

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Lecture 53: Levels of Awareness: Right Mindfulness

Venerable Sir and Friends,

Buddhism generally speaking is known as a religion. And as a religion we may say it exists on two quite different, quite distinct, but nevertheless quite intimately connected and related levels. That is to say it exists on a popular level, a level of popular practice and observance and faith and piety, and it exists also on what we may describe, within single inverted commas, as a 'philosophical' level, a level of higher thought, of metaphysics, even of transcendental intuition and so on. Now taking, or rather turning to, popular Buddhism, or Buddhism as it exists on the popular level, the level of popular practice, we find that one of the most popular of these popular practices is that of going on pilgrimage. I remember when I was in India years ago, I remember every autumn, every winter, bands of people started arriving in India, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh from all the Buddhist countries of Asia, even from faraway England and America, to visit some of the places associated with the life and teaching of the Buddha, places like Bodh-gaya where He gained Enlightenment, Sarnath where He taught His first discourse and so on. And many of these people had come a very long way indeed, not only hundreds but even thousands of miles to visit these places to pay their respects in these ancient sacred shrines to the memory of the Buddha, the Enlightened One. And it was noticeable, it was observable that when they left their own countries they left sometimes in great companies, not only of scores but even of hundreds of people, but it was also noticeable that not all of them arrived at their destination. Some fell as it were by the wayside, some just died en route, others unfortunately, I sometimes noticed, on my way to the Holy places got detained rather a long time in Calcutta and sometimes didn't get on to the Holy places at all. And in fact I remember in the case of some of my Tibetan friends, when they used to say that they were going off on pilgrimage for three months, you knew that that meant two days in Bodh-gaya, and the rest of the time among the flesh pots of Calcutta! So this the sort of thing that happens, a few at least will fall by the wayside in one way or another.

Now in the course of the last few weeks, I think it's six or seven weeks now, we too have been on what we may describe as a sort of pilgrimage. We've been following, or trying to follow in imagination, at least, a path much more long, much more difficult than any trod by any earthly pilgrim in the purely geographical sense - the pilgrimage, the journey upon the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. And in this journey of ours, in this pilgrimage of ours, many set out at the beginning and most of those, I'm glad to say, are still with us, even after some six, now seven, rather strenuous weeks. A few of course have joined us en route, they weren't with us for the earlier stages of the pilgrimage but they joined us en route and are still perhaps with us. And everybody seems to be making quite good, quite satisfactory progress in this pilgrimage of ours.

But today we come almost to, if not the end of our journey, at least to the beginning of the end. Because today we're going to consider the question of levels of awareness. In other words today we shall be concerned with what is usually termed 'Right Mindfulness' which is the seventh stage or seventh aspect of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. But before we go on to this stage, before we try to understand some of the implications of Right Mindfulness, of awareness, let us just first of all allow ourselves a very brief, a very quick backward glance, let us look back along the path that we've traversed so far and try to see, try to ascertain just how far we have come.

We saw in the first place that this great Path, the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, consists of two great stages, two principal stages. The first is known as the Path of Vision. The second is known as the Path of Transformation. The first, the Path of Vision, consists of what we've described as the initial spiritual insight and experience. Insight into, experience of, the true nature of existence or reality itself. And this Path of Vision comprises the first stage, the first of the eight stages of the Path, that is to say what is termed Perfect Vision, *samyag-drsti*.

Now the second great stage, the stage or Path of Transformation, we saw consists in the whole process of transformation by this insight, by this vision, of the different aspects and the different levels of our own being and our own consciousness. And this stage, the stage of transformation, comprises, we saw in the first place, Perfect Emotion, then Perfect Speech, Perfect Action, Perfect Livelihood and Perfect Effort. And the first three of these we saw, that is to say Perfect Emotion, Perfect Speech and Perfect Action, these three pertain more to the transformation of our individual life, our individual existence, whereas the fourth of these - that is to say the fifth stage of the path - Perfect Livelihood pertains more to the transformation of all aspects of our *collective* existence whether social or political or economic.

