

## Mahaparinibbana Sutta - Verses 16 and 17 (Rhys Davids translation)

Seminar held at Padmaloka 5/2/83 Present: Venerable Sangharakshita, Prassanasiddhi, Buddhapalita, Gunapala, Devaraja, Silaratna, Yashopala.

S: Anyway, let's start. I'm in two minds as to how to proceed in the case of this sutta. I think it might be a good idea to read the whole thing through first. It is very short. It's sections 16 and 17, that's all. So we can get an idea of the episode as a whole and then maybe we can go through it again bit by bit, OK? So, who's a good reader, or maybe two people, one reading section 16 and one reading section 17 Who's got a good loud voice?

TEXT IS READ

S: So, what do you make of that? What are the questions that arise out of that, do you think? Have we come across that passage before?

Gunapala: I think it's been discussed before.

S: According to the footnote it occurs in two other places in the Pali Canon, so that means you have three times as great a chance of encountering it as passages that occur only once. You might of course have heard it read out on Parinirvana Day. The whole sutta was read out.

Part of this passage does occur, section 16 only, in "Some Sayings of the Buddha" - some of you might have encountered it there. But it's interesting that there only the first of these two sections occur and sometimes therefore this passage is known as the Buddha's rebuke to Sariputta. But if you have only section 16 without section 17 a quite misleading impression is created because Sariputta comes back as it were and justifies himself at least to some extent. Sariputta in a way has the last word in this little episode, not the Buddha. Whereas if you only quote section 16 it appears that the Buddha has the last word and that last word is simply a rebuke to Sariputta. That does not do justice to the text.

Devaraja: Sariputta became enlightened...

S: Yes.

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Devaraja: ...so at this point, at the Buddha's death, he would have been enlightened.

S. He died before the Buddha.

Devaraja: Oh, I see, so this story is before the actual...

S: Yes, it would be some time before, even some years before. The episode does occur in the course of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta but that sutta relates not very connectedly, but with some degree of connection, the (...) events of the last few months of the Buddha's life. But there are sort of flashbacks it would seem, older material is incorporated. I will say something about that in my talk tonight. So the fact that you have this episode here does not mean that, or is not to be understood to mean that Sariputta was right there up to the time of the Buddha's Parinibbana. There are accounts of his death and Moggallana's death some time

before that. The episode itself seems to have no connection with the Mahaparinibbana at all. That's evident from the fact that the same episode occurs word for word in another sutta in the Digha Nikaya, as well as in the Samyutta Nikaya, in these two other places, so there's no necessary connection with the Mahaparinibbana Sutta or with the Parinibbana itself. Why do you think it was then - let's take this as a point of departure - why Woodward, the translator of "Some Sayings of the Buddha" just ended with section 16? Why didn't he go on to include section 17 as well? Why did he just end on that note of rebuke to Sariputta without, as it were, giving Sariputta a chance to come back? Sariputta's come-back was, so to speak, suppressed. So why do you think Woodward might have done that? Why do you think he would have attached greater importance, so to speak, to just that section 16?

Gunapala: It seems a bit unfair, he's putting across an image...

S: What does section 16 say? What is the basic point there?

Yashopala: The Buddha is saying; "what are you making such a fuss for", really.

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S: If Sariputta is wrong to any extent, in what way is he wrong? What is the Buddha taking him to account for?

Devaraja: Well, for saying that there's been nobody else who's achieved...

S: He is really going beyond the limit, actually, isn't he? And the Buddha makes that very clear.

Prassannasiddhi: He's eulogizing to the point of actually not being truthful in a sense.

S: Not even not being truthful. He's not even in a position where he can speak the truth or otherwise. He simply doesn't know.

Gunapala: He's way out of his depth.

S: So what is the sort of, I mean leaving aside the case of Sariputta, what is the sort of general attitude that the Buddha is getting at?

Silaratna: An emotional outburst without reasoning backing it up.

S: Yes... that's on, as it were, a relatively lower level. It's not even just reason versus emotion or emotion versus reason, though it may be in some cases, but it's, as it were, faith altogether outstripping the justifications for faith. It's not really faith any more. So, leaving aside the case of the Buddha and Sariputta, does not one find this sort of thing happening in different pseudo-spiritual movements? What I at least call pseudo-spiritual movements and cults, even today in an even more exaggerated sort of way, doesn't one find this? Can you think of any examples?

Prassannasiddhi: Christianity; "happy is he who believes even though he does not [4] see"

S: I was thinking actually of living examples. I was thinking of people like Guru Maharaj.

Now what is it that makes people so concerned to declare, to insist, to try to convince you that Guru Maharaj is the greatest or that Rajneesh is the greatest? Why is this? Isn't this the bottom to what the Buddha is getting at? Sariputta is really trying to say that the Buddha is the greatest that is, that ever was and that ever will be, which is an impossible statement. How could he possibly make that? No doubt it's very good that Sariputta should have tremendous faith in the Buddha, but in a sense he's not expressing his faith rightly. He's putting his faith into a sort of pseudo-statement which cannot possibly be backed up because he hasn't got the knowledge to do that. So what is it that makes people just go over the top in that sort of way? We're coming back again maybe to the devotee of Guru Maharaj or Rajneesh or some particular Tibetan lama or whoever. What is it that makes people want to say or to assert or to insist that they're the greatest? Why can they not be content with saying, for instance; "he's a highly developed person, at least he's more developed than I am and I feel I can learn from him", which is a comparatively modest statement but which could be backed up with facts. If you actually feel that someone is more spiritually developed than you, wiser than you, more enlightened than you and that you are in the receiving role in comparison with him, well that is quite understandable, as I say quite... to be backed up by facts or capable of being backed up by facts, but to say that someone is the greatest, that they are Jesus Christ and Muhammad and the Buddha all rolled into one and just living down the road and running that particular centre... well, why?

Gunapala: ...things that could be connected. I mean, the fact that you know the greatest person in the world could be one of them.

S: It's a means of indirectly promoting yourself.

[5]

Gunapala: Yeah, knowing the greatest person that ever was, ever will be...

S: Perhaps you're very close to him, perhaps...

Gunapala: ...you're his friend...

S: ...his chief disciple...

Gunapala: It makes you feel really important; you're in contact with the greatest man that ever will be.

Yashopala: So, if he's the greatest, he's a bit like, I suppose a bit like God, he's absolute. So you can't really aspire towards being him in the way that you might aspire towards being a Buddha.

S: Yes, in a way it's a bit of a cop-out. You sort of sink on to your knees and that's that; you just gaze in adoration. You don't really think in terms of being like that person, at best you think in terms of serving that person, doing whatever that person tells you to do. So really the question of authority comes in; you're looking for an absolute authority or a figure who embodies absolute authority, so that you can blindly submit to that. You can just give up all sense of responsibility. No doubt nowadays, I was going to say in the middle, but it's getting towards the end of the twentieth century, people may feel the burden of responsibility very very greatly, the world being such a difficult place and there being so many apparently

insoluble problems, they just want to hand over responsibility for their lives to somebody and to whom better than to God or the equivalent of God.

Gunapala: Sariputta did make his point clear. He took quite a few steps back and then did explain where he was coming from.

S: Yes, well we'll go back to that in a minute He did modify his position. He [6] did have some sort of position which was more genuine underneath his, as it were, not so genuine, his slightly false position as expressed in his original utterance.

Gunapala: We're comparing that to some of these other groups...

S: I'm not really comparing, because after all the Buddha was enlightened and one can't feel the same way about people like, you know, Guru Maharaj and Bhagwan Rajneesh. In the case of the Buddha there's something to exaggerate. In their case the degree of exaggeration is very much greater in as much as they're very much smaller, as far as one can see, than the Buddha.

Silaratna: It's, sort of, a case of sentimentality creeping in.

S: Mmm, sentimentality, there's that too. Perhaps also what is at the bottom of it in a sort of, what shall I say, methodological way, is the effort to give expression to something which is qualitative in terms of quantity, do you see what I mean? Or to try to express a feeling or a sense of value in factual terms. This is what I meant by quantitative; in terms of the factual. I mean, Sariputta has got tremendous feeling for the Buddha, there's no doubt about that, there's nothing wrong in that, it's completely positive He's conscious of the greatness of the Buddha and he can't find any way of expressing that. He can only express it by... He thinks that the way to express it is "you're the greatest". That is not the way to express it. But how can one express it?

Gunapala: It's a bit like making it very flowery and putting it up on a pedestal in a sense... decorating it.

S: It's a bit like saying to a woman "you're the most beautiful girl in the world". Well, you may actually feel that but obviously you haven't seen, or carefully examined, or closely scrutinised all the other women in the world. (laughter) That's just your way of saying that you appreciate her quite a lot, do you see [7] what I mean? What is it that makes us put this sort of subjective feeling, to expose it almost, in these objective terms which aren't really justified. This is what we are doing isn't it?

Yashopala: Just to make it sound grand.

S: Also, if it is more honest, it's to communicate the intensity of our feeling; we don't have any other way of doing it. It's as though the factual statement doesn't quite fit in expressing the intensity of our feeling. We try to do that in terms of factual statements which cannot be borne out.

Gunapala: But in another sense I can see how it is quite valid. He's genuinely expressing a feeling.

S: Yes, a feeling, after all it is Sariputta, he is an Arhant, a feeling, no doubt, that is genuine, completely genuine. Let's say, for the sake of argument, he's not indulging in sentiment and he's not really, subjectively speaking, going over the top at all. His feelings towards the Buddha, his feelings of devotion are completely natural and completely appropriate, but he expresses them in the wrong terms. He expresses them in these sort of objective terms, these comparative terms, which he isn't really able to justify.

Devaraja: So he was an Arhant at the time?

S: That would be the assumption, yes, because he attained Arhantship quite soon after meeting the Buddha.

