [kshanti](#)<sup>13</sup> - are not really paramitas unless they're conjoined with Wisdom. So clearly when Shantideva is warning us against anger or hatred, he is advising us to cultivate kshanti in the first place as a sort of relative virtue. But if it is conjoined with Wisdom then of course there's no danger, or very little danger, of your falling into that particular unskillful mental state.<sup>14</sup>

I suppose it's part of the Indian way of doing things that each time a particular virtue comes up, well you give that particular virtue the highest praise, and that when you practise it you should practise it as though that is the best and the highest, in a sense even the only one, for that particular moment.

Jayarava: Bhante, do you think that it is significant that he doesn't talk about eliminating anger in this context but actually cultivating

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<sup>10</sup> 'Prajna' means 'wisdom' in the sense of having seen deeply and directly the nature of reality. It is part of the [Buddha's Threefold Way](#) of ethics, meditation and wisdom. Listen to [talks on prajna](#).

<sup>11</sup> 'Dana' means 'giving' or 'generosity', a central Buddhist practice to help reduce the sense of separation between 'self' and 'other'. Listen to [evocations of dana](#).

<sup>12</sup> 'Sila' (Pali, 'shila' in Sanskrit) is often translated simply as 'ethics', and is the term used for the whole realm of intentional, ethical behaviour in Buddhism. Listen to [perspectives on sila](#).

<sup>13</sup> The Buddhist practice of patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. [Hear more on kshanti](#).

<sup>14</sup> In [Buddhist ethics](#), the discourse is predominantly around the idea of skilful (kusala) and unskillful (akusala) mental states and actions (skilful conducing to wellbeing, unskillful conducing to suffering). For explorations of this, see [talks on skilfulness](#) and on [unskillfulness](#).

forbearance. So he doesn't attack the anger directly, but says cultivate something else.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well this goes back to what the Buddha says somewhere in the [Pali Canon](#)<sup>15</sup> about the four ways in which you can deal with unskillful mental states.<sup>16</sup> The first way is simply to be aware of the unskillful mental state. Just look at it as it were, just as you might look at clouds, you know, passing through the sky. And it may be that just as a result of that simple awareness of it, the unskillful mental state disappears.

But then the Buddha says, if that doesn't work - and of course very often it won't work - there's another method to which you can have recourse and that is cultivating the opposite. So here of course that is what Shantideva is speaking about - cultivating the opposite. You eliminate hatred or anger by making a deliberate practice of cultivating kshanti. But the Buddha goes on to say there's a third way, because even that second method may not work, and the third way is contemplating the evil, even disastrous effects or consequences of your engaging in that unskillful mental state. And of course we can look at anger or hatred from this point of view also, and of course Shantideva does that by pointing out the disastrous consequences in terms of one's relations, say, with other people. So if you become

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<sup>15</sup> A lot (though by no means all) of the Pali Canon is available for free online at [Access To Insight](#).

<sup>16</sup> Relates to the '[Four Right Efforts](#)'. For more on this, see '[The Conscious Evolution of Man: Right Effort](#)' by Sangharakshita.

more aware of where your anger or hatred or any other unskillful state is leading to, you'll be less likely to indulge any of it.

But then the Buddha also said that there's a fourth way and that is, if all else fails, you just forcibly suppress the unskillful mental state. Of course some people believe that you shouldn't suppress anything, but in fact we have to sometimes, that is if we have, maybe momentarily, the urge to murder someone, well that's [LAUGHTER] something we just have to suppress, if that's the only thing we can do. So there are certain very unskillful mental states that can't be dealt with, at least for the time being, in any other way. So it's quite legitimate to suppress them forcibly, hold them down.

Balajit: Doesn't Shantideva say later something about 'become like a piece of wood' or something?

Sangharakshita: Yes, it isn't always advisable to let everything hang out. Or even with regards to... Well, some people might say, well if you feel angry with someone or if you really dislike them, you should just express that. Well I think one can't do that in all cases. You have to consider the effect on the other person. Sometimes you can express yourself very strongly and, even as it were angrily, and as it were get away with it, partly perhaps you know the other person well and you know that, well it's not going to result in a permanent breach in your relationship. But one has to be quite wary, quite careful nonetheless.

So sometimes we have to check and restrain ourselves. In fact, texts like the [Dhammapada](#)<sup>17</sup> are very much concerned with restraint. So once again, as followers of the Buddha we can't always afford to let all our emotions hang out. All right so let's go on - next verse.

Jayagupta: ***[3] One's mind finds no peace, neither enjoys pleasure or delight, nor goes to sleep, nor feels secure while the dart of hatred is stuck in the heart.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes, a person of angry temperament never looks happy. They always look unhappy, because anger or hatred isn't a very comfortable mental state. You feel uneasy. You can't enjoy anything. Even if you turn on the most beautiful piece of music, while you're feeling angry you can't enjoy it, because the mental state of anger is so inimical to anything of a pleasurable or blissful nature. So therefore I say the angry person is an unhappy person.

So it's in your own interests not to be angry. If you want to be happy, well you have not to be angry, not to entertain thoughts of hatred. You have to practise and develop forbearance. And also one might say that well, forbearance is something that we have to practise all the time, because all the time things are happening which we don't quite like. There's probably not going to be a day in our lives when nothing happens to displease us, even to a slight extent. I think such days are likely to be very rare.

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<sup>17</sup> See [Sangharakshita's own translation](#). Also, Padmavajra, 'The Dhammapada - the Buddha's Way of Truth' series of talks.

So therefore forbearance is a virtue that we need to be practising all the time. And we can look at the negative mental state of hatred, or 'dvesha', as having various levels. We could say first of all there comes just annoyance; and then there may be irritation; then there may be dislike; and then of course we've got anger; then we've got hatred; then there's enmity; and then there's malice. So there's a whole range of negative mental states of this kind, and it's very easy to slip from one to another, from a less serious to a more serious one. So we need to be on our guard, and yes practise the virtue of forbearance.

Amalavajra: Can you repeat that list? [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Well... [LAUGHTER] first annoyance, someone that doesn't wash up his cup and saucer, leaves it dirty - you feel a bit annoyed. But then there's irritation. Perhaps that's when someone does something that annoys you and does it repeatedly. You get irritated, you get a bit irked. And then after that, well, there's dislike, you start disliking that person because that's the way he behaves and it rubs you up the wrong way. And then, well, that dislike, that irritation, can lead to anger and you may express the anger and speak a few harsh words to that person. And if they don't take much notice of you, or they strongly disagree with you, or criticise you in their turn, well, even enmity may develop between you. And as for malice, I understand malice to be the deliberate harming of others for, so to speak, no reason, simply because you enjoy inflicting pain and

suffering on others. That's the worst. But I think that very few people, you know, experience that kind of mental state.

Vidyakaya: It seems like through that succession you're becoming more and more identified with the hatred or the anger..

Sangharakshita: Yes, Yes.

Vidyakaya: And it's becoming more and more a part of you.

Sangharakshita: And there's more and more of ego behind it.

Nityabandhu: And less and less of seeing the other person.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: I've often thought of generosity as a practice, as a way of cultivating awareness of other people. You can't really be generous unless you're aware of what the other person might like, for instance.

Sangharakshita: Yes, indeed.

Jayarava: So it seems like that ties back up with what we were saying before about...

Sangharakshita: Yes, whether it's in terms of some objective object or some kind of treatment, some kind of relationship they want to have with you.

Nityabandhu: Where is metta's place here, because his advice seems to be kshanti for hatred, but you hear also about metta for hatred.

Sangharakshita: Yes, because kshanti suggests that it's a response to something that happens to you. You could say that with regard to metta, kshanti comes before metta, that is if... and, of course, metta relates primarily to people, but kshanti can be with regards to impersonal conditions. But as regards people, if they do something that you dislike, or even harm you, perhaps you can't respond immediately with metta, but at least you can respond with kshanti. And to the extent that you're able to respond with kshanti, well you may be able gradually to feel metta towards that person. But, as I said, kshanti is also with regard to external conditions like the weather. So in a way kshanti has a wider connotation than metta, which more often than not relates to people. I suppose it's difficult to speak of loving the weather, even good weather, except in the very metaphorical sense.

Naganataka: It seems like kshanti can very often be sort of practised wrongly or misinterpreted as kind of a sort of a redemptive suffering...

Sangharakshita: Redemptive suffering...

Naganataka: Sort of 'oh well I just have to kind of accept this because I can't change it'.

Sangharakshita: Well yes, later on in the chapter Shantideva does make that point. He says, when something unpleasant happens to you, well if you can't change it, well why worry? Why torment yourself unnecessarily or further by worrying or bothering or resenting something which you're not able to change? It's a bit like the Western

Classical virtue of fortitude, which is not a favourite virtue nowadays I guess. Just putting up with things which can't be helped.

Jayasiddhi: Bhante, I have come across in other Mahayana sources the idea that you could try to develop kshanti by allowing difficult conditions to persist, to build up a kind of strong kshanti. Is that a good idea or is it better to resolve issues when we can?

Sangharakshita: Yes, but you have to be aware of your own strengths. Perhaps it's dangerous to put yourself into difficult situations or situations of temptation in order to test how strong your virtue is. I was thinking the other day of something of this sort in connection with [Mahatma Gandhi](#).<sup>18</sup> After Mahatma Gandhi's death his secretary published his reminiscences. And these created a great stir because the secretary revealed that at one stage of his career, when he was quite an old man, Mahatma Gandhi used to sleep at night naked with two naked young women. And this was to test the strength of his [brahmacharya](#).<sup>19</sup>

So people had very mixed reactions to that practice. So yes I wonder if it's wise to expose yourself to situations which might be a little too much for you. So it's an attitude of almost a sort of athleticism

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<sup>18</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the pre-eminent leader of [Indian nationalism](#) when India was under [British rule](#), famous for his campaign of non-violent civil disobedience which led to [Indian independence](#) in 1947.

<sup>19</sup> Literally, 'the path or way of [Brahma](#)'. In this context referring to the aspect of the path concerning strict celibacy. [See more on this practice](#) within a specifically Buddhist context.



towards the spiritual life, perhaps with a bit of ego behind it - just testing yourself to see how strong you are. And I think, under normal circumstances, life itself will provide enough tests that you don't need to put yourself through them unnecessarily.

So there will always be something around that might annoy you, so I think you don't really need to go seeking such situations or even deliberately prolonging a difficult situation, unless it's of a very minor character. Certainly not anything very serious. All right, what's next?

Gambhiradaka: ***[4] Those whom one honours with wealth and respect, and also one's dependents, even they long to destroy the master who is disfigured by hatred.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, Yes. If you're an angry person or a person whose mental state is often one of hatred, well, members of your family, your companions, your close relations, they won't like you, even though they are close. Your own children may avoid you if you're a person of angry or hating temperament. A person who is of an angry temperament will rarely be popular - people will tend to avoid him or avoid her.

Jayarava: Do you think that part of that avoidance would be what you were saying before about the scale - how it's very easy to slip from one level up to the next level of intensity - so that angry people are a bit unpredictable?

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. Well I did have the experience of associating for quite a long time with a person of angry temperament, so I think I can say I know all about that. [LAUGHTER] And such a person is very difficult to live with, especially if they are of a rather explosive temperament. I mean you have to be very careful what you say. They can very easily get upset, very easily get angry and unless you know them very, very well, you can't always anticipate what's going to spark off some furious outburst.

Vidyakaya: Do you think that was good training for you? [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: I think it helped but I must say when that particular period of training came to an end [LAUGHTER] I think I was a little relieved. Yes.

Abhayanaga: What do you think about, if you're in a situation where you're in a situation like that, and there's no foreseeable end to it - it's someone you work with or live with - and they're just really difficult or really angry most of the time, do you think it's worth broaching the subject or trying to do something to help, or just keep the block of wood practice going indefinitely?

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well there are other things one has to practise also besides kshanti. So maybe one could think well it's time for me to concentrate on another virtue now. All right then.

Dharmamodana: ***[5] Even friends shrink from him. He gives, but is not honoured. In short, there is no sense in which someone prone to anger is well off.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, one could say that... it's interesting that the translation uses the expression 'well off', which suggests material wealth, even prosperity. And if you're in business, well you have to deal with other people. If you have an angry temperament well it's going to make your business connections more difficult, so you're less likely to be successful as a businessman. So often we do find that, that people...I noticed this in India, that people who engaged in trade or business - having a lot of dealings with other people - they speak very sweetly, very charmingly. You might almost say they have an 'oily manner' because they don't want to rub anyone up the wrong way, because that's bad for business.

Samudraghosa: That's interesting, that suggests that there is some other principle which is even more important to them, than a defensive anger or hateful reaction - something else is going on that's more valuable to them.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Dharmamodana: Well they're motivated by greed. They've worked out that by being patient it feeds their greed.

Sangharakshita: And of course some people can practise patience with a view to achieving a particular end for themselves.

Dharmamodana: So their motives may not be pure but at least they're practising patience.

Sangharakshita: I think it's important to practise patience without resentment, because you can be outwardly very patient with someone but you can be inwardly full of resentment that you're having to be patient. So the practice of patience must be a real practice, not accompanied by an inward feeling of resentment that you're in that particular position. A merely outward appearance of patience is not the real thing. And of course we do find quite a few examples of that unreal kind of patience in the world.

Naganataka: Along those lines, you talked about prajna being the one sort of true perfection. What would you say it means to practise kshanti with an element of prajna?

Sangharakshita: Well there would be in that case a complete absence of resentment and there'd also be metta and karuna, because there would be little or no ego due to the fact that you've experienced prajna. So that would be a real, full practice of patience.

Amalavajra: I'm quite struck, both this verse and the previous verse, it talks about giving, giving gifts and how even if, even though one gives one isn't honoured, I think is the phrase in this verse. I thought that's quite interesting in terms of human relations.

Sangharakshita: Yes, Yes.

Amalavajra: People care far more about how you are than what you can give them.

Sangharakshita: Yes and that's why it's also said that when you give someone something, well you should give smilingly and affectionately, not in the way that some people do in India, say when they meet a beggar, just throw a few coins to him in a contemptuous sort of way. That's not real giving.

Jayagupta: Is it that there's some distinction behind the action and the intention that lies behind it?

Sangharakshita: Yes, well again throughout Buddhist ethics, throughout Buddhist spiritual life, there is this emphasis on the importance of the inner attitude, the importance of the motive. And more attention has to be given to that than to the merely outward expression. Anyway, what comes next?

Samudraghosa: ***[6] The person who realises that hatred is an enemy, since it creates such sufferings as these, and who persistently strikes it down, is happy in this world and the next.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, well yes one is happy not only in this life obviously, but in the next. That obviously brings in the question of **rebirth**.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See 'Karma and Rebirth' by Sangharakshita. For other considerations of the traditional Buddhist doctrine of 'rebirth' or 're-becoming', see talks on **karma and rebirth** and 'Exploring Karma & Rebirth' by Nagapiya.

Nityabandhu: But this thing, 'the person who realises that hatred is an enemy' - I think there are people who want to be feared and I think they want to... they do use the anger... they don't want to give it up.

Sangharakshita: Well, it's an unfortunate circumstance, that very often people take you seriously only when you get a bit angry [LAUGHTER] and it's sometimes said that, I've thought it as one of the disadvantages of being a Buddhist that you couldn't ever get angry, because if you never got angry people didn't always take seriously what you said. That the way to get them to take what you say seriously is to get angry, but of course as a Buddhist one can't do that, so one just has to be careful to try to speak strongly or firmly without actually getting angry.

Jayarava: What's your take on the **Tantric** idea that anger or hatred is just an energy that... I hear this quite a bit from people that are interested in **Tibetan Buddhism** that, you know, hatred isn't an enemy to be... in this verse it says to 'strike it down'. And there's this other sort of way of talking about it which is that it's not an enemy, that it's something that you almost embrace. What's your take on that sort of...?

Sangharakshita: Well, Shantideva himself has sometimes used these expressions like 'be angry with anger'. I think I look with some suspicion on these sort of Tantric views and interpretations. There is truth in fact what... in anger there is energy, and yes that energy is in a sense neutral - it can be dissociated from anger, it can be directed into

some other, more positive mental state. But I think that shouldn't cause us to justify the indulgence in anger as anger.

Of course there's also this question of resentment which comes along if anger is constantly bottled up. And it may be that, speaking purely psychologically, in the case of some very bottled up people, it might be a positive thing, in a way, for them to get a bit angry sometimes. But one nonetheless has to be very careful because even in that sort of situation a person could do a lot of harm which they might afterwards regret.

So perhaps it's important that... perhaps one should say that one should give expression, or at least acknowledge, when you're feeling a bit annoyed or irritated with someone, not wait until it builds up into anger. If you say to someone who, for instance, always leaves the tap running, or something like that, if you say, 'well look I get a bit annoyed, I get a bit irritated because you keep doing this'. So you can acknowledge your irritation, you can acknowledge your annoyance. So since you acknowledge it, communicate it to the other person in a skilful way, it doesn't build up into anger and therefore there's less risk of an explosion. So I think it's much better to acknowledge anger in its early stages, as irritation or annoyance, rather than leave things until the emotion becomes less and less controllable.

*Abhayanaga:* Can I ask you a question about rebirth? It says 'happiness in this world and in the next' so I guess it's saying if you're an angry person you're destined towards an unfortunate rebirth. Do

you literally believe in sort of the hells of Buddhist history? I'm curious about this.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. You probably have already found in Shantideva that there's quite a lot about hell, in fact quite a lot about the hells. And there's no doubt, there are references to hell in the Pali scriptures. And the general term used is *upaya*, sorry not upaya, I can't get the right word at the moment... it means 'states of downfall'. And when you engage in unskillful activities or unskillful mental states, yes you experience *apaya*, downfall, and that can be painful. And one might say that the references to hell are a sort of, you know, mythologisation of that experience or state in, as it were, cosmic terms.

So one can take that literally or one can take it more metaphorically, take it more psychologically. But I think Shantideva is in no doubt that if you persistently entertain the unskillful mental state of anger or hatred, you are a very unhappy person, and you may be said even to be in hell. You don't even have to wait to be reborn in a state of suffering [LAUGHTER] you're in one already. So if you are reborn well you'll carry your *samskaras* with you, you'll carry your angry or hating temperament with you, so you will continue to be unhappy. You will continue to suffer, you will have 'gone to hell'. So I see it more like that. Anyway let's press on.

Jayasiddhi: ***[7] Consuming the food of dejection prepared by doing the undesirable and thwarting the desirable, biting hatred strikes me down.***



Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Jayasiddhi: ***Consuming the food of dejection prepared by doing the undesirable and thwarting the desirable, biting hatred strikes me down.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, 'eating the food of dejection'. It's a very interesting phrase. Yes, and that food is prepared by unskilful action. So one might say that the person who is prone to anger or prone to hatred is not only an unhappy person, sometimes they give the impression, when they're not actually expressing their anger, of being dejected: not very happy at all, a bit downcast. An angry person can't be a joyful person, can't be a contented person, as well as can't be a happy person.

Jayarava: My observation about being angry is that it's quite hard to communicate. Even if you're saying something that's quite reasonable, you say it in an angry way. The other person won't hear it. So I've certainly noticed that I end up feeling quite isolated when I'm angry, so maybe there's that isolation that comes with it as well.

Sangharakshita: Yes, if one speaks angrily to someone, well the anger registers but the content, the, as it were, rational content, that you're trying to express, doesn't register clearly. They've taken the angry way in which it was expressed because that's something that's felt, not just something that is thought.

Balajit: It's funny the way... because it's almost as though I can get angry because I feel it gives me more power. But it's like, you can see that when I am angry I actually lose power in a way, because I become less effective. Whatever it is I want, anger doesn't seem to help it.

Sangharakshita: Well, as was mentioned a little while ago, well there's energy in anger, so if you express your anger, if you express it verbally, you experience that energy. You feel more alive. You get a kick out of it. Some people do get a kick out of getting angry and expressing it, but obviously it's not a very skilful thing to do. And you suffer, and there may be a reaction: when you're not actually expressing your anger well you may be quite dejected, quite downcast. And in any case not a happy person. And the next verse?

Dhiraka: ***[8] Therefore I shall destroy the food of this deceiver, since this hatred has no purpose other than my murder.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well... So it's if you really engage in anger or hatred, well you're killing yourself. You're not really harming another person, you're harming yourself.

Jayarava: You're kind of harming both aren't you? Wouldn't you, well, you are harming others...

Sangharakshita: Yes, you're capable of harming both at the same time.

Jayarava: But yet...

Sangharakshita: But even if you don't harm the other person, suppose the other person is practising kshanti, you nonetheless do harm yourself.

Nityabandhu: That's maybe where the element of prajna comes in, seeing that there are these dark energies in the cosmos which want to bring about your downfall.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes.

Nityabandhu: And being aware that it's not something that's good for you.

Dhira: I am aware sometimes also that when I get angry, the person I'm angry with doesn't always know because I don't tell them and it may not be apparent, so the only person who's getting hurt is me.

Sangharakshita: Yes, indeed, yes. Well usually even if someone doesn't express their anger in strong words one can usually - if one is at all sensitive - pick up that they are in fact feeling like that.

Nityabandhu: Maybe even before the person, the angry person, knows themselves.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. And of course, you know, sometimes people will say, 'Why, I'm not getting angry'. [LAUGHTER] It's like the man who says, 'Well, no I'm not drunk' while you know that they are. Whether they do protest that they're not angry, well the likelihood is

that they are. But they're aware of it, they're not really happy with it, they want to deny the fact.

Jayarava: Often the person saying they're not angry is shouting at the time.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayagupta: Through clenched teeth...

Gambhiradaka: Or you can get passive aggression, can't you, where people don't express their anger but they do something later on to get you back, as it were.

Sangharakshita: Yes, passive aggression. That's an interesting expression, yes. Yes, they can put themselves subtly in the right in such a way as to make you feel uncomfortable.

Nityabandhu: And be very stubborn.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Khemajala: One of the things that comes up for me quite often is that sense of guilt and shame and it's like, 'Cos we can talk quite freely as Buddhists about 'Well, I'm not supposed to get angry', then quite quickly that gets onto 'You're not supposed to get angry'. And I've seen an awful lot of problems come out of that, where people have been waving a finger at somebody else saying...and if somebody is angry, well as Shantideva says later on, it's like they can't necessarily

stop themselves. I suppose, like I say, I've just seen a lot of harm done.

Gambhiradaka: This is the difficult thing isn't it because he says you've got to strike down anger, but I'm kind of wondering how exactly you do that in a way which is genuinely getting rid of it, rather than just either 'bottling it up' or pretending that you're not angry but really you are.

Sangharakshita: Well sometimes people need a definite outlet for their anger. Well, some people recommend punching a pillow or something of that sort. But I think if you're angry it's directed against people - it's not so easy to let it out against something which is not a person, like a pillow.

Well there can be, I mean, there can be a, you know, a letting off of anger, a sort of letting off of steam, in a way perhaps which is not totally unskillful. Sometimes you have to do that, without perhaps directing it against any particular person.

Vidyakaya: I noticed one Order member in Shabda<sup>21</sup> - I can't remember who it was now - was very into Swedish **Death Metal** music.

Sangharakshita: Swedish?

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<sup>21</sup> The private monthly journal of the Triratna Buddhist Order.

Vidyakaya: Death Metal music: very, very loud, heavy, aggressive rock music. Possibly that was his way of...

Sangharakshita: Yes, I wonder to what extent it provides one with an outlet for that kind of mental state or to what extent it actually stimulates it.

Vidyakaya: Hard to know...

Priyadaka: I think the expression 'letting off steam' hints at the fact that anger might be an expression of a certain form of energy, but it's not, it might have become a habit of expressing one's energy. So one might be able to train oneself to express that energy through other ways. It's not 'angry energy' but it's just energy, and it's kind of useful or easy to turn it towards anger.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well perhaps some people can do that through violent physical exercise. It depends on your mental and physical type I suppose.

Vidyakaya: I suppose ultimately you only really develop kshanti through developing prajna.

Sangharakshita: Yes, in the long run. To the extent that you have developed prajna to that extent the kshanti will be the genuine article - it'll be kshanti paramita and not just a sort of gritting of your teeth, you know when circumstances get difficult. [LAUGHTER]

Gambhiradaka: So that suggests you need to do some...like say you've got angry and you've been able to let off steam in whatever way, you also need to start reflecting on what happened in the first place and where the anger arose.

Sangharakshita: Yes, what were the conditions leading up to that? What was the sort of situation that you'd allowed yourself to get in to? And whether you should not in the future avoid that sort of situation? I've noticed you know, when two people, or maybe just a small number of people, are engaged in discussion and the discussion becomes an argument, there is a point sometimes when the argument gets really heated and very negative emotions start coming into play. So one must be able to watch that gradual development of the really negative emotions and draw back, you know, before it's too late.

Naganataka: It's interesting, we're talking a lot about kshanti as a practice in small, sort of isolated situations - you know, responding to a particular event or another person. But my experience of kshanti is very often it's a sort of larger thing, it's developing a patience to accept aspects of the world that I can't change, including myself. Certain personality traits of myself that I would really like to be different, but I just have to realise that they're not going to be. I just have to kind of accept it. So I wonder if you can talk about kshanti as that kind of larger overall, you know, approach to the world.

Sangharakshita: Yes, if one has that larger, more philosophical sort of approach to the world, well then you're probably less likely to become

impatient or angry in particular situations. Reminds me of an exchange which took place between [Carlyle](#)<sup>22</sup> and the [lady visitor](#) who was a bit of an idealist. This lady said to Carlyle, 'I accept the universe' and Carlyle said 'My God, you'd better'. [LAUGHTER] Well, meaning you've no choice.

Jayarava: You'll really be in trouble if you don't.

Sangharakshita: 'You'd better'. Yes.

Gambhiradaka: Do you think that's what anger is? It's when we want something from a person or situation, or ourselves, and it doesn't deliver, and we take that terribly personally and then we get angry, and kind of argue against the whole set of conditions.

Sangharakshita: Yes, kshanti is very much, one might say, you know, bound up with the whole notion or experience of acceptance. And of course, well one could say that there are certain things happening in the world which it would be better if they were not happening. And perhaps one should make an effort to change things. And some people seem to do this by getting very angry with what is happening, and sort of fuelling themselves with anger, and acting out of that anger.

This is the case perhaps with people who want to relieve poverty in this or that part of the world. They sort of get themselves going by just

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Carlyle, Scottish philosopher and writer of the Victorian period. Read the [works of Carlyle](#). The 'lady visitor' was Margaret Fuller.



feeling very angry about what is happening, and perhaps this isn't the most skilful way of going about it. But nonetheless anger does fuel certain peoples' energy. [PAUSE]

But, well it reminds me of those lines of [Yeats](#):<sup>23</sup>

*'The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity'*.<sup>24</sup>

Samudraghosa: Could you say that again please, Bhante?

Sangharakshita: So if the best had that same kind of intensity, but of a positive, of a skilful nature, rather than an unskilful one, what wonders could be accomplished. But sometimes it does seem that the people who are most active in various well, so to speak, 'good' senses are fuelled by negative emotions. That seems rather odd

Gambhiradaka: Do you think that's because accepting things in a kind of not fully ideal way can make you think you can't change anything, so you go passive, you don't do anything, if you see that as being a great virtue.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's not, perhaps one should say, a real acceptance - you know one is just lazy. One just doesn't want to do anything and one justifies that by saying, 'well, you can't change things anyway, why try?' But there are certain things which can be

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<sup>23</sup> William Butler Yeats, Irish poet and one of the foremost figures of 20th C. literature. Read the [works of Yeats](#).

<sup>24</sup> From *'The Second Coming'* by W. B. Yeats.

changed, and should be changed, and we should have the energy to change them. But that energy should not be the energy of hatred or anger. I think that's where the difficulty lies.

Jayarava: You say in one of your...I think it's one of the relatively early lectures about.. that you should never 'accept' yourself. And I've always taken it to mean it in that sense, but it's sometimes controversial, in talking about it with other people.

Sangharakshita: Well yes, when I said, as I certainly have said, one shouldn't accept oneself, I mean one shouldn't accept oneself in the sense that you don't think that you're not in need of any improvement. Yes? But in more recent years of course there has been a lot of talk about accepting oneself, and I think that is taking it, going to extremes, and so I have been quite critical of that sort of acceptance of oneself. And I think that I've said, on more than one occasion, that one should speak of an acknowledgement of oneself; acknowledge that yes, such and such qualities and characteristics are there, such and such weaknesses. So, one shouldn't accept everything in one's composition - there are some things that need changing, you need to develop. So in that sense you don't accept yourself as you are. You don't think that you're not in need of improvement or development.

Jayarava: I suppose the danger is that you just acquiesce to negative mental states, if you accept yourself.

Sangharakshita: Yes, so I think we should not talk too much in terms of acceptance.

Naganataka: Bhante, along these lines what would you say is the relationship between kshanti and upeksha<sup>25</sup>?

Sangharakshita: And upeksha? Hmm. Well, upeksha of course is a much more general thing I would say. At its best, or at its highest, upeksha is a state of complete equanimity towards experience, existence. Whereas kshanti has a special reference to, one might say, unpleasant experiences or aspects of existence. So in that way kshanti is much more general.

Nityabandhu: Upeksha, you mean.

Sangharakshita: Sorry, sorry, upeksha is much more general, yes. Whereas kshanti has reference more to the unpleasant or painful aspects of life, and existence and even the universe.

Nityabandhu: I'm reminded of that... you recalled that experience of yours which you had I think when you were very ill at some point - a fever.

Sangharakshita: Ah yes, yes. Yes, that's true. I've written about it in retrospect of 1969, which is actually on my personal website, yes. When, just at that time I felt my mind was sort of, you know, balanced between life and death, and I genuinely didn't mind, you know, whether I lived or whether I died. Yes, so there was a sort of upeksha

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<sup>25</sup> The Buddhist concept of equanimity, one the four traditional 'Brahmaviharas' ('sublime attitudes'). Listen to [evocations of upeksha](#).

there, one might say. Anyway I think the hour is up, so I think we'll close there for the time being.

Several voices: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Sangharakshita: Likewise.

## session 2: verses 9-19

(7th june, afternoon)

Dhivan: Only 127 verses to go.

Sangharakshita: All right. [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: In this chapter....

Sangharakshita: So how far did we get? Let's go back.

Dhivan: 126.

Jayarava: Verse 8.

Sangharakshita: Are we all sitting in the same places as before?

Amalavajra: Would you prefer us to all sit in the same places?

Sangharakshita: No, not really. Anyway we need to go back to the next verse. The one after the last one that we did. So who's going to read that?

Vidyakaya: That's me.

***[9] I must not disturb the feeling of sympathetic joy, even at the arrival of something extremely unwelcome. There is nothing desirable in the state of dejection; on the contrary, the skilful is neglected.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Sympathetic joy, that is [mudita](#).<sup>26</sup> Shantideva seems to think that it's important that we are, normally perhaps, in a state of sympathetic joy, mudita, hmm? In other words, you know, looking on the bright side of things, feeling therefore consequently joyful. Looking of course on the bright side of things from a moral or spiritual point of view. Hmm? And it's important not to allow, you know, feelings, negative feelings, of anger or hatred to disturb that. [SILENCE] I wonder why he brings in sympathetic joy particularly, rather than say, upeksha, peace of mind?

Jayarava: We've been talking earlier about kshanti being a response to other people.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: So, mudita is an attitude to other people.

Sangharakshita: That's also a response to other people, to the good that other people do, to the positive qualities that other people possess, yes. So, at the same time, he says when we're in that state we must be careful, be careful not to allow it to be disturbed by negative feelings like anger or hatred. Because that will result in... what does he say at the end of the verse?

Vidyakaya: The skilful is neglected.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Mudita' means 'sympathetic joy' and is also one of the [Brahmaviharas](#). Listen to talks about [mudita](#).

Amalavajra: A state of dejection.

Sangharakshita: More than neglected, the skilful is forsaken for the sake of something unskilful, which can only result in dejection. So here Shantideva seems to be emphasising the importance of the positive mental state as opposed to emphasising the importance getting rid of the negative mental state.

Jayarava: Bhante, do you know what the original of 'dejection' might be?

Sangharakshita: No I don't, no. I wish I had a text of the original. No, clearly some kind of sadness.

Jayagupta: Because that is a theme that runs through those last four verses; 'the food of dejection'.

Sangharakshita: Ah Yes. Yes, it's not very positive but it's not as it were actively negative. We might even say in more modern terms, depression. Depression isn't a positive mental state but it's not actively negative, so to speak. It suggests also disappointment, maybe disappointment with oneself. Sense of failure.

Jayarava: Hmm. I was going to suggest that it has that sense of not quite self pity but definitely self-oriented.

Sangharakshita: Yes, you're very close to self pity when you feel dejected I think.

Jayarava: Yes.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. But it's here Shantideva is saying that a mental state of hatred or anger is quite incompatible with positive feelings like sympathetic joy, and if you allow feelings of anger to cloud your mind then correspondingly the feeling of sympathetic joy disappears. It connects a little bit with what we were saying this morning, that the angry man is not a happy man. In the same way that the angry man is not a man who is imbued with sympathetic joy. You can't have both at the same time. One exists at the expense of the other. So, when you get angry you miss out on something. You miss out on the positive mental state which you could have enjoyed, had you not become angry. Let's carry on then.

Balajit: **[10] *If there is a solution then what is the point of dejection? What is the point of dejection if there is no solution?***

Sangharakshita: [LAUGHS] Yes, Shantideva tries to impale himself on the horns of a dilemma here. If there's no solution to the problem or the trouble or whatever, well, why get upset, hmm? But if there is a solution, well why get upset? You just create the solution, hmm? But usually we're not so logical as that. It's extremely logical, isn't it? Hmm?

Nityabandhu: If it worked then we'd never experience any negative mental state again would we?

Sangharakshita: Yes, in those sorts of situations, indeed. We find that very often Shantideva's approach is very logical. It's sometimes super-logical. And it's very convincing, but at the same time one suspects



that though so logical it doesn't always work, because people aren't logical. In fact far from it.

Vidyakaya: It's the classic [A.A. prayer](#) isn't it?

Sangharakshita: What's that?

Vidyakaya: Umm...

Naganataka: 'Grant me the courage to change the things I can, the serenity to accept the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference?', I think, isn't it?

Vidyakaya: It's the wisdom to know the difference that's the key bit.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, that's good.

Jayarava: It's more practical, I think.

Sangharakshita: Yes, in other words, it says, don't waste emotional energy, hmm? Because sometimes people can, because if something can be fixed, yes, why get upset? But if it absolutely can't be well just accept that, don't get upset either. Very often people go on fussing and worrying and complaining, instead of just accepting the situation.

Gambhiradaka: You can get stuck in the past as well, thinking 'oh, if only I'd done something different'.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Gambhiradaka: Thinking 'if only I'd made different decisions or whatever'.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes you can't change the past. That's one of the things you very definitely can't change.....

All right, the next.

Naganataka: **[11] *Suffering, humiliation, harsh words, and disgrace: these we desire neither for ourselves nor our loved ones; but for our enemies it is the reverse.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Stating the obvious, yes? Of course you may not have any actual enemies, hmm? People that you literally would like to, you know, do away with, but it's true we do have definite preferences, hmm? And we give the preference usually to those who are very close to us. And we find it much easier to wish them well or to do positive things for them, than we do for other people, not to speak of any enemy we may have. Shantideva is saying, we don't have that attitude of upeksha, or even mindedness, towards all beings, regardless of whether we are personally close to them or not. Whether they are related to us or not. And so on, hmm?

Priyadaka: You say that we may not have enemies. Unfortunately I find myself, sometimes looking for someone to put negativity onto or to get angry with. It's kind of potentially there and I'm discussing with myself how this mythical person has done me wrong and it goes on and on, and then someone might do me some slight harm and they

get everything that I've built up, which has nothing to do with them whatsoever. Or I'll catch myself rather embarrassed.

*Sangharakshita*: Yes, well that sort of thing often happens. We've built up, ourselves up, into a certain mental state, often a negative one, and go round looking for some possible object of that. Also with regard to *[word missing]* we notice the difference of our attitude towards different people when it comes to the question of indifference.

Because we might hear on the radio that so many people have died in an earthquake, and we might say, 'well that's too bad'. However we don't feel really very upset or sorry, yes? But if it was someone known to us, or close to us we would feel very upset at the same news. So we do discriminate in this way, hmm? And in a sense, from a high spiritual point of view, that's undesirable. But it's very difficult to be, you know, even-minded towards all living beings. Very difficult. But then Shantideva's talking about the Bodhisattva. So, we need to have that at least as an ideal, even though it maybe for the present a very remote ideal.

*Jayarava*: Do you think it's more difficult these days? You know, we get the news very quickly. We often, if we listen to the news, if you're aware of the news, you often get this bad news about people dying.

*Sangharakshita*: Well you can be inundated with that sort of news.

*Jayarava*: Yeah, so it's very difficult to sustain a reaction to it because there's so much of it.

Sangharakshita: It's interesting that that term has come to be used, fairly recently, called 'compassion fatigue'.

Jayarava: Yeah.

Sangharakshita: And I think that's very true. Many people of good will, you know people are normally of a very positive state of, concerned about other people, nonetheless, they, after a while can start experiencing this 'compassion fatigue'. There are so many demands on their compassion.

Jayarava: I notice the media, more and more, report excruciating detail of cases of abuse or particular things that have happened to people, almost as though they're, like it's a drug where you have to have more and more and more to get a response.

Samudraghosa: It seems often to be aimed at sort of provoking a response of horrified anxiety.

Jayarava: Yeah, yeah.

[Speaker unclear]: And anger.

[MURMURS OF ASSENT - BIRDSONG]

Sangharakshita: Yes, so we certainly do discriminate, and we may wish all sorts of good things, you know, for those who are near and dear to us, but we won't have that sort of attitude towards people who we dislike, or about whom we are indifferent, hmm? And certainly towards an enemy, if we happen to have one. In fact of course we

know quite well, if there's someone we heartily dislike, if something unfortunate happens to them we might feel secretly pleased. All right, let's move on.

Abhayanaga: **[12] Happiness is scarce. Suffering persists with no effort; but only through suffering is there escape. Therefore, mind, be strong!**

Sangharakshita: Could you repeat that? I didn't quite catch it all.

Abhayanaga: **Happiness is scarce.**

Sangharakshita: 'Happiness is scarce'?

Abhayanaga: **Suffering persists with no effort; but only through suffering is there escape. Therefore, mind, be strong!**

Sangharakshita: That's a sort of existential situation... 'Happiness is scarce'. We wonder what Shantideva's thinking of. It's as though he's surveying the whole of samsaric existence, and he's saying, 'happiness is scarce'. Hmm? I suppose that's true. If you think of human beings, I mean, are they, normally, brimming over with happiness? Hmm? I remember when I used to live in London and used to travel quite a bit on the Underground. I used to notice the faces, you know, of the people sitting in the carriage. Very, very rarely, you saw someone who looked really happy. Often they were tired or worried or strained. And if you look at the animal world, well, many animals live in fear of being caught, or eaten, or whatever. Yes, so

Shantideva's probably right in saying 'happiness is scarce'. And then what does he say with regard to suffering?

Abhayanaga: ***Only through suffering is there escape.***

Sangharakshita: But before that?

Abhayanaga: ***Suffering persists with no effort.*** [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: You don't have to make an effort to suffer. You need more often to make an effort to be happy, to do something that will make you definitely happy, but, you know, suffering will come of its own accord, hmm? Nonetheless he says, it's only through suffering that there is escape. So escape, presumably from the samsara.

Hmm? I'm not certain but I suspect that there may be a reference here to the suffering in dependence upon which there arises faith.

[SILENCE - MORE BIRDSONG]

Abhayanaga: Well yeah, **Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's** version<sup>27</sup> is 'Without suffering there would be no renunciation'.

Sangharakshita: Yes...

Abhayanaga: As a spur to the spiritual life...

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<sup>27</sup> 'Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life', tr. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso.

Sangharakshita: Yes, but more positively, no faith, because suffering leads to being discontented with [samsara](#)<sup>28</sup>, discontented with ordinary life, and you start looking around, for something else, something more, and eventually in one way or another, you encounter the Dharma or encounter the Buddha and faith arises. In that way, in dependence upon suffering faith arises. So there seems to be an allusion to that sort of situation, in this particular verse. Shantideva may not have had that particular teaching in mind, he may not even have known it, but it does seem to be indicated here.

But about this other related teaching that I can think of, one is rather striking. You may or may not have come across it: '[Hell is the Lama of all the Buddhas](#)'.<sup>29</sup> [MURMURING] 'Hell is the Lama of all the Buddhas'. Lama in the sense of Guru, hmm? So what does that mean, hmm?

[SILENCE] Lama is the Guru. The Guru of all the Buddhas. It's because of suffering. Hmm? Because of their insight into suffering, even perhaps their experience of suffering, that in the past, beings have become Enlightened. Have become Buddhas. So suffering is the Lama of all the Buddhas.

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<sup>28</sup> In Buddhism, the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises from ordinary beings' grasping and fixating on a self and experiences. Samsara arises out of ignorance ([avidya](#)) and is characterised by [dukkha](#) (suffering, anxiety, dissatisfaction). In the Buddhist view, liberation from samsara is possible by following the Buddhist path in order to see deeply and clearly the nature of reality and freeing oneself from the cycle. See [talks on the nature of samsara](#).

<sup>29</sup> See track 7 of linked talk.

And there's another saying I've been quoting recently. This seems to be more like a Tibetan proverb. It goes something like this. 'If it isn't difficult, it isn't the Dharma'. [LAUGHTER]

Which suggests that when you practise the Dharma you're going very much against the grain, hmm? At least until you get up to a certain point, where there begin to be dividends in the form of very positive mental states. [SILENCE] All right, let's pass on.

**Khemajala: [13] In Karnata the devotees of Durga willingly endure to no purpose the pain of burns, cuts, and worse. Why then am I a coward when my goal is liberation?**

Sangharakshita: Yes, hmm... 'The devotees of Durga'. Durga of course is the same as the Goddess Kali<sup>30</sup>. And so, devotees sometimes deliberately torment themselves, in her honour, so to speak, yes? Of course, what Shantideva seems to be saying is that these people willingly suffer out of their wrong views, hmm? How is it that you, maybe addressing himself, practising the Dharma, are afraid of a little suffering, you know, in the course of your practice? In India, even today, you can see people inflicting pain on themselves, out of so-called religious motives. One used to see, I don't know whether one still does, saddhus lying on beds of nails. Of course if the nails are quite close together, it's not so painful as it looks. [LAUGHTER] It's when the nails are really spaced out that you're more likely to feel it.

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<sup>30</sup> Kali is the fierce aspect of the Hindu goddess Durga.



But yes, this is in a way, quite a point. I think this can be extended; that people undergo so much suffering, as it were for a bad cause, when if they suffered just a little bit for the sake of the Dharma, they could be so much happier.

Naganataka: So Bhante, I've got a question about kshanti, as we very often speak of kshanti as the, kind of the feminine, sort of practice, having a sort of feminine aspect, you know, and **virya**<sup>31</sup> having a sort of masculine aspect. Curiously, we say about that, and here we have a lot of stuff about sort of being strong and enduring and doing the difficult thing. We don't usually associate those adjectives with kind of the feminine principle.

Sangharakshita: No we don't, but a woman faces the same difficulties as a man if she wants to follow the spiritual life so a woman also has to be a hero. Of course in Sanskrit that would be 'viiraa' [fem.] as distinct from the 'viira' [masc.], so yes I think that we have to be careful about that distinction which is often made - I've made it in the past myself - between the so-called 'feminine' and the so-called 'masculine' virtues. I think in some of my old lectures I've made a point of putting feminine and masculine in between inverted commas. They're not to be taken too literally.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> One of the Six Perfections (see notes), commonly translated as 'energy', 'diligence', 'enthusiasm', or 'effort', rendered by Sangharakshita as 'energy in pursuit of the good'. Listen to [talks on virya](#).

<sup>32</sup> See, '[Masculinity and Femininity in the Spiritual Life](#)'.

Jayarava: I think probably that most women who've given birth would say they had a fair amount of fortitude and courage.

Naganataka: Although I'm not only talking about men and women, I'm talking about masculine and feminine as applied to both men and women, in terms of the quality of kshanti.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, kshanti requires, you know, great strength, great inner strength.

Vidyakaya: In a sense I think, kshanti and virya require each other, don't they, to work. It's kind of two sides of the coin in a way.

Sangharakshita: And of course virya also comes into it, as we may see, later.

Gambhiradaka: Do you think he's referring to the kind of normal suffering you get from being alive, when he's talking about 'why am I a coward?' or is he referring to like a special set of sufferings that you get if you try and practise the Dharma? Do you see what I mean, like a special set of difficulties that you come up against? Or is he just talking about the wind and the rain?

Sangharakshita: I think he's talking about the wind and the rain and a lot of other things, especially people. A lot of our trouble, very often, comes from other people, for one reason or another. Especially sometimes those who are very close to us. People who can arouse our feelings most strongly, both positive feelings and negative feelings. One doesn't literally get angry with the weather, however bad it may

be, but one can get very angry with another person. [Silence] So what comes next?

Saddhananda: **[14] *There is nothing which remains difficult, if it is practised. So, through practice with minor discomforts, even major discomfort becomes bearable.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, hmm. Well this is pretty obvious; it applies in all sorts of walks of life. The first time we try to do something it's difficult, but with practise it becomes more easy. Like, well you might say, with weightlifting. I've never tried it myself. [LOUD LAUGHTER] You start off with trying to lift a few pounds, and you get up to, I don't know how many pounds, but you do it gradually. So it's a bit like that in some aspects of the spiritual life. You practise little acts of forbearance first, accustom yourself to those, and then you go on to the more major forms of forbearance. But I don't think that Shantideva is suggesting that you deliberately inflict different levels of forbearance on yourself. I think he's saying that with practice, if you accustom yourself to being forbearing in small instances, well gradually you will be able to practise forbearance in situations where more forbearance is called for. And normally, you will be faced with those sorts of situations, sooner or later, anyway.

Dhivan: Am I right in thinking Bhante, that Shantideva's regarding, anger and hatred towards other people, as things that we, that they're responses to pain, as it were? That seems to be the background. Some ways of trying to avoid pain?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well it's a reaction of rejection, hmm? If something painful comes along, we want to get rid of it, and that can of course manifest itself as anger or hatred. No-one complains about being too happy.

Jayarava: They complain about other people being too happy.

[LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: There's that well known saying of [Jean Paul Sartre](#)<sup>33</sup> - 'hell is other people'<sup>34</sup> - but I don't know whether you remember my comment on that. It's there on one of my tapes somewhere.

Jayarava: 'Heaven is also other people'.

Sangharakshita: 'Heaven is also other people' [LAUGHTER] Yes. Oh yes. And the same people can be hell at one time and heaven at another. [LAUGHTER] But actually they don't change, it's just our mental attitude towards them that changes.

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<sup>33</sup> French philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. He was one of the key figures in the philosophy of [existentialism](#) and [phenomenology](#), and one of the leading figures in [20th-century French philosophy](#) and [Marxism](#).

<sup>34</sup> From 'Huis-clos' ('No Exit'), 1944. The [full line](#) is: 'Alors, c'est ça l'enfer. Je n'aurais jamais cru... vous vous rappelez: le soufre, le bûcher, le gril... ah! Quelle plaisanterie. Pas besoin de gril, l'enfer, c'est les autres.'

'So that is what hell is. I would never have believed it. You remember: the fire and brimstone, the torture. Ah! the farce. There is no need for torture: Hell is other people.'

(Garcin, Act 1, sc. 5)

Priyadaka: What we may not always be aware of is that we can be hell for other people, and also heaven for other people. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well perhaps we sometimes like to feel that we're heaven for other people, when they may have a different story to tell.

Jayarava: My take on the paramitas is often that these first three are about interacting with other people, and being aware of other people, being aware of our impact on them, and being aware of their impact on us. It's kind of a logical progression.

Sangharakshita: Yes..... All right, what's next?

Priyadaka: ***[15] The irritation of bugs, gnats and mosquitoes, of hunger and thirst, and suffering such as an enormous itch: why do you not see them as insignificant?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. Shantideva may well be thinking of the life of the wandering monk. And he may well have been a wandering monk himself, yes? And in the Pali scriptures, where we get a picture of the life of the Buddha and his disciples as they lived from day to day, there is mention every now and then of the **Bhikkhu**, the monk, being indifferent to the bite of gnats and mosquitoes, and creatures of that kind. Often, if you go to India, even today, you may find that you can get bitten by all sorts of little creatures.

Dhiraka: So are you saying that these monks are completely indifferent to these bites, or that they're just very well practised at forbearance? Or is that the same thing?

Sangharakshita: They're just advised just to be indifferent towards them. Though there is a passage in the Vinaya, I've never been able to find it, but I've been told that **there's a passage**, this is usually said by Burmese monks, where the Buddha permits this monk to burn or to smoke a rolled up leaf, cigarette-like, to keep away flies and mosquitoes when they're meditating<sup>35</sup>. This is what I've heard, but I've never actually been able to trace the passage.

Vidyakaya: Maybe that's just for beginners.

Sangharakshita: Burmese monks normally **do smoke cheroots**. Hmm. But yes, if we make a big fuss about these little discomforts, well, then what sort of a Bodhisattva will we be, hmm? It's difficult to practice, seriously, something like forbearance. But one notices, quite often, that there are people who make a big fuss about very little discomforts and inconveniences, and perhaps in the Western world, you know, with generations of good living, we've become really soft, almost like the princess in the fairy story, who was sleeping on what, twenty thick mattresses and complained of discomfort and not having a good night because right at the bottom of the pile there was a pea. So we've become a bit like that.

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<sup>35</sup> Vin.I, 204, as quoted in the linked webpage (unconfirmed).

Nityabandhu: That actually proved she was a real princess.

Sangharakshita: Exactly, yes. Some people are rather proud of their sensitivity, or even proud of the fact that they're upset by little things. But that is really nothing to be proud of at all. Things like that always should be matters of indifference to us.

Nityabandhu: So you're recommending that we shouldn't be princesses then?

Sangharakshita: Ha ha. Neither princes nor princesses.

Dhivan: Hunger and thirst though are sometimes not insignificant.

Sangharakshita: That's right, real hunger and real thirst, yes. But I suspect that many of us have never actually experienced real hunger. Perhaps you'll disagree with that. But certainly not real hunger for days at a time.

Gambhiradaka: It is a turn of phrase isn't it, when you're like two hours late for your lunch and you say, 'Oh, I'm starving'.

