

Sangharakshita
The Dalai Lama: His Reincarnations

Mr Chairman and Friends,

Time is passing, and this is the third lecture in our series on an introduction to Tibetan Buddhism. In the first lecture, as you just heard in fact, we saw in some detail how Buddhism came to Tibet, how it gradually penetrated into the Land of Snows and how, despite setbacks and rebuffs and difficulties of various kind, it eventually took firm root there. And it took firm root there, we saw, mainly through the efforts of four religious kings, as they are called, as well as through the activities of a number of great scholar-saints of India and of Tibet such as Santarakshita, Padmasambhava, Atisha, Marpa, and so on.

In our last lecture last week we started to the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. And we saw that there are, broadly speaking, altogether four main schools. These are the schools of the Nyingmapas - the ancient ones, the traditionalists; of the Kagyupas - the oral traditionalists, those who attach more importance not to scriptural instruction but to the ear-whispered teachings of the Guru; then the Sakyapas, celebrated for their scholarship; and finally the Gelupas, the virtuous ones. We saw moreover that the first three of these schools are collectively termed The Old Schools, whereas the fourth, the Gelugpa school, the school of the virtuous ones, is usually referred to as The New School.

Now, last week we were able to study the first three of these four schools, that is to say the Nyingmapas, the Kagyupas and the Sakyapas, in some detail. But the last school, that of the Gelupas, we decided to leave until today. Partly on account of the fact that we had already gone very much over our time last week and also because the Gelugpa school ties up very nicely with the topic with which we are dealing tonight, The Dalai Lama: His Reincarnations.

Now, one must emphasise at the very outset that one can not possibly understand the Dalai Lama, what he is or who he is, his nature and his functions, apart from the general background of Tibetan Buddhism, and especially of the background of the Gelugpa school to which in particular he belongs, or to which in particular he is affiliated. I remember some years ago, when the Chinese invasionary army invaded Tibet and again at the beginning of the Lasa uprising in 1959, the newspapers, at least in India, I don't know about this country, but the newspapers in India contained of all sorts of rather grotesque references to the Dalai Lama, which showed quite clearly they had no idea of his status, or his nature, or his function. Some newspapers, some reporters for instance, would refer to the Dalai Lama as 'the living Buddha', which of course he isn't. Others would refer to him as 'the priest king'. I remember headings in the newspapers of India, 'Priest King Flees to India' or something of that sort. And some newspapers, some reporters, even went so far as to refer to the Dalai Lama as the Buddhist pope, and to the Potala as the Buddhist Vatican, and to some of the incarnate lamas as to the Buddhist princes of the church, and things of that sort, showing that they hadn't got really the faintest idea of who or what the Dalai Lama really was or really is.

Now, I suggested one can not understand the Dalai Lama apart from a background,

not only of Tibetan Buddhism in general, but of the Gelugpa school or Gelugpa order in particular. And this Gelugpa school itself, the fourth, the last, the latest, the newest of the four great schools of Tibetan Buddhism, this school one can not possibly understand apart from the character and the career of its great founder, that is to say, Tsonkapa. Tsonkapa is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in Tibetan Buddhism. Possibly he is the most characteristic. We might feel that Milarepa is perhaps even more highly spiritual than Tsonkapa, and Milarepa is certainly very representative of one strand in the total Tibetan spiritual tradition. But, I think, if we want a really representative figure, a figure that embodies the characteristic spiritual or religious genius of the Tibetan people, I think we have to recognise that that figure is Tsonkapa. One might even go so far as to say that not only is Tsonkapa one of the greatest figures in Tibetan Buddhism but even one of the greatest figures in the entire range, the entire history of Buddhism itself.

Tsonkapa is known primarily as a great reformer of Tibetan Buddhism, one who swept away many abuses. He is known also as a great organiser, one who unified the sangha to a great extent, who imposed a unified discipline, and so on. He is also known as a scholar-saint of the very highest distinction. Often you get saints who are not scholars, and, of course, only too often you get scholars who are by no means saints. But Tsonkapa was that rather rare combination of scholar who is a saint, a man of saintly life, and a saint who also, at the same time, is a scholar. And both of these Tsonkapa combined, we may say, almost to the highest possible pitch of perfection. And in addition to this he was a very voluminous author, a very voluminous writer, who produced manuals and textbooks innumerable, as we shall see in some detail a little later. But above all in the estimation of the Tibetan people, in the estimation of the Gelugpa school in particular, Tsonkapa is not just a great reformer, not just a great organiser and administrator, not even just a great scholar and a great saint and a voluminous author, for them he is above all one of the Bodhisattvas, or at least a manifestation of one of the Bodhisattvas.

Traditionally Tsonkapa is regarded as a manifestation, a very special manifestation, of the Bodhisattva Manjusri. And Manjusri, as many of you know, I'm sure, is the Bodhisattva of wisdom par excellence. He is associated especially with the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. And this is the reason why in Tibetan Buddhist iconography when you encounter tankas, that is to say painted scrolls and images representing Tsonkapa, he is shown with the attributes and with the insignia of Manjusri. You see at first this rather characteristic, this rather typical Tibetan scholar-saint, seated there in his Tibetan monastic robes and his tall yellow cap, about which we shall have a word or two to say later on. And then, as it were, almost growing out of his shoulders, rather like two little wings are two lotus flowers. And on one lotus flower is the flaming sword of Manjusri, the sword which cuts athunder the bonds of ignorance, on the other the book, the scripture, of the Perfection of Wisdom. So, these two insignia, these two attributes of the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, Tsonkapa bears in this way. And this indicates that he is regarded as a manifestation on the earthly plane of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, or as over-shadowed, as it were, by this great archetype of spiritual wisdom, the Bodhisattva Manjusri or Manjugosha.

