

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Lecture 54: Samadhi, The Higher Consciousness: Right Meditation

Venerable Sir and Friends,

Eight weeks ago we all, or most of us at least, set out on a journey together, a journey on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, and today we come to the end of that long journey. Today we come to the eighth and the last stage of that Noble Eightfold Path. And this last step or last stage is of course that of *samyak samadhi*, which is usually translated, not very adequately as we shall afterwards see, usually translated as Right Meditation. What it really means, what it really is meant to convey, will become clear, I hope, as this talk proceeds. But before we come on to the subject proper of this evening's talk, a very brief, a very rapid recapitulation of ground covered so far. We've learned - and I'm sure everybody who has been coming regularly knows this very well by now - we've learned that the Eightfold Path is divided into two principal sections. There's first of all the Path of Vision and secondly there is the Path of Transformation. The first of these, the Path of Vision, represents initial insight into or even experience of Ultimate Reality. While the second, that is to say the Path of Transformation represents the transformation, the transmutation, even the transfiguration of various levels, various aspects, of one's being and consciousness in accordance with the initial insight and experience. The second section of the Path, the Path of Transformation, is therefore much longer, much more complex, also much more difficult than the first. The first section of the path, that is to say the Path of Vision, corresponds to one stage of the Eightfold Path only, that is to say to Perfect Vision. But the second section, the Path of Transformation, corresponds to all the other stages from two right up to eight, up to, that is to say, and including Perfect *samadhi* with which we are particularly concerned this evening.

So the question at once arises - what is Perfect *samadhi*? What do we mean by this term? And this is the question that we now have to try to answer. But before trying to answer this question let me make just one relevant observation. I think we can say that as a general rule the more advanced the stage with which we are concerned, the more advanced the stage of spiritual life or spiritual experience with which we're concerned, the less there really is to say about it. I think we can say that this principle holds good throughout the whole spiritual life. If we look, for instance, at the Buddhist scriptures, especially at the Pali scriptures, we'll find that the Buddha had very much to say for instance about ethics, about morality, about how one should behave, how one should conduct oneself and so on. He went into all these questions in very considerable detail, but when it came to questions of, for instance, *nirvana*, the Ultimate Goal, then there was very little indeed which he said, in fact there was very little indeed for him to say. And we do find in fact as we search through the scriptures that though they're very extensive, though they're very elaborate, though they deal with many topics, on the whole they do tend to say very little about *nirvana*. The Buddha wasn't very communicative on this particular subject. Indeed we do sometimes find that at times when He was questioned about *nirvana*, about the nature of Enlightenment, about the experience of the Enlightened Person, He just remained perfectly silent.

I remember in particular there's one *sutta*, not a very well-known one, I think its in the *Samyutta Nikaya* - a whole series of questions of this sort is put to the Buddha and whoever compiled the *sutta* after each question says 'The Enlightened one remained silent'. Then another question - 'The Enlightened One remained silent', yet another question, 'The Enlightened One remained silent'. And this is how it goes on. And it's very much the same, we may say, with regard to this same Noble Eightfold Path. There's quite a lot that one can say about Perfect Speech, there's quite a lot that one can say about Perfect Action, about Perfect Livelihood - under Perfect Livelihood you can go into the whole question of economics and spiritual life and that sort of thing. There's a very great deal of material. Now there's even quite a lot to be said about Perfect Effort and about Perfect Mindfulness. But when we come to today's topic - Perfect *samadhi* - there seems in comparison much less for one to say about it. Indeed when I started thinking over today's talk it did even occur to me at one point that we might not even have enough material, real material, on this subject of Perfect *samadhi* for a whole, for a full evening's talk. But let us see.

It may well be that having said something one might have to take refuge in silence. But if this does happen, if one finds that there's very little that can be said about *samadhi*, or if one discovers that one ought not perhaps to be saying anything about it at all, if one feels obliged rather to be silent, this should rather be taken as emphasizing the importance of the stage with which we are now concerned and not the opposite. In worldly life of course the more we have to say about something the more important we consider it. Tonight's papers, I believe are full of reports and information connected with the dollar and gold and things of that sort. So the papers being full of these two subjects people automatically think they must be very important because people are talking so much about them - and this is how things are in the world. But in the spiritual life, you may say, it's just exactly the other way round - the less you say about something, or the less you *can* say about something, the more truly important it is.

