

Lecture 37: Buddhism and the Language of Myth Sangharakshita

Friends,

This morning I spoke about Buddhism and psychoanalysis, and you just heard this evening we are still on psychological grounds. This evening as Mike Waters has announced our subject is Buddhism and the language of myth. And there is, I may say, a definite reason for my selecting this evening this particular topic. We are all familiar I think or most of us are familiar I think with the parable related by the Buddha called the parable of the blind men and the elephant. In case any one hasn't heard this story, this parable, this story with a meaning before it goes something like this, apparently in ancient India in the days of the Buddha there was certain king, and just to create for himself a little amusement he had an elephant brought into the palace court yard. Then he sent his minister out into the streets of the city to collect about a dozen blind men. And then when the minister had brought the blind men, when he had collected them in together into the palace court yard the blind men were shown the elephant, not literally of course but led towards it the elephant and made to feel it. They were all asked by the king to describe the elephant. So one caught hold of the ear and he said the elephant is like a great winnowing basket, another caught hold of the trunk and said the elephant is just like a snake another caught hold of the tail and said the elephant is like a broom another caught hold of the tusk and said the elephant is like a plough share, another stood underneath the elephant and caught hold of the belly. and said the elephant is like a great pot another caught hold of a leg and said the elephant is like the pillar supporting a house. In each way they gave the various descriptions and accounts of the elephant, and obviously they contradicted one another. They realized that they were contradicting one another. Neither believed any of any of the others and we are told they start fighting and quarreling, and the king highly amused by this sort of incident, it created a pleasant sort of diversion for him, apparently for the afternoon. So this little story illustrates the dangers of a one sided approach to the Truth. The Truth is something total, something multi-dimensional, something multi-faceted, but we see one aspect, we take on the one dimension as it were one facet, and we say this is the truth, the truth is this, not realizing that there are so many other aspects, dimensions and facets remaining blind to all of them, just concentrating on one particular aspect, dimension, or facet. The Buddha's parable of the blind man illustrates this sort of erroneous and one sided view to the truth. Now this little story, this parable of the blind men and the elephant can illustrate not only one sided approaches to the Truth but also the history of the study of Buddhism in the west. Buddhism is like the elephant has many aspects, many dimensions, as it were, many facets, and the one blind man, as it were, one scholar after another comes, examines Buddhism, and says Buddhism is this, or Buddhism is that. One says Buddhism is humanitarianism another says Buddhism is mysticism, another says Buddhism! is atheism, another says Buddhism is a form of oriental philosophy, another says that Buddhism is rationalism tinged with mysticism, another says its mysticism tinged with rationalism. So in this way they all give their different accounts of Buddhism, all equally one sided, all containing some element of the truth, but none true as a generalization. But there's some difference between the blind man in the original story and these blind men, the scholars who describe Buddhism. In the original parable the blind men just start fighting and quarreling among themselves, but with regard the study of Buddhism, what happens is each blind man having examined one aspect of the elephant Buddhism goes away and then writes a book about it. So in this way you get so many different one-sided presentations of Buddhism. If we look over some of the books written even 40 even 50 years ago about Buddhism by western

scholars then we are quite astonished, because even within this short period our knowledge of Buddhism has grown so much, meager though it still is, that those older, those earlier presentations are still out dated. If you read for instance [Waddell?] The Lamaism Of Tibet, you can't help laughing at some of his descriptions of Buddhism. As when he says its philosophy is sophistic nihilism, and when he speaks of the Tibetans worshipping the fiendesses or great demonesses, or Buddha demonesses, and so on, but many of these are one sided presentations of Buddhism nevertheless are still quite widely current and this is perhaps not surprising in view of the fact that Buddhism is such a vast, and such a vast a complex system, or perhaps we should say organism, **it** is so vast, it has so many different aspects, levels, dimensions, applications, ramifications. Its like one of those vast old gothic cathedrals, not surprising that we cant grasp it in its totality all at once, or immediately. But this certainly does not mean that we should ever acquiesce in any one of these one sided presentations. There is no need for us to do this any more. As the years go by more and more material on Buddhism, more and more reliable au or authentic material is becoming available in so many western languages. Let me give you an example, for instance, Doctor Conze, in what is a very monumental labour of love, has quite recently, translated the whole of the Perfection of Wisdom corpus of scriptures. As you know every morning, or or nearly every morning, we've been reciting the Heart Sutra, the heart of the Perfection of Wisdom. This is a Sutra that occupies only one page, but it gives the essence of the Perfection of Wisdom. But there's not just this one little Sutra related to the subject of the Perfection of Wisdom or Transl transcendental wisdom. There are more than 30, 34 35, of these Sutras or discourses of the Buddha dealing with the Perfection of Wisdom. Some of them are several volumes long, there's the Perfection of Wisdom in 1000 lines, the Perfection of Wisdom in 25000 lines, 18000, 10000, 6000, 500, lines, the Perfection of Wisdom in one page, the Heart Sutra.

