21: Evolution: lower and higher

Friends. The lectures which we've been having over the last few days, both live and tape recorded, have been independent - that is, they don't make up a series. As from today, as from this morning, we shall be having a series of talks. We shall develop a connected theme. And we shall be having them live every morning. The general title of the whole series is simply 'Introducing Buddhism'. That was the title of the very first talk we had. That introduced Buddhism from a rather different point of view, and very very briefly, but this will be a much more extended introduction which will try to take in a very much more Buddhist teaching, manage to give one a very much more detailed picture, a very much more comprehensive idea.

Today's talk has the title of 'Evolution: lower and higher', and the rather mysterious chart or diagram that you see on the blackboard is designed to illustrate certain points in that lecture, in fact it's designed to illustrate in a way the whole skeleton, the whole structure, of the talk this morning.

Now as we approach Buddhism, as we try to become acquainted with it, one of the things that strikes us first, perhaps, is the need, is the necessity, for taking of it, for taking of Buddhism, a very broad and a very general view. In fact it's necessary, we may say, for us to try and have of it the broadest and most general view possible - to see it, if we can, all spread out in front of us, as it were, at once. Nowadays we do find that so much of our knowledge is piecemeal. We know a little bit of this, we know a little bit of that, but all these little bits of knowledge don't link up. There's no interconnection between them, they don't link up into a single system, a single network, of thought, a network of ideas. We know everything just in bits and pieces. This is the age, this is the era, of specialization. And you all know the well-known definition of the specialist: the man who knows more and more about less and less. And this is the predicament that only too often we find ourselves in.

And sometimes one is surprised when one is having contact with people to find how much they know about so little, and how much there is that doesn't fall within their purview at all. An engineer, for instance, may know all about engineering. He may be able to build you a bridge, if you want one, or a house, if you can afford one. But he knows absolutely nothing about the arts, perhaps never even heard of Shakespeare, certainly never heard of Salvador Dali or anyone like that - he's completely oblivious of all these things. And in the same way, if you take the artist, well, the artist might be able to paint you a picture, if you are able to commission one, or make you a pot. But probably the artist couldn't build you a bridge or design you a house or do something of that kind - again, completely oblivious. The politician knows only politics; the literary man knows only literature; the scientist knows only science; the man who follows the humanities knows only the humanities; the sociologist knows only sociology.

So this is the modern sort of tendency. We tend to cover just a very tiny field, you know, just a little bit, and we don't have any general, any all-embracing philosophy of life within which everything is included. And this sort of situation, this sort of problem, presents us, we may say, with an acute difficulty. People are not satisfied with having their knowledge piecemeal. They're not satisfied with these little bits and pieces. It's as though they had just four or five pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and all the rest of the pieces are missing, and they don't know what the picture is supposed to be - they've got little coloured bits, just two or three of them, they haven't got all the other pieces, so they haven't got a total picture of anything.

And therefore we often find nowadays that people are searching for a more comprehensive world view which will give some sort of meaning and some sort of significance to their lives. They want to find all the other bits of the jigsaw puzzle, and they want to put them all together, they want to build up a picture and see what it is all about. Otherwise they feel completely lost and completely confused, in the dark. So we find that people do go on searching. Sometimes they turn to the traditional systems of the past and the present, more authoritarian systems perhaps, which will profess to explain everything. They have an answer to every question. Some people,

for instance, in this way turn to the Roman Catholic church. They feel that the Roman Catholic church is an ancient and a venerable institution, and in the course of two thousand years it's worked out all the answers - it's got an answer to everything, from the immaculate conception to the pill. It knows all about everything. You've only got to buy a copy of the catechism and there it is - all the questions are there, all the answers are there, a complete philosophy of life. So some people turn to this, and they find, perhaps, everything fitting in.

Others turn to Marxism in its various forms. Here also they find something comprehensive, something comparatively all-embracing, quite a grand sweep, that explains everything in simple terms, in terms of economics, in terms of supply, in terms of demand, and so on. And then again others turn to another quite comprehensive system: humanism. The humanistic movement, we know, nowdays is growing rapidly. You've even got humanistic marriages and humanistic christenings and humanistic burials now, which means that they're turning into a sort of religious system themselves. So some people do turn to these more comprehensive, more all-embracing systems, which do offer, or profess to offer, a whole complete philosophy of life, and to explain everything.