Devaraja: It seems extraordinary that this would have occurred then. I find it strange that he would have spoken that way. I would have thought if he'd been an Arhant he would have...

S: Known better?

[8]

Devaraja: ...known better, yeah.

S: Well, on a certain level perhaps even an Arhant can make a mistake. On a certain level even a Buddha can make a mistake. You notice in connection with this that he says, even in the midst of his eulogy, he doesn't lose, in a sense, his mindfulness, he says; "Lord' such faith have I in the Exalted One, that methinks there never has been, nor will there be, nor is there now any other, whether Wanderer or Brahmin, who is greater and wiser than the Exalted One, that is to say, as regards the higher wisdom". That is as regards Bodhi, I think Bodhi is the original word here, in other words, not as regards ordinary, mundane knowledge. He carefully makes that distinction. Also, you notice he doesn't actually say that the Buddha is greater than all these others, he says that he has the faith, the conviction, that there is none who is or was or will be greater than the Buddha.

Gunapala: Even though that's true, you know, maybe it is true, but the fact that the Buddha said "it's impossible for you to know that", I mean, I feel in a sense .

S: Well, yes, we'll go into Sariputta's reply later. The Buddha says he doesn't know, as it were, by direct perception. The essence of his reply is that he knows it by inference. (laughter) (...) he does come back.

But to come back to Woodward, it would seem that Woodward was quite, as it were, sympathetic to the idea of someone being ticked off by the Buddha for this, what seems to be this, exaggerated eulogy. Perhaps he felt that religious enthusiasm of that sort was something to be curbed or restrained and also there is the point that after all he was a Theosophist wasn't he and he was translating and all that very soon after the Krishnamurti debacle. I hope this is not being too far-fetched. But he obviously knew all about that and was involved in all that. That was the occasion when Krishnamurti was proclaimed as the messiah, Christ and Maitreya Buddha all rolled into one, the new world saviour and I rather, I don't know, but I suspect that Woodward did not quite go along with that. This was about 1923 or '24 as far as I remember and he was translating Pali texts around that time and for [9] some years afterwards. So, he may have felt, may have been rather conscious of this particular issue, of

this unbounded eulogy and glorification such as the young Krishnamurti received from Ann Besant and others and from which some Theosophists dissociated themselves; some in fact even broke away. So he might have felt it more important to emphasize the Buddha's rebuke than to emphasize Sariputta's come-back to that rebuke, if it was a rebuke at all.

Silaratna: Couldn't you look at it from another point of view, with regards to say that perhaps he might think that the Buddha is not really... if the Buddha makes a statement it's not really, sort of... you can't come back at it. A bit of absolutism in what the Buddha says.

S: Yes, because there is this point that Sariputta does come back, he bounces back, there's a dialogue. The Buddha doesn't have, the Buddha isn't left with the last word and that is, perhaps, a no less important point, that you can answer the Buddha back, even if you're wrong and it doesn't appear that Sariputta is even necessarily wrong. The Buddha doesn't always have the last word and perhaps it's no less important to emphasize that point.

Prassannasiddhi: He made no remark about that point did he, "as regards the higher wisdom"? Sariputta made no... have you picked this up, Bhante, from somewhere else, this ...

S: No; "who is greater and wiser than the Exalted One, that is to say, as regards the higher wisdom", that is to say Bodhi. This refers to the fact that in the Buddha's day there were some teachers who apparently claimed omniscience, that is to say they claimed, or perhaps their disciples claimed on their behalf, that they knew everything. One still finds such teachers or at least such disciples in India today and I suspect even in the West today. For instance, the sort of omniscience that was claimed was that, for instance, a particular teacher knew exactly how many leaves there were on a particular tree, he knew everything. Do you see what I [10] mean? The Buddha is represented as definitely disclaiming omniscience in that sense. He's not omniscient with regard to the facts of botany or geology or geography or history, but he does claim to have a complete knowledge of the path leading to Nirvana. It is that with regard to which he has complete knowledge and of course he has the knowledge, one could say the experience, of Nirvana itself. He makes no claim beyond that. So, Sariputta may be referring to that. He says; "such faith have I in the Exalted One, that methinks there never has been, nor will there be, nor is there now any other, whether Wanderer or Brahmin, who is greater and wiser than the Exalted One, that is to say, as regards the higher wisdom", as regards Bodhi, as regards the path to Bodhi, to enlightenment. "Others may know more than you about archery or about elephants or about the martial arts", he's not disputing that but "no one knows more than the Buddha, no one is greater and wiser than the Buddha as regards the higher wisdom at least", that is the point of his qualification there.

Yashopala: I mean, in that case it's true. (laughter)

S: You could also say that the Buddha is not rebuking Sariputta so much as testing him. I mean, maybe the Buddha is a bit amused by this - "what's in this? what's behind this? what substance is there?" Can Sariputta justify himself? Let's see We need not take it as a rebuke even though it usually is. Sariputta, also, doesn't seem lacking in confidence. He's not in the least apologetic about his statement. The Buddha says; "Grand and bold are the words of thy mouth, Sariputta: verily thou hast burst forth into a song of ecstasy! of course thou hast known all the Exalted Ones" etc. etc. etc. And then Sariputta says; "O Lord! I have not the knowledge of the hearts of the Able Awakened Ones that have been, and are to come, and now are. I only know the lineage of the faith." He's not apologetic about it. So, Sariputta's

position is not quite that or not at all that of say the modern devotee of Guru Maharaj or Bhagwan Rajneesh and so on. Sariputta's position is in fact quite different, though often it is, sort of, misunderstood, I would say, as being like that of the sort of people I've referred to. They can't really back up [11] their eulogies, whereas Sariputta can. We'll see how he does that shortly.

Prassannasiddhi: It is, sort of, out of character in a way for Sariputta to be eulogizing in that way, because he's supposed to be the one who knows the doctrine really well and the one who's intellectual.

S: But, then, that assumes that even on that level one can be enlightened, one can have wisdom, but not faith, which no doubt is an entirely wrong assumption. If Sariputta was an Arhant, well, he'd not only have wisdom, he'd have, well, one might say faith and compassion and so on too. That presupposes a quite narrow, unjustifiably narrow view of Arhantship. That may have been the way that Arhantship was seen later on, but it doesn't seem the way that Arhantship was seen in the Buddha's day, not such a hard and fast distinction was made between Arhantship and Buddhahood.

Devaraja: There does seem to be a distinction here. He's implying that Sariputta doesn't know directly, his understanding is not the same as that of a Buddha.

S: The Buddha is not saying that he knows.

Devaraja: That the Buddha knows?

S: The Buddha is not saying that he, that is to say the Buddha, does know. He doesn't say that actually, I mean, the Buddhist might assume that the Buddha knows but the Buddha hasn't said so. You see what I mean? The Buddha knows that he himself is enlightened, but he isn't, now I'm not saying he doesn't know the degree of enlightenment of the Buddhas of the past and future, but he hasn't claimed that he knows, not in this passage. He merely asks Sariputta if he knows and also, especially, he asks Sariputta whether he knows him, doesn't he?

Prassannasiddhi: Sariputta does deny it.

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S: "But at least then, O Sariputta, thou knowest me as the Able Awakened One now alive, and hast penetrated my mind (in the manner I have mentioned)!" which was "all the Exalted Ones who in the long ages of the past have been Able Awakened Ones, comprehending their minds with yours, and aware what their conduct was, what their wisdom, what their mode of life, and what the emancipation they attained to?" No doubt Sariputta has some knowledge of the Buddha, some direct knowledge by virtue of his personal communication with the Buddha, but he cannot claim to know the Buddha completely, even the Buddha who is now alive. This raises another very important point, something I've touched on on other occasions, the difficulty of knowing another person. Here is the Buddha, here is Sariputta. The Buddha is the Buddha, Sariputta is an Arhant and even assuming that an Arhant isn't so highly developed, so to speak, as a Buddha, nonetheless an Arhant is very highly developed indeed. He's very much on the same path, he's not very far behind a Buddha and in the case of Sariputta, he's in personal contact with the Buddha. But it's very difficult for him to know fully the mind of the Buddha. So this makes, in a way, the general point it's not easy to know

another person and therefore not easy to judge another person, not easy to estimate or to know, where another person really is at. I don't think it's necessarily more easy to know an unenlightened person than to know an enlightened one. You could say an enlightened person is more difficult to know and in a sense that is true, because of the level of his consciousness, but an unenlightened person is no less difficult to know in another way, because his consciousness is so confused. It's only bits and pieces, many of them quite unrelated. You could say, in a sense, it's as difficult for an enlightened person to know the mind of an unenlightened one as it is for an unenlightened one to know the mind of an enlightened one. We could put it in that way and there would be an element of truth in it. You might even say it's still more difficult for the unenlightened mind to know the other unenlightened mind. It's very difficult (laughs) for one kind of confusion to know another kind of confusion. An enlightened mind might have some chance, but another unenlightened mind has hardly any chance at all, hardly any hope at all. So that means that communication is not an easy matter and the practical result, the upshot, the corollary of that is we must be very careful about judging other people, [13] at least judging their states of mind. You can judge their actions, just as actions but we have to be really careful what conclusions we draw from those actions about their states of mind. Supposing somebody doesn't get up in the morning, someone doesn't appear at breakfast, well, it's easy to jump to conclusions, but he might have needed extra sleep, he might have been ill, he might have been lying there perfectly mindfully repeating his mantra, you don't know, but only too often one just jumps to conclusions, usually (...) thing to talk about. Do you see what I mean? And in other sort of (...) it's very difficult to tell, very difficult to understand, very difficult to judge, but one finds people only too often very quickly jumping in, with very snap judgements.

Gunapala: I know when I meet someone for the first time, I very often will judge them quite quickly, within a minute. I can get quite a strong...

