

Lecture 31: Mind - Reactive and Creative Urgyen Sangharakshita

Friends,

We all know that there are in the world a number of different religious systems, a number of different spiritual traditions. We have of course in the West, Christianity. We have Platonism and Neo-Platonism. We have in the East, Hinduism, the great teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. We have Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism. In this way, in both ancient and modern times, in the East as well as in the West, so many different religious systems, so many different spiritual traditions, all of them in one way or another seeking and searching after truth, after the experience of ultimate Reality. All of these systems, all of these traditions, start, as it were, as spiritual inspirations, something very fluid, something without definite form, something very inspirational. But gradually, each one becomes, as it were, condensed; as it were crystallised into a system which can be expounded, part by part, step by step; expounded, in a word, systematically. And every one of these systematic expositions, whether it be of Buddhism, whether it be of Hinduism, whether it be of Christianity, has some starting point or other, some point which it catches hold of first, and out of which it, as it were, teases the whole of the rest of its system.

Now so far as Buddhism is concerned, the system or the tradition in its totality is known as the 'Dharma', the truth or the doctrine or the teaching. And this Dharma, this truth or this doctrine or this teaching, when expounded systematically has a certain starting point, whether it be Zen or whether it be Shin, about which we heard this morning, or Theravada, or Tibetan Buddhism, it's the same starting-point always. The same, what the Hindu and Buddhist traditions call the Bindu, the same non-dimensional point from which everything issues, from which everything proceeds. And for Buddhism this starting point of the whole system, the whole teaching, the whole tradition, is none other than the mind, the mind itself. And this fact is very well illustrated by the first two verses of the Dhammapada, one of the best known, one of the best loved of all Buddhist sacred texts, the Pali Dhammapada of the Theravada Canon. In these two verses which open the Dhammapada, the Buddha is represented as saying, in very famous words,

All mental states have mind as their forerunner, mind is their chief, and they are mind made.
If with an impure mind one speaks or acts, then suffering follows even as the wheel, the hoof of the ox who is drawing a cart.

Mind is the forerunner of all mental states. Mind is their chief and they are mind made.
If with a **pure** mind one speaks or acts, happiness follows him close like his never departing shadow.

So from purity, happiness. This reminds me or reminded me just as I was reading these verses about what we heard this morning. The Pure Land is the Happy Land, and the Happy Land is the Pure Land. If you see this world itself with a pure mind, this world is the Pure Land, and if you see it with a pure mind it is also the Happy Land or the Happy World, despite all the suffering that appears to be on its surface. But we're not concerned with this at the moment. We're concerned with the fact that mind, as announced in the opening verses of the Dhammapada, is the starting point of the whole Buddhist teaching, mind itself.

So thus the Dhammapada, and another great Buddhist tradition, that of Zen we may say, is even more emphatic about mind being the starting point. There's a very famous verse on which a couple of years ago I gave a series of talks, a verse of four lines which summarises the message, the essence, of the whole of the Zen tradition, and this verse reads, describing the special characteristics of Zen:

A special transmission outside the Scriptures.
No dependence on words and letters.
Direct pointing to the mind of man.
Seeing into one's own nature, realising Buddhahood.

So whether it's the Buddha speaking in the first two verses of the Dhammapada, or whether it's this unknown, this anonymous Zen master summarising the essence of Zen in his four-line verse, they all say the same thing. They all make the same point. That the starting-point of Buddhism itself, that from which we begin, that from which we commence, is not anything outside ourselves. It's not even anything which we call Buddhism. The starting point is within, the starting point is the mind itself. Buddhism begins there.

But then what do we mean by mind? In the Dhammapada verses which I quoted, in the original Pali the word which we translate as mind is *mano*. Etymologically the same word as our word mind. In the Chinese Zen stanza, in the original Chinese it is *hsin*, which corresponds to the Sanskrit and Pali *chitta*. So whether it's *mano* or whether it's *hsin* or whether it's *chitta*, all these expressions which are rather popular, literary expressions rather than technical philosophical terms, all of these are quite adequately rendered by the English word 'mind' in its common-or-garden sense, its popular significance. So no need to go into etymologies and so on.

Now the mind, to begin with, according to Buddhism, is twofold. There's on the one hand what is usually called the Absolute Mind, the One Mind, about which we spoke in our lecture on the 'Depth Psychology of the Yogachara' the week before last, and then on the other hand, what is known as relative mind. Now Absolute Mind, mind in its nakedness as the Tibetan tradition calls it, our Transcendental Mind or the One Mind, is synonymous with reality itself. According to the great, as it were, idealist tradition of Buddhist thought, mind is absolute reality, absolute reality is mind. Not mind as we know it broken by the schism of subject and object but a pure non-dual awareness. A luminous void awareness, a blissful awareness, transcending the duality of subject and object. And it is the realisation of this One Mind, mind as absolute reality, this waking up beyond the dream of dualism, to the sole and simple reality of mind itself, so that one sees the whole universe in its heights and in its depths and on all sides, in all its modifications, in all its transformations, as One Mind: it's the awakening, the realisation of this great supreme truth, which constitutes Enlightenment. So this is Absolute Mind, the One Mind.

Then, the relative mind, that is to say the individual mind, the mind of each person, or if you like my mind and your mind. This is what we call relative mind. And it's with this, with this relative mind, rather than with absolute mind, that we're concerned this evening.

