

## Lecture 25: The Texture of Reality

Friends,

We are continuing our series introducing Buddhism as today we are concerned with the texture of Reality and, as was announced last week, under this title we shall be dealing with what Buddhism calls traditionally the Three Laksanas - the three Signs or the 3 Characteristics.

Now Reality is rather a big word. It is not only rather big but we might say it is very abstract even a trifle vague and one could also say that Buddhism on the whole, in general, isn't very fond of abstract or vague terminology. If we take the example of Tibetan Buddhism we find that far from dealing in abstractions - far from dealing in vague generalities - it prefers very concrete images. This is one of the things which impresses one at first very much about Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is not only concrete it is almost, one might say, materialistic if one can have a contradiction in terms: it is a materialistic spirituality. It's very concrete.

In the same way, or in the same spirit rather - not quite in the same way - another great school of Buddhism, that is to say Zen also avoids, as far as possible, abstractions and vague generalities. In some ways, Zen goes even much further than Tibetan Buddhism, rather than indulge in abstractions, Zen will either utter a piercing shriek or else give you thirty blows.

Now Reality, in any case, is not really a Buddhist word. In Buddhism we've got Sunyata, Tathata and so on - dharmakaya - but we haven't got really any true semantic equivalent of this word 'Reality'. There is no word in traditional Buddhist terminology of which Reality represents a satisfactory equivalent. So when we use this word 'Reality' in English, in speaking about Buddhism, we use it in a very makeshift, and very provisional sort of way. It isn't to be taken too literally and all the connotations which attach to it in general - Western, philosophical and religious usage - don't quite apply here in a Buddhist context.

Now the title of today's talk also speaks of the Texture of Reality. Now 'texture' is quite a different sort of word. 'Texture' isn't abstract, it is remarkably concrete. We speak, as you know, of the texture of a piece of cloth - cotton, silk or wool - they've all got a different texture which you can feel with your fingers quite easily. One also speaks of the texture of a piece of stone - if you put your fingers over a piece of marble the texture is quite different from what it would be if you put your fingers over a piece of granite.

This rather reminds me of an ancient Chinese custom. The Chinese as you probably know are very very fond of jade. There are all sorts of different kinds of jade: red and green and blue and white and black and so on. And they have all sorts of exotic names like 'Muttonfat jade' and 'dragon's blood jade' and things like that. And in the old days, I don't know if it goes on under the present regime, but experts used to be able to distinguish different kinds of jade just by feeling the texture of them under water with their fingertips - and with their eyes closed. They could know at once whether this was a piece of white jade or 'muttonfat' jade or purple jade - whatever it was - there were hundreds of varieties.

So this is a rather extreme example of what we mean by 'texture'. It is something very concrete whereas 'Reality' is something which seems rather abstract but it seems appropriate to use this more concrete expression to speak of the texture of 'Reality' because this implies that Reality is something to be felt even something to be handled - something to be experienced and, Buddhism

after all, is as you surely know by this time, above all else practical. It comprises ethics, religion, spiritual tradition. It isn't just a system of philosophy in the western academic sense. Now, continuing to use this word 'Reality' provisionally, we may say that in Buddhism, broadly speaking, Reality is of 2 kinds: there is what we call Conditioned Reality and what we call Unconditioned Reality. Or more simply, we can speak in terms of the Conditioned and the Unconditioned.

This distinction, we may say, is absolutely basic to Buddhist thought. You can't go very far in the study of Buddhism, especially in the study of Buddhist philosophy, whether the Abhidharma of the Theravadins or the Sarvastivadins, or in the study of the Madhyamika School, Yogacharya School, you can't go very far in your study of any of these schools, any of these traditions, without coming up against this basic distinction. In some of the schools, admittedly, the distinction is regarded as an ultimate distinction, but in other schools it is not so regarded, as we shall presently see.

Now 'conditioned' in the original languages is samskrta. Samskrta literally means 'put together' or 'compounded'. 'Sam' is 'together', 'krta' is 'made' or 'put' - so 'compounded, put together'. And 'Unconditioned' of course is asamskrta - that which is not put together, that which is not compounded, that which is simple in the philosophical sense.

Now this word samskrta or asamskrta - conditioned or unconditioned - is the same word, interestingly enough, as the name of the language Sanskrit. 'Sanskrit' is the Anglicised way of pronouncing it - it should be 'Sanskrita'. It is so called, at least according to the Brahmin pundits, because it is the perfected language, the language which has been properly put together, beautifully put together - as opposed to the rough, crude and unpolished prakrit (including Pali) spoken by the common people, that is to say especially by the non-Brahmins. In modern India usage sanskriti, in languages like Hindi and Bengali and Marathi, means 'culture'. They speak of bharatiya-sanskriti, meaning 'Indian culture' and Western Sanskriti and so on. So in this way, one gets the suggestion, the connotation, that the conditioned, samskrta, is also the artificial, that which has been put together, that which has been compounded, that which has been perfected and so on; whereas the Unconditioned is the natural, that which has not been subjected to any of these processes.

