

## Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal

### Lecture 67: The Bodhisattva Vow

Mr. Chairman and friends:

Some of you have been coming along for quite a while, not only to lectures, courses of lectures, but also to quite a number of other functions. And you might have noticed that, in the course of these functions, in the course of these meetings, there are several different kinds of talk, or different kinds of lecture. They may all be called 'lectures' but if you look a little closely, as some of you no doubt have done, you will have observed I'm sure that they aren't always quite of the same kind, or quite of the same type, and you might also have noticed, if you were very observant, that these different kinds, or different types of lecture are productive of different kinds, or types, of effect.

For instance one has what we may call just the single talk, the single lecture, that is to say one which stands by itself, which doesn't constitute part of a series. And this lecture, or a lecture of this kind, of this type, may be compared to a pool of water, inasmuch as one can draw upon it, draw from it, and it remains complete in itself, it has a definite boundary. Also, there are of course the series of lectures, one coming after another, in one single stream as it were. And the series of lectures we may say, can be compared to a river. A river which flows on and on, especially when the lectures, or all the lectures in the series are on a single theme as at present. Now we all know that when we get into a river, in the literal sense, at first we don't feel very much, especially if it's a nice warm day and we've just got down into the water, at first we just feel that we're in the water, nothing much more than that, and there isn't all that difference at this stage between being in the waters of a pond and being in the waters of the river. But as we get further out into the water, as we get further out into the river, into the current, as we begin to entrust ourselves to it, then of course something begins to happen. We start feeling something. We feel, slowly at first, but ever more rapidly, we feel the grip and the pull of the current. And we find ourselves, we feel ourselves, pulled along, carried along irresistibly, by that.

I think we can say at this point that we are now beginning to be fairly in the current, as it were, of these lectures. And perhaps some of us already have felt, as it were, in the grip of the Bodhisattva Ideal. We've already had two lectures in the series and today's is the third. The first lecture was on 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal', and in the course of this lecture we saw that the Bodhisattva was the ideal Buddhist. We saw that he was one who lived for the sake of Enlightenment. But great as that is, we saw that that wasn't all, or rather that the expression had a significance that the actual wording does not at first suggest. We saw that the Bodhisattva technically, traditionally, is defined as 'One who seeks to gain Enlightenment, but who seeks to gain it for the sake, for the benefit, for the welfare, of all sentient beings'. And this addition, this rider, this addendum if you like, 'for the sake of all sentient beings', this brings out most powerfully, most emphatically, the Compassion aspect of this teaching and this tradition and this ideal.

Buddhism we saw, has two great sources: one source is the Wisdom, the transcendental knowledge and insight of the Buddha as revealed in his teaching, especially his verbal teaching. But the second great source is the Buddha's Compassion, as revealed, as manifested in his life, in his deeds, in his activities of various kinds. And the Bodhisattva Ideal, this great spiritual ideal of the Mahayana does justice, does, we may even say, full justice, to both of these sources, to both of these aspects: that of Wisdom, and that of Compassion. The Bodhisattva we saw is inspired, is motivated, if you like is enthralled, not just by what the Buddha said, but also by what the Buddha was, what he was in his fundamental being, and also what he did.

Now our second lecture in the series was devoted to the Awakening of the heart. And in the course of this lecture last week we saw that one becomes a Bodhisattva upon the arising of what is called the Bodhicitta, very often translated as 'the thought of Enlightenment', but that we saw was almost precisely what it was not - it isn't just a thought of Enlightenment, not just an idea, not just a concept. The Bodhicitta, we saw, is not even a conditioned mental state or function at all. In traditional terms, as was pointed out last week, the Bodhicitta is not included in the Five Skandhas. It isn't anything worldly, it is something, we may say, transcendental, something out of this world, which arises in us. We also saw that the Bodhicitta is not anything individual there's only one Bodhicitta, and individuals participate in, or manifest, that one Bodhicitta in varying degrees.

We saw further last week that the relative Bodhicitta is not static, but active. We saw that it constitutes what may be described as a sort of cosmic will to universal redemption. And that those of whom it takes possession, in whom it arises, or in whom it manifests, or through whom it manifests, these beings become, or are called, are known as, Bodhisattvas. Now transcendental though the Bodhicitta is, it nevertheless arises, it manifests, in dependence on certain conditions, and these conditions are represented firstly by Shantideva's Supreme Worship, which we saw consisted in a sequence of profound spiritual experiences of worship etc., culminating in transference of merits and self-surrender, and also by Vasubandhu's 'Four Factors'. According to Vasubandhu the Bodhicitta arises in dependence on: (1) the recollection of the Buddhas; (2) seeing the faults of conditioned existence; (3) observing the sufferings of sentient beings, and; (4) contemplating the virtues of the Tathagatas. And these two sets of conditions in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta, the transcendental Bodhicitta, can

arise are not, we saw, mutually exclusive, but complementary. So that if we only can create or induce these conditions within ourselves, these conditions as represented by the Supreme Worship and the Four Factors, then the Bodhicitta inevitably, in due course, will arise, will manifest within us, and not in any other way.