Sangharakshita: Ah, right, yes, yes, exaggeration. I remember when I was travelling around with one of the [ex-Untouchables](#)<sup>36</sup>, years and years ago, I remember it happened on one occasion I was given some lunch, I forget what it was, but the people who were travelling with me were not given any lunch. Maybe, well, food was in short supply at the

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<sup>36</sup> Members of the [Dalit](#) community who have converted to Buddhism to escape the Hindu [caste system](#), inspired by the life and memory of their leader [Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar](#).

place where we were. So I sort of commented on this and I said to someone, I'm sorry that you haven't been given anything to eat, and he said 'oh don't worry, we people' meaning the Dalits, the Ex-Untouchables, 'we people are accustomed to going without food for two or three days.' He said 'We just tighten our belts'. That was his attitude, hmm? Very matter of fact, though that really struck me, with him. 'We people are accustomed to going without food for two or three days.'

I think very few people in England would be able to say that, that they were accustomed to going without food for two or three days, and of course due to poverty. So, we often complain if things aren't 'just right', over some minor inconvenience, so we've become quite, quite soft and self indulgent.

Dhivan: About the only way for us to go hungry is to fast on purpose.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. And that's not quite the same thing is it? Hmm. So this is something we need to reflect on.

Gambhiradaka: You can pay hundreds of pounds, can't you, to go to special health farms, and fast.

Sangharakshita: Special what?

Gambhiradaka: To go to health farms. You can pay lots of money to go and starve yourself.

Sangharakshita: Oh right, yes.



Naganataka: It occurs to me that much of our sense of suffering comes from our expectation of how things should be, and what's ok. I was reading about a woman who does long distance swimming in Arctic waters, in just a swimsuit, at 28.8 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the coldest that water can get, without becoming solid. And you know, she does this for fun. But the point is, a human's capable of doing that, and you know, we kind of complain if it's little chilly while we're waiting for the bus. Because we have this idea, this expectation, that we should be able to be warm all the time, but it's not actually a threat to us.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. So this also connects with the whole idea, or ideal, perhaps I should say, of just living more simply. Making do with less. Well it's not really making do, because we can manage very often very easily. So this is an aspect of the spiritual life I've been talking quite a bit about in recent years, but it's not the most popular aspect: that of living more simply. All right, let's pass on then.

Jinapalita: ***[16] Cold, heat, rain and wind, journeying and sickness, imprisonment and beatings: one should not be too squeamish about them. Otherwise the distress becomes worse.***

Sangharakshita: Well, that's pretty obvious. Well - imprisonment? Shantideva is presumably addressing would-be Bodhisattvas. So I imagine when he speaks of prison he's probably thinking of being imprisoned unjustly, rather than being imprisoned as a result of some

crime that you've committed, hmm? And it could be that in his time, in ancient India, well things were sometimes very arbitrary. Well yes, I remember a case within my own experience. I don't mean that I went to prison, but I remember that when I was in Nepal, I think it must have been '51 or '52, I was taken to see the palace of the then hereditary Prime Minister, and apparently it was his custom, or had been his custom, to appear in the morning, on the top verandah of his palace and look down into the courtyard, and people who wanted to deal with him had to deal with him from a position in the courtyard, and I was told that if he was in a bad mood he would send you to prison if you'd come to ask for a job. If he was in a good mood he'd give you a job even though you'd come to be sentenced for some crime. [LAUGHTER]

So if that was the case in the kingdom of Nepal, still, in the twentieth century, well I wonder how things would have been in earlier ages. Incidentally, Nepal of course has just ceased to be a kingdom. The monarchy has been abolished, whether for better or worse will remain to be seen. So yes, kings could be very arbitrary no doubt in Shantideva's time, so even a would-be Bodhisattva, even a Bodhisattva, might find himself in jail, but he should treat that as something of little consequence. What else might befall one?

Jinapalita: Beatings.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Dhivan: One thinks of the [Guantanamo Bay](#) people these days.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well anyone who's unjustly in prison, or suffering from any form of injustice.

Vidyakaya: You think of Tibetan monks as well, who will know this teaching backwards.

Sangharakshita: Yes. So again in the West, or in some parts of the West, we're in a very fortunate position. We can practice the Dharma freely. We don't always realise, again, how fortunate we are. So what's the word that Shantideva uses, I mean in English, does he say 'shouldn't be squeamish'? That's quite a good word isn't it, that? Especially in connection with prison and beatings. One shouldn't be squeamish about such things.

[LAUGHTER]

Dhivan: He says 'too squeamish'.

Sangharakshita: Too squeamish. [LOUD LAUGHTER]

Jayagupta: Are you allowed to be a little bit squeamish?

Sangharakshita: Let's hope that the translation here is a very faithful one. What next, then?

Dhira: **[17] *Their own blood for some is valour's boon;***

***While others' for others produces a swoon.***

Sangharakshita: Say that again?

Dhira: ***Their own blood for some is valour's boon;***

***While others' for others produces a swoon.***

Sangharakshita: Ah yes. I've been listening to an audio book translation of the [Bodhicaryavatara](#), which puts things rather differently, and I think better<sup>37</sup>.

Nityabandhu: Have you got it there, Abhayanaga?

Abhayanaga: Shall I read it? I've got the other one.

Sangharakshita: Oh yes please. That's Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, yes.

Abhayanaga: ***Some when they see their own blood, become even stronger and braver, while for others, just seeing someone else's blood, causes them to become weak and even to faint.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's a bit more expressive, yes.

Amalavajra: Can you say that again?

Sangharakshita: Yes, maybe Shantideva is thinking of a battle. Someone gets just a little wounded and he sees his own blood and that has the effect of invigorating him still further, stirring up his heroic qualities. But some people they see just a little drop of blood, you know, and they feel weak and they faint.

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<sup>37</sup> ['Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life'](#), tr. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso.

Samudraghosa: So I suppose, 'blood' here is partly being used as a metaphor for just any kind of suffering. Some people if they see someone else suffering, they become very anxious.

Abhayanaga: Or even any hindrance or obstruction, you know, when you try to do something, the first thing that pops up if you just give up right away. You gotta just keep going.

Jayarava: I think that at this time in India there was quite a lot of social and civil unrest and warfare among small states after the break up of the **Gupta empire**. Possibly these might have been quite relevant metaphors at the time.

Sangharakshita: Yes, the average person might quite easily find themselves in somebody's army and having to fight.

Samudraghosa: So in a way, though you can treat it as a metaphor, that first line seems to be pointing to something even beyond forbearance. It's saying if there's suffering, you take that as a challenge, or a call to act even more, sort of, heroically.

Sangharakshita: Yes. There's been an interesting discussion on the radio recently about counselling, especially counselling after some traumatic experience. Experiments seem to show that counselling isn't always a good thing, and that very often, people do get over some traumatic experience without professional counselling. And it has been suggested that again we've just got into the habit of thinking that if something even slightly unpleasant happens to you, then well, you

need 'counselling'. And there's a whole army of people ready to counsel you. It seems that some investigators are beginning to become quite sceptical about that whole scenario. I tend myself to be in agreement with them.

I remember in London, during the Blitz<sup>38</sup>, then people had to put up with all sorts of things, even suffering in various ways, but there wasn't any talk of 'counselling'. Then people got by, people survived, very often quite positive and cheerful in the midst of it all. So I think this is another aspect of our being, well, weak, hmm, so to speak. Metaphorically speaking, not being able to bear the sight of blood. So we need to be more strong.

All right then, what comes next?

Amalavajra: ***[18] This comes from the bravery or cowardice of the mind. Therefore one should become invincible to suffering, and overpower discomfort.***

Sangharakshita: These are very strong words. 'One should become invincible to suffering'. Unable to be conquered by suffering. And we know that some human beings have got a tremendous capacity to resist suffering. And again, referring to the radio, I heard just a few days ago, an interview with a man, he must have been in the S.A.S.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The 'Blitz' (from German, 'lightning'), or 'London Blitz', is the English phrase used to describe the period of sustained strategic bombing of the United Kingdom by Nazi Germany during the Second World War.

<sup>39</sup> Special Air Service, a regiment of the British Army and part of the UK's Special Forces.

or something like that, who'd actually been tortured, and he described how he withstood it, hmm? And he was tortured quite badly it seems, but he said one very striking thing, and apparently he'd been trained to resist torture, he said what was important also was, when you're being tortured, not to get angry. Not to get angry. That made things worse.

Jayarava: It was quite striking that programme because he was saying he didn't have any ill will towards most of his torturers.

Sangharakshita: But he did say, when he was eventually freed, he did say that if he happened to meet two torturers in particular, and if he'd been able to get away with it, he probably would kill them. But at the time of being tortured he didn't feel anger, and he was very clear about that. He actually didn't feel anger. That was part of his training, yes?

Jayarava: The other thing he said was that most of them were just doing their job...

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: ...but the two that he felt ill will for, they enjoyed it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that, that was malice. That was malice, the extreme of hatred. I thought that was very interesting. So you heard that same interview?

Jayarava: Yeah, I was quite struck by it as well, yes.

Sangharakshita: So human beings do have great capacity for endurance. And yes, some people have that, but in the West on the whole we've become rather pampered. We expect that we have an easy time, yes? That life gives us an easy ride.

Jayarava: I wonder if some of it is to do with alienation as well. You know, quite often we have this alienated awareness, a state that means we react strangely to things that we might otherwise be alright about.

Sangharakshita: So what comes next?

Samudraghosa: ***[19] Not even in suffering should a wise person allow his serene confidence of mind to be disturbed, for the battle is with the defilements, and in warfare pain is easily won.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Lets hear that again?

Samudraghosa: ***Not even in suffering should a wise person allow his serene confidence of mind to be disturbed, for the battle is with the defilements, and in warfare pain is easily won.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, 'the battle is with the defilements'. Of course some people nowadays will say, 'well you have to accept the defilements', but that's not Shantideva's point of view. You have to do battle with them, you have fight them, you have to overcome them. In a way that's what the spiritual life is all about.

So it's 'serene confidence' yes?



Samudraghosa: 'Serene confidence of mind'

Sangharakshita: Serene confidence of mind. I'm taking it that the translation is pretty literal. You can have confidence but it must be a serene confidence. Not an overbearing or arrogant sort of confidence. A serene confidence, a calm confidence. That's quite important. And a serene confidence that you're going to win, that you're going to defeat the defilements. Not all at once maybe, but little by little.

Some years ago I gave a talk on, what was it? I forget the title. The heroic nature of the Bodhisattva ideal?<sup>40</sup> And that heroic nature comes out very strongly in these verses. Anyone remember what that talk was called? Anyone remember hearing it? Or reading it?

Nityabandhu: I've heard it but I can't remember.

Sangharakshita: I have commented recently that that's one of my talks which is not exactly a favourite, but I like to remind people of it. It does draw attention to a very important aspect of, well not just the Bodhisattva ideal, but you know, the spiritual life.

Dhivan: This, at the end of this verse, the phrase, 'and in warfare, pain is easily won', it suggests that the spiritual life is painful, or is likely to 'win' you pain. Is that right?

Sangharakshita: Pain, 'pain is easily won'.

Dhivan: 'And in warfare pain is easily won'

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<sup>40</sup> Possibly '[The Heroic Ideal In Buddhism](#)', tracks 10 & 11, 1969

Sangharakshita: W-o-n? Yes an odd usage of the word 'won'. One would have thought it would be 'overcome'. Yes, doesn't seem very idiomatic in a way. What about the other...

Vidyakaya: No, I think it actually means, pain is easily, it will come up, in a battle, (Jg: It's to be expected.) Pain is to be expected.

Sangharakshita: Yes, if you expect a painless battle, well that's rather naïve isn't it? If you expect the spiritual life to be easy, well you're sure to be disappointed. Hence the Tibetan proverb I quoted, 'If it is not difficult, it is not the Dharma'. If you're not experiencing difficulties, the likelihood is you're not really practicing the Dharma.

Amalavajra: Is there another Tibetan proverb along those line about, 'Better not to start, once started better to finish'. I've heard that reported to me, I haven't heard that one.

Sangharakshita: Say it again.

Amalavajra: As in well, something like, with reference to the spiritual life or practising the Dharma, 'Better not to start' for that reason ' But once started, better to continue'.

Sangharakshita: I don't remember anything quite like that. It's good to start, even if, later on you abandon, not that it's good to abandon, but at least you've made some effort, at least you've had some (inaudible)

Naganataka: Well [General Patton](#)<sup>41</sup> did say, ‘If you’re going through hell, keep going.’<sup>42</sup> [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes, we do exaggerate sometimes. [LAUGHTER]

Naganataka: Bhante, I had a question. We’re talking a lot about enduring hardship, about keeping one’s awareness and you know sort of emotional integration while going through hardship. My experience is that the way you endure hardship is to kind of shut down. Just kind of, you know, put your head down and go. But that’s really not, doesn’t seem very kind of, well it’s not conducive to our overall spiritual development. I think it kind of reduces one to sort of an animal state.

Sangharakshita: Well, it’s good not to be overwhelmed by the immediate experience, and so forget the larger context. Because you could be on the whole having quite a good life but, at the moment, you have to deal with some particularly difficult situation. So you need a more panoramic awareness, which would take in both, the realisation that on the whole you are having quite a good time, but at the same time the awareness that you’re faced by a difficult, even painful, experience in some particular area of your life.

In other words, keep a sense of proportion.

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<sup>41</sup> A general in the U.S. Army, best known for his commands in Europe during the Second World War.

<sup>42</sup> This quote is possibly by [Winston Churchill](#), [see reference here](#).

Anyway, I think perhaps we'll end on that note. Because I think an hour is up isn't it, roughly?

Samudraghosa: Gosh it is, yes.

Sangharakshita: Time passes quickly, doesn't it?

Samudraghosa: Thank you Bhante.

### session 3: verses 20-38

(8th june, morning)

Sangharakshita: So, all ready? So who's going to start?

Dhiraka: ***[20] Those who conquer the enemy taking the blows of their adversary on the chest, they are the triumphant heroes, while the rest kill what is already dead.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. A strange verse in a way. Hmm? [SILENCE]  
Let's hear it again?

Dhiraka: ***Those who conquer the enemy taking the blows of their adversary on the chest, they are the triumphant heroes, while the rest kill what is already dead.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, Shantideva seems to be comparing the real hero with the fake hero, hmm? It seems to be an ordinary battlefield, hmm? The really brave man confronts the foe. He takes the blows of the enemy on his chest. But there are others who, when the battle is more or less over, they go round killing those who are already dead, hmm, as though they themselves had killed them. I think that is the meaning here.

Jayarava: Could he also be thinking about, 'Well, we all die anyway, so...'

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes.

Jayarava: So killing someone's no great achievement, 'cause they all die at some point anyway.

Sangharakshita: So they could be someone who is already dead, who already in principle at least has already been killed by Yama<sup>43</sup>.

Jayarava: And the real hero conquers death itself.

Sangharakshita: In a sense, because in a sense you can't conquer death, well, unless you gain Enlightenment.<sup>44</sup>

Jayarava: That's what I mean.

Sangharakshita: And then I suppose you are the greatest hero of all. But in the meantime I suppose you are fighting Mara<sup>45</sup>. Mara is the enemy. Well, the defilements, the passions are your enemy. So one who confronts Mara, one could say, is the real hero. But then how does that contrast with the rest of the verse, in that case?

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<sup>43</sup> In [Buddhist mythology](#), Yama is a [dharmapala](#) ('wrathful god') said to judge the dead and preside over the [Narakas](#) ('Hells' or 'Purgatories') and the cycle of [rebirth](#).

<sup>44</sup> The central Buddhist ideal that anyone can see deeply and clearly into the nature of reality, understanding it fully and therefore being radically and completely transformed by the experience. It's often a translation of 'bodhi' ('awakening') or 'nirvana'. Listen to a range of talks on the [ideal of Enlightenment in Buddhism](#).

<sup>45</sup> A 'demon' or [trickster-type](#) figure who is depicted in the Pali suttas as trying to tempt Siddhartha Gautama, the future Buddha, away from his path. More generally, in [Buddhist cosmology](#), Mara personifies unwholesome impulses, unskillfulness, the 'death' of the spiritual life. He is the 'Lord of Illusion', of the [realm of the senses](#): a tempter, distracting humans from practising the spiritual life by making mundane things alluring, or the negative seem positive. Listen to [evocations of Mara](#).

Priyadaka: I find this a bit hard to express, but I wonder if it's like conquering battles of a very mundane level, for example the **Asuras**<sup>46</sup>, who win in business, or with women, or in power, and they'll gain those kind of successes which are actually empty successes. They'll need to be reconquered and reconquered, so there.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes... But anyway, be that as it may, Shantideva is in any case comparing the true hero with the fake hero, on whatsoever level, whether it's the level of ordinary life or an ordinary literal battle or the spiritual life itself. Anyway what does he say next?

Dhivan: ***[21] The virtue of suffering has no rival, since, from the shock it causes, intoxication falls away and there arises compassion for those in cyclic existence, fear of evil, and a longing for the Conqueror.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes. Let's hear that again, it's a rather long verse. Is it one verse or two?

Dhivan: It's just one.

Sangharakshita: One. Let's hear it again.

Dhivan: ***The virtue of suffering has no rival, since, from the shock it causes, intoxication falls away and there arises compassion for those in cyclic existence, fear of evil, and a longing for the Conqueror.***

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<sup>46</sup> The lowest rank of the gods in the realm of sensual desire, often depicted as part of the **Tibetan Wheel of Life**. See '**The Symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life**' by Sangharakshita.

Sangharakshita: Well, let's deal with that first: 'the virtue of suffering has no rival'. Hmm? That's a very strong statement. Because the suffering has virtue, there is potential in suffering, you can learn, perhaps from suffering, or be stimulated by suffering, in a way that doesn't happen with anything else. [SILENCE] So, 'the virtue of suffering is without rival'. Suffering is valuable one might say, or one can make very positive use of suffering. It's without rival in that respect. So what comes next? What is the next clause?

Dhivan: '...since, from the shock it causes, intoxication falls away...'

Sangharakshita: Ha ha. Yes, suffering gives us a shock, especially when it's unexpected. And 'intoxication falls away', um, well intoxication is of various kinds, I don't think Shantideva here is speaking of intoxication in the literal sense, [intoxication with alcohol](#). [LAUGHTER] But several forms of intoxication in the more metaphorical sense are mentioned in the Pali scriptures<sup>47</sup>. There's the intoxication with wealth. There is the intoxication with youth. So, and there are various other forms of intoxication similarly.

So intoxication with wealth is when you are so puffed up by the fact that you are rich and powerful, that you become careless, you become unmindful, and more likely to make mistakes. And of course the intoxication of youth, well, is when you're young, you're intoxicated with your sense of youth, your energy, maybe your good looks, you feel you can do anything. Hmm? So you're more liable to slip up, to

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<sup>47</sup> See, [Upajjhatthana Sutta](#): Subjects for Contemplation, and [more here](#).



make mistakes, to end up disastrously. So, the shock of suffering can sometimes bring you to your senses, and cure that kind of intoxication. [SILENCE] So what comes after that in the verse?

Dhivan: ‘...and there arises compassion for those in cyclic existence’.

Sangharakshita: Yes... Yes... When you’re intoxicated, whether with youth, or wealth or position, you can cease to care about other people, hmm? But once you’ve suffered, once suffering has given you a shock, once suffering has opened your eyes to what is really going on in the world, then you can start feeling compassion for beings, who are born again and again, in the course of cyclic existence.

So suffering has this great value, and therefore Shantideva says that ‘suffering is without a rival’... ‘has no rival’.

Priyadaka: There’s a hint here that it says that ‘suffering will lead to intoxication falling away and therefore compassion will arise’. There’s a hint there that that’s inevitable, but of course it’s not inevitable that one will learn or benefit from suffering.

Sangharakshita: No, not everybody learns from suffering. Some people are simply hardened by suffering. But the potential to learn from suffering is there. If one would only open one’s eyes.

Gambhiradaka: Isn’t...that’s kind of the gist of a lot of this chapter so far, isn’t it? Suffering’s an inherent part of life, and if we don’t like that, if we can’t accept that, we become angry, whereas if we can accept that, we can have this experience of sort of ‘waking up’.

Sangharakshita: Yes.. Yes... And again Shantideva mentions the shock of suffering, especially in relation to intoxication, hmm? Because, this intoxication is a very dangerous state, however it comes about, hmm? As I mentioned, some are intoxicated with their youth, others with their wealth, others with their power... And then the shock of suffering can have a very salutary effect. Opening the person's eyes. All right, next verse.

Gambhiradaka: ***[22] I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even though they cause intense suffering. Why am I angry with the sentient? They too have reasons for their anger.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Let's hear that again?

Gambhiradaka: ***I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even though they cause intense suffering.***

Sangharakshita: Is it bile?

Gambhiradaka: Bile, bile.

Sangharakshita: Sorry I'm not getting the word.

Gambhiradaka: Bile? As in kind of acid reflux.

Sangharakshita: Oh bile. Yep, right.

Gambhiradaka: ***Why am I angry with the sentient? They too have reasons for their anger.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, well there of course Shantideva is referring to the [Ayurvedic medical system](#), which is found in the West as the [Four Humours](#)<sup>48</sup>. The Black Bile, the Yellow Bile, there's Phlegm, and... What's the other one?

Jayarava: Erm, is it Blood?

Sangharakshita: Blood, yes Blood. So he's saying well, if you suffer with Bile, you don't get angry with the Bile, you know it's due to certain causes. Due to something you've eaten perhaps. You don't get angry with it. Similarly, you shouldn't get angry with sentient beings, because their anger or the fact that they hurt you is due to certain causes in the same way, so why get angry? Again this is one of Shantideva's very logical arguments, which perhaps can convince you of the undesirability of anger, if you're already convinced.

Jayarava: Isn't this slightly deterministic? Just that, you know, that anger just arises from causes, is it...

Sangharakshita: Yes it's the anger of the other person. If you can see it just as arising in dependence on causes, you can see it as inevitable that a person of that kind is going to get angry. Well, why get angry with him. He can't help it, he's acting mechanically. But yes it does suggest that the other person is in a sense determined. But of course, in the case of many people, that is just what happens. They act, or

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<sup>48</sup> See, [Sangharakshita, 'The Question Of Psychological Types'](#)

they re-act, quite mechanically, without thought, without awareness, hmm?

Of course, one aspect of the spiritual life is trying to bring awareness into one's actions, so that one doesn't act mechanically. So one doesn't simply re-act, but acts more creatively. But Shantideva seems to be concentrating on that more mechanical aspect of people's behaviour, and using reflection on that as a means of convincing us that we shouldn't get angry with sentient beings.

He says 'sentient beings' doesn't he? He doesn't say 'human beings'. So presumably that includes animals, hmm? If a dog bites you, you don't get angry with the dog really, that's its nature. If an insect stings you, well, that's its nature, why get angry. So you could also say, well, in the case of an ordinary person that gets angry, well, it's his nature to get angry, why get angry with him on that account? That's the way some people behave, hmm? So why should you make matters worse by getting angry with him or her in turn?

So by various means, various arguments, you know, Shantideva's doing his best to convince us that we ought not get to angry, but should respond with kshanti, with forbearance. So if one argument doesn't appeal to you well perhaps another will. [LAUGHTER] So he's offering all sorts of arguments, trying to get you to practise kshanti by hook or by crook. Because that's what you really need to do if you're going to be a fully-fledged Bodhisattva.

Samudraghosa: Just wondering, in connection with that verse and that reflection, it seems so logical, you think, well why do we get angry?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Samudraghosa: It seems to be that with a person there's so much sort of unknown. We can make up all sorts of our own stories about why they're acting the way they are, and perhaps that's the thing that sort of fuels our anger, whereas with an insect or whatever, it's fairly obvious what's happening.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, other people in a way, are mysteries, hmm, so it's very easy to attribute all sorts of motives to them, but often it's much better in situations of difficulty or conflict to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. If someone treads on your toe, well, assume he did it accidentally. Not jump to the conclusion that he did it deliberately and therefore you've a right to get angry with him.

Nityabandhu: That's what the English do, then they say 'Sorry'

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Nityabandhu: That's what the English do, then they say 'Sorry'

Dhiraka?: Not always. [LAUGHTER]

Nityabandhu: It strikes me that he applies very different measures to others than to himself. It's like, it's almost, he doesn't say that, but it's like he can see very clearly that you can't just get rid of anger like that,

and he can see that other people assume they can't do otherwise. That's the kind of normal human state, but if you want to be a Bodhisattva then you're like a completely different class of being you have to become. That doesn't apply to you, you can't justify yourself the way that he justifies others.

*Sangharakshita:* Well there is the fact that often we say things like 'he made me angry' as if to say our reaction of anger was inevitable, and therefore in a way was justified, because he made me angry. We don't say, 'Well, I became angry, because that was, in a sense, what I chose to do. That was the way I chose to react.' So sometimes we excuse our own anger or other unskilful behaviour by speaking of it in those sort of terms of inevitability. 'I couldn't help it. I had to become angry.'

So we sometimes make ourselves out to be mechanical by way of excusing ourselves, when really we're not mechanical. We do have the capacity to respond in whatever way we choose. We don't have to be reactive, we can be creative.

*Jayarava:* It strikes me that it's just as dangerous to say 'he made me happy.'

*Sangharakshita:* Yes.

*Jayarava:* Perhaps less dangerous, but it's a slippery slope.

*Sangharakshita:* It may be more dangerous, depending who is 'making' you happy. You can become very dependent on that person,

if you need them to make you happy, if you could not live without them, hmm?

Nityabandhu: Sooner or later they will, make you, huh? [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: There's a book titled 'If you can't live without me, why aren't you dead yet?'

Unknown: It's a song.

Sangharakshita: Well that seems to strike a note of cynicism.

[LAUGHTER] Anyway Shantideva's not cynical so what does he say next?

Jinapalita: ***[23] As this sharp pain wells up, though unsought for, so, though unsought for, wrath wells up against one's will.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes. Yes, Shantideva is realistic. He realises that well, sometimes, practically speaking, we can't help ourselves. Wrath, anger, it just wells up. Sometimes I think that most people have a sort of, almost reservoir of hatred or negative feeling, ready within them, and it just needs some little occurrence to spark it off. But it's always there. Hmm. So Shantideva seems to be saying something of that kind. The potentiality for wrath or anger is there, you know, all the time. We can't help it welling up, as he says. So what should we do about that? Presumably he goes on to say.

Dharmamodana: **[24] A person does not get angry at will, having decided 'I shall get angry', nor does anger well up after deciding 'I shall well up'.**

Sangharakshita: What was the last bit, after 'deciding'?

Dharmamodana: 'I shall well up.'

Sangharakshita: So, he's continuing the theme of the previous verse, that we don't always have control, in practice, over our anger. It just wells up. We don't decide to be angry. Of course, some people do, I think, decide to be angry, hmm? I'm sure my old friend **Buddharakshita**<sup>49</sup> sometimes used to decide to be angry, hmm? He seemed to get some sort of 'kick' out of being angry. So he very readily took offence at things that happened or at things that people said. So there are some people who do choose or decide to be angry, but normally speaking, anger just wells up.

Jayagupta: So Bhante, apart from that exception that you just pointed out, does that suggest that anger doesn't have any intentionality at all?

Sangharakshita: Well it often doesn't have any intentionality, in the sense of, it's not being directed towards any particular person, hmm? It just wants some object, so then it has an outlet, so that it can well

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<sup>49</sup> Early companion of Sangharakshita after his initial **Going Forth** as a Buddhist in India. See **Sangharakshita**, 'The Rainbow Road'.



up, and perhaps sometimes it doesn't particularly care what that object is. It just wants to get angry.

Jayagupta: So it's triggered.

Sangharakshita: Yes, almost any trigger will do.

Nityabandhu: I think it's quite obvious, sometimes, I notice when I hit myself, for example against something with the head. The anger arises, but it's such a stupid feeling because, like, you can't direct it. Well, you know, it's the wall, you're not a child anymore, to kick the wall.

Gambhiradaka: Do you think that anger arises when you're in pain? Like there you mention with physical pain. I'm thinking with people. Someone says something and actually they've just kind of poked you in your open wound or whatever, the anger's a response to try and protect yourself. So when someone's angry...

Sangharakshita: Hmm. I suppose that anger's always a response to pain of some kind or other, whether physical or mental. There's something you don't like, there's something that upsets you. There's something that hurts you so you react with anger.

Gambhiradaka: I'm kind of... I don't know if he goes on to say it later... But I'm kind of surprised that that doesn't get mentioned here. Like he's trying to give us ways to not be angry with someone else's anger, but if we can see someone else's anger as an expression of the

fact that they're in pain, then that really works for me. I can see that, well, they're not a happy healthy person, they're in pain.

Sangharakshita: Well Shantideva, in a way, has already covered that by saying that people act mechanically. That they re-act, hmm? For various reasons. Usually because they experience pain, on account of something that one has said or something that one has done. So yes, if one can understand that, well, one not only does not get angry, but in some circumstances one can even feel sorry for the person who has got angry, even if as a result of that anger, they have tried to hurt you. [PAUSE] So what comes next?

Jayarava: ***[25] Whatever transgressions and evil deeds of various kinds there are, all arise through the power of conditioning factors, while there is nothing that arises independently.***

Sangharakshita: Well this is a basic psychological-cum-philosophical principle. So here Shantideva is drawing a general conclusion from the examples he's already given. If we can see that whatever happens has a definite cause, and if we can see that when people become angry or when they harm us, it's just due to causes, well that can alleviate our anger.

Jayarava: It strikes me that there's quite a lot of cultural conditioning around this as well. You know, like, we learn that if there's something we don't like, to push it away, in various ways, you know, anger's just an habitual response to something we don't like. We've observed that

in everyone around us so why would we think about doing it differently? It's not... In a way, it's not until we get into a spiritual community that we see that there might be another way of doing it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Anyway, Shantideva doesn't go into that. Perhaps he will go into it in the next verse.

Jayasiddhi: ***[26] Neither does the assemblage of conditioning factors have the thought, 'I shall produce'; nor does what is produced have the thought, 'I am produced'.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, he's pressing the same point, the same argument in a way, hmm? That nothing is deliberate, it's just a question of causes and conditions coming together, and whether taken singly or taken collectively, there's no-one saying, 'well I will do this, I will do that'. It's a sort of, in a way, impersonal process, hmm? So again his point is, well, what is there to get angry about? Who is there to get angry with? Hmm? [SILENCE] It's just certain things happening in dependence upon certain causes.

I don't know to what extent we can generally look at things in this way. It's probably rather difficult. But to some extent we can. To some extent if we understand what makes people tick, or what it is that is causing them to act in a certain way, to some extent that will help modify or even mollify our own reaction, so that we react less negatively. Just as we don't become angry when a child hits us. The child is just a child, hmm? So, similarly, with adults, who in many cases are not much better than children, why get angry with them,

when they do something that we don't like? They can't help it. They're not mature. They don't have much awareness.

So we should respond creatively, even though they are acting reactively.

Jayasiddhi: I think from my own experience, quite often there's a quick story that comes up, umm, which is 'Ah, they've done this because they want to get at me'. There's some sort of projection that comes up very quickly, that makes it very personal.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, well sometimes that is happening, but that's all part of their reactivity, so why should, again, why should we get angry with them? And Shantideva would come back to the same point, yes? People do project, yes. It's an unconscious mental process, so why should we get upset? Why should we get angry with them for projecting something unpleasant onto us? Of course they'll do that, and because they project, well, they'll perhaps do something painful or hurtful to us. It's only natural, hmm?

So one can apply this line of thought to almost anything that people may do which we feel harms us or causes us pain.

Naganataka: Bhante, would you agree that Shantideva's working here very much with a [developmental model](#), versus more a sort of an [immanence](#)<sup>50</sup> model?

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<sup>50</sup> For a brief note on this distinction, [see here](#).

Sangharakshita: [LAUGHING] Well I should hope so, yes. [LOUD LAUGHTER]

Naganataka: I mean, in a way, of course, yes, but it's interesting isn't it, because it raises the question, you know, how much is anger sort of our innate nature, you know, rather than forbearance being more of our innate nature? How much do we have to use our will to supplant that which is more innate, rather than letting the anger fall away?

Sangharakshita: Well, both are potentials, hmm? We have the potentiality to be angry, we have the potentiality to forbear, hmm? And to use the term 'free will', well we have the free will, so to speak, to choose between them. And that would seem to depend on our being aware. Aware that there are those potentialities, that there is the possibility of choice.

So I think the developmental model is clearly indicated here. That seems to be the one that Shantideva is assuming.

Amalavajra: So is there... I'm just trying to, sounds like, maybe we covered this yesterday, it's almost like, what's the, if you're in this difficult situation with this difficult person, what's the, what's the benefit, ha, ha, in practising forbearance? I mean, we talked yesterday about how an angry man is an unhappy man, so presumably by implication, someone who's able to practise forbearance is a happier person.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well consult one's own experience. If you consciously forbear, instead of retaliating, how do you feel? Normally, if one does it as a Buddhist, one would feel good. One would think well, I'm glad I didn't react with anger. I'm glad that I was able to practice forbearance. You won't hopefully be self-satisfied or complacent, but at least you'll feel good, thinking that you've acted in accordance with your ideals, hmm? That you haven't just retaliated. So you may not feel, sort of positively overjoyed, but at least you'll feel a bit pleased with yourself.

Gambhiradaka: It can also defuse the other person's anger, as well. If you don't give them anything to lock horns with, they can back down.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, depending of course how angry the other person is. Well, if they aren't very angry, well yes, as you say, your forbearance can defuse the situation to some extent, yes. It's very difficult to go on being angry with someone who refuses to get angry with you. [MURMURED ASSENT]

Dhira: Sometimes in those circumstances the person though, turns to somebody else to be angry with, who is less patient. They're looking for an argument aren't they? If they can't argue with you, they'll find somebody else to have an argument with.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Because the anger wells up, and it goes around looking for an object.

Jayarava: It sort of becomes self sustaining. If someone's angry with us, they're trying to hurt us, we get angry with them, we try to hurt them, we've hurt them, so they get angry with us, and at some point we just have to stop.

Sangharakshita: Someone has to stop.

Jayarava: And it has to be us.

Sangharakshita: Yes, to the extent that we are Buddhists, or trying to practise the Bodhisattva Ideal, it has to be us, yes. We should be the one that stops.

Priyadaka: I think that sometimes where I get confused is when I'm angry with myself, for example, and I have to practise forbearance towards the fact that I do feel anger, and whilst not using that as an excuse, and not to cultivate it, I still have to say, well, this happens...

Sangharakshita: Yes, one is simply acknowledging the mental states that one actually does experience. If they are of a negative nature, yes, one just acknowledges that, and tries to work on them. Because we do have that expression 'being angry with oneself', and that's very often when one disappoints oneself: when one fails to live up to, perhaps, one's image of oneself.

All right then....

Saddhananda: *[27] The much-sought-for 'primal matter', or the imagined 'Self', even that does not come into being after deciding 'I shall become'.*

Sangharakshita: Well here, Shantideva is getting polemical, and you may have to refer to the end-notes here. The '[pradhana](#)'<sup>51</sup> is a term, as far as I can remember, of the [Samkhya](#) philosophy<sup>52</sup>, and of course the '[atman](#)'<sup>53</sup> here, it's not altogether clear which school he's referring to. It may be the Jains or it may be a [Vedanta](#) school<sup>54</sup>. Would someone like to turn to the end-note and see what the translators have to say?

Dhivan: Shall I read it out Bhante?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Dhivan: *'Primal matter (pradhana) is considered by Samkhya philosophers to be the material cause of all phenomenal existence. The "Self" (atman) is the ultimately real essence of an individual according to many, non-Buddhist Indian philosophies. The sarcastic*

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<sup>51</sup> Translated in this verse as 'primal matter'.

<sup>52</sup> One of the six orthodox ([astika](#)) schools of [Hindu philosophy](#) and classical [Indian philosophy](#).

<sup>53</sup> Translated in this verse as 'self'.

<sup>54</sup> Originally synonymous with the [Upanishads](#). By the 8th century, all philosophical traditions were concerned with interpreting [the three basic texts](#) (the Upanishads, the [Brahma Sutras](#) and the [Bhagavad Gita](#)). At least ten schools of Vedanta are known, of which [Advaita Vedanta](#), [Vishishtadvaita](#), and [Dvaita](#) are the best known.



*tone of this verse reflects Shantideva's disdain for these philosophical theories which are rejected in Buddhist thought.'*

Sangharakshita: Yes... Yes, that hits the nail on the head. Yes... Shantideva doesn't go into any detailed argumentation, he assumes that they are clearly wrong. Because they are certainly inconsistent with the view that he has been putting forward in the previous few verses. And in a way, they're extremes. The primal matter is, so to speak, the extreme of materialism, the atman is the extreme of, so to speak, spiritualism. Anyway, perhaps we need not bother too much about the pradhana or the atman here. The Samkhya school of philosophy is virtually extinct in India today, and of course there are still a number of schools putting forward various versions of the atman theory and they don't necessarily agree with one another. So what comes next?

Vidyakaya: ***[28] Since what has not arisen does not exist, who would then form the wish to come into existence? And since it would be occupied with its sphere of action it cannot attempt to cease to exist either.***

Sangharakshita: So let's hear that again. Take it bit by bit.

Vidyakaya: ***Since what has not arisen does not exist, who would then form the wish to come into existence?***

Sangharakshita: Yes... In order to exist, something must have arisen. Shantideva is arguing that there cannot be something existing

beforehand which wishes to exist. Because existence really means that something comes into existence that was not there before. And what else?

Vidyakaya: ***And since it would be occupied with its sphere of action it cannot attempt to cease to exist either.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's not clear what Shantideva means here. Is there an end-note to this? Clearly he's still concerned with some polemical point.

Vidyakaya: The note in here, anyway, says it's a continuation of the previous verse.

Sangharakshita: So what does the end-note say?

Vidyakaya: *'Something uncaused obviously does not function within the realm of causality, and could be responsible neither for our sufferings, nor for the existence of the phenomenal world.'*

Samudraghosa: There's a bit more at the end.

Vidyakaya: Oh is there?

Samudraghosa: *'These arguments are both based on the premise held by atmavadins, "those who hold a doctrine of a Self", that a Self is necessarily permanent and unchanging. If it is permanent it must always have existed, so there can never have been a time, prior to its existence, at which it forms the intention of coming into existence. If it does exist and is involved in "the sphere of action" or the material*

*world, since it is unchanging, this involvement must be part of its nature and so it cannot change and stop doing this.'*

Sangharakshita: [LAUGHING] Hmm. Well we probably don't need to go into that in too much detail.

So Shantideva basically and very briefly is trying to state his opposition to those philosophies which are incompatible with his view, of things arising in dependence on causes.

Abhayanaga: Is he making the point that you really need to see things with Wisdom in order to really make use of these teachings?

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes... Anyway let's go on.

Abhayanaga: ***[29] If the Self is eternal and without thought processes, then it is evidently inactive, like space. Even in contact with other conditioning factors, what activity can there be of something which is unchanging?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, again he continues a polemic against the unchanging self, which of course is an idea inconsistent with Buddhist philosophy. [PAUSE] All right, let's carry on.

Dhira: ***[30] What part does something play in an action if, at the time of the action, it remains exactly as it was prior to it? If the relationship is that the action is part of it, then which of the two is the cause of the other?***

Sangharakshita: Ha, ha, yes, well again, he's continuing the same polemic, against the unchanging atman. He's trying to point out an inconsistency in the point of view of the opponent, that is to say the person who believes in an unchanging atman.

Abhayanaga: You're saying that if something is eternal, it could never really interact with anything else? That interaction, means change?

Sangharakshita: Yes, so if it is eternally unchanging, well obviously (?) it cannot act in a different way at different times.

Abhayanaga: One thing could never affect another because there is no change.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. All right, so what more?

Khemajala: ***[31] In this way everything is dependent upon something else. Even that thing upon which each is dependent is not independent. Since, like a magical display, phenomena do not initiate activity, at what does one get angry like this?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, Shantideva now returns to the Buddhist point of view, that everything depends upon conditions, and restates that as a reason for one not getting angry. So he has made this little detour through contemporary Indian philosophy, rejecting the views which contradict those which he holds.

So one can sort of trace the process of causation back and back. Maybe the more one traces it back the less likely one is to get angry.

Supposing for instance, someone speaks very angrily to you, hmm? Well then you reason, and say yes, well, there's a reason for him getting angry, he's not in a good mood, yes? He had a quarrel with his wife this morning, yes? So that's why he's not in a good mood. Why did he have a quarrel with his wife? Well there was a disagreement over money, so well, why was there this disagreement over money, well, they're rather hard up at present.

So in that way you can go on tracking it back and back, each event being caused by some previous event, and the more you track it back in that way the less likely you are to get angry with someone who becomes angry with you. Or who does something against you, or something that you don't like.

Dhivan: It strikes me Bhante as well, that perhaps our emotional belief in self, which is behind self (*atmavada*)<sup>55</sup>, is often connected with why we get angry, y'know, by, believing that somebody is really there we can feel our...

Sangharakshita: Because atman is eternal and unchanging, it hasn't come in to existence, so you can't reason about the cause that might have brought about the anger which that person, the atman, expresses. So, it's as though the atman, for you, is not only theoretically in conflict with Shantideva's position, but practically also.

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<sup>55</sup> See [these talks](#) by Subhuti and Vishvapani touching on views of 'atman'.

Jayarava: If we were going to bring this up to date, presumably we'd have to look at Christian views about why anger arises, because not many of us actually have to deal with people who are well versed in Indian philosophy these days.

Sangharakshita: Yes... Well from the Christian point of view, why do you get angry? Presumably because of original sin. And why's that original sin there? Well it's because of the sin of Adam, hmm? Whether you take Adam literally or metaphorically, that's the Christian position. That's why, sometimes, when someone behaves badly, we say, you know, colloquially, well, it's the 'old Adam' coming out. Anyway, we won't dwell on that.

So what comes next from Shantideva?

Naganataka: ***[32] If it is argued that to resist anger is inappropriate, for 'who is it that resists what?', our view is that it is appropriate: since there is dependent origination<sup>56</sup> there can be cessation of suffering.***

Sangharakshita: That's a very important point. Let's hear the first half of that again.

Naganataka: ***If it is to be argued that to resist anger is inappropriate, for 'who is it that resists what?'***

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<sup>56</sup> 'Pratitya Samutpada', the central philosophical doctrine of Buddhism, that all things arise and pass away in dependence upon complex conditions. For extensive discussions of this, [see here](#).

Sangharakshita: Yes, this is the sort of attitude of the popularised **Advaita Vedanta**, which is becoming a little bit popular it seems nowadays. 'Who resists what?' Who does what to whom? Hmm? But Shantideva retorts by saying... What's the second half?

Naganataka: ***Our view is that it is appropriate: since there is dependent origination there can be cessation of suffering.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. Because suffering comes into existence as the result of a series of causes. As the result of a series of causes, it can also be made not to exist.

Gambhiradaka: It kind of strikes me that you could only really hold that view, of 'who is it that exists?' if you quite alienated, and you'd thought through this in a very philosophical way, but you weren't connecting with the fact that there's another person, in pain.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well perhaps the people who espouse that view are a bit alienated, but alienated or not, it seems to be, I won't say a common view nowadays, but it does seem to have crept into some Buddhist circles in the form of Advaita Vedanta. I certainly encountered it when I was in India. You may remember that my friend Buddharakshita got into an argument with an Advaita Vedantan, a monk, and they got angry with each other, and Buddharakshita accused the monk of having got angry, and the monk said, 'Who has got angry? No-one has got angry. It's just your delusion.' [LAUGHTER] So, it amounted to the same thing.

Amalavajra: I have this kind of row with one of my friends who is into Advaita Vedanta, because he uses that basis to say that the whole idea, in a way, of, let's say, self development, or you know, things like practicing forbearance, is deluded because it just reinforces the sense of self. It sounds like this answer that Shantideva gives, of dependent origination, is basically the answer to that point of view.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes.

Amalavajra: But how... I suppose the trick must be to somehow talk about dependent origination without the idea of a self, in a certain sense. That must be the subtlety of the argument.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well it depends how one expresses oneself. If one can talk of things happening, you know, without bringing in the notion of an unchanging self behind it all. And of course sometimes, I mean, language is not very helpful here.

Naganataka: Well it breaks down doesn't it? Because what we're talking about is taking responsibility for one's actions, while not making the mistake of seeing a self at the core of those actions. But still taking responsibility for the process that led to those.

Sangharakshita: Yes, you recognise the relativity of your own self, even though at the same time you are insistent on that changing, impermanent self taking responsibility for what it does.

Jayarava: In my less temperate moments I sometimes think that it would be good to stamp on that person's foot and then say 'well



who's suffering?' You know, I think Bhante does this, well doesn't do that, but brings out the argument for suffering as a methodological starting point. You know, it's an experience, or there is an experience and it doesn't matter if someone is experiencing it or not, there is suffering.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: And well you know, the suffering can go away.

Sangharakshita: Well in a way, from another point of view, that's the Bodhisattva's attitude: there is suffering. It doesn't matter whether it's my suffering or your suffering. It's suffering and that needs to be eliminated.

Dhivan: Yes there's a sense that the pain and the anger's real, which perhaps the non-dual point of view doesn't quite embrace. Slightly idealistic perhaps.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well, idealistic in, we might say, an alienated sort of way.

Dhivan: Yes, yes.

Jayarava: So giving them a good strong experience is a ...?

[LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Anyway, lets move on?

Amalavajra: **[33] Therefore, even if one sees a friend or an enemy behaving badly, one can reflect that there are specific conditioning factors that determine this, and thereby remain happy.**

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. You remain happy... So, it may be that the friend is behaving badly, well, you can understand why. Maybe an enemy is behaving badly, again you can understand why. So you don't trouble yourself too much about it. You remain happy.

Of course, if they are acting in a way that might harm themselves or others, well yes you can be concerned, yes? But the fact that you are able to see why they are acting in the way that they do means that you yourself can remain happy and not be mentally disturbed.

Jayarava: I had quite a strong experience of this in my childhood. The neighbourhood kids could be quite violent and quite mean and I was terrified of them. And looking back as an adult I can see that, well, their parents were alcoholics and they were really badly treated, and we weren't very well off, but we were much better off than they were, and so we were the obvious targets in a way, but I don't... I think seeing that, in perspective, has meant that I don't have any lingering anger towards those kids. In a way they were doing what came naturally to them.

Sangharakshita: Of course that is not to say that something should not be done about it.

Jayarava: Yeah. Yeah, but in retrospect...

Sangharakshita: Otherwise you end up in the position of saying that people are not to blame for what they do because it's all the result of their upbringing, they can't help it, and so on and so forth... So that may be true, but if they've been conditioned in a particular way, a negative way, well, they can also be conditioned in a positive way. They can be rehabilitated. So one doesn't accept as final, so to speak, the way in which people are behaving badly at present. You see that due to certain causes and conditions they're behaving badly, but if the causes and conditions were changed, well, they could in fact behave in a much better way. So in both cases you invoke the principle of Dependent Origination. To explain why something bad is happening, but also to make possible the arising in its place of something good.

Priyadaka: I wonder if the significance there is, as you say, that we can still do things about what's going on, but if we accept what's being said here we'd do it from a basis of compassion for the wellbeing of all beings, rather than from righteousness or punishment, or 'they deserve it' or 'I deserve it'. Our motivation's wholly different.

Naganataka: It does seem that what Shantideva's addressing is the situation in which we are confronted by someone who does not share our value system. Who is not going to take responsibility for their anger. And we have to recognise that, that all we can do is take responsibility for our own.

Sangharakshita: Right, yes... All right, what comes next?

Priyadaka: **[34] *Were all embodied beings to have their wish fulfilled, no one would suffer. No one wishes for suffering.***

Sangharakshita: Well, it's an impossible situation isn't it? For everyone to have their wishes fulfilled, because some of those wishes are conflicting, hmm? So what does Shantideva mean I wonder?  
[SILENCE] Let's hear it again?

Priyadaka: ***Were all embodied beings to have their wish fulfilled, no one would suffer. No one wishes for suffering.***

Sangharakshita: It just seems obvious doesn't it? But it doesn't represent the actual situation. I mean, people don't have their wishes all fulfilled. I think very few people have all their wishes fulfilled. Some might have some wishes fulfilled, so the result is that people aren't always happy. Some people in fact are very unhappy. So what follows on that?

Jayagupta: **[35] *People cause themselves torment, with thorns and other instruments, in a state of intoxication, by refusing food and the like out of anger, and with things that they wish to obtain, such as unattainable women.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. People torment themselves in various ways. Let's have that bit by bit.

Jayagupta: ***People cause themselves torment, with thorns and other instruments, in a state of intoxication...***

Sangharakshita: Yes. I'm assuming that, well, Shantideva can either be referring to literal intoxication, or, of course, he can be referring to intoxication in the more metaphorical sense, hmm? But of course, when people are literally intoxicated we know that they do themselves harm. They might not even feel it at the time.

But taking the intoxication to be metaphorical, hmm, well then, how would that work out?

Jayarava: Sometimes you see religious devotees sort of working themselves up into a fervour and then doing these things, you know, putting pins through their skin and things like that.

Jayagupta: That's what it conjured up for me, a sort of ascetic, well, you call it self-mortification practices.

Sangharakshita: Lying on beds of nails... And the rest of the verse?

Jayagupta: ***by refusing food (this is an extension of that) and the like, out of anger...***

Sangharakshita: Yes...when you're angry you don't feel like eating do you? Very often...

Vidyakaya: Actually, it says in the notes that the refusal of food is a widespread form of emotional blackmail in Indian society.

Jayagupta: It's going off in a huff and not eating your tea.

Sangharakshita: Well, some people used to think that Mahatma Gandhi's fasts were just emotional blackmail. He tried to get his own way. That was almost certainly the case when he fasted over the [Scheduled Caste Reservations](#)<sup>57</sup> and all that, in opposition to Ambedkar's attitude, yes? I think he said that he learned this trick from his wife. [LAUGHTER] She used to go off her food when she was angry with him, to try to bring him round to doing something he didn't want to do. But yes, children, when they sulk, which is a mild form of anger, they can go off their food. So, at it's worst it's a sort of emotional blackmail.

Jayagupta: So finally - *they cause themselves torment... with things that they wish to obtain, such as unattainable women.*

Sangharakshita: Now what's the logic there? I don't quite follow the logic. Read that again?

Jayagupta: *With things that they wish to obtain, such as unattainable women.*

Amalavajra: It's just the way people cause themselves torment.

Sangharakshita: Maybe it's the case of the lover who threatens to starve himself to death, unless the lady, you know, returns his feelings. Maybe something like that.