Tsonkapa, we may say, on account of the force of his personality, on account of his great spiritual genius, his vast organisational ability, left a permanent imprint, a

permanent stamp, if you like, on the whole of Tibetan Buddhism. And I personally fear it's a very great pity that the name and the career and the work and the life of Tsonkapa are not better known outside of Tibet. Inside Tibet, of course, they are very, very well known indeed. There is no Tibetan Buddhist who hasn't heard the name of Tsonkapa, who is not familiar with his picture, his appearance, his writings. But outside Tibet, unfortunately, his name is hardly ever mentioned. The Buddhists of Ceylon and Burma and Thailand have, I'm sure, in practically all cases, if not indeed in all cases, not heard the name of Tsonkapa. And the same goes probably for the great majority of the Buddhists of Japan. And I'm equally sure that even in this country, even though people here do study a lot about Buddhist history and literature and so on, on a comparative basis, here also, I'm sure, very few Western Buddhists, very few English Buddhists, are in the position to state very clearly what the significance of the life and work of Tsonkapa was and indeed still is.

If we want to introduce any sort of comparison between Tsonkapa and comparable figures in our western Christian tradition, we could well say that Tsonkapa is a sort of St Benedict and St Thomas Aquinas rolled into one. St Benedict was the great monastic reformer, the great monk, the great founder of monasteries, and St Thomas Aquinas, of course, was the great theologian, the great philosopher, the great thinker, and both were very saintly men. So, Tsonkapa, if we want to give a general idea, a general characterisation of his activities, of his nature or the nature of his work, he, we may say, was a sort of Buddhist St Benedict and St Thomas Aquinas rolled into one.

He was born about 600 years ago. His life is very well documented, because the Tibetans, as I think I have mentioned before, were never indifferent to history. Here they differ from the Indians. The ancient Indians had no regard for history whatever. Sanskrit literature is very, very rich indeed. All branches of literature are represented: poetry, drama, fiction, and so on. But you will find in the whole range of Sanskrit literature, which is one of the richest literatures in the world, only one historical work, and this is the Raja Tarangini, a history of the kings of Cashmere. But not so in Tibet, the Tibetans, for some reason or other, have always been very historically minded. They produced lots of histories, histories of India, histories of Tibet, histories of Buddhism. They also produced biographies innumerable, mainly of saints and religious people. And these are very often quite sound critical works, not just hagiography. So, the life and the career of Tsonkapa happens to be very well documented indeed, and we know the exact date of his birth. He was born in the year 1357. And he was born in a place known as Tsonka. Tsonka means literally 'the onion valley'. Presumably a valley where they grew onions. And this was situated in the province of Amdo, which is in eastern, or rather north-eastern, Tibet. And for this reason Tsonkapa is so called Pa as a masculine suffix, meaning man or person. So, he is the man from the onion valley. The Tibetans have this practice or this custom that they never refer to you by your personal name. This is considered highly disrespectful. For any respectable person, especially religious person, they at once coin a sort of title.

I remember this happened to me when I arrived in Kalimpong. Most Tibetans they never knew that my name was Sangharakshita, because nobody ever used it. During the first few years they called me Injigelung, which meant, this was a title meaning the English Monk. And when I had been there a few years they called me Injigelung

Geshe Rimpoche, which is much more respectful. But they always keep these titles going. They never descend to use your personal name. This would be regarded as very familiar and disrespectful.

His monastic name, Tsonkapa's monastic name, the name which he was given upon his monastic ordination, was Sumatikirti. And this is of course a Sanskrit name and it means 'one who is praised' or 'one who is praiseworthy on account of his superior intelligence'. So, of course, it was a name, a very appropriate to a person such as Tsonkapa. The Tibetans usually refer to him as Jetsun Tsonkapa. Jetsun means 'the venerable one', and Tsonkapa means of course, as I have said, 'the man from the onion valley'. They also call him

Je Rimpoche. This is the most common way of referring to Tsonkapa, Je Rimpoche, which means 'the greatly precious ruler', the spiritual sovereign, as it were. At present, I say at present, but that may not be strictly literally true because we don't quite know what is happening in Tibet at the moment, but at present, we hope that is still true, the famous Kumbum monastery, the monastery of the 100,000 Buddha images, stands on the birth-place of Tsonkapa. And Tsonkapa like many other famous, like many other illustrious men, came from a very poor, a very humble family, and he was the fourth son of his parents. He seems to have been rather precautious, not to say rather a protege because his religious education began when he was three, when he received various initiations and started practising. And he became a sramanera, that is to say a novice monk, at the age of seven. One can't become a novice monk before that. According to the Vinaya, the Book of the Discipline, if you are old enough to learn earn your living by scaring crows, from the crops, that is to say, a very important occupation in an agricultural country, or manly agricultural country, then you can be ordained. And it's usually understood in the East that you are old enough to earn your living in this way, by scaring the crows away from the crops, when you are seven to eight. So, his was ordained at the earliest possible opportunity as a novice monk when he was seven. And I should incidentally remark that this is not very unusual even today. In many Buddhist countries, like Ceylon and Burma and Thailand, youngsters are ordained at this tender age. And our record in the Buddhist scriptures little boys of seven or eight even attaining arahantship or Enlightenment. So it only goes to show what one can do and how far one can get if only one starts early enough before one has been soiled and mudded and corrupted by what Trahan calls 'the dirty devices of this world'.

