

Lecture 33: Meditation: the Expanding Consciousness

Friends:

The present age - the age in which, at about the middle of the twentieth century, we are now living - has been given, by various people, all sorts of names. Sometimes it is called, for instance, the Age of Anxiety; sometimes again it is called the Age of Psychology. Whether it is called the Age of Psychology because it is called the Age of Anxiety or vice versa I don't know, but these are just two of the names which are given to the age in which we live. This name: the Age of Psychology, we could say, is particularly appropriate inasmuch as, at present, what we may call the mind, or consciousness, is being very much studied. In fact we may say, from an empirical, a mundane, point of view, humanity probably at present knows more about the mind, more about its workings, its inner workings, more about its hidden recesses, than ever before in history.

When we mention the word psychology, most of us at once think of Freud, and we remember that Freud, for instance, discovered (as we may say) the subconscious mind; even though poets and philosophers had had some intimation of its existence long before; but Freud placed the whole concept of the subconscious mind on an irrefutable scientific basis. Then again, to mention another great modern psychologist, Jung went even further: envisaged not only the subconscious mind (which he called the personal unconscious) but envisaged the unconscious itself, with a capital U - not, perhaps, a very helpful term, because it does include contents which we may say, on their own level at least, are certainly conscious. But all these facts go to show how much the mind, consciousness, the psyche, is being studied nowadays. We also find that various hidden powers of the mind have been made the subject of scientific investigation. I think we can now say that telepathy, thought transference, is an accepted scientific fact; so, perhaps, is pre-cognition; possibly even the experience of clairvoyance - of seeing things at a distance. I think we can also say that nowadays we probably know much more about abnormal mental states (which used to be called conditions of insanity) than we ever did before in our history; at least we are more aware of them. We may not always be able to do very much about them, but they are being, they have been, studied, and the importance of the study of these stages is very widely recognised.

More recently still, especially in very recent years, we may say that all sorts of researches have been going on into the effect of various drugs, especially LSD on the human mind. And it does seem as though, in all these various ways, ever more fascinating vistas are beginning to be revealed. And strange to say we may even go so far as to observe that even professional psychologists, even psychoanalysts in some cases - psycho-therapists - are beginning to take serious something at which they previously laughed, many of them: that is what we may call even mystical experience. Some of them are beginning to consider seriously even this.

And all this is, indeed, extremely interesting. I've skipped, as you've seen, over a vast field; I've just given a pointer here and there (because this is all, as it were, introductory); it all adds up to one thing, one point; that our concept of the mind, in the West, is changing, in fact has been considerably enlarged, is being all the time more and more enlarged. We used to have in the West a very limited, a very superficial notion of what the mind of man was. We thought of it as something relatively static, we identified it with the conscious mind, with the individual consciousness, and so on. We tied it up with the body very much. But this is all now changed or beginning to be changed, and we're beginning to realise, we're beginning to see that the range of mind, the range of consciousness, is far greater than we had ever previously thought. Depth Psychology particularly is very fond of the image of the iceberg: we all know that the iceberg is an enormous mass of ice and six-sevenths of it is submerged, (I think it's six-sevenths; the exact proportion doesn't matter) and only one-seventh shows above the surface of the waves. And we are often told that the mind is like this, the conscious tip as it were protruding above the waves of the unconscious. It's very small. It's only a very tiny fraction of the whole. And underneath, corresponding to the submerged portion of the iceberg, there are layers and layers, levels and levels, which are not conscious; of which normally we are not aware.

So this is the sort of image, as it were, which Depth Psychology presents to us, but we may say

that this is not the whole truth; we may say that it's only half the truth. We may say that the mind is not only like an iceberg, six-sevenths of which is submerged, but the mind is also like a mountain; like the mountains which one sees not only in Alps but in the Himalayas, as I've seen them so often, towering thousands and thousands of feet up but the summits, the higher slopes as it were, covered with cloud. You see only the lower slopes, you see only the foothills, but those higher peaks, most of the time, you don't see at all; they're covered with an impenetrable blanket of mist and cloud. So we may say the mind is also like this. The mind has not only depths of which we are unaware, it has heights of which we are unaware, too, so that if we want to get a correct, a complete, picture or image of the mind we should combine both these images: the image of the iceberg with its submerged depths and the image of the mountain with its veiled peaks. Both of these represent different aspects of the mind, revealing that the mind has depths below mind and heights also above.

Now all this of very great interest from the point of view specifically of Buddhism. We all know, I am sure, that Buddhism is very greatly concerned with the mind. We may even go so far as to say that Buddhism is concerned with very little else than with the mind. For instance, as some of you may remember who have heard the talks on Zen Buddhism, Zen is defined in one of the lines of the four-line verse which gives its essence; Zen is defined as 'a direct pointing to the mind'. This is all that Zen does, in a sense: it just says 'Look at your own mind'. It directs attention to the mind. So this is very characteristic, very typical, of Buddhism. Almost every school of Buddhism is saying in one way or another, in one form or another: 'Look at your mind. Look at yourself. Be aware of the heights and the depths of your own consciousness.' So Buddhism knows quite well, has known from the very beginning, has known for thousands of years, that the mind - our so-called everyday mind - has heights and has depths of which normally (or usually, I should say) we are unaware.

Now we'll be going into all this - or many aspects of all this - later on in the year when we have our course of lectures at the Kingsway Hall on 'Aspects of Buddhist Psychology', in which many of these topics will be systematically explored. We shall, of course, not only then but now, be more concerned with the heights than with the depths, and concerned not only theoretically but practically, because the emphasis of Buddhism all the time is not just on the theoretical but on the practical. It not only envisages heights of mind beyond mind but is also concerned with the scaling of those heights. It's also concerned, we may say, with the expansion of consciousness, of the expansion of awareness, beyond its present limits to the very heights of mind.

