Lecture 13: A Special Transmission Outside the Scriptures - edited version

After spending twenty years in the East, mainly in India, I returned to England in August 1964 at the invitation of the English Sangha Trust, and was for two years Incumbent of the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, London. During this period I delivered at the Vihara upwards of a hundred lectures on various aspects of Buddhism, including five talks on `The Essence of Zen'.

The present work is a transcription of these talks, which were given towards the end of 1965. Though the passage from the spoken to the written word has inevitably resulted in a certain amount of condensation, I have tried to resist the temptation of recasting the substance of these talks in more `literary' form. In this way, I hope, I have not only remained closer to the heart of Ch'an but avoided the obvious inconsistency of producing yet another `book on Zen'. Despite the fact that you are now reading with your eyes rather than listening with your ears, in the following pages I am still just talking ... I wonder if you can hear me.

Freathy Bay, Cornwall. 26 April 1973

introduction

Zen is one of the best known and most important forms of Buddhism, and for a long time I have been wondering whether to speak on the subject. I was aware that, in venturing to speak on Zen, I would be treading on very dangerous ground. Some people, indeed, might regard me as a trespasser on their own special preserve. However, after pondering the matter for some time I decided to take my courage in both hands and speak on Zen. There will, therefore, be a series of five talks on `The Essence of Zen', of which the first talk in the series, the one I am giving today, will be of an introductory nature.

My reluctance to speak on Zen was certainly not due to any feeling of disrespect towards this form of Buddhism. I have in fact the greatest admiration for Zen. Along with the Maha Mudra and Ati Yoga teachings of Tibet it represents, in my opinion, the peak of Buddhist spirituality. My reluctance was due rather to an awareness of the extreme difficulty of doing justice to the subject. I was also aware of the numerous misunderstandings surrounding Zen, some at least of which would have to be dispelled before Zen itself could be approached. However, having given series of lectures on the Theravada and Mahayana schools, as well as on Tibetan Buddhism - not to mention an odd lecture on Shin - I eventually decided that, for the sake of completeness at least, I ought to overcome my reluctance and speak on Zen too.

A few words about my personal connection with Zen might be of interest here. At the age of sixteen I happened to read the Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Wei-Lang (as the Platform Scripture was then called) and immediately had the intuitive perception that here was the absolute truth which, far from being new to me, was what I had really known and accepted all the time. Like many others, I also read the writings of Dr D.T. Suzuki and his imitators. Suzuki's own words on Zen, with their combination of erudition, intellectual brilliance, and spiritual profundity, impressed me deeply, and I have returned to them for inspiration throughout my Buddhist life. For more than twenty years, mainly in the East, I studied and practised forms of Buddhism other than Zen. In particular, I practised meditation according to Theravadin methods and according to the Tantric traditions of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. These studies and practices, and the spiritual experiences to which they led, deepened my understanding and appreciation of Zen. This will seem strange only to those who tend to regard the different forms of Buddhism as so many mutually exclusive entities each of which has to be approached independently and as it were de novo. Far from being mutually exclusive, all the schools of Buddhism, despite their immense diversity, have a great deal of ground in common, so that to experience the truth of any one of them is to some extent at least to grasp the inner meaning and significance of all the others. All are concerned, ultimately, with the attainment of Enlightenment. Having known the truth of Buddhism by practising, for example, a form of Tibetan Buddhism, it is therefore possible to understand and appreciate the Theravada or the Jodo Shin Shu. Knowledge of the whole includes knowledge of the parts. In order to understand the spirit of Zen one does not always have to read books on `Zen Buddhism', or stay at a monastery labelled `Zen Monastery', or even practise `Zen meditation' - much less still learn Japanese or sit on cushions of a particular size and shape.

However, had that been all, had my connection with Zen been limited to my experience of the Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Wei-Lang, my reading of Suzuki's works, and my general understanding of Buddhism, it is very doubtful whether I should have ventured to speak on the subject. But fortunately there was one more link. Before returning to England in 1964 I was in contact with a very remarkable man. This was a lay Buddhist hermit living on the outskirts of Kalimpong in two small rooms which he has now not

left for at least fifteen or sixteen years. From five in the morning until five in the afternoon he sat, and I am sure still sits, in meditation, with a short break for lunch. Visitors are allowed only in the evening, by appointment. For several years I saw him regularly, usually on Saturday evenings. Besides possessing a thorough knowledge of the canonical literature of Buddhism he was, I soon found, an advanced practitioner of the Vajrayana, which he had studied in eastern Tibet, as well as of Zen or, as I ought to say - since he was Chinese - of Ch'an. He was moreover a prolific writer, publishing numerous books on Tantric Buddhism and Zen, though he allowed himself only half an hour a day for literary work. Despite the fact that he refused to act as a guru, and accepted no disciples, in the course of talks and discussions I was able to learn a great deal from him. In particular I was able to imbibe the spirit of Zen in greater measure. Had it not been for this contact I probably would not have felt able to speak to you about Zen at all.

