

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Lecture 52: The Conscious Evolution of Man: Right Effort

Mr Chairman and Friends,

At present, week by week we are following, or trying to follow at least in imagination, the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. And it is hoped that as we proceed, as the weeks go by, this very important aspect of the Buddha's teaching does become clearer and clearer. Now though as we go on week by week the teaching may become clearer certain difficulties at the same time do in fact arise, difficulties at least from the point of view of the speaker if not of the point of view of the audience. One difficulty is that every week, every time we begin a new talk, a new lecture, it becomes increasingly difficult to recapitulate. Some of you, those who have been coming regularly, might have observed that every week I start off with a short résumé of the ground that we have covered before - I recapitulate very briefly the content of all the previous talks. But, as I say, as the weeks go by that does become more and more and more difficult because obviously the further we get along in the series the more there is to repeat and recapitulate. It's just like a snowball - you start off with a very small ball of snow, containing a very small quantity of snow, and when it's small it's very easy to push it along the ground but as it is pushed along the ground, as it rolls over and over it of course gathers accretions of more and more snow and it gets bigger and bigger. So the bigger it becomes the more difficult it becomes to push it along. Recapitulation is rather like that - the further we progress in the series, the more material we accumulate, the more difficult it becomes at the beginning of every talk to go over all that ground even briefly again. So I should perhaps warn you that from now onwards, as from this week, when we reach our sixth talk, there will be in fact no detailed recapitulation of the ground that we have covered before, of the stages of the path that we have so far traversed. Instead there'll be just a very brief reminder and this should be, at least for those who have come along regularly, quite enough. So far as others are concerned, so far as those who have come along for perhaps the second time or perhaps even the first time, so far as they are concerned tonight's talk I hope, is sufficiently self-contained to be intelligible by itself even if you haven't heard any of the previous talks. And of course, in any case, if difficulties do arise all the talks are being recorded and the complete set of talks will in due course be available after the completion of the last talk.

Now we know, most of us already, that the Noble Eightfold Path consists, as its name in fact suggests, of eight steps, they're usually called, but it would be more accurate to speak, as I have been speaking, of stages or aspects. And this Eightfold Path is also divided into two main sections. The first section is known as the Path of Vision and the second section is known as the Path of Transformation. The first section, the Path of Vision, contains only one stage of the Path, that is to say Perfect Vision and the second section of the Path contains all the other stages, all the other aspects, all seven of them. Perfect Vision, this first step or first stage of the path, consists in what we may describe as a direct insight into the nature, the ultimate nature, of existence itself. We may say it corresponds to a sort of initial glimpse of reality above and beyond all concepts, above and beyond the limitations of the relative mind. And this vision, this insight, this glimpse, is not just something intellectual, not something theoretical, it is more of the nature of what we may describe as a spiritual experience.

Now all the other stages of the path - those that comprise the second section of the Path - represent the transformation or if you like the *transmutation* of different aspects of one's own being, one's own nature, one's own consciousness, in the light of that Perfect Vision, in the light of that initial insight, that initial spiritual experience. The second stage of the path, you may recall, is Perfect Emotion, the third is Perfect Speech, the fourth is Perfect Action, and these three represent the transformation in the light of Perfect Vision of different aspects of our individual nature, our individual existence. Fifthly came, of course, Perfect Livelihood with which we dealt last week, and Perfect Livelihood, as we then saw, represents the transformation not only of the individual but even of the collective existence, the transformation of our whole social life, our political life and our economic life.

So thus far we have come in this Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. And today we come to what is known in Sanskrit as *samyak vyayama*, the sixth stage or sixth aspect of this Noble Eightfold Path, and as we have already instituted the precedent we shall speak of *samyak* as 'perfect', not as 'right'. We shall speak of Perfect Effort, not Right Effort. Now this word *vyayama* in *samyak vyayama* is usually translated as 'effort' so we shall continue that practice or that custom and speak of Perfect Effort. This is what we're primarily concerned with this evening. Now what this term *samyak vyayama* or Perfect Effort really means or really connotes we shall see in a minute or two. First of all, I want to say just a few words about the context of this Perfect Effort. You may remember, as I mentioned or as I reminded you just now, the second, the third, and the fourth stages of the Path deal mainly with the transformation of the individual - transformation of his emotional life, his communication with other people, and with his behaviour, his actions. The fifth stage, Perfect Livelihood, deals with the transformation of the community, of society as a whole, as we saw in fact last week. Now this sixth step with which we're concerned today, Perfect Effort, deals, like the second, third and fourth stages with the transformation of the individual - and we may say that it deals specifically with the transformation of the individual will or individual volition. But it does this, it effects this transformation and transmutation of the will, against a very wide background indeed. The

background of Perfect Livelihood, as we saw last week, was sufficiently wide - its background is the whole human community, society at large. But the background of Perfect Effort is even larger, even wider, even more comprehensive. The background of Perfect Effort is nothing less than the whole range of sentient existence, the whole of life, the whole of organic existence, or we may say the whole process of the evolution of organic life. So against this background, within this context, we may say that Perfect Effort represents, within the general structure or the general framework of the path - the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path - the fact that the spiritual life can be regarded as being in a sense the continuation, even the culmination, if you like the consummation, of the entire process of evolution. And it's for this reason that in our main title for today's talk we speak of the Conscious Evolution of man with the Perfect Effort or the Right Effort just in brackets. Now what this all means we shall try to see, we shall try to understand towards the end of the talk. Meanwhile let us direct our attention to Perfect Effort itself.