Now tonight we're concerned with the Bodhisattva Vow. And the Bodhisattva Vow is one of the most important practical aspects of the Mahayana tradition. Now in a sense, tonight's talk is a direct continuation of last week's. Last week we saw that the Bodhicitta has two aspects. There's first of all the Absolute Bodhicitta, identical with Enlightenment, identical with Reality, above and beyond time, above and beyond space; and then we saw there was the Relative Bodhicitta, the Bodhicitta which manifests within, as it were, the stream of time. Now the Relative Bodhicitta, in turn, has two aspects, and these are known respectively as the vow aspect of the Relative Bodhicitta, and the establishment aspect of the Relative Bodhicitta. The second of these, the 'establishment aspect', refers to what are known as the six paramitas, or the six transcendental virtues. The six great virtues, the practise of which carries the Bodhisattva on his way to supreme Enlightenment. And these are of course Giving or generosity, Uprightness, Patience, Vigour (or Energy), Meditation and Wisdom. These six transcendental virtues, these six perfections, will be dealt with in the next three lectures. This evening we're concerned with the first of the two aspects of the Relative Bodhicitta, that is to say, with the vow aspect.

So the question which arises of course is: What is the Bodhisattva's Vow? What do we mean when we speak of - what does the Mahayana mean when it speaks of - the Bodhisattva's vow? Now the word in the original, in Sanskrit, is pranidhana. And pranidhana means of course 'vow', it means 'inflexible resolution', it means 'determination', it means 'pledge', and so on. And it's understood to be something very solemn, something very special, also something public, not private; and something irrevocable, something which when it has been given, when it has been made, never, under any circumstances can possibly be withdrawn. We may even describe the Bodhisattva's Vow as a sort of promise made by the Bodhisattva upon the arising of the Bodhicitta within him, or the manifestation of the Bodhicitta within him at the commencement of his career. And it's a promise, a pledge as it were, made to or given to the universe at large, or to all sentient beings.

Now this is the word meaning, this is what the word pranidhana or vow means, but the word meaning, as usual, does not help us very much in understanding the truth of the matter, so let us now look into it a little more deeply.

We saw, last week, that the Bodhicitta represents a sort of cosmic will to universal redemption. And its manifestation in the individual in dependence on the appropriate conditions, is what is known technically as the arising of the Bodhicitta. Now as we also saw the Bodhicitta itself is not individual, the Bodhicitta itself is universal: There's only one Bodhicitta in which all Bodhisattvas participate. But this one Bodhicitta, one though it is, manifests in the individual, or rather manifests in individuals. Not only does the one Bodhicitta manifest in individuals, but it also expresses itself through them. So this expression, this expression of the Bodhicitta through the individual, this individual expression, as it were, of the Bodhicitta, this is what is known as the Bodhisattva's Vow. The vow therefore may be defined as the concrete practical expression of the Bodhicitta in the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva.

Now this expression is not single; it's multiform. Traditionally we do speak indeed of the Bodhisattva's vow, but the vow is in fact a set of vows, a plurality of vows. So we can now begin to see the difference between the Bodhicitta on the one hand and the Bodhisattva's Vow on the other. The Bodhicitta is universal, the Bodhicitta is one, different Bodhisattvas participate in it; but the vows are individual: the vows reflect the Bodhisattva's special interests and aptitudes within the context, within the framework if you like, of the Bodhicitta and the wider framework of the Bodhisattva ideal itself.

Now at this point, at this stage, as this may begin to sound a little abstruse, a comparison may possibly help. We may say that the Bodhisattva himself is like a prism, like a glass prism, and the Bodhicitta is like pure white light shining through the prism. And the vows of the Bodhisattva are like the different coloured lights which emerge from the prism on the other side. So you've three things: you've the prism, representing the Bodhisattva; the pure white light, representing the Bodhicitta, shining in; and all the colours of the rainbow, as it were, shining out, representing the Bodhisattva's Vows.

We can pursue this sort of comparison even further. We can go so far as to say that this pure, white light of the Relative Bodhicitta streams from the sun of the Absolute Bodhicitta. And we can further say that this light, this pure, white light of this one Bodhicitta, shines through hundreds, and through thousands of individual prisms. And as it shines through them all each one produces its own particular set, its own particular combination, of colours. We know of course only seven colours of the rainbow, but in some kinds of meditation we're advised, we're asked, to try to imagine, even try to see, to visualise, colours which as yet we know not. So if we can extend the comparison even further, if we can think of all these prisms, as the white light shines through, them emitting not just the seven colours that we know, but hundreds of thousands of all sorts of wonderful colours that we know not of, then perhaps we shall get some idea of how this one Bodhicitta shines through the minds of different Bodhisattvas producing all these innumerable combinations of colours, in other words, of vows.

We see therefore in this way that provision is made both for unity and for variety. We see that the Bodhisattvas all participate in one Bodhicitta. This is the source of their unity, its one Bodhicitta shining in the midst of them all, shining through them all, they all participate in it. It manifests itself in them all in different ways. But each Bodhisattva expresses that one Bodhicitta in his own way, or in her own way, and this individual expression in terms of life, and work, and career, and activities - this is what we call, this is what we term, the Bodhisattva's Vows. We usually think of a vow as something verbal, rather like an oath you take in the court, putting up your hand and so on and so forth. But the vow is not just a verbal expression, it's not just that the Bodhisattva says, "I will do this and I will do that". The vow is an expression in terms of the life and the work and the activity of the Bodhisattva. It's not even just a question of the Bodhisattva's conscious willing, not even a question of his conscious intention. To change the metaphor we may say that the vows of the Bodhisattva are so many sparks, as it were, struck from the Bodhisattva's total being - not just from his mind, not just from his will, but from his total being under the tremendous impact of the Bodhicitta.