S: Well, yes, I mean as soon as you meet a New Zealander, you think, well, he must be a good chap. (laughter)

Gunapala: I know that in a matter of seconds!

S: Well now, he might be an utter rogue.

Gunapala: There's a possibility I could be wrong I suppose. I do that, you know. I meet someone, met someone yesterday and I still feel that there was something about them that I really liked and that judgement was made in a matter of...

S: No, you have to distinguish... if you like them that is not by itself a judgement, that is your feeling. If you say to somebody; "well look, I like this person, I'm attracted to this person, that means that that person is a good person", well that is a judgement. Your subjective feeling of liking for that person is not a judgement. You see what I mean? You see the difference between a feeling and a judgement? I mean just in the same way as you might meet someone and dislike them, [14] you can't conclude from that; "that is a bad person", in the sense of a morally unworthy person. The fact that you dislike them may be for purely subjective reasons. You may have been projecting something on to them. They may be quite good. Because you don't like them, you conclude that they're bad. So we have to draw a line of demarcation between our feeling about someone or something and our objective judgement or assessment of that thing or person.

Gunapala: It's very difficult for me to separate the two.

S: Well, we usually don't, but we should. I like him, therefore he's a good chap.

Gunapala: We usually like a person because of certain aspects or certain qualities.

S: Well, that's all right, you can say that I like that person and that person possesses such and such qualities. Even that isn't necessarily an objective judgement, because you're not saying whether those qualities are good or bad. You are merely saying that you like the person on account of those qualities, assuming that the qualities you perceive are actually there. And you can be mistaken, for instance, you might meet someone, you might go off with them, who may be very generous, who may be spending money on you and you might think he's a very good man because he's generous, you don't look further than that. But he may have a motive in spending money on you, you don't see that, you don't see as far as that or as deep as that. So your judgement about him as a generous person is mistaken. You see the action, which is an action of spending money but you interpret that as an expression of generosity.

Gunapala: In your own way, on your own terms.

S: So your perception of the fact is correct, but your interpretation of the fact, your evaluation of it, is mistaken. This is why, I sometimes say, you have to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. If someone's actions are capable of [15] more than one interpretation, you should suspend your judgement. Very often people don't do this. I would go further, in the case of someone you know quite well, you should even persist in your, as it were, judgement of them, maybe your positive judgement of them, even in the face of evidence apparently to the contrary. This is what trust means. I mean, for instance, you may have a friendship with somebody, you may be really fond of him, he really fond of you, you get on well, you're good friends and then you hear from somebody that he has said something quite unpleasant about you, if your trust is strong enough you will say to yourself, he couldn't possibly have said that, there must be some misunderstanding, I know there's a misunderstanding, I know him so well that I know he could not have said that. But if your trust is weak, you may at once believe that statement, feel angry with him and even when you meet him say, well, why did you say that, when perhaps he didn't. Or you may not say it, you may just keep quiet but your feeling of friendship will be affected and he may notice that. He may say, well, what's the matter, you may say, well, nothing. You may deny that there is anything the matter. In that way things become confused, just because your trust was not strong enough. Do you see what I mean? So this is why trust in human relations is very important, you must give the other person the benefit of the doubt. You must have enough trust in them if they really are a good friend of yours, to be able to do that when necessary.

Prassannasiddhi: Would you say this generally in human relations or just specifically with regards to friendships, and such things as that. Because, I mean, it does seem as if...

S: Well, I think you can only trust someone really unless there's some underlying element of friendship or at least definite knowledge of that particular person, for instance in business dealings you know someone well enough to know he's not going to cheat you, so that even if you hear from somebody, well, he's not honest in his dealings, well, you have enough confidence in that person based on your past experience to know that that is not true and therefore you won't pay any attention [16] to it. Actually trust is an integral part of friendship

at least, or any kind of reliable human relation. Just as in the case of marriage, you trust your wife. She may go out, you trust her, that she's not going to make use of the opportunity to do something that you wouldn't like. You trust her and even if someone says to you, well, "I saw your wife chatting to another man", you're not bothered. "Well, yes, all right, very well, she was, but there's nothing for me to worry about, I trust her". Do you see what I mean? If that element of trust is not present in a friendship, you can say the friendship is quite weak, it's not a proper friendship. It hasn't yet been properly developed.

Gunapala: It is built up over a period, I mean you get trust from someone who has never let you down before.

S: Yes indeed. So this is why friendship, and especially trust as a part of friendship, cannot be developed quickly. It is built up over a period of years almost.

Gunapala: So when you do lose your trust in somebody it's when they have let you down a couple of times and it just shakes your confidence in them. You can't trust them.

S: You may not altogether lose your feeling of friendship for them, but you will know that the friendship has certain definite limitations. There are certain areas in which you can't trust that other person. They may not be areas of direct significance to the friendship itself. I mean, the person may have certain weaknesses which aren't directly related to your friendship, but, you know, when any question arises in any area where those weaknesses may be relevant, you can't trust that person, even though you have the same feelings of friendship for him.

Gunapala: I've experienced that, where I've had a strong feeling for someone and yet known that he's not a trustworthy person.

[17]

S: In a certain respect or in a certain area?

Gunapala: Yeah, mainly with unethical dealings. I still felt friendship.

S: So, it's not easy to know another person. This is the point that we started from, and therefore one should be very cautious about jumping to conclusions about people, be very cautious about judging, assessing. One needs to have known that person for quite a long time and perhaps seen them in different conditions, under different circumstances. Someone made the point, I think it was the year before last on the occasion of the first Tuscan, that they travelled out to Tuscany with somebody and they found that their experience of that person travelling was quite different from what they had expected, because the conditions under which they were living were very different. They hadn't lived under those sorts of conditions together before. So a new aspect of the other person's character came out. So you need to see people under different conditions to see how they react, how they respond, how they meet particular challenges or difficulties.

So the Buddha does expose certain deficiencies in Sariputta's statement. I mean, his original eulogistic statement assumes that he did know, not only the Buddha himself, but the Buddhas of the past and the Buddhas of the future. It assumes that he knew them directly, but he makes it clear in his reply that he's not saying that he knew them directly but as it were by inference.

Gunapala: What does that mean?

S: Well, maybe we can go on to that. He says; "O Lord! I have not the knowledge of the hearts of the Able Awakened Ones that have been, and are to come, and now are. I only know the lineage of the faith". Unfortunately I don't have the Pali text here, we don't have it in the Order library. So, I'm not sure what "lineage of the faith" is. "Lineage" is probably vamsa and "faith" is probably not shraddha, it's probably sasana vamsa, I'm not sure, but anyway he goes on to explain what his meaning is with an illustration. He says; "Just, Lord, as a king might have a [18] border city, strong in its foundations, strong in its ramparts and towers, and with only one gate; and the king might have a watchman there, clever, expert, and wise, to stop all strangers and admit only men well known. And he, on patrolling in his sentry, walks over the approaches all round the city, might not so observe all the joints and crevices in the ramparts of that city as to know where even a cat could get out. He might well be satisfied to know that all living things of larger size that entered or left the city, would have to do so by that gate. Thus only is it, Lord, that I know the lineage of the faith" And he illustrates that; "I know that the Able Awakened Ones of the past, putting away all hankering after the world, ill-will, sloth, worry, and perplexity, those five hindrances, mental faults which make the understanding weak; training their minds in the four kinds of mental activity;" that is the four Satipatthanas, actually, "thoroughly exercising themselves in the seven-fold higher wisdom," the seven bodhyangas, "received the full fruition of Enlightenment. And I know that the Able Awakened Ones of the times to come will do the same. And I know that the Exalted One, the Able Awakened One of to-day, has done so now." So inference is when you know that something is present which you cannot see, because it is invariably connected with the presence of something which you can see. Do you see what I mean? Fire, say, is always accompanied by smoke, so when you see smoke you know that there is fire. In other words, from the perception of the smoke, from the existence of the smoke, you can infer the existence of the fire. So he said, I don't directly perceive the minds of those Enlightened Ones, of the past, present and future, but I know that whoever gains enlightenment can do so only in a particular way. Just like if you want to enter that city you can only do so by the gate, not any other way, so I know that those who are enlightened will have gained enlightenment by getting rid of the five hindrances, developing the four foundations of mindfulness and the seven bodhyangas. I know that if they have done those things they will be enlightened and I know that you have done that, so I know that they cannot be greater than you, because what they have done, you also have done. I know that. It isn't even so altogether clear because there isn't a complete distinction being made between Buddhahood and Arhantship, not as regards content of experience. I mean, there's a note here by [19] Rhys Davids, he says; "all the details he gives are details not of Buddhahood but of Arhantship. He makes no distinction between the two states of attainment. This is most important for the history of that buddhology, which in the after centuries was the main factor in the downfall of Buddhism". We won't go into that at the moment, but yes, in this passage there isn't really a distinction made between Arhantship and Buddhahood, not as regards content of experience. The original distinction seems to have been that the Buddha, in the technical sense, was one who gained the experience first by his own efforts and the Arhants were those who gained it, also by their own efforts, following in his footsteps and practising his teaching but ending up with the same experience. So in a way, Sariputta knows that the Buddha must have gained enlightenment, because the Buddha has practised what he, Sariputta, has practised and he Sariputta has gained enlightenment. He may not know it by direct perception, not in full, but he knows it by inference. Do you see what I mean? So, he knows with regards to Buddhas of the past that if they have practised those things, yes, they will have gained enlightenment, but

they will not have gained anything more than the Buddha. And the Buddhas of the future, if they also practise those things, they too will gain enlightenment, but they will still not gain anything more than the Buddha. So he knows, by inference at least, that there is no one in the past or in the future who is greater than the Buddha. He may not know it by direct perception, he seems to be saying, but he knows it by inference. So, in a way, he justifies his position. He stands up to the Buddha's test.