Now relative mind itself is of two kinds. Two great kinds, two great modes, of functioning; and these are what I have called, in the title of this talk, the reactive mind and the creative mind. Now I must make it clear that these are not traditional Buddhist terms. This afternoon in the course of the guided group discussion, the point was made that we have, as it were, to re-present, to re-phrase, Buddhism, and this is certainly necessary. So this is, I may say, an example, or at least an attempt, of such a rephrasing; because we don't find the expressions, we don't find these terms - reactive mind and creative mind - in traditional Buddhism. But it does seem to me that these two terms between them, taken together, do express very well, very accurately, and if I may say so very vividly, what the Buddha had in mind.

Now the whole distinction between mind reactive and mind creative is, as we shall see in some detail later on, of very great importance indeed, and it is the transition, we may say, the passing over from reactive mind to **creative** mind, which marks, which constitutes the beginning of the spiritual life. It is this, we may say, which is conversion, turning around, in the true sense of the term: this transition from having a reactive mind to having instead a creative mind.

Now what do these terms mean? We speak of reactive mind, of creative mind, but what do we mean thereby? What **is** a reactive mind? What **is** a creative mind? First of all we shouldn't, of course, think too literally in terms of two kinds of mind. It isn't as though we've got a reactive mind here and a creative mind there. There's only one mind on any level. But there are rather two ways in which the mind can function. So we may say the reactive mind is the mind itself, the relative mind, functioning in a reactive manner. And in the same way the creative mind is this same relative mind switched over, as it were, or switched on if you like, and become creative, functioning creatively.

Now first of all let us try to describe, let us try to characterise, the reactive mind. This is of course the mind with which we are very familiar; we carry it around with us all the time and we use it all the time, or at least most of the time. This is what we use. The reactive mind. Or we may even say that it's not so much that we use the reactive mind, it's rather the reactive mind which all the time is using us, which has us at its mercy. We are, as it were, most of the time, slaves of this reactive mind. In some people of course reactive mind, unfortunately, functions all the time. Of these people one may say, well, they're not really human. I call them just **humanoid**. [Laughter]

Now what are the characteristics of this reactive mind, or this mind when it is functioning reactively? Well, to begin with, the worst thing that you can say about the reactive mind is that it is re-active. This condemns it or exposes it straight away. The reactive mind does not really act. The reactive mind only re-acts. In other words it doesn't function spontaneously. It doesn't function, it doesn't work, it doesn't operate or manifest out of its own inner fullness. It doesn't as it were **burst** forth. It requires some external stimulus, some provocation as it were, to set it going, to set it in motion. And usually, for most of us, this stimulation, this provocation, comes in one way or another through the five senses. Just

imagine or just recollect, you are walking along the road, just idly, for the most part perhaps unawares, just walking along, and you happen to look around, and your eye catches a very vividly coloured and attractively phrased advertisement. So at once what happens? - your mind is captured by this, and you react. You don't know most of the time what you are doing. You're not aware of what is happening. And a reaction arises, usually one of greed or interest, craving, something of this sort, depending on what you've seen with, or through, the eye, the organ of sight. So we can therefore say that the reactive mind, because it is reactive, is a conditioned mind. It's conditioned by its object. We see the advertisement, then automatically the craving arises. It doesn't come, as it were, from within spontaneously. Even that would be something, but it's prompted, it's activated, stimulated, from without. It's conditioned by its object. So the conditioned mind is not free. It's another very important characteristic of the reactive mind. The reactive mind is not free. We are not free so long as we merely re-act instead of just acting. And because the reactive mind is conditioned in this way, conditioned by its object or a series of objects, the reactive mind is also, we may say, a mechanical mind. Sometimes I describe it therefore as the 'penny-in-the-slot' type of mind. That is to say you insert the coin in the machine, in the slot, and out comes a package of peanuts or cigarettes or whatever it may be. So most of our so-called thinking is of this type. There's a stimulus from outside in one way or another. A penny is put in the slot and we respond, we react, and most of our thinking, our so-called thinking, is of this reactive type. For instance, suppose you take this question of politics, suppose you belong to a certain party, well, obviously the party has conditioned you to think it its own way. So you open your favourite morning newspaper, if that's the newspaper which is somehow connected with your party and reflects its views, well, as soon as you open it you react favourably, without thinking. If it's of another type; if it's connected with some other political viewpoint, you react unfavourably. It's just a re-action. The penny is put in the slot: out comes the package, out pops the package. This is what happens most of the time. We're conditioned in this way and react in this way. We very rarely think for ourselves. Most of our thinking, practically all our thinking, is re-active thinking. Not just, as it were, inspired by something from without, taking it as a point of departure, but fully and totally determined by the impact of external sensations, stimuli, perceptions, even ideas, and so on. So it's a terrifying, it's a staggering thought, that we may even say that in the course of our whole life, sometimes we have not a thought which is really ours. Nothing which we really originated from within. Nothing to which we have really spontaneously given birth from the depths of our own being. Every idea, every thought, even our so-called ideologies, even our so-called religion; it all comes, as it were, from without. And our so-called religiosity, very often, is just a reaction - a religious type of reaction admittedly - to external stimuli but still a reaction, and still, therefore, of the conditioned mind, the relative mind.

