

Lecture 24: The Dynamics of Being

Venerable Sir and Friends. I need hardly tell you that the religion which we know as Buddhism but which is known in the East as the Dharma or the Dhamma has not been known very long in this country. In fact it has not been known very long in the West generally. At the most we can say its been known for perhaps a 100 years - not very much more than that. A 100 years is perhaps a good round figure. Now this 100 years during which Buddhism has been known in the West and in this country can be divided I think roughly into three more or less distinct periods. First of all, quite naturally, there is the period of what we may describe as purely scholarly interest. This is connected with the growth of what is very often called orientalism. As you know in the last century and even into this century this country had very vast colonial interest in different parts of the world, including different Buddhist countries. And some of the civil servants who were engaged in the administration of those Buddhist areas within what was then called the British Empire which is now called the Commonwealth and sooner or later no doubt we shall not know what else to call it, engaged in the study of Buddhism as a help to their understanding of administration. For instance, Rhys Davids, the great Pali scholar found himself in Ceylon in the '70s of the last century. He found that in his capacity as judge he had to delve into rather complex questions of Buddhist law. So this led him to the study of the Vinaya - Buddhist monastic law - this led him to the study of Pali and the Buddhist scriptures generally and in this way he developed an interest. So in the last century we get this first period as it were of the development of Buddhism in this country, that of purely scholarly, often orientalist exploration.

Now, during the second period which began we may say towards the end of the last century, during the second period you get English people actually taking up Buddhism as a way of life. Some of them actually calling themselves Buddhists, not approaching it just in a scholarly fashion, not just with a sort of dilettante or even serious intellectual interest, but considering it quite seriously as a practicable, feasible way of life which they could follow in the West just as others could follow it in the East. So that's the second phase, the second period.

The third period began about the beginning of the last century although it didn't get under way really until considerably later - began when you got not only English lay people but also English monks, when bhikkus and bhikshus started to appear.

So these are the three main periods we may say of the history or development of Buddhism in this country. First the purely scholarly orientalist intellectual interest. Then after that people taking up Buddhism as a way of life and then thirdly and lastly some even entering an English branch of the Order of monks in this country.

Now a 100 years as religions go especially a religion like Buddhism is not a very long time but it is quite long enough for various changes to take place. When I speak of changes I don't mean the development to which I have already referred - these three periods - but I mean rather changes in the very approach to Buddhism. A 100 years is quite long enough a period for changes of approach to the religion also to take place in this country. I need hardly remind you what a very, very complex, sometimes a bewilderingly complex phenomenon Buddhism is. All sorts of aspects, teachings, levels, schools and so on. And it may so happen that different aspects of Buddhism or different teachings within the whole body of Buddhism may appeal more strongly at different times according to difference of circumstances, different problems which arise and so on. So therefore we may say, that those aspects of Buddhism, or those teachings, parts of Buddhism which appealed perhaps more strongly or even most strongly 50 years ago are not those which appealed so much to people nowadays. It's not that those aspects or those teachings or those features are absent but they've become less important. They don't occupy the centre of the picture any longer but they've drifted as it were imperceptibly towards the periphery. Now one might generalise a bit and say that 50 years ago people in this country, if they were attracted to Buddhism at all were attracted mainly by three things. First of all they were attracted by the personality of the Buddha, as a human being, as a teacher, as an historical figure, as someone

wise and compassionate and so on. Secondly, they were attracted by the ethics of Buddhism, its code of conduct, the virtues which it laid down for its followers to practice. And thirdly and lastly they were attracted by Buddhism's teaching of karma and rebirth. These if we examine the literature, the books and the articles produced in those days seem to be the three features, the three aspects of Buddhism which most strongly attracted people then - the personality of the Buddha, the ethical teachings and the teaching of karma or action, reaction and rebirth.

Now today, I would say on the basis of my own experience that people tend to be attracted rather by other features of Buddhism. It's not that they don't admire the personality of the Buddha any longer. They certainly continue to admire it very much. They certainly appreciate the ethics of Buddhism and so on. But it is not these aspects we may say which are decisive in bringing them into closer contact with Buddhism or even in inducing them to describe themselves as Buddhists, to take the Three Refuges or go for the Three Refuges, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as in traditional terms we say.