Now this factor receives explicit recognition in later Buddhism especially in the Tantric form of Buddhism. The Tantrics have a very interesting word for Reality, they call it sahaja. Now sahaja literally means 'born with' or co-nascent, if you want a Latinism. 'Saha' is 'together', 'ja' is 'born' as in jati, birth. So Reality is said to be that with which one is born, that which is innate, that which does not have to be acquired.

Now, as I have said, this distinction between the Conditioned and the Unconditioned, the artificial and the natural, spiritually speaking, is absolutely basic to Buddhism, Buddhist spiritual life, Buddhist philosophy. And the distinction goes very far back indeed - it is found very, very early in the history of Buddhism. It is found even before the Buddha's Enlightenment and you can hardly go back further than that so far as Buddhism is concerned. You probably know that the Tripitaka - the three baskets of Buddhist scriptures - consists of a Sutra Pitaka, a Vinaya Pitaka, an Abhidharma Pitaka. The Sutra Pitaka which is the collection of discourses of the Buddha consists of 5 great collections. The first is the Digha-Nikaya, the collection of long discourses. The second is the Majjhima-Nikaya, the collection of medium-length discourses.

Now in the Majjhima Nikaya, in the collection of medium-length discourses of which there are 151, there is a rather interesting discourse called the 'Ariyapariyesana-sutta'. It is of rather special interest because it's what we may describe as an autobiographical discourse. In it the Buddha himself is represented as relating the story of his own life, especially from his earlier days at home in the palace with his parents until the time of his great Enlightenment. In this particular discourse, the Ariyapariyesana Sutta, he describes how he left home, how he became a wandering monk, and how he strove and struggled for Enlightenment, practised terrible self mortifications and so on.

It's rather interesting that in this particular autobiographical discourse there's no mention made about the famous Four Sights. We all know the story of how the Buddha - or rather the Bodhisattva - is supposed to have sallied forth one fine morning in his chariot with his charioteer, and then to have seen successively the sick man, the old man, the corpse and then the monk, the wandering ascetic. Well, in this particular account there is no description of these Four Sights at all. It gives - the text gives - what we would describe as a comparatively naturalistic, even humanistic, description of how the Buddha came to give up the household life. It represents him - in his own words - as simply reflecting. It was a purely internal process, not connected so far as this account is concerned with anything external, anything which he saw, or anything which he heard - a purely subjective process going on within the depths of his own mind.

The Buddha relates how one day he was sitting at home in the palace, apparently withdrawn from his relations, his friends, his associates, sitting alone perhaps under a tree in the compound, perhaps in the evening when it is very cool, very calm, very quiet in India, and just reflecting. And the text represents him as reflecting in this way. What am I? What am I doing? How am I behaving? I myself am a being subject to birth. That's obvious: I've been born, no-one can deny that. I'm subject to old age - one day I shall grow old. I'm subject to sickness - I sometimes fall ill. And one day I shall die - I'm subject to death. So this is the sort of being I am - I'm mortal, subject in this way, to birth, old age, sickness and death. So being such a being, what do I do? What is my whole life? What is my whole course of existence? Being myself subject to birth I pursue those things which are also subject to birth. Being myself subject to old age I pursue these things which are also subject to old age. Being myself subject to sickness, decay, I pursue those things which are also subject to decay in the same way. And being myself subject to death, I pursue those things, those beings, which also are subject to death.

So this was his first line of reflection, his first line of thought: that being himself mortal, being himself conditioned, he pursued, he was interested in, he followed after, even lusted after, thirsted after, those things which also were mortal, which were conditioned. But then he goes on to relate to his interlocutor, who is a Jain ascetic, he goes on to relate how another, a different, almost a contrary train of reflection or train of thought arose. He says, 'It occurs to me: suppose now I was to do otherwise. Suppose now, being myself subject to birth, I go in search of that which is not subject to birth; which has no origin, which is timeless. Suppose myself being subject to old age, I go in search of that which never changes, which is not so subject. Suppose, being myself subject to sickness, to decay, I go in search of that in whose perfection there is no diminution. Or suppose, finally, being myself subject to death, I go in search of that which is everlasting, that which is eternal, that which is not subject to death as I am.'

So this was his second line of reflection, his second line of thought. And he relates how very shortly afterwards, as a result of thinking in these two ways, reflecting in these two ways, he left home. There is no story in this sutta about stealing out at night or about going off on horseback.

It simply says that although his parents - his father and his foster-mother - were weeping and bewailing, he didn't mind that. He put on the yellow robe, he shaved his head, cut off his beard and went forth from the home into the homeless life.

So this is the story, in brief, of what we may call the Buddha's conversion. 'Conversion' means literally a turning round, a turning about, not externally, not just from one religion to another, but internally from the conditioned to the unconditioned. The Bodhisattva, as he then was, realised that he was a conditioned being, realised that he was spending his whole time, his whole energy, going in pursuit of conditioned things, so he therefore decided to change it all, decided to go in search instead of the Unconditioned. So it was as simple as that. Stripped of all its mythological accretions, stripped of all the rather gorgeous legends which have accumulated about it in the course of centuries, the Buddha's conversion was as simple as that.