Now the Mahayana scriptures make mention of a number of different sets of vows, and some of these sets of vows are associated with the names of various great Bodhisattvas. For instance there are the celebrated forty-eight vows of the Bodhisattva Dharmakara, who became the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. And these forty-eight vows are enumerated at length in the Larger *Sukhavativyuha* Sutra. '*Sukhavativyuha* Sutra' means the sutra of the adornment of the happy land, the pure-land, the land of bliss. Again the *Dasabhumika* Sutra, or the sutra on the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's path, mentions ten great vows, and these ten great vows of the *Dasabhumika* have been summarised as follows: First of all, to provide for the worship of all the Buddhas, without exception; (2) to maintain the religious discipline that has been taught by all the Buddhas and to preserve the teaching of the Buddhas; (3) to see all the incidents in the earthly career of a Buddha; (4) to realise the thought of Enlightenment, to practise the duties of a Bodhisattva, to acquire all the paramitas or perfections and purify all the stages of his career; (5) to mature all beings and establish them in the knowledge of the Buddha, viz. all the four classes of beings who are in the six states of existence; (6) to perceive the whole universe; (7) to purify and cleanse all Buddha-fields; (8) to enter on the Great Way (the Mahayana) and to produce a common thought and purpose in all Bodhisattvas; (9) to make all actions of the body, speech, and mind fruitful and successful; (10) to attain the supreme and perfect Enlightenment and to preach the doctrine.

So all these vows, all these ten vows of the *Dasabhumika* Sutra, are clearly different aspects of the Bodhisattva's one determination to gain Enlightenment for the sake, for the benefit, of all sentient beings. But well known as these sets of forty-eight and of ten are, perhaps the most famous set of Bodhisattva's vows is the set of what is known as the Four Great Vows. And these Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva are recited daily throughout the Far East. In China - at least they used to be recited in China, one doesn't quite know now - Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Vietnam and so on. And these Four Great Vows - there are different versions - are usually given as follows:

- (1) May I deliver all beings from difficulties;**
- (2) May I eradicate all passions;**
- (3) May I master all dharmas;**
- (4) May I lead all beings to Buddhahood.**

Now let us try to understand some at least of the implications of these vows. But before we do that just a comment. I've observed that these four great vows are recited daily throughout the Far East, which suggests that every Bodhisattva, or would-be Bodhisattva, takes or makes the same four vows. But it isn't quite like that. These Four Great Vows obviously suit, obviously comprehend, the spiritual aspirations of many people, but one is not necessarily obliged to adopt this particular set, or any other set, even though found in the scriptures. Any individual Bodhisattva, the scriptures make this quite clear, is free to formulate his own set of vows, if he or she so wishes, in accordance with his or her own particular aspirations, within of course the general framework of the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. The main consideration is that the vow should be universal in scope. This is the common characteristic of all these vows. They don't have reference to mean or petty or immediate objectives, but to something ultimate, something remote, something all-comprehensive, something universal.

So now for the Four Great Vows themselves:

**"May I deliver all beings from difficulties".**

Now the Bodhisattva starts at the beginning, you notice. Here, by difficulties, is meant worldly difficulties. It's as though whoever framed or compiled these vows said, to the would-be Bodhisattva: forget for the moment about helping people spiritually, that's very difficult indeed. It's very difficult indeed to help other people spiritually, even if one is qualified to give spiritual help as occasionally is the case. Many people indeed do ask for spiritual help, but even when someone is qualified to give it, very few people are able really to receive the spiritual help, or the spiritual advice, and act upon it. So therefore the Bodhisattva begins, as it were, in a small way, because everybody can give, to some extent, material, tangible help and assistance to other people. And therefore it is said,

under the heading of this particular vow that the Bodhisattva, or the would-be Bodhisattva, should be sympathetic and helpful in the affairs of everyday life. The Bodhisattva should do, upon all occasions, whatever he or she can do to help. Should be friendly, co-operative, helpful and so on. There's no need to go into details because I think everybody understands the sort of thing - the sort of attitude that is meant here. The only thing I want to add to this is that when the Bodhisattva's Vow speaks of helping all beings - or delivering all beings - from difficulties, it's understood that 'beings' includes not just human beings, but even animals as well.

Now those who take the Bodhisattva Ideal seriously, and those who take the Bodhisattva Vow seriously, should not be satisfied just being helpful in this way - in the affairs of everyday life, useful and necessary though that is. They should be prepared to go a little further, should be prepared even to go a little out of their way to help those in difficulties. And in this connection I'd like to suggest four kinds of people in difficulties that we can particularly help today. First of all the old, or the aged, those who euphemistically are now called 'senior-citizens' but it doesn't make it any easier for them. Lots of our senior citizens' have to live alone, and they not unnaturally feel lonely, and often feel neglected. So here is a whole class of people who are in difficulties of some kind, we may say. Maybe nothing very serious, nothing very acute, but certainly very often lonely, friendless, and feeling perhaps very much neglected. So one who takes the Bodhisattva Ideal seriously, and this Bodhisattva Vow seriously, could very well make a point of trying to establish contact with one, or two, or three old people in the neighbourhood, and maintaining a friendly human contact and relationship with them, which will obviously do them a very great deal of good.

And then secondly, there are the sick. Not just those who are down with 'flu for a couple of days, but those especially who are perhaps confined to hospital, sometimes very serious, very painful diseases for long periods of time. And it often happens that even their own closest relations after a while begin to forget, begin to neglect; they think "ah well, I can go next week or I can go the week after. After all, old so-and-so's there all the time; they don't go away; I can go and see them any day". So what happens? In the end they don't go at all, and the weeks and the months slip by, and it may be your own brother or sister or your own father or mother or uncle or aunt, but, strange as it may seem, very often you just don't go along. So there is a very great deal of work which can be done in this particular field, with people of this sort. Many of these people, in hospital, especially those who've been there a long time, and especially those who are also old, have perhaps no relations, no friends, to go and visit them. So here's something very practical, very concrete, which we can do.