So this is what happens to most of us most of the time, if not all the time. There's an absolute paucity in most of us of original thought on any subject whatsoever. Of course we know some people try to be original and they think that originality consists in being different from other people, but real originality consists in producing something out of one's own inner resources. It doesn't matter whether it coincides with what somebody else produced fifty or a hundred or a thousand years ago, that's quite irrelevant. If we produce it from our own inner resources, it's spontaneous and it is original. But some people, as I have said, try to be different, but this is only another kind of reaction, only another kind of conditionedness. If you **try** to be different, as when you try not to react, this is itself reactive. So it can be a subtle form of conditionedness, because still determined by the object. You are determined by the object or conditioned by the object from which you are trying to be different. So you are still **re**-acting - you have your eye on the object - you are not really acting out of your own inner fullness, your own inner depth.

Now the reactive mind is also a repetitive mind. The reactive mind tends to do the same thing over and over and over again. That's another reason why it's like a machine. It gets the same stimuli - the same old newspaper open, the same weather or whatever it may be - and it reacts in the same way. And in this way the whole of life becomes a matter of a sort of routine. You just go on mechanically functioning, just like a machine; chug, chug, chug, chugging away, and this is one's life, and if we're not careful we see that a very tragic thing happens, and that is that even our religious life becomes incorporated in the routine, becomes part of the machine. We get into a sort of religious habit, and there's just the same reactive mind functioning, but a portion of it or a particular part of its functioning is labelled 'religious'. We can see this happening when our life, when our activities, fall into too set, too rigid, patterns. As I said the other evening, some people think like this, 'Monday I go to the cinema, Tuesday I go and have lunch with my Grandmother and Wednesday I go to the meditation class.' And this is how it goes on. It becomes incorporated into the routine, and you feel sometimes uneasy if you haven't fulfilled that little bit of your routine. It's just become a pattern, just become a habit. It hasn't become anything real and living, which you do, as it were, afresh each time. So with all our religious activities, our religious life, we have to be careful that they don't become part of the pattern, they don't become part of the routine, and this is of course a great danger to all of us who are trying to fit in a lot of activities, even religious

activities, into a very small and very narrow timetable. We tend to try to regularise and do this on that day and something else on another day and yet something else on a third day; but in this way it all becomes incorporated into a pattern, into a mechanical machine-like sort of repetition. And it becomes in this way, as I've said, re-active. But I'll have more to say about this danger perhaps a little later on.

But above all characteristics of the reactive mind, it must be said that the reactive mind is the unaware mind. This is perhaps its most important characteristic from our point of view. Most people, most of the time, are unaware. That is to say most people, most of the time, are really asleep. This might surprise, this might even astound you to be told that you are asleep, but actually this is what is happening. I won't go so far as to say that you're dead - some people do even go as far as that - but certainly all asleep. In a sleep you come here, in a sleep you sit here, in a sleep you listen to the lecture, in a sleep, even, you meditate, but it's all sleep, because awareness - full, pure, bright awareness, is not there. So we have to start with this truth, with this realisation, that most of the time we are in fact asleep. And if you're at all spiritually perceptive, if you're at all aware yourself, if you look round at other people, you can see that they are asleep. Their eyes may not be closed, they may be talking, may be laughing, may be playing, may be doing all sorts of things, but they're doing it, as it were, somnambulistically. They are like puppets, as it were pulled and jerked by strings. They're not really aware, so they're not really alive, they're not awake.

So it's with the awareness, we may say, that we are not aware that the spiritual life begins. When we become aware of how conditioned we are, how reactive our minds are, how we're just like tiny puppets jerked all the time by these strings and wires; how we've no freedom, how we don't originate anything freely, spontaneously, creatively, when we've become aware of our own reactive nature, aware of our own unawareness, as I've said, **then** there is the beginning of the spiritual mind.

Then we may say not only spiritual life but even human life begins. One is not really human until one has at least a modicum, at least a seed, at least a shoot, of awareness. It's that which really differentiates us from the animals. We may be well fed, we may be well clothed, we may watch the television set every night, but if we don't have awareness, then we're not really human after all.

So these are the characteristics, or **some** of the more important characteristics of the reactive mind. Now we come on to the **creative mind**. What are the characteristics of this creative mind? The characteristics of the creative mind are obviously opposite to those of the reactive mind. The creative mind does not merely react. The creative mind is, as it were, active on its own account. The motive power, the force, the drive, the inspiration, as it were, of the creative mind, comes from the depths within the mind itself. Not just from external stimuli. External things may give, as it were, the occasion, may give a hint or a suggestion, and the mind, the creative mind, may take up that, but this is not a reaction. This is rather, we may say, a sort of response.

Just take an example, a concrete example. Suppose some misfortune befalls us. We lost something or we're bereft of something. Something happens. Maybe something tragic which we don't like; so what usually happens? Usually of course we grumble, we complain; we, as it were, complain, 'Why should it be me, why should this happen to me?' So this is the reactive mind. This is the way we react if we don't think, if we're unaware. But suppose we take that misfortune, that bereavement or that loss as a sort of challenge, as a sort of opportunity for unfolding something from within ourselves which is not determined by that object, then this is the creative mind in operation. The reactive mind does tend to be, very often, negative and pessimistic, but the creative mind on the other hand is positive, and it is optimistic. Not optimistic in the superficial sense. Not optimistic in the Panglossian sense, but optimistic in the sense that the creativity persists despite even quite unpleasant external conditions and stimuli.

Now because it doesn't really depend upon an external object, because it isn't really conditioned by that, it doesn't really react from that, the creative mind is the non-conditioned mind. Not dependent for its life, for its functioning, on any external object. Maybe taking an occasion from the external world but not really determined thereby.