Now one can observe that there are both negative and positive reasons for this change. I want to go into that a little later on. First, let us just try to understand that people were attracted by the three aspects or the three features of Buddhism which I've just mentioned. The first thing we have to bear in mind, I think, is that we cannot isolate the history of Buddhism in this country from the total religious history of the country. You can separate it, its part, however exotic it may seem, however even bizarre it may seem in some people's eyes at times, the history of this religion Buddhism is a part of the general religious history of our times - can't be separated therefrom. Now, during the second half of the last century in this country the hold of Christianity certainly of orthodox dogmatic Christianity on people generally especially the more thinking people was very considerably, very seriously weakened. Partly as a result of scientific explorations and discoveries; 'The Origin of Species'; studies of comparative religion and all that and partly for other reasons into which I need not go at present.

Well, what happened was, and one can become very aware of this if one studies the general literature of the time, biographies and diaries and so on; what happened was Christianity became less and less intellectually acceptable to a great many sincere and thoughtful people who weren't by any means irreligious, who weren't by any means spiritually insensitive. It became intellectually unacceptable. At the same time, though it was intellectually unacceptable they remained in a way, a rather strange sort of way, emotionally involved in it. They could emancipate themselves from the dogmatic doctrinal side intellectually but their heartstrings as it were remained tied to the beliefs and practices, customs, traditions of their childhood and youth. Now for these people, originally one can say Christianity had meant three things. This is especially true of the evangelicals who were prominent in English religious, even social and political life in those days. Christianity meant in the first place devotion to the person of Christ as the saviour and the incarnate son of God. It also meant an ethical code by which they could shape their actions, by which they could live - the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, the Sermon on the Mount of the New and so on. And finally, Christianity gave them the hope of life after death. Perhaps we can't understand nowadays how strong an element that was in religion in the last century. I remember when I was a boy of about 13 or 14 I was sent down to the West Country to stay with some friends. So I stayed in a very old rambling house which was decorated and furnished in the style I think it must have been of the '60's and '70's of the last century. And I remember that in the bedroom in which I was put there were very large framed religious pictures on the walls. And one showed angels welcoming the departing souls to heaven and another showed a little bevy of angels having what appeared to be a little gossip, and another showed the heavens opening and a faithful soul aspiring upwards. There were all these sort of religious pictures on the walls. So this illustrates the fact that in the minds and hearts of our forefathers not so many decades, not so many generations ago the hope of life after death, even the conviction that after death you go straight to heaven preferably was very, very, strong indeed. One can even find references to this sort of thing in popular fiction. If you take for instance Dickens', nowadays we would call it very oversentimental even pathetic description of the death of poor Little Nell. How the snow was falling and as she passed away the voices of the angels

could be heard calling her to her everlasting rest. He does really lay it on very thick and very heavy but that is what our Victorian forefathers appreciated because they felt, they believed this very, very strongly. But after Christianity became intellectually acceptable of course this faith was very much weakened, perhaps disappeared entirely.

As I've said though even after the intellectual abandonment of Christianity, these people often, as I must insist very sincere, worthy people felt an emotional need for something equivalent to these three things which had satisfied them in Christianity. So some of these people, towards the end of the last century, some of them, not very many, but a few found them in Buddhism. Now in the Buddha, in the person of the Buddha we can say they found what we can describe as a non-theological Christ. That is they found a figure, an historical figure, so far as they could see with all the virtues of Christ, all the virtues traditionally associated with Christ plus perhaps a few more, but without the encumbrance, not to say embarrassment of Trinitarian theology.

In the second place, they found in Buddhism a code of ethics, a moral code by which to live but without any supernatural sanction, with, if anything, a purely humanistic sanction. They found one would say the Sermon on the Mount but without the Mount - the Mount of course being the dogmatic, doctrinal background. And again in the teaching of karma and rebirth they found a more rational, or what appeared to them a more rational basis for their hope in a future life, a future existence. Now with regard to this last item we can see their attitude was rather different to the eastern attitude. In the East this idea of rebirth, this idea that you have to come back again even after the flames of the funeral pyre have died down is accepted implicitly. No one ever argues about it, no one ever discusses it, it's just accepted. In the East, in India, in a Buddhist country, I think I don't exaggerate in saying, that you won't ever get a lecture on karma and rebirth. It isn't necessary. No one needs it, no one requires it. They just take it for granted that there is such a thing as rebirth; that you come back, again and again and again. But they also view it as a very terrible thing. It's nothing to be very happy about, nothing to be very proud of that you come back again and again. They think it's a very miserable sort of process having to come back and get into a body with all its limitations, all its pains, all its suffering. Rebirth is a terrible thing in the East. So nirvana, freedom from rebirth, represents the possibility of escape from all that.

Now in the West, 50 years ago, for these people about whom we are speaking after the collapse of belief in Christianity the prospect that after death there would be no life, annihilation as it were, this was a terrible thing. And this teaching of karma and rebirth represented for them the possibility of escape from this terrible predicament or terrible prospect. So we can see how different the two attitudes were. In the East rebirth is a terrible thing - you've got to escape from it, but in the West, at the end of the last century of these people, it was the prospect of [no] life after death which was terrible so this idea of karma and rebirth came to them as a sort of salvation from that.

Now to generalise we can say that some of those people towards the end of the last century in this country who in all sincerity and good faith took to Buddhism, were really treating Buddhism as a sort of Christianity substitute. This is what happens then. Now there is nothing wrong with this so far as historical development is concerned. This is an intermediate stage in the development of Buddhism in this country, which we have to expect. It's only natural that you can't jump all at once as it were into a new, strange oriental religion like Buddhism. You have to go down into it gradually step by step. You have to go from the known to the unknown. So in these early days, it's only to be expected, it's only natural that you get people coming into Buddhism, I won't say for the wrong reasons, because the sincerity was there, but certainly treating Buddhism to some extent, if not to a great extent as a sort of Christianity substitute. We can now begin to see I think, why today the position is rather different.

Today, we can say that the people who come into Buddhism, or into contact with Buddhism or who start getting interested in it, the majority of them, at least, are not conditioned by Christianity, or very, very little conditioned by it indeed. They are certainly not looking, whether consciously or unconsciously for a Christianity substitute. Nowadays we can say we are all more

or less, or those of us who are gathered here, post-Christian. It's not that we are reacting against Christianity but it often just doesn't mean much to us. We no longer think, for example, of religion in terms of devotion to a person. This was an integral part of religious ideology in the last century. It's an integral part of the faith of many orthodox Christians even today. But we don't think like that, those of us who come into contact with Buddhism we are not searching for someone to worship, not searching for a relationship with a person. We don't think of religion in those terms at all. We are not looking very likely for an ethical code. We certainly need a certain amount of guidance in our day-to-day life but we're not looking for a list of do's and don'ts. In any case, as you know, nowadays ethics is very much in the melting pot. Not that people are unethical more than before, I wouldn't like to say that, but they certainly sit loose to any systems or codes of ethical behaviour. Most of them one might say ethically speaking live simply by rule of thumb. Also one can say that nowadays people are not unduly concerned about life after death. During the last century even among the people we've been talking about this question of life after death was a burning one. They wanted to go on living after death. From the talks I've had with people over here since my arrival in this country 18 months or so ago, it seems that people are not unduly concerned about life after death. Lots of people apparently do not even mind considering the possibility that after death they might not continue to exist at all. One can say that for most people, interest does centre very much on this life itself. They are more concerned with this life than they are with any future life.

Now these are the negative reasons for the change about which I've spoken - change in those aspects of Buddhism which appeal to us more nowadays - the negative ones. Now let's take a look at the positive ones. I think we can say that nowadays in English Buddhist circles we are less exclusively concerned with the person of the Buddha because we have taken more to heart the Buddha's declaration, 'He who sees the Dharma, sees me!' If we understand the Dharma, the Truth, the principles taught by the Buddha, then and perhaps then only we truly see, and understand the Buddha himself. He being the embodiment, the living embodiment of those principles. Nowadays in so many Western languages especially in English and French and German we have so many more translations of the Buddha's teachings from Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese than people had 50, 60 or 70 years ago. So it's only natural therefore that the interest shifts from the person of the Buddha more and more to the teachings, especially if that shift is reinforced by his own declaration, 'He who sees the Dharma, sees me'.

Ethics I would say tends to be less central nowadays not only for the negative reasons mentioned but also because in the Buddhist movement nowadays people pay more attention to meditation. If one reads through books and articles about Buddhism written say 50 or 60 years ago one sees very little reference to meditation. It is the ethics which are all important. But nowadays ethics seems to have gone a little to the periphery and its meditation which now occupies the centre of the picture. People of course don't neglect ethics, I wouldn't say that but they understand that ethical behaviour is important because of its effect on the mind because only a mind which has been prepared through ethical behaviour can really meditate, or concentrate and meditate in any way satisfactorily.

