

(Words in square brackets ([]) are attempts by the transcriber to guess the correct word.)

Lecture 64: the Heroic Ideal in Buddhism

Mister Chairman and Friends,

One of the happier features of events of the last few years has been the gradual but fairly steady spread of the influence of Buddhism in the West. But at the same time it must be confessed that even though the influence of Buddhism, the influence of the Buddha's teaching is spreading, there are still quite a number of popular misconceptions about Buddhism in the West. Not only popular misconceptions one may say, but even quite a number of misconceptions which are current in scholarly and in religious circles, If one wanted to put the matter in a rather extreme form one might even go so far as to say that at the present stage to try to study Buddhism is to misunderstand it. One might even go further than that and to say to try to practise Buddhism is to misunderstand it still more. Some people for instance think that Buddhism is just an Eastern cult, it's something specifically and definitely oriental. Others again think that Buddhism is just an intellectual system, it's just a philosophy, it's just a system of concepts, it's just a system of conceptual understanding just like the philosophy say of Plato or of Kant and so on. Other people again think that Buddhism is just a code of ethics. When you read books about Buddhism written by orthodox Christians, especially by Roman Catholic scholars who for some reason or other have specialized in Buddhism, they always tell you this. In fact they always tell you that Buddhism is not really a religion at all it's just a code of ethics and they try to dismiss it in this way as something rather inferior and rather elementary and they praise it (of course they damn it with faint praise as we say) - they say, "Yes it's very good and it tells you not to tell lies, it tells you not to steal and not to take life, of course it is wonderful but then it's just a system of ethics", and they make the point that of course Christianity goes far beyond that, Christianity is a real religion. So in this way there are lots of misunderstandings current. In fact we may say that misunderstandings are endless, and this evening we're concerned with one misunderstanding about Buddhism in particular and that is the misunderstanding which is still quite current in some circles, that Buddhism is rather weak, that it's rather feeble, that it's negative and that it's a rather passive and even emasculated sort of teaching and tradition.

Now the Question arises well how did this sort of impression arise? How did it get about? Why did some people at least start thinking that Buddhism was rather weak, rather feeble, rather negative, rather passive sort of teaching? Now this sort of impression seems to have arisen in quite a number of different ways as a result of quite a number of different factors: First of all it derives from some at least of the literature about Buddhism, certainly literature circulating in English. I think we don't always realise how old are the books very often on which we depend for our understanding of Buddhism. If you go along to any public library which has got books on Buddhism in it, ten to one that you'll find that most of those books are quite old books, and even if you go along to bookshops which are selling new books you very often find that what they are selling are in fact reprints of quite old books, books written some fifty, sixty or even seventy years ago. In fact both in India and in America there are publishing firms which are specialising nowadays in simply reprinting old books without bringing them up to date or correcting misunderstandings or errors in any way. So we are still, as it were saddled with quite a lot of literature on Buddhism which was originally produced some fifty or sixty years ago at the very beginning of the study of Buddhism in the West. And these productions, these books about Buddhism tend very often to see Buddhism, the Buddha's teaching, in terms of the religion then current - that is to say in terms of Christianity - and they tend to see the Buddha himself very much in terms of Christ, as though the Buddha was a sort of oriental Christ. Now we may say that at that time this was only natural, this was indeed inevitable. One has to go when one is trying to broaden one's knowledge, broaden one's outlook, one has to go from the known to the unknown, one has to go little by little, step by step. So it was only natural at that time that people encountering Buddhism or trying to explain Buddhism should make use to some extent of Christian concepts and so on, and it was even natural we may say that they tried to understand the Buddha in the light of their understanding of Christ. But the difficulty, but the drawback was that the Christianity which was then current, fifty or sixty years ago, was often popular Victorian Christianity. Not Just Christianity but Victorian Christianity and Christ was of course the Victorian Christ, and both of these tended to be, one may say, rather milk and water versions of the real

thing. I remember it has been said that for the Victorians, for our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, Christ was a ghostly figure in a white sheet gliding around Galilee and gently rebuking people for not believing in the Nycean creed. This was the Victorian Christ. So one might say that in the same way for this type of literature, the type of literature about which I am speaking, the Buddha, also, is a ghostly figure in a yellow sheet gliding around India gently rebuking people for not being kind to animals. Now not that one shouldn't be kind to animals of course but being kind to animals is by no means the whole of Buddhism. So this is just one of the ways in which we tended to get the impression about Buddhism, about the Buddha, that they were rather weak, rather negative, rather if you like emasculated.

And then again some of us at least derive our impressions of Buddhism partly, perhaps even unconsciously, from an acquaintance with later Indian Buddhist art. Now Indian Buddhist art has a long and a glorious history, but towards the end of that history it does become a little degenerate, a little decadent, and it often depicts the Buddha as a rather dreamy, rather feminine, not to say effeminate figure, and one might say that modern Indian art does this even more so. If you go around India and you find or you look at popular representations of the Buddha, well they're simply ghastly. He looks like a cheap thirdrate -film star. This is how he's depicted nowadays. So if one encounters this sort of picture of the Buddha, usually on calendars, or if you encounter images or little even plaster figures of the Buddha of this type, you will get the impression of something weak and feeble and as I've said even effeminate. In this sort of so-called art, in this popular art, the figure of the Buddha becomes very sugary and very sentimental. The Buddha is usually represented not with a smile of Enlightenment but with to sort of simpering smile, almost a coquettish smile which doesn't look like the real Buddha at all. So this sort of impression that we have if we are in contact with this sort of art in any way - this impression that Buddhism is something feeble and weak is a little strengthened.