Now, by the age of sixteen Tsonkapa was sent to study at a number of famous monasteries in central Tibet. He apparently moved from one monastery to another and one great teacher to another for a number of years, and in this way he covered systematically the whole field, the whole course of Buddhist studies. He studied the scriptures, very voluminous scriptures, 100 volumes or so in Tibetan translation with their commentaries, and he also studied the translations of the works written by the great Indian thinkers, the great Indian Buddhist sages and philosophers, which are even more voluminous and extended. He studied in particular logic, on which in later life he was rather strong, not to say hot - he was very, very fond of logic; mathematics, not that the Tibetans go very far in mathematics. I remember I had a student once in Kalimpong, and I asked him whether he studied arithmetic. And he said: 'Oh, quite a bit. I spent a couple of years at it'. So I said: 'Oh well, how far have you got?' He said: 'Well, I have done addition and subtraction, but I haven't got on yet to division.' So, arithmetic in Tibet is a bit primitive. And he also studied, and this is a

science which is not so primitive by any means, though different from our own traditions, Tsonkapa also studied medicine, medical science according to the Indo-Tibetan aryuvedic tradition. And in addition to this, of course, he studied and he practised the teachings of all tree Yanas: the Hinayana, the ethical-psychological form of Buddhism, the Mahayana, the devotional-metaphysical, and the Vajrayana, the esoteric, the magical, or the archetypal, what ever one may like to call it. And it's therefore clear that in his own life, in his own work, in his own teaching, he had a very rich source of material upon which he was able to draw. By the time of Tsonkapa's advent Buddhism had been firmly established in Tibet for several hundred years. Practically everything of importance had been translated, was known, was being studied. So Tsonkapa's approach was quite encyclopaedic. He took the best of all the existing traditions, he immersed himself in all the existing traditions, and he codified and systematised them in a manner which is still of importance for the study of Tibetan Buddhism. His approach, in other words, was a very, very broad one indeed.

At the age of 25 he received his full ordination as a Buddhist monk. You can receive this higher ordination, as it is also called, at the age of 20. But as he was busy with his studies he deferred it until he was 25. And after that event, from the age of 25 onwards, he was fully occupied with both study, because he never gave up his studies, and also with teaching. And the remaining roughly 30 years of his life were past in this way: studying, writing and teaching. And in the course of these years he gathered of course many disciples, who on account of their devotion and dedication to the course of Buddhism, on account of the purity and the holiness of their lives, gradually became known to the people at large as the Gelugpas. Gelugpas means 'the virtuous ones', or, if you like, 'the strict ones'. And they were so called because they, following Tsonkapa's precept and example, insisted on a stricter observance of the Vinaja than which was usually customary at that time. And this involved for them a total prohibition of marriage as well as of alcohol. In the West to western scholars the Gelugpas are usually known as the Yellow Hats, in contradistinction to members of the older schools who are known as the Red Hats. And you may wonder what the basis of this distinction is. Some of the Kagyupa offshoots are called the White Hats and others are called the Black Hats. And I remember when I was sometimes speaking to Tibetan Buddhists in Kalimpong at the lecture we used to have periodically at the Kalimpong town-hall I used to tease them a little and say that I get confused with this Tibetan Buddhism, all the Yellow Caps and Red Hats and White Hats and Black Hats, I'm not quite sure what it is all about. But at least we can be clear as regards the Yellow Hats and the Red Hats. In certain tantric ceremonies at the time of tantric initiation, at the time of transmission of power, about which we shall be learning something in a few weeks time, the officiating lama or the guru, he puts on a cap. In the case of the Gelugpas this is of course yellow and in the case of the Nyingmapas it's red. But there is a meaning, there is a symbolism in this. He puts it on at those moments in the ceremony or in the initiation when mentally through meditation he is identifying himself with the Buddha or Bodhisattva whose initiation he is giving. So that when this sort of solemn moment comes, and it is a very solemn moment, when you see an acolyte handing the yellow cap or the red cap, as the case may be, to the guru, it's usually handed very ceremoniously on a little piece of silk, or even on a cushion or something like that. And when you see him putting it on then you know that a very important moment has been reached in the ceremony and that he is at that moment meditating. Therefore he has his eyes closed, and he is identifying

himself in his meditation with the Buddha or Bodhisattva, it may be Avalokiteshvara, or Manjusri, or Amithaba, whose initiation he is then about to give, so that you feel that you are getting that initiation, as it were, from the Buddha or Bodhisattva himself through the guru, or through the teacher. And after that moment has past, when some other part of the ceremony comes along, then that hat is equally solemnly taken off and given back to the acolyte, folded up and put away. And it may be that in the course of one ceremony or one initiation, as I have seen myself, the red or the yellow cap or hat will put on and taken off five or six times, or even more than that. So therefore this isn't something comparatively extrinsic to Tibetan Buddhism, this question of the hat. It is something of quite great practical importance and symbolical significance.

So up to the time of Tsonkapa all the lamas following the Indian tradition used to have red hats or red caps for this particular ceremonial initiatory purpose. But Tsonkapa wanted to make a distinction, a rather obvious distinction, a very visible distinction between his followers and those of the existing schools. So he changed the colour of the hat used in these ceremonies from red to yellow. And in this way the Gelugpas came to be known, sometimes in Tibet itself, as Yellow Hat or Yellow Cap lamas. And some Western scholars have taken up this title and used it generally instead of speaking of the Gelugpas.

Now in the course of the lifetime of Tsonkapa three great monasteries were founded by his followers, by his monastic disciples, on behalf of the Gelugpa school. And they were all founded around Lasa, that is to say around the capital of Tibet. And these were the three great monasteries of Ganden, Sera and Depung. These survived right down to the present, or practically to the present, they are no longer occupied, they have been, I believe seriously been damaged by the Chinese, but up to the Chinese occupation there were at Ganden, as far as I recollect, about 700 monks, at Sera about, as far as I recollect, 3 – 400, and at Depung even more: 4 – 5000. They were almost like most monastic cities, or at least monastic towns. But even during the lifetime of Tsonkapa himself the beginnings of this development took place in these monasteries where I found it.

Tsonkapa himself died in the year 1419 when the Gelugpa order and the movement which it represented was already very well established and with a firm footing within the religious life of Tibet. And thereafter the anniversary of his death was observed every year as a great festival by all Tibetan Buddhists, not only by the Gelugpas themselves but even by the Nyingmapas and the Kagyupas. All Tibetan Buddhists on the anniversary of Tsonkapa's death joined in honouring his memory. And the way in which they do this is rather interesting; they do it by way of a Festival of Lights. In a few days time in this country we'll be having a sort of a Festival of Lights, if you want to call it that, on the 5th of November. But on the anniversary of Tsonkapa's death there is a Festival of Lights of a rather different character. And what happens is this: as the evening draws on, as it begins to get dark, every house and certainly every monastery, every temple, puts out all around in the windows, along the parapets, on the flat roofs, on the window sills, they put out scores, even hundreds, even thousands of tiny oil lamps. There may be just little tiny cups filled with oil, with a little wick, or they may be filled with clarified butter, and they are lit. And you can see them in rows. It's much more beautiful than rows or strings of electric bulbs, I can assure you. And you see these all over the town, as I have seen them Kalimpong at night on this

occasion. And it reminds one very, very much of the Indian festival of what they call Deewali or Deepawali, when also lamps are lit round all the houses and temples and shops, everywhere in the same way. The Indian festival, of course, is to celebrate the return of Rama to India after he had conquered Ravana in the Island of Lanka or Ceylon. But in the case of the Tibetan festival, the Tibetan Festival of Lights, it's in honour of the memory of Jetsun Tsonkapa on the occasion of his death anniversary.

As I've mentioned, Tsonkapa was a very voluminous author. There is a standard collected edition of his writings in Tibetan and they fill 16 massive volumes, many, many thousands of pages. His two principal works are first of all the Lamrim Ch'enmo and secondly the Ngagrim Ch'enmo. The Lamrim is a survey of the whole spiritual path according to the Mahayana tradition. The name literally means 'the great stages of the path', in other words the spiritual path, and it discusses in detail the practice of the Paramitas and so on, the Perfections with citations from innumerable Buddhist scriptures. The Ngagrim Ch'enmo is a similar account of the tantric path, the Mantrayana, the Vajrayana, and Ngagrim Ch'enmo means 'the great stages of the tantric path'. And these two very encyclopaedic, these really highly systematic, these really massive works are the basis Gelugpa studies. Tsonkapa himself made a shortened version of the Lamrim for those who are of lesser intelligence, and this is the one which are even the monks usually study because the big one is very, very difficult and very abstruse and technical indeed. There are also by Tsonkapa a number of commentaries on scriptures and a number of minor works, rather beautiful ones, one of which in fact I myself had rendered into Tibetan some years ago. It was published incidentally in the Middle Way I think about six years ago.

After Tsonkapa's death, we may say, the Gelugpa school continued to flourish. There is no time for details. It's a very inspiring story but a rather complex one, and we haven't time to follow it. But just skipping a generation or two we may say that the third abbot of Ganden, Ganden being the first of the three great Gelugpa monasteries, founded during Tsonkapa's lifetime, the third abbot of Ganden after Tsonkapa was one Gedun Dugpa, who happens to be the nephew of Tsonkapa himself. And he founded the famous monastery of Tachi Lunpo at Tchigatse, which is southeast from Lasa. And he installed his own personal teacher as the abbot of that new Gelugpa monastery. Now this abbot, this third abbot of Ganden, was regarded, was popularly regarded as the reincarnation of the second abbot of Ganden. Tsonkapa himself being regarded as the first abbot of Ganden. And it is from this time, from that time of the third abbot of Ganden, that we find the idea of what is known to scholars as the hubbleganic succession, that is to say succession by reincarnation, starts to arise. And at first, at this early stage, there are only two lines of such hubbleganic succession: first of all there is the line of Tsonkapa's nephew the third abbot of Ganden, his successive reincarnations, and secondly those of his teacher the abbot of Tachi Lunpo. And these two lines were subsequently known as those of the Dalai Lama and those of the Panchen Lama. This is how they originated. The Dalai Lamas are the descendants or the continued reincarnations of the third abbot of Ganden, whereas the Panchen Lamas are the continued reincarnations of the first abbot of Tachi Lunpo. The present Dalai Lama is the 14th of his line, he is 14th in this hubbleganic succession, and the present Panchen Lama is the ninth in succession in his particular line.

