

Lecture 2: The Meaning of the Dharma

Friends,

Yesterday I spoke a few words about the significance of our threefold salutation with which we begin all our meetings, the salutation to the Buddha, salutation to the Dharma, salutation to the Sangha. And these three, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha they constitute what we call in Buddhism the three jewels or the three most precious things, the three highest or the three greatest, the three most ultimate values. So Buddhism is concerned mainly with these, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Enlightenment, path to Enlightenment, community of people following the path to Enlightenment, and Buddhism revolves mainly around these three things. Now yesterday evening we considered the question 'Who was the Buddha?' So we've learned something about the first of these three jewels, the Buddha and this morning therefore I want to come on to the second of the three jewels and consider something about the Dharma. And once again I must ask our elders, our regular members to bear in mind that we are considering in this short series of talks the needs and requirements of those who are new to our movement rather than the needs and requirements of those who have been with us a long time. At the same time we always do recognise that to recapitulate, to revise, to refresh our memories is always a very good thing. It's sometimes strange as I know myself when you go over some old familiar text and you find a verse, a very important, a very striking verse which somehow you do not think you have ever noticed before, so there's no harm in revision, no harm in recapitulation. I remember in this connection once my old friend in Kalimpong, Mr Cheng, a Chinese Buddhist yogi, told me that in his younger days when he was a student, a student monk, he went through the entire canon in Chinese three times very, very carefully, studying by himself, also with a teacher, sutra by sutra, and there are more than nine thousand six hundred sutras in the Chinese canon. He went through the whole thing three times and he thought he knew it quite well. But some years later he said one of his teachers, in the course of instruction said at such and such point you should refer to the Great Dragon sutra, it's one of the most important in the entire canon. So he thought back but he couldn't remember having read a word about the Great Dragon sutra. And he thought well is there such a sutra? I don't remember it, I've read it three times, three times I have gone through that canon. I don't remember any Great Dragon sutra. He did not say anything to the teacher, he kept his doubts to himself. But he thought well the teacher said it's one of the most important in the whole canon., how could I have missed it? So he went quietly in the evening, he went back to his worn out volumes of the canon, turned over the pages, sure enough there it was, the Great Dragon sutra, it had been there all the time and he couldn't remember having read it. And he said this surprised him very much, this experience. But this is the sort of thing that we do find. It may be reading about the life of the Buddha, sometimes when I have proposed speaking about the life of the Buddha I can almost hear our friends as it were, saying 'Do we need to go over that elementary stuff all over again? We know that the Buddha left home when he was twenty-nine, and we know He sat under that bodhi tree, and we know He did austerities for six years, and we know that His chief disciples were Sariputra and Moggallana, do we have to go over it all again?' But sometimes we do need because there are all sorts of not only facts but significant connections and occurrences and implications which we miss. And I know in my own case that I have gone over some Buddhist scriptures time and time again. But every time I came to speak about them I find there's something new to discover or something new to appreciate, some fresh angle, some fresh aspect that we hadn't considered before. So let us not mind therefore, not only for the benefit of newcomers, even perhaps for our own benefit going back to fundamental things, revising, recapitulating and refreshing.

So let's come on therefore this morning to that well-known topic the Dharma, the meaning of the Dharma, the second of the Three Jewels, the second of the Three Refuges. Now let me say right away that this word Dharma is a very difficult one. It's quite untranslatable. There's no one English word by which we can render this word Dharma. So it's rather difficult to simplify here. If we go through the Buddhist scriptures, the sutras, we find that the word Dharma is used in a number of quite different senses. I think we can say that in the Buddhist scriptures there are five principle meanings of the word Dharma. Each of which shades as it were into every other meaning. So let's begin by a groundwork as it were by considering these five principle meanings of the word Dharma in the Buddhist tradition, in the Buddhist scriptures. First of all Dharma

means thing, things, a phenomenon, if you like, to use more sophisticated, more philosophical language. But just things in general are Dharma. Usually in translations we find that when the word Dharma has this meaning it's printed with, in English, a small "d". You may remember that in the Dhammapada there's a very famous verse 'All things are anatta. All things are devoid of separate self'. So the word which is used here for things in the original is dharma or dhamma. All things are devoid of separate self, of real individuality. So the first of the five principle meanings of the word dharma is simply thing in general, a phenomena, any thing whether it's mental, whether it's physical, whether it's spiritual, transcendental, a dharma, a thing, an ultimate element of existence as it were.