Now this word *samadhi* happens to be the same in Sanskrit and in Pali. Usually we find that there is some difference between the technical terms in these two languages, but in this case, as sometimes happens, we find that

the term is the same, *samadhi* in both Pali and Sanskrit. And the word *samadhi* literally means the state of being firmly fixed or established. This is the primary signification of the term. But it can be understood in two rather distinct ways. In the first place it can be understood as representing the fixation of the mind on an object. You fix your mind on an object, you establish your mind on an object, this is *samadhi*, in other words *samadhi* in the sense of concentration. This is the first signification of the term.

The second, which goes rather further, is the fixation or establishment, not just of the mind but of the whole being, in a certain mode of awareness or a certain mode of consciousness, in other words Enlightenment. So we have these two meanings, *samadhi* as concentration and *samadhi* in the sense of being fixed and established in the state or experience of Enlightenment or Buddhahood. These two rather distinct meanings.

Now in the Theravada texts, in the texts of the Pali Canon, the word *samadhi* in Pali is usually understood in the first sense - it's usually understood as concentration, usually understood as one-pointedness of mind. But in the Mahayana sutras, in the Mahayana texts, the word *samadhi* is used in the second sense, the sense of being fixed or established in Ultimate Reality, not just in the sense of concentration, not even in the sense of concentration in meditation *on* Reality - but the state of being established or the establishment of one's own being in the state of Enlightenment, in, in other words, Buddhahood. And therefore in the Mahayana texts we often find that instead of using the word *samadhi* in the sense of concentration, they keep the word *samadhi* for the higher state, the higher experience, and concentration is usually known as *samatha*. We shall see the meaning of that a little later on.

Now this distinction between *samadhi* in the sense of concentration, concentration of mind as in meditation, and *samadhi* in the sense of fixation or establishment of one's total being *in* Enlightenment is very important indeed, in fact it's vitally important. If we interpret Perfect *samadhi*, the final, the culminating stage or phase of the Eightfold Path merely as concentration, merely as *good* concentration even, then the whole meaning of this stage and therewith the whole meaning and significance of the Path itself becomes distorted. But unfortunately this is what is very often done. Very often Perfect *samadhi* is translated or rendered as Right Concentration, so one has the impression as it were of the whole Path, the whole spiritual Path, the whole practical teaching of the Buddha, culminating simply in Right Concentration, the sort of thing you do, or at least can do in your meditation class, almost, I was going to say almost every evening but certainly almost every week. So the impression is produced that just Right Concentration, just one-pointedness of mind, is the culminating stage and phase of the whole Buddhist spiritual life, the whole Noble Eightfold Path of The Buddha.

And one may even go further than that and say that in modern times the whole of the Eightfold Path, each and every step or stage of the Noble Eightfold Path, is rather seriously, as it were, undervalued, if not actually minimized. And one finds a very limited, a very narrow, a very cramped sort of interpretation given of each step, each stage. And this is very unfortunate because it makes the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path appear something rather unattractive, or rather limited or rather conditioned, and sometimes, I do know, people wonder how the Eightfold Path can be considered as the central theme of the Buddha's whole teaching. But it's all a matter of correctly and properly understanding the significance of each and every step and stage of that path. And I certainly hope that in this present series of talks we have been able to show that there is much more to the Noble Eightfold Path than some at least of its modern exponents generally suspect.

Perfect *samadhi*, then, the culminating phase of the Eightfold Path, is very much more than just good concentration - essentially Perfect *samadhi* represents the culmination, the fruition if you like, the bringing to fulfilment of the whole process, the whole path, of transformation. Perfect *samadhi* represents the state of one's being fully and perfectly and thoroughly, from top to bottom, in all aspects and all phases of one's being, transformed. In other words it represents one's transformation, or one's *total* transformation, the culmination of one's transformation, from an unenlightened state to an Enlightened state. It represents, we may say, the complete and perfect permeation of all aspects of one's being by that Perfect Vision with which one started. Perfect *samadhi* means that Perfect Vision has in the end triumphed, as it were, and now reigns supreme on every level of one's existence and one's being. And this is surely a very fitting and a very appropriate culmination to the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, this state of being in this stage thoroughly and perfectly transformed, not just practising Right Concentration.