Prassannasiddhi: Is what he is saying... is it that if you've eradicated these things then you couldn't really do much better than that?

S: Yes. If you've eradicated the five hindrances, you've developed the four foundations of mindfulness and also you've developed fully the seven bodhyangas, he's saying that you cannot do more than that. That is, so to speak, the highest attainment of which a human being is capable. So, his faith is based upon knowledge or not divorced from knowledge. Maybe his faith is not bound up with direct [20] perception, he doesn't have, as it were, a direct telepathic perception of the minds of all these other Buddhas, but at least he can infer from what they have practised, what their attainment must be, basing himself presumably upon his own experience.

Gunapala: One thing that keeps coming to me is the fact that there are signs here, of the fact that someone is enlightened, which seems a bit of a contradiction somehow to me, from my knowledge...

S: He doesn't exactly say that there are signs, but he says, well, if you actually have practised such and such things, you must have attained certain realizations. It's not that if you get rid of the five hindrances and if you practise the four foundations of mindfulness and if you develop fully the seven bodhyangas, then you will gain enlightenment. The fact that you have done all these things means that enlightenment is attained. The attainment of enlightenment is tantamount to these things, so that if someone has done these things, they are enlightened, they must be, because that is what enlightenment means. Its not something added to these things.

Gunapala: Has Sariputta done... you are saying that he has done these things? The fact that he is an Arhant, that he is enlightened, this is where he gets his clarity, this is where he gets his right to be able to say this?

S: He sees that in the Buddha there are no hindrances, he sees that the Buddha practises the four foundations of mindfulness and that he has fully developed the seven bodhyangas. Presumably he can see that from the Buddha's daily life, or see it to a very great extent and so he can infer from that that the Buddha is in fact in a state of enlightenment as he himself is.

Devaraja: You said something about Woodward's comment at the bottom, the distinction between the two...

[21]

S: This is Rhys Davids.

Devaraja: Rhys Davids. Why was that lack of distinction... if Rhys Davids is right...

S: Rhys Davids says; "Sariputta acknowledges that he was wrong in jumping to the wide conclusion that his own lord and master was the wisest of all teachers", but is that his conclusion? Does he say that? I mean, let us be quite clear; "such faith have I in the Exalted One, that methinks there never has been, nor will there be, nor is there now any other, whether Wanderer or Brahmin, who is greater and wiser than the Exalted One". So Rhys Davids has not understood or he did not remember when writing his note what he himself has translated. Sariputta does not claim that the Buddha is the greatest; he claims that there is none who is greater than the Buddha, and Buddhist tradition does specifically maintain that Buddhas are equal in respect of their enlightenment. Sariputta is saying no more than that. So Rhys Davids seems to have missed the point. "So far, after the cross-examination by the Buddha, he admits that his knowledge does not reach". He admits it doesn't reach so far by way of direct perception, but he says instead that it reaches so far by way of inference. "He maintains that he does know that which is, to him, after all the main thing, namely, that all the Buddhas must have passed through the process here laid down as leading up to Buddhahood."

Prassannasiddhi: Sariputta doesn't acknowledge that he was wrong in jumping to the wide conclusion?

S: No. He seems to be saying that he arrived at it not as a result of direct perception but as a result of inference. This is what he seems to be saying and Rhys Davids seems to be making a different sort of point. He seems to be saying there is a difference between Buddhahood and Arhantship, to some extent, and that Sariputta is saying, well, at least my knowledge goes as far as Arhantship even if it doesn't go as far as Buddhahood. I don't think in fact that that is the point [22] that Sariputta is making, I think he is simply making the point that his knowledge is based upon inference and that inference is of course rooted in his own experience. He doesn't actually withdraw anything, he doesn't acknowledge that he was wrong in jumping to the wide conclusion and he certainly never claimed that the Buddha was the wisest of all teachers; he only claimed that there was none wiser, which is a completely different thing. Rhys Davids does slip up there.

Prassannasiddhi: It shows you've got to be very careful when even reading through these things.

S: One does sometimes find this, in reading scholarly works, that sometimes the scholar's conclusions don't follow from the facts as stated by them and here we are; Rhys Davids has translated this but he seems to have forgotten the wording of the passage which he himself has translated when he writes this note. Little slips like this are quite easy to make.

TEA BREAK

S: Devaraja's about to come out with something! (laughter)

Devaraja: It seems to me that there are one or two things being implied here; that either there is a qualitative between Sariputta's enlightenment and the Buddha's enlightenment or alternatively that even an enlightened mind doesn't necessarily know another enlightened mind, in the same way that you were talking about people knowing each other.

S: Do you notice what the Buddha says? He says; "of course then thou hast known all the Exalted Ones who in the long ages of the past have been Able Awakened Ones,

comprehending their minds with yours, and aware what their conduct was, what their wisdom, what their mode of life, and what the emancipation they attained to?" So that is really quite comprehensive. But its true, as you say, that there are those [23] two alternatives; either Sariputta doesn't know the Buddha's mind directly because it goes beyond his own mind, the Buddha is, so to speak, even more enlightened, or that even between equally enlightened minds there is not a full, mutual comprehension. That issue doesn't seem to be resolved within the context of this particular section. Or perhaps it is. Sariputta says; "I know that the Able Awakened Ones of the past, putting away all hankering after the world, ill-will, sloth, worry, and perplexity, those five hindrances, mental faults which make the understanding weak; training their minds in the four kinds of mental activity; thoroughly exercising themselves in the sevenfold higher wisdom, received the full fruition of Enlightenment." That does suggest that enlightenment consists in those things and that therefore it might not, in principle at least, differ from Arhantship. Therefore it would suggest that Sariputta, in a manner, is no less enlightened than the Buddha but that he does not comprehend the mind of the Buddha with his own and therefore that mutual comprehension between two enlightened beings is not fully possible. That would seem to be the implication, though, perhaps we can't be too certain about that. But then that raises the question of what does one mean by knowing another person, by knowing another person's mind? I mean, do you ever actually get inside another person's mind? Do you ever know another person as that person knows himself? Because that person knows himself as subject. When you know that person, you know that person as object; can it be the same? Again, although this particular text doesn't raise this question, you could say that an enlightened being has transcended the distinction between subject and object. So two enlightened beings having equally transcended the distinction of subject and object would presumably be able to know each other, but we can't even say that, at least we can't use that language literally, because if they had transcended the distinction between subject and object, would each know the other as an object? Not really. In order to resolve this difficulty one has to transcend the terms of the difficulty altogether. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Devaraja: I'm getting a bit lost'

[24]

S: There is also the whole question of whether enlightenment is a sort of static state. We mustn't jump to that conclusion. Maybe bring it down to another level, maybe bring it down say, I say bring it down, that might be questioned, to the level of the arts. In what sense, in what way does one artist understand another or let's say the work of another?

Devaraja: Its through the work.

S: Its through the work, but does he sort of get inside the mind...

Devaraja: The work sort of infers the mind of the other person.

Yashopala: They have something in common.

S: But what to him was subject to you is object, perhaps to him also its now object in as much as he's embodied the subjective in an objective work of art. But it was originally subjective and maybe he feels that what is important objectively in the work of art doesn't really do justice to what he actually experienced. He may well feel that. So you don't fully get at his

experience through the work of art which he has produced, because it falls short of his experience perhaps or doesn't fully express it or adequately express it. So what do we mean by knowing another person? This is really the question I'm getting at. We're not really discussing about can Sariputta know the Buddha, can Arhant know Buddha, can an Arhant know an Arhant, can a Buddha know a Buddha? What do we mean by one person, one human being, one individual, knowing another anyway, what do we mean by that? Do we mean that we have their experience or that we experience things as they experience? Well no, we don't. Someone can be really close to you but if he's got a toothache, do you experience that in the same way that he does? No you don't experience a toothache at all. You can say; "I feel for you", you can be very sorry but actually you can be quite enjoying yourself at the same time in other ways. You don't have that experience, you don't really know what its like.

[25]

Prassannasiddhi: You do get these people getting stigmata on their hands.

Gunapala: I mean, that's weird too. They experience something that Jesus...

S: St Francis.

Gunapala: ...that person may not have even experienced it.

S: Well, assuming that St. Francis did experience the stigmata, well, we don't know for certain that there was an historical person who had wounds of that sort and therefore that St. Francis is experiencing what he was experiencing. No, St. Francis had a vivid mental image of the crucified saviour and that was so vivid that he started getting wounds on his hands, just as a woman can be convinced that she's pregnant and start swelling up, but she isn't pregnant. Mind can influence the body.

Devaraja: Getting back to the toothache, where you can sympathize with a person is by finding something in your own experience which corresponds.

S: Even so its only sympathy, its not experience. At the time when that person has the toothache you are not experiencing toothache, you have only a recollection of your toothache and also there may be other experiences to which there's no analogy in your experience. So how can you even really sympathize?

Silaratna: Is that another example of inference? You infer that the person is feeling pain because when you had a pain in your tooth...

S: Yes, right. You have some idea of what its like but its only an idea based on perhaps some analogy from your own experience but you do not actually experience the other person's experience.

[26]

Prassannasiddhi: Actually I'm not quite so sure. I know that in the case of twins or I've heard that in the case of twins and even some other people that one feels when the other... I think this has happened with twins, one of them dies and the other twin feels ...

S: Well, that raises the question again, to what extent twins are two individuals. You may not

be dealing with two individuals here in the full sense or in the sense that we're discussing. You may be dealing either with one person or one individual or something between the two.

Buddhapalita: One and a half!

Gunapala: Two people sort of connected. One person connected with two bodies.

S: Sort of - something like that, very roughly.

Gunapala: Very strange.