Then secondly, dharma means a mental object, an object of mind. In the West we usually speak of five senses, but the Indian tradition, including the Buddhist tradition, speaks of six senses and their respective sense objects. There's of course the eye, it's object is form, not matter but form, rupa. There is the ear, it's object is sound. The nose - it's object is smell, and so for the rest of the physical senses. And then in Buddhism there comes mind. And it's object is we could say idea, but in Pali and Sanskrit it's dharma, another meaning of the word dharma. Dharma in the sense of an object of mind, a mental object, if you like a presentation to consciousness. This is another meaning of the word dharma. You notice incidentally that the mind, this is the ordinary work-a-day mind, the mind that we're using most of the time, not our absolute mind or transcendental consciousness, but our ordinary mind, is put on the same level as the five senses. In the West we tend to think of the five senses here and the mind, even the ordinary mind, up there, but not in Buddhism, there, in Buddhism, they're all on the same level. There's your ear, your eye, your nose, your tongue, your skin, and your mind, your mind is on the same level. So the object of mind, idea, is dharma. Another meaning of the term.

Then thirdly dharma means a state or condition of existence. In Buddhism there's a very famous expression or term, the eight loka dharmas, loka means worldly, dharma here means conditions, and these loka dharmas therefore are the eight worldly conditions of if you like vicissitudes, archetypal pairs of opposites. And they are gain and loss, fame and infamy, blame and praise, and pleasure and pain. These are known as the eight worldly conditions or states, these pairs of opposites. And we're asked of course to be indifferent to them. And therefore it says in the Mangala sutta that the greatest of all blessings is the blessing of having a mind, a consciousness which cannot be touched, which cannot be disturbed by any of these eight loka dharmas, these worldly conditions, unmoved whether we gain or whether we lose, unmoved whether we're famous or whether we're infamous, whether people blame us or whether they praise us, in the midst of pleasure, in the midst of pain. So these eight, there are many such pairs of course, not just eight, these are known as the eight loka-dharmas. So here dharma means a state or a condition, a worldly state or a worldly condition which is one of a pair of opposites. So another important meaning of the word dharma. You can begin to see how rich in meaning the term is and how careful you have to be in studying the original text, how careful you have to be to sort out the right meaning of the word dharma if you are to make sense of that particular passage.

Then fourthly dharma in the sense of law or principle or truth. As when we say the Dhammapada says

which means - hatred never ceases by hatred. Hatred ceases only by love. This is an eternal dharma. Here dharma means rule or law or principle. It's in the very nature of things so far as the human world is concerned, that hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases only by non-hatred, only by love. This is the principle, this is the law, or if you like this is the truth, a psychological and a spiritual principle. So this is another most important meaning of this word dharma, a psychological and a spiritual law or regulative norm of existence, or spiritual principle, whatever you might like to call it. Then fifthly dharma in the sense of doctrine and teaching as when we say the Buddha-Dharma this means the Doctrine of the Buddha, the teaching of the Buddha. This connotation, this sense of the word can't very easily be rendered into English. Dharma in this sense is not quite teaching, it's more like a sort of exposition, a making clear, a clarification, a presentation. One would often speak in Pali or Sanskrit of Dharma !!deshana!! which means exposition of the dharma, or talking about the dharma and so on So this is the fifth

of these five most important meanings of the word dharma. That is to say dharma in the first place, in the first case as a thing in general; dharma as a mental object, an object of mind; dharma as a state or condition of mundane existence; dharma as a law, or a principle or a truth; and dharma as a doctrine, as a teaching, something expounded.