Then a third class of persons: What about prisoners? Those confined to prison for one reason or another. It may not be possible for us to visit them personally, but at least we can write. Quite a lot of prisoners, in prisons, get a great deal of help and benefit and interest if people write in to them and help to keep them in touch with the world outside, help to make them feel that they still in a sense belong to that world outside to which one day they will have, no doubt, in most cases, to go back. So this is a kind of person that we can very easily help, a kind of person in difficulties.

And then fourthly I would suggest the psychologically disturbed. Those who are neurotic, as we say, mentally unbalanced, or who are suffering mentally in one way or another. Many of them of course may need what we may describe as 'expert help', and we certainly shouldn't try to venture here farther in than we're really qualified to cope with. Though at the same time I myself cannot help thinking sometimes that the 'expert help' from all of what one hears about 'shock therapy' in hospitals and things like that, the 'expert help' sometimes makes things worse instead of better. In fact I might even go so far as to say, as a result of my own contact with this particular field, that I'm rather deeply convinced at present that there is in fact, no psychological solution for psychological problems, -in the long run there's only a spiritual solution. It wasn't so many weeks ago that I read - I think it was in the *Evening Standard* - a report, a very shocking report, which stated that in the year 1967, in this country, five thousand young people committed suicide. Now I wasn't able to verify that figure but I suppose it's more or less accurate, A hundred or two more or less doesn't make it any less shocking. So if one has a little imagination, if one thinks about this, what does it mean? It means that in one particular year, five thousand young people, who ought to have been on the threshold of their lives, of their careers, looking forward to the future, were so overcome by problems and difficulties - largely mental I should imagine - of one kind or another, that they felt that they had no other resort, no other recourse, than to simply opt out. In other words to commit suicide. Probably a sort of case by case study of all these five thousand cases might make very interesting and revealing reading. No explanation was given - no indication was given - as to what the reasons might have been in any of these cases, but obviously these five thousand young people who ended their lives in that way, were under very, very considerable stress, and strain, and one cannot help thinking, one cannot help even feeling sure, that had some friendly person been at hand at the appropriate moment, then quite a number of those people who did commit suicide might possibly have been saved. So here is a whole field of work open. Here is a whole class of people in difficulties, or potentially in difficulties, who can be helped. The mentally disturbed, especially the mentally disturbed younger people.

Now these are four classes, four kinds of people in difficulties which I've suggested as very proper objects of the

Bodhisattva's help, if he takes his first great vow seriously: The old, the sick, the prisoners, and the psychologically disturbed. But we can if we wish, go even farther afield than this - we can think in terms of helping refugees, the homeless, the starving, the under-privileged in all countries all over the world. But this sort of thing is very difficult to do directly; not everybody can just up and go away to Africa or India and help. If we want to help at all we usually have to do it indirectly. Through some particular organisation, through some particular charitable organisation, and many of us I know are not a little suspicious of organised charity. One sees that only too large a proportion of the funds subscribed are dissipated for administrative expenses and so on, and a very small percentage seems to reach the people for whom the money was intended. So perhaps we may say, perhaps we may emphasise, that the personal help is best, the personal action is best. I remember there's one of our own Friends, one of our own members, who isn't present here tonight so I can just tell this little story about him.

This particular friend of ours was very much concerned with the problem of race relations, and he felt that he had to do something about it. So he asked, he said well what can I do? He was a rather active sort of person and a good speaker, and had been politically involved in the past; and he thought at first - well, he might join some group, some Organisation, and perhaps carry out some militant action, or something like that. But then he thought, "No, that doesn't really do any good; if I really believe in inter-racial harmony I should begin by practising it myself, by putting it into operation myself." So he happened to have a spare room in his house so he advertised that he was willing to put up any coloured student. And he got several coloured students in succession, I think most of them from America, university students, and he said it was a very, very interesting experience indeed - adjusting his own relations with these people, and really learning himself to live in harmony, and friendship, and understanding, with a person of another colour. So this is the sort of attitude I feel that we should adopt. Not thinking in terms of sending out help so much to remote areas, or doing something highly organised and militant, and dramatic, but working out these things, giving this help, helping these people in difficulties within the context of our own immediate lives personally and directly. So this is the first great vow of the Bodhisattva. May I deliver all beings from difficulties. And these are just a few of the ways in which some of us perhaps can help, can deliver, some other people at least from at least some of their difficulties. These remarks, these observations, are obviously only suggestive, not definitive. There's so much that can be done if only we have the will, if only we have the heart. But this is the first thing that the Bodhisattva sets himself to do - to help living beings, human beings, animals - in difficulties, immediate, practical, material difficulties - he doesn't at this stage presume to think of helping them spiritually, leading them to Enlightenment. At this stage, it's enough if I can just give them a little helping hand in the affairs of everyday life.