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<sup>57</sup> See [Wikipedia](#) for the general topic, and also [this discussion](#) of antipathy between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Also referred to more sympathetically on the main Wikipedia [page for Gandhi](#). For a more in-depth look at the issues around the relationship between the two men, see 'The Doctor and the Saint: Ambedkar, Gandhi and the battle against caste' By Arundhati Roy.

Nityabandhu: In the next two verses they kind of explain what he's... it's a longer argument.

Sangharakshita: All right, let's hear the next two verses then.

Balajit: ***[36] Some people kill themselves, by hanging themselves, by throwing themselves off cliffs, by taking poison or other unwholesome substances, and by conduct that is devoid of merit.***

That's one verse.

Samudraghosa: ***[37] When, under the power of the defilements in this way, they injure even their own dear selves, how could they have a care for the persons of other people?***

Sangharakshita: Yes...well in the same way that people abstain from food as a sort of emotional blackmail, they may even commit suicide, as a sort of emotional blackmail, when they don't get what they want. As if to say to the survivors, 'Well, look what you've done to me, you've made me kill myself.'

Gambhiradaka: Don't you think that these are all just really tragic ways of people dealing with their own suffering though?

Sangharakshita: Yes...

Gambhiradaka: I mean that's what I'm saying, they're not doing it for the fun of it, they're kind of suffering, they don't know how to deal with

that, so in the worst case, you resort to killing yourself, as a way of ending your suffering.

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's all highly reactive behaviour, instead of having a more creative response. And of course, it's all to do, as Shantideva says, with the defilements. The wishes and desires that are frustrated, as a result of which you torment yourself, are negative, are not skilful.

Jayarava: It's all kind of the context of this earlier verse, of 'no one wishing suffering' and yet they do these things, thinking it will solve their problems.

Sangharakshita: Yes, just out of blindness as it were.

Gambhiradaka: When you're in these sorts of states, when you do these things... You're insane really.

Sangharakshita: You're in a state of intoxication.

Dhira: So he's saying that you become sort of intensely selfish...

Sangharakshita: Pardon?

Dhira: ...You become intensely selfish when you're in those sort of states.

Sangharakshita: Yes, self-centred perhaps, rather than selfish.

Naganataka: Well, they've recently shown with brain scans that people in love have the same sort of pattern as a person with



delusional schizophrenia... So almost literally, it's a sort of insanity.  
[LAUGHTER] Especially if the love is unattainable.

Sangharakshita: Ah. Hmm. All right, let's carry on.

Nityabandhu: ***[38] When, driven insane by their defilements, they resort to killing themselves, how is it that not only have you no pity but you become angry?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm... Yes, here again Shantideva strikes the note of compassion. If people have been driven to commit actions which are harmful to themselves, through their reactivity, even though you see that they are reacting just through reactivity, you don't condemn them, because they are suffering and therefore you feel pity, you feel compassion.

So that's why, from the point of view of the Bodhisattva, if you look out at the world, and you see all the foolish things that people do, all the different ways in which they bring suffering upon themselves, individually and collectively, you don't feel angry. You just feel pity. You feel compassion. So that's the more Bodhisattva-like attitude.

So perhaps that's where we should conclude this morning, striking a positive note, as there are some rather negative ones. Because sometimes, I suppose, when one listens to the news or sees television or reads the newspaper, you can get such a very dreadful impression of what is going on in the world, of people doing all sorts of foolish, crazy, even wicked things, that it's very easy to become indignant or

angry. But that's not the right response. The right response is one of pity and compassion, that people are acting in that way, you know whether collectively or individually, causing themselves suffering just basically out of ignorance, or out of unhappiness, out of suffering. So the emotion that should be evoked, as I said, should be more one of pity and compassion... And also perhaps a stronger determination to make sure that in one's own little corner of the world one does one's best to react to people's suffering with compassion, rather than in some other way.

Righto then...

All: Thank you, thank you, thank you...

## session 4: verses 39-56

(8th june, afternoon)

Sangharakshita: So are we all here?

Jayarava: We're missing Nityabandhu.

Sangharakshita: Oh... Oh! [ LAUGHTER] How did I lose him?!

[LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: We'll wait for him.

[SILENCE]

Sangharakshita: All right then, back to where we left off. I notice over the last dozen or so verses that we read, there is a slight, well, in fact, quite a definite, development, one might say, with regard to Shantideva's thinking, or perhaps I should say, his presentation, because he starts off by pointing out that people act as they do, including unskilful actions, or commit hostile actions, or are angry towards us, for various causes and conditions, and if we bear that in mind then we shall be more likely to be able to respond with forbearance.

We see them as driven, as it were, as driven by their defilements, rather than acting spontaneously.

But then he seems to change his note, and point out that, not only do they act as a result of certain conditions, but they act blindly. They act so as to secure their happiness, as they think, but in fact their actions result only in suffering. So instead of viewing people with a sort of

detached, almost cold sort of scientific attitude, seeing them, in a way, as mechanical and reactive; because they do suffer, we should see them as acting in such a way as to bring suffering on themselves and therefore as giving rise to compassion on the part of the Bodhisattva. So there's this change, as I see it, or development, in Shantideva's thinking, in the course of those verses. So let's carry on from where we left off.

Dhivan: ***[39] If it is their very nature to cause others distress, my anger towards those fools is as inappropriate as it would be towards fire for its nature to burn.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes, a different argument. You don't blame fire for burning you, and in the same way, when people act inappropriately or harmfully, well they're just acting in accord with their natures: that's another reflection that one can have. In a way, this goes back to the more mechanical model. So that doesn't really tell us anything new. So let's go on.

Gambhiradaka: ***[40] In fact, this fault is adventitious. Beings are by nature pleasant. So anger towards them is as inappropriate as it would be towards the sky if full of acrid smoke.***

Sangharakshita: Beings are by nature what?

Gambhiradaka: Pleasant.

Sangharakshita: Pleasant. Hmm. Beings are by nature pleasant; now what does Shantideva mean by that? I wonder what the other translation says, if someone has it.

Abhayanaga: ...I've got it. ***'On the other hand, if that harmfulness were a temporary fault, and that person were otherwise good-natured, it would be just as unreasonable to get angry with him as it would be to resent space for filling with smoke.'***

Sangharakshita: Yes, good-natured instead of pleasant, yes. That gives a clearer meaning. But, even if people do perform unskillful actions, with great harm, or which even do us harm, we must reflect, well, basically they're good-natured. They don't really intend to do harm. They're just like the sky when it fills with smoke. We don't say that the sky isn't there because of the smoke. So in the same way we can recognise that even someone who does harm, perhaps foolishly, is basically good-natured.

In other words, one has to see people as a whole and not simply see them in relation to oneself. They may not behave very well towards oneself, but on the other hand they may behave very well in other ways towards other people. So one should try to see the sky, as well as seeing and feeling the smoke. I suppose we can say that it's very common that we judge people harshly just from a very slight knowledge of them or a very slight experience of them.

I can recollect an experience of my own in this connection. I remember when I was in Kalimpong<sup>58</sup> I happened to meet a visiting monk. He was quite elderly. He was a Nepalese monk, and I didn't have much contact with him, but the little contact I had - I won't say it wasn't particularly pleasant, but he didn't create a good impression in me. He seemed rather, perhaps even rather bad-tempered. I just had in fact quite minimal contact with him. He didn't stay very long in Kalimpong.

But some years ago I read a translation of a sort of autobiography that he had published, and it was really quite amazing. The pilgrimages he'd undergone, the meditations he'd done - so I got a completely different picture of that particular monk. It was quite revealing. I remember that. That's an example of how easy it is to judge people, or even to generalise, from a very limited experience of them.

So we need to think sometimes, even if someone impinges on us in a rather unpleasant way, well he's not necessarily an unpleasant person in relation to others. He may be a very pleasant person, a very good-natured person. It's not easy to know other people. It's not easy to know them in a rounded, comprehensive sort of way; so we should be very wary of making any judgements.

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<sup>58</sup> Sangharakshita's home in India from 1950, and his base until 1966 when he returned to the West. See '[Facing Mount Kanchenjunga](#)' and '[In The Sign Of The Golden Wheel](#)'.

Jayarava: Do you think, Bhante, that if someone is generally a pleasant person but they've been unpleasant to us, it's an opportunity to reflect on what effect we might be having on them?

Sangharakshita: Yes, of course, yes. I don't know what that particular monk that I've mentioned thought of me. Perhaps he didn't think very much. I was just a young monk in those days. I don't know what impression he had of me. It may have been a quite negative one. I thought quite well of myself in those days! [LAUGHTER] But to me he seemed just a rather grumpy old man. But no, there was much more to him than that. Anyway, let's proceed.

Dhira: ***[41] If, disregarding the principal cause, such as a stick or other weapon, I become angry with the person who impels it, he too is impelled by hatred. It is better that I hate that hatred.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes - better that I hate the hatred. And what's the best way of 'hating the hatred?' Well, responding with metta, with forbearance. With forbearance, you can hopefully destroy the hatred even, bring it to an end. Shantideva is rather fond of these rather neat little arguments.

Jayarava: It's an interesting point that he's saying, that if someone hits you with a stick, the principal cause of pain is the stick.

Sangharakshita: Yes, rather than the hatred behind it.

Jayarava: Yes. That's probably a bit nit-picking, that point.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well, he's nit-picking in a wholesome sort of way, trying to encourage us to practise forbearance: 'He didn't hit you: it was just his stick!' [LAUGHTER] And of course there is this other - I don't know if we'll come to it in this section - but there is a famous verse in this connection. Anyway, carry on.

Jinapalita: ***[42] Previously, I too caused just such pain to living beings. Therefore this is just what I deserve, I who have caused distress to other beings.***

Sangharakshita: Of course, one can say this, one can believe this, only if one also believes not only in karma<sup>59</sup> but in rebirth. So Shantideva is saying, well we should reflect that we deserve the punishment that we get, because the likelihood is, perhaps even the certainty, that in a previous existence we've committed similar acts, so this is just a consequence. We're suffering the results of our own previous bad deeds.

I think this sort of reasoning is convincing only for someone who really does believe in karma and rebirth, and many Buddhists, many Western Buddhists, of course, don't have that firm faith in karma and

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<sup>59</sup> A term that literally means 'action' or 'doing'. The term karma is used in two senses within the Buddhist tradition:

1. On the specific level, karma refers to those actions which spring from the intention (*cetanā*) of a sentient being. Karmic actions are compared to a seed that will inevitably ripen into a result or fruition (referred to as *vipāka* or *phala* in Sanskrit and Pali).
2. On the general level, contemporary Buddhist teachers frequently use the term karma when referring to the entire process of karmic action and result.



rebirth that Buddhists often have in the East. And, of course, we do believe that there is such a thing as the five [niyamas](#)<sup>60</sup>, that not everything that happens to us is necessarily the result of our own previous deeds, even according to the Buddha's teaching itself. So perhaps we might say well, it may be that what we're experiencing now is the result of bad deeds of ours in the past, but we don't really know - but Shantideva seems to have the faith that that is the case.

Jayarava: That seems to be the Tibetan view.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: That everything that happens to you is the result of your karma .

Sangharakshita: Which, of course, is not the Buddha's view, so far as the Pali Canon is concerned. Well the Buddha says very clearly that whatever we do has a result; whatever willed action we commit has a result. We experience that result. But that does not mean that everything we experience is the result, karmically, of a willed action on our part. The one does not follow from the other. But the Tibetans seem to have got hold only of half of the truth. Some Tibetan Buddhists will argue the point very vigorously. They really do believe that everything that happens to you is the result of your own past

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<sup>60</sup> The [niyamas](#) are the five levels on which, according to Buddhist commentarial tradition, [pratitya samutpada](#) is said to play out. Karma is only one of these levels. Listen to [introductions to the niyamas](#).

karma, but that's not what the Buddha really taught, and it's important that we should understand that.

Jinapalita: I had a discussion with a Tibetan monk some years ago around this area, with Amoghacitta. It seemed like this monk was basically putting forward that, because I was reborn due to karma, therefore the things that happened to me in this life were karmic as well.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well you certainly can argue like that, because you can say, you have been reborn because of certain [samskaras](#)<sup>61</sup>, so therefore it's your fault, so, indirectly, whatever happens to you is due to something you have done. But it's only indirectly due, not directly due.

Gambhiradaka: It would seem absurd to think that every detail of your life, and all the complex situations you were in, were dictated by your own karma.

Sangharakshita: Individual past karma, yes indeed, but that is what many Tibetan Buddhists do believe quite literally. So this brings us to an interesting point, though it's not directly connected with Shantideva. Some English-educated Tibetan lamas are beginning to

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<sup>61</sup> A term figuring prominently in the teaching of the Buddha. Literally, 'that which has been put together' and 'that which puts together'. Frequently rendered as 'karma formations'. Samskaras are viewed as volitional in nature both because they are formed as a result of volition and because they are causes for the arising of future volitional actions. Listen to Sangharakshita's [description of samskaras](#).

be aware of the Pali scriptures, and are beginning to be aware that some of the things that the Buddha says in the Pali scriptures do not tally with something that they have been taught, in Tibetan Buddhist tradition. So I think that in the course of the next so-many years, we'll see some very interesting developments, when Tibetan Buddhists discover the Pali Canon, and perhaps realise that in certain respects they've strayed away from the Buddha's teaching.

Gambhiradaka: I think it can possibly put some people off Buddhism, hearing these statements by some lamas, like for example the victims of the tsunami were reaping the consequences of being fishermen and so on.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes.

Gambhiradaka: It's not good PR.

Sangharakshita: Well some years ago the [Dalai Lama](#) was asked whether what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany was the result of their own, their collective bad karma, and he said that it probably was. I don't think he was very definite, but he certainly didn't say that it wasn't. And this upset some people at the time, I remember.<sup>62</sup>

Dhivan: A Jewish person would be quite offended.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

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<sup>62</sup> See this note on [Karma and the Holocaust](#).

Jayarava: I think, to be fair, they also say that the invasion of Tibet, and all the bad things that have happened to the Tibetans, are also due to their past karma. They don't exclude themselves from it.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I remember something that [Dhardo Rimpoche](#)<sup>63</sup> told me. He told me that the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government had consulted the [Nechung Oracle](#)<sup>64</sup> and asked what was it that they had done that had resulted in the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese? The oracle said it was due to the sin of the murder of [Reting Rimpoche](#).

Vidyakaya: Which was when?

Sangharakshita: Reting Rimpoche was murdered, of course, two or three years before the Chinese invasion, and he was the regent immediately after the thirteenth Dalai Lama. He was murdered. He was a very high-ranking lama, a rather controversial character. So he was murdered, and another incarnate lama took his place as regent.

So this is something that Dhardo Rimpoche told me. So this also illustrates the fact that, yes well, the Tibetans can apply that idea of karma to themselves, to their own national existence.

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<sup>63</sup> One of Sangharakshita's main teachers and his close friend. See, '[My Eight Main Teachers](#)'. His motto was: 'Cherish the doctrine; live united; radiate love', which also became the motto of the school he founded. [The ITBCI school](#) is funded by the Triratna Buddhist Community. See a [gallery of Sangharakshita's teachers](#).

<sup>64</sup> The State [Oracle](#) of Tibet.

Abhayanaga: Do you think holding this view of karma, it doesn't sort of tally up with what the Buddha taught, is it a hindrance to gaining Enlightenment, to spiritual practice, do you think?

Sangharakshita: Sorry, would you say that again?

Abhayanaga: This view of karma, would it be a hindrance to spiritual practice in some way, to gaining Enlightenment?

Sangharakshita: Yes - because certainly you have to believe that what you do has an effect, but it's pointless to attach so much importance to what happens to you, in the karmic sense. Anyway, that's all by the way. But the subject is an important one.

Dharmamodana: ***[43] His the knife, and mine the body - the twofold cause of suffering. He has grasped the knife, I my body. At which is there anger?***

Sangharakshita: Yes [CHUCKLES], another of Shantideva's very logical propositions. Two things have come together; my body, and his knife. So I'm as much responsible as he is, in a way. Why blame him? Why blame him for being angry?

Jayarava: Although presumably one didn't throw oneself...

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Jayarava: Presumably one didn't throw oneself on the knife, so there's no intention to be stabbed.

Sangharakshita: No, but one has the body, and I suppose at one time in the course of cyclical karma, you intended and wanted to have a body.

Gambhiradaka: You could only use this sort of logic for yourself, couldn't you?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Gambhiradaka: You couldn't use it in court. [MUCH LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes, it is very difficult to convince other people, or you would have to be already convinced to find these sort of arguments at all plausible. So they're meant to bolster the already established faith of the Buddhist or Bodhisattva. Though in a way, Shantideva does have a point. Anyway, let's carry on.

Jayarava: ***[44] Blinded by craving I have grasped this boil in the likeness of a human figure, which cannot bear to be touched. In that case, when there is pain, at which is there anger?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. He, in the order of karma and rebirth, he has, so to speak, wanted a body. When he died, the last time, all his samskaras came into play, and they resulted in his being born as a human being. That's what he wanted, so that's what he got. And of course, Shantideva compares this human body to a boil. A boil is something very sensitive, so in the same way the body is very sensitive. It's susceptible to pain.

I mean theoretically I suppose we could have been born with a cast-iron body, that didn't experience feelings of pain, but that's the body we've got. And in a way, it's our own fault. We wanted to have an embodied existence as a human being. So here we are, with this very sensitive body, which is like a boil, which is very easily hurt. So we have some responsibility for the situation. We suffer through the body.

Samudraghosa: Bhante, could we also see these two verses as pointing out that we're sort of grasping the body in an ongoing way, being attached to it and so on?

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes indeed. Yes, we continue to care for it. We don't want to give it up, and perhaps we look forward to the dissolution of that body with a certain amount of dread. Indian Buddhists are rather fond of this comparison of the body with a boil. A boil is so sensitive, easily feels hurt, even at the lightest touch. The body is very sensitive, but it is we who have wished for, who have wanted this boil-like body. And of course we continue to cherish and protect it. Anyway, not a very popular line of thought, these days. [LAUGHTER] So let's carry on.

Jayasiddhi: ***[45] I do not wish for suffering. Being a simpleton, I do wish for the cause of suffering. When suffering has arisen through my own wrongdoing, how can I become angry with someone else?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, he's pursuing the same line of thought: I'm responsible for my own suffering. And sometimes we quite

obviously are. Shantideva seems to be thinking of the fact that we're responsible for having a body and therefore any suffering that comes to us through the body is ultimately our own fault. So he maybe consoles himself with that thought. Anyway, what comes next?

Vidyakaya: ***[46] Just as the infernal forest of razor leaves, just as the winged creatures from hell are really brought into being by my actions, so is this. At which is there anger?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, well here we are in hell again. [LAUGHTER] I think some readers will be rather shocked by the number of references to hell in the Bodhicaryavatara. There's all sorts of, in some sutras, very unpleasant descriptions of the sufferings of hell. But according to Shantideva, these have all been brought into existence, all these unpleasant experiences, these hell-like experiences, as a result of his own unskillful actions.

Dhivan: But it's noticeable that he's not giving them an objective existence. They exist through past actions.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Well of course it's also said that even our present existence is not absolutely real, it has only a conditioned existence, but nonetheless we do feel both pleasure and pain. So it's the same in the case of the heavens and the hells, according to Buddhist thought. They are not ultimately real, but nonetheless we can experience pleasure in one and pain in the other.



Jayarava: I find this line slightly disturbing. I mean I experience quite a bit of suffering in my life, and I can sort of sometimes wonder well, what was it that I did to get this amount of suffering, and it's... It's quite, it doesn't seem to add up.

Sangharakshita: Well I suppose this is one of the questions that people have always asked. When we suffer, especially when we suffer intensely, we want to know why. We want to make some sort of sense of the situation, because the suffering is there and it may be very intense. So it seems to me that there are basically three answers...

One, it is due to your own past actions, either direct or indirect. Indirect as when we take a human body. Or [two] it's due to the will of God. Or [three] that it just happens by chance. There's no reason why it happens, it's just an accident. So not many people nowadays like to think that suffering is due just to pure accident. That isn't very meaningful. So they've got a choice between God, and karma and rebirth.

Jayarava: Hmm.

Sangharakshita: And some people find one alternative preferable and, for various reasons, others find the other alternative preferable. But what people want to do is to give their experience of pain or suffering some sort of meaning, to be able to interpret it, to be able to understand it in some way. I remember hearing on the radio some time ago an interview with a woman whose child had been killed, and the woman said, I'm a good person, I'm a Christian, I go to church

regularly, I've always worshipped God, and now look what he's done to me. It's God who has taken away the child; God who is responsible. She blames God. So she has found a reason, which satisfies to an extent. She can at least blame God. But not so many people nowadays have that sort of naïve faith in God, even Christians.

Vidyakaya: People often lose their faith in God after something like that.

Sangharakshita: Maybe Muslims do. I remember again a similar experience listening to the radio. There was a recording of an incident where in Iraq, people in a convoy were attacked, and many were killed, and most of them were Iraqis. So the recording showed their voices. And what one man, when people were killed, was shouting, 'Well, it's His will, it's His will' - meaning it's the will of Allah. Even in those sort of circumstances. So that's one explanation, that many people have found plausible and convincing throughout the ages, but not so many now. And Buddhists, of course, have always sought the explanation of suffering in human action. And of course, the law of karma.

Naganataka: Bhante, I suppose that's what can help us have forbearance with difficulty, right. If we can see it as being the inevitable result of actions or states of mind that we have had in the past.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Naganataka: Then we can see that we just need to go through it, really.

Jayarava: The thing is, I find that, in my imagination, the bad person I would have had to have been to generate the suffering I experience now is not something I can identify with. The fact is I'd really rather not think of myself as that kind of bad person.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Because we don't really know. It's one possible explanation.

Naganataka: I have a question in this regard as well. It seems there's a popular conception of karma, that it's sort of cause and effect. You do something to someone; that sort of action will be revisited upon you, and my understanding is that's not really the way that it works. It's more about how we tend to interpret the things that happen to us, as being either positive or negative - is that... What would you have to say about that?

Sangharakshita: Well, I see things a little differently. I think we can't look at karma and karma-vipaka<sup>65</sup> in too sort of literal a manner. That you do something and then there's a result, a sort of reward, or it may be a punishment. I think by virtue of the character of your own action, whether skilful or unskilful, you have an effect upon your own being, and that is what is really important. If you perform acts of violence, it's not that on some future occasion someone does something violent to

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<sup>65</sup> 'Vipaka' (often used as shorthand for 'karma-vipaka') is the result of karmic action. For more, [see here](#).

you. The result is that you become a violent person. And that is a very negative development; you have, as it were, punished yourself. So one can think of karma more along those sort of lines.

*Amalavajra:* Does that mean it's operating more at the level of consciousness than out in the world, so to speak?

*Sangharakshita:* Yes, yes. Though of course, in the course of one's life one does see that if one acts unskillfully, well yes there can be consequences here and now in this life, in this world. That's sometimes plain and obvious.

*Amalavajra:* And outside the sphere of consciousness, in this lifetime, but also externally?

*Sangharakshita:* Yes. The problem arises of course, when you extend karma from one life to another. But one can think of karma and karma-vipaka in terms of - one: the actions you commit, whether skilful or unskillful; and then - two: the vipaka in the form of the way in which those actions of yours modify your over-all being and character.

*Jayarava:* It would seem like from that, looking at it in that way, that individual actions are a little less important and that it's more of a cumulative process that results in...

*Sangharakshita:* Yes. In the teaching about karma, there's a mention of what's called habitual karma, that is to say karmas, willed actions, which are repeated over and over again, and they will of course

inevitably modify one's character, as well as the more dramatic actions that you may commit, skilful and unskilful, only occasionally.

Jayasiddhi: Presumably the type of character we develop in that way will affect how we interpret the world around us, so we do all create our own.....

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, not only how we interpret it, but even how we experience it.

Naganataka: I can remember **Manjuvajra's** story about his friend who always thought that he got cut off in traffic, always thought that people were trying to sort of, you know, get in front of him in traffic.

Manjuvajra drove with him, and said, 'No, that's not actually happening. You're just imagining that.' He could see clearly from his standpoint that it was just his friend's mind at work, making this up, when actually it wasn't really happening.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Anyway, let's go back to Shantideva. Let's hear more about the hells, perhaps.

Saddhananda: ***[47] Those who injure me are really impelled by my actions. For this they will go to the realms of hell. Surely it is they who are harmed by me?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Another little logical exercise on Shantideva's part, yes? Yes, people act unskilfully towards me, they do me harm, and what's the result? They go to hell. Well it's my fault. I was in the way, so to speak, of their unskilful action. I'm not sure personally how

seriously Shantideva really takes these arguments, or whether he's just enjoying the intellectual exercises. The logic here seems a little perverse. Anyway, let's see what comes next.

Abhayanaga: ***[48] On account of them, because I am patient, my evil is considerably decreased. While on account of me they experience the long-lasting agonies of hell.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. Again, he's developing that same rather perverse line of thought.

Dhiraka: ***[49] Really it is I who am harmful to them, and they who aid me! So why, slippery mind, do you turn it the wrong way round and become angry?***

Sangharakshita: Yes. We would normally say that it's Shantideva who's turning it the wrong way round, but as I said, he's being perverse, he's making this sort of logical point, which in a way is convincing, but one couldn't really influence anyone with it who wasn't perhaps a believing Buddhist.

Amalavajra: So again, with this idea about 'it is they who aid me', or in the previous verse, 'because I am patient, my evil is considerably decreased', again, that's the idea that, through practising kshanti, there is a sort of ongoing spiritual benefit, there is development, there's self-development. It's this idea isn't it? Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Amalavajra: It's almost like a spiritual exercise in its own right. Is it that idea?

Sangharakshita: Yes. And of course we can quite literally sometimes do harm to others, and think that we're doing good. And sometimes perhaps even do good when we think we're doing harm. It's sometimes very difficult to judge. Anyway, let's see what comes next.

Khemajala: ***[50] If I am not to go to the realms of hell, I must possess the virtue of determination. If I protect myself, what in that case is the effect on them?***

Sangharakshita: Let's here that again. I'm not quite clear what Shantideva is getting at.

Khemajala: ***If I am not to go to the realms of hell, I must possess the virtue of determination.***

Sangharakshita: Well, that's clear enough. If one is not to be reborn in a painful situation, yes one must act and practise the Dharma with determination. That part is clear enough. And then what follows?

Khemajala: ***If I protect myself, what in that case is the effect on them?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Shantideva is asking, what is the effect on other people? If I protect myself, by practising the Dharma, and as a result, not being reborn in hell? So, he is only acting for himself, for his own benefit. Presumably that's to be seen within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal. It's the Bodhisattva Ideal that he is concerned with, so simply to act in such a way that one benefits oneself is not the sort

of thing that a Bodhisattva normally does. But what does the next verse say? That may make it clearer.

Amalavajra: ***[51] If I did retaliate, they would not be protected and I would fail in my practice, with the result that those in torment would be lost.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Let's hear that again.

Amalavajra: ***If I did retaliate, they would not be protected and I would fail in my practice, with the result that those in torment would be lost.***

Sangharakshita: In other words, there's a continuation of this perverse logic, as I've called it.

Jayarava: Would the protection in this case again be the practice of the Dharma?

Sangharakshita: It would appear so, yes.

Nityabandhu: Can it also mean that if he failed in his practice as a Bodhisattva, they wouldn't have the protection of the Bodhisattva? 'those in torment would be lost'. The Bodhisattva wouldn't be there.

Sangharakshita: I think he's going at it in a more round-about way than that. Anyway, let's carry on, and see if further light comes.



Priyadaka: ***[52] Since it lacks physical form, the mind can never be harmed by anything, but because it clings to the body it is oppressed by the body's suffering.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well this is a very clear point. In a sense, the mind can't be harmed, because it's an immaterial thing. But the mind can be hurt, can't it? We can say things which hurt people, mentally. But literally, you can't hurt the mind in the way that the body can be hurt. That's pretty obvious. So presumably Shantideva develops that point in the next verse?

Naganataka: ***[53] Humiliation, harsh speech, and disgrace, this collection does not oppress the body. Why then, mind, do you get angry?***

Sangharakshita: Yes. Though it's as though Shantideva is assuming that we ought to get angry, or we can be justified in getting angry, only when the body is hurt, because according to him, the mind cannot be hurt. I suppose one could argue that yes, the mind can be hurt. People's feelings can be hurt.

Gambhiradaka: That's often more painful than physical...

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Gambhiradaka: Emotional pain is often more painful than physical pain.

Sangharakshita: It can be, yes.

Gambhiradaka: If someone hits you...

Naganataka: It can even result in direct physical pain, actually.

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Naganataka: Emotional abuse can be very physically damaging.

Sangharakshita: Yes. So one finds oneself a little in disagreement with Shantideva here, perhaps. [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: He does seem to be talking about more just verbal...he seems to have shifted here to name-calling or, you know, someone...

Sangharakshita: Yes. What's that rhyme about 'Sticks and stones may hurt my bones but...' What was it?

Jayarava: 'Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me.'<sup>66</sup>

Sangharakshita: Yes, exactly. That's what Shantideva is saying.

Gambhiradaka: It's untrue! [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Words don't hurt, literally, but the meaning they convey may be very hurtful to the mind.

Jayasiddhi: Is this a reflection that someone should do who's suffering verbal abuse. Is this intended as a reflection for someone to say, where is this thing that's being hurt?

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<sup>66</sup> For origins of this nursery rhyme, [see here](#).

Sangharakshita: Well presumably it's an argument in favour of forbearance, because it is forbearance that Shantideva is still concerned with.

Naganataka: And I suppose we shouldn't lose sight of that, but I'm curious, Bhante, what you think of this basic division of mind and body?

Sangharakshita: Hmm... That's a very big subject indeed. Hmm... I think the general trend of Buddhist thought is not to accept a mind-body dualism. I have said, I think, more than once, that I think that, within the samsara, one never finds body apart from mind, but sometimes the body may not be literally a material body, but a more subtle one, a more refined one. And according to traditional Buddhist teaching, it's that sort of body that one experiences in other worlds, in the so-called heavenly worlds.

But no, a radical mind-body dualism seems to be foreign to Buddhism. And of course then you have the problem of if they're so completely different, how they manage to interact. Of course, materialism reduces consciousness to body, mind to body; but a one-sided idealism, similarly, reduces body to mind, or consciousness. Buddhism seems to follow a [Middle Way](#)<sup>67</sup> in this respect. But one might even say that the same experience can be looked at from two different points of view: from the point of view of body; from the point

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<sup>67</sup> A common term used by the Buddha to evoke the nature of the path to liberation. See ['Twenty Years on the Middle Way'](#) by Sangharakshita.

of view of mind. But this sort of topic has been the subject of endless discussion through the ages. It's one of the very knotty problems.<sup>68</sup>

Samudraghosa: Isn't it one of the unanswerable questions? No, is it not? Dhivan's shaking his head! [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: It's one of the unanswerable questions, perhaps, that people go on trying to answer.

Dhivan: Bhante, I remember in the book 'The Three Jewels', you tend to take a somewhat idealistic point of view in your exposition of Buddhism; that.....

Sangharakshita: Well, I was very young then! [LAUGHTER]

Dhivan: Would it be true to say that now you don't quite hold to that idealism?

Sangharakshita: I'd have to go back to that passage and examine it carefully first.

Dhivan: I see.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: It strikes me, though, that Buddhism does tend to focus more on the mind, in terms of, in a pragmatic sense.

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<sup>68</sup> For practical discussion in terms of health, see 'Mindfulness For Just About Everything' by Paramabandhu.

Sangharakshita: Well it does in a way because it's not just the mind, it is volition. It is mind which determines how you act. The first verse of the [Dhammapada](#)<sup>69</sup> says that: mind comes first. If you act with an impure mind, suffering follows. If you act with a pure mind, happiness follows. So mind has to be the starting point; experience, conscious experience, has to be the starting point, from a practical point of view.

Anyway, what's next?

Balajit: ***[54] Will the disfavour that others show me devour me, here or in another birth, that I avoid it so?***

Sangharakshita: Will the what? I missed that word.

Balajit: The last bit?

Sangharakshita: 'Will the...'

Balajit: ***Will the disfavour that others show me devour me, here or in another birth, that I avoid it so?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, is it such a big deal, if others disfavour us, or are inimical towards us? Perhaps we attach too much importance to it.

Priyadaka: I'm not sure if this is a helpful line to pursue, but I'm wondering if this is something down to our struggle with believing in a

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<sup>69</sup> For Sangharakshita's own translation, see '[Dhammapada: The Way of Truth](#)'.

permanent, fixed self, and all this deeply disturbs that, and we constantly try to reassert our permanent self.

Sangharakshita: Hmm.

Priyadaka: And we constantly try to re-assert our permanent self, and that's where, that's one fundamental cause, of the suffering, because we can't accept that there isn't anything fixed. This theoretical thing that we create constantly gets knocked.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well we have a sort of idea about ourselves, and we're constantly trying to maintain that, and if that is challenged, of course, instead of questioning the idea of that fixed self, we feel upset, and we respond to the challenge. But it is the fixed self, or the idea of the fixed self, that is at the root of all the trouble.

Jayarava: It's quite a good image, isn't it - 'devouring'? 'Will the disfavoured devour me?'

Sangharakshita: Yes... Yes; is it such a terrible thing, after all?

Jayarava: Hmm.

[SILENCE]

Samudraghosa: ***[55] It may be that I avoid it because it gets in the way of my material gain, but that will be lost in this life alone, whereas my evil will certainly persist.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, hmm. Yes. 'Lost in this life' isn't such a big deal, but if you act unskillfully, well that will have unpleasant consequences much further on.

[SILENCE]

Nityabandhu: ***[56] Better that I die right now than have a long life lived improperly, since, even if I remain here for a long time, the same pain of death awaits me.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. Let's hear that again.

Nityabandhu: ***Better that I die right now than have a long life lived improperly, since, even if I remain here for a long time, the same pain of death awaits me.***

Sangharakshita: Better a short and virtuous life than just a long life, because in any case, we're going to die, and that can be a painful experience.

Jayarava: I saw quite a practical application of this in watching the last few months of Subhavajri's life in Auckland. Some of you might have seen the video, [the interview that Nagabodhi did with her](#). She'd been struggling to engage with the spiritual life for years and was falling away from things, but once she got her diagnosis of cancer and it was clear that she only had a few months to live, all of her hesitation dropped away, and she started practising really intensely, and she... I think she says in her interview that she's happier than she's ever been, and she's well on her way to dying.

She only has a few weeks left at that point, and it's quite clear that she's dying. And that process just continued. She just got happier and happier, her mental states got more and more refined. It was quite remarkable. So in those six months of life she lived far more intensely and far more ethically and spiritually than she might have done if she'd lived another thirty years.<sup>70</sup>

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well that's quite a reflection. I've seen that happen in the case of a few other people too. That the thought that they didn't have much longer to live sort of spurred them on. In fact, I also find that in another way with much older people who've only recently discovered the Dharma and the FWBO<sup>71</sup>. I've had quite a few such people come to see me recently, people in their sixties, and they genuinely feel that they've really got to make up for lost time. They really have to throw themselves in, whereas a younger person, in some cases, a younger person discovering the Dharma, may feel that they've got a lot of time ahead, they've got a lot of time ahead to go on retreat and do all those other Dharmic things, and it doesn't matter if they're a bit sort of relaxed about it. But the older person who discovers the Dharma quite late in life often does feel a great sense of urgency. Likewise the very sick person.

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<sup>70</sup> Archive footage of Subhavajri's funeral is [here](#).

<sup>71</sup> 'Friends of the Western Buddhist Order', the former name for the Triratna Buddhist Community, [see here for details](#).



Vidyakaya: Do you think it's helpful to reflect that we may die tomorrow? Do you think people get into too much horrified anxiety?

Sangharakshita: I think it's useful to bear it in mind, because it is a fact, because we don't know - whether we're young or whether we're old - we don't know when we're going to die. Even if we're healthy, there can be an accident. Accidents are happening all the time. So yes, it's something we need to bear in mind, not in a morbid sort of way but realistically, and also perhaps, when we reach a certain age, make our will. A lot of people resist making their will. They feel as though they're signing their death warrant, as though once they've made their will, they're sure to die. [QUIET LAUGHTER] But if one makes one's will, well it saves other people quite a bit of trouble, usually, once you're dead. So in a way, it's your duty to make it.

Jayarava: I noticed in that recent Shabda you were talking about having given away your property, all your possessions. Did you say something like that you wouldn't want to die owning too many things?

Sangharakshita: Well I certainly wouldn't want to die rich. I'd consider that very shameful. Yes. I think my thoughts in this connection were sparked off a bit by a radio report I heard about the [Maharishi](#)<sup>72</sup>. When he died, it seems he was the proprietor, or perhaps even the direct owner, of an estate worth two billion dollars. So I thought, well how on earth did he manage that? And of course, I've also seen in India there is quite often that gurus and religious figures amass a lot of money,

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<sup>72</sup> Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who developed the [Transcendental Meditation technique](#).

and that seems to be quite inconsistent, in many cases, with what they've actually been teaching.

So also nowadays I feel very strongly that, in a materialistic world, as Buddhists we should try to live as simply as possible; make do with as little as possible, not accumulate possessions, give as much as we can, certainly not get a sense of worth, of identity, from the things that we possess, the things that we own.

So I was quite pleased when I was given that opportunity to talk about the history of my finances. I think Siddhisambhava and Lokabandhu were both quite surprised by some of the things I had to say.<sup>73</sup> And I do feel quite strongly about the whole matter. And I think... Recently someone was saying that finances, money matters, are almost the last taboo. People speak quite freely about their sex lives and their sexual experiences and sexual relationships, but they never speak about their finances. So even if you know someone quite well, you don't know whether they own a house, or whether they've got money in the bank, or whether they've got stocks and shares, or what their income is. They never mention these things, unless of course they're being supported by a Centre, and then usually people know.

But I found in India it was very very different, and probably still is. If you happen to travel on a train with someone, in the same compartment, and get talking, then someone will tell you, quite naturally, oh yes I'm a

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<sup>73</sup> [See here](#) for talks around money and Buddhism, including references to the conversation referred to.

clerk in such and such a bank, and I get five hundred rupees a month, and they tell you their salary automatically, whereas if you get into conversation with someone on a train in this country, it's almost the last thing they tell you, how much they earn.

Dhivan: In England it seems almost a matter of principle that people don't disclose their finances. My dad doesn't like talking about that kind of thing, for instance. I wonder what it's like in other countries.

Sangharakshita: It's said that in the old days the wife very often didn't know how much the husband earned.

Gambhiradaka: People will try and show you how much money they've got though, but not tell you. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes. If they have a flashy new car, well you know they can't be doing too badly! Anyway, that's something we can all ponder, and perhaps within the Movement<sup>74</sup> or at least within the Order, well now that I've led the way to some extent, well perhaps others will follow, and perhaps we'll get some surprises. We may find that we've got some millionaires amongst us, or people with very substantial possessions. We may find that we have got some people who literally have nothing at all. It would be very interesting to know. Anyway, let's leave Shantideva there for the moment.

Voices: Thank you; thank you very much.

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<sup>74</sup> An informal, dynamic way of referring to the Triratna Buddhist Community (as distinct from the Triratna Buddhist Order). See [this short introductory piece](#).

## session 5: verses 57-71

(9th june, morning)

Sangharakshita: Which number verse?

Jayarava: 57. Verse 57.

Sangharakshita: Verse 57. There's still a long way to go then?

[LAUGHTER] All right lets carry on.

Dhiraka: ***[57] In a dream one person enjoys one hundred years of happiness and then awakes, while another awakes after being happy for just a moment.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm... Hmm. What conclusion does one draw from... Maybe the next verse tells us.

Jayarava: Is the second clause another awakes after being happy?

Sangharakshita: Hmm.....

Dhivan: ***[58] Surely the happiness of both ceases once they have awakened. That is what it is like at the time of death for the one who lives long and for the one whose life is short.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, well whether you have lived a long life or whether you have lived a short life, well when you come to die, well it doesn't make any difference. You die, you're dead. [QUIET LAUGHTER] That's a bit of a truism in a way, hmm? One could say that there is no value in long life just as regards its length. It depends on what you've done

and it depends upon the quality of your life. For good or bad, when you come to die, well, you die. Just the same.

*Amalavajra:* It mentions the word dream. Is it conveying something of that lack of tangible, or lack of graspable... quantity that, you know, when you die, whether it's a day or a hundred years, there is nothing you can actually...?

*Sangharakshita:* Yes, when you look back over your life, especially if you have lived a long time, it can seem rather like a dream. Especially if it is very different from the sort of life that you are leading at the present. Was that really me? Did that really happen? It does seem rather dreamlike. So whether long or short it doesn't really make any difference. In death is the final reality as it were.

*Naganataka:* Presumably, Bhante, the happiness that Shantideva is talking about here is the happiness of external circumstances rather than as a result of one's skilful actions. Do you know what I'm saying? That it's kind of a pleasant lifestyle rather than the happiness from having a skilful mental state.

*Sangharakshita:* Yes, well the happiness that comes from virtue. Hmm. Yes. Because when things just happen to you and not happen as a result of something you've done, they are in a way a bit less real, a bit more dreamlike. So you may think later on and reflect, well, could all that really have happened to me? Because it just happened. It wasn't something that you did, which you're much more likely to remember.

Jayarava: Do you think that with looking back on your time in India?

Sangharakshita: Oh yes. Looking back on my wandering life and, ha ha, my life in Kalimpong, it is very easy to think well, was this really me? It is a very different set of circumstances. And I suppose in some ways, to some extent, a very different me.

Jayarava: I was thinking yesterday about that image of you walking along the train tracks, trying to get ordained, in the hot, hot sun. And experiencing you now and thinking, you know... trying to imagine you, now, doing that.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, it is difficult to think of me as having once been a young man. Or even a baby! [LAUGHTER] I don't think there are any people around now who have known me for my whole life. Most of the people who know me have known me, well, in the course of the last 25, 30 or 40 years. There are still a few in India who knew me before I came back to England, but they are a dwindling band. Occasionally Order members travelling in India come across some old man sitting in a village, a remote village who says 'Ah, in 1950 so and so I met Bhante... [LAUGHTER] So yes the past can seem like a dream. All right, carry on then.

Khemajala: ***[59] And though I acquire many possessions, though I enjoy many pleasures over a long time, I shall go empty-handed and naked, like someone who has been robbed.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, like someone who has been robbed. It is interesting that Shantideva uses that comparison because you don't give up your pleasures, you don't give up your possessions willingly. They are torn away from you by the fact that you have come to the end of your life. So it does feel as though you have been robbed. Especially you know if you have identified yourself with those pleasures and those possessions, so that can be a very painful, a very uncomfortable experience. So that is why we should sit rather loose to the pleasures that we experience or the possessions that we have so that when death comes it's not such a violent turning away from things that we are attached to.

So it's a very sobering sort of thought. The more greatly one is attached to something - a certain kind of enjoyment or possessions, well the more likely you are to suffer at the time of death. We can be very attached to relations and friends or your property or your reputation, your power, and then it is all snatched away.

Priyadaka: I would say I have felt that occasionally during life. Something goes for various reasons and I might think it's not fair, I've been robbed or I might feel some awkwardness about I've robbed myself somehow of something that I should have and it's a hard loss.

Sangharakshita: Yes and Shantideva says you go naked, you can't take anything with you. I remember you know, when I was in my

teens, I saw a balletic version of the old morality play 'Everyman'<sup>75</sup>. Those of you who are students of English literature may know it, that in the play God sends Death to summons Everyman to judgment. So Death goes to Everyman and says, well, 'You've got to come along with me. God calls you.' And Everyman wants to take someone with him and doesn't want to go alone so he goes to his relations, but no one wants to go with him. Then he goes to his friends, not even his best friend wants to go with him.

Then he goes to his money bags, but they don't want to go with him either. Then after trying to persuade all these people to go with him, he hears a faint, weak voice coming from the ground and it's the voice of his good deeds. And she says, 'Here I lie cold in ground, your deeds have me sore bound, so that I can neither stir nor go'. So he manages to help her up and she staggers to her feet. She's very weak: he hasn't done many good deeds. [LAUGHTER] But anyway, she does agree to accompany him.

So she is the only one in the end who accompanies him. So this play really struck me at the time when I saw it performed as a ballet in London, during the war. It seemed to convey a very Buddhist sort of message. Apart from of course God. Death doesn't have to be sent by God, he just comes. It was a very moving play. It drives home a very serious message and must have made a very strong impression

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<sup>75</sup> *The Somonyng of Everyman (The Summoning of Everyman)*, usually referred to simply as *Everyman*, is a late 15th-century English morality play.



on the medieval people who saw it. Yes, so it's only our good deeds that can go with us so to speak.

Unknown Speaker: And our bad deeds. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes and unfortunately our bad deeds whether we like it or not.

Jayarava: I find it a bit paradoxical you know, that what we become attached to it's painful to let go; but with people it's hard to be friends with someone or love someone and not be attached to them, and yet I can't see a way for us to be fully human without those kinds of relationships.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Of course, there is attachment and attachment, because it can be an attachment which is natural and understandable, but there can also be an obsessional sort of attachment, which is very extreme and sometimes even unreasonable. Especially where people are concerned. Or even possessions, power.

Dhivan: I try to reflect that the people that I love may die at any moment. But I am told by people, for instance, who have lost their parents, that you can't really imagine what it is like. So I am struck by how difficult it is to really have an accurate sense of how you might lose your loved ones.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well that applies to so many experiences. You don't really know in advance what you are going to feel. Sometimes you feel more, sometimes you feel less, sometimes it takes you a long

time to feel anything. Suddenly it hits you, much later. It's difficult to anticipate. But nonetheless we can reflect that sooner or later we are going to have to part company with all the things and all the people to whom we are attached whether in a positive way or a more negative way. This is not perhaps something to dwell upon but perhaps to bear in mind from time to time. No need to be morbid about it. All right, lets press on.

Jayasiddhi: **[60] *Suppose I destroy evil and perform good while living off my gains? There is no doubt but that someone who grows angry on account of gain acquires evil and destroys good.***

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again?

Jayasiddhi: ***Suppose I destroy evil and perform good while living off my gains? There is no doubt but that someone who grows angry on account of gain acquires evil and destroys good.***

Sangharakshita: Someone who lives off his gains... Well perhaps he's a merchant or a businessman, the income from his business. Then of course with the wealth he has acquired it is possible for him to do good. Nonetheless he may be attached to his wealth and maybe could easily become angry if anyone attempts to rob him of it. So, it's as though Shantideva is saying that the possibility of doing good in those sort of circumstances also entails the possibility of acting or behaving unskillfully. In one respect you may be skillful, in another unskillful.

Priyadaka: I wonder if living with one's gains could also be not transferring one's merits. Holding onto one's achievements.

Sangharakshita: Yes. One can take it metaphorically also.

Jayarava: Although the passage does say that you destroy evil and perform good while living off your gains, so it doesn't quite add up.

Sangharakshita: It does raise the general question of about how much you need to live on to enable you to destroy evil, presumably unskilful mental states and to do good. I remember there is a passage somewhere in the writings of Asanga where he is arguing that monks ought to be able to possess property. Usually of course they don't possess property or riches. Because he says, if you don't have property, well, you can't be generous. You can't practise at least one form of dana. So he sees having a certain amount of wealth as necessary to the full practice of the Dharma. But of course, nonetheless, in guarding that wealth even though you do use some of it skilfully you may of course fall into other forms of unskilfulness such as being angry with people who try to rob you.

I am just reminded again of something I heard on the radio, it was a recollection of an address that Mrs Thatcher gave to the, I forget what

they call it, the Convocation of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland<sup>76</sup>, and apparently she rather upset them. Because she referred to the parable... - it was almost a sermon that she delivered. She thought that was appropriate as her audience were all clergymen, or mostly clergymen. So she referred to the [Parable of the Good Samaritan](#). It was the Good Samaritan, not the priest or some other orthodox person who came to the assistance of the man who'd been, I think, set upon by robbers.

Samaritans were of course regarded almost as outcasts by other Jews. But nonetheless this Samaritan was a good man. He helped the wounded man, took him to an Inn and left money with the Inn keeper who was asked to look after the wounded man. Well he couldn't have done good if he hadn't had money. But you have to create wealth before you can distribute it. This point apparently was not very welcome. So she got into a lot of trouble on that account. But yes, it's a two-edged sword. You might say that I really want to help the FWBO, I really want to donate a lot of money. All right, I'll go into business. But when you get into business you find there are all sorts of crooked things you have to do. Perhaps you have to give bribes.

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<sup>76</sup> This was the speech Mrs. Thatcher gave to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on May 21st 1988, colloquially known as 'The Sermon On The Mound'. Read the text [here](#) - and [watch extracts](#). After completing the speech, the Moderator of the General Assembly, Dr James Whyte, presented Mrs Thatcher with some books as a memento of her visit. He handed over recent church reports on poverty, housing and a fair social benefit system, and the house broke into both laughter and applause as he read out the titles of the reports. ([See here](#).)

Perhaps you have to cheat sometimes if you really want to make money. So in the course of earning money for a good cause you may of course have to act fairly unskillfully, so that lands you in a contradictory sort of position. So it seems it's that sort of situation, roughly speaking, Shantideva has in mind here.

Samudraghosha: Would you say in your experience Bhante that most people who have a deep and effective spiritual practice don't have much in the way of income or material possessions?

Sangharakshita: Very often they don't. I remember [Christmas Humphreys](#)<sup>77</sup> telling me once that over the years he'd come to the conviction that there was a kind of conspiracy going on to keep money out of the hands of Buddhists. [LAUGHTER] That was after his experience of running the [Buddhist Society](#) for so many years.

But again, I suppose the general idea, the general principle that Shantideva is touching upon is that we should be very careful that in our wish to do good, we don't almost inadvertently do something which is not good.

Abhayanaga: What do you think about accepting donations for the FWBO where you wonder or have some reservations about how the money was made?

Sangharakshita: Well I haven't yet been in the situation where people have offered me money that was possibly tainted. All the money that I

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<sup>77</sup> Founder of the London [Buddhist Society](#).

have received for giving out to various FWBO activities has mostly come from Windhorse Trading, or [Windhorse:Evolution](#)<sup>78</sup> as it now is. I'm quite sure that they haven't been doing anything unethical in order to make their money.

Jayarava: There is the classic case with a [Mitra](#)<sup>79</sup> who makes his money from playing poker. He's quite generous I believe, In giving money to the FWBO. But some people are a bit doubtful about accepting it.

