

Tape 23: The Buddha, God and Reality

Sangharakshita

Friends. We know, even from our ordinary experience of life, that there are many different ways in which we can look at the same thing. There are many different angles from which we can view it, many different points of view. Not only this, but we can also look at one and the same object, one and the same phenomenon, from as it were, different levels of existence, different levels of experience, even different levels of reality. For instance, we can look at a thing from, say, the standpoint of time and we can also look at a thing from the standpoint of what we may call eternity above and beyond, or outside, disconnected from time altogether. In the first case when we see a thing, or when we see things as processes we see them in terms of space and in terms of time. And in the second case, when we see things, as it were, in the dimension of eternity, we see them not as processes, we see them as unchanging realities, as we may say, outside space and outside time. Now when one says 'unchanging' one doesn't mean that those particular objects, those particular phenomena remain unchanged, as it were, within the time, within the temporal process, but one means that they are outside time, above and beyond time in a different dimension altogether.

Now, this sort of double standpoint, this sort of seeing things in time and space, and seeing them also, at the same time, outside time, outside space, seeing them as it were in eternity, under these two different dimensions, in these two different ways, from these two different points of view, this sort of double standpoint is reflected in the central thesis of one of the most important of all the early, in fact medieval schools of Buddhism. That is to say the Sarvastivada. The Sarvastivada is the principle Hinayana school of India, it was the dominant school in India, so far as the Hinayana was concerned, for well over a thousand years. And its teachings, subsequently, were very influential in China, in Japan, in Tibet, and so on. Now people often wonder what the name, or what the term Sarvastivadin means. It literally means, 'those who teach that all exists', 'sarva' is all, 'asti' means existence; so all things exist — sarvam asti'. So, 'Sarvastivada', they who teach that all things exist. Now what does this mean? What did the Sarvastivadins mean by teaching that all things exist, one might think that it was pretty obvious that all things exist, so there must be, obviously, some more recondite, some more mysterious sense or meaning to their thesis that all things exist.

Now, 'all' here, the sarva - all, means all dharmas and this of course at once raises the question of what one means by a -dharma. The word dharma is one of the most ambiguous words or terms in the whole of Buddhist literature, the whole of Buddhist thought. When we say dharmam, or dharmam saranam gacchami, here it means the teaching, the doctrine of the Buddha. But dharma also means truth, it also means law of the universe, or reality. It also means an idea in our minds, it also means cause. And also in Buddhist philosophy, more technically, a dharma is a sort of ultimate element, and especially it has this meaning in what is called the Abhidharma. The Abhidharma is the more advanced form of Hinayana Buddhist thought, and the Abhidharma analysis the whole of existence into a number of elements, a number of ultimate elements, irreducible elements, elements which can't be reduced to anything else. So it is form of what (Sarvapali Ralakrishnum?) calls pluralistic realism. He holds that reality is, as it were, plural. That if you analyse and analyse you can get down to a certain, given, limited number of ultimate elements, some mental and some material, which are called dharmas. And the whole of existence, the whole of conditioned existence, according to the Abhidharma, is simply various combinations, various permutations of these irreducible and unchanging dharmas, or ultimate elements. So this is the Abhidharma point of view, and this is what is meant by dharma, a phenomenon in the sense of an ultimate element of existence, whether physical, whether material, or whether mental, or even spiritual.

Now, the dharmas, are, as it were, in a process of flux, or they make up a process of flux. They come into existence, they remain in existence, they go out of existence.

Now the Sarvastivadins maintained that though dharmas came into existence, remained in existence, and then as it were flashed out of existence, they Sarvastivadins maintained that there was all the time something, some element in them which did not change. And they

expressed this by saying that in the dharmas there were some elements, some substratum, some substance if you like, which remained the same throughout the three periods of time. It's as though there was a past phase, a present phase, a future phase of that particular phenomenon, that particular dharma, but it was as though, at the same time there was a substratum underlying those past, present and future aspects which lasted all the time. Which was in a sense eternal. And therefore they gave expression to this insight, or this understanding of theirs in the expression 'sarvam asti', everything exists. In a sense, everything is existing all the time. The past phase, the present phase, the future phase come and go but underneath that there is a substratum of each individual thing which is not subject to the temporal process.

