

Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal

Lecture 71: The Bodhisattva Hierarchy

Madam Chairman, or perhaps I should say Sister Chairman, and Friends,

In the course of the last few weeks we have been on what may very well be described as a journey. Not the sort of journey on which we usually go, not a journey by rail, not a journey by car or underground. Not even a journey on foot. It's been, we may say, a journey - sometimes a rather strange, a rather mysterious journey, through the undiscovered, perhaps the uncharted, regions of our own mind. During the last few weeks we've been travelling - perhaps I should say climbing; perhaps I should even say clambering through the very mountainous terrain of the Bodhisattva Ideal. Climbing perhaps, sometimes, from plane to plane and from peak to peak. Now on a journey of any kind it sometimes happens that we may look forward, may look ahead; and at other times we may look back, we may cast our eyes behind us. Sometimes we look forward, sometimes we look ahead, to see how far we still have to go, if indeed we are able rightly to judge that at all. We look ahead, we may say, to encourage ourselves, to inspire ourselves, by fixing, by fastening our eyes, just for a few moments, on the last, the final, the ultimate snow peak, perhaps which is our destination, our goal, as it discloses itself in the midst of the blue sky when the clouds momentarily part. And we look back sometimes just to see, just to try to estimate, how far as yet we have come. We look back to see something of the nature, something of the appearance of the country through which we have been passing, because when we look back, we can sometimes see the country through which we've just passed, especially if we look from a higher altitude, more clearly and more definitively than when we were actually passing, struggling, through it.

And as we look back over the road that we've traversed. As we look back, perhaps from this higher altitude, we may see that here and there, behind us, certain landmarks tend to stand out. And this, we may say, is particularly true of mountainous country, when we are journeying, when we are travelling through it. And certainly the country through which we are still at present even passing, we may say, nothing if not mountainous. To me, as I look back in thought, retrospectively, over the lectures of the previous weeks, there is something that stands out, one thing perhaps that stands out, something that dominates, as it were, the entire landscape through which we have been passing and through which we are still passing. And that is the Bodhicitta - the Will to Universal Enlightenment. In retrospect, looking back over the lectures of the past few weeks, all the other aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal seem to group themselves quite naturally around this one, around the Bodhicitta, the Will to Enlightenment. They seem to group themselves around it just as lesser mountain peaks group themselves around one great, one particularly lofty peak that towers above all the rest.

The Bodhisattva we saw, at the beginning, is the ideal Buddhist. He is one who lives for the sake of the Enlightenment of all sentient beings. But then how does the Bodhisattva become a Bodhisattva? He becomes a Bodhisattva, we saw, only by virtue of the arising of the Bodhicitta, which is not just a thought, not just an idea in somebody's mind, however refined an idea, however elevated a thought. The Bodhicitta is something much more than that. It's something, we saw, Transcendental, something cosmic, something universal, something which sweeps through the whole of existence. And we saw also that it has two great aspects, this Bodhicitta. It has what is traditionally called a 'vow aspect' and what is similarly called an 'establishment aspect'. The first, the vow aspect, consists in the formulation by the Bodhisattva of certain vows, the import of all of which is universal. For instance the Four Great Vows, which we studied in some detail. And this vow aspect of the Bodhicitta represents the expression of the one universal Bodhicitta in terms of the life and the work of the individual Bodhisattva. And the other aspect of the Bodhicitta, the establishment aspect consists, we saw, in the practice by the Bodhisattva of the 'Six *Paramitas*', the 'Six Perfections', the 'Six Transcendental Virtues'. And these, as we saw over a period of three weeks, are made up of three pairs. First of all there's the pair of Giving and Uprightness. These represent the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life. Then there's the pair of Patience and Vigour. In other words the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' approaches to the Spiritual life. And then again, finally, there's the pair of Meditation and Wisdom, and these represent, we may say, the internal and external dimensions, as it were, of the Enlightened mind, the Buddha mind. And all these pairs of opposites, altruism and individualism; the 'masculine', the 'feminine'; meditation, Wisdom - all these pairs of opposites, we saw, are synthesized and balanced by the Bodhisattva. In his life, in his spiritual life there is no one-sidedness whatsoever; everything is balanced, harmonized and integral.

Now today we are still concerned really with this same Bodhicitta, the same Transcendental, this same cosmic Will to Universal Enlightenment, but we are concerned with it today in a somewhat different manner. Formerly, in previous lectures we were concerned with it more by way of general principles, as it were, but today we are more concerned with the concrete embodiments, the different concrete embodiments, of those principles. Today we are dealing with what has been described as the 'Bodhisattva Hierarchy'.