Sangharakshita: Well, I had a long talk with him a few years ago about poker. Very recently his photo was on the front cover of a magazine devoted to poker. There was a spread inside about him and his life. I came to rather different conclusions. Well, he pointed out, or has pointed out, that poker is not gambling. Because, according to him it is a game of skill. One persons skill is pitted against another person's skill. There is a winner and a loser. So it is not gambling, gambling depends upon chance. At least in principle. So he maintained that people may bet on the result of a game, but the game itself was not gambling. So therefore, he felt that the fact that he was a professional poker player should not stand in the way of him getting ordained. But I believe that the relevant ordination team has decided that it does

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<sup>78</sup> A successful Triratna Buddhist [Right Livelihood](#) business, based in the UK.

<sup>79</sup> In the Triratna Buddhist Community, someone who wants to make a particular connection and develop friendships with members of the Order can ask to become a *Mitra* (which simply means 'friend' in Sanskrit). See, '[Becoming A Mitra](#)'.

stand in the way. So I think that is where things stand at present. But it is clearly a very tricky point.

Jayasiddhi: Mother Theresa received some money that came from dubious sources I believe<sup>80</sup>.

Sangharakshita: This is what is sometimes called conscience money. People just sort of put it through the letter box in an envelope, to ease their conscience, knowing that they acquired quite a lot of it through illegal means.

Jayasiddhi: Someone pointed out to her that it was dirty money and she said it was OK, she could clean it. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: These nuns are pretty astute when it comes to money. [LOUD LAUGHTER]

Priyadaka: The Mitra was on television recently on a gambling program. I was quite pleased to see the relationship between the gamblers, between him and the others. It was quite friendly. It wasn't a hard competitive, doing each other down kind of atmosphere. They were in some kind of reasonable communication.

Sangharakshita: Well, they were good sportsmen.

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<sup>80</sup> See [this discussion](#) of criticism of Mother Theresa.

Vidyakaya: Do you know the story about [Chatral Rinpoche](#)<sup>81</sup> and Richard Gere? Apparently, you know [Richard Gere](#), the Hollywood actor...

Sangharakshita: Yes....

Vidyakaya: Apparently tried to give Chatral Rinpoche a large sum of money. Chatral Rinpoche handed it back, saying 'You need it more than me'.

Sangharakshita: There is another story about Chatral Rinpoche that you may not have heard. This took place quite a few years ago, when the then Regent of Tibet invited him to perform some very important ceremonies and initiations. And at the end he gave him some very, very valuable presents. So what Chatral Rinpoche did was to put them all onto a cloth, tied the cloth up into a bundle and handed them back to the Regent and said 'Could you look after this for me' and just left. So, that is one of the reasons he is called Chatral, which I am told means no concerns, no affairs, no worries. Something like that<sup>82</sup>. Very free. And of course he remains free. The last I heard of him he'd gone off on his own somewhere. No one knew quite where.

Anyway, it's very good that we have these sorts of examples of detachment where possessions are concerned. But, yes it's not easy in a modern world to get involved with money and making money,

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<sup>81</sup> One of Sangharakshita's eight main teachers. Also known as [Chetul Sangye Dorje](#).

<sup>82</sup> Meaning given online as '[Precious] Hermit' or 'Precious Ascetic'. Ref. [here](#) and [here](#).



even for good purposes, without getting your hands just a little bit soiled. Anyway, lets carry on.

Dhira: ***[61] If that for which I live comes to nothing, what is the point of living, performing only unlovely deeds?***

Sangharakshita: This is a rather serious reflection. Well this might be the reflection of someone who has lived not in a very sort of ethical way. Even so his life has not been much of a success. And he reflects 'Well, what is the point of it all?' It's doubly sad. It's sad that he spent his life in that particular way and it's sad that at the end he had nothing positive to show for his life.

Jayarava: It would be easy to stop at the 'what is the point of living?'. That last phrase was important.

Sangharakshita: Yes it's very sad if you look back at the point of death and ask yourself 'Well, what have I lived for?' If you can't give a positive reply. [PAUSE] All right, what's next?

Jayarava: ***[62] If you argue that your dislike of one who speaks ill of you is because he is harming living beings, why then do you feel no anger when he defames others in the same way?***

Sangharakshita: Well, this is in a way an obvious point. We don't like it when people criticise us, we feel it very strongly, whereas if he's criticising other people we don't take it so much to heart. This illustrates, you, know, the strength of the difference which we feel

between ourself and others. We are much more concerned about things that happen to us than about what happens to other people.

Priyadaka: Unfortunately, I have felt some pleasure in hearing someone else being criticised because I think, well I'm glad it's not me. I did not realise that at the time.

Sangharakshita: One can learn a lot from hearing other people being criticised. Because you can say to yourself, well maybe to some extent I am in that person's shoes. Maybe the criticism applies to me too. And in India there is a saying that the mother scolds her daughter to teach the daughter-in-law. In India the custom is that when a man marries he brings his wife to live with him and his parents. So his mother and his wife are living under the same roof. So the suggestion is that it wouldn't be very tactful that if the wife does something wrong that the mother-in-law scolds her directly. She scolds her own daughter instead, knowing that the daughter-in-law will listen and hear what is said and get the message.

Naganataka: So presumably we could take the same sort of criticism towards us much more effectively if we didn't take it personally.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Naganataka: If we could hear it as if it were being given to someone else.

Sangharakshita: Just as in this case the real daughter wouldn't take it negatively. She would understand that what her mother had said was

really meant for the daughter-in-law. But even apart from that, if we listen carefully to the criticisms of other people we may find that the criticisms apply equally to us and we can learn from those. It's such a useful point.

*Jayarava:* Seems like the way we treat each other in the order it's especially important that we exemplify communication, especially so to Mitras, but also to the world in general. In terms of criticising each other.

*Sangharakshita:* Yes. I remember in the early days of the Movement, I used to use this technique to some extent, in both a critical and a non critical way. In India I would say, 'Western Buddhists, they do this, they are so good at this, so good at the other'. To make a point to the Indian Buddhists. But in England I say, 'Oh, these Indian Buddhists, they are so devoted, you should be as devoted as that!'. Hoping that the English Buddhists would get the message. Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't.

But in the Order we shouldn't need to make a point in this roundabout sort of way. Especially within a chapter<sup>83</sup>. It should be possible to speak directly and if we have any criticism we should make it directly. But in a skilful and positive way. No one really likes criticism, even when it is cast in very positive terms. So we should be careful even

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<sup>83</sup> Members of the Triratna Buddhist Order often meet locally in small groups known as 'chapters', which Sangharakshita has likened to 'spiritual workshops'. See [talks on Order chapters](#).

with friends. Of course, sometimes a criticism has to be made. In honesty one has to do that.

Jayarava: It seems to have calmed down in the last year or two, but for while there was a lot of criticism of Order members by Order members and I 'm not sure if it was that productive.

Sangharakshita: Well, very often it depends on the way in which the criticism is made: the time, the place, the tone. All these things are important. If one is going to criticise someone, criticise them openly, it shouldn't just be to get something off ones own chest. But it should be with a view to their benefit.

As well as criticism, of course, there should also be appreciation. Criticism should be balanced by appreciation, maybe more than balanced.

Samudraghosha: I heard a Mitra say that in the family that she was brought up in.. Oh, no I'm sorry, I'm confusing two things. But the point she made was that you need about five positive things to be said to you to balance one criticism. She was speculating that you might need more like twenty. [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: I suppose it depends upon your self esteem.

Vidyakaya: For most people that's pretty low, so....

Samudraghosha: **[63] You tolerate those showing disfavour when others are the subject of it, but you show no tolerance**

***towards someone speaking ill of you when he is subject to the arising of defilements.***

Sangharakshita: Could we have that one again?

Samudraghosha: ***You tolerate those showing disfavour when others are the subject of it, but you show no tolerance towards someone speaking ill of you when he is subject to the arising of defilements.***

Sangharakshita: The same point made in slightly different terms. We feel something directed towards us, but we don't feel it directed towards others.

Naganataka: Really, it seems what he's talking about here is righteous indignation. We are justifying our anger at someone by saying, 'Well they're being unskilful.' So you're feeling righteous about being angry at their unskilfulness, but it's just an excuse because our feelings are hurt. We wouldn't feel the same righteousness when they criticise someone else.

Sangharakshita: Well, righteous indignation is a very suspect quality. Religious people in particular often feel that they are justified in feeling and expressing righteous indignation. Getting upset by something they consider unskilful. And that's not really the Buddhist approach. I personally see righteous indignation as, well, I don't see the least righteousness as justifying the indignation. It's a form of anger. So, I think you should beware of the so-called righteous indignation. You

often find this expressed in the press and on radio and TV. So, I think if you hear someone letting off steam in this way, you should be very suspicious.

I don't think Buddhists go in for righteous indignation quite so much as Christians and Muslims. Perhaps Christians and Muslims will see things differently.

Amalavajra: I was at the recent protest against China in London. You know, these were pro-Tibet protesters in Whitehall. I think there was a flavour of righteous indignation there. I thought it was a kind of irony that there was a lot of anger and aggression there. Expressed with the aim of protecting the Buddhist culture that's about expressing compassion and kindness. I have to say that I think the Order presence there was the best thing I saw. About 10 Order members meditating on some steps. Actually, positioned right between the Chinese people and the pro-Tibet people. I expect they were mostly Westerners. And the Order members were sitting right in the middle as it happened.

Sangharakshita: This was in London?

Amalavajra: Yes, in Whitehall. Right outside Downing Street.

Sangharakshita: How did you know that they were Order members?

Amalavajra: They were wearing Kesas.

Sangharakshita: Good! [LAUGHTER]

Amalavajra: I knew them anyway.

Dhivan: Were the Order members making a point? In some public way?

Amalavajra: I think it was quite obvious, yeah. You know, they were on these steps, so they were slightly raised. And they were sitting and they looked quite distinct with their...

Dhivan: Were they commenting about the procession?

Amalavajra: They weren't saying anything, no. They were just sitting there meditating, but people noticed that and they stopped and were taking photos. And journalists came over and personally I thought it made a really good point. Because obviously it was saying, it was making a point about Tibet, by implication, by association, that we are Buddhists and we care about Tibet. But in a way that is more consistent with compassion and the values of Buddhism.

Sangharakshita: And of course there were many, or some, who were protesting against the Dalai Lama himself. I saw that when I was in London.

Amalavajra: I think that was a later thing. This was all around the Olympics and the procession of the Olympic flame. This is what this protest was about.

Jayasiddhi: Did you go to a meeting with the Dalai Lama recently?

Sangharakshita: Yes, I did have the opportunity of meeting him. We had a little chat, which was good. We hadn't met for many years. I reminded him that the first time we met was in 1956, when he came from Tibet with the [Panchen Lama](#)<sup>84</sup> to join the Buddha Jayanti<sup>85</sup> celebrations in Delhi. After that we met a few times and since then we hadn't met until once in 1966. So we had a little chat. He mentioned the FWBO's work in India and [Lokamitra](#)<sup>86</sup>, because he has visited the [Mahavihara](#) and he's visited [Nagaloka](#). In fact I was told that when he visited the Mahavihara he saw my photograph there and he said, 'Oh, that's my old friend Sangharakshita'.

So, I was pleased to think he remembered me, which he did.

And I met a number of other people at the same time. There were about two dozen 'religious leaders' we were called. We were invited by the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#) to meet with the Dalai Lama. So I also had the opportunity of having a little chat, while we were waiting for the meeting to begin, with [Sumedho](#)<sup>87</sup>, with a Sinhalese Bhikkhu<sup>88</sup> that I knew from the [Chiswick Vihara](#), and various other people. And I

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<sup>84</sup> See [here for details](#) of controversy around the current Panchen Lama.

<sup>85</sup> See 'Annus Mirabilis - The Year of Wonders' by Sangharakshita. Also, 'Ambedkar and Buddhism' by Sangharakshita.

<sup>86</sup> [Listen to more](#) by Lokamitra on his work in India.

<sup>87</sup> Ajahn Sumedho is the senior Western representative of the [Thai forest tradition](#) of [Theravada](#) Buddhism.

<sup>88</sup> Possibly [Ven. Bogoda Seelawimala Nayaka Thera](#).



also met Mr. Brown<sup>89</sup>, he wasn't looking very happy, but he'd just had his meeting with the Dalai Lama at [Lambeth Palace](#)<sup>90</sup>. And after making the rounds and have a few words with each of us, he just went. Just left us to have our own meeting.

So yes, it was quite a pleasant occasion. The Dalai Lama was very cheerful, as it seems he usually is. Which considering what responsibilities he has, it's amazing that he does stay so cheerful and positive. Anyway, that's by the by.

Priyadaka: Is he older than you, Bhante?

Sangharakshita: No, he's about 10 years younger. So when we first met he was very young indeed. Yes, he and the Panchen Lama were not more than 20 when they came to India on that occasion. That was, of course, three years before he was forced into exile and came to India as a refugee. I did actually see him at that time but only from a distance. But I mention it in my little book, [Precious Teachers](#)<sup>91</sup>. And he was on his way from Tejjpur to Delhi. I went down to Siliguri and I could see him in the distance. He looked very worried then. Anyway, that's all by the way.

Naganataka: I just wanted to say, returning to the text a bit and Amalavajra's example of what the Order members were doing there in

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<sup>89</sup> [Gordon Brown](#), then British Prime Minister.

<sup>90</sup> The official London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury in England.

<sup>91</sup> Listen to a community audiobook of '[Precious Teachers](#)'.

London, really is an exemplification of what Shantideva is talking about in the text. Because they weren't taking sides, they were exemplifying something to both sides that rises up above the whole dialogue.

Sangharakshita: I suppose sometimes, in a sense, we have to take sides. But even when we takes sides we should do that in a moderate and reasonable manner. And not in an extreme manner. Presumably if we feel that the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese was wrong, in a sense we are taking sides. But if we want to give expression to our sense that that was wrong, then we should do it in a peaceful manner, not a violent manner. And of course the Dalai Lama himself has always spoken in favour of non-violence. As far as I know, he has never approved of violent resistance to the Chinese. He's always been very consistent in that respect. Yes, but if we feel called upon to protest for any reason, well, it has to be a peaceful protest. So what comes next?

Amalavajra: ***[64] And my hatred towards those who damage sacred images and stupas or who abuse the true teaching is inappropriate, since the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not distressed.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's very, very appropriate and very timely. This sort of teaching, it goes right back to the Buddha himself. You may remember, I think it's the opening of the [Brahmajala Sutta](#), where the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha are being criticised by people. I forget by whom. And this is reported to the Buddha. And he says that if the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are being criticised, you

should calmly consider whether or not the criticism is justified. You should not get angry, because if you got angry you would be obstructing your own practice of the Dharma. So the Buddha is quite clear here, he doesn't expect us to become full of indignation and anger, when he himself is criticised or his teaching is criticised or his Sangha is criticised. This is so different from what we find in some other religions.

Some people seem to feel that if their religion is attacked or criticised they are justified in getting angry. They are justified in being violent. But the Buddhist approach is totally different and the Buddha has made that clear from the very beginning. And it is this teaching that Shantideva is referring to in this particular verse.

*Jayarava:* It is quite common though amongst Buddhists to express indignation about things like the [Bamiyam Buddhas](#)<sup>92</sup> being blown up, or the opening of a bar called the Buddha bar gets protested against.

*Sangharakshita:* One usually finds this in the case of Buddhists who associate themselves with Buddhism more in a cultural than a purely spiritual way. So I expect if, well we know that in Tibet, under the [Cultural Revolution](#)<sup>93</sup>, images were smashed, temples were destroyed.

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<sup>92</sup> Two 6th century monumental statues of the standing Buddha carved into the side of a cliff in Afghanistan, destroyed by the [Taliban](#) in 2001.

<sup>93</sup> A social-political movement that took place in the [People's Republic of China](#) from 1966, intended to remove [capitalist](#), [traditional](#) and cultural elements from Chinese society, and to impose [Maoist](#) orthodoxy within the Party. [See this note](#) on the destruction of 6000 monasteries in Tibet.

Monks were harassed and persecuted. And no doubt we feel upset and perhaps to some extent we are justified in feeling upset, but not justified in expressing anger or not justified in trying to respond with violence. It's a very fine line that we have to tread. Because one can't be totally indifferent when say the Buddha is criticised or images are smashed. But one must be very careful that one's feeling of pain or hurt doesn't result in one indulging in unskilful mental states or unskilful actions. Because in Europe, not so long ago, there were the [cartoons of the prophet Mohammed](#)<sup>94</sup> in that Danish paper and that led to a lot of violent outbursts on the part of Muslims, who seem to have felt fully justified in expressing anger and even in some cases being violent, by way of protest. But that is quite foreign to the spirit of Buddhism. So I think it's important that people should generally understand this, that this is the Buddha's position.

Dhivan: There was a sculpture in Norwich a few weeks ago that came up on Sanghajala<sup>95</sup>. It was an inappropriate use of this Buddha image. It was equipped with a big erection and the police went round to say this shouldn't be in the shop front. But Tejananda made the point that actually it was inappropriate for Buddhists to take offence, if you see

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<sup>94</sup> 12 editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the [Islamic](#) prophet [Muhammad](#), were published in the Danish newspaper [Jyllands-Posten](#) on 30 September 2005. The newspaper announced that this publication was an attempt to contribute to the debate about criticism of Islam and self-censorship. Muslim groups in Denmark complained, and the issue eventually led to protests around the world, including violent demonstrations and riots in some Muslim countries.

<sup>95</sup> Formerly an online forum for the Triratna Buddhist Order.

what I mean. It wasn't Buddhist. And in that sense we were recommended to contact the gallery owner and say we are not offended. I found that thought-provoking.

Sangharakshita: So, of course, we may consider it inappropriate or unskillful but we don't have to be offended or become righteously indignant.

Jayasiddhi: I believe that rupa was equipped with a banana and two apples.

Dhivan: Two eggs.

Jayasiddhi: Two eggs was it?

Sangharakshita: Got to be accurate. [LAUGHTER]

Dharmamodana: Seems to be well equipped.

Sangharakshita: Well that's perhaps even better. [LAUGHTER]

Anyway, on we go. [LAUGHTER]

Jinapalita: ***[65] When people harm one's teachers, relatives and others dear to us, one should, as above, regard it as arising on the basis of conditioning factors and refrain from anger towards them.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, this is very difficult and a lot of people in this world are in this dilemma. When those near and dear to one, one's wife and one's children are attacked or misused it is very difficult not to

feel anger and not to be violent. So, of course, we can apply the teaching of dependent origination here. But it'd be very, very difficult. I think one can apply it in a situation like that only if one is a very serious and experienced Buddhist. The ordinary non-Buddhist is of course not going to ever think in that sort of way.

Vidyakaya: Well there are stories, I remember there was a woman in South Africa who's daughter was murdered by a mob. She actually befriended the man who killed her and you know, became almost like a son in a reconciliation. It can, it does happen.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well there have been two or three quite remarkable cases that I've heard about on the radio, where someone's son or near one has been killed and the mother, in one case it was the mother, she did not feel any anger or hatred towards the killer. She felt only compassion for him, because he must have been in a very negative state of mind to have been able to commit such an action. So occasionally one does find people responding in this way and sometimes one has to admit it's in accordance with their Christian faith. That they genuinely believe in what Jesus teaches in this respect and are genuinely trying to practise that. In a way that is quite admirable, in a way as Buddhists we can appreciate.

Jayarava: There is always the possibility of trying to prevent someone from harming yourself or others without anger.

Sangharakshita: Yes. It's very difficult. You've got to be good at Karate or something like that.

Jayarava: That's what I was thinking of.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, that used to be the question at the time of the First World War. When the authorities were very hard on conscientious objectors<sup>96</sup>. When the conscientious objector appeared before the tribunal he'd always be asked what would be your response if someone was trying to kill your mother or rape your sister. Of course, what can one say? The answer is not easy.

Vidyakaya: I think the answer was, 'I would attempt to juxtapose myself between them.'

Jayarava: That's something I have been struck by coming to England is the effects of war here, coming from New Zealand. We were involved in the war, I lost an Uncle during the Second World War, but it's so much more of a reality here. There is still bomb damage in London that you can see, preserved in walls and things.

Sangharakshita: Well, in Coventry, the ruins of the cathedral have been kept as ruins and they've built a new cathedral, next door.

Jayarava: And it sort of seems like, well, resisting the Nazi's was a good thing. Even though the means that had to be employed to do it weren't...

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<sup>96</sup> An 'individual who has claimed the right to refuse to perform military service' (according to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; See Article 18](#)) on the grounds of freedom of thought, conscience, and/or religion.

Sangharakshita: Well I listen to the radio a fair bit as I can't read and I've noticed over the last few months there have been so many anniversaries of events connected with the Second World War and the First World War even. Well there are still survivors from the First World War, one of them being a man, I think of 112. Who's still around. There are three men it seems who took part in the First World War and are still alive, he is one of them.

But there is this constant succession of anniversaries of events connected with the two World Wars. So, the consciousness of those wars runs quite deep I think, in Britain. More recently it was the anniversary of [Dunkirk and the little boats](#)<sup>97</sup>. Of course I personally remember all these things. And, of course, I was in London during part of the Blitz.

Vidyakaya: Your house got blown up.

Sangharakshita: Well, yes, both the houses in which I'd lived as a child got blown up. Not only the one in which my family was living, but also the one in which we had lived a few years earlier on. Well I must say I

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<sup>97</sup> The Dunkirk evacuation, code-named Operation Dynamo, also known as the Miracle of Dunkirk, was the evacuation of [Allied](#) soldiers from the beaches and harbour of [Dunkirk](#), France, between 27 May and 4 June 1940. The operation became necessary when large numbers of British, French, and Belgian troops were cut off and surrounded by the German army during the [Battle of France](#) in World War II. In a speech to the [House of Commons](#), British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called the events in France 'a colossal military disaster', saying that 'the whole root and core and brain of the British Army' had been stranded at Dunkirk and seemed about to perish or be captured. In his '[We shall fight on the beaches](#)' speech on 4 June, he hailed their rescue as a 'miracle of deliverance'.



remember, looking back, if I may be a bit biographical, I remember I was already in the army then, I described in my memoirs<sup>98</sup> how I walked up the road and saw more and more bomb damage; and then it was that here, my own house was half destroyed, and father, just standing outside looking at the ruins. But I must say that I didn't feel any hatred towards the Germans or even the Nazis. And I don't think my father did either. It was something that had happened. I think a lot of people were like that. There wasn't much in the way of actual animosity towards the Germans, whereas there had been at the time of the First World War.

Jayarava: Do you think that's national character, or particular to your family or...?

Sangharakshita: I don't know, I can't say. But I know my father and his friends were a bit like that. Yes. Anyway, that's all by the way, we are straying from the text.

Abhayanaga: ***[66] Whether the cause possesses consciousness or not, distress is inevitable for embodied beings. That distress appears in what is conscious. Tolerate that pain therefore.***

Sangharakshita: So what is Shantideva saying here?

Vidyakaya: That life is always painful.

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<sup>98</sup> See Sangharakshita, 'The Rainbow Road: From Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong'

Naganataka: It seems he's also saying we shouldn't discriminate between sources of pain that come from... that have a motive behind them or that don't. That's not an important factor.

Sangharakshita: Not in relation to forbearance in regard to the pain. Just forbearance.

Jayarava: It seems like he might also be referring back to the thing about you don't get angry with fire for burning, echoing that point that if the cause has consciousness or not, you are going to suffer. So why make that distinction?

Sangharakshita: Yes and of course he is concerned with kshanti, forbearance, so therefore what is it that you practise forbearance in relation to, well something painful. Whether it is caused by something animate or inanimate well that's really irrelevant from the point of view of the practice of forbearance.

Naganataka: I suppose part of the reason for that is that we can never really know someone's motive for doing something and even if they tell us what it was, it is usually just a story we are telling ourselves about what their motive is.

Sangharakshita: Very often they don't really understand themselves. Why they do something. Just their nature.

Priyadaka: I'll definitely feel different towards someone if I feel they are being malicious on purpose rather than accidental, but that's just my

story, the pain might be the same or even less but how I take it is my creation.

Sangharakshita: So let's go on.

Vidyakaya: **[67] *Some commit offences out of delusion, others deluded grow angry. Who among them should we say is free from blame, or who should we say is guilty?***

Sangharakshita: So some act out of delusion, some act out of hatred inspired by delusion. Well there is a kind of ideological hatred we could say. So, Shantideva wants to know which is the more blameworthy?

Vidyakaya: Do we need to know the difference?

Sangharakshita: I think somewhere in the Pali scriptures the Buddha does say something to the effect that acting unskillfully on the basis of an established wrong view is a more serious matter than acting unskillfully out of straightforward anger or greed<sup>99</sup>. That is what I would call the ideological hatred. It's got its roots in some sort of ideology and derives a great deal of strength and pseudo-justification from that.

Abhayanaga: Is that because you won't acknowledge that you are doing anything wrong or acting unskillfully? You are just kind of justifying your unskillful action. There's not much of a chance for regret or confession.

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<sup>99</sup> Reference unknown. For the Buddha's basic exposition of skillfulness and view, see the [Sammaditthi Sutta](#) and also this [collection of suttas](#).

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, in my book 'From Genesis to the Diamond Sutra' I have written on the way in which the Church in the past has treated heretics. It wasn't that the inquisitors, say, who burnt people at the stake, just had a personal dislike for them or a personal hatred, no, they had a firm belief that heretics were dangerous. They were dangerous because they had the effect of encouraging skepticism about the Christian faith among people and in that way imperilling people's souls. So they were convinced that when they were trying heretics, and finding them guilty, and sentencing them to death, and burning them at the stake, they were performing a good action, which God would approve. So here, the unskilful action is deeply rooted in wrong views, a whole complex of wrong views. So therefore, much more difficult to extirpate. It's like a plant that has a whole network of underground roots so it's very difficult to tear up, whereas some plants have just a few short very weak roots and they can easily be pulled up.

So this is the reason why in Buddhism so much importance is attached to right view and wrong view. Right view can strengthen right action and wrong view can strengthen wrong action or unskilful action.

Jayasiddhi: Presumably wrong action based in wrong view will strengthen that wrong view will it?

Sangharakshita: Yes, it will have that effect in turn. Well, if we think of modern times, the Nazis had certain wrong views which went deep into their consciousness and those views were responsible for some

very terrible behaviour on the part of the Nazi party and the German government.

Dhivan: Isn't Shantideva's point in this verse to say that we might be tempted to let people off, not blaming them, if they commit offences out of delusion.

Sangharakshita: Well it depends what one means by delusion. If by delusion one means a kind of fixed wrong view well then it's a more serious matter. But if it's a delusion in the ordinary everyday sense then, of course, it is a less serious matter.

Samudraghosha: To me it seems to be saying the person does something which I consider to be an offence to me and I get angry, well we are both deluded, so why say what I am doing is right while he, what the other person is doing, is not alright. If both are coming from delusion.

Sangharakshita: All right, let's press on.

Naganataka: ***[68] Why did you behave before in such a way so that others now trouble you in this way? Everybody is subject to the force of prior actions. Who am I to change this?***

Sangharakshita: So who is speaking here, I wonder? This sounds almost like a rationalisation for not feeling sorry for people who are suffering as a result of their previous wrong deeds. It's as if they are getting their just deserts. Perhaps one shouldn't think like that? Just feel sorry for those people.

Naganataka: Once again it seems like one of those things you can't apply to someone else necessarily. Unless they are prepared to hear it.

Sangharakshita: I think somewhere amongst [my aphorisms](#) there is an aphorism that some people are quite happy to forgive their enemies in this life, and they quite genuinely forgive them because they are convinced that God will punish them later when they die! [LAUGHTER] But that's not real forgiveness.

Naganataka: Deference of punishment?

Abhayanaga: Wasn't it [Angulimala](#)<sup>100</sup> after he gains Enlightenment, he's abused by people he's hurt in the past. The Buddha tells him to bear with it, it's just what's going to happen. Even though he is already an [Arahant](#)<sup>101</sup> he still has to face that.

Sangharakshita: So if we forgive, we forgive wholeheartedly. And also if we see people suffering we should not rejoice because we believe they are only suffering the results of their own unskillful actions in the past; but we should also feel compassion for them, while perhaps acknowledging the justice of their suffering.

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<sup>100</sup> A ruthless serial killer whose conversion to Buddhism is the subject of the [Angulimala Sutta](#) and points to the universal human potential for spiritual progress, regardless of one's background. Listen to talks that reference [Angulimala's story](#).

<sup>101</sup> Connotes someone who has perfected their practice of the Buddha's Dharma and attained to [Nirvana](#).

Jayarava: I think in India that this kind of attitude is partly what props up [the caste system](#)<sup>102</sup>. That if someone is born into a low caste then they must have done something terrible to deserve it. So you can't help them, you can't do anything to change that situation because they deserve it and if you try to change it, you try to change the social system...<sup>103</sup>

Sangharakshita: You are working against the law of karma.

Jayarava: And you are probably doing yourself harm, in that way of thinking.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well there was the same sort of reasoning in Britain in religious circles with regard to the social order. I can remember the verse of the hymn, 'The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate'<sup>104</sup>. So around 1800 and the early nineteenth century, when a lot of reforms were being proposed, some religious people, including Bishops, opposed them because they thought that was disturbing the social order and that that social order was ordained by God.

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<sup>102</sup> The discriminatory system of [social stratification](#) that is still a major force in Indian society.

<sup>103</sup> See the work of [The Karuna Trust](#), in this regard.

<sup>104</sup> From '[All Things Bright and Beautiful](#)' by Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-95). For the origins of the hymn, see [this article](#).

Prior to the [Reform Act of 1832](#), 21 Bishops of the Church of England voted against the Reform Bill designed to address some of the worst imbalances in the [parliamentary democratic system](#) in Britain. See '[Religion & Politics in England & Ireland 1820 - 1841](#)' by Roy Huggins.

Well recently in England they were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the [abolition of the slave trade](#). So when the House of Lords came to consider the bill it seems that all the Bishops voted against the bill with one exception, who was the then Bishop of Norwich. So the official Church was against the abolition of slavery. And then later when anaesthetics came into use they objected to anaesthetics being used on a woman in child birth<sup>105</sup>. Because in the bible it is written God said, 'In pain thou shall bring forth'. So if you are trying to relieve a woman's pain at the time of childbirth you are trying to make God a liar. And the use of an anaesthetic in child birth only became respectable after Queen Victoria herself made use of it<sup>106</sup>. So, since the Queen... [Jayarava: made God a Liar] ...it must be all right.

So we can see how religious beliefs in the past have sometimes been responsible for very unskilful attitudes and unskilful behaviour. So right

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<sup>105</sup> The historical accuracy of this common assertion around the development of anaesthesia is disputed in some quarters, see '[Anesthesia for childbirth: Controversy and change](#)' by Donald Caton, MD, Michael A. Frölich, MD, and Tammy Y. Euliano, MD. Also, '[The religious objections and military opposition to anesthetics, 1846-1848](#)' by George A Swanson, MD.

For an interesting (if necessarily partial and sympathetic) timeline of specific details of the Church's response, see '[Chloroform in Childbirth](#)' from the 'Church in History' website. [Professor Simpson](#), the inventor of chloroform, successfully advanced his own [defence against potential religious arguments](#) in 1847, making the case that the Hebrew word translated as 'pain' actually connoted 'labour' rather than physical pain.

<sup>106</sup> For notes on Dr. John Snow's administering of chloroform to Queen Victoria see [this site](#).



belief, sammaditthi, or right view is very, very important in the Dharma<sup>107</sup>.

Saddhananda: ***[69] But realising this I shall make the effort to perform good actions in such a way that everyone will develop an attitude of friendship, each towards the other.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, that is the objective, to act in such a way as to create harmony within society. There is no direct reference to the Sangha here but clearly it applies to the Sangha, but it also seems to apply to a much wider situation. I remember there is a saying of **William Blake's**<sup>108</sup>. He says somewhere, 'Religion is politics and politics is brotherhood'<sup>109</sup>, so brotherhood, friendliness, amount to more or less the same thing. So we're to act in a such a way as to have a positive harmonising effect upon the society in whose midst in which we move. Encouraging friendly relationships between all people, regardless of differences. Sometimes of course we have to recognise the differences objectively but they are just differences. They shouldn't be seen as reasons for giving rise to unfriendly feelings. So I think that this kind of aspect of Buddhist teachings is quite difficult for a lot of people to understand because it runs counter in some respects to human nature or even runs counter to some other religious teachings.

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<sup>107</sup> See Sangharakshita, '**The Nature of Existence: Right Understanding**'.

<sup>108</sup> Seminal English poet, painter and printmaker of the 18th/19th Century.

<sup>109</sup> From '**Jerusalem**': 'Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion'. For the text of Blake's works, see the **Blake Digital Text Project**. For the illuminated manuscripts, see **The William Blake Archive**.

So...

Priyadaka: **[70] When a house is burning down and the fire has spread towards the next house, any grass or such in which it might spread is dragged off and taken away.**

Sangharakshita: OK. Is there something following here?

Dharmamodana: **[71] So, when the mind is catching alight with the fire of hatred as a result of contact with something, it must be cast aside immediately for fear that one's body of merit might go up in flames.**

Sangharakshita: It comes back to what was almost the first verse I think. That anger or hatred destroys the merit that you have heaped up perhaps in the course of hundreds of lifetimes. So the flame of hatred is to be extinguished immediately. In an earlier verse it spoke of hatred as just welling up. As soon as we become aware of that, if it does happen at all, which is unfortunate, we should just damp it down as soon as we can. Otherwise it will consume our good qualities. If we act in accordance with it, it will leave us very regretful and sorry, and ashamed perhaps.

Jayarava: Do you think contact here is being used in the technical Buddhist sense? You know, object, contact and sight organ. Or is it just being used in a more general sense?

Sangharakshita: I think in a more general sense, but obviously hatred can arise on account of something you hear or something that you

see. If you see someone attacking your wife that will give rise to anger and hatred. Nothing needs to be actually said. Or even if you hear that something like that has happened you can become angry straight away. But Shantideva is concerned that that sudden burst of anger and hatred does not come to fill your whole mind and affect every aspect of your thinking and your behaviour in such a way that any good qualities that you may possess may be simply burned up and nullified, they're neutralised or even destroyed for the time being. That's what he's concerned about. The damaging, detrimental affects of hatred.

If one might develop the analogy a little bit more, there is the anger that flares up. So I suppose when the fire catches the thatched roof it flares up. But then there is also the anger that smoulders underneath the ashes, sort of biding its time. Waiting for an opportunity to harm another person, so we're left in no doubt as regards the unpleasant and painful niche of anger and how incompatible it is with the life of the compassionate Bodhisattva.

## session 6: verses 72-85

(9th june, afternoon)

Sangharakshita: All right, then, let's carry on.

Dhiraka: *[72] If a man condemned to death has his hand cut off and is spared, is it not good? If, through human sufferings one is spared from hell, is it not good?*

Sangharakshita: Yes, a reminder of the rather grim punishments in ancient India. If a man who is condemned to death, instead of being executed, he just has his hand cut off, well, he counts himself lucky. So in the same way, it's better for us that we endure a little hardship and suffering in the cause of the Dharma, or for the sake of the Dharma, rather than act unskillfully and go to hell<sup>110</sup>.

Again, a rather logical argument. Like we said, well, putting it into the words of the Dhammapada, better to endure a little suffering in a good cause than enjoyment now and punishment later. Well, in a way, this does suggest a slightly utilitarian approach to ethics. In some ways, it's better to stress the positive appeal of the good life, and basically hone on enjoying what it is. A vision of suffering that is sort of incidental.

Dhivan: I suppose if the suffering involved is simply bearing with a situation, and not responding with anger, that isn't so much utilitarian, as it were.

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<sup>110</sup> The idea of 'hell' in a Buddhist context is framed somewhat differently from the traditional Christian view. For some perspectives, [see here](#).

Sangharakshita: No. All right, let's hear the next verse.

Dhivan: ***[73] If even this small measure of suffering cannot be tolerated now, then why is anger, the cause of torment in hell, not restrained?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, rather strong words, hmm? Yes, again the argument from the possibility of future punishment, future suffering. Really not much one can add to that.

[LAUGHTER]

It's pretty direct.

Abhayanaga: Is it the traditional view that anger is the general cause for being reborn in hell?

Sangharakshita: Sorry?

Abhayanaga: Is it the traditional view that the primary cause for being reborn in hell is anger?

Sangharakshita: Well, anger and violence.

Abhayanaga: Right.

Sangharakshita: Extreme violence, yes. It would seem to be, as it were, appropriate, just as the punishment or the result of extreme greed is being reborn as a [Preta](#)<sup>111</sup>.

Abhayanaga: Ah, right, of course.

Sangharakshita: And of course, sometimes it's said, the karmic result of being aggressive and quarrelsome is being reborn as an Asura. Well, then, if there's a pretty even mix of the good and bad, the skilful and unskilful, then one is usually reborn as a human being. And of course, if one is devoted oneself to meditation and has enjoyed meditative states and the [dhyanas](#)<sup>112</sup> to a great extent throughout one's life, then one may be reborn in a heavenly realm. Of course, the Bodhisattva tries to avoid that, so it is said, because he wants to be reborn on earth among human beings. Because that's a suitable sphere for his Bodhisattva activities.

But yes, anger and violence, if carried to extremes, are likely - according to Shantideva - to cause one to end up in hell, in a painful state, a state of suffering. So, this is an additional argument for the practice of forbearance. As well as, Shantideva is producing all these

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<sup>111</sup> Often translated as 'Hungry Ghost', a class of being experiencing extreme suffering, particularly an extreme degree of hunger and thirst. As discussed in the [Tibetan Book Of The Dead](#). See [these talks](#) for details.

<sup>112</sup> Refers to various states of [samadhi](#). In this state the mind has become firm and stable and the ability to concentrate is greatly enhanced. Dhyana proper is the concentration of the mind, resulting in samadhi. The [Sutta Pitaka](#) describes four levels of dhyana, called jhana, each of increasing depth.

different arguments and persuasions in the hope that anyone reading the book will at least be convinced by one or two of them, even if they're not convinced by all of them.

Naganataka: Bhante, what do you make of the fact that Shantideva really here is sort of just taking it for granted that there's going to be suffering involved? He's not even kind of positing an alternative to suffering. He's saying, 'Well, if some kind of abuse is inflicted upon you, you're going to suffer as a result of that.' And that even practicing forbearance is going to involve an experience of suffering; there's just no way around it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well, I think he assumes two things. One, that suffering is inevitable in human life. And then he assumes that under the law of karma, if you act unskillfully in any way, the vipaka, the result of that will be that, sooner or later, you suffer for what you have done. I think these two things are axiomatic, for Shantideva, as for all traditional Buddhists.

Vidyakaya: It's hard to argue with. There's always some kind of suffering, at some point in someone's life.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Naganataka: I know in later verses he does get into the pleasure of forbearance, but it's just interesting to note right now he's saying, this is the best you can do sometimes, is forebear with an experience of suffering.

Sangharakshita: I think I did say the other day that if one practices forbearance, it's not simply that you don't get angry, but you can feel a sort of, well, pleasure and satisfaction in the fact that you haven't yielded to anger, but that you have managed somehow to practice forbearance, and you can give yourself a sort of little pat on the back, without being too egoistic about it.

Samudraghosa: There's that verse from St. Francis, I can't remember the quote, Bhante, when he's talking about what's the greatest joy in the spiritual life, and he talks about when you're lost in a wood and it's dark - I can't remember it, can you remember it?

Sangharakshita: [LAUGHTER] Oh, yes, I've quoted it somewhere, it's from a work called 'The Little Flowers of St. Francis'<sup>113</sup>. Yes, it's when, on one occasion he asked his disciples, what was the greatest pleasure that they had enjoyed, that they could think of? So they all gave their opinion with examples, and then he said, 'No, this is my idea of the greatest pleasure: that you're on foot, and you're wandering from place to place, and you get lost in a dark forest, and it's really dark, and it's raining, and you're really miserable, yes? And after several hours of walking, and you're tired, and your feet are sore, you see a light in the distance, and think, 'Ah, there's a house, yes.' So you make your way there, you knock on the door, and the door opens, and a woman says, 'What do you want, you lazy, good-for-

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<sup>113</sup> 'Fioretti di San Francesco'. This story doesn't seem to appear in 'The Little Flowers of St. Francis' quite in this way. Likely a reference to CH.VIII, 'How St. Francis Taught Brother Leo That Perfect Joy Is Only in the Cross'.



nothing monk?!' and slams the door, and he says 'Oh what bliss! Oh what happiness!' [LAUGHTER]

As if his inner happiness was so great, that it could endure, no - endure is not quite the word - that it could counteract even that sort of difficulty, that difficult situation, yes?

Naganataka: Well, there, and that's the point, isn't it? Because what's presented here is almost that you're accepting the lesser of two evils, in a way. You know, 'At least she didn't pull out a gun and shoot me.' He's not saying that. He's saying that there's the surface experience maybe of being miserable, but below that there's a deeper current of satisfaction...

Sangharakshita: And joy even, yes. Though of course Shantideva does bring in the question in earlier verses of compassion, that you can experience compassion for the people who are trying to injure you. Not merely practising forbearance, but that compassion can be joined with that. Which is an even more positive mental state, yes? But one can also say that there's a great deal in St. Francis's position, hmm? But perhaps Shantideva is arguing the case, you know, of forbearance for the benefit of people who haven't got that deep well of inner joy that St. Francis had. Because that's quite unusual.

All right, so what's next?

Amalavajra: ***[74] In this very same way, on account of anger, I have been placed in hells thousands of times, and I have benefited neither myself nor others.***

Sangharakshita: So once again hell comes into it; also the question of rebirth. Because basically the Bodhisattva wants to benefit others, so if the Bodhisattva commits unskillful actions and ends up in hell, he's not in a position to benefit anybody. So again Shantideva presupposes here rebirth, hell, and so on, (with) the Bodhisattva ideal.

Priyadaka: There's a bit of an implication here that one hasn't learned, if one keeps going back to hell.

Sangharakshita: Well, you know, people don't learn. Very often a lesson has to be repeated again and again. Which is why Shantideva is rather fond of stating his case rather strongly.

Anyway, let's move on; we may find something different.

Jayasiddhi: ***[75] But this suffering is not of that kind, and it will produce great benefit. Delight is the only appropriate response to suffering which takes away the suffering of the universe.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, so here we get a more positive touch. Delight. Let's hear that again.

***But this suffering is not of that kind, and it will produce great benefit. Delight is the only appropriate response to suffering which takes away the suffering of the universe.***

Sangharakshita: Here we get a little closer to St. Francis's attitude. If you practice forbearance as a Bodhisattva, in order to benefit others, it's a very positive thing; it's even a delightful thing.

So does he develop that idea?

Dhiraka: ***[76] If others take pleasure and joy in praising the strength of someone's virtues, why, mind, do you not similarly rejoice in praising it?***

Sangharakshita: This seems to be an objection. I think I mentioned the other day, that I've been listening to an audio book of another translation of the Bodhicaryavatara, and these objections are made in a different voice. The bulk of the text is read by a very pleasing female voice, and then a rather gruff male voice butts in with the objections from time to time, and this I think is one of those verses. The first time I heard that, it sounded just like the voice of Mara!

[LAUGHTER]

So let's hear that again.

Dhiraka: ***If others take pleasure and joy in praising the strength of someone's virtues, why, mind, do you not similarly rejoice in praising it?***

Sangharakshita: The answer seems to be expected. So let's hear that answer.

Jinapalita: ***[77] Such pleasure from your rejoicing is a blameless source of pleasure, not prohibited by the virtuous, attractive to others in the highest degree.***

Sangharakshita: It's only too often we rejoice, we find pleasure in, something which is not very skilful. But rejoicing in someone's virtue; rejoicing, for example, when they practice forbearance - this is a highly positive thing, hmm? So Shantideva is striking a slightly different note here. I suppose one can connect it with sympathetic joy, and also with singing the praises of other people - rejoicing in people's merits.

Vidyakaya: It's not often you hear about a blameless source of pleasure, is it?

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's a very significant expression! You might also say innocent pleasure. I think some years ago something struck me, it was in the course of a convention, an Order Convention. Everybody was there in the tent, and one of the speakers made a remark, and everyone laughed. I thought to myself, it was such a happy, innocent laugh. And I thought, one doesn't often hear that sort of laughter in ordinary life. But it was so happy, in a way so childlike, so innocent - without any sort of negative element in it. I was really struck by that.

So it's that sort of innocent joy that we should be able to feel, to experience.

Saddhananda: I guess it's something we do very well in the Movement, that we are, for each other, a source of pleasure and joy.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Saddhananda: I'm just thinking, on this retreat, we're reporting in to each other in the morning and in the evening, and just hearing people's stories is a delight in itself. I identify with that as a way that we sustain each other. It's very special.

Sangharakshita: Yes. There's verse in the Dhammapada which says it would be like a certain kind of *devata*<sup>114</sup> - living on joy. One could say joy is very nourishing. You feel joyful if you're uplifted; you feel well. Especially, perhaps, when you rejoice in the virtues of others.

Naganataka: Bhante, something somewhat ancillary here, but it catches my eye, I'm curious what you think about it. Much of the time Shantideva addresses himself in the first person and says 'I', and in this passage he actually addresses his mind in the second person. I just find that interesting that he moves fluidly back and forth in that way.

Sangharakshita: Well, it may be for the sake of literary variety, to avoid monotony. But of course, in a way, he's having a dialogue with himself throughout the whole text.

Saddhananda: Do you believe, Bhante, that this whole text really did come from the mouth of one man?

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<sup>114</sup> The Hindu term for 'deity'.

Sangharakshita: Well, that's a question which is addressed in the translator's introduction. It seems that there's a certain amount of interpolation when we come to Chapter 9, which is the one dealing with Wisdom. That's the general view, and I think some scholars believe that parts of Chapter 2 are not Shantideva. But on the whole, as far as they're able to make out, by far the greater part of the text is from one and the same person.

Saddhananda: I guess I just imagine, if we could be there while he was saying this, having this debate with himself, it strikes me as very dramatic, it's a verbal exploration and transformation of this man.

Sangharakshita: Yes, a sort of inner dialogue.

Saddhananda: I can almost see it in my mind, him standing there and speaking the words. Maybe late at night, after he's slept all day. I quite like that idea.

Sangharakshita: The legend which accompanies the story is very different<sup>115</sup>. He was supposed to be a monk at Nalanda and been very lazy, and just passed his time sleeping, and wasn't very highly thought of. But actually he was a secret practitioner of the Dharma, very profoundly, and one day he was challenged by the other monks. Whereupon he rose up into the air chanting the verses of the Bodhicaryavatara. And that's how it originated; that's the legend.

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<sup>115</sup> [See here](#) for a more detailed telling of the legend by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche.

But perhaps it suggests that there's something magical about the text, and the effect it has. But of course, in the English translation we miss the beauty of the **original Sanskrit**, which is said to be very melodious.

Dhivan: Do you happen to know, Bhante, if the Bodhicaryavatara belongs to a genre of Buddhist or Sanskrit literature of this kind of reflective sort, this dialogue with the self?

Sangharakshita: I don't know of any other example comparable with the Bodhicaryavatara. But I seem to remember that in the **Theragatha**<sup>116</sup>, in the Pali Canon, you do get something of that sort, in some of the individual verses. Where one exhorts oneself. Yes, I seem to remember, in one place it says, 'Thus the elder so-and-so exhorted himself'. Yes, so that no doubt represented a sort of prototype, though as far as I remember it wasn't a whole series of verses.

Yes, it's coming back to me - I think there's a series of verses by the elder Talaputa, which I think includes some verses of this kind<sup>117</sup>. He was a monk who would have been an actor. He was the one who asked the Buddha where actors went when they died, whether it was not true that they went to the heaven of the laughing gods - because they made people laugh. And the Buddha said, no, when pressed by Talaputa, that actors, when they die, go to hell. Because, being

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<sup>116</sup> The Theragatha, the eighth book of the **Khuddaka Nikaya**, consists of 264 poems in which the early monks (**bhikkhus**) recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship.

<sup>117</sup> See **Talaputa Sutta**.

overcome by greed, hatred, and delusion themselves - by their acting, they cause greed, hatred, and delusion to arise in the minds of other beings.

Of course, no doubt, the Buddha was thinking of a certain kind of actor. Of a certain kind of drama - something rather primitive and crude. One couldn't say that, I suppose, necessarily, of people taking part in the plays of **Shakespeare** or **Racine**<sup>118</sup>.

But yes, there was quite a discussion, I remember, within the Order, about whether it was a skilful thing to be an actor. And I think the general feeling was, that in as much as the actor assumed very different roles, very different parts at different times, it was very difficult for him to have an integrated personality. He would almost necessarily be a rather emotionally unstable person. But anyway, you can certainly be emotionally unstable without being an actor! [LAUGHTER]

Anyway, that's by the by. So what's next?

Saddhananda: ***[78] What if you do not like it because it is a pleasure only for him? If you were to stop giving wages and the like, both visible and unseen benefit would be lost.***

Sangharakshita: I'm not following the argument here, I'm afraid. Could you repeat it?

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<sup>118</sup> Jean Racine, a French dramatist, one of the three great playwrights of 17th-century France (along with **Molière** and **Corneille**), and an important literary figure in the Western tradition.



Saddhananda: ***What if you do not like it because it is a pleasure only for him? If you were to stop giving wages and the like, both visible and unseen benefit would be lost.***

Sangharakshita: 'What if you do not like it'? What is being referred to?

Naganataka: I think it's referring to the previous verse. 'What if you do not like the pleasure that the skilful one takes in your forbearance.' Is that the way other people are reading it?

Dhivan: Can we hear the other translation?

Abhayanaga: ***Those who are not concerned by others' happiness, and do not want them to be happy, are like someone who stops paying wages to those who work for him, who then experiences many problems.***

Naganataka: Oh, I see.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's clearer. Yes. Well, that's pretty obvious. So let's carry on.

Vidyakaya: ***[79] When your own virtues are being praised, you want others to be pleased as well. When the virtues of others are being praised, you do not even want to be pleased yourself.***

Sangharakshita: [LAUGHTER] Again, of course, he's addressing himself. This just shows how partial we can be, how one-sided.

Khemajala: So is this talking about envy and jealousy, rather than straightforward anger?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, envy and jealousy are very unskilful mental states. And also, they're very painful unskilful states. The jealous man is not a happy person. We can see that in Shakespeare's *Othello*<sup>119</sup>. People can be tormented by jealousy. You don't get any benefit, and pleasure from it at all. It's a very serious weakness, almost an illness, in some people who are jealous or envious.

