

The Venerable Sangharakshita

Lecture 35: Poetry and Devotion in Buddhism: The Sevenfold Puja

Venerable Sirs and Friends,

This morning we studied the Heart Sutra, the Hridaya Sutra, and the Heart Sutra has been very rightly described by Doctor Edward Conze as one of the sublimest spiritual documents of mankind. But sublime as it is, or perhaps we may say on **account** of its very sublimity and profundity, it is not very easy to understand. In fact it's quite difficult to understand, but I do hope that as a result of this morning's talk, aided perhaps by your own intuition, it has been possible for everybody to understand at least something of the meaning of the Heart Sutra, to have at least a glimpse of the truth which the Heart Sutra enshrines.

But we all know that however much, or however little, we might of understood, however bright that glimpse might have been, it's still very very difficult to put **what** we have understood into practice and to embody it in our lives, in our day to day activities and behaviour.

Socrates used to be fond of saying that to know the good was sufficient. Doing, he said, doing the good would automatically follow. Well that no doubt was true for Socrates but it isn't true for very many people. It's true for very few people indeed. It isn't really, for the vast majority, as easy as that. So therefore we find, a hundred or so years later, we find Aristotle for instance criticizing Socrates for ignoring what he called the irrational parts of the soul, these irrational parts of the soul, Aristotle says, Socrates left altogether out of account.

This brings us to what is if not the basic problem certainly one of the basic problems of the spiritual life, upon which we've touched more than once before in previous talks, and that is the problem or the question of how to translate knowing into being. To know the truth, to understand the truth, to gain an intuitive glimpse of the truth, is difficult enough as we all know, but to embody it in one's being, to embody it in one's life, one's behaviour, this is a hundred times more difficult. Buddhism as a whole is very much concerned with this problem, this great problem, of how to translate knowing into being, and it draws attention to the problem and the difficulty of the problem in its distinction between what it calls the Path of Vision and the Path of Transformation.

Now this whole subject was dealt with at length in the course of the series of talks which we had here on 'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path' some months ago, and some of you, I do know, attended that series and you may remember what was said on that occasion. The Path of Vision, we then saw, represents the initial spiritual insight or experience; what starts one off, as it were. Sometimes this insight or experience comes, as it were, spontaneously. This is the experience of quite a number of people. It suddenly strikes them or it suddenly overwhelms them. They get a sudden, unaccountable, glimpse if not of the truth, of some higher and wider dimension of being and consciousness, all of a sudden, apparently without previous preparation. Sometimes again its initial insight or experience may come as a result of study, may come as we are reading a book, or musing upon some passage that we've read. It may come when we are concentrating our mind, or trying to concentrate our mind; when we are meditating, and so on. It may come at any time, any place, under any circumstances, in any way, either as I've said, spontaneously or in connection with one or another of these other activities, whether religious or otherwise. So this initial vision or insight or experience, this is known, in Buddhism, as the Path of Vision.

The Path of Transformation represents the gradual transformation of one's whole life according to that vision, according to that insight, according to that experience. And the second path, therefore - the Path of Transformation - is very much longer and very much more difficult than the first, the Path of Vision. In the series of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Path of Vision is represented by the first step, that is to say by what is known as Perfect Vision, usually translated as 'Right Understanding', but the Path of Transformation is represented by all the other seven steps. That is to say by Perfect Emotion, Perfect Speech, Perfect Action, Perfect Livelihood, Perfect Effort, Perfect Awareness and Perfect Samadhi. These all represent the working out of the insight, of the initial experience, in terms of different aspects of one's life and activity.

Now the question arises, 'Why should all this be so?' Why should it be so difficult to translate knowing into being? Why shouldn't we all be like Socrates? - able to know the good and immediately do the good, without any sort of hiatus between the two. Why should the Path of Transformation be so long and difficult compared with the Path of Vision? What is it in us which prevents us, which hinders us, from making the transition as it were immediately, from the Path of Vision right onto the Path of Transformation in its fullness, its completeness? What is it that stands in the way?