The English word effort represents, as we've seen, the Sanskrit word *vyayama*, and we find that in the modern Indian languages, that is to say the languages of Northern India like Hindi and Gujarati, Marathi, this word *vyayama* still is current, and it means 'exercise', ordinary physical exercise, especially in the sense of gymnastics. They usually say *vya* or *vyam*, so exercise or gymnastics. And when they want to translate this English word, or rather Greek word, *gymnasium* into the Indian languages they say *vyamshala*, so you can begin to get some idea of what the word really connotes.

Now this stage, this stage of *samyak vyayama* or Perfect Effort, draws our attention to a very important aspect of the spiritual life, and that is that the spiritual life is an active life. The spiritual life is not an armchair life, it's active, if you like it's dynamic. Now this activity, this action, is not necessarily physical. Spiritual life being active doesn't mean that you must always be rushing around doing things in a crude, external physical sense. But it certainly means that one should be mentally, spiritually, even aesthetically active. In fact we may say that this step or this stage of the Eightfold Path stands for the element of what we may call spiritual athleticism, which is a very characteristic and very prominent feature of Buddhism. We may say, generalising that Buddhism is for the active. We may say Buddhism is not for the mentally crippled or the spiritually bedridden. It's not for people of this description, it's for people who are prepared to make an effort, for people who are prepared to try. You may fail, of course, you'll fail ten times, you'll fail twenty times, you'll fail a hundred times, but that doesn't matter so much, the thing is that you should make the effort, that you should try. So Buddhism is for those who are prepared to make that effort, not for those who are prepared only to sit back in their armchairs comfortably and read all about the efforts of other people. Well, you know the sort of thing, you take the life of Milarepa and you ensconce yourself by the side of the fire, with perhaps a cup of tea and a plate of muffins or a box of chocolates and you munch your muffins and nibble your chocolates, and you're all warm and cosy and you read about the austerities of Milarepa and you think how fine and how wonderful! So not like that, not just reading about other people's efforts, but being prepared to make at least a minimum effort of our own. One may say quite frankly that for a long time in this country, in the Buddhist movement, a wrong sort of image of Buddhism prevailed. For quite a while the impression as it were got around that Buddhism was intended primarily for 'old ladies', and when I say 'old ladies' I'm not being disrespectful to our senior citizens. When I say 'old ladies' I mean of course 'old ladies' of both sexes and all ages! And the impression did certainly seem to get around that Buddhism was meant for people more of this description. Whereas instead we may say that Buddhism, which is a very demanding and very exacting sort of path is really for the young and for the vigorous - either for those who are physically *and* mentally young or at least who are mentally and spiritually young, whatever the age, or whatever the state of their bodies may be.

Now Perfect Effort is twofold. There's a general Perfect Effort and also there's a specific Perfect Effort. Perfect Effort, or at least some degree of effort, is necessary at all stages of the Path. We shouldn't think that just because one particular stage of the Eightfold Path is labelled as Perfect Effort you can accomplish, you can traverse, the preceding stages without any effort at all - that is not the impression that is intended to be conveyed. The sixth stage may be labelled the stage of Perfect Effort, but that's the specific Perfect Effort; but a general Perfect Effort, some element of effort and exertion and striving is necessary from the very beginning. Now this specific Perfect Effort, which the Perfect Effort as the sixth stage of the path represents, consists of a certain set of exercises, as we may call them, which are to be practised at this stage. And these exercises are known as the *Fourfold Perfect Effort* and it's these which we have to study if we want to get some idea of what Perfect Effort, the sixth stage of the Path, is all about.

These four, as we may call them, Perfect Efforts are, or rather they consist in:

1. Preventing
2. Eradicating
3. Developing
4. Maintaining.

Now preventing, eradicating and so on - what? Well, primarily thoughts, thoughts good, thoughts bad, skilful, unskilful. I think I mentioned about two talks ago that in Buddhism we don't use the words 'good' and 'bad'; we use instead the words 'skilful' and 'unskilful'. So the effort which consists in preventing means the effort to prevent the arising within our minds of those unskilful mental states which have not yet arisen. This is preventing. Similarly eradicating means eradicating within our minds those unskilful states which already are present therein. Developing means developing within our minds those skilful states which are not there already. And in the same way maintaining means maintaining within our minds those skilful states which already exist there. This is the fourfold right effort. Preventing, eradicating, developing, and maintaining.

So in this sense we may say Perfect Effort is primarily a psychological thing. Perfect Effort consists obviously in a sort of unremitting work on oneself, on one's own mind - preventing, eradicating, developing, maintaining. And this sort of emphasis is given, this sort of classification is given, as an incentive and as a reminder because it's so very easy to slacken off. People start with lots of enthusiasm. They're all for Buddhism or all for meditation, all for spiritual life, but it very often quickly wears off, enthusiasm wanes, and after a while it's as though it all had not been at all. And this is because, we may say, the forces of inertia within ourselves, the forces holding us back, the forces keeping us down, are very, very strong indeed. Even in simple matters like getting up early in the morning to meditate - you might make a good resolution that you're going to get up half an hour earlier. Well, you might succeed once or twice or even three times, but certainly by the third or fourth morning temptation will have begun to set in. And it will be a matter of a quite serious moral struggle and conflict whether you get up or whether you stay a little longer, one minute longer, two minutes, three minutes, in that warm and cosy bed, and you're nearly always, of course, the loser. And this is because, as I say, these forces of inertia within ourselves are so very strong. It's so very easy for enthusiasm to wane and dwindle and vanish.