Now this is all a bit obscure and a bit scholastic. But this was the central thesis of the Sarvastivadins and we can perhaps have some understanding of what they were trying to get at. They didn't, perhaps, express themselves very well, their whole procedure, their whole scholastic procedure was often very cumbersome,, not to say clumsy, and they did eventually land themselves in a species of what is called substantialism, which in Buddhism is regarded as a sort of heresy. They got into difficulties and they had to be rescued by the Madhyamikas, another school of Buddhist thought, a Mahayana school of Buddhist thought, who solved the problem with their doctrine of sarva dharmas sunyata. Their doctrine that all these dharmas, all these ultimate elements of existence and experience, these were themselves Sunyata, Void. Or putting it another way, were in their depths both unreal and real. Sunyata after all is Reality, which is beyond time, so to say that the dharmas are essentially Sunyata, is to say that in their innermost essence they are above and beyond time. So in a way the Madhyamika teaching isn't unlike that of the Sarvastivadins, except that the Madhyamikas, perhaps, were more skilful in their way of expressing it and more in accordance with the true Buddhist tradition. But both of these, both the Sarvastivadins, and the Madhyamikas, they try to do justice to these two ways, these two different ways in which a thing can be looked at. That is to say that it can be looked at as within time, or functioning within time as a process within time, and that it can be looked at also as an entity, if you like, a reality, existing out of time. That one and the same object can be seen from one point of view as phenomenon and from another point of view, if you like as noumenon. But we may say that the Madhyamika, had on the whole a much more profound approach and they eventually identified the two, that the phenomenon is the noumenon, noumenon is phenomenon, Sunyata is rupa, rupa is Sunyata, as the Heart Sutra tells us.

However all this, we may say, is introductory, and also by way of illustration. For the last two mornings we have been dealing with Buddhism in terms of process. In other words we have been dealing with it in terms of time. We have been dealing with evolution lower and higher, which of course is a process taking place within time. And we have seen that the Buddha, for instance, is to man, even highly evolved man, very much as man himself is to the Amoeba. In other words the Buddha represents the goal of human development, much as the human being, we may say, represents the goal, ultimately, of the Amoeba's development. And then again, on a very much smaller scale, on the smaller triangle within our big triangle we saw that just as the man of genius is the forerunner in terms of aesthetic sensibility and general higher culture, in the same way the Buddha is the forerunner of the human race with regard to spiritual development, with regard to Enlightenment. So all this, all this material represented by these first two lectures, evolution lower and higher, the Buddha man or superman, all this material represented also in terms of the chart or the diagram, all this is very interesting and very important, but it represents, we may say, only half the truth. We look at things, or we have been looking at things these last two mornings in terms of time, in terms of evolution, in terms of development, in terms of progress. So that is only one point of view, we now have to start trying to see things in terms of eternity. In other words we now come today to the other half, the other point of view from which things can be seen, from which they can be observed.

So today we are dealing with the subject of the Buddha, God, and Reality. In other words, now we are trying to see, trying to understand, trying to study Buddhism not in terms of time, not in terms of progress and growth and development, or evolution from the lower to the higher, but in terms of eternity. We are trying to see the Buddha now not as the culmination of

a process occurring within time, we are trying to see him today as occurring, as it were, outside time altogether. In other words whereas for the previous two mornings our approach has been more evolutionary, if like e scientific, today it will be perhaps more metaphysical, even more mystical. are a familiar with the main details of the life of the Buddha, we know that the Buddha was born in the Lumbini garden, we know how he was educated, we know how he left his home, know how he gained enlightenment at the age of thirty five, know how he preached his teaching, his discover, know how he founded his Sangha and we know how finally he passed away. We know this, we understand all this quite well. But there is one thing that we don't always understand, or at least that we don't always bear in mind, even if it does occur to us, and this is the fact that the life of the Buddha, the biography of the Buddha deals in a sense with two quite different people. Deals with two quite different people. One we may call Siddhartha, the other we may call the Buddha. And these two people, dealt with by the Buddha's life, the Buddha's biography, these two are divided from each other by the event, the fact of the Enlightenment. Up to the Enlightenment Siddhartha, after the Enlightenment, the Buddha. Of course we usually do understand quite well that the Buddha's Enlightenment was the central event of his life. But in what way do we usually think of it? We usually think as the Buddha's life rather like this, here was the Buddha at home, living with his life and his child, and then he goes forth, so there is a little sort of ascent, he goes a bit higher. Then he practices meditation in the jungle, yes, then he sits down at Bodhgaya after five years, gains Enlightenment - there's a little slope, and then like that. This is how we think, graphically, of the Buddha's life, as it were. In other words the Enlightenment is a peak with a gentle slope up to it and a gentle slope, perhaps, down, from it. So this rather illustrates the way in which we think of the Buddha before and after the Enlightenment. The way in which we think of Siddhartha and the Buddha. We tend to think that the Buddha, after his Enlightenment, was more or less the same as if he was before except of course that he was Enlightened. And we ourselves, had we been around at the time and had we known the Buddha, say, a few months before he was Enlightened and a few months after he was Enlightened, we might not have been able to perceive any difference, any difference at all perhaps. We would have seen, after all, the same physical body, probably the same clothes, and he was speaking the same language and he had the same general sort of characteristics. We might not, in fact we almost certainly would not have been able to perceive any difference before and after. So therefore, we tend to regard the Enlightenment, the Buddha's Enlightenment as a sort of just last finishing touch to a process which as been going on for a very long time. The sort of hair that turns the scale, just that little difference that makes all .the difference. But really, we may say, it isn't like that at all. Not in the least like that.

