

## Lecture 17: Is Religion Necessary?

### Sangharakshita

If you've seen the advertisement which was published, or if you've seen the calendar for the month on the notice board., you will know: already that this series is entitled 'Introducing Buddhism.' Now this title, such a title, may come as a surprise to some people - even as a shock one might say, especially to the regular members, They might be thinking that, here we are, we've been studying Buddhism for a long time, quite a number of months, even several years, and we surely by. this time know it, at least the elements of the teaching quite well. So where is the need, they might be thinking for an introduction? It's rather like. as it were going to a party, and your host says to you, 'Oh, I'd like you to meet Mr So and So' and he introduces you, and you find it's an old friend; it's someone that you've known very very well for a long time. So those of you who have been studying Buddhism for a number of months, even for a number of years, might feel rather in this way. You might feel that here you are being introduced as it were to Buddhism, when already, you've been acquainted with it, or perhaps on very friendly terms with it for quite a long time.

Some might be thinking, well, this idea of an introduction to Buddhism, a series introducing Buddhism is excellent for the novices, excellent for .the newcomers, but as for the old hands, those that come faithfully week after week for so long, is it really necessary, is it really essential to go over the same ground, again, and again and again. Now I might say that it isn't a question of going over the same ground at all. In fact one might go so far as to say that it is really just the opposite. What one is really doing is asking the old hands as it were to see Buddhism, to see the Buddha's teaching afresh. To see it as it were with new eyes. Not just to see it as they've always seen it, but try to see it, as it were, as though they've never seen it before. Try to put behind them, if that's possible, their old understanding of Buddhism, and just to try to see it objectively, as though they've never seen it in fact before.

Indeed the fact that we can think at all of even the most simple teachings, even the most elementary teachings of Buddhism as being old ground is significant. Because it means that instead of seeing the facts or the truths or the principles, with which the teachings which we refer to as 'old ground' really refer, instead of trying to see them afresh and new, with a fresh mind, a new mind, we're trying to approach them in terms of a previously acquired understanding. In other words, we're not approaching them with the mind, the experience that we have now at this very moment, but with the mind and the experience that we had last week or the week before, or even the year before that, or even ten years ago. So what we have to do really is to keep our understanding, or our insight into Buddhism up to date. Not be living as it were on our past capital, not be living on the understanding of Buddhism which we had all these months, or even all those years ago but renewing it, making it fresh, hewer more living, even if necessary day by day, if possible, even minute by minute. There is a saying as you know, that 'familiarity breeds contempt'. Well in this case, familiarity with Buddhism certainly won't breed contempt, but certainly it may breed a sort of staleness; we might settle down in our understanding of Buddhism, think that we know it, and not make an effort to exert ourselves, and to really pierce into it, penetrate into it again, thinking that we've already understood it.

So instead of really confronting ourselves with the principles and the truths which the Buddha taught, we may really be confronting ourselves, and thereby limiting ourselves, with our own previous understanding of those principles, or of those truths. It is this that we must constantly be on our guard against, and in order to guard against it we have to constantly return, we have to go back again and again to fundamentals, to the basic things, to the principle teachings, and again and again re-examine them, to turn them over afresh in our minds; not to allow ourselves to think, 'well, five years ago, I made a thorough study of say the five skandhas, the five aggregates, and I understood them quite well; and I remember what I understood then, so I understand the five aggregates'. Not that. But again, even this week, even today, to ask oneself, 'Now what did the Buddha mean by the five aggregates? What does this teaching convey? What does it signify?' Because after five years of acquaintance with Buddhism, after five more years of the practice of Buddhism, one should have evolved a little bit more, one's understanding should be a little clearer, a little brighter, so that if now, if today, one directs one's attention, one directs one's mind to the understanding of the five aggregates, that understanding should be a little more advanced than the one which you had five or ten years ago, however good that might have been. So instead of resting as it were on one's laurels, instead of carrying over from the past the previous understanding, the understanding of the past, one should recreate an even better understanding from the present, and this is what one must do again and again and again, with all aspects of the teaching, both theoretical and practical. It's just like taking the Refuges - I've