Of course, the opposite is rejoicing in the merits of other people; feeling happy when they're praised.

Priyadaka: Not paying another's wages implies a rather short term view of the benefit, and I suppose forbearance implies having a longer term view of what is healthy or more skilful.

Sangharakshita: Yes. And of course forbearance itself can be pleasurable in itself if you reflect on the fact that you're behaving skilfully, and also if it's accompanied by compassion.

So what's next?

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<sup>119</sup> The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice is a tragedy by Shakespeare. The work revolves around four central characters: *Othello*, a *Moorish* general in the *Venetian* army; his new wife, *Desdemona*; his lieutenant, *Cassio*; and his trusted *ensign*, *Iago*. Its main themes are racism, love, jealousy and betrayal.

Khemajala: ***[80] After arousing the Awakening Mind, out of the desire for the happiness of every being, why are you angry at them now that they have found happiness for themselves?***

[LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes, Shantideva is thinking, what a contradiction! You as a Bodhisattva are aiming at Enlightenment so that you can benefit all living beings, and here in the world at present, if someone is praised, or if someone enjoys a certain happiness, you're upset. How contradictory.

So, Shantideva is pointing out in a specific way, how we often fail to live up to our - not only fail to live up to - our own aspirations, but how contradictory our actual behavior is to those aspirations. One would have thought that the very first thing that a would-be Bodhisattva would be happy about is to see other people happy or satisfied or successful, but no. Sometimes he isn't, even though he is supposedly dedicated to bringing happiness to all.

Well, I suppose we can apply that very easily nearer home.

Naganataka: I had an experience when I was training to go into the prison to teach meditation to the inmates there. Basically, the entire training consisted of the prison staff trying to warn us about how dangerous the inmates were, and they didn't actually train us to effectively reach them. But at a certain point, there was this old

Tibetan nun there, and at a certain point, she just kind of laughed and said, 'If they want to hurt me, let them hurt me!'

[LAUGHTER]

And the prison staff were just kind of at a loss as to how to respond to that. It wasn't their way of looking at it.

Sangharakshita: I remember my own experience of prison visiting in India. I once visited the Nagpur central jail, and I gave a talk there with the governor and the chair, and the whole prison assembled - four to five hundred prisoners. Afterward, I was given tea, and I was entrusted to the care of four 'trustees', they were called. That is, prisoners who have been in there many, many years, and who are particularly trusted by the authorities. And I learned that these four men, to whose care I was entrusted, had all committed murders. So they took me into another room and gave me tea, and I was in their care!

[LAUGHTER]

That was my only experience of prison visiting in India. But, yes, the trustees wore special caps, and they behaved with me just the way other people in India behaved with me - served me tea and so on. But at some point in their lives they had committed murder. But you wouldn't have looked at them and singled them out as murderers.

All right, what next?

Abhayanaga: ***[81] You desire Buddhahood, which is worthy of worship throughout the three worlds, expressly for living beings. Why do you burn inside on seeing them have some slight honour?***

Sangharakshita: Yes. He may be making this remark within the context of the monastic community, where sometimes, of course, jealousy does occur. And he's perhaps envisioning a situation where another monk is being greatly respected and honored by somebody, maybe by the lay people, and he feels jealous. And he says, how inconsistent, because as a Bodhisattva you're hoping that all beings will become Enlightened; all beings will become Buddhas, and of course as Buddhas they will receive immense respect. But despite that, you begrudge the little respect that is being paid to somebody here and now.

So again, a tremendous inconsistency. But I've seen this myself, in India as a monk - little jealousies between the monks. Sometimes, not always.

Amalavajra: Do you make a clear distinction, Bhante, between jealousy and envy? How would you distinguish them?

Sangharakshita: Yes, they do seem different. Jealousy is often with regard to persons, and envy is more often connected with possessions, or reputation, or position. You can envy someone who has a better car than you do, but jealousy arises when you notice that someone is taking a particular interest in your wife or your partner.

Yes, jealousy seems to pertain more to persons, and envy to possessions.

Vidyakaya: Jealousy seems to be about fear of loss, doesn't it? Fear of losing someone.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, in the case of envy, it's not just fear of loss. You begrudge someone else possessing something which you would like to possess yourself. You don't necessarily want to attack him and take it from him forcefully, but you're not happy that he has it and you don't.

I referred to Shakespeare's Othello; you wouldn't say that he was envious - he was definitely jealous. He already was in possession of Desdemona. His jealousy involved his being angry that anybody else might possibly have anything else to do with her.

So, what next, after envy and jealousy?

Samudraghosa: ***[82] The person who nourishes someone whom you should nourish is really giving to you. On finding him supporting your family, you do not rejoice; you become irate.***

Sangharakshita: Again, another example of inconsistency. The would-be Bodhisattva behaving in a very un-Bodhisattva-like way. If, in the previous verse, he had in mind a monastic situation, here he has in mind a more domestic situation.

What next then?

Naganataka: **[83] What does the person who wishes Awakening upon living beings not wish for them? How can one who is angry at the good fortune of others possess the Awakening Mind?**

Sangharakshita: Yes. The 'Awakening Mind' is this translator's version of Bodhichitta<sup>120</sup>. Yes, you can't have both.

Priyadaka: If the story is true about the other monks being rather negative towards him, maybe this ...

Sangharakshita: Being rather...?

Priyadaka: Rather critical of him - they didn't value him; they were trying to show him up.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Priyadaka: I wonder if to some degree he's talking to them, saying about their perhaps rather petty jealousies.

Sangharakshita: Maybe, yes.

Dhivan: I've lost the connection in these verses with kshanti, actually.

Sangharakshita: Sorry?

Dhivan: I've lost the connection back to kshanti in this discussion.

Sangharakshita: Yes, he has strayed rather away from that.

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<sup>120</sup> For talks on the significance of Bodhichitta and Sangharakshita's view of it, [see here](#).

Vidyakaya: He's talking about anger; why you get angry, why you become irate.

Samudraghosa: He seems to be just giving a series of reflections to help you let go of anger in -

Vidyakaya: In different situations...

Naganataka: Right, seems to be different flavours of anger; there's the immediate anger of being struck or something, and then there's this kind of burning resentment at others' good fortune.

Sangharakshita: Yes, all of which are opposed to kshanti or forbearance. Well, then what?

Priyadaka: ***[84] If he had not received that gift it would have remained in the donor's hands. In any case it is not yours, so what matters it whether it was given or not?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. This does suggest again a monastic situation, where one monk might be envious of the gifts given to another. There's been a rule, I think it is, for the monks, that you shouldn't look into the contents of another monk's bowl - his begging bowl. The inference being to see whether he has received more than you. Even within a monastic life, where in principle monks have given up so much in leading an ascetic life, there's always room for little jealousies and envies to creep in.



Dhira: Does that mean we shouldn't look at each other's dinner plates, Bhante? [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Well, I know some people who count whether certain others always call for seconds or even thirds, and take note of that.

Khemajala: There seem to be implications for ...

Sangharakshita: I remember an incident in the life of [Dr. Johnson](#)<sup>121</sup> when someone was counting how many cups of tea he drank at a time, and he was very offended, and he said, 'I do not count the number of glasses of wine that you drink; why should you try to number the cups of tea that I drink?!' He was said to drink 24 cups at a time<sup>122</sup>. [LAUGHTER]

But it's so easy to find fault.

Priyadaka: Equally, I suppose, bizarre in this case, is that I may be happy with what I've got, until I look at someone else's plate, or what they've got. And suddenly, what I was happy with, I'm no longer happy with.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I've seen this behaviour even with animals - with dogs. I've seen dogs eating at their separate plates, and one dog sees that the other dog has a bigger morsel than him; he'll leave his own plate and try to take from the other dog. We see this sort of

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<sup>121</sup> Samuel Johnson, an English writer who made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and [lexicographer](#).

<sup>122</sup> To Sir Joshua Reynolds, see '[Samuel Johnson: A Life](#)' by David Noakes.

behaviour on the human level, too. So it's not surprising that we see it on the animal level.

Naganataka: Bhante, what sort of implications do you think these verses have for us as non-monastic ordines? Because a monk who enters the monastery - the whole idea is that he sort of just accepts whatever is given to him, whereas in a way it's not so simple for us out in the world. We're actually going out and trying to earn our living.

Sangharakshita: Yes, you sometimes argue over your salary, maybe even join a union to try to pressure your employer to give you more. So it is a different sort of world, and different values. But I suppose as a Buddhist, as an Order member, one is seeking to live simply, and to demand from society only what is enough to sustain one's life in a reasonable way. And not to be greedy.

Vidyakaya: I think there's still occasions where you learn that someone you thought was poor actually turns out to have a rather substantial private income. So there's a little twinge of envy. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes, I've been having thoughts in this area recently. Because in much of the East, especially in the **Theravada**<sup>123</sup> countries, the ethics of the general spiritual practice of the laity - where there is any spiritual practice at all - usually, apart from giving dana to the monks, is a sort of watered-down version of the monastic ideal. Say, monks don't eat after 12:00, so the lay person doesn't eat after 12:00

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<sup>123</sup> The oldest surviving branch of Buddhism, derived from the Sanskrit word meaning 'the Teaching of the Elders'.

once a month. Or even twice a month. Or the monk observes celibacy, so once a month the lay person observes celibacy.

So in that way, the layman's spiritual life tends to be a watered-down version of the monastic. But it seems to me that we need somehow to formulate an ethic for the person who is living and working in the world, and who is trying to practise the Dharma as seriously as the monk practises it, despite living and working in the world. And that's the position, of course, of many Order members.<sup>124</sup> So, I think we have to try to work out a different kind of ethic, especially one connected with the whole question of **Right Livelihood**. Right Livelihood within the Movement, as team-based Right Livelihood, and Right Livelihood outside the Movement, where one is working in an ordinary job, so to speak<sup>125</sup>.

So I think that is something that we have to do, something that remains to be done for the future. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Dhivan: Have you got any ideas for what that might consist in, Bhante?

Sangharakshita: Not at the moment. But you see what I feel it shouldn't consist in - not simply a watered-down version of the monastic ideal. One needs a sort of system of ethics and spiritual life and training generally which is appropriate for the person who

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<sup>124</sup> See '**Monk or lay**' discussion on [The Buddhist Centre Online](#).

<sup>125</sup> Listen to explorations of [Right Livelihood](#).

genuinely does want to lead a fully Buddhist life, but nonetheless who has also to live and work in the midst of secular society.

Naganataka: Yes, I get that, and in a way it seems that it demands far more creativity. Because it's not such neat, clean parameters.

Sangharakshita: Yes, and imagination.

Vidyakaya: Do you think you need more than **the ten precepts**?<sup>126</sup> If you're actually trying to really practice the ten precepts in a situation which is extreme?

Sangharakshita: Well, one needs the ten precepts, but one may have to give, well, will have to give very careful consideration to how one is going to practice them, in that kind of situation.

Amalavajra: I'm quite struck by you saying that - you think that really needs some work, obviously - because there has been quite a bit of work on that in the various team-based right livelihoods...

Sangharakshita: Yes...

Amalavajra: ...in the Movement, but it's your feeling that needs more work, more development, as a model.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Because the team-based right livelihoods are just within the Movement, so what about the situation of the person, the Order member especially, who tries to lead a fully Buddhist life, but

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<sup>126</sup> Ten ethical principles which provide a comprehensive guide to the moral dimension of human life. Central to the practice of ethics in the Triratna Buddhist Order.

who is living and working outside the organizations of the Movement?  
Who's faced by very definite challenges.

Naganataka: I suppose the inspiration I take there is that even as an Order member working outside the institutions of the Movement, I can bring these principles to bear on my work, and in doing so try to be an exemplar to people around me who don't necessarily share my Buddhist values.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Naganataka: And there's great challenge there, but there's great opportunity, I think.

Sangharakshita: Well, someone came to see me some time ago, who had been a policeman in Britain. And who'd been in the force for a number of years, in one particular unit. But there were other members of that unit who were doing things that were unethical. And he wouldn't join in, as it were. He didn't give me the details, but the fact that he wouldn't join in made him so unpopular that in the end he was forced to resign. So sometimes one has to pay that sort of price.

And hopefully one can exert some sort of influence on one's surroundings and on one's colleagues in that sort of situation.

Vidyakaya: This is where the support of a chapter is even more important, isn't it?

Sangharakshita: Yes. To give one moral support.

Abhayanaga: I've heard people use this term 'urban yogi'. I don't know if you've ever heard it: the idea of a yogi as someone who's mind is either being trained, or is so well trained, that it's an open expanse regardless of what comes in or what's going on. Can you imagine someone developing that in the urban situation?

Sangharakshita: Well, I don't know if you've heard of the 'Urban Retreat'<sup>127</sup>?

Abhayanaga: I have, yeah.

Sangharakshita: I know Saraha has organized a couple of urban retreats in Birmingham.

Dhira: We've done some in Croydon that have worked very well.

Sangharakshita: Where people, a group of people say, agree to meditate at the same time each day during that week.

Dhira: Yeah.

Sangharakshita: And report in to the leader, so to speak, every day.

Dhira: I think they met one Saturday to decide what they were going to do for the week, and then met the following Saturday to see how they got on.

Sangharakshita: Ah, yes.

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<sup>127</sup> A biennial retreat undertaken by the Triratna Buddhist Community online and at Buddhist Centres around the world. The idea is that instead of going away for retreat one stays at home and brings Buddhist practice more deeply into one's daily life.

Dhira: But everyone spoke very well of it. They were very inspired by it.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's what I heard regarding the urban retreats in Birmingham. People in fact said that they got more out them than they thought they would.

Dhira: I think perhaps we don't have enough faith in the effect we have on other non-Buddhists. Because I've always worked outside Buddhist organisations, and people have said to me, in different organisations, that they've sort of noticed something different about me. One organisation, when I left, when I was moving on, one chap said, 'Oh, no. You're the only sane person here!' [LAUGHTER]

Behind that sort of joke, I knew what he meant, because I knew him very well. He meant, well, 'You say things that help us, and now you're going'. So I realised then what I hadn't realised - that I was having, perhaps unintentionally, an effect.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Dhira: And then I felt more confident about working outside team-based right livelihood, because I felt I could do something. I actually had faith that I could do something.

Sangharakshita: Well, there's a lot more we could do. As I said, perhaps we need to work out a whole system of ethics for the Order member living and working in the world, taking into account all the sort of situations that he or she is likely to encounter.

Naganataka: Bhante, I had a specific question about that, which has very much been on my mind lately, which is that working in business outside the Order, I find that I'm frequently working with people who don't share my system of ethics, of course, but who are very often just trying to take advantage of you in the world of business. And I struggle with trying to strike a balance between culpability and suspicion. Because within the Order I'm used to being around people who are very ethical, and so I can be very trusting of them. I want to have that same kind of trusting attitude out in the world of business, but I don't want to be taken advantage of. But I don't want my mind to be given over to suspicion, either, because then I've lost my values.

Sangharakshita: Yes. One has to be aware and alert without being suspicious.

All right, let's...

Dharmamodana: ***[85] What! Have him suppress acts of merit, and those who are faithful, and even his own virtues? Let him not accept when he is being given donations? Tell, with what are you not angry?***

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Dharmamodana: ***What! Have him suppress acts of merit, and those who are faithful, and even his own virtues? Let him not accept when he is being given donations? Tell, with what are you not angry?***



Sangharakshita: Yes, 'Tell, with what are you not angry?' An angry person can be angry with anything. He's not very particular, provided there's something onto which he can latch his anger. He's, well, not exactly happy, but that's how he likes it.

Amalavajra: The sort of absurdity of it.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes, again Shantideva is pointing out inconsistency.

Well, I think that's it for the moment, unless anyone's got any particular question or point with regard to inconsistency? [LAUGHTER]

Shantideva does seem to have brought it well in, hmm?

[Chorus of thank yous]

## session 7: verses 86-98

(10th june, morning)

Sangharakshita: So, if we're complete, let's start. Begin where we left off.

Amalavajra: ***[86] Not only do you not grieve at the evil you yourself have done, you seek to compete with others who have performed acts of merit.***

Sangharakshita: Mmm... Well, another paradoxical situation. Presumably Shantideva is still addressing himself. He's saying if you don't grieve over the unskilful actions that you yourself have performed, which is what you should be doing, instead you try to compete with others in virtue. This raises a profound question of competition, especially competition in spiritual life and the extent to which it can be a positive thing. People probably are competitive by nature. It's very difficult to avoid. But I think the important thing is one should think of competitiveness as a means of approaching oneself to do the best that you can; not so much as concern with defeating the other person. I think that's probably the right or the more positive action towards competitiveness.

Dhiraka: I read one of your aphorisms that says 'true competition is a form of collaboration', or something like that.

Sangharakshita: Yes - that sounds a bit like me! [LAUGHTER] Yes, the right sort of competition, one could say, is a form of collaboration. I

think you get that in the [Karuna appeal](#)<sup>128</sup>, don't you, where different people go off door-knocking. There is a sort of competitiveness as to who can do best - who can raise the biggest amount of money. You're not trying to do anybody down. You're just using the competitive element as a means of urging yourself to do as well as you possibly can. So I could say that sort of competitiveness is relatively healthy. But when you want to win at all costs, as in some sports, even to the extent of taking drugs that you're not supposed to take, well that is extremely unhealthy, and unethical in fact.

*Vidyakaya*: According to a report by Manjuvajra a few months ago - he was talking about his own competitiveness and he said you'd once said this [competitiveness] was the biggest problem for men. Do you still think that?

*Sangharakshita*: Well, yes. Men are competitive. I wouldn't say women are not competitive. Perhaps they compete in other ways. Perhaps in more subtle ways, or in different areas. But men certainly are competitive - there's no doubt about that.

*Vidyakaya*: Do you think it's healthier to be upfront? I know when I did the [Karuna appeal](#) I was appalled to realise there was going to be a chart of exactly how much we had taken and what order we were in every night.

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<sup>128</sup> A regular intensive fundraising event by the [Karuna Trust](#), a Triratna UK-based charity striving to help oppressed people to develop the skills, dignity and confidence to transform their lives and take their rightful place in society.

Sangharakshita: I think that's a quite healthy form of competitiveness and it is in a good cause!

Dhivan: Can there be excellence without competition?

Sangharakshita: I think there can be, but competition is certainly a means of achieving excellence for both or all the competing parties, not just for the one who, so to speak, wins. The others have benefited because, although they may not have won, they've done their best. They've done their very best and that is what is really required; that everybody should do their best. The fact that someone does better than anybody else in a way is incidental. So if you do win you shouldn't crow too much. You've just done your best [and] others have also done their best. In that respect you're all equal, but your best happens to be better than their best. So I don't think healthy competitiveness needs to be discouraged.

Priyadaka: I suppose one might define healthy competitiveness as competitiveness subservient to mindfulness and compassion - competitiveness to support mindfulness and compassion, as with Karuna.

Sangharakshita: Yes, because clearly in the case of a Karuna appeal a great deal of mindfulness is required and one is motivated to a great extent by compassion, because if one wants to help the various good causes that Karuna supports.

All right then, let's go on.

Khemajala: ***[87] Suppose something unpleasant does befall your rival. Would your satisfaction make it happen again? It would not happen without a cause, merely by your wishing it.***

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Khemajala: ***Suppose something unpleasant does befall your rival. Would your satisfaction make it happen again? It would not happen without a cause, merely by your wishing it.***

Sangharakshita: I'm not sure what Shantideva is really getting at here. But it's pretty clear; take the example of a sport. If you're competing against somebody else and they happen to trip and fall over, that may give you a certain amount of satisfaction because it enables you to be more certain of winning. But the fact that you might wish for that sort of happening or accident to happen again, doesn't happen merely because of your wishing. It would, if it happens at all, it would be as the result of a certain sequence of causes and conditions.

Jayasiddhi: ***[88] If your wish was fulfilled, what pleasure would there be for you in his suffering? But even were there some advantage in this, what disadvantage would ensue?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, after all, you are supposed to be a Bodhisattva, or would-be Bodhisattva as Shantideva would say. So even if your wish of that kind was fulfilled, what good would it do you?

Khemajala: It reminds me of the story of [Milarepa](#)<sup>129</sup>. I can't remember the exact story but he believed that a whole bunch of people had died because of black magic which he was responsible for. I suppose that feeling, well the classic cliché is of having an argument and then the other person dies and you feel really bad because of how things have been left.

Sangharakshita: Well the story does represent Milarepa as actually practising black magic and representing that magic as actually bringing about the death of a number of people, and when he realises that, well, Milarepa feels great remorse and feels he's such a terrible sinner that unless he gains Enlightenment in this life, when he dies he's going to go straight to hell. That's the background of this story. But later on, doesn't he have a competition in magic with a Bon priest<sup>130</sup>? I can't remember the actual story. Milarepa, of course, wins!

[LAUGHTER]

Oh well, let's go on.

Dhivan: ***[89] For this is the horrific hook cast by the anglers, the defilements, from whom you will be bought by the warders of hell and stewed in cauldrons.***

[LAUGHTER]

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<sup>129</sup> Jetsun Milarepa (11th/12th C.), one of Tibet's most famous and revered [yogis](#) and poets. [Listen to talks](#) on the life and teaching of Milarepa.

<sup>130</sup> Probably [this contest](#) between Milarepa and Naro Bhun Chon.

Sangharakshita: Rather a dreadful fate! So what is that hook? What is the verse referring to?

Vidyakaya: It seems to be taking pleasure in beating your rivals.

Sangharakshita: Taking pleasure in your rivals defeat. Not just the defeat but the fact that some accident befalls him that prevents him from winning the competition, whatever it happens to be. Basically, if you're a real sportsman you'll regret the fact that your opponent has an accident because that will not enable him to genuinely compete, and if he can't genuinely compete then neither can you because you're rivals. It would be a very empty victory if you won just because he'd had an accident and could not do his best. It would be a hollow victory.

Jayarava: Perhaps the situation's more likely to arise when you know you can't beat your opponent. When you know you're up against someone who's definitely superior.

Sangharakshita: But then you don't know really. Presumably when you start the competition you think you've some chance of success, because sometimes the most unlikely person does win, and the most unlikely horse sometimes.

Jayagupta: I suppose it's the opposite of mudita?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Unfortunately some people do feel a sort of quiet satisfaction when things go wrong for some other person.

Amalavajra: Is that **schadenfreude**<sup>131</sup>? Is that the same thing?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Vidyakaya: I like this image that you're just a sort of helpless fish that's actually bought and sold and stewed.

Samudraghosa: It's thrashing around on the hook but unable to get off.

Sangharakshita: The **defilements**<sup>132</sup> are like a hook. Once they get stuck in one's gullet they're very difficult to remove, and you can be hauled in by Mara, not to speak of being boiled alive in hell like a fish. But this whole area of competitiveness is very interesting. Because it obviously comes up in connection with business and the question arises of what is fair competition, what is unfair competition? It's a very big business question. If a Buddhist is involved in any kind of business this ethical issue obviously arises.

Jayarava: This comes up at Windhorse quite often because we have shops that we sell wholesale to that we compete with directly through our own outlets - the Evolution shops - and it causes friction with some of the wholesale customers sometimes.

Sangharakshita: I suppose it depends on how you compete because there's always competition of some kind. It can't be ruled out of

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<sup>131</sup> Pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others.

<sup>132</sup> The '**kleshas**', 'mental states that cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions'.



business. I suppose it's sometimes a matter of opinion whether a particular kind of competition is fair or unfair. There's quite a bit of discussion about unfair competition on the part of big retailers. But then there's the opposite of this - there is collusion and the formation of cartels and so on. Anyway, some of you know more about that than I do.

Dhira: When I worked in international reinsurance years ago there was a kind of agreement when we were buying and selling that people wouldn't always tell you the whole story. But there was an understanding by the buyer that he wouldn't be being told the whole story. So there was a sort of agreement between us all that we were all acting slightly dishonestly. Because we all knew it, that kind of made it all right in our eyes. And if somebody was out of line, and was particularly dishonest, that was considered to be not all right.

Sangharakshita: So if you had all been honest and one wasn't honest, he would have an unfair advantage because he was being unethical. So if no-one is to have an unfair advantage you all have to be unethical.

Dhira: And that's the way we thought it was fine.

Saddhananda: ***[90] Praise, good repute, and honour lead neither to merit nor long life, are no advantage to strength or to freedom from disease, nor do they bring me physical pleasure.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, 'praise, honour and' what is it? 'Good repute.' Shantideva's making the point that in a way they're just words. They don't constitute by themselves any merit of one's own. The fact that you are praised and held in high repute doesn't mean that you're any further advanced on the Path to Enlightenment. And at the same time, people are so influenced by praise and rewards and decorations. I remember there's an incident in the life of Napoleon<sup>133</sup> when he was distributing all sorts of war awards and honours when he'd made himself Emperor. Someone said to him, 'Why do that? These things are just baubles - just toys'<sup>134</sup>. So Napoleon smiled and said 'Ah, but men are governed by baubles!' [LAUGHTER] So in Britain recently we had 'cash for honours'<sup>135</sup> - some people apparently are so keen on getting themselves an honour that they're prepared to fork out substantial sums of cash. So clearly it must mean something to them.

Jayarava: There's no honour in buying an honour, is there?

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<sup>133</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte (18th/19th C), regarded as one of the greatest French military and political leaders in history.

<sup>134</sup> The full attributed quote is: 'On appelle cela des hochets; eh bien! c'est avec des hochets que l'on mène les hommes... Croyez-vous que vous feriez battre des hommes par l'analyse ? Jamais. Elle n'est bonne que pour le savant dans son cabinet. Il faut au soldat de la gloire, des distinctions, des récompenses.' 'You call these baubles, well, it is with baubles that men are led... Do you think that you would be able to make men fight by reasoning? Never. That is only good for the scholar in his study. The soldier needs glory, distinctions, and rewards.' As quoted in Mémoires sur le Consulat. 1799 à 1804 (1827) by Antoine-Claire, Comte Thibaudeau. Chez Ponthieu, pp. 83-84.

<sup>135</sup> A political scandal in the UK in 2006-7 concerning the connection between political donations and the award of life peerages.

Sangharakshita: Well, as Tennyson said, 'His honour rooted in dishonour stood'<sup>136</sup>, referring to a different kind of situation. 'His honour rooted in dishonour stood.'

Dhivan: Makes me think, on the lower level of culture, modern TV celebrity culture, people really seek celebrity but from a certain point of view it doesn't mean anything.

Sangharakshita: Someone who's famous for being famous. I listen to the radio a bit nowadays, now that I can't read and I'm constantly hearing different people being introduced as 'the legendary so-and-so' or 'the celebrated so-and-so' and I've never heard of these people! [LAUGHTER] Yes, this is the first time I've heard of them. And there's not just a few of these people, there seems to be dozens of them. World famous, allegedly, in one way or the other.

Saddhananda: It takes a lot less time to become a legend these days!

Sangharakshita: You could say that's a cynical remark but no doubt it's very true. Well we talk about 'instant celebrity' - somebody having their five minutes of fame<sup>137</sup>.

Naganataka: So Bhante, do you think Shantideva's going so far as advocating practising forbearance towards praise?

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<sup>136</sup> From 'Lancelot and Elaine' by Alfred Lord Tennyson, from 'Idylls of the King' [1859-1885].

<sup>137</sup> Probably referring to 'fifteen minutes of fame', an expression credited to Andy Warhol: 'In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes' (program for 1968 exhibition of his work at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden).

Sangharakshita: Maybe forbearance is not quite the right word here, but certainly one should try to practise equanimity in the face of praise. And of course there are the eight worldly winds and two of those relate to praise and blame. One should do one's best to maintain one's equanimity in the face of praise and blame. And I think anyone in the course of their lives is going to encounter a certain amount of praise and a certain amount of blame. I've certainly encountered in the course of my life quite a lot of praise and quite a lot of blame also, in one way or another. So I've always said to myself if someone praises me, 'Well sooner or later I'm going to be blamed by somebody'. [LAUGHTER] And if I was blamed by somebody, I'd say to myself, 'Never mind, somebody's sure to praise me before long!' [MORE LAUGHTER] So one tries to maintain an even mind. If one day you get a bouquet, the next day you get a brickbat. That's how life is. So one has to try to maintain equanimity, and not be disturbed, not be elated by praise, and not be downcast by blame.

Naganataka: So my question would be, is that state of equanimity - the one who's responding to praise with - is that fundamentally similar to the state one should be responding to criticism from or anger?

Sangharakshita: If one is responding to criticism - as the Buddha said of criticism to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - one should just ask oneself, 'Is the criticism justified?'<sup>138</sup> That means you adopt a calm, objective sort of attitude. You don't just react negatively because

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<sup>138</sup> In the [Brahmajala Sutta](#). For details, see '[Responding to Praise and Blame](#)' by Vishvapani.

you're being criticised. Maybe there's something in the criticism. Maybe it should be taken seriously. If there's nothing in it, all right you can afford to shrug your shoulders and forget about it

Priyadaka: What about looking at praise in terms of praise from those you consider wise and taking encouragement from that?

Sangharakshita: Well, of course, in a way the temptation could be seen as more subtle because you think 'Oh well, they're wise; they're praising me; they must be right.' So the fact you're being praised by the wise shouldn't make you any less vigilant. Some people's praise, of course, is, so to speak, not worth having and especially if one is praised for the wrong thing, one can even feel a little annoyed. Especially when you pride yourself on some other quality, but that's ignored and you're praised for something that you don't attach any value to.

Naganataka: In my experience I will often modify my behaviour to bring out the qualities that I'm praised for even if I don't really value them.

Sangharakshita: Encouragement is certainly a very positive thing. But I suppose one has to be careful in giving encouragement. Careful in giving it in such a way that it causes the person to whom you're giving the encouragement to think more highly of himself than he really should be thinking.

Jayarava: That raises the question of what we're doing when we rejoice in people's merits<sup>139</sup> which is still quite a common practice and in a way we need to be careful that we're accurate.

Sangharakshita: Yes, praising positive qualities that they genuinely possess. And praise them sincerely. Also not thinking, 'Ah well, so-and-so is leaving so we've all got to sing his praises' and just rejoicing in his merits in rather a stereotypic sort of way. That's not right, clearly. One should be able to do it really genuinely and in a heart-felt manner. Yes, as you say, we do regularly rejoice in people's merits on certain occasions and I think we have to be careful it doesn't just become a habit or a routine - that this is expected so we do it. Perhaps without our heart really being in it.

Saddhananda: I kind of have a view that the world needs indiscriminate encouragement to make it go round. [LAUGHTER] I think this is something I practice a lot and I don't know, considering what we're talking about, whether it's an appropriate thing. But my experience of a lot of people - or some people - is they're starting from a bit of a minus. Maybe they're not self-confident.

Sangharakshita: Well how does one help someone to become more confident? One has to be realistic because sometimes their lack of confidence in some respects may be justified. You don't want them to develop an unreal self-confidence but rather a genuine self-confidence. So you should encourage people to do those positive

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<sup>139</sup> A common practice within the Triratna Buddhist Community.

things that they really can do but which they don't have quite enough confidence that they can do at the moment. But the real Bodhisattva doesn't need any encouragement to be a Bodhisattva. Or to take another example, [Aloka](#)<sup>140</sup> doesn't need any encouragement to be an artist. You couldn't stop him!

Jayarava: Would you make a distinction between encouragement and praise?

Sangharakshita: Well, praise is with regard to something past or present. But encouragement is more to do with the future.

All right, let's pass on then.

Jayarava: ***[91] And this is the kind of thing that would benefit the wise person who knows what is best for himself. One desiring pleasure for the mind could resort to drunkenness, gambling, and the other vices.***

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Jayarava: ***And this is the kind of thing that would benefit the wise person who knows what is best for himself. One desiring pleasure for the mind could resort to drunkenness, gambling, and the other vices.***

Sangharakshita: I'm afraid I missed the connection here.

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<sup>140</sup> A prominent artist in the Triratna Buddhist Order. For recent large-scale Buddhist works, see [this book](#).

Jayarava: Maybe if I read the two together, because I think they run together:

***[90] Praise, good repute, and honour lead neither to merit nor long life, are no advantage to strength or to freedom from disease, nor do they bring me physical pleasure. [91] And this is the kind of thing that would benefit the wise person who knows what is best for himself. One desiring pleasure for the mind could resort to drunkenness, gambling, and the other vices.***

Dhivan: Does that mean 'this' refers to long life, strength and freedom from disease?

Naganataka: I would say it's the knowledge - the knowledge that praise and so forth don't lead to pleasure.

Amalavajra: Or it could be kshanti.

Dhivan: Well, kshanti's not mentioned.

Samudraghosa: Does the other version help?

Abhayanaga: I'll read that one. This is the second verse. ***Transient pleasures, such as drinking and playing meaningless games are deceptive. If I understand the real meaning of the human life, such things will have no value for me.***

Sangharakshita: That's clearer. And, of course, rather obvious in a way. Drunkenness, gambling ...and what else?



Abhayanaga: Meaningless games, playing meaningless games...

Jayasiddhi: I wonder if he's hinting about the intoxication of people's craziness, and getting caught up in it?

Jayarava: Then there's a note. In the middle of it he says 'the contrast drawn in this verse is between those things which are of real benefit and those which merely give pleasure. The social stigma of drinking and gambling is high.'

Sangharakshita: Well certainly that was the case in the old India. Drinking alcohol, I remember when I was in India, was regarded as the practice or habit of only low-caste, really uncultured people. Respectable people never drank. And gambling was not really known. Certainly I never heard much about gambling. Some of you may have heard of the [Mahabharata](#), the great Indian epic. Well that represents the disasters that led to the great war in the Mahabharata as starting from a game of dice<sup>141</sup>. And maybe India has learnt her lesson since then. Drunkenness and gambling - even now in Westernised circles, it's still regarded as socially rather disgraceful.

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<sup>141</sup> [From Wikipedia](#): Shakuni, Duryodhana's uncle, arranges a dice game, playing against Yudhishtira with loaded dice. Yudhishtira loses all his wealth, then his kingdom. He then even gambles his brothers, himself, and finally his wife into servitude. The jubilant Kauravas insult the Pandavas in their helpless state and even try to disrobe Draupadi in front of the entire court, but her honour is saved by Krishna who miraculously creates lengths of cloth to replace the ones being removed. [Watch this scene](#) in Peter Brook's [filmed stage production](#) of 'Mahabharata'.

Jayarava: In the Pali Canon drunkenness is quite often associated with madness - an equivalent to madness<sup>142</sup>. And gambling: people who are represented as gamblers are represented as the lowest of the low.

Sangharakshita: Well, I had quite a surprise when I was travelling in the States some years ago with Manjuvajra and Paramartha. One thing was Manjuvajra knew the States quite well and he was very keen that when we happened to pass through Las Vegas we should visit a casino. So he took us to, I think it was called, the **Luxor Casino**, which was in the form of an enormous pyramid with a great big sphinx at the entrance. We went in and I noted there was an escalator going up into the entrails of the pyramid, but there was no escalator coming down. [LAUGHTER] When we got inside Manjuvajra pointed out that there were no exit signs. It was very difficult to find the exit.

And then I studied the gamblers. And of course my own impression of gambling had been just from my reading. I thought of gambling as something very sophisticated, indulged in by elegant, well-bred, educated people at **Monte Carlo**. But no, there were these banks upon banks of gambling machines of some kind, and hundreds upon hundreds, there may have been several thousand, people in that casino. But they all looked poor rather than well-to-do. Definitely not well-to-do people. And I was really surprised too that a large majority, perhaps two-thirds of them, were women. I hadn't expected that. So gambling in that sort of context didn't seem in the least romantic or

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<sup>142</sup> See '**Sammaparibbajaniya Sutta**' from **The Sutta Nipata**.

sophisticated. It just seemed very dull and sordid. And clearly it was poorer people who were hoping to have a win and get some extra money that were gambling. Not rich people.

Naganataka: People of great emotional poverty too. I was just in Las Vegas and it struck me the same thing - the dullness in people's eyes; the sense of desperation.

Sangharakshita: Well, eventually we did find an exit - and that was my experience of a casino. Quite enough for one lifetime!

Priyadaka: You didn't lose your shirt. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Well, we parted with the price of a very expensive cup of coffee!

Jayarava: You didn't have a flutter?

Sangharakshita: No. I wasn't even tempted, I can honestly say. No, 'flutter' is not quite the right word, anyway, I think. Something much more dull and lethargic. But anyway, that's an unpleasant subject so let's pass on. We have been warned.

And of course, yes, drunkenness is mentioned and I'm sure you all know binge drinking has become a problem in this country, most unfortunately. And no-one seems to know what to do about it. It seems to be engaged in by young people, and more and more young women. One wonders what sort of lives they lead, that regular binge drinking is a part.

Priyadaka: There's a level of hypocrisy of course, in that the government makes a great deal of money from drinking and gambling.

Sangharakshita: Yes, of course.

Vidyakaya: Yes, they should just ban it altogether...

Sangharakshita: Anyway, we will pass on.

Jayasiddhi: **[92] *For the benefit of renown they deprive themselves of benefit. They even kill themselves. Are words fit for food? In death who feels their pleasure?***

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Jayasiddhi: ***For the benefit of renown they deprive themselves of benefit. They even kill themselves. Are words fit for food? In death who feels their pleasure?***

Sangharakshita: Some people are crazy to become famous. Perhaps this has a more positive side. There are those lines in Milton. 'Fame is the spur that the clear mind doth raise - that last infirmity of noble mind.'<sup>143</sup> But in modern times and the television age it's become rather ignoble rather than noble. Sometimes people will even commit a crime so that their name and their photo will be in the papers. It is said, in the case of some criminals, after they've been arrested, the first thing they ask for is the newspapers to see if their picture's there.

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<sup>143</sup> From 'Lycidas' by John Milton. The full quote is: 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise / (That last infirmity of noble mind) / To scorn delights, and live laborious days.'

So there is this desire; this craving for renown, for fame, for celebrity. And people will go to great lengths to become famous, to become a celebrity. They may even kill.

Jayarava: It seems like the intensity of the activity around the notion of celebrity is ever increasing.

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's as though there is a world of celebrities. Celebrities live in their own world. Sometimes they marry one another; sometimes with disastrous results.

Vidyakaya: There's a whole industry. The number of magazines with people with no idea who they are or what they did.

Dhira: Presumably the motivation behind it is they want to be special. They can't bear to be ordinary and have the wrong view that being ordinary is somehow unacceptable.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, of course in a way everybody is special, but being special in that kind of way is not the kind of special those people want. But if you're just an ordinary person who happens to become famous, well it says nothing about you as a person at all. It's not that one is necessarily famous, although in some cases one is, by some special quality or achievement. But it's a question of just being well known; just being celebrated.

Vidyakaya: It's interesting that most of the people who get really well known are actors and film stars who are well known for pretending to be someone else. [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: The Buddha said that actors go to hell! [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: I was moved earlier this year when [Edmund Hillary](#)<sup>144</sup> died and he was a quite a huge figure physically and symbolically in New Zealand. And I was trying to think of anyone I knew outside the Sangha who was a great man and I didn't come up with anyone. He was genuinely a great man - kind and compassionate. Big hearted.

Sangharakshita: Yes, and he did what he could for the [Sherpas](#), didn't he.

Amalavajra: And he was a [patron of the Karuna Trust](#).

Jayarava: He was very humble. So it's getting quite hard to find men...

Sangharakshita: He must have had some awareness of Buddhism, Sherpas being Buddhist. [Tenzing Norgay](#), his companion came to see me once when I was in Kalimpong. He was a very modest man. Didn't seem like other Sherpas at all, strange to say. I knew many Sherpas and for a while I had a Sherpa cook. He seemed very different.

Jayarava: In what way?

Sangharakshita: He was very quiet, quite modest. He came to see me when I was living at Craigside, I remember<sup>145</sup>. And as I mentioned,

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<sup>144</sup> New Zealand mountaineer, explorer and philanthropist. On May 29th, 1953, Hillary and Nepalese Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay became the [first climbers](#) confirmed as having reached the summit of [Mount Everest](#).

<sup>145</sup> This may be misremembered: [see P.185 of 'In the Sign of the Golden Wheel'](#).

Hilary must have had some knowledge of Buddhism because in the '70s when I was visiting New Zealand and was in Christchurch, his wife was attending our classes, and his son did for a while. I talked with her several times. As far as I know he never attended, but she certainly did<sup>146</sup>.

Amalavajra: You don't remember her name do you?

Sangharakshita: I don't. Her son's name was, I think, John<sup>147</sup>.

Amalavajra: I've been meaning to write to his family.

Jayarava: His wife from the seventies died, though. I think he remarried<sup>148</sup>.

Sangharakshita: I don't know if she's alive or not. This, as I said, was back in the early '70s.

Amalavajra: I could write to his son ...

Sangharakshita: But yes, no doubt he was a good man and no doubt it was a genuine achievement, but personally I've not ever been at all happy with the idea of conquering Everest or conquering mountains. I think of it as being a very vainglorious sort of activity. And now of course dozens, perhaps hundreds of people have got to the top of

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<sup>146</sup> For talks given by Sangharakshita in New Zealand in 1975 and 1979 respectively, see ['Human Enlightenment'](#) and ['A New Buddhist Movement - the Meaning of the FWBO'](#).

<sup>147</sup> Refers to [Peter Hillary](#), only son of Edmund Hillary.

<sup>148</sup> See [this excerpt](#) from the personal history of Edmund Hillary.

Everest. Little old ladies in wheelchairs seem to be getting there!  
[LAUGHTER]

Vidyakaya: It's an absurd idea to say you've conquered it because a tiny little person has stood at the top of it.

Jayarava: When I was reading Hillary's memoirs, what he conquers is his own limitations and it's quite inspiring from that point of view.

Sangharakshita: I think that we should not use the language of conquest of nature. It seems to belong more to the **Victorian period**, when success went to the head of many scientists: the conquest of nature. In recent years - in recent months - we've learnt that nature's not so easily conquered. She comes back with tsunamis and earthquakes<sup>149</sup> and unpleasant things like that. Puts us in our place.

All right, let's go on.

Dhira: **[93] Like a child that howls a wail of distress when his sandcastle is broken, so my own mind appears to me at the loss of praise or renown.**

Sangharakshita: Hmm. I suppose you lead a rather sad life when you've been famous, been a celebrity for a while, and then it all collapses and no-one knows you any more. So, yes, Shantideva gives a very apt comparison of a child whose sandcastle has been broken - maybe washed away by the waves. So the ex-celebrity. Well

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<sup>149</sup> Sangharakshita may be referring to the **2007 Solomon Islands earthquake**.



sometimes they are in a very sad state. Recently I heard something about **George Best**<sup>150</sup> - maybe that was before your time?

Jayarava: ? Not everybody!

Sangharakshita: He retired at the age of 25, after being I think - of course, I know nothing about football - England's most famous footballer<sup>151</sup>. He became an alcoholic and the closing years of his life were very sad indeed, though just for a few years he'd been very famous indeed.

Jayasiddhi: There was another footballer - what was his name?

Chorus: **Paul Gascoigne!**<sup>152</sup>

Jayarava: **Gazza!**

Jayasiddhi: Another recent example of the same...

Sangharakshita: You obviously know about such things. [LAUGHTER]

Vidyakaya: It's almost that it's part of the celebrity circus to watch people decline as well. The press love all that. The public do as well.

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<sup>150</sup> Celebrated footballer of the late 1960s and '70s who played for **Manchester United** in England.

<sup>151</sup> This refers to Best unexpectedly quitting his club Manchester United relatively early in 1974 at age 27, though he returned to football for a number of clubs around the world in short spells, until finally retiring in 1983, age 37.

<sup>152</sup> Another mercurially talented footballer who also suffered from alcoholism and mental health problems.

Naganataka: I've seen much more mundane examples of that sort of thing happening to people I know - it's not just a loss of the fame; it's the loss of the activity by which they define themselves. They no longer have a sense of self. I've seen this just with people who've had to quit doing hobbies of theirs, that they define themselves by.

Sangharakshita: Of course in the case of famous footballers it's the loss of income also. Yes, the model is when one does achieve a level of renown or celebrity or praise, do not be too upset when it comes to an end, as one day it will. The opposite story - this is more the case with literary people and artists - is that they're not recognised for the greater part of their lives, and in the case of some of them fame and fortune come right at the end of their lives, when perhaps they're too old or too tired to enjoy it - that's also sad.

Jayarava: What do you make of the emergence of celebrity Buddhists? You know: people that are either famous for being Buddhists or teachers.

Sangharakshita: I don't think we have any in this country, but you certainly have in America. I suppose you mean someone like [Richard Gere](#)<sup>153</sup>? I think it's rather an unfortunate development. I can't think of any others, apart from Richard Gere.

Naganataka: There's [Steven Seagal](#), the action movie actor, [recognised as a tulku](#), apparently.

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<sup>153</sup> American actor and prominent Buddhist, associated mainly with the [Gelugpa](#) school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Sangharakshita: Another person I haven't heard of!

Naganataka: That's ok.

Sangharakshita: A measure of his fame, I suppose<sup>154</sup>.

Jayarava: Some Buddhist teachers, especially Tibetan teachers, get a certain amount of celebrity status.

Sangharakshita: The only one who is really famous is the Dalai Lama. Others may be famous within the field of Buddhism or to Buddhists, but they're not household names. I think only the Dalai Lama comes into that category. I did read somewhere that once the Dalai Lama was taking part in an inter-faith convention in the United States and I think it must have been a politician who was in the chair and he introduced the Dalai Lama as a leading Muslim teacher<sup>155</sup>!

[LAUGHTER] Anyway, that's by-the-way, let's carry on.

Vidyakaya: ***[94] Because it lacks consciousness, I must admit that a word cannot praise me. Undoubtedly, the cause of my delight is that another is delighted with me.***

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<sup>154</sup> To be clear, [Penor Rinpoche](#), the head of the [Nyingma](#) school, who recognized Seagal as the reincarnation of a 17th-century [tertön](#) from eastern Tibet, [Chungdrag Dorje](#), noted (in the statement linked to above) that 'such recognition does not mean that one is already a realized teacher'.

<sup>155</sup> This was during the Dalai Lama's tour of the USA in 2000. The mistake was made by [CNN](#) news broadcaster [Larry King](#), see New York Times article, '[Dalai Lama Lite](#)'.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. It's very pleasant when people are delighted with us. It's something we have to be careful about. And similarly, when they show their displeasure, that also we have to be careful about. But probably praise is much more seductive. I think we're likely to be much more on our guard against being too depressed when we're blamed than we are being on our guard when we are praised and when we feel that perhaps we deserve the praise - that is much more seductive.

But obviously this is a very basic Buddhist teaching. I mentioned a little while ago [the worldly winds](#)<sup>156</sup>. The worldly winds are mentioned right at the end of the [Mangala Sutta](#). I think it's the last verse but one where the Buddha says 'He whose mind is not moved when touched by the worldly winds but remains stainless and secure, his is the greatest blessing'. So in some ways you can say that the whole practical ethical teaching of the Buddha is summed up in these words. And when I first encountered them, they were words that made a very strong impression on me. I can still remember the Pali:

*Putthassa lôka dhammehi - Cittam yassa na kampati*

*Asokam virajam khemam - Etam mangala muttamam.*<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> For a full exploration of the teaching of 'the worldly winds', see [Urban Retreat 2011 archive on this theme](#).

<sup>157</sup> As given at [here](#).

It's almost like a **mantra**<sup>158</sup>. I may be able to remember my own verse translation:

*He whose strong mind, untroubled by the touch of all terrestrial happenings whatsoever is void of sorrow, stainless and secure. His is the greatest blessing. Or. This is the most auspicious sign.*

So there's a great deal of teaching summed up here. Worldly conditions is my translation of **lokadhammas**<sup>159</sup> - the four pairs of opposites: success and failure; praise and blame, and so on. So if we are going to attain a state where our mind is untroubled by these opposites then we have achieved a very great deal.

So here Shantideva is concentrating much more on praise and blame and the dangers of attaching to them.

All right - let's move on.

Abhayanaga: ***[95] But what does it matter to me whether another's delight is in me or someone else? His alone is the pleasure of that delight. Not even a trifling part of it is mine.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, one should not appropriate that delight. It doesn't really belong to you. He feels delight; that's his experience. The fact that he feels delight in you, is in a sense nothing to do with

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<sup>158</sup> 'Mantra' is a sacred utterance, numinous sound, or a syllable, word, phonemes, or group of words believed by some to have psychological and spiritual power. See '[The Symbolism of Colours and Mantric Sound](#)' by Sangharakshita.

<sup>159</sup> Commonly translated as 'worldly winds'.

you. You gain really nothing from it. So, once again, we need to be detached.

Of course it's not necessarily quite as straight forward as that because on the one hand we want to sing people's praises - we want to rejoice in their merits - but we don't want them to become inflated or puffed up. So we have to be a bit objective even when we enthusiastically praise someone or rejoice in their merits.

All right, what's next?

Samudraghosa: ***[96] If I take pleasure in his pleasure, let me take it in every single case. Why do I take no pleasure in people who are made happy through their faith in another?***

Amalavajra: Is this to do with competitiveness in the monastic sangha where there might be a lay person who has faith or is devoted to one of the other monks, and there's sort of envy around that?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Naganataka: This verse, it just seems to be a mirror image of the verse in which he says 'Why do we take displeasure in someone's criticism?' Although if we don't take displeasure in their criticism of someone else it seems like a reversal.

Sangharakshita: All right - let's see what comes after that.

Naganataka: *[97] Therefore, it is because I am praised that delight is produced in me. In this case, too, because of such absurdity, it is simply the behaviour of a child.*

Sangharakshita: To be happy just because someone praises you is very childish. It's behaving just like a child does when he's told 'you're being a good boy'. It means you're easily influenced. Your emotional positivity depends upon the praise or the good opinion of other people. So that means you can very easily change. So if people praise you for something one day, well you will maybe try to continue acting in the way that they praise. But maybe on another occasion someone praises you for something quite different, so you go along with that and try and be more like that. So the more susceptible you are to praise the less sensibility there will be in your own character and personality. You can be more easily influenced by the winds of passion.

Jayarava: Sometimes you can be praised and blamed for exactly the same thing. And it's a bit confusing.

Sangharakshita: Yes indeed. So you really do have to have self-confidence and be clear about your own values. The case in my own experience I had years ago when I was staying in Benares with [Jagdish Kashyap](#)<sup>160</sup>. On the same day I had two letters: one was from a very orthodox Singhalese monk who I knew; the other from a

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<sup>160</sup> Another of Sangharakshita's main teachers during his years in India. See '[My Eight Main Teachers](#)'.