So because it's non-conditioned it's independent, it's free, as it were. It is spontaneous, and at its highest level, as it develops, this inner freedom and spontaneity more and more, it is, as it were Unconditioned, Unconditioned Mind with a capital 'U', as it were, a capital 'M', and this is conterminous, it is identical, with Absolute Mind itself. Because it's non-conditioned or Unconditioned it is really and truly free. In fact we may say that the creative mind at its highest level is freedom itself. And being creative, being free, it is also original in sense of producing something new from its own depths, from the treasures within. And it is characterised, we may say, by a ceaseless productivity. All the time it's producing, giving birth, originating, causing to arise ever newer and newer things.

Now this creativity is not necessarily just artistic or literary or even spiritual. It can also extend, we may say, to personal relationships, as when two people meet or in communication between them give birth to something which is more, something which is greater, than themselves.

Now, summing it all up we may say that the creative mind, above all else, is the aware mind, the mind that is not asleep, the mind which is awake, the mind which is in fact awareness itself. And because it is aware it is really and truly alive. Reactive mind is very dead. It's like a machine, but the creative mind, because it is not reactive, because it's spontaneous, because it's free and non-conditioned, is the really alive, the living mind.

Now we have in Buddhism two very important symbols. Recently we've been rather preoccupied in our series of lectures at the Kingsway Hall with symbolism. We've touched on one or two of the symbols I'm going to mention now, but in Buddhism we do have two very important pictorial symbols illustrating these two types of mind - the reactive mind and the creative mind - the reactive functioning of the mind, the creative functioning of the mind. Some of you are already quite familiar with these symbols and I'm sure in the case of some people at least, these symbols have sunk deep into their unconscious mind; and these symbols are what we call the Wheel of Life and what we call the Path. Or if you want it, as it were more geometrically, the symbol of the Circle and the symbol of the Spiral. In connection with, I believe it was our second, lecture at the Kingsway Hall, a chart was produced which among other things illustrates these two symbols, and if anybody is interested or would like to have a copy of that chart which illustrates part of this lecture also, I believe some copies are still available at Sakura.

But these are the two great symbols of Buddhism: the Wheel of Life and the Path, or the circle and the spiral. Some of you, I know, have seen pictures of the Wheel of Life. Some of you - those who attended our second retreat week - spent a very happy hour drawing, in fact, a copy of the Wheel of Life which I've sketched, very roughly, on the blackboard. But all of you know, I think, or most of you know, that the Wheel of Life has a very important place, a prominent, even a central, place in Tibetan religious art. The Wheel of Life is divided into four concentric circles. At the centre there's a hub which contains three animals. These three animals represent different aspects of the reactive mind. This is essentially what they represent. There's a cock, representing craving; a snake representing anger; and a pig representing ignorance or delusion. And these are the three principal aspects of the reactive mind. The ignorance, the pig, represents the darkness and blindness of the reactive mind, and the craving and the hatred represent its two principal blind dark functions.

Then secondly, in the second circle, which is divided into two segments, we find a black half and a white half. In the black half people plunge down. In the white half they soar up to higher states of being. But both the segments are within the wheel, within the round of life, signifying that conventional morality and conventional religion, merely external morality or religiosity, are still part of the reactive mind. They're not really and truly religious or spiritual - they're within the wheel. They're more refined products of the reactive mind but still reactive.

Next we come, in the third circle, to a division into the five or six spheres of conditioned existence. That is to say the sphere or spheres of the gods, the asuras who fight with the gods, human beings, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in states of suffering. Now traditionally these five or six spheres are interpreted or understood cosmologically, as definite planes of existence somewhere else in this universe; but we can also interpret them as different aspects of human existence itself: the world of the gods representing states of happiness or we may even say affluence; the world of the Titans representing states of antagonism and war even with other forms of life. Then the human state, the average human life - a bit of pleasure, a bit of pain. Then that of the hungry ghosts, well, people who are deprived, who are undernourished, who don't have enough to eat and to drink even, as so many people don't even now in the so-called underdeveloped countries. And then beings in actual states of torment and suffering, as very often, even in this Twentieth century, people are, in various places, various parts of the world, in one way or another, whether it may be in a concentration camp or a torture chamber or even a prison. In some countries of the world still, very terrible things go on, and really and truly we may say that hells are found on the surface of this earth.

So these are the states of existence understood, as it were, in terms of human life, of human existence, and they're depicted, as I've said, in this third circle of the Wheel of Life. But, as I've said, traditionally Buddhists understand all this cosmologically.

And in the fourth and last, the outermost circle, there is a division into the twelve *nidanas* or twelve links which explain the whole process of karma and rebirth, reference to which was made, incidentally, in the course of our discussion. Now these twelve *nidanas* or links are links in the chain of the reactive mind,

and they are, briefly, just to give you the names because we have gone over this ground elsewhere: first of all *avidya* or ignorance, spiritual blindness and darkness. In dependence upon that the *samskaras* arise, different activities of body, speech and mind growing out of that darkness. And then, thirdly *vijnana*, the flash of consciousness which arises in a new life in the mother's womb. Then fourth, *nama-rupa*, the psycho-physical organism which, as it were, groups itself around that initial flash of consciousness. Then, fifthly, *salayatana*, the six sense organs with which the psycho-physical organism is equipped; the five physical senses and the mind, that is to say. Then sixthly, *sparsa* or contact, which arises when the six sense organs come in contact with their respective sense objects. Seventhly, *vedana*, the feelings or sensations which then arise, pleasant, painful and neutral. Eighthly, *trsna*, thirst or craving which arises in dependence upon pleasant sensation. Ninthly, *upadana*, the clinging, the tendency we have to try to hold on to the pleasant sensations as long as possible and repeat them. Then, *bhava*, the process of the conditioned mind, the mind becoming hard and reactive, as it were. And eleventh, birth [*jati*]. As a result of all this in a fresh life a fresh existence. And then, twelfthly, *jara-marana*, old age and death once again.