But others are not, perhaps, so easily satisfied. Even those who turn for some time to one or another of these systems are not altogether satisfied. Only too often they discover some inconsistency, some irrationality, some absurdity, something which they feel they can't accept, something which constitutes for them a stumbling block. Or else they find that there's some aspect of themselves, which they know very well because they experience it, which falls outside the system, and which the system just doesn't explain, which the system just doesn't satisfy. So therefore they decide to go on to something else, to continue the search, to continue looking. So sometimes they turn aside from these older, these larger, these more established movements and systems, and they try some of the smaller groups. Some may try, for instance, theosophy. Others may turn to spiritualism. In our own meetings up and down the country quite often we find we get spiritualists coming along, and very often they're a bit dissatisfied with spiritualism, and they're still looking for something more, something a little deeper, as it were. Others again turn to Christian Science, or they turn to Vedanta. Maybe the groups in which they become interested, and which they start investigating, become smaller and smaller; and eventually perhaps some of them turn to Buddhism, which of course in this country, and in the West generally, is a very small movement indeed.

So we find that this is the sort of quest, this is the sort of search, which is going on nowadays so far as a great number of people are concerned. They explore system after system, teaching after teaching, group after group, trying to find some consistent philosophy of life which will give meaning to their lives, which will validate their aspirations, which will make them feel positive and progressive. And some people change many many times. And I recollect in India I knew a woman who claimed to have changed her religion seventeen times. She'd started off as a Roman Catholic and she'd worked her way through the Vedanta and the Swedeborgian church, and the Ramakrishna Mission, and by the time I knew her she was a middle-aged woman, and at that time she was a Seventh Day Adventist. But she was dissatisfied even with that, and she was thinking of changing, but there was nothing else to change to. She'd been everything in the course of seventeen years. And she was dissatisfied with the Seventh Day Adventists' system because it prohibited the consumption of tea. And I remember a very amusing episode - this was whn I was in Kalimpong - when I was visiting her once and we were having a quiet and apparently simple cup of tea together, and suddenly there was a knock at the door and she turned pale. And she said, 'My God, that's the minister!' and she hid the teapot. And shortly after that we lost track of each other. I believe now she's in Australia, but which religion she now follows I just don't know.

We may laugh at all this, but in a way we even ought to cry, because we might say it is really very pathetic, because people are all the time searching for the truth. And it's only for this reason that they're searching, that they keep up the search, that they go through all these systems and all these groups. Now it may well be that some of you have had this sort of experience at least

to some extent. You might not have changed your faith seventeen times, but I imagine that quite a number of you have sampled in the course of your lives - in some cases not very long lives - at least two or three teachings. Some I know have been along to the School of Meditation and other groups functioning in London, and in this way, from this group to that group, one eventually, it appears, comes into contact with Buddhism.

Now when we encounter Buddhism we discover that Buddhism represents really a very comprehensive system of thought - I'm not very satisfied with this word thought, but it's the best that we have for the time being, so let's just make use of it - a comprehensive system of thought. That's what it really is, that's what it essentially is. But when we come into contact with it concretely, when we come into contact with actual Buddhist groups, actual Buddhist individuals, despite the comprehensiveness of Buddhism in principle, what do we find? We find only too often the same sort of piecemeal approach that characterises the whole of modern knowledge.

If one takes for instance this question of schools. There are lots of schools in Buddhism - not exactly sects. You've got the Theravada, you've got Zen, Tien tai, Gelugpa, Kargyupa, Mahayana, Vajrayana, and so on. But very often one finds that the followers of one school of Buddhism, in the East, even in the West, know very little about some at least of the teachings of some of the other schools. I've had in the East quite a lot of contact with Theravada Buddhists, Theravada monks also, of Ceylon and Burma and Thailand, and I was rather surprised at first to find that they knew absolutely nothing about Ch'an or Zen. In the vast number of cases they just hadn't heard about it at all. And in the same way, if you meet Zen monks, even Zen masters, you'll find that probably they haven't heard about the Theravada and they know nothing about it at all. And this is the sort of situation by which one is confronted. In the East the followers of each school know the traditions and teachings of their own school, but usually they know very little, if anything at all, about the teachings and traditions of the other schools to which they do not belong.