We may say that Enlightenment, the Buddha's Enlightenment, or anybody else's Enlightenment represents the point of intersection, as it were, of time and eternity. The point of intersection of time and eternity. Strictly speaking, of course, it is only a line which can intersect another line. So eternity isn't a line. We can represent time as a line but not eternity as a line. So in a way you can't really speak of eternity intersecting time as though it was another line, another time, as it were. It is ridiculous to speak of it in that way. So perhaps we should think rather in terms of time, that is to say a line, which at a given point, just stops. At this so called point of intersection it isn't intersected by another line, the first line, merely time, just stops. Instead of propogating itself indefinitely, it stops, it disappears, as it were, into a new dimension. It is rather like the flowing of a river into the ocean. The ocean represents the new dimension, the river is time, the ocean is eternity if you like. This simile is, of course, rather hackneyed, but it is still rather useful if one doesn't take it too literally and perhaps it is possible to improve on it to some extent. Suppose we do that. Suppose we just assume, or we imagine, that the ocean into which our river is flowing is just over the horizon. So what does one see? One sees the river flowing and flowing to the horizon, but you don't see the ocean into which the river is flowing. So it seems as though the river is flowing into nothingness, flowing into a void, it just stops at the horizon, because that is the point where it enters the new dimension which we cannot see. So time is like that, time just stops as it were at eternity, time just comes to an end, time is succeeded by eternity, and this is what we mean by Enlightenment. Enlightenment is just like that. Siddhartha disappears, just like the river disappearing at the horizon and the Buddha takes his place. This is of course from the standpoint of eternity. From the standpoint of time Siddhartha becomes the Buddha, he

developes into the Buddha, grows into the Buddha, evolves into the Buddha. But from the standpoint of eternity Siddhartha just ceases to exist and there is the Buddha, who has of course been there all the time.

Now this difference of approach, approach in terms of time, approach in terms of eternity, is at the bottom of the whole controversy between the gradual school of Zen and the abrupt school of Zen. You probably remember that in the early days of Zen, or rather Chan in China, there were these two branches of the Chan or Zen school, those who believed that Enlightenment was attained suddenly, in a sudden sort of flash or illumination, and those who believed that it was attained gradually, step by step, by patient effort and practice. And you remember also that in the platform scripture Hui Neng tries to clear up this whole controversy by saying that it isn't that there is a gradual path, and that it isn't that there is a sudden path or abrupt path, it is merely that some people gain Enlightenment more quickly than others, presumably because they make a greater effort. And this is true. But one can also go rather more deeply than this. The abrupt realization, or the abrupt attainment of Enlightenment, we may say, has got nothing to do with speed within time. When one speaks of the abrupt path, or the abrupt school, or the abrupt realization of Enlightenment, one doesn't mean that one has speeded up the same process within time. It doesn't mean that if you take the usual process of attaining Enlightenment, as it goes on within time, and you just speed it up, you just get it through more quickly. It doesn't mean that whereas normally you might spend fifteen, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years on the gradual path, you speed it all up and you compress that into, say, one year, or even a month, or even a week, or even a minute. It isn't that. The abrupt path, we may say, is outside time altogether. And sudden Enlightenment is simply the point at which this new dimension, this dimension of eternity outside time is entered. So one cannot, as it were, reach this point, one cannot reach this point, as it were, of eternity by speeding up the process of realization within time. You can never get closer to eternity by speeding up your process of approach to eternity within time. Within time you just have to stop. But at the same time, paradoxically, you can't stop without first having speeded up.