Singhalese lay-woman. The monk wrote to me 'When you can write such good intellectual articles on Buddhism, why do you waste your time writing those foolish poems?' That's what the monk wrote. The lay-woman wrote 'When you can write such lovely poems, why do you waste your time writing those dry intellectual articles?' [LAUGHTER] So, you can't please everyone! [MORE LAUGHTER] So I'm afraid I continued writing both articles and poems.

Jayasiddhi: Maybe you should have sent the letters on to the other correspondent.

Naganataka: It does strike me that Shantideva is warning us against pursuing our natural response to praise, in the same way he warns us against responding to our natural response to anger, but our response to praise seems much more innocuous. It's not so evident that we need to practice equanimity or forbearance in that sort of situation. It seems more harmless.

Sangharakshita: Praise is more seductive. Or anger is more obviously in need of control.

Jayarava: I think he does say why it's a problem.

Naganataka: Yes - that's coming up, isn't it.

Sangharakshita: All right, let's carry on.



Priyadaka: **[98] Praise and so on give me security. They destroy my sense of urgency. They create jealousy towards those who possess virtue, and anger at success.**

Sangharakshita: So Shantideva says quite a lot of things here. Let's take it clause by clause. What's the first clause?

Priyadaka: **Praise and so on give me security.**

Sangharakshita: Give me security... Psychological security; emotional security. This suggests, though, that you're not really a very secure person, in that case.

Jayarava: There's a thing that Order members say to Mitras when they're in the Ordination process, which is 'You're doing all the right things - just keep on going'. And I was talking to someone just the other day who got that same feedback and it's quite disheartening in a way because it's not specific enough. I think it does undermine people's sense of urgency about what to do. Maybe in that case it works perfectly in the sense if you just get told you're doing all the right things you can relax.

Sangharakshita: Yes... yes. So what's the next clause?

Priyadaka: **They destroy my sense of urgency.**

Sangharakshita: Yes. That's the point. You need to be kept on your toes, as it were, and encouraged, yes, but, a bit of encouragement, but it should be a critical encouragement that will motivate you to

make more of an effort to be even better, not just to settle down in your present achievement or present level.

What's the next clause?

Priyadaka: ...***They create jealousy towards those who possess virtue, and anger at success.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. 'Jealousy towards those who possess virtue'. So how could that be? If you're praised, well obviously you start thinking very well of yourself - perhaps too much of yourself - and that may mean you may start feeling competitive in relation to those possessed of virtue and perhaps be jealous of them if you feel that they perhaps are doing better than you.

Naganataka: It doesn't actually seem like he's talking about it creating jealousy in us, in the one who is praised, it seems like he's talking about it creating jealousy in others towards us.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's also possible.

Naganataka: Which in a way I don't feel is so kind of applicable here. It doesn't seem like our problem really, if others are jealous towards us - well, that's their problem.

Vidyakaya: But still, if your security is depending on praise and you see other people being praised - maybe they're getting praised a bit more than you. Someone's kicking off ...

Jayarava: Someone getting the praise that you deserve.

Sangharakshita: Especially if they don't deserve it!

Vidyakaya: Absolutely! [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: Hit a nerve there...

Sangharakshita: And what was the last clause?

Priyadaka: ... *and anger at success.*

Sangharakshita: '...and anger at success' presumably of others of whom you're jealous.

Dhivan: You might like to know, we've been studying just over an hour, Bhante.

Sangharakshita: Oh, have we? We'd better stop then. [HUGE GALE OF LAUGHTER]

Dhivan: You wanted to know when an hour was up.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Thank you. All right then, we'll stop here and we'll start again with you, and you, when we gather again.

All: Thank you... thank you...

## session 8: verses 99-115

(10th june, afternoon)

Sangharakshita: So, here we are again.

Priyadaka: **[99] *Therefore those conspiring to destroy things such as my praise, are really engaged in preserving me from descent into hell.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, people who try to destroy our praise are really doing us a good turn. [LAUGHTER] Because it means our own heads won't be turned by that praise then and we shall be saved from a possible descent into hell. Hmm. I suppose this is just one aspect of Shantideva's general idea that our enemy is really our friend. [PAUSE] Yes it's not an easy thought, but there is some truth in that. So if we can think of our enemy of having in fact done us a good turn by his enmity, well perhaps it will save us from many sleepless nights. I think Nietzsche says something about being careful in one's choice of enemies. [LAUGHTER] An enemy keeps one on one's toes, yes? Keeps one alert. Perhaps it's not the best way of being kept alert but there is something in that saying.

Yes, Shantideva seems to be following that sort of line of thought.

Dharmamodana: Next verse Bhante?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Dharmamodana: ***[100] The shackle of acquisition and honour is unfitting for me who longs for liberation. How can I hate those who liberate me from that shackle?***

[LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Yes... Acquisitions and honour...

Jayarava: If you were to take it too seriously we'd all be stealing from each other and doing each other down wouldn't we? [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Or just allowing oneself to be robbed, hmm? I suppose one has to take the spirit of what Shantideva is saying, hmm? [LONG PAUSE] But it's true, because if we lose something, whether it's stolen or any other way, well we can reflect quite realistically that well perhaps I was a bit attached to that particular object, and perhaps it's not a bad thing that I'm no longer in possession of it.

As for praise, well as I mentioned earlier, well sometimes people may praise you, but you can be pretty certain that sooner or later you're going to incur some blame from someone or other. I think perhaps it's better to reflect in that way. All right, what next?

Dhiraka: ***[101] How can I hate those who have become, as if by the Buddha's blessing, a door closed to me as I seek to enter upon suffering?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. 'A door closed to me as I seek to enter upon suffering.' By allowing my head to be turned by praise and so on? Those who have the Buddha's blessing. They're doing the Buddha's work, hmm? They're helping me.

Vidyakaya: It's interesting isn't it that Shantideva is supposed to have this really poor reputation, that he was blamed and scorned, people talk about this.

Sangharakshita: Yes, so perhaps he is writing from experience. All right then let's see what comes next.

Khemajala: ***[102] Nor is anger appropriate in the case of someone who hinders acts of merit. There is no spiritual practice equal to forbearance. Without doubt, this is accomplished through him.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, Shantideva is speaking in the highest terms of the practice of forbearance. I suppose in a way his reasoning goes like this. That the outstanding quality, in a way, the characteristic quality, of the Bodhisattva, is compassion, hmm? But nothing destroys compassion like anger. So the Bodhisattva cannot afford to be angry. He therefore has to practice forbearance, and therefore, for the Bodhisattva, forbearance is the highest form of spiritual practice. It is that which enables him not to give way to anger, to develop compassion, and therefore to be really and truly a Bodhisattva.

I think at the very beginning of the chapter Shantideva says something like that, that a sudden outburst of anger will consume all one's previous merits. And of course a Bodhisattva's greatest merit consists in his compassion. His compassionate activity.

Dhiraka: So is he getting at the outburst, at the expression of the anger? Which is the dangerous thing, but actually the impulse to anger, the feeling, the irritation or whatever, before the expression of anger, is still there and needs to be dealt with.

Sangharakshita: Oh yes, it's still there and needs to be dealt with. It's not enough simply to restrain oneself. Genuine forbearance goes beyond restraint. As we saw I think the other day, the real practice of forbearance includes compassion, because of your compassion for those who are doing you harm and seeking as it were to make you angry.

Vidyakaya: So anger doesn't even arise, if you're practicing all the time.

Sangharakshita: Yes, just as in the case of the mother, even if the child kicks her, she doesn't feel angry.

Jayasiddhi: In the case of a practitioner would that imply some degree of [Insight](#)<sup>161</sup>, or reflection? Could we use this as a reflection for practice?

Sangharakshita: Well, yes and no. One could say that in a sense there are two levels of practise, yes? The first level where the practice is a discipline, where you do something with effort, where ego is still present, but nonetheless you practise yes? The other level is where, due to Insight, the practice becomes part of your very nature, because there is either no ego there at all, or very little ego. So one is the mundane practice of the virtues, the other is the transcendental practice of them. As with the [Eightfold Path](#)<sup>162</sup>; there is the [Mundane Eightfold Path](#) and there is the [Transcendental Eightfold Path](#).

In the case of the Mundane Eightfold Path you're following it with effort and there's always the danger of slipping back, but in the case of the Transcendental Eightfold Path, to follow that path has become your

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<sup>161</sup> Usually given as a translation of '[vipassana](#)', the transformative attainment of seeing clearly and deeply into the nature of reality so that one cannot fall away from that degree of awareness. Listen to [various perspectives on Insight](#).

<sup>162</sup> Perhaps the most widely known of the Buddha's teachings. It is ancient, extending back to the Buddha's first discourse and is highly valued as a treasury of wisdom and practical guidance on how to live our lives. Traditionally the teaching is seen as highlighting eight areas or 'limbs' of 'right' practice (Sangharakshita prefers 'perfect' to 'right'), which sit in mutual relationship to one another and are each essential elements in an integrated approach to the Dharma.

Listen to Sangharakshita's classic series of talks on [The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path](#). Read the [extended companion book](#).



second nature. And there's no possibility of your falling back, you've become at least irreversible.

Naganataka: So Bhante, because Shantideva, throughout the text, uses the language of self and other, would that indicate the presence of an ego and therefore a more mundane level of practice?

Sangharakshita: To the extent that you are aware, not just aware but strongly aware, of the existence of 'an other' or take the other as real, to that extent of course you are still within the realm of ego, because you can posit the existence of 'other' in a real sense only in distinction from a strong sense of 'I'. So yes, Shantideva would seem to be addressing the struggling would-be Bodhisattva, namely, apparently, himself. If he had been a real Bodhisattva, he wouldn't have needed to address all these exhortations to himself. Or we may say that perhaps he was a real Bodhisattva and he's only putting the verses of the Bodhicaryavatara in that form for the encouragement of other people. We don't really know I suppose.

Jayasiddhi: So the compassion that's included in forbearance here then, would be attainable by anybody, even without Insight.

Sangharakshita: Hmm.... Well it depends what kind of compassion and what degree, what depth of compassion. For it to be irreversible and as it were, invincible, there would have to be Insight, but it is possible to practise and to develop compassion short of developing Insight.

Vidyakaya: The two have to kind of really go together don't they? They kind of work together.

Sangharakshita: Well compassion in the full sense, transcendental compassion, goes together with Insight, but one can have, so to speak, mundane compassion, without there being any genuine Insight. There may be just a general understanding.

Amalavajra: So you were laying out the logic of Shantideva's argument just now when you said - I just wanted to make sure I caught that - you said 'the Bodhisattva aims to cultivate compassion' and that 'nothing destroys compassion like anger' and therefore there is no spiritual practice like forbearance.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes, he's assuming that compassion can be destroyed. If it can be destroyed of course it's not the real thing. It's not transcendental compassion.

Amalavajra: And is there a final link there that somehow the practice of forbearance somehow is the cultivation of compassion? Is there some link there?

Sangharakshita: Well, sometimes genuine compassion may be there, other times you may just have to grit your teeth.

Dhivan: Do you think Bhante that with this sentence 'There is no practice equal to forbearance' there may be an echo of the Buddha's words, 'There's no tapas<sup>163</sup>... the highest tapas is patience'<sup>164</sup>.

Sangharakshita: Hmm! Yes, it does seem like that yes, yes. That is what the Dhammapada says, yes.

Dhivan: He's putting it into the context of Mahayana.

Vidyakaya: Tapas meaning?

Sangharakshita: Asceticism, or even self mortification in a sense. *Tapasya*. There's a verse in the Dhammapada, that must be then one you're referring to. Yes there does seem to be a parallel... Anyway, what's next?

Jayasiddhi: ***[103] In fact, it is through my own deficiency that I fail to practise forbearance here. In this instance I alone create the hindrance when grounds for an act of merit have been provided.***

Sangharakshita: So, what is Shantideva's argument here?

Jayasiddhi: It's not the enemy that causes us to lose it?

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<sup>163</sup> 'Tapas' - defined in 'A Glossary of Pali and Buddhist Terms' as 'The purifying 'heat' of meditative practice'.

<sup>164</sup> From 'The Dhammapada': verse 184, translated from: 'Khanṭī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā,/ Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā.'

Sangharakshita: Yes, he's saying that we are our own worst enemy. That's what he's really saying. Someone gives me a wonderful opportunity of practising forbearance and I don't take that wonderful opportunity. So it's my fault, yes? I'm my own worst enemy. He gives me the opportunity of doing something really good and I don't take it.

Jayarava: Is he not also referring back to the previous verse, which starts, 'Nor is anger appropriate in the case of someone who hinders acts of merit'? Is he not taking on board that situation where I'm trying to create merit? If someone hinders me, he's saying 'well you have to take on that as well'.

Sangharakshita: Yes, you mustn't hinder your own creation of merit, by opposing those who are acting towards you with anger and violence. [PAUSE] So he's coming back in these last few verses very much to forbearance directly, having made a bit of a detour in previous verses.

All right then, what comes after that?

Dhivan: ***[104] If one thing does not exist without another, and does exist when that also exists, then that other thing is really its cause. How can that be called an obstacle?***

Sangharakshita: Ha, ha, ha, hmm. Yes. Very logical. I mean Shantideva is nothing if not logical. So let's hear it again to make sure we get the point.

Dhivan: ***If one thing does not exist without another, and does exist when that also exists, then that other thing is really its cause. How can that be called an obstacle?***

Sangharakshita: Yes. If you suffer... If someone acts towards you with anger, well you practise forbearance. Where forbearance exists well the anger exists, where anger exists the forbearance exists. They both go together. So what follows from that?

Saddhananda: ***[105] After all a person in need who turns up.....***

Sangharakshita: No I didn't mean that, I meant the second half of the verse.

Dhivan: ***Then that other thing is really its cause.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. So someone's anger towards me, or act of violence towards me, is the cause of my forbearance, yes? One could perhaps dispute with Shantideva here because there is a difference between cause and occasion. So strictly speaking I suppose one should say, not that someone's aggression against us is the cause of our forbearance; it's the occasion of our forbearance. That would probably be more correct... Well it would be.

Saddhananda: Because there are other causes, like our own personal aspiration.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: It's quite interesting that when Buddhists want to make a point, they quite often use a one-to-one cause and effect. It seems like in the Pali Canon the Buddha's saying that you can't really think of causation like that. It's much more complex than that. But it's quite a good teaching tool.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, it is one of the principles of Buddhist philosophy, or Buddhist thought, that for a phenomenon to occur there must be at least two conditions<sup>165</sup>. I think that was one of the arguments against the creation of the Universe by God<sup>166</sup>.

[LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: He couldn't have done it alone.

Sangharakshita: That it cannot just have one cause... Right let's have that next verse then.

Saddhananda: ***[105] After all, a person in need who turns up at a suitable time is not a hindrance to generosity, nor can it be called a hindrance to going forth when one meets someone who has gone forth!***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. So what's the logic here? What does the first half say?

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<sup>165</sup> See note on '[Pratitya Samutpada](#)' [here](#).

<sup>166</sup> See [this note](#) on the Buddhist view of a creator God. For a Christian argument *against* pratitya samutpada as the basis for refuting the Creationist approach, [see here](#).

Saddhananda: ***After all, a person in need who turns up at a suitable time is not a hindrance to generosity.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. In the same way that someone who assaults you is not a hindrance to forbearance, so in the same way, someone who turns up at a suitable time is not a hindrance to your being generous. And similarly...

Saddhananda: ***Nor can it be called a hindrance to going forth when one meets someone who has gone forth!***

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, that's pretty obvious isn't it?

Amalavajra: It's interesting isn't it? Presumably someone who has gone forth would be quite inspiring, in a positive sense, to go forth, whereas obviously it's extending the logic to say that someone who's assaulting you is inspiring you to forbearance.

Sangharakshita: Yes, there is a difference in that way. Anyway, let's press on.

Jayarava: ***[106] Beggars are easy to find in this world but those who will cause harm are not, because, if I do no wrong, no one wrongs me.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Rather curious logic here. Let's hear the first clause.

Jayarava: ***Beggars are easy to find in this world...***

Sangharakshita: Yes, therefore it's very easy to practise generosity.

Jayarava: ***But those who will cause harm are not, because, if I do no wrong, no one wrongs me.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, this is... it's difficult to find those who will act aggressively towards me and therefore enable me to practise forbearance. Because if I have acted rightly, well there will not be those people. So in a way he seems to be in a paradoxical sort of way, regretting even his own good behaviour, because it means he doesn't have any enemies who will give him the opportunity for practising forbearance, hmm?

Jayarava: Suggests that it could get harder and harder as you go along being more and more ethical, doesn't it?

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes. It's an obstacle to the practice of forbearance, when there are no people with regards to whom one is obliged to practise it.

Vidyakaya: Hmm. I'm not sure what planet that's on. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: Shantideva therefore seems to attach some value to the practice of forbearance even apart from the necessity of practising it. He doesn't say 'well if there's no need for you to practise forbearance, that's a good thing'. Hmm? He seems to have the view that the practice of forbearance is something that, as a Bodhisattva, you really need to do. And that, if no one behaves in such way that you have to practise forbearance, well, that is unfortunate.



Priyadaka: And therefore one would need to look for...

Sangharakshita: And therefore one would need even to look for, even to expose oneself to, people in relation to whom you can practise forbearance. So Shantideva seems to see forbearance as a sort of virtue in its own right one might say.

Jayarava: Isn't it a slightly literal reading of the need to perfect all of the Perfections in order to become Enlightened? Isn't it taking it just slightly too literally?

Sangharakshita: Well the texts do seem to say that. You have to fulfil all the paramitas.

Vidyakaya: Fulfilling the paramitas, in a sense, this is an Insight practice isn't it?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Vidyakaya: You can't really do it without gaining Insight, so by doing it one...

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes. Therefore, we say that prajna is really the only paramita, because dana paramita is dana paramita only when dana is practised in conjunction with prajna or Insight.

Vidyakaya: So the more we practise forbearance the more we move towards Insight.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Samudraghosa: I suppose this raises the whole sort of question of what good conditions for practice really means.

Sangharakshita: Yes, because we usually assume that nice quiet places with pleasant scenery and agreeable companions, well these are the good conditions for spiritual practice, hmm? But that's perhaps a rather simple-minded way of looking at things, and perhaps true only with regard to the beginner. Perhaps even to a certain kind of temperament. That's why there is the saying which I mentioned the other day that 'Hell is the lama of all the Buddhas'<sup>167</sup>. There is a place for difficulties; there is a place for obstacles.

Samudraghosa: Have you found yourself that there have been certain times in your life, certain conditions that have been particularly helpful in your own practice?

Sangharakshita: That's very difficult to say. I can certainly say that when I was moving about in India, especially central and western India, among the ex-Untouchables, conditions were often very difficult, material conditions, in every sense, and I was having to exert myself quite a lot. But I consider that as a very valuable part of my experience, and difficult though it was, I did really enjoy it at the same time.

So I suppose the moral is, that good conditions for spiritual practice are not necessarily easy conditions. Well, some people find it far from

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<sup>167</sup> See earlier note.

easy staying at [Guhyaloka](#)<sup>168</sup> for a few months. Some find it really difficult. [LAUGHTER] I'm not referring to anyone particularly. [LAUGHTER]

Jayarava: Oh, you don't need to. We know who we are.

Sangharakshita: One does hear such things. There you are. Ideal conditions hmm?

Samudraghosa: Is it perhaps helpful for many people to move from what we might call easy conditions to more challenging conditions and then back again.

Jayarava: There's no holidays in the spiritual life.

Sangharakshita: Yes, hmm, well, it's basically not so much a question of thinking whether the conditions are easy or difficult, but maintaining one's inspiration, strengthening one's spiritual aspiration, and gradually finding that you can operate under almost any conditions.

Vidyakaya: I was very struck when I read [Khantipalo's book](#)<sup>169</sup>, about living with you, and he said all the time he was with you in India, travelling around, he never once saw you get impatient or lose your temper with anyone. After my experience in India I just think that that's absolutely remarkable! Did you learn to do that or were you like that when you first started?

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<sup>168</sup> The Triratna Buddhist Community's retreat centre for men in Spain, mainly used for four-month long ordination courses.

<sup>169</sup> 'Noble Friendship: Travels of a Buddhist Monk', [Windhorse Publications](#), 2002

Sangharakshita: It's very difficult for me to say. I'm not in touch now with people who knew me when I was very young. I remember an occasion when I was very small, I must have been what, three, something like that, and one day I found my mother in the kitchen, crying, and I asked her why she was crying, and she said 'I'm crying because you're so naughty'<sup>170</sup>. [LAUGHTER]

Vidyakaya: What had you done?

Sangharakshita: I've no recollection of what I might have done, yet clearly I had done something which I shouldn't have done. Whether there's a connection with patience or something else I just can't say.

Dhivan: Given away the family silver...

Sangharakshita: Anyway, let's move on.

Jayasiddhi: ***[107] Therefore, since he helps me on the path to Awakening, I should long for an enemy like a treasure discovered in the home, acquired without effort.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. Again there's a verse very similar in the Dhammapada, where the Buddha says that if you are reproved by

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<sup>170</sup> For accounts of Sangharakshita's early life, see his 'The Rainbow Road: From Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong, Memoirs of an English Buddhist'.

someone you should be just as happy as if you'd found a buried treasure<sup>171</sup>. This is very similar. So let's hear it again.

Jayasiddhi: ***Therefore, since he helps me on the path to Awakening, I should long for an enemy like a treasure discovered in the home, acquired without effort.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. I should long for an enemy. I should long for someone who will give me the opportunity of practising forbearance. Yes, not just put up with it, but long for it. Long to be tested, as it were, long to be given an opportunity of practising that wonderful virtue, hmm? [NERVOUS LAUGHTER]

Yes, Shantideva is a little extreme at times. [PAUSE] So what follows from that?

Dhira: ***[108] Both he and I, therefore, receive the reward of this forbearance. It should be given to him first, since the forbearance was first occasioned by him.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, note that the word is 'occasioned' by him, not 'caused' by him. Yes, so the merit is due to him. If I practise forbearance, well it's he who has enabled me, he who has been the occasion, so let the greater merit go to him. Of course that may not be

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<sup>171</sup> From 'Dhammapada - Panditavagga: The Wise', translated from the Pali by Acharya Buddhharakkhita: 'Should one find a man who points out faults and who reproves, let him follow such a wise and sagacious person as one would a guide to hidden treasure. It is always better, and never worse, to cultivate such an association.'

the other person's intention, but Shantideva doesn't consider that. So what's next?

Vidyakaya: **[109] *If an enemy deserves no honour, because he did not intend you to achieve forbearance, then why is the True Dharma honoured? It too is the unconscious cause of achievement.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. So what does one think of that argument? The Dharma is not a person but we do in a way honour the Dharma. In fact we [Go for Refuge to the Dharma](#)<sup>172</sup>, hmm?

Jayarava: Is he saying that the Dharma is a teaching, but we still have to have the intention to practice it. It's the intention that creates the karma or merit. The Dharma in itself is neutral, you can practise it or not, it's up to you.

Sangharakshita: Yes....

Vidyakaya: Yes, there's no point just knowing about it, you have to practise it.

Several: Hmm...

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<sup>172</sup> Traditionally Buddhists express their spiritual aspiration by 'Going for Refuge' to the *Buddha*, his *Dharma* (teaching) and the *Sangha* (spiritual community) – or the [Three Jewels](#), as they are called. The emphasis on Going For Refuge as a unifying factor for all Buddhist practice traditions is a hallmark of Sangharakshita's non-sectarian approach to the Dharma. See many perspectives from within Triratna on '[Going For Refuge](#)'. See also, '[Going For Refuge' As Idiom And Metaphor](#)' by Dhivan Thomas Jones.

Priyadaka: There's also something about interconnectedness. It's not just, 'there's just me or just him', it's when things have a relationship and they come alive, and therefore there's something going on.

Sangharakshita: Hmm... [PAUSE] Anyway, what comes next?

Abhayanaga: **[110] *If an enemy is not honoured because his intention is to hurt, for what other reason will I be patient with him, as with a doctor who is intent on my well-being?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes. The doctor is intent on my well-being even though he may hurt us in the course of performing a little operation. So the enemy is a bit like a doctor in a way. Hmm. So in a way the comparison is changing a bit. The enemy was more like a friend but now the enemy is become even more like a doctor. Doing good to you, hmm? Even though it may be a bit painful. All right, after that?

Amalavajra: **[111] *In that case, it is really in dependence upon his malign intention that forbearance is produced, and in that case it is really he that is the cause of my forbearance. I must worship him as the True Dharma.***

Sangharakshita: Ha, ha, though here the word 'cause' is used rather than 'conditions'. Perhaps we should understand 'occasion' rather than 'cause'.

Vidyakaya: Do you know if there is a particular Pali word which is being used? Do you know what the word would be? That Shantideva would actually use.

Sangharakshita: Well, usually the distinction is between 'hetu' and 'pratyaya'. 'Hetu' is 'cause' and 'pratyaya' is condition, or 'paccaya' in Pali, so the distinction is made in both Sanskrit and Pali<sup>173</sup>.

Naganataka: It occurs to me that taking this view of, even one's enemy of being an occasion or even an inspiration to practise the Dharma, I mean then really one's entire world, one's entire existence, would be, sort of, an inspiring condition for the Dharma. You know what I'm saying? When it's almost as if at this point one is living in sort of a **Pureland**, where everything, even one's enemies, everything around one, is spurring one towards greater progress.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Even if you look at say nature, you look at a tree, well, you see a leaf falling, well, it's giving you a teaching, giving you a teaching of impermanence, so you can look upon everything that surrounds you as giving a teaching in some way or other. You can learn from everything, learn from anyone, hmm? It's not that they will have the conscious intention to teach you, especially the inanimate things, but one can certainly derive a lesson from everything.

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<sup>173</sup> See [here](#) for the basic distinction. For discussion of this in the **Yogachara** (from the Chinese sources), see '**Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism**' by Dan Lusthaus. For discussion found in **Vasubandhu's** key text, '**Abhidharmakosha**', see '**Indian Philosophy: Metaphysics**', edited by Roy W. Perrett.



Dhiraka: Is that sort of approaching the Tibetan view of seeing the 'Diamond Aspect'<sup>174</sup>?

Sangharakshita: Yes, one could look at it like that. In a way this verse comes to me from **St. Paul**. St. Paul says 'All things work together for good, for him who loves God'<sup>175</sup>. So we could translate that into Buddhist language, that all things work together for him who loves the Dharma and tries to practise it. You can always find occasions for practising the Dharma. Of course Shantideva is more concerned perhaps with those occasions for practising the Dharma, and especially forbearance, that normally we would not think of in that particular way. That we would more likely think of as hindrances.

We might think, 'Well here am I, wanting to be calm and serene in mind, and along comes somebody and tries to make me angry' hmm? So we don't take it as an opportunity for practice, but take it as interfering with our practice. So Shantideva is trying to direct our attention to those circumstances which normally we would regard as hindering us, and he points out that they really help us, in fact they're essential in some respects if we want to practise forbearance.

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<sup>174</sup> This refers generally to the **Vajrayana** phase of Buddhism (one of the classic three '**yanas**'), and particularly to the '**Vajra**' or '**Diamond Thunderbolt**' of **Tantric Tibetan Buddhist** contexts.

<sup>175</sup> Romans 8:28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' (**King James Bible**).

Vidyakaya: I've often thought this about [Yogi Chen](#)<sup>176</sup>, that he chose to live right in the middle of the bazaar. Presumably he could have lived somewhere quieter?

Sangharakshita: Yes, he wasn't right in the middle, I would say, but he was right there on the edge.

Vidyakaya: But not exactly a quiet spot was it?

Sangharakshita: It wasn't quiet, but it wasn't too noisy. There wasn't any traffic — the road wouldn't bear any traffic — but it was on the edge of the bazaar. There were lots of people around, lots of children playing and shouting, but he didn't seem bothered by that. In fact some people visiting Burma and Thailand, and going to what they imagine would be very peaceful country retreat centres, often found them situated right bang in the middle of the city. And very noisy.

So yes, whether conditions are more or less favourable to spiritual practice, practice of the Dharma, is very much a relative matter. Relative to the person concerned too.

Dhivan: In the Pali Canon, Bhante, there are stories about how the Buddha, when groups of monks came who were noisy, would send messages to say 'Be Quiet'. In fact on one occasion he left.

Sangharakshita: Yes, on another he sent them away after a scolding, yes.

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<sup>176</sup> Sangharakshita describes his time with Yogi Chen in '[My Eight Main Teachers](#)'.

Dhivan: He didn't forbear them..

Sangharakshita: Ah, but he was thinking of what was good for them. [LAUGHTER] He didn't need to practise forbearance in that way any more. It was good that they should be made to realise their fault, their own unmindfulness, and wrong practice of speech. He said they were like a lot of fishwives. [MORE LAUGHTER]

Amalavajra: So when you say conditions are relative to the practitioner, is that why you say that the earlier on you are on the path, the more important it is to have favourable conditions, and that later on less so?

Sangharakshita: Well, at one time one finds certain conditions more favourable, at another time one finds other conditions more favourable. They may be more positive or they may not be, so to speak.

Dhira: We're thinking of rebuilding our shrine-room in Croydon, to make it more soundproof, and that will benefit people coming in to learn meditation, but those of us who've been meditating there for many years are used to meditating with the noise. In a sense we're in a better position. It's kind of better to practise with noise and get used to that, so then you can practise either in a retreat centre or a suburban centre equally well.

Sangharakshita: Well, there needs to be serious discussion of the matter in your Council, doesn't there? [LAUGHTER]

Dhira: But this assumption that ‘Ooh, we must make it soundproof, that’s the best thing’ it’s not so obvious.

Sangharakshita: Yes, we mustn’t be precious about conditions for practice. We can always practise in some way or other, whatever the conditions. I think that should be our attitude. There are no good conditions, there are no bad conditions. There are just conditions, and our determination to practise, whatever the conditions may be.

Naganataka: I’ve found great value in [Reggie Ray’s](#)<sup>177</sup> teaching that there’s great opportunity in moving back and forth between a contemplative situation and a more worldly situation. Because it’s in that movement that we can actually experience some insight and incorporate the contemplation that we’ve done, you know, into the world.

Sangharakshita: Yes, and then of course when you’ve had a bit too much of the world, well you know what to do, you withdraw for a while, and ‘recharge your batteries’ as we say. If one is in that sort of situation, one is very fortunate. But again as I said, one shouldn’t be too precious, too choosy, about conditions for practice. We can practise in some way under any conditions. What one practises may vary from time to time.

All right, let’s move on.

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<sup>177</sup> Reginald ‘Reggie’ Ray is an American Buddhist academic and teacher, a student of [Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche](#) for forty years.

Naganataka: *[112] For this reason the Sage has said that the fertile field of living beings is the fertile field of the Conquerors, because many have reached success and spiritual perfection by propitiating them.*

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes... Propitiating... This is a curious sort of variant on forbearance. It's more active than forbearance.

Jayasiddhi: What does 'propitiate' mean Bhante?

Sangharakshita: Well usually of course, it's used in connection with God, or a god, that you seek to please them, to win their favour, by offerings or behaving in a certain way, hmm? So Shantideva is saying 'Well, here are beings, this is one's field of practice'. In fact it was the field of practice of the Buddha's, and he gained his Enlightenment by, well, Shantideva says 'by propitiating beings'. But the basic point is I suppose that one gains Enlightenment, the full Enlightenment of a **Samyaksambuddha**<sup>178</sup>, not in isolation, but through one's interaction, one's positive interaction, with other beings. That's the point that is being made.

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<sup>178</sup> Samyaksambuddhas gain **Nirvana** by their own efforts, and discover the Dharma without having a teacher to point it out. They then lead others to Enlightenment by teaching the Dharma in a time or world where it has been forgotten or has not been taught before, because a Samyaksambuddha does not depend upon a tradition that stretches back to a previous Samyaksambuddha, but instead discovers the path anew. In the **Bahudhātuka Sutta** ('Many Kinds of Elements Discourse'), the Buddha tells Ananda: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that two Accomplished Ones, Fully Enlightened Ones, could arise contemporaneously in one world-system - there is no such possibility'.

Jayarava: You can't have compassion without being in relationship with another being, can you?

Sangharakshita: Yes, though, of course, we mustn't forget that in the ultimate sense there are no beings; but, of course, Shantideva doesn't go into that. Yes, on the level at which you are conscious of yourself as a separate existence and of others as separate existences, on that level you need to practise with regard to others, and among other things you practise forbearance. That practice, so to speak, of 'propitiating' others will lead you to Enlightenment, Shantideva is saying.

Jayarava: Wouldn't you say though, that even the Bodhisattvas still set out to save beings, you know, in the sutras.

Sangharakshita: Well, yes, the sutras do say that, but it immediately says, after making that statement, at the same time, that the Bodhisattva realises that there are no beings to save. The two have to go together. This is the refrain we've had throughout the [Perfection of Wisdom](#) texts<sup>179</sup>. The Bodhisattva resolves that he will lead all beings to Enlightenment at the same time he reflects that there are no beings in the ultimate sense. But as I said, Shantideva isn't going into all that in the Bodhicaryavatara. He remains very firmly on the level of practice.

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<sup>179</sup> The Prajnaparamita texts ('Perfection of [Transcendent] Wisdom') elucidate the practice and understanding necessary as indispensable elements of the Bodhisattva Path. See, Sangharakshita, '[Wisdom Beyond Words](#)'. Listen to [the introductory lecture](#) and download the [free community audiobook](#).

Naganataka: It occurs to me that what it seems like he's describing here is the experience of someone with a very high level of Insight. But as you pointed out, someone with a very high level of Insight wouldn't necessarily need these teachings, they would already be living them. So it's as though in reading this, we can try and emulate that Insight, through imitation almost... I don't know if that's a good way of putting it.

Sangharakshita: Well, in a way, leaving aside forbearance, the practice of all the precepts, just the ordinary precepts, has relation to other beings, hmm? Because, in the case of the first precept, non-violence, well clearly that relates to other beings, and not stealing, that relates to other beings, and no sexual misconduct, that relates to other beings, not telling lies, that relates to other beings. So the whole of our practice, in one way or another, relates to other beings, and is concerned with our attitude towards other beings, and that is above all, one might say, with regard to the practice of the Bodhisattva, and especially here in connection with forbearance.

So, what comes next?

Samudraghosa: ***[113] When the transmission of Buddha-qualities comes equally from both ordinary beings and from the Conquerors, what logic is there in not paying that respect to ordinary beings which one pays to the Conquerors?***

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Samudraghosa: ***When the transmission of Buddha-qualities comes equally from both ordinary beings and from the Conquerors, what logic is there in not paying that respect to ordinary beings which one pays to the Conquerors?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. The Conquerors are of course the Buddhas, but how have the Buddhas become Buddhas? By the practice of the paramitas, which brings them into relation with beings. So the fact that those beings exist, with regard to whom the Buddhas were able to practise forbearance and other qualities, it's on their account that the Buddha is able to become a Buddha. So we should respect beings in the same way that we respect the Buddhas, because both have made possible the development of the Buddha-qualities. That seems to be the argument, yes? So we should be grateful to all those beings with whom the Buddha in his previous existences came in to personal contact, and through whom, or with the help of whom, by virtue of the occasion of whom, he was able to become a Buddha. So we should be grateful to them as well as to the Buddha himself. In a way they have equal value.

All right, after that?

Priyadaka: ***[114] The greatness of the intent comes not from itself but rather from its effect, and so the greatness is equal. In which case ordinary beings are the equals of the Conquerors.***



Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, those ordinary beings didn't intend that the future Buddha should become a Buddha, but even though they didn't intend it the result was the same, as though they had intended it like the Buddha himself, so with regard to the effect they're equal. So, they also should be honoured equally.

Naganataka: Now this is in a way, this is not the ethic that we ourselves are held responsible to. Am I right in that? The ethics that we ourselves practice is one of intent, not necessarily one of effect.

Sangharakshita: Yes indeed.

Naganataka: He's only speaking here of the effect others' actions have on us, an occasion for forbearance.

Sangharakshita: Yes, so far as we're concerned intent is definitely what has to be taken into consideration above all. But Shantideva, of course, is concerned with making, in a way, another kind of point,.

Naganataka: Let me see, throughout the text here he applies a double standard to us our enemies.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Hmm.... All right, after that, what next?

Dharmamodana: ***[115] It is greatness on the part of beings that someone with a kindly disposition is honourable, just as it is greatness on the part of the Buddhas that merit comes from serene confidence in the Buddhas.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Let's hear that again.

Dharmamodana: ***It is greatness on the part of beings that someone with a kindly disposition is honourable, just as it is greatness on the part of the Buddhas that merit comes from serene confidence in the Buddhas.***

Sangharakshita: Let's have the alternative translation, I don't find that very clear.

Abhayanaga: ***Whatever merit there is in venerating one with limitless love is due to the greatness of all beings, and whatever merit there is in having faith in the Buddhas, is due to the greatness of the Buddhas.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes, that's a bit clearer isn't it? Especially in the case of the Buddhas. Well in the last few verses Shantideva has brought in the Buddha, and of course he speaks of veneration of the Buddha, so in some ways it's quite an interesting thought that Shantideva says that yes we must venerate the Buddha, obviously all Buddhas do, but what about those who in one way or another, intentionally or unintentionally, did help the Buddha to become the Buddha. We have to venerate them as well.

Because sometimes people speak about, with regard to the life of **Gautama the Buddha**<sup>180</sup>, those who did actually help him in the course of his life. You may remember that after the Buddha gains

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<sup>180</sup> Siddhartha Gautama, the name given to the historical future Buddha before his Enlightenment. For accounts of this particular story, [see here](#). For a comprehensive revisiting of the Buddha's life story, see '[Gautama Buddha](#)' by Vishvapani.

Enlightenment, and after he decides to communicate his Enlightenment, or communicate the teaching, he reflects, 'To whom shall I first communicate that teaching that I've discovered, that truth that I've discovered' and then he thinks of his earlier teachers. And what does he say to himself then?

He says, 'They were very helpful to me, or useful to me, and therefore I should communicate what I have discovered to them'. Then he realises that they no longer are alive. And then he thinks of his five previous companions, and he reflects that they were helpful to him in his earlier days, so he will communicate the teaching to them. They are still alive, so he then goes to them. So the Buddha here recognises the value of the help that he did receive earlier on in his career and is grateful for that. So here we can speak of the Buddha feeling gratitude towards those who had helped him. So in a way there's a little hint here of the sort of thing that Shantideva is talking about.

And, of course, I think years ago I gave a talk on gratitude<sup>181</sup>, because it does seem to be very often one of the unacknowledged virtues. So we need to be grateful to all those who in one way or another have helped us along the spiritual path. Some of course may not have intended to do so, but we can be grateful to them none the less. Do any of you know that talk on gratitude which I gave?

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<sup>181</sup> 'Looking At The Bodhi Tree', 1999. Listen to [more talks on gratitude](#).

Abhayanaga: 'Looking at the Bodhi Tree'? Is that what you called it?  
Gazing at the Bodhi Tree?

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's right, it must have been that one.

Amalavajra: In London at Bishopsgate.

Sangharakshita: Yes the Buddha was grateful to the tree that sheltered him, during the time that he was engaged in achieving Enlightenment. It's a very important teaching in a way, that of gratitude.

Anyway, let's leave it there for today. How far have we got by the way?

Priyadaka: We've got a page and a half to go.

Sangharakshita: And how many verses?

Samudraghosa: Twenty. Twenty more to go.

Sangharakshita: And how many have we covered?

Priyadaka: One hundred and fifteen.

Sangharakshita: And how many left?

Priyadaka: There's a hundred and thirty-four altogether and we've done a hundred and fifteen.

Vidyakaya: We're on the home stretch.

## session 9: verses 116-122

(11th june, morning)

Sangharakshita: All right - in that case we'll begin.

Dhivan: **[116] *Therefore in one aspect of the transmission of Buddha-qualities, ordinary beings are equal to the Buddhas. Of course, none are fully equal to the Buddhas, who are oceans of virtues with unlimited aspects.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, this is Shantideva reverting to the theme mentioned just earlier by him, that sentient beings by being objects of the Buddha's forbearance, for instance, have helped him to become a Buddha, so therefore in a way, they're known as his equal, so therefore we should respect other beings. That seems to be the conclusion. Although Shantideva seems to be basically inculcating, for the would-be Bodhisattva, a positive attitude to other living beings, especially other human beings and this argument seems to be intended to drive that point home. If it wasn't for others and their being objects of the Buddha's forbearance when he was a Bodhisattva, there would have been no Buddha, there would have been no Dharma for us to follow.

Therefore we should be grateful to them, should have a positive attitude towards them and see them in a sense as equal to the Buddha.

So what follows?

**Khemajala: [117] *If a virtue appears anywhere which is even an atom of those who are a unique mass of the very essence of virtue, then even the three worlds are not adequate for the purpose of worshipping it.***

Sangharakshita: Ha ha, yes, not to speak of worshipping the Buddha who has oceans of good qualities there, we cannot pay sufficient respect even to the smallest manifestation of what is virtuous or positive. That seems to be the meaning. I suppose that is partly because, once the seed is there it can develop, so long as there's even the slightest trace of positivity, well that positivity can develop eventually, even into Enlightenment. So it's not to be despised, in fact it is to be highly regarded, even venerated.

I mean we do sometimes see that thing, in people, in quite ordinary people, a flash of sheer goodness as it were, and we can appreciate that and even venerate it because it contains an infinite potential, if that person only happens to come across the favourable conditions for its development.

Jayarava: Yes, but this is a very positive thing for ourselves as well, well, you know like often I think for myself that I have so much non-virtue, that the Bodhisattva Ideal seems a bit daunting.

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's the little jewel in the dust-heap. Well it needs to be appreciated.

Abhayanaga: If I sort of think about my life, when people have treated me very positively and respectfully and tried to bring out some virtue in me, you know, and I'm thinking that this verse is almost re-paying that kind of kindness to other beings that was extended to me, you know earlier in my life, especially the sort of people who taught me the Dharma and how to meditate.

Sangharakshita: Yes, one also hears accounts of people behaving really admirably, even heroically, under the most unfavourable conditions, like those for instance at [Auschwitz](#)<sup>182</sup>. There are some very moving stories of what a few people did, under those conditions. So we should recognise that potential anywhere it appears, and respect it.

Dhivan: Do you think the idea of worshipping such treasures of virtue is hyperbole?

Sangharakshita: Well yes and no, because Indians seem to, even now, find it easier to worship than we do in the West, or at least they understand the term in a much broader sense, or at least they apply it in a much more broad sense. For instance, we might hear, say, in India, an [orthodox Hindu](#) say that, 'Before I go to work in the morning I go and worship my parents', meaning that he pays his respects to

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<sup>182</sup> Auschwitz Concentration Camp, a network of [concentration](#) and [extermination camps](#) built and operated by the [Third Reich](#) in [Polish areas annexed by Nazi Germany](#) during World War II.

them. I think the average Indian doesn't draw that hard-and-fast distinction between respecting and worshipping that we do.

Vidyakaya: When I meditated inside the shrine, at [Bodhgaya](#)<sup>183</sup>, there were a lot of Hindus coming in, and they treated me, and the other meditators as though we were to be worshipped, and one lady was bowing down and touching her head to my foot.

Sangharakshita: [LAUGHS] Well, clearly it's there in the Mangala Sutta, there's a line '*puja ca pujaneyyanam*'<sup>184</sup> which can be translated as 'the worship of the worshipful' or 'the showing of respect to those who deserve respect'. It can be translated either way. So yes, Indians traditionally have a much broader understanding of the term 'worship' or '[puja](#)' than we have. Where we might say 'pay respect' they would be more likely to say 'worship'. In fact where images of the Buddha occur we might even be concerned to show that we don't worship the image. We might have the suggestion of idolatry at the back of our minds, brought from our Christian heritage, so we might say, well 'we pay our respects to the Buddha', to the image, not that we worship it.

But clearly, be that as it may, worship — the experience of strong devotional feelings towards something that we see as higher and

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<sup>183</sup> An important Buddhist religious pilgrimage site in [Bihar](#), Northern India, where the Buddha is reputed to have gained Enlightenment.

<sup>184</sup> See [Pali with translation](#) here.



nobler and more elevated than ourselves — is a very important part of practising the Dharma. This is where the shraddha<sup>185</sup> comes in.

In some ways it goes very much against modern egalitarian notions, that everyone is equal and no-one is more deserving of respect than another, and that such things as deference are really out of date. That really goes against the grain of traditional Buddhist teaching.

Naganataka: Bhante, it seems like one thing that you're saying is that we could stand to have a bit more of that sort of worshipful attitude in our culture and our society. How do you sort of rectify that with the sort of things you've said about the teacher/student relationship? That that's often best seen as a sort of a good friendship. Is there room for worship within a friendship?

Sangharakshita: Well, yes, again, it depends upon how broad is one's conception of friendship. At least we speak of 'spiritual friendship'<sup>186</sup>, and, of course, within a relationship of spiritual friendship one person can be giving more than the other in that context. But I think in the earlier days of the Movement, you know when I gave that talk on 'Is a Guru Necessary?'<sup>187</sup>, I was very concerned to undermine the more

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<sup>185</sup> 'Faith', in the Buddhist sense. [See here for talks](#) on this spiritual faculty.

<sup>186</sup> An emphasis on the importance of spiritual friendship is a key aspect of Sangharakshita's approach to the Dharma and plays an important role in the collective life of the Triratna Buddhist Community.

<sup>187</sup> In this lecture from 1970 Sangharakshita first establishes what a guru is not. He then explains what kind of relationship a disciple has with a guru or spiritual teacher, and draws a distinction between Eastern and Western attitudes towards spiritual teachers.

extreme notions about the guru that one sometimes encounters in Indian, especially Hindu, circles. There was a bit of a problem then, not within the Movement, but when one saw a very extreme example of rather grotesque guru worship going on elsewhere. I remember when Guru Maharaj<sup>188</sup> came to London - anyone heard of Guru Maharaj?

Vidyakaya: I went see him a long while ago.

Sangharakshita: You went to see him?

Vidyakaya: Yes it was a big thing...

Sangharakshita: At [Alexandra Palace](#)<sup>189</sup>?

Vidyakaya: This was at the [East Dulwich Temple of Peace](#)<sup>190</sup>.

Sangharakshita: I'm thinking of...

Vidyakaya: It was probably around the same time.

Sangharakshita: Yes. There was really a very excessive atmosphere of adulation around him, which I felt was not very healthy. So I wanted to discourage that. But the question is, whether one can have a, so to speak, relationship of guru and disciple, within spiritual friendship. I think one can, if one has a sufficiently broad understanding of spiritual

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<sup>188</sup> Possibly refers to [Prem Rawat](#), also known as Guru Maharaj Ji in the 1960s and '70s.

<sup>189</sup> See [this short piece](#) detailing his visit to Alexandra Palace in 1973.

<sup>190</sup> For a personal account of the time, see the first section of [this piece](#).

friendship. And in the case of, I think, almost any spiritual friendship, you will very rarely find the two people concerned on exactly the same level. In fact that's almost impossible I would think. And of course it may be that one, at one time in a certain situation, one of the two is a little bit more guru-like and the other a little bit more chela-like<sup>191</sup> but that may change, as circumstances change. But it may even be that on the whole, over a long period of time, one is, as it were, superior to the other, to use that term, but none the less, the relationship of spiritual friendship may still be there.

I've emphasised in the past, that within the context of spiritual friendship, or even when you come into contact with any other person, it's not wise for either party to assume that (one or other) is the senior or junior partner in the relationship. You find that out only in the course of your continuing friendship, hmm? There need not be any assumption to begin with that one is superior to the other. Maybe one is more experienced than the other, but that's quite another matter. Apparently it's not quite the same thing.

Dhiraka: Does it matter whether you acknowledge it or not, this sort of superiority?

Sangharakshita: I think it does matter. I think it's important if superiority is there, if you see it, you should acknowledge it, why not? What is preventing you from acknowledging it? You may not acknowledge it in

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<sup>191</sup> 'Chela' is the word being rendered as 'disciple' in this context.

a very obvious way, but certainly some acknowledgment should be there, at least in one's own mind.

Jayarava: We're generally fairly informal with senior Order members in the Movement, I've noticed. I think you would probably be the only person anyone would stand up for as they entered the room for instance. Do you think that's a problem, or is that fine or...?

Sangharakshita: I don't know... Because nowadays, in this country at least, socially and culturally, we're going through a very chaotic period, and we're subject to all sorts of conflicting influences. But there is that verse I quoted, 'puja ca pujaneyyanam', 'the worship of the worshipful' or, 'respect for those who deserve respect', and we show that in different ways, according to the culture in which we live and work. So when I was living in South India, I remember I mentioned in my memoirs<sup>192</sup> that when I used to visit the houses of certain friends, Hindu friends, the young men would never sit in the presence of their elders. However long they were there, they wouldn't sit. At the most they'd lean against the wall, and sometimes, even when the elder would say, 'No, it's all right, you sit down', they wouldn't, out of respect. So by our standards, that's a bit extreme, but until not so very recently, in Britain, in perhaps middle-class families, a son might stand up when his father came into the room. Or men might stand up when

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<sup>192</sup> Likely in 'The Rainbow Road: From Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong, Memoirs of an English Buddhist'.

ladies came into the room, but that's been more or less dropped now I believe.

Vidyakaya: We used to stand for the [National Anthem](#)<sup>193</sup>.

Sangharakshita: Well, yes.

Vidyakaya: Even when it was on the telly. [LAUGHTER]

Sangharakshita: So I think it's psychologically and culturally significant, the way in a society we cease to have respect for things. And it does suggest a certain absence of values.

Jayarava: Yes, yes.

Sangharakshita: I think in Britain there are very few occasions on which collectively we express our respect. I think one of the very few is perhaps [Armistice Day](#) and the events that happen around the [Cenotaph](#). I think in America it's a bit different. One of the things I noticed when I was in the States for the first time, was how many houses had a flagpole in the middle of the front lawn, and how many, on certain occasions would run up the [Stars and Stripes](#), and how much respect was paid to the flag, whereas in Britain a [Union Jack](#) is not treated with that kind of respect at all. You can find it on shopping bags, and some football supporters used to wrap it around themselves, whereas, I believe, in the States there's a whole protocol as to how the national flag is to be treated.

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<sup>193</sup> The British anthem, 'God Save the Queen/King'.

Abhayanaga: There's rules about disposing of an old flag.

Naganataka: Those have actually developed fairly recently, just in the last century, those rules.

Sangharakshita: The American customs you mean?

Naganataka: Yes, yes, those were developed in the early part of the Twentieth Century<sup>194</sup>.

