

Lecture 18: Why Buddhism? Sangharakshita

At present, that is to say the beginning of this new year 1966 [*portion of lecture missing*] we raised, and we tried to answer the question of 'is religion necessary?' - a question very often asked nowadays by thinking people. Now last week, last Sunday, we split this question up into three separate parts, and we dealt with these parts independently.

First of all, we investigated the nature of religion itself: what we mean when we use this word. Then we tried to see in what sense it is possible to speak of religion as being a necessary thing. And lastly, we tried to understand for what or for whom religion is necessary. I don't want to go over that same ground again this afternoon, but I will just very briefly recapitulate the conclusions we reached at the end of that talk for the benefit of those who were not here last week, as well as to remind those who were, and this recapitulation will give us a sort of point of departure for today's talk.

After discussing the meaning of religion, we saw that it meant essentially the achievement of a state or condition of psychological and spiritual wholeness, and also in that state of wholeness, relating to others, to other people, as well as to ultimate reality. We saw further that rather contrary to what people usually think, or what they usually take for granted, we saw that religion isn't necessary for everybody. Religion is necessary for those who have begun to be self-aware, and who want, in who ardently desire to embark on a higher evolution to psychological and spiritual wholeness, in other words, religion as we've already defined it.

Now let us suppose, let us take for granted, let us assume that we are self-aware. Let's suppose that we're not just propelled, not just motivated by instinct or custom: suppose we really are self-aware; suppose we really are considering our place in the universe, our place in the whole great system of existence, in the whole scheme of things. Supposing we're trying to understand that; supposing we're trying to understand what is the meaning, what is the purpose of life itself? Why are we here? And supposing, being self-aware in this way, suppose we make up our minds that we wish ourselves to pursue the path for the course of the higher evolution. Suppose we want to achieve wholeness, that is psychological and spiritual wholeness in the full sense, at the highest level as it were, and supposing so wishing, we want to have recourse to religion as we've already defined it, for this purpose. For then we find that we're confronted, as also we saw last week, towards the end of the talk, we're confronted by a rather serious problem. We're confronted by the fact that religion does not exist in the singular, though we have so far been speaking of religion, and the necessity of religion; we find in fact that it doesn't exist at all in the single, but only, very bewilderingly so, in the plural. We find that there isn't just religion existing in the world, but we find that all over the world there is a plurality, a multiplicity, an immense variety of religions. Thus to speak of the world as a whole - even if we take this one great city of London, within a few miles of this very place, we can encounter, not only Christian churches, not only other Buddhist organizations, we can encounter also representatives of Islam, of Hinduism, of Judaism, the Bah'ai, the Theosophists; there are so many groups, so many sects, so many churches, so many schools, so many religions in a word, represented even in this one city of London, not to speak of the world outside as a whole.

So the problem which confronts us, or the difficulty which confronts us is 'which one, of all these to choose?' Even supposing, even assuming that we do come to the conclusion that religion is necessary for us as a means to our own higher evolution, our own achievement of psychological and spiritual wholeness, even assuming that we do come to this conclusion, and we try to lay hold of religion as it were, then this question arises 'Which one? - this one, that one

or another one? How are we to choose? How are we to come to a decision in this matter?' Most of us who are here this evening, who are sitting here, most of us, to some degree or other, more or less definitely, have chosen Buddhism. But the question arises 'Why? Why Buddhism? Why this particular teaching?' This is the question with which we're concerned today. 'Why Buddhism?' rather than some other teaching, some other system, some other religion.