This puts one in mind of the story of Angulimala, which I have often referred to. Its a rather instructive story because it illustrates this question of these two dimensions. Some of you may remember that Angulimala was a famous bandit, and there is a very long story about how he became a bandit, sometime we might tell it but it is rather a long story so we'll skip over the early stages, the early chapters, today, and start as it were in the middle, when Angulimala was living in a great forest somewhere in central India and he had a rather unpleasant habit of catching people, travelers who were passing through the forest and chopping off their fingers. And he made for himself a garland of fingers, a garland of hands, and that was why he was called Angulimala, angula is finger, and angulimala is one who has a garland of fingers, mala is garland. So he was called Angulimala because he used to chop people's fingers off and string all these fingers into a garland and he wore the garland round his neck. At the time when the story begins he apparently had ninety-eight fingers, and he wanted to have a hundred. And the Buddha was about to pass through that forest, and people who knew about Angulimala tried to dissuade the Buddha, and they said that you shouldn't go through the jungle, it's dangerous, Angulimala lives there and as soon as he sees you, well he will just have a finger off your hand. And in fact that very day Angulimala had been getting a bit desperate. (Laughter) His old mother was living with him in the forest and cooking for him, a devoted old soul and he decided that he'd have her finger that day, he was fed up with waiting any longer (laughter) and maybe she used to nag him a bit, so he decided to have her finger to make ninety-nine, and he'd be looking round for the hundreth one. So as soon as he saw the Buddha coming, because of course the Buddha didn't listen to the village folk, he just ignored their warnings and just set off, as soon as he saw the Buddha coming he changed his mind about cutting off his mother's finger first, he thought 'Well I can always come back and chop off her finger, so I'll go and get the finger from this monk, this Sramana, who has entered the forest'. So we are told it was a beautiful afternoon, a very peaceful sort of atmosphere, there was this little trail just winding through the jungle and the birds were singing in the trees, it was all very quiet and very peaceful, and there was the Buddha just very meditatively walking along, very slowly, left, right, left, right, just like this, just thinking to himself. No-one knows of course what the Buddha was thinking, perhaps he wasn't thinking at all, perhaps he was

simply walking. So Angulimala just emerged from the shadows of the forest and very stealthily he started pursuing the Buddha. Creeping up from him from behind, and he had his sword drawn, and as soon as he got near him he would just spring on him and before the Buddha could protest or struggle, off would come a finger. That was the idea. So Angulimala was just stealthily pursuing the Buddha and hoping to get closer and closer until he was ready to make the final spring. But he was following the Buddha for quite a while, and he noticed a rather odd thing was happening, that though he seemed to be moving much more quickly than the Buddha the distance between the two didn't seem to be decreasing. (Laughter) So there was the Buddha, way in front of him going, left, right, left, right, (slowly) and there was Angulimala behind going, left, right, left, right (quickly) - but he wasn't getting any nearer. The Buddha was the same distance in front. So Angulimala thought, 'that's odd', so he quickened his pace and then he was running; and there was the Buddha in front, left, right, left, right (slowly) and though Angulimala was running furiously in the end he was no nearer to the Buddha. The Buddha was just in front. So when he realized what was happening he just, we are told, broke out into a terrific perspiration, with fright and astonishment, and bewilderment. And he didn't know what to do, didn't know what to think, so he thought he'd just make a last effort, a last sprint, a last dash, so he summoned up all his strength and he was dashing along; but the same thing, the Buddha was the same distance ahead and he seemed to be going even more slowly if anything. (Laughter) Just left, right, just like that. So in desperation Angulimala called out to the Buddha 'Stand still'. So the Buddha turned round and he said, 'I am standing still, it is you who are moving'. So Angulimala, who had considerable presence of mind despite his fear, he was a rather bold sort of person, he said, 'you are supposed to be a monk, you are supposed to be a Sramana, how can you tell a lie? You say you are standing still and here am I running like mad and I can't even catch up with you, how can you say that you are standing still?' So the Buddha said, 'I am standing still because I am standing in Nirvana, I have come to rest, and you are moving because you are going round and round in the Samsara'. So this was the reply, and of course Angulimala became his disciple - but that's another long story, and what happened to him afterwards, which is also very interesting.

But the point which this story illustrates is this, that Angulimala could not catch up with the Buddha because the Buddha was, as it were, moving - or standing still, it is the same thing here, in a different dimension. Angulimala representing time, couldn't catch up with the Buddha representing eternity. However long time goes on, **it** never comes to a point within time where it catches up with eternity. It doesn't find eternity within the temporal process. So Angulimala couldn't even have caught up with the Buddha even if the Buddha, had stood still, even if the Buddha had stood still, Angulimala could be running now, still, after two thousand five hundred years, but he wouldn't have caught up with the Buddha. The distance between them would be the same now as it was then, he wouldn't be any nearer.

But anyway, this story, though illustrative, is perhaps something of a digression, so let us return to our main topic. We have seen, in other words, that Enlightenment, or the attainment of Enlightenment, represents entry into a new dimension of being, it is not a prolongation of the old one, however refined. So after his Enlightenment, after his Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree the Buddha is a different, even a new person. Not just the old Siddhartha slightly improved, or even considerably improved, but a new person. We tend, unfortunately, to think of the Buddha's Enlightenment in terms of our own experience of life. What usually happens is that in the course of our lives, in the course of so many years, so many decades we undergo various experiences, we add to our knowledge, we learn different things, we do different things, go to different places, meet different people, but underneath we remain, as it were, fundamentally, the same person, recognisably the same person. The change is only peripheral. Whatever changes take place don't go very deep. Perhaps we are the same person now that we were twenty, thirty years ago when we were a child. Very often this is the case, very definitely, very remarkably, in as much as we do not succeed in outgrowing those very early, those childhood, even those infantile conditionings and attitudes.