Prassannasiddhi: I would prefer to think more in terms of what we perceive as separate bodies, ourselves, two people just getting that close to each other that they've, sort of, jumped on to another level in a sense, in twins occurring ... rather than looking at it as one person sort of splitting in two.

Devaraja: What about sometimes in communication exercises if you establish an intimacy with someone, it's almost as if you can actually see what's happening; are you actually seeing or is there some sort of...

S: When you say seeing, well what is that? What is it, "a seeing"? What do you see?

Devaraja: It's a sort of a...

[27]

S: If you say that you see that assumes a seen. But then what you see, that seen object is not experienced by that person as a seen object but as a subject, therefore your experience is different. Your experience can only be the same, so to speak, if the subject/object distinction is transcended. Later on there'd be a hiatus in the subject/object relationship.

Devaraja: What does a hiatus mean?

S: That is to say, the subject/object relationship breaks down. You don't see the other person at all, because there's no object there. He is no longer an object for you and you are no longer an object for him and it's very difficult to express whatever does happen, whatever does occur without seeming to make it an object, which means of course to falsify it completely. This is really when we speak of the Buddha; the Buddha, say, having transcended the subject/object duality, it's easy to say those words but you're thinking of that Buddha, who has transcended the subject/object duality, as an object therefore you're not thinking of him as having transcended subject/object duality at all. You've made him an object.

Devaraja: Is the Buddha attacking that in Sariputta?

S: Difficult to say. We've only got the words of the text to go by. Maybe. There are implications of that sort and maybe the Buddha was aware of them.

Prassannasiddhi: When you say, when you're in communication with another person you may be able to transcend, briefly, the objectivity of that person, does that mean that you would actually, in a sense, transcend all objectivity not only, you know, in the midst of that

experience, not only the objectivity of the person but all objectivity?

[28]

S: Well, yes and no, because for the time being at least that person is for you objectivity in as much as you're concentrating on that person. That person is right at the centre of your attention, so therefore I say that for you that person is objectivity itself. So that to the extent that you transcend the objectivity of that person, you transcend objectivity itself, to that extent. Because if you transcend your subjective relationship with any object as object you do transcend the subject/object duality itself for an instant.

Prassannasiddhi: In its entirety or only as regards that one person?

S: Can you distinguish in that way? Can you have, say, a set of objects laid out in front of you and you transcend subject/object duality with regard to this object and not with regard to that object, is it possible? Its as though the whole objectivity is sort of narrowed down to that one person on whom you are concentrating, with whom you are trying to concentrate. Its as though objectivity is spread out and it comes together in a sort of point, and that point meets the corresponding point in the subject, that is to say you and the two points meet. A point of course is dimensionless, so its not a question of two surfaces meeting, its a question of two points meeting. So the meeting is a non-meeting, because how can there be a meeting between one point which doesn't occupy space, which has no dimensions, and another point which doesn't occupy space, because it doesn't have dimensions. And that sort of meeting which is a non-meeting is another way of looking at this transcendence of subject/object duality, so in a sense you transcend the duality within yourself and that other person, but in another sense also at the same time, you transcend the duality between subjectivity and objectivity itself, in as much as, for the moment at least, that person represents the whole of objectivity for you, just as you represent the whole of subjectivity.

Gunapala: Just a thought - if you're using the breath as an object and you transcend subject/object through the breath or your point of concentration is in communication with someone else, them being the object, narrowed to that point, [29] and you transcend subject/object, is the experience of the transcendence the same, because there another person, another being involved, is that the same as...

S: You see the presence of another being makes a lot of difference, in as much as the other being is conscious. I mean, your subjectivity is reflected back as objectivity, which is a quite odd thing because what you're experiencing as subject the other person is experiencing as object. So at the same time you're experiencing yourself as subject, you're experiencing them experiencing you, i.e. subject, as object, that is to say, object to them. So in that sort of curious way objectivity and subjectivity come together and that seems to spark off this experience of, well, from objectivity and subjectivity you get neither objectivity nor subjectivity. (laughter)

Gunapala: I still don't know where that's getting me with my point of thought about what the difference is between the communication, the subject/object, when you're left with no subject and no object, when your object is your breath, when there is no other being.

S: The breath is not you, the breath is yours. So the breath, even though it is your breath, is an object, you concentrate on it as object.

Gunapala: But then if you transcend...

S: But it's not a conscious object, it's like a thing, but in the case of a person, when you are looking at someone, it is a subject that you are looking at. So in the case of an object, you look at the object, but when you look at a subject, even as an object, the subject looks back at you. An object, a mere object, never looks back at you, but the object which is also a subject looks back at you and says "Ana!" you're not only looking at me, I'm looking at you.  
(laughter) That is a completely different experience.

[30]

Gunapala: What happens when you transcend it? It's the transcendence of the subject/object that I was wondering whether it was different, looking at it intellectually...

S: I must confess I haven't thought about that one. I'm tempted to think you'd need to encounter the object which is also a subject. I mean, supposing, just for the sake of argument, supposing you were looking at a tree, you'd just look at it as an object. Supposing you became aware that the tree was looking at you, supposing an eye opened in the bark of the tree and looked at you and you knew that the tree was looking at you, well, it would be a totally different experience wouldn't it? Or supposing an eye was to open in a stone and the stone looked at you. So its very different. It seems to me that its not easy, I don't want to generalize too much, but it seems to me not easy to get to a state of neither objectivity nor subjectivity, except via the experience of another object, which is also in its own way subject, looking at you as object and recognizing you as subject and yourself doing the same with that other person. You can have objects meeting objects, one stone bounces off another. You can have a subject meeting an object, or an object a subject. You can also have subjects mutually meeting each other as objects. Very curious things happen in communication. I think what often happens is that you, when you see another person, you are seeing them as object despite your lip-service of various kinds, you're not really seeing them as a subject appearing as an object, you're seeing them just as object. Women complain that they are treated as sex objects, well, very likely they are, I'm sure they are, just as they treat men as sex objects. I think its very rare that a subject who is an object for others does actually appreciate the fact that a person appearing as an object is not just an object but there is a subjectivity behind the objectivity. It is very difficult actually to appreciate that. That only comes to the fore in real communication. Otherwise you treat, you behave towards other people as though they are objects, more complicated objects, objects which are more difficult to manage and manoeuvre and manipulate, but still objects.

[31]

Yashopala: So when you recognize the subject in an object, is that when you are beginning to know somebody?

S: Well yes, I think the two are inseparable. I think you cannot be said to know another person as a person unless you really do recognize, well, to put it in that way, that behind the objectivity there is subjectivity or that what you perceive as object is to itself, so to speak, subject. But, I repeat its very difficult really to appreciate another person's subjectivity. To you its just an object. Its very difficult, therefore, to enter into another person's feelings, another person's mental states its very easy not to sympathize.

Gunapala: Because that's what you have to do, to treat them as a subject...

S: Even sympathy is only half way there. Sympathy is a half-way house. You sympathize because there's something in your own experience analogous to or remotely resembling what seems to be what that person is experiencing and sympathy really goes no further than that. And everyone knows that even between people who think that they know each other quite well and are quite close, dreadful misunderstandings can arise as though they had never understood each other at all. So this whole question of whether or in what sense or in what way an Arhant can comprehend the mind of a Buddha, is not quite so straightforward or as clear as one might have thought at first. What happens, I mean, what happens even in ordinary communication, ordinary human communication, even that is quite a mysterious business.

Yashopala: I'm reminded of that proverb of William Blake's about "he who suffered you to impose upon him knows you". Its always baffled me when I've read it as to what it means.

S: Well, I've taken it to mean he knows what you're capable of. The fact that he's imposed upon you means that he's revealed himself, in his true colours, so to speak. What does one mean by imposing upon, taking undue advantage - if you allow someone to take advantage of you, well, you know that person, you know he is a [32] person who is capable of taking that sort of advantage of you, of another person, who is capable of imposing on you in that sort of way. That certainly tells you quite a lot about him.

Yashopala: Is that knowing in the sense that you were...

S: No, I think this is more inferential - you infer his character from his behaviour in that respect. One is assuming that it was a real act of imposition and not an apparent one. So its as if Blake is saying, if you impose upon somebody don't think that you're getting away with something, you're not, because as a result of his allowing you to impose upon him, that man now understands you better than he did, so don't think that you've taken advantage of him. No, you might have done in a certain respect but there are certain disadvantages attached to that, namely that he now knows what you're really like.

Yashopala: Won't trust you in a certain way.

S: So you haven't really put one over him at all. In a certain respect yes, but in another respect not. You've given yourself away. You haven't really been smart or clever at all.

Prassannasiddhi: All this seems to make communication quite an important thing, in terms of spiritual life.

S: Well, if one normally doesn't get to a state of neither objectivity nor subjectivity except via the quite close or the quite intense encounter between one subjectivity and another, then that kind of encounter, that kind of communication, is really quite important. But again one might say, to come back to Buddhism, the Buddha gained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, I mean, the fact that he gained enlightenment meant, at least from a certain point of view, that he transcended the distinction between subject and object, but as far as we know he had no communication [33] with any other person. So that would suggest that its not absolutely necessary to have that intense communication with another person in order to reach that kind of state. So where does that leave communication in that sense? Have things changed since the Buddha's day? I mean in the Vajrayana it seems to me that communication in a more

spiritual sense did come to the fore.

Devaraja: In Ch'an as well, the mondo...