Now when we say the Dharma and when in English we put Dharma with a capital D, when we're thinking in terms of the second of the three jewels or second of the three refuges, it's the last two meanings of the term which we have in mind even though the other meanings are also there in the background. When we say the Dharma we mean Dharma in the sense of law, principle, truth, and also Dharma in the sense of Doctrine, Dharma in the sense of Teaching. Where the Dharma is concerned these are the two primary meanings, Dharma as truth, law, principle, reality, Dharma as doctrine, Dharma as teaching. So these two primary meanings. And these two, and this is very important, these two are closely connected - when we speak of the Dharma. They're two aspects of the same thing as it were. The first, Dharma as truth or law or principle or reality represents the Buddha's experience of Enlightenment beneath the Bodhi-tree - because the content of that experience, what we may call its objective content, its ultimate content was just this same, law or truth or principle or reality behind the universe. And the second, that is Dharma as doctrine or teaching represents the Buddha's expression of this content of his Enlightenment in terms of thought and in terms of speech for the benefit of all living beings. So from this we can see how closely these two primary meanings of the word Dharma are connected. Dharma as the content of the Buddha's spiritual experience, Dharma as truth, reality, law, principle, and Dharma as Teaching or Doctrine, the expression in terms of thought or speech of the inner content of that spiritual realisation of Enlightenment. So Dharma as experience on the one hand as it were, Dharma as expression on the other hand. Experience corresponds more to the wisdom aspect of Enlightenment, and expression more to the compassion aspect. And wisdom and compassion as we know are the twin pillars of the whole edifice of Buddhism as Dr. D.T. Suzuki calls them. From our point of view we can distinguish between experience and expression, wisdom and compassion, but in reality, in truth they are indistinguishable, they're the two aspects of one and the same thing.

Now at this stage there are three important questions for us to consider. We've spoken of an experience, we've spoken of an expression. Experience of enlightenment through wisdom, expression of enlightenment through compassion. But the questions which arise to be considered are - first of all the general nature of the expression in thought and speech, and the function of that expression. So the first question as to the general nature of this question, this amounts to asking whether the Buddha's conceptual formulation or formulations of His experience, His experience of Enlightenment cannot be all reduced to a single leading principle from which all the others could be deduced. In other words when the Buddha preached, when the Buddha taught, He preached and He taught out of ultimately His experience of Enlightenment. He taught many different kinds of people, different degrees of intellectual abilities, different temperaments, different difficulties, different degrees of understanding and spiritual development. So He might have taught one person in one way, taught another person in another way, - presented things in one light to one kind of person, in another light to another kind of person. So all these different teachings, all these different expressions were all ultimately stemmed from the Buddha's Enlightenment or issuing from that. So the question which arises is whether all these expressions, all these teachings cannot be reduced to one great principle, from which they could all be deduced? So is there a general principle which is as it were a general almost archetypal expression in terms of thought and speech on the philosophical level of the Buddha's spiritual experience? Beyond which you can't get - so you can't have anything more general than that, from there you'd have to go directly to the Enlightenment experience itself. So is there any such general principle or expression of the Buddha's Enlightenment? Now we can say very definitely that there is. There's a principle, an expression which is we may say widely, universally recognised in Buddhism, in the Buddhist tradition as being the expression, the most widely generalised expression of the Buddha's Enlightenment. And this is what we call in Buddhism the law or the principle or the teaching of Pratitya Samutpada, the law of conditionality. Now though this is so general, though it is so fundamental, basically like all fundamental things it's very simple indeed. So simple we might possibly overlook it. And the formula which is given for this expression of the Buddha's Enlightenment in the Scriptures is as follows - in very simple almost