Well before we go into this main question of the evening, we'll briefly consider one or two preliminary questions, because these are not only connected with the main question, but they are also of some importance in themselves. First of all, there's the whole question of choice, selection itself. Should we be free to choose at all? Should we be free to choose our own religion ourselves? Some people think not - the choice is to be made by some other authority, not by ourselves. And some even say that we shouldn't think in terms of choice at all, we should simply follow that religion into which we happen to have been born. If you're born in a Christian country, follow Christianity; in a Buddhist country, follow Buddhism; in a Hindu country, follow Hinduism; in a Confucian or Taoist country, follow those religions. That's one school of thought, or one tendency of thought: that one shouldn't try to make one's own individual free choice, but that one should simply follow the religion nearest to hand, the one into which as it were, one has happened to be born. Well this particular view, as I can testify from my own experience, is very strong indeed in India. In India, one will hear this sort of idea expressed all the time. I myself have been asked by Hindus why, having been born into a Christian family, I abandoned Christianity, and took to Buddhism? And when I tried to explain the reasons, Hindu friends have told me 'Well that doesn't matter, you should have stuck to Christianity, after all you were born into that' as though that is the last word on the subject. So this idea is very strong in India among Hindus. It is strong of course, because it is connected, linked with the caste system. The word which we usually translate when speaking about Buddhism or speaking about Hinduism as religion, in the original Indian language is of course *Dharma*. But in each of the systems, each of the teachings that have sprung up on the soil of India, the word *Dharma* has a slightly different connotation. What it means for Buddhism we know already, or we should know, at least to some extent. But so far as Hinduism is concerned, it's got a rather different connotation from what it has in Buddhism. In Hinduism as you know, there is a sort of socio-religious tradition which we call the caste system. It's a really complex question, there's no time to go into it in detail, but broadly speaking, we can say that there are four main castes. Actually, in modern India, there are about two thousand separate castes, but theoretically at least, they can all be classified under the four, and the four are, starting from the top, the class of the Brahmins, the priests and teachers, although nowadays often you find them doing very different kinds of work; secondly the Kshatriyas, the land-owners and rulers, warriors; thirdly the Vaisyas, that is the shopkeepers, traders and merchants, sometimes peasants; and fourthly the Shudras, or labourers - the menials, the servants, the coolies. The out-castes, including the Untouchables, about whom I've spoken on other occasions, they come outside this system altogether - they're lower than the low as it were.

Now the Hindus have the view that appropriate to the caste to which you belong, there is a particular kind of duty of religion. So they speak of *Dharma* in terms of those customs, those practices, those duties, appropriate to the caste into which you happen to have been born. For instance the *Dharma* of the Brahmin is to teach. The *Dharma* of the Kshatriya is to fight. The *Dharma* of the trader, the Vaisya, is to make money, and the *Dharma* of the Shudra is to serve the other three castes. And Hindus hold that it is a sin to depart from the *Dharma* of the particular caste into which you happen to have been born. Orthodox Hindus for instance hold that that the Buddha committed a great sin in as much as having been born into a Kshatriya family, that is a warrior family, instead of devoting himself to fighting, he took up the *Dharma* of the Brahmin, and actually had the temerity to teach religion. So in this way, the orthodox Hindu view is that

a person should confine himself to the practices of Dharma appropriate to the caste into which he happened to have been born. And this idea is very deep-rooted, and that's why they tend to think that if you're born a Christian, you should remain a Christian; born as a Buddhist, you should remain a Buddhist. That's the sort of idea they have. In this connection, I remember a rather amusing story from South India, which shows how deeply rooted this sort of idea goes. Now the story relates to an old woman in South India. And this old woman apparently had been converted to Christianity. There are many Christian missions in South India, and quite a number of Christians of various churches. So apparently the old woman had been converted by one of these churches - I think it was the Methodist, or the Baptist church, something of that -sort. So what happened, after some months, Christmas came round, so the Padre, the Missionary said to his converts 'On Christmas day, you have to come to Church. There won't only be a service, there'll be a big feast for all of you, so come to church, and after that we shall have the feast'. So they all came, and amongst others the old woman also came along. So she sat through the service very happily, and afterwards when the Padre or Missionary looked round, he found that she wasn't there at the feast, so he went searching for her; so he found her separately by herself. So he said 'Why aren't you joining in the feast?' She -said 'I'm not going to sit there with all those low caste people'. The Padre said, 'but look here, you're a Christian - you've embraced Christianity, so you're following the Christian religion now, so how is it that you refuse to sit with these other Christians, who might have been low caste before, what does it matter?'. She said, 'Yes, it's true, I might have become a Christian, that's very true, I have become a Christian, but that doesn't mean I've given up my Dharma.' So in this way the word Dharma is used colloquially, even today, to signify, to mean these very practical observances of untouchability and so on and so forth appropriate to the caste to which one belongs. Now sometimes it happens, I need hardly tell you, that the religion into which one is born, doesn't suit one. The son is not necessarily the same height, the same build as the father. The father's suits don't necessarily fit the son. So it's just the same with religion. Your father, your mother might have been Christians, or they might have been Buddhists, they might have been Hindus, they might have been anything, but their religion does not necessarily suit you.

Very often, it may, but on a number of occasion, in a number of cases, it may not fit at all. One may not have any sympathy for this or that reason, with the religion into which one has been born. So what are such people to do? Supposing we do find ourselves in this situation - we've been born as a Christian or born as a Buddhist, or born as anything else, but we find that the ancestral religion doesn't suit, so obviously, we must be, we should be free to choose some other teaching.

In ancient times this was hardly possible. One just didn't know about other teachings, other religions - one knew only that into which one had been born. But nowadays the world has become as it were smaller; knowledge has expanded in many ways; horizons have widened. We might even say that a sort of global culture almost is beginning to develop - nowadays in this country since the last war, one can find so many people who are learning to appreciate for instance, Indian music or Indian dancing or Chinese poetry or Japanese prints - - things of this sort which were hardly heard of before the war, at least not heard of by ordinary people. So this is as it should be - every human being nowadays, in whatsoever country he lives, should have some contact with, some appreciation of the cultural traditions, the cultural products of countries other than his own, and especially in the West, we should have some knowledge, some appreciation, of the great cultures of the East. Well it's just the same in the sphere of religion and philosophy - we shouldn't limit ourselves just to culture, to the arts - we should be pursuing our search in this sphere of religion and philosophy. We should try to acquaint ourselves with the very highest achievements in these fields, regardless of the place of origin of these achievements. It is really incumbent upon us, we may say, to know, for instance, the philosophy of Shankhara,

the great Vedantic Hindu philosophy, as we know the philosophy of Plato, and to be acquainted, to be familiar, with the sayings of the Buddha, in the same way that we are familiar with the sayings of- Christ. Cultural and religious parochialism, we may say, has really no place in the modern world. We shouldn't just adopt exclusively what lies nearest to hand: we shouldn't think, that just because we've been born a Christian, that we've got to be a Christian; that we've been born as a Buddhist, or a Jew or whatever it may be, that we must belong to that. We should have a look round, see what else there is in the world. Any other attitude we may say, is unworthy of a thinking and reflecting human being. But after having had this look round, after having surveyed the religions and philosophies of the world, it may well be that we decide that after all we will continue to follow the religion into which we've been born - this might- in fact happen very often. But we won't then be following it just because we happen to have been born into it - we won't be following it out of ignorance as it were, we shall be following it out of Positive choice, even after we have known and appreciated the other teachings.

on the other hand, after making a general survey or study, of other religions and other teachings, we may be attracted by the teachings of a religion other than that into which we have been born - and then of course we should be free to follow that if we so wish. This brings me to another question - quite an important one - that is the question of religion in schools; or rather one might say, the teaching of religion in schools. I do know that some of our younger Buddhists have got rather strange views on this particular subject, and I remember that in a summer school held by the Buddhist Society last August at (?) this topic was discussed in a number of the discussion groups which were held then; one might say that not everybody saw eye to eye on this particular topic, but there did seem to be a general consensus of opinion and feeling that there should not be any attempt to impose upon the child the religious beliefs of the teacher. As you probably know, nowadays religious instruction usually means the teaching of the Bible in schools. And generally, one may say, it is done in a rather dull and unimaginative sort of way. Very often, it is done by someone who doesn't believe in those particular teachings at all. I remember in my own case, when I was at school, we were usually taught the Bible by a teacher who was an atheist; we were taught - we were taught mainly by him for several months and the way in which he taught it was certainly not conducive to any kind of faith in Christianity. One can say that he simply ridiculed what he was supposed to be teaching. So this is the sort of thing which can happen. But even if one doesn't find an extreme case of this sort, the fact that the Bible is taught, or that any religion is taught by someone who doesn't really believe in it, can have one may say, a very dreadful moral effect upon the mind of the child. Children are very perceptive, very quick to understand whether you really believe what you tell them or not. Those of you who have children of your own will know this. Very often you have the experience of being asked questions by your children, and you know quite well that you can't very easily fool them You might think that you've just sort of palmed off some explanation which you think may satisfy them, but which you're not really satisfied with yourself, it may be one time, a question of general knowledge, or science or anything you like - but the child will always detect that sort of ring of lack of conviction in your voice, and your slight sort of uneasiness, and the child will know instinctively, intuitively that you don't really believe what you're saying, and that will undermine your authority with the child. So it's just the same with the teaching of the Bible in schools - the child is all the time subtly aware that the teacher doesn't believe what he is saying. The teacher might, with his conscious mind try to put it across. But if he doesn't fully accept it, if there's some lurking doubt in his own mind, or if he's even critical of what he's supposed to be teaching, that doubt or that lack of conviction, that hesitation will communicate itself to the child, and it may be that the child is left with a sort of impression that his whole business of religion is fundamentally dishonest, and that's why I say that this sort of teaching of the Bible or any religion can have a really dreadful moral effect. It will almost convince the child that anything to do with religion is dishonest; so that people are not honest when they discuss with

each other; so the child will as it were by degrees be put off religion, lose interest in it, think it something in the course of which honesty and sincerity are not possible. So that's why I feel, why I think-many people feel, that this sort of religious instruction, or this sort of denominational religious instruction or sectarian religious instruction, should be replaced in schools, by the study of comparative religion. This has already been done I know, in the case of some schools. Sometimes here we get invitations from schools to give lectures on Buddhism, and we are told when we receive the invitation that the sixth form, or some other form, is having a series of talks on comparative religion - that is the great religions being dealt with one by one. So this an extremely healthy sign, an extremely healthy development. And instead of trying to ram the tenets of one particular teaching down the children's throats, what is more necessary, what is more required, is that the teachers concerned should try to arouse the interest of the children in, and the sympathy for the spiritual quest as it were, of man himself. They should try to show to the child that the questions which are dealt with by religion are important questions, and that the children themselves will one day have to face these problems and attempt some sort of solution. They shouldn't just try to hand them one particular religion as it were, ready-made. There should also be an emphasis on the fact that the acceptance of a particular religion is a personal matter; it's a matter where everybody has to make up his or her own mind, and one cannot as it were take one's religion ready-made from some other person. Even if one does accept the religion into which one has been born, one must as it were, remake it or remould it in the fire of one's own personal conviction and experience. So obviously a very valuable change is needed in the orthodox Christian attitude towards religious instruction, both in this country and in other Western countries. Very often, the impression prevails that if you've got a lot of children coming along for religious instruction, well, there's your opportunity. If you're a Baptist, well you can get them for the Baptist church; if you're a Catholic, you can get them for Catholicism; if you're a Methodist then you can get the unfortunate children for Methodism. So this is the idea -that you have to recruit them into your own church, to swell the band of your own believers. This is the usual attitude among Christian bodies. In some quarters admittedly, some improvement has set in, but it hasn't, we must confess frankly, hasn't gone nearly far enough - there still is this very competitive sort of attitude and attempt.

Now before we get onto the main question, there's just one more question that we have briefly to consider, and that is: why we should choose at all, as between the different religions. Some people say: 'well browse through them all, have a look at them all and take what appeals to you from each one; take a bit from Christianity, a bit from Buddhism, a bit from Hinduism, and make your own - what the Indians or what the Hindus call 'kedgerie' I don't know whether you've heard that expression but 'kedgerie' means a sort of dish made up of all sorts of oddments - you've got a bit of rice left over and a bit of cabbage and a bit of potato - you mix them all up and you stew them together, and you produce this 'kedgerie'. So some people try to treat religions like this, and this sort of attitude is known as 'eclecticism'. It may seem plausible, intellectually, it might seem a good idea, that yes, one should try to garner whatever is best in all the great religions. But in practice I find that adopting this attitude, one cannot really get very far in the spiritual life -it's a rather superficial attitude. Because usually, people simply take what they want, what appeals to their prejudices, what flatters their preconceptions; they're not really able to take what they need from a spiritual point of view. In fact usually they don't really know at all what they do in fact need. So eclecticism of this sort usually involves a sort of evasion of the real issues of the spiritual life. If we want seriously therefore to practise religion, we have to practise according to a particular discipline, a particular tradition. Supposing for instance you want to practise meditation. Well you can't just sit down and meditate - you have to meditate according to a particular system of practise; according to a particular discipline belonging to a particular religion; one can't just meditate. So therefore the choice of religion is important, because otherwise, one can't get onto a definite path, can't take up a definite system of practise, and one

therefore just dithers along, and doesn't really get anywhere.

Now the main question which arises, which we have to deal with this evening is: 'Why Buddhism?' Sometimes, we decide, or have decided to make this choice, but why Buddhism rather than any of the other religions? First of all, let's survey, or try to survey briefly, rapidly, the whole field: let's try to see how many religions there are in the first place for us to choose from. Now we'll leave aside the dead religions, or the so-called dead religions - it's the people who followed them that are dead of course, not the religions themselves. I suppose no-one is likely to want to follow ancient Egyptian religion - worship Isis and Osiris; no-one is very likely to want to follow the ancient Greek religion, and worship Apollo or Mars, though in fact of course, people are doing that sort of thing all the time really. So ignoring or passing aside the so-called dead religions, we've got altogether I would say, some ten or twelve independent religions at present existing in the world. Now in more or less chronological order, they are, in the first place, Hinduism; a very ancient religion, the indigenous religion of India, based on a set of scriptures called the Vedas, the four Vedas. In modern times, Hinduism has been represented to the West by three prominent thinkers - that is by Swami Vivekananda, by Sri Aurobindo, and by Dr. Rama Krishna. The writings of these three great Hindu thinkers of this century, have made familiar to most educated people, the main, the basic teachings of Hinduism: all rather complex, I won't try to go into them today.

Secondly, we have Zoroastrianism. This is one of the religions of ancient Persia, founded by the sage Zoroaster. It's a dualist system - a system which posits two fundamental principles in the universe - the principle of good and the principle of evil. It's man's duty, his moral and spiritual duty-, to side therefore with the forces of good in the universe, and thereby help ensure their eventual victory. Zoroastrianism was displaced. in Persia by Islam many centuries ago, Practically wiped out there, but it survives among the thirty thousand or so Parsees of Bombay. I have personally and number of Parsee friends in Bombay, and have had the opportunity of coming rather close to their religion. They are rather exclusive though - they don't allow non-Parsees into their Fire Temples, and if a Parsee marries a non-Parsee, he or she is at once excommunicated. So they are a little rigid in that way.

Then we come to Judaism. Judaism of course is the religion of the Jewish people, the Hebrew race, and for two thousand years it has had no homeland until very recently. The Jews regarded themselves as being the people chosen by God, and they believe they have that kind of special relationship with him.

Then next on the list we have Jainism. Jainism was founded by Mahavira, an elder contemporary of the Buddha, who received the title of 'Jina' or 'conqueror' - the one who conquered mundane existence. So Jainism is called after Mahavira, the Jina or conqueror. It's sacred books unfortunately are mostly lost - we don't know very much about this teaching, at least in its early form, but we do know that it advocates a very strict nonviolence, carried out to extremes, and a very rigorous asceticism, as the main path to emancipation, or salvation. It's confined to various parts of India - you've got Jains in Rajasthan, in Mysore, and also in central India.

Then, very much farther afield, one discovers Taoism - yet-another religion, one of the indigenous religions of China, ancient China. Origin ally, Taoism was a very sublime mystical philosophy, but in course of time it became corrupt and degenerate, and in modern times, the name Taoism attaches to a system of what we may call crude popular magic and superstition; very little better than that.

Then we have Confucianism. Confucianism is complementary we may say to Taoism. It's a

system of teaching systematized by Confucius who lived about the sixth century BC, and it is mainly what we may describe as a comprehensive code of social morality.

Then of course we have Buddhism. I'm not going to say anything about that particularly, and after Buddhism, Christianity, about which also I don't propose to say anything special.

Next on the list Shinto. Shinto is the indigenous national cult of Japan, and it consists in various practises of purification, both physical and mental, and of nature worship.

Then after that we have Islam. Islam, the word Islam literally means submission - submission in this case to God. It's very often referred to as 'Mohammedanism' because it was proclaimed by Mohammed in the seventh century, but Moslems themselves very strongly object to their religion being called Mohammedanism, because they say it didn't originate with Mohammed, it originated with God himself - Mohammed was only its prophet or revealer Islam is an uncompromising monotheism of a particularly rigorous and even one might say intolerant kind. Its sacred book of course is the Koran which is regarded as being quite literally the word of God, dictated by God to Gabriel, by Gabriel handed on to Mohammed,

Then after Islam, we have another religion, Sikhism, which was founded by Guru (?) in India in the 13th Century. This is more or less monotheistic, and highly devotional. It was refounded by the tenth Guru in the 17th Century - refounded as a sort of semi-military brotherhood, which is what it is today. Most of you must have seen Sikhs in their picturesque turbans and their beards - they are all followers of Sikhism, the religion of Guru and Guru (?)

Now apart from these religions, there are quite a number of modern what we may call 'fringe' religions or cults, representing various degrees of eccentricity and eclecticism. We're going to leave those aside - they're far too numerous to mention and perhaps not particularly rewarding to mention. So for practical purposes, our choice we may say, is limited to the eleven major religions mentioned, that is Hinduism., Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Jainism, Taoism and Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity, Shinto, Islam, and then, lastly Sikhism, For all practical purposes, our choice is limited to these eleven really great, important, major religious-systems of the world. So why Buddhism - that is the question which we are considering.

Now we are not considering this question as it were in the abstract - considering abstract pros and cons, or arguments for and against. We're considering it much more concretely - considering it as it confronts us as it were here in this- country today. Why Buddhism, or why follow Buddhism - why do we follow Buddhism in preference to any one of the other ten great religions. So let's just begin to answer this question. If we look down our list, our list of eleven religions - Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and the rest, we find that they fall into two great groups - I touched upon this last week. First of all they fall into the groups of the ethnic religions, and the universal religions. Now 'ethnic' means 'pertaining to a group of people united by ties of blood and ties of soil;' sometimes also by ties of language, but not invariably so. So ethnic religion is the religion professed or practised by a particular ethnic group, and an ethnic religion is inseparable from the indigenous culture - the culture that is to say of the country and the people amongst whom it arises - it's not separable.

Now a prominent example of an ethnic religion is Hinduism - that is the most prominent example. Hinduism is an ethnic religion. because in the first place it's -the religion of the people, the majority of the people of India. Apart from Indians living over .seas in various parts of the world, it's limited to India, to the soil of India, it's not a proselytizing religion, and is inseparably bound up with Indian culture, even with Indian geography one might say, Indian social life,

institutions and customs. You can't as it were disentangle Hinduism from all these things. Now Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Taoism and Confucianism and Shinto - these are all ethnic religions. Zoroastrianism, bound up with the soil of Persia - they trans- planted the religion and ethnic group in Bombay; Judaism, bound up originally of course with the soil of the Holy Land, but after that with the Jewish race, the Jewish people; and then Taoism and Confucianism confined or limited to China, and Shinto in the same way to Japan. As regards Jainism and Sikhism, these were not originally ethnic religions, but they have become in the course of centuries such; Jainism is the religion nowadays of just a particular caste of people, contained within Hinduism, and Sikhism almost the same, though. originally they were intended to be more universal religions.

Now one may say that it is characteristic of ethnic religions that by their very nature, one cannot be converted to them. One can sometimes marry into them - especially it's easier for a woman to marry into them, if she marries a man belonging to that particular ethnic religion, then usually she is accepted into that religion, except in the case of the Parsees as I've said. But generally speaking, the only way in which one can belong to an ethnic religion, is by being born into it; you have to be born a Hindu, or you have to be born a --Zoroastrian, born a Jew, born a Taoist or Confucianist, and so on. That's why we never have any actual cases, I'm sure you can't any of you, remember any cases, of anyone converted say to Taoism, or converted to Shinto, or converted to Zoroastrianism. Nowadays, in the United States, one does occasionally hear of conversions to Judaism - usually through marriage, but such conversions are limited to the liberal or reformed branches of Judaism - you certainly don't get people being converted to orthodox Judaism; they probably wouldn't have you even if you did want to be converted to them.

So one begins to see that one's choice as among these different religions is already rather restricted; you can't be converted to, you can't choose an ethnic religion; in a sense it has to choose you in the sense that you have to be born into it. So therefore, if one wants to make a choice, one is really in effect confined to the universal religions, because universal religions are religions which are explicitly preached, not only for one country, not for people of one race, or one ethnic group, but potentially, to people all over the world, to men simply as human beings. That's why they are called universal religions. Sometimes they are called 'founded' religions because they all go back to individual founders. Sometimes they are called 'missionary' religions, because they all go out and try as it were to convert other people, or at least to explain themselves to other people all over the world.

So we've seen therefore that in one's choice among these various religions, these eleven religions, one is in effect confined to the universal religions. One hasn't really the capacity one might say to choose one or another of the ethnic religions, while the universal religions to which our choice in practice, is narrowed down, are only three in number; that is Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. So if the question of choice arises at all, practically speaking, concretely speaking, it really means making a choice between these three religions: either being a Buddhist or being a Christian, or being a Moslem. Theoretically, you can wish to embrace Taoism or Confucianism, but that's all theoretical or abstract as it were. - In concrete practical terms only Buddhism Christianity and Islam confront one, and among these one must choose.

Now if we Look at these three great universal religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, we find that they in turn divide themselves into two groups: one group having two religions in it, the other having one religion in it. First there is the group of the theistic religions, theistic universal religions, the other of the non-theistic universal religion. 'Theos' as you know means 'God' that is a personal God, a supreme being, creator of the universe. so 'theistic' means 'pertaining to the belief in such a God of Theos'. Now. Christianity and Islam, are both of them systems of theism.

They both posit, or they both accept a personal God, a supreme being, a creator of the entire universe Guardian of the entire universe. So Christianity and Islam are both theistic religions. And the fact that they are such we may say, affects their whole nature, and their whole character.

Now Buddhism on the other hand, the sole representative of the non-theistic universal religions, is non-theistic; In other words in Buddhism, there is no place for a personal God, a supreme being or a creator. And in the 'same-way that the fact that Christianity and Islam are theistic, affects the whole character or nature or structure of these two religions, in the same way, the fact that Buddhism is non theistic, affects its whole character nature and structure also. I don't want to labour this particular point of theism and non-theism, because I've already dealt with it, or touched upon it in a number of talks and lectures previously in the course of the last year or so. But I will say that this is really the basic issue. In other words, the issue of theism, of theistic religion, versus non-theism or non-theistic religion. Now at present so far as this talk is concerned, I'm not arguing the respective merits of these two positions. I'm not trying to decide or determine whether theism represents the truth, or whether non-theism represents the truth. So far, I am being merely descriptive. But the fact is, that Christianity and Islam are theistic religions, and Buddhism is a non-theistic religion.

It is also a fact, and an important fact, a very striking fact, a very significant fact, that today, in the West, an increasing number of people, we may say of religious minded people, find it more and more difficult to accept theism: the theistic form of religion. And we may say then that this question of 'Why Buddhism?' is not to be answered, in fact cannot be answered without reference to this fact. That is to say to the fact that more and more religious minded people in the West, in this country too, find it increasingly difficult, to think of religion, to think 'of the spiritual life, in terms of theism, in terms of belief in God. I'm quite sure that-most of those who are sitting here, and who would wish to be Buddhists, or who think of themselves as Buddhists, have chosen Buddhism rather than Christianity or rather than Islam because among other reasons, but this being the most important of all, because Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, a religion which talks the language of religion, talks the language of the spiritual life, talks the language of enlightenment without any reference to God, without any reference to a supreme being, a creator. And I think it is very important to grasp this point - that one of the major attractions, if not the major attraction of Buddhism in the West, is that it does provide people with this sort of system, with this sort of teaching, a non-theistic religion.

Not very long ago, I was looking at a book by Julian Huxley called 'Religion without Revelation' and there is a chapter called 'Personalia' where he talks about himself. -It's a sort of chapter of autobiography, and he relates how, when he came as a young man, to the understanding, to the realization, that there could be religion, religious life, without a personal God, this understanding, this realization came to him as a sort of tremendous relief, of 'Thank heavens!'. It isn't as though one is suspended between religion -and God, and no God, and no religion on the other. Not that. It isn't that- one is forced to make this almost impossible between these alternatives But here, religion and God, and there, religion without God, on both sides, equally religion, spiritual life. So he tells what a tremendous relief this was to him, that there could be a form of religion without God.

So it's very important to grasp this point - to grasp this point that one of the major attractions of Buddhism for the -modern mind, for people in this country, is the fact that it's a complete system of religion, of spiritual life, of enlightenment, but without the personal God which so far in the West, people have considered indispensable to religion, as in fact being part of the very definition of religion itself. So I suggest that we shouldn't attempt in any way to water down this fact, this difference. Sometimes we are over afraid of scaring people off; sometimes people come along,

they ask questions, sometimes they ask rather timidly 'What does Buddhism- say about God?'. Well one might be tempted to think 'Well, look here, perhaps this person believes in God so if I say, well, in Buddhism, there just is no God, it might be a rather nasty shock'. So one might be tempted to compromise and say, 'Well, em, er, Buddhism doesn't use the word God, but it talks about Nirvana, and enlightenment, and that's about the same thing you know-, what you call God, we call Nirvana. So it's alright, don't get worried.' So this is the sort of approach that some people in the goodness of their heart, are tempted to employ. It's true of course that one should take people step by step and stage by stage, in easing them from the known to the unknown. But one shouldn't in doing this betray the cause of Buddhism itself. One must be quite clear. If people want theism well it's up to them; they've a perfect right to choose theism if it appeals to them. But at the same time one should make it perfectly clear, that Buddhism is a non-theistic religion otherwise, we're simply guilty of slipshod thinking, even of intellectual dishonesty. If one really puts it as crudely and bluntly as this, 'that, well, it doesn't matter what you call it, you call it God, we call it Nirvana' it shows that one hasn't really understood what the Buddhists - mean by Nirvana, or even what the Christians mean by God. As I've said, this is Tea' ly the basic issue. And I would go so far as to say-, 'even to predict, even to prophesy, that the whole future of religion in the West, that is Europe or America, is bound up with this issue - that is with this issue of theism and non-theism; theistic religion and non-theistic religion. Lots of thinking people realize this already. I've referred to Julian Huxley's *Religion without Revelation*. So, religion without revelation, what does it mean? It really means non-theistic religion, because revelation is bound up with the idea of God, the idea being in the theistic system that God reveals himself to humanity, and that revelation of himself to humanity, either through his Son, or the messenger or prophet that he sends, is the of religious life. So religion without revelation really means religion without God, and as in Buddhism there is no revelation, there is no revelation of truth from God to man. Instead we have in Buddhism discovery and realization of the truth by man by his own efforts. So one sees the difference, one sees the contrast: in the theistic: religions there's God revealing himself to man; in the non-theistic religions there's man discovering the truth for himself by his own efforts.

Now I'm not one of those persons who likes to recommend, or to try to recommend Buddhism to non-Buddhists by describing it as a scientific religion - I think this is actually a misnomer, and based on great confusion of thought. At the same time one can say that there's a certain analogy in a way between Buddhism and science, even though their respective fields and their methods are rather different. We may say that both Buddhism and science represent an effort to ascertain the truth. Science of course is concerned with the truth about material phenomena; it's concerned with scientific truth; while Buddhism is concerned of course, not with scientific truth, but with spiritual truth, but inasmuch that this spiritual truth is to be discovered and realized by man himself, there is this analogy as it were with science. And for this reason, because it speaks in these terms of discovering of spiritual truth, and the realization of spiritual truth by man, Buddhism places a very great emphasis indeed on personal experience of that truth., direct experience of that truth. This we saw- last year when we had our series of talks on Zen Buddhism which some of you may remember: we saw that Zen was a special transmission outside the scriptures: no dependence on words and letters, direct pointing ,to the heart or the -mind of man; seeing into one's own nature, realizing Buddhahood. So this is the emphasis of Zen - on direct experience, But in one way or another, it's really the emphasis of the whole Buddhist tradition. And this is why in Buddhism, we may say, meditation is so important. This importance of -meditation represents we may say, the practical corollary of the general nature of Buddhism itself; because meditation is regarded as a sort of avenue, sort of royal road leading to the direct experience of truth or reality for oneself.

Now Buddhism as many of you know; is very rich in system of meditation, These will be dealt

with in detail in a later talk. in this series, but some of you will Be familiar with some at least of these systems already- - the system known as the 'mindfulness of breathing' and the various visualization exercises, either of abstract forms- -. colours and so on, or the different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, those of mantra recitation and so on - these are some of the better known, more popular forms of meditation.

Now one can go, one could go on indefinitely pursuing the implications of the fact, or ramifications of the fact that Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, but this isn't really necessary. Once one grasps the fact that Buddhism is non- theistic, and that it therefore emphasizes the importance, the value of direct experience, personal experience of reality, the importance of- meditation, and all the rest of it - these all follow as it were, automatically. Once one grasps the fact that Buddhism- is a non-theistic religion. One might put it in terms of the popular proverb and say, that if one grasps hold of the bull by the horns, then the tail of the bull comes along of its own accord. So in the same way, if one grasps the fact of the non-theistic character of Buddhism, then its emphasis on experience, the importance which it attributes to meditation and all these other characteristics, they follow automatically.

So now we can as it were review our position. We may say, reviewing, or recapitulating, that if we do wish, as many of us do, if we do wish to have recourse to religion as a means to psychological and spiritual wholeness, we're confronted by a choice among no less than eleven major religions. And if we examine them-, if we go into the matter more deeply, we find that eight are exclusive because they're ethnic religions into which one has to be born, and that leaves us with the three universal religions: that is with Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. And these three fall into two groups, two categories: the theistic and the non-theistic. Christianity and Islam belonging to the first, Buddhism and Islam belonging to the second. So this really-means that if one cannot think of religion, if it's impossible for one to think of religion in theistic terms, there's no practical alternative really but to choose Buddhism.

So this is the basic answer, the essential answer we may say to this question 'Why Buddhism?'. We choose it basically and essentially because it is a non-theistic universal religion. Because it's non-theistic, there's no question of revelation; it stresses discovery, realization of spiritual truth by man, by his own efforts; emphasizes personal experience and gives importance to the practice of meditation. So we choose it for these reasons too. We also choose it, many of us, because it's a non-dogmatic teaching, because it's a tolerant teaching, and also because of its **very** rich cultural traditions and associations Also we may say, Because of its comprehensiveness, even its all-comprehensiveness; the fact that it embraces not only metaphysics and psychology, But art, and ritual and yoga and a dozen other things also. But all these considerations. we may say, are really secondary or even tertiary. The basic, the essential reason as I must emphasize again why we choose Buddhism is because it is a non-theistic system of spiritual self-development.

Now having chosen, having made that choice, having committed oneself in this way, having decided the matter once and for all, another question arises: how are we to get to know this teaching, this tradition, this religion, properly, if possible perfectly, how- are we to approach it, how are we to get near -to it? So this is what we shall be dealing with next week. Next week, the subject of our third talk in this series 'Introducing Buddhism' will be on 'The approach to Buddhism'.

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