And this sort of piecemeal approach we may say is reflected in a very great deal of the literature available in English on Buddhism. Very often what professes to be a book on Buddhism is really a book about the teachings of one particular school of Buddhism, the version of Buddhism put forward by one particular school. You very very rarely get a presentation of the whole field of Buddhist thought in all its richness, in all its efflorescence. So far as I know in fact there are in English only two serious attempts to cover the whole field of Buddhism in a single volume. The first one of course is Doctor Edward Conze's 'Buddhism: its essence and development', which in the course of 250 very succinct and very well written pages covers practically the whole ground, and mentions in some detail all the important schools and all the important teachings. And the other one in English is of course my own 'Survey of Buddhism', which is about twice as long and which goes into even more detail than Doctor Conze himself does. But apart from these two works one finds that other books on Buddhism don't cover the whole field, but only a part of the field. Either they're about Theravada or they're about Zen, but Buddhism itself they don't really deal with, not totally, not completely.

One finds the same sort of piecemeal approach, even, to the doctrines and practices of Buddhism. Very often one gets a very well-written account of one aspect of Buddhist teaching, one particular set of doctrines, but they're not related to other aspects of the teaching, not related to other doctrines. For instance - just to mention an example without going into details - the teaching about duhkha, the unsatisfactoriness of all conditioned existence is treated usually without reference to another highly relevant doctrine, that is of the Tathagatagarbha, or the seed of potentiality, of Buddhahood, in all sentient beings. So what one usually has, or what one is usually presented with, or confronted by, is a number of teachings, independent, not properly related, all suspended as it were in mid- air, without any overall framework, any overall context. One might know all about the Four Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Twelve Links, the Seven Bodhiangas - but how do they all fit together? How do they all add up to a system? How do they all combine into something comprehensive, even universal?

Worse even than this, we sometimes find that some doctrines and teacings are truncated in modern times. You're not even given the whole teaching, the whole doctrine - you're given only half of it, and you have to make do as best you can with that. The most notorious example, the most glaring example of this sort of thing is the very great teaching, in fact the central Buddhist teaching in a way, of what is called the pratitya-samutpada, the chain of conditioned coproduction, or dependent origination. And this is quite literally cut in half. And in all modern expositions of Buddhism, practically, you're given just half, one half, and not the other half. You're given the negative half, as it were, but you're not given the positive half. You're given the twelve links, which pertain to the round of existence, the wheel of life, which is the wheel of death and of rebirth at the same time, but you're not given the twelve links which pertain to the progressive path of spiritual development. All these teachings are found, of course, in the texts, but in modern expositions they're not fully presented - only half the teaching is presented. In this particular case the lost half was restored from the Pali texts first of all by that great Pali scholar Catherine Rhys Davids, then another Indian scholar, Dr Benin Modhasbora (?) - he contributed towards it - and then I myself in my Survey tried to round it all off.

So this is the sort of thing that one finds - that even when one is given a certain teaching, in most books on Buddhism only too often one is given only half the teaching, so one isn't properly able to understand it, or to see where it fits in the total system. On the practical side again we find that very often people try to practise meditation without some knowledge of the general principles of Buddhism. One can of course do this up to a point, providing one restricts oneself to the purely psychological aspect of meditation, but if you want to go into meditation as a religious practice, a religious exercise, a spiritual exercise, then one has to have some understanding, some knowledge, of the general spiritual framework or context. In the East it doesn't matter so much, because there the whole of life, the whole of society in a way, is a context for that, and if one has a good teacher, one doesn't need to know very much about the doctrine intellectually. But that sort of situation doesn't pertain here, we're not supported by our environment, so when we want to take up the practice of meditation in a religious sense it is important that we should have some knowledge at least of the general framework of thought, the general context of teaching, within which the practice of meditation takes place. Otherwise we remain at the level of profane psychology merely.

Now this is all as it were introductory, and is intended to draw attention to the fact that we ought to try to understand Buddhism as a whole, in all its aspects, all its parts, and to see these parts as integrated into a perfect as it were system. The great Western philosopher Hegel said: 'The truth is the whole.' So what we're going to try to do this morning is to place Buddhism itself in the broadest possible context, and to see it in the most far-reaching perspective. And this context of course has to be one which is familiar to the modern mind, so that we have a better chance of understanding Buddhism itself.