Now, this hubbleganic succession as the scholars call it, hubbleganic is a word coming from the Mongolian language, does not represent anything really new in Buddhism. It doesn't really represent a very radical departure. We may say that it is a new application of an old principle. So what is that old principle? It's a principle which is very familiar to all students of Buddhism, one which penetrates into practically all aspects of Buddhism, practically all schools, and this is of course the principle of the Bodhisattva ideal. If we study the whole range of Buddhist thought, if we look at the various formulations of the spiritual ideal in Buddhism, then I think we have to recognise that the Bodhisattva ideal is the highest of them all. It embodies the Buddhist spiritual ideal in its loftiest form. Especially, of course, in the case of the Mahayana. The Bodhisattva ideal, we may say, is the ideal of Enlightenment not just for one's own sake alone but for the benefit of all, not just individual salvation but in a sense collective salvation, or even, if you like, cosmic salvation. Now, what does this mean? The Bodhisattva ideal is not only a great spiritual ideal, it's also the expression of a very profound metaphysical outlook, a very profound spiritual experience, and there are quite a number of abstruse metaphysical explanations of the meaning and the significance of the Bodhisattva ideal. But I'm not going into those this evening. The Bodhisattva ideal can also be expressed, and certainly for the purposes of the lecture of this evening can be expressed in comparatively simple terms. We know that all Buddhists accept the idea of karma and rebirth, the idea that men does not just live ones on this earth but that on the contrary there is a succession of lives which he undergoes, that he not only goes from this earth but he comes back according to what we call the law of karma, the law of cause and effect, working on the psychological and the ethical plane. This evening I'm not concerned to prove the truth of this idea of karma and rebirth, but only to refer to it for purposes of explanation of the Bodhisattva ideal and ultimately and directly the hubbleganic succession.

Rebirth, according to the teaching of all the different Buddhist schools, takes place on account of the residue of craving and aversion and ignorance left in the individual stream of consciousness, popularly known as the soul, at the time of death. In other words, if you have died with your passions unexhausted, if there is something which you still want, if there is something for which you still crave, something to which you are still attached, whether it's wife and family, or riches, or name and fame, or even study, or even Buddhism perhaps, then you will have to come back, you will be drawn back by the power of your craving, by the power of your desire, into a new body and a fresh incarnation, a reincarnation. And this whole process, how it takes place, and so on, is depicted in the Tibetan Wheel of Life, which most of you, I'm sure, know quite well. In the middle there is the hub with the three animals: the cock, the pig, the snake, representing the three poisons or passions of craving, anger and ignorance, which set the whole process going, then in the second circle the upward and the downward path, then in the third circle the five or the six spheres of conditioned existence into which one can be reborn, among them the human, and in the outermost circle the twelve links of the chain of conditioned coproduction in accordance with which the whole process takes place.

So this is common, this is standard Buddhist teaching, teaching of The Wheel of Life, the wheel of birth and death and rebirth, the wheel, if you like, of incarnation and reincarnation. And the whole wheel is set turning round and round on account of the Three Poisons or passions or fires of craving, of aversion and of ignorance. But by the way of spiritual practice, or in the course of spiritual practice, one gradually is able to

eliminate these three poisons or these three passions: craving becomes less, aversion becomes less pronounced, ignorance is dispelled. And in the end in one's mind or in one's consciousness there is only a state of peace, a state of love, a state of wisdom, one is no longer bound to the wheel, one has no longer to come back. So therefore when one dies, when the consciousness, as it were, slips out of, flashes out of the physical body, there is nothing to draw it back. It remains, as it were, on the higher, the archetypal, even on the transcendental plains. Our existence remains in, as it were, Nirvana or in the state of unmodified and undisturbed Buddhahood or Enlightenment. In other words, there is no need for any further rebirth, any further reincarnation.

But, but according to the Mahayana at this point two possibilities, or, if you like, two paths open up and disclose themselves. Having reached this point one can either just remain there, one can allow oneself, as it were, to disappear into Nirvana, to disappear from the can of the world, one can slip into that like the dewdrop into the shining sea, or, on the other hand, one can turn back, and one can decide quite voluntarily to be reborn, not because there is any residue of karma left unaccounted for, but out of compassion, so that one can continue to help other living beings in the world with the knowledge, with the spiritual experience which one has gained.

This is the sort of story which is told e.g. about the great Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, whose name means 'the one who looks down', that is to say the one who looks down in compassion. It is said that originally thousands of years ago, many, many centuries ago, Avalokiteshvara was a great monk, a great yogin, and he had practised meditation in a cave in the Himalayas for many, many years, that were the greater part of his life, and the time came, the moment came when he found himself on the brink, on the verge, if you like, of Enlightenment or Nirvana. His experience, we are told, was that he ascended ever higher and higher one stage of super, one stage of higher consciousness to another, ever going further and further and further away from the world, through all sorts of experiences, through all sorts of archetypal realms, all sorts of paradisiac realms, all sorts of forms, all sorts of glorious figures, experiences. And this faded away and he came, as it were, to the shore, to the boundary of a great ocean of light. And he could see, he could hear nothing but this ocean of light. And he experienced tremendous joy and happiness that at last he was returning to his source, returning to his origins, and was going to be merged with Reality itself. So, with a great sigh of relieve almost, we are told, he just started to let himself go, to slip into that. But just at that moment, we are told, just at that very moment he heard a sound. At first he didn't know what it was, but he heard a sound coming as though from a great distance, coming as though from afar off, coming as though from far below. So, this just arrested his attention and he just listened. And he heard not just one sound, he heard many sounds. He heard, as it were, many voices, and they were all crying out, wailing, weeping, lamenting, grieving. And the sounds seemed to get louder and louder. So, at last, we are told, he turned his eyes, he turned his vision away from the great ocean of light, and he looked down (this is the way he gets his name from, 'the lord who looks down'). He looked down, he looked down right down into the depth, right down to this world itself, and he saw in this world so many people, so many millions of living beings, suffering in various ways (usually there are ignorance, their spiritual ignorance, their lack of spiritual instruction). So then the thought came to him, or the realisation came to him, that how can I leave these beings, how can I allow myself to slip into, to merge into this ocean of light, just saving myself when there are in fact in the world below so

many people, so many beings, who need my help and my assistance and guidance. So he turned back. He not only looked down but he went down, he went back into the world, and this is called 'the path of the Bodhisattva'.

The first, the path of aligning oneself, emerged in Nirvana, oneself, individually; this is the path of the Arahant, the one who desires his individual salvation. The second is the path, as I have said, of the Bodhisattva, the one who desires not just his own Illumination, not just his own Emancipation, but the Liberation and the Enlightenment of all living beings whatsoever, who is not satisfied until he can, as it were, gather all living beings into his arms and go with them into Buddhahood, into Enlightenment, in a sort of cosmic Enlightenment, as I called it earlier on.

[...] in Nirvana, to gain Liberation for oneself, for one's renunciation of that to have any meaning or any significance at all, otherwise one's following of the Bodhisattva ideal may become not the following of a spiritual ideal but only indulgence in a rationalisation of one's attachment to the world.

Now, Tibetan Buddhism takes this Bodhisattva ideal very, very seriously indeed. It's a living thing, a real thing, for the Tibetan Buddhists. Some of you may know, some of you may have read a book by Marco Palis called Peaks and Lamas. And in the later edition of that book there is an extra chapter which he has added and this is called The Presiding Idea, the presiding idea of Tibetan Buddhism, and this is of course the Bodhisattva ideal, because this ideal does indeed preside over, spiritually preside over the whole of Tibetan Buddhism. If one doesn't understand the Bodhisattva ideal, one probably hasn't understood Tibetan Buddhism one little bit.

So the Tibetans, as I have said, do take this Bodhisattva ideal very, very seriously indeed. They do believe that there are still living in the world people who have made this great renunciation, this great sacrifice. They do believe that there are living in the world people who have literally turned their backs upon Nirvana and who are returned to the world to help in the higher evolution of the race towards Enlightenment or towards Buddhahood. For them the Bodhisattva ideal is not just a beautiful dream.

I remember reading a book by a French, I think it was a Jesuit writer, certainly a catholic writer, and he is writing about the Bodhisattva ideal. And he said, it's very beautiful, but it's a beautiful dream; there are no Bodhisattvas in the world. But he said, on the other hand the ideal of Christianity, that is to say, the ideal of the crucified Christ, this is a historical reality. But the Bodhisattva ideal is just a spiritual pipe-dream, a sort of opium dream that the endearing Buddhist has, laying on his couch in the East and just having nothing else to do except dream up this spiritual ideal. But it isn't really like that. Not at least for the Tibetan Buddhists. They regard the Bodhisattvas, because I should use the plural, as being very much with us as part, in a sense, of the spiritual economy of the world. And they believe very, very strongly indeed that there are some such Bodhisattvas, people who have literally turned their back upon Nirvana, living in the world and living in Tibet. And they believe that this can be identified and known and, as it were, picked out. And amongst them, they believe very strongly, especially the Gelugpas believe, was the third abbot of Ganden and his teacher the first abbot of Tachi Lunpo; in other words, the first of the Dalai Lamas and the first of the Panchen Lamas.

The first of these was regarded as, or is regarded as a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, the great Bodhisattva of compassion, whereas the second was regarded as the manifestation of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite light. In this context one might say that the brought difference, the brought distinction between Buddha and Bodhisattva is the distinction, as it were, between the static and the dynamic aspects of the same spiritual reality. Buddha represents the static aspect, the aspect out of time, the eternal aspect; and the Bodhisattva represents that same out of time Enlightenment or transcendental experience in process of realisation within time, within the historical process. So one is, as it were, static, not static in the sense of standing still in time but of standing, they said, were outside time altogether; and the other is the dynamic, the Buddha and the Bodhisattva.

Some western writers have rather confused the function of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Some western writers have said that the Dalai Lama is the temporal ruler of Tibet, whereas the Panchen Lama is the spiritual ruler or the spiritual head. And they seemed to have arrived at this conclusion on account of the fact that technically a Buddha is superior to a Bodhisattva. So the Dalai Lama is only the incarnation or manifestation of a Bodhisattva, while as the Panchen Lama is the incarnation or manifestation of a Buddha. So they assume the Panchen Lama must occupy a higher position than the Dalai Lama. But this isn't so; it doesn't work out like that. It sounds quite logical, but in the context of Tibetan Buddhism it just isn't true.

In the eyes of the Tibetans, in the eyes of Tibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama is in fact all in all, he is the temporal ruler and the spiritual head, both together. And the Panchen Lama is in comparison a rather shadowy figure. I remember that when I used to visit the houses of Tibetan friends in Kalimpong you always see a large framed photograph of the Dalai Lama in the altar, or in the shrine rather. You'd always see this, you never went to a house without seeing it, but you very, very rarely saw a similar framed photograph of the Panchen Lama. And I remember also that when both the lamas, both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, were received at the Siriguri airport not far from Kalimpong in, I think, 1956 I think it was, winter 1956, owing to the machinations of the Chinese, who were semi-sponsoring the Panchen Lama, the Panchen Lama was provided with a throne of the same height as the Dalai Lama. And this intensely resented by the Tibetans, who regarded the Panchen Lama as a comparatively unimportant figure and regarded the Dalai Lama as very much the superior of the two. But this is just in passing to illustrate this fact, this point, that for the Tibetans, for the Tibetan Buddhists, traditionally the Dalai Lama is all in all, not only the temporal ruler but the spiritual head and the human, the living manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

Now, among the line of the Dalai Lamas, amongst the 14 Dalai Lamas, the third and the fifth and the 13th are of special historical importance. The third Dalai Lama lived in the 16th century, roughly contemporary with our queen Elisabeth I, and he finally converted the Mongols. You may remember from the last lecture that the Mongols were originally converted by Gpakpa, the Sakyapa hierarch. But they subsequently fell away from Buddhism after the collapse of their empire in China. And the third Dalai Lama was responsible for bringing them back into the fold of Buddhism. And thereafter they became very staunch followers of Tibetan Buddhism, and especially staunch followers of the Gelugpa school. Incidentally the Mongolian Buddhists, the

Mongolian monks in particular, had produced a great many saints and scholars. Mongolian lamas I found from my own personal contacts and experiences, Mongolian lamas are especially famous for their learning. The Tibetan Gelugpa lamas are sometimes learned enough, are usually learned enough, but the Mongolians, for some reason or other, surpassed even the Tibetans in learning.

And I remember a little story, which was told me once by Dandu Rimpoche. He said that when the 13th Dalai Lama fled to Mongolia, when Sir Francis Younghusband's expedition reached Lasa early in the present century, the Dalai Lama, the 13th Dalai Lama had a number of discussions with Mongolian lamas. But he found, rather to his consternation, that they referred to texts with which he just wasn't acquainted, which he had never studied. So this gave him much food for thought, Dandu Rimpoche said. And when he did eventually return to Lasa he revised and he reorganised the curriculum of studies after his contact with these Mongolian lamas, who are, who really are formidable.

I remember again one whom I happened to know personally, and we travelled about a bit together. And whenever we sat down out were come a book, out were come a great volume, and he sit down cross-legged and he put a silk cloth across his knees, and he'd opened the book and he start studying, he start reading. He'd never do anything else. Day and night almost, the whole of the time that I was with him, he was studying in this way. He was absolutely indefatigable. And this, I gather, very typical of the Mongolian monastic scholars. But this is by the way.

Back to the third Dalai Lama. The third Dalai Lama received from one of the rulers of the Mongols in those days, a ruler known as Altun Khan, the title of Dalai Lama. The word Dalai, in fact, is not Tibetan at all, it's Mongolian. Dalai means 'great like the ocean'. So Dalai Lama means 'the lama, the teacher, the guru, who is great or wide like the ocean'. And this is the title, of course, which is usually used by Westerners. But Tibetans again do not usually use this title when they refer to the Dalai Lama. They use it when they are talking to Europeans, but amongst themselves they usually say either Gelwa Rimpoche, which means 'the precious ruler', or, even more often, I think, Yeshe Norbu, which means 'the jewel of knowledge'. These are the two very respectful titles, which they use when referring to the Dalai Lama.

Now, the fifth Dalai Lama lived in the 17th century, and he is known as 'the great fifth'. He is a very learned man, a great scholar, a great author, and apart from purely religious subjects, on which he wrote a great deal, he also wrote on history, on grammar, on poetry and on astrology. So you can see that he was a rather cultivated sort of person. And though the leading representative of the Gelugpa school, he was in fact very sympathetic to the Nyingmapa school. And he did in fact write several books on the traditions of the Nyingmapa school, which is rather, like say, in the West a pope writing on Methodism, or something of that sort. And he wrote very sympathetically. And he was not only a great scholar and great writer, but he was a great statesman and a great administrator. And with the help of the Mongols, with their support, he took over the rule of Tibet. So it is from the days of the fifth Dalai Lama, the great fifth, that Tibet became what we in the West call a theocracy, a sort of religious state. And it is important to remember that Tibet has been a theocracy for only 300 years out of the 1300 during which Buddhism has been known in Tibet. We tend to think of the Dalai Lamas and the theocracy of Tibet as something fixed and

established for all time, but it isn't really so. Buddhism has been established in Tibet, has in fact flourished there until the recent past for 1300 years. So out of that period only 300 years, only about a fourth of the period, saw the rule of the Dalai Lamas and the establishment of this theocratic state. In other words, this, which we usually think of as typically Tibetan Buddhist, is a comparatively recent development. It's this great fifth Dalai Lama who started building the Potala, that famous seat of the Dalai Lamas in Lasa. And the Potala is named after Avalokiteshvara's traditional abode or residence in south India, according to the Buddhist scriptures.