abstract mathematical language the Buddha says that it's always useful to think 'This being that becomes, from the arising of this, that arises, this not becoming that does not become, from the ceasing of this that ceases.' So this is the formula in it's highest degree of generality and abstractness. Let me repeat it just once more - 'This being that becomes, from the arising of this that arises, this not becoming that does not become, from the ceasing of this that ceases.' And this law, this principle, holds good of the whole of existence whether it's material or mental or spiritual, the same great law holds good, the law of Pratitya Samutpada, the law of conditionality, or conditioned co-production, or dependent origination as is also translated. And the whole of Buddhism we may say, all this great superstructure of thought and practice is based on this formula, on this principle, Pratitya Samutpada, the law of conditionality. I mentioned a little while ago one of the Buddha's two chief disciples and that was Sariputra. In a sense Sariputra is the chief disciple, he was said to be the wisest of the disciples, and the Buddha calls him the !!senapati!!, the commander-in-chief. And the story of his conversion to Buddhism is not only very interesting but it's associated with this teaching. You may remember I described how the Buddha went to Saranath where His five former disciples were staying. He went back there after His Enlightenment, gathered them around Him and He taught them. So they became Enlightened, other people came they also became Enlightened, and eventually in a very short time there were sixty Enlightened beings in the world. And then the Buddha said to them "I am free from all bonds human and divine. You also are free from all bonds human and divine. Go now and teach all beings for the benefit and the happiness of the whole world out of compassion, out of love for all living beings. Go forth and teach." So they all scattered in all directions, and they were going up and down the length and breadth of India, spreading the message, spreading the teaching of the Buddha. Now at that time we are told in Vihare in a little village near Nalanda, a little village which incidentally I have visited, there were two young men called Sariputra and Magallana. And they left home and they decided to search for the truth and to find a great Enlightened teacher. So they made a pact because they'd been very close friends from childhood, since babyhood in fact, they'd always been together, so they made a pact. And the pact was that they would go in opposite directions and whoever found an Enlightened teacher first should go and tell the other and they'd both become His disciples together. This was their pact. So Sariputra went in one direction and Mogallana went in the other. But Sariputra was the lucky one. He hadn't gone very far, he hadn't wandered for many weeks before he saw someone coming in the distance who seemed, well he hardly dared hope for what he seemed maybe 'Enlightened'. So he drew near and it was Ashvajit or!! _____ !! in Pali, one of those original five, now wandering from place to place. And Sariputra was very impressed by his whole appearance, his whole deportment and he put to him the question, which is the question in India, in the East, they don't ask about the weather or anything like that, he put the question he came right to the point, he said, 'Who is your teacher?' in the East incidentally, especially in India and Tibet everybody has a teacher, a spiritual teacher from whom he has received some kind of initiation, some kind of religious practice. If you don't have a spiritual teacher well they say you hardly exist as a human being. You might just as well be a dog or a cat as be a human being and not have a spiritual teacher. So the first question or the first thing you want to know about anybody well what line of spiritual practice does he belong to? So Sariputra asked Ashvajit 'Who is your teacher?' So he at once said 'Gautama who has gone forth from the clan of the Sakyas, the Enlightened One who is now the Buddha. He is my teacher.' So Sariputra was overjoyed to hear this and then he said, 'But what is His teaching?' So here's the second point, the second thing you want to know, what is his teaching? So Ashvajit, who was apparently enlightened but he was a very modest man and he said, 'I am newly converted, I don't know much of the teaching, but what little I do know I shall tell you.' So he recited a verse which has since become famous all over the Buddhist world, all over the East, he said, - and in the original it's in metre and not in rhyme - he said, 'The Tathagata has explained the origin of those things which proceed from a cause or a condition. Their cessation too he has explained. This is the doctrine of the great !!shramena!!, doctrine here is Dharma, this is the Dharma of the great shramena, the great ascetic, the great renunciant, so much. That was all. But when Sariputra heard this verse his whole sort of being rose up as a sort of flash of insight and he said well this is the truth. Whatever arises arises in dependence on condition. When those conditions are there no longer. He saw and he at once became what we call a stream-entrant - he entered the stream leading ultimately to liberation. And he became a disciple of the Buddha, became the chief disciple. And this great verse we find as I've said all over the Buddhist world. You can find it in India, stamped on the base of images. You can find