Perfect Effort, we saw, represents the transformation of the individual will or volition. And as we saw last week this Perfect Effort is fourfold or of four kinds, consisting in an effort to prevent, an effort to eradicate what are known as unskilful mental states, and in an effort to develop and to maintain what are known as skilful mental states. Now this stage of the path, this aspect of the path, Perfect Effort, also pertains, we saw, more to the transformation of the individual life, the individual will, the individual volition, but it does this against, as we also saw, a very wide background indeed, this background being nothing less than the whole evolutionary process, the whole story, the whole history of the evolution of life and consciousness on this planet. In fact Perfect Effort, we

saw, represents what we may describe as the evolutionary aspect of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. It draws attention to the fact that the Eightfold Path, in fact the whole of the higher spiritual life, is a sort of continuation on an even higher level of the evolutionary process itself. So that one can in fact speak of two great stages or phases of evolution, that is to say what we've termed *Lower Evolution* and what we've termed *Higher Evolution*. Lower evolution, we saw, is the whole process of development of life from the amoeba up to the self-aware human being. Whereas the second, the higher evolution, is the whole process of development of the self-aware human being right up to enlightened humanity, the state or position of an enlightened human being, that is to say a Buddha, a fully emancipated wise and compassionate one.

So this stage, this phase of the higher evolution is represented by the higher religions in general and especially, we would say, by Buddhism, the Buddha's teaching, and in particular, in its higher reaches at least, by this same Noble Eightfold Path. Now we saw towards the end of last week's talk that the lower evolution and the higher evolution are, as it were, continuous, the one leads out of, develops from, the other. But at the same time we saw there are important differences between them, between lower evolution and higher evolution. Lower evolution is collective - the species advances as a whole, as a group - whereas the higher evolution is individual - it's one person at a time - so that one person may go a little ahead, another may remain a little behind. Also we saw the lower evolution is largely unconscious. The lower the level of evolution the more unconscious it is. And even in its higher levels, its higher reaches, it is at least not actually self-conscious. But the *higher* evolution on the other hand, on the contrary, the higher evolution is self-conscious, it is aware, it is something which is, as it were, personally directed, personally willed into existence, personally achieved, achieved in awareness and clear consciousness. And this is the point where - this is the point at which - we arrived last week. And we'll lead on today from there.

Today, as I've already said, we come to the whole question of 'levels of awareness'. In other words we come as we've already heard to Right Mindfulness, which is the penultimate, the last but one stage, of the Path.

Now the connection of this stage, the connection of this Right Mindfulness with the previous stage, the stage of Perfect Effort, of the conscious evolution of man, should not be difficult to see. We've already said that the higher evolution is distinguished from the lower by the fact that it is an *aware* process. It takes place in and through *awareness*. And it follows therefore that progress in the higher evolution is at the same time a progress in awareness. And progress of course, as we know, is measured by the achievement of successively higher levels. And this therefore in turn introduces the whole idea of levels of awareness. These levels of awareness it is which are the subject matter of the seventh stage of the path, that is to say Right Mindfulness. And it's into these that we have to go, it's these which we have to investigate if we want to know what Right Mindfulness or Perfect Awareness really connotes, really conveys.

Now first of all what is Right Mindfulness literally? What do the words themselves actually mean, what are the words in the original language or languages? In Sanskrit one says *samyak-smṛti*, which is equivalent to the Pali *samma-sati*. *Smṛti* or *sati* is usually translated as mindfulness, sometimes it's translated as awareness. But the literal meaning of both words, the literal meaning of *smṛti* as also of *sati* is simply memory or recollection. And the word has, as one can well imagine, several shades of meaning and these are not always very easy to disentangle. So I propose this evening to approach the whole question of the meaning, the connotation of this word mindfulness or *smṛti* or *sati* rather indirectly. And I'm going to do this by taking an example not of mindfulness, not to begin with, but of *unmindfulness* from daily life. Then I propose to analyse this example, try to see what unmindfulness is - because we're more familiar with unmindfulness than with mindfulness - and then from unmindfulness try to arrive at some conception, in turn, of mindfulness.