So if one understands Perfect *samadhi* in *this* way as the culmination of the whole process of transformation then real sense is made of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, real sense is made of one's journey, one's pilgrimage on that path.

Now in order to understand this just a little better, a little more clearly, let us go back a little bit. I've tried to point out that there are two meanings of this word *samadhi*. *Samadhi* in the sense of concentration, concentration of mind, and *samadhi* in the sense of the state of Enlightenment, Buddhahood itself. But these two meanings of the term, these two meanings of the term *samadhi*, though quite distinct and not to be confused, are not really mutually exclusive. One would perhaps not be going far wrong if one described them as the lower and higher degrees of the same experience or at least of the same kind, the same type of experience. And one could also say that in between

the two, in between *samadhi* as concentration and *samadhi* as Enlightenment, there is another, an intermediate stage, an intermediate degree which in the Mahayana texts is known as the stage or the degree of *samapatti*. And *samapatti* means literally attainments and it suggests all those spiritual experiences occurring as the result of the practice of concentration, but which nevertheless fall short of *samadhi* in the fullest sense, *samadhi* in the sense of Enlightenment.

In this way therefore we have three terms, first of all *samatha*, that is to say concentration, then *samapatti* attainments, and lastly *samadhi* in the full and final sense as Enlightenment itself. And these three terms, *samatha*, *samapatti*, *samadhi*, represent between them one single progressive series of spiritual experiences, each one as it were introducing the one that comes next and preparing the way for it. So let us briefly study each of these three in turn and this will give us, as it were cumulatively, some idea, some glimpse, of the nature of *samadhi* in the more ultimate sense.

First of all *Samatha*. *Samatha* means literally just 'tranquillity'. It's sometimes translated as 'pacification' or 'calming down', or sometimes even as simply 'calm'. Probably if it was translated just as 'peace' we wouldn't be going far wrong because it is a state of deep, indeed very profound, peace and calm of mind, not only of the mind but even, we may say, of the whole being. And in this state or stage of *samatha*, mental activity, discursive thought, the clattering and chattering of the mental machinery, is either minimal, just very subtle or even entirely absent. And the state or stage of *samatha* is also an experience of perfect concentration, one-pointedness of mind, an integration of all the psycho-physical forces and energies of the being. *Samatha* thus corresponds to what are known as the four *dhyanas* in Sanskrit or *jhanas* in Pali - the four states or stages of the higher consciousness. You may remember that we did deal with these the week before last under the heading of Perfect Effort and some of you may remember the Buddha's four similes for these states or stages of higher consciousness.

Now very often *samatha* is divided into three degrees or three levels or three grades. The first is that of concentration on a gross object, a material object. The second is the stage of concentration on the subtle counterpart of the gross object. And the third is the state of absorption in the object, that is to say into the subtle counterpart of the object. Now this may not be very clear so let me just illustrate. Suppose you take up the practice of concentrating on the image of the Buddha, say a stone image or a metal image or even a painting, a *thangka*, so this particular image, which is a material thing, is your gross object. So suppose you sit down in front of this image, you look at the image, not of course staring but just *looking*. You look at the image, you don't pay attention to anything else - you shut out all other sights, all other sounds, and you are just fully concentrated with eyes wide open on that material image of the Buddha - you take it in fully, you take it in completely - and you're aware, you're conscious, of nothing else. This is the first degree, the first level of concentration - concentration on the gross, that is to say the material object.

Then in the second stage you close your eyes. And with your eyes closed you see that image of the Buddha just as clearly as though you had your eyes open and were looking at the material image itself. This of course takes quite a bit of practice and some people visualize more easily than others. But what is meant is that even with eyes closed you can visualize, you can reproduce that material image as vividly and as clearly as though, as I said before, your eyes were open and you were looking at that material image. You see the subtle, the mental counterpart of that image within your own mind and you concentrate upon that. So there's no sensory perception eventually, there's no hearing, there's no seeing with the physical eyes, you're completely concentrated on this subtle, if you like this archetypal, image within. And this is what we call the stage of concentration on the subtle counterpart. This concentration is very much more intense than of course the first.