Now you may have noticed that so far as these talks are concerned I have arrived at the subject of Zen as it were schoolwise. That is to say, having given courses of lectures on the Theravada, on the Mahayana, on Tibetan Buddhism, and so on, I finally decided to give, for the sake of completeness, a series of talks on Zen. This brings us to an extremely important point, a point directly affecting the nature of the Buddhist movement not only in this country but throughout the Western world. Buddhism has a long history. It has flourished in the East for 2,500 years, and during this time, in India, China, Japan, Tibet, and elsewhere, numerous sects and schools have sprung up. Nobody knows exactly how many of them there are or were, for some are extinct. Probably there are several hundred still in existence. These schools present a picture, or pattern, of unity in diversity, and diversity in unity. All aim at the attainment of Enlightenment, or Buddhahood. At the same time they approach it in a number of ways and from many points of view. They are either predominantly rationalist or predominantly mystical, inclined to activism or quietism, situating their teaching in a historical or a mythological context, and so on. These schools, or at any rate some of the most important of them, are now in process of being introduced into the West. Partly on account of the reasons already adduced, and partly through being associated with different national cultures, they at first present, to the Western student, a spectacle of unmitigated difference, not to say disharmony. But we should not allow ourselves to be misled by appearances. Despite their apparent differences, even mutual opposition, we should study and learn to appreciate them all, thus making ourselves acquainted, as far as possible, with the whole vast range of Buddhist thought and practice. Only in this way will it be possible for us to obtain a balanced picture of Buddhism. Otherwise, we might commit the mistake of identifying Buddhism with one or another of its expressions, maintaining that this, and this alone, was the true embodiment of the Buddha's teaching. Such a course would be unfortunate as it would mean, in effect, adopting an attitude of sectarian exclusiveness which, though unfortunately characteristic of most forms of Christianity until recent times, is quite foreign to the spirit of Buddhism.

In this place we do not identify ourselves exclusively with any particular school. Therefore, having dealt with so many other forms of Buddhism, it was inevitable that sooner or later we should get round to Zen. This synoptic kind of approach is, of course, a very difficult, even confusing, one to follow. It demands ability to discriminate what is essential from what is inessential in Buddhism. It demands objectivity and power of judgement, as well as a considerable amount of hard study. Most of us shrink from the effort involved. After all, it is so easy, in comparison, to `take up' the form of Buddhism to which we are most strongly attracted, to identify ourselves wholeheartedly with it, to derive emotional satisfaction, perhaps, from proclaiming this, and this alone, to be the true Dharma, and all the other forms travesties, misrepresentations, and corruptions! But the temptation must be resisted. We must remember that, as Buddhists, we take refuge in the Dharma, not in the teachings of this or that particular school. Our line of spiritual practice may, indeed must, be specialized, at least to some extent: we either recite the Nembutsu, or practise mindfulness of breathing, or visualize a mandala of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities. But our general approach, our overall attitude, to Buddhism, should be as broad as possible. Indeed, it should be universal.

In this connection I remember my experience at the Buddhist Society's Summer School in 1964, shortly after my return from India. There were lectures and classes on the Theravada, Mahayana, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism. Going from one meeting to another, as most of them did, some of the newcomers very quickly became disheartened and confused. Sometimes it seemed as though Buddhism was severely rational, strictly ascetic, and rather dry; sometimes as though it was warm, mystical, and ethically permissive. In one class they would be told to think; in another, to use their intuition. One speaker would sternly exhort them to rely on their own efforts for salvation; immediately afterwards, perhaps, another would invite them to rely solely on the compassion of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who in ages long gone by had already graciously accomplished their salvation! Some, indeed, were heard to remark that they had learned a lot about the Mahayana, the Theravada, and various other schools, but where, they asked, was Buddhism? When were they going to hear about that? For most of them, however, light eventually

dawned, and by the end of the week they had begun to realize that, despite their contradictions, all schools aimed at Enlightenment, all were concerned with one or another aspect of the same transcendental Reality.

We have had the same type of experience in our speakers' class. On one occasion four people, two men and two women, were asked to speak for twenty minutes each simply on `Buddhism'. Though the subject was the same, they produced four completely different talks. In fact, the talks could hardly have been more dissimilar. To begin with, the two men's approach to the subject was noticeably more intellectual; that of the women, more intuitive. While one speaker gave a systematic exposition of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, another devoted the whole of her talk to the subject of meditation. One of the four included a detailed account of the life of the Buddha. Another did not mention the Buddha at all. At the same time, despite their different approaches, all four talks were recognizably about the same thing - Buddhism. It was as though all, while inevitably falling wide of the central point of the incommunicable essence of Buddhism, in aiming at it drew, at different angles, lines which between them demarcated an area, or described a figure, within which Buddhism could be found and experienced. However comprehensive and objective we try to make them, our approaches to Buddhism are inevitably limited and conditioned - in short, one-sided. As my experience at the summer school, and in the speakers' class, illustrates, one way in which we can transcend this one-sidedness is by juxtaposing contradictory formulations of Buddhism in such a manner that we not only experience their contradictoriness but realize that they are equally valid expressions of a spiritual experience that forever eludes the logical categories of the discriminative mind. This is one of the benefits to be derived from a comprehensive study of different schools of Buddhism. We should not be afraid of contradictions. `A foolish consistency,' said Emerson, `is the hobgoblin of little minds.'