Now if there's anything that strikes us about Buddhism it is that it's a very vast subject indeed. There's a great deal of it. It's very difficult to get round it all. Buddhism covers an enormous area of human experience, so that when we speak of finding a context for Buddhism itself we mustn't take this expression too literally. It isn't like finding a big box into which we can put a smaller box. What we really mean when we speak of finding a context for Buddhism is finding a principle which is in the first place sufficiently familiar to the modern mind as not to require much explanation, if any, which appears more or less obvious or self-explanatory; and two, which is capable of being generalise in such a way as to provide a medium for the expression of Buddhism. In other words, what we require, what we are looking for, is a universal principle of which within its own field Buddhism is, or will be, an exemplification. And at the same time, by the inclusion of Buddhism, the significance of that principle itself will be more fully revealed.

Now so far as I can see there is only one principle of modern knowledge, or only one principle known to the modern mind, which is capable of functioning in this way, and that is the whole concept - this very important modern concept - of evolution. It is so familiar in a way that I need not say, perhaps, this morning, very much about evolution itself, or evolution in general. And

of course we realise now that evolution, the doctrine or theory of evolution, was not discovered by Darwin. It was anticipated by a number of thinkers: by Kant, by Hegel, and others - according to some, even by Aristotle himself. But Darwin was the first to trace the operation of this principle of evolution in detail within a particular field of knowledge ie within the field of biology.

And since then the ramifications of this evolutionary principle have been discovered to extend throughout the universe, that evolution is a general concept. Evolution applies to everything, not just to life, not just to living forms, not just to biology, but evolution is a universal principle. And therefore we find Julian Huxley writing that 'the different branches of science combine to demonstrate that the universe in its entirety must be regarded as one gigantic process, a process of becoming, of attaining new levels of existence and organisation which can properly be called a genesis or an evolution.'

So we see that this concept of evolution covers the whole of life, the whole of existence. The whole of life, the whole of existence, is not just existing. It's at the same time evolving. So man is a part of the universe. Man is a part of nature. Man is not something separate, not something apart from the rest of creation, as the theistic religions usually teach. So inasmuch as man himself is a part of existence, a part of nature, man himself also comes under the operation of this great process of becoming. Man himself is in process of attaining new levels, not just new forms, of existence and organisation. Man himself is an evolving and developing being.

Now any evolving phenomenon, anything that evolves at all, anything that develops, that grows, can be studied in two different ways. We can study this evolving phenomenon in terms of its past and in terms of its future - in terms of what it was, the origins out of which it grew, and in terms of what it will be or can be, that towards which, or into which it can grow. In other words we can study any evolving phenomenon in terms of its origins and in terms of its destination or its goal. The first method of study, or the first method of explanation, is called the genetic, in terms of origins; and the second is called the teleological, in terms of purpose, in terms of aims, in terms of goals.

So suppose we take this phenomenon man, with which, of course, we are comparatively familiar. And suppose we take this phenomenon man at the very best that we know him. Suppose we take the self-conscious or aware human being. Suppose we take someone who is intelligent, perhaps of above average intelligence, who is sensitive in the sense of being aware of the reactions and responses of other human beings, sensitive so far as nature is concerned, responsive to nature, and also ethically responsible, morally responsible. So if we take such a human being, man at the best that we know him, this self-conscious or aware human being, we find that we can look at him in two ways, or we can try to understand him in two ways. We can try to understand him in terms of what he has developed out of, and also in terms of what he will or can develop into, or in fact what he is in process of developing into.

Now the first of these - that is to say the whole process of development from what man was to what he is now - this constitutes what we call the lower evolution. The second - from what man now is to what he can be - this constitutes what we call the higher evolution. Now the lower evolution is dealt with by science, especially the science of biology, by anthropology and so on; and the higher evolution, the process of the higher evolution, is covered by the religions of the world, and especially by Buddhism.

Now all this may sound as if it's becoming rather complicated, rather difficult to follow, so let us start thinking now diagramatically. Let's start thinking in terms of a picture. And I'm going to ask you to imagine a right angle triangle, which is simple enough. And if that's difficult, well, just look at the board, where you'll see a right angle triangle. And this is our simple chart. This is going to make it all very simple and easy and obvious. I'm afraid the chart itself is a bit of a do-it-yourself job. Perhaps later on one of our artist friends will really get down to it and produce something really splendid.