This reminds me of another little story, this just floats into my mind as I am speaking, but it is very relevant here. I remember reading some time ago a short story by an American author. I

forget who it was but it was quite interesting in this way, from this point of view. The story was about a woman who was a student of the occult and the mystical and all that sort of thing, and the esoteric. And she had become quite well known, and she started her own little movement and it had grown to a big movement, and there were thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of followers. This was in America of course, not in this country. And they all had cheque books and lavish contributions starting pouring in, so she had a dream, a sort of wish that she wanted to fulfil. She had the idea of a beautiful temple, she wanted to build, as the headquarters of her cult, a beautiful temple. And she saw it all quite clearly in her mind, with a flight of beautiful steps going up to a beautiful marble portico. And inside there was a multicoloured glass dome and multicoloured light streaming down, and there was she on a throne, a white alabaster throne in a rainbow robe with a golden crown on her head (laughter) and all the faithful followers around, you see. So she saw this quite clearly, and being a woman, not only of occult knowledge and mystical knowledge and esoteric knowledge and all that sort of thing, but a very hard headed practical business woman as one has to be to run a thing of this sort. (Laughter) She got things really moving and she had the foundation stone laid, and as I said this is within the United States of America and within about six months the whole thing was there in all its glory. And she was installed as the high priestess, and she wore the rainbow robes and the golden crown and there were all the faithful flocking around, and that was that, or she thought that was that. Not very long afterwards she had a letter from someone she had never heard from for years, a sister. Apparently their ways had parted and when she started going all occult and mystical her family, as often happens, rather disowned her and she hadn't had any contact with them or with her sister for years. So anyway a letter came from her sister, and her sister wrote 'You might be sorry to hear that our mother died not so long ago and the house has been sold up and I have been clearing up and in one of the attics I found some of your things, and I thought you might like to have them so I am sending them by separate post.' So after a few days along came a parcel and there were some childrens books, little bits of books, which had belonged to this woman when she was a girl. So the story goes that she opened this parcel and right on top there was a picture book, and the title or heading of the picture book was 'Mabel in Fairyland' or something like that, and on the front cover there was a beautiful picture of a white marble temple, and there were three marble steps going up and then there was a beautiful marble portico and a rainbow coloured dome, and there was a little girl standing on a marble throne in a rainbow robe with a golden crown (laughter), surrounded by crowds of fairies. So the moral of the story is supposed to be that all her life and all her work as the leader of this group, and this movement, was just the fulfilment of this wish which she had formed when she was a little girl to be this sort of fairy queen like figure.

So this is just an illustration, this shows how, at bottom, very often, we don't change. There may be peripheral changes, we may grown in knowledge, in experience, in contacts, we may travel widely, but just as this woman was at heart still that little girl craving to be the fairy queen, in the same way we remain very often deeply and even dramatically, even sadly conditioned by our childhood, our infantile past. So any change that takes place is usually comparatively superficial. We may say that we take to Buddhism, we take refuge in the Buddha, but the change is superficial, it isn't usually very deep. But the Buddha's experience of Enlightenment wasn't like that. The Buddha's experience of Enlightenment didn't represent just a little, peripheral change in him, a change just on the surface. It was something much deeper, something in a way much more dramatic than that. More like the change that takes place as between two lives, when you die to one life and you are reborn in another, and there is a great gap inbetween. The Enlightenment experience is more like that, it is more like we may say, death. In fact in some Buddhist traditions Enlightenment is called the great death. Because when you are Enlightened everything of the past dies, everything is annihilated, in a way, and you are completely reborn. So in the case of the Buddha, we may say, Siddhartha dies, not that Siddhartha is changed, or that Siddhartha is tinkered about a bit with and sort of patched up and improved - revised edition issued, no. Siddhartha dies, Siddhartha is finished, Siddhartha dies, as it were, at the foot of the Bodhi tree and the Buddha is born, the Buddha comes into existence, or a p pears, only after the death of Siddhartha. We say the Buddha is 'born' but it is not really even like that. At that moment, when Siddhartha dies the Buddha is seen as having been alive all the time, as we say, but when we say all the time we really mean

above and beyond time, out of time altogether.