Now let's start our example from daily life with something quite simple, something that we're all quite likely to be doing almost any day. Suppose we're writing a letter, just writing a letter to someone. It so happens, let us suppose, that we're writing about some rather urgent matter, the letter has to go off very quickly and we want to catch the next post, and it's imperative that we should do so, so we're very conscious of this and we're trying to get our letter done as quickly as possible to catch the post. So while we're engaged in this way what happens? As of course so often happens in modern life - I used not to have this sort of experience in Kalimpong in India but I've had it here, I'm sure most of you have it every day, if not every hour - the telephone rings, right in the midst of it all. So it's some friend of yours rung up about something or other, maybe important, maybe not important, maybe they were feeling lonely, they wanted a little chat so they rang you up and before you knew where you were you were engaged in quite a lengthy conversation - expense apparently was no object - and you found it quite interesting to go on chatting in this way, so maybe the conversation lasted let's say for half an hour - perhaps that's a modest sort of estimate, but eventually, the conversation completed, you put the phone down. Now you've talked about so many things with your friend on the phone you've forgotten all about your letter, this just doesn't enter your head at all. So you suddenly realise, you suddenly think you feel rather thirsty because you've been talking all that time, so you go or you wander into the kitchen and you put on the kettle, let us say, for a cup of tea. So you're just waiting there, waiting for the kettle to boil and while you're standing there waiting for the kettle to boil you hear a sound, a rather pleasant sound coming from next door, through the wall, you just listen, a rather pleasant sort of tune and you realise it's coming from the radio, so you think, 'I might as well listen to that', so you nip into the next room, you switch on the radio, you start listening to this tune and it's quite pleasant, so you listen to that

tune, another one comes on, maybe another record or something like that, in this way a little more time passes and of course you've forgotten all about your boiling kettle, once again you've just forgotten. So while you're in the midst of this, I was going to say daze or trance-like state listening to these tunes, there's a knock on the door, someone has called to see you, so you're very glad to see them, you welcome them in, they come in, they sit down and have a chat. In course of time you offer them a cup of tea, they say, 'Yes thank you very much.' You go into the kitchen, you find it's full of steam, you think, 'Ah well, yes, I forgot I've already put the kettle on.' Then you think, 'Oh I forgot about my letter too - it's too late, I've lost the post.'

So this is what happens, this is an example of unmindfulness in daily life. I've said or I am saying unmindfulness *in* daily life but for the most part daily life *consists* of this sort of unmindfulness, we can all recognise ourselves, I hope, or perhaps I shouldn't hope, in this portrait, that this is how we live our lives, in this chaotic, unmindful fashion. We go through life just like this, most of the time at least.

Now let's analyse this situation a little. Let's try to understand in what the unmindfulness consists, and then we may be able to understand mindfulness just a little better. First of all of course there is this plain and simple fact of *forgetfulness*. Forgetfulness is a very important element in unmindfulness. First of all we forget about the letter which we were writing when we're talking on the phone, and we forget about the kettle which was boiling for tea when we're listening to the radio. Now why do we forget so easily in this fashion? Why is it that we just lose sight of something we ought to be bearing in mind? And the reason is that we're so easily *distracted*. Our mind is very easily turned away or turned aside. Now I often give another example of this sort of thing; it often happens that I'm speaking - giving a lecture or giving a talk of one kind or another and everybody's paying close attention, a sort of pin-drop silence perhaps, but the door opens and someone comes in, and what happens? Half the heads swivel round just as though the people had been shot, they're as easily distracted as that. Sometimes it's a bluebottle buzzing on the window-pane. Sometimes you just happen to drop a sheet of your notes and all the eyes go down - they're very interested in your notes even though they can't read them. So all these things show, all these things indicate, how easily we are distracted and this is why we tend to forget in these affairs of everyday life. Now why is it that we're so easily distracted? How does *this* come about? We're easily distracted because our concentration is weak. If for instance you were really listening to what I said, if you were really concentrating upon it, an elephant can come in at that door and you wouldn't take any notice at all. But if one is not concentrated in this way then distraction very, very easily occurs. So we are distracted, we're liable to distraction just because concentration is so weak. We don't really concentrate wholeheartedly on what we are doing, we attend to what we are doing or what we are saying or what we are thinking about or what we are listening to usually in a very half-hearted way.