So let's just look at this right angle triangle. We'll see there are various points marked along the hypotenuse, which are numbered, and various segments of the hypotenuse which have various letters affixed to them. Now point 2, halfway up the hypotenuse, represents our aware human being, our intelligent, sensitive, responsible human being. That's point 2. Now the section of the hypotenuse 0 to 2, this represents the whole process of the lower evolution; and then 2 up to that symbol - which some of you will probably recognise - of infinity, the 8 standing on its side as it were, 2 to infinity represents the whole process of the higher evolution. So these are the two main divisions, the two main sections - the lower evolution, 0 to 2, the higher evolution 2 up to infinity.

Now each of these two sections can be divided again in turn. So in the middle of the lower section, right in the middle - or it should be right in the middle - you find point 1. This is the point at which consciousness emerges, the point at which the animal becomes human. Of course, animals do have a sort of rudimentary consciousness, but here we're thinking of consciousness in its specifically human form, especially self-consciousness. So this is the point at which consciousness, human consciousness, emerges, halfway through the process of the lower evolution. And then we've got point 3. Point 3 represents the point at which transcendental consciousness or awareness emerges in comparative fullness. In a rudimentary form, in the form of just flashes of insight, it can emerge even before that, but at point 3 it really and truly emerges in a decisive manner. So point 3 represents the point of what the Hinayana calls Stream-entry, or what the Mahayana calls the stage of irreversibility from which you cannot fall back. So point 3 is the point of non-return, non-return of course in the sense of modern rocketry, not in the sense of ancient Buddhism - the point which having reached you can't fall back, you can only go on, you must only go on. We'll go into that a little later on.

So we now have three points - point 1, point 2 and point 3, which divide the hypotenuse of our triangle into four sections. Now if we include the points made by the two angles - down there and up there - we have five points altogether. So point 0 represents the starting point of the whole evolutionary process. For physics this is the sub- atomic unit; for biology it's the amoeba. And point 1, as I said, represents the point where consciousness, human consciousness, emerges. Point 2, the point at which self-consciousness or self- awareness emerges - and may I say that most of us are just a bit below point 2. And point 3, the point at which transcendental awareness emerges, or awareness of reality. This is the point of conversion in the true sense. And infinity, that point represents the point of Nirvana, full Enlightenment or Buddhahood. So these are five points strung out along this hypotenuse of the right angled triangle.

As you see there are four letters against the four sections, into which these five points divide the whole line. So section or segment A represents the infra-human, the evolutionary process below the human being. In other words it represents the mineral, the vegetable and the animal kingdoms - they come in section A. And then in section B there's the human, the human world, both primitive and civilised. Section C is what we may call the ultra-human, where the human as we know it is carried to the highest possible pitch of perfection; but D represents the superhuman or the transhuman, that which goes far beyond any form of humanity that we can conceive, even perfected humanity.

So in this way we see, with the help of this chart, that the whole process of evolution is covered, from the amoeba down there through man - unenlightened man - up to Buddha or Enlightened man. So we see in this way that science and religion, the lower evolution and the higher evolution, are embraced in a single vast, all-comprehending sweep. And this surely when we contemplate it is a very inspiring prospect, and it enables us to understand ourselves better than ever before. It helps to make sense, we may say, of human existence. We can begin to see just where we are, just where we stand. We can see that we occupy this middle point in the evolutionary process - this is where we are, this is how far we've come. But we can see with equal clarity that we still have a very long way to go, a very long way indeed. But though we may have a long way to go we can advance joyfully, because we can see now exactly where we are, where we have to go, along what line, in what manner, and so on. There's no need for

doubt, no need for bewilderment, no need for confusion.

Usually, of course, this is our state. We can compare it to that of a man who suddenly wakes up in an inn. Just put yourselves in this predicament. Suppose one day you wake up and you find yourselves in a strange place. You find yourself in an inn. You wake up in a strange bed. You can't remember how you got there. You don't know where you are. You don't know what the place is. You realise it's something sort of temporary - people are coming and people are going. It's not your own place. You don't know on what road it is. All you know is you've just woken up there and you don't know how you got there. So you are bewildered and confused. And this is our usual state. We find ourselves in the midst of human existence - well, here we are with a body, with two eyes, with a mouth and a nose, with thoughts. Here we are in the middle of England, dumped down in the middle of the twentieth century. How we got here we don't know. What caused it, what brought us here, we just don't know. We just find ourselves here. We just wake up here, and here we are. So where are we going? What is our path? What is our road?

