

The Psychology of Buddhist Ritual

(1967)

(Sangharakshita Tape: 36)

Venerable Sirs and Friends,

This morning I am going to start off with a question. And the question is: What is the most difficult thing in the world, nowadays? Now, you may be able to provide your own answers to that question, you may not wait for me to provide the answer, but most of you may think - perhaps in terms of international affairs - the most difficult thing to achieve is world peace and so on, and so forth. But I'm not thinking along those lines. I'm thinking more in terms of: what is the most difficult thing nowadays for the individual? And I think if we think this over, if we try to sort out in our minds all these most difficult things, I think we cannot help concluding in the end that nowadays the most difficult thing for us as individuals, the most difficult thing for each one of us, is to be one's self, to be one's self. What we usually find is that circumstances, our environment tend to inhibit us, as it were, to prevent us from being really and truly ourselves. What very often happens is, or what usually happens is, that people get a certain idea about us, they think that we are like this, or like that. Very often it isn't a very true or accurate picture. But they not only get this idea about us but they succeed in impressing this idea about us on us. And then we have to live up to their idea about us, or of us, and we are not able, therefore, to be ourselves. Sometimes people think that we ought to be like this, or ought to be like that, especially our parents and other well-meaning friends, and we try to live up to their idea about us. And in this way we don't succeed in being ourselves. And this sort of thing is happening all the time: the wife tries to be the sort of wife her husband thinks she ought to be; or, the parent tries to be the sort of parent that he book on childcare says he/she ought to be; you try to be the employee that your boss would like to have in the office; and so on. You try to live up to other people's feelings and thoughts about you, and you act out a sort of simulacrum of yourself, and you are not yourself. You are not able to be yourself. Not only this, not only is it very difficult for us to be ourselves, most of the time we don't even know ourselves. You can't really be yourself until you know yourself. If you don't know yourself, know what *is* yourself - your true identity, in a sense - well, how can you possibly be yourself? You can be yourself, in a deep and adequate sense, even and when you really know yourself. But who knows himself? This is what the Delphic Oracle said to Socrates centuries ago: know thyself! And we've been trying to know ourselves ever since but it's only very rarely that anybody really succeeds, truly succeeds, in depth in knowing himself, or herself. In fact we may even go so far as to say, that it is only the Enlightened person, who is himself, because it is only the Enlightened person who knows himself. Paradoxically of course - I'm not going to go into this, but let me just touch upon it - paradoxically of course, the Enlightened person knows himself as a non-self, but to pursue this line of thought may carry us rather too far afield. So, let take it then, let's take it as agreed, that the most difficult thing for the individual is to be oneself, which means knowing oneself.

Now, what is the next most difficult thing, while we're at it, next most difficult thing, next to being oneself? I think we can say that the next most difficult thing, is to think for

oneself. Nearly all our thoughts are second-hand. In the course of the last few days many of us have engaged in discussions and conversations of various kinds, some short, some not so short, some early, some late, some with one other person, some with four or five other people, given expressions to various ideas, various opinions, thoughts concepts and so on, but, if we were to ask ourselves the question: how many of these thoughts, how many of these ideas, were our own? How many were original? How many had we really produced or created for ourselves? Because most people do not think for themselves. They do not think really at all. Most people's conversation is only, we may say, a sort of regurgitation of slogans. You pick up slogans. You pick up slogans of daily life, politics, literature, religion, art, and when a certain subject is touched upon in conversation, out comes something that we've heard, or something that we read, but not anything, usually, that we have really thought out as originally and as deeply for ourselves. And, of course most of the time, we do not think for ourselves, because we are not trying to be ourselves. If you want to think for yourself you must be yourself, thinking for yourself is in fact an aspect of being yourself. The two are very closely connected. When we fail to be ourselves, when we fail to be ourselves, in both cases there is a sort of lack of awareness. And both being ourselves and also thinking for ourselves demand this same quality of awareness.

Now let's take an example; take, for instance, the religions of the world. There are so many religions in the world even now: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, Taoism, so many religions, but what usually happens, what is the standard pattern? Most people are simply *born* into a religion. You're a Christian because your parents were. You're a Hindu because your parents were. You're a Jain because your parents were. There's no question of personal, no question of individual, choice. The fact that you are a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist or a Jew, seems to be a complete accident, you might just as well have been anything else, had you been born in some other part, in some other quarter of the globe. And this is very much the case with religious attitudes in general. It is that we are born into them. We accept them unthinkingly as part of our education, as part of our general background. Not only religious attitudes, but even non-religious attitudes. Formally one used to hear people say: 'Oh, I was raised a Methodist' or 'I was brought up in the Church of England'. But nowadays you hear people say: 'Well, I was brought up an agnostic' or 'My parents were atheists and I'm atheist too.' You hear this sort of statement nowadays, or else: 'I was brought up as a Humanist' or something of this sort. So, there's no real difference as regards being born into religious, and being born into non-religious, surroundings. There's the same sort of blind acceptance, the same sort of unthinking acquiescence, the same sort of conditioning. Take, for instance, the case of Russia. A hundred years ago, even fifty years ago, all the Russians accepted Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Christianity. They were born into it. But the children and the grandchildren of those same people, they accept Marxism in just the same way. They are born into it. So the attitude, the mental attitude, even the emotional attitude, is really the same in both cases. There hasn't really been any change at all. One just accepts something into the midst of which one is born, without thinking very much about it.

Now, another example of this sort of thing is our temporary, our current or our modern attitude towards ritual. Very few people have bothered to think out what is meant by *ritual*. What does ritual really signify? What is it really trying to achieve? We tend to take it for granted - we just accept this from the sort of current intellectual atmosphere of

our times - we just take it for granted, that ritual is a sort of excrescence upon religion. You usually get a very simplified picture of the histories of religion. One gets a purely imaginary picture, of course, of a pristine, simple, purely spiritual teaching, which in the course of a few centuries degenerates and becomes loaded down with dogma and ritual, sort of groaning underneath the weight, and has to be periodically purged and purified from these things. So most people think of ritual in this way: as not really belonging to the essence of religion, as something added on afterwards, as something with which one can very well do without, and something which is, in fact, an excrescence, if not a positive degeneration or even something harmful.

Sometimes again, people regard ritual as a primitive survival. They think, well, savages in the African jungle they've got their rituals, they dance around the bonfire at night and wave their spears, and all that sort of thing, this is ritual. And you get survivals of this sort of thing in even the higher religions and even in modern life, as when people dance around the Maypole, or when they perform a Mass, it's all the same sort of thing - a survival of primitive ritual. So in this way most people nowadays quite unthinkingly accept from their surroundings, the current intellectual atmosphere and climate, this sort of evaluation, of ritual. This is true, I'm afraid, even of many Buddhists, especially in the West. Most people take it for granted that ritual is unnecessary in the spiritual life and even harmful. And some western Buddhists are under the strange impression, I'm sorry to say, not anybody here I expect but in other places, that there is no ritual in Buddhism. And this is in fact one of the reasons that some of them are attracted by Buddhism, or what they think is Buddhism, that it has no place for ritual and no time for ritual.

Now today, this morning, I intend to question this sort of attitude. First of all let us try to understand the historical sources of our current devaluation of ritual. I would say there are two sources. The first source is to be found in classical Rationalism and the second in early psychoanalysis. Of these two, Rationalism and psychoanalysis, rationalism has the longer history. Rationalism, we may say, goes back about two hundred years, back into the eighteenth century, and Rationalism, on the religious side tried to reduce religion to morality, tried to abolish anything, as it were, supernatural, anything metaphysical, anything very spiritual, tried to reduce religion to a matter of personal and social morality. In fact Rationalism, as its very name suggests, in those days was hostile to all non-rational elements. In those days people knew nothing about the subconscious and the unconscious and all that and it was quite easy in those days for rationalists and the great thinkers of the Enlightenment Period in France and England and Germany to discount all the non-rational elements and reduce, as I've said, religion to a matter of private and public morality. And they were especially against such colourful things as ritual and ceremonies and also against any kind of doctrinal precision or dogma. So, many of us are still living to some extent on this heritage of Rationalism and eighteenth century Enlightenment and we inherit, therefore, this hostility to the non-rational elements in religion and especially to ritual.

Now, early psychoanalysis is comparatively recent, as we saw the other day it dates only from the beginning of this century. But why should psychoanalysis be concerned with ritual. This seems a little bit odd. You couldn't imagine say Freud indulging in any ritual, how does psychoanalysis come to be concerned with ritual. Now, psychoanalysis, among other things, studied the behaviour of neurotic patients. You all know what a neurotic person is. You may not be able to define one clinically but you can recognise

the type when you meet them. So psychoanalysis studied neurotic patients, neurotic individuals. And, it discovered that some kinds of neurotics perform private rituals. Now these private rituals of some neurotic patients had no connection with their own religious beliefs or practices. That is to say, if you were a Jew and if you were neurotic, the private ritual you performed because you were neurotic wasn't a Jewish ritual, had nothing to do with the Jewish religion. In the same way if you were a Catholic and neurotic, when you performed your private ritual, because you were neurotic, this had nothing to do with the Catholic ritual tradition. At the same time, the private rituals of the neurotic did seem to be in many ways very similar to religious rituals. For instance if you take one very well known, very common example, that is, the ritual of compulsive washing. You might have met people like this. Some neurotics have a compulsion to go and wash every half an hour. In some cases every ten, every five, minutes, they would go and wash their hands. There's no need for this. It's not that their hands are dirty, but they feel a need to wash their hands. It may extend to other things, they may have a fanatical need to keep their surroundings absolutely clean. They may be always washing things, taking curtains down, washing them, putting them up again, sometimes every week, all unnecessarily, no objective necessity at all, to satisfy a psychological need. So this is neurotic, this compulsive washing and cleaning and purifying. But the psychoanalyst, the early psychoanalyst very quickly saw that this sort of ritual, which people engaged in compulsively, was very much like certain religious rituals of purification. In all religions you've got rituals of purification. You've them in Buddhism, in Hinduism, in Jainism, in Christianity. So the psychoanalyst, noticing this sort of similarity concluded in these early days, that religious ritual and neurotic ritual were basically of the same type. When they continued their investigations they discovered, by probing into the depths of the mind of the neurotic person, indulging in these compulsive rituals, they discovered that the washing ritual was an attempt to get rid of strong feelings of guilt. These feelings of guilt were not caused by anything that the neurotic person had actually done. It's not that they had stolen or killed anyone or anything of that sort, and therefore felt guilty, not that at all. The feelings of guilt were caused by unconscious destructive impulses. Deep down in themselves they had an impulse to destroy, to kill, and they felt guilt on account of this unconscious destructive impulse and the function of the washing ritual, the compulsive washing ritual, was to undo the destruction that had been unconsciously done or unconsciously planned. In other words they could not afford to allow the destructive impulse ever to reach consciousness. So therefore the washing ritual was needed to cope the feeling of guilt and to relieve the intolerable pressure and tension. So cases of the sort, Freud and his colleagues found can be analysed and the neurotic person can be made aware of his or her own destructive impulses, can be made aware that this perpetual washing of hands and cleaning and purifying everything around is only to keep, as it were, the destructive impulse at bay, to prevent it coming up into consciousness and to relieve the feeling of guilt felt unconsciously on account of those impulses. So Freud and his colleagues found that if a patient could be made aware of these unconscious destructive impulses and made aware of the connection between the compulsive ritual washing and these impulses, then having come to terms, as it were, with themselves, having recognised what Jung later on was to call their own dark side, their own shadow, they would become free from this compulsive washing, would give it up, would no longer perform the ritual.

Now with this sort of material to hand or in mind, early psychoanalysis generalised, and it tried to explain all religious ritual on the same basis. In other words it tended to

dismiss all religious ritual whatsoever as compulsive and as neurotic. This was of course going too far. Psychoanalysis in its early days, we may say, was a very confident, very self-confident sort of movement, and in the first flush of early success it made all sorts of sweeping statements and drew all sorts of rash conclusions, which later on it had to retract. And this was one of them: that all ritual, including religious ritual, was necessarily neurotic and compulsive. So even though early psychoanalysis did advance this point of view, later analysts had to retract and rather modify it, this view. For instance we find that Jung and Fromm were much more sympathetic towards religious ritual than Freud and some other early psychoanalysts had been. We find in fact that Fromm distinguishes two kinds of ritual. Fromm says that ritual may be either irrational or rational, and he says further that it's only the irrational ritual which is compulsive but not the latter, not the rational ritual. We'll return to this distinction a little later on. But before doing that I want to take note of another factor in our general current devaluation of ritual, certainly in so far as this country is concerned. I touched upon this a few days ago. You've all heard, I'm sure, of that famous religious movement a century or so ago in the country: the Oxford Movement. Not the later one of the same or similar name in the present century, but the one which was started by Keeble and John Henry Newman (afterwards Cardinal Newman) and Pusey(?) and so on. Now, one aspect of this Oxford Movement was a revival of ritual in Anglican churches. But some extreme Protestants, evangelical Protestants reacted rather sharply to this, and you probably remember that there were a number of prosecutions launched by evangelical clergy and organisations and associations against High Church Romanizing clergy, who introduced or tried to introduce into their churches rituals, which were strictly not authorised by the Book of Common Prayer, and not, therefore, by Parliament. So this gave rise to what is called the Ritualist Controversy, and religious circles in this country seventy or eighty years ago were ringing with this controversy. The significant (fact), for Buddhists, is (that) because the first translations from the Pali Canon were made about this time. And they were made by Protestant scholars and inevitably these scholars were influenced by prevailing religious attitudes, even in matters of translation. So, we tend to get them reading certain things into the Pali Texts, and embodying those readings in their translations, which are not actually there. Again I've touched upon this a few days ago, but I think there is no harm in reminding ourselves of it. We saw that there are ten fetters, which change us down to the Samsara and prevent us realising Nirvana, and the third of these Ten Fetters is what is known as *Silavrata-paramarsa* and this is usually translated, and was translated then, as *dependence on rites and ceremonies*. In other words the impression was given, that as regards rites and ceremonies, Buddhism adopted, or the Buddha adopted, a Protestant, as distinct from a Catholic attitude. But if we look a little more closely at the original term we find that it doesn't really mean rites and ceremonies at all, not in the sense that the translators had in mind. *Silavrata*: *silā*, is simply, ethical rules. It is the same as when we speak of the *pañcasīla*, the Five Ethical Rules. So *silā*. *Vrata* literally means a vow, and it's a word applied to various Vedic religious observances in the days of the Buddha. And *paramarsa* means dependence, in the sense of clinging and attachment and treating as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. So, *Silavrata-paramarsa* doesn't mean dependence on rites and ceremonies, it means attachment to ethical rules and religious observances of whatsoever kind, treating them as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. It's this treating of things as ends in themselves and not as means to an end that constitutes this fetter. One might even say that what the Buddha had in mind, when he spoke of this third fetter, was irrational dependence on ritual or irrational ritual in general. In other words that, which in psychological terms, is

obsessional and compulsive. But rational ritual, we may say, is an integral part of Buddhism, as it is of all other religions, and an integral part of all schools. Whether we look at Tibetan Buddhism or Zen or Theravada there is no school of Buddhism which does not have a strongly ritualistic aspect. Some people I know do like to contrast Theravada Buddhism, and say, Tibetan Buddhism in this respect, suggesting say, that in Theravada Buddhism there is no ritual, whereas Tibetan Buddhism is full of it; it being assumed that to have ritual represents a degeneration. But this as usual is quite wrong, as one can see for oneself if one goes to any Buddhist country. The Theravada, like any other form of Buddhism, is highly ritualistic and if one goes, for instance, to the Tooth-Relic Temple at Kandy, in Ceylon - there's a great temple housing what is believed to be an actual tooth of the Buddha - then you can see ritual in full-swing every day. I remember I visited there twenty-odd years ago and was quite surprised because I'd also been told that in this country that the Theravada's very rationalistic, has no time for ritual and all that sort of thing, but when I went to Ceylon, and when I went to Kandy, which is the main centre for Buddhism in Ceylon, and I went to the Temple of the Tooth, well, I saw elaborate rituals going on all the morning in front of the Buddha's tooth. So it's quite clear that the Theravada had its ritualistic side as well as the much maligned Tibetan Buddhism and the Mahayana in general. But one can say this, that in Tibetan Buddhism especially the ritual is much more symbolically, spiritually significant. In Theravada countries the ritual tends to be more of the nature of ceremony than ritual proper. It isn't so well integrated into the doctrinal tradition. Zen, we may say here, in China and in Japan, is highly ritualistic. If you go to Zen monastery you won't pass all your time meditating, there will be all sorts of rituals to engage in: chanting of sutras and recitation of mantras and so on, and a lot of bowing down and all that sort of thing. And this might be something of a shock to some western Zen addicts, that Zen also has this highly ritualistic aspect.

So we can't get away from the ritual side of Buddhism, nor should we try to do so. We should try to understand it and see what it really is, what rational ritual really is.

Now Fromm gives what I think is an excellent definition of rational ritual. Fromm says: *Rational ritual is shared action, expressive of common strivings, rooted in common values.* That's his definition. And I feel that every word of this definition is of value, so I propose to examine it in some detail. And in this way I hope we shall be able to arrive at some understanding of the psychology of ritual, that is to say, of rational ritual.

First of all, ritual is *shared action, shared action.* Both these words are important. First of all ritual is an action, a certain kind of action and this very fact is indicated by the Buddhist equivalent. The Buddhist word for ritual, which is *kriya*. Yesterday we spoke about the tantric tradition of Tibet, or the tantric aspect of Tibetan Buddhism and we saw that one of the Four Yogas, or Four Tantras, the first was called the Kriyayoga, or the Kriyatantra. So, *Kriya* means the yoga or the tantra of ritual. And the work *kriya* is etymologically connected with the word *karma*, which means action in the more ethical and psychological sense. So, *kriya*, we may say, action, is the Buddhist equivalent of ritual and underlies the fact that ritual is something done. It's an action. This suggests, as it were, that religion, spiritual life, is not just a matter of thought and feeling, but also of action, not only of moral action, but also of ritual. As I pointed out the other day according to Buddhist tradition human nature is threefold. There's our body, there's our speech and there's our mind. These three make up our total personality. So religion, the

spiritual life, is concerned also with our total personality, so it must cater for all three. There must be something for the mind, something for the speech and also, something for the body. in other words, action. And only too often in the West, we find that our approach to Buddhism is too one-sidedly intellectual, as I remarked a little while ago, only this morning. There's a lot of discussion, a lot of study - well, a fair amount of study, let's say, quite a bit of discussion and conversation and listening to lectures, but very often we find that very little actual devotion and hardly any ritual and this we find is true of practically the whole Buddhist movement in the West. So, this imbalance we must try to correct and try to have a type of Buddhist movement and tradition in the West, which provides for not only the head, not only the heart, but even for the body, and for the speech. In this way we shall have a balanced and total approach. So, ritual is action. It's something to do. It's the way in which the body, as it were, the physical side of ourselves participates in the religious and spiritual life.

Now, ritual is not only action, not only something that we do, but according to Fromm's definition, it is shared action. It's what we do together with other people. And here we notice an important difference between the irrational or the obsessional compulsive ritual and the rational ritual. The neurotic, the obsessional compulsive ritual, tends to isolate people. It's something you do by yourself. If you've got an urge to go and wash your hands every ten minutes, you do this by yourself. This is your private problem, your private neurosis. It doesn't bring you closer together with other people. It tends to isolate you from them. But in the case of the rational ritual it's a shared action and it tends to bring people together. Ritual is shared action and this togetherness is not just physical, it can also be, should also be, spiritual. It should in fact be both physical and spiritual. There should be a performance of the action, the ritual, together physically and at the same time a common spiritual attitude. And one knows from experience if one can have this, if one has in a room a number of people performing the same ritual actions with the same sincerity and devotion and so on, a very powerful atmosphere, spiritual atmosphere, can be created. So ritual is first of all shared action.

Secondly, continuing our study of Fromm's definition, ritual, rational ritual, is *expressive of common strivings, expressive of common strivings*. Now lets take the last word first. Ritual expresses a striving. It's something, certainly in Buddhism, that one does oneself. It is not something which is done for you. It is not something in which one passively participates, much less still is it a gorgeous spectacle, which one merely watches. This is of course the sort of understanding we've got about ritual. It's something that someone comes along, say a priest comes along, and does for you; you just sit back and watch or you pay him to do it for you. This is a degeneration. According to Fromm, and certainly according to Buddhism, ritual is something which one does for oneself or at least does oneself. You may not do it only for yourself, for your own individual benefit alone, but it's something you do yourself. It a matter of striving, a matter of exertion. In other words, ritual is part of what is called one's sadana, one's spiritual practice or spiritual exertion. We should not think that the performance of a ritual is a substitute for spiritual striving - it's a form of it, we may say. So we may therefore also say that the ritual approach is not for the lazy man. Sometimes people talk of the performance of ritual as though it's very, very easy, it's an easy way; you don;t like the hard way of religion so you take up ritual instead as an easy comfortable sort of substitute. But this is really not so. If one has this sort of attitude it shows that one knows nothing about ritual from experience. To be a good ritualist is not easy. To be a good ritualist is at least as

difficult as giving a lecture, or at least as difficult as meditating, if not more so. Because to be a good ritualist quite a number of qualities are required:

First of all you have to be very mindful because you have to do one thing after the other. You know how difficult it is even when you Take the Refuge, even though you've got me to say it first and you say it after me, I say *Dhammam saranam gacchami* or *dutiyampi dhammam saranam gacchami* and someone says *tatiyampi* instead of *dutiyampi*, even though it's just been said before. And why is this? It's only a lack of mindfulness, that's all, no other reason. So, to be good ritualist isn't easy. You have to have your wits about you to do one thing after another in the correct order in the correct manner, with just the right emphasis and maybe you will have to do several things at the same time. And all this is not easy. It means a great deal of mindfulness is necessary, and then again, attention to detail. There are lots of little things that have to be attended to; whether the water is in the bowls, whether there are three incense sticks, whether the candles are alight, whether the flowers are properly arranged. And when the ritual becomes complex you sometimes even have to have an expert just to make sure everything is as it should be. I remember once in Kalimpong, just to digress a little bit, I had invited Dhando Rimpoche to perform a rather complex ritual and, as the custom is, before his arrival, all the offerings had to be kept ready on the altar. So usually this sort of thing is done by my own Tibetan students and disciples, though on this occasion they weren't satisfied with that. They did it all themselves. They laid out very elaborate offerings on many tables; lots of little lamps and lots of tormas and things of that sort but then they said: we've called in one of the lama gyupas just to check it before the Rimpoche comes. So the lama gyupas came and he just cast his eye over all these elaborate arrangements, and: no this should be there, that should be in that place, these should be the other way around. In about five minutes he checked it and everything was in order. So to be a good ritualist you also have to have the capacity to attend to detail. And again you have to have aesthetic sense. You mustn't only do it in the correct way, it must be beautiful, because if it isn't beautiful it isn't inspiring. Now this is a great difference I noticed as between Hindu rituals and Buddhist rituals. The Hindus, I'm sorry to say, and this isn't a criticism, are very untidy in their rituals. They don't mind if you go into a temple, into a house where a ritual is going on; they don't mind a great deal of disorder, even dirt. I've been quite shocked sometimes going into Hindu temples and you find underfoot decayed flowers, which have been trodden for several weeks past, great heaps of them and husks of coconut, the kernel having been offered but the husk just thrown down on the floor and bits of dirty newspaper, which have been used for wrapping offerings just flung down anywhere in front of the image and all this rubbish lying about and no one seeming to bother to tidy it up. And even Hindus coming from a Hindu temple into a Buddhist temple are very impressed by the difference. In a Buddhist temple everything is beautifully arranged: the flowers are beautifully arranged on the altar, everything is clean, everything is bright, everything is polished and this you found not only in Tibet, in Ceylon, but in all Buddhist countries. They are very very particular about this, that the ritual and all the ritual appertinences should be aesthetically satisfying.

And then again to be a good ritualist you also have to understand the meaning of it all. It's no use just being able to do it all mechanically, go through all the right actions unless you understand what is really going on. And this is perhaps most essential of all. In addition you need I would say to be a good ritualist, plenty of physical stamina, because

you may have to sit for hours, chanting, doing this and doing that and it takes therefore plenty of physical vigour to be able to do it. Usually we like to think that ritual is a sort of kindergarten stage of religion, it's for the beginners. But the Tibetans don't think that. The Tibetans, or rather the Tibetan tradition, permits only the spiritually advanced to indulge in lengthy and complex rituals. This perhaps is news to most people. Certainly every Tibetan Buddhist has a little ritual that he does but it's only the rinpoches, and the more highly developed in general who are permitted to indulge in very lengthy and very complex rituals, because ordinary people won't have the necessary mindfulness, they won't understand what they're doing and so on. So, they're not allowed to indulge in these very long, and as I've said, very complex rituals. I remember from my own experience seeing Dando Rinpoche himself perform quite a number of rituals and Dando Rinpoche, whom we'll be seeing on the slides, incidentally this evening, among his other qualifications is an excellent ritualist. He's very good at Buddhist philosophy, he's a very good organiser, runs an excellent school, and knows much about Buddhist yoga and he's also a very good ritualist and I often watched him for hours on end going through certain rituals and I sometimes wondered to myself how he was able to correlate it all, because I would notice that he'd be chanting, maybe for half an hour or one hour, ringing his little bell and making offerings and sometimes as he was chanting, got towards the end of the text he would start folding the silken cover in which the book was wrapped in a very elaborate sort of way in a sort of pattern. And I noticed that as the last tinkle of the bell died away, and the last word of the ritual was recited, the last flower thrown, the last grain of rice... at that very moment the last fold of that cloth would be put in place and it all synchronised. And he seems to do it all perfectly effortlessly. He might even be looking around, even smiling, but it would all go on almost like a piece of music and all just end together just at that moment, apparently without any effort at all, because he had been trained in these things for many many years and was, one may say, a perfect master of them. I might also add that his gestures and mudras, as those of many lamas, were very very beautiful to watch as he made the different mudras to accompany different offerings and so on. Anyway that is a digression, let's get back to our main point which is that ritual expresses a common striving. It's not only a striving, not only a form of spiritual practice as I've tried to make clear, but it's a common striving. And this is a very important point. It implies that ritual, the performance the practice of ritual is possible only within a community. If you're just doing it on your own, well it may not be exactly neurotic, but it isn't ritual in the full sense. It may be a striving but it's not a common striving. So this common striving can take place only within a community, a spiritual community. We've already spoken of ritual as shared action and this means not just performing the same actions side by side, it means giving expression through the actions to a common striving. And for this reason a feeling of brotherhood is, as it were, essential. And we see therefore that ritual also implies, metta, loving kindness, solidarity and so on.

Then, as Fromm says, the ritual *expresses* a common striving. Practically this is the most important of all, that ritual is an expression. Elsewhere in his writings Fromm defines ritual as: a symbolic expression of thoughts and feelings by action. So what do we mean by action. Expression means bring out something. Bringing something out from within, even from the depths. And this is why symbolic expression is necessary. Conceptual expression is not enough. Conceptual expression only brings out something from the unconscious mental level. But we've got to do more than that. We've got to bring out from beneath the level of the conscious mind. Now, I've spoke a bit about

myth and legend and symbol in one or two previous lectures and we may say that the ritual is also the equivalent to an acted out symbol or acted out or dramatised myth. But the question arises why is it necessary to bring out from the depths, why is expression at all necessary. Now expression means externalisation. If you express something which is deep within your own being you externalise it you make it into an object, something which you can see, something which is visible, something which you can know. So if we externalise our thoughts and feelings, if we bring up from the depths that which is hidden there and express and externalise, we can then see them, we can then understand them. If we see them and understand them objectively then we can begin to incorporate them into our conscious attitude. In this way our whole being will be enriched and tension between the conscious and the unconscious will be lessened. Now all this is a matter for experience and all those who have participated to any degree in ritual will know. When one performs the ritual actions one expresses something which is very very deep within. One therefore objectifies it, one externalises it, and one is able to incorporate it into one's conscious attitude. We find that this sort of thing happens even with our own very simple devotional meetings when we recite together the Sevenfold Puja. Everybody knows that when we do this, when we do it properly when we do it with concentration we create quite a different sort of atmosphere than we do when we have a meditation or when we have a lecture. meditation has its own atmosphere which is very beautiful, the lecture also has its own atmosphere which can be very good, but find that the devotional meeting, when we do a ritual together, when we recite the Sevenfold Puja and so on has its own distinctive atmosphere again. And usually what gives it its distinctive atmosphere is the fact that something is brought up from the depths, externalised, objectified and then incorporated into the conscious attitude, so that the conscious attitude is enriched. I think I spoke a few days ago of my experience at the Buddhist Society Summer School, shortly after my return to this country in 1964. I remember, that I was rather surprised that 'though there were many lectures and also a little meditation at the summer school there was no provision for any sort of puja, no provision for any sort of ritual. So one day I suggested we might try out a little ritual, have a little puja in the evening. So, this suggestion at first, I'm afraid, was not very well received and I was told that English Buddhists were right off ritual, they didn't like it at all and they reacted rather strongly - they preferred the rational approach. So I said never mind even if only five or six people want it, lets have it. So it was announced therefore that in the Oak Room about nine o'clock at night there would be, conducted by Bhante, a short puja, a short one, and very simple, not too many candles or anything like that. So to our surprise, perhaps not to our surprise, instead of having six or seven people, we had practically that whole summer school - I think about 140 people turned up and it was difficult to get them into the Oak Room, only six or seven had stayed outside. Not only did they come and continued to come every other evening, but they seemed also to thoroughly enjoy it, they seemed to definitely to get something out of it. And everybody felt, everybody remarked that a different sort of atmosphere was created. Something seemed to be brought up, they knew not how, they knew not why, something seemed to be brought up from the depths, which could enrich the conscious attitude and create an altogether more meaningful and harmonious atmosphere. So sometimes we find that people are, as it were, starved for these things. They get just the intellectual approach, just the conceptual approach, it's all books, it's all understanding, it's all talk, it's all ideas, it's all philosophy, it's all theoretical. So when you offer them something that goes a bit deeper which supplements, which compliments the intellectual, not that we're running down the intellectual, this is no less necessary and it's the approach, the initial

approach for practically everybody, but sooner or later we must begin to engage the depths, sooner or later we must begin to tap those vast resources of energy which lie down there in the unconscious mind. Sooner or later we must begin to speak the language of myth, as I described it, I think, yesterday, use symbols, use images, and in this way integrate the unconscious with the conscious. And this is what ritual, among other things helps us to do.

Lastly, in the terms of Fromm's definition ritual is common striving rooted in common values, *rooted in common values*. Ritual is never just ritual. It issues from a whole religious philosophy. We may even say that the more highly developed a religion is, the richer its religious expression. If we look at all the religions of the world we can probably claim that the two most highly developed are Buddhism and Christianity. And these two religions, Buddhism and Christianity, are at least in certain forms, at least in their dominant forms, mainly ritualistic. Christianity's main forms are, we may say, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. These are both highly ritualistic. And in Buddhism we see, for instance, Tibetan Buddhism is highly ritualistic, as Ch'an and Zen and even the Theravada.

Well we can begin now to see the truth in Fromm's definition of ritual, rational ritual, that it is: *Shared Action, Expressive of Common Striving, Rooted in Common Values*. Now having studied this definition let's apply it to Buddhism, very briefly. Let's take a very simple example. The example is the ritual - let's not mind calling it that - of Going For Refuge; Going for Refuge, or Taking the Refuges, as they're sometimes called, although *Going* is really more correct. Going For Refuge is a very simple rite or ceremony, but a highly important one. First of all it's an action, this is something that I like to stress. We say *buddham saranam gacchami*, and in the Pali and the Sanskrit the verb comes out very powerfully. In English we usually translate it as: *I Go For Refuge to the Buddha*, which doesn't sound so strong. Or even as: *I take Refuge in the Buddha*, which sounds even weaker. But, if you say: *To the Buddha For Refuge I go*, *buddham saranam gacchami*, *gacchami* is 'I go', then it's much more powerful and it stresses that the refuge or Going For Refuge is an action, and it is an action, above all, of the whole being. You Go For Refuge with body, speech and mind. So, therefore, the Tibetans, in the Tantric tradition, think it's not enough to Go mentally, it's not enough, even, to Go verbally, and say that you Go, you must also Go For Refuge physically. So, therefore in the Tibetan tradition the Going For Refuge is a threefold practice. There's a mental side, a verbal side and also there's an action, a physical side, when you literally prostrate yourself in front of the Buddha-image or any other image that you may be using, at the time that you take the Refuges. There's a whole practice as I explained, which is one of the Four Mula-Yogas, or Foundation Yogas.

So first of all, the Going For Refuge is an action, a total action of body, speech and mind, the whole being. And secondly, it's a shared action, because we repeat the words of the Refuge *together*. We do it all together, in unison, in harmony. So it's not only an action, something that we do, but something that we do together, and the procedure is, as you know, in Buddhist countries that the *bikkhu*, the monk recites first and the others all recite after him. So that a sort of dialogue, almost, emerges and a certain almost dramatic element is introduced. So the Going For Refuge, this ritual of Going For Refuge is very much a shared action; something you do and something that you do with other people. Not just side by side but with them heart and mind. Now the Going For Refuge is also

expressive of a common striving, a common striving. Why do we Go For Refuge? We Go For Refuge because we aspire to realise, or to achieve, Nirvana, or Enlightenment. This is our common goal. We've got the same goal, the same ideal. We all want to be like the Buddha, Enlightened. We all want to follow the path of the Buddha, the Dharma. We all want to take help from one another, other members of the Spiritual Community, the Sangha. So therefore it's a common striving. Our Going For Refuge is not only a shared action, it's a shared action expressive of a common striving, our common-, our joint-, our united striving for Nirvana, or for Enlightenment. And then these strivings are rooted in common values, that is to say, they're rooted in the whole body of the Buddhist teaching. It isn't that the Going For Refuge is something isolated by itself, it grows out of the whole teaching, it grows out of the whole tradition. If you explain, if you expound the meaning of the Three Jewels, the Three Refuges in detail, then that's the whole of Buddhism. That's why as some of you know earlier this year I published a book called *The Three Jewels*, which deals only with Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the Three Jewels, the Three Refuges. But those of you who've read the book, or looked at it, will know that under those headings of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, one can cover practically the entire field of Buddhism. One might even go so far as to say that what cannot be included under any one of these headings, Buddha, Dharma or Sangha is perhaps not worth including at all. So therefore we may say that the strivings, represented by the Going For Refuge, the shared action of Going For Refuge are rooted in common values, in other words, the whole Buddhist tradition.

So in this way we see that Fromm's definition of ritual, Fromm's definition of ritual as a shared action, expressive of common strivings, rooted in common values, is applicable to this very important Buddhist practice of Going For Refuge. Now I think we can say that we have now understood something at least of the psychology of ritual and we can perhaps begin to see, perhaps begin to have some idea, of its value. Whether we like it or not I'm afraid ritual is an integral part, rational ritual is an integral part of Buddhism, indeed of the spiritual life itself. As I've said of course, however nowadays ritual is not very popular and very often we find people coming into Buddhism, who are even actually hostile towards ritual. Well this isn't actually anything very intelligent, it's usually simply the result of their past conditioning. And we usually find as people get deeper and deeper into our movement they are gradually able to overcome this conditioning and appreciate the ritual aspect and realise its benefit for themselves. This reminds me of another little incident from my experience in Kalimpong with which perhaps we ought to close, and that relates to an Englishman who came to stay with me, to study Buddhism. It's the same one, incidentally, who wanted to develop the psychic powers. But he was also very interested in Buddhist philosophy and he had been brought up as a Protestant and of course was against ritual. And he sometimes used to say to me well I love Buddhism, I like the philosophy, I like the sutras, and I like the philosophy (sic) and all the rest of it, but I just can't stand this bowing and scraping in the shrine. He didn't like it at all. So anyway I put the Buddhist point of view to him. We had several arguments and several discussions about it, but whenever I mentioned ritual he was very quiet, very silent and he wouldn't join in the ritual in the shrine. Our practice was every evening for an hour we'd have a puja and meditation. So he'd join in the meditation but he wouldn't join in the puja, he wouldn't even put his hands together, he was as conditioned as that. But I didn't say very much I just the point, the Buddhist point of view to him and let him get on with it. But evidently he was thinking it over. One day he came dashing into my room and he said: 'Bhante, I've done it.' So, I said: "What do

you mean; you've done what?". So he said: "Believe it or not, I went into the shrine just now and I bowed down." So I said: "Well that's very good. How do you feel?" He said: "I feel quite different." He said: "I wouldn't have thought it would make such a difference as that, but I feel quite different having done it." So this is perhaps very significant. He may be a rather extreme case but I suspect that quite a number of people, if only they could bring themselves to do a little ritual. I don't mean they should go all out for it and neglect every other aspect of Buddhism and spend all day offering flowers, although there are many worse ways of spending one's time than that. But certainly if they could bring themselves to participate a little in the ritual side of Buddhism at least to the extent of participating wholeheartedly in the Sevenfold Puja and so on, they would get a lot more out of Buddhism, I suspect, than they at present do.

So, this all points to the conclusion that in this country as well as in the West generally we do need to develop the ritual aspect of Buddhism rather more than we have done so far. We also need, of course, to develop the devotional side. Otherwise there's the danger of Buddhism being in the West a purely intellectual movement. And that isn't going to get us very far in the direction of Enlightenment.

How things are in England we know quite well I think, how they are on the Continent, insofar as the Buddhist Movement is concerned, we know also quite well. We are not quite so well posted perhaps about the United States of America. I don't know whether they are in the same predicament there, whether their Buddhism tends to be predominantly intellectual or whether there are devotional and ritual aspects, but no doubt in a few minutes time, we shall have the opportunity of hearing something about these things in response perhaps to our questions from the Rev. Ayru(?) Price. So as there isn't very much time left before lunch let us conclude with the Psychology of Ritual for the time being and proceed now after a few minutes intermission to our question and answer meeting.