The 13th Dalai Lama ruled in this present century. And it was he who reassured the independence of Tibet against the Chinese. The present Dalai Lama was discovered and identified in 1935, which means that he is now 33 years of age. I don't want this evening to go into any questions of politics, because I think in any case the story, the very tragic story of Tibet in recent years is quite well known to you all. But I do want to explain briefly what the Dalai Lama means to the Tibetan people and then I propose to close on a more personal note.

First of all the Dalai Lama is of course, *de jure* if not *de facto*, the temporal ruler of Tibet. And such being the case he is the sort of focal point of the national consciousness, especially at the present day, both, for the Tibetans in Tibet who don't accept the Chinese rule, and for the exiles, the refugees in India. He is the sort of symbol, if you like even the incarnation of the Tibetan national spirit. But his significance is not by any means confined to that. Traditionally the Dalai Lamas are extremely well educated. From their very earliest years they are given a very careful training in all departments of Buddhist thought, indeed of Buddhist life. They have to study, they have to meditate, and they have a rather hard and rather a difficult course of study and practice. So by the time they reach majority they are usually very, very well informed indeed about all aspects of Buddhist tradition, both theoretical and practical. But at the same time, despite this immense learning, despite also this immense authority and prestige, the Dalai Lama is never regarded as a supreme doctrinal authority. The Dalai Lama doesn't lay down, isn't responsible for laying down what is Buddhism, not even what is Tibetan Buddhism, not even what is Tsonkapa's interpretation of Tibetan Buddhism. If anybody has this position and function it's a comparatively subordinate figure, that is to say the *Ti Rimpoche*, who is the head, the abbot of the Ganden monastery. So the Dalai Lama doesn't occupy a position in Tibetan Buddhism in any way analogous to that of the pope in the Roman Catholic Church. The pope defines morals, defines dogma, but the Dalai Lama does not do any such thing.

So the question arises what, apart from being a sort of embodiment of the national consciousness, what does the Dalai Lama mean to the Tibetans? Well above all, as I think I probably made clear already, the Dalai Lama means or the Dalai Lama represents for the Tibetans a sort of living Bodhisattva in their midst, and I can assure that the Tibetans, whatever we may think, the Tibetans take this quite literally. Just as the pious Catholic quite literally regards the pope as infallible when he pronounces on morals and doctrine, in the same way the Tibetans quite literally regard the Dalai Lama as a living Bodhisattva. He is not just a very good man, he is not just the ruler of the country, he is not just a great teacher or great spiritual figure, he is for them quite literally an incarnate Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara amongst them and in their midst, so that they feel that through him they, the whole of Tibet, the whole of their

tradition, the whole of their life is in contact with the archetypal world, in contact with the spiritual, in contact, if you like, with the transcendental. And this is the basis, this is the source of their very, very deep devotion to him.

I met hundreds, possibly thousands of Tibetans of all shades of opinion, of all social classes, of all degrees of education, but there was never any doubt about their absolute devotion to the person of the Dalai Lama, a devotion which was based primarily on the firm belief that he was, as I have said, quite literally, and as I repeat again, quite literally a Bodhisattva in their midst, one who had earned the freedom of Nirvana, but who voluntarily had elected to remain behind in the world to help them. So if one wants any sort of comparison at all from Western thought, one might say that its for the Tibetans the Dalai Lama is rather like a sort of combination, if you can think of that, of, let's say, the British monarch plus the pope, divested of his infallibility of course, and Christ himself. This is how the Tibetans look upon the Dalai Lama. So obviously he is centre, the focal point of a very great deal of spiritual emotion indeed.

I myself have met the present Dalai Lama on a number of occasions. I met him first in New Delhi in the year 1956. In the following year, 1957, I had the pleasure of receiving him in Kalimpong at my own Vihara. And after his return to India as a refugee I met him again a number of times and we had quite a number of interesting discussions, mainly about Buddhism. The last time we met was in Dalhousie just about two years, in fact I think almost to the day two years ago. And those of you who have seen our slide show will remember that he appears on those slides which were made from pictures which were taken on that occasion.

Now, nobody can say with certainty what the future holds for Tibet. There are some prophecies in Tibet, abroad, to the effect that the 14th Dalai Lama will be the last of the line, and any Tibetans believe that. At present there are in India some 100,000 Tibetan refugees, 100,000 people, amongst them many monks, many lamas, who have fled from Tibet rather than live under the communist regime, and who are now living and trying to work and trying to preserve their culture and trying to preserve their religion in India and a few other places to which they have been able to migrate. There are thousands of them for instance in Switzerland and several hundred, I believe, in Canada. We have also, as you know, a few here in this country too.

Transcribed by Punyaketu