Then in the third stage one continues concentrating ever more intensely, ever more one-pointedly, on this subtle counterpart of the originally gross image. And as you concentrate upon it more and more and more, you become as it were assimilated to it - it becomes as it were assimilated to you, you become as it were absorbed into it. The distinction between the two, the subject and the object, the person meditating or concentrating, and the object of concentration, this eventually disappears and you as it were merge with the object of your concentration, you become absorbed in it, you become identified with it, and this is the stage of absorption *in* the object, that is to say in the subtle counterpart of the object.

So these three degrees, these three levels, comprise what we call *samatha*, tranquillity or calm. I've taken by way of example this question of concentrating on an image of the Buddha because here the difference between the three degrees can be explained more clearly. But in every type of concentration we start by taking a gross object, we work our way up to the subtle object and then we become absorbed in the subtle object, and these make up the three degrees or three grades of the *samatha* or practice of tranquillisation or calm.

Now we come on to the second, that is to say *samapatti*, which as I explained literally means 'attainments'. And *samapattis* or attainments are experiences gained as a result of practising concentration. All those who come along to the meditation classes, who practise concentration and meditation, eventually get experiences of one kind or

another. The type or the kind, also the degree of the experience you get, depends very much upon your personal temperament. It isn't necessarily a question of your degree of spiritual development. Sometimes people conclude that if you have a lot of experiences of this sort you're more advanced than if you just have one or two or don't even have any, but it isn't quite so simple as that.

The commonest sort of experience of an elementary nature is probably the experience of light. As the mind gets more concentrated you may see light of various kinds. Usually people see a white or a yellowish light, sometimes a bluish one, occasionally red or green lights, though these are comparatively rare. And experiences of this sort are a sign, are an indication, that the mind has become concentrated, that the level of awareness has been raised slightly, and that one is beginning to contact something just a little bit beyond the ordinary conscious mind. Some people, instead of seeing lights, hear sounds. They may hear a very deep, sustained sort of musical note rather like a mantra, or they may hear even words pronounced as it were within themselves. They may hear these words very, very clearly at times as though a voice was speaking to them, as though a voice was addressing them. People who believe in God of course often think that God is speaking to them, but according to the Buddha's teaching these sounds, these words, voices, all come from the depths, and sometimes not even from the deepest depths of one's own mind, one's own consciousness. Occasionally it also happens that in the course of the practice of concentration people have the experience of perceiving various scents. Sometimes they perceive as though the whole room in which they're sitting and practising is pervaded by a very sweet-smelling scent like jasmine or roses or something of this sort, and sometimes it can be smelt even by other people. This too is a sign that concentration is developing, the mind is becoming more subtle, more refined, more rarefied, and that one is contacting a higher degree, a higher level of awareness or consciousness. Then as one progresses the experiences change. I'm not going to try to give you an account of all the various experiences but just a few typical ones which are likely to occur with most people. One may get the experience of suddenly seeing, as it were unfolded in front of one, panoramically, landscapes of various kinds, hills and trees and scenery of various kinds, sometimes stretching as though for miles. And again very often one may see brilliant blue sky or flashing geometrical patterns, or patterns made as though of jewels, or *mandala*-like forms or figures. All these are quite common in the case of people who practise concentration and meditation even a little.

One may of course also see figures of various kinds, figures, faces, eyes - experiences like this also are quite common. And again one may experience, to come on to something a little different, one may feel a change in one's body weight, you may feel very, very heavy as though you couldn't possibly get up, or you may feel very, very light as though you were going to float away like thistledown. And you may have the experience of intense heat or cold. And sometimes these changes of temperature can be perceived by other people. They're physical changes brought about by the practice of concentration.