So these twelve links, which I've just very briefly explained - there are much more elaborate explanations given elsewhere - are distributed over three lives: the first two belong to the previous life, the middle eight belong to this life, the last two belong to the next life. So in this way the twelve links are distributed over three lives and explain the process of karma and rebirth, how we come to be in this world at all, in terms of these twelve links. So these represent, in very concrete simple terms, the whole process of the reactive mind. How it just reacts when confronted by the pleasant stimuli and continues in its conditionedness. At the same time, though all these twelve links are distributed over three lives, it's also said that they are all contained within one and the same life. But whether distributed over three lives, whether contained within one life, the series shows us exactly how the reactive mind works. This is, as it were, the mechanism of the whole process, and it's on this account, on account of the process represented by these twelve nidanas, that the mind goes round and round like a wheel. This is why we speak of the Wheel of Life, and the wheel, as you know, is a machine, the simplest of all machines. So this fact that the reactive mind is represented in terms of a wheel, the Wheel of Life, illustrates very appropriately its machine-like nature.

So this is the first great symbol of Buddhism, the symbol of the Wheel of Life with its hub and its three animals, its white and its black paths, its five or six spheres of conditioned existence and its twelve links explaining the whole process of karma and rebirth, process of the conditioned mind. This represents the mechanism, the machine, as it were, of this conditioned reactive mind which we're using most of the time, if not all the time, illustrates how we're bound by it, imprisoned by it and go just round and round and round like a squirrel in a little wheel, as it were, inside its cage.

Now for the symbol of the Path. The Path works on a quite different principle. The Wheel of Life, as representing the reactive mind, works on the principle of round and round, over and over again, repetition. But the Path works on the principle of not round and round but up and up indefinitely. There are many formulations to describe or to depict this sort of up and up process, and I'm going to take, this evening, only one of them, which happens to be perhaps almost the best known; and that is the formula of what is known as the Seven *Bodhyangas*, the Seven Limbs or Links in the process of Enlightenment or the process of the creative mind as it soars ever higher and higher in the direction of Nirvana or the direction of Enlightenment.

Now, the first of these links or the first of these limbs, as it were, is what is called *smriti*, which means mindfulness, which means recollection; and which corresponds, we may say, to awareness, or self-awareness. And as I've already indicated, as I've already suggested, the spiritual life or the Higher Evolution, if you like to call it that, begins with just this. Most of the time normal people are conscious, but we can say they're not self-conscious. They're in a sense aware but they're not self-aware, they don't remember themselves, and as I've said they are, as it were, all the time asleep. So the first step, the first stage, the first Bodhyanga is what we call this awareness or this mindfulness or this becoming not self-conscious in the psychological sense but self-conscious in the sense of conscious of ourself, and realising ourselves, being **aware** of ourselves, as a living and a growing person. So this is the first *Bodhyanga*.

Then the second one is what we call *dharma-pravicaya*. *Dharma* here means, simply, mental states, not doctrine or teaching, mental states. *Pravicaya* means analysis. So this link, this *Bodhyanga*, means the analysis of mental states. Having become aware of ourselves, remembering ourselves, what do we then do? We start looking at our mental content, we start looking at our mental states. Not only looking at them but sorting them out, trying to make up our minds, trying to determine, what mental states are of a reactive nature; what mental states are of a creative nature. At least awareness having been developed, the seed of awareness is there, the seed of creativity is there. So we at this stage try to sort out, try to see

how much in us there is of the reactive mind, how much in us there is of the creative mind, and distinguish these two quite clearly, and know, as it were from moment to moment, when we're being reactive and when we're being creative. And at first of course we shall find that most of the time we are being or have been reactive. Very often we know only in retrospect, but sometimes we shall know or we shall become aware that we have been or we are not reactive but creative. And in this way we sort out our mental states. This is *Dharma-pravicaya*.

And then the third *Bodhyanga*, the third link is what we call *virya* or energy or vigour, and this is very important indeed. It's not enough just to contemplate these different states, it's not enough to see just to what extent the mind is reactive, to what extent it is creative, and so on. We have with vigour and with energy to cultivate that which is creative, to make it **more** creative, as it were, to release more from within, and gradually minimise that which is reactive. So this requires a tremendous effort all the time. Most of us are only too ready to, as it were, rest on our oars. We make a tremendous spurt sometimes - we attend a meditation class on Monday, we have a lecture on Tuesday, on Thursday **another** meditation class, on Friday maybe a seminar. We make a tremendous effort, but then we take two weeks off, and we're not seen again. This is what happens most of the time. People can make an effort but it's in fits and starts, in bursts of enthusiasm, but the slow, steady sustained effort is usually not there. So we go a little bit forward, then back we slide. Go a bit forward again, slide back even further back, and this is the sum total of our spiritual life most of the time. So unremitting energy or vigour is necessary. All the time awareness, all the time analysis of our mental states, whether reactive or creative, and all the time vigour and energy, and this effort, this attempt at least, to increase the creative side and to gradually weed out, to cause to wane away, the reactive side more and more.