it on clay seals in the ruins of monasteries, hundreds and thousands of little clay seals just stamped with this verse. You find it in China, you find it in Tibet. In Tibet when they consecrate a Buddha image very often they print hundreds of thousands of little copies of this verse and they stuff them all inside the image. And this is one way of consecrating an image. So this first is really you may say basic Buddhism. On the doctrinal level there's nothing more basic than this. This is common ground to all the Buddhist schools, whether it's the Buddhism of Ceylon or the Buddhism of Tibet or the Buddhism of China or Japan, whether it's Theravada or Mahayana or Zen or Tibetan Buddhism, it all comes back to this, sooner or later you come back to this Pratitya Samutpada, conditioned co-production, the great law of conditionality. And if one wants any further proof or evidence of the importance of this great teaching, of the fact that it is the most highly generalised expression of the Buddha's experience of enlightenment then one can turn to the Ariya Pari sutta of the Majjima Nikaya. This is a sort of autobiographical discourse, there are several of them in the Pali canon and they're very, very interesting. The Buddha as an old man to a monk just relates some of the experiences of His younger days, how He practised asceticism, how He gained Enlightenment, about His thoughts and doubts, about preaching the Doctrine and so on. All in this Ariya Pari sutta, the sutta, the discourse on the noble quest. So here the Buddha relates the story of how after his Enlightenment He wasn't quite sure whether to preach or not, whether to make known the truth He had discovered or not. And the text represents Him as reflecting in this way, as saying to himself, 'I have gained this Dharma.' You notice the word Dharma is used, here it means, of course truth, law, principle, reality. 'I have gained this Dharma which is profound, hard to perceive, hard to know, tranquil, transcendent, beyond the sphere of reason, subtle, to be known only by the wise.' And then He went on to reflect 'mankind is intent on its attachments, and takes delight and pleasure in them. For mankind, intent on its attachments it is hard to see this Dharma, namely conditionedness, origination by way of cause, Pratitya Samutpada.' In other words when the Buddha was reflecting by Himself and as it were saying to Himself 'Well it's difficult for humanity to understand what I have discovered, and what have I discovered, what Dharma, what truth, what reality, - conditioned co-production, conditionality, universal conditionality. So this also goes to show that this is the first, the most highly generalised presentation of the Buddha's insight. As if to say that when the mind is Enlightened and when it looks out, when the Enlightened mind looks out at all of existence, at the whole of the phenomenal universe, what is the first thing that strikes it? What is the most obvious thing about it? That it's all conditioned, arises in dependence on conditions and when those conditions cease disappears. So this is the basic insight as it were so far as the world is concerned, from the standpoint of Enlightenment.

Now even though the importance of this Pratitya Samutpada, this law of conditionality, that everything arises in dependence on conditions and ceases when the conditions cease where the importance of this principle, this formulation, this expression, of the Buddha's experience of Enlightenment, is agreed upon is accepted on all sides by everybody, its meaning is not always clearly understood. So let's just go a little into this. We say conditionality, there are two kinds of conditionality. Two ways as it were in which things can arise, experiences, states can arise, in dependence upon causes and conditions. So what are these two kinds of conditionality? Here again we come onto familiar ground for many of us, but its worth considering over again because of it's of fundamental importance, and we shall find it recurring in one form or under one aspect or another in practically all our talks, in all our studies of the Buddha's Teaching. The first type of conditionality is what we call cyclical, between opposites and you sway backwards and forwards between opposites. In dependence upon pleasure there arises pain. In dependence upon loss there arises gain. Dependence upon gain, loss. In dependence upon winter, summer. In dependence upon summer, winter. The play of the opposites, the cyclical process about which I said something last Sunday in one of the talks at our seminar. So this is the cyclical type of conditionality. Now the other type of conditionality is not cyclical but as it were spiral, not between opposites but between factors which progressively augment each other so that in dependence upon say A you don't arising a factor which negates A as when say loss arises in dependence upon gain; you get the arising of a factor which augments A, which is A plus, or A1, and then A2 and A3 and so on to infinity, as when in dependence upon say happiness you get joy. In dependence upon joy, bliss. In dependence upon bliss, rapture. In dependence upon rapture, ecstasy. This is a progressive spiral series as it were in which you don't get a reaction to the opposite. So these are the two basic types or kinds of conditionality at work in the universe, at

all levels. The cyclical and the spiral.

Now in traditional terms the whole process of cyclical action and reaction, the cyclical type of conditionality, in traditional language this can be called the round, the round of existence or the Wheel of Life - with its process of karma and rebirth. If we look at the picture of the Wheel of Life this is a detailed presentation of the whole cyclical mode of conditionality on ?? an existence, sentient existence as involved in the cyclical process, undergoing the cyclical process, reacting-acting and re-acting, between the pairs of opposites - going up and down, round and round in accordance with the law of karma and re-birth by means of the twelve nidanas or links as they're called - there's no time to go into this in this talk.