Now it isn't very difficult to answer this question. Popular expressions, common modes of speech, sometimes embody a great deal of wisdom, traditional wisdom. Suppose somebody's doing something, engaged in some work, some job, some undertaking, engaged in something which he knows he ought to be doing, but suppose he doesn't do it very well. What do we say about him? We usually say his heart isn't in it. His heart isn't in it. In other words, he isn't emotionally involved. Energy comes from emotion. If there's no emotion, there's no energy, there's no drive, and for that reason the work to be done is not very well done. There's no need for me to insist upon this point, because we can verify it for ourselves, perhaps every day. The work in which we are not really deeply emotionally involved is not really well done. But this is particularly true in connection with the spiritual life. We may have a certain amount of spiritual insight, a certain amount of understanding, even experience, but if there is no, as it were, emotional equivalent of that insight, of that understanding, then it does not become embodied in our life. In other words understanding must pass through the emotions before it can influence life.

This is made clear by the structure of the Noble Eightfold Path. The first step, we've seen, is Perfect Vision. The second step or second aspect of the Eightfold path is Perfect Emotion, and Perfect Emotion is the first of the seven steps which make up, within the Eightfold Path, the Path of Transformation. In other words, we may say, Perfect Vision has to pass through, has to become, if you like, Perfect Emotion before it can manifest as Perfect Speech, Perfect Action and all the rest of the successive steps of the Noble Eightfold Path. In fact we can go so far as to speak, simplifying the whole matter, in terms of three centres in the human being. We can speak of a thinking centre, we can speak of an emotional centre, and we can speak of a moving centre; and in terms of the spiritual life, within the spiritual context, these three become a higher thinking - an intuitive or even visionary centre, a higher emotional or positive emotional centre, and a higher moving centre or centre of spiritual practice and experience. And I would request you at this point not to take these terms too literally or even too seriously, not to confuse them with similar terms used in other contexts by different writers on psychology and religion. The point which emerges here is that the thinking centre can influence the moving centre only through the emotional centre. So the question therefore arises: 'how to bring this about?', 'how to ensure this?', or 'how to involve the emotions?', and this of course in turn raises the question, 'why are the emotional energies themselves **not** involved? And answering the second question first we may say that the emotional energies are not involved because:

one, they are blocked;
two, they are wasted; and
three, they are too coarse.

In order to involve the emotional energies therefore we have to remove the blockage, stop the waste and find some means of refining the emotional energies. So let's consider each of these in turn briefly.

First of all, emotional energy is not available because it is blocked. We all know what emotional blockage means, but when I was thinking about this I happened to just turn over the pages of a book by Ouspensky, and quite by chance I found a rather striking thing of Ouspensky's, and he says in this book, 'People are not nearly emotional enough', and if you think about it it's very striking and very significant. And what does it mean? It means that our emotional centre is not functioning freely. The emotions do not flow freely. They've somehow all got jammed, all sort of stuck up, as though someone had thrown a spanner into the works, as perhaps they did when we were young or smaller, and Ouspensky as you probably know was a Russian, and Russians have the reputation of being rather emotional people, so he probably noticed this lack of emotion, this inadequate emotionality in the English, who are said or believed other nationalities to be very very reserved and in fact, in a word, on the whole, rather emotionally blocked. But whether or not it's true of the English, that they're emotionally blocked as compared with some other nationalities or peoples, it's certainly true of the old as compared with the young. In children we see usually the emotional centre functions very very freely indeed. A child is emotionally quite spontaneous until his parents or her parents start conditioning the child. Of course it is rather the lower emotional centre which is functioning, but at least it **is** functioning very freely and spontaneously. But in the adult, this is usually not the case and the older we are, usually, the more emotionally we are blocked and unable to express our emotional energies.

Now there are various reasons for this blockage. One of the reasons is that for years on end we may be engaged in mechanical, routine work. In other words, work into which we are unable to put our emotional energies. Work in which we are not interested, work in which we are not emotionally involved. So we have to put a certain amount of effort into it. We put the effort into the work with strain and with difficulty and with tension and with worry perhaps, with unpleasant reactions and repercussions and after effects, but inasmuch as we're not able to put our emotional energies into the work, we get into the habit, as it were, of keeping our emotional energies in reserve, and eventually what happens is the emotional energies, not being put into our work, into what we're doing every day and all day, get as it were sort of congealed.