But though it was simple, though its simplicity is almost classic, as we may say, though it was simple, it certainly wasn't easy, we can be sure of that. Here and there in other portions of the scriptures we get indications that a terrible struggle went on in the Buddha's mind before he made his final decision.

Now the first type of pursuit when the conditioned pursues the conditioned, the mortal pursues the mortal, this is called in Pali the anarya pariyesana or the ignoble quest. And the second, when the conditioned goes in search of the Unconditioned, the mortal in pursuit of the immortal, this is called the aryapariyesana, the Noble Quest. Esana is a very strong word. It means search, quest, will, desire, urge or aspiration. It's a very strong word indeed, and it is pre-Buddhistic. We find it in the Upanishads. We find it, for instance, in the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, which is one of the oldest of the Upanishads. Esana: urge, desire or will or search, aspiration.

So the ignoble quest, the anarya-pariyesana - the conditioned pursuing the conditioned - corresponds to the round of existence, the Wheel of Life of Tibetan Buddhism, in which we are all involved, within which we all go up and down, up and down, round and round, from one life to the next indefinitely. And the Noble Quest, in which the conditioned goes in quest of the unconditioned - this corresponds to the Path: the Eightfold Path, the Sevenfold Path, the Path of the Bodhisattva, if you like, leading from the round, from the Wheel of Life, up through the spiral, about which we have spoken before, to the goal, Enlightenment or Nirvana.

Now the essence of the spiritual life we may say is to be found here. Here we put our finger, as it were, on the spring which works the whole mechanism. And the spring is the conditioned in pursuit of the unconditioned, the mortal seeking the immortal. Not just immortality of its own self, not immortality of the ego, but immortality which transcends all self, all ego.

In this connection we can refer to a young monk called Govinda who is mentioned also in the Majjhima-Nikaya who asks a question of the Brahma Sanankumara. We are told that this young monk was very devout, very earnest. So when the rainy season came, he decided to spend the whole rainy season meditating. You probably know that in the east, especially in India, there are three main seasons of the year. You've got your hot weather, then you've got your rainy weather, and then you've got after that your so-called cold weather, which is about as cold as England's summer. This is what the seasons are like in India. Each of them lasts about 4 months. So you've got 4 months of blazing sunshine without a drop of rain, 4 months of torrential rain with a little sunshine in between but the rain doesn't let up, and then you've got 4 of beautiful mild, warm rainless weather.

So the practice was in the Buddha's time, and it's still the practice in many Buddhist countries today, that during the rainy season monks simply go into retreat. You can't wander about, you can't walk from place to place, so in the old days they just stayed in a cave or in a little shed, or in their monastery later on, and they went into retreat. And this is an institution in all the Buddhist countries nowadays - the rainy season retreat - and they have it even in those countries where there's no rainy season, like parts of China. (There they call it the summer retreat.) Here it's been suggested in this connection we have a winter retreat.

So Govinda - this all happened during the lifetime of the Buddha - Govinda decided to observe the rainy season retreat by meditating. And he spent the whole three months - three months is compulsory, four months optional - meditating on metta, that's to say love, universal love, universal friendliness. So at the end of the three months we are told, such was the success of his meditation, that he had what we would call a vision. He had a vision of the Brahma Sanankumara, the eternal youth. And the Brahma said to him, 'What do you want?' So Govinda said 'I have a question.' And the question is this, in Pali: Papa .... anantam Brahmaloka. 'How may the mortal obtain the immortal Brahma world?' This was Govinda's question.

I'm not going to tell you what the reply was - might have that in another lecture. But the question is the essential religious question. How may the conditioned become unconditioned; how may the mortal become immortal? How may one conquer death? Now you may say at this point, it's all very well to talk of giving up the conditioned and going in search of the unconditioned, but it's all rather vague, it's all rather abstract. What exactly does one mean by the conditioned? How can we recognise the conditioned? How are we to know it?

Now the answer which the Buddhist tradition gives to this question is that we recognise the conditioned by means of the three characteristics, lakshanas, which it invariably bears. These 3 characteristics, these three lakshanas, are sometimes called the three signs of being, but I don't personally consider this a very good rendition. I think it should be rather the three signs of becoming, because the condition is becoming, it's not a static being. Now the three lakshanas, the three characteristics, of all conditioned existence, inseparable from it are dukkha, anitya, and anatman. These may be rendered as the unsatisfactory, or painful; the impermanent; and the devoid of self. And all conditioned things whatsoever, in this universe, possess all these three characteristics. They're all unsatisfactory, all impermanent, all devoid of self.