S: But also one might say that in the case of the Buddha he had to do everything himself. I mean, this is part of his function as Buddha, he has no alternative. There was nobody else. But that is not to say that because the Buddha had to do it on his own, had to do anything on his own, everybody else has to do it on his own too. Do you see what I mean? Maybe it is certainly easier, or at least makes thing easier, if one can do it with another person. Just as you can meditate on your own perfectly successfully, but perhaps it does make it easier to meditate if you do it with another person. You keep each other up to scratch. Not that you can't do it on your own, but that it certainly makes it easier if you do it with somebody else. So maybe one could apply that to communication; not that you can't break through the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity on your own through meditation, you can, but its more easy, perhaps its more pleasurable, doing it in company with another person, or, so to speak, by means of another person or with the help of another person.

Prassannasiddhi: One thinks of various cultures - like you get in the Italian Renaissance all these paintings of young men or people in general. Its as if the element of communication or the element of seeing other people seems to...

S: I think there has been a study on this, the rise of the portrait. Well, I saw something about it. Anyway, we take these things for granted. We take different forms of art, even different artistic conventions, for granted. But there must be a reason why in certain cultures, at certain moments in certain cultures, there is [34] a greater tendency wishing to produce portraits. I mean, what is the significance of this? What is the spiritual significance, one might say. We take portraits for granted, I'm sure they weren't always taken for granted.

Yashopala: What do you think is the spiritual significance?

S: Well, I can only speak in fairly general terms. I'm sure there's a lot more to it than this, that at the very least it represents a greater awareness of the individual and therefore it seems to be natural that at the time of the Renaissance, when the individual was, so to speak, almost rediscovered, there should have been not an emphasis on portrait painting, but that portrait painting should have been quite prominent, more so than before. You don't find much of real portrait painting during the Middle Ages. Perhaps also there is the question of technical capacity to be considered. I was reading Lytton not so long ago about ancient Egyptian sculpture and in ancient Egyptian sculpture there are many figures of Pharaohs, but they were never intended as actual portraits in the sense of actually representing the physical appearance of the monarch, of the Pharaoh. He was always represented as a perfect physical specimen regardless of what he actually looked like. It is also interesting that the Egyptian artist knew how to depict naturalistically, it was that they weren't permitted to, or they didn't choose to in the case of the Pharaohs, that these sort of rules, that Pharaohs had to be depicted as perfect physical specimens, did not apply to the rulers of other countries. So there is one illustration in a book I was looking at of a queen of a foreign country depicted as very short and fat and crooked. They knew how to depict in that sort of way but it was not considered appropriate for a Pharaoh. And then, of course, came the famous Akhenaton who insisted, apparently, on being depicted naturalistically and the Egyptian artists were fully able to do that and he looked completely different from any other Pharaoh, very odd indeed, and that has been the

subject of a lot of study and discussion. So the fact that he wanted to be depicted in that way, naturalistically, he wanted, as it were, portraits of himself, not just idealized images, that would seem to tell us something about, if not his [35] personal attitude, the particular group that he represented. I do believe, I'm not very sure, in the case of the ancient Greeks, the classical period, I think that very often their sculptures were not intended as portraits in the strict sense. I'm not very sure about that, but the Romans had a very strong tradition of portraiture. I sometimes think myself that that was their greatest achievement in the visual arts or at least the plastic arts. The portrait sculpture is very, very good and then again at the time of the Renaissance. So it must have some significance, it must have some link with the border cultural contacts.

Yashopala: Sorry, what's that term, border cultural contacts?

S: It must have some link.

Yashopala: I'm not, I'm not...

S: The fact that portraiture makes its appearance at certain times and not at others must have some connection with the border cultural contacts. It can't be just an isolated phenomenon.

Prassannasiddhi: Then the question arises of ideal depictions, like apparently in Tibetan art they had to depict Bodhisattvas and it was all prearranged, you just drew your Bodhisattva...

S: The case of Bodhisattvas is a bit different because nobody knows, in a sense, what a Bodhisattva looks like. There's no question of a portrait of a Bodhisattva because he's not a living historical person. You can only have an ideal image, not even idealized, but an ideal image of a Bodhisattva, you can't have anything else.

Yashopala: Presumably in order to depict a Bodhisattva you need to have some experience otherwise you'll be painting a rather dry icon.

[36]

S: Which often happens in Tibetan art. But we do get a portrait tradition in Chinese painting, in Japanese painting, though the conventions are very different from those of Western portrait painters, for instance no shadows on the face. It's interesting that we do have records of instructions given by Queen Elizabeth I to a portrait painter. She was very emphatic that no shadows must be shown, that the nose should not throw any shadow for instance. It wasn't just a question of wrinkles, it might have been partly that, but she wanted to present a sort of iconic appearance, you might say. She didn't so much want an actual illusionist portrait.

Gunapala: Maybe you could throw a bit more light on how that is connected with the individual for me, how self-portraits...

S: Portraits! Self-portraits are another subject.

Gunapala: ...well portraits, are more strongly connected with the individual, you know, the fact that you're painting other people.

S: Well, the two are reciprocal, as you become more aware of the people you become aware

of how different they are. Each one is completely different from all the others. So portraiture in art is surely connected with that sort of awareness; if you are under the impression that people were more or less alike, well you wouldn't bother to paint a portrait of a particular individual. You'd just have the equivalent of a rubber stamp and that would do. Just as, apparently, I'm told that at some period during the classical time, artists had a sort of ideal body for some king or ruler and when they ordered his full length statue they just put his head on it; the head would roughly resemble him but the body wouldn't. But if you look at some great portraits, it's very clear that the painter was very conscious of the other person as a person, as an individual. It couldn't have been otherwise, it wasn't just a sort of camera likeness, pointing a camera at someone and clicking it and you've got an image. No, he is very aware, he could read the character, so to speak, of the sitter. There are some portraits of that sort and there are other [37] portraits where the eyes are looking at you, following you around the room. There are some famous portraits of this kind.

Yashopala: It's interesting, for instance, in Giotto's art, he doesn't paint portraits but each character has an incredibly individual expression. I find it really fascinating because they're obviously human beings he's painted, perhaps he had models.

S: Then you mention the self-portrait, well that again is another sub-division, another department of the portrait. It's surely, also, not without significance that painters started producing self-portraits, which is an intensification of reflexive consciousness, you try to see yourself the subject as object.

Devaraja: Do you think that in a way the Buddha might have done that? We were talking earlier about communication between people and transcending subject/object, do you think that the Buddha might have applied that approach to himself, almost like self-portrait or something like that?

S: Well there are traditions about the Buddha describing how a representation of himself should be made but those directions are usually considered to be quite late and not actually to go back to the Buddha himself.

Devaraja: No, I meant in the sense of his coming alive in the process of his move towards enlightenment, maybe there's a parallel, or the self-portrait is analogous to...

S: (...) a certain level of consciousness of oneself as an individual, a self-portrait I think generally represents the intensification of self awareness or at least of self consciousness, to distinguish between the two, so there must have been some state, presumably, analogous to that in the case of the Buddha or anyone engaged in individual development or spiritual development, even though it wouldn't [38] find expression in that particular form. I mean, you might study yourself in a mirror for instance. Some artists did paint their portraits in that sort of way, looked at themselves in the mirror, made chalk outlines and then copied those. I don't know which is the first self-portrait in the history of Western art, I don't know that, but I do know that Durer was very fond of the self-portrait and left us a number of them and also Rembrandt. Rembrandt, I think, painted about thirty-five self-portraits, which seems a quite unusually high number, at different periods in his career, from a rather, sort of, swaggering looking young man to a very worn out, tired, decrepit old man. Who else has painted self-portraits, that we know?

Yashopala: Well, Bosch from the period of Durer. He didn't actually paint self-portraits, but its very interesting that a lot of his characters are actually known as portraits of himself.

S: Quite a few artists did that, they put themselves into their paintings, they inserted portraits of themselves into their paintings, sometimes as historical characters or biblical characters, but that's a little different, maybe that's one step towards the actual portrait, where there is just you. Botticelli is supposed to have put himself into a painting, into a corner, he's just looking at the spectator.

Silaratna: Van Gogh was a person who did quite a few self-portraits.

S: That's true. I don't know if it has any significance that certain painters produced a lot of self-portraits and others apparently didn't produce any at all. I don't know whether that has any meaning. It might be worthwhile looking into it.

Prassannasiddhi: It seems that on the one hand you can have the tendency to picture the actual, the living uniqueness of a person, but then on the other hand you get such things as an embodiment of wisdom or compassion, a sort of universalized...

[39]

S: But you seem to have intermediate forms, I mean, an historical person can assume a sort of archetypal significance, like the Buddha himself. He was an historical person, so, presumably, it would have been possible to have an actual portrait of him, had an artist been around to do that. We don't have a portrait, so all images of the Buddha are ideal images. I wouldn't say idealized, because they could only be idealized if we had the original features of the Buddha to start from and then subject to a process of idealization. But we know that the Buddha was a human being or the artists know that he was a human being, so you have to have at least a credible human form to start from, which you can then idealize. Its the same with the portraits of Christ, the pictures of Christ, I should say. We have no real portrait though there were some apocryphal portraits, some of which are attributed to St. Luke. several of them in fact.

Silaratna: Do you think that the tradition of the thirty two major marks of a Tathagata arose later as well, as a part of that...

S: Its very difficult to say. It does seem that that list does go back to the time of the Buddha and it does seem that, to all appearances at least, the Buddha didn't possess those marks, not physically. Sometimes the statement is made that they were marks of the subtle body, not the physical body, though He is depicted sometimes in art as having some of them at least, for instance the urna, the protuberance on top of the head, others are not represented at all. They may have had something to do with the ideal manly beauty, to some extent, some of them, but again others are quite ordinary. We just don't understand them. The key to the understanding of them seems to have been lost, to a great extent. I think this is in some ways the most difficult form of portrait, when you want to produce a genuine portrait but at the same time that particular figure has a sort of archetypal significance. For instance, this is so with Bodhisattvas and gods and goddesses say; you have to take the human form as your starting point but you don't want to give the impression of, say, just an ordinary human being, because the figure has got to embody some sort of quality, some higher quality, even some [40] spiritual quality, at the same time that its a credible representation of a human being. I mean, this is if you want to do it naturalistically. Sometimes one does it symbolically, as when one

gives, say, a Bodhisattva extra heads and arms, if you can't keep to a naturalist image and at the same time express what you want to express. I mean, how can you express the fact that Avalokitesvara's compassion extends in all possible directions? Can you put that into a smile? No you can't, you think perhaps, so you try to express it with a thousand arms. But it could be said that the very greatest artist probably can put everything in and not transgress the naturalistic mode of representation.