Now the second type of conditionality - the spiral - this is represented traditionally not by the round but by what leads out of the round, out of the Wheel of Life, away from the Wheel of Life, represented by the Path culminating in Nirvana, represented by the eight angas of the Noble Eightfold Path, represented by the seven !!bodhiangas!! or limbs of Enlightenment about which I spoke yesterday. The Path essentially, the Path of the spiritual life represents the embodiment in terms of our own life and experience of this progressive spiral type of conditionality.

Now the first type of conditionality the cyclical, that's symbolised by the round, the Wheel of Life is covered by the first and second of the Noble Truths, the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering which is craving. So here you get a reversal, you get the reaction first and then the action, effect and then the cause. So instead of suffering-craving you can also put it as craving-suffering. This is the action and reaction as it were. So the first and second of the Noble Truths, the Four Noble Truths, represents the cyclical type of conditionality, represents in another as it were abbreviated form the round of existence, the Wheel of Life. And the third and the fourth Noble Truths, that is to say the Truth of the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering - these represent the spiral process. Again you have to reverse - there is the cessation of suffering that's into Nirvana, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, that is the Path. So the cessation of suffering, Nirvana is the culmination of the Path so again reverse and you get the spiral process. So the third and fourth of the Noble Truths represents the spiral mode or type of conditionality. Now there is no time to go into all this in detail - sufficient to just give the general outline, and those who have been with us for some time they do know in any case all these things in sufficient detail. But let's just bear in mind that there are these two kinds or types of conditionality at work in the universe - the cyclical acting and reacting between factors which are pairs of opposites and the spiral going as it were from perfection to perfection.

Now so much for the general nature of Dharma as expression - it's basically the law of conditioned co-production, conditionality, in these two forms. What about the purpose, the function of the expression. Why is there the Dharma? Why does the Dharma exist? Why did the Buddha express it at all? Why do we have the Teaching of conditioned co-production, universal conditionality and all the other teachings? Now the function of the Dharma, the function of the Buddha's Teaching is made clear by the Buddha Himself in what is called the parable of the raft. And we can't remember this, we can't think about this too often or too much. The Buddha said, 'Under the symbol or under the figure of a raft do I preach the Dharma, or do I make known the Dharma. How is that so?' He said 'Supposing a man were to come to the edge of a great stretch of water, a great river. Supposing he wanted to get to the other shore, the opposite bank. But there was no ferry, no-one to take him across, what would he do? He'd chop down a few saplings, he'd lash them together, he'd make a raft. He'd sit on the raft and using hands and feet to paddle he'd get across to the other side, he'd cross to the other shore.' So the Buddha put the question 'Well, having arrived at the other shore what would he do with raft? Would he ... yes, he'd throw it away, of course he would. He wouldn't out of gratitude, thinking how useful it had been, he wouldn't load it onto his shoulders and continue his journey with the raft, he'd just leave it where it was.' So in the same way - the Buddha said - the Dharma, my Teaching is a means to an end. It's a raft to take you to the other shore of Nirvana, it's not an end in itself. It's the means to Enlightenment. This is what the Dharma essentially is. This is its function to be a raft for men and women to gain Enlightenment. And here therefore there are two extremes with regard to the Dharma, two extremes with regard to the raft to be avoided. One extreme of course is walking up and down this shore saying - What a beautiful raft. Oh how lovely - but you continue walking