On the psychological plane Buddhism attaches great importance to harmony and balance. Human nature has a number of different aspects, intellectual and emotional, active and contemplative, and so on, and justice must be done to them all. In the spiritual as in the secular life, all must be cultivated and developed, and a perfect equilibrium maintained. This is illustrated by the doctrine of the Five Spiritual Faculties, one of the most ancient and important of the `numerical lists' in which, from an early date, the Buddha's teaching was preserved. The Five Spiritual Faculties are faith (shraddha), wisdom (prajna), vigour (virya), concentration (samadhi), and mindfulness (smriti). Faith, representing the emotional and devotional aspect of the spiritual life, must be balanced by wisdom, otherwise it runs riot in religious hysteria, persecution mania, fanaticism, and intolerance. On the other hand wisdom, which stands for the intellectual - better, cognitive or gnostic - aspect, must be balanced by faith, without which it speedily degenerates into hair-splitting scholasticism. Vigour, or the active, kinetic aspect of the spiritual life, must be balanced by concentration, representing the introspective, contemplative counter-tendency, without which vigour is either animal high spirits or neurotic restlessness, and concentration itself by vigour, divorced from which concentration is aimless reverie, morbid introspection, or neurotic withdrawal. Mindfulness, the remaining faculty, being by its very nature incapable of going to extremes - one can't have too much mindfulness - requires no counterbalancing faculty to hold it in check. Mindfulness it is, indeed, that keeps faith and wisdom, and vigour and concentration, in a state of equilibrium. `Mindfulness is always useful,' the Buddha once declared.

Besides being one of the schools of Buddhism, Zen is, more specifically, also one of the schools of the Mahayana - the second of the three great stages of historical development into which Indian Buddhism traditionally falls. In the Mahayana four major schools, or types of approach, can be distinguished, and these, as I have explained in detail in my book A Survey of Buddhism, correspond to the Five Spiritual Faculties. What Conze terms the Buddhism of faith and devotion, with its highly emotional worship of the Buddhas, both historical and `legendary', and of bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Tara, represents a specialization, as it were, in the faculty of faith. The Madhyamaka School, or `School of the Mean', with its rigorously dialectical approach to Reality, represents a specialization in the faculty of wisdom. Similarly the Tantra, which in its esoteric form integrates not only the mind but the physical energies of breath and semen, concentrates on the faculty of vigour. The fourth spiritual faculty, that of concentration, is represented on the theoretical side by the Yogachara and on the practical side by the school which is known, in its Japanese form, as Zen. The faculty of mindfulness is represented by the spirit of tolerance which is diffused through all the schools and which holds them together as `moments' in the Mahayana-concept.

This correspondence between the schools of the Mahayana and the Five Spiritual Faculties gives us an important clue to the nature of Zen. Quite simply, it is that aspect of Mahayana Buddhism which emphasizes the importance of meditation, and specializes therein. This is indicated by the very name of the school. The Chinese term ch'an'na is a corruption of the Sanskrit dhyana, the general Indian word for meditative practice and experience, while zen-na, zen for short, is the Japanese corruption of the Chinese corruption. Thus the Zen School is really the Dhyana or Meditation School.

At the same time, Zen has its own distinctive features. This becomes obvious as we go a little deeper into the meaning of the word meditation. According to the remarkable man previously mentioned there are four kinds of Ch'an or Zen. So far as I know, this extremely important traditional classification, which sheds much light on the nature of Zen, has never appeared in English before, and it is unknown to Western Buddhists. I therefore hope it will be of interest to you.

Firstly there is Tathagata Ch'an - the classical methods of concentration such as counting the breaths and cultivating a spirit of universal love which were taught by Gautama the Buddha and are common to practically all forms of Buddhism, including Zen. In Zen monasteries the beginner is taught these methods and often practises nothing else for several years.

Secondly, Patriarchal Ch'an, i.e. the Ch'an of Hui-Neng, the sixth Chinese patriarch of the Zen School. This refers to the Platform Scripture's teaching of the identity, or at any rate the inseparability, of samadhi and prajna. Hui-Neng says, `Learned Audience, in my system samadhi and prajna are fundamental. But do not be under the wrong impression that these two are independent of each other, for they are inseparably united and are not two entities. Samadhi is the quintessence of prajna, while prajna is the activity of samadhi. At the very moment that we attain prajna, samadhi is therewith; and vice versa.... A disciple should not think that there is a distinction between "samadhi begets prajna" and "prajna begets samadhi".' Further, `samadhi and prajna ... are analogous to a lamp and its light. With the lamp, there is light. Without it, it would be dark. The lamp is the quintessence of the light and the light is the expression of the lamp. In name they are two things, but in substance they are one and the same. It is the same case with samadhi and prajna.'