Now let us consider them one by one. First of all dukkha. Dukkha's one of the best known Buddhist words, lots of people know it in the original language, Pali or Sanskrit, simply as dukkha. It's usually translated as suffering. But I personally feel that unsatisfactoriness, though a bit cumbersome perhaps, a bit clumsy, is better. One must confess that the etymology of the word - and the etymology of the word often sheds light on its meaning - the etymology of the word in this case isn't very clear. According to some authorities, some traditional authorities, the term was originally used for an ill-fitting chariot wheel. Du as a prefix means anything which is not good, bad, ill or wrong, or out of place. And the kha, the main part of the word is supposed to be connected with chakkha or chakra, which means of course wheel. So according to some of these traditional authorities, dukkha meant originally the ill-fitting wheel of the chariot.

Now in the days of the Buddha and before, as you know, chariots were the principle means of conveyance and they didn't have any springs. So if the chariot wheel didn't fit properly, then the chariot was very, very uncomfortable to ride in indeed. So the idea of the ill-fitting chariot wheel suggests something which is not fitting properly, something which is out of place, and something

which therefore results in disharmony and discomfort and suffering. And according to these traditional authorities that's the origin of the word dukkha.

Now suffering or unsatisfactoriness is obviously of very many different kinds. The Buddha speaks usually of 7 different kinds. Let's take a look at what they are; perhaps we shall recognise some of them, perhaps we already know some of them ourselves. First of all, the Buddha says, birth is suffering. Human life starts with suffering. I remember in one of his writings, Oscar Wilde says that at the birth of a child or a star there is suffering. That's a bit poetic, perhaps, but it does express a great spiritual truth. Birth is suffering. It's rather significant that our life begins with suffering. Birth, the event of birth, is certainly physically painful for the mother, sometimes it's even painful for the father, and for the infant it is, we are told, a traumatic experience, a very unpleasant experience indeed: to be suddenly thrust forth into this cold world, to be slapped perhaps and beaten and all that sort of thing. It isn't a very welcoming experience.

Then, the Buddha says, decay, in the sense of old age - this is a suffering. Nowadays, there's some improvement, we have old age pensions, or senior citizens pensions I believe they call them now. But even so, old-age or senior citizenship has quite a number of disadvantages. There's physical weakness. You can't get about as you used to, you can't dash up those stairs, climb those mountains that you used to. Also loss of memory: you can't remember names, you can't remember where you put things. Sometimes it's quite tragic to see this in old people. Not so long ago Dr. Suzuki was interviewed - I think it was Maurice Walshe who told this story, or maybe it was Ruth Walshe. And he was talking, discussing various aspects of Buddhism, and he wanted to refer to a certain book and he couldn't, he had forgotten the title. He's 94 after all, or 95. Then he said well my brain is not so bad, but my memory does fail me from time to time. So it's very sad when you see a man of this intellectual and spiritual eminence suffering from old age in this way. There's not only loss of memory, there's even senility. Sometimes you see people who are very advanced in age, and they quite evidently have started losing their senses. A particularly tragic example of this sort of thing was Dr. Annie Besant who in the last five years of her life had to be looked after. There are a number of other examples that one can think of.

And lastly, perhaps most painful of all, when one is very old one is dependent upon others. One can't do very much for oneself. One might even have to be physically looked after by a nurse or relations. So all this makes the time of old age, especially extreme old age, despite all modern comforts and amenities, very often a time of suffering.

Then sickness is suffering. I need hardly insist on that. Whether it's a question of a little toothache, or whether it's a question of a terrible disease like cancer, no sickness, no disease, is pleasant. It seems that as the years go by, as the centuries pass, as we have more and more effective medicine ...

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... very often people don't want to die. They are very sorry to leave the scene of their labours, activities, pleasures, and they don't want to go. But even if they do want to go, even if they are quite happy to pass on to a new life, a new existence, or into they know not what, very often the

physical process of dissolution is quite painful. Also connected with it there's much mental suffering. Sometimes on their death beds, people are stricken with remorse, they remember all the terrible things they've done in the past, wrongs they've done certain individuals, fears and apprehensions very often for the future. All this makes death for many people a very terrible experience and one which before it comes, they try their best not to think about.

Then again there are other forms of suffering: to be joined with what one dislikes, that is suffering. We all have this sort of experience. Sometimes it happens that even in our own family there are people that we don't like, people with whom we don't get on well. This is very tragic. Not very often, or not always second cousins and third aunts and things like that, but sometimes even brothers and sisters, even parents, even children, don't get on well together. But because the tie of blood is there, well one can't help it, there's a certain amount of contact, we have to be joined with them, but we dislike them and there's suffering.

Then with regard to say our jobs, many of us don't like our jobs, those who've got jobs of course, they'd rather do something else, but they were stuck into it when they were fifteen or sixteen, or seventeen or eighteen and can't get out, and that's a suffering: they have to do things they don't want to do, come into contact with people they don't like coming into contact with - all that is suffering. And all sorts of environmental conditions which are unpleasant. Even things like the English climate one might say. These are not altogether pleasant. One would prefer to get away, to go to the sunny south, sunny Italy or sunny Greece or sunny Yugoslavia or sunny Tunisia. But isn't always possible. So very often one is joined to what one dislikes - people, places, things - and there seems to be no way of escape, certainly no way of escaping entirely. You just have to go around with these people, places, things you don't like indefinitely. Sometimes it feels almost like being tied to a corpse; you can't get away from the corpse.