There's even the Perfection of Wisdom in one word, even a single letter. It's all said to be concentrated there in the one letter, the letter 'A'. Though how that comes to be, we are not going to examine just at present. The point I want to make, that this whole vast body of literature, the 30 odd great Sutras or discourse of the Buddha on the Perfection of Wisdom, transcendental wisdom, have all now been made available in English thanks to the labours of Dr. Conze. So we do have this enormous amount of material available for study, there's no excuse at all for not having a very good idea, at least for what is meant in Buddhism, in Mahayana Buddhism particularly about the Perfection of Wisdom or transcendental wisdom. There's no shortage of material any longer on this topic. Somewhat more recently, to give another example, Dr. David Snellgrove has edited in Sanskrit and Tibetan and translated a whole Tantra, this is to say the 'Heyvajra' Tantra. This is the first Tantra to be translated, first Buddhist Tantra to be translated in it's entirety so far as I know into any European language, certainly into English, but we now do have this available to us for our study. If you just go through it by yourself without a teacher you won't make head nor tail of the text, even Dr. Conze when he came to review this particular volume, or these two volumes, he confesses that rather that he wasn't able to make very much of it, because it is not sufficient just to read a text like the Heyvajra Tantra, one has to study it with a teacher, and actually practice according to the teachers instructions. But this is neither here nor there, the point I'm trying to make with the help of these illustrations, is that we have nowadays, have at least in the course of the last ten or fifteen years more and more opportunities of correcting and enlarging our total picture of Buddhism. It's now possible to begin to see Buddhism as a whole, and it's less necessary than ever, and there's less excuse for us than ever, for relying upon one-sided, and to that extent, misleading interpretations of the Buddha's Teaching.

One of the one-sided presentations of Buddhism which is still quite widely current is that Buddhism is rationalistic. I'm not saying rational, I'm saying rationalistic, a presentation which sees Buddhism entirely and exclusively in terms of rationalism. This particular presentation says Buddhism appeals only, at least appeals primarily to the reason. It says that Buddhism is a philosophy rather than a religion, for instance Dr. George Grim, a great German Buddhist scholar has written a thick book entitled 'Buddhism, the Religion of Reason'. This is characteristic, he selects reason as the distinguishing feature of Buddhism, he calls it 'Buddhism, the Religion of Reason'. He wrote this book about forty years ago, and it's rather significant that fairly recently in the new edition there's an emendation to the title, and it's now called 'Buddhism the Religion of Reason and Meditation'. But you see meditation comes as an after thought, there's an appendix tacked on about meditation finally (?) conception of 'Buddhism the Religion of Reason' with meditation just sort of tacked on as a sort of afterthought. Even though the change is significant. Forty years ago one could publish a book and call it 'Buddhism the Religion of Reason' and leave it at that, but nowadays one has to at least to add (?) and meditation, one has to at least to bow in the direction of meditation, genuflect in the direction of meditation if nothing else. Now George Grim as I've said is a German scholar, he was a European, a Westerner, but we mustn't think that this rationalistic, reason only type of presentation of Buddhism is found only in the West. It is found or is begun to be found also in the East, especially in some of the Theravada countries, and among English knowing Buddhists, including English knowing monks.

I remember in the course of my own travels, and adventures, and studies in the East, (?) myself that by Eastern Buddhists Buddhism is based on pure reason, or sometimes it has been said Buddhism is scientific. This is a popular ploy (?) nowadays, or that Buddhism anticipates modern science. Some Eastern Buddhists, they've written some very big books to demonstrate that all modern scientific discoveries including things like V (?) and atom bombs they're all anticipated by the Buddha and thought out by Him, and if you'd studied the Abhidharma (?) you can find them all there. There's a very popular sort of approach and presentation in some quarters in the East nowadays (?) and sometimes I even have been told by some Eastern Buddhists that modern science proves Buddhism. This again is a very popular point in lots of Buddhist magazines which are listed in the East. You find this sort of argument that (?) Buddhists sort of arbiter as it were that science has succeeded in proving Buddhism, that science demonstrates that Buddhism is true, Buddhism is a scientific religion, or sometimes it's even said that Buddhism is pure science. Now this is all, I am afraid very naive indeed. It's not of course that there are no non-rational elements in Buddhism in the Theravadin countries, there are plenty of these non-rational elements fortunately, otherwise Buddhism would have died in these countries long ago. To put the matter a little paradoxically, it's better to have a bit of superstition rather than too much pure rationalism. You can perhaps compare rationalism to a garden made entirely of rock and gravel, it may look quite nice and neat and clean, a nice area of cement, and a few nice rocks, and pieces of stone dispersed here and there, and gravel walks, but no trees or no grass and no flowers. It may be quite beautiful in a way, at least quite functional and hygienic as it were, but though it may be beautiful it will be sterile, nothing will grow. But we may say on the other hand that superstition is rather like a garden which is full of weeds. Even though the weeds in a way are undesirable things, the fact that there are so many weeds, at least says that the soil is good, the soil is fertile. So we can make this sort of comparison, the rationalistic type of presentations is beautiful but sterile, rock and stone garden, were as a more superstitious sort of element, though much more needs to be weeded out, is rather like the garden with many weeds, which at least proves the fertility and richness (?).