But of course the question arises: how far is this to be done? How are we to scale these heights? How are we to expand our minds, expand our awareness, expand our consciousness? And the answer - the traditional answer of Buddhism - is - in all its schools - that this is to be done through the practice of meditation. Meditation, in fact, may be defined, for general purposes, as the systematic expansion of awareness or consciousness.

Now most of you, most of you I know, are practising meditation (or at least, concentration) in one form or another, regularly or fairly regularly. Many of you, I know, attend the weekly meditation classes which we hold at Sakura. Quite a number of you also have participated in our two retreat weeks which he had at Haslemere recently. So most of you, that is to say, have experienced, as a result of your own practice of meditation, some degree of expansion of consciousness, of awareness, of the mind. And meditation, indeed, is something to be practised, something to be experienced and not so much talked about - not even perhaps, really, lectured about. At the same time, it is very useful for us to have a general idea of what we are supposed to be doing when we meditate; whither we are supposed to be going, otherwise we may practise, we may get a certain definite benefit out of the practice, but we may, at the same time, feel that we are rather groping in the dark; we may have no real sense of direction in our practice. So therefore, this morning, I want to deal with this topic of meditation, of the expanding consciousness, in a very practical way, to help mainly those who are actually practising to orient themselves and to deal with it by way of a consideration of four principle themes or topics.

First of all: Why we Meditate - that'll be the first topic. Secondly: The Preparations for Meditation. Next: The Five Basic Methods of Meditation; and fourthly and lastly: The Three

Progressive Stages of Meditational Experience. And, as I have said, the emphasis here will be practical rather than theoretical, and we shall be aiming at helping those who are actually meditating to get their bearings and to help them be more clearly aware of what it is that they are doing when they sit down and meditate. (Now, as I see several people have got notebooks and pieces of paper, let me just repeat these four topics as you can get them down and use them as a sort of aide-memoire later on. First of all: Why we Meditate. Why we Meditate. It's amazing sometimes how even a short note of this sort can refresh your memory long after you've heard the lecture. So first of all: Why we Meditate. Secondly: Preparations for Meditation. Thirdly: The Five Basic Methods of Meditation. The Five Basic Methods of Meditation. And fourthly and lastly: the Three Progressive Stages of Meditational Experience. So these are the four topics which we shall be considering this morning. All right - one: Why we Meditate. Two: Preparations for Meditation. Three: The Five Basic Methods of Meditation, and four: the Three Progressive Stages of Meditational Experience. If we have these four headings then we can fit in all the things which have to be said on the subject of 'Meditation: the Expanding Consciousness'.

So first of all: Why we Meditate. Well, one may put the question: Why DO we meditate? And perhaps I might even say that YOU should be telling ME why we meditate, or why you meditate. But I can say, as a result of conversations with a number of people who come to our classes and who practise meditation, that there are basically two types of motivation; two types of approach; and we may just provisionally designate these as: the psychological and the spiritual. By the psychological type of motivation I mean that someone is in search simply of peace of mind. They are not particularly interested in Buddhism, perhaps; not particularly interested even in religion, or in philosophy, or even in psychology, but just want peace of mind. They find that the hurry and bustle, the wear and the tear, of day-to-day living is a bit too much for them. The various strains, the various tensions to which they are subjected, the various problems which they have to solve, various difficulties, perhaps with other people and, of course, with themselves - there may even be a touch of neurosis or something of that sort - but they are not happy, they are disturbed, they're tense and they start looking around for peace of mind. And someone tells them, or they hear in some way (as so many people have related to me) that Buddhism teaches meditation and meditation can give you peace of mind. So this is the first type of motivation. People take up the practice of meditation as it were psychologically: just to gain some inner tranquillity; some peace which, it seems, the world cannot give.

Then we may say the spiritual type of meditation consists, basically, in an aspiration after, not just peace of mind but after what we call in Buddhism 'Enlightenment' or 'Buddhahood'; a desire, in wider terms, to understand the meaning of existence itself; to come to some sort of intelligible terms with life; or even, more metaphysically, to know reality, to see the truth, to penetrate into the ultimate reality of things. So some people take up meditation with this sort of motivation; meditation as a stepping-stone to something further, something higher - awareness of, understanding of, experience, even, of ultimate reality itself.

The two approaches, of course - the psychological and the spiritual - are not mutually exclusive. Quite a number of people come in, take up meditation with a psychological motivation merely, but they find that imperceptibly, without being aware of it, the sheer momentum of their own practice carries them beyond the boundaries of the psychological into the spiritual, into the spiritual world, into a world of spiritual experience; indeed, we may go so far as to say that sometimes it is very difficult to draw a hard and fast line of demarcation between the psychological on the one hand and the spiritual on the other. The two are definitely distinct, but they shade into each other in such a way that very often we are not quite sure whether we are within the boundaries, as it were, of the psychological or within those of the spiritual; there's a sort of - I won't say No-man's-land - but a sort of common ground in between the two where both overlap. So, therefore, even those who take up meditation with a psychological motivation very often find themselves, without warning as it were, without expecting anything of the sort - I won't say precipitated into the spiritual - but certainly sliding into it by imperceptible degrees. So the two approaches - the psychological and the spiritual - are not really mutually exclusive. Even if you come with a spiritual motivation, you have to take up, of course, concentration and meditation in a purely psychological sort of way to begin with in order to lay a good foundation.

Now we may say that in terms of expansion - in terms of expansion of mind, expansion of consciousness - one type of motivation, one type of approach: the psychological; represents a partial and a temporary expansion of consciousness, whereas the other - the spiritual approach - stands for a total and permanent expansion of consciousness; so that there's a difference of degree, in a certain sense, rather than a difference of kind, between the two methods or the two approaches or the two motivations. So this is why we meditate, very broadly and briefly: either to gain peace of mind within a purely psychological context or framework of reference, or as a stepping-stone to the experience of reality or to some kind of spiritual experience, something above and beyond the psychological in the narrow sense.

Now secondly - our second topic -: the Preparations for Meditation. These are very important indeed. Sometimes people take up the practice of meditation and it sometimes happens that they are a bit disappointed. They don't seem to be progressing so rapidly as they had thought. They don't exactly see the milestones flashing by or anything like that. They seem to be going rather at a snail's pace. But one of the reasons is that they tend to neglect the preparations; they tend to plunge straight in without prior preparation. But in this context, in this connection, one may say that the preparation is half the battle: if you are really well prepared you are almost already meditating. To use just an ordinary comparison, one might say it's like cooking. (I think the ladies will appreciate this comparison especially). If you get all your vegetables neatly cut and all your spices mixed and all that sort of thing - all your dishes ready - then you'll find that the job is half done. So it is just the same with meditation: the preparation is half the battle. If your preparation is perfect, we may say you are already meditating without knowing it.

So let's look at some of these preparations. First of all, there is what we may call the ethical preparation. This comes first because it is very important indeed. And usually the ethical preparation for meditation is explained in terms of the observance of the Five Precepts. That is to say: abstention from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from wrong speech and from intoxicants. But this sort of presentation is, I feel, a little bit stereotyped, it falls, as it were, a little too pat. I think we have to go into it a little more deeply.

Modern Indian meditation teachers usually speak in terms of controlling three things, as constituting the ethical preparation for concentration and meditation. They say one should control - not in the sense of completely alienating but of bringing within certain limits - three things: first of all, food; secondly, sex; and thirdly, sleep. The Yogi, they say, should be moderate in these three things. As regards food, of course, one should neither (they say) overload the stomach nor should one leave it ever completely empty, unless one is doing a definite fast. In fact, the modern Indians very often say that you should divide your stomach, as it were, into four quarters. One quarter you should keep for food. Not a very large allowance! One quarter you should keep for water. And half you should keep for air. So this is the prescription for the Yogi. And it's also said that one should avoid stimulating food. This is said, of course, within the Indian context, where they are fond - in fact, very fond; inordinately fond; of spices and all sorts of hot things: red pepper and so on. So the Yogi is advised to abstain from these stimulating foods and spices and so on. They say that stimulating food stimulates thoughts and even stimulates passions. I regard this with some scepticism, but I have noticed that there is one factor which is perhaps relevant with regard to stimulating food in the form of spices and chillis and so on; that if you eat a very highly spiced diet - and this is very relevant in India indeed, where people, as I said, take lots of spices - you will very often suffer from flatulence; that is to say, from wind; and this will very often disturb you at the time of your meditation. I do know that I have meditated with Indians who've taken so many spices, so much of the 'hot-stuff', that you can hear the rumblings in their intestines, I would say, even hundreds of yards away! It can be really deafening at times! So I think this particular prescription is made more with this in mind. As I say, I am a little sceptical about this idea of food being stimulating in a purely psychological sense.

Then, as regards control of sex, here it is said, of course, that best of all is celibacy, but if this is difficult or impossible for any reasons, then here, also, moderation should be observed. In the course of meditation we do require, we do need, a great deal of nervous energy, as we shall find if we get very deeply into meditation, and this nervous energy is dissipated in the course of sexual indulgence, and therefore in this matter also, we are advised, the meditator, especially those who

are in retreat, should observe very strict restraint and moderation. Here we can say that with a little observation and with a little reflection, each person will know for himself or herself, what is best in this respect.

Then sleep. This is not something that we usually speak about in connection with meditation, but this, too, is important, and we are told by the Indian meditation teachers that sleep should be must a little less than what we used to take before we started meditation. If we meditate much, in fact, we do find that sleep tends automatically to be reduced: you need less sleep. Now sleep, we may say, very broadly speaking, or in a general way, is a very wonderful thing indeed. We usually take it for granted, but it is not only a very wonderful thing; sleep is a very mysterious thing. I remember in Don Quixote Cervantes sings the praises of sleep, and it's a very beautiful and striking passage, but we should reflect upon this whole matter.

It's only recently, it's only in the course of the last few years, that we've begun to understand what sleep really is and what sleep is for. Formerly we used to think that you slept just to rest your body and rest your heart and rest your everything else, but, apparently, it is not just like that. It seems that we have to sleep, at least partially, in order to be able to dream. And dreams, it seems, are necessary so that all the perceptions and impressions of the day can be sorted out and filed away neatly for future reference. In fact in this respect man's mind has been compared to a computer, and I am told that the computer needs resting sometimes, and I believe that there are people who go around putting computers to sleep, as it were, so that they've got time to sort out all the data which has been fed into them and process it properly and file it away for future reference. If the computer isn't given this period of rest, it just gets jammed up; it goes crazy, as it were - or at least, neurotic! So we require sleep in order to be able to dream, and we require dreams, apparently, (this may be only part of the truth), so that we can sort out the vast mass of all these millions and millions of impressions which have come surging in on us all during the day.

Now if we meditate deeply, we are no longer aware of the body, we are no longer aware of impressions; impressions don't register, so there's much less sorting out and filing away to be done, therefore we don't need to dream so much and therefore we don't need to sleep so much. So this is why - or at least part of the reason why - when we meditate a lot, when we meditate deeply so as to be unconscious of the body, we need less sleep. And those who do meditate a lot will find that their sleep is quite drastically reduced. I am quite sure that there are two or three people here, at least, who have had the experience of cutting down sleep, as a result of meditating, to two or three hours, or even less, per night, and not feeling any strain or any tiredness or any weariness at all. But this is just by the way. What is of importance here is to emphasise the fact that the meditator should bring sleep under control; not think that it can be left out; not think that it doesn't matter, that you can go on sleeping and sleeping and do your meditation afterwards. No. Just as in the case of food and sex, so sleep, also, must be controlled.

So this is as it were just introductory to this whole question of ethical preparation. Ethical preparation is, in the first place, control of food, of sex and of sleep. One must also control one's aggressiveness if one wants to meditate successfully. (I see a few people smiling here). Well, aggressiveness can be both bodily and verbal. Being aggressive doesn't mean simply that you go and clout somebody over the head. It also means that you speak harshly, violently, loudly, rudely and so on. In this connection, one should try to be always quiet and gentle, in all one's movements, when one speaks, and so on. And if possible, ideally, one should be a vegetarian. Not, I am suggesting, a strict lacto-vegetarian or a food-reformist - much less still, a faddist - but at least abstain, so far as one can, so far as conditions permit, from meat and from fish, as an expression of one's dedication to a harmless way of life.

So one might say, one can sum up by saying that the whole ethical preparation for meditation consists in leading, as far as possible, a quiet life, a harmless life and a simple life. And there shouldn't, of course, be too much noise or too much activity. Noise is one of the things we find it very hard to get away from. In the course of the morning, even while we were meditating here, I don't know how many decibels of noise came in through the windows, but it was probably several decibels at least. But it is very difficult to get away from noise, but we should do so as

far as possible, and not make or create noise ourselves. And if we want to be serious about our meditation, we shouldn't indulge in too many hectic activities. We should also cut down, even, on violent physical exercise. If you are doing violent physical jerks or swimming for two or three hours a day, it's very difficult to meditate. You find it has an effect on the nervous system: when you sit down to meditate, it's as though you feel that your whole system is sort of tingling and 'raw', as it were, and too gross to transmit the refined impulses which are generated by meditation. So one should lead a quiet life, as far as possible, free from noise, activity, too much social life, and so on, and without indulging very often in violent physical exercise. None of these things help meditation. They all get in the way to some extent.

We can also say that Right Livelihood is also of very great importance here. Most people spend much of their time - they might think, too much of their time - working; earning a living. So when you're working at a certain job for six, eight, even ten, hours a day, every day, or at least five, six, days of the week, year after year, this all has an effect upon the mind. You are being psychologically conditioned all the while by your occupation! So one should bear this in mind and one should choose, if one has the power of choice at all, an occupation, a means of livelihood, which is quiet, which is peaceful, which is gentle, which is not anti-social, and which, if possible, is of some constructive benefit to other human beings. This is an extremely important aspect, not only of the preparation for meditation, but of one's whole ethical and spiritual life. Right Livelihood.

Now, in addition to all this (as though this wasn't enough), one may say that one should be, all the time, as a most important part of the ethical preparation for meditation, mindful and self-possessed: aware of one's body and its movements, aware of one's emotions, one's emotional reactions, aware of one's thoughts, aware of what one is doing, why one is doing it, and so on, and cultivating all the time this calmness, recollection, mindfulness, awareness, in everything that one is doing: whether one is speaking or remaining silent; whether one is working; whether one is cooking; whether one is doing a job in the garden; travelling; driving; all the time be mindful and aware. This is the best preparation for meditation. If you are mindful and aware in this way, then as soon as you sit on the meditation seat, as soon as you summon up your object of concentration, as it were automatically, you slip, you slide, into a meditative state without any difficulty at all.

Now two more things which are of great importance before we can actually start meditating: first of all, we should find a teacher. Meditation cannot be learned from books, so we should find a teacher: someone who has some experience, some practice, of meditation himself and is able to impart it to other people. We can't get this sort of information or this sort of guidance from books, it must come from a personal source. In the course of our own meditation practice, so many questions, even so many difficulties or problems will arise which the information we find in the books simply doesn't cover. One needs, therefore, personal instruction and personal guidance, at least until one is able to get along on one's own as a result of one's own more advanced spiritual experience.

Then lastly, there are what we call the various devotional exercises. I am quite aware that these don't appeal to everybody, especially those who come with a more psychological approach, and even many of those who come with a spiritual approach, but many people, at the same time, especially those who are more emotionally or devotionally inclined, do find them very helpful indeed. And at their simplest, these devotional exercises consist in offering to a figure or image of the Buddha, before we start meditating, lights - by lighting a candle, symbolising the light of vision that we are about to try to light in our own hearts -, flowers - symbolising the impermanence of all worldly things -, and lastly, incense - lighted joss sticks, symbolizing the fragrance of the good life which permeates in all directions, influencing other people in subtle, imperceptible ways. So these are, in the simplest form, the devotional exercises. They can be comparatively long and more elaborate, but there is no need to go into all that now.

So so much, therefore, for the preparation for meditation. I've spoken about the preparation at such length because, as I said at the beginning, preparation is important. If you pay attention to all these preparations, if you make all these preparations, then, as I said a little while ago, when

you come to sit on your meditation seat, on your cushion or your stool or your chair, you'll settle down, almost without effort, into a state if not of higher consciousness at least of concentration, of recollection and of tranquility. One might almost go so far as to say that if you prepare for meditation sufficiently, you don't need to meditate: as soon as you remain still and close your eyes - there you are; you're meditating, straight away.

Now, thirdly, we come to the Five Basic Methods of Meditation. And you may ask: Why five? And there are five basic methods of meditation because, in this arrangement, the methods of meditation correspond to the five mental poisons. Enlightenment or Buddhahood is within us all, but it is obscured, it is covered over, just as the sky by dark clouds, but it is there behind them or underneath them all the time. And this obscuring factor; this cloud or this darkness; of ignorance or avidya, can be looked at in a number of different ways, from a number of different points of view. We can analyse it, we can split it up. So if we analyse it, if we split it up, we find that this obscuring factor consists of what we call the Five Mental Poisons which stand between us and our own innate Enlightenment.

And these five mental poisons are: first of all, distraction or distractedness; multiplicity of wandering thoughts; inability to concentrate; mental confusion and so on. And then, secondly, anger, or aversion, or hatred. Then, thirdly, lust or craving. Fourthly, ignorance, in the sense of ignorance of spiritual things, of our own conditionality. And fifthly and lastly, conceit or pride or ego-sense. So these are the five mental poisons. (As some of you are writing them down, let me just go through them again quickly: distraction, anger; craving; ignorance; conceit; the five mental poisons.)

Now, each of the five basic methods of meditation is designed as an antidote for one particular poison. So let us now just briefly describe these five basic methods and refer also to the poison of which they are meant to be the antidote. Now first of all, the first of the five basic methods is one with which we are already acquainted, and perhaps acquainted very well: that is to say, the mindfulness of breathing practice, which we have done this morning and which we do in our meditation classes. This practice - mindfulness of breathing - is the antidote to the mental poison of distraction or distractedness. It eliminates wandering thoughts. That is one of the reasons why we practice it first, why we learn it first before any other method: because we can't practise any of the other methods, or any method at all, until we have learned to concentrate. And concentration means unifying our attention, eliminating wandering thoughts. I am not going to describe this method in detail because most of us know it, and in any case we have already practised it this morning. So this is the first of the five basic methods; mindfulness of the breathing process, leading to concentration and elimination of distraction in the sense of wandering thoughts.

Then, secondly, our second basic method: the development of what we call metta or maitri; friendliness, loving-kindness, or as we may say, not very exactly but giving the spirit of the thing, universal love. And this, of course, is the antidote for anger or hatred. Some of you have practised this method, others haven't; some are expecting to practise it in the weekly classes in the course of a few weeks time; so I shall just briefly run through the five main stages of this practice. It will also help to refresh the memories of those who have done it, but have maybe done it some time ago. In the first stage of this practice we develop love towards ourselves: something which many people find very difficult indeed; they don't seem to be on very good terms with themselves for one reason or another. So we develop love first of all towards ourselves. If you can't love yourself you will find it very difficult to love other people; you will only project. Then in the second stage, we develop love towards a near and dear friend; someone of the same sex (because if we think of someone of the opposite sex, craving may arise), someone of the approximately the same age (within ten or fifteen years) and someone still living. So we visualise - if we can visualise - the image or figure of this person and we develop love towards this person; the same love that we developed towards ourselves or even stronger we now develop - and actually feel - towards that near and dear friend. And here I must emphasise, as I always emphasise because it is so necessary, that what we are trying to develop in this type of practice is not a thought about developing a feeling but the actual feeling itself. And lots of people when they practise find that they are as it were all dry inside; they can't squeeze out even

a drop of feeling, but, in the course of time, if they practise hard, they begin to feel. It's as though, before, they were all numb, all insensitive, they can't feel, but in the course of this practice they begin to generate an inner warmth, a sort of glow, towards themselves, first; then towards this near and dear friend. And usually this second stage is the easiest, for obvious reasons. Then, in the third stage, we think of a neutral person; someone whose face we know very well; whom we've seen often; but towards whom we've no particular feeling either positive or negative; we neither like them nor dislike them. So the same love, that we felt towards the near and dear friend, we now direct, we now develop, towards this neutral person. And then, in the fourth stage, we think of someone whom we dislike, even an enemy; someone who has done us harm or an injury; and the same love we develop towards that person, too. These are the first four stages and they are as it were introductory. Then, at the beginning of the fifth and last stage, we as it were line up all these four persons in front of our mental vision: self, near and dear friend, neutral person, enemy; and we develop the same love equally towards all. Then we go a little further, we spread a little wider: we develop the same love, we direct the same love, towards all the people in the room where we are meditating; all the people in the locality; all the people in the city, the country. Then, continent by continent, we go all the way round the world. We think of all men, all women, all nationalities, races, religions; even animals, even beings, maybe, who are higher than human beings - beings which the Buddhist tradition calls devas, deities - or even, higher than that, spiritual teachers like the Buddha, Milarepa, Hui Neng and so on, even non-Buddhist spiritual teachers: whoever is eminent for any good quality; and we develop love towards all of them. And in this way we feel, we find, as though we are being carried out of ourselves in ever expanding circles; we forget ourselves, sometimes quite literally, and we become enfolding in an ever expanding circle of love. And this can be a very tangible experience for those who practise, even after a comparatively short time. One does find, here, the matter of temperament rather important. Some people take to the metta practice like ducks to water and they enjoy it immensely within a matter of minutes, but others have to strain and struggle before they get that little spark of love and before they start radiating that metta; many of them feel that to talk of radiating metta is just a joke! They don't see how they are ever going to do it! But they can. They do, in the end, with a bit of practice, a bit of perseverance; after all, it's all there! If even Buddhahood, if even Enlightenment, is within, why not just metta? That's surely even simpler! So this is the second type of practice, the second of the five basic methods of meditation: metta-bhavana - development of universal love.

Now, thirdly, we come to a much less popular method, which is known as the contemplation of impurity or decay. And this counteracts lust or craving or attachment. It is not a practice which many people care to take up, though it is popular in some quarters in the East. The first type of practice - there are three different ways of practising it, but the first, and the most radical, as it were, is to go to a graveyard or a burning-ground (and in the East one gets these things) and to sit there among the corpses and half-burned bodies - I know it sounds drastic, but the our craving is very strong - and just to sit there and look at these bodies one after the other and just think: "Well, this is what will happen to me one day!" After all, this is common sense! Nothing of Buddhism here, even. One day you will be like that! One day your head will be off or your arm will be just lying to one side; you will be a little heap of ashes in somebody's urn - cherished, somewhere, we hope! - but this is how you'll end, so why not face the fact? Why not admit it? And if necessary orient one's life accordingly? So in the Eastern countries, very often along goes the bhikkhu - I had almost said 'gaily'! - to the burning ground - and some of them do go, I would say, gaily, happily - and they sit and they look at one corpse after another: this one just ready to be burned, just dead; another one, a bit swollen; another one, well, in rather a mess. And they go on until they get to just a skeleton, a heap of bones, a heap of dust; and they just reflect, they turn over in their own mind: "One day, I too shall be like this." And it's a very salutary practice and it does tend to cut down, to reduce, craving or lust or attachment to the things of the body, the things of the senses, the things of the flesh. There's another way of practising which is less drastic: that is, simply contemplating death. Not going literally to the graveyard, which is rather radical, but just reminding yourself, reflecting on the fact, that one day you must die, one day you must be separated, your consciousness must be separated from this physical organism. One day you will no longer see, you will no longer hear, you will no longer taste, or feel, or sense in any way. One day your body will just not be there, your senses will not function, you will be a consciousness on its own, you don't know where; spinning, perhaps bewildered, in a sort of void;

you don't know. So one must bear this in mind. Or, if even that is a bit too drastic, a bit too harsh, well just think about impermanence. Now Autumn is beginning, it is a very beautiful time of year to think about impermanence; if we even look out of the window we see the leaves on the trees are turning yellow, some of them are falling. We see chrysanthemums are in season now. So: everything fades, everything passes away, everything is impermanent; if we dwell upon it in this gentle melancholy sort of fashion, reflectively, poetically, quoting Keats and so on; even this will help if these more drastic methods are too terrible for us to face. But one can say, as a result of experience, that even the more drastic method can be intensely exhilarating; it certainly isn't depressing! If one takes it up at the right time. It certainly isn't a depressing experience to remind yourself that one day you'll be free of the body. Some people who practise find this very, very exhilarating. I remember once, in my very early days, when I was just beginning as a monk in India, one day I did do this. I went along to a burning ground at night and I sat there. And it was a very beautiful scene, because it was on the banks of the river Ganges; there was a great stretch of silver sand, and at intervals funeral pyres had been lit and people had been burned, and there was a skull here and a bone there and a heap of ashes somewhere else, but it was very beautiful, because the moonlight was over it all - the silvery moonlight of the tropics - and the Ganges was gently flowing by, and one felt not only in a contemplative, not only in a detached mood, but one felt in a very free, one might even say, exhilarated, mood. And it is significant that this sort of practice overcomes fear. It is said that the Buddha himself practised in this way to overcome fear. If you can stay alone in a graveyard of this sort at night, well, you'll never be afraid of anything again; because all fear, basically, is fear of loss of the body, fear of death, fear of loss of self. So if you can come face to face with this and overcome it or resolve it or go beyond it, then you'll never be afraid of anything any more. But this sort of practice, at least in its more drastic form, is not for beginners. Even in the Buddha's day, we are told, some monks, who practised without proper preparation, became so depressed that they committed suicide. So normally one is advised to practise mindfulness of breathing first, then metta-bhavana, and only when one is full of lots of metta, to go to the graveyard and practise in the more drastic way. But all of us can practise to some extent, recalling the impermanence of things, remembering that one day we too will die, we too will fade and perish even as the flowers or even as the grass of the field.

Then, fourthly; the contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas. This is the fourth basic method of meditation: contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas, or twelve links in the Chain, as it is called, of Dependent Origination or Conditioned Co-production, as Dr. Conze calls it. And this contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas is the antidote for ignorance. Those of you who have seen pictures of the Wheel of Life - the Tibetan Wheel of Life - will remember that the Twelve Nidanas are depicted in the outermost, fourth, circle of the Wheel of Life. The first Nidana is ignorance, represented by a blind man with a stick; the second: the Samskaras or karma-formations, volitions, depicted by a potter with a wheel and pots; then, thirdly; consciousness, shown by a monkey climbing a flowering tree (because that's what our minds are like, most of the time: little monkeys climbing up into the branches of this world and plucking little flowers here and there); and, fourthly: name and form (that is mind and body), a ship with four passengers, one of whom, representing consciousness, is steering. Then the six sense organs, represented by an empty house; contact, represented by a man and woman embracing; then feeling, a man with an arrow in his eye; craving, a woman offering drink to a seated man; grasping, a man gathering fruit from a tree; then coming-to-be; development; represented by a pregnant woman; then birth, represented by a picture of childbirth; and then old age and death; men carrying a corpse to the burning ground. So these Twelve Nidanas, illustrated in this way, represent the whole process of birth, life, death and rebirth. As a result of our ignorance and volitions based upon ignorance in previous lives, we are precipitated again into this world with a consciousness endowed with a psycho-physical organism, endowed with six senses which come into contact with the external universe. As a result of this contact, we experience feelings - pleasant, painful and neutral - we develop craving for the pleasant feelings, we cling on to the things which gives us the pleasant feelings; in this way we condition ourselves in such a way that inevitably we have to be born again and have to die again. So these Twelve Links, in this way, (and I'm describing them very briefly because we are not really concerned with this subject today), are distributed over three lives, but are also, at the same time, all contained in one life; even in one moment. And they illustrate - whether spread over three lives or a day or an hour or a minute - they illustrate the whole process, or way in which we condition ourselves; how we

make ourselves what we are by our own reactions to what we experience. If we like we can contemplate not only the Twelve Nidanas forming the outermost circle of the Wheel of Life, we can contemplate the whole Wheel of Life itself, in all its circles and all its details, because this is really not a picture of something outside of ourselves: this is a picture of ourselves. When we look at the Wheel of Life we are just looking in a mirror. There's anger; that's in me. There's greed; that's in me. There's ignorance; that's in me too. There are people going up from a lower to a higher state; well, I sometimes do that. On the other side, people slipping from a lower to a higher state(?); well, I sometimes do that. And then different aspects of existence: a happy state like that of a god; a painful state like that of a devil; a hungry state like that of a tormented ghost; an animal state; an aggressive state like that of an asura: all these are depicted. And how the whole process goes on, well, that's depicted, as we've just seen, in the Twelve Nidanas of the outermost circle. So when we contemplate the Wheel of Life, we are really contemplating our own conditionality; we are really seeing ourselves, as in fact we are most of the time, as just a piece of clockwork! We are really no more free, no more spontaneous, no more alive than a clock or a watch or an engine! We're mechanical. Because we are unaware, we are conditioned. So in this practice we become aware of our own conditionality, our own mechanicalness, our own un-free-ness, our own lack of spontaneity; our own death, if you like: our own spiritual death. And the contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas only provide a sort of traditional support for this sort of awareness. So contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas we may say - restating and rephrasing it - means rather, the becoming deeply aware of our own conditionality. How we simply act and react; how we are not free, not really originitive, not creative, not spontaneous, not spiritual, but bound hand and foot to the Wheel of Life, the wheel of Samsara. So this is the fourth method, the fourth basic method of meditation: contemplation of the Twelve Nidanas.

Then, fifthly and lastly: analysis of the Six Elements. And the practice, the method, of analysis of the Six Elements is the antidote for conceit or pride: that is to say, the feeling that I am I, and this is mine, and this is me. And in this practice, in this method, we try to realise that nothing really belongs to me, that we are, in fact, spiritually (though not empirically) just nothing: that what we think of as 'I' is an illusion; it doesn't exist in reality. Now the Six Elements of this practice are: earth, water, fire, air, ether or space, and consciousness; and here they are arranged in an ascending area of subtlety. Now I'll briefly explain the practice. First of all we sit, of course, (as is usual for meditation) and we think of the element earth. Earth. The earth upon which we're standing, and the earth in the form of trees and houses and flowers and people, and our own physical body. And we think: "Well, our own physical body is made up of certain solid elements. Where did these elements come from? These elements came from food. Where did the food come from? It came from the earth. So I have, as it were, incorporated a portion of the earth in my physical body. It doesn't belong to me. I just borrowed it; if you like, stolen it for a while. It does not belong to me at all. One day I have to give it back. So this is not me. It doesn't belong to me. It goes". So we relinquish, as it were, hold on the solid element in our physical body. Then we go a bit further. We think: "Well, in the world there is so much of water; great oceans and rivers and seas, streams and lakes and rain; and in my body also there is water: there is blood, there's bile, there's pus, spittle and so on. This is a liquid element, but where did I get it from? I borrowed it. I've taken it - on loan, as it were - from the water element of the whole world. It doesn't belong to me. I have to give it back one day. This also isn't me." So in this way 'I' begins to disappear; 'I' begins to vanish. Now we come to a still subtler element: the element of fire. In this stage we reflect, as it were, that there is in the universe the sun, the source of light and heat for the whole solar system. And we think, we reflect, that whatever heat, whatever warmth, there is in our own physical body, which we can feel within us, this all ultimately derives from the sun, and that when we die, when the body lies cold and immobile and stiff, all heat will have left it, all heat will have been given back to the earth, given back to the original source of light and heat. Then, the next stage; the contemplation of the next element, which is air. In this stage we reflect that our life is dependent upon air; that is to say: we live and we breathe, we breathe in and we breathe out, and whatever air there is in us in our lungs in the form of breath, this belongs to the wider circumambient atmosphere, as it were. And when we die; when the last breath passes from our body; then we give back that air into the air and we cease to identify ourselves with it, we cease to think that 'this is my breath': we are quite dissociated from it. The next of the elements is what is called in Sanskrit and Pali: akasa (akasa Pali sp.). Akasa is translated sometimes as 'space' and sometimes as 'ether'; it isn't space in the ordinary mathematical sense, we may say,

it is rather the 'living space' within which everything lives and moves and has its being. We reflect, we think, that our physical body occupies so much space - our physical body, made up of earth, air, fire, water - it occupies so much space. And when those elements are resolved back into their sources, then there is, as it were, an empty space left which the body formerly occupied, and this empty space merges back into universal space. At this stage we are dissociated altogether from the physical body. Sixthly and lastly, we come to the element of consciousness. At present, our consciousness is associated with the physical body through the five gross physical senses and through the mind, but when the body goes, when we are no longer conscious of the body, when we are no longer conscious of earth or water or fire or air, when consciousness is no longer bound up with these, when it's no longer bound up with physical existence at all, then consciousness dissolves - or re-solves - itself into a higher and a wider consciousness: that which is not identified with the physical body. Here, of course, there are so many levels. We can go to the individual consciousness, free from the body; from that to a wider and more universal, even collective, consciousness; from that to what we call the Alayavijnana (Alayavinnana in Pali), the repository or store-consciousness; and from that we proceed even to the fringes of what we call Absolute Mind. And in this way our own petty small individuality, our own petty small individual mind, is dissolved or resolved into the ocean of the universal consciousness. And in this way, too, we become free from the sense of 'I' and the sense of 'mine'. Now these are the five basic methods of meditation. And I think we may say it is axiomatic that everybody who takes up the practice of concentration and meditation at all seriously should have some experience at least if not of all of these, certainly of two or three. If one isn't able to practise all five to the very limit, at least one should have some acquaintance with them - at least with the theory - but one should have a very definite practical acquaintance with and experience of at least two or three out of the five. Usually what we do in our own meditation classes is to start people off with the mindfulness of breathing, and then to get them on to the development of love, and only after that to take up, if they feel so inclined, one or another of the three remaining practices. But quite apart from the five basic methods, there are a very large number indeed of more advanced methods, more advanced techniques, which are known in the Buddhist tradition: techniques, for instance, of mantra-recitation, visualisation and so on, but into these it is not necessary for us to go today.

Now if we look at the five basic methods which I have explained and described, we shall see that they fall quite naturally into two great groups. They fall in the first place into a group concerned with tranquility: a group which helps us to develop tranquility or samatha; and the second group is that of those concerned with the development of insight or understanding of reality. Now the tranquility group consists of mindfulness - that is to say, the mindfulness of breathing - and the development of love. These calm, tranquilise and expand the mind. And the insight group consists of the contemplation of impurity, of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination and of the Six Elements. This is the insight group, or the group connected with the development of insight. Now there is, obviously, some overlapping between these two groups, but broadly speaking we can say quite definitely that they can be classified in this way.

And this brings us to the fourth and last of our topics this afternoon: the Stage of Meditational Experience. But before we go on to that, just one or two words about this very important question of 'technique'. All the five basic methods of meditation involve making use of certain techniques, and these techniques very definitely must be learned, must be practised, we must be thoroughly familiar with them if we are to make any progress in the meditation at all. But here a danger - or at least a difficulty - arises: there is always a great temptation, as it were, to think that the practice of meditation consists simply in the manipulation of the technique. But this in fact is not so. We must say, we must emphasise, quite emphatically, that the practice of meditation does not consist merely in the operation of a technique, even though the technique very definitely has to be learned, has to be mastered. We may even say that meditation is not so much a science as an art, and in this art, as in all others, it is the inner experience rather than the technique which is all-important. It is even possible, sometimes it does happen, to master all the techniques of meditation - at least of concentration - to be able to go through all the exercises, but one may remain very far indeed from the real spirit of meditation.

Now for the fourth stage, in which we are concerned with the four stages of meditational experience - I beg your pardon: the three stages of meditational experience. And these are what

are known in Sanskrit as samatha, samapatti and samadhi. Samatha literally means tranquility. It stands for peace and calm and equanimity of mind, and in this state, mental activity of any kind, especially discursive mental activity, is minimal or else entirely absent. It's a state of perfect inward concentration, perfect equilibrium, perfect calm, and it corresponds to what are known as the four dhyanas (Skt.) or four jhanas (Pali): the four states of superconsciousness which are mentioned so often in the scriptures. Very often, samatha itself is subdivided into three levels or three degrees. The first of these consists in concentration on a gross physical object, as when we have our eyes open and we are fully concentrated on some material object external to us: that's the first of the three levels of concentration. The second level of concentration is when, closing our eyes, we concentrate our minds on the subtle mental counterpart of that original gross material object. Here, the degree or level of concentration which is attained is much more refined, much more elevated. And in the third stage of concentration - the highest of all - we are totally absorbed in the object: there is no difference now between our concentrating mind and the object on which we are concentrating; we have become one with it. So these are the three stages of samatha - tranquility or calm, the three levels or the three degrees. Next there is samapatti, which literally means 'attainment'. Samapatti stands for those attainments we experience as a result of practising concentration. Sometimes it happens that we see light with our mental eyes; we hear sounds - sounds of mantras, divine voices and so on -; we may even smell scents, we may even smell a sort of divine perfume pervading the room even though there is no physical cause for it; we may see beautiful landscapes unfolding themselves with blue sky and marvellous trees and clouds; we may also see figures of various kinds - figures of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, great teachers, mythological beings and so on -; there may also be changes in our bodily weight, temperature - we may feel very hot, we may feel very cold - and this may be not only subjective but even objective so that another person in the room with us and putting their hand on our body could also feel the change of temperature, the heat or the cold. Then again, sometimes we may have experience of telepathy - reading other people's thoughts -, of clairvoyance - seeing things at a distance -, clairaudience - hearing them at a distance. And again, even more important than these things, we may have experiences of wonderful peace and bliss, rapture, joy and so on. And even more important still: flashes of insight, flashes of understanding - when, at least momentarily, we realise and become one with, the truth. All these experiences from the highest to the lowest level, these are all what we call samapatti-type experiences. Inasmuch as people's temperaments and levels of development vary immensely, there is also an immense variety of experiences of this kind. This is a very, very rich field indeed. Nobody, however gifted, probably experiences all these different samapattis, but everybody in the course of their own practice of concentration and meditation, their own experience, their own spiritual experience, will come across at least some of them.

Then thirdly and lastly, what we call samadhi; a quite untranslatable term. It's very, very difficult to say very much about samadhi. We may very briefly describe it as a blissful state of transparent and luminous voidness free from all thoughts; free from the dichotomy of subject and object. And the perfection of samadhi; samadhi in its fullness, samadhi at the highest possible level, complete samadhi, is equivalent to what we call Enlightenment, or at least, one aspect of Enlightenment. And when we develop samadhi, when we reach at least the fringes of Enlightenment, then we come to the end of what we call meditation. Consciousness has been fully expanded; expanded from the individual to the universal, from the finite to the infinite, from the mundane to the transcendental, and from the consciousness of ordinary humanity to that even of supreme Buddhahood.