Sangharakshita: And of course I know that there was recently a case which was considered by the [Supreme Court](#). I think brought by Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to salute the flag when everybody else did because they considered it a form of idolatry, and the Supreme Court allowed that objection, so they don't have to salute it when others do, or they can't be compelled to salute it<sup>195</sup>.

So there is this whole question of respect, and connected with that, worship. If in a society there's nothing that we can respect, nothing we can look up to, nothing we can worship, that society is probably in a very bad way.

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<sup>194</sup> See this early 20th C. [history of the flag](#).

<sup>195</sup> See, [West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette](#).

Dhira: So in our Movement, that's why the Kalyana Mitra<sup>196</sup> ceremony is very important.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Dhira: We don't have perhaps at my centre, so many of those as perhaps we used to.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well I think the position of kalyana mitrata, official kalyana mitrata, in the Movement has changed over the years.

Dhira: In what way?

Sangharakshita: I seem to remember in the very early days of the Movement, you had kalyana mitras when you were preparing for ordination. But now one often hears of people who have been ordained without having kalyana mitras. That wouldn't have happened in the earlier days.

Dhira: Is the principal reason behind it to help people become ordained? Is that the main reason?

Sangharakshita: It was originally, but it seems to have changed over the years, and some Order members have said that they felt it would

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<sup>196</sup> 'Kalyana mitrata' is the term usually rendered as 'spiritual friendship' in the Triratna Buddhist Community (the word 'kalyana' in this context usually connotes something like 'good', 'noble', 'lovely', 'beautiful', 'benevolent', 'auspicious'). In the training process for joining the Order (see the latter part of [this piece](#)), **Mitras** ('Friends') usually choose two close friends in the Order to be their 'Kalyana Mitras' and help them in their training before and after [ordination itself](#). This is celebrated in a formal ceremony. [Listen to talks](#) on kalyana mitrata.

be helpful to have, as it were, official kalyana mitras, so that has happened.

Dhira: Because it is actually a lifetime commitment, is that right? Technically a lifetime commitment.

Sangharakshita: Well, can you have technicalities in connection with kalyana mitrata? I assume that when people enter into that relationship they intend it to be, so to speak, forever. Just as, when people get ordained, at the time of their ordination, they intend to be an Order member forever, you know? But obviously, they are free to change their minds at any time. And some do - a few do. But the intention is that the relationship is going to last. Just as - it's the same with regard to marriage, although that's not always the case nowadays, but, traditionally at least, people always intended that the marriage should last. That, at least, was their hope.

Naganataka: This does bring up something for me, which is in regards to this whole conversation about sort of veneration for others and what not. Examples we've talked about of sort of civic, nationalistic pride, for the flag or what not, which is that, it seems like in our Movement, the sort of veneration we hold for one another should be an individual choice and not because it's expected of us within the Order, you know, it's not just a way that...

Sangharakshita: Well, ideally it is something that one should feel. That may not be the case in society as a whole. I remember a few years ago in Birmingham, I attended an interfaith meeting. It was a meeting



of representatives of all the different religions represented in Birmingham, and I think pretty well all were represented. So we were gathered in the room and the meeting was to be presided over by the Mayor of Birmingham, hmm? So we were all sitting there waiting for him and then in marched his 'mace bearer' and a master of ceremonies called out 'Please all stand for the Mayor' and everybody stood up. Hmm?

So here we see a civic expression of respect, respect not so much for the individual but for the position that he holds. He's the 'chief citizen' of Birmingham so he's respected as such. Of course he's changed every year. So I was personally rather pleased to see that. At least today there are these sorts of vestiges of tradition and respect.

Naganataka: Sure, and of course there's nothing wrong with that; the problem with that within the Order is that if there is that kind of civic respect, well, if the tone of the Order changes then that sort of respect will change, if it's not an individual choice, you know.

Sangharakshita: Well, Order members should be strong minded enough to be able to make individual choices.

Jayasiddhi: Would you say there's a relationship between receptivity and respect, Bhante?

Sangharakshita: Pardon?

Jayasiddhi: Would you say there's a relationship between receptivity and respect?

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, the fact that one recognises, you know, nobler qualities in another person and therefore respects them suggests that you have an attitude of receptivity towards those particular qualities. I think all these things sort of ‘hang’ together.

Anyway, we’ve wandered a bit from the text, so let’s go on.

Jinapalita: **[118] Yet the very best aspect of the development of Buddha-qualities is found in relation to ordinary beings. One should worship ordinary beings in accordance with this aspect.**

Sangharakshita: Yes. So, the translation uses the word worship and perhaps the term ‘respect’ could just as well have been used. Yes, so ordinary beings are to be respected, venerated, even worshipped, on account of the part that they have played in the Buddha’s attainment of Buddhahood. And also I suppose, for the fact that they themselves, in any case, contain the potential for the realisation of Buddhahood.

All right, let’s move on.

Dhiraka: **[119] Moreover, for those friends who give immeasurable help without pretext what better recompense could there be than propitiating beings?**

Sangharakshita: Let’s hear that again.

Dhiraka: **Moreover, for those friends who give immeasurable help without pretext what better recompense could there be than propitiating beings?**

Sangharakshita: I'm afraid this isn't quite clear to me. Could we have the other translation?

Abhayanaga: ***Moreover, besides pleasing living beings, what other way is there for us to repay those supreme, unchanging friends who bestow immeasurable benefit?***

Sangharakshita: Yes, Shantideva seems to say 'what better way have we for repaying the Buddhas for all that they do for us, than by respecting living beings, who, in some cases at least, by being objects of their forbearance, have enabled them to become Buddhas. It's a little bit round about but... it's as though Shantideva is saying, 'Well, you're concerned with Buddhas and you're concerned with living beings, so you're concerned with those who have actually realised Enlightenment and those who have the potential for realising Enlightenment, yes? And what better way of showing your gratitude (than) by a positive attitude towards living beings?

One might paraphrase that rather irreverently and say 'well, love me, love my dog', hmm? [LAUGHTER]

Well, if you love the Buddha, you will love Buddhists presumably. [MORE LAUGHTER] It would be rather odd if you were to profess to love the Buddha but not particularly like Buddhists, hmm? So this is what Shantideva is saying, you know, show your love for the Buddha by loving Buddhists, or appreciating them at least.

Jayarava: You could take it further as well though, couldn't you, just loving beings.

Sangharakshita: Yes, because beings are, well, not just potential Buddhists but potential Buddhas, hmm? Though it might take them rather longer.

Anyway, let's carry on.

Saddhananda: *[120] One should do it for those for whose sake they dismember their own bodies, and enter the Avici hell<sup>197</sup>. For that reason, even if people are extremely malignant, all that is skilful should be done for them.*

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes, because according to traditional Buddhism the Buddha, as a Bodhisattva, passes through all sorts of lives and sacrifices himself on many occasions and in that way gains Buddhahood. So you should show your gratitude to him for what he has done by the way in which you behave towards sentient beings. Shantideva's putting almost the same sentiment as before into slightly different words.

Priyadaka: Is there a sense here that we should protect others against themselves, or what is skilful should be done for them, reaching out for others to protect themselves against themselves?

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<sup>197</sup> In Buddhist mythology, Avichi ('without waves') is the lowest level of the Naraka or 'hell' realm, into which the dead who have committed grave misdeeds may be reborn.

Sangharakshita: Well sometimes one may have to, but that suggests one's attitude is more like that of a parent towards children, to suggest immaturity on the part of the other people. But sometimes in one's relationships with others, perhaps it is a bit like that. One may, in certain circumstances, have to protect people from themselves. Occasionally one may have to do it, so to speak, forcibly. But of course, that does suggest that you know what is good for the person concerned better than they know it themselves. Which may be the case and of course may not be.

Another comparison that occurred to me was that, and this is a point sometimes made in Buddhist scriptures, that if you are on friendly terms with someone, if that person has children, well then you'll feel well disposed and protective towards the children. So you could say that it's a bit like that with the Buddha and beings. The Buddha is, as it were, spiritually in the position of the father, they are like the children. So if you care for the Buddha and you respect the Buddha, well you will naturally care for sentient beings likewise.

In fact, I think somewhere in the Pali scriptures, mention is made of the fact that one of the signs of friendship is that you look after somebody's children. When the father dies, that is to be expected of a friend. So one could apply that, you know, to the fact that the Buddha Shakyamuni<sup>198</sup> is dead, so we need to have even more care than

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<sup>198</sup> Literally, 'the sage of the Shakyans'. [Siddhartha Gautama's](#) family clan is traditionally given as the Shakya clan. See ['Gautama Buddha'](#) by Vishvapani and ['What Do We Really Know About the Buddha?'](#) by Dhivan.

usual of sentient beings and help them as much as we can, and help them especially by communicating the Dharma. But the best way, no doubt, is showing our appreciation of the Buddha and our appreciation of the teaching that he's given us.

So the Mahayana, generally, has got a lot to say about this relationship between the Buddha and all sentient beings, and the Bodhisattva and all sentient beings. [SILENCE]

Anyway, let's move on.

Jayarava: ***[121] How can I act with arrogance rather than servitude towards those very same masters for the sake of whom my Masters, of their own accord, have such lack of regard for themselves?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Presumably Shantideva is referring to the Buddha's lives as a Bodhisattva, before he became a Buddha, and when he sacrificed himself for the sake of other beings, with the attitude that they were, as it were, his masters. So how can we, as it were, be disrespectful towards those living beings, whom the Buddha himself, as a Bodhisattva, regarded as his masters, and for the sake of whom he sacrificed himself?

Once again Shantideva's purpose seems to be just to encourage us to respect living beings, and the part that they may have played in the Buddha's own previous lives, and also bearing in mind their own potential for gaining Enlightenment.

Jayarava: It strikes me that this is an image rather than an exhortation, in a way, because if we were to treat ordinary beings as our masters and do whatever they wanted us to do, we'd end up probably doing a lot of unskilful things.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Though, of course, Shantideva does use some very extreme language in other chapters; 'May I be a slave to others, may I fulfil their wishes' and so on. Perhaps we have to take that as typical Indian exaggeration of a point. Yes, sometimes we have to say 'No' - perhaps in the interest of the other person as well our own.

Naganataka: I suppose it depends. I mean the old Tibetan nun who I mentioned, you know, whose attitude was, if the prisoners wanted to hurt, let them hurt her. I spent a fair bit of time with her and this was very much her attitude. People could sort of use her in whatever way was useful for them, but I would also say that she was just...she spent a lot of time working on herself and she really... I don't know... She had a kind of presence that that was 'ok'. I don't feel that I myself could necessarily... I couldn't take that same attitude I don't think, without getting into the sort of position that Jayarava's talking about.

Sangharakshita: I think I mentioned somewhere in my memoirs about the Hindu monk I knew. Quite a young monk, a member of the

Ramakrishna Mission<sup>199</sup>. I knew him very well and we talked a lot, and he used to say that well, his attitude was just to be of service to others, and especially the other monks. And he had a reputation of being of service. Some of the older monks always liked him to be around because he'd do anything that they asked. And I could see that it was really genuine on his part. He really enjoyed serving others in that way, especially, you know, serving the other monks.

And he was very helpful to me. This was my early days in Calcutta. He'd take me anywhere I wanted to be taken, to see this temple or that monastery or whatever. He would place himself completely at the service of others. But you have to be able to do this willingly and happily. If you do it with slight resentment or a grudge or feelings that you're being exploited it's not a spiritual practice anymore and not really for you. It's not easy to be able to serve others. In fact in our society the idea of 'serving others' is often regarded as rather demeaning. We don't have a positive attitude. No-one likes to be described as a 'domestic servant' now. Previously almost half the population were domestic servants, but now 'servant' has a rather negative connotation. And if a politician were to say 'I regard myself as a servant of the public' we'd be very suspicious.

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<sup>199</sup> A worldwide spiritual movement known as the Ramakrishna Movement or the Vedanta Movement. The mission is a philanthropic, volunteer organisation founded by Ramakrishna's chief disciple Vivekananda in 1897. The mission conducts extensive work in health care, disaster relief, rural management, tribal welfare, elementary and higher education and culture. It uses the combined efforts of hundreds of ordained monks and thousands of householder disciples. The mission bases its work on the principles of karma yoga.



Jayarava: Not the politicians, but I think the earlier point, I think that's a little bit different in different countries. It may be the same in the States but in New Zealand giving good service is seen as quite a positive thing.

Sangharakshita: Good service? Yes but that's a little bit different from being a good servant. Hmm? Good service is more impersonal, providing a good service. I don't think many people would feel complimented nowadays if they were described as being a 'good servant'.

Jayarava: Yes, I see what you mean, yes.

Saddhananda: People these days may have got very good at giving 'good service' in this country, but it is quite impersonal.

Sangharakshita: Yes, the idea of good service has been quite dissociated from the idea of being a servant.

All right, what's next?

Jayasiddhi: ***[122] At whose happiness the Lords of Sages become joyful; at whose distress they are sorrowful: to satisfy these creatures is to satisfy the Lords of Sages; to offend them is to offend the Sages, too.***

Sangharakshita: Yes, we can't take this very literally for obvious reasons. Well, first of all Buddhas don't become happy or sad, hmm, in the first place. They're even-minded. But anyway, Shantideva puts it

in that way. So if the Buddhas themselves become happy when beings are happy and sad when beings are unhappy, so, we should do our best to make beings happy and avoid making them unhappy. Again, he is trying to encourage a certain attitude, a positive attitude, towards other beings, but we can't take this verse at least, quite literally.

Dhivan: Bhante, I'm thinking about this verse in the context of the Buddha in the Pali Canon, and thinking on the one hand, the Buddha was a teacher, for anyone who was prepared to listen, and on the other hand he was very forthright, and would give people quite stern teachings, when appropriate. Is that another side, as it were, to the attitude of serving?

Sangharakshita: I'm not quite sure what the point is that you're making?

Dhivan: That on the one hand, the Buddha was a servant to beings, in teaching the Dharma...

Sangharakshita: Yes, but in the Pali Canon, we don't find the Buddha using that language of service with regard to himself and his teaching. This sort of language comes in the Mahayana, and of course comes here in the Bodhicaryavatara. No, the language of the Pali Canon is a bit different. The Buddha is always the Teacher. He's always the Master<sup>200</sup>. I don't remember him ever being described in the Pali

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<sup>200</sup> [See here](#) for some epithets of the Buddha in the Pali and Mahayana texts.

Canon, either by himself or by anyone else as being, so to speak, a servant, or serving. Anyway, that sort of language goes quite against the general image of the Buddha that we're presented with in the Pali Canon, which is of course the human historical Buddha. Shantideva seems to be speaking more of the Mahayana Buddha who is much more of an idealised figure, one might say.

*Samudraghosa:* Bhante, you mentioned the Buddhas being even-minded and not experiencing... I can't remember the words you used... I think you said 'sorrow and joy' or something like that. Could we not expect the Buddhas, to, in some sense, to experience pleasure or pain in accordance with the pleasure or pain others are feeling?

*Sangharakshita:* Well, it's quite clear in the Pali scriptures that the Buddha can experience physical pain, but it's also made quite clear that the Buddha does not experience the emotions that ordinary people experience. By virtue of his Enlightenment he has transcended those. That's the sort of picture of the Buddha that we get in the Pali scriptures. He may feel pain, he may feel tired; that's all physical, but his mind is not affected by that. His mind remains, well, so to speak, Enlightened.

Vidyakaya: Did he not express some grief when [Shariputta](#) and [Moggallana](#) died<sup>201</sup>? I don't think he beat his chest but he expressed regret, I thought.

Sangharakshita: I don't remember that he expressed any regret there. He certainly made it clear that he valued them and that their death, their premature death even, was a great loss to the Sangha. But of course, don't forget, he rebuked Ananda, when Ananda expressed sorrow and regret at the thought that the Buddha himself was going to pass away<sup>202</sup>. So it would have been rather inconsistent for the Buddha to feel sorrow and regret when Shariputta and Moggallana passed away.

But I think it's very difficult for us to imagine that sort of mind. A mind which is not subject to grief, not subject to joy in the ordinary sense. Which doesn't entertain any negative emotion, but is one of pure Insight, compassion, purity and so on. It's very difficult for us to imagine even; such a mind, such a person. This is so much beyond our own experience, even our own experience of ourselves at our best. Or our experience of other people at their best.

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<sup>201</sup> The Buddha's two chief disciples. In the [Cunda Sutta](#), the Buddha speaks of his feeling for them shortly after their deaths.

<sup>202</sup> In the preceding section of the [same sutta](#) Ananda expresses his own grief at the death of his mentor Shariputta and the Buddha responds with his famous injunction: 'Therefore, Ananda, be ye an island unto yourself, a refuge unto yourself, seeking no external refuge; with the Teaching as your island, the Teaching your refuge, seeking no other refuge.'

Dhiraka: Is there anything that you could recommend that would help in sort of relating to that sort of mind?

Sangharakshita: Well I think reflection, and reading at least some parts of the Pali scriptures. I remember an interesting discussion I had, you know, in this sort of connection, with one of the famous [Vipassana](#) teachers in America, [Jack Kornfield](#)<sup>203</sup>. This was a few years ago, well, quite a few years ago. Manjuvajra was very friendly with him, so we arranged to meet. So Manjuvajra and I met up with Jack Kornfield at [Spirit Rock](#). They'd just acquired the property.

We had lunch together and a long discussion, and Jack Kornfield was saying that in a sense he had a sort of problem, was in a dilemma. He said his teacher was in [Burma](#)<sup>204</sup>. His teacher was Burmese, yes, and he said he believed, he sincerely believed, that his teacher was Enlightened. Fully Enlightened. But he said he also had to recognise that his teacher had quite a bad temper. So he said that therefore he had come the conclusion that being Enlightened and having a bad temper were not incompatible.

Well, I disagreed with that. I said that it is very clear, in the Pali scriptures, that the Buddha is beyond the possibility of getting angry, so if someone gets angry, whatever his other accomplishments, then I can't believe that he's fully Enlightened. So I differed with Jack here.

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<sup>203</sup> One of the founders of the [Insight Meditation Society \(IMS\)](#).

<sup>204</sup> Officially, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, commonly shortened to Myanmar.

And I remember a few years later, I was talking with [Ayya Khema](#)<sup>205</sup>, I don't know if you remember her or know about her, and I mentioned this incident to her, and we were agreed upon that point, hmm?

But then this led me to other more general reflections, that it's very difficult for us to envisage what it is like to be Enlightened, or what a fully Enlightened person would be like. And so we might even start doubting whether such a thing is possible at all. We might even start wondering whether the Buddha himself, Shakyamuni, was Enlightened, fully, and therefore we might start wondering 'well, perhaps he was culturally conditioned and maybe some of his teachings were culturally conditioned and therefore we're free to reject them' and so on.

So I think this is a very important point, that we have to make a real effort to imagine or to envisage what the Buddha was really like. And what it would be like to be free from greed, free from anger, free from delusion. It's not easy, but so much depends upon that. And there are passages in the Pali Canon, several of them, where the Buddha says,

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<sup>205</sup> Ayya Khema (August 25, 1923 - November 2, 1997), a Buddhist teacher, born as *Ise Kusse* in Berlin, Germany, to Jewish parents. Khema escaped Nazi persecution during World War II. She eventually moved to the United States. After travelling in Asia she decided to become a Buddhist nun in Sri Lanka in 1979 and was very active in providing opportunities for women to practise Buddhism, founding several centers (centres) around the world.

'Monks, a being without delusion has arisen in the world'<sup>206</sup>, referring, of course, to himself. A being without delusion has arisen in the world. And that's a very extraordinary thing, because it's delusion in the full traditional Buddhist sense. The Buddha does not suffer from that delusion, hmm? And it's on that account that he is able to teach the Dharma.

So I think that as Buddhists, you know, one needs to take the Buddha, as it were, seriously and try to see, or try to envisage what he was like; what it was like to be Enlightened, beyond anything we can experience or imagine at present. Perhaps we get little glimpses sometimes, hmm? And that helps. It still remains far beyond.

Jayarava: It's a very common beginner's question, you know, 'Who's Enlightened? Are you Enlightened?' They want to know if Sangharakshita's Enlightened, is anyone Enlightened in the Order? And often I think that slightly more charismatic leaders like the Dalai Lama are considered to be Enlightened, and sometimes I wonder whether we don't slightly fudge the question as we hang around a bit longer.

Sangharakshita: Charisma is something different from being Enlightened.

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<sup>206</sup> The references for this particular quotation/translation seem unclear. [Viewable as a similar quotation](#) (given as from the [Majjhima Nikaya](#)) as part of 'The Buddha and His Disciples' by Shravasti Dhammika, and [elsewhere](#); likely refers to '[Chiggala Sutta: The Hole](#)': 'A *Tathagata*, worthy & rightly self-awakened, has arisen in the world.'

Jayarava: Oh yes.

Sangharakshita: I met the Dalai Lama recently as I mentioned, and I don't think he's charismatic, in the negative sense or the popular sense. He's honest and straightforward. You know where you stand with him. When he communicates he really does communicate. There are other teachers who have been around who are charismatic and whose charisma I would be a bit suspicious of.

Khemajala: Some people have suggested that we talk... Well, those people who've got them, talk more concretely about things that have happened to them through practice, without necessarily making any claims about what they are. Is that possibly a way for people to talk about this area?

Sangharakshita: I think it's quite in order to communicate, you know, one's experiences, even one's spiritual experiences, within a context of friendship. But I think the difficulty arises if the other person expresses perhaps a degree of scepticism or doubt, what does one do then? I think what one shouldn't do is to try to 'prove' that what one has said is true and that you did have that experience. And I think some people may have been a bit hesitant to talk about their spiritual experiences because they don't want to be put in a position of, in a sense, almost having to prove that they've had those experiences. Because one can't.

Abhayanaga: You'll be much more highly scrutinised after saying something like that. It might be very awkward or uncomfortable.



Jayarava: There's a chap in Cambridge who says he's experienced all of the **Eight Dhyanas**, all of the **Arupa Dhyanas** as well as the **Rupa Dhyanas**.<sup>207</sup> I just never know what to make of something like that. I kind of have to go, 'Hmm...'.

Sangharakshita: Well, it's not impossible. I also know someone who has experienced all those dhyanas, but he doesn't make any claims. Well, he's rather matter of fact about it. I don't think he's told many people.

It's not just a question of rather unusual experiences. In the case of a lot of people it's just a case of plodding along with one's regular practice of ethics, meditation, spiritual friendship and so on. And I think that there are quite a lot of people that perhaps don't think... Don't bother to take stock of themselves in that sort of way, but who have, actually, over the years, as I've seen myself in some cases, developed very considerably. They may not necessarily be particularly known as a lecturer or a meditation teacher.

Well, I know, judging by the people who come to see me, that quite a few Mitras who fall into this category, who've been practising for maybe eight or ten years, have really quite substantially achieved something. But who wouldn't think of themselves as particularly spiritually developed. So all the more reason for being quite open-

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<sup>207</sup> 'Dhyana' or 'jhana' is a term sometimes used as synonymous with 'meditation', though it particularly refers to degrees of absorption and concentration achieved within meditation. For an exploration of the four dhyanas of form (**rupa**) and the four formless (**arupa**) dhyanas, see '[On the Threshold of Enlightenment](#)' by Sangharakshita.

minded about the people that we meet, and not assuming either that they're necessarily more developed than us or that we are more developed than them. We don't know, though we may get know, or have some idea, once we know them better or more deeply but to begin with we should just be open-minded. Whether it's another Order member or even a Mitra, we don't know.

All right, let's hear some more.

Jinapalita: It's just over an hour.

Sangharakshita: Oh, right. Time passes doesn't it? [LAUGHTER] Well we'd better continue in the afternoon in that case and I assume we'll be finishing in the afternoon.

All: Thank you, thank you very much.

## session 10: verses 123-134

(11th june, afternoon)

Sangharakshita: All right then; so, where did we leave off?

Vidyakaya: *[123] Just as no bodily pleasure at all can gladden the mind of one whose body is engulfed in flames, so too those full of compassion cannot come near to feeling joy when living beings are in distress.*

Sangharakshita: Hmm. But I, I wonder a bit about that first part, that first clause, hmm? Let's hear that again.

Vidyakaya: Shall I read it again?

Sangharakshita: The first part.

Vidyakaya: *Just as no bodily pleasure at all can gladden the mind of one whose body is engulfed in flames...*

Sangharakshita: Hmm, ah. I think this rather underestimates the capacity of the mind in certain extreme circumstances. Yes. I mention this because it has been a bit in my mind recently on account of the investigations that Devamitra's been doing into the life of [Quang Duc](#)<sup>208</sup>. You remember Quang Duc?

Various: Hmm; yeah.

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<sup>208</sup> The Vietnamese monk famous for his self-immolation in 1963 as a protest against persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government. See '[Quang Duc](#)' by [Devamitra](#).

Sangharakshita: He was the first of the Vietnamese monks who immolated themselves in Vietnam, and by all accounts, though he was enveloped in flames, his mind remained quite calm and steady, as one can see from the photographs taken at the time. And well, there are other remarkable cases, even in relatively modern times, or earlier times, of people who've died in that sort of way, but apparently maintaining a very positive mental state. So it does seem that the mind has capacities that we're not usually aware of, in exceptional circumstances, and perhaps exceptional people.

And Quang Duc was certainly an exceptional person; Devamitra's been interviewing people who knew him, and finding out more and more about him, and he's found, he's discovered some quite extraordinary things, which I hope that he'll eventually be able to embody in a book or at least a lengthy essay, about Quang Duc. Because I was, of course, around at that time, and I remember very clearly reading about Quang Duc's self-immolation and seeing photographs of it in the Indian papers. And, of course, I had Vietnamese monk friends who spoke to me about it. Anyway, just that in passing. And yes, in the same way, in the case of the genuine Bodhisattva, it's difficult for him to enjoy himself, one might say, when he realises that beings are suffering.

Jayarava: Might this also be a reference to the fire sermon?

Sangharakshita: Pardon?

Jayarava: Might this also be a reference to the fire sermon, that all things are on fire?

Sangharakshita: Yes, it could be.

Jayarava: Therefore there's no pleasure while you're on fire with the fires of greed, hatred and delusion.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Well it's not that beings realise that they're on fire with greed, hatred and delusion; they think that they're quite happy, but nonetheless the Bodhisattva is filled with compassion with regard to them. They don't realise that they're suffering. And of course usually we find it very easy to exclude from our mind the thought of others suffering, especially when we are enjoying ourselves; we find it very easy, usually, to shut it out.

But Shantideva is saying, so to speak, that the Bodhisattva is not like that. While beings are suffering, whether they realise it or not, it's difficult for him to feel happy; he wants to relieve them, wants to relieve them of their suffering, and that's why he wants to become Enlightened, so that he can do that more effectively, by teaching them.

Dhivan: Bhante, how do you think this fits with the idea that an Enlightened being, having attained [Nirvana](#)<sup>209</sup>, has attained highest happiness, and yet also will feel for other living beings in states of distress?

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<sup>209</sup> Literally 'blown-out' or 'extinguished'; referring to the peace of having extinguished the fires of greed, hatred and confusion in ourselves.

Sangharakshita: Well I suppose it's a state of mind which is very difficult for us to envisage. I sometimes quote a line of Tennyson, which goes like this; he speaks of 'Some painless sympathy with pain'<sup>210</sup>. So it must be something of that sort. Somehow you sympathise with pain, but you don't experience the pain. Nonetheless your sympathy is genuine. So some painless sympathy with pain. So one has to think of the Buddha as it were exemplifying that in the highest degree. He deeply sympathises with the pain of other people; it's a very genuine sympathy, but it doesn't mean that the Buddha himself is suffering. It's a sort of state of mind very difficult for us to have an idea of, even.

Jayarava: Presumably he could remember having suffered, if we're talking about the historical Buddha.

Sangharakshita: Yes, yes definitely. Well, he refers to his period of self-mortification, doesn't he, while speaking about his own earlier life, before the Enlightenment. In fact he says he subjected himself to unparalleled sufferings. [LONG PAUSE] Anyway, let's move on.

Abhayanaga: ***[124] Therefore, today, I confess as evil the suffering I have caused to all those of Great Compassion by causing suffering to those people. May the Sages forgive that which has oppressed them.***

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<sup>210</sup> From 'In Memoriam, A.H.H', section 8, written for his friend Arthur H. Hallam: 'Canst thou feel for me/Some painless sympathy with pain?' The full text is [available here](#).

Sangharakshita: Yes. So Shantideva brings in the element of confession. He asks the Buddhas to forgive the pain he has caused them by inflicting pain on those on whose account they feel pain, in other words living beings, human beings. Of course Shantideva seems to assume here, as in previous verses, that the Buddhas do actually, literally, feel the pain of others, but I do not personally agree with that.

Khemajala: It seems to suggest that we're supposed to bring the pain quite close to ourselves, rather than leave it with people who are quite indifferent to it: bring it much closer to home.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Yes.

Vidyakaya: There seems to be something about empathy here: you can empathise with someone's pain, and actually really experience it; you sort of tune into it.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well if someone suffers extreme physical pain, you can feel sorry for them, but you don't feel the pain.

Abhayanaga: What do you think of the practice of [tonglen](#)<sup>211</sup>, where you're meant to literally think that you're taking on the sufferings of all beings, and giving away your own merit?

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<sup>211</sup> Tibetan for 'giving and taking' (or 'sending and receiving'). Refers to a meditation practice where, on the in-breath, you visualise receiving into yourself the suffering of others, and then on the out-breath sending happiness and wellbeing to all [sentient beings](#). [See here](#) for audio and text resources from a tonglen retreat.

Sangharakshita: Yes, I think one has to be very careful one doesn't delude oneself, in this connection, because one isn't taking on the sufferings of all beings. Well you're not, are you? [LAUGHTER] So what does it mean to say in that sort of way that you are taking on the suffering of all beings?

Abhayanaga: I think of it more as aspirational.

Sangharakshita: Yes, does it express a wish, or an aspiration? And, but do you literally, here and now, really want to do that? [LAUGHTER] I think we have to be honest with regard to these rather grandiose sentiments, whether we really mean them or not. And I think with regard to the Mahayana generally, and its rather florid style of expression, we have to be particularly careful. We don't have to be so careful with regard to most of the Pali Canon, the Pali scriptures, because the language is much more restrained and sober. But the language of the Mahayana is often very extravagant.

Vidyakaya: On the Bodhichitta retreat they had here recently, with Padmavajra teaching<sup>212</sup>, it was very much in the context of [sadhana](#)<sup>213</sup> and the Six Element Practice<sup>214</sup>. And in a sense - he was explaining

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<sup>212</sup> Listen to some of the material that would have been used by [Padmavajra](#) on this retreat [here](#) and [here](#).

<sup>213</sup> In this context, refers to the particular meditation chosen by (or given to) a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order at the time of ordination as an insight practice.

<sup>214</sup> Another meditation intended to facilitate insight into the true nature of all things as being impermanent and devoid of any fixed self-nature. For more on this, see [Six Element Practice](#) on Free Buddhist Audio.



that it wasn't really me taking on the suffering. I was getting out of the way, trying to facilitate the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas taking on and giving back.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. So it means we have to make sure that we really understand what it is we're saying, in this sort of connection, not just repeat the words, and not think that we understand what we're saying when in fact perhaps we don't, or not understand it fully anyway. Of course, there are some people who can get into rather strange mental states where they really do think that they're taking upon themselves the sufferings of the world. It's a sort of saviour complex that can develop, and that's certainly not a very healthy thing. Perhaps it's much safer to just think, I would like to be so spiritually developed, so highly developed, that I can really make a very definite contribution to the lessening of human suffering. That's more realistic, and more truthful.

Jayarava: There is that story at the end of Milarepa's life, where the lama has poisoned him, and says, 'Oh, Milarepa, I wish I could take on your pain', and so Milarepa actually gives him part of the experience of the pain, and it's completely unbearable<sup>215</sup>.

Sangharakshita: Yes. [LAUGHTER] Yes, Milarepa calls his bluff!

Jayarava: Yes, and he can't live up to it.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Hmm. Alright then, let's press on.

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<sup>215</sup> See the [story here](#). Also [the songs](#) composed around the time.

Amalavajra: *[125] Now, to propitiate the **Tathagatas**<sup>216</sup>, with my entire self I become a servant to the world. Let streams of people place their foot upon my head or strike me down. Let the Lord of the World be satisfied.*

Sangharakshita: Hmm, in the translation I don't like this word 'propitiation'. It suggests something rather dark and negative in the character of the Buddha, which needs to be propitiated.

Vidyakaya: Something a bit wrathful.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Also, this expression of others placing their feet on one's head; of course this is very extreme indeed, because in India, normally you would never allow your head to come into contact with somebody's feet, unless of course you revered them very, very greatly.

Vidyakaya: This is exactly what this old lady did to me in Bodh Gaya; I was really surprised.

Sangharakshita: Well, she must have thought you were Enlightened.

Vidyakaya: She must have thought I was a god or something.

Sangharakshita: Well, perhaps you looked like that. [LAUGHTER] How should she know?! Anyway, just let's hear that verse once more.

Amalavajra: ***Now, to propitiate the Tathagatas, with my entire self I become a servant to the world. Let streams of people***

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<sup>216</sup> An epithet of the Buddha which he uses to describe himself. Often translated as either 'one who has thus gone' or 'one who has thus come'.

*place their foot upon my head or strike me down. Let the Lord of the World be satisfied.*

Sangharakshita: Yes, let me become a servant to the world. Of course, Shantideva has expressed this much more elaborately early on in the text. And yes, 'a servant of the world' is perhaps a bit too ambitious. Perhaps one can be of service within one's own sphere of activity. Perhaps Shantideva, when he speaks these words, is thinking of the time that he will be a Buddha, and will perhaps be able to be of service to the whole world, not just to a few people.

Amalavajra: I heard something second-hand that seemed useful around this, in terms of when you think of all living beings, most of us just think about the people that you're with. I found that really...

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's more realistic, obviously.

Vidyakaya: It's easy to get very grandiose and actually do nothing; it's better to be practical, to actually do something practical.

Sangharakshita: Yes, it's easy to be carried away by wonderful dreams of what you'll do when you become a Buddha, or even a great Bodhisattva, and actually not do very much in the here and now, in your immediate circumstances. I think that's perhaps a weakness of some popularised forms of the Mahayana, that people lose themselves in these sorts of dreams.

Samudraghosa: Bhante would it be better then to have a... Would it be better then to have a simpler form of the Transference of Merit and

Self-Surrender<sup>217</sup>, which we use quite a lot, which is quite ... well I don't like the word grandiose in connection with that, but it is... The scale is quite enormous.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. No, I wouldn't like to alter the words, alter Shantideva's words, but certainly we should interpret them in our own case rather modestly, and realise our limitations, but do the best we can within those limitations.

Jayarava: Bhante, I... I struggle with this kind of language, and with some of the other language that Shantideva uses.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: I get a sense of quite strong self-hatred in this kind of... You know, 'Let people strike me down, and place their foot on my head': the kind of quite violent language that he uses about the body in other places in the text, I have found it quite disturbing at times.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well it's not a language which is really natural to us in the West, except perhaps for some, in the case of some Christian saints. But be that as it may, that's not our language nowadays, our religious or spiritual language, and this is just one example of the fact that, as the Dharma moves to the West, there will

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<sup>217</sup> The [closing section](#) of the [Sevenfold Puja](#), a [key ritual](#) performed in the Triratna Buddhist Community, the text of which is derived from the Bodhicaryavatara itself.

be a sort of, what I've spoken of as a translation of the Dharma<sup>218</sup> into cultural terms which are more familiar to us.

Jayarava: Also, I imagine, you know, how it would be to read that line in an audience of Dalits, for instance, who have been struck down...

Sangharakshita: And of course they're Indian, hmm? Even so.

Jayarava: Yes. I can't imagine them feeling that any good would come of that kind of language.

Sangharakshita: Yes. But of course, in the West we're in a difficulty, because on the one hand there's the traditional religious, i.e. Christian, language. On the other there is purely secular language, and neither of these languages is really adequate to express what we as Western Buddhists would like to express, and I suppose that will develop gradually, just as more visibly in the realm of art we're gradually developing a more Western kind of Buddhist art<sup>219</sup>.

Aloka represents a sort of step in that direction, and so does Chintamani<sup>220</sup>, but probably no more than a step. There's a long way to go. And similarly with language, with our religious language. We're

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<sup>218</sup> See Track 8, '[My Relation to the Order](#)'.

<sup>219</sup> See, '[The Religion Of Art](#)' by Sangharakshita, and '[In the Realm of the Lotus](#)'. For more explorations of this topic, see talks around the '[religion of art](#)' and [the Arts](#) generally.

<sup>220</sup> Another prominent artist in the Triratna Buddhist Order, specializing in paintings and sculptures of Buddha figures. Recent examples can be seen [here](#) (image from [this story](#) from Mexico) and [here](#).

probably going to have to modify quite a lot. A modification of that sort did take place, of course, in the Far East, when many of the Zen teachers did away with the rather exaggerated, florid, Indian religious language, and reverted to something much more succinct, much more straightforward.

Jayarava: There's texts like the [Awakening of Faith](#)<sup>221</sup> which scholars now think was composed in China, which does that same thing: presents the philosophical arguments without all the hyperbole.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I'm thinking more of Zen questions and answers: mondos or haikus. It's all there, but in such a very different form from what we get, say, in the Mahayana sutras, or other Indian work. But of course in the West Buddhism is really just beginning to strike root, so we've a long way to go yet, and in the meantime, well we are so to speak almost landed with some of this more traditional Indian language.

I know people have tried to write Sevenfold Pujas in a more acceptable style, but I'm afraid they just don't work. Not, you know, for practical purposes, for collective recitation. I know this does present a problem for some people. I remember in the very early days there was someone who objected to the verse where we speak of 'mandarava, blue lotus and jasmine'. He said: well we're not actually

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<sup>221</sup> 'The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana', attributed to [Ashvaghosha](#). The term Mahayana points not to the Mahayana school, but to the concept of 'suchness'. A full (non-Christianized) translation of the text is [available online](#), tr. Teitaro Suzuki, 1900.

offering these things, so when we say that we are, we're telling a lie. So he was rather literal-minded. But that's one kind of difficulty.

So I, my own feeling is, for the time being at least we go on using the same old Sevenfold Puja for instance, until something better, something more appropriate finally emerges from our collective endeavour.

Vidyakaya: I know my response to the Sevenfold Puja has changed completely, over ten years. I used to be a bit reactive or just uncomprehending. Now it does feel much more real. Also, we were talking about self-hatred. This kind of language does certainly trigger a reaction if one is suffering from self-hatred, and presumably the people it was addressed to were not particularly suffering from self-hatred, were probably reasonably well-adjusted, because it is very much, it seems to be a very western phenomenon.

Sangharakshita: Hmm.

Vidyakaya: So, in some ways, looking at this stuff and allowing that triggering but not taking it too literally, just trying to work with it, is quite helpful, because it does... Certainly pujas used to bring up all sorts of reactions in me, and that was actually helpful.

Sangharakshita: For some people puja itself, the very notion of puja, produces a very negative reaction, for various reasons.

Saddhananda: It strikes me that Shantideva, as far as I read it and experience it, Shantideva at least tries to do something that I haven't

found in any other Buddhist writing, which is he, almost on purpose, he's trying to stimulate an emotional response, a strong emotional response, with these kind of things, and I get where Jayarava's coming from but then counter that with what Vidyakaya says. It's almost like, in a way I find it quite amazing, that he sees that, and he's almost trying to, I don't know, liberate emotional energy or something, in himself, by going through, by putting his mind and his heart through these possibilities. I think it's quite special. I don't know if anyone else sees it like that.

**Sangharakshita:** The Bodhicaryavatara is certainly quite an extraordinary text, and I don't think there's any other text in Indian Buddhist literature quite like it. That's perhaps why we do spend so much time over it, and why now there's so many translations. When I started reading Buddhist books there was just one translation into English, which didn't include the last chapter. Now, to the best of my knowledge there are at least seven complete translations, so that's rather significant. Some translations from the Sanskrit, and others from the Tibetan translation.

**Saddhananda:** Do you think, Bhante, that we should feel free to experiment, with coming up with different translations of stuff, to actively go about it?

**Sangharakshita:** Do you mean translations in the literal sense or in a broader sense?



Saddhananda: I don't know quite what I mean, to be honest.

[LAUGHTER] I guess it could include both.

Sangharakshita: I do know that, in the course of the various [Buddhafield](#) events<sup>222</sup>, there's a certain amount of experimentation in connection with ritual, and, I mean I haven't witnessed any of these things, but people say that, well, it's experimental, and it's not quite traditional, though there are traditional elements, but people do find it at least uplifting, at least some people do, or perhaps many people do. So a certain amount of experimentation is going on. Anyway, let's experiment with the next verse [LAUGHTER].

Naganataka: ***[126] There is no doubt that those whose selfhood is compassion have taken this entire world for themselves. Is it not the case that they appear in the form of these good people! It is these people who are the Lords. How can I be disrespectful?***

Sangharakshita: Hmm, hmm. Let's hear that again, especially that first part.

Naganataka: ***There is no doubt that those whose selfhood is compassion have taken this entire world for themselves.***

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<sup>222</sup> [Buddhafield](#) is a land-based Buddhist retreat and festival project based in the UK. [See here](#) for a range of talks, videos and pictures from the main [Buddhafield Festival](#).

Sangharakshita: Yes, 'whose selfhood is compassion': that clearly refers to the Buddha, or Buddhas. They've 'taken the whole world for...'

Naganataka: 'For themselves'

Sangharakshita: For themselves. Yes, made no distinction between themselves and the world, themselves and others. And then?

Naganataka: ***Is it not the case that they appear in the form of these good people!***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Yes, so that's a further point. That we should see the Buddhas, at least perhaps as existing potentially, in people, people in general.

Jayasiddhi: Could you say a bit more about that, Bhante?

Sangharakshita: I suppose it's a question of recognising the potentiality that people have. This of course may sometimes be quite difficult, because people may be behaving in a very unskillful way, and it may be difficult to see any virtue in them, not to speak of potentiality for Enlightenment. But it is very much the belief, the confidence of Buddhism in general, not just the Mahayana, that every human being has the potential of becoming Enlightened. So one should bear that in mind in dealing with people, and of course bear in mind the possibility of a change, as it were a conversion, taking place in the case of even the most unlikely people.

Vidyakaya: Did the idea of [Buddha Nature](#) or [tathagatagarbha](#) exist at this time?

Sangharakshita: I think that's a doctrine where one has to be quite careful<sup>223</sup>.

Vidyakaya: Oh yes. I just wondered if it could have been in Shantideva's mind at the time, or if it was a later development.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, the tathagatagarbha doctrine is a very late development, but it probably had already come into existence, probably by the time of Shantideva, so he may well have been aware of that. But he doesn't quite use that language. I personally think it's a rather dangerous language to use. I think it's much better to think in terms, well as I've said, of potential, rather than telling someone: well, you are a Buddha, so you ought to behave as Buddha. It's meaningless. But it's quite meaningful to say that someone has great spiritual potential, and there's no, in theory, in principle, there's no limit to that potential.

Amalavajra: Then why do you say, what's the danger...? You say that's dangerous.

Sangharakshita: The danger is that one thinks not that the tathagatagarbha represents a potentiality but that it is something literally there at present.

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<sup>223</sup> For some discussion of this approach to awakening within the Buddhist tradition, see [these talks](#).

Amalavajra: So one might not make the efforts that one needs to.

Sangharakshita: Yes, so one might not, would not, need not, really, make the effort.

Jayarava: I haven't studied it closely, but looking at tathagatagarbha, it seems as though it's an answer to the problem of how do we get Enlightened if we're unenlightened, and it strikes me that, because we have the spiral path teaching, we don't have to solve that problem. We have a very good approach to how can an unenlightened being become Enlightened. So we don't need to fall back on some sort of innate nature. There's a clear path for us.

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. I think there's, one might say there were two extremes to be avoided. One is the sort of Vedantic extreme that you are that, you are **Brahman**, you are already Enlightened, but you don't know it. And the other extreme is that of some forms of Christianity: you are a miserable sinner. [LAUGHTER]

Buddhism follows a Middle Path<sup>224</sup> between these two extremes, recognising that, yes, we are quite a mixture of skilful and unskilful. But we do have the potential to grow, to develop, and even eventually, perhaps of course after many lifetimes, because most Buddhists believe in rebirth, to become Enlightened. So we're neither already perfect nor of course totally imperfect. We're mixed beings who are

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<sup>224</sup> Commonly referred to as 'The Middle Way'. See 'Twenty Years On The Middle Way', Sangharakshita, 1987.

capable of transcending whatever we are at present, if we follow a spiritual path. All right, so what comes next?

Samudraghosa: ***[127] This alone is the propitiation of the Tathagatas; this alone is the fulfilment of my own goal; this alone beats back the suffering of the world; so, let this alone be my vow.***

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Here Shantideva seems to be winding up or be concluding. So what is he referring to, does one think?

Samudraghosa: I think he's referring back. He doesn't seem to be referring forward.

Sangharakshita: Let's hear it again.

Samudraghosa: Shall I read the previous verse as well?

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Samudraghosa: ***There is no doubt that those whose selfhood is compassion have taken this entire world for themselves. Is it not the case that they appear in the form of these good people! It is these people who are the Lords. How can I be disrespectful?***

***This alone is the propitiation of the Tathagatas; this alone is the fulfilment of my own goal; this alone beats back the suffering of the world; so, let this alone be my vow.***

Sangharakshita: Yes. You please the Buddhas by serving living beings, by becoming a servant of the world. But again, propitiation I think isn't really quite suitable.

Priyadaka: Is there a word you have in mind that would be more helpful?

Sangharakshita: Well, I have said I preferred 'pleasing', though even that's not really quite suitable.

Abhayanaga: The other translation is 'delights the Tathagatas'.

Sangharakshita: Again, perhaps a word doesn't exist in our language to express the...

[BREAK IN RECORDING; missing verses:]

***[128] When a single servant of the king tyrannizes the entire populace, the far-sighted populace has no power to effect change,***

***[129] Because he is not really alone: his potency is the potency of the king. So one should refrain from slighting any impotent person who has caused offence,***

***[130] Since his potency is that of the warders of hell and of the Compassionate Ones. For that reason one should propitiate living beings, just as a servant would a cruel king.***

***[131] What could a wrathful king do that would equal the agony of hell experienced as a result of causing misery to living beings?***

Sangharakshita: ...it varies. A lot, of course, might be seeking, for want of a better phrase, peace of mind: that's why very often meditation is the gateway for them into the Dharma. Quite a few people come along to our **public Centres**, or even go on retreats, because they want to join a meditation class or learn about meditation. They don't always necessarily think in terms of Buddhism. But after a while they come to realise that the meditation that they have learned, the **mindfulness of breathing**, the **metta bhavana**, is part of a whole **system of practice**<sup>225</sup> which we call the Dharma. So they become involved, in many cases, in the Dharma, in Buddhism as such.

And I remember that when we, the first time we held a men's ordination retreat at Il Convento<sup>226</sup>, I had the idea - or someone had the idea - that we should start off by hearing life stories. And the idea was that each person on the retreat, each prospective ordinee, would just take ten minutes to give a summary of his life. But actually it so

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<sup>225</sup> The 'Mindfulness of Breathing' (a variation on **Anapanasati** meditation) and the 'Metta Bhavana' ('Cultivation of Loving Kindness') are the two main **samatha** ('calming') meditations taught within the Triratna Buddhist Community. See specific discussion of the Triratna '**system of meditation**'.

<sup>226</sup> A former monastery in Tuscany, Italy, where for many years ordinations into the Triratna Buddhist Order were held. [See here](#) for some reminiscences of Il Convento.

happened that most of them took two hours, [LAUGHTER] and I remember one person, one man, needed two whole evenings. But what struck me, personally, was the extent of suffering that many people had gone through; and that suffering was, usually, perhaps more mental than physical, and they had a really tough struggle, for years and years; and here they were, they ended up at Il Convento, ready to be ordained. So many people's motivation is to get away from a very unsatisfactory kind of existence, even a very painful mental state. Some come along with a history of alcoholism. There's quite a few ex-AA<sup>227</sup> people in the Movement, a few in the Order, and some I know keep up their AA membership because they're so fearful of falling back; they just don't want to fall back at all costs.

So I think very, I think comparatively few people start going along to an FWBO Centre because they just want to hear about the Dharma. Usually it's some personal problem, for want of a better term, that they're seeking a solution to.

Vidyakaya: Dharmamodana was saying the other day, in Southampton that they have two classes, and one of them is very much people who are simply suffering, in quite a gross way, and the others are more successful, quite well-established people, but they have a sense of meaninglessness, quite existential suffering. Two quite clear groups; it's very interesting.

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<sup>227</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous.



Sangharakshita: I've noticed recently, in the course of the last year especially - people come to see me virtually every day - and I notice I've had recently a relatively large number of women in their sixties, who've been married, had children, are now retired, and are just looking for something more than what they've experienced so far. Quite a number of them. And sometimes surprisingly similar, because I think within the same ten days I had a woman of sixty, who had had four children, and had contacted the FWBO recently, and within ten days another woman, also sixty, had four children, and recently contacted the FWBO.

So there's almost a sort of pattern emerging; people have had successful lives, successful domestically, professionally, children grown-up, gone their own way, and now they think, what next? So that's another group? - as you said. But certainly more and more people are coming along to our Centres. That seems very clear. And more recently I've noticed a few more younger people than we have had, more recently. When I say young, I mean definitely in their twenties, if not early twenties. So that's a change for the better. We're becoming more representative across the range of ages.

Vidyakaya: Do you have any ideas about what we can do to encourage that? Because, Lokabandhu was saying with the Order Survey<sup>228</sup>, apparently the average age of the Order is fifty.

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<sup>228</sup> Conducted in 2007.

Sangharakshita: Well, I think what is important, where young people are concerned: the Centre, and the Order members who are teaching at the Centre: they must be lively. They must be, not just energetic, but they must really communicate that they're alive, that they're vital, that the Dharma really means something to them - enthusiastic. Young people are much more likely to be attracted to people of that sort. And when they come along to the Centre, well it's the people that they'll be attracted to, or not attracted to, and who'll make an impression on them, not the building.

Vidyakaya: That was true for me, when I first came along I was in my forties. Nagaraja led the classes that I first went to, and he had exactly those qualities. And that really is what drew me in.

Sangharakshita: Yes. You don't necessarily have to have young Order members taking classes, but certainly you need to have youthful Order members of whatever age, who are inspired and who can communicate that inspiration. I think that's what's really necessary. People respond to that.