up and down or you sit on this shore and you admire the raft, you never think of making any use of it. Or you start disputing about it - you say well I think the raft isn't very well made. I think the raft there ought to be ten saplings not twelve, and I think it ought to be lashed together a bit more securely, and I don't quite like the way it floats in the water, I'd build it bigger and better, but you remain sitting on the bank, and you speculate and you dispute and you discuss about the raft. So this is one extreme. The other extreme of course is to get onto the raft and to go across to the other shore but then you get stuck with the raft, and you sit down and you say - Well the raft is the thing after all it brought me here - and you insist on continuing your journey bearing the raft. Now both these attitudes are ridiculous. Most people of course are more likely to be guilty of the first - walking up and down this shore, looking at the raft, possibly admiring it, talking about it, but never actually getting onto it. Now this parable of the raft gives us a very good guide, it gives us a very good criteria, it makes it absolutely clear that the Dharma or rather the function of the Dharma is to carry us across, is to help us spiritually to progress. We can even go further than this as we shall see a little later on that the Dharma is that which helps us a little way up the spiral, this is the Dharma. We find that the great emperor Asoka who lived two and a half centuries after the Buddha, inscribed in his Rock Edicts this memorable saying - 'Whatever the Buddha said was well said.' But we find the Mahayana sutras which may have been written down a little later than that - the reverse in this and they say - 'Whatever is well said that is the word of the Buddha. In other words whatever helps you across, whatever helps you up that spiral take it as the Dharma, take it as the word of the Buddha, because that's all that the word of the Buddha, all that the Dharma is - that which helps you across, that which helps you on your journey. That's why it's ridiculous to say as sometimes you hear people saying well such and such practice helps me in my Buddhist life very much, I feel much better for it, it helps me concentrate, but of course it isn't anything to do with Buddhism, it isn't part of the Dharma. And if it helps you spiritually it is essentially, in principle part of the Dharma. So we may say that whatever leads to Enlightenment, whatever helps us in that direction, whatever helps man to evolve, this is the Dharma. And this is exactly what the Buddha said in so many words to his aunt and foster mother Maha pajapati Gautami. Some of you know the story, you know that the Buddha's own mother died when he was seven days old. He was reared by His mother's sister, His aunt, who was also His father's wife and you know that after the Buddha became Enlightened she and a number of other women followed Him and at Ananda's intercession they were ordained as nuns. But one day, many years later Maha pajapati Gautama, the aunt of the Buddha came to Him rather upset and rather disturbed. She said 'Lord I don't know what to think.' So the Buddha said - I'm paraphrasing a little - the Buddha said - Well, what's the matter Aunty?' So she said - It's those disciples of yours. So the Buddha said - Well, what have they done now? So she said - I don't know what to make of this Teaching of yours. I've heard so many of your disciples, and they all seem to give a different version. Some say you teach this, others say you teach that. I don't know what to think. How am I to know which is really your Teaching? They're all teaching in your name, they all say that this is what you say, they're very sure about that, but they all seem to differ. So how am I to know what is your Teaching, what is your Dharma? So this is the question put by the Buddha's own aunt to the Buddha Himself. And the Pali scriptures record the Buddha's reply. He said - Don't worry - He said - take it like this - whatever you find in practice conduces to peace of mind, conduces to purity, conduces to seclusion, conduces to fewness of desires, conduces to contentment, conduces to insight and wisdom and detachment from the world, conduces to an understanding of the transcendental, whatever you find in your own experience conduces to these ends, take that as my Dharma, take that as my Teaching.' This is the principle, this is the guideline that the Buddha Himself gives. The test of the criterion is in practice, as we say in English colloquially - I hope not too colloquially for this context - the proof of the pudding is in the eating. And !!if everyone!! remembers that simple principle in dealing with Buddhism it saves us a lot of fuss and bother. We've got many forms of Buddhism now in the world, in the Buddhist world. Buddhism is a very old religion, it's been going on for two thousand five hundred years. It's spread through all sorts of countries of the East, it's spread to the snowy tablelands of Tibet, the sweltering jungles of south-east Asia, the beautiful islands of Japan, the deserts of central Asia, the sub-tropical plains of India, it's spread through all of these places, and everywhere it's changed in accordance with local conditions so we get all sorts of forms, all sorts of presentations of Buddhism. And sometimes it happens that we unfortunate people in the West we're deluged with all sorts of conflicting presentations of Buddhism. One Buddhist schools says Buddhism is this another says that it's that, one school says as I point out sometimes 'rely on your own efforts