Now the second great vow. The second great vow is

### **"May I eradicate all passions".**

Now here there are two questions which arise. First of all, what are the passions, and secondly, how are they to be eradicated? Now the term 'passions' covers all (what are described as) mental defilements. That is to say negative emotions, psychological conditionings, prejudices, preconceptions, all in other words that binds us to the Wheel of Life, which makes the Wheel of Life revolve yet again. Now there are several ancient traditional lists of these passions. For instance there's the list, first of all of what are known as the 'Three Unwholesome Roots' and these are craving, hatred, and ignorance, and these are symbolised by the cock, the snake, and the pig of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. If you remember, they stand at the centre. When you see this beautifully depicted Tibetan Wheel of Life, with its circles and subdivisions, right in the centre, right at the heart of the wheel, the wheel of our own lives, you see these three animals, these three creatures, the one behind biting the tail of the one in front. The cock representing craving, the snake representing hate, and the pig representing ignorance.

Another list of passions is that of the Five Asravas. Asravas is an untranslatable term, very, very roughly it may be rendered as the 'poisonous fluxes'. And these poisonous fluxes are craving, hatred, restlessness and anxiety, sloth and torpor, and indecision. I've spoken about these on another occasion.

Now perhaps the most useful of these lists of passions is the list known as the Five Poisons. You'll notice they don't have very pleasant names, any of these sets. The Five Poisons. And the Five Poisons are: distraction, anger, craving, conceit, and ignorance. And while I'm on the subject, it occurs to me that this word 'poison' or 'poisons' isn't used accidentally. The passions, the negative emotions and so on are poisons quite literally. If you give way to - if you indulge in - negative emotions, you're poisoning your whole system. Not only in the metaphorical sense but even quite literally. And I remember in this connection some rather horrifying experiments which were carried out in the United States (I don't know why it is but all these interesting sort of experiments seem to be carried out in the United States. And one reads about them about two or three years later in this country in the *Readers Digest* or somewhere like that) (laughter). But apparently what happened was this: The experimenter, or whoever it was conducting the investigation, got hold of a number of people who were consumed by anger. I believe in fact, in the laboratory itself, he made these people angry, made them furiously angry. And then in that state of anger, or when they were in that state of anger, popped a bag or something over their mouth and nostrils, and as they were

breathing in and out of course, a slight film was left. And he kept on doing this, and when the film was thick enough it was sort of scraped off. And it was brown in colour and found to be a deadly poison. So apparently all the negative emotions are quite literally poisonous, and when we indulge in them we quite literally poison our own system. You might even have noticed yourself sometimes that when you're overpowered by a very strong, a very powerful negative emotion, especially that of anger or hatred, you may get a sharp stabbing pain either in the stomach or in the heart, or somewhere like that, and this is literally the poison as it were eating into your vitals almost. So it's no accident that this particular list of the passions refers to the Five Poisons, they're quite literally poisonous, and we're poisoning ourselves all the time that we're indulging in them. Indulging in - just to remind you again - distraction, anger, craving, conceit and ignorance.

Now the passions can be eradicated in a number of different ways. But the best thing to do is to attack them at source. In this connection I remember the Buddha gives a little illustration, he says, "Suppose there's a gang of robbers operating in the kingdom. How do you destroy them?" Or how does the king go about destroying them? He says, "he finds out their hide-out, and he destroys that, then the robbers can no longer function and can no longer operate." So with the passions: you have to find their hide-out you have to attack them and root them out, as it were, at source. And where is that what is their source - their source of course is in the mind. That's where they are to be eradicated. And how does one do that? One does that through meditation. This is one of the results, one of the effects, of meditation. That it helps to eradicate the passions. Now as some of you know, there are five basic meditation exercises in the Buddhist tradition. And each of these meditation exercises is an antidote to one or another of the five Poisons.

First of all distraction, the poison of distraction. This is of course the tendency of the mind, the very natural tendency of the mind, or at least usual tendency of the mind to jump about from this to that. We speak of people having a 'grasshopper mind' or a 'butterfly mind'; we mean that they can't settle on one thing steadily for any length of time. It's a matter of being, in Mr T S Elliot's famous line "distracted from distraction by distraction". And that just about summarises modern life - it's a process, a constant process every day, every week, of being distracted "from distraction by distraction". This is a sort of summary, we may say, of modern life. This is how we have to live, just one thing after another. Now the antidote to this sort of thing, at least as a mental state, is Mindfulness of Breathing. Very simple, I don't think there's any need for me to describe the method, the practice. It's familiar to most of us because we practise it every week in all our meditation classes - just watching the breath, just fixing the mind on the breath. This one-pointed concentration on the breathing process is the antidote to all our distractions. So this is how we eradicate the passion, the poison, of distraction by practising the Mindfulness of Breathing.

Now secondly, anger. This is the second of the five poisons. And this is said to be the most un-Bodhisattvalike of all passions. Now, you can give way to craving - you're still a Bodhisattva; you can give way to desires - you're still a Bodhisattva; you can steal, you can tell a lie - in your heart of hearts you may still be a Bodhisattva. But if you get really angry, if you really lose your temper, then bang goes all your Bodhisattvahood. You have to start all over again because anger is directly opposed to the spirit of Compassion. And one of the works of the *Siksa-Samuccaya* says: "well here are you promising to deliver all beings and be kind to them and compassionate, and then what do you do - you go and get angry with one of them! So there isn't really much substance in your Bodhisattva ideal or your Bodhisattva Vow". So the Bodhisattva is advised, at all costs, to avoid anger. And the antidote to anger is again quite simple - it's the metta-bhavana, the development of universal loving-kindness: this beautiful practice which so many of us find extremely difficult. But though difficult it's familiar, only too familiar, because this too we practise every week in our meditation classes and many people do know from their own experience, at least from time to time, that this particular negative emotion of anger or hatred can be dispelled through this particular practice, the deliberate, mindful development of love and good will towards all living beings. So one eradicates the poison, the passion, of anger through developing universal loving kindness.