Now I sometimes find in the east that English knowing monks, especially in the Theravada countries are a bit ashamed of the non rational elements in popular Buddhism. I especially noticed this(?) saw in stance in Ceylon. I remember when I went first to Ceylon in 1945, I think it was, or end of 1944. I went one day to a temple not far from Columbo, and there was a courtyard, I entered that and immediately to the left there was a temple with all sorts of gods, goddesses, I thought 'thats strange, perhaps I've made a mistake, maybe I hadn't come to a buddhist temple at all.' So I then went and looked at those images, and sure enough they were images of Hindu gods, there was, Shiva, Ganesha the elephant headed god, Lakshmi, sagitar(?) the Hindu god of war. I thought 'thats strange very strange, I know' they're in a Buddhist temple how did they come to be here?' So a monk came up, a Buddhist monk came up(?) and he happened to meet me. So I asked him, 'What are all these gods and goddesses doing here within the precinct of a *Buddhist* temple I thought only the Buddha would be found here?'. So he said, 'Oh there just for the local people to worship, we dont worship them'. So this sort of attitude as it were, there just for the benefit of the laity, this I felt at the time, and still feel was a sort of a potentially dangerous situation. You get as it were, a rationalistic sangha, a rationalistic monastic order, and a superstitious laity. And in this way a sort of, what we may describe as schizophrenia of the Buddhist community develops. Not unlike, for instance the situation which you had in this country in the 18th century. When a clergy, the local parsons, even though they were continuing to administer the sacraments and preach, really a were really at heart sceptics and rationalists, but the people, the flock, the sheep in other words, they continued to believe firmly in Christianity. So the two were alienated from each other, as it were, and a sort of split in the religious community occurred. So this sort of situation I did find very much in Ceylon. Sometimes I found that when official Buddhism in Ceylon oppressed the nonrational elements, didn't allow them to find expression within the field of Buddhism which was kept all clean and bleak and rational, then they found expression outside Buddhism. I remember in this instance a very interesting, a very lengthy correspondence which ensued in one of the best known Ceylonese Buddhist magazines, English Buddhist magazines on the subject of what they called a chroile. A chroile is what they call a Hindu temple in Ceylon, near south India. And according to this correspondence, which went on for a couple of years I think, more Hindu temples were being built in Ceylon than Buddhist temples. Year by year. And the number of Hindu temples were increasing proportionately - all the time. Now the population of Ceylon is predominately Buddhist not Hindu, Hindus are a minority, so how was it that more Hindu temples were being built, more temples for Hindu gods than for the Buddha. So it wasn't because 'they were being built by Hindus but because Buddhists were building, lay Buddhists, that is to say ordinary Buddhists were building, not temples to the Buddha, but temples to these Hindu gods and goddesses. So why is this ? The reason is that the gods and goddesses of Hinduism were(?) than the rather rationalistic buddhas of official Ceylon Buddhism. These Hindu gods and goddesses correspond to those aspects of the Ceylonese psyche. We may say that the official Buddhism was unable to cope with, and did not in fact recognize.

So I think this is a very significant and interesting situation, which if we are not careful, or if the Ceylonese Buddhists are not careful, may well mark the beginning of the end of Buddhism in Ceylon. Now we mustn't go to the other extreme. We must ant deny that there is a rational element in Buddhism, in fact the rational element in Buddhism is very strong indeed, and we may go so far as to say, Buddhism is the most rational of all the great religions. But at the same time, And this is the point I want tof stress, It is by no means purely rational. A strong rational element, but not rationalistic, not exclusively rational

After all we may ask ourselves what is Buddhism as teaching trying to do? Basically, essentially as a teaching Buddhism is trying to communicate what we can only describe as a mystery, is trying to communicate the mystery of Enlightenment, the mystery of the Buddha's Enlightenment, and trying to communicate that mystery, some hint or some glimpse, or some intimation of that mystery to unenlightened man, and trying to communicate it in such a way that unenlightened man to the measure of his ability to the measure of his capacity can actually participate in it. Now when Buddhism tries to communicate this mystery of the Buddha's Enlightenment to man, To unenlightened man he's(it's) obviously trying to communicate it to the whole man, not just to a part of him, but to man in his totality, in all his aspects, all his dimensions as it were, the whole being, the whole man. And man we know is not a simple being, man is a sort of composite being, to put it very simply, even crudely man consists of 3 things, there's the head, there's the heart, and there's the hand. Man is these 3 things. There's the conscious surface we may say alternatively, and there are also the unconscious depths. So in order to communicate fully of the mystery of Enlightenment, of the Buddha's Enlightenment Buddhism has to get at as it were all of these, head, heart, hand, conscious surface and unconscious depths. Has to communicate with them all, and speak to them all as best it can, other wise there's no real contact, no full contact, no full communication. If Buddhism is only the head, only the heart, or even only the hand. Now how does Buddhism get at the head, how does it communicate with the conscious mind? This is done by speaking the language of reason and knowledge, in this way it communicates the mystery of the Buddha's Enlightenment to the head, to the conscious mind. It makes use of concepts, makes use of diplomatic reasoning, it makes use of metaphysics, it makes use of philosophy, epistemology, psychology. In this way it communicates with the head. But how does it communicate with, how does it get at the heart? At the unconscious mind? How does it do this, because this also it must, if it is to communicate with the whole man., if it is to communicate fully and totally and convey to the whole man some glimpse, inclination of the mystery of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Now Buddhism gets at the heart of man, gets at the unconscious mind of man by speaking not the language of logic, not the language of concepts, of philosophy, of metaphysics, these touch only the head, it gets at the heart of the un at the unconscious mind of man by speaking another language., a different, an equally valid language, an equally powerful and important language, and this is the language of myth. And it speaks this language with the help of such things as symbol, with the help of legend, ritual, music, poetry, and so on. And not only Buddhism but all religions speak this language.