Now to come back to another very important reflection of Buddhist thought, and even of metaphysical thought in the West, time and space are not things in themselves. We usually think of time and space as things in themselves. We think of space as a sort of box within which things move about, we think of time as a sort of tunnel along which things move, but they are not really like that. Time and space are really forms of our perception. We see things, we perceive things under the form of time, we perceive them under the form of space, and so on. And things, when we see them, or phenomena when we see them through the spectacles of space, through the spectacles of time. When we experience them through these dimensions, then we speak of these things as phenomena. And these phenomena make up the world of relative existence, of conditioned existence, or what Buddhists call the Samsara. But when we enter this other dimension, when we enter the dimension of eternity, then we go beyond time and beyond space, and therefore we go beyond phenomena, which are only realities as seen under the forms of space and time. So we go beyond the world, we go beyond Samsara, and in the Buddhist idiom we enter Nirvana, or in the Hindu idiom we go from darkness to light, from the unreal to the real, from death to immortality.

Often Enlightenment is described as awakening to the truth of things. Described in terms of knowledge and vision of reality, seeing things as they really are, not as they appear. Seeing things in their truth, seeing things free from any veils, free from any obscurations. Seeing them without being influenced or affected by our own assumptions, our own psychological conditionings. Just seeing them with perfect objectivity, as they are. Not only seeing them, but if you like becoming one with them, becoming one with Reality, or one with the Reality of things. So the Buddha, the one who has awoken to this truth. the one who, as it were, exists out of time, in this dimension of eternity, maybe regarded, therefore, as reality itself in human form. The form is human but the substance, if you like, is reality itself. And this is what is meant by saying that the Buddha is an Enlightened human being; the form is human, there is a human form, but there isn't the ordinary conditioned human mind. In the place, as it were, if we can use such an expression, in the place, as it were, of the conditioned human mind with all its prejudices and preconceptions and limitations, in the place of that there is reality itself, or the experience or the awareness of reality. Therefore we say that the Buddha, the Enlightened one is reality in human form, or symbolises, or represents that in human form.

So in this way we see that the Buddha. is an altogether, we may say, distinct, indeed unique, type of human being, not to be classified and not to be categorized. And this is the moral, as it were, of the story that we recounted the other day, of the Buddha's encounter, shortly after his Enlightenment with (Upaka?) the naked ascetic. Upaka, as you may remember tried to classify, tried to categorize the Buddha as a deva, a yaksha, a ghandava, even human being, but the Buddha repudiated all that and said that in as much as he has transcended all those conditionings, all those psychological conditionings on account of which he might have been called a deva, or yaksha, or ghandava or human being, he was simply a Buddha, one free from all those conditionings. And the same idea we find expressed in the first verse of the Buddhavagga of the Dhanmapada, where the Buddha says, 'whose conquest is not to be undone, whom not even a bit of those conquered passions follows, that Enlightened one whose sphere is endless, by what path will you trace him? That pathless one.' So the Buddha is a pathless one, the Buddha doesn't go on any particular path, there is nothing by which he can be identified, nothing by which he can be tracked or classified or categorised in any way. Often we find that people want to classify you, they want to categorise you. I remember when I was in India one of the first questions that I was always asked anywhere, by anyone, was 'what is your caste?'. Especially in South India, this is the first thing that they want to know about you, are you a brahmin, are you a kshatriya, are you a shudra, are you anything else, what is your caste? And if they don't know that, if they can't classify you or categorise you according to caste they don't know what to do you with you. They don't know how to deal with you, they don't know how to treat you, whether they can take water from your hand or not take it, whether they can get to know you or not, or whether you might marry their daughter or not. All these things are very important. And just the same in this country, although here we are not so direct. In India I have often been stopped in the road by someone

just passing by and he says 'what's your caste?' without any sort of preamble. In this country people are much more indirect in their approach, but they are trying to worm out of you the same sort of information. They want to know, really, what sort of job you've got, they try to work out your income, maybe, from that. Where you live, where you were born, where you were educated. In this way, by taking these various 'readings' as it were, these sociological readings, they can gradually narrow down the field, and then they've got you just there (Laughter) You are this, you are that. And then they feel that you are nicely, neatly pigeon holed. But you can't do that with a Buddha. You can't even really do it with an ordinary human being, not really, though you can try and even succeed to a greater extent, but with a Buddha you really can't do it. A Buddha is one whom you can't pin it down, you can't say he's this, you can't say he was that. But people like to try to classify and categorise even the Buddha, just as Upaka did. He wanted to know, he wanted to pin the Buddha down, whether he was a deva or yaksha or ghandarva or human being, and when he found he couldn't pin the Buddha down, the Buddha refused to be pinned down, he repudiated all those categories, then Upaka just didn't know what to do. And according to the account he just shook his head and said, 'Well it may be so', and he went away. That was his reaction, because he couldn't classify, couldn't categorize, couldn't pin down the Buddha.