And then thirdly we come to craving. In a sense it's the poison *par excellence*. It's not just desire, it's what we may describe as neurotic desire. Take for instance the case of food - not being philosophical, just ordinary food. We all have a desire for this, we all like to eat food, we all have a good healthy appetite (or at least I hope we have) and this is quite normal, and this is quite healthy. But the desire for food becomes neurotic when we try to use food as a substitute satisfaction for some other need, usually either mental or emotional. Only last night I was reading a magazine, and in this magazine it said that there was a report by a writer for young girls' magazines. Not that it's the sort of thing one usually takes an interest in, but this was rather interesting, and this particular writer for these young girls' magazines (I've never seen any of them, but perhaps you know what is meant) wrote that many girls - readers of these young girls' magazines - wrote in to say to Aunt or Uncle whoever-it-was (I don't know) that when faced by emotional problems (what they were you can probably imagine) they felt an uncontrollable urge to eat sweets and chocolates. Now this is a neurotic desire. In other words it's a craving. Now craving can be eradicated by various practices, and as we can see, only too easily, craving is quite a problem especially in modern times. There's a whole vast industry geared to the stimulation of our craving and nothing else, and what is this? This is of course, the industry (or whatever you like to call it) of advertising. It's geared to convincing us or persuading us, with or without our knowledge, that we must have this, that or the

other. In fact we may say that advertising is one of the most immoral of all the professions. I'll mention just a few of the practices which are designed to eradicate craving - you can see how big the problem is from the number of the antidotes. Some of the antidotes I must warn you in advance, are really quite drastic (laughter).

For instance we come first of all to 'Contemplation of the Ten Stages of the Decomposition of a Corpse'. This is quite a popular practice still in some Buddhist countries, and this is said to be especially good as an antidote for sexual craving, in other words for neurotic sexual desire. I won't describe these stages of the practice one by one, that might be a little too much for some of you, but if one can't go the whole hog (as it were) there's a simple version of this, a milder version if you like, and that is simply going and meditating in a cremation ground - a place where dead bodies are burned. In India, as you probably know, they don't usually bury, they usually cremate. And a special area, a special ground is set aside for this purpose. It's called a cremation-ground or a burning ground, and very often it's on the banks of a river. So one is advised to go along there, at night, alone, and to sit and meditate, preferably when it's dark. And I can assure you that these cremation-grounds are not always very pretty places, at least by day. You get fragments of charred bone and so on, charred cloth, lying about and usually there is quite a stench of burning - burning human flesh - still lingering in the air. But it can be a very beneficial and interesting, and even I would say exhilarating practice. I remember that I had one experience of this myself in India many, many years ago, on the banks of the River Ganges, not very far from Lucknow. I remember there was a beautiful stretch of silver sand along by the side of the River Ganges, and that was used as a cremation ground. And on this particular night I remember it was the night of the full moon. So the whole thing was completely silvered over, and one could just make out the slight mounds here and there on the sand where cremations had been held. And there were little bits of bone and pieces of skull. And I remember it was very quiet and very very peaceful, and one really felt quite away from the world. And there was nothing depressing about the experience at all. One can only say that it was exhilarating. One felt (as I say) away from it all; one felt as though, almost, one's own cremation had already taken place. It does occur to me, since we're on the subject, that it's a very interesting ceremony that when a Hindu becomes an orthodox *sanyasin*, he performs his own funeral service - he (as it were) goes through the motions of cremating himself. Because the idea is that when he becomes a *sanyasin*, when he gives up the world, he is dead civilly; he no longer exists so far as the world is concerned, he has died, he's dead and gone. So the last thing he does before going off in his yellow robe is to perform, to conduct, his own funeral ceremony. And then he goes away. It's the same sort of idea, this association of death (as it were) with renunciation and eradication of all worldly cravings.

Now if even this is too much, even this occasional visit to the cremation ground - or the graveyard - is too much (it may be too much for quite a lot of people) then if one wants a still milder form of the same sort of practice, one can meditate simply on death. Meditate on death; That death is inevitable; it comes to everybody in due course; none can escape it. So since it must come, why not make the best possible use of one's life? Why devote one's life to unworthy ends? Why indulge in miserable cravings which don't bring any satisfaction and happiness in the long run? So in this way one meditates upon, or reflects upon, or dwells upon the idea of death. And this is an antidote (we may say) for craving in general, whether it's a craving for possessions and goods or success or pleasure, and so on. One can also meditate upon impermanence, thinking that everything is impermanent, that nothing lasts, that nothing stays, whether it's the solar system, or whether it's your own breath, from instant to instant everything is changing, everything is flowing, everything is impermanent, everything is transient. So this has the same sort of general effect. When one remembers that everything is going to pass away, it's just like the clouds passing through the sky, but one can't hang on very determinedly to things when one knows that sooner or later one's going to have to give them up anyway.