Prajna of course means wisdom, in the sense of transcendental wisdom. But what does samadhi mean? Here there is a great deal of confusion to be cleared up. As one of the Five Spiritual Faculties, samadhi means simply one-pointedness of mind, or concentration. This is the meaning of the term in what we may call general Buddhism, the type of Buddhism codified in, and nowadays represented by, the Theravada, and it is in the same sense that samadhi is to be understood when it is enumerated as the second of the three great stages of progress into which the spiritual path is divided, the first stage being shila or morality and the third prajna or wisdom. In the Mahayana sutras which form the background of Hui-Neng's teaching, however, samadhi has a quite different meaning. Confusion has been created in the minds of Western students of Zen because they wrongly assume that the samadhi which Hui-Neng was equating with prajna was samadhi in the sense of mental concentration, thus making nonsense of the entire scheme of Buddhist spiritual self-development. In the Mahayana sutras samadhi corresponds to the chetovimutti, or state of conscious spiritual emancipation of the Theravadin texts, rather than to samadhi in the sense of concentration. Mahayana samadhi may well be said to be Enlightenment in its subjective aspect of personal realization. Prajna or wisdom is the objective aspect of actual manifestation and function in the world, the two of course being inseparable.

This prajna is not the ordinary prajna of the general Buddhist teaching, consisting of insight into the unsatisfactory, impermanent, and unsouled nature of conditioned things, but maha-prajna, or Great Wisdom, realization of the Voidness - not emptiness but absolute unconditioned Reality - of all the phenomena of existence. Collating the general Buddhist teaching with that of the Mahayana sutras we may say that, according to Hui-Neng, the entire system of Buddhist spiritual training may be expressed in the formula shila (morality) + samadhi (concentration) + prajna samadhi-prajna = Buddhahood.

While Tathagata Ch'an is concerned with the practice of concentration, the second term in the series, Patriarchal Ch'an, is concerned with the realization of samadhi-prajna, the fourth.

Thirdly, Offspring Ch'an. This is Ch'an as taught by the spiritual descendants of Hui-Neng, especially by the great masters of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh generations, who became the founders of the five Ch'an `sects' of China. Whereas Tathagata Ch'an and Patriarchal Ch'an are Indian in form, Offspring Ch'an is characteristically Chinese. Instead of quoting the scriptures and discoursing at length on the philosophy and practice of Zen in the traditional manner, as even Hui-Neng does, this kind of Ch'an tries to bring about the experience of Enlightenment in a more direct and concrete manner with the help of seemingly eccentric and bizarre words, sentences, and actions. These are the celebrated kung-ans (Japanese koans: literally `public documents') or `concurrent causes' of Enlightenment, such as a sudden shout, a roar of laughter, a gesture, or a blow with a staff.

Fourthly, Mouth Ch'an. This is the Ch'an of people who merely talk about Zen, or write books and articles about it, and never do any practice. When my friend in Kalimpong told me about this kind of Ch'an I remarked that it was very common in the West, where it was the dominant school, with many distinguished masters, and almost a patriarchal succession of its own. He replied, rather sadly, that it was common

enough in China too, even in the old days. On another occasion, when I showed him an article on Zen in a Western Buddhist magazine, he burst into roars of laughter after reading a few sentences. But soon the laughter changed to tears, and he wept bitterly, out of compassion for sincere seekers after truth who were being deceived and misled by the exponents of Mouth Ch'an.

In the course of the next four weeks I shall try to do justice to what Zen has in common with other schools of Buddhism as well as to its own distinctive features. The subject will be dealt with by way of a consideration of a popular traditional verse widely regarded as embodying the essence of Zen. By this means, it is hoped, misunderstanding will be avoided. Before telling you what this verse is, let me briefly touch upon what are, so it seems to me, the three causes for much of the current Western misunderstanding of Zen.

The first cause is our purely intellectual approach. Most Western students derive their knowledge of Zen from books, usually those of Suzuki. In the beginning this is, of course, unavoidable. Fortunately, at present a number of books on Zen are available which are probably as reliable as books on Zen can be. Such, for example, are the three volumes of Charles Luk's Ch'an and Zen Teaching and Trevor Leggett's First Zen Reader and The Tiger's Cave. Thoughtfully - one might even say contemplatively - read, works of this nature, besides conveying something of the spirit of Zen, make the sensitive reader aware of the limitations of the intellectual approach. As though with one voice they urge him to practise Zen. Unfortunately, only too many people seem to have a perfect intellectual understanding of the fact that Zen cannot be intellectually understood. So thoroughly do they understand the need for practice that the idea of actually practising Zen themselves never occurs to them. Instead, on the basis of their reading and their intellectual knowledge of Zen, they set to work and produce yet another book on the subject. In these books they usually argue at great length, as if to convince the unconverted, that books cannot tell you anything about Zen, that the intellect is a hindrance, and that one should cultivate one's intuition. After several hundred pages of discussion, Zen is usually defined, very much to their own satisfaction, as `the indefinable'. If questioned about meditation, Zen intellectuals of this type are liable to snap back, `I do my meditation while I'm waiting for the traffic lights to change.'

Secondly, we try to understand Zen apart from Buddhism. This is like trying to understand the acorn apart from the oak, and is absolutely futile. Zen is an integral part of the total Buddhist tradition. As we have already seen, it is that aspect of the Mahayana which specializes in the practice of meditation. The terminology and techniques of Zen, as well as its doctrines, its scriptures, its spiritual ideal, and its monastic organization and ordination lineage, have all been taken over from Buddhism, and even after being given the special development, the characteristic emphasis, that makes them Zen, cannot be understood independently. If we are in personal contact with an enlightened Zen master and are prepared to follow his instructions implicitly, we need not bother about Buddhism. We need not bother even about Zen. But so long as we do not have this advantage we have no alternative but to study Zen as part of Buddhism. Any other course would be as futile as trying to understand the origins and nature of Methodism without reference either to the Church of England or to Christianity.

The last of the three main causes for our misunderstanding of Zen is that we mistake the finger for the moon. According to the Buddhist saying, when one asks, `Where is the moon?' and somebody points it out with his finger saying, `There it is!' one does not stand with eyes riveted on the finger. One looks from the finger to the moon. In the same way all the teachings and methods of Zen are so many pointers to the experience of Enlightenment. The disciple does not take them for ends in themselves. He utilizes them as helps to the attainment of liberation. Some Western students of Zen, however, fascinated by the apparently bizarre sayings and doings of the later Zen masters, think that this is Zen. For instance, they read that when disciple so-and-so questioned Master such-and-such about Zen, the latter, instead of answering, gave him thirty blows with his staff. Giving thirty blows, they think, is Zen. Whenever anybody mentions Zen, therefore, they explain triumphantly, `Aha, thirty blows for you!' and think that they have thereby demonstrated their superior understanding of Zen. Others think that the tea ceremony is Zen, or judo, or kendo, or karate. They fail to realize that these are not Zen itself but only expressions of Zen within a certain Far Eastern cultural context. Some even think that Zen is Japanese. If one wanted to be paradoxical, not to say provocative, one could go so far as to say that Zen had nothing whatever to do with Japan.

In the coming weeks we shall try to avoid misunderstandings of Zen such as those I have described. Now for our verse. It is said to have originated during the T'ang dynasty in China, but nobody knows who composed it. The verse reads:

@Verse = A special transmission outside the scriptures;

No dependence upon words and letters;

Direct pointing to the mind;

Seeing into one's own nature and realizing Buddhahood.

Each of the four lines of the verse represents a fundamental principle of the Zen School. Each week, therefore, we shall take up one line for study. In this way, I hope, we shall acquire some insight into the essence of Zen, thus approaching nearer to Enlightenment and broadening and enriching our understanding of the whole Buddhist tradition.

@Chaphead = a special transmission outside the scriptures

At first sight the idea of a special transmission outside the scriptures seems quite simple and easy to understand. Had we encountered it in a book we probably would not have given it a second thought, assuming as a matter of course that we understood what was meant. But is this line, the first line of our verse, really so simple as it appears? `A special transmission outside the scriptures.'... If we give ourselves time to think, a number of questions suggest themselves.

What are the scriptures? What is meant by a `transmission', or a `special transmission'? What is meant by `outside'? Let us examine each of these in turn.

First of all the scriptures. All the religions of the world possess sacred books. Christians, for example, have the Bible, Muslims the Koran, and Hindus the Vedas. Similarly Buddhists have what is known as the Tripitaka. Tri means `three', while pitaka means `basket' or, by extension of meaning, `collection'. The Tripitaka is therefore the `three basketfuls' or `three collections' of Buddhist sacred texts. According to some authorities, in the early days of Buddhism the bundles of palm-leaf manuscript on which the texts were inscribed were divided, according to subject matter, into three groups that were kept, for convenience of reference, in three wicker containers. Some, however, suggest that the term refers to the way in which earth and other excavated material was passed from hand to hand in baskets down a line of workmen. In the same way the monks handed down the sacred traditions, first in oral and then in literary form, from generation to generation.

The `three basketfuls' or `three collections' are, firstly, the Vinaya Pitaka or `Collection of Monastic Discipline'. In its present form this consists mainly of the rules governing the Monastic Order, including the circumstances in which these are promulgated, interspersed with a great deal of biographical, historical, and doctrinal matter. The original nucleus of this pitaka seems to have been a short life of the Buddha. Secondly, the Sutra Pitaka or `Collection of Discourses, Dialogues, and Sayings of the Buddha' on various moral and spiritual topics. This is the most important collection. Thirdly, the Abhidharma Pitaka or `Collection of Higher Doctrine'. This is a systematic arrangement and scholastic analysis of material found in the Sutra Pitaka.

Traditionally the entire contents of the Tripitaka are regarded as Buddha-vachana or `Word of the Buddha'. The Buddha himself, of course, wrote nothing. Like Socrates and Christ, he taught orally. Those who remembered what he had said told his sayings to their disciples; they told theirs and in this way the teaching was transmitted to posterity. Only after five hundred years, approximately, of oral transmission was the teaching committed to writing. Much, no doubt, had been added. Much, perhaps, had been lost. At present there are extant in the Buddhist world three major editions of the Tripitaka: firstly, the Chinese San Tsang or `Three Treasuries' (i.e. Tri-pitaka) in 55 volumes; secondly, the Tibetan Kanjur (`Buddha-vachana') in 100 or 108 volumes. Both these editions consist mainly of translations from the Sanskrit, many of the original texts having since been lost. Thirdly, the Pali Tipitaka in 45 volumes (Royal Thai edition). This is the only version of the canon to have survived complete in the language in which it was originally compiled.

The three editions of the Tripitaka possess a great deal of material in common. The biggest difference is that while the Chinese and Tibetan editions include the Mahayana sutras the Pali edition omits them.

Even when allowance is made for overlapping, the Buddhist scriptures are far more voluminous than those of any other religion. The Bible consists of 64 books; but the Chinese San Tsang, for example, contains 1,662 independent works, several of them almost as long as the entire Bible. Though much of this vast literature has been translated into English and other European languages, an even greater part of it remains untranslated. Thanks to the labours of the Pali Text Society, the Pali Tipitaka has been translated almost in its entirety. A number of the most important Mahayana sutras are also available. Kern has translated the Saddharma-Pundarika, Izumi the Vimalakirti-Nirdesha, Suzuki the Lankavatara, Lamotte the Sandhinirmochana (in French), Luk the Surangama. Above all, in the greatest individual achievement in

this field in modern times, Conze has translated the whole Prajnaparamita or `Perfection of Wisdom' group of sutras, consisting of more than thirty independent works.<$FSince this book was first published, many more translations of Mahayana texts have become available. Among the more important are included Schiffer and Tamura's revision of Soothill and Kato's translation of the Saddharmapundarika Sutra, Thurman's translation of the Vimalakirtinirdesa, Emmerick's translation of the Suvarnaprabhasasottamasutra, Thomas Cleary's translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra, and Bays' translation of the Lalitavistara. An extensive bibliography of translations is included in Andrew Skilton's A Concise History of Buddhism, published by Windhorse.>

A great deal of basic material is thus available for study. Unfortunately, the majority of English Buddhists and students of Buddhism fail to take advantage of the fact. Very few study regularly and systematically even a tithe of what has been translated. Consequently their knowledge of Buddhism remains vague and superficial. Some, indeed, appear to read anything rather than the scriptures. Classics of Christian mysticism, books about Pak Subuh, even the romances of Lobsang Rampa, are eagerly devoured, while essential texts like the Diamond Sutra and the Sutta-Nipata remain unread. This is not to say that there is anything wrong in reading the classics of Christian mysticism and deriving inspiration from them. But if one considers oneself a Buddhist and claims to be seriously following the path of the Buddha, it is strange that one should not make every effort to acquaint oneself with the basic literature of the subject. No doubt the Buddhist scriptures, even in the best translation, are often unattractive in form and obscure and difficult in content. But if we want to participate in the spiritual riches of Buddhism the effort to understand them must be made. After all, if we want to take up engineering, or medicine, or even pig-breeding, we have to put in a certain amount of intellectual hard work: we have to study. Buddhism demands no less. Ask yourselves, therefore, those of you who consider yourselves Buddhists, when it was that you last read a translation of one of the Buddhist sacred books. The answer might surprise you.

Some, of course, try to rationalize the situation and justify themselves. Western advocates of Zen, for instance, are fond of citing the example of Hui-Neng, the Sixth Chinese Patriarch, whom Far Eastern Buddhist art sometimes depicts in the act of tearing up the Diamond Sutra. They forget that if he did in fact do any such thing (there is no mention of the incident in the Platform Scripture) it was only after realizing the import of the Sutra and that, in any case, he probably knew the entire text by heart. In Zen monasteries scriptures like the Diamond Sutra, the Heart Sutra, and the Kwannon Sutra are not only studied but learned by heart and liturgically recited as an aid to the spiritual life. It is interesting to observe that those who neglect, and then depreciate, the primary sources, can be fanatical in their devotion to quite secondary ones. The word of the Buddha resounds unheeded, but Suzuki and a host of lesser lights are hearkened to with eager attention.

Whether our interest is in Buddhism in general or in one or another of its special forms, we cannot bypass the scriptures. In them are contained the original records of the transcendental experiences of the Buddha and his Enlightened disciples. Without a preliminary intellectual understanding of these records we have no means of knowing what it is that we, as Buddhists, including followers of Zen, are trying to attain and what is the method of its attainment. The only thing that can absolve us from study of the scriptures is regular personal contact with an Enlightened teacher, who is the living embodiment of the scriptures. Such a teacher is difficult to come by even in the East. In the absence of personal contact of this kind the scriptures are indispensable.

So much for what is meant by the scriptures. Now we come to the transmission, or special transmission. What is meant by this? According to the dictionary the literal meaning of the word transmit is `to send across', also to pass on or hand down. Here we have the idea of Buddhism itself as something transmitted, something handed down. On the biological plane, life is transmitted from parents to children. On the spiritual plane, there is a transmission of Buddhism, or the Dharma. This transmission takes place between master and disciple. Hence the importance of this relationship. It is, in fact, the axis upon which the whole world of Buddhism turns. There are a number of different types of transmission of Buddhism, or rather, the transmission can take place on different levels. Four principal transmissions are enumerated:

(1) Transmission of Ordination. Broadly speaking ordination is of three kinds: as a lay brother or lay sister (upasaka, upasika), as a monk or nun (bhikshu, bhikshuni), and as a bodhisattva. These three categories of ordained persons make up the Sangha or Spiritual Community in the socio-ecclesiastical sense of the term. Each ordination involves the adoption of a certain spiritual attitude and the observance of a certain rule. The lay brother or lay sister, who can be ordained by any monk, nun, or bodhisattva, goes for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and undertakes to observe the Ten Precepts, that is to say, to abstain from harming living beings, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from false, harsh, frivolous, and backbiting speech, as well as from greed, hatred, and wrong views. A monk must be ordained by a chapter of not less than five other monks including an elder (sthavira) or monk of at least

ten years' standing in the Order. Nuns require a double ordination, once by a chapter of monks and once by a chapter of nuns. Both monks and nuns renounce the household life, devote all their energies to the realization of nirvana, and observe a basic rule of 150 clauses. The four most important clauses relate to abstention from sexual intercourse, from theft, from murder and incitement to suicide, and from making false claims to spiritual attainments. A bodhisattva is ordained ideally by a Buddha, but in practice by any senior bodhisattva. In special circumstances self-ordination is permitted. He (or she) develops the Will to Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and observes a rule consisting (according to the Indo-Tibetan tradition) of eighteen major and forty-six minor provisions, all strongly altruistic in emphasis. The three kinds of ordination are not mutually exclusive. A lay brother or lay sister, or monk or nun, may in addition be ordained as a bodhisattva. In the Mahayana Buddhist world bodhisattva ordination tends to supersede all other kinds of ordination.

(2) Transmission of the Scriptures. As we have seen, the Buddha himself wrote nothing. After centuries of oral transmission his words were committed to writing and preserved in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts. Eventually the manuscripts were printed in book form. These books, in the three editions described, constitute the Buddhist scriptures. Traditionally, one of the principal functions of the monks was to preserve incorrupt the pure and authentic word of the Buddha, first in oral and subsequently in literary form. They alone had time for the prodigious feat of memorization involved. Once the `scriptures' had been committed to writing, though, the importance of the monks as preservers and transmitters diminished. But they continued to be the custodians of the correct interpretation of the texts. This interpretation was often embodied in commentaries, which gave not the author's personal understanding of the texts so much as the traditional interpretation which he had received from his teachers along with the texts themselves. In some parts of the Buddhist world one is still not considered to have mastered the scriptures unless one has studied them with a teacher. Reading the printed page by oneself is not sufficient. One has to learn, at the same time, the correct interpretation, which can be done only with the help of a teacher `in the succession'. Tibetan Buddhism still retains the institution of lun or `authorization'. Students are permitted to read or recite a sacred text only after it has been read aloud in their ear, with explanations, by their teacher. Some texts, of course, require more explanation than others, but in all cases the principle of a proper transmission of the scripture and its meaning is upheld.

(3) Transmission of the Doctrine. By `doctrine' is meant, in this context, the systematic presentation of the teaching, as contained in the scriptures, in terms of a logically coherent intellectual structure. The expression may be considered roughly equivalent to the terms `Buddhist thought' and `Buddhist philosophy'. Such presentations seem to have originated with the `lists of lists' which were compiled after the Buddha's death, perhaps even during his lifetime. These were more or less complete enumerations of the various sets of related doctrinal topics - the Five Aggregates, the Nine Holy Persons, the Twelve Links, and so on - in which, for mnemonic purposes, the teaching had been cast. As presentations of the teaching the `lists of lists' were systematic only in the purely formal sense. More truly systematic are the shastras, such as the Abhidharma treatises, the Five Books of Maitreya, and The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana. In India there were four different, practically simultaneous, transmissions of the doctrine, in the form of the four `philosophical' schools of the Vaibhashikas, the Sautrantikas, the Vijnanavadins, and the Madhyamikas. These were systematic presentations of the teaching in terms, respectively, of naive realism, critical realism, idealism, and absolutism. All four transmissions continued, with amplifications and extensions, in Tibet and the Far East. In China the Transmission of the Doctrine was safeguarded by the great indigenous schools of the Hua-Yen (the Avatamsaka or `Flower-Ornament') and T'ien-T'ai, characterized respectively by Takakusu as the totalistic and phenomenological (Mahayanistic) schools.

(4) Transmission of the Spirit of Buddhism. This is the most important transmission of all. It is to this type of transmission that the verse refers when it speaks of a special transmission outside the scriptures. Though only the scriptures are actually mentioned, the transmission is to be understood as taking place outside ordination and outside doctrine as well.

How did this transmission of the spirit of Buddhism begin? According to tradition, the Buddha was once seated in the midst of a great concourse of his disciples. Hundreds of bodhisattvas and arhants, monks and nuns, lay brothers and lay sisters, were present, as well as various orders of celestial beings. All were silent, waiting for the Buddha to speak. This is, of course, the customary setting for a discourse by the Buddha, but on this occasion, instead of speaking, the Master simply held up amidst the silence of the assembly a golden flower. Only Mahakashyapa, one of the oldest disciples, famed for his austerity, understood the meaning of the Buddha's action, and smiled. The Buddha then said: `I am the owner of the eye of the wonderful Dharma, which is nirvana, the Mind, the mystery of Reality and non-Reality, and the gate of the transcendental truth. I now hand it over to Mahakashyapa.' This was the transmission.