Now why is our concentration weak? We can ask this question also. And we can reply that our concentration is weak because there's no continuity of purpose. We've no, as it were, over-riding purpose, no over-mastering purpose, no purpose which remains unchanged in the midst of all the different things that we do. We just switch from one thing to another, from one purpose to another, from one wish to another, all the time. There's a very classical sort of description of a person in this kind of state, I remember, in one of Dryden's satires - some of you may remember this. And because there's no continuity of purpose, because we're not bent on one main thing all the time, there is therefore no real individuality. We are as it were a succession of different people, all of them rather abortive, not to say embryonic. There's no regular growth, there's no real development, there's no true evolution. So some of the main characteristics, at least, of unmindfulness should now be clear. Unmindfulness is a state of forgetfulness, it's a state of distraction, a state of poor concentration, of an absence of continuity of purpose - in other words a state of drift, and it's a state of no real individuality.

Mindfulness of course has just the opposite characteristics. Mindfulness is a state of recollection, it's a state of *undistractedness*, it's a state of concentration, of continuity and steadfastness of purpose, and of continually developing individuality. And all these things, the recollection, the undistractedness, the concentration, the continuity of purpose, the developing individuality, all these things are implied and conveyed and connoted by this term awareness and especially by, of course, Perfect Awareness. It's not of course that Perfect Awareness is fully or perfectly defined by these characteristics, by these attributes, but certainly they are enough to begin with, enough for us to be getting on with for the time being - they will suffice, they will serve to give us at least a general idea of what mindfulness is, of what awareness is, of what *Perfect Awareness* is.

Now let us turn to our main theme which is of course the *levels* of awareness. Traditionally these levels are arranged or ordered in various ways. But today I propose to discuss the levels of awareness under four principal headings. First of all - **awareness of things**. Secondly **awareness of self**. Thirdly **awareness of others**, awareness of people. And fourthly **awareness of Reality** or awareness of truth or awareness of the Ultimate. And by considering the levels of awareness under these four main headings we shall be able to obtain, I hope, a fairly comprehensive idea of the true nature of Perfect Awareness.

Now first of all **awareness of things**. When we say 'things', what do we mean? We mean material things. We mean this cloth and this box and this table, and so on, material things. We mean our whole material environment, full of so many objects. We mean in short the whole realm of nature. Most of the time of course we're just vaguely conscious of the things around us, we've a sort of peripheral consciousness of the things around us, we're not really

aware of the things around us, not really aware of our environment, not really aware of nature, not really aware of the cosmos. And we're not really aware because we never in fact, or very seldom, really stop and look. Perhaps it hasn't occurred to you how very rarely we ever stop and look at something. One might even ask - well, take today, how many minutes, not to speak of hours, has one spent just looking at something, just looking at it? Well, probably we haven't spent even a matter of seconds. And if we're asked why not we shall say because we have no time. This is a characteristic of modern life, modern society, modern civilisation even. We've got no time to stop and look. This is perhaps one of the greatest indictments of modern civilisation which could possibly be made. We've no time to stop and look at anything. We pass a tree, maybe, on our way to work in the morning, we've no time to stop and look at it. Even less romantic things like walls and houses and fences. We've no time to stop and look at anything.

So it makes one wonder what is this life, what is this modern civilisation worth if one hasn't time to stop and look at things? In the words of the poet:

What is this life if full of care?

and full of care means full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare.