Not just the language of logic but the language also of myth. And they sometimes speak it very very powerfully indeed. Christianity, we may say has some very impressive myths and symbols. 'the fall of man, has the symbol or the myth of the virgin birth, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and all of these myths and symbols of Christianity appeal to, effect, the emotions, the unconscious mind, the heart, and very strongly indeed. Unfortunately in official Christianity these symbols and myths are usually, if not invariably (usually) interpreted literally. And what are really myths, what are really symbols are regarded as historic facts. take for instance the myth or the symbol of the Virgin birth. What does this mean? According to official Christianity it means that the mother of Christ at the time of her conception, at the time of Christ's conception rather, was still technically a virgin still a virgin, and remained a virgin. This is regarded as a historical fact, that if you could have been present at that time, and if you could have subjected the Virgin Mary to a medical examination, you would have found that she was a virgin. This is how it is taken. This is very, very literal, one might even say crudely literal. If one looks a little deeper one will find that this idea of virgin birth, and virgin mother hood is a universal symbol which we find not only in Christianity, we find it

also in other religions, even pagan religions of Greece and Rome and Egypt, and so on. So what does this symbol, this myth of the virgin birth really mean? Virgin means that which is pure or one who is pure. Virginity represents the state of purity, not just sexual purity but purity in the full sense in the complete sense. So virgin birth means that the Christ, or the Christ consciousness, the higher consciousness can come into existence, can come to birth only in the mind which is pure, which is virgin. This is the real meaning of the symbol.

The real meaning of the myth. That it is only the virgin mind as it were which can give birth to the Christ or divine consciousness. But official Christianity interprets the virgin birth in this literal, this historical sort of way, and therefore to a great extent misses its meaning, and misses its significance. Myth in this way is transformed into, or hardened into dogma, and belief in this dogma is regarded as essential to salvation. Not that the spiritual meaning is always or entirely lost, but is usually very, very much obscured to say the least. Now in Buddhism the position is rather different, we may say that Christianity spoke the language of myth from the beginning, from the beginning its appeal was more to the heart, more to the unconscious mind only, later it learned to speak the language of reason, the language of logic, and even then it learned to speak it only rather imperfectly. But in the case of Buddhism it was the other way round. The initial appeal of Buddhism was more to reason, more to the intelligence, and it is only afterwards, especially when Buddhism spread among the masses that it started appealing to started speaking to the emotions and the unconscious mind, and this sort of development, this sort of procedure is fully in accordance, we may say with the whole conception with the spiritual path in Buddhism. As I explained in detail in the course of the 8 lectures which we had on the Buddha's eight fold path, the higher path, the path of the higher evolution, the spiritual path is divided into two great stages, is divided into what we call the Darsana Marga or the path of Wisdom, and into the bhavana marga or the path of transformation. The path of Wisdom represents the initial spiritual experience or insight, or vision, and the heights of ones being, and bhavana marga, the path of transformation represents the gradual transformation of ones whole being in all its aspects in accordance with that original insight and or vision. The first, the path of vision is also the path of the stream entrant. the second is the path of the once returner, the non-returner, and the Arahant. The path of vision we may say also represents the realization of truth with the conscious mind but not with the unconscious mind. But the path of transformation represents the penetration of that Truth, after it has been realized by the conscious mind into the depths of the unconscious. And the second path, the path of transformation is of course much more difficult, because the unconscious mind is much more difficult to transform than the conscious mind, it takes very, very much longer, and that's why the path of transformation is sub-divided into three stages, of once returner, the non-returner, and Arahant. Were as the path of vision consists of only one stage, the stage of the stream entrant. So we get the same sort of sequence also in the canonical literature of Buddhism. The earlier texts especially those you find in the Pali cannon appeal more to the conscious mind, they speak the language of abstract thought, concepts, reason, but the later scriptures or those which are scripted(?) as later literary records, as later, these appeal to the unconscious mind, they speak the language of concrete image, the language of myth, the language of legend. There are of course exceptions, according to the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, many of them are quite late but they continue to address more the reason, not so much the emotions, not so much the unconscious. So on the whole the rule holds good, the earlier scriptures of Buddhism address the conscious mind, that the later scriptures of Buddhism especially so of the Mahayana sutras and the tantras address more the unconscious mind,, so its not surprising as we may say that the history of western Buddhism has followed a similar course. In the west Buddhism has first of all been grasped intellectually

to some extent, at least that's more or less where we stand now. Now what we have to do is start assimilating Buddhism emotionally. We've We've listened to the language of logic long enough, now we have to start listening to the language of myth.

Now let me give you a few examples of the sort of thing I mean, but before I do that just a few definitions or at least explanations. I've spoken of symbol, of myth, of legend and ritual these are all parts of the same language. One could also add poetry and parable, and so on. I may later on in the retreat speak about the psychology of ritual so I'm not going to say anything about ritual for the moment, I am going to concentrate for the present more on myth and legend.

And the two terms myth and legend are very often used synonymously, loosely, and this way confuse. most people th think myths and legends means sort of stories, means sort of stories of ancient gods and heroes, rather like you find in Homer and so on. But strictly speaking a myth usually at least often explains the origin of a certain object or certain custom, for instance, take the Prometheus myth from Greed mythology. Prometheus is supposed to have stolen fire from heaven. This is a myth to explain the origin of fire. Where did fire come from? Primitive man didn't have fire, except by accident. How did he learn about it, how did he learn how to make it? Well there is a myth to explain that. A kind god, a titan, called Prometheus, he stole from heaven, because fire is in the sky, in the form of the sun and the stars and so on. So he stole it from heaven and he brought it down to Earth. That is how man got the blessing of fire. So the Prometheus myth explains the origin of fire.