The fourthly, what we call *priti*, often translated as rapture but it's more like joy, it's more like ecstasy. It's a sort of ecstasy or joy which is coming welling up within us, especially at the time of meditation, when we have made an effort, when the creative side is functioning, and all the energy which was blocked formerly in the reactive process of the mind is released from that process, and wells up into the creative process of the mind, and then we experience that as an intense sort of psycho-physical rapture or bliss, which may even be experienced in the physical body. I've spoken about this on other occasions elsewhere, so no need to go into it very much today.

And then, next, the fifth link, *prasrabdhi*, which is literally calm or pacification, but I sometimes render it as tension release. At the stage of rapture, there's a mental experience of bliss, a physical sort of counterpart of that, but in this stage the physical side calms down, and all that is left is a state of bliss and happiness and joy felt within. And one may even be at this stage quite oblivious to the physical body.

And that brings us to the sixth *Bodhyanga*, the sixth link in the chain, as it were, of the creative mind, and this is *samadhi*. Usually *samadhi* means one-pointedness of mind. Here we can take it to mean not just concentration, not even just meditation in the ordinary sense, but, as it were, the harmonisation of all the forces of our mind, both conscious and unconscious, the bringing of them together; sort of union of opposites about which I was talking the day before yesterday, on an ever higher and higher level. Sometimes people think that *samadhi* or concentration is the forcible fixation of the mind on a point. They say, for instance, you take some material object, like this, say a bell or a matchbox, and you **concentrate** on it. So most people just look like this, and they think that they're concentrating, but this has got nothing to do with concentration. Not forcible fixation of attention. Concentration, *samadhi*, really means the harmonisation of all the forces of the mind, conscious and unconscious. A sort of marriage, if you like, between the forces of the depth and the forces of the height, the unconscious and the conscious, the masculine and the feminine forces, the yin and the yang; a sort of two-in-oneness of all these forces at the highest possible level; so that there's integration, so that there's harmony, so that in a sense there is beauty. So this is all covered by the term *samadhi*.

And then seventhly and lastly *upeksha*. *Upeksha* means literally equanimity. It's not the same *upeksha* that we have in the four *Brahma Viharas* where we get *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, *upeksha*. That's on a lower level. This is on a higher, more metaphysical, transcendental level. So here we may say *upeksha* means the state of complete equilibrium of the mind, complete **stability** - if you like **axiality** - of the mind, **centrality** of the mind, on the highest possible level, so that it cannot be moved. So that the mind becomes, as it were, like a great ball, like a great globe, from which everything, as it were, bounces or slides off. Nothing can throw it out of gear, nothing can, as it were, affect or upset its perfect stability and equilibrium. So this *upeksha* the Buddha exemplified when he sat beneath the Bodhi Tree in meditation, and when Mara, the Evil One, launched against him all his armies of hate and fear and greed and jealousy, and he was unmoved, untouched, unstirred, by all that. So this complete equanimity and stability of mind, at the highest possible level - this is what we call *upeksha*, and it's out of this equanimity at this level that the highest of all kinds of creativity springs and arises, which is what we call

compassion born of the enlightened mind, the compassion which directs itself after, as it were, Enlightenment, to the good and the welfare of all sentient beings.

So these seven *Bodhyangas*: awareness; discrimination between reactive and creative mental states; energy; rapture; then tension release; *samadhi*, and finally equanimity, these illustrate, just illustrate, the whole process of the creative mind. They demonstrate how the creative mind functions. How it doesn't react, how it **acts**, how it goes, as it were, from perfection to ever greater **and** greater **and** greater perfection. Not reacting round to an opposite in a cyclical fashion, but going up and up as well as round and round, in a sort of spiral.

So these two great symbols covering practically the whole of Buddhism - the symbol of the Wheel of Life and the symbol of the Path, the symbol of the circle, the symbol of the spiral. But the question arises, 'What is the connection between the two? Are they just, as it were, loose? Are they just, as it were, disconnected? What's the connection between these - the Wheel and the Path or the circle and the spiral? Do they intersect at any point? Do they come together anywhere?' And this is very important indeed. They do come together. They do intersect.

You may remember that when we came to the fourth, the outermost circle of the Wheel of Life, I described the twelve links in the process of the reactive mind into which this outermost circle is divided. You remember that the seventh of those links was *vedana* or feeling, especially in the sense of pleasant feeling, and the eighth was *trsna* or craving or thirst. Now *vedana* or feeling is the last link of what we call the effect-process of the present life, while *trsna*, the thirst or craving, is the first link of the cause-process of the present life. This requires perhaps a word of explanation because it's a quite crucial point. The whole of the twelve links, the twelve *nidanas*, are distributed between cause-process and effect-process. A process of action, as it were, a process of reaction in accordance with that. So these processes - cause-process and reaction-process, cause-process and reaction-process, this continues all along the line, as it were. So *vedana*, feeling, is the last link of the effect-process of the present life. That is to say the consciousness, the initial flash of consciousness in the womb of the mother, then followed by the arising of the psycho-physical organism equipped with its six senses. Then it's contact and feeling. These are all effects of what has happened in the past. So *vedana* or feeling is the last link of this effect process of the present life, arising as a result of the past, the cause-process of the previous life. And *trsna* or craving, the greed that arises when we are confronted by or experience a pleasant feeling, pleasant sensation, is what we call the first link of the cause-process of the present life, because the cause-process represents the reaction, the mechanical, unaware reaction which sets up a whole series of effects of its own in the future.