Then again historically at least Buddhism is an Eastern religion in the sense that it originated in the East. It's a universal teaching, it isn't limited to the East but it arose there and historically speaking it is an Eastern religion, an Eastern teaching, and in the West even now only too many people tend to think of the East generally as being rather slow and rather backward and rather unprogressive as compared with the West. So these sort of epithets tend to attach themselves to Buddhism too when Buddhism is considered to be an Eastern or an oriental teaching or religion.

And then again we have to recognise the fact that a very great deal of contemporary Buddhist teaching in the East is in fact rather negative. If you look at the Buddhist scriptures themselves you'll find a very strong, a very powerful positive emphasis. There is a negative side too which is complimentary but only too often in the East today, in the Buddhist countries of the East today it's the negative virtues which tend to be stressed. They tend to tell you that you are not to do this and not to do that and refrain from this and abstain from that, but what you should do, what you should cultivate, what you should develop, this is not stressed nearly as so often, And very often in the East, especially in expositions of Buddhism written for the Western world in English and other Western languages, the teaching of the Buddha is presented very much in terms of avoidance rather than in terms of engagement, in terms of escape rather than in terms of commitment. If one picks up some of these little popular tracts on Buddhism which come from Ceylon or from Burma or from Thailand one usually finds I'm afraid that it's this negative aspect of the teaching which is stressed more than the positive aspect.

So in these and in various other ways we tend to get the impression very often in the West that Buddhism itself is rather weak, is rather negative, rather passive and so on, and we tend to get the impression sometimes that in this way Buddhism is a religion for the old and feeble rather than for the young and vigorous. So this evening what I propose to do is to try to show just for a few minutes the other side of the coin, and that's why I'm speaking this evening on "The Heroic Ideal in Buddhism".

Now when I prepared this lecture I did look at my dictionary and my dictionary told me quite a lot about the word "hero", about the word "heroic". The word "hero" is a word with a long history and it has various shades of meaning. In mythology and in religion the word "hero" means in the first place *"a man, especially a warrior of the Greek epic or heroic age."* And secondly it means *"a man honoured after death by public worship because of exceptional service to mankind and usually held to be in part at least of divine descent."*

" These are the two primary meanings of the word "hero". And derivative meanings which the dictionary gives are: "1. *The principal male personage usually of noble character in a poem, story, drama or the like*" and "2. *A person of distinguished valour or enterprise in danger.*" and "3. *A prominent or central personage taking an admirable part In any remarkable action or event.*" Well this is what "hero" means. And "Heroic" is defined as "*pertaining to or like a hero or heroes; worthy of a hero; bold, daring, brave, illustrious.* So this is what "heroic" means.

So the question arises what does one mean by speaking of "The Heroic Ideal in Buddhism"? In what sense is Buddhism itself heroic? We know that Buddhism is a spiritual teaching. It's a teaching which has as its aim the attainment of that state of Enlightenment, which is traditionally known as Buddhahood, It has as its aim the attainment of a state of complete moral and spiritual perfection. So the ideal of Buddhism we may say broadly speaking is a spiritual ideal, it's not just an ethical ideal as sometimes people try to make out. It's a spiritual even a transcendental ideal, but this ideal, this spiritual ideal, this transcendental ideal of Buddhism is not a weak, is not merely a negative thing. We may say, in fact that the spiritual ideal of Buddhism is an heroic ideal. We can say that it calls for the exercise on the moral and spiritual plane of the sort of qualities that we call heroic. So that when we speak of the heroic ideal in Buddhism we are not speaking of anything distinct from, much less still opposed to, the spiritual ideal itself. When we speak of the heroic ideal in Buddhism we're speaking of the spiritual ideal itself under its heroic aspect. We're drawing attention to the fact that the spiritual life itself is heroic in the highest degree. Now we don't often think of the spiritual life in these terms. We usually think of it as something sort of in a way 'goody-goody' that you don't do this and you don't do that. You don't think of it usually in heroic terms but this is really what it is. The spiritual life is the heroic life and it's heroic in the highest possible degree.

Now the spiritual ideal of Buddhism is revealed historically speaking in the person of the Buddha. He didn't just teach about Enlightenment, he was the Enlightened One. He had realised the ideal, he had realised the goal. So we find that the Buddha is the representative, the incarnation if you like of the spiritual ideal in Buddhism. So we find the spiritual ideal of Buddhism fully revealed in him and also in what is known as the Bodhisattva Ideal, and this means that the heroic ideal is also revealed by them, by the Buddha and by the Bodhisattva Ideal. I'm therefore going to say a few words this evening on each of these; on the Buddha as the embodiment of the heroic ideal and also on the Bodhisattva Ideal as the embodiment of the heroic ideal.

Now the ancient Buddhist texts, whether they are in Pali or whether they are in Sanskrit regularly represent the Buddha himself as a spiritual hero. In these languages, in Pali and in Sanskrit, the Buddha has a number of different titles, and one of these titles is "*Mahavira*". "Maha" means "Great, noble, eminent" and "Vira" means simply "hero". It's the common word even in modern Indian languages for hero. So "Mahavira", this title of the Buddha means the great hero. So this is not one of the titles that we in the West are accustomed to using for the Buddha. We usually say the Buddha, the Enlightened One or the Compassionate one, we don't usually say the great hero, But this epithet of the Buddha does occur quite often in the original Pali and Sanskrit texts. The Buddha is also known as the "Jina". The word "Jina" in the original texts is almost as common as the word Buddha, so what does Jina mean? Jina means the "Victor" or the "Conqueror" and the Buddha is called the victor, the conqueror not on account of any material conquest but on account of the fact that he is victorious over, that he has conquered the whole of conditioned existence within himself, He is one who has conquered the world by conquering himself. There's a famous verse in the Dhammapada as many of you know which says, "*Though one may conquer in battle a thousand men a thousand times, yet he who conquers himself has the more glorious a Victory.*" So the Buddha is the victor, he is the conqueror. In later Buddhism in medieval Indian Buddhism the idea arose of what they called *Trailokya Vijaya* - conquest of the three worlds, victory over the three worlds. Not the worlds without but the worlds within, So this word Jina, this victor or conqueror sums all this up very well.

Then again by virtue of this conquest the Buddha is a king. In ancient times if a king went forth or if a hero went forth and conquered a territory, conquered a country, he became the king of that. So the Buddha is the victor, is the conqueror of the whole of mundane existence, the whole of conditioned existence which he has subdued within his own mind and consequently the Buddha is a king, and he's known in Pali and in Sanskrit as the *Dhammaraja* or *Dharmaraja* which means the king of the law, the king of truth, the king of spiritual

reality and we find that very often in Buddhist art in India and elsewhere that the Buddha is represented as accompanied by the insignia of royalty, shown accompanied by the parasol for example, and the fly whisk, and these are insignia, these are symbols of royalty in India, in fact in the East generally wherever the Buddhist cultural tradition has penetrated. Just as in the West we have the orb and the sceptre so in the East they have the parasol and the fly whisk. In the Buddha's day in India the parasol was the symbol of the king. An ordinary person never used an umbrella. They didn't use it for keeping off the rain. At best they used a leaf, but a real umbrella could be used only by the king or by a very noble and very eminent person. There's a whole background mythologically to this. Lama Govinda has gone into it to some extent. He traces it back to the wise old man, the elder of the tribe or the village who sat in the evening underneath a tree and with his back to the trunk and legislated for the tribe, settled various cases, gave advice. So the umbrella according to this line of thought is really a sort of artificial tree held above you as you go about. It's not utilitarian, nothing to do with keeping off the sun or the rain - it's just a symbol, just, a sign of honour. Ultimately according to Lama Govinda it's linked up with the cosmic tree which overshadows the whole world, the whole of existence but perhaps we need not pursue that line of thought but, it is sufficient to note that in art, in sculpture, in painting, the Buddha very often is accompanied by the insignia of royalty, Just as you might represent say in the West Christ with an orb and with a sceptre to represent his divine kingship, in the same way in Buddhist art the Buddha is shown with an umbrella held over him sometimes by divine beings and by gods flanking him with fly whisks.

I don't know whether you've ever seen a fly whisk. It's made actually from the tail of the yak. The yak as you know is a Tibetan beast and it has a marvellous tail which is like a great bunch of very soft white hair and in ancient times in India and even today these were made into whisks - they're very, very long - about so long, about two feet long and very very beautiful and this tail is mounted on a silver handle and the king is just sort of gently fanned with this to keep off the flies. And it's used in Hindu pujas, in Hindu ritual worship even today, there's a stage in what they call the Arati, the evening worship, when the fly whisk is waved in front of the image of the deity because the deity, whether Rama or Krishna or whatever it may be is being treated for the time being as a king, not only as a divine, but as a royal personage or royal being. So in Buddhist art, as I've said, the Buddha is represented very often with these insignia of royalty to show that he's the king of the Dharma, the king if you like of the spiritual universe.

And we find also that the Buddha's chief disciple in the Pali texts Sariputta (or in Sanskrit Sariputra) - is known as his Dhammasenapatti. So what does senapatti mean? Senapatti means commander in chief. So what a title! It's almost like the Salvation Army! But you can see the sort of background, the sort of attitude. He's not called the chief disciple, he's called the Dhammasenapatti, the commander in chief of the dharma. If the Buddha is the king, well the chief disciple obviously is the commander in chief, the commander of the army. So in Pali Sariputta is regularly referred to as the Dhammasenapatti or in Sanskrit the Dharmasenapatti.

Now all this, all this sort of terminology, all this sort of symbolism of royalty, even of the military, the army - all this is not unconnected perhaps with the Buddha's original social background. The Buddha as we learned yesterday was born into the Ksatriya or the Warrior caste. In ancient India there are four principal castes. According to the Hindu reckoning they are first of all the Brahmins, the priests; then the Ksatriyas, the rulers and fighters; then thirdly, the Vaisyas, the merchants, traders and farmers, and lastly the Shudras, the labourers. the serfs. So the Buddha was born into the second of these, the Ksatriya caste. But it's rather interesting, it's rather significant that the Ksatriyas did not regard themselves as the second caste. They regarded themselves as the top caste, the first caste. And we find it rather interesting that in the Pali texts this sort of attitude of the Ksatriyas is reflected because in Pali when they enumerate the four castes they always put the Ksatriyas first, In Pali you never find Brahmana, Ksatriya, Vaisya, Shudra. You always find Ksatriya, Brahmana, Vaisya, Shudra. So this reflects the sort of attitude of the social group from which the Buddha himself originally sprang. We find also (This is just a point of interest in passing) that the Buddha not only sprang from this sort of background but he came from a rather patrician sort of family and at the time of the Buddha's birth his father was the elected king or president of the Sakya republics. It's not always appreciated that in India in the Buddha's day there were two forms of government - there was monarchy but there was also republican government. Towards the end of the Buddha's lifetime the little republics of India

were swallowed up by the developing Magadha empire, but when the Buddha was born these republics were for the most part in a very flourishing condition and they elected their head. He sometimes had the title of raja but he was nevertheless elected, and in the case of the Sakya republic, it seems he was elected for a period of twelve years, and the Buddha it seems was born while his father, Suddhodana, was serving a twelve year term of office. Now born as he was into this sort of environment, the Buddha as a young man became highly proficient in all sorts of martial arts. We might tend to think of the Buddha as a young man as studying

philosophy and studying maybe literature and all that sort of thing, but there's no evidence for that whatever. The Buddhist texts say nothing at all about the Buddha's studies as a young man except that he learned how to fight, that he learned how to use the bow and arrow and the sword and the spear. He learned how to ride a horse and he learned how to drive a chariot, but there's nothing at all about studying. There were of course no books in those days. He must have picked up a bit of legendary law, he might have learned a few mantras from some of the elders. Brahminism hadn't penetrated into Sakya territory. We know that. He might have learned a bit about the history of the tribe, about the constitution of the republic, the way things were administered, but there's no sign that he received anything like what we would regard as a good education. I said he learned to fight and he learned various kinds of weaponry and that was about all.

There is a very interesting legend that when he became betrothed to his cousin Yashodhara some of Yashodhara's kinsmen objected that he wasn't good enough at fighting, so he had to demonstrate his prowess, and there are all sorts of legends about this - how he beat the kinsmen of his betrothed at all sorts of contests, whether it was archery, swordplay and so on.

So therefore with this sort of background, with this heroic background it isn't surprising that the Buddha even before his Enlightenment exhibited heroic qualities. We know that he left home when he was about twenty-nine. That must have been a great wrench, it isn't easy to break away in that fashion. If you've been brought up in comfort, even in luxury in the bosom of one's family and one's tribe. One has everything that one could wish for. The Buddha as a young man, we are told, had three mansions, one for each of the three seasons and they were full of singing girls and dancing girls we are told. This is the sort of background from which the Buddha came. Not a university background or a background of bookish study - this is the sort of background from which he emerged. But he left it all. He left it all behind. He wrenched himself away and it wasn't easy and this certainly called for great and heroic qualities, to go out alone into the darkness, into the forest, going he knew not where, only knowing that he went in search of the Truth. And then we find that for six years the Buddha practised austerities. It's interesting to note there's a very human touch indeed, that the scriptures relate or the Buddha himself relates in the scriptures - that when as a wandering monk he begged his food for the first time what happened? As you know traditionally in the East the mendicant monk including the Buddhist mendicant monk begged from door to door, You take a big black begging bowl and you move from door to door. You stand there for a few minutes and people come and put a few scraps of food in it and you move to the next door. When you feel you've collected enough for your meal you go off to a quiet spot outside the village and you sit down and eat it. So the Buddha once related to his disciples according to the scriptures, and this is a story that has all the ring of truth because it's not the sort of thing that anyone would invent later on. He related to his disciples how the first day that he lived in this way, the first time he sat down outside the village with this bowl full of scraps, he looked at it and he vomited, because he hadn't been brought up in that way, He had been used to the best, and when as a monk, as a wanderer, for the first time he found himself face to face with that bowl of scraps his stomach just turned. But he forced himself to eat, he forced himself to live this sort of life, to subsist on this sort of diet. He no longer wore his rich princely garments, He just wore some rough yellow stained robes. (We say robes but they were probably more like rags. When we go around the modern Buddhist world we tend to think that the Buddha lived rather like a modern Buddhist monk but I don't think it was like that at all. In the East Buddhist monks usually go around in beautifully laundered, very neat, very clean, very new yellow robes, and I'm afraid in some Buddhist countries it's considered rather disgraceful for a monk to go around in a rather old robe. I remember once I came down to Calcutta myself to a Buddhist monastery and I happened to be wearing a very old robe and some of my monk friends were quite scandalised and said, "well that's terrible what will people think!". But it obviously wasn't like that in the Buddha's time but the Buddha had to get used to this gradually and it represented a complete change from his previous way of life).

So for six years he not only endured these minor hardships but he practised austerities. We're told that for some time he went without clothes altogether, even in the snow. You don't often think of it snowing in India but on the slopes of the Himalayas it does. And we're told that the Buddha even in that bitterly cold weather with snow on the ground, at a certain period in his early life he just went about naked without any clothes at all, and he also gradually reduced his diet. He experimented in different ways. He was after all trying to find a path. He didn't know. He was just using the method as we discussed this morning of trial and error. So some people said that well if you cut down your food and if you just live on a few grains of rice or barley a day and a few sips of water that will bring you very nearly to Enlightenment. So he tried this method and he found that it didn't work. We are told in the scriptures that at one time in his career he became just like a skeleton with skin clinging to it, and there's a very famous image in Gandhara Buddhist art showing the Buddha at this stage of his career and it's a very very terrible figure indeed, You see just the skeleton with all the veins visible, the muscles visible and just the skin clinging on to that framework, onto that bony skeleton. So this is how the Buddha lived for several years. So what tremendous determination this must have taken. How heroic was that life, how heroic was that endeavour.

But then, when he'd become quite famous for these austerities and was regarded by many people as a really holy man, because in India even today people are very much impressed by austerities. I remember in this connection - this is just by the way - Vinova bhava(?) once went to Sarnath, which is a Buddhist centre and his disciple told some monk friends of mine that Vinova bhava only ate a certain type of grain for his breakfast, and it had to be ready right on the dot of seven o'clock. So the disciples impressed this upon the Buddhist monks so much that the abbot there, or rather the assistant abbot who is a friend of mine, he personally went exactly at seven o'clock with this grain to Vinova bhava's room to make quite sure he got it in time. So he was there just a little before seven o'clock, but Vinova bhava had already gone, So one or two disciples were still lingering so my friend asked "*well what's this? You asked for it to be brought exactly at seven and here I am just a minute beforehand with the very thing he wants - well he hasn't even waited for it!*" They said "*Ah. that's his Greatness!*" So my friend was very disgusted and I'm afraid in a rather polite way he told those disciples what Vinova bhava could do with his greatness! Which didn't go down very well and he told me this story himself a little later on. But this sort of eccentricity can very often attract a great deal of attention in India. Not only in India, even in this country in some religious circles if you behave in a rather eccentric sort of way then you can perhaps gain quite a little following. At least among some kinds of people.

So the Buddha lived in this way - we might even say, in this eccentric way - practising extreme austerities for a number of years and he got quite a following. One of the texts says that at that stage of his career his fame resounded throughout India just like the sound of a great bell hung in the canopy of the skies. And even at that time people flocked to him, marvelling at his austerities. But then the Buddha did something even more heroic. He realised that that was all a mistake, that it was the wrong path and he stopped. And that was more difficult. still I would say. Here he was surrounded by the admiration of so many people. They all thought he was doing the right thing. They were all convinced he'd get Enlightenment one day by torturing himself and there they were waiting around him just like vultures you might say - ready to pick up whatever bits of Enlightenment fell from him after he'd got his Enlightenment, and then what did he do? He let them all down. He let them all down. He didn't fulfill their expectations, He scandalised them by actually taking solid food. And when he did that they left in disgust saying, "*He has returned to the path of luxury.*" because he took a bit of rice and curry - the path of luxury - and they left him in disgust, and he was left all on his own, completely on his own and this really tested, we may say, his heroic qualities. It's easy to go along. It's easy to do anything however difficult so long as other people are with you.

It's quite easy to do something difficult when you've got lots of people applauding and saying well how wonderful and look what he's doing and how difficult it is and admiring and all that sort of thing. But when you have to go against everybody and when no one likes what you are doing, when everybody disagrees with what you are doing and they leave you in disgust then that is a very difficult time, and it's very very few people who can carry on then, We might say that Christ reached a similar period of his career in the Garden on the Mount of Olives when everybody practically deserted him. So it was the same with the Buddha in a way at this particular stage of his career everybody deserted him, everybody left him and he was alone struggling to find the path by himself.

So the Buddha wasn't afraid to go it alone. He wasn't afraid, and he went on alone, and later on when he was quite an old man he used to reminisce a bit about these days and he related several interesting incidents. He related that when he was staying in the depths of the jungle all on his own, sometimes, for no apparent reason he'd be overwhelmed by terrible fear. Those who've practised meditation know that this can happen sometimes. There can be a welling up of a tremendous fear - a fear which has no apparent reason, no apparent cause, no apparent object. It isn't a fear of anything, not even a fear of death. It's just like a solid block of fear, and one can do very little about it. So the Buddha apparently had this sort of experience when he was all by himself in the depths of the jungle and he told his disciples that if this experience of fear, this panic, fear and terror as he called it, arose when he was walking he continued walking until it subsided. If it arose when he was sitting he continued sitting until it subsided. If it arose when he was lying down he continued lying down until it subsided. In other words he didn't try to escape it. He didn't try to run away [with] it. He let it come, he let it stay there and he let it go away, and he did not suffer his mind, his true mind, his essential mind, to be disturbed by that experience.

And then we see also the Buddha's tremendous determination to gain Enlightenment. Once he'd realised what the true path was, that it led through the stages of meditation. The texts represent him as coming to Gaya (what we would now call Buddhagaya) and they represent him as sitting down on heap of grass underneath a tree and saying to himself, "*Let blood dry up, let flesh wither away but I shall not stir from this spot 'til Enlightenment is attained*". This was the Buddha's determination. He didn't say well I'll try it for a few days and, well, if it, doesn't work I'll just try something else I suppose, He said no, I will sit here. I will stay here. I will not stir from this spot until Enlightenment has been attained. And [also] with that sort of determination he did gain Enlightenment. Exactly how many days and how many nights he had to sit there we are not exactly told, but we know that it didn't happen all at once. He had to sit meditating, with full determination, for quite a long time. But we are told that one day when the morning dawned and when he saw the morning star shining in the East then, taking that as his object of concentration, he did gradually gain Enlightenment. And this Enlightenment itself is very often represented, is very often described as a victory, a victory over Mara, Mara (the name literally means Death) is a personification of all the forces of evil existing within man's own mind. All his negative emotions, his psychological conditionings and so on. So on account of his victory over Mara, these dark forces within his own mind, the Buddha is called "Marajint", the conqueror of Mara.

Now it's not unexpected, it's not unnatural that we find the heroic emphasis prominent in the teaching of the Buddha after his Enlightenment. Throughout his teaching the Buddha stresses self reliance very much. He stresses very much that his disciples should not rely even on him. Very often the Pali texts represent him as saying to his monks, "*All that a teacher could do I have done for you, Here are the roots of trees. (iddani, mullani rukani) in Pali sit down, meditate, the rest is up to you*, And very often we find him saying this in the Pali texts, and because he stressed self-reliance he also stressed very much vigour and energy. We find him always calling to his monks and asking them what they were up to, what they were doing, how they were getting on. He never let them as it were

slacken off, and of course they responded, at least most of them responded - some of them got a bit tired of it and said well the Buddha's always asking us to do that and telling us to do this and the other. They went off to find some easier teacher. Also we find that on more than one occasion the Buddha spoke of the spiritual life itself in terms of a battle. He realised it wasn't an easy matter, it wasn't an easy business, it was a battle. And he said in several places on several occasions addressing his monks, "*We are Ksatriyas, we are warriors*" and he didn't mean in the caste sense because his disciples came from all castes. Some were Brahmin, in fact lots were Brahmin, (others were Vaisyas, Shudras, Untouchables and so on, but addressing them he said to all of them we are Ksatriyas. We are Ksatriyas because we're warriors, because we're fighters. And then he went on to say or to ask what do we fight for? He said we fight for Sila, for the moral life, We fight for Samadhi, for the higher consciousness, we fight for Wisdom, Prajna, and we fight for vimukti, complete spiritual freedom - freedom from all psychological conditionings. And in the Dhammapada, one of the most ancient Buddhist texts we find that the Buddha speaks of the disciple destroying the hosts of Mara, the hosts of the evil one, with the sword of Wisdom.

And in the Mahayana tradition we find the same sort of symbolism appears in the figure of Manjusri. In the Mahayana you find all sorts of Bodhisattva figures who are sort of symbolic personifications of different aspects of Enlightenment. So Manjusri embodies the Wisdom aspect of Enlightenment, and there's one

particular form of Manjusri which is called Arapajjana Manjusri where he's represented brandishing aloft in his right hand a fiery or a flaming sword, the sword of knowledge or the sword of Wisdom, and this too is very typical, very representative of this heroic emphasis in later Buddhist tradition, Now there are many episodes in the life of the Buddha as is related in the scriptures which demonstrate, which reveal his heroic qualities. For instance there's that very well known incident of Devadatta's attempt on his life. Devadatta was his own cousin, he'd been a monk for many years. In a sense he was spiritually advanced. He had all sorts of psychic powers, but he was very ambitious and he was also very Jealous, and one day the rather evil thought came to him that it would be much better if he took over the movement from the Buddha. So he went to the Buddha and he said, "*Lord, you are getting old. Lord, you are a bit past it. Lord, don't exert yourself any more. Take it easy retire, rest.*" He said, "*I shall look after everything for you. I shall lead the Sangha.*" So the Buddha said rather sternly, "*Not even to Sariputra and Maudgalyana would I hand over the Sangha, not to speak of handing it over to you.*" So Devadatta from that moment conceived an enmity against the Buddha and we are told that with the connivance of a certain local king, Ajatasattu, he even made attempts upon the life of the Buddha. He made friends with the king's elephant tamer and he one day released against the Buddha a mad elephant but nothing happened. When the Buddha..... [small part of tape missing]

A little later Devadatta tried again. He knew that the Buddha used to like walking at the foot of a hill at Rajgriha so he stationed himself halfway up the hill and when he saw the Buddha walking slowly underneath him he rolled down a great boulder, a great mass of rock and it went bouncing and rolling down the hillside. It just missed the Buddha, in fact a splinter from that rock pierced the Buddha's foot and drew blood. So when these things started happening the disciples became rather alarmed, all the other disciples - well here's Devadatta trying to murder the Buddha. They felt we must do something about it. He's failed twice but maybe he'll succeed next time. So without saying anything to the Buddha they ringed the whole vihara, the whole monastery where the Buddha was staying with a sort of guard. So it was the Buddha's custom sometimes to get up in the night. So one night he got up and he saw the whole place surrounded by bhikkhus on guard with sticks in a great ring. So he said "*Monks, what is this?*" So they said, "*Lord, we are protecting you, As you know Devadatta is trying to kill you, We're protecting you.*" So the Buddha said "*Go away! The Buddha needs no protection from anybody.*" So very very reluctantly they just went away. They had to go because they, one might even say, they feared the Buddha. At least they respected him so much they couldn't possibly disobey him despite their fears. So they just sort of melted away, and the Buddha was left there in that little vihara all by himself and we're told he just sat there like a lion, as it were, [] nothing happened and sometime later Devadatta died of disappointment, and we're told after his death he went to an unpleasant place. But we must also add this. In the Mahayana scriptures you find the name given which Devadatta will assume when he becomes a Buddha in the future. Because even someone like Devadatta has the seed of Buddha nature and when he has expiated those crimes and those sins, when he's purified himself, he too will become Enlightened. This is the tremendous spiritual optimism of Buddhism. If you read Dante's divine comedy where do you find Judas Escariot? The bottommost circle of Hell and there's never any hint that he would ever get out, But it's not like that with Devadatta, We're told that in the very moment Devadatta is in Hell but he'll get out we're told and we're even told in some of the Mahayana scriptures after how many years he'll get out and where he'll be reborn. Well this may be so or may not be so in that precise way, but the principle is important. That even the worst sinner can sort of bounce back and can recover from his sin. No one is ever completely and hopelessly lost, So within the context of Buddhism there's no reason for despair. You may fall, you may- backslide, you may break all the precepts. I won't say it doesn't matter but never mind, you still have within yourself the potentiality to recover and to make progress. This is all summed up in this very significant remark of Buddhism that even Devadatta would gain Enlightenment and become a Buddha and liberate other sentient beings.

So if we study the Pali scriptures, especially the Pali scriptures we find that the Buddha was a sort of embodiment of fearlessness and self confidence. This rather strikes us when we read these scriptures. We find the Buddha is never hesitant. He isn't humble, not certainly in the Uriah Heap sense. He's very confident. He knows what he's doing, he knows what he's saying, he knows what he knows, not in any egoistic or overbearing way. But you get the impression of calm, quiet confidence and strength. And it's rather significant that the Buddha's utterance is spoken of in the scriptures as his *Singhanada* which means his Lion's roar-, The Buddha's preaching is compared to the roaring of a lion, not to the bleating of a sheep, not even to the baaing of a little woolly lamb, much less still to the barking of a dog, but to the roaring of a

lion. And we're told that the lion is the king of beasts, and in Indian mythology when the lion roars every other beast in the jungle falls silent. So in the same way we're told that when the Buddha preaches, when the Buddha expounds the truth, everybody else keeps quiet, they can't stand up against this.

Now all these heroic qualities of the Buddha of Buddhism itself are depicted in early Buddhist art in India. I'm not thinking of the Gandharan art which isn't purely Indian, which is sometimes a bit (cloned). I'm thinking rather of the art of [Matura], [Matura] being in North Western India not so very far from the present Delhi, and in this [Matura] Buddhist which is the earliest purely Indian Buddhist art, the Buddha is represented usually as a very powerfully built man in the prime of life. He's often depicted not even in a seated position, in a seated posture, but standing tip, very firmly, like a great tower, like a great tree, and he's very often represented in this [Matura] Buddhist art in this standing posture showing the *Abhaya* mudra, (which is like this) which means "Fear Not", don't fear, be not afraid. This is very typical and very representative of the [Matura] Buddhist art, and in this art we may say that on the whole it is strength rather than sweetness which is emphasised. The Buddha is not represented so much as a sweet and kind and affectionate figure but as a strong and a powerful and a vigorous and a confident sort of person. In later Indian Buddhist art this was often modified and the Buddha became more as it were gentle and sweet and so on, and in the end just a little bit sentimental, but in the oldest Buddhist art, that of [Matura] the Buddha is represented in this very heroic sort of way.

Well so much then for the Buddha, the Buddha himself, as the embodiment of the heroic ideal in Buddhism. Just a few words before we close on the Bodhisattva Ideal as the embodiment of the heroic ideal in Buddhism. The Bodhisattva as I think we all know is one who aims at Buddhahood, aims at supreme Enlightenment but not just for his own sake, for the sake, for the benefit, of all. And the Bodhisattva Ideal is of course the spiritual ideal of the Mahayana form of Buddhism in particular, Not only is it a spiritual ideal but as I pointed out earlier on, it's also the heroic ideal. The Buddha himself in the Mahayana literature is often compared to the full moon. The Bodhisattva is compared to the new moon, because the new moon grows and becomes the full moon, and the Bodhisattva grows, he becomes a Buddha becomes a fully Enlightened one by the practice of what are called the six paramitas, the six great or transcendental virtues of dana or giving, sila or morality, ksanti or patience, virya or energy, samadhi or higher meditation, and prajna or wisdom. And these are all to be practised we are told in the Mahayana texts on an heroic scale. Not just a little bit of giving, not just a little bit of morality, a little bit of patience, once or twice a week, but they're all to be practised on the heroic scale.

Take for instance dana - giving - generosity - it's not just a question of being a little bit generous, of putting threepence instead of twopence into the box, but it's a question of much more than that. The Bodhisattva practises dana, giving, on a truly heroic scale, not just giving money, not just giving material things, not just giving possessions, but sacrificing if necessary life and limb themselves. And this is the sort of background that one must try to understand, background to the self immolation of the Vietnamese monks a few years ago when they wanted to draw attention to the terrible plight of Buddhists in their country. They were sacrificing themselves against this background of the Bodhisattva ideal, this practice of dana or giving, of self-sacrifice on this heroic scale. And not only dana but all the perfections, all the paramitas, are to be practised by the Bodhisattva in this way, in this heroic, and not we're told even for one lifetime but for many and many and many a lifetime, over a whole series of lives. According to the traditional accounts the Bodhisattva practises the perfections on this heroic scale for a period of three kalpas or three great ages. They give the exact number of years but perhaps it isn't necessary to go into all this. It belongs just to the detail of Buddhist dogmatics rather than to the principles of the Mahayana.

Now a very good description of the Bodhisattva as embodiment of the heroic ideal in Buddhism is given in one of the Prajnaparamita or Perfection of Wisdom texts known as the Astasahasrika, the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines, and I'm going to read that now before we start concluding.

The Buddha says addressing Subhuti the disciple,

"Suppose, Subhuti, that there were a most excellent hero, very vigorous, of high social position, handsome, attractive and most fair to behold, of many virtues, in possession of all

the finest virtues, of those virtues which spring from the very height of sovereignty, morality, learning, renunciation and so on. He is judicious, able to express himself, to formulate his views clearly, to substantiate his claims. One who always knows the suitable time, place and situation for everything. In archery he has gone as far as one can go. He is successful in warding off all manner of attack, most skilled in all arts and foremost, through his fine achievements, in all craft, He is versed in all the treatises, has many friends, is wealthy, strong of body with large limbs, with all his faculties complete, generous to all, dear and pleasant to men. Any work he might undertake he manages to complete. He speaks methodically, shares his great riches with the many, honours what should be honoured, reveres what should be revered, worships what should be worshipped. Would such a person, Subhuti, feel every increasing joy and zest?"

Subhuti:

"He would, oh Lord."

The Lord:

"Now suppose further that this person, so greatly accomplished should have taken his family with him on a journey, his mother and father, his sons and daughters. By some circumstance they find themselves in a great wild forest. The foolish ones among them would feel fright, terror and hair-raising fear. He, however, would fearlessly say to his family, 'Do not be afraid. I shall soon take you safely and securely out of this terrible and frightful forest. I shall soon set you free. If then more and more hostile and inimical forces should rise up against him in that forest would this heroic man decide to abandon his family and to take himself alone out of that terrible and frightening forest? He who is not one to draw back, who is endowed with all the force of firmness and vigour, who is wise, exceedingly tender and compassionate, courageous and a master of many resources?"

Subhuti:

"No, oh Lord, for that person who does not abandon his family has at his disposal powerful resources both within and without, At his side forces will arise in that wild forest which are quite a match for the hostile and inimical forces. They will stand up for him and protect him, Those enemies and adversaries of his who look for a weak spot, who seek for a weak spot, will not gain any hold over him. he is competent to deal with the situation and is able, unhurt and uninjured, soon to take out of that forest both his family and himself and securely and safely will they reach a village, city or market town."

The Lord:

"Just so, Subhuti, is It with a Bodhisattva who is full of pity and concern with the welfare of all beings who dwells in friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy and even mindedness."

So the hero of this passage of this text is of course the Bodhisattva. His family represents all sentient beings, all living beings. The forest is the forest of this world itself, this samsara in which we get so easily lost, and the village, the city or the market town is Enlightenment or Nirvana, and to that city, to that market town the Bodhisattva leads safely all sentient beings.

So much then for the Bodhisattva as the embodiment of the heroic ideal. One could say a great deal more, One could refer to the heroic ideal in Zen. I could refer to the heroic ideal in Tantric Buddhism but perhaps enough has been said. Enough to show that Buddhism is not as sometimes people may think a weak or a feeble, a negative, a passive or an emasculated sort of teaching.

Now just one more word before we conclude. I've spoken of Buddhism in terms of the hero and the heroic

and I've emphasised that the spiritual life is in fact the heroic life, but at present we find that heroes are rather out of fashion. This started some time ago perhaps on a more popular level when a great novelist published a novel well over a hundred years ago with the subtitle "*A novel without a hero*" and it seems we've lost the hero since then. The hero is out of fashion. And this I think is a great pity in many ways because man really needs something to live for. If necessary something to die for and it's this which the heroic ideal gives him and which the heroic ideal in Buddhism also gives him. The heroic ideal as coincidental we may say with the spiritual ideal.