Then on the other hand, the Buddha says, to be separated from what one likes is suffering. Do you see how difficult we human beings are to please? To be separated from what we like is a suffering for us too. And this can be a very terrible suffering indeed. It often happens that in the course of life we're separated from relations, separated from friends. There are people we'd like to be with, people that we'd like to meet more often, but circumstances interpose and it becomes simply impossible. This happens very often in time of war. Families are broken up, and so on, as the older ones amongst you will remember very very well indeed.

I remember during the war when I was out in the East, and when I was in the Army, I remember that so many of my friends used to get letters from home, letters from their families and friends regularly every week or every two weeks, and then a day would come, a time would come, when the letters would stop. And they didn't know what had happened. They knew of course that there were bombs falling in England, so sometimes they would think - well, no letter for one week, no letter for two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, and they would start thinking - well, the worst must have happened. And then perhaps they would get the news either from another relation or officially that either their wife and children, or their parents or brothers and sisters, had been killed in an aerial bombardment. And for them of course there was the permanent separation through death.

And many people, as we know, brood over these sort of losses for years and years. I've met since I've come back to this country quite a number of people, mostly women, who seem to brood for years over the loss of someone near and dear. In the case of the women, they usually brood over the loss of their husbands - well that's quite natural to feel sorrow, to feel shock for a short

period, but when it goes on year after year then it become obsessional, becomes positively neurotic. And all this is a suffering.

Then, not to get what one wants is suffering. We all know this very well because we all like to get what we want. If we can't get it, we feel upset, disturbed, troubled. And the stronger the desire, the more the suffering. No need to elaborate upon that. It's something with which we're acquainted almost every day, if not every hour. So the Buddha, on those occasions, those many occasions, when he spoke about suffering, and tried to get people to see it in perspective a little, summed up his discourse, summed up his talk, by saying: 'In short, the five aggregates themselves are unsatisfactory, are suffering.' The five aggregates being of course form, feeling, perceptions, volitions and consciousness. These make up the totality of conditioned sentient existence, as we saw a couple of weeks ago.

Now most people if you ask them, certainly if you press them, they're prepared to admit that birth is painful, sickness - yes, old age - yes, death - yes. They're quite prepared to admit that all these things are painful things, painful experiences; but at the same time they are rather reluctant to accept the conclusion which follows from all this, the conclusion that conditioned existence itself is suffering. It's as though they admit all the digits in the sum, but they won't accept the total to which those digits all add up. They think that to say that conditioned existence itself is suffering is going just a bit too far. They say yes, there is a certain amount of suffering in the world, but on the whole it's not a bad place. And they say that Buddhism, when it says that conditioned existence as such is suffering, is being rather pessimistic, if not morbid. Surely, they say, there's some little gleam of happiness somewhere in the world.

Now Buddhism doesn't of course deny that there may be pleasant experiences in life as well as painful ones. We saw the other week that feeling is pleasant and neutral as well as painful. But Buddhism says that even the pleasant experiences are at bottom painful. The pleasant experiences themselves are really only concealed suffering, suffering, as it were, glossed over, the gilt on the pill, as it were. And the extent to which we can see this, the extent to which we can see the suffering behind the pleasure, the extent to which we can see - to borrow a metaphor from classical mythology - the skulls and bones behind the banks of flowers in the sirens' caves, depends on our spiritual maturity.

Dr. Conze gives four interesting examples of concealed suffering. In the first, something which is pleasant for oneself involves suffering for other people, for other beings. Now usually we don't think of this aspect. If we're alright, if we're having a good time, we don't bother too much or too often about others. There's a well-known little army saying which some of you may know that expresses this attitude of mind perfectly well. No need to repeat it.

To take a common example: suppose you take meat eating, carrion eating. I don't know how many people have enjoyed their roast beef and Yorkshire pudding today, but many people who do enjoy roast beef, or whatever it happens to be, they don't bother very much about the sufferings of the cow or the pig or the lamb or the chicken or whatever other unfortunate animal it happens to be. Some of us, a few months ago, attended at Kensington College of Psychic Science Miss Ruth Harrison's lecture on animals as machines, which was illustrated by slides. And some of the slides showed very, very shocking sights indeed, showed very clearly how much suffering is involved for so many animals just to give us the pleasure, if it is that, of eating meat. Most of the time the conscious mind just ignores all that. It goes on merrily plying knife and fork without thinking about the suffering of the animals at all.



But the unconscious mind is aware. The unconscious mind knows. Very often the unconscious mind is wiser than the conscious mind. You can't fool, you can't deceive the unconscious mind. You can shut something out, some unpleasant fact out from the conscious mind, but where does it go? It just goes down, it sinks down into the unconscious, and it's there all the time, and you don't know it, at least the conscious mind doesn't know it. And it's because of this, this sort of unconscious knowledge, that there's also an unconscious feeling of guilt, because in the depths of ourselves we know that our own pleasure has been bought at the expense of the suffering of other living beings.