Then again if one keeps up the practice of concentration and meditation over a long period, in the case of *some* people, though not all because this is a matter of temperament, in the case of some people not only their minds become very much sensitised but they may develop, as it were, various subtle senses. They may become aware that they're understanding what other people are thinking or they may develop the faculties of what we call in the West clairvoyance and clairaudience. These faculties develop, according to the Buddhist teaching, in fact we may say Buddhist experience, develop as the result of practising concentration and meditation, when the whole being becomes more refined and more subtle. But again they don't develop in the case of everybody, and some people apparently can go the whole way and even realize *nirvana* without developing any of these faculties at all.

Then of course, perhaps more importantly other *samapattis* include experience, especially at the time of meditation but also at other times, of intense joy, bliss, ecstasy and of an ineffable peace descending upon one and enfolding one. But even more important - and here the *samapatti* begins to merge into the *samadhi* - even more important, one may develop, one may attain, as it were flashes of Insight. Suddenly it's as though a sort of veil had been rent and you suddenly see things as they are, but just for an instant, and then the veil closes. But one does get a glimpse, one does get a flash in various ways. You might suddenly comprehend the truth of a teaching or a doctrine that you'd known for a long time, but had never really realised, had never really had any insight into, something that you'd read about in books, and something that you'd thought you believed and you knew very well but when one has this sort of experience, this sort of flash of insight into that truth, into that reality, then you realise that before you didn't know it at all, not one little bit. Not that you understood it partially or fairly well, not that at all. When you really see, when you have the actual flash of insight, then you realise that before when you knew it only from books or hearsay you didn't know it really at all.

Now all these things which I've described, all these experiences, are *samapatti*-type experiences, and as you will have understood already there's an immense variety of them, as no one person of course experiences all these things. But all people, all those who tread the path of concentration and meditation, all experience some at least - as I do know quite a number of you have experienced yourselves already in the course of your own practice of concentration and meditation.

Now we come on to three which is *samadhi* proper, the state or the stage of being fixed, being established in Reality, in other words the state or the stage of being Enlightened, being a Buddha. And there are of course many ways of looking at this state or this stage of *samadhi*. Often of course it's described in negative terms. It's described for instance in terms of the destruction of the *asravas* as they're called. The word *asra* means a sort of poisonous flux, a bias, a sort of lopsidedness in our nature. And the *asravas* are three in number. First of all there's the *kamasrava* or the bias towards the poisonous flux of the desire or the thirst for contact with material things, for their own sake, on their own level. Then secondly *bhavasrava*, the bias towards, the poisonous flux of conditioned existence, in other words the attachment to or desire for any mode of being, any mode of existence short of Enlightenment itself. Then thirdly *avijjasrava*, bias towards the poisonous flux of ignorance, in the sense of spiritual darkness and unawareness.

So in the first place, in the first instance, *samadhi* proper is described as the complete absence of any vestige of these three *asravas*, these three poisonous fluxes or biases. A state in which sense experiences, material things, mean nothing, a state in which there is no desire for any kind of conditioned existence, where one isn't really interested in anything other than *nirvana* or Enlightenment itself, because one is that at that moment, and a state of complete illumination and clarity and freedom and Enlightenment, when there is no shadow of ignorance or spiritual darkness.

Now in addition to this negative description there are also various positive descriptions, though here of course we must tread rather warily and realise, understand, that we're trying to give a hint or two about something which really goes far beyond any power of words to express. Some of the texts, some of the teachings, mention a group of three *samadhis*, in this higher sense of this term *samadhi*. Not that there are really three in the sense of three mutually exclusive states. The so-called three *samadhis* are more like different aspects or different dimensions of the one *samadhi*.

The first of these is known as the *Imageless*. It indicates the state of *samadhi*'s perfect freedom from all thoughts, from all conceptualisation. If we think for a while, if we can just imagine, even, a state in which we're fully and clearly conscious, fully and clearly aware at the highest possible level, but there's no discursive thought; if we think, as it were, of the mind as being like a beautiful bright blue clear sky with no cloud - not even a speck of cloud, this is what this state of imageless *samadhi* experience would be like. Most of the time of course the sky of the mind is full of clouds, full of grey clouds, full of even black clouds, sometimes full of storm clouds, occasionally of course full of clouds tinged with gold, but usually rather dark and grey and unpleasant. So the state of *samadhi* is a state of imagelessness, freedom from all clouds of thought. A state of freedom from conceptualisation.

The second *samadhi*, or aspect or dimension of *samadhi*, is known as the *Directionless*, also translated as the unbiased, because *samadhi* is a state in which there's no particular direction in which one wants to go. There's no particular preference. One as it were remains just poised, like a sphere resting on a completely horizontal plane, it's just poised there, there's no particular reason why it should roll in this direction or in that direction of its own accord, it just stays where it is. So *samadhi*, the Enlightened mind, is like this. It has no particular tendency or inclination in any particular direction because it has no individual or egoistic desire. It's a rather difficult sort of state to express but if one thinks of it perhaps in terms of perfect spontaneity without any particular urge or impulse to do anything in particular then one may get somewhere near it.

Now the third *samadhi* or third aspect or dimension of *samadhi* is known as that of the *Voidness - sunyata*. *Sunyata* doesn't mean emptiness or voidness in the literal sense, it means reality. So *sunyata samadhi* is the state or the stage of full and complete realisation of the ultimate nature of existence which cannot be put into words. It's not just a glimpse as in the stage of Perfect Vision. It's a full, a total, and a perfect realisation. Now this *samadhi* of *sunyata*, Ultimate Reality, is connected in some of the texts, in some of the *sutras*, by what is known as the *ekalaksana-samadhi* or the *samadhi* of one characteristic, which is also known as the *samadhi* of same-mindedness, or even-mindedness. This is a state or stage or experience where one sees everything as having the same characteristic. Usually of course we see things as having different characteristics. We say some things are good, some are bad, some are pleasant, some are unpleasant, some we like, some we dislike, some are near, some are far, some are past, some are present, some are future. In this way we give different characteristics to so many different things. But in this stage, in this state of *samadhi*, you see that everything has got the same characteristic - it's all *sunyata*, it's all ultimately real, in a sense it's all the same in its very depths, in its ultimate depths. So inasmuch as everything is basically the same there's no reason why you should have different attitudes towards different things. If everything is the same obviously you have the same attitude towards everything. So this is this particular state or this aspect or dimension of *samadhi*. So if one sees everything as same, everything as having the same characteristic, obviously one is in a state of peace and tranquillity and stability and rest.

Now those of you who are interested in Zen, interested especially in Hui Neng and his Platform Scripture, may be interested also to know that both these *samadhis*, that is to say the *samadhi* of one-characteristic, and the *samadhi*

of same-mindedness, are mentioned in the Platform Scripture itself - sometimes known as the *Sutra of Hui Neng*. And this brings us to a very important point in connection with Zen Buddhism. Hui Neng, you may remember, says *samadhi* and *prajna*, *prajna* meaning wisdom, are not different. He says *samadhi* and *prajna* are really the same thing. Or he says *samadhi* is the quintessence of *prajna* or wisdom and wisdom, *prajna* is the activity, the functioning of *samadhi*. He gives a comparison to illustrate this. He says *samadhi* is like the lamp, like the body of the lamp, *prajna* or wisdom is like the shining, like the light of the lamp. Now this is a very important teaching of Hui Neng and of the Zen school generally. And some Western students of Zen have found this teaching of the identity or at least non-duality of *samadhi* and *prajna* rather difficult to understand, if not confusing. And one may say that they have sometimes even distorted it. And why is this?

The reason is that *samadhi*, the word *samadhi* in this passage of the Platform Scripture, is understood in the sense of concentration. What they think Hui Neng is saying is that wisdom is the same thing as concentration and that concentration of mind is the same thing as wisdom. But this is not at all what Hui Neng meant. If you understand him in this way you can't possibly make sense of his teaching. You go very far astray indeed. Hui Neng's *samadhi* or the *samadhi* of Hui Neng in this passage at least is *samadhi* in the *highest* sense. *Samadhi* as identical with the eighth step of the path as we've explained it so far. In other words *samadhi* in this passage means the state of being established in the fully Enlightened mode of awareness. And this is in fact quite clear from the Platform Scripture itself. Hui Neng says quite categorically, quite emphatically, he says people misunderstand, they misinterpret the *samadhi* of One Characteristic. He says some people think the *samadhi* of One Characteristic means sitting quietly and continuously without letting any idea arise in the mind. Some people, he says, think that the *ekalaksana-samadhi* is that. In other words they think it's concentration. Now Hui Neng rejects this interpretation. He says the *samadhi* of One Characteristic isn't this at all. He said if it were this, if *samadhi* was just concentration, this would make us like inanimate objects. And he says real *samadhi*, *samadhi* in his sense, *samadhi* in the Ch'an or Zen sense, is something quite different. Now this doesn't mean that Hui Neng is against sitting or against concentrating the mind. He's only saying that sitting and concentrating, *samatha*, is *not samadhi* in the fullest and highest sense, in the *real* sense. Sitting and concentrating is just sitting and concentrating, it's not *samadhi*, not that *samadhi* which is identical with *prajna* according to his teaching. Thorough(?) *samadhi*, Hui Neng says, is that which is the same, that which is identical under all conditions and all circumstances. It's not something you experience just when you sit and meditate.

Now in the Zen monasteries, in Zen temples, of course, all three, that is to say *samatha* plus *samapatti* plus *samadhi* in the true sense are taught and are practised, but Zen shares *samatha* and *samapatti* with all the other schools. Its specific contribution, the specific contribution of Zen, lies more in its teaching about *samadhi* in the Ultimate sense, especially its teaching about *samadhi* as non-different from *prajna* or wisdom.

Now perhaps we're in a better position to understand what it is that we're working up to, what it is we're trying to attain, what it is we're trying to experience when we follow the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. We're trying to work our way up to, trying to attain, trying to experience a higher state, a higher mode, of being and consciousness. Not just trying to practise Right Concentration. What we're aiming at is a complete, a total transformation of ourselves, our whole being at every level, in all its aspects, in the light of the initial Perfect Vision. And so far as we can see this step or this stage of Perfect *samadhi*, of Enlightenment, marks the culmination of the whole evolutionary process, the whole process at least of the higher evolution.

Now just a word of warning or at least a word of explanation. The Noble Eightfold Path, as its name tells us, is a Path, a way, a *marga* in Sanskrit. And it consists, as we've seen over the last so many weeks, consists of eight steps or eight stages. And the spiritual life, the Buddhist life, consists in following, consists in walking on, walking along, this path. Now this is very familiar imagery. We're using it all the time in Buddhism - following the path, treading the path, going from this stage to that stage and so on - but at the same time we should, we must, beware of interpreting literally, or too literally at least, what is really, what is essentially, a figure of speech. We're so easily misled by words. We so easily take words at their face value.

It's true that in a way the spiritual life consists in following a path, going from stage to stage. But in a way also the spiritual life isn't anything like following a path. When we follow a path, when we walk along a path as we progress, as we go forward we leave the earlier stages, we leave the earlier steps behind, they're done with, they're finished. But in the case of the spiritual life it isn't like that. It's a cumulative process, like rolling a snowball along the ground it grows, it expands all the time. So in a sense we may say that we're following all the stages of the Eightfold Path all the time. Not that we have Perfect Vision, all right, then Perfect Vision's finished with, you forget all about Perfect Vision, you go on to Perfect Emotion. Having traversed that stage you leave Perfect Emotion behind, go on to Perfect Speech - *not like that at all*. Probably we've been thinking in those terms, perhaps understandably, perhaps unavoidably, but it isn't really like that at all. It's cumulative, it's a process of growth, a process of expansion, and as I've said in a sense we follow all the stages of the path all the time.