Now before we discuss these four Perfect Efforts or this fourfold Perfect Effort in detail, there's an important observation to be made, and that is that the fourfold Perfect Effort, if we are to make it at all, presupposes something without which it isn't possible. And this thing, this very important thing, this very important factor is simply self-knowledge. We can't even begin to prevent or eradicate, develop or maintain, unless, to begin with, we know ourselves, unless we know which way our minds are going, unless we know what the contents of our minds are. And to know this, to know ourselves, requires very great honesty indeed - at least honesty with ourselves - it's not expected that we should be completely honest always with other people but at least so far as this fourfold Perfect Effort is concerned we should be honest with ourselves. I notice one or two people sort of looking up as I say it's not altogether necessary that we should be honest with other people *always* but does one realise how difficult this is? I remember someone once writing that anybody who sat down to write his own autobiography at once became conscious of all the things he was *not* going to tell! And this is very true.

It's difficult enough to be honest with ourselves, not to speak of being honest with other people. But if we want to practise this fourfold Perfect Effort we must at least be honest with ourselves, about ourselves, try to see ourselves truly, try to see ourselves as we are so that we know what has to be prevented, what there is to prevent, what there is to eradicate, develop, and so on. Most of us, of course, have got our own private dream picture of ourselves. We close our eyes, we see ourselves as it were in a mirror, how beautiful, how noble. This is how we see ourselves most of the time - highly idealised, and not endowed perhaps with all the virtues, not quite perfect but a really warm, lovable, intelligent, sympathetic, intelligent, kind, well intentioned, honest, industrious, human being - that is what we usually see. So what we have to try to develop, what we have to demand almost, what we have almost to pray for in the words of the poet is that '*O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as others see us*'. And to see ourselves as others see us is of course not very easy - we have to undertake a sort of stock-taking, a mental, a personal stock-taking of our own good and bad, skilful and unskilful, thoughts and mental states, our own, in a word, 'vices' and 'virtues', and I've got these words in my notes in single inverted commas just to suggest there are no moral absolutes involved here, but at least we have to understand ourselves, our minds, our mental states, our mental qualities, very seriously and honestly first before we can even think of applying this fourfold Perfect Effort. So in other words we just won't know how to proceed and no real improvement, no real development, will be possible.

So let us turn finally to each of the four Perfect Efforts in turn. Study them, try to understand what they mean, what they involve.

First of all the effort to **prevent the arising of the unarisen bad or unskilful thoughts**. Now what do we mean by that? As we saw a little while ago in one of the previous talks, bad or unskilful means contaminated by craving, by selfish desire, by hatred and by delusion, mental confusion, bewilderment, lack of perspective and so on. So any mental state, any thought, is said to be unskilful or bad when it arises in association with one or more of these unskilful mental states or factors - craving, hatred, delusion, and so on. Now where do these unskilful thoughts come from? If we want to prevent them from entering our minds we just have to know where they come from. We're not concerned at the moment with tracing their *ultimate* source but we can certainly point to their immediate source. Their immediate source is the senses. And in Buddhism, as you probably know by this time, there are six

senses - there are the five physical senses and the sixth sense is the mind, the ordinary mind which we usually employ, with which we conduct our lives. For instance, as you are walking along the street you happen to see, you happen to notice, something attractive, something pleasant, something colourful, and at once you think - I'd like to have that, I'd like to enjoy that. And in this way through the organ of the eye greed or craving arises. Or sometimes it happens that we just happen to remember something - we are just sitting quietly by ourselves and a recollection of something we had or enjoyed or thought before floats, we know not whence, into our mind and before we know what has happened we've been ensnared by craving or hatred or fear and so on. So in order to prevent the unarisen unskilful thoughts entering the mind, taking possession of the mind, dominating the mind, what is necessary is what is known in Buddhism is watchfulness or awareness with regard to the senses, especially watchfulness of the mind. And this is again traditionally known as 'guarding the doors of the senses'. The senses are as it were pictured as doors of a house - so if you want to stop someone getting into the house you post a guard at the gate to examine the credentials of everyone who presents himself. So in the same way you remain watchful - you watch the doors of the senses, whether those of the physical body or the mind, and you just try to see what impressions, what thoughts, what ideas are as it were presenting themselves for admission, and in this way as it were the enemy is kept out.

So one prevents basically these unskilful thoughts entering the mind, whether through the senses or through the lower mind itself, by remaining watchful, by being aware of the senses themselves, how they are working, how they are operating, what objects are being presented to them, what they're perceiving, what they're receiving and so on. And one distinguishes in this way all the time. And in this way the unarisen bad or unskilful thoughts are prevented from arising. We all know from our own experience they usually take us, as it were, unawares - we don't even see them coming in, we don't even see them entering the door as it were - before we know where we are, there they are right in the midst of the mind, sitting down as it were very much at home right in the middle of the house - and we wonder how on earth did they get in? - well, they got in through the door, they got in through one or another of the six senses - so we have to watch these doors of the senses if we want to keep out these unskilful thoughts.

Secondly, the effort to **eradicate the arisen bad or unskilful thoughts**. And in this connection we can discuss the bad thoughts or unskilful thoughts in terms of what are known as the *Five Hindrances*. They're a very well-known set in Buddhist teaching. First of all there's the *craving for material things*. We all know how strong this is - the craving for food, craving for clothing, for shelter. Well, it's all right so long as we keep it within limits but we don't usually do that. We usually want many more material things than are really necessary - and very often in this respect craving gets really out of hand and it becomes not just a means of functioning and living in the world, it becomes a hindrance to any sort of higher mental spiritual life, even, we may say, cultural life. So this is the first of the hindrances - the hindrance of craving for material things.

And then secondly there's the hindrance of *hatred* - in all its forms, some of them gross, some of them subtle - aggressiveness, antagonism, dislike, even righteous indignation. Only yesterday when I was at Sakura a woman came into the shop and she tried to present us with a little tract on the Messiah. So we couldn't help entering into conversation and eventually discussion with her and conversation eventually turned upon the Bible and she asked us what Buddhists thought about Jesus. So we said we certainly respected and even admired him, but there were one or two things in the gospel which we couldn't quite understand and one of those was when Christ seemed to lose his temper in the temple with the money changers and drove them out. So she said, 'That's righteous indignation, it doesn't come under the heading of anger or anything like that.' But I said, 'Buddhists usually believe that a perfect man doesn't exhibit greed or anger or any of these things.' So she said, 'Well, Christ was God and with God it's different'! So this is the sort of attitude, and unfortunately, as I pointed out to her, this sort of thin end of the wedge, this righteous indignation which may or which may not have been exhibited by Christ himself, has opened the way for all sorts of very unfortunate developments and consequences in the West in the form of persecution, inquisition and so on, some of these very unpleasant historical phenomena which we're all familiar with from our study of history.

But Buddhism would say that under the heading of hatred (antagonism), is to be included any manifestation of any sort of aggressiveness or violence or anything of that sort, all these things are comprised under the hindrance of hatred - and one should not rationalise. One should try to be honest, as I said a little while ago, and really see what is in one's own mind.

Now the third hindrance is *restlessness and anxiety*. This is a hindrance which is perhaps very much in evidence in modern Western society. You wouldn't say that Western society nowadays was peaceful or that it was calm or that it was placid, you would say it was restless, agitated, anxious, even tormented, and most of the people that you meet are like this. They don't convey any impression of restfulness. You don't feel like sitting down beside them, as it were, and feeling all peaceful - you never feel like that, perhaps, with anybody that you meet, or hardly anybody - most people are in fact so much consumed by worry and anxiety and restlessness and haste. Sometimes it seems almost impossible just to sit quietly for a few minutes, even. Even if one tries to meditate there are noises

outside, people rushing past, lorries thundering nearby and all the rest of it. But this sort of thing, according to Buddhism, is a hindrance - restlessness, worry, anxiety, haste, of any kind. It doesn't mean one shouldn't sometimes do things quickly but this is quite a different thing from a *mental* state of restlessness, this turning as it were restlessly from one thing to another, because nothing really satisfies, but one doesn't really know where to look for something which will satisfy. So this also is a hindrance, this anxiety, restlessness and so on.

Then, rather differently, fourth hindrance, *sloth and torpor*. This is the usual translation. I'm not giving you the Sanskrit words here because they're all very difficult to pronounce and you'll never remember them, but sloth and torpor. You could also say inertia, stagnation, going all stiff and dry as it were. And sometimes people do get into this sort of state - nothing matters, why make any more effort, why bother, it's nothing to do with me, let things slide, let them go. This is also a common sort of attitude, and it's a sort of reaction to all the restlessness and anxiety, this sloth, this torpor, this inertia. This also is a fetter. Often of course people rationalise it, some people that you think are calm and quiet are merely stagnating, just as some that you think are busy active people are merely restless. So this is the fourth fetter, sloth and torpor.

And fifthly *doubt and indecision* - the inability, even the unwillingness, to make up one's mind, to think things out and then *commit* oneself to take a definite line of action, to adopt a definite concrete attitude, just to refuse to try to think, to try to clarify one's mind, and come to a definite conclusion and a definite decision.

So these are the five hindrances, and when we speak in terms of eradicating arisen unskillful thoughts and mental states we have in mind primarily the getting rid of these five hindrances which usually infest our minds.

In Buddhism the mind, the mind of man, the consciousness of man is very often compared with water. Water in its natural state is pure, it's translucent, it is brilliant, it is sparkling, but it very easily gets defiled, it very easily gets spoilt, it very easily gets contaminated. So the mind overcome by the hindrances is compared in Buddhist literature to water which has been defiled or contaminated in various ways. The mind, for instance, which is under the power of craving is compared with water in which various colours, various dyes, have been mixed so that they stain the water red and green and blue and yellow, The mind which is full of craving, full of desire, is just like that. There's a certain beauty, a certain attractiveness, but the purity of the water, the purity of the mind, is lost.

And then the mind which is overcome by hatred, what is that compared to? The mind under the influence of hatred is compared with water at boiling point, bubbling and hissing and giving off steam. When we get angry we sometimes say we let off steam, so it is just like that. When we're angry, when we're under the influence of anger, our minds are just like boiling water and we scorch and scald ourselves as well as other people.

And then the mind overcome by restlessness and anxiety is like water which is whipped up into waves by a strong, a violent wind. And the mind again under the influence of sloth and torpor and inertia is just like a pond, the waters of which are choked with weeds - you don't see this very much in this country, but in India they've got a plant, I think introduced originally from Australia, known as the water hyacinth. You give it just two or three weeks and it will absolutely choke any expanse of water, you can't even move in that water, it's just a solid mat of vegetation. So the mind under the influence of sloth and torpor is just like that.

And then the mind which is under the influence of doubt and indecision, inability to commit itself, is just like water which is full of mud, just thick, muddy, very likely evil-smelling, water.

So the question arises, how to clear this water of the mind, how to purify it, how to eradicate these hindrances, how to get rid of the craving for material things, of hatred, of restlessness and anxiety, of sloth and torpor, of doubt and indecision? And traditionally in Buddhism four methods are recommended, four methods of getting rid of these five hindrances, or in a word of eradicating the arisen unskillful thoughts. And these four methods are very important. They're usually tried, as it were, in the order in which I shall explain them now.

The first method is by *considering the consequences of that unskillful mental state*. By considering the consequences. We very often entertain unskillful thoughts without considering the consequences. But this method says, as it were, just consider the consequences. Suppose you allow yourself to get angry, what may happen? You may speak angrily, you may speak harshly, that may lead to unpleasantness, to misunderstandings. If you get very angry you may even strike someone, you may even kill someone - this is the logical result of anger if you don't check it, if you don't control it. The end product, the end result, is the taking of life, murder. So reflect on the consequences of this unskillful state. This is the first method, you can apply it to any of these hindrances. You can apply it also, say, to sloth and torpor - if you go on like this, stagnating, what will be the result? You won't get anywhere, you won't make any progress, you'll lose whatever you've gained already whether materially or spiritually - so consider the consequences. This is the first method.

The second method consists in *cultivating the opposite*. Each unwholesome mental state has a positive wholesome counterpart. If you find on examination that your mind is overpowered by the unskilful thought of hatred and anger, if you dislike people, if you don't get on well with them, don't think well of them, then cultivate the opposite of hatred, what is that? metta, or love in the spiritual sense - practise the *metta-bhavana*, the development of loving kindness, a form of meditation - because the two things can't exist in the mind simultaneously. If hate is there love cannot be there, if love is introduced hatred has to depart. So this is eradicating the defilements by cultivating their opposites.

Thirdly, *letting them just pass*. As it were taking no notice of them, thinking the mind is like the sky, all these unskilful thoughts just like clouds, they come and they go. Don't get too upset, don't get too much worked up over them, don't beat your breast and bewail them too much, just let them go, let them pass, let them float on as it were. Cultivate as it were a sort of 'witness-like' attitude towards them, just see them - and if you like reflect, they're nothing to do with me, they come into my mind from outside, they will go, nothing to do with me, these are not my thoughts, let them go. Cultivate this sort of attitude. If one keeps it up long enough usually - sure enough - they will go, they'll just pass away, fade away.

But if these methods don't succeed there's a fourth method - *forcible suppression*. This sort of thing isn't very popular with the psychologists, of course, but forcible suppression. The Buddha even says if you can't by any of these previous methods get rid of these unskilful mental states, well, do it by force, he says grit your teeth, and with an effort of will suppress it. Now you notice we say suppress and not repress. Repression is an unconscious process, but here you're acting quite consciously, you're quite aware, you know what you're doing and why. So all the terrible consequences which the psychologists tell us come about as a result of repression won't happen in this case, not if you've tried these other methods first and then resort to suppression only in the last resort as it were.

So these are the four standard methods - the four standard methods of eradicating the hindrances, the arisen unskilful states, that is to say by considering their possible, their even likely, their logical consequences; by cultivating the opposite; by just letting them go, cultivating a witness-like attitude; and lastly by forcible suppression.

But what do you do if all these four fail? Sometimes it may happen that, yes, you grit your teeth, you try to suppress it but it won't be suppressed, it's there or it comes up again a moment afterwards just like grass that you've stepped on, as soon as the foot is removed up it springs - what should you do then? Can one do anything? Is there anything left to do? If you're on the merely psychological plane, if you confine yourselves to a psychological context, there is nothing that you can do, nothing at all. But if you are within a religious or spiritual, specifically in this case Buddhist, context there's only the one thing you can do - and we are told by the great sages, by the great masters, by the great teachers, by the Buddha himself - if all these things fail, as very often they do or at least sometimes they do, you cannot get rid of these hindrances, if they persist when you try all these methods - you strive and you struggle and you sweat in vain - there's only one thing left to do and that is just to *take refuge in the Buddha* together with your failure and just let it rest there.

Now thirdly the effort to **develop unarisen good thoughts**. The effort to develop unarisen good thoughts. This is not just thinking good thoughts in the ordinary sense - it means the development of a higher state of consciousness and being the transformation as it were of the level and the quality of one's own existence - and this is possible with the help of meditation. Not just meditation, but meditation within the total context of the spiritual life. In Buddhism, in Buddhist literature, in Buddhist texts, meditation is technically called *bhavana*. *Bhavana* means literally 'making to become' or 'development'. The real aim of meditation is not just to concentrate the mind, that's just preliminary, the real aim of meditation is to transform consciousness, to make you a higher type of being than you were before practising the meditation. And progress in meditation, progress in this attainment of higher states of being, is marked, is measured by the attainment of what we call the *dhyanas*. The *dhyanas* are states of higher consciousness and being. There are four of these, four *dhyanas*, four states of higher consciousness, and of course they are very difficult to describe. In Buddhist literature, especially in the Abhidharma we have analyses of them, and accounts of what mental factors are involved and so on and so forth, but that doesn't really help very much to get the *feel* of them or to know what is really involved. It may be that a sort of poetical description or, if you like, even evocation of these states of higher consciousness may help us more. And fortunately for us, fortunately for our weakness in this respect, the Buddha himself does give four very beautiful similes for these four states of higher consciousness.

Incidentally, I must remark that throughout Buddhist literature - especially the early literature - we do find very, very beautiful and often remarkable similes indeed, many of which no doubt go back directly to the Buddha himself, and I personally feel that this aspect of the Buddha's teaching or His teaching methods is insufficiently stressed. We mustn't think that the Buddha was always dry and analytical. The Buddha also did present the

teaching very often in what we can only describe as purely poetical, imaginative terms which sometimes conveyed the spirit more than the rather analytical descriptions that some of his followers later on tended to concentrate upon.

Let's just look briefly at these illustrations, these similes for these four states of higher consciousness which we are to develop.

The first one the Buddha said is like this: he said suppose you take some soap powder - you see the Buddha can be quite homely at times - some soap powder. You might of course be surprised to hear that 2,500 years ago in ancient India they had soap powder of all things, but they did. And believe it or not it grew on a tree. It still grows on a tree, I've seen it in India and I've used it myself. It doesn't grow in powder form and it doesn't come in cartons, but it's a fruit, a sort of fruit, and they dry it and then they powder it, on a scraper, and it makes a very fine powder, and they mix this with water and you can get a very, very good bath with this. So the Buddha said suppose someone takes a plateful of soap powder and mixes it gradually with water and he kneads the water into the soap powder until the soap powder is just a ball, absolutely saturated with water. And the Buddha said supposing it's so fully saturated that not one particle of soap powder is left dry, but at the same time there's not one drop of water in excess of what is required to saturate that ball of soap powder. He said this is what the first state of higher consciousness is like. He said the whole psychophysical being is as it were saturated with the higher consciousness. There's nothing that overflows. There's no particle of you within which is unsaturated, unpermeated, just like the soap powder with the water. Now if any of you have had any sort of experience or foretaste of this state then you will know very well what is meant to be conveyed. It's as though your ordinary being is suffused and penetrated in some other higher element. You are still there as it were, but you're penetrated throughout completely by something of a higher nature. So this is the first state or stage of higher consciousness.

Then what is the second one like? This is rather more poetical. The Buddha says imagine a beautiful tank of water. In India a tank means an excavated tank, an artificial lake as it were. He says supposing there was a beautiful tank, an enormous tank of water full to the brim. And he says suppose it is fed by an underground, a subterranean spring, so that the water is all the time bubbling up within the tank. He said the second state of higher consciousness is like that. The mind is all pure, all translucent, and it's as though from the very depths something pure, something very active, something dynamic, something inspired is sort of bubbling up all the time as though you've tapped some inexhaustible source of inspiration and nourishment. This is the second of these higher states, states of higher consciousness.

Then the Buddha as it were waxes even more poetical and he says, still thinking of a lake, think of lotus flowers, think of lotus flowers like for instance those we saw in our slideshow not so very long ago, growing in the water, soaked by the water, permeated by the water and at the same time standing clear of the water. He said the third state of higher consciousness is like this. You're immersed in it, at the same time as it were you are out of it, you as it were almost transcend it. You're living in the midst of it, it's your natural element just as the water is the natural element of the lotus. You're drawing your strength and your nourishment from that source, and you're living from that source. This is the third state.

And the fourth he said is like a man on a hot day, when he's very tired and very sweaty, takes a bath. Now if you've lived in a tropic or at least a very hot country you'll know what this means. You take a cold bath on a very hot day. You wash off all the dust and the perspiration and you come out of the bath, and if you're in India of course you dress yourself in a white garment which is made out of a white sheet, a clean white sheet. So the Buddha says imagine as it were a man coming out of his bath, a nice cold bath on a hot day and wrapping himself in a beautiful clean white immaculate sheet and just sitting there. He said the fourth state of higher consciousness is like that. The higher state or the higher level of consciousness is as it were all round you protecting you and insulating you from the touch of the outside world so that nothing can affect you. You're as it were hermetically sealed within that. Not that you're out of contact or out of communication but nothing from outside can touch or affect you. So this is what the fourth state of the higher consciousness is like.

Now we've gone quite far, we've gone sufficiently high but there are four even higher states or stages of higher consciousness which are also sometimes mentioned, above and beyond the four that we've just described. These are described a bit more abstractly, they're even more rarefied. There's the stage or state of the realisation of Infinite Space. Perhaps modern astronomy has made it more easy to practise this but the realisation as it were of infinity, unobstructedness, realisation that one is not limited, one is not confined to the body, even to the mind, but that one as it were stretches out to infinity. If you think even in terms of physical space millions and billions and billions of billions of miles of light years in all directions, then conceptions of this sort or reflections of this sort will have the effect of widening the mind and transporting it beyond its natural barriers and boundaries. So in this state of higher consciousness one has the awareness and the experience of absolute infinity, no limitation, no barrier, no obstacle.

But beyond even that, in this second of the second four states or stages, the state or stage of infinite consciousness, when one realises the mind itself is infinite. We usually think this is my mind and this is your mind and the mind is tied to the body and anchored to the body, identified with the body, but in this state, in this stage you realise, no, consciousness, mind, is infinite. There's no limit to it and you can, if you wish if you like, unite yourself with or realise this state of higher infinite consciousness, extending and expanding in all directions.

And then thirdly, the third state or stage, of no-thingness, not just nothingness, not a state of blankness but nothingness, no thing in particular. This is a very strange state which is very difficult for us to understand, it means nothing's special as it were. Things are all there but you can't really distinguish one thing from another. They're there but there's an underlying unity if you like, but this is a very crude way of putting it. Things lose their sharp edges, they no longer mutually exclude one another. So no-thingness, of course no space, no time.

And lastly, quite beyond expression in a way, the stage or the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. No perception because there's no subject. No non-perception because the object also is wiped out, the whole subject-object duality here has been transcended, so really there is nothing which one can profitably say.

So these are the second set of four states or stages of higher consciousness. And it's in this way through meditation, through developing first the four states of higher consciousness which were illustrated by the similes, and then by developing the second set of higher states or stages of consciousness, it's in this way that the so-called good thoughts, the skilful thoughts, are developed within ourselves, within our own minds.

Now there's a little technical point. Some of you, I'm sure, those who are more acquainted with Buddhism than the majority, some of you, I'm sure, have been a little surprised that I've dealt with meditation and these states of higher consciousness under the heading of Perfect Effort. You might be thinking that usually meditation comes last, usually meditation comes under the eighth step or eighth stage of the Noble Eightfold Path which is Perfect Samadhi. And you might be thinking that if meditation is dealt with now in the sixth stage then what shall we have left to deal with when we come to Perfect Samadhi? It's as though we've anticipated our subject. Well, we'll deal with this difficulty when it arises the week after next. I'm not going to let you into the secret just yet.

But meanwhile there's just one observation which may be made and that is that meditation is of two kinds. There are many ways of classifying but this is just one of them. Meditation is of two kinds. First of all that which depends upon conscious effort; and that, on the other hand, which arises spontaneously, naturally, as the result, the natural result of our higher spiritual life. And it's the first of these, meditation with effort, which is meditation so far as we are concerned and for all practical purposes. And it is because meditation does involve and demand so much effort that it's in a sense the major manifestation of effort within the context of the spiritual life and the Eightfold Path that it's included here as part of Perfect Effort.

Now we haven't quite finished yet. Fourthly, we've got **maintaining arisen good thoughts**. We've prevented, we've eradicated, we've developed; now we have to maintain the arisen good thoughts - in other words have to maintain the states of higher consciousness and being which we have developed. And this aspect, this effort, draws our attention to the fact of how easy it is to slip back. We just stop our practice, give up for a day or two, then we're right back where we started from maybe months before, so regularity is necessary. Quite a few people again give up after attaining a certain level, don't make a further effort, with the result they slip back even from that level. But eventually if we make effort, continue to make effort, we reach a state or stage of non-regression from which we can't fall, but that's a very long way ahead for most people and until then we have to be always on our guard to maintain what we've developed, not to slip back, not to fall. And this is the fourfold Perfect Effort - preventing, eradicating, developing, maintaining.

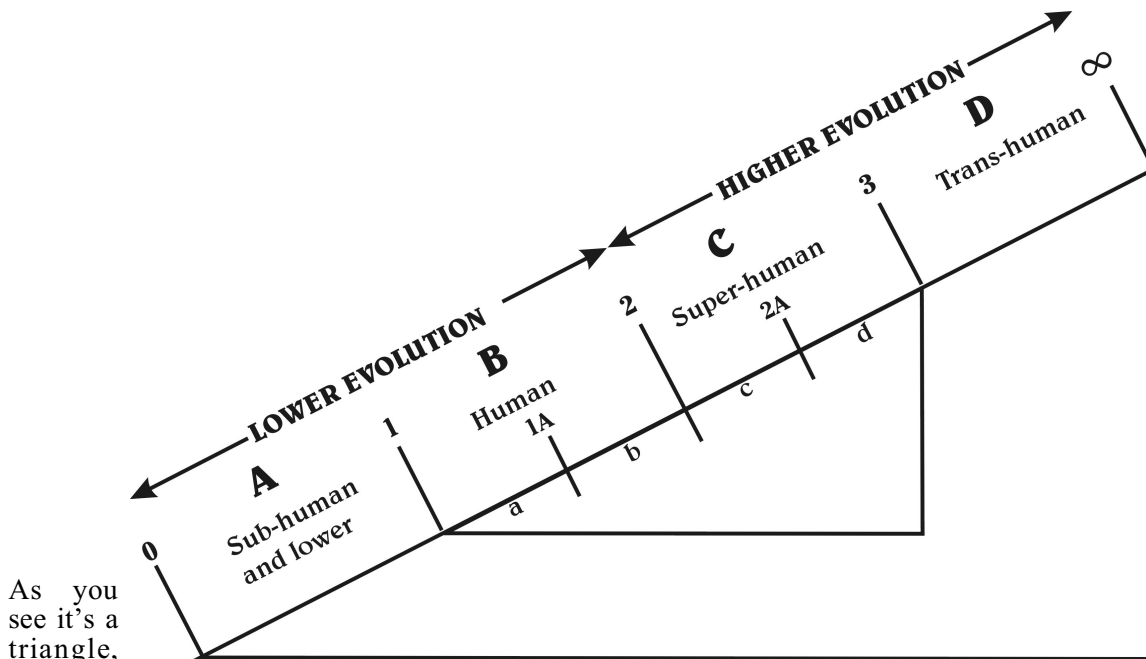
Now from Perfect Effort itself we must turn to the context or the background of Perfect Effort. Last week we saw that the ramifications of Perfect Livelihood extended to the entire community, the whole society. In the same way we may say the ramifications of Perfect Effort, its implications, extend to the whole evolutionary process. Perfect Effort makes it clear - in fact we may say that the spiritual life is a special phase of the evolutionary process itself; that it constitutes in fact what I've elsewhere called the Higher Evolution. Now, what do we mean by this? A couple of years ago I gave, here in London, a talk on 'Evolution - Lower and Higher', and some of those who are present today may have heard that lecture. I'm afraid it was rather a long lecture. I'm afraid today's lecture, talk rather, is rather a long one, and I haven't time this evening to repeat or even to summarise what I said on that occasion. But for those who are interested the whole lecture is on tape and available. Just a few points, however, from that previous lecture. The concept of evolution, we may say, is in many ways the dominant modern concept. It emerged first of all in the sphere of biology but it was rapidly extended to all other departments of knowledge so that nowadays you talk about the evolution of religion, evolution of spiritual life, evolution of consciousness and so on. Huxley, Julian Huxley that is to say, says in one of his books,

The different branches of science combine to demonstrate that the universe in its entirety must be regarded as one gigantic process, a process of becoming, of attaining new levels of existence and organisation which can profitably be called a genesis or an evolution.

So man is a part of the universe, of nature. So man too is in process of becoming. Man too is attaining all the time new levels - not just new forms but new levels of existence and organisation - man too. He wasn't just created like that as people used to think in the past in the West, man was evolved, man is evolving still. Now any evolving phenomenon can be studied in two ways - can be studied in terms of the past, can be studied in terms of the future, can be studied in terms of its origins and in terms of its destination, of its goal. Or to use the technical language it can be studied genetically and it can be studied teleologically. So suppose we take the phenomenon 'man'. Suppose, that is to say, we take ourselves. Suppose we take man at the best that we usually know him - as a self-conscious, as an aware human being, someone who is, let us say, intelligent, sensitive, responsible - taking such a being we can look at him in two ways, or we can try to understand him in two ways: first in terms of what he has developed out of and secondly in terms of what he will or can at least develop into.

Now the first - the story of what he has developed out of, constitutes the lower evolution. And the second, what he will or can develop into, constitutes the higher evolution. The lower evolution is the subject matter of science, especially the sciences of biology and anthropology; the higher evolution is covered by the religions, especially, we would say, by Buddhism.

Now as this may all become a little bit complicated I think we'd better start thinking as it were diagrammatically. In the course of our last series of lectures at the Kingsway Hall we had provided for some very excellent charts but this time there is no time to produce a chart but I have instead made a rough - I'm afraid, a very rough - sketch on the blackboard which I'm now going to ask you to look at.



As you see it's a triangle, a right

angled triangle with a hypotenuse. And you'll see along the hypotenuse various symbols, figures and letters. And I'm going to ask you now to look at the point right in the middle of the hypotenuse which is marked 2, that point right in the middle of the hypotenuse. This point marked 2, represents our aware human being, half way up the hypotenuse. Now - making good progress - now right at the bottom, at the lower left-hand angle of this triangle you'll see a zero. So from zero up to 2 represents the whole process of the lower evolution. Then from 2 up to the top of this triangle, culminating in the symbol for infinity, this represents the Higher Evolution. So zero to 2 - lower evolution, 2 to infinity - Higher Evolution. Now each of these two sections, zero to 2 and 2 to infinity, can be divided in turn into two. Now point one, intermediate between zero and 2, this is the point at which consciousness emerges, real human consciousness, the point at which the animal becomes human - happened, may I remind you, not all that long ago. And point three, intermediate between 2 and infinity, this represents the point at which transcendental awareness begins to emerge, this is the point, we may say, of Stream Entry, of irreversibility, or in a rudimentary form even the point of Perfect Vision. So we've got three points, one, two and three, and these three points divide the hypotenuse of our triangle into four sections. So including the points of the two angles we've got five points in all.

So let's go up the hypotenuse pointing first of all to zero, that's the starting point of the whole evolutionary process - for physics this is the sub-atomic unit, for biology it's the amoeba, but that's the starting point. Then one, higher up, represents the point at which human consciousness emerges. 2 represents the point at which self-consciousness or awareness emerges. Most of us incidentally are still a little below this point. Some may be a little above it but most are just below. Three represents the point at which transcendental awareness emerges, and of course by transcendental awareness we mean awareness of Reality, it's the point of conversion in the true sense. And infinity right at the top represents *nirvana*, Enlightenment, Buddhahood, and so on.

So now for the four sections into which the hypotenuse is divided by the middle three points - these are marked by letters, not by numbers. So the section A we describe as the infra-human level or stage of evolution, the infra-human that is to say the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, animal excluding man. Stage B, higher up, is the human both primitive and civilised. Some may question why the civilised should be higher than the primitive, but we won't go into that now. And stage C represents what we may call the ultra-human, this is where the arts and the sciences and culture and the lower religions also are found. And then D, the topmost stage, represents the supra-human or the trans-human state or stage of evolution. So in this way we see, up this entire hypotenuse, the whole process of evolution is covered, from the amoeba through man, unenlightened man to Buddha, that is to say, to enlightened man. So science and religion, the lower and the higher evolution, are embraced in one single vast sweep. And this is I'm sure to anyone with a little imagination, one who can, as it were, close his eyes and see it all growing and developing and efflorescing from the very first beginning up all those innumerable steps and stages, the whole painful slow ascent of life culminating at least for the present in man, and I repeat at least for the present, in man, this can be or this surely is a most inspiring, even a most invigorating prospect.

But it's time we returned to Perfect Effort; we are after all concerned with that, this is only the background of Perfect Effort. But how is it the background of Perfect Effort? Perfect Effort is the sixth step of the Noble Eightfold Path. And we may say that the Noble Eightfold Path strictly speaking corresponds to or formulates the fourth stage or fourth section of our evolutionary process, D - that's the Eightfold Path. Or we may say that in a very general sense the Eightfold Path corresponds to the whole process of the Higher Evolution beginning from 2 up to zero, that is to say comprising sections C and D. Now if we regard the Eightfold Path very strictly, even radically then it corresponds only to D. But if we are a little bit lax and take into account even half-hearted efforts to follow the Eightfold Path, as most of our efforts are, the Eightfold Path covers C and D and not only D.

Now as our chart, as our drawing illustrates, the lower and the Higher Evolution are continuous but in a sense again they're not continuous, there are in fact important differences between the two, between the lower and the Higher Evolution. And it's one of these differences between the two, between Higher Evolution and lower, or between lower and Higher, which is illustrated by Perfect Effort. And with this we must close. Lower Evolution is collective. It's the species which evolves as a whole rather than the individual. In a sense at this level there is no individual. But the Higher Evolution is an individual affair. One individual may outstrip another, can evolve ahead as it were of the whole of the remainder of the human race. And this possibility presupposes self consciousness, presupposes awareness, and it's for this reason that we speak of the 'conscious evolution of man'. And it also presupposes effort, individual effort. And this is why Perfect Effort figures so prominently in the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path corresponding either to stage D or to C and D.

Now we've all evolved to our present level, whatever that may be, the present human level collectively, we've come up together for the most part. But further progress requires each person's personal and individual effort, in other words requires Perfect Effort, effort to prevent, effort to eradicate, effort to cultivate, effort to maintain. And if we keep that up to the very end then we shall reach the end of the path *nirvana*, Buddhahood, Reality.

Checked December 2000