Then I would say finally that those who make up the Buddhist movement nowadays are less interested in karma and rebirth than their counterparts of 60 or 70 years ago, because they are more concerned at least theoretically with realisation here and now. And this I think is very likely connected with the increasing popularity of Zen. Zen as you know stresses very much the here and now. So that emphasis which many people take seriously tends to swing interest away from karma and rebirth and the whole future prospect of life after life after life.

Now our real subject this evening as those of you who were present last week will know, is the dynamics of being. As I mentioned also last week this title covers what we call *pratitya-samutpada*, conditioned co-production consisting of the twelve *nidanas* or links. Just as we saw the analysis of man covers the five *skandhas* or aggregates and just as we will see next week the title 'Texture of Reality' covers the three *lakshanas* or characteristics. These three that is the twelve *nidanas*, five *skandhas* and three *lakshanas* being three of the most important doctrinal

categories or formulations of Buddhism.

Now Pratitya-samutpada, the conditioned co-production represents the application of the general Buddhist philosophical principle of universal conditionality to the process of rebirth. And that's why in this rather lengthy introduction this afternoon I've spoken of karma and rebirth. And, as I've already made it clear this is not one of those aspects of Buddhism which tends to attract people most nowadays. But nevertheless it is of great importance especially historical importance. It is an integral part of the whole Buddhist teaching and for this reason we are dealing with it in a cursory manner today. We can even say that while it is true that different aspects of Buddhism are of greater interest at different times, we should nevertheless try to achieve a balance as between these different aspects. And this of course is only possible, if we ourselves become psychologically and spiritually balanced. If we find that one aspect appeals to us very strongly it is usually because there is some imbalance in ourselves. A certain need in ourselves to which that aspect of the teaching corresponds. So as we become more and more balanced we find it less and less this aspect or that aspect which attracts more or less exclusively and more the body or the whole body, the sum total of the teaching which attracts us instead.

Now I've spoken of the dynamics of being. It might have been more appropriate one may say to have spoken of the dynamics of becoming. Being, rather a static word, not a very Buddhistic word whereas becoming, a more dynamic word, is perhaps more appropriate. Now, pratitya-samutpada, as I've already said, means literally conditioned co-production and this is obviously a very dynamic term and not a static one. It deals with production or origination. We also translate it dependent origination. And, as I've also said, it consists of twelve nidanas or twelve links in a series. Each of these nidanas or links arises in dependence on or conditioned by the preceding. That is why we speak of conditioned co-production or dependent origination of these successive links or nidanas, one by one in the series or chain, as it's also called. So let's see one by one what these are.

I should observe first of all that some texts enumerate five nidanas, other texts enumerate 10 nidanas but 12 is the standard number. Usually twelve are described in the various textbooks of Buddhist philosophy. But we shouldn't forget the existence of the five-fold and ten-fold enumerations, because they serve to remind us that lists of this sort shouldn't be taken too literally. You mustn't think of any particular subject, or any particular object as literally divided into a specific number of parts. You shouldn't really think of the Eightfold path as quite literally consisting of eight distinct parts. These are divisions just for practical convenience. So the existence of the five and the ten as regards the links, ? the pratitya-samutpada should remind us, even when we're dealing with the twelve that the twelve are not to be taken too literally. We should try to understand through them and with their help the spirit of conditionality rather than pin it down in a set, particular framework.

Now, the first nidana, in some ways the most important of all, although they are all very, very important is avidya or ignorance. Not ignorance in the intellectual sense so much as what we may describe as a lack of spiritual awareness, deprivation of spiritual awareness or even if you like spiritual consciousness and spiritual being. So avidya in this sense is the direct antithesis of bodhi or enlightenment. Some weeks ago we saw in the course of the lecture on evolution, lower and higher, we saw that bodhi or enlightenment or as it's also called, nirvana, is the goal of the whole evolutionary process especially of the whole process of the higher evolution. And in our chart which some of you may remember it was represented by the symbol for infinity. Now, in the same way avidya, ignorance, lack of spiritual awareness represents all that lies behind us as it were or if you like below us in that evolutionary process. If Enlightenment represents the goal, then avidya represents the depths as it were from which we have come. If Enlightenment represents the mountain top, the mountain peak, then avidya represents the valleys or the lowlands form which we gradually we are emerging and which lie wrapped in darkness. More specifically avidya or ignorance or lack of spiritual awareness is made up of various wrong views - wrong ways of looking at things. A number of these are specified in the canonical texts. For instance, the wrong view which consists in seeing the conditioned as unconditioned. Thinking that anything mundane, anything phenomenal can last forever. It's not an intellectual conviction,