A legend on the other hand is a sort of pseudo-history. Myth is not really history at all, not even in form. But the legend is a sort of pseudo-history. It purported to be historical speaks about kings and battles and so on, but it doesn't really correspond to anything we can really call historical fact. For instance, until only a few hundred years ago in this country, it was believed, there was a legend to the fact, that Britain was named after Brutus, and that Brutus had come and he had founded a kingdom here, and that Britain was called Britain after Brutus. But this is only legend, a pseudo-history, like King Arthur and his knights. I hope I am not disillusioning anybody about these things. A myth on the other hand is not really history at all. Myth represents, as it were, psychological experiences and spiritual truths in terms of historical events. It is in this sense that the fall of man is a myth, not the Christian interpretation of course, but if we look at the fall of man as a myth, what does it mean? It means we are not to take it literally, we are not to think that so many thousand years ago that there was a man called Adam who lived in a garden called the Garden of Eden which you can actually find on the map if you look hard enough, And that this Adam ate an apple which he had been commanded not to eat, and because he was disobedient he fell. And this was the fall of man. And it used to be believed in all seriousness by everyone in all the Christian countries until up to a hundred years ago only, that this was historic fact. It's very difficult for us to grasp nowadays because there has been such a revolution in our ideas, but until as recently as that, until as recently as a hundred years ago, the fall of man, Adam eating the apple, was a historical fact which no one seriously questioned. I myself am not all that old, but I remember not so many years ago meeting a farmer in Devonshire who was astounded when I told him that Adam was not an historical person, and refused to believe it. He said, "nor, it's all there in the good book." And yes, it gives the date in the margin of some bibles of 5004 B.C., that's Adams date. And some theologians worked out the exact day of the week on which he ate the apple, and the hour of the day. So it was plain it was all historical fact. But the myth of the fall of Adam isn't historical fact at all, it has nothing to do with what even happened in time. It

refers to something which is taking place all the time when of our higher nature we follow the dictates of our lower nature. This is the fall of man. It didn't happen 5005 years ago, it might have happened five minutes ago, or it might have happened five seconds ago, or it might be happening at this very minute.

So the story, the myth of the fall of man, represents or embodies the spiritual truth, the psychological truth, which is eternally valid. It doesn't represent a historical fact. It tells us a truth about human nature, truth about every man and every woman. It doesn't convey a mere historic fact.

Now I am going to take this evening, some examples of Buddhist myth from the life of the Buddha, to give some examples of this non conceptual, mythical approach of the part of Buddhism, to the heart of man, to the unconscious depths. Some examples in other words of this language of myth.

Now the Buddha lived some 2,600 years ago, and that is quite a long time. But though he lived such a long time ago, we do know quite a lot about him. There are quite a number of biographies of the Buddha in existence, both canonical, and that is to say are part of the Buddhist scriptures, there are also semi-canonical which are sort of apocryphal. For instance, in the Pali canon, there are long sections of the Vinaya Pitaka, the book of the discipline which are biographical, which recreate various important episodes in the career of the Buddha. Then, in what is called Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit, or mixed Sanskrit, there is the Mahavastu, the great story, Then there is the Lalitavistara, the extended sports, if it is literally translated. Then there is the Abhiniskramina sutra, the discourse on the going forth of the Buddha. Then there is the Maha Parinirvana sutra, a detailed account of the last days of the Buddha, or indeed the last weeks and months of his life. Then there is the Buddhacarita, a beautiful epic poem in classical Sanskrit, written by Ashvagoshya, written in the Indian Middle Ages. And all these accounts of the life of the Buddha, they contain material of various kinds. They contain not only what may be regarded as indubitably historic facts, they also contain a great deal of legendary material, and a great many mythical elements.

Now leaving aside the legends, lets take up the myths. The myths, we may say, are of two kinds, those which represent the Buddha exercising supernormal powers. Now in some passages in the Scriptures, you get an incident, you get an episode, where the Buddha, for instance, knows what is going on in somebody's mind. He reads the mind of a monk or a layman. This is what we call telepathy. It used to be fashionable to dismiss telepathy as just a story, as an old wives tale, but this is now being demonstrated to be empirically verifiable. So we may say that these accounts, these legends or myths, if you like, in the Buddhist scriptures, which represent the Buddha as exercising supernormal powers, such as telepathy, are not myths proper. But they are really historical facts which are only regarded as myths in modern times, owing to the limitations of the modern scientific approach.

Secondly we have in the scriptures, in the biographies, those elements which are myths in the true sense. That is to say, which are representations of psychological experiences and spiritual truths. And it is with these that we are at present concerned. These elements I may say, are a source of some embarrassment to modern Western scholars. Some of them when they write about the Buddha, they just cut out those elements, They say, "Oh, it's all a lot of nonsense." "All these mythical elements, they just leave them out and they are even a source of embarrassment to some rationalizing Eastern Buddhists who would, apparently, be happier

without them.