Now the word 'Hierarchy' isn't a very popular one nowadays - it isn't one of those sort of 'in' words which are on everybody's lips. According to the dictionary, it is generally used in the sense of 'a body of ecclesiastical rulers', which has, you may agree, a rather unpleasant sort of ring about it. For instance you read in the newspapers that the Roman Catholic hierarchy has issued a statement condemning, say, divorce, or condemning birth control, or

condemning something else - they usually seem to issue statements condemning something! Now I am not using the word 'hierarchy' quite in that sense. I am using the word hierarchy in something which is perhaps more like its real, its true, its original meaning. This evening I am using the word 'hierarchy' in the sense of an embodiment, in a number of different people, of different degrees of manifestation of Reality. Inasmuch as a great deal of the lecture depends upon an understanding of that definition, let me just repeat it. That I'm using the word 'hierarchy' this evening in the sense of an embodiment, in a number of different people, of different degrees - higher and lower degrees - of manifestation of Reality.

And in this sense - using the word 'hierarchy' in this sense - one can speak, for instance, of a hierarchy of living forms. Some living forms being lower, expressing, manifesting lesser Reality. Other living forms being higher, expressing, manifesting, more of Reality. And in this way one has a hierarchy of living forms, from the lowliest, one might even say from the amoeba right up to the unenlightened man. A continuous hierarchy of living forms. The higher level, the higher form, all the time manifesting a greater, a more abundant, degree of Reality than the lower one. And this what we call the 'Lower Evolution', this hierarchy of living forms, from the amoeba right up to the unenlightened man.

But there is another hierarchy of living forms, which people don't usually take into consideration, and that is the hierarchy from the unenlightened man right up to the Enlightened man, and this hierarchy of living forms corresponds to what, in other contexts, we have described as the 'Higher Evolution'. Just as the unenlightened man embodies, we may say, manifests, we may say more of Reality, more of truth, than the amoeba, in the same way the Enlightened man himself embodies or manifests, more of Reality in his life, in his work, in his words even - more of reality than the man who is unenlightened. The Enlightened man manifests Reality more clearly, is more like a window as it were, through which the light of Reality shines, through which it can be seen almost as it is, without any diminution, without any stain. Just like light, just like the light of the sun coming through a window, through a sheet not even of glass but of pure, transparent crystal or diamond, as it were.

Now in between the unenlightened man and the Enlightened man - the Buddha - there are a number of intermediate degrees. And these degrees are embodied, as it were, in people, different people, at various stages of spiritual progress, spiritual development. These people are, we may say - the majority of them - not completely Enlightened, they're not full perfect Buddhas, they are still short of Enlightenment, to a greater or to a lesser extent. But at the same time they are not wholly unenlightened. They are some way in between. And it's these people who stand, as it were between the unenlightened state and the state of full Enlightenment, who make up the spiritual hierarchy, and it is the higher ranges, the higher reaches of this spiritual hierarchy which is known as the 'Bodhisattva Hierarchy'.

Now this principle of spiritual hierarchy is a very important one for Buddhism. And it's important therefore that we try to understand it right from the bottom up, should try to understand it radically, as it were. We can do this perhaps by remembering that we, that human beings, are related to Reality, to Ultimate Reality, in two different ways. In the first place we are related directly. In the second place we are related indirectly.

So how are we related to Reality directly? we are related to Reality directly in the sense that in the very depths of our being there is something which all the time connects us with Reality, there's a thread - if you like a golden thread, however thin it may be. It may be gossamer thin, but that thread is there, in the depths of our being, which is connecting us directly all the time with Reality. In some people, of course that thread has become a little thicker, a little stronger. In others it has widened out almost into a road, and with others, those who are Enlightened, there is no difference at all between the depth of their being and the depth of Reality itself - the two are directly continuous as it were. But this is the case only with Buddhas. Most of us, though we are directly connected in the depth of our being with Reality, do not realize it - don't even see that thin golden thread shining, as it were, in the midst of the darkness within ourselves. We don't see it, we're not aware of it. It's only the Buddhas who wake up to it fully. But we are nevertheless related to Reality directly, in the very depths, at the very roots of our own being, all the time, however oblivious we may be to that.