And this guilt is the source of a great deal of uneasiness, a great deal of anxiety and a great deal of suffering. It's quite interesting to read some - I think it was a year or two ago - that the pilot who dropped - if it was the pilot - I don't know who exactly was responsible - who dropped the first atom bomb on Japan, on Hiroshima, died in a lunatic asylum, in a mental hospital in America having been almost completely insane for two or three years. That's rather significant.

Dr. Conze gives a different example, a rather milder one but a quite common one. He gives the example of wealth. He says in one of his books that he's known quite a few wealthy people, and they've nearly always been afraid of becoming poor. Now it's a strange thing, a poor person isn't afraid of dying of starvation or anything like that, strange as it may seem. I know people in India who don't really know where their next week's meal is coming from, sometimes not even their next day's meal, but you don't find them worrying about it. You find they are perfectly cheerful, sometimes even quite happy. But wealthy people, so Dr. Conze says, are often afraid of becoming poor, afraid of losing their wealth - and why is this? He says it's because unconsciously they feel that they don't deserve to have it. The unconscious says it ought to be taken away from you, and the conscious mind says well perhaps it will be taken away from you, and worries.

Unconscious guilt feelings are there very often in the mind of the wealthy person, because he knows, however much his conscious mind may deny it, that he has acquired his wealth in various dishonest ways by causing suffering to other people, directly or indirectly, and he therefore very often feels a constant need for self justification. He says: 'I earn my money. I contribute to the well-being of the community. It's a social service.' - and so on and so forth. Or else he may say: 'Well if I'm rich and other people are poor, it's because I work harder, others are lazy, good for nothing, and so on.' But sometimes the feeling of guilt becomes very, very strong indeed, and drastic measures are required to relieve it, very drastic indeed, consisting even in giving away some of the wealth - giving away in the form of donation, usually to the church, very often to a hospital. This is rather significant because hospitals relieve suffering - so he's compensating for the suffering he has caused in acquiring the wealth by giving some of it to alleviate some of the suffering in the hospitals. This sort of donation is what is called conscience money. If one has anything to do with religious organisations, one very quickly learns how common a thing conscience money is. And sometimes it's just put through the letter box - many hospitals have this experience - in envelopes simply encribed 'from an anonymous donor'. Then you know that someone's conscious is really biting them.

Now the second sort of example that Dr. Conze gives is this: that something is pleasant, but it's tied up with anxiety because we're afraid of losing it. Now a very good example of this sort of thing - which is very pleasant to enjoy and to exercise, and which is tied up with a very great anxiety of losing it - is of course political power. It's very sweet, so people say, to exercise it, to have power over other people, but all the time you're afraid of losing it. You're afraid even in a democratic country, especially afraid if you're a dictator, if your political power has been arrested

by force, if there's all sorts of other people greedy to seize it from you, then you may not have a single easy night's rest.

It must be a very terrible thing, the state of mind of a person of this sort. It must be very terrible indeed to be surrounded by guards, always suspicious, not even able to trust your best friend, always worrying who is going to make the next move, whether you ought to wear your bullet proof vest the next time you go out or not. So think of the state of mind of a person of this sort. Buddhist texts give a very good illustration. They say suppose there's a hawk. The hawk seizes a piece of meat and flies off with it in its claws. And what happens? Hundreds of other hawks fly after it and try to seize that piece of meat. Some peck and stab at the first hawk's body, some at his eyes, some at his head, trying to tear away the meat. So many so-called pleasures, like that of possessing political power, are rather like that especially, I would say, in the highly competitive world of society of today. You can't hold on to anything, you can't enjoy anything, without hundreds of other people trying to snatch it from you, whether it's a good job, or whether it's so many other things that you can think of for yourselves.

Then a third example given by Dr Conze is: something is pleasant but it binds us to something else which brings about suffering. And he gives the example of the body - a very simple example which we can all understand. He says through the body we experience all sorts of pleasurable sensations. Because of these pleasurable sensations we become attached to the body, because the body is the source of these sensations. But the body's also the source of unpleasant sensations. So by being attached to that which provides us with the pleasanter sensations we become no less attached to that which provides us with the unpleasant sensations. We can't have them separately.

Then lastly he says, pleasures derived from the experience of conditioned things cannot satisfy the deepest longings of the heart. In us, in each one of us, as I've said before, there is something which is unconditioned, something which is not of this world - as it were - something transcendental, the Buddha-nature, call it what you like, but whatever you call it, its distinctive characteristic is that it cannot be satisfied by anything conditioned. It can be satisfied only by the unconditioned. So whatever conditioned things you give it, whatever conditioned things it enjoys, there's always a lack, always a void, which only the unconditioned can fill. So therefore it can be said, to come back to the Buddha's conclusion, that all conditioned things - whether actually or whether potentially - are unsatisfactory, are suffering; that suffering, that unsatisfactoriness is a characteristic, a basic characteristic, of all forms of conditioned existence, sentient conditioned existence especially.