So this is the crucial point. In dependence upon the feeling, the pleasant feeling, arises the craving. So this is the point at which the Wheel of Life either stops, or begins to make a fresh revolution. If when you are confronted by a pleasant feeling, no craving arises, then the Wheel stops. But if on the other hand when confronted by a pleasant feeling, you end up **craving** for that, then the Wheel slowly but inexorably makes another turn, another revolution. But this point is also the point of intersection with the Path. The Path, as it were, arises out of here from this point. This is very well illustrated, by the way, in our chart. If anyone is feeling a bit confused, and I am covering this ground rather rapidly, please get hold of a copy of our chart, our chart number one.

The first *Bodhyanga*, you may remember, is *smrti* or recollection or awareness. So if instead of reacting to a pleasant feeling with craving, you are just **aware** of the pleasant feeling, just aware, just see it, just watch it, but don't allow the craving to develop, then, through that awareness, you, as it were, put a brake on the Wheel. You start slowing the Wheel down, and eventually, of course, as you practise the subsequent *Bodhyangas*, you stop it.

So this is the reason, or one of the reasons, why awareness or mindfulness has such a central place in the Buddhist teaching and in the Buddhist doctrine. It's awareness which is the means of transition from the reactive mind to the creative mind, from the Wheel to the Path, from the Circle to the Spiral - and ultimately, from Samsara to Nirvana, from the Conditioned to the Unconditioned. If only, instead of reacting, we are aware, aware of the stimulus, aware of our own incipient tendency to react, if we can only be aware in this way, then the whole reactive process as symbolised by the Wheel of Life can be slowed down and eventually stopped, and then we wake up, and then we are, as it were, truly alive.

Let me say just a few words before I close about the practice of this awareness or mindfulness. Traditionally in Buddhism there are four levels of practice. First of all one learns to be aware, to be mindful of one's body, its positions and its movements. One learns to be aware when one is walking that one is walking, when one is speaking that one is speaking, when one is sitting that one is sitting. Most

people don't know most of the time what exactly it is that they are doing. They're not aware, so one learns to be aware in all bodily movements and postures. This is the first. The culmination of this practice, by the way, is when we concentrate on the process of in and out breathing, representing, in a way, the most subtle bodily activity, and this is a means of inducing concentration.

Secondly, we become aware of our emotional reactions. If we feel happy, we know that we're happy, we're aware of that. If we're unhappy, we're aware of that too. If we're disturbed or agitated we're aware of that. If we're calm and at rest we're aware of that. If we're afraid, aware of that, and all the time digging deeper and deeper and deeper into the mind, into the unconscious depths, becoming more aware of all these unconscious emotional processes which are going on in all of us nearly all the time. So this is awareness at the level of the emotions, the emotional reactions.

Then thirdly, awareness of thoughts. We don't usually know it, we don't usually realise it, but all the time hundreds and thousands of thoughts are passing through the mind, just like a great stream, a great cataract, a great Niagara of thoughts, as it were. Sometimes when I'm giving a talk, when I'm giving a lecture, I just, as it were, look around the audience, look around the people present, and usually one can see who is concentrated, who is following the lecture, and who is not. And almost literally one can see sometimes thoughts flitting across people's faces, just like little tiny shadows or little birds, flitting across the face, one after the other, and you know that their minds are far away. They're thinking of something else - who are they going to meet tomorrow; what they're going to eat tonight after they go away from the meeting; what someone said to them last week - something of this sort. Some distant dreamy picture they know not what. So this is most people's state most of the time. So if you suddenly, as it were, say to them, 'what are you thinking of?' they have to stop and think, 'Well what was I thinking of?' because they're not aware in their thinking, they don't know what they are thinking of. So this is the state of most people. So we have to learn to be aware of our thoughts, be aware what we are thinking of, from not just one meditation period to another but from moment to moment and instant to instant. We have to saturate the mental level with awareness. And if we do all this - if we are aware of the level of the body and its movements, aware at the emotional level, at the level of emotional reaction, aware at the thinking level too, then we shall become more and more aware of how conditioned we are. All our bodily movements - reactions. All our emotional experiences - reactions. All our thoughts, our judgements - reactions. And we'll begin to feel, as it were, 'Well what am I? Who am I? I'm just a sort of bundle of machinery, I'm just a system of cogs and wheels, I'm really no better, no more than that.' But out of that awareness, as I've said, of our own conditionedness, our own unawareness, true awareness, true creativity does spring.