Gunapala: You mean, naturalistic; with two arms and two legs and so on?

S: Yes. I don't want to dogmatize about this but I'm thinking for instance of the famous Padmapani in Ajanta. There's the Bodhisattva of Compassion with a blue lotus looking down and the artist has put a tremendous amount into it. You might say that was almost successful, mainly successful, he didn't need to add a thousand arms.

Prassannasiddhi: I wonder, could you say that there was an objective kind of Avalokitesvara in the universe that you could in a sense depict?

S: Well, that raises a quite different question. I mean, what sort of existence do Bodhisattvas have if they're not historical? If Bodhisattvas represent something that is neither subjective nor objective, in what sense do they appear, can they appear? What you're trying to do in the case of representing a Bodhisattva or archetypal Buddha, you're trying to represent, and that means you're trying to see first of all, something as an object which in fact is not an object, which transcends the subject/object division altogether. So you could even say Bodhisattvas don't exist, if by exist you mean have an objective as distinct from a subjective existence, but one could say that they can be thought of or even depicted in that way. One can speak of them as inhabiting another world or another plane but you're still having to make use of this objective terminology.

[41]

Gunapala: The thought that a form can represent compassion and wisdom like that, just a plain form, that just stops me dead, the fact that you can get the expression on a form to put across compassion and wisdom.

S: So that means that demands a great deal of the artist. You can't just copy the external lineaments of something or just conform to certain artistic conventions and expect to produce whatever is needed. You can't depict a feeling, you don't to some extent sort of experience yourself.

Gunapala: But the fact that it looks like something, that compassion and wisdom, that it looks like something, that you can produce a form that communicates.

S: Well, you could say that it doesn't look like something, except in the sense of being an illusion. I mean, even though the artist uses the representational convention he's not actually concerned or primarily concerned to represent an object he uses the conventions of representing an object in order to express something that he experiences himself. Do you see what I'm getting at? Because in some cases an object corresponding to what he depicts in his painting doesn't exist, i.e. Avalokitesvara - he's never seen Avalokitesvara, who doesn't exist as an object distinct from a subject.

Devaraja: It makes me think... it seems like a process of sympathetic magic or ritual or something like that which occurs.

S: Supposing for instance, abandoning Buddhist art, an artist has a feeling of love. Well, he wants to depict that. He can depict it representationally by depicting a certain scene, a certain situation, certain figures, but he's not primarily concerned to represent something existing in the objective world. He is using that as a vehicle to express something which he experiences subjectively, he's using that particular language, as it were, to communicate his own particular subjective message.

[42]

Devaraja: But the language itself does have the effect in certain situations - its real language, you're actually bringing that out or making that conscious.

S: This is what Sariputta is doing in a way to begin with, when he's using this highly eulogistic language. He's using the language of objectivity to express something subjective. He can be taken up on that only if you take that language literally, in other words, if you understand him as actually really making a statement about something objective. He isn't intending, one could say, to make a statement having objective validity, he's really concerned to express his feeling. But if he is not to express his feeling in those, as it were, objective terms, then in what way is he to express his feeling? If the artist is not to express his subjective feeling in terms of objective paint, canvas and figures, how is he to do it?

Gunapala: I suppose in an action, just other forms.

S: But action is also objective and dimensional. Supposing you have a feeling, say, of love, towards someone, can any actions fully express that? You might cook someone a meal, you give them a present, well, you soon come to an end of what you can do and you might feel, well, your feeling goes far beyond that, you still haven't even begun to express it.

Gunapala: I know, say, Shantideva, where he offers up the whole universe, the imagination comes in and though he didn't use paint and canvas, the fact that he imagined this beautiful universe and offered it up...

S: But even in the case of imagining it, it becomes an object, because its an object on the mental level, a mental object, since he doesn't have the material objects at his disposal. But yes, maybe that's a key to at least some of the reasons why art is produced. You can't do it in real life, as it were, you can't achieve it in real life. You can't achieve that, or find or experience or discover [43] that level, that degree of beauty, you have to create it, you have to bring it into existence. I think that isn't quite true of modern art, but that's another question.

Prassannasiddhi: You can't bring it into existence?

S: Well, on the material plane, so you bring it into existence on another, a mental, imaginative plane, just as in the case of Shantideva. He doesn't have all these things at his disposal on the material plane, so what is he to do if he wants to express his desire to make these offerings? He has to create them mentally.

Gunapala: And it was through poetry too wasn't it? Through poetry he was able to express a

lot of that, so in a sense its very closely tied with the arts.

S: So, in a sense, and I don't say this in a pejorative sense, the arts are a kind of wish-fulfilment, in a positive sense. Through them you transcend the limitations of material existence, of ordinary life. There is no really beautiful woman around, okay, you'll create one, you'll paint her! (laughter) Some ancient artist, classical artist, even said that he took the neck of one woman and the arm of another and the foot of another and he combined them all into a perfect whole. One may disagree about the method there but it illustrates that kind of dissatisfaction with what you actually have and the need to create yourself on another almost, in a sense, higher plane.

Prassannasiddhi: Do you think that is what art has been about?

S: I think this is one factor at least in it, I won't say this is the explanation, but I think this is a factor, the desire to create almost a higher world. This isn't true of all kinds of art, obviously some artists seem to want to create a worse world, modern artists.

[44]

Silaratna: Francis Bacon!

S: I think many artists are inspired at least to some extent by an urge to recreate the world to create it over again on another level in a more ideal form.

Buddhapalita: Isn't that what we're doing when we're visualizing, creating an ideal kind of figure which we can aspire to.

S: In a way yes.

Prassannasiddhi: I was trying to see where you get on the one hand this tendency to depict the individual, the uniqueness of things and what kind of attitudes that would present in relation to working on the level of archetypes.

S: In a way they are contradictory, a naturalistic art and a, for want of a better term, ideal art, they seem to be contradictory. That's what I said a little while ago, that probably only the very greatest artists can bring them together, so that through a faithful depiction of the natural, you do communicate something of the ideal. For instance, there's one great Chinese artist, a painter called Wang Wei, and he's famous for his Buddhas, but unlike Indian artists he depicts his Buddhas quite naturalistically, just as an old man, a wandering beggar almost, a wandering mendicant. He makes no attempt to idealize the Buddha whatever, there's no halo, nothing like that, but at the same time he does communicate something quite mysterious and quite powerful. He brings together, as it were, the naturalistic and the ideal, well not brings together, they're the same thing. I don't know whether there is any Western artist... I think some Western artists try to do this. For instance, in the case of the figure of Jesus, they try to depict naturalistically, nothing special, no halo, no particular beauty, but they try to communicate something special through that. I think Caravaggio is a case in point here isn't he?

[45]

Yashopala: He seemed to lead that whole naturalistic school. I was just thinking that there

seem to be incredible advantages... in Tuscany two years ago you mentioned Persian art as an art form which was made of colour and light, no shadow and in a way, well, nature isn't like that at all. So where does that leave the naturalistic ... the artist who is attempting to paint great things in a naturalistic way, because he obviously can't. He's painting using the naturalistic world, he won't be using that degree of colour and light.

S: I think this raises a lot of questions. First of all what we mean by naturalistic, because we tend to identify naturalism with the use of certain artistic conventions, for instance, a certain system of perspective. So I think perhaps we need to go a bit further into what we mean by naturalistic and also ... for instance one wouldn't say that, say, the Impressionists, were unnaturalistic, but they brought brilliant colour into their paintings and also does it not depend upon where, on what part of the Earth's surface, one is painting? I mean, in some countries you do get blue skies (laughter), you do get bright sunshine, you do get purple shadows, even though you might not get them in England.

Yashopala: Perhaps its the aspects that they notice then.

S: Anyway, where does that leave us? We've got quite a long way from Sariputta, maybe not so far in some ways.

Prassannasiddhi: I was wondering what effects these things had in terms of ... like if you have a society in which an ideal was presented, such as wisdom and compassion, or enlightenment, what effect does that have on the members of the society?

S: I think a lot depends on what you mean by presented. Does one mean effectively communicated or does one simply mean that the tokens or formal attributes of, say, wisdom are sort of publicly accessible? Do you see the point?

[46]

Devaraja: Can you explain that further?

S: Well, supposing you have, say, a Buddha image and supposing that Buddha image is such a successful work of art it really expresses something of, say, wisdom and compassion, so that anybody looking at it in at all a receptive frame of mind, cannot but be affected by it. One could say that work of art, that image, does present the ideal of wisdom and compassion. But supposing you've got a very poor, clumsy Buddha image, which is not really a work of art at all and which doesn't really effectively communicate anything of those qualities, well, the fact that you had a large number of such images around which you were told were images of the Buddha, would that necessarily present the ideal of wisdom and compassion to you? That's why I make a distinction between effectively communicating those ideals and just having, as it were, tokens of those ideals around.

Gunapala: I know what you mean. I feel that with some of the Indian rupas I've seen. I don't feel they convey, they're just sort of gestures or tokens or symbols.

S: You can associate ideas but they don't communicate.

Gunapala: I feel that with quite a few rupas.