Now secondly, the characteristic, the lakshana of anitya. Anitya means impermanent, this is quite easily translated. Nitya is permanent, eternal; Anitya - negative - prefix is impermanent and non-eternal. This characteristic, this lakshana won't detain us as long as Duhkha, suffering or unsatisfactoriness. It's comparatively easy to understand, at least to understand intellectually. It asserts, to begin with, that all conditioned things, all compounded things, are constantly changing. Conditioned things, by their very nature, their very definition in Sanskrit and Pali, are compounded, made up of parts. And what is compounded, which is made up of parts, can also be uncompounded, can be unmade. This is happening of course all the time.

Perhaps it's easier for us to understand this truth nowadays than it was before, in ancient times. We know nowadays from science that there's no such thing as hard solid matter in lumps as it were, scattered throughout space. We know that what we think of as matter is in reality only various forms of energy. The same great truth applies to the mind. In the mind also, in the mental

life, there's nothing unchanging, no unchanging permanent immortal soul. There's only a constant succession of mental states, feelings, perceptions, volitions, acts of consciousness. The mind we may say changes even more quickly than the physical body. We can't see the physical body changing, not usually, but we can see the mind changing, our own mind changing, if we are a little observant.

And that's why the Buddha said, rather strangely, apparently, that it's more reprehensible to identify oneself, one's ego if you like, with the mind than with the body. To think that I am the mind is more reprehensible than to think I am the body, because the body at least possesses a certain relative stability but the mind doesn't possess any stability at all. It's constantly changing, and we can perceive that change. To put it very, very broadly, one can say that the characteristic of anitya shows us that the whole universe from top to bottom, in all its grandeur, in all its immensity, is just one vast congeries of processes of different types, taking place at different levels, and all interrelated. But nothing is standing still, nothing is immobile, not even for an instant, not even for a fraction of a second.

It's very easy to forget this. We think that well, the mountains are always there, the everlasting hills, the sky is up there like an inverted bowl, our bodies are relatively permanent, houses at least, chairs, tables and things like that. It's only when the little increments of change add up to a great change, add up to a catastrophe when something breaks or comes to an end, or when we die, that we realise the truth of anityata, impermanence or non-eternity. So this also characterises all conditioned things. All conditioned things begin, continue and then cease, pass away.

Now thirdly and lastly, the third characteristic, the third lakshana, is anatman, literally the no-self or the non-self. This teaches us that all conditioned things are not only suffering, not only transitory, but are devoid of a permanent unchanging self, or if you like selfhood. I've really dealt with this the week before last in the talk on the analysis of man, so I need not go too far into it today. Perhaps it might be helpful on this occasion to speak a few words on the meaning of the word Atman.

I remember many years ago, my own teacher, who was an Indian Buddhist monk, used to say that one cannot possibly understand what the Buddha meant by anatman unless one understood first of all the contemporary conception of atman. And he told me a rather amusing story in this connection about his own experience in Ceylon. He apparently once got up in Ceylon in the midst of a meeting, a gathering of Buddhist monks and laymen there, and he made this point. He said, We're all discussing about anatma, but surely we should try to understand first of all what is meant by atma. The Buddha denied atma, but what was he denying? What was the contemporary belief or doctrine? What did the Hindus of his day believe about the atman? Let's go into that, then we can understand the Buddha's position. But this rather subtle point of view wasn't very acceptable, and several rather orthodox people got up and said 'We don't want that sort of Hindu philosophy here.' So he just sat down.

But it's true what he said. You can't understand what the Buddha meant by anatma unless you know what Hinduism means - at least Hinduism of the Buddha's day - by atma. Now there are many, many conceptions; in the Upanishads alone there are many conceptions of anatma mentioned. Some Upanishads say that the atma is the physical body. Other Upanishads say that the atma, the self, the soul if you like, is just as big as the thumb, it's material, and it abides in the heart. There are very many different views, very many different doctrines. But the most common one in the Buddha's day, the one which he appears to have been most concerned with, asserted

that the atma, the self, was first of all incorporeal or immaterial, conscious, unchanging, individual, as I am I and you are you, sovereign - in the sense of exercising complete control over its own destiny, and also blissful.

Now the Buddha maintained that there was no such entity. And he appealed to experience. He said, if we look within, if we look at ourselves, if we look at our own mental life, we see there are only five aggregates. We see that there's form, we see that there are feelings, perceptions, there are volitions, and there are acts of consciousness. We see that all these are constantly changing, there's nothing permanent. We see that they all arise in dependence on conditions, there's nothing sovereign. We see that they're all riddled with suffering in one way or another, there's nothing blissful, ultimately. So there's no self, atma. The five aggregates are anatma. The five aggregates don't constitute any such self as the Hindus of the Buddha's day had denied. Neither does it exist in them or outside of them or associated with them in some other way. All conditioned things whatsoever without exception are dukkha, anitya and anatma, are suffering, are impermanent and are devoid of self. So these are the three great characteristics of all conditioned existence, all conditioned life in all its forms.