Jayarava: It's interesting, looking back: you were in your forties, I think, when you started the FWBO, and you attracted lots and lots of young people.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. Some of them very young. Anyway, let's move on.

Dhivan: **[132] What could a gratified king give that would equal Buddhahood, experienced as a result of causing happiness to living beings?**

Sangharakshita: Hmm, yes. That's a more positive, other side of the coin. Yes, that's pretty obvious. All right, let's carry on from there.

Khemajala: **[133] Never mind future Buddhahood arising from the propitiation of living being! Do you not see good fortune, renown, and well-being right here and now?**

Sangharakshita: Hmm. 'Do you not seek...?'

Khemajala: 'Do you not see... good fortune'

Sangharakshita: 'Do you not see'

Khemajala: Yes.

Sangharakshita: So what's Shantideva saying here?

Jayarava: Something like that true good fortune, renown and well-being comes from working for the good of all beings.

Sangharakshita: Yes. You'll gain a good reputation. Yes. 'All this and heaven too.'<sup>229</sup>

Amalavajra: What's that 'All this and heaven too'? Is that a quote?

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<sup>229</sup> Possibly refers to the title of the 1939 novel by Rachel Field, or the subsequent film.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that's just a saying, as it were. Shantideva's saying, not only Buddhahood, but good fortune, here and now.

Dhivan: This reminds me, Bhante, in the [Kalama Sutta](#)<sup>230</sup>, and other places, the Buddha says to the Kalamas that, whether or not in fact there's rebirth, it's worth practising ethics for the benefits now. I don't know if Shantideva thought that.

Sangharakshita: Yes, hmm. All right, carry on.

Jinapalita: OK, the last verse:

***[134] Serenity, freedom from disease, joy and long life, the happiness of an emperor, prosperity: these the patient person receives while continuing in cyclic existence.***

Sangharakshita: The 'patient person' presumably being the person who practises forbearance. Yes. So let's go through the list of the benefits he receives.

Jinapalita: Serenity.

Sangharakshita: Yes! [LAUGHTER] You just forbear. Yes. So you have a serene mind. Then...

Jinapalita: You said that with some pleasure! Freedom from disease.

Sangharakshita: Hmm. That's not quite so clear. Perhaps diseases which originate in a negative mental state.

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<sup>230</sup> Read the [full text of the sutta](#). Listen to Sangharakshita [reading the sutta](#).

Jinapalita: Joy and long life.

Sangharakshita: Joy. Yes. You'll enjoy practising forbearance. That's Shantideva's idea, anyway. It shouldn't be something that you grit your teeth and do. You should positively enjoy practising forbearance. And... long life? Possibly. Possibly. At least, perhaps you won't make enemies, who might bring your life to an end. Also, perhaps if you're happy and contented and joyful, that will contribute to longevity.

Naganataka: Perhaps Shantideva means long life in the sense more of meaningful life, rather than duration.

Sangharakshita: No, I think the ancient Indians thought very literally in terms of long life. And then?

Jinapalita: The happiness of an emperor.

Sangharakshita: Yes. And that's supposed to represent the summit of human happiness. So Shantideva is saying if you only practise forbearance, well, you'll be as happy as any earthly person possibly could be, even an emperor - I suppose even a **chakravartin raja**<sup>231</sup>.

Samudraghosa: There's an association there, perhaps, of someone practising forbearance as being like an emperor, perhaps more...

Sangharakshita: Yes. As one says, it's all in the mind. I remember years ago, in India, I forget how it happened, but I happened to be

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<sup>231</sup> Ancient Indian term for an ideal universal ruler, who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world.

talking to just an ordinary coolie<sup>232</sup>, or maybe a rickshaw-puller, someone like that. And this man was saying: I'm really happy. He said, I work during the day, I get paid, I buy some vegetables, my wife cooks, I eat the meal; he said, I live just like a king! [LAUGHTER] And he really meant it. 'I live just like a king.' As if to say, well there, what more do I want? I was very impressed by that. So yes, one who practises forbearance, yes, he lives like a king, like an emperor. And, anything more?

Jinapalita: The last one's prosperity.

Sangharakshita: Prosperity. The connection here is not so obvious. Let's take Shantideva's word for it. [LAUGHTER]

Priyadaka: I was wondering about prosperity in terms of being happy with what one has.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that also.

Priyadaka: However much you have, if you're not happy with it, it's not enough.

Vidyakaya: True wealth is actually being satisfied with what you've got, like your rickshaw man, who feels really rich.

Sangharakshita: Yes. I think, I suspect, Shantideva is thinking of prosperity in the literal sense.

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<sup>232</sup> Colloquial label applied to a slave or unskilled manual labourer.

Jayarava: I think if you had a high reputation as a spiritual person in those days, you got a lot of donations.

Sangharakshita: Yes.

Jayarava: Probably still.

Sangharakshita: Anyway, what else have we?

Vidyakaya: That's it.

Sangharakshita: That's it? So we end on a very happy note.

[LAUGHTER] Yes. Any further point that we need to talk about, in connection with what we've just covered?

Amalavajra: There is one final... It says: **...these the patient person receives, while continuing in cyclic existence.** It's as though it's saying...

Sangharakshita: Let's hear that again.

Amalavajra: It says: **...these the patient person receives, while continuing in cyclic existence.**

Sangharakshita: Yes. It's not that he will be happy and prosperous just in this life. The patient person will enjoy all these advantages in his future rebirths.

Jayarava: Is the implication, until the rebirths stop?

Sangharakshita: Until Enlightenment, yes.

Naganataka: Bhante, I had a question for you in this regard, this question of, you know, do we know any Enlightened people, or, you know - is Enlightenment an aim for us in this lifetime? What's your feeling on that for people in the Order?

Sangharakshita: What... I think we should certainly aim high. But be realistic about our chances of going as far as we would wish to. I think the real problem arises for those who have difficulty believing in rebirth. Because in the East the traditional Buddhist does believe in rebirth, so it's possible for him to believe that, well even if he doesn't succeed in gaining Enlightenment in this life, assuming that that is his objective, well he will continue on the path in future lives, and get nearer and nearer to it gradually. But if you're a Western Buddhist who doesn't believe in rebirth, or who has very serious doubts about it, you can hardly adopt that attitude. At the same time, you may not have a very strong faith that it's possible to gain Enlightenment in this life. So where do you stand? You're, you're in difficulties, in a way. There's a dilemma.

Naganataka: The reason why I ask is, it seems like the tone in the Order these days is that we shouldn't be thinking of Enlightenment in this lifetime, that there's almost a spiritual sort of pride or arrogance in thinking that that's possible for oneself; but it seems to me that, if we don't think that way, we basically adopt the attitude of a layperson in some of the Eastern countries, that the best we can do is kind of do our best and sort of hope for a better rebirth. Do you feel that that's good enough for us?



Sangharakshita: I don't think it's good enough. I think we should aim high. But as I say, be realistic about our actual progress. But certainly aim high. If you aim at Enlightenment, well you stand a good chance of becoming at least a [Stream Entrant](#)<sup>233</sup>.

Naganataka: And aiming at Enlightenment with really the intention to become Enlightened, not just sort of, do you see what I'm saying, not just kind of giving lip service to aiming at Enlightenment.

Sangharakshita: But, of course, also there is a sort of doctrinal tension between the more so to speak Hinayanistic<sup>234</sup> idea of becoming an Arahant, and gaining Enlightenment in this life in that sense, and also the more Mahayanistic idea of becoming a fully Enlightened Buddha by passing through a series of lives as a Bodhisattva, practising the paramitas. I personally see this distinction as ultimately an empty one, and I think part of our rethinking as Western Buddhists [is that] we need to deal with that apparent discrepancy, because it doesn't seem that the Buddha himself, so far as we can gather, did make that sort of distinction.

And, of course, in the scriptures, the Buddha himself is called both Arahant and samyaksambuddha. If you like, when we chant '*Iti'pi so*

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<sup>233</sup> One who has made a definitive step towards full Enlightenment by seeing through and breaking the [first three fetters of mind](#) (a degree of Insight into the nature of reality that the stream entrant cannot fall back from). [Listen to talks](#) on the notion of stream entry.

<sup>234</sup> Pertaining to the [Hinayana](#) (as contrasted with the [Mahayana](#) or [Vajrayana](#)), the first of the three major phases of Buddhist historical development.

*bhagava araham sammāsambuddho*<sup>235</sup>, and so on. So I think we have to find some way round that dichotomy, think of Enlightenment, so to speak, without thinking of it necessarily either in Hinayanistic or Mahayanistic terms, but just as the sort of farthest reach of human potentiality, something of that kind.

Naganataka: This question of, is Enlightenment possible for us, is the theme of the American Order Convention this summer, so it will be interesting to see what the conversation is like.

Sangharakshita: Yes. Well, I hope we get a full report.

Jayarava: On that note, it's interesting that when [Kukai](#)<sup>236</sup> was teaching, the Mahayana Buddhism in Japan insisted that it took three incalculable aeons to become Enlightened, and it was almost as though people gave up, and so his catch cry was 'Enlightenment in this very life'<sup>237</sup>, which seems to me to echo what the Buddha in the Pali Canon was talking about: that it is possible in this life. But Kukai really struggled to get that message across, for many years, before he became more mainstream. He was considered a real outsider for that

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<sup>235</sup> 'Such indeed is He, the Richly Endowed.' From the Tiratana Vandana, 'Salutation to the Three Jewels'. See here for the [full text in English and Pali](#). Listen to the [Tiratana Vandana being chanted](#), and [other explorations](#) of this Buddhist ritual common to many traditions.

<sup>236</sup> One of the great Japanese Buddhist masters, founder of the [Shingon](#) ('True Word') school. Listen to [an introductory talk on Kukai](#) by Vadanya.

<sup>237</sup> '[Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence](#)' is the title of one of Kukai's major works defining the Shingon approach to the Dharma. Read [Kukai's Tantric Poetry](#), trans. Morgan Gibson and Hiroshi Murakami. Also, see [Jayarava's bibliography for Kukai](#).

and some other reasons, so there's themes like that belief in rebirth can make one a bit lazy, as well; oh well, if not in this life, then the next life, so maybe I'll just have a good time in this one.

*Sangharakshita*: So of course, according to the Mahayana the Bodhisattva isn't thinking in terms of rebirth out of laziness. The Mahayana doctrine is that it takes three *kalpas*<sup>238</sup> for a Bodhisattva to become a Buddha. That's the traditional Mahayana doctrine. It's only the Hinayana liberation, according to the Mahayana, or some versions of the Hinayana, that can be accomplished within one lifetime. But then of course the Vajrayana comes along, and complicates the business, well, we've got various esoteric methods, whereby the Bodhisattva Path can be traversed in fewer lives.

Some texts even work it out to the extent of correlating different stages of the Vajrayana with the diminishing number of rebirths that the Bodhisattva has to undergo, before he becomes a fully Enlightened Buddha. So all this requires, as it were, consideration and re-translation, reaffirmation, by the Western Buddhist who is confronted by all these traditions and teachings, some of them apparently contradictory.

So therefore, I think perhaps we are left with a belief in, to coin a phrase, human perfectibility, and we think more in those terms, rather than specifically in Hinayana or Mahayana terms. Perfectibility reaches

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<sup>238</sup> Sanskrit word often translated as 'aeon'. See *types of kalpa* in Buddhist discourse, and their duration.

to what broadly speaking we call Enlightenment, and usually we think of Enlightenment not just in terms of no greed, hatred or delusion but as the fullness of Wisdom and the fullness of Compassion. But perhaps that's the best we can do for the time being at least. But certainly aim high. I think that's important. And don't compromise.

All right. I think that's that, then.

Voices: Thank you very much. Thank you, Bhante.

## session 11: questions and answers

(13th june)

Vidyakaya: Communication exercises? I was wondering where they came from?

Sangharakshita: Yes, I haven't forgotten that... I can tell you. This is one of those straightforward questions that just needs factual information. Yes, I learnt these questions, sorry these exercises, when I was in India, many years ago. I learnt them from a woman called Muriel Payne<sup>239</sup>. She was English and she had been many years in India. She was an educationalist, in fact she had got a **O.B.E.**<sup>240</sup> for her work in India, in that capacity. In the course of her work as an educationalist in India she had noticed that the teachers normally didn't really communicate with their students. She saw this as a weakness and so she set about devising some exercises. She herself wasn't actually a very educated woman. But she had been around a bit. She was middle aged by the time I knew her. She knew something about, what shall I say, **Gurdjieff**<sup>241</sup>, and his teachings, and she had

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<sup>239</sup> Muriel Payne, O.B.E., wrote '**Creative Education**' (now out of print), interested in and influenced by **Scientology** and L. Ron Hubbard. She was indeed a **nurse to Krishnamurti** in India.

<sup>240</sup> 'Officer of the [Most Excellent Order of the] British Empire', a class of award belonging to the **British Honours System** made by the monarch in recognition of personal bravery, achievement or service to the UK or its overseas territories.

<sup>241</sup> George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, an influential spiritual teacher of the early to mid-20th century who taught that most humans live their lives in a state of hypnotic 'waking sleep', but that it is possible to transcend to a higher state of consciousness and achieve full human potential.

also had some contact with Krishnamurti<sup>242</sup>. She also happened to be a nurse. And I think she'd nursed Krishnamurti during one of his illnesses.

But anyway, on the basis of her experience as an educationalist, and with the help of, to some extent, her recollections of the teachings of Gurdjieff, she devised these exercises. And she got teachers practising them of course between themselves to begin with. But she also came to the conclusion that in India, husbands and wives didn't communicate. And in fact I knew this because of one extreme case that I was staying, I think I mentioned this in my memoirs, with Indian friends in Bangalore, I think it was. And this friend lived there with his wife, his mother and his children. He never spoke directly to his wife. If he wanted to tell his wife something, he always spoke to his mother and she told his wife. And that was the way things were. So that's a rather extreme case, but perhaps in some ways not untypical.

So Muriel came and noticed all this and devised these exercises. I remember certain amusing stories she told. One was that she taught one particular man, a teacher, these exercises. So one of the exercises was that when he woke up in the morning he should just turn to his wife, who would, of course, be in bed beside him and just smile. So apparently he did this and it was so unusual, that she shrieked and jumped out of bed. [LAUGHTER] So this is perhaps a little bit of background. Through her connection with Krishnamurti she

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<sup>242</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, Indian speaker and writer on spirituality and philosophy.

was in contact with certain friends of mine in Bombay, who were devotees of Krishnamurti, and it was through them that I met her. And I became quite interested in her exercises so I arranged for her to lead an evening course in them. I persuaded various friends of mine to attend this course and naturally I attended it myself. And learnt these exercises.

It's not that I actually forgot about them but they weren't much in my mind during the rest of my stay in India, but it once happened on one of the quite early FWBO retreats I felt that people were a bit stuck in their communication. There didn't seem to be any free flowing communication. So I announced that we would do these exercises which I had learnt in India. So I must admit I modified them a bit, I think I simplified them. And of course from then onwards they have been part of, what shall I say, our general equipment. And I think some people still find them useful. And of course in the FWBO we have always been rather keen on this question of communication. That one should communicate not just talk, not just speak. And I noticed in India, especially after meeting Muriel Payne, that Indians don't communicate. They talk, but they talk at one another, even to one another, they don't communicate. There's a sort of cultural gap there.

I think I give an example of this in another volume of memoirs, the latest one, that is '[Moving Against the Stream](#)'. When I was in Nagpur, I think it must have been in '66, when I was invited to tea by an eminent lawyer and he invited his friends who were also eminent lawyers. One of them was the ex-chief justice of Nagpur High Court and well known

to me. So here they all were these eminent and very respectable gentlemen. And gathered for this tea party, maybe six or seven of them, and they all talked at the same time. They just talked. They seemed not bothered if anyone listened to them, they just talked at, as it were, cross purposes. And I thought this was so strange because in other respects they were so cultured but not in this respect. So that's the story of the communication exercises. That's the history.

Jayarava: Is the wording more or less the same, what you learnt from Muriel Payne?

Sangharakshita: I can't remember exactly what she taught. I don't think they are too different. I think probably simplified. So that's the story.

Vidyakaya: Just one little thing. They are only really used in introductory retreats, as far as I can tell at the moment. Do you think we should carry on doing them later in our Order careers?

Sangharakshita: Well they are like a medicine, if you are sick take the medicine. If you are not sick you don't need the medicine. So if you feel that you or others are going, as it were, out of communication, they can be helpful. But I think a lot of people seem to have replaced



them with Nonviolent Communication<sup>243</sup>, but certainly one should try to be aware of whether one is communicating with the other person or not. And on retreats of course, those who are running the retreat or leading the retreat, need to keep an eye open for that sort of thing. But they are useful, quite definitely.

*Amalavajra:* We've found them very helpful on Karuna appeals. Seems to make quite a difference to people's fundraising. Even though obviously they are communicating with different people to whom they are doing the team exercise, it seems to make a big difference to people being able to connect with strangers on the doors.

*Sangharakshita:* I think people going on Karuna appeals have sometimes told me that they've found the exercises useful.

*Amalavajra:* I did have another question. It's about cynicism. A couple of times this week you have identified a statement as sounding a bit cynical, and I was wondering, in a way, or just want to hear a bit more about what you mean by cynicism and what the sort of issues are there or what the problem might be there. Or why you wanted to identify that.

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<sup>243</sup> Often referred to as NVC: a communication process developed by [Marshall Rosenberg](#) beginning in the 1960s. NVC often functions as a [conflict resolution](#) process. It focuses on three aspects of communication: *self-empathy* (defined as a deep and compassionate awareness of one's own inner experience), *empathy* (defined as listening to another with deep compassion), and *honest self-expression* (defined as expressing oneself authentically in a way that is likely to inspire compassion in others).

Sangharakshita: Cynicism. This is a term with a very ancient history: it goes back to the Greeks. **The Cynics**<sup>244</sup> were a school of Greek philosophers. But as popularly used nowadays cynicism suggests not just a lack of belief in, lets say, higher values but an attitude of wanting to undercut those values or to cast doubt on them, undermine them. That is what I mean by cynicism. It's often, well nearly always in relation to people. Someone might say, 'Well, so-and-so does a lot of good work, helps people', but then someone might say, 'Ah, well, he only does it for the sake of a good reputation'. That's cynicism, one is unable to believe that the person in question is genuinely motivated by some sort of social conscience. Obviously nowadays there is a lot of cynicism in and about politics and politicians. So, I think it is unfortunate. It can become a sort of habit. There are people who are cynical by habit. That's very unfortunate.

Amalavajra: One Order member, Amoghavamsa, described it as like the water that we swim in, and therefore it's very hard to sort of spot...

Vidyakaya: Because there is so much of it..

Sangharakshita: I don't think it is so hard to spot actually. It is pretty obvious. The water's dirty, you know it. But yes, I see what you mean, yes. Yes, if we are not careful we can become accustomed to it. But it's a unpleasant kind of mental state.

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<sup>244</sup> For the Cynics, the purpose of life was to live in virtue, in agreement with nature. As reasoning creatures, people could gain happiness by rigorous training and by living in a way which was natural for humans, rejecting all conventional desires for wealth, power, sex, and fame. Instead, they were to lead a simple life free from all possessions.

Dhiraka: Bhante, there is a book here this week going around about [Chogyam Trungpa](#)<sup>245</sup>, written by his wife<sup>246</sup>. Did you ever have any run-ins with the man.

Sangharakshita: Did I ever...?

Dhiraka: Did you ever meet him or have anything to do with him?

Sangharakshita: Yes. I read the book by the way, that book. Shortly before my eyesight deteriorated. I'm quite glad I did read it. I thought it quite an honest account of her life with him. And she emerged as quite a likeable character. But yes I did have some contact with Trungpa. I think the first time I met him was in Kalimpong. He was visiting there. I can't remember the occasion but, of course, he was quite young then and he didn't speak any English, so there was no communication between us. Sometime later he came to England with [Akong](#)<sup>247</sup>, and they were staying in Oxford. So I met them in Oxford. By that time Trungpa was able to speak English reasonably well. So we had some communication then.

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<sup>245</sup> A major, albeit controversial, figure in the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism to the West.

<sup>246</sup> Diana Mukpo, '[Dragon Thunder: My Life with Chogyam Trungpa](#)'.

<sup>247</sup> Chöje Akong Tulku Rinpoche, [tulku](#) in the [Kagyu school](#) of Tibetan Buddhism, and a founder of the [Samye Ling Monastery](#) in Scotland.

And at that time I was, of course, at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara<sup>248</sup> and then **Wesak** came - Vaisakha Purnima<sup>249</sup>. I organised a celebration and I invited him down to come and speak at that. So he came and he stayed with me for a few days. He spoke at the Wesak celebration. I didn't see him after that for a while.

The last time we met was on the **Underground**<sup>250</sup>, on the tube. I was travelling up, it must have been to **Archway**<sup>251</sup>, where our centre then was. I think it was then. And there weren't many people in the compartment. I was looking along and I saw this figure in red. He saw me and jumped up and came running towards me and was very pleased to see me. So he sat down beside me and we had a good chat. Then his station came, he got out and that was that. He got out and that was that. That was the last I actually saw of him. And, of course, I heard quite a lot about him after he started his activities in the States. So yes, I did have a bit of contact with him.

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<sup>248</sup> For accounts of Sangharakshita's time with the Hampstead Vihara, see '[The Nucleus of a New Society](#)' and also his memoir '[Moving Against The Stream](#)'. [Watch a short interview](#) on this period.

<sup>249</sup> Known in the Triratna Buddhist Community as '[Buddha Day](#)'. An annual festival marking the birth, Enlightenment, and death ([Parinirvāna](#)) of the Buddha. In south Asia, many Buddhists celebrate Wesak, but, despite the United Nations' adoption of Wesak as an internationally recognised festival, it remains the case that most Buddhists worldwide do not observe the festival day. Some Tibetan traditions mark Buddha Day in December.

<sup>250</sup> The London Underground, London's subway system.

<sup>251</sup> An area of north London, location of the very first Triratna Buddhist Centre.

Jinapalita: Can I ask on the back of that. He is devoted to [this is unclear but presumably means 'people are devoted to him'], and also people are put off by him. Some of his private life, some of his drinking. Do you think he actually was an alcoholic...?

Sangharakshita: I think that emerges quite clearly from Diana Mukpo's book. I think he clearly was an alcoholic and, of course, that did bad things to his liver, and that is partly why he died.

I don't know whether I have told the story of Dayaratna and the **Vajra Regent**<sup>252</sup>. Do you know Dayaratna, in Cambridge? Of course he has a background in A.A. Not the Automobile Association. [LAUGHTER] In the States somewhere, I'm not sure where this was, but he attended a talk by the Vajra Regent. And do you know who the Vajra Regent was. He was the man who Trungpa had marked out as his successor.

Dhivan: **Ösel Tendzin**?

Sangharakshita: Yes. So Dayaratna attended this talk and at the end of the talk one could ask questions. So Dayaratna asked what has the Vajra Regent got to say on the subject of alcohol. Bit of a leading question in a way. So the Vajra Regent simply said, 'Alcohol is **Amrita**'. Amrita meaning the nectar of immortality. Alcohol is Amrita. So end of exchange. But as Dayaratna was leaving someone tapped him on the shoulder and said the Vajra Regent would like to speak to you. So Dayaratna made his way to the Vajra Regent and they got talking. And

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<sup>252</sup> The chosen successor to Chogyam Trungpa.

the Vajra Regent asked, well, who is your teacher. So Dayaratna said 'Sangharakshita'. So the Vajra Regent said 'Ahhh, Sangharakshita; he is the only Western teacher that Trungpa never criticised'.

[LAUGHTER] So I found that very interesting. And I also know that I heard from several people that Trungpa regularly recommended '[A Survey of Buddhism](#)'<sup>253</sup> to his students.

Vidyakaya: (to Jayasiddhi) You were saying that that nun had read his books.

Jayasiddhi: Yes, one of his disciples, Ani Migme, who I met in Canada. The first Dharma book she read actually was the Three Jewels I think. She still had the copy. In fact there were quite a number of Windhorse publications in their library, including the Survey.

Sangharakshita: And, of course, when I was in the States once, it may have been the last time, I met Reginald Ray and I had a very positive impression of him and a long discussion. And this was in Boulder. He took me along to the Boulder centre, showed me around.

Khemajala: Have you read his most recent book '[Touching Enlightenment](#)'<sup>254</sup>? Reginald Ray's most recent book.

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<sup>253</sup> One of Sangharakshita's earliest and most comprehensive books. Listen to his account of the writing of the book as part of the talk '[The History of My Going for Refuge](#)' (track 8).

<sup>254</sup> For a synopsis article, see '[To Touch Enlightenment With the Body](#)' by Reginald Ray.

Sangharakshita: No, no. Of course, I've read his '[Buddhist Saints in India](#)'<sup>255</sup>. I think that's his best book. His later books on Tibetan Buddhism, in my view, are not so good, I think they are much more routine. I think based on lectures and seminars he did. [Buddhist Saints in India](#) is a much more original and creative book. It is quite significant. But it seems that he functions nowadays as an independent teacher.

Priyadaka: Bhante, you have been studying Dharma for decades. Is there a particular place or a person where you perhaps had particular Dharma insight, or took in very significant teachings at any one time?

Sangharakshita: Sorry could you repeat that?

Priyadaka: I'm wondering if there is a particular place or a particular person with whom you took in your most significant Dharma insight or profound study.

Sangharakshita: It is very difficult to grade them, so to speak. All of them were important at their time. And in some ways one has been influenced by all the people that one meets. To a greater or a lesser extent. I certainly took in something from all my different teachers, but there were others in my life from whom I also learned and took in quite

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<sup>255</sup> For an introduction to the ideas of '[Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations](#)', see Mahabodhi, '[Work As Spiritual Practice: Introducing Reginald Ray's Threefold Model](#)'.

a lot. I'm thinking for instance of [Lama Govinda](#)<sup>256</sup> who wasn't ever formally one of my teachers. But I appreciated him very much and I still do, and have found [his books](#) very helpful. And especially appreciated you know the connection he made between Buddhism and the Arts. And of course I appreciated some of the Hindu teachers, whom I met in the course of my travels. Especially among the Hindu teachers I think I most appreciated [Swami Ramdas](#)<sup>257</sup> and the one eyed guru - the Yala Hanka [[Yelahanka?](#)] Swami<sup>258</sup>.

*Amalavajra*: Was he the one who could always go higher or go lower?

*Sangharakshita*: Yes, that's right. I found that a very striking sort of teaching. That humility was a form of egotism. Well, in the Christian West humility is regarded as a virtue isn't it? There is a story in this connection which I have repeated before but you may not have heard it. Apparently there was some discussion among the different Catholic orders as to which one was the best. So a little Franciscan friar spoke up and said, 'Ah, well, we admit the Dominican's are best when it comes to theological understanding, and the Jesuits are best you

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<sup>256</sup> Lama Anagarika Govinda (May 17, 1898–January 14, 1985), born Ernst Lothar Hoffmann was the founder of the order of the *Arya Maitreya Mandala* and an expositor of Tibetan Buddhism, [Abhidharma](#), and Buddhist meditation as well as other aspects of Buddhism. He was also a painter and poet. His seminal 'The Way Of the White Clouds' is [available for free](#) online. Listen to Sangharakshita recall his friendship with Lama Govinda in '[Great Buddhists Of The Twentieth Century](#)' ([free eBook available here](#)).

<sup>257</sup> Swami Ramdas (1884–1963) was an Indian philosopher, philanthropist, and pilgrim.

<sup>258</sup> See, '[The Rainbow Road](#)' for details of Sangharakshita's encounters with the Swami in India.



know when it comes to educational work, and the Carmelites are best when it comes to contemplation, but everyone agree when it comes to humility we Franciscans...’ [LOUD LAUGHTER] So maybe it’s good to be humble but it shouldn’t be too self-conscious.

Jayarava: I was wondering, Bhante, whether you had had any contact with Dhardo Rimpoche’s [Tulku](#)<sup>259</sup>? The new Dhardo Rimpoche.

Sangharakshita: Not personal contact but we have exchanged letters, and a few months ago I sent him a book. I sent him, what was it, trying to think of the title of it now. ‘[The Home Planet](#)’<sup>260</sup>. You probably know the book. It’s a very big book, well illustrated. Just about the earth. Because the young Rimpoche is very inquisitive. He asks lots of questions. So I sent him this with a [khata](#)<sup>261</sup> and a little money. That’s the Tibetan custom. Along with the present you sent a khata and a little money. So, not long afterwards, someone brought me a little present from him of a book. A translation of a Tibetan text, a khata and a Indian currency note and a little note of thanks that he had written. I noticed his handwriting is quite reasonably good. Because

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<sup>259</sup> An honorary title given in Tibetan Buddhism to a recognised reincarnate [Lama](#) either on the grounds of their resembling an [Enlightened being](#) or through their connection to certain qualities of an Enlightened being. [Listen to an interview](#) with Dhardo Tulku Rimpoche.

<sup>260</sup> ‘The Home Planet’ by Kevin Kelley is a collection of photographs of the earth as seen from space, together with excerpts from the writings of astronauts who have flown on either U.S. or Soviet space missions. See this [interview with the author](#) about its curation.

<sup>261</sup> A traditional ceremonial scarf, originally Tibetan, often given as a gift or offering.

Suvajra is in regular contact with him. And he's stayed at [Bhaja](#), at our retreat centre.

Jayarava: What do you make of the Tibetan Tulku system?

Sangharakshita: I don't know. [LAUGHTER] Of course, I believe in rebirth. So possibly it is theoretically possible to identify a reincarnation, but so many of them... This is where my, not my cynical, but my sceptical side, you know, comes into play. I think I mention in the book [Precious Teachers](#), I once asked Dhardo Rimpoche how many real Tulkus, in the sense of incarnate Bodhisattvas, he thought that there were in Tibet. He thought and then he said, 'Maybe, maybe six or seven'. But the official list is about 2,000.

Dhivan: Are they all supposed to be incarnate Bodhisattvas?

Sangharakshita: They're not all necessary incarnate Bodhisattvas. More often, just reincarnations of prominent gurus or leading abbots. I remember Christmas Humphreys, you know, talking about this. I don't think, he is not exactly a household name these days, but he was very well known in his day. And once he said to me, 'What's all this talk about Tulkus and incarnate Bodhisattvas, it's just a Buddhist equivalent of the local vicar reborn'. [LAUGHTER] There's something in that.

Samudraghosha: Bhante, do you think that Tibetan Buddhism will continue to have quite a strong influence upon Buddhism in the West

as it has done over the last forty years? Or perhaps are other forms of Buddhism starting to have more influence?

Sangharakshita: Very difficult to say.

Samudraghosha: Or what do you see as the most promising potential for the development of Buddhism in the West?

Sangharakshita: Not long ago I read a scholarly study called 'Buddhism in Britain'<sup>262</sup>. Don't know if some of you have seen that.

Jayarava: By Robert Bluck?

Sangharakshita: I can't remember the name of the author...it was a very expensive book. It wasn't very big but it was £50.00. So I thought we will have to have it for the Order library. Anyway, it is quite good. A little bit biased perhaps. Yes, a bit biased. But it is an account of, a factual account of, the seven major forms of Buddhism in Great Britain. And out of these seven, according to the author, three are the biggest - [NKT](#)<sup>263</sup>, [Soka Gakkai International](#)<sup>264</sup> and FWBO [Triratna]. Not necessarily in that order.

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<sup>262</sup> ['British Buddhism: Teachings, Practice And Development'](#) by Robert Bluck.

<sup>263</sup> New Kadampa Tradition, a relatively recent Buddhist organization developed from the [Gelug](#) school of Tibetan Buddhism by [Geshe Kelsang Gyatso](#) and now known as [The New Kadampa Tradition ~ International Kadampa Buddhist Union](#).

<sup>264</sup> A Japanese lay [Nichiren Buddhist](#) movement which reveres the [Lotus Sutra](#) and considers repeatedly chanting its title in Japanese to be the road to happiness, material wealth, and enlightenment. [Read more about Soka Gakkai](#).

So I thought that was very interesting because these three, the big three, they're very different from one another. So how is it, if they're the biggest, it means they are the most popular in a way. But at the same time they're very different. I'm going to raise this question at a conference I will be attending in a few weeks time.

*Amalavajra:* Is that the one at the Soka Gakkai headquarters?

*Sangharakshita:* Yes, at [Taplow court](#). Yes. So the NKT does seem to be the biggest of the Tibetan groups or movements in this country. And, of course, it is present abroad as well. And, of course, it's, in a sense, a split off from the main [Gelugpa](#) movement.

*Abhayanaga:* I had a question. When you were leaving India and speaking with your teachers before you came back to the UK, did they have any sort of idea of form of how you would teach the Dharma over here, of practices or anything like that.

*Sangharakshita:* No, they left it to me.

*Abhayanaga:* No particular advice in a sense...

*Sangharakshita:* No. Once one of our friends asked Dhardo Rimpoche why he didn't come to the West and he said there's no need for me to come because Sangharakshita was there. Which suggests that, well in principle, he wouldn't have done anything very differently. In principle. Though one doesn't know, of course.

Naganataka: Bhante, along these lines you've spoken in places about the development of so called 'fourth phase Buddhism'. How do you see...?

Sangharakshita: Fourth stage Buddhism...? I don't remember that actually. Can't remember everything I've written... Fourth stage... Ah, post-Vajrayana as it were...?

Naganataka: Yes. I am maybe using a different term. But my question really is - it seems like what we are trying to do in the Order and what I see largely happening in the West - how do you see that post-Vajrayana Buddhism developing differently to the other major phases of Buddhism, the major schools?

Sangharakshita: Well, of course, in the West we are aware of the whole history of Buddhism. We are aware of all the different schools, in a way that in Tibet they never were. All the different schools, well nearly all of them, are present amongst us. Even quite minor schools seem to be represented.

So I think what I have called perhaps fourth-stage Buddhism will have to take that into account, and also it will have to develop a sort of critique. It cannot but be a rather critical Buddhism, critical in the positive sense because it will be able to compare the different versions of the scriptures. It will be able to see that, well, many of the texts

which are regarded in the East as [Buddhavachana](#)<sup>265</sup> cannot in fact be Buddhavachana and that will mean a sort of reformulation of whatever teaching they had. So a fourth-stage Buddhism will have to include those sorts of elements and what that will result in is very difficult to predict.

Naganataka: Do you think those elements were present in the development of the other stages?

Sangharakshita: Hmm?

Naganataka: The elements you were speaking of being critical of, sort of, previous schools or developments...?

Sangharakshita: Oh yes, there is a critical element. For instance the [The Madhyamaka](#)<sup>266</sup> in Tibet will be critical of the [Yogachara](#)<sup>267</sup> and so on. And in Japan there is a lot of sectarian criticism among the different sects. But I'm thinking of something more objective which surveys the whole history or presence of Buddhism in a positive

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<sup>265</sup> 'The Word of the Buddha.' This refers to the works accepted within a tradition as being the teachings of the Buddha. Some traditions recognize certain texts as buddhavachana which make no claim to being the actual words of the historical Buddha.

<sup>266</sup> Refers primarily to a Mahāyāna Buddhist school of philosophy founded by [Nāgārjuna](#). [Listen to a short seminar](#) by Padasda on Nagarjuna's '[Mulamadhyamakakarika](#)' ('Fundamental Verses On The Middle Way').

<sup>267</sup> An influential school of Buddhist philosophy and psychology emphasizing [phenomenology](#) and [ontology](#) through the interior lens of meditative and [yogic](#) practices. For a comprehensive exploration of the Yogachara school, as well as its relationship to the Madhyamaka approach, see '[Rambles Around The Yogachara](#)' by Subhuti. [Listen to more material on the Yogachara](#).

critical spirit and which tries to ascertain what did the Buddha really teach. For instance, I mention the Soka Gakkai. Well, their principle text is the [Saddharma Pundarika](#)<sup>268</sup>. Well, we also value and appreciate the Saddharma Pundarika, but they seem to believe it to be the actual utterance of Shakyamuni. Which is very difficult for a scholar to accept. So what difference is that going to make, you know, to their formulation of the Dharma and their view of the text if they are forced to conclude that, well, it came into existence some centuries after the time of the Buddha and doesn't have much relation to his actual teaching.

Jayarava: It's pretty clear with that sutra that it developed over time as well with chapters added.

Sangharakshita: Yes, that is the case with so many Mahayana sutras. And of course even within the Pali Canon it is quite clear there are different strata. Theravadins will have to face up to the fact that the [Abhidharma](#) is not the word of the Buddha as traditionally believed. The tradition is that the Buddha ascended into a [devaloka](#)<sup>269</sup> where his mother had been reborn, taught her the Abhidharma then

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<sup>268</sup> 'The (White) Lotus Sutra'. See, '[Parables, Myths and Symbols of Mahayana Buddhism in the White Lotus Sutra](#)' by Sangharakshita. [Listen to more talks](#) on the sutra. There are many translations available for free online. See, for example, [B.H. Kern, 1884](#) and [Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama, 2007](#).

<sup>269</sup> In Indian religious traditions the realm where the gods live; in Buddhist mythic tradition the realm of the '[devas](#)', beings who are more powerful, longer-lived and generally more refined and contented than humans.

descended to earth and taught what he had told his mother to Sariputra and that Sariputra had handed it down. That is not accepted by modern scholarship. And it is clear, of course, there is more than one Abhidharma. There is the [Theravadin Abhidharma](#) and there is [Sarvastivadin Abhidharma](#) and differences between them.

Naganataka: Sounds like you are advocating a healthy distinction between history and myth.

Sangharakshita: Yes but not an entire repudiation of myth. Myth does have its own value, but myth is not history.

Jayasiddhi: I had this same conversation with a friend of mine who is a [Karma Kagyu](#)<sup>270</sup> monk and he said - we were talking about the Heart Sutra<sup>271</sup>, and I made the argument that it wasn't Buddhavachana and recent scholarship had suggested it might even be Chinese in origin<sup>272</sup> - and he was horrified and said, 'Well, if you believe this then why would you chant it, why would you have anything to do with it, if you didn't believe it was literally the word of the Buddha'?

Sangharakshita: Well this raises another question. What is the spiritual value of those texts which are not really Buddhavachana? It doesn't

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<sup>270</sup> A [lineage](#) within the [Kagyu](#) school, one of the four major schools of [Tibetan Buddhism](#).

<sup>271</sup> The Heart Sutra (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya*) is a well-known Mahayana sutra. Its Sanskrit title literally means 'The Heart of the [Perfection of Transcendent Wisdom](#)'. The sutra is chanted as a key part of the Triratna Sevenfold Puja. [Read the text](#) in English and Sanskrit. [Listen to talks](#) on the Heart Sutra and find more [related resources](#).

<sup>272</sup> See Jayarava's article '[The Heart Sutra - Indian or Chinese?](#)'.



mean that because they are not Buddhavachana they have no value. Take a Christian parallel. We can regard the Bible or the New Testament as your main source, but also you value works like that of [Thomas à Kempis](#)<sup>273</sup> or some of the other Christian mystics, even though they are not Gospel.

*Saddhananda*: In a sense we are not comparing history versus myth, we are comparing history versus history.

*Sangharakshita*: Yes.

*Saddhananda*: It may not be Buddhavachana, say something like the White Lotus Sutra, but it was written by Buddhists, we presume, who were practising wholeheartedly and were trying to communicate.

*Sangharakshita*: Yes so we have to ask ourselves well what were they trying to communicate? And what value has that for us today? And also of course how it connects with the Buddha's actual teaching. Or what, as far we can see, was the Buddha's actual teaching.

*Jayarava*: Coming back to what Naganataka was asking about, in terms of the differences. It seems to me that one of the differences is that we get a lot of input from secular scholarship, and you have written about that, but maybe you could say something about how you see our relationship with secular scholars these days.

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<sup>273</sup> 14th Century German [Canon Regular](#), author of 'The Imitation of Christ'.

Sangharakshita: Well that is something I'm going to be touching upon at this conference. Because it is not even as simple as that; because there are some people who are Buddhists and practising Buddhists and who are well qualified in terms of secular scholarship at the same time. So it is interesting sometimes to know what is going on in their minds, because on the one hand, yes, they are Buddhists of one kind or other at the same time, yes they have, you know, an academic background and they are well versed in the methods of well, what's called 'the higher criticism'<sup>274</sup>. A very good example is the translation of that text translated as 'A Few Good Men'<sup>275</sup>.

Jayarava: Yes, Ugrapariṣccha<sup>276</sup>, by Jan Nattier.

Sangharakshita: Yes. It is very well done. I don't know whether the author is a practising Buddhist but she certainly writes with a good deal of sensitivity. I suspect she is at least sympathetic to Buddhism.

Jayarava: I know her work reasonably well and I don't think she is a Buddhist. But she is a very fine scholar. She's the one that established that the Heart Sutra was almost certainly composed in China.

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<sup>274</sup> Also known as the historical-critical method or historical criticism, is a branch of [literary criticism](#) that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand 'the world behind the text'.

<sup>275</sup> 'A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to the Inquiry of Ugra (Ugrapariṣcchā): a Study and Translation' by Jan Nattier.

<sup>276</sup> For selected excerpts, see [references here](#).

Sangharakshita: Well I think that is a view of several scholars. That it was compiled in Chinese, translated into Sanskrit, probably by [Hsuan-tsang](#)<sup>277</sup>, and then translated from the Sanskrit back into Chinese. And, of course, apart from that we know that many of the Chinese sutras allegedly translated from the Sanskrit are in fact Chinese compilations. But nonetheless, some of them are of great intrinsic value. So all these will be questions and problems to be sorted out perhaps or at least discussed. Leading perhaps to the creation of a fourth stage in the theory and practice of Buddhism.

Vidyakaya: Was [Mrs Bennett](#)<sup>278</sup> a Buddhist? Mrs Bennett, who wrote the version we use in the puja, of the Bodhicaryavatara.

Sangharakshita: I don't really know to be honest. I knew her reasonably well. She was certainly a scholar. She seemed to have the outlook of a Buddhist. But she was English and of course in those days you didn't ask those sorts of questions. [LAUGHTER]

Vidyakaya: So you knew her when you were in India? But she was in England presumably?

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<sup>277</sup> 7th C. Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveller, and translator.

<sup>278</sup> Mrs. Adrienne Bennett, a friend of Sangharakshita's from London, with whom he corresponded while in India, basing the sevenfold puja on her translation of chapters 2 and 3 of the Bodhicaryavatara. [Read more](#) about this translation.

Sangharakshita: Yes. She was one of my best correspondents. And was very useful when I was editing the [Mahabodhi Journal](#)<sup>279</sup> because she often translated good material from German and from French. She was a very gifted lady and she knew Chinese also as well as Pali and Sanskrit. She had worked as a translator during the war in China. And after I came to England well we met and I got to know her personally quite well. Her grandson is involved with the FWBO.

Yes she was quite a formidable lady in a way.

Vidyakaya: So she did all that and had a family.

Sangharakshita: She had one daughter. She had a husband. He died of cancer when I was in England and she rang me just a few minutes later. Yes, I guess in a way she was a Buddhist. In the sort of way that many people were in those days, if you see what I mean? In the very early days some people felt it was rather bad taste to say that you were a Buddhist. It was something you should keep to yourself.

I remember you know one woman when I was at the Hampstead Vihara telling me in fact rather proudly that she had been a Buddhist for 17 years but not even her best friends knew it. She seemed to think this was well the right sort of thing, the right sort of approach. Of course not everybody was like that. That was an extreme case. There was a feeling among some people that Buddhism, or your religion in

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<sup>279</sup> The journal of the [Maha Bodhi Society](#), which Sangharakshita edited between 1954-64. [Read many of the editorials for free online.](#)

general, was a very private thing not to be talked about. Perhaps that's part of the English character.

Vidyakaya: It used to be.

Sangharakshita: Used to be. Well I'm not sufficiently immersed in ordinary life to be able to say really whether it still is or still isn't. But perhaps some constraints have lessened.

Jinapalita: Bhante, another question? I think the bald question is: How ethical does one need to be for Insight to arise? I think that's the bald question. The sort of thinking behind it is; I used to think you need to be able to have perfect ethics to be able to move on, but then I think well, the Tibetans have been rather topical here today: they have not been vegetarian largely, but they seem to have a significant spiritual practice so...

Sangharakshita: The general principle is one which I think I dealt with towards the end of the talk on regular and irregular steps<sup>280</sup>. The general principle is that if you take the three stages of sila, samadhi and prajna<sup>281</sup>, the success of the succeeding stage cannot be perfected before the previous stage has been perfected. But that there can be some experience of the succeeding stage before the preceding one has been perfected.

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<sup>280</sup> 'The Path of Regular Steps and the Path of Irregular Steps', 1974.

<sup>281</sup> The 'Threefold Way' of ethics, meditation and wisdom. This is a progressive path, as ethics and a clear conscience provides an indispensable basis for meditation, and meditation is the ground on which wisdom can develop.

Of course, also one might discuss what was meant by perfected. And with regard say the Tibetans and vegetarianism, well, one could argue that in Tibet well, of course, the fact that vegetables weren't so easy to come by. And the Tibetans were quite conscious of the fact that there was something wrong with meat eating, because it was a Tibetan belief that you should take as few lives as possible. That's why the Tibetans believed, and perhaps they still believe, at least this is what I was told, that to kill fish is particularly bad, because you need a lot of little fish. It is less bad if you kill, say, one sheep.

They don't seem to evaluate different degrees of life, they seem to see all living things on the same level. So that if you kill one sheep well that is much much better than killing a dozen or two dozen fish. So they were conscious of the fact that, well, killing is not very ethical. But, as I think I mentioned, Chetul Rinpoche is now teaching vigorously that Tibetans, well all Buddhists, should be vegetarians. But, of course, in evaluating someone's ethics, one has to balance one thing against another. Someone may be a non-vegetarian but very kind. Someone may be vegetarian and not very kind. And in India, among Hindus, very often they talk as though vegetarianism was the only virtue and non-vegetarianism the only real sin. But that's a very exaggerated sort of attitude.

Naganataka: Along these lines, Bhante, I had a question that actually came up from the study regarding the whole idea of service and ethics. And so the question would be: does performing service, in the sense that Shantideva talks about serving another for the sake of, sort

of, getting your ego out of the way, does that, how do I put this? does that preclude other specific ethics? I'm thinking in the sense of: the Buddhist followers would accept alms food, they would eat whatever was put in the bowl, even if that were meat, for example; so that would preclude vegetarian ethics, accepting alms food. So the question is if one were performing service for example in the spirit of a Bodhisattva and in the course of doing so one is, for example, asked to lie, what's the greater ethic there, the service or adhering to the principle of truth?

*Sangharakshita:* Yes. But you could say, are you really serving someone if on their behalf you lie? Or you could say that, well, if you are just the instrument, it is they who are really responsible for the lie that is unskillful. So the best service you can render them is to point out that lying is unskillful and that you should not do it. Not only for your own good but for their good too, if they ask you to lie on their behalf. So in a way I think there is no real clash between the different virtues.

Any more or have we concluded?

*Jayarava:* I wonder if I may, if I could ask you one slightly more personal question about your retirement? Do you ever, it's hard to know how to phrase it... to say that you made a mistake would be too strong... Do you ever reflect on your retirement and think maybe you could have done things differently, are you happy to be out of the firing line?

Sangharakshita: I don't think I am out of the firing line. [LAUGHTER] There still seems quite a lot that I can do and I'm quite happy to do that. Yes, yes I did retire. It was in 2000 I think and of course I was quite ill for a year with the chronic insomnia but luckily I managed to get over that and, of course, that was where Nityabandhu came in and he was very, very helpful. He was a real example of service. I can say that. I haven't really come across an example like that since I came back to this country.

So I am able to do a bit, yes I like to visit Centres and I like to give talks. I can't prepare talks in the way that I used to, as I can't make notes so I have to just have a few general ideas in my head and speak more or less spontaneously, and yes I can still take a bit of study, though it isn't always easy when I can't see the text in front of me as you may have noticed. But anyway I am happy to carry on in that way for the time being. And structures are slowly being set up, and senior Order members and **Public and Private Preceptors**<sup>282</sup> do consult me, so I've a pretty good idea of what's going on and, at present, things seem to be going quite well.

Certainly in this country, and in some other places as well, Centres on the whole seem to be thriving, and many ordination requests, and a lot of people getting ordained. And even a few younger people coming

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<sup>282</sup> Those responsible for ordinations into the Triratna Buddhist Order. The Public Preceptors in particular also see their role within the Community as passing on the spirit of the Order by preserving, sustaining, developing and communicating Sangharakshita's particular presentation of the Dharma.



along, which I am very pleased to see. So I'm full of optimism about the future, whatever form the future may take and whatever form you know the Movement may take. It is going to change, I was going to say over the centuries, but over the years; but so long as people continue to practice the Dharma individually and collectively all will be well. That's the main thing.

Jayarava: I suppose in the back of my mind is that it is very rare for a man in your kind of position - to have been a founder of a spiritual movement, and leader of a spiritual movement - to step back. I can't think of another example. I'm interested in what that experience has been like for you.

Sangharakshita: Yes, well one has to step back. It is a mistake to try and hang on whether in the field of spiritual organisations or in politics. Of course, you know some people, some leaders create a situation in which it is impossible for them to step back gracefully, or to step back without being assassinated. [LAUGHTER] I'm not of course in that sort of danger, as far as I know. [LAUGHTER] I'm quite happy to take a relatively back seat and one shouldn't try to be a back-seat driver. If the driver likes to consult you, fine. One can say what one thinks. But one shouldn't try to tell the driver what to do, especially when there's a number of drivers [LAUGHTER] all working together, of course.

Saddhananda: Do you think we have a main driver, as it were?

Sangharakshita: Well, formally we do, in a sense, at least the Order has; that is to say, the Chairman of the Public Preceptors. But he is not a driver in a sort of political sense, obviously.

All right, lets leave it there.

Amalavajra: Bhante, just before you go. We've got a little something for you. This is a card signed by us all and made by Vidyakaya.

Sangharakshita: Oh great.

Amalavajra: To say thank you very much for coming here this week and leading study for us. Here is a book that I believed you admired earlier in the week. Actually it is the [Lost Teachings of Lama Govinda](#)<sup>283</sup>. I don't know how useful it is to you.

Sangharakshita: I'll get someone to read it to me. Great.

Amalavajra: There's some dana. We haven't got a khata but sounds like that's the last thing. Everything else is there. Thank you very much.

Sangharakshita: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

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<sup>283</sup> A set of lectures by Lama Govinda given at the [Human Dimensions Institute](#) in upstate New York to a largely Western audience but not previously published. [Read an extract.](#)