of course, but an unconscious assumption. We behave as though certain things were going to last forever, we cling on to them therefore and we're unhappy when we finally have to surrender them. Another example, another specific instance of avidya is belief in a personal god, a supreme being. Some of you may be rather surprised to learn that Buddhism lists this as an example of spiritual unawareness, but Buddhism as I tried to explain two weeks ago in the talk at Caxton Hall on Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, Buddhism like psychoanalysis itself tends to regard the god figure, the idea of a supreme being, a creator, as a sort of representation of the father of our childhood on which we depend for help when we get into difficulties. So Buddhism tends therefore to regard belief of this sort, dependence of this sort as a manifestation of spiritual immaturity and spiritual unawareness. Also various beliefs, whether rationalised or not in the efficacy or the value of purely external actions. Now, this might seem rather to be flogging a dead horse probably is so far as most people here are concerned but having spent 20 years in India, having seen so much of popular Hinduism, it doesn't seem to me that this is so much of a dead horse in others parts of the world. Even now there are very many Hindus, orthodox Hindus, who genuinely believe that the waters of the Ganges for instance have very definitely a purifying effect. And if you take a dip in those waters then your sins will really be washed away. You'll probably be surprised to hear that quite educated, intelligent Hindus, some of them Western educated will quite seriously and quite honestly defend this belief. It reminds me of a little story about Rama Krishna, the great Hindu mystic at the end of the last century. He was once asked about this. Is it true as the orthodox say, when you take a dip in the Ganges all your sins are washed away. Now he didn't like to offend the feelings of the orthodox, at the same time he didn't like to commit himself to the orthodox belief. So he said to the questioner, 'Yes, it's quite true. When you take a dip in the sacred Ganges all your sins are washed away. He said, 'But when you go down into the water, they take the form of crows and they perch off on the trees nearby. And when you come out of the water they come back again.' So this is how he got round this difficulty. This does reflect the tendency of people to attach importance to external acts. Anyone might say in the West, the whole Reformation conducted by Luther was really about this question. Whether a purely, mechanical, external observance, in this case the whole question of indulgences and the sacramental side of religion generally had a value of their own. You probably know for instance in those days that it was one of the teachings of the church, I think it still is in fact, in the Catholic Church, that the sinfulness of the priest in no way impairs the efficacy of the sacrament. The priest can be as sinful as you like but when he performs the sacrament because he utters certain words in a certain way the efficacy is unimpaired. So Luther protested against this sort of external view of religion. And it still is quite strong in certain quarters. Only recently I was reading an account, several accounts of the proceedings of the two recent Vatican Councils. It's quite clear that in the Councils there were two groups of fathers participating. One group, a smaller group, admittedly wanted to hang on to all the old mechanical, external, ritualistic ways of regarding religion and the other, more progressive fathers wanting to abolish them or at least modify them. So this is a permanent element it seemed in the religious character, if we're not careful - trying to treat things external, as it were actions, ceremonies, rituals and sacraments as possessing efficacy and value by themselves, quite apart from the state of mind with which they are performed. This sort of belief, this sort of conviction though ostensibly religious is really a part of avidya, a part of ignorance, a part of spiritual unawareness. Also one can say above all, unawareness, spiritual unawareness includes ignorance of the law of universal conditionality itself; of which the conditioned co-production or dependent origination is the exemplification. Metaphysically, as I've already indicated, we can say that avidya represents a state of mental and spiritual darkness or lack of illumination.

Now the formula says, dependent on this ignorance, this avidya, this spiritual unawareness arise what are called the samskaras. Samskaras literally means preparation or set up. We saw this last week. We saw this last week. We also saw that the word stands for volitions, acts of will. Here it stands more for the aggregate of those mental conditions which under the law of karma are responsible for the production, or preparation, or setting up of the first moment of consciousness in a so-called new life. In this context, that is the context of the 12 nidanas, the word samskaras is often translated as karma formations when it appears in the context of the five skandhas, the five aggregates, it isn't so translated. It's usually translated there as volitions. But here it's