Now I am going to take up this evening, four well known incidents from the life of the Buddha, mythical incidents, as it were, which occurred before the Enlightenment, and two which occurred after the Enlightenment. The first is the story, the myth, if you like, of the Buddha's victory over Mara. A few days ago when I spoke about the life of the Buddha, I described how he sat down under the Bodhi tree, meditated, and gained Enlightenment. But the biographies don't leave it at that. They spin a very elaborate myth about this great event. And they describe, for instance, how when the Buddha sat on that seat, beneath the Bodhi tree, he was attacked by a terrible army of demons in all sorts of repulsive and horrible forms. And these demons were led by Mara, who is the, sort of, Buddhist Satan. He is called Mara, the evil one, Mara Paprika. And this particular incident, this particular myth, is very vividly and strikingly depicted in Buddhist art, as well as being described in Buddhist poetry. That this beautiful picture of the calm figure of the Buddha or the Buddha-to-be, seated underneath the Bodhi tree, with his eyes half closed, peacefully meditating, and on all sides there are terrible figures, hideous, deformed, monstrous figures, rather like something out of the canvasses of the western artist Hieronymus Bosch. It's very much like that. You get demons with the heads of crocodiles, with the heads of wolves, demons with tails, and demons with ten arms, and demons with eyes in the middle of their chests, all attacking or trying to attack, the calm figure under the tree. Some are throwing stones, some are spitting flames, others are discharging bows and arrows, and so on. But the Buddha is unmoved, there is a great radiance about the Buddha, a five colored radiance of white and blue, and yellow and red, and orange, a five colored radiance.

And when all these weapons of the stones, and the flames, and the arrows, and the spears, and the clubs reach the edge of this halo, they're all transformed into flowers, and as flowers they fall at the Buddha's feet. So this incident, this myth (?) and beautifully portrayed in Buddhist art and in Buddhist poetry. And then the myth goes on to relate Mara the evil one wasn't finished. Having tried to frighten the Buddha with his demon hosts and failed, what does he do- He tries a more subtle approach, if you can call it that. He sends to the Buddha his three daughters. One is called lust, one is called passion, the last is called delight. So they dance in front of the Buddha and exhibit their charms. But the Buddha is still not moved, he doesn't take any notice at all. And in some version of the story the three beautiful daughters of Mara, they turn into withered old hags, and they creep away. Now what does this represent? All these figures, these demon hosts, mara the evil one, the three beautiful daughters of Mara all of them surging up around the Buddha, attacking the Buddha, they all represent the unregenerate forces of the unconscious mind. All those passions, all those cravings which swirl about in the pit of the unconscious, as it were, in conflict not only with the conscious mind and its aspirations, but even among themselves. The demons represent all the negative emotions like fear and anger and hatred and jealousy and wrath and fury. And the daughters represent different aspects of craving and clinging and lust and desire. And Mara himself, the father of the three daughters, the leader of the demon hosts, he represents primordial ignorance, spiritual ignorance, darkness, blindness and confusion. And one of his names, or rather the literal meaning of the name Mara is death, the principle of impermanence in its negative form. So we may say that this great myth of the Buddha's victory over Mara represents his victory, the victory of his enlightened consciousness over all the negative forces, even the positive forces, within his own unconscious mind. This is the significance, the spiritual and psychological significance, of this great myth.

Then there is another myth, another episode, number two. This is called, calling the Earth Goddess to witness. The Buddha was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, and according to the Buddhist myth, the spot on which he was sitting was the center of the universe. He was sitting on the diamond throne, the Vajrayasana, which was the center of the universe. This is, of course, again, another myth, or an aspect of a myth. The Buddha, in order to gain enlightenment takes his seat, takes up his position on the central point. This is a sort of concrete presentation of the middle way. You must be perfectly centered and balanced before you can hope to gain enlightenment. So Mara the evil one's attempts are by no means finished, challenges the Buddha's right to occupy that seat. This was the seat, this was the point, on which all previous Buddhas have sat before gaining enlightenment. So the Buddha, the future Buddha, has naturally taken up his seat there because he was about to gain Enlightenment. So Mara says, 'What is your right to occupy that seat, how do you know you are worthy to sit upon that seat, which was occupied by previous Buddhas, how do you know that you are going to gain Enlightenment, that you are not deluding yourself, that you are not fooling yourself.?' So the Buddha said, or the future buddha said: 'I know that I am worthy to sit on this seat because for hundreds of previous lives I have observed the perfections, the transcendental virtues. I have practised generosity, and ethics and patience, and vigour, and meditation, and higher wisdom. I practised all of these life after life, for hundreds of lives. Therefor I am ready. I prepared myself. I am worthy to sit on this seat.'" So mara said, sneering, 'That's your story, we don't know anything about these previous lives, previous births, and all this practise of the paramitas. We never saw them, who is your witness.' Mara it is sometimes said was the first lawyer, so he asks 'Who is your witness', in reply. the Buddha taps on the earth, he puts his fingers on the earth, this is the position in which you see so many images of the Buddha, the earth witness or earth touching position, he said 'I called the earth to witness, because all these lives were lived on the earth.' On this earth he practised the paramitas so he called the earth itself to bear witness that he had practised in this way and prepared himself. So in response to the tap, in response to the summons up comes the earth goddess. This is all depicted in Buddhist art a woman of mature age, but still beautiful in appearance. She come up bearing a vase in her hand, a vase of riches, for the earth is the source of all riches. She also represents the unconscious in another form. And she bears witness, she says 'yes I have seen it all, I have seen all these hundreds of lives, he has practised all these perfections therefor he is worthy to sit on this seat."

And as I said this scene or also depicted in Buddhist art, you see the Earth-goddess half emerged out of the earth. She's in the earth from the waist downwards and out of the earth from the waist upwards. So she's depicted like this very much like, I would say, the appearance of Mother Urda in Wagner's *the Ring*. Urda means of course earth and it's the same name in another form as the Hirka of Swinburne's famous poem. Now the significance of the Earth-goddess is a subject in itself, there is a whole literature about her, but she represents essentially, basically the same forces as re presented in the previous episode, the previous myth, by mara's daughters. She represents the same forces but she represents them now tamed and subdued, ready to help instead of to hinder. So this is the second incident, the second myth.

Then the myth, the episode of Brahma's request. Now I have often mentioned this, I have mentioned it in the course of the week, there is no need to relate in detail. You may remember that after his Enlightenment the Buddha was inclined to remain quiet, not to preach until he was requested by Brahma sahampati, the great Brahma. And opening his eyes the Buddha as I described the other day, saw mankind like a bed of lotuses in different stages of development

and he agreed to preach for those whose eyes were covered with only a little dust. Now we shouldn't take this episode too literally, it is not so much that the Buddha needed to be asked to preach. Brahma's request represents we may say the manifestation of the forces of Compassion within the Buddha's own mind, we are not to think literally a god appeared and reminded the Buddha of his duty. If he was really the Buddha he knew that anyway. So the figure of Brahma represents the emergent forces of Compassion and Love springing up within the Buddha's mind. After his Enlightenment or as a result of his Enlightenment or as part of the Enlightenment experience, and as a result of the upwelling of those forces of Compassion the Buddha preached. This is the significance of this myth. As I have dealt with it all before I am passing over it rather quickly.

Now the fourth and last incident, the fourth and last myth is rather more complex and interesting. And is called the Mucalinda episode or the Mucalinda myth. The Buddha spent seven weeks under or near the Bodhi tree after his Enlightenment, and at the end of the seventh week, after the Enlightenment there came a great storm. It's as though the heavens burst open, as you can so often see in India. Not like the little showers we have in this country. The rain came simply pouring and streaming down. It was apparently the beginning of the rainy season and the Buddha was still seated under that tree with only the tree for shelter, and as it were an inadequate shelter. The myth goes on to relate how Mucalinda the Serpent King came out of his hole, came out of hiding and wrapped his coils round and round the Buddha to protect him from the rain and then reared his hood, it was like a cobra hood, up over the head of the Buddha just like an umbrella. So this incident is also quite often depicted in Buddhist art, and sometimes it is depicted in a slightly comical way. You get the Buddha's head appearing over the top of a great coil of rope as it seems to be, with a little cobra's head just like an umbrella over the top, it looks rather quaint, so this is how it is depicted usually. Now when the rain stopped Mucalinda the Serpent King threw off the guise of the serpent and he assumed the form of a beautiful young man, and he bowed before the Buddha, and saluted him. So what does this myth represent? Mucalinda represents we may say the forces of the unconscious mind in their most positive and their most beneficial aspect. All over the world the ocean, the sea, water in general, rain is associated with the forces of the unconsciousness. Mucalinda is the King of the nagas, the Serpent gods and the serpent or dragons, represent the forces within the unconscious mind, the waters of the unconscious mind. The nagas the serpent deities are the forces within the unconscious mind and Mucalinda is the King of the nagas so the symbolism becomes quite clear. And the rain represents, the pouring down of the rain represents a sort of baptism, And baptism in the form of sprinkling with blood or sprinkling with water always represents in primitive religions, even in advanced religion the investment of the conscious mind with all the powers and forces of the unconscious mind. Now it is very significant that the storm occurred and Mucalinda appeared at the end of the seventh week. It is also significant that Mucalinda wraps his coils around the Buddha seven times, that is significant. Mucalinda also corresponds to what the tantrics call the Chandali, the fiery one, or what the Hindu's call the Kundalini, or coiled up one, usually rendered into English as the serpent power, the potential of the spiritual energy within each man and woman. And the seven coils which Mucalinda wraps around represent the seven psychic centres strung along the median nerve up which the serpent power passes in its ascent from the lowest to the highest centre. And the beautiful youth or the form of the beautiful youth bowing before the Buddha represents the new personality, The new being which is born as a result of this process of ascent of the kundalini or the coiled up power And Mucalinda salutes the Buddha and this represents the perfect subservience of all the powers and forces of the unconscious mind, on all levels to the Enlightened mind.

Now its obvious even from the very little I've said that these four incidents, these four myths have a very deep psychological and spiritual significance. It is also interesting to note that the four main figures of these myths form a definite set. Apart from the figure of the Buddha himself what are the principle figures of these four myths? First of all Mara the evil one, then the earth goddess, then Brahma, and then Mucalinda. And their order of appearance is also rather interesting. First of all Mara appears, then the earth goddess appears, then Brahma appears, and then Mucalinda. I am going to make what maybe a rather bold suggestion, it seems to me that these four figures represent the four principle archetypes according to Jung. And their appearance represents the process of the integration of these archetypes into the conscious mind, in other words represents what Jung calls the process of individuation. Mara represents the shadow, what Jung calls the shadow, the shadow is the repressed side, the darker side of our own nature. If any spiritual progress is to be made this has to be dealt with, we have to let the shadow side come up, have to see our own darker side and integrate it into our conscious attitude, we have to recognize it as our shadow not project it outwards and say well that's somebody else not me, have to recognize it as me as my self, as part of myself, this is me behaving in that way and the integrate it into the conscious attitude by resolving it. So Mara represents the shadow, or what Jung calls the shadow.

Then the earth goddess, the earth goddess represents the anima, she comes up from the depths, from the earth. And the anima is what we may describe as the repressed feminine part of the masculine psyche. Every mind, every psyche is, we may say both masculine and feminine, but in the case of a man the feminine side is repressed, is in the unconscious. In the case of a woman the repressed side is called the animus. So we may say that the earth goddess represents the repressed feminine side of the masculine unconscious which also must be brought up and resolved just as the earth goddess appears in the myth and integrate it into the conscious mind, into the conscious attitude. In other words the appearance of the earth goddess represents the process of the integration into the masculine conscious psyche of the unconscious femininity.

Now Brahma represents the wise old man archetype, the teacher. In Buddhist art it's interesting to see, he's represented with white hair and white beard, he's a sort of god the father figure. So he represents a voice of the higher consciousness which has to be heard not just as a voice coming from out side of oneself but integrated into ones unconscious attitude.

And Mucalinda represents the archetype of the young hero. There are many myths in world religions of the birth of the young hero, and the young hero represents the higher consciousness which is born out of the stress and conflict, as it were, of tne spiritual life, and spiritual progress. So Mucalinda, as I say represents this birth of, emergence of this higher self or higher personality occurring at the end of the individuation process. Now we can go father than this and draw another sort of parallel. We may say that these four figures of Mara, of the earth goddess, of Brahma, and Mucalinda correspond to the four principle figures of Christian mythology. What does Mara correspond to? Well obviously mara corresponds to Satan, the earth goddess corresponds to the Virgin Mary, brahma corresponds to god, god the father, and Mucalinda corresponds to Christ, the young hero as it were. But there's a very great difference, though we can set up a sort of parallelism between these two sets of four, there's a very great difference in Buddhism. These figures, these archetypal figures, the shadow, the anima, the wise old man, the young hero, that is to say, Mara, the earth goddess, Brahma, and Mucalinda, these are all regarded as phenomena, aspects of ones own true mind, all regarded as projections of ones own mind, but in Christianity on the other hand they're regarded as

objectively existent beings, that there is a being called Satan, that there is a virgin Mary up there in heaven that there is a god the father also in heaven firmly seated upon his throne, or nowadays perhaps not so firmly seated, and there's also a Christ figure objectively present out there, Christ the saviour. So these are all regarded as objectively existent beings. But in Buddhism these archetypes, these forms, these figures are regarded as I've said as projections, as really alienated parts and fragments of ourselves, so that we can reclaim what is our own property, and integrate them all into our conscious mind, and our conscious attitude. So in as much as in Christianity these archetypes are regarded not as archetypes but as objectively existent beings, therefore the possibility of their full integration, and therefore the possibility of the individuation process taking place, therefore the possibility of gaining full Enlightenment doesn't occur, these archetypes are left unresolved out there, and the process of integration is not completed. In other words there's no Buddha. You see in the Buddhist myth you've got. Mara, the earth goddess, Brahma, and Mucalinda, and you've also got the Buddha, the integrated consciousness which emerges out of the resolution of these archetypes. But in Christianity there's nor emergent Buddha as it were, because the archetypes are left unresolved, just as figures and beings out there, objectively existent, not recognized as phenomena of ones own true mind or consciousness. Now these are just a few examples culled almost at random, one may say these great myths, and it's quite obvious that even from the fact that some of them have seem rather to have gripped your attention, is obvious that the language of myth still speaks very effectively to human heart and to the unconscious, and this is in fact how Buddhism speaks what I've called the language of myth. How it gets through to the heart, gets through to the unconscious depths. You can surely tell yourselves from your own experience that when something is expounded logically and rationally you feel it in a certain way, but when you listen to these myths and stories and parables then you feel it, you experience it in quite a different sort of way, there's a different sort of atmosphere, there's a different sort of feel to it all, and the reason is that the logical exposition reaches the head but the myth and the story, and the parable, and the poem, these reach the heart, reach even the unconscious depths of the psyche, and this is not only how but why Buddhism speaks the language of myth.

Now these are just very small examples, are we may say, that Buddhism speaks this language of myth on a much grander scale in some of the great Mahayana sutras like the Saddharma pundarika sutra, the Sukhavativuyha sutra, the Gandhavuyha, the Avatamsaka. We've got no time to go into all this but one thing we can say is that this is the language, the language of myth that we must now learn to understand. If we can understand, read as it were, this language of myth we shall not only be able to grasp Buddhism intellectually but also assimilate it emotionally. So far in the west we may say our approach to Buddhism has been rather one sided it has been a Predominantly intellectual approach, and its time that we tried to redress the balance. The Buddha as we know gained Enlightenment sitting beneath a tree, the Bodhi Tree, and the tree is one of the most important Buddhist symbols. I've not got time to go into the significance of that symbol, but one fact we can note about this tree, in fact about trees in general, and that is, the roots have to go down very, very deep, as high and as wide as the branches spread. So deep and so wide do the roots have to go. If you've a massive trunk and enormous branches and hundreds of little branches, and thousands of twigs, but only tiny roots at the bottom, what happens is your tree is very quickly and very easily blown over. the roots must be deep and strong, as well as the branches lofty and large. And it's just the same with us we may say that the branches of Buddhism, the great tree which is Buddhism must spread wide and high with in our conscious mind, but the roots of Buddhism must also go very deep down into our unconscious, and only then will the tree of the Dharma be firmly

established in our lives, and this way also perhaps we may speak on behalf of Buddhism the language of myth.

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