only you can do it, it's up to you, no-one can help you, no God, no Buddha, no-body.' Another school comes along and says 'You can do nothing, only the Buddha Amitahba can do it for you, you rely upon Him, trust in Him, He's done it already in fact, you just have to accept that.' Completely different points of view apparently. So we get all these conflicting presentations, all these conflicting interpretations, so we are very much in the position of the Buddha's aunt. We don't know what to think sometimes, all these conflicting presentations and expositions of disciples so let us remember what the Buddha said to His aunt. It's may Dharma, it's my Teaching if it works. If you find in your own spiritual life, your own spiritual experience that it helps you become more concentrated, more kind, more sensitive, more intelligent, wiser, more understanding, if you find that the Teaching helps you in this way well this is the Dharma - this is the true teaching, this is what the Buddha really taught and really meant. So the proof of the pudding is in the eating. If we want to know, if we want to be sure whether any form of Buddhism, whether it's Theravada or Tibetan Buddhism, Kargyupa, Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, Tendai, Shin, Zen, if you want to know whether it's really authentic, whether it's really Buddhist in the true sense then we have to ask ourselves the question does it really help people to become Enlightened? Does it really still continue to produce enlightened beings? Or is it a verneable museum piece, very ancient, very beautiful, very admirable, but for the museum and not for life. We have to ask ourselves this question. Because it's only Dharma, it's only really the Buddha's Teaching if it's alive, and if it works, and if it still helps people to follow the spiral and to follow the process of the higher evolution. Only then is is the Dharma. We must resist the temptation to think that the Dharma is this or the Dharma is that, this teaching or that teaching. Provisionally that may be true but not in the long run, not ultimately. In Christianity we're familiar with creedal statements, I believe in God the father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth - and so on - Christianity is tied down there in these creedal formulations, there are presentations but they're all provisional, they're all pointing. As one of the sutras says it's all a finger pointing to the moon. We saw the full moon last night, at least I hope we did and if you point it out to someone you use your finger but sometimes instead of looking at the moon he keeps his eyes fixed on your finger and never goes from the finger to the moon. So it's just like that with many of these teachings - the teachings all point to Enlightenment but they never think of Enlightenment, they fasten on the finger, they fasten on the teaching, never think it's a means to an end, a means for indicating the state of Enlightenment. So these are the sort of things that we have to consider, these are the sort of things that we have to bear in mind.

Now in this country we're in the process of introducing Buddhism, the Dharma, the Buddhist spiritual tradition, Buddhist spiritual life, and I think we may say that Buddhism in this country as and when it develops is very unlikely to follow any existing Buddhist pattern, because our needs, our approach, our background in this country are different from those of any Eastern country; what we have to do in this country is to take, to draw upon the essence, the inner spirit of the Buddha's Teaching as preserved in all schools, take the best, not just in an eclectic sort of way, not just intellectually, but draw upon them deeply and spiritually and unite them, blend them all into one great stream of spiritual tradition adapted to the needs of people in this country. This is really the task which is before us. It isn't very easy to do, it's something which will demand a great deal of effort and spiritual experience on our part. It's a very vast subject incidentally. I don't want to touch upon it really this morning. But let us bear it in mind that the Dharma really represents not this doctrine, not that teaching, but a great current of spiritual life in which we can participate in which we can help others to share and which sweeps us on, bears us on at any rate, eventually in the direction of Enlightenment, in the direction of Nirvana.

Now let me before we close just briefly recapitulate the main points of this talk.

First of all the Buddha's Dharma is the expression on the conceptual level in terms of thought and speech of His experience of Reality, Enlightenment. Secondly, this expression, the Dharma, consists fundamentally of the Teaching of Pratitya Samutpada, universal conditionality in its true form the cyclical and the spiral or the Round and the Path. And thirdly that the function of the Dharma, the function of this expression, as illustrated by the parable of the raft is to act as a means to Enlightenment, its function is pragmatic. And fourthly whatever helps us gain Enlightenment, whatever helps us to progress spiritually, whatever helps make us morally and spiritually more perfect is to be regarded as being really a part or aspect of the Dharma in which

we take refuge. And fifthly we recollect that in this country the Buddhist movement which is now growing and developing here, will be applying all these principles, not only vigorously but even rigorously. So if we understand all this we shall be able ourselves to take refuge in the Dharma, we should be able to board that raft, to do a little paddling, perhaps hoist a little sail to catch the breeze, and eventually we hope, not alone but with others on that raft, cross to the other shore.