S: So I think if you did have a lot of images around or any works of art around, that did present in the sense of effectively communicating an ideal, it would have a tremendous influence, but the point is does the particular image actually effectively communicate what its supposed to effectively communicate or is it just a sort of association of religious ideas on a quite low level.

Devaraja: And if anything might even have a detrimental effect.

S: Might even blunt your spiritual sensitivity. Perhaps there shouldn't be too many images around.

[47]

Devaraja: I notice this quite a lot. Sometimes if you put up a picture of a Bodhisattva or something like that ... perhaps communities shouldn't have them around too much. After a while they just become another picture on the wall and I wonder if any image that we have shouldn't actually be behind doors and then just opened up for a special occasion.

S: And be a very good image.

Devaraja: Yeah, and be a very good image.

S: Not a disappointment! (laughter) Here you are, you open the door and there's some quite inadequate representation. It should be like something rare brought out for showing on some special occasion, not just part of the furniture.

Yashopala: I suppose if your emotions of devotion are to be directed towards figures of Avalokitesvara and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and yet all you see are these pretty inadequate reproductions, I mean, its a horrible thing to happen.

S: You can associate, you are told, this is Avalokitesvara, well, you can associate the ideal of compassion with that image but it is an external association, it is not that the image for you embodies and therefore effectively communicates that ideal and therefore you are not stirred. Otherwise its like, say, a very inadequate portrait of your father, or you're told its a portrait of your father, you'd never have recognized it, but you say this is a portrait of my father, so even though it doesn't represent him, at least it reminds you of him or at least if you tell yourself, well, that is my father. But if in fact it was a really good portrait so that every time you looked at it you saw that your father was looking at you, it would produce a quite different effect.

Gunapala: I've noticed that in some good photos of people, because you have a (...) image of them, a smile, however they were feeling then, when you click [48] you've got that in your camera. You can get that very strong feeling of someone through a photo, at the time, however they were at that moment.

Prassannasiddhi: I was thinking of even the word in a sense, like the word "Buddha" or the fact that the possibility existed, what that would mean in terms of ... perhaps on the one hand you get these societies where they move towards the depiction of the more human or the uniqueness, it seems a different approach than working with an ideal.

S: Well, if you want to express the ideal you have to work with the material that you have to

hand and if you want to represent the ideal in human terms, you have to work with human eyes and human nose and try to get them to express whatever ideal it is that you want to communicate. That can be a very difficult thing indeed to do. Otherwise you could draw a circle and say this represents the Buddha, well, in a way it would, but you wouldn't find it very easy to relate to. It might represent Buddhahood but it wouldn't represent the Buddha.

Gunapala: I find it really interesting, this idea of form representing something almost beyond form. You're using form but its to represent or to point at something much further and beyond the whole subject/object. You're representing compassion and wisdom through form and a form which we relate to as being human.

S: Which of course also reminds us that the ideal is an ideal for human beings, that human beings in their own lives can actually eventually embody that ideal, they can realize that ideal. But they might not do so in an ideal way, I mean, there is the famous case of Bhaddiya the dwarf, who was an Arhant, but who was jeered at or even mocked by other bhikkhus because he was a dwarf. They couldn't recognize the Arhantship because of the form in which it was embodied, the form in which it had been attained or realized. This is why we tend to represent the Buddha, however he might have appeared, as a perfect physical specimen. From the accounts that we have it does seem that he was at least a reasonable physical [49] specimen, whether he was a perfect one is another matter. But we like to think of the ideal as having a perfect embodiment or we like to think of the embodiment being perfect in terms of the level on which the embodiment takes place.

Silaratna: That's what makes that picture you sometimes see of that very emaciated Buddha, after his austerities, so interesting because its very different.

S: Well, that's not the Buddha, that's before the enlightenment, so the figure is not intended to embody enlightenment but trying to embody the idea or ideal of striving towards enlightenment, even to that extent.

Gunapala: What I relate to when you mention that is Milarepa, because I've seen some quite strange pictures of Milarepa, very skinny and sort of ...

S: I've seen fat Milarepas!

Gunapala: You've seen fat Milarepas?

S: I think not intentionally, but they were actually fat. Well in Chinese Buddhist art you have fat Buddhas, which to us are not at all inspiring. (...) Bodhisattvas always represented as sixteen year old youths, according to Indian eyes this is the most attractive and inspiring sort of age from the physical point of view, that would be the most perfect embodiment for a Bodhisattva. Can't really imagine a Bodhisattva as an old man. Its as though, this is the Greek assumption almost, that what is ideal can only be embodied in terms of what is best, its only the best human body that can adequately embody a higher ideal, what is best spiritually must be embodied in what is best, as it were, materially, because that corresponds to it. Some artists, of course, like to show the contrast, the more naturalistic artists, the contrast between the ideal, say, which the person has realized, the mental state and the physical state. Here the physical does not embody the mental or the spiritual but it stands in contrast to it and therefore in [50] a way accentuates it. This is, in a way, a little more subtle but its also much

more tricky to handle perhaps.

Yashopala: Could you give an example?

S: Well the way that some artists treat the figure of Christ in Western art. They don't attempt to make him a perfect physical specimen, at the same time they try to communicate something of divinity. So there is a sort of tension between the physical embodiment and what is embodied.

Devaraja: ... Japanese picture of Bodhidharma ...

Prassannasiddhi: Could you say, in a way, that a depiction in a more naturalized form was almost like depicting the ideal as, like the Buddha in a sense, appearing in the human realm, as opposed to if you had the Buddha appearing in a god realm, you'd perhaps be depicting him ideally?

S: Yes, because if the Buddha appeared in the god realm he'd be appearing in ideal form in as much as the gods have ideal forms, but if the Buddha appears in an ordinary human form, well, an ordinary human form is an ordinary human form. In other words, it wouldn't correspond so much to what it embodied as the god's body would correspond to what it embodied. One is more naturalistic and the other is more ideal. But the disadvantage of, say, the Buddha appearing as an ordinary human being is how can you tell that it is a Buddha if it seems to be just an ordinary human being? So its only a really great artist, or at least a really great artist of a certain kind who can convey some impression of the Buddhahood breaking through even the ordinary human body.

Yashopala: That's just reminded me of Vajrapani who wears the skulls; instead of the jewels he's actually wearing skulls - a connection suddenly! Its almost as if he's powerful enough to wear the hindrances.

[51]

S: But we shouldn't have to be told this is the Buddha or this is Apollo or whatever, the figure itself, the painting or sculpture, should communicate something of that to you directly, it shouldn't have to be labelled. I think it can be communicated either way, either naturalistically or in terms of more ideal art.

Prassannasiddhi: Sometimes, perhaps you could relate it to seeing someone in a certain physical form but actually having a feeling of them which is different to the form. You see them and they are maybe, well, any human form but actually the feeling that you get from them is more of an archetypal, sort of perfect human.

S: One could say in terms of this ideal art that if the embodiment is more ideal on its own level, that is more satisfying, because, for instance, supposing you represent the Buddha as embodied in a perfect human body, well, that is more satisfying to your sensuous instincts and therefore your sensuous instincts are drawn more in the direction of the ideal, whereas if, for instance, the ideal is embodied in a fairly ordinary or even let's say an emaciated human form, your sensuous feelings get no satisfaction contemplating that form. Maybe your higher intuition gets a satisfaction because something higher is expressed but your sensuous instincts are left without satisfaction. Do you see the difference?

Devaraja: You've talked about the tonic effect of the dhyanas and higher states of consciousness.

S: The pleasure!

Devaraja: ... and I'm just thinking back to Ananda in the Surangama Sutra where he talks about his perception of the Buddha and how the Buddha was radiant and beautiful and like a crystal etc. To what extent actually is ... is a Buddha actually a decrepit old man or whatever?

S: Well, the Buddha must have been at one stage in his career, well, he might have [52] looked very impressive and dignified but he hardly would have looked beautiful unless you were so intensely aware of the Buddha's inner spirit that you could see that, as it were, transfiguring it.

Devaraja: I'm just wondering to what extent we accept or we take for granted the basic reality of something like that, a physical appearance, and we give it a kind of ultimate credibility and are things that fixed?

S: Well, it does seem our responses are pretty fixed. You respond to a youthful, healthy, well-proportioned human body in a different way from that in which you respond to an elderly, unhealthy, decrepit and malformed human body. So if you want to attract, as it were, the more sensuous instincts towards the ideal, the ideal has to be embodied in an attractive form, a form which is attractive on that level. That would seem to be the case. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Devaraja: I see what you mean but what I was wondering was more an examination of perception, or just basic attitudes towards perception. If we in ourselves rise up to a higher level of consciousness and development etc... what we see ...

S: Well then the material doesn't matter, or we see it differently or we see it so differently that it doesn't matter, but then the point is to get up to that level. Images are made presumably to help people to get up to that level. So if the image also embodies what is sensuously attractive, then you've got all your energies flowing in the same direction, all being satisfied in different ways, on different levels, whereas if the ideal is embodied in an image, in a form or a figure which is not sensuously appealing, then those energies are not going to be satisfied by that particular image, they're going to be, as it were, either held in abeyance or suspended or frustrated, they may go wandering elsewhere.

Prassannasiddhi: Where does that put wrathful deities in the Tantric?

[53]

S: Well, you could say that wrathful deities are very attractive, some people find them very invigorating and inspiring.

Gunapala: You've got something there that's very physical.

Prassannasiddhi: ... or the ten stages of decomposition of corpses.

S: That's a different kind of practice. I was thinking of the case of, well, a wrathful deity or

unwrathful deity - just the twelve arms, well, fancy being hugged by someone with twelve arms. (laughter) It's highly speculative, probably you never will be. (laughter) Anyway perhaps we'd better leave it on that note.

General: Thanks... Thanks Bhante... Thanks a lot... etc.

S: We seem to have got a little bit away from the text but no harm's been done.

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