Now we are related indirectly to Reality in two ways. We are related, in the first place, to those things which represent a lower degree of manifestation of Reality than ourselves. We are related, say, to nature; we are related, say, to minerals, to rocks, to stones, to water, to fire; we are related to the different forms of vegetable life; to the different forms of animal life, that are lower in the scale of evolution than ourselves. So in this way we are related to Reality indirectly. We are related to Reality through these forms which manifest a lesser, a lower, degree of Reality than ourselves. And then secondly, we are related to Reality indirectly also through those forms which represent a higher degree of manifestation of Reality than ourselves. What those higher forms are we shall see in a moment.

Now the first kind of relationship with Reality, that is to say the first kind of indirect relationship with Reality - this kind of indirect relationship with these forms of life which are lower than our own, which manifest Reality less than we manifest it ourselves - this sort of relationship may be compared with the seeing of a light through a very

thick veil. Sometimes the veil seems to be so thick - especially in the case of matter, material forms and so on - so thick that we are unable to see the light which is there back of that form, back of that veil, all the time.

But the second kind of relation to Reality, the second kind of indirect relation - that is relation with Reality through those forms of life which manifest Reality more clearly than we manifest it ourselves - that relationship is like seeing a light, as it were, through a very thin veil. A veil which seems at times to become gossamer like, diaphanous. A veil which seems at times to have even rents, apertures, through which the light of Reality can be seen directly, as it is, without any intermediation at all. Now this thin veil, through which we see the light of Reality, this thin veil is the spiritual hierarchy, especially it is the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.

And it is therefore important, it is therefore of the utmost importance for us to be in contact with those who are at least a little more spiritually advanced than we are ourselves, through whom the light shines, the light of Reality shines, a little more clearly than it shines through us. And those who are of this kind, these are known traditionally in Buddhism as our spiritual friends, our *Kalyana Mitras*. For the most part, undoubtedly, we are not ready for contact with a Buddha. For most of us, surely, if not no doubt for all of us, the idea of receiving guidance directly from a Buddha is perhaps even, we may say, ridiculous. Even the idea of direct contact with a highly advanced Bodhisattva, and probably even if we met a Buddha or a highly advanced Bodhisattva,- we would not be able to recognize him or recognize her for what in fact, what in truth they were.

But we certainly can benefit immensely, immeasurably, from contact with those who are just a little more spiritually developed, a little more advanced, whose veil is a little thinner, as it were, than our own, whose veil lets through just a little more light, a brighter glimmer of light than does our own, than do we ourselves.

And in this connection there is a very beautiful passage in that great Tibetan spiritual classic, '*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*'. Some of you I know have come straight along just now from the Tibetan exhibition, the exhibition called, I believe, 'The Tibetan Tradition', and you might feel it appropriate that it falls to our lot this evening a quotation from, as I've said one of the greatest of the spiritual classics of Tibetan Buddhism,

'The Jewel Ornament of Liberation' of sGgam.po.pa. So speaking of the spiritual friends, the *Kalyana Mitras*, sGgam.po.pa says:

"Since at the beginning of our career it is impossible to be in touch with the Buddhas or with Bodhisattvas living on a high level of spirituality, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as our spiritual friends. As soon as the darkness caused by our deeds has lightened, we can find Bodhisattvas on a high level of spirituality. Then when we have risen above the Great Preparatory Path we can find a Nirmanakaya of the Buddha. Finally, as soon as we live on a high spiritual level we can meet with the Sambhogakaya as a spiritual friend.

Should you ask, who among these four is our greatest benefactor, the reply is that in the beginning of our career when we are still living imprisoned by our deeds and emotions, we will not even see so much as the face of a superior spiritual friend. Instead we will have to seek an ordinary human being who can illumine the path we have to follow with the light of his counsel, whereafter we shall meet superior ones. Therefore the greatest benefactor is a spiritual friend in the form of an ordinary human being."

Now this sort of association, this association with spiritual friends, this association with those who are a little more spiritually advanced than we are, or who are at least on the same level, not on a lower level than we our ourselves, this is what the Indians even today call *Satsangh*, and they attach tremendous importance to it. *Satsangh* is a Sanskrit word (in fact it's a Hindi and Marathi and Gujarati and Bengali word too). It is made up of these two parts, '*sat*' and '*sangh*'. '*Sat*' means 'good', it means 'true', it means 'right', it means 'real', 'genuine', also 'holy', and 'spiritual'. So '*sat*'. And '*Sangh*' means 'association', 'company', 'fellowship', 'community', and even 'communion'. So *Satsangh* means this sort of 'good fellowship', 'communion with the good', or 'holy association' - any sort of combination that you care to adopt. All these shades of meaning, all these connotations, are included and suggested.

And the reason why in India all down the centuries and even today the importance of this *Satsangh* is stressed - the reason is that we all need help in leading the spiritual life. We need at least strong moral support from other people. If we are honest with ourselves we have to admit, we have to recognize, that we can't get very far on our own. Just think, most of you, supposing you had no meditation class to go to; suppose you had no lectures to come to; suppose you never met another person interested in Buddhism week after week, month after month, year after year; you never met anybody else interested. Supposing you couldn't even get any books, because even reading

books in the right way, books of the right kind, even this is a kind of *Satsangh*. So if one was entirely on one's own; however great one's enthusiasm, however great one's sincerity - one would not be able to get very far.

So we get encouragement, we get inspiration, we get moral support, we get help, from associating with others who have similar ideals and who are following a similar way of life. And especially is this the case when we associate with those who are at least a little bit more spiritually advanced than we are, or we may say, putting it even more simply, who are simply more human than most people usually are.

Now in our own particular Movement, in the Western Buddhist Order and in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, we lay very great stress, very great emphasis, on this principle of spiritual hierarchy and its corollary, the principle of spiritual fellowship, or brotherhood. In practice this means that we should try to be receptive, should try to be open as it were, towards those who are, as it were, above us in the spiritual hierarchy, those who have greater insight, greater understanding, greater sympathy, greater compassion and so on. We should try to be open with regards to them, ready to receive. Just like the lotus flower opening its petals to receive the light and the warmth of the sun.

And then towards those who are, as it were, below us in the spiritual hierarchy, our attitude should be one of generosity, one of kindness, one of helpfulness - giving them at least a little verbal encouragement, at least making them feel welcome, and so on. And then with regard to those on the same level, our attitude should be one of mutuality, of sharing, of reciprocity.

And these three attitudes - our attitude towards those who are higher in the hierarchy, those who are lower in the hierarchy than ourselves, and those who are on the same level - these three attitudes correspond to the three great spiritual emotions of the Buddhist spiritual life.

Firstly, of all there is the emotion of *Sraddha*. It's often translated as 'faith' or 'belief' - it doesn't really mean that. It means a sort of devotion, a sort of receptivity to the light streaming, as it were, from above.

And then Compassion. Compassion means a giving out of what we have received from above to those who are lower in the spiritual hierarchy, a few rungs lower on the ladder, than we are ourselves.

And then thirdly, Love, which we share with, which we radiate with and towards all those who are around us, all those who are on the same level.

So these are the three great positive spiritual emotions of the Buddhist spiritual life: faith and devotion directed upwards, openness; and then compassion directed downwards; and love radiating all around us in all directions, on all sides, and this is the sort of spirit. This is what we mean when we speak in terms of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood.

But one must stress that though I have referred to those who are 'higher up' and those who are 'lower down', there is no question here of a sort of official grading. It's nothing like that. And there's no question certainly of, "Well, I'm a bit higher than you are" or "You're a bit lower than me." It isn't quite like that. If we start even thinking in those terms, then we have forgotten the whole meaning of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood. Everything should be natural, everything should be spontaneous, the appropriate feeling, the appropriate emotion, whether of devotion or of compassion or love, this should flow forth naturally unselfconsciously and spontaneously when we are confronted by something higher, or something lower or something equal. I remember in this connection sometimes going - again to speak about Tibetan Buddhism - I remember sometimes going with Tibetan friends, whether lamas or whether lay people, to visit Tibetan monasteries and temples, and it was very interesting to see their reactions when they entered, or rather I should say their responses. People in this country when they go to a place of worship, when they go say to a great cathedral or something like that, they don't quite know what to do, because we've in a way gone beyond that tradition, it no longer appeals to us. But it's not like that with the Tibetans. As soon as they see an image of the Buddha, as soon as they see a beautiful thangka, a painted scroll of the Buddha, at once you can see the feelings of devotion and faith and reverence welling up within them, and at once they put their hands to their forehead and very often they prostrate themselves flat on the ground three times, and they do it naturally and quite spontaneously and completely unselfconsciously, because this is how they have grown up within the context, or at least how they grew up within the context - now that context has been rather shattered. This is how they grew up and how they learnt to behave.

So this is the sort of thing which is meant - a spontaneous feeling of devotion when you encounter something which you feel is higher; a spontaneous overflowing of compassion when you are confronted by distress or trouble or difficulty of any kind, of other people; and then love, sympathy and so on when you find yourself surrounded, as it were by your equals. So these are the three great spiritual emotions, the positive spiritual emotions - devotion or faith, compassion, and love, which should fill as it were, which should influence our whole Buddhist movement

and spiritual community, based upon these twin principles of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood. People in such a community, some higher and some lower, but not aware of it, not conscious of it, should be, as it were, all like roses in different stages of growth and unfoldment, all blooming on a single bush. Or they should be just like a family, should be like a spiritual family, a family of which the Buddha, we may say is the ultimate head and the great Bodhisattvas the elder brothers. And in a family of this

sort, we may say, everybody gets what they need - the younger are cared for by the older people - and everybody gives what they can. And the whole, the whole family, the whole group, the whole community, is pervaded by a spirit of joy, by a spirit of freedom, by warmth and by light.

Now the Bodhisattva Hierarchy, we may say, concentrates all this, concentrates all this, we may say, into a single focus, into a single focal point almost, of dazzling intensity. And it has, this Bodhisattva Hierarchy, its own degrees, its own radiant figures, as we may call them, in the higher and ever higher stages of spiritual development, right up to Buddhahood itself. And it's at some of these figures, at some of these radiant figures, archetypal figures, that we are now going to look; but we mustn't forget all the time that we are still really concerned with the Bodhicitta, with this Universal, Transcendental, Cosmic Will to Enlightenment.

Now the Bodhisattva Path is divided, according to the Mahayana, into ten progressive stages, which are known as the 'Ten *Bhumis*'. I won't bother you with the literal meaning of *Bhumi* - for general purposes it just means a 'stage of progress'. And these 'Ten *Bhumis*' represent increasing degrees of manifestation of the Bodhicitta. In the first *bhumi* the Bodhicitta just begins to show itself. In the second it manifests a bit; in the third a bit more. In the fourth and the fifth *bhumis* it's quite prominent, and then by the time it reaches the ninth and the tenth it has shaken, as it were, all mundane habiliments and it stands complete and entire and perfect in itself, identical with complete Enlightenment, the Enlightenment of a Buddha.

And some of the scriptures describe this process of the progressive manifestation of the Bodhicitta through and up the 'Ten *Bhumis*' in terms of a rather interesting simile. They say it is like taking a lump of gold, a lump of gold which is mixed with dross, and gradually smelting it, refining it, purifying it, and finally working it up into some beautiful ornament, a tiara or diadem, as it were, for the head of a prince. And here the gold is of course the Bodhicitta itself, which is here within us all the time but which is mixed and which is adulterated, which is covered over, which is smothered, which is overwhelmed by all sorts of extraneous and adventitious defilements and murkinesses and so on. So that it has to be purified. Not the gold itself purified - the gold is pure all the time in itself but the defilements and the foreign matter, these have gradually to be purged away, the foreign elements have to be separated, so that the gold, the gold of the Bodhicitta, is allowed to manifest its own incorruptible nature.

Now I am not going to attempt to describe these ten stages, these 'Ten *Bhumis*'. I am simply going to use them as points of reference for describing the four principal kinds of Bodhisattva, these four principal kinds of Bodhisattvas who make up the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.

The first kind of Bodhisattvas we call 'Novice Bodhisattvas'. That's the first group. Novice Bodhisattvas. Second group is made up of Bodhisattvas of the Path. Third group is made up of Irreversible Bodhisattvas. Fourth group is made up of Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya*. And we are going to deal with each of these in turn.

First of all then the Novice Bodhisattvas. The Novice Bodhisattvas are sometimes called also 'Bodhisattvas in Precepts'. And these Novice Bodhisattvas are those, all those who genuinely accept the Bodhisattva Ideal - the Ideal of gaining, of attaining Enlightenment, the Enlightenment of a Buddha, not just for the sake of one's own individual emancipation but so that one may contribute to the cause of Universal Enlightenment, the Enlightenment not even of just the human race but of all forms of life, all sentient beings. So all those who genuinely, who deeply, who profoundly accept this Bodhisattva Ideal as the highest of all possible spiritual ideals - these are Novice Bodhisattvas. This isn't of course just a question of intellectual understanding - anybody can read a book about Buddhism, about the Mahayana and understand these, but they don't thereby become a Novice Bodhisattva. A Novice Bodhisattva is not just one who intellectually understands, who theoretically accepts, but who is deeply and genuinely devoted at the same time to the Bodhisