

## **Lecture 61: Tibetan Buddhist Meditation** **Sangharakshita**

Mr Chairman and Friends,

Time is passing, as time always does pass, and it seems that we are now crawling to the end of our course on an Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, and this is in fact this evening the last lecture but one. Let me just remind you, before we begin, that the first half of the series, the lectures comprising the first half of the series, were more historical and as it were even institutional in character, but the second half of the series, the second group of four lectures, seems to be rather more practical, rather more, if you like, religious or spiritual. The week before last, therefore, beginning this second group within the series, we dealt with Symbols of Tibetan Buddhist Art, and last week, as you may recollect, we dealt with the Four Foundation Yogas of the Tibetan Buddhist Tantra. Now today we come, in our seventh lecture, to the most practical, we might also say the most religious, the most spiritual, aspect of all: we come to something which constitutes the heart in many ways of the spiritual life, that is we come to Tibetan Buddhist Meditation,

Now we may say, in a general way, that meditation, or dhyana, is an important aspect not only of Tibetan Buddhism but of all schools, of all Buddhist traditions whatsoever. Whether one examines the Theravada teachings or those of the general Mahayana, whether Indian or Far Eastern, whether one looks at the Tendai school or whether one looks at even the Shin school one finds that meditation in one form or another is an important aspect, an integral part of each and every one of them. And this isn't surprising, because from the very beginnings of Buddhism, if we go right back - to the Buddha's own teaching, so far as we can make that out, so far as we can decipher it, it does seem that an emphasis, a very great emphasis often, was placed upon what we call meditation. If we let our thoughts go back to the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, about which we spoke last winter, if we go back to that path; then we find that the last three steps or stages or aspects, that of the Perfect Effort, the Perfect Awareness, and the Perfect Samadhi, these are all concerned in one way or another with what we call meditation. And then if we go to that other great formulation of the Path the Path of the Bodhisattva, the path of the six or the ten perfections or transcending virtues, then we find that the fifth of these, the fifth paramita, the fifth perfection, the fifth transcending virtue, is the same dhyana, or samadhi, or meditation. And if we look among the schools of Buddhism we see that some are concentrating more upon, others are concentrating more upon metaphysics, but some - and among them one of the most famous of all Buddhist schools, the Chan school, the Zen school - specializes as it were in meditation, in dhyana; even though it isn't perhaps quite meditation in the ordinary, in the conventional, sense.

So from all these facts, from all these considerations, we can understand that meditation is important, occupies an important place, an integral place, we may say, not only in Tibetan Buddhism but in the whole Buddhist tradition as exemplified by all schools,

Now most of you, I know, have got some idea of what meditation is all about. Many of you, I know as I look around, many of you do attend one or another of the meditation classes which we hold in the course of the week at Saku-ura in our shrine and meditation centre there. And some of you, I know again, have attended one or another of our retreats, when, amongst other things, we meditate sometimes for three or four or five, or even more, hours a day for seven days or ten days, as the case may be. But just as it were to refresh your memories, and also

perhaps to provide a little guidance for those who haven't practised meditation, or who may be a little in the dark as to what it is all about, let me just briefly, by way of introduction to Tibetan Buddhist meditation, let me briefly recapitulate the main stages of the meditation experience.

We know that when one is speaking of matters of this sort, which are matters of experience and which also differ very much, very greatly, from one person to another, according to temperament and line of practice and so on, it isn't very easy to generalize, and we have to be very cautious, very careful, about generalizing. But even bearing these things in mind, I think we can say that broadly speaking there are some five main stages of meditation or in what we may call the meditation experience. These are not sharply marked off one from another; they are not rigidly demarcated, just like the colours of the rainbow, just one fades into another by imperceptible degrees. But broadly speaking nevertheless we can distinguish, we can point to five broadly main successive stages in our meditation experience, regardless of the method we pursue, regardless of the specific meditative path which we follow.

Now the first of these stages is the stage of what we may describe as withdrawal of the mind from the senses. This is the first step, this is the first stage, This is one of the reasons why when we meditate we choose, we select, a quiet, a secluded, place in which there will be a minimum of interference from the external world. We shut out as far as possible all external stimuli. Very often, as you know, we sit cross-legged, we fold our hands in our lap, Not only that, we close our eyes, and we close the eyes so that we shall shut out sights, so that we shall shut out visual objects. We just withdraw the mind, withdraw the consciousness, from those things; and not just from the visual objects - we try to ignore sounds, we try to ignore tangibles, tastes, sensations coming from or through the senses of every kind, We try in this first stage to shut out for a while the external world, We withdraw within. We withdraw the senses from the sense organs, We withdraw consciousness itself from the senses, So this is the first stage of all meditation practice: a withdrawal within, a turning away of the mind from the external world and from the senses. I should, of course, point out, in case anybody is liable to misunderstand, that this is the first step, this is the first stage, but it does not mean by any means that withdrawal or turning away from the world is the last word of or in meditation, So this is the first stage of our meditation experience, a stage in which the mind or the consciousness is withdrawn from the physical senses and poised as it were in itself. Sometimes it so happens that if we are practising regularly, or if we are practising intensively, the external world does as it were disappear, or even quite literally just disappears; we don't perceive it any more, we don't see anything, we don't hear anything, we don't smell, we don't taste, we don't touch anything, We are just fully absorbed and concentrated within. So this is the first step or the first stage in the meditation experience.

And the second stage is what we call traditionally the suppression of the five hindrances, The five hindrances represent five unhealthy, negative psychological states, especially emotional states. The first of these is what we call desire or thirst. or craving for sensuous experience. You may for a while shut out the external world; you may not be looking at anything or listening to anything, but as you sit There, concentrated as you are, a little sort of tremor may arise in the mind, based on a recollection of a previous experience, and That will lead the mind as it were insensibly back towards The original sense object, and there will be along with that a desire for the experience of, the enjoyment of, that sense object. So This is what we call the hindrance of the desire or craving for sensuous experience, and this is very difficult to get rid of, very difficult to eliminate, because it goes right deep down into the unconscious mind,

right down to the roots of the mind as it were. In this second stage of meditation experience, there's no possibility of eradicating the hindrances, but they have to be temporarily suppressed, temporarily held down, if further progress is to be made. So this is the first hindrance to be suppressed or held down or held in abeyance as it were - the desire for sensuous experience.

And then ill will: anger or hatred or antagonism, in any of its forms. If while you're sitting there, if while you're trying to concentrate, trying to meditate, there's any residue in your conscious mind of antagonism towards anybody, if you're irritated or upset, you will not be able to make any further progress in your meditation, so the hindrance of ill will also has to be suppressed, has to be held in abeyance as it were, at that particular time.

And then the third hindrance is what we call sloth and torpor. This is a very terrible hindrance indeed; it probably holds people back much more than either the desire for sensuous experience or ill will, because as you sit there trying to meditate you may find That your mind is quite free from desire for any particular Thing, you don't particularly want a cup of tea or you don't particularly want to be more warm and more cosy, and you may not be conscious of any ill will towards anybody, you may not be feeling at least positively murderous towards anybody, you'll be feeling moderately affectionate; but sloth and torpor, that's quite a different proposition. Sloth and torpor may overwhelm you nevertheless. In Pali these are called *tina nidha*(?), and The distinction is a quite interesting one. *Tina* or sloth represents a sort of physical sluggishness, and the *nidha*, The torpor, psychological and stagnation. So it represents a sort of psychological inertia and stagnation. So sort of stagnation of both body and mind, a sort of dullness, a sort of deadness, a stiffness, a lack of resilience, a sort of - well, a force which is sort of pulling you down all the time and preventing you from making any further progress. So This also is a hindrance to be overcome, Incidentally, I should remark perhaps at this stage that these five hindrances by themselves can provide us very easily with material for a whole talk, but we are having in This connection this evening just to skip over them very very briefly and very quickly indeed.

So let's come on to The fourth hindrance, and This is a hindrance which is the opposite of sloth and torpor: this is restlessness and anxiety, This is hurry and flurry. If you do manage to get out of this state of sloth and torpor, you'll probably find that you get restless and start worrying; you fly from one extreme, in other words, to The other. So this is a state where you are always on edge about something, always nervy, always worried, always anxious, always looking at things with a furrowed brow as it were, wondering what on earth is going to happen next, what disaster or tragedy is going to strike you down the next minute, And lots of people do go around like this, you can see it from the expression on their faces; they are always expecting something terrible to happen - and of course sometimes it does happen. But in general the hindrance is that of restlessness you can't settle down. One thought chases after another, and you're anxious, So this is a hindrance to be suppressed, to be held in abeyance. If you want success in meditation, you must be calm, you must be peaceful, you must settle down, you mustn't worry about anything. Just leave your worries just outside the door of the meditation room, In India, as you know, when people enter a temple or a shrine they leave their shoes outside the door, and this is said to be symbolical. It's said to symbolize the leaving outside of all one's cares and worries and troubles when you go into the meditation room or into the temple or the shrine. If your wife is sick, well, never mind; forget about it for one hour, If your children aren't doing too well at school, never mind; forget about it for one hour. Just put it down, just drop it. I'm sure those of you who know anything about Zen find

that the little phrase 'putting it down', or 'putting her down' in particular, has all sorts of associations, very meaningful ones.

So so much for restlessness and anxiety, These also constitute a hindrance which must be allowed to die down, to sink down, to die away, before one can successfully meditate.

And lastly, doubt. This is vicikitsa, It isn't doubt in the sense of just wondering whether something is true or false; it's doubt in the sense of indecisiveness, unwillingness to commit oneself; wondering at the time of the meditation,, is this going to do me any good? or is there any meaning in meditation? or am I really going to get anywhere? or am I not rather wasting my time, and think ing that you're rather a fool just sitting there with your legs crossed and- - you don't really think you're going to get nirvana in six easy lessons? And this sort of Thing is doubt, indecision, So this is suppressed, or held in abeyance, by a firm determination, by a conviction, that as a result of the practice, you are going to get somewhere; and this vicikitsa, this doubt, this indecisiveness, has been placed last for a very definite reason: it's probably the last one you get rid of, Sometimes people come to me and they say, well, I've been meditating in the class for a year; I suppose I'm doing quite well, but I do sometimes wonder why on earth I do it; I can't help wondering whether it's any good, whether I'm not wasting my time, whether I'd better read books on Buddhism, or whether I'd better just give up Buddhism altogether. But this is the lurking remnants of vicikitsa, doubt and indeisiveness, So this also is a hindrance to be overcome, If this is present at the time of meditation, no further progress is possible; it just undermines you.

So this is the second stage of meditation experience: freedom frou:, at least temporary freedom from, freedom for the period of The practice at least, of these five hindrances of desire for sensuous experience, ill will, sloth and torpor, and restlessness and anxiety, and lastly doubt. Unless the mind is free from these, at least for the time being, no meditation, no further meditation experience, is possible, Of course, I know when people come along to meditation classes at the end of a busy day, in The course of which no doubt their m minds have been in turmoil of one kind or another, it isn't easy just to settle down and allow these five hindrances to die away. It takes time, And sometimes people say; after meditating for an hour, or at least sitting there for an hour, then when the bell rings to mark the end of the session, then they feel that, well, they're just about ready to begin! Because it's only then, it's only by that time, that all these hindrances, all these wild and wandering thoughts, have died down, And this is one of the reasons why we find a retreat so helpful, when one can qet away for a whole weekend, a whole week, even ten days, as we do at Easter time, for instance, because then one finds, when one is living in a pleasant, a congenial, a natural environment, when one sees trees every day and hears birds every day, actually singing, every morning, and when it's all peaceful and you don't hear the traffic, and with a bit of luck there are no planes roaring overhead, and when you're with people who share your own ideals and with whom you can talk on Buddhism, and you do a little reading and you do some meditation, then you find that of their own accord almost these hindrances die away; so that when you do go to sit for meditation, when the bell rings, then you find in the retreat that the hindrances are already just not there, they've already gone, and you can get on with your meditation from there, as from this second stage.

Now we come to the third stage of the meditation experience, and this consists in elimination of discursive thought elimination of discursive thought. Very often people think that meditation consists in getting rid of thoughts, Well,, in a sense This is correct, with the proviso that you don't sit there just as it were throwing out the thoughts or trying not to think

thoughts; because if you try not to think thoughts this is rather like, as I said to some of our Friends yesterday evening, like trying not to Think of a monkey: the more you try not to think of it, the more you are thinking, So you don't make the mind free from Thoughts by sort of setting to work on each individual thought and thinking how to get rid of it, No. You eliminate thoughts by forgetting about thoughts altogether, In other words, you take a particular concentration technique; you take a particular object of concentration, and without thinking about the wandering thoughts, without thinking about the discursive mental activity, you concentrate all your attention on that particular object of concentration or object of meditation, For instance, when you're practising the Mindfulness of Breathing, here your object is the breath itself, and you're concentrating on the breath; you're trying to be aware of the breath in different ways, But if you start thinking about the thoughts which are interrupting your practice, then you lose whatever gains you've made. So you have to ignore the thoughts; not try to get rid of them directly, but just concentrate on the object of your concentration, whether it's the breath, or whether it's a coloured disc, or whether it's a mantra; just concentrate on that, forgetting all about thoughts, and then you'll find - or rather, you won't find, because you won't notice, perhaps that the thoughts are no longer there.

So this is the third stage, the stage of the attainment of an experience of thoughtlessness: no discursive thought, And here, of course, obviously, there are different degrees. At first, when you practise, you just manage to hang on as it were, like grim death almost, to your concentration object, and you're vaguely conscious of a swarm of thoughts sort of swirling all around you, But gradually it so happens that you can almost as it were relax your grip on that concentration object, You don't need to hang on to it, it's there, you're getting more and more absorbed in it, and you feel rather than see that the wandering thoughts are subsiding, They become faint, they become indistinct, And eventually it'll happen that the thoughts, discursive thoughts, die away altogether, You're not thinking of this, you're not thinking of that, You're not thinking about the day's work tomorrow; you're not thinking of anything which has happened in the course of this day; you're not thinking about your job, you're not Thinking about your family, you're not thinking about yourself, you don't even know who you are. You're not thinking about anything, But at the same time, of course, you're not thinking that you're not thinking about anything, As soon as the thought occurs to you that 'Oh, look, I'm not thinking about anything', at that moment all, your concentration just slides away downhill, and you have to start all over again, or practically all over again.

But one must emphasize, at the same time, that this stage of absence of discursive thought is not a state of unconsciousness; it's not a blank state, Often we hear people talking about meditation in terms of emptying the mind, or making the mind a blank, Well, this is in a sense nonsense, You don't make the mind a blank by removing discursive thought because when discursive thought is removed, well, awareness is left, and awareness is something very positive, The mind in its purity begins to be revealed, So when we eliminate discursive thought, what results is not just a sort of psychological blank; you're not in a psychological vacuum.. Then the fullness of the mind, the purity of the mind, begins to manifest itself, So this is the third stage; negatively, the stage of elimination of discursive thought; positively, we may say, the stage of the emergence of the pure mind, which is above and beyond discursive thought.

And that brings us to the fourth stage, which is the stage of the development of higher states of awareness, new levels of consciousness, new levels of mind, And this sort of experience comes naturally almost of its own accord, as concentration deepens, as one becomes more and

more absorbed in one's concentration object, and eventually sort of unified with it, one with it, so that in a sense there is no longer any concentration object, You're concentrated, but you're not concentrating on anything in particular, you're just concentrated, And with this experience of concentration there comes an experience increasingly of purity, of repose, of peace, happiness, joy, bliss, and so on. And sometimes it happens That in this stage we have a sort of experience, a sensation if you like, of being carried out of ourselves, or flowing out of ourselves, or being swept beyond ourselves or above ourselves.

And sometimes it happens that when this sort of experience comes, when this sort of experience arises, people resist; they become a little afraid, It's as though they're dissolving as though they're disintegrating, as though they're being swept away, and they don't know where, It's as though they had become caught up sometimes in a great torrent, a great mighty rushing river which was carrying them to some destination, some ultimate goal, the nature of which they didn't fully understand; so they resist, And if they start resisting, well, eventually the experience passes a way and they return to a lower stage. But one shouldn't resist, one should as it were just let go, and not start bothering about what is going to happen to me and am I losing myself or is my ego dissolving; one shouldn't bother about that, one should just as it were have faith, one should just trust the nature of the experience itself, one should just, if I may use the term. surrender oneself to the experience and let it carry one whithersoever it will, And this is the fourth stage, the stage of the development of higher states of awareness, higher levels of mind, consciousness, and eventually even of being.

Now fifthly and lastly, there's the stage of the arising of what we call Insight, and this stage represents a sort of knowing of Reality, Ultimate Reality, or even we may say, a sort of suffusion of our whole being with Reality, in such a way that it is transformed and transfigured, At this point, we may say, in our meditation experience, quantitative change, that is to say increase of concentration and so on, becomes qualitative, and something in a way quite different happens,,, something quite different is the arising of what we call Insight, Suddenly we start seeing things or seeing into the heart of things, and not seeing things in the sense of seeing apparitions or anything of that sort, but seeing things as they are, seeing things more clearly than we've ever seen them in our lives before, At first, of course, we see just by flashes, I remember someone - I think it was Coleridge - writing that to see the actor Kean acting was like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning, So these flashes of Insight are rather like that: they light up the whole intellectual, the whole spiritual landscape, just for a instant, and you see everything in all directions clearly, and then it's no more, So this is how the Insight arises to begin with in these sort of flashes.

But eventually it becomes more stable. The flashes last longer, they linger a bit, and you start taking in more and more of this spiritual landscape which is revealed, And eventually it's as though a sort of continuous beam, even a continuous light, starts dawning, and you never altogether lose that. And in this way, eventually, in the course of years or decades or lifetimes of practice, eventually Enlightenment dawns.

Now this is the pattern of development, this is the way in which our meditation experience unfolds, at least in outline, through these five successive, progressive, stages, starting with withdrawal of the mind from the senses, and then continuing with suppression of the five hindrances and elimination of discursive thought, then going development of higher states of awareness and consciousness, and culminating in the arising of Insight into Reality itself.

Now there are many possible variations I've given just the outline of those features which

seem to be common to all particular kinds of meditation practice and experience, but there are many possible variations, It's possible to pass through these stages in a number of different ways. Now today we're concerned with the way or ways in which meditation is practised, and people pass through these stages, in Tibet.

Now I've made it clear in, I think, more than one previous lecture in this series, that Tibetan Buddhist meditation is mainly Tantric; that is to say, it belongs not so much to the Hinayana, not so much even to the Mahayana; it belongs to the Vajrayana, which is that phase or stage in the development of Buddhism in India which stresses esoteric meditation and symbolical ritual very much, It specializes, as it were, in these things, Now I've also tried to make it clear more than once in the course of this whole series that Tibetan Buddhism is triyana, that is to say it is a Buddhism of the three yanās or three main ways, When we distinguish, when we characterize Tibetan Buddhism, very often we speak of it as Mahayana Buddhism. This isn't altogether wrong, but it isn't at the same time altogether correct, Tibetan Buddhism isn't just a Buddhism, it isn't even just a form of Mahayana Buddhism; it's Hinayana plus Mahayana plus Vajrayana Buddhism; in other words, it's three-yanā or triyana Buddhism, It's a very rich thing Tibetan Buddhism, as I've tried to bring out constantly in the course of these talks. It draws from all sources, It draws material from the Mahayana and also from, of course, the Vajrayana, From the Hinayana Tibetan Buddhism draws its Vinaya or code of monastic discipline, as well as its Abhidharma, its sort of psychological analysis and general philosophical statements From the Mahayana Tibetan Buddhism derives its spiritual ideal, which is the Bodhisattva Ideal, as well as its underlying metaphysics, which is that of the voidness or sunyata, And from the Vajrayana, from Tantric Buddhism, as I've said, it derives, Tibetan Buddhism derives, its esoteric meditation and its symbolic ritual. So Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhist meditation, rather, is Tantric.

But the question arises: what is Tantric meditation? What exactly is it? And I suppose that that is the question an answer to which most of you are looking for this evening: what is Tantric meditation? How does it differ from Hinayana meditation? How does it differ, even, from Mahayana meditation? So let's try to answer that question first.

There are many possible answers which we could give, but I think here the simplest is the best. So we may say that Tantric meditation is that type or that kind of meditation which is practised by the sadhaka, by the practitioner, after initiation by a guru. This is what Tantric meditation essentially is, it's that kind of meditation which you practise after receiving initiation by a guru. And by initiation here we mean, of course Tantric initiation, In a sense, when any kind of meditation practice is explained to you, in a sense, that is an initiation but it isn't a Tantric initiation. And now what do we mean by a Tantric initiation? Now in Sanskrit the term for a Tantric initiation is abhiseka, and the Tibetans render this by wongkur. This Tantric initiation, whether you call it abhiseka or wongkur - we'll see what these terms mean in a minute - usually, though not always involves the giving of a mantra or a sort of sacred syllable or sacred phrase to repeat over and over again What a mantra is we shall try to see a little later.

Now, as I've said, the Sanskrit term for the Tantric initiation is abhiseka, which means literally a sprinkling; it's a sprinkling with water. And it's so called because, in the course of the Tantric initiation, the person to be initiated is sprinkled ceremonially, ritually with water. But this doesn't tell us very much about the inner meaning, the essence, of the initiation, This is just one particular ritual aspect of the initiation. The Tibetan word, the word which doesn't

translate literally but which renders. in a way, the word འཕམ་པ་, gives us a much better clue to its real meaning, The Tibetans render abhiseka by the word wongkur which means literally transmission of power. And this is what it really implies, what it really involves, what it really conveys, The sprinkling with water represents the transference, as it were of power, spiritual power, spiritual energy, from the guru to the disciple, therefore the Tibetans following the inner meaning of the term rather than the literal meaning render abhiseka as transmission of power. Wong is power; it 's also sovereignty, It's energy it's vigour, it's spiritual potency And kur means transmission. or giving or So bestowal, the Tantric initiation essentially basically is a transmission of spiritual power from the guru to the disciple symbolized by the sprinkling and embodied very often in the mantra which is given at the time of initiation.

Now the term literally is a giving of power, a bestowal of power. Now we can also, if you like, think of it in terms of an activation of power. You can also as it were think that what the guru does is not so much literally to give some of his own power to the disciple, so much as to activate by his own spiritual presence and energy the latent spiritual forces and energies of the disciple. So one can think of it, one can speak of it, in that way, but at the same time it must be said that in the course of the initiation itself, in the course of the Tantric initiation, many people do experience the initiation as an actual transmission of power. They don't feel something being activated within them, they actually feel, they experience, something passing into them from the guru, actually passing into them physically from the guru, even piercing or penetrating the body. This is the experience of quite a number of people at the time of the Tantric initiation. So even though one may explain it as an activation of the disciple's own powers by the guru, as I say it is often experienced quite literally as a transmission of power. If anyone has any sort of connection with or experience of spiritual healing, then they may be able to understand the sort of thing that is meant; not that the Tantric initiation is akin in way to the spiritual healing, but just as in the spiritual healing a sort of health - giving, positive force passes from the healer to the patient, in the same way in the Tantric initiation, on a much higher level, a sort of charge of spiritual energy passes from the guru to the disciple.

Sometimes people ask the question whether Tantric meditation, Vajrayana meditation, can be practised without a guru, but from what I've just said it should be evident that practising Tantric meditation without a guru is a contradiction in terms. If one practises a so - called, an allegedly, Tantric meditation without having received the appropriate initiation by the guru then it becomes a Mahayana - type meditation. And, in the same way, if what is technically a Mahayana - type meditation is practised with a Tantric initiation by a guru. it becomes a Tantric - type meditation or Tantric - type practice. In other words, it really means that in a sense you cannot categorize specific practices; specific meditation exercises. as either Tantric or non - Tantric If you practise them after having been initiated in the Tantric sense by a guru then they are Tantric meditations, But if you practise them on your own, even though the book may label them Tantric, they're not Tantric at all, they're Mahayana at best.

Now, despite that, one can say at the same time there are, at least so far as the Tibetan Buddhists are concerned, quite a number of practices, quite a number of meditation exercises, which are in fact, in practice, never practised without wong or Tantric initiation, So one can speak of these as being Tantric meditations proper. But one must bear in mind that the Tantric nature of these meditations is determined, or is dependent upon, not what you actually do in the course of the meditation, but upon the fact that you've been initiated into it by the Tantric guru who has given you the Tantric initiation.



Now having said, having made it clear that Tantric meditation is that type of meditation for which you require Tantric initiation by a guru, I'd better say something about the Tantric initiation, the abhiseka or the wongkur, or wong for short, Broadly speaking, there are four different wongs or initiations, Tantric initiations, in the Vajrayana. They are often regarded as constituting a series, but that can't be taken too strictly or too literally.

First of all, there's what is known as the kalasa(?) abhiseka, or the jar initiation, It's so called because in the course of the ritual which accompanines this initiation a jar was used in ancient India. In modern Tibet the jar is no longer used 'generally, but this initiation, this first initiation, is still called the jar or kalasa initiation; and it comprises six minor initiations. I'm not going into this in detail.

Secondly, there is what is called the guhya abhiseka, the secret or the esoteric Tantric initiation, and this is so called because it includes, amongst other things, practice of various esoteric methods of breath control; not just mindfulness of breathing, but of actual control of the breath, and not only the breath but the nervous energy in general.

Thirdly, the third initiation is called the inana prajna abhiseka, which means the knowledge of the prajna. Prajna, of course, means wisdom, but you'll find that in the Vajrayana every term has got a different meaning from what it has in the Mahayana, and this is what makes the study of the Tantra so difficult and so confusing, For instance, in Tantric texts you read about the sun and the moon, and you might think they were dealing with astrology, but actually they're dealing with yoga, So you need the key to this sort of cryptic language. So 'knowledge of the prajna' - well, this used to be translated by scholars 'knowledge of wisdom', but it's got nothing to do with wisdom in the ordinary sense, Here prajna means a woman; prajna means, in this connection, in this context, the female partner in the practice, sometimes called the dakini, This can be understood either literally or symbolically. If it's understood literally, then it means an actual human being in whose company one performs various practices belonging to this level of Tantric meditation experience, But if it is understood symbolically, then the prajna represents, we may say, the unrealized 'feminine' - single inverted commas - side of one's own nature; one's own nature, that is to say, in the case of a man, In the case of a woman, it would be the other way around, So this is the third initiation, this is the jnana prajna or knowledge of the wisdom, the knowledge of the dakini, if you like.

Then the fourth initiation is simply called 'the fourth'. It isn't usually given a descriptive title.

Now these initiations, these four Tantric initiations, are correlated with the body, speech, and mind, I'VE often remarked in the course of lectures - not only this series but other lectures - that in Buddhism the basic division of the human being is not into <sub>body</sub> soul and spirit, as in traditional Christianity, not just into body and soul even, but into body, speech, and mind, Now the aim of the Vajrayana, as of all forms of Buddhism, is Enlightenment, But the Vajrayana often speaks of Enlightenment in very peculiar terms, It speaks of Enlightenment in terms of the acquisition of the three kayas. It doesn't just say, well, and then you attain Enlightenment; it says that you become endowed with the three kayas, Kaya literally means body but it's not body as opposed to mind. We might say that personality is a better rendering.

So, according to general Buddhist teaching, Mahayana as well as Vajrayana teaching, there are three personalities, or three bodies as it were, representing different aspects of the Enlightened mind, different aspects of Buddhahood; or rather Buddhahood as appearing on different

levels. First of all there's what we call the nirmanakaya. This is the manifested personality; this is Buddhahood as appearing on the human historical plane, as the specific human historical teacher, Gautama the Buddha, Then there's the sambhogakaya, which is the body or the personality of reciprocal enjoyment - this is what it literally means - or the glorious or glorified body or personality.

And this represents Buddhahood as manifesting on higher, celestial planes as it were, glorified, transfigured, archetypal planes, above and beyond the historical context, And lastly there's the Dharmakaya, the absolute personality, the body of truth, which represents Buddhahood in its absolute essentiality, above the historical plane, above even the archetypal plane, as it is in itself.

So these three bodies, or this doctrine of the three bodies, the three personalities, represents the fact that Buddhahood, or if you like the Buddha, manifests, or exists if you like, on different levels of reality, At the top as it were the Dharmakaya, the absolute level, Buddhahood in itself; then the sambhogakaya, Buddhahood as existing on, as manifesting on, the archetypal plane; and then the nirmanakaya, the human historical Buddha, Buddhahood as manifesting in the historical order, Now these three kayas, these three bodies or these three personalities, they represent the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha. What in us is mind, in the Buddha, that's transformed into Dharmakaya, what in us is speech, principle of communication, in the Buddha this becomes sambhogakaya, body of reciprocal enjoyment., And what in us is physical body, in the Buddha becomes nirmanakaya or his manifest-ed body or manifested personality.

So it's the aim and the object of the Vajrayana not that we should just gain Enlightenment or Buddhahood in a general sort of way. The Vajrayana is as it were more concrete, more specific than that, It's the aim of the Vajrayana that our threefold personality, consisting of body, speech, and mind, should be transformed or transmuted into the threefold personality of a Buddha, consisting of Dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya, So this whole process, the transformation of our three bodies into the three bodies of a Buddha, this is effected by means of the three wongs, the three Tantric initiations, and their associated practices.

Let's see how this works out, Our body, our physical configuration, is transmuted into the nirmanakaya, the manifested body of a Buddha, with the help of the jar wong and its associated practices and meditations, Our speech, our principle of communication, is transformed into the sambhogakaya, a Buddha's body of reciprocal enjoyment, with the help of the secret wong and the practices associated with it, And our mind is transmuted into the Dharmakaya, the absolute body, the absolute personality the inner essence of Buddhahood, with the help of the knowledge of the prajna wong and its associated practices and exercises and experiences.

But you may say, if you've been following very closely, well, what about the fourth wong? You've only accounted for three, so what about the fourth wong? Now the fourth wong represents the transmutation of body, speech, and mind collectively - not just individually but collectively - into what is called the svabhavikakaya; and this is a fourth - not really a fourth, but a body representing the sort of collectivity of the three kayas, Dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya; and it means the self - existent body or personality, So one's three kayas collectively are transmuted into the three kayas collectively of a Buddha; in other

words, into this svabhavakakaya, and this is effected by the fourth wong, which is not so much a separate wong as a collectivity of the previous three wongs.

Now the initiations, the Tantric initiations of the jar, the secret one, the knowledge of the prajna, and the fourth, these are also correlated with the four yogas; but not, I'm afraid, with the four mula yogas that we were talking about last week, but four different yogas altogether, which are also sometimes known as the four Tantras. These four are, first of all, kriya yoga. This is the ritual Tantra, and we are told that practices of this type - because the term kriya yoga covers a whole class of practices, hundreds of different practices and exercises and experiences - kriya yoga or ritual Tantra is usually described as consisting of one part meditation and three parts symbolic ritual. In other words, if you take up a Tantric practice or a Tantric exercise which consists, roughly speaking of say, a quarter of an hour's meditation and three - quarters of an hour symbolic ritual, then this is regarded as belonging to the kriya yoga or the ritual Tantra.

Then the second is the Ubhaya(?) yoga, or both sides' Tantra; ubhaya means both sides. So what two sides? On the one hand meditation, on the other symbolic ritual. So ubhaya yoga or both sides' or 'two sides' Tantra means a Tantric practice, a Tantric meditation or Tantric spiritual exercise in which meditation and symbolic ritual are equally, are evenly, balanced, half and half.

Then thirdly there's what is called yoga yoga or yoga Tantra. You can probably guess what this one is going to be like; Here there's three parts meditation and one part symbolic ritual. And then, fourthly and lastly, there's anuttara yoga; this is the 'unsurpassed' Tantra, and this is devoted wholly to meditation, wholly to Tantric meditation without any symbolic ritual,

Now I'm afraid, I'm sorry to say, that the correlation of the four initiations and the four yogas or four Tantras is not quite straightforward. You don't get one initiation to one yoga or one Tantra; that would be far too simple. So what is the position? First of all, let me remark that the first three yogas - the ritual one, the ritual yoga or ritual Tantra, the both sides' one, and then the yoga.yoga or yoga Tantra - these collectively comprise what is called the outer Tantra or the exoteric Tantra. But the fourth, anuttara yoga or anuttara yoga Tantra, this comprises the inner Tantra or the esoteric Tantra. Now for practices, for meditation practices, belonging to the outer Tantra, that is belonging to the ritual Tantra, the both sides' Tantra, and the yoga Tantra, for this you require, in order to be able to practise it, only a simplified form of the first initiation, the so - called body wong - this is all that you need. This is also called the little wong, or the little Tantric initiation. If you want to practise anything belonging to the first yoga or first Tantra, or the second, or the third - the ritual, the both sides', the yoga yoga or yoga Tantra - for this you only need a simplified form of the first initiation, and then you can go ahead with your practice. This is the so - called little wong. the little Tantric initiation.

But if you want to practise the meditations of the inner Tantra, the esoteric Tantra, then you need all four initiations: that is say, the initiation of body, of speech, of mind, and their unity - the kalasa, the guhya the inana prajna, and fourthly the fourth. And these four together, these are collectively termed the great wong or the great initiation - the great Tantric initiation, that is to say about Tantric Buddhism, about Tantric meditation. To begin With there are limits of time, and I think I've probably gone a little over them already. But there are also limits of what we may describe as appropriateness, of propriety. The Buddhists, it might be interesting to recall, never have lectures on meditation; not because they're not interested in meditation,

but because they are too busy practising it, It's only here in the West that we tend to have lectures on meditation, There there's lots of practice and comparatively little talking; here, I'm afraid, only too often there's lots of talking and very very little practice, But there's no harm, at the same time, in our having a sound knowledge of the theory before we practise, or even while we are practising; but sooner or later, of course, we do have to start practising, we do have to get on with the practical side of things, I may have something to say about that next week.

Now this evening I propose to give a concrete example of a meditation belonging to the outer Tantra, Obviously I can't speak about the inner Tantra; that's rather difficult, in fact in a way it's impossible, because it is said, it's one of the conditions of initiation into the inner Tantra, that you don't speak about the practices of the inner Tantra to anybody who hasn't received the same initiation; and there's much that is spoken about only amongst those who have themselves been initiated.

So that's as regards the inner Tantra. But regarding the outer Tantra, we find that that is more open and more accessible, and we usually find this, the outer Tantra or practices belonging to the outer Tantra, which are followed by laypeople in Tibet and by ordinary monks - when I say ordinary monks, I mean monks who are just getting on with their own practices and who are not actually teachers.

Now there are many ways of practising, There are many types, many methods. And I remember, when I first myself came into contact with Tibetan Buddhism, and especially with Tantric meditation, I was very very much bewildered by the profusion of material; in fact it took me several years even to start to get it all sorted out, Having perhaps a rather methodical and tidy mind, I wasn't quite happy with all these great heaps of unorganized material lying as it were all over the place, But it was very very difficult to reduce them to any sort of order at all So I think I'll just select, almost at random, one particular type of practice, one particular method, of meditation, Tantric meditation, belonging to the outer Tantra, that is to say, which is very popular in Tibet, And this is the widespread meditation on the Green Tara.

Now there are a number of good reasons for selecting this particular practice. In the first place, Tara, or Dolma, is one of the most popular of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of Tibet, The name means literally, the Sanskrit name means, 'the one who ferries across' - the one who ferries across in the sense of the one who saves - and the name is in the feminine gender, so it's translated usually as 'the Saviouress' Tara is a female Buddha or Bodhisattva. In the Hinayana and the Mahayana Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for some strange reason, are always men, but in the Vajrayana we find that there are just as many female Buddhas and female Bodhisattvas as there are male ones; so Tara is the most prominent of these female Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, And Tara is the embodiment of compassion. All these Buddhas, all these Bodhisattvas, all these individual forms, represent some aspect or other, some individualized or personalized aspect, of Enlightenment or Buddhahood, whether wisdom or love or peace or power. So Tara is the embodiment or, if you like the embodiment of the compassion aspect; because Tara is the sort of spiritual daughter of Avalokitesvara, Avalokitesvara is the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

In the Mahayana and the Tantra there are three main Bodhisattvas: there's Manjusri, representing Wisdom; Vajrapani, representing power or energy; and Avalokitesvara, or Chenrezig as the Tibetans call him, representing Compassion, so he's the Bodhisattva of

Compassion. So we might think, well, where does Tara come in? Well, she comes in in this way. It is said once upon a time - and here we have a legend, it after all embodies a great spiritual truth - there's a legend that Avalokitesvara, the great Bodhisattva of Compassion, was one day surveying, from the terrace of his palace, the whole mass of humanity; and he saw all over the world people were involved in so many troubles, in so many difficulties, in so much suffering, He saw that some were engaged in lengthy, protracted lawsuits, others were being devoured by wild beasts, others were lying sick on their beds, others were suffering bereavement, others were being slaughtered by robbers and highwaymen, others were dying painful natural deaths So when he saw this great mass of human suffering and misery, it is said that Avalokitesvara, the great Bodhisattva, out of compassion, could not help shedding tears. So he shed so many tears that a sort of pool, a sort of lake, formed on the ground, and then in the midst of this lake a beautiful white lotus appeared; and the lotus opened its beautiful white petals and out came a beautiful green goddess, And this was the female Bodhisattva Tara.

So the story, the legend, says as it were that she was born out of the tears of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, So if Avalokitesvara is Compassion, well, what is Tara? She is as it were the essence of compassion, and it may well be that Tara, the essence of compassion, is given a feminine form because traditionally women are said to be more tender-hearted at least, more compassionate, than men, and therefore the essence of compassion, the quintessence of compassion, is given this beautiful feminine form of Tara the Saviouress.

Now in Tibet she has many forms, but there are two principal ones. There's a White Tara and there's a Green Tara. They're both very popular all over Tibet, all over Mongolia all over the Himalayan region, but perhaps we may say that the Green Tara - in Sanskrit she's called Khadiravani Tara - is the more popular of the two. So it's this meditation on the Green Tara or, if you like, the evocation of the Green Tara, that I'm going to describe this evening. I'm going to describe the standard procedures for this kind or this type of meditation. There are many ways of meditating even on the Green Tara, but this is the standard one. And the procedure that I'm going to describe can be applied also to meditation on other Buddhas and other Bodhisattvas, It includes various standard practices which you encounter in all Tantric meditation exercises; practices like, for instance, visualization, mantra recitation, and so on.

Now in this practice of the meditation on the Green Tara there are ten successive stages, ten stages of practice. Some of these we're already acquainted with from other sources, in other ways. First of all, there's the Going for Refuge, When you take up any Tantric meditation practice, whatever it may be, you start off by Going for Refuge, And this Going for Refuge represents a sort of brief recapitulation of the Hinayana within the Vajrayana context. As you know, the Three Refuges are refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma, refuge in the Sangha; in other words, refuge in the Enlightened teacher, in the teaching of the way leading to Enlightenment, and in the community of disciples treading that way leading to Enlightenment, But in this context the Refuges are given a Tantric colouring; they're not the usual refuges, To begin with, there's four of them - because in the Tantra there's not only refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, but first of all you take refuge in the guru, So in the Tantric context you say 'To the Guru for Refuge I go', and Then Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; because the Tantrics say that it's only through the guru that you really come to know the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Now when you practise Tantric meditation, the Refuges, even the four Refuges, are changed,

are given a sort of Tantric colouring according to the type of practice that you are doing, and in this context, the context of the Tara meditation practice, when you take the Refuges or Go for Refuge you consider that Tara herself is the Buddha; in other words you take refuge in Tara, you take refuge in her, you take refuge in the compassion aspect of Enlightenment, That is the Buddha for you in the context of this practice. And then what is meant by the Dharma here? The Dharma is the great compassion of Tara; in other words, it's the compassion experience, or the compassion aspect of the Dharma, with which you are particularly concerned in this practice. So you take refuge in the compassion of Tara as the Dharma. And then what about the Sangha? You take refuge in the Sangha in the sense of the twenty - one manifestations or twenty - one forms of Tara, And what about the guru refuge? Well, if you look at paintings, if you look at painted scrolls, of the Green Tara, you'll notice that in her hair there's a little tiny image, which you could easily miss, of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light: because she belongs, as it were, to his family, He's the head of that spiritual line, that spiritual branch, He is the Buddha of whom Avalokitesvara is the Bodhisattva, and she is the spiritual daughter of Avalokitesvara; so she belongs to the Amitabha family, He's the head of the line, the guru of the line, if you like. So he is the guru, So you Go for Refuge to Amitabha as the guru, to Tara herself as the Buddha, to her compassion as the Dharma, and her twenty-one forms as the Sangha.

So this is the Going for Refuge in the context of this practice. If you were practising, say, with Manjusri, it would be different. You would Go for Refuge to Vairocana as the guru, Manjusri himself as the Buddha, his Wisdom as the Dharma because he's the Wisdom aspect, and his eight forms as the Sangha. And so on for all these different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas - no need to go into detail. So this is the first stage of practice, the Going for Refuge.

Now second is the development of the four brahma viharas. So what are the four brahma viharas? Brahma viharas means the four sublime abodes, the four sublime states of mind; and these are, first of all, love, in the sense of universal friendliness; then karuna, compassion for all that suffer; mudita, sympathetic joy, rejoicing in the happiness of all other beings who are happy; and then upeksha, peace and equanimity of mind. Now these four brahma viharas are also found in the Mahayana, and they're even found in the Hinayana too; but there's a difference between the brahma viharas as found in the Mahayana and as found in the Hinayana, In the Hinayana the brahma viharas are what is known as a samatha practice; they are meant just for calming the mind down. But in the Mahayana they are not only samatha practices but samapatti [vipassana] practices; they are practices for developing Insight. Because when you develop love and compassion and so on towards all living beings in the Mahayana context, you realize at the same time that all living beings are void or sunyata, and this is the samapatti [vipassana] aspect.

So this particular stage of the practice of the Tara meditation - the development of the four brahma viharas, sort of recapitulates these practices, recapitulates the Mahayana, So just as the Going for Refuge recapitulates in a Tantric form the Hinayana, in the same way the development of the four brahma viharas recapitulates, again in a Tantric context, the whole of the Mahayana. So this is the second stage, Having taken the Three Refuges, you sit as you usually do for meditation, and you develop these four brahma viharas of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, and at the same time you realize that the beings towards whom you direct these feelings, these emotions of love and so on, they are themselves void,

Now the next stage that we come to is the stage of meditation on the voidness itself - sunyata.

And this is an extremely important stage. This stage too, we may say, is carried over from the Mahayana - the meditation on the voidness, meditation on sunyata, And it is said that without some experience of the voidness, without some experience of sunyata, there's no real practice of the Vajrayana, In the Vajrayana there are so many visualizations, and so many rituals and so on, and I remember that my good friend Mr Chen in Kalimpong used to remark that without the sunyata experience, without the sunyata meditation, the Vajrayana was nothing but vulgar magic, in his own words, So unless you go through the sunyata experience first, unless you have some taste of the sunyata experience, there's no real Vajrayana, You may be going on doing this and thinking that, but it isn't the Vajrayana, it's something quite different; it's just, event, on the psychological level. You have to go through the sunyata experience, through the Mahayana, in a way.

Now there are many ways of meditating on sunyata, In the Mahayana, Mahayana meditation proper is mainly concerned with meditation in one way or another, on the sunyata or the voidness; but we've no time to go into that this evening, So this, therefore, is the third stage: the meditation on the voidness or sunyata.

Now next we come to visualization of the bija mantra, visualization of the seed syllable of Tara, In the background, as it were, there is the void, sunyata, the Absolute if you like; the Unconditioned, And then in the midst of this we visualize the bija or the seed syllable, In the Tantric system, every deity has a seed syllable of his or her own, and this seed syllable is regarded as containing the heart or the essence of that particular deity; just as in a seed the whole tree or the whole blossom is contained, in the same way in this bija is contained potentially the deity, the Buddha or the Bodhisattva himself or herself, This bija, this seed syllable, is always one single syllable, Now the bija of the Green Tara is the syllable tam, and this is visualized in the midst of the void, green in colour, in Tibetan or Sanskrit letters, and it's visualized standing upright on a moon disc - that is to say, the moon disc is horizontal and this visualized letter is vertically placed upon it, And the moon disc itself stands on a white lotus. So first of all you've got the white lotus, on top of that a moon disc, and on top of that you have standing erect the green - coloured bija of the Bodhisattva or Buddha Tara. And one visualizes light radiating from this in all directions, So this is the bija visualization, the visualization of the seed syllable.

Then one comes to the visualization of the Green Tara herself, and this is of course the central stage in the whole practice. The Green Tara in this stage appears out of the seed syllable, she sort of grows out of it or springs out of it, and she's of course green in colour. She wears a crown ornamented with the five Buddhas representing the Five Wisdoms, The right hand rests on her knee, on the right knee, palm upwards, This represents generosity or giving. And the other is held near the left breast, and it holds a blue lotus with three blossoms, As regards the legs, one is folded underneath her in the meditation posture, and the other sort of hangs loose as though ready to step out or to step down, And this represents, the one leg that she's always immersed in meditation and the experience of the Absolute, and the leg hanging down represents her readiness to as it were enter into the world and help people out of compassion. And of course there's a beautiful smiling expression, Sometimes it is said that the Green Tara embodies the three attributes or the three natures of the virgin, the mother, and the queen. She is spoken of as virgin to represent the complete purity and transcendental nature and so on, as mother to represent the love and compassion aspect, and as queen to represent the aspect of spiritual sovereignty and power and as it were domination.

Now when the Tara image is visualized it's important that the image should be seen or visualized in a particular way. There are different kinds or different levels of visualization. In a dream, for instance, that's a visualization, if you see something in a dream. Or if you see something by way of a hallucination. But it's not the same as this sort of visualized image which one gets in meditation at this level, This sort of image has to be very very fine, very very delicate, diaphanous; it's said like a rainbow, The colours of a rainbow are very fine and very delicate. So these visualized forms or figures which you see in meditation, in this way, mustn't be sort of solid and opaque. This would indicate a lower level, They must be very fine, very delicate, very diaphanous, as though sort of cut out of the colours of the rainbow; or, as is sometimes said, they must be seen like reflections seen in a mirror; very very sort of evanescent subtle, delicate; not anything gross or solid. And one may say that this whole exercise of visualization is extremely important for the whole of Tantric Buddhist meditation practice, and it plays a very important part indeed in Tibetan Buddhist meditation.

We may say, generally speaking, that the aim of the visualization exercise is to help or to enable the meditator, the practitioner, to project from the depths of his own mind, from the depths of his own psyche, higher aspects of himself of which he is not as yet aware, Now what does this mean? You may feel that to speak in terms of projecting from the depths a higher aspect - you may think, well, this is a sort of mixture of metaphors, that you ought to get it straight, whether it's really up or whether it's down, whether it's deeper or whether it's higher; but really it's both, You really are, as I say, trying to project, when you do a Tantric visualization of this sort, from the depths of your own mind, higher aspects of yourself of which you are as yet unaware.

So how is this? Let's try to make it clear with the help of a comparison, Suppose you're standing on the bank of a river, and suppose you're looking down into the river, into the water. So, all right, if you look down into the water, you will see first of all your feet and then your knees, and going down and down you'll see your head, So your head is as it were the lowest; the head appears below the feet, even though the head is in actual fact the highest part of the body, So it's like that when as it were you look down into the unconscious: what is in fact higher in you but unrealized, appears as deeper.

Now the visualized image, whether it's Tara or any other, acts as a sort of focal point for corresponding qualities which are as [it were?] undeveloped in the unconscious. Tara in this case represents compassion, so she becomes a focal point on the level of the conscious or even superconscious mind, a focal point of all those unrealized capacities for compassion existing deep within yourself. So by means of that projected, that visualized, image, these unrealized, these undeveloped, feelings of compassion within you deep within you, which at the same time represent the higher part of your own nature, these are enabled to the threshold of consciousness and to be integrated into one's own conscious, aware being at ever higher and higher levels, In other words, through the Tara practice, through the Tara visualization and so on, we become more compassionate.

Now the next stage, stage of the visualization and repetition of the mantra, the Tara mantra. Here we begin by seeing, by visualizing, in the heart of the visualized image of Tara, the seed syllable- - of course, tam, We see that in her heart, as it were, And around that we see the ten letters of her mantra, The mantra of Tara consists of ten letters. So we see these ten letters standing up as it were around that central seed syllable, tam, and they're all, of course, vertical, rather like the stones of Stonehenge, standing up. And we visualize them revolving or



rotating in an anti - clockwise direction. In the case of a male deity, the rotation is clockwise; in the case of a female deity, it's anti - clockwise. This is of course universal symbolism. And of course these moving mantras or moving letters are the most difficult things to visualize of all, It's comparatively easy to visualize something stationary, but to visualize a mantra in motion is very difficult. it is the most difficult exercise of all. But this is what one has to do at this stage, to visualize the seed syllable in the heart of the goddess and the letters of her mantra revolving in an anti - clockwise direction and emitting light.

It is said that if you're mentally very restless and you've too many thoughts, the mantras or the letters of the mantra should go round very very slowly; but if you're sluggish and dull and slothful and sleepy, if you've got lots of.... middha, then you should visualize the letters of the mantra going round very very briskly indeed, And as you visualize them going round. whether slowly or whether briskly, you repeat the mantra to yourself, and you repeat it at least 108 times - the longer the better. And, of course, in between periods of actual practice, in between periods of actual meditation, you can go on practising or reciting the mantra as long as you like. So this is the visualization and repetition of the mantra.

Then, next resolving the Tara figure back. into the voidness. Do you remember you experienced the voidness, or you even visualized the voidness, then you superimposed upon that voidness the figure of the Tara, then you visualized the seed syllable and the mantra? So now you've got to resolve it all back into the voidness from which it comes, So there are many ways of doing this. One way of doing it is resolving Tara back into the lotus on which she sits. You sort of collapse her into the lotus. Then you collapse the lotus into the moon on which it stands; you collapse the moon into the mantra; you collapse the mantra into the seed syllable, and the seed syllable you allow to disappear into the voidness. And this stage is very very significant, because it signifies, it represents, the fact or the truth that all these forms, whether they 're Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, Taras or Manjusris, whatsoever, they all emerge from the void, they all emerge from our own minds; not just our ordinary everyday minds but the depths or, if you like, the heights of our own - inverted commas - minds, [from?] universal consciousness, not anything apart from that.

In other traditions, very often, these forms are seen and visualized, different gods, goddesses, saints and sages, and saviours and so on; but usually it's considered that there's something actually appearing. But not in Buddhism, not in the Tantra, Here it is to recognize that all these forms, all these images are the products ultimately of one's own mind or one's own consciousness; certainly of Absolute Mind itself, So one experiences this practically by dissolving, by resolving, this Tara figure back into the void from which she came.

Then the next stage is the stage of the double meditation of Tara and the voidness, Here, in this stage, the figure of Tara appears instantaneously; there's no building up. It just comes, And the comparison is, it's like a fish leaping from the water: there's a silvery flash against the background of water, So here Tara just emerges, she just sort of pops up against the voidness, And in this stage one visualizes the form or the figure of Tara, and one sees or experiences the voidness at the same time. The two are not contradictory, the two interpenetrate. So far in the practice, the void was there, Tara wasn't there; when Tara was there, the void wasn't there. But here, you get them both together, just as in the Heart Sutra, there's the identity of rupa and sunyata. The Heart Sutra says 'What is rupa? That is sunyata, What is sunyata? That is rupa,' There's no difference between them, 'What is form? That is void, What is void? That is form.' No difference. So Tara here represents form, rupa; rupa

also means body. And the void, of course, is the Void itself,

So in this stage we realize the truth of the Heart Sutra's teaching; we realize it through practical experience; we realize the truth that the noumenal and the phenomenal, the absolute and the relative, these are not different, these are if you like one. And also in this stage we identify ourselves with Tara, and we identify also with all other beings that we see; and whatever we hear we are supposed to identify with the mantra, If anyone says anything, we're supposed to feel, or to experience, that this is Tara herself speaking, this is the mantra of Tara resounding. And in this way, identifying ourselves with Tara and all sentient beings, we become ourselves embodiments of compassion.

Now tenthly and lastly there's the stage of dedication of merits, and this is the conclusion to all Buddhist spiritual practices, You say as it were that whatever merits I might have gained from this practice. from this exercise, from this meditation, I share them with all living beings, There's nothing that I want to keep back for myself.

So this is the meditation of the Green Tara. I've had to go' through these stages of practice rather quickly, but I hope that I've been able to give you some idea of the nature of each of these stages, To hear about them, of course, is one thing, to practise them is quite another, and if one really wants to understand or to have any idea, even, of what they are like, what they represent, what the experiences involved are than one just has to practise for oneself, There's no other way of doing it at all.

Now, as I indicated at the beginning, this sort of pattern, this sort of sequence of stages, can be applied to other deities, You can meditate on Manjusri in the same way, on the Buddha of Infinite Light in the same way and so on. In this description incidentally, I've left out the entire ritual part; I haven't said anything about ritual, I've just confined myself to the meditation side. But even so, even though I've confined myself to the meditation aspect, the whole practice is simple by Tibetan standards, But it must be confessed, it must. be admitted that many ordinary practitioners, especially laypeople, they simplify it even further. So I'm going to tell you how they do that, and then we shall close.

How do they simplify it? Well, to begin with, they just keep in their room, or in their shrine or their meditation room if they have one, an image of Tara, and/or a painted scroll of Tara, This is just to give them an idea of how to visualize, what they should try to see. And then every morning they will lay out their seven water bowls and they'll fill them with water, usually repeating a mantra. And they'll light a lamp and they'll light some incense. Every morning they will do th is, as soon as they get up, as soon as they 've had a wash, they come into the shrine, just look at the picture; they may just salute it; and they change the water in the seven bowls, and as I said they light the lamp and they light the incense. And this usually suffices for the ritual part of the practice. Then they sit down. They sit down on a sort of - what shall I say? on a sort of plank bedstead, on a rug; they sit cross - legged; and they start by reciting various hymns, as we would call them, praising Tara and her great compassion. And usually, in these hymns, the goddess is described limb by limb, almost, and ornament by ornament, so you can build up the picture in your mind. And they go on reciting and chanting these for quite a while. Then they recite verses indicative of their Going for Refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in the Tantric way, and then verses indicative of their practice of the four brahma viharas and taking of the Bodhisattva Vow.

And then, just sitting there, and perhaps looking at the picture or trying to see the image of Tara in their minds, they just go on repeating the mantra of Tara for half an hour or whatever length of time they can spare. And then they conclude by bowing down and dedicating and sharing their merits. And this is The way in which the ordinary person will practise this sort of exercise or this sort of Tantric meditation But if you're serious, especially if you've got two or three hours to spare every morning before you go to the office - and Tibetans do this - then you can go through the whole practice.

I remember in this connection - this is just by the way, nothing to do with the Tara practice. but another kind of practice - I remember that one of my own teachers, after I'd had the initiation and the practice had been explained, gave me two versions. He said, well, here's the short version, which is to be done every day; and he said, here - and there were 20 pages of it - here's the lengthy version and, he said when you have two or three days to spare at any time, you can go through this So this is how the Tibetans, how the Tantric Buddhists, look at it.

But this very simple sort of practice, the one I've described, is very very common in Tibet, very common among Tibetans, both monks and laypeople; and what usually happens is that as they get older, as they 've got less and less responsibilities in the world, they'll devote more and more time to this; and eventually they may end up spending the greater part of the day in this way - not just with this particular practice or with one particular practice, but with a sequence of practices, a number of different practices. And I do remember that when I used to be in Kalimpong and I used to go and see my Tibetan friends - and among Tibetans the proper hour for calling on friends is about 9.30 or 10 in the morning, 'cause then you can stay the whole day - very often I would arrive, and the servant or the disciple would say, well, please wait a few minutes; he hasn't quite finished his meditation. And this happened very very often; and I'd usually learn that they'd start about six and they finished about nine, And this was quite common; these were either government officials or busy abbots in charge of monasteries, or even quite ordinary people, traders and suchlike - they would very often spend two to three hours chanting and repeating mantras before starting the day's work. And of course at intervals during the day you could very often see them reciting, or hear them reciting, their mantras, especially when they used to go for their evening walk.

And for me it's one of my pleasantest memories of Kalimpong that I used to go myself for an evening stroll in the direction of the bazaar, and as the shades of evening were falling I'd pass so many elderly Tibetans, men and women, walking this way or walking that way, and as they went along they'd be turning a prayer wheel in this hand, and they'd be telling their beads with the other, and murmuring a mantra. And I know lots of writers who have described Tibet have spoken about mechanical practices and mechanical rites and so on, but believe me there was nothing mechanical in this sort of practice. You could tell, the way the people were walking, the way they were absorbed, that they were really concentrating on what they were doing. And in this way, even comparatively advanced practices of meditation, Tantric Buddhist meditation, become an integral part of the daily life of the average person.

Now there are many other practices, as I've already indicated, especially practices of the anuttara yoga Tantra, but we just haven't got time to go into anything of that sort. But perhaps this very brief description of the Tara meditation practice has sufficed to give you a representative idea of Tibetan Buddhist meditation, Even from the little I've been able to say, the little I've been able to convey, I think it's clear that in this country we still have much to learn about these things; but we may be going into all that next week, in the last lecture of our

series, when we deal with the future of Tibetan Buddhism.

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