often spoken about this. One takes the Refuges, one takes them very often, in the Buddhist tradition, in Buddhist countries, here also, as it were ceremonially one repeats in Pali 'Buddham saranam gachami' 'To the Buddha for Refuge I go: to the Dharma for Refuge I go; to the Sangha, for Refuge I go'. So one is as it were repeating these same words again and again. In the East they sometimes take them daily, even sometimes take them weekly. Some very pious people take them morning and evening. So it's as though you're doing the same thing over and over again. But in a sense you're not, because in the interval between your two ceremonial takings of the Refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, your understanding of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, through your study and through your practice should have deepened, so you understand them better, and the better you understand them, the more effectively, the more deeply you can take Refuge. Your taking of Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha this week shouldn't be the same as your taking Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha last week or last month or last year, or ten years ago when you first became a Buddhist. If it is the same, if it means exactly the same to you, really so far as experience and understanding are concerned, it means you haven't made any progress. So, in a sense, if one is progressing, though one takes the Refuges today, takes tomorrow, takes this week, takes next week, one isn't really taking again in fact: one can say, one should never take again - one should just take, here and now. In other words, one should always take as though for the first time, with a certain freshness, a certain directness, a certain as it were, newness. And it's the same with the study of the teachings as a whole. One mustn't live, one mustn't subsist upon one's past understanding, one's past practice, resting as I've said upon one's laurels, but one should always approach the truths which are concerned, by the principles which are involved with a new and a fresh mind - approach them directly, as though one had never approached before. And in as much as one's previous approaches, as in the case of one's previous takings of the Refuge will have elevated one a little more, will have helped one to grow and develop a little more, then one's study and one's practice here and now, one's attempt to understand certain of the principles and to apply them, will represent a certain advance, will go a little deeper, will carry you a little further.

So in this way your study of Buddhism and your practice of Buddhism will never become stale it will always be a. fresh, one might even say, a self-recreating thing constantly it will always in other words be new, and it will have therefore the freshness, and one might even say the wonder, and impressiveness of what is new. So something of this sort will be our approach in the new year, with our new series 'Introducing Buddhism'. So far as the newcomers are concerned, the material covered or dealt with will be in the literal sense, in the ordinary sense, quite new. But to the, what we might call the old-comers, as contrasting with the newcomers, to the old-comers, it shouldn't all be old, it shouldn't all be something they've heard before. It won't of course be new, in the sense that it's new to the newcomers, but to the old-comers we may say, the material, though in an ordinary sense it has been treated before, should be doubly new, because they should approach it with a new fresh mind, which has been fortified by the study and the practice of the previous years, but approaching the material directly, and seeing it as it were anew. So therefore, if, of course as I know there are, if there is anyone present, if anyone knows anything about Buddhism, or anyone thinks that they know anything about Buddhism, so far as this particular series is concerned they should just forget it. They might have been studying for years well let them put it all out of their conscious minds: what they remember about the Four Truths, Eightfold Path, pratitya samutpada, karma, Nirvana, Bodhisattva, meditation, ethics, Silas, let them put it all out of their minds, out of their consciousness. They won't of course be able to put it out of their being, but that in fact is not wanted; but put it out of their conscious minds, out of their recollections, out of their memories, and make as it were, their minds as far as Buddhism is concerned a complete blank, just like someone whose never heard of Buddhism at all. Just go back as it were to the time before you'd heard of Buddhism, if you can remember that, and imagine yourself as it were quite devoid of any knowledge of Buddhism, not knowing anything, in a state of complete - I won't say ignorance, but innocence - not knowing anything at all. And go back in imagination, even further than that. Go back to an even prior period, logically if not chronologically prior, and imagine yourself as it were even without any religion. Not only without Buddhism, but even without religion. Imagine yourself as it were getting up in the Thorning, doing your household work if you're a woman, going off to the office if you're a man, or wherever you work; coming home in the evening, reading a bit - a novel, newspaper, listening to the wireless or looking at the television, but being quite devoid of religion. Leading a life without any sort of religious (?) - just imagine yourself like that. And then further imagine yourself as it were, as one day, in the midst of this irreligious existence, asking yourself the question, the question with which we're concerned this evening: 'Is religion' - not even Buddhism but is religion necessary, is it necessary at all?'

Now this is the sort of question that often comes up. In the course of discussion, in the course of conversation, as you move about, as you meet people, you might be asked this as it were quite casually - it might just occur - that 'Is religion necessary?' It's the sort of question that we all have faced, and which in

fact we have still to face, if not so far as we ourselves are concerned, certainly so far as other people are concerned, we have to face it for them as it were, on their behalf. Is religion necessary? It's a question we can't ignore living as we do in this modern world, in the middle, or just after the middle of the 20th century. We have to ask it, we have to try to answer it. Now the question really breaks itself down into three questions, interrelated or interconnected questions. The first question which arises obviously before we can even hope to answer this question of whether religion is necessary, is 'What do we mean by this word 'religion'?' And secondly, when we say that it's necessary, or when we ask whether it's necessary, when we inquire whether it is necessary, what do we mean by 'necessary'? Even that isn't really obvious, even that isn't really clear. And then, necessary to what, or necessary to whom? All these questions of course are interconnected, and interrelated, like the three sides of a triangle, but we'll take them up, consider them, one by one.