translated as karma formations, all those mental conditions which, as I've said, under the law of karma are responsible for producing the first moment of consciousness in the new, or so-called new life. Essentially one may say they are acts of will connected with different states of mind. These states of mind can be either what we call technically skilful or unskilful. Buddhism in its original texts usually avoids words like good and bad. It uses instead skilful or unskilful. The unskilful mental states are those dominated by greed or craving, by hate and also by mental confusion or bewilderment. And the skilful mental states are those which are the opposite of these. Those which are dominated instead by generosity, love, kindness and clarity of mind. All of these can of course be expressed through body, through speech and through mind. Now those volitions which are based in or based on rather or rooted in unskilful states, that is to say states of craving or hate or mental confusion result in what's popularly called, a bad rebirth. And those which are based on skilful states, those volitions which are based on skilful states that is to say states which are dominated by generosity, by love and by clarity of mind result in what we usually refer to as a good rebirth. But it's important to note here that Buddhism regards both of these as ultimately rooted in ignorance. Buddhism would say that desire for a good rebirth or even working towards a good rebirth is just as much a product of ignorance in the spiritual sense as working towards a bad one. Because rebirth isn't the goal of Buddhism, not even a good rebirth. The goal one may say is the complete emancipation of the mind or of the consciousness from the round of conditioned existence itself, from the round of birth and death and rebirth. The texts give very often a rather pointed comparison for the relationship between ignorance, that is to say, the first nidana, on the one hand and the samskaras or karma formations on the other. They view the state of ignorance is like the state of drunkenness. A state of spiritual unawareness is like a state of drunkenness when the mind is overpowered with drink, with alcohol. And the samskaras, the karma formations are like the actions which you perform in that state. So in effect the Buddha is saying that most people in their ordinary everyday actions, even their so-called conventionally religious actions, are no better from a spiritual point of view than drunken men or women behaving foolishly in various ways. That's really the state of most of us. We've often heard it said that we're asleep, but now the Buddha is telling us we're drunk which is ? it would be difficult to say. We're drunk because we are overcome as it were by this spiritual unawareness and everything we do, everything we say, everything we think is the product in one way or another of that spiritual unawareness. Just as when a man is drunk, wherever he sits, whatever he does, whatever he thinks, might seem very wise and clever to himself but it's just the outcome of his drunkenness, the expression of that. So in the same way we may do all sorts of things, may speak, may think, may indulge in all sorts of charitable activities, all sorts of conventional religious practices but it's all the outcome basically, ultimately of spiritual unawareness. This we may say is a rather sobering thought.

Now, three, in dependence on the samskaras, in dependence on these karma formations, in dependence on all these drunken activities as it were, arises vijnana or consciousness. Now this isn't consciousness in general. It's consciousness in a specific sense. What is called technically the relinking consciousness. And it is so-called because it relinks one, the person concerned, or the psyche concerned to the psycho-physical organism of the new life or new birth if you like. According to Buddhism for conception to take place, conception of a human being, three factors are necessary according to the texts. First of all, sexual intercourse. Secondly, it must be the prospective mother's season and thirdly there must be what the texts popularly describe as the being to be reborn. Being here of course represents or equals the last moment of consciousness belonging to the previous existence or previous birth. In other words, it represents the re-linking consciousness. According to the Theravada school, there is no interval. Rebirth follows immediately upon death. There's no interval in between. But other schools, the Sarvastivadins and following them the Tibetans, teach that in between there's an intermediate state. This intermediate state is very well known to a number of us from 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead'. I'm not going at present into the question of who is right and who is wrong. I'm merely stating this difference.

A very important question which does arise however, is who or what is reborn. One is often asked this. Sometimes people like to ask tricky questions, sometimes think that they are being

rather clever especially when you talk about anatta, the no-self, or the no-soul and so on, they like to pop up afterwards and say if there's no self what's reborn. Or who is reborn? This is considered by some people very clever. Now, one may say in this connection that there are two extremes to be avoided. One extreme is maintaining that the person who is reborn, who reappears in a new existence is the same as the old one. So if someone is reborn, well, it's the same Tom or Dick or Harry or Gertrude or Mary that you had before. Same old mind in a new body. This sort of belief is expressed for instance in the Bhagavad-Gita, where Sri Krishna says what is rebirth - it's just like changing your clothes. You get up in the morning, you decide to wear a new set of clothes, so just like that, you cast aside the old body and you take a new body. You yourself as it were remain unchanged. So the person in the previous life, the person in the present life are the same. The other view says no, they are different. They're two quite different persons. The influence or conditioning coming from the body is so profound, so basic as it were that you can't speak of the same person. It's a different person entirely. So these are the two extremes. That the person reborn is the same as the one who died or different to the one who died.