So that is what is meant when we say, in the words of the Dhammapada, that the Buddha cannot be tracked, he doesn't leave any trace, he is the pathless one. Just like the bird going through the sky, the bird doesn't leave any track in the sky, and if you try to track a bird by following its path in the sky, and looking for signs that it has left in the sky, then you would have your work cut out, as they say. So it is just the same with the Buddha, you can't track him, you can't trace him, because he belongs to a different dimension, the transcendental dimension, the dimension of eternity the same idea is expressed in the Sutta Nipatta, where the Buddha says, 'There is no measuring of man, won to the goal, whereby they'd say "his measure is so", that's not for him. When all conditions are removed, all ways of telling are removed.' When all psychological conditionings are removed in a person then you have no way of accounting for that person, and this is what the Buddha is like. And the same sort of idea is expressed more abstractly in four out of the list of fourteen inexpressibles, as they are called. We won't go into all of these now but these four positions are; whether the Buddha existed, or would exist after death, or not, or both, or neither. And the Buddha was very often asked this. For some reason or another some of the ancient Indians had a real thing about this, and they often used to come to the Buddha and say, 'please tell us, when you die, will you go on living or not, or both, or neither?' So the Buddha always used to repudiate all these four, and he would say, 'It is inappropriate, it is inapplicable to say of a Buddha that after death he will continue to exist. It is also inappropriate to say that after death he will cease to exist. It is inappropriate to say he will continue to exist and cease to exist. And it is inappropriate to say that he will neither continue to exist nor cease to exist. All these are quite inapplicable and quite inappropriate. Because', he went on to say, 'Even during his lifetime, even when he sits there in a physical body the Tathagata, the Buddha, is beyond all your classifications, beyond all your categories. You can't say anything about him. The Buddha is the person about whom you can't say anything, because he doesn't have anything, he isn't anything' in a sense. And this is why in the Sutta Nipatta again, there is an epithet of the Enlightened beings, 'akincana', which is usually translated as man of nought, one who has nothing because he is nothing, and therefore you can't say anything about him. Which is very tantalising for the human mind.

We find, again, that many of the Buddha's disciples gained Enlightenment by following his teaching, gained individual emancipation, but they still seemed to have felt that there was something very mysterious about the Buddha himself, something they couldn't quite understand, something they couldn't quite fathom, something beyond them, even though they were themselves emancipated, even Enlightened. And there is a story about Sariputra in this connection which is typical. Sariputra was once in the presence of the Buddha and he said to the Buddha, out of his excess of faith and devotion, he said, 'Lord, I think you are the greatest of all the Enlightened ones who have ever existed, or will exist, or who exist now. I think you are the greatest of them all.' So the Buddha was neither pleased or displeased by that, he didn't say 'Well what a marvelous disciple you are and how wonderfully well you understand me.' (Laughter) He said, he just asked a question, he said, 'Sariputra, have you known all the

Buddhas of the past?’ So Sariputra said, ‘No Lord’. Then he said, ‘Have you known all the Buddhas of the future?’ ‘No Lord.’ ‘Do you know all the Buddhas that now are?’ ‘No Lord.’ Then he said, ‘Do you even know me?’ And Sariputra said, ‘No Lord.’ (Laughter) Then the Buddha said, ‘That being the case, that being the position, how is it that your words are so bold and so grand?’ So this shows that even the Enlightened disciple, the wisest of the disciples, like Sariputra, didn’t fully understand. Didn’t succeed in fathoming the Buddha. And therefore, we find that after the death of the Buddha this feeling or this attitude on the part of the disciples that the Buddha was unfathomable. That even though they were Enlightened, presumably just as he was Enlightened, they couldn’t really understand him at all, couldn’t fathom him at all. This found expression in a list of ten powers and eighteen special attributes which they built up and which they attributed to him just to mark him off, as it were, from all the other just merely emancipated and Enlightened disciples.