First of all, what do we mean by 'religion'? Now there are very many definitions of this word, as you know. No doubt there are a number of you present who could quote all sorts of definitions of this quite protean word 'religion'. We can as it were run up and down the whole gamut from that rather sarcastic definition or description of Voltaire's, who said that 'Religion originated when the first rogue met the first fool'. That was Voltaire's definition - at least of the origin of religion. We can go at the other end of the scale, at the other end of the gamut, to Whitehead, who said that 'Religion is what a man does with his solitude'. It certainly gives us something to think about. Though today, we're not concerned, at least not concerned just now, at this stage of the proceeding, with abstract definitions, this doesn't help us very much, doesn't get us very far; just for the present at least, we'll take the word, 'religion' as meaning as covering, as a sort of collective designation for, of all the individual religions, just as a sort of collective term. We've got so many individual religions in the world. Sometimes we don't even realize how many of them there actually are. We're blind to all the others except that one in which we happen to be brought up ourselves, perhaps. There are so many religions, there's Christianity, there's Islam, there's Judaism, in the East there's Buddhism, there's Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Parsees that is; there are also modern cults like the Mormons, like the Baha'is, like the Theosophists; all sorts of tribal beliefs, all sorts of primitive cults, even all sorts of dead religions - religions of the Egyptians and Babylonians, and the Syrians, and the Phoenicians and Aztecs and all the rest of it. So let's take this word 'religion' just for the present as covering all these different systems, all these different teachings, that are popularly described as or at least generally pass current as religions.

Now when we study them, when we look them over, at least casually, we notice of course that there are very very many differences among them. We see that they can be distributed into various classes. We see that some religions are what we call 'ethnic' religions that is, they're the religion of a single group, united by ties of blood, or by loyalty to a single piece of territory. Religions like Hinduism or Judaism, these are more or less ethnic religions. And then on the other hand we've got the universal religions - religions which don't really recognize, are not based upon any distinctions of blood or soil, or culture and so on - religions like Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam these are the three great universal, world religions. Then adopting other classifications, we've got among the religions, a theistic group, a group believing in a supreme Being, a personal God, like Judaism, and Christianity and Islam, and then a non theistic group, quite a big group, not usually recognized very much in the West, that is the group consisting of Buddhism, some forms of Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism - a group which is non-theistic, not recognizing a supreme being, or personal God, or creator. Then there's even another classification - we can say humanistic: those which posit certain human values, and those which are authoritarian, those which try to impose as it were upon man, values which come from outside man himself, which are usually considered to be given by God by way of revelation. So there are all these differences among the big family of religions, some ethnic, some universal, some theistic, some non-theistic, some humanistic, some authoritarian, and so on. But even though there are so many differences, even though there are so many important differences, one does find that there are a number of features in common. And we can say that all these religions of the world, whether ethnic or universal, theistic or non-theistic, humanistic or authoritarian, they are all without exception perhaps, basically concerned or revolve around three main issues.

First of all, there's the great issue, the great question of man in relation to himself. All religions are concerned with this: man in relation to himself. Then secondly, man in relation to other men, or even in the case of some religions like Buddhism, other living beings. And thirdly, man in relation to ultimate reality. They're all concerned with these three man in relation to himself, man in relation to other men, man in relation to ultimate reality. All religions, whatever their other differences, deal with, revolve around these three main great basic issues. We can illustrate this :from the various religions. Take for instance first of all, the religion that is best known to us in this country, first of all, take Christianity. In Christianity, or according to the Christian teaching, man is in relation to himself when he knows first of all that he is a

creature, that he was created by God; when he knows that as he was created good, but that he sinned, and that on account of that, he is no longer good., but even in a sense, completely evil. Christianity of course further teaches that all men, in as much as they are children of the same father, or created by the same God, are brothers, and that therefore, the appropriate relation between them or among them is one of charity or mutual love. In Christianity of course, the ultimate reality is God, the Supreme Being, the Creator himself. And he is considered to be known, not directly, but indirectly, that is through Christ, who is regarded by the orthodox, as the son of God. Christianity of course further teaches that Christ died on the cross for all men,, and that further, if one believes this, one's sins will be wiped out, and that one will attain salvation. So one sees that the pattern, the basic pattern of man in relation to himself, man in relation to other men, man in relation to ultimate reality is quite clear in the case of Christianity.

And it's more or less the same one might say, with regard to Buddhism. Buddhism says that man is a conditioned being, he is conditioned because he is subjected to rebirth, that he undergoes this process again and again and again, of suffering, on account of birth, old age, disease and death. And it says that rebirth, either into this world, the human world, or into any other world higher or lower than this, is due to man's ignorance of the spiritual truth, and due to his craving and selfish desires, based upon this ignorance and growing out of it. At the same time Buddhism says that though man is a conditioned being, there is in him something, some element which is unconditioned, which has some kinship, an affinity as it were, with ultimate reality. And that because of this unconditioned element in the midst of his conditioned being, man is capable of attaining enlightenment, capable of realizing the truth. Buddhism further inculcates compassion for all beings, not just for other human beings, but for all beings whatsoever without exception, whether human, or animal, even for insects, because all beings are subject to the same suffering that we are subject to, all are equally sensitive. You stick a pin in an animal, it feels, just as a human being will feel if you stick a pin into it. So in as much as we all are subject to this same law, this same universal rule of suffering, of all sentient beings, we should have compassion, one upon another. We should also according to Buddhism, have respect for other beings, in as much as all like ourselves, though conditioned in this way or that way, have in them, some element, some aspect which is unconditioned, which is capable of enlightenment. So we should respect all, whatever they may appear to be right now, however bad they may be, however wicked they may appear to be, however misguided, we should respect all, because fundamentally, that same capacity, that same potentiality for enlightenment is there. Though in Buddhism of course, ultimate reality is not thought of as a personal God, a Supreme Being - Buddhism says you can't think of ultimate reality at all, it's beyond thought, it's. beyond speech. We might say conventionally, that it constitutes the 'objective' as it were, content of enlightenment, or it's what we perceive, what we see, what we experience, what we realize when all mental conditions, from the highest to the lowest have been removed or have been transcended. So we see that Buddhism also, though in rather a different way, conform to this basic pattern, just as Christianity did, of dealing with or revolving round these three great issues, of the relation of man to himself, man to other men or in the case of Buddhism to other beings, other living beings, and to ultimate reality. So that if we wanted to generalize, not only from these two religions, but from all religions, into which we haven't got time to enter in detail now, we may say, that religion consists in the achievement of a state of complete psychological and spiritual <sup>wholeness</sup> and that in that wholeness, it consists in relating to others, to other beings, and also to reality. But if we want to put it even more briefly, even more simply, Se can say that religion consists, in total concern, riot just a partial concern, a concern of this aspect or that aspect of ourselves, but in a total concern with what is of ultimate value. We can in the last resort define religion in that way - total concern with what is of ultimate value. That is religion, that is the spiritual life.

Now we come to the second of our three questions: when we ask whether religion is necessary, what exactly do we mean by 'necessary'. In ordinary parlance, when we say that something is necessaryto something else, we mean that it's indispensable it's absolutely requisite to its existence; that without that thing that second thing would die as it were, would pass away, would cease to exist. So so far as man is concerned, food is indispensable. If you don't get food, you'll die; I don't know if you realize how many days you can go without food; some people think that you can go without food for only two or three days; or four or five days. But I've known people in India who've gone without food for nearly two months - the exact length of time was 56 days, in the case of one of my friends, a Parsee doctor friend, who happened to have been one of the physicians of Mahatma Ghandi, and who managed his second fast in Poona. So this doctor fasted once for 56 days, for purposes of spiritual purification. His wife also fasted once for 46 days she herself told me by the way, that wasn't for spiritual self-purification, but because she was angry with her husband. She fasted for 46. days. But apparently if you do it for spiritual purpose you can go ten days longer! So you can go quite a long while, but you can't go on indefinitely without food, so food, one might say, is indispensable, is necessary to human life. So in the same way with sleep. You can go without food quite easily, any one of you for a week; but you can't go without sleep for more than about

48-56 hours, without actually breaking down. Sleep is even more necessary in this sense than is food. So these things are called necessary, food and sleep are called necessary because we can't do without them. Without them, human life, human existence just breaks down, we come to an end, we just die. So can it be said that religion is indispensable in the same way? Is it as necessary as food or as sleep? Well apparently not. Apparently, there are millions of people who get on perfectly well without religion at all or even if their don't get on perfectly well, at least they don't break down and die after a few weeks or after a few days. Especially in the West, especially in Europe and America, lots and lots of people - if not actually the majority- seem to get on perfectly well - or at least fairly well - without religion at all. So it would seem that for them at least, religion is not necessary; that is in their case there is no contact with conventional religion, in other words with the churches. The vast majority of people certainly in this country seem to have no real contact with conventional religion, with any of the churches whether Catholic or Methodist or Baptist or Congregationalist or 7th Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses or all the rest of the catalogue. There are lots of churches but apparently lots of people don't have contact with any church. And this seems to be one of the most significant features of life in the present century in this country. If you think back to your ancestors at the time of the Conquest or at the time of Magna Carta or at the time of the Civil Wars or at the time of Dr Johnson or Napoleon or even Victoria, your ancestors in 99.9 cases or even 99.9 cases had a close contact with religion in some form or other, some church or other, but now you have not got that. It's something quite new, something quite novel, something as it were peculiar to this century that there is no contact with conventional organized religion, no contact with the churches. The vast mass of people are sectionalized and unchurched and dechurched. It's very difficult to rechurch them or recharge them in this way; and it would seem that the language of religion, the religion as spoken by people in the churches - the traditional language of Christianity is quite meaningless to modern people; that is to say to most of us, for nine out of ten of you sitting here. Terms like for instance 'God' or 'soul' or 'sin' 'redemption' or atonement or 'sanctification' or 'justification!'. Terms which represented burning issues in the past and perhaps your great great great grandfather might have cut your great great great grandmother's throat if she disagree with him had been perfectly orthodox (?) or perhaps would have divorced her for heresy. Issues which were represented by these words just leave you cold, they don't mean anything at all. Say the word 'God', no reaction; 'soul', sorry it means nothing; sin' - well most people, certainly most young people, laugh at the idea of sin. Nowadays, redemption and the rest don't mean anything at all. It's not so much that people are anti Christian, that phase has passed. One might say that nowadays, we are post- Christian. We are no more anti God than we are anti Jupiter or anti (?); they just don't mean enough for us to be against them. So if we consider them at all, we just as it were dismiss them with a shrug of a shoulder. God is dead, well very sorry; He was a good chap while He lived but He is dead, there is no use bothering about it, one has to die some day even God so, put another nail in the coffin, put another shovel full of earth on it, just let it go out of sight; why bother any more about it. So this way traditional, conventional religion means nothing to us of very little to most of us. We've no contact with it especially in its churchified form.

But at the same time I would say that modern man (that's of course rather impressive expression; just for you and I, all of us) modern man is irreligious more in appearance than in reality. Conventional religion one might say quite frankly has become something quite flat and something quite stale. I remember not so long ago, I had a conversation with a young curate, a young Anglican curate. In fact perhaps I should not say this, of one of the churches up the road. So we were talking shop. So even Anglican curates and Buddhist bhikkhus can talk sort of religious shop. So he was asking me how long I spoke for when I gave a talk or a lecture. So I said 'usually for an hour or an hour and a quarter'. I said once at the Buddhist Society I got sort interested in the subject, I spoke an hour and 45 mins. He said 'good heavens, I never speak for more than ten minutes. In church' he said 'people aren't interested enough. He said 'your people must be interested if you can regularly speak for one hour'. Just think, according to his statement, according to his confession, at least the people who went to his church weren't so much interested in the Christian faith that they would even sit for more than ten minutes and listen to a talk about it. They just went of course to the talk sermon as they call it because that's the convention that's the tradition that has to be gone through; it's like passing round a plate at the end; you don't particularly welcome it but it's one thing you've always done; so while you listen to the sermon you put your hand in your pocket and you put something in the plate; it's all part of the routine, it's all part of the ritual as it were. It's all flat, it's all stale. So modern people are quite right in a way to lose interest in this sort of thing. Why should they be interested, there is no life in it, no vitality in it, no meaning in it, no deeper significance. So what is the point of continuing this meaningless routine, week after week, month after month. Of course, there are some good people in the churches well meaning people who still think in terms of a revival of religion, in terms of getting masses of people, tens of thousand of people back into church, sitting on those pews, sitting on those hard wooden seats or getting down on their knees on their hassocks and confessing their sins, beating their breasts if necessary, perhaps a bit gently, and confessing saying that they've done this, done that and that they are sorry. Some still think in these terms of having a revival of religion in the older conventional

sense. But it's quite impossible; one cannot really put the clock back in that way; one can never put the clock back. The hands are always going round and round, on and on, inexorably. One might wish to, one might like to.

One perhaps would like to put the clock back in many parts of the world. I certainly would like to put it back in Tibet, say ten years or fifteen years. But one can't. There are few people even in the Church of England, few people like the bishop of Woolwich they realize this. You can't put the clock back so they try quite sincerely to cope with the situation even to the extent, you know, when you're shipwrecked or rather when you are going to be shipwrecked, when there is terrible storm and the boat is full of water, what do you do? You throw overboard everything which is heavy because your life is in danger. You might even have a box of diamonds on board, you might even have a trunk of pearls, you might even have bars of gold but if it's loading the boat, if it's making it go down below the water, while if your life is in danger without any hesitation you'll throw overboard the diamonds and the pearls and the gold bars and everything because life is more precious.

This reminds me just by the way of a little story from the Scriptures. There was a man lost in the desert and he was lost there for days, and days and days. Nothing to eat, nothing to drink. So he was in desperation as it were but wandering around aimlessly blindly, he came up upon a track in the sand, the track of a caravan. So he thought thank heavens that I am saved. So he went on and on, ( ? ), mile after mile and then he saw from the distance at the end of the track, two or three dead camels and there was some loads on their backs. So he thought there must food, there must be water, I am saved. So he staggered up and clutched hold of the side of the camel and tore up the sack, opened it to get something to eat and to drink and what do you think he found? It was full of pearls. So what was his state of mind; he could not eat pearls, he could not drink pearls. When life is at stake, these things are worthless: So just the same when the ship is sinking, you will fling overboard everything; the pearls, the diamonds, the gold. So in the same way there is this ship, this good old ship, the Christian Church or at least the Church of England's boat which is sinking. Some of the timbers are pretty rotten and the water is pouring in so there are ready to throw overboard all sorts of things. So even God to save the Church, to save Christianity if possible even at the cost of throwing God overboard. That's what the bishop of Woolwich has done. He realized that the situation is critical, acute. Half measures are no good; even God goes overboard. Lightening the boat, you see, *it's* floating on a little better, at least as far as the bishop of Woolwich is concerned; he is there is sitting at the helm as it were, trying to steer it that it has become lighter.

Now if religion, if conventional religion, by even mere virtue of the fact that it's conventional, become as it were non-religion in the same way there are certain non-religious activities or certain non-religious areas of life and culture which have come to be possessed as it were of religious or a spiritual significance and value. Religious of course means as we've already seen that which contributes to the wholeness of man, which gives him some sense of ultimate values in the plural at least if not in the singular. There are lots of people nowadays who can't find this in conventional religion but who can find it to some extent, even a limited extent, elsewhere. There are some people as you probably know - may be some such people are here amongst you some people who find this for instance, say, in classical music. They get more out of that, they get more spiritual feelings, more spiritual inspiration out of that, out of Beethoven Bach, out of Mozart than they do by going to church. It's sometimes strike them as extremely odd; going to church, you feel depressed, come away flat, uninterested. But listen to a fine piece of fine classical music, a symphony or something of that sort, you feel uplifted, you feel as if you have a certain insight into things, you feel better, you feel more whole, integrated or refined. So some people get these sort of spiritual values out of so called 'secular' things. Others find it of course in poetry; whether ancient poetry or in a modern poetry. Other again find in philosophy, reading say Schopenhauer, reading Kant, reading Plato or reading even more spiritual philosophers like Plutineus. So sometimes it happens in the modern times that not only as the religious become evacuated of spiritual significance but the so called secular' is sometime more deeply imbued with the spiritual significance than the so called conventional religion. So it would seem that many modern people are not so much without religion but they derive their spiritual values not from conventional religion but from what are really, technically at least, secular areas of life and culture. We shall become as it were more - at least in some of their aspect - more spiritualized or more capable of giving spiritual inspiration, guidance even, than the so called religious of conventionally or technically religious areas.

So it would seem therefore that religion in the true sense as distinct from conventional religion, from churches and so on, is necessary for more people than one had first supposed. And because it is necessary for them, because they need it if they can't get it from the churches, they can't get it from conventional religion, then they'll get it somehow whether it's from classical music or poetry or even from other things of that sort. At the same time however one must be careful not to exaggerate; the number of people who

derive spiritual inspiration in this way is frankly limited. There are lots of people, even more people who get along not only without religion in the conventional sense, without classical music, even without classical jazz one can say, without poetry, without modern poetry, without philosophy, without any cultural interest at all; quite devoid of all that. They are quite satisfied with their home and family, their job, television, washing machine, and the rest of it; the car in their garage or at least at the curb and so on and so forth. And apparently they manage to live - or at least to exist - without any cultural interest at all in a perfectly, respectable, decent philistine sort of way. It reminds me of a line of T.S. Elliott - 'And the wind shall say they were a decent godless people.' Something of that sort.

Now this brings us to the third question which you may remember was: 'To what or to whom is religion necessary?' and this perhaps is the most important of all the three questions because it provides us with a key, with a clue, to the answer to our main question that is 'Is religion necessary?'. (Pause.) I am going to say something which may come as a surprise too; that is that religion is not for everyone. Now we're brought up of course to think that religion is for everyone, that everyone must be saved; Jesus died for all; all that sort of thing. Religion is for everyone. That's why for hundred of years missionaries have been sent forth to preach to the heathen to convert them to baptize them, to put trousers on to them, and all that sort of thing, because they must all be saved; religion is for everyone. So if one says or suggest that it is not for everyone - then for whom is it? for whom is it not? (Pause.)

And now let's begin by recording our definition of religion. In the first place, religion consists in the attainment of a state of complete psychological and spiritual wholeness. Now this implies a conscious effort. You don't become psychologically and spiritually whole if you just allow yourself to drift along. Not even if you allow yourself to drift along however regularly - to the vihara on sundays. You become psychologically and spiritually whole only by conscious, deliberate, willed, determined, regular, systematic effort or endeavour - right effort, right endeavour. But conscious effort, deliberate effort of this sort is impossible without self awareness or self consciousness. One must have attained that.

And it is this in fact one might say that which really distinguishes man from the animals. But of course it does not distinguish all men from the animals. One might even say that most people are really more animal than they are human; they are animal rather than truly human. If one surveys the whole vast world of things, or living things, one sees that there are various grades of existence that one can define existence, or existences, in various ways into various classes. First of all, the first great division: the nonliving and the living I am not going now of course into the metaphysical question of whether everything is not in the ultimate sense living, even a stone or a piece of marble living. But just as in an ordinary popular scientific way one can say that there are some things that are non living which are non living things and other things which are living things. One can take the living things and one can divide them also into two classes. There is a class of living things which is merely sensitive or vegetable world and then there is an other class of living things not only sensitive but conscious, the animal kingdom. Now conscious living beings who can be further divided in two. You've got those living sensitive beings who are: not only conscious but also self-conscious. So here is your two-fold division, the conscious and the self-conscious.

So evolution proceeds upwards through all these grades. From the non-living to the living; from the sensitive to the conscious; from the conscious to the self-conscious. So man we may say - cutting the whole thing rather short - man we may say is a conscious being in process of becoming self-conscious or self aware. (Pause.)

Now one who has become self aware - even intermittently self aware can strive to become psychologically and spiritually whole; not one who has not become self aware or self-conscious. And up to the level of consciousness, the process of evolution we may say is collective and as it were automatic; it just goes on irrespective of the individual effort made by the individual beings or existences and therefore it's very slow. While for the vegetable kingdom to evolve into the animal kingdom, we know took millions upon millions upon millions of years. For the animal kingdom to evolve into human beings took millions of years. And for human beings to develop from consciousness to a state of self-consciousness or self awareness has taken - not millions - but several thousands of years and only a few have been able so to attain. And this attainment, this evolution, this higher evolution from the conscious to the self-conscious or self aware unlike the whole previous process of evolution in nature is not collective or as it were automatic but it's individual and proceeds only through individual deliberate effort, aware effort, self-conscious effort and this of course is therefore much quicker. We can even say - it has been said rather - that there is a greater difference between an enlightened man and an unenlightened man than between the enlightened man and the animal. But to go from the state of animal to unenlightened man takes millions of years, or has taken millions of years but to go from the state of unenlightened man to enlightened man - representing

even greater difference can take even only a few years if the right effort is put in.

Now religion we recall is the achievement of complete psychological and spiritual wholeness. It's also the sum total of all those teachings, all those practices which makes this achievement of complete psychological and spiritual wholeness possible. So



So religion therefore is obviously only for those who have developed some degree at least of self awareness and who, as the next stage of their evolution higher evolution feel the need of achieving this psychological and spiritual wholeness. Now religion is for those who in this context know that they don't know, that they have not yet got this psychological and spiritual wholeness, that they don't yet know reality, who know that they don't know and who want - one might even say desperately want to know. So religion therefore is really for the minority, not only now, not only in the midst of the 20th Century but even in end time. It's for the minority at least until such times as all members of the human race - all human beings - become more or less self-conscious, self aware which they certainly are not at present as you know.

Now a question may arise: what about all those millions, tens of millions, thousands of millions of believers devout Christians, devout Buddhists, pious Hindus, strict Confucionists and so on in all the various religions and all the various churches all through the centuries, can't one say that they were 'religious'? Well strictly speaking one can't because they weren't really 'self-conscious'. They weren't really self aware, they weren't really deliberately and consciously using religion the teachings and practices and observances of religion, the particular religion to which they belong - as a means of achieving 'wholeness'. Theirs one might say, was a mere passive, semi conscious participation and sometimes one might even say they were just using religion in a fundamentally irreligious way - the masses of nominal followers; we're quite familiar with this in all religions. It's the same here in a Christian country, an ordinary Christian country like England even those who do go to church were using Christianity or participating in, aren't participating in a self aware way for the sake of their higher evolution. They just conform; they're getting some sort of emotional satisfaction, blindly, (?) half consciously.

which is quite a different thing. You go to a Buddhist country like Ceylon or Burma or Thailand or Japan, in almost all cases it's exactly the same. The vast majority are not conscious participants at all. They are just passive beneficients on a very low level indeed. So religion even when nominally professed by everybody still most of the time if not all the time is very definitely for the minority. That is because the masses tend to use religion in a fundamentally irreligious way to make use of it in a sort of semi magical way just to help get what they want. This is one of the reasons we may say for the failure of the church in becoming conventionalized in accordance with the non-religious, or pseudo-religious, needs of the masses.

I remember a little while ago I was reading a book. This book was discussing - I forget exactly the terms of the discussion - but it was I think as far as I remember the non belief of modern people in England in Christianity. Someone was writing a letter saying 'it's not the non-belief of the non Christians that shocks me, it's the belief of the Christians.' And the writer who was a woman gave two little stories to illustrate this. One story was that she met a certain woman who for thirty to forty years had been a pious Christian. Going to church every Sunday, put six pence in the collection plate, on to prayer meeting on Wednesdays, mothers' union on Fridays - all the rest of the routine and rigmarole. So this person - the letter writer had met this woman - after an interval during which the woman had been ill - so when she met her she said 'how do you feel I know you've been ill?'. So she said, in reply to the question 'I've lost all my faith. I feel so bitter to think I've been a good woman all these years, I've believed in God, have gone to church. What do you think (?) He just let me down, I've fallen sick, for three whole weeks I was suffering. I have lost my faith in God, I became really bitter about this.' So the writer commented 'It's this sort of belief which really shocks me.' And there was a similar case, another case. She met a woman coming from the funeral of her best friend, a young woman who died in childbirth. She said you know I've been a good Christian all these years but I am losing my faith. Why? Look this woman, she died in childbirth; a respectable married woman. That so and so (?) girl in the next street, she had an (illegitimate) baby and she did not die. What sort of God is this? He allows these sort of things to happen I am losing my faith, she also faith. So this woman again commented 'It's not the non belief of the non Christians that shocks me, it's the belief of the Christians that shocks me.' Because they try conventionally religious people try, the mass of religious or nominally religious people are trying all the time to use, to bend, to twist, to pervert religious teachings just to satisfy their own needs and their own desires. And because they've got control as it were, that they're sitting there on the bench of bishops and in the prebendary stalls and all the rest of it because they've got control really; fundamentally irreligious people got control of the machinery of religion at all levels that the church has failed. Or even to be quite honest in the East, Buddhist organizations also fail so far as sincerely religious, sincerely spiritual people are concerned. The churches and the sects, they very often become just as it were clubs for the non-religious and even the irreligious. The main thing is to belong to the club.

Now our main question has now been answered. Religion we've seen is the achievement - or consists in the achievement - of wholeness. It represents in more simplified definition a total concern with what is of ultimate value and it's the means to the achievement of all this. And it's necessary in the sense of indispensable to the existence of all those who are self aware, all those who are self aware and to whom the

achievement of wholeness - psychological and spiritual wholeness and in that wholeness relating to others and relating to ultimate reality are matters not of just passing intellectual interest but really of life and death themselves. Religion is necessary for such people not for others.