What happened? It is very difficult to explain. When the Buddha held up the golden flower (not when he spoke, which was only for the benefit of the other disciples, who had failed to understand the significance of his action) there took place a direct communication of truth from one mind to another, from a supremely Enlightened mind to one that was almost so, and needing only the most delicate of touches to bring it to perfection. The transmission from the Buddha was analogous to what happens, at an infinitely lower level of experience, between two people who understand each other very well. A sign or a look, the significance of which is a mystery to everyone else, suffices to convey a whole world of meaning. So it is on the highest spiritual plane.

Mahakashyapa transmitted the spirit of the Dharma to Ananda, who had been the Buddha's personal attendant during the last twenty years of his earthly life, he to his disciple Sanakavasa, and so on. From Mahakashyapa in the fifth century BCE to Bodhidharma in the sixth century CE it continued to be transmitted down a long line of spiritual masters, some otherwise unknown to fame, others among the most distinguished names in Indian Buddhism. The list of these masters, who are traditionally regarded as the twenty-seven (including Bodhidharma, twenty-eight) Indian `patriarchs' of the Zen School, is as follows:

(1) Mahakashyapa, (2) Ananda, (3) Sanakavasa, (4) Upagupta (spiritual teacher of the Emperor Ashoka), (5) Dhritaka, (6) Michchaka, (7) Vasumitra (the earliest historian of Buddhism), (8) Buddhanandi, (9) Buddhamitra, (10) Parshva (?President of Fourth Council, the Council of Kanishka), (11) Punyayashas, (12) Ashvaghosha (author of The Life of the Buddha, The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana, etc.), (13) Kapimala, (14) Nagarjuna (rediscoverer of the `Perfection of Wisdom' sutras and founder of the Madhyamaka School), (15) Kanadeva (=Aryadeva, co-founder of the Madhyamaka School), (16) Rahulata, (17) Sanghanandi, (18) Gayasata, (19) Kumarata, (20) Jayata, (21) Vasubandhu (author of Abhidharma-Kosha, etc., and founder of the Vijnanavada School), (22) Monorhita, (23) Haklena, (24) Aryasimha, (25) Basiasita, (26) Punyamitra, (27) Prajnatara, and (28) Bodhidharma.

A study of this list reveals the close connection between Zen and what may be termed the central tradition of Indian Buddhism.

It was the celebrated Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth Indian Patriarch - whom tradition depicts crossing the ocean on a reed - who `took' Zen to China, thus becoming the First Chinese Patriarch of the School. What he took to China, of course, was not the Zen School as we know it today, complete with doctrines, scriptures, and temple organization, but the living spirit of Buddhism. This spirit he transmitted to his disciple Hui-K'o, he to his disciple, and so on down a succession of altogether six spiritual masters. These masters are known as the Six Chinese Patriarchs of the Zen School, as follows:

(1) Bodhidharma, (2) Hui-K'o, (3) Seng-Ts'an, (4) Tao-Hsin, (5) Hung-Jen, (6) Hui-Neng (Wei-Lang).

Such was the spiritual genius of Hui-Neng, the sixth and last Chinese Patriarch, that he was able to transmit the spirit of Buddhism not to one disciple only, as the custom apparently had been hitherto, but to forty-three. Thereafter there were many different lines of transmission, no one of which could be regarded as the main one. Five lines were however of special importance, of which two continue down to the present day. These two lines are represented by the Soto and Rinzai Schools of contemporary Japanese Buddhism.

Zen is essentially concerned with the fourth type of transmission, the transmission of the living spirit of Buddhism. This transmission is made possible through the high level of spiritual communication existing between master and disciple, usually within a context of meditation and study. Ordination and observance of the monastic discipline, scriptural studies, and doctrinal knowledge are all important, but only as means to an end, never as ends in themselves. The real thing, the only thing that ultimately matters, is the spiritual - better, transcendental - experience, the experience of Enlightenment. If this is not transmitted the transmission of all the rest is a waste of time. At best it is a cultural curiosity. Amending our previous definition, which was provisional, we may now say of Zen not merely that it is that aspect of the Mahayana which specializes in meditation, but that it represents a transmission of the living spirit of Buddhism with the help of the three main kinds of Ch'an described in the previous talk.

Thirdly and lastly, what is meant by outside the scriptures? The scriptures consist of words. Words convey ideas. In the case of the scriptures these ideas point in the direction of a spiritual experience. Zen, we have seen, is concerned primarily with this experience. It is not concerned with ordination, scriptures, or doctrine; or rather, it is concerned with them only as a means to the experience of Enlightenment, not as ends in themselves. But it certainly does not dispense with them altogether, on principle as it were. Instead, it follows a middle path. Distinguished from the scriptures but not divided from them, its own distinctive

transmission makes use of the scriptures without becoming attached to them and without being enslaved by them. This is what is meant by `outside'.

We have now answered the three questions which suggested themselves at the beginning of this talk, and have understood, I hope, the sense in which Zen is said to be `a special transmission outside the scriptures'.