We are not going into that now, however, but what we are concerned with and what is significant is that this all crystalized eventually, into a very important distinction, made with regard to the Buddha. And that is the distinction between what came to be called his Rupakaya, his physical, phenomenal appearance, and his Dharmakaya, his true form, his essential form. Rupakaya literally means form body, and Dharmakaya means body of truth or body of reality. Rupakaya is the Buddha as existing in time, Dharmakaya is the Buddha as existing out of time in the dimension of eternity, and it is the latter, the Dharmakaya that is the real body. And this is clear, for instance, from the Buddha’s admonition to Vakkali. There was a monk called Vakkali who was very, very devoted to the Buddha, so much so that he used to go about, he used to follow the Buddha around just looking at him. He was so fascinated by the appearance and the personality of the Buddha he just used to spend all his time just sitting and looking at the Buddha, or following him round and just looking at him. He didn’t want any teaching, he didn’t have any questions to ask, he just wanted to look at the Buddha. So one day the Buddha called him and he said, ‘Vakkali, this physical body is not me. If you want to see me see the Dharma, see the Dharmakaya, see my true form.’ And we are told that Vakkali afterwards meditated upon this. And the same point of view is found in two very famous verses of the diamond sutra. One of the most important of all Buddhist texts, where the Buddha says to Subhuti, he says, ‘Those who by my form did see me’, by my physical appearance, ‘And those who followed me by voice, wrong the effort they engaged in, me those people will not see. From the Dharma should one see the Buddhas, from the Dharma bodies comes their guidance, yet Dharma’s true nature cannot be discerned and no-one can be conscious of it as an object.

So most of us, like Vakkali, try to see the Buddha in, as it were, the wrong way. Not that we should ignore the Rupakaya, the physical body, the form body, but we should take it as a symbol of the Dharmakaya, the true form and the true body, the Buddha as he is above and beyond time, in eternity as it were, in his ultimate essence. But we must confess, we must admit, that the word Buddha itself is very often a bit ambiguous. Sometimes when we say ‘The Buddha’, we mean the historical figure. For instance we say that the Buddha spoke Magadhi, well here obviously the Buddha means the historical figure, Gautama the Buddha. But sometimes we use the word Buddha to mean the transcendental reality, as when we say for instance, ‘Look for the Buddha within yourself.’ When we say look for the Buddha within yourself we don’t mean just Gautama the Buddha, we don’t just mean Siddhartha, we mean the eternal, the time transcending Buddha nature within ourselves. Broadly speaking we may say that the Theravada school today uses the word Buddha more in the historical sense. But the Mahayana, especially Zen uses the word Buddha more in the spiritual, more in the trans-historical sense. For this reason we find that very often, though rather wrongly, the Mahayana is accused of deifying the Buddha, of making the Buddha into a god, but this isn’t really what happens at all, as I have had occasion to explain on quite a number of occasions. There is quite a lot which could be said in this connection, on this particular point, but I think I need not go into that here, this morning. I think from what I have said already, the connection between the Buddha and Reality, even the Buddha and God, should be quite clear.

So lets just very briefly summarize the conclusions reached so far. Enlightenment, we may say, can be looked at from two points of view. It can be looked at from the point of view of

time, from the point of eternity. It can be regarded as the culmination of the evolutionary process, a process which is carried on, a culmination which is reached through and by means of personal effort. But Enlightenment can also be regarded as being a sort of break through into a new dimensions beyond time and beyond the evolutionary process. In the same way we can look at the Buddha in two ways, as Rupakaya and the Dharmakaya; as included in history and also as transcending history. And in the second case, when we regard the Buddha or Buddhahood as synonymous with Reality, as occupying the dimension of eternity, as transcending time, then the Buddha figure becomes a symbol of reality itself, but not identical with god, in the Western sense, because there are no theistic attributes, no question of creation of the world or anything like that even though object of devotion. Now before we close for the morning, or before we close this morning's talk there is a, as you may remember, there is a promise to be kept. And that is, what does the right angle represent, or the point at the right angle represent. We can call that point X, perhaps there ought to be an X there just to indicate that. It should be pretty clear now what it represents. We may say that the point infinity is the Rupakaya of the Buddha, here is the evolutionary process starting at zero, going up through points one and two and three, and culminating in the attainment of Enlightenment or Buddhahood right at the top at the point represented, or marked by the sign for infinity. So that sign for infinity is the Rupakaya of the Buddha. But in addition to the Rupakaya there is the Dharmakaya of the Buddha, the Buddha as existing out of time, the Buddha as existing in reality, in eternity, and this is the Dharmakaya. So Dharmakaya, Rupakaya (indicating something), this is the evolutionary process within time, this is eternity, this is ultimate reality. (So in relation to Rupakaya this is Dharmakaya, what is this point here in relation to zero? - loud sounds on tape here make it unclear) In relation to the infinity symbol Rupakaya is Dharmakaya, in relation to zero symbol it is what Buddhism calls the Dharmadhatu, reality as supporting the whole phenomenal process. Reality as expressing itself, as it were, in the whole cosmos. And the common denominator, of course, of Dharmadhatu and Dharmakaya, this is we may say Sunyata, Mahasunyata, the great void, great emptiness. So this point also represents that, in itself it is Mahasunyata. In relation to infinity it is Dharmakaya, in relation to zero it is Dharmadhatu. And that is, perhaps as far as we need go for today.

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