And fourthly and lastly - there's still a higher kind of awareness - which is awareness, to begin with, of our own creative functioning, but finally, ultimately awareness of the Ultimate, aware of what is beyond, or if you like, awareness of Reality itself. And this is the highest form. It's this which, as it were, cancels out, renders unnecessary, renders nugatory all of our lower forms of awareness, to continue from moment to moment, instant to instant, awareness of Reality. There are many ways of doing this. One which I might mention is the constant repetition within one's own mind of what, in Buddhism, is called a mantra. A mantra is not meant just to concentrate one's mind. The meaning goes far beyond that. It's a sort of archetypal sound symbol, one may say. But also it has the function, as one repeats it - not mechanically of course but as one repeats it - of keeping one in touch with, aware of, all the time, the higher spiritual realities or one's own true nature, as it were, which it represents, which it symbolises, which even it embodies. So this is why in some Buddhist traditions, including the Pure Land tradition, about which we heard so beautifully this morning, it's why in so many Buddhist traditions this practice of repetition is stressed so much. Because it keeps us in touch with, keeps us aware of, Reality, the whole of the time. If you say even *Namo Amida Butsu*, salutations to the Buddha of Infinite Light, if you are saying that all the time, at the back of your mind, however dim, however distant, however clouded, there is some awareness of the Buddha of Infinite Light. There's some awareness that shining somewhere in the universe, shining somewhere - you hardly know where - there is this infinite light which we symbolise as The Buddha which shines in all directions on all beings and all things, which illuminates all, which, as it were, showers its grace, its beneficence, upon all. If you repeat, as I say, this salutation somewhere at the back of your mind in some corner there will be this dim awareness of that Ultimate Reality all the time.

So this is why this sort of practice is stressed so much in so many forms, in so many schools of Buddhism. It's just a means of keeping us in contact, keeping us aware of the ultimate all the time. So if we can practise awareness, if we can practise mindfulness, in this way, at these four levels at least to some extent, that will be a beginning for us of our higher, our spiritual, our **creative**, our truly alive life.

In Buddhism, as I've said, there are many exercises to help us develop awareness, mindfulness, but we should be very careful to see that they do not become mechanical. Those of you who practise, for instance, Mindfulness of Breathing, counting the breaths, know that even this can become mechanical. You can go on doing it - some people are rather skilled at this - go on doing it, at the same time allow your mind to go a-wandering and drifting and wool gathering. Some people are so clever at this that they can do all the exercises beautifully, perfectly, count one to ten, one to ten, over and over again for hours on end, but they can keep up a continual reverie at the same time. So this means that the whole thing has become mechanical. So we should be very careful that our practice of mindfulness itself which is the de-mechanising catalyst, as it were, doesn't itself become mechanical. And this applies in a much broader, more general, way to all our religious beliefs and all our religious practices which, as I've said, are only too often part of our general mechanicalness. If ever I hear anybody say, 'Oh yes, of course I'm going to the Sunday seminar. I always go', then the chances are that I will say, 'Please don't come'. It's becoming a habit, and from a spiritual point of view any habit is a bad habit. There are some spiritual teachers even in the East who make a habit - but I shouldn't say a habit, of course, but sometimes they do this - of breaking up the religious habits of their disciples. If the disciple, say, is used to meditating from six until eight, the teacher makes him meditate every now and then from, say, ten until twelve. Or if he's in the habit of reading religious books at a certain time, he makes him stop it. If he's in the habit of getting up early every day, he makes him get up late. If he's in the habit of going to bed late, he makes him go to bed early, and so on. If he's in the habit of meditating during the day, he makes him meditate all night! [Laughter] And in this way he breaks up his pattern, his repetitive pattern which is becoming, as it were, mechanical, and you can see this in so many ways, in so many spheres. If you go about the religious world you can see religious groups, religious organisations which have just become machines. They function perfectly, beautifully, smoothly, but just like machines. Not like real living movements. They don't flow, they don't flower, they don't develop. They've no creativity. Just over and over again the same old ground, the same old pattern of activities.

So we have to be very careful of this. We have to watch. And of course above all we have to watch ourselves, and though we ourselves - and when I say we ourselves I mean the Friends of the Western Sangha - though we are busy, we hope, creating, we hope, patterns, in a sense, of activity for the future, retreat weeks and meditation classes, we hope, and we have to bear this in mind all the time, it doesn't just become another routine. It doesn't just become another pattern beautifully labelled 'Buddhist activities'. Every now and then mindfully we have to sort of break it up, keep it loose, keep it flowing, keep it free. Otherwise we just settle down. We become just another branch of the good old firm, as it were, of, well, you can call it the establishment or whatever you like - whatever has settled down into death, as it were, on the level of the reactive mind and the reactive consciousness. Sometimes in the East people have said to me very proudly, 'I'm a born Buddhist'. Well how can you be a born Buddhist? You can't be born as a Buddhist. This is all the reactive mind at work. You can make yourself a Buddhist creatively, but you can't be born as a Buddhist - this is not possible. You can't just take your Buddhism from outside, from your parents or your group, even your class, even your teacher. You can't just take it ready-made and react to it. Prompted, or as it were, **stimulated**, inspired from outside, you create it all from within. Now I think this came out very clearly - I hope it came out very clearly, at least - in the talk which I gave the day before yesterday when we were dealing with archetypal symbolism. There's a little stimulus from outside which sparks off something within, but it's the process within, the creative process, the flowering within which is all-important.

So this is what we have to be aware of all the time, these two processes of the mind, the lower mind, the relative mind. The reactive process and the creative process. The fact that we are here at all, the fact that we can understand these words, the fact that we can even laugh at ourselves, this shows that the germs of awareness are there and the germs of creativity are there. We have to bear this in mind all the time, to bear in mind this distinction. Try to increase and enhance and enliven the creative side and allow the reactive side to just fade and wither away, as it were. And we can bear all this in mind with the help, with the aid, of these two great symbols; that is to say the Wheel of Life, upon which we are bound at present for the most part, symbolising the reactive mind and the Path, or if you like the circle; and on the other hand the spiral. We have to leave behind that circle, and up and up on the rings of that spiral, even to what we call Nirvana, Enlightenment or, if you like, the Pure Land, there we have eventually to go.

Checked June 2001