And seeing conditioned existence, seeing life, in this way as invariably subject to suffering, to impermanence, to non-selfness, this seeing is called by a very special name in Buddhism. It's called insight, translating the Pali vipassana or Sanskrit vidarshana. Insight, it's axiomatic for Buddhism, can be developed only on the basis of a controlled, purified, elevated, concentrated, integrated mind, in other words a mind which is meditative. Insight isn't just intellectual understanding; it's direct intuitive perception which takes place in the depths of meditation when the ordinary mental processes have fallen into abeyance.

Certainly one can say that a preliminary intellectual understanding of these three characteristics is helpful, is useful, even spiritually. But ultimately, in the last resort, insight is something which transcends the processes, the workings of the intellectual mind. Now, when in meditation, through insight, one sees conditioned things in this way, when one sees that without exception everything conditioned everything that one experiences through the five senses, through the mind, everything that one can feel and touch and smell and taste and see and think about, is conditioned, is subject to suffering, is impermanent, is self-less, soul-less - when one sees things in this way then one loses interest, and one experiences what is technically called revulsion, even disgust. Not just a psychological reaction, a spiritual experience. And one turns away from the conditioned. One turns away because one sees it is not on its own terms worth having.

And when that turning away from the conditioned to the unconditioned takes place decisively, as a sort of spiritual experience as a result of the arising of insight into these three characteristic, then one enters the stream, as it called, leading to Nirvana. One sets one's face in the direction of the unconditioned.

Now we must guard here against a misunderstanding. Some schools of Buddhism think of the conditioned and the unconditioned as though they were two quite different entities, two ultimate principles as it were. They suggest a sort of dualism, a philosophical dualism. But really it isn't so. It isn't that on the one hand you've got the conditioned, on the other you've got the unconditioned, and there's a vast gap between them. It isn't that. They are more like two poles. One may even say, and some Buddhist schools do say, that the unconditioned is the conditioned itself in its depth, in, as it were, a new, higher dimension. If one knows the conditioned deeply, if one sinks as it were down to the bottom of the conditioned, one as it were comes out on the

other side, and one penetrates the unconditioned.

This fact, which is a very important one, is made clear by the teaching of the three vimokshas or the three liberations. These are common to all schools. The three vimokshas or three liberations are first of all apranihita, the aimless or the directionless, or the without bias. That mental state that does not incline towards any direction, has no likes or dislikes, which is perfectly still, perfectly poised. Then the animitta: the signless. That which is devoid of all thought, transcends all thought - which can't be indicated as being this or that, which is above and beyond all conception, and therefore all knowledge in the purely intellectual sense. And lastly, thirdly sunyata, which as you know means the voidness. Not just voidness in the sense of emptiness, but voidness more in the sense, very broadly speaking, of reality. Emptiness of unreality if you like.

Now these three, these three liberations as they are called - the aimless or the directionless, the signless and the voidness - these represent what we may call different aspects of the unconditioned, the unconditioned as it appears from different points of view. And the unconditioned itself therefore can be attained, can be realised, through any one of them. You can penetrate into the unconditioned through the aimless, through the signless and through the voidness. Now what concerns us here is that the three liberations correspond with the three characteristics. And they correspond because the conditioned itself corresponds with the unconditioned, because the two, as we call them - conditioned and unconditioned - are really the obverse and reverse of the same coin, as it were.

If one concentrates on the conditioned as suffering, if one pays to the unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence, if one goes deep into this, if one penetrates to the bottom of this, then one realises the unconditioned as aimless. Because when you see the suffering inherent in conditioned things, you've no particular aim as regards conditioned things. You don't want this, you don't want that; you're just still as it were, without any desire, without any aim, without any direction, just poised. So when you go into the conditioned through the aspect of suffering you go into the unconditioned through the aspect of aimless or directionless.

Then in the same way when you concentrate, or if you concentrate, on the conditioned as impermanent, transitory, changing all the time, with no permanent identity, then going to the bottom of that, coming out the other side as it were, you realise the unconditioned as the signless, devoid of all concept, transcending all thought, if you like, the eternal: not the eternal which continues through time, but the eternal which transcends time.

And thirdly, if you concentrate on the conditioned as devoid of self, devoid of individuality, devoid of I, devoid of you, devoid of me, devoid of mine, then one approaches, one realises, the unconditioned as sunyata, as the voidness.

Now very much more could be said on this part of the subject. Especially one could say very much more about the voidness, sunyata, but we're keeping that for another occasion. In a few weeks time we'll be speaking on the mystery of the void; perhaps we shall be able to lift just a little corner of the mystery on that occasion. Meanwhile, so far as today's talk is concerned, I hope I've been able to make clear, at least in a general way, the nature of these three lakshanas, or three characteristics of conditioned existence. They are of central importance not just in Buddhist philosophy, but in the Buddhist spiritual life. According to the Buddha at least, we don't really see conditioned existence until we learn to see it in these terms. If we see anything else, that's just an illusion, just a projection. And once we start seeing the conditioned as suffering,

impermanent and as no-self, then little by little, gradually, we get a glimpse of the unconditioned, and then that glimpse, of course, guides us on our way.