Now this difference these two extremes are connected historically with a very ancient Indian dispute about the nature of causation. One can say that in this connection there were two schools, even now in India there are two schools. One is called Satkaryavada. The Satkaryavadan schools maintain that cause and effect are identical. They say that when a so-called effect is produced all that has really happened is that the cause has changed its form. They say for instance that supposing you have a lump of gold, that's the cause. The lump of gold is made into ornaments, that represents the effect. Well, it's the same gold whether you call it cause or whether you call it effect. It doesn't make any difference, it's one, it's the same, it's uninterrupted.

Now those called the Asatkaryavada, they say no. They say cause is one thing, effect is quite different. Both these views, the Satkaryavada and Asatkaryavada if they are pressed logically, they both make causation impossible. If cause and effect are really identical, well, you can't really speak of cause and effect at all. If on the other hand cause and effect are quite different, well how can you relate them. So in that case there's also no causation. So Buddhism avoids this whole argument and regards it as proceeding from wrong premises in any case. Buddhism teaches neither Satkaryavada, identity of cause and effect nor Asatkaryavada, difference of cause and effect. It teaches pratitya-samutpada. It teaches conditionality. It says symbolically or abstractedly, in dependence on A B arises. It says that the relationship between the two terms A and B cannot be described in terms of identity and cannot be described either in terms of difference. These two categories do not just fit.

Now the same idea is applied also to this question of rebirth. Buddhism says if you ask is it the same person who is reborn or is it different then that's beside the point. The one who is reborn is neither the same as, nor different from the one who died. And here in the same way the formula is in dependence on the samskaras of the last life, the karma formations of the last life consciousness arises in this way. Buddhism doesn't say it's the same person reborn, doesn't say it's a different person entirely. If one puts in paradoxically and sometimes Buddhist writers do. They're rather fond of paradox. One can say the really strict orthodox Buddhist position is there is rebirth but there's no one who is reborn. That's exactly what the position is. And it's for this reason that Buddhism avoids terms like reincarnation. If you use the term reincarnation well, what is incarnating, getting into a body. Reincarnation means getting into the body again. It assumes just as in the case of the Bhagavad-Gita passage that I referred to, that you've got a little soul or self up here as it were and popping into one body after another. So this assumes that the soul or the self that does the popping into different bodies remains the same, unchanged, is reincarnated. So Buddhism doesn't like to use this word reincarnation. Technically the word punarbhava or again becoming or rebecoming, not even rebirth.

Now fourthly in dependence on consciousness, that is to say the relinking consciousness arises nama-rupa or name and form. This term was mentioned last week, so we need not go into it in great detail. Here it simply means the physical body. At first the embryonic physical body together with the other three mental aggregates of feeling, perception that is to say and so on.

Fifthly, fifth nidana, in dependence on this name and form, in dependence on this initially embryonic psycho-physical organism arise what we call the salayatana or the six bases. The six bases are simply the five physical sense organs together with the mind which is treated as a sort of sixth sense or even organ. They are so-called because they constitute the bases for our experience of the external world, the external universe.

Sixthly, in dependence on these six bases of the psycho-physical organism arises sparsa, contact or impression. This represents what we may describe as the mutual impact of organ and appropriate object. For instance, the eye comes into contact with form, visual form and this gives rise to what the Buddhist texts call eye contact and so on for the other five senses.

Now, seventhly, in dependence on this contact whether eye contact or any other sense organ contact arises feeling. This also was mentioned last week. With regard to its origin feeling is six-fold according to whether it's born of eye contact or ear contact and so on. And each of these is in turn three-fold that is to say pleasant, painful and neutral, neither pleasant nor painful as also we saw last week when we discussed vedana or feeling as one of the five aggregates.

Then eighthly dependent on feeling trsna or thirst arises. Now this is very important. First trsna, craving is of three kinds. There's kamma trsna, bhava-trsna and vibhava-trsna as also was explained last week. Karma trsna is thirst or craving for sensuous experience. Bhava trsna is thirst or craving for continued existence especially continued existence after death in heaven and vibhava tanna or vibhava trsna is craving for annihilation or death. This particular stage, the stage at which in dependence on feeling there arises thirst or craving is a very important stage, even the crucial stage of the whole chain, the whole series as we shall see a little later on.