Now there's another kind of practice, and this consists in what is known as the contemplation of the loathsomeness of food. Now I'm not going into the details of this practice either, because they're rather unpleasant, quite deliberately so, but this practice (we may say) is very good for young ladies neurotically addicted to sweets and chocolates (laughter). Now, under this particular heading, one should select the exercise according to one's needs. If one feels that craving is very, very strong and very powerful, and really has one in its grip, then by all means just grit your teeth and go off to the cremation-ground, and if you can find a corpse (I don't suppose you can in this country - after all it's a civilised country and we don't get these sort of spiritual helps!) (laughter) but anyway you can find something reminiscent of death, if it's even only a skull or a bone or two (laughter) or dwell upon the idea of death. Some people familiarise themselves with this idea - and after all we only laugh because in a way we're terrified, at bottom (*laughter!*) familiarise themselves with this idea by keeping these things around them, skulls and bones - after all what is there to be afraid of? I remember that up at my own place at Highgate I've got a very beautiful, old, highly polished skull-cup, and one day a lady came to tea and was asking about my Tibetan things, and she loved everything Tibetan. So I said to her. "well would you like to see this", and I put it into her hand and she nearly dropped it, as though it had been a live coal. She said, "Oh, but it's a skull." I said, "Well, of course it is, the Tibetans are always using them." And Tibetans I would say are very fond of these things, they're very fond of anything made out of human bone, or a human skull, they like rosaries made out of bits of human bone, they like thigh-bone trumpets and they like skull-cups. And this is only because they take a quite normal, natural, common-sense view about death. They don't think there's anything morbid or anything macabre in it as we do. We've been brought up in the wrong way. We've been

brought up in the Christian tradition in which if you pronounce the word 'death' it's supposed to send a shiver down your spine. But this isn't the Buddhist way of looking at it. Death is something just as natural, just as normal as life. And I often quote in this connection these very beautiful words of Tagore, the great modern Indian poet, the great Bengali poet Tagore, he says, somewhere, he says, "I know I shall love death, because I have loved life." He sees them as two facets of the same thing: Life, and death. If you love life, you will love death. If you can't love death, you haven't really loved life either. It sounds a bit paradoxical, but very deeply true.

But I think it's time now that we passed on to another of the poisons, another of the passions, the fourth one, which is **conceit**. Sometimes translated as pride but I think conceit is better. After all we all know about this, and I need not say very much about it. Conceit (we may say) is one's experience of oneself as separate, not only separate but isolated, not only isolated but superior, to other people. And the meditation, or the antidote, for this poison of conceit is meditation on the Six Elements. Now what are the six elements? Earth, water, fire, air, ether or space (*akasa* in Sanskrit), and consciousness. And these are arranged in increasing order of subtlety. They're also represented symbolically by various geometrical forms which build up into the stupa. That is to say, earth is represented by a cube, which is the base of the stupa; water by a sphere, which comes on top of the cube; and then fire by a cone on top of the sphere; air by an inverted bowl, or rather a bowl like this representing the inverted firmament; then ether, represented by a flame in that bowl; and consciousness represented by the space in which the whole thing stands. So this is the stupa, which has a great symbolical significance. Each element representing one or another of the six physical elements, and arranged, as I've said, in an order of increasing subtlety, with the grossest at the bottom, the subtlest at the top.

Now, how does one do this meditation? There's not much time to tell you about it but let me just briefly describe it. First of all one meditates upon earth, how does one do that? One reflects that "in my own physical body there is the element of earth, the solid element - there's flesh, there's bone, and so on. All this represents the element earth. And where does this come from? This element earth in me comes from the earth element in the universe, from the solid matter in the universe, and when I die what's going to happen? This is going to go back, the physical body - the solid parts of the physical body - are going to crumble, are going to dissolve, are going to go back to earth. Earth to earth, dust to dust", and one thinks and reflects in this way. The meditation is more elaborate than this, but this is just the outline.

And then one takes up the watery element in one's physical body. One thinks: "in me, well, there is blood, there are tears, sweat, and so on, this is the watery element. And where does this watery element in me come from? It's not my own, doesn't really belong to me. It came from the water around, it came from the rain, it came from the seas, it came from the streams and the lakes and the rivers: and one day I'll have to render it back. One day the liquid element in me will flow back into the liquid element in the universe".

And then one meditates upon the element of fire, still more subtle. That "there is in me heat, there is warmth, where does this come from? What is the great source of heat for the whole solar system? It's the sun. Without the sun the whole solar system would be cold, would be dark. So the warmth in me, the heat in me, comes from that source. And when I die what happens?" Heat is one of the last things to depart from the physical body: As you die heat withdraws from the feet, from the lower parts of the body, from the lower limbs, until in the end there's just a little hot spot at the top of the head. When that disappears then you are dead. The heat element in your physical body has returned to the heat element - the reservoir of heat, warmth, light, in the universe. This is how one meditates on the element of fire. One thinks that, "fire also, the fire element in me doesn't belong to me, I've borrowed it for a while, I've got to render it back in due course".

And then one thinks of air. "What is the air element in me? It's the air in my lungs. I'm taking in and giving it out, giving it back every instant. It doesn't really belong to me. I think that all this is me, this solid part, this watery part, this fiery part, this vaporous part. I think that this is me but it isn't really, I've only borrowed it, I've got it for a few years or a few months, or a few instants as in the case of the breath. I take it, I borrow it, and I give it back, and one day I'm going to breathe in, and I'm going to breathe out, and I'm not going to breathe in again. I will have finally given back my breath,- I will be dead. It won't belong to me then, so it doesn't really belong to me now".

And then one meditates upon ether or space, one reflects that one's physical body as it stands occupies a certain space. This is the space I occupy, you identify yourself with it, but when the physical body disintegrates what becomes of that space that you occupied? It merges in the vast space around. It merges in universal space, and it disappears.

And then what about consciousness? You think, well, at present part of your consciousness depends upon the eye - eye consciousness, part upon the ear - ear consciousness, but when there's no eye, when there's no ear, there's no physical body, where will that consciousness be? Or there may be a certain consciousness bound up with the physical brain; when that physical brain no longer exists where will that consciousness be? When your present individuality as you know it, as you experience it, ceases to exist, where will the consciousness associated with

that individuality be? And in this way you withdraw your consciousness. You withdraw your mind (as it were) from the material, from the lower mental, from these different lower levels of consciousness, you go higher and higher. And you realise that not just at the time of physical death (because it doesn't happen then, or if it does happen it happens just for an instant) but at the time (as it were) of spiritual death (which is something much higher, something more important) then, the individual consciousness (as it were) dies into the universal consciousness, and in a sense, realises its everlasting identity with that universal consciousness. As the Tibetans say: the son-light (s-o-n) returns to and merges in the mother-light. And in this way one meditates upon consciousness. This is again a very, very brief summary indeed, but it will give you perhaps some idea of how one meditates upon the six elements of earth, water, fire, air, ether and consciousness. And in this way dissolve the idea that one is some-thing individual - one dissolves the poison, or provides the antidote to the poison of conceit. One merges, one may say, the individual in the universal. One merges the unenlightened in the Enlightened One becomes Enlightened. This is a very important practice indeed, as you've probably already understood, even those who haven't encountered it before, and it is symbolised very well by this stupa, consisting of these five geometrical forms, superimposed one upon another. There are variants of the practice. One can visualise a square, one can visualise a sphere and so on, of different colours. The cube or square will be yellow, the sphere will be white or blue, and so on. In this way one can supplement the practice and make it more easy, possibly more congenial. So this is the antidote for conceit - resolving or dissolving one's sense of individual identity in the narrow sense.

Now the fifth poison is that of **ignorance**. And here is meant of course spiritual ignorance, unawareness of reality, and this is, in a sense, we may say, the basic passion. And the antidote for this is meditation on the *Nidanas*, the links, of Conditioned Coproduction. There are twenty-four of these. Twelve are worldly, pertaining to conditioned existence, twelve are spiritual, pertaining to Unconditioned existence. The twelve worldly *Nidanas* represent the cyclical type of conditionality. The twelve spiritual *Nidanas* represent the spiral type of conditionality. One set represents the Wheel of Life, the other set represents the Stages of the Path. One set represents reactive mind, the other set represents creative mind. There's no time this evening to describe in detail. We have here the subject matter, one may say, for several lectures. In fact I have often spoken before, as some of you know, on these things considerably in detail. So perhaps we should leave this for the present.

But these are the five basic meditations. Let me run through them again for your benefit. Mindfulness of Breathing which is the antidote for the poison of distraction; development of universal loving-kindness which is the antidote for the poison of anger; and then, thirdly, various forms of meditation on impermanence, death, impurity and so on, all of which are antidotes for the poison of craving; and then meditation on the six elements, antidote for conceit; and finally, meditation on the *nidanas*, twelve worldly, twelve spiritual, which are the antidote for spiritual ignorance.

So with the help of these five basic meditations the Bodhisattva eradicates the passions, and thus fulfils the second of his Four Great Vows.

Now the third Great Vow is

**"May I master all Dharmas".**

Now I'm going to deal with this and the following vow somewhat more briefly that dealt with the first two. By dharmas here is meant, primarily, the teachings of the Buddha, the teachings as contained within the scriptures, both scriptures of the Hinayana and of the Mahayana, as well as the teachings of all the Buddhist Schools - the Bodhisattva doesn't belong to this school as opposed to that school. He doesn't even belong to the Mahayana as opposed to some other yana. He belongs to, he studies, he masters, the teachings, the dharmas, of all yananas, of all schools, of all sects, all traditions. Not only that, but the Bodhisattva (we are told) should study, should master, even the non-Buddhist religious and philosophical systems. Some scriptures go so far as to say that the Bodhisattva should study secular arts and sciences, especially we are told rhetoric and prosody which were very much in favour during the Indian Middle Ages. And we're told that he should study these things, should study these subjects because this will increase his power of communication. He'll be able to put across his message more effectively more efficiently if he has these arts and sciences at his fingertips (as it were). A few of the sutras even say that the Bodhisattva should master various trades, such as the trade of the potter, because then, knowing the vocabulary, knowing the outlook of these trades, he will have a fresh sort of range of reference, and with the help of that fresh range of reference will be able to get across to more and more people, more and more beings (as it were). In other words he'll be able to speak their language, and put his point of view, his attitudes, his ideals, his aspiration more and more effectively to them as he knows the sort of language, both literal and metaphorical, which they normally use. So this is the Bodhisattva's third Great Vow - to master all dharmas, to master the teachings of Buddhism, of the non-Buddhist schools, and even all the humanistic subjects.

And finally, the fourth Great Vow:

**"May I lead all beings to Buddhahood".**

And this of course, is the ultimate aim, and this the Bodhisattva does by teaching, by example, and also (we might say) by silent communication of his influence.

Now such are the Four Great Vows. Let me just briefly recapitulate them so that they're perhaps more firmly fixed in our minds. First: May I deliver all beings from difficulties. Two, May I eradicate all passions, Three, May I master all dharmas. Four, May I lead all beings to Buddhahood.

So perhaps now we're in a position to understand something at least of the implications of these Four Great Vows. They're recited daily in all centres of Mahayana Buddhism. And they together constitute - these four great vows together constitute - the heart of the Mahayana, the heart even (we may say) of Buddhism itself. And together they constitute The Bodhisattva Vow. In other words, they constitute the concrete, practical expression of the Bodhicitta in terms of the life and the work of the individual Bodhisattva, and thus constitute the foundation of his whole subsequent spiritual career.