But suppose, suppose this person who wakes up at the inn meets someone who puts into his hand a map. And he looks at the map and he sees that it gives a complete picture of the country. He sees the road at the side of which the inn is situated. And he realises that he's come from a certain place and he's going to a certain place, he's come so far, he's got to go so far, and then he knows what to do. There's a certain meaning and a certain purpose in his activity. He knows he has to pack up, he knows he has to leave that inn and get to his destination.

So this is very much our own situation, our own position, when we see things as clearly, perhaps, as they are depicted, as they are represented, in this diagram or in this chart. This is what happens to us when we've placed our lives within this context of evolution in general, and the higher evolution, spiritual evolution, or Buddhism in particular. We know where to go. We know where we stand. We know where we have to go and we know the path which we have to follow.

Now let's try to restate this more fully in terms of the traditional Buddhist terminology. I mentioned a little while ago the teaching or the doctrine of pratitya samutpada, the conditioned coproduction, the dependent origination. And we may say that this corresponds very well to the modern conception of evolution. Pratitya samutpada is the law of universal conditionality, that one thing arises in dependence on another, grows out of another, if you like. In traditional Buddhism the pratitya samutpada is not usually invoked as a cosmological principle, but there's no reason why it should not be. In fact we find in the Digha Nikaya of the Pali Canon a very long sutta, a very long discourse, delivered by the Buddha, which deals with the evolution of the universe and the origin of man. It isn't very well known, but there it is if we only care to study it.

Now those of you who've heard talks on this subject before know that there are two types of conditionality distinguished by Buddhism within the one general conditionality represented by the pratitya samutpada. There's a cyclical type of conditionality which represents a process of action and reaction between factors which are opposites, and then there's a spiral type of conditionality which represents a process of action and not reaction, but augmented action between factors which progressively augment each other, so that the succeeding factor doesn't react to the opposite of the preceding one, but carries it a stage or a step further. As I've said, I've covered all this ground many times before. I don't want to go into details now.

Now the samsara or the round of existence, the wheel of life as depicted in the Tibetan version of the wheel of life, this corresponds to the cyclical type of conditionality. And the path and the goal, these correspond to the spiral type of conditionality. Probably one needs to go into this a little more in detail to make it fully comprehensible, but I think I've said enough for my present purpose, so let's try to relate this now to our chart. We may say that the lower evolution, 0 to 2, is governed by the cyclical principle, the cyclical type of conditionality, and the higher evolution, 2 to infinity, is governed by the spiral principle which constitutes the path. There's no time to go into this in detail, but we may say 0 to 2 corresponds to the samsara, and 2 to infinity

corresponds to the spiritual path, the path of the higher evolution. And the point infinity itself corresponds to nirvana, or to Buddhahood.

Now there's one other important thing that we have to understand, and that is that the whole of the lower evolution is what we may call collective, whereas the whole of the higher evolution is what we may call individual. And this is why the development of self-consciousness or self-awareness or mindfulness is so important, because it's the growing point, the starting point, of the higher evolution. Amongst lower forms of life, those that occur in process of the lower evolution, we find that the different members of particular classes, particular species, don't outstrip as it were one another. They go forward as a group, as a class - there's no real individuality. But in the case of man, and in the case of the whole of the higher evolution, one individual form can go ahead, can go very far ahead even, of all the rest. One man can outstrip other men. And this is why we find that one human being can for instance go all the way up the higher evolution to Buddhahood even though nobody else goes along with him. One human being by himself can do just this.

We may that it's as though self-awareness generated a tremendous energy sufficient to carry one in a single lifetime right the way up all the succeeding stages of evolution, the whole process of the higher evolution - and we'll come back to that in a few minutes just before we close. But we should also correlate what we've said so far, what we've explained so far, with the four noble truths. There isn't very much time for this but very broadly speaking we may say that the first two noble truths are covered by the lower evolution and the second two noble truths are covered by the higher evolution. We'd better leave it at that for the time being, going into it perhaps in some detail a little later on.