Of course, the poet puts in 'stare' for the sake of the rhyme, he doesn't mean staring, he means he means looking, just seeing. So we've no time to look, we've no time to see, we've no time, in other words, to be aware of things. This is something which we have to realise, or at least of which we have to remind ourselves. And there's *another* difficulty. Even supposing we have some time, even supposing we can stop and look at something and try to be aware of it, there's another difficulty, there's another factor which comes in the way. And this is that we very rarely, we hardly ever see the things in themselves. What we usually see even when we stop and look at something is our own projected subjectivity. We look at something, or some things but we see it, we see them as it were through the veil, through the curtain, through the mist, through the *fog*, if you like, of our own mental conditioning. I remember some years ago in Kalimpong on one of my walks with a Nepalese friend I happened to stop at the foot of a magnificent tree, it must have been a pine tree. So I stopped and looked up at it and I couldn't help exclaiming when I saw this beautiful smooth trunk and this mass of beautiful deep green foliage, I couldn't help exclaiming, 'Isn't it a beautiful tree?' So this Nepalese friend who was standing next to me said 'Oh yes, it's a beautiful tree. There's enough firewood there for the whole winter!'. So he didn't see the tree at all. All *he* saw was a certain quantity of firewood. And most of us, we may say, look at the world, look at the whole world, look at *all* material things in just this way. So it's this way of looking at things that we have to learn to undo. We have to learn to look at things themselves for their own sake, untainted if you like, unstained by any trace of subjectivity, of our own personal preferences and desires and prejudices. And this sort of attitude, this sort of approach, is very much emphasized in Far Eastern Buddhist art, in the art of China, the art of Japan. I remember in this connection, it is said or it is written that a certain disciple, a certain apprentice painter once asked his master who was a great, a celebrated artist, how to paint bamboos. So the master didn't say you begin by taking your brush and making such and such strokes on the silk or the paper, no, he didn't say anything about brushes, he didn't say anything about ink, he didn't say anything about paint or painting. He just said. 'If you want to paint bamboos then learn to see bamboos first.' So this is quite a sobering thought - you rush in trying to paint something when you haven't even looked at it first. This is what many artists do, or many amateurs in art at least. So the disciple, we were told, just looked, he went about looking at bamboos; looking at the stems, looking at the leaves, looking at them in the mist, looking at them in the rain, looking at them in the moonlight, looking at them in the spring, looking at them in the autumn, looking at them in the winter, looking at large ones and small ones, looking at them when they were green and when they were yellow, when they were fresh and springing, when they were old and decayed, looking at bamboos. And we are told he spent years in this way, just looking at bamboos. And in this way he became really *aware* of the bamboos, he really *saw* them. And seeing them, being aware of them in this way, he *became* as it were one with the bamboos. His life, as it were, passed into the life of the bamboos, the life of the bamboos passed into his life, he became one with the bamboos. And *then*, we are told, *then* and then only, he painted bamboos. And then of course you may be sure they were real bamboos which he painted, in fact we may say it had become a question of a bamboo painting bamboos!

Now according to Buddhism, at least according to Far Eastern Buddhism - the tradition of China, the tradition of Japan, above all perhaps the tradition of Ch'an or Zen - this should be our attitude towards *all material things*. This should be our attitude towards the whole of nature, not only towards bamboos but towards the sun and the moon and the stars and the earth, all trees and flowers and human beings and faces - this should be our attitude, we should learn to look, learn to see, learn to be aware, and in this way we should become supremely, as it were, receptive. We'll become as it were one with, at least *fused* with, all things, and out of this oneness, out of this realisation of affinity, of deep unity, out of this, if we are of artistic temperament, out of this we shall create, and truly create. So much then for awareness of things.

Next **awareness of self**, or awareness of oneself. And this level has many different sub-levels of which three, we may say, are of particular importance. First of all *awareness of the body and its movements*. Traditionally in the sutras, in the scriptures, the Buddha speaks of being aware whether one is walking or sitting or standing or lying down - aware of the position of the feet and the hands, how one is moving, how one is gesturing and so on. And according to this teaching, according to this aspect, or this level of awareness, one shouldn't do, in fact one *cannot* do if one is aware, anything in a hasty or a confused or a chaotic fashion. And here illustrating this level, illustrating this sort of practice, we have a wonderful example of what is known as the Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Some of you may have witnessed this. On the face of it the Japanese tea ceremony revolves around a very ordinary sort of thing, something which we all do every day, the making and the drinking of a cup of tea. We've done this thing hundreds, thousands of times, all of us. But how do they do it in Japan? How is it done in the Japanese tea ceremony? It is done in a different way because it's done with *awareness*. With awareness the kettle is filled with water, with awareness it's put on the flames, with awareness one just sits and watches the kettle boiling, listening to the humming and bubbling of the water, watching the flicker of the fire, and then with awareness one pours out the boiling water into the teapot, with awareness one pours out the tea, offers it, drinks it, and all the time in silence, it's a sort of exercise in awareness. So one can say that this represents or this illustrates the application of awareness to the affairs of everyday life. And this sort of principle, this sort of attitude should be brought out, should be brought *into*, we may say, all our activities. All our activities should be conducted on, as it were, the same sort of principle, the same sort of basis as the Japanese tea ceremony. Everything done with awareness, everything done with mindfulness, therefore with stillness, with quietness, with beauty, also with dignity, with harmony, with peace.

Now let's ask a question at this point. If the Japanese tea ceremony is characteristic of a certain level of awareness, awareness in the affairs of everyday life, if the Japanese tea ceremony is characteristic of a certain type of spiritual culture, the Far Eastern Buddhist culture, especially Zen, if the tea ceremony represents that sort of culture, then what analogous ceremony or institution is there which represents the culture or the spirit of today? I wonder whether anybody can give me any suggestion? I was turning this over in my own mind and I was wondering what have we got parallel to the Japanese tea ceremony, something which breathes the whole spirit of our commercial culture,? And I thought, yes, what is characteristic of our culture is the business lunch! In the business lunch you're trying to do, of course, as some of us know, two things at the same time. You're trying to have a good meal and you're trying to pull off a good deal; both at the same time. And this sort of thing, doing two things at once, we may say, two contradictory things like this, is quite incompatible with any true, with any real, any deep awareness. And in any case we may also say it's very bad for the digestion.

Now awareness of the body and the movements of the body, if continued, if protracted, will have the effect as it were of slowing them down. The pace of life will become more even, more rhythmical, in a sense slow, everything will be done more slowly, more deliberately, in other words more *awarely*. But not that we shall do less work, that's a fallacy. The person that does everything slowly because he does it with awareness, with deliberation, may well accomplish more than the person who looks very, very busy because he's always dashing around and has lots of papers and files on his desk and all that sort of thing, and seems to be busy because he's just confused. A really busy person goes very slowly and gently and methodically, and because he doesn't waste time in trivialities and fussing, because he's aware, he actually, in the long run, gets more done. So much then for awareness of the body and its movements.

Now **awareness of feelings**. Awareness of feelings consists, according to the Buddha's teaching, of being aware in the first place of whether we are happy or whether we are sad, or whether we're in a sort of dull, grey, neutral state, neither happy nor sad but as it were somewhere perhaps uncomfortably in between. And if one applies awareness in this way to one's feelings, to one's emotional life, one will find that unskilful emotional states, those connected with craving or hatred, or fear, will tend to be resolved whereas the skilled ones, those connected with love, peace, compassion, joy and so on, will tend to be refined. For instance if we are by nature a bit hot-tempered, a bit prone to anger, if we develop awareness first of all of course we will be aware that we have been angry, but with a bit of practice we shall be aware that we are being angry, with a bit more practice aware that anger is arising. But if we continue in this way practising the awareness, applying the awareness to our feelings, to our emotional life, in this case to the anger, eventually it will subside or at least be brought under control. So this is the application of awareness to our emotional life, to our feelings.

Then thirdly **awareness of thoughts**. Suppose one is asked, suddenly, what one is thinking of just now. If you're asked this question very directly, very pointedly, abruptly, unexpectedly, usually most people have to confess they don't know. You're taken unawares, you don't know what you were thinking of at the moment that you were asked what you were thinking of. And this is because we don't really think, we just allow thoughts to drift, as it were, through the mind. We're not really *aware* of them, we're just vaguely conscious in a sort of twilight, dull way but not really conscious, not really aware because there's no *directed* thinking, we're not *deliberately* thinking. We don't say to ourselves, now let me think about such and such, and then go on thinking about it, no. The thoughts, the ideas, just drift vaguely, fleetingly, woollily, loosely, through our minds, drift in and drift out, and sometimes they'll just eddy and curl and wind round and round inside the mind. So we must learn as it were to watch from

moment to moment, see where the thoughts arise, see where they come from, see where they go also. And in this way we shall find the flow of thoughts will be reduced, and what has been termed mental chatter, the chatter of the mind, which goes on incessantly all the time, will be stopped. And eventually if we persist in this practice of awareness of thoughts long enough the mind will become, certainly, at certain points, certain peaks in meditation practice, silent. All thoughts, all discursive thoughts, ideas, concepts, will just stop, will just, as it were, be wiped out, the mind will be left silent and empty, at the same time full.

Now this sort of silence, this sort of emptiness of the mind is much more difficult to achieve, much more difficult to experience than any mere silence of the tongue. But it is at this point when the mind becomes silent, owing to awareness, thoughts as it were vanish leaving only the pure, clear awareness or consciousness behind - it's at this point, we may say, that real, true, meditation begins.

Now these three kinds of awareness, that is to say awareness of the body and its movements, awareness of one's feelings, one's emotions, and awareness of one's thoughts, these three should be practised, we are told, all the time, whatever we are doing, all through the day, even, with practice, at night, even in the midst of dreams, we should continue to be aware. And if we're aware in this way, aware all the time of how our body is disposed, how we stand, how we walk, how we sit, how we raise our arms, how we put down our foot, if we're aware of this, if we're aware of what we're saying, aware of our feelings, aware of whether we're happy or sad or neutral, aware of what we're thinking, aware whether our thinking is distracted or undistracted, whether directed or undirected, if we're aware all the time, aware as I've said day and night, aware week after week, aware even all our lives if possible, then we shall find that gradually, little by little, perhaps imperceptibly, but nonetheless surely, this awareness will transform, will transmute, we may say, our whole being, our whole character. Psychologically speaking one may say that awareness is the most powerful transforming agent that we know. If we apply heat to water at once the water is transformed into steam, and in the same way if we apply awareness to any psychic contents these are at once refined, and we may say, sublimated. So much therefore for awareness of self, of oneself, on these different sub-levels.

Thirdly awareness of people. If we are aware of people at all we're usually aware of them not as people but as things, objects out there, in other words usually bodies, lumps of matter impinging upon ours, floating about in space. But this way of being aware of people as things is by no means enough. One must become aware of them as persons. So how is this done? How is one to become aware of a person as a person? In the first place, of course, one must look at them. It sounds very simple, doesn't it, but it's very difficult. And when one says look at them one does not mean stare - one doesn't fix them with a hypnotic sort of gaze, one just looks, and as I've said this is not as easy as it sounds, and one might even say, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration but truly enough in substance, that some people have never looked at another person, never really looked at them, and some people have never been looked at. And one may go all through one's life without ever looking at another person, or being looked at by them. So no awareness of persons, no awareness of others at all. Some of you may remember that last year in one of our retreats we did, or rather some of *you* did, some what we call 'communication exercises'. And the first of these exercises was learning just to look, to sit and look at the person opposite you, taking a long steady sort of look, without strain, without any sort of tension or embarrassment, without bursting into hysterical laughter, and at least half the people did, sometimes for minutes on end, just learning so much, and this is, as I've said, only the first stage, just learning to look at people, just learning to see them. And of course also you cannot be really *aware* of people as persons unless you also *communicate* with them, unless there's some real exchange. And this subject, that of communication, is of course a whole subject in itself. I did just touch upon it when I was speaking about Perfect Speech, but it may just be said now that communication is by no means confined to speech or confined to words. It can be as it were direct, very, very subtle, almost telepathic - and if it is of this type it usually indicates a rather high level of awareness of persons. And usually of course this sort of awareness, this sort of *telepathic* awareness between people, between persons, is mutual.

Now in India, you may be interested to hear, there's one very important form of this kind of awareness - awareness of others, awareness of people, or awareness of the person, and this is known in the Indian languages as *darshan*. *Darshan* simply means, literally a sight, if you like, seeing, a vision. And *darshan* means awareness of the spiritual teacher. One finds in India that spiritual teachers very often have, or usually have what are called their *ashrams*, which are sort of retreat centres if you like where the teacher lives, where his disciples gather around him, where people come to see him. And you'll find usually what happens is in the evening they have a sort of service which they call *arati*, waving lights and offering flowers in front of the image, whichever one they happen to worship, and then after that the teacher just sits there and people come. In the case of famous teachers they come from all over India - come not only in hundreds but in tens of thousands and they sit, and what do they do? - they just look. They just see the teacher. They, as they say in their own language, their own idiom, take his *darshan*. They just sit and look. In other words they try to be aware of him as a person, a spiritual person. A very famous example of this sort of thing with a very well-known spiritual teacher was of course that of the celebrated Ramana Maharshi. He used to sit in his *ashram* giving *darshan* all day, weeks on end, months on end, he sat I believe about fifty years in this particular spot. And people used to come, as I saw myself, from all over India just to see, just to look, just to be *aware of him*. Very often they didn't *ask* anything, they didn't put any questions, they didn't enter into any discussions, some did of course, but the majority just sat, looked, were aware, took *darshan*. Because according

to the Indian spiritual tradition it's not enough just to listen to the teacher's instruction, it's not enough just to learn in that way, one must be aware of the teacher *as* a spiritual person. If one doesn't have that awareness then very little is gained from the teacher, one may gain intellectually but will not really gain spiritually. So much for awareness of others, of persons.

Fourthly and lastly, **awareness of Reality**. Awareness of Reality means not thinking about Reality, not even thinking about being aware of Reality. It means, we may say, this awareness of Reality, a sort of direct, a non-discursive contemplation. This is perhaps the nearest we can get to it. And it has of course very many forms, I'm only going to mention briefly one or two of these. One of the best known, one of the most important, one of the most universal is what we call recollection of, or awareness of, the Buddha, the Enlightened One. That is to say awareness of the person of the Buddha, that is to say of Reality as embodied in the form of the Enlightened human being, the Enlightened teacher. When one practises this as a regular exercise usually one starts off recollecting or being aware inwardly of the external appearance of the Buddha, what he actually might have looked like, as he trod the roads of India 2,500 years ago. One sees or tries to see the tall serene figure in the yellow robe as he paced about from one end of Northern India to the other preaching and teaching people. And then one tries to be aware, one tries to see, inwardly still, the Buddha in various historical situations, various important moments in his career, especially when he sat beneath the Bodhi tree, repulsed the armies of Mara within his own mind and gained Enlightenment. Various other episodes also, as one can well imagine. And then one starts recollecting or being aware of the attributes, the qualities, the spiritual qualities of the Buddha, the boundless Wisdom, the infinite Compassion, the great Peace, the immaculate Purity, and so on. And from the awareness, the contemplation as it were, the recollection, of these attributes, the wisdom, the compassion, the peace, one tries to pierce back, one tries to become aware of their common, their innermost essence, that is to say the Buddhahood of Buddhahood, the Enlightenment of Enlightenment. And one tries to become aware of that, aware of Reality itself expressing itself through, shining through as it were the person and the figure of the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

Then also one can practise, along the same lines, the awareness of *sunyata*, awareness of the voidness, or awareness of reality pre-empted as it were of all conceptual content, above and beyond the reach and the range of imagination and thought and aspiration and even desire. But this sort of awareness, awareness of Reality in its nakedness, awareness of *sunyata*, this is possible, this can be practised, only after some previous experience in meditation.

Now awareness of Reality is the most difficult of all the levels of awareness to maintain - more difficult than awareness of things, more difficult than awareness of oneself, more difficult than awareness of other people, other persons, and so there are various aids to sustain one's constant recollection or awareness of Reality, of the Ultimate, of the Transcendent. And one of these ways, one of these means, is the constant repetition of a mantra, a sacred word or syllable, connected usually with some particular Buddha or Bodhisattva, and the repetition of this syllable over and over again, after of course one has been properly initiated, not only puts one into contact with that which it represents, but keeps one in contact with it in the midst of all the vicissitudes, all the ups and downs, all the heartbreaks and tragedies even of daily life. And eventually this repetition becomes - I was going to say automatic but it's not really automatic so much as spontaneous - it sort of springs up, it wells up all the time even independently of one's personal volition, so that a thin thread, a slender thread of contact with Reality, is kept up in the midst of all the avocations and duties, responsibilities and trials, and pleasures too, of one's daily living.

Now these are the four principal levels of awareness: Awareness of things, awareness of oneself, awareness of other people, awareness, finally, above all, of Reality. And each of these principal levels or kinds of awareness has its own distinctive effect on us, on the person practising. Through awareness of things, things as they are, we become free from the taint of subjectivity. Awareness of self, awareness of one's own self refines our psycho-physical energies. Awareness of others stimulates. And awareness of Reality finally transmutes, transfigures and transforms. And all these different kinds of awareness contribute in their own respective fashions to the entire process of what we've called the Higher Evolution. They, one and all, bring one near, very near, to the last stage of the Path, which of course is the Perfect *samadhi*. What that Perfect *samadhi* is we shall try to see, at least we shall try to glimpse, next week. And when we've got at least that glimpse of that Perfect *samadhi*, the last stage of the Path, then we shall have ended, at least in imagination, our long pilgrimage

Checked December 2000