How is this? Well, suppose we experience just for a moment, just for an instant, Perfect Vision. It may be while we're meditating. It may be while we're out for a walk in the country, may be while we're listening to some music, may be when we pause in the midst of the traffic for an instant. But howsoever it may be in one way or another we have an experience of Perfect Vision. It's as though something opened out within us and we see things as they are, at least for an instant, at least for a fraction of a second. For that time at least we're in contact with something Ultimate, even with Reality. So having had this moment of Perfect Vision what happens? To some extent at least this moment of Perfect Vision influences our emotions. To some extent we develop Perfect Emotion, the second step of the path. It overflows also into our speech, it influences our speech. Our speech becomes more like Perfect Speech. Our action also is influenced, influenced at least to some extent, subtly, indirectly, by this moment of Perfect Vision. We're changed in all these ways on all these levels in all these aspects. And this is how it goes on.

It may happen then again that some other time, it may be weeks later, months later, years later, there's another moment of Perfect Vision, perhaps as I've said at the time of meditation, perhaps at some other time, but the whole process repeats over again. We're influenced still more by this moment of Perfect Vision. Speech becomes more like Perfect Speech. Action becomes more like Perfect Action, and in this way it goes on. You may remember that at the very beginning I pointed out that *anga* means limb or shoot, not step or stage. It's the *arya astangika marga*, the eight-*limbed* or eight-*membered* or *eight-shooted* path, not really the path of eight steps or eight stages. The path of eight *limbs* or the path of eight *members*. So that's why we've been translating *anga* sometimes as 'aspect' so as not to give the impression too much that it's a succession, a series of steps and stages mutually discreet.

So we can see from all this, especially from this usage of the word *anga*, that the spiritual life is a process of growth. It's more like a process of growth, more like the unfolding of a living thing than it is like someone going from one stage to the next of a path, or one rung to the next of a ladder. Spiritual growth, we may say, is like the growth of a tree. You may have a small tree, a sapling, rooted in the ground, and then what happens? - one day the rain falls. Rain falls perhaps quite heavily, and that rain is absorbed through the roots of that tree and the sap rises within the tree and that sap spreads into the branches, spreads into the twigs, and in this way the tree grows until there's a pause, there's an intermission, and again the rain pours, and again the sap rises and this time not only does it spread into the branches, into the twigs, but leaves start unfolding. And again there may be an interval, after a while again, it may be no rain falls for a little while, there's a sort of dry period during which the tree may wither a little, but eventually again the rain falls. There may even be a real cloudburst, a real downpour, and then not only does the sap rise into the branches, into the twigs, into the leaves, but flowers start unfolding.

So the following of the Eightfold Path is just like that. As I've said, there's a sort of glimpse of reality, a spiritual experience, in other words a moment of Perfect Vision, just like the falling of the rain in the case of the tree. And this Perfect Vision, just like the sap rising, starts transforming different aspects of our being. The emotional life is transformed, then speech is transformed, actions are transformed, livelihood is transformed, even volitions and awareness are transformed. And to some extent as a result of that moment of Vision, to some extent the whole being is transformed. And this process is repeated over and over again at ever higher and higher levels until the whole being at last is completely and thoroughly transformed and nothing is left untransformed. One's whole being is pervaded, as it were, by the light of Enlightenment. And this is the state, this is the stage of Perfect *samadhi*, when one's whole being, one's whole consciousness, has been brought into line with the original Perfect Vision, and has been thoroughly transformed and transmuted by that, from the lowest right up to the highest levels. And this of course is the state of Enlightenment or Buddhahood. The path has now been completely traversed, the path has been completely accomplished, the path has in fact become the goal, and the whole process of the higher evolution has been perfected and fulfilled.

With this we come of course to the end of our journey. At least we come to the end of our journey in imagination, because to some extent at least we've been following this path, at least so far as these talks are concerned, in imagination. And I'm very glad that in the course of these talks, in the course of the last eight weeks, we have had the company of so many people for so long - in many cases right up to the end, right up to the conclusion of the journey itself. And I certainly do hope that this series, this course of talks has been of some use and help both to those who are newcomers to the study and practice of the Buddha's teaching, and to those who have been trying to tread, trying to follow the path with us for quite a while. It may be - I certainly hope it *is* so - it may be that the talks have given beginners and newcomers some glimpse, at least some inkling, of the more practical side of the Buddha's teaching. And I hope that our regular members have been helped to have perhaps a clearer, even a deeper understanding of those things which already they may know.

Checked December 2000