Now, ninthly dependent on trsna, thirst or craving arises upadana which is grasping or clinging or attachment. It's very interesting to note that there are four kinds of upadana. Usually we think just in terms of attachment to material things - to pleasures and possessions. This is indeed the first one - the attachment first of all to sensuous pleasure, attachment to pleasant experiences coming through the eye or the ear or the nose. Well, we all know what they are, so no need to elaborate upon that. But then we get secondly, attachment to drsti, literally view, but which means also opinions, speculations, beliefs, including all sorts of philosophical and religious opinions. Now this is very significant. Buddhism represents attachment or grasping or clinging to our own beliefs, our own convictions as unhealthy. It's not that you shouldn't entertain beliefs or convictions or philosophical or religious opinions, but not be attached to them. How can you tell? What's the sign? It's not so difficult, in fact it's quite easy. Very often, you might have noticed when you're engaged in argument with someone, you challenge what they say. You refuse to accept it, you want to discuss it; for you it isn't axiomatic. Now some people become upset, some people may even become angry. I remember in this connection a little incident that occurred in Pune when I was there some years ago. I was staying with a Parsee friend who runs his own religious organisation. And there came to see us a husband and wife, both of them Jehovah's Witnesses. Now the wife was an Englishwoman, the husband was an Indian and he started talking to my friend. And he gave my friend of course the familiar line - you probably know what it is - about salvation and so on and so forth. So my friend asked one or two rational questions and then this man instead of replying said, look it's here in the Bible, look it's such and such a chapter, such and such a verse, it's all here. So my friend said, 'It may be all there but er' and he started asking another question. So this man said but look can't you see, can't you read? It's there in the Bible, it's all written down. So my friend again tried to speak and the man got really exasperated and said 'Well, llok there it is staring you in the face. Can't you see it?' So his wife who was a bit more intelligent just plucked him by the sleeve and said, 'Dear, the gentleman doesn't accept the Bible'. So the discussion went on along these lines and in the end this man lost his temper. And he just shook the dust of that place from his feet and in disgust and his wife remained behind very apologetically just trying to smooth things over. So when people behave in this way whether they're Christians or whether they're Muslims or whether they're Hindus or whether they're Buddhists; or whether they're humanists or whether they're atheists, they behave in this way, it's not that their opinions are right or wrong intrinsically, objectively considered but

they're attached to them. They cling to them and that attachment and that clinging is wrong, is a fetter, binds us to the wheel of birth and death. So it's something very salutary for us to remember. By all means accept the Three Refuges, accept karma and rebirth, accept the teaching of the five aggregates, of selflessness, accept the Buddha's teaching about meditation, about nirvana. Yes accept it all. Try to put it into practice, try to follow it all but don't be attached to it, don't cling to it in such a way that if anyone questions you or challenges you, you feel threatened and react in a hostile, unsympathetic manner. So this is the second type of clinging or attachment or grasping - clinging on to our views, our beliefs, our convictions.

Thirdly, there's attachment to what are called sila and vrata. Sila is ethics, vrata is religious observance. So clinging to these things also it's not that they're wrong. It's not that you shouldn't be ethical, it's not that you shouldn't practise the five precepts but don't cling on to them, that is to say don't cling on to your own practice. Don't think that this is an end in itself. Don't think that by practising you're differentiated from other people. The practices themselves are alright, just as the beliefs and convictions were but the clinging to them, the attachment to them, the one-sidedness psychologically with regard to them, that is not alright. It's all wrong. So this is the third.

Then fourthly, attachment to or clinging to or grasping, the belief in a permanent, unchanging self, or soul in the orthodox Christian sense, existing apart from the five aggregates about which we spoke.

So one can see that attachment, upadana in Buddhism has a very wide range of meaning. And it's therefore something about which we should be very, very cautious about. It's not just that we shouldn't be attached to material things, to sense pleasures. There's much more to it than that. We shouldn't be attached to our own opinions, our own ethical observances and religious practices and shouldn't be attached even to our own selves or any philosophical formulation of that belief in our self. So this is attachment.

Then tenthly, in dependence upon upadana attachment there comes into existence bhava or becoming. Bhava is life or existence as conditioned by our attachment on any plane on any level. And then eleventh, dependent on bhava, dependent on becoming, birth, jati, in Pali and Sanskrit.

Then lastly dependent upon birth, decay and death. Because once you've been born, well nothing on this earth can prevent you from decaying eventually and dying.

So these are the twelve nidanas or links of conditioned co-production as they're called. And they're a concrete, serial exemplification of this universal Buddhist principle of conditionality especially as that principle is applied to the process of rebirth.