Now Buddhism we may say, broadly speaking, is concerned exclusively with the higher evolution of man, the higher evolution of man. And this comes out very clearly in the Buddha's reply to a question put to him by his aunt and fostermother, Mahaprajapati Gotami. Apparently she'd been very confused by the conflicting versions of his teaching given already in his own lifetime by his own disciples. So she came straight to the Buddha himself and she said, 'What do you really teach? How can I know what you really teach? Here are these disciples of yours going round the whole of India practically. One says you teach this, another says you teach that - how am I to know? What is the criterion, what is the principle for finding out?' So the Buddha said to her in reply, 'Gotami', he said, 'Those teachings concerning which you can assure yourself that they lead to sedation of cravings, to development of the higher consciousness, to peace of mind, to liberation, of those teachings which have this sort of tendency, this sort of forward, progressive, upward tendency, of these teachings you can assure yourself that they constitute my Dharma.'

So this is the criterion that the Buddha gives. This is the principle that he lays down. And it isn't always appreciated. Sometimes Buddhists think of the spiritual life in a rather one-sided, a rather exclusively negative manner, as the abolition of the whole of the lower evolution, and then they just leave it at that. You just root out everything that is lower in yourself, and you leave it at that. But if we look carefully at the scriptures, as for instance Mrs Rhys Davids has done in many of her books, we see that the Buddha spoke of the spiritual life in terms of positive growth, and of man himself as involved in a process of becoming more, not less, of journeying by conscious effort towards what Mrs Rhys Davids usually very picturesquely calls, with a capital M, the Most.

Now of course in the total spiritual life both negative and positive aspects are present, but perhaps the positive emphasis is more helpful than the negative. If we look at the four brahma viharas, for instance, we find that they express the will towards the higher evolution. The first brahma vihara is love towards all living beings. It's a desire for the growth, the evolution, of others. Then there's karuna or compassion. This is the feeling we have towards people who are not growing, whose growth is stunted, who can't evolve. And thirdly there's mudita, sympathetic joy. This is the joy to see others growing. It's like when you go out into the garden and you are

happy to see the flowers growing and blooming and blossoming, everything springing up in the springtime and the early summer. It makes you happy to see this process. So in the same way when you see other people, other human beings, evolving and growing, you feel happy on that account. And then the fourth brahma vihara, upeksa or equanimity. And when the process of growth has been accomplished, you feel very happy, very satisfied with that. You as it were take your rest - not resting on your oars but just balanced in this higher state of spiritual equilibrium.

But perhaps we can say that the will to the higher evolution is embodied most clearly and most beautifully in the figure of the Bodhisattva, the one who dedicates himself to the cause of universal Enlightenment, of cosmic emancipation. We may say that the will to Enlightenment, the arising of which makes the Bodhisattva a Bodhisattva, represents the whole principle of higher evolution become as it were fully self-conscious. We've no time to pursue this in detail. We've done it in a way recently in the course of the lectures given at Centre House on aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal. There we saw that the bodhicitta, the will to Enlightenment, was the dominant factor not only of the Bodhisattva Ideal itself but perhaps of the whole of the Mahayana, even the whole of Buddhism. And within this present context we can see, we can understand, why that should be so. So it isn't necessary perhaps now to go into details. Confucius, you may remember, said on one occasion, 'If I give you one corner of the subject, I expect you to be able to grasp the other three for yourself.'

Now from the Bodhisattva to the Buddha there's only, as it were, a step. As our chart shows, as our diagram shows, we ourselves occupy an intermediate position in the scale of evolution. Point 0 shows us what man has been. Infinity shows us what man can become. So the Buddha is as it were the forerunner, because he's got up as far as there, towards that point infinity. And therefore the next two talks in this series will be devoted to the Buddha, the forerunner. And tomorrow we shall be saying something about the Buddha, and asking if he was man or superman. And the morning after that we shall be saying about the Buddha, God and Reality.

But before closing this morning there's just one question which I should like to put. I'm not going to ask you to answer it now, but just to think it over. We've seen that there are five points scattered along the hypotenuse, and you've understood, I hope, what they represent. But there's another point which is unaccounted for, and that's the point made by the right angle. So the question is: What does this point represent? Just think it over, and then at the end of the series, or perhaps later on in the series we shall see to what extent your ideas square with my own on this subject.