They go all sort of sticky and gluey and then hard within us, and then they start hardening more and more, and eventually they even petrify. So we're unable to put any emotional energies into our work, or perhaps into anything at all. They've just all got stuck within us. Sometimes this emotional blockage comes about through plain and straightforward emotional frustration and disappointment. This happens of course to quite a number of people in the course of their lives. They never really feel or never really find any positive or creative outlet for their emotions, whether in relation to creative work or in connection with people and so on, so for this reason they suffer from emotional frustration and disappointment and this leads to emotional blockage. And some people again are very afraid of being hurt, afraid of being wounded through their emotions, so they don't let their emotional energies flow out - they keep them to themselves, keep them within, and don't let themselves go very easily or freely. Perhaps not at all.

Another very important reason for emotional blockage is the absence of any real communication with other people. You may go through life. You may know many people, have many acquaintances, but you never really communicate with anybody. If you do chance to communicate with anybody one of the results, as you will find, is that you feel sort of emotionally liberated. It's as though energy had flowed out of you, but on account of the energy flowing out of you in this way. you don't feel depleted, you feel more full of energy. But lots of people don't get the opportunity of any real communication with other people. They come up against a sort of blank wall, as it were. They may **try** to communicate but there's no response. So the energy, again the emotional energy, gets blocked up within us and they become emotionally, as it were impoverished, and this is the fate, this is the plight, of many many people in modern times, certainly in the West, certainly in this country, that inasmuch as there is no real human communication possible for them, they become emotionally blocked.

Another reason for emotional blockage is the wrong type of conditioning, and I'm thinking especially of the wrong type of religious conditioning. Most of us have been subject to this at some time or other - when we were young especially - and I mean in particular the Christian, the orthodox Christian teaching about morals and especially about sex; this is responsible for a great deal of emotional blockage of one kind or another in quite a large number of people.

So we can see all these factors at work, all these factors operative, and the result of them all, the net result of them all is that many people, if not the **majority** of people, in the West today, certainly in this country today, can be described only as emotionally blocked. There's no free outward flow of emotional energy, and so people's lives are impoverished, not only spiritually but even on the ordinary psychological, the ordinary human, level.

Now these emotional blockages can be removed in various ways. First of all, through what we may describe as general self-knowledge. We must start by being aware that we are blocked. Most people like to think well how kind and how friendly and how outward going, and how spontaneous they are, but not a bit of it. If you take a closer look at yourselves you will usually find that you are very very blocked indeed, that you don't really express, certainly not to the full, not to the full extent of your capacity, the emotional energies which are within you. Most of them, if not all of them, are dammed, are blocked up. So first we have to understand, we have to feel this, we have to face up to this fact, be aware of this - that we are in a state of blockage, we might even say chronic blockage, and we have to try to understand why. Not just work it out intellectually by reading books on psychology, but just try to see how it comes about that we are blocked in this way, and our emotional energies do not flow or do not function freely.

It does sometimes happen that blockages, emotional blockages, are removed, as it were automatically, in the course of meditation. Even without your thinking anything about it, or about them, or even knowing intellectually about them, it does sometimes, in fact quite often happen, that in the course of meditation, certain emotional blockages will be resolved. And as a result of this there are various side effects. Sometimes we find that as a result of meditation, sometimes in the midst of the meditation, some people start crying, they start weeping bitterly and shedding tears, and so on. And this is the relaxation, the resolution if you like, to some extent, at least partially, of one or another emotional blockage. So it's a very good thing when it does happen. Some people again find what we call the communication exercises very very helpful. We've done these communication exercises in retreat, as many of you know, and those who have undergone them, those who have experienced them, know, that at the end of the exercises you feel, as it were, emotionally liberated. You feel as though emotional energy, in fact energy in general, is almost pouring out of you and you feel greatly stimulated, you feel much more vital, much more alive than you were before, because a portion of that blocked energy has been released and liberated. So the communication exercises can also help, in many cases if not in the majority of cases, at least to some extent.

So these are just some of the ways in which blockages are removed and the blocked energy, as it were liberated and made available to the whole of the conscious psyche.

Now secondly, emotional energy is not available because it's wasted. And how is it wasted? Well we waste it all the time, and we waste it by indulgence in negative emotions. These negative emotions are, for instance, fear, hatred, jealousy, self-pity, remorse, guilt, anxiety and so on. These are all negative emotions. There's not a scrap of good in any of them. They're completely useless, in fact positively harmful, and they fester in most people's minds most of the time. They not only fester but they find various outward verbal expressions, and these verbal expressions of negative emotions, they drain away our energy, our emotional energy, all the time. No wonder we feel so weak and so depleted as energy is pouring out of us quite literally all the time in these various ways. Let me give a few examples of these sort of verbal leaks of negative emotions draining away our energy. First of all grumbling. Some people keep it up all the time. In this country there's a sort of tradition, a very honourable tradition, to grumble about the weather. If it's raining well it ought not to be raining. We grumble because it's raining, regardless of how good the rain is for the farmer or for the crops, because we can't go out, or at least if we do go out we've got to take a raincoat or an umbrella. If it's hot, well of course it's too hot. We grumble about that. If it's cold it's too cold. We grumble about that, and so on. We keep on grumbling all the time. We make the weather in this country a sort of scapegoat, a sort of whipping boy for our unconscious negative emotions and we go on grumbling about it, and some people, as I've said, grumble about just about everything. Nothing seems to be going right for them and they seem satisfied with nothing. They seem in a state of constant disgruntlement, but this is just negative emotion finding an outlet, and it's very very bad indeed. People who grumble, habitually grumble, are constantly wasting emotional energy.

Secondly, carping criticism. There are some people again who are never satisfied with anything. They have a positive genius for finding fault, however good something may be, however successful some undertaking, they always manage to discover something wrong with it, something inadequate, something not complete, something not quite satisfactory. Needless to say I'm not speaking here of objective detached criticism - this is quite a different thing - but believe me it's very very rare indeed. We may say that someone who always criticizes, who habitually criticizes, is inevitably expressing negative emotions. So don't criticize, or at least don't indulge in criticism in this way.

The next verbal expression of negative emotion hasn't got, for some reason or other, a proper name in English, so I've taken the liberty of coining one and I think we might call it 'dismal-jimmyism'. During the last war this was known officially as spreading alarm and despondency, and it was in those days a punishable offence. You could be hauled up in front of the magistrate by the police for spreading alarm and despondency. I think it would be a good idea if we made it always an offence, this dismal jimmyism. You get in this case a person who is always predicting disaster, who always exaggerates difficulties, who thinks that nothing is going to go right, who assures you that you can't possibly succeed, who pours cold water on all your cherished schemes and plans. And even if you do succeed then such people will usually shake their heads gloomily and remark 'it would have been much better if you'd failed!' This is their general outlook. So this is dismal-jimmyism, the prophet of gloom and disaster.

And then, something even more sinister, gossip. Gossip, we may say, is one of the commonest expressions of negative emotion, if not the commonest, and it's also one of the most terrible and dangerous. Gossip, we may say, is very rarely innocent, very rarely indeed is it innocent. It may start off innocently enough - 'What do you think about old so and so, how is he getting on?' but within half a minute you are up to your neck in gossip of the worst possible description. In fact we may say that malicious gossip is really poison, quite literally poison, and those who spread it are again quite literally spreading poison. So it's something which should be avoided at all costs.

Lastly, another familiar specimen of verbal expression of negative emotion. I'm sorry to be so colloquial but this is what we call 'nagging'. Nagging. This almost invariably happens as between husband and wife, and there's a reason for that, because if you nagged anybody else, well they just leave you straight away [*Laughter*] but husband and wife are bound to each other and they can't get away. Traditionally, of course - I say traditionally - it's the wife who is the nagger, but I rather suspect that the nagging husband is no less common and possibly much worse. Nagging in this country, in these modern civilized times, unfortunately is not ground for divorce but I think serious consideration ought to be given to the question of making habitual sustained nagging grounds for divorce, because nagging kept up, and some people do keep it up for hours on end day after day, week after week, month after month, is psychologically very damaging indeed. In fact if one wanted to be a little extreme one might even say that habitual nagging is much worse than occasional adultery.

Now these are some of the verbal, some of the commonest verbal expressions of the negative emotions. Some of the commonest, and let me just repeat them so that we don't forget them: grumbling, carping criticism, dismal-jimmyism, gossip and nagging. What a horrible collection! And there's only one thing to do about them, and that is just stop them. Just stop them. If you start talking about them you are already

giving in to them. Just stop them. One of the French poets is said to have said about rhetoric, 'take rhetoric and wring its neck', so you might say the same thing about these verbal expressions of negative emotions - just take them and wring their necks as it were, just stop them, just give them up. There is no excuse, no beating about the bush, just stop them forthwith. This of course means maintaining constant awareness, constant watchfulness over oneself, so that one doesn't involuntarily start grumbling or gossiping or nagging or criticizing, or any other of these unpleasant things. But if we can do this, if we can cut them off, as it were, a very great deal of energy will be saved. A very great deal of energy indeed.

Some of you may remember - those of you who were present - that at our Easter Retreat earlier in the year we had an experiment, and this was an experiment with silence; and the experiment culminated with our remaining silent, with everybody remaining silent, completely silent - it's a bit noisy here I'm afraid, but there it was really quiet - remaining silent from, as far as I recollect, tea-time one day right round to just before lunch the next day, completely silent. Not saying a word. And afterwards quite a number of people were talking about their experiences of the silence, and quite a number of them remarked that they experienced, as a result of the silence, an access of energy. They felt more alive, they felt more vital, they felt more full, in a word, of energy. Now this was partly because talking takes up energy, but also, perhaps mainly because, our talking is usually an expression of negative emotions which waste and drain away energy. So if we remain silent we save all that energy, the energy which normally is wasted, thrown away if you like, in these verbal expressions of negative emotions. And therefore we find that silence is an extremely important spiritual discipline, whether in Buddhism, whether in Hinduism, whether in Christianity; in all these great spiritual traditions silence is considered important, if not imperative for the person who would lead a spiritual life, just silence. I think I've mentioned before that in Pali and Sanskrit they've got one word - *muni* - for the man who is silent and the wise man. The silent one is called *muni*, the wise one also is called *muni*, and I think you can understand for yourselves what that is meant to convey. It's of course interesting to notice that when we have these experiments with silence, one or two, perhaps three people usually rebel against the silence. They don't like the silence, and this again is very very significant. Perhaps they don't want to remain silent themselves, nor do they want others to remain silent, because when others are silent they start feeling uncomfortable. At the last retreat I noticed that sometimes quite spontaneously at mealtimes everybody would be silent. It wasn't a negative silence, it wasn't a silence of embarrassment, it wasn't a silence of not knowing what to say - it was a silence almost of communion, one might say. People were quite happy being silent together. But sometimes it would happen that just one person - usually a newcomer who'd only been there a few hours or perhaps a single day - would evidently not feel quite comfortable, and in the midst of this beautiful silence you'd hear someone's voice raised to say, 'isn't everybody quiet today!'. In other words by commenting on the quietness you break it. This is what happens. And if you're not quite in tune with it it makes you a wee bit uncomfortable, so you say, 'isn't everybody quiet today'. Then of course you're not longer quiet, you've got rid of the silence. All right, so much for wasted energy.

Thirdly, emotional energy is not available because it's too coarse. The higher thought, intuition, spiritual vision, can act only through the higher emotions, and the ordinary positive emotions have therefore to be refined, or if you like have to be sublimated. Now how is this to be done? Principally we may say there are three ways of doing it. First through faith and devotion. Secondly, through the fine arts, and thirdly, through a combination of these two.

By faith and devotion we mean what is generally called in Buddhism '*Sraddha*', usually translated as 'faith', though it doesn't really mean that. *Sraddha* comes from a Sanskrit root meaning 'to place the heart on', and it represents, we may say, our emotional response to higher, that is to say to spiritual, values. Now *sraddha*, faith and devotion in this sense occupies we may say an important place in all traditional religions. The majority of followers in every religion don't understand but they have faith, they have devotion, and it's this faith and devotion which gives the different religious traditions their organizational, as distinct from their spiritual, strength. But unfortunately, this faith and devotion is often not acted upon by the higher thinking centre which remains, as it were, inactive, and therefore this common, this popular faith and devotion is not directed by or neutralized by any higher spiritual vision or insight. It not only functions under its own steam as it were, but it decides its own course, its own direction. Not only that, more than that we may say, it very often happens in such a context, in such a situation, that the emotional centre itself tries to do the work of the higher thinking centre. So the result is that instead of having knowledge, one has merely belief, and belief eventually, inevitably, hardens into dogma, and the dogma eventually becomes quite irreconcilable with, quite unacceptable to, the intellect and this is what has happened, especially in the case of religion in the West, in Christianity. And this is the reason why modern Western man usually reacts rather strongly against anything that smacks of faith or devotion. He's really reacting against the illegitimate functioning of faith and devotion, really reacting against the usurpation by the emotional centre of the functions of the higher thinking centres. So it comes about that people may, for instance, take to Buddhism; they may take up the practice of meditation, they may study Buddhism,

may consider themselves Buddhists, but this sort of resistance to faith and devotion and everything connected with it, continues often for a very long time.

And this brings us to the second way of refining the emotional energies, that is to say refining them through the fine arts, through the enjoyment of poetry, through the enjoyment of music, especially classical music, painting and so on; and for many people nowadays this is the easiest, as well as the most natural and the most enjoyable way of refining the emotional energies. In fact we may say, we may go so far as to say, that for many intelligent people nowadays one or another of the fine arts, whether music or literature, poetry and so on, functions almost as a substitute for religion itself. Lots of people, for instance, wouldn't dream of going to church. If you suggested that they'd just laugh, but they've no objection to going and hearing say a concert performance of a mass by Bach or Mozart - the musical side of it appeals to them; that they respond to, but not to the religious framework, as it were.

Finally the emotional energies can be refined by a combination of faith and devotion and one or more the fine arts. For instance there can be a combination of say devotion and poetry, and it's this sort of combination that we encounter in the Sevenfold Puja.

The Sevenfold Puja is so called because it consists of seven distinct, articulated parts. Each part represents a certain mood, or if you like a certain phase or certain aspect of religious experience.

End of Side One Side Two

Now the text that we use in our own meetings, our own pujas, is extracted from a work known as the *Bodhicariya avatara*, the entry into the life of Enlightenment, a work written by the great Seventh Century Indian teacher, Shantideva. Shantideva was remarkable in many ways. He was a great thinker, a great metaphysician - in him the intellectual side was well developed - but he was also a very great devotee with great faith and devotion as well as being a remarkable and outstanding poet. A little later on this evening we shall, ourselves, be celebrating here the Sevenfold Puja, reciting these verses extracted from the *Bodhicariya avatara* of Shantideva, and I would say - in fact I would **emphasise** - that it's only actual participation **in** the Sevenfold Puja that can give us any real understanding or appreciation of its significance and its effect. In other words, of the way in which participation in the puja does succeed to some extent in refining our emotional energies.

But before we come to the Sevenfold Puja this evening, a brief commentary on the seven parts may be of some assistance to those of you who have not participated in the Sevenfold Puja before. Now the seven parts of the Sevenfold Puja are, first of all Worship, secondly Obeisance, thirdly Going for Refuge, fourthly Confession of Faults, fifthly Rejoicing in Merits, sixthly Entreaty and Supplication, seventhly Transference of Merits and Self Surrender.

Now let me just say a few words on each of them in turn.

First of all Worship. This is addressed in Buddhism principally to the Buddha himself. To the Buddha not just as a human historical figure but to the Buddha as the ideal of Enlightenment, as the symbol, if you like, of Enlightenment. And worship of the Buddha as the ideal of Enlightenment represents our recognition of the worthiness, represents our recognition of the value, the supreme value of this ideal, as well as of the desirability of its realization by us. This is what worship essentially means. And it finds outward, if you like ritual expression, in the making of various symbolical offerings, and especially we offer in the course of the worship, flowers representing the impermanence of all created things; light representing the illumination of wisdom which we aspire to attain and realize; and then lighted incense sticks, symbolizing the fragrance of the pure life, of the holy life which we aspire to live, wafting in all directions and influencing all with whom it comes into contact. And these three offerings - the flowers, the lights and the incense - are offered in front of the Buddha image on the altar with this understanding and with this significance. Representing our, as it were, consecration of ourselves to the ideal of Enlightenment, at least of our recognition of its worth and its value and its desirability.

Secondly, Obeisance. In other words bowing down. This represents the paying of outward physical respect. Buddhism says, as it were, it isn't enough to keep it in the mind - express it outwardly. In fact if you have any strong inner feeling you will want, inevitably, to express it outwardly, because you have a body as well as a mind as well as a heart, and if you feel, if you experience something totally, you experience it physically also. So obeisance, the bowing down is the outwards physical expression of the respect which we feel for the ideal of Enlightenment. It represents also, we may say, a sort of realistic recognition of the distance which as yet separates us from the ideal. When we worship we recognize well there stands the ideal, the ideal of Enlightenment, but when we make the obeisance, when we bow down, then we as it were recognize well 'here stand I'. I'm looking up towards that but I'm still a very great distance from it.

Then thirdly, the Going for Refuge. Going for Refuge, that is to say to the Buddha, the Enlightened one, to the Dharma, the way to Enlightenment, and the Sangha, the community of those treading the way to Enlightenment. We began, in the worship by recognizing the ideal; then with the obeisance we realize the distance at which we as yet stand from the ideal; and now in the Going for Refuge we commit ourselves to the actual realization of the ideal. We commit ourselves to treading the way leading to its realization and we are aware of the fact that we're treading that way not alone but in company with many other people who also can help us along that way. So this is what it means to go for Refuge, to commit ourselves to the Buddha, the ideal of Enlightenment, the Dharma, the way leading to that ideal or the realization of that ideal, and to the Sangha, to the company of those with whom we tread that way leading to Enlightenment, and from whom we derive encouragement and support.

Fourthly, Confession of Faults. This is simply recognition of the darker side of ourselves, of what Jung calls the shadow. There's no question of breast-beating or bewailing our sins or anything like that. It's a question of a realistic appraisal of our own shortcomings and weaknesses so that they may be overcome. And it comprises also a resolution that we will overcome that darker side of ourselves, we will conquer it, we will get beyond our shortcomings and our weaknesses. So this is Confession of Faults.

Then fifthly, Rejoicing in Merits, or if you like virtues. Here we recollect the noble lives of others. We think of the Buddhas, all the Enlightened ones, the great Bodhisattvas, the great spiritual teachers; we think of beings like Milarepa, beings like Wei Lang, beings like Han Shan or Hakuin. We think of the great spiritual teachers and leaders and helpers of humanity of the past. We think even of ordinary people that we know who upon occasions act in a self sacrificing or noble or generous or kindly way, and we derive enthusiasm and inspiration from the example of all these people. We think, as it were, well they are also human, what they have done I can also do because I am a human being, I too can attain to that level. I can be no less noble and no less worthy than they are. So this is what we call Rejoicing in Merits; feeling happy on account of other people's spiritual attainments and deriving strength and inspiration from the contemplation and recollection of those attainments.

Then sixthly, Entreaty and Supplication. This is the earnest request that those who are more Enlightened than ourselves may teach us. It expresses our own readiness to be taught. Very often we find people, even religious people, aren't so ready to be taught as they might be, so we have to make ourselves ready and open in this way, because unless we adopt a receptive attitude, we just can't receive. It doesn't mean being negatively receptive in the sense of weak and submissive and just swallowing anything that you're told, but it means being, on the spiritual level, genuinely receptive to anything coming from higher sources, whether in the form of direct spiritual influence or spiritual teaching. In this connection there's a little story about a Zen master which some of you may not have heard. The story goes that a professor at a university went to call on a Zen master to ask him to teach him. So the Zen master received the professor very politely, and as the custom is he offered him tea. So he placed two cups on the little table and he started pouring tea from the teapot into one of the cups. So he went on pouring and pouring and the cup became almost full. And he went on pouring, the cup became quite full, but he went on pouring, pouring, pouring; and the professor was watching all the time and the tea flowed into the saucer and the Zen master kept on pouring, pouring. The saucer was filled. It overflowed, it flowed all across the tablecloth in little rivulets right onto the floor, and then the professor couldn't contain himself any longer. He thought well, these Zen masters are supposed to be pretty queer but this is the queerest, the most eccentric one I've ever met. He said, 'Why are you still pouring? The cup is full!' So the Zen master said, 'Why you come here? Your cup is full'. And he said, 'unless you empty your cup you can't receive. It's no use expecting me to pour into a full cup'. So in other words we have to make ourselves empty to receive. We have to adopt a receptive attitude before we can receive. So there's no question of a literal emptying. We don't have to forget what we already know, that's impossible, but we must put it aside. We mustn't let it get in the way. So this is what this section of the puja represents, the Entreaty and Supplication. We express our readiness, our willingness to receive the teaching.

Seventhly and lastly the Transference of Merit and Self Surrender. Here the dominant theme, the basic feeling is nothing for oneself. One has done all this, one has celebrated the Sevenfold Puja, maybe one has meditated, maybe one has studied the scriptures, maybe one has advanced in understanding, then one thinks, no, not just for myself alone. I'm not concerned just with **my** liberation or **my** Enlightenment, because basically, ultimately there is no me, no my, because there is no I. So therefore we think at this stage of the puja that whatever benefits I might have gained - whatever **merits** I might have gained by celebrating this puja, or by any other religious, any other spiritual practice or understanding, attainment or realization; may they be shared by all. Not just for me but for everybody's sake.

So this last concluding section of the puja paves the way, as it were, for the Bodhisattva ideal, about which I spoke in the course of the last seminar, the ideal of gaining Enlightenment, of devoting oneself to the life

of Enlightenment not just for the sake of one's own individual salvation but for the sake and the benefit, the happiness and the well being, of all sentient beings.

So this is the Sevenfold Puja, and when you hear the verses recited you will see that the Sevenfold Puja, in Shantideva's version, extracted from his great work, combines both poetry and devotion. The poetry is of course Indian poetry, the idiom is a little unfamiliar. It may not strike home to the hearts of everybody, but you may be interested to learn that some of our friends, not in London but in the North, are at present working on an English style poetical version of the Sevenfold Puja. So let us see what they are able to make of it, and let us see also, eventually I hope, how it functions and what its effects are.

So in this way, by celebrating, by participating in the Sevenfold Puja which combines faith and devotion and poetry, and sometimes the image of visual beauty, sometimes even music in some Buddhist traditions, we find that the emotional energies are to some extent refined, and it thus becomes possible for the vision and the insight of the higher thinking centre to act through these refined, sublimated emotional energies directly onto the moving centre and in this way transform the whole of life.

I should also remark that just as emotional blockages are sometimes resolved in the course of meditation practice, so also they are sometimes resolved, at least to some extent by participation in the Sevenfold Puja and similar observances, and of course, so long as we are participating in the Sevenfold Puja, even if we're just sitting and listening and watching, there's no question of wasting energy in negative emotions, much less still in their verbal expressions.

Now some of you may know, some of you may remember that towards the end of our last retreat, on the last day but two I think, we held, for the benefit of all those attending the retreat, a puja more elaborate, in fact considerably more elaborate, than we usually do celebrate. It was a sort of experiment. We spent several hours getting ready and making the preparations and doing the decorations, and the whole puja lasted for two hours, and I'm quite sure that all those who attended, all those who participated in that puja, that lengthy and rather more than usually elaborate puja on that occasion, that Friday afternoon and evening, can testify very definitely to its effect.

Now tonight's puja, which will follow almost immediately will not be quite on that scale. It will certainly not last as long, but I certainly hope that nevertheless it will still be for all of us a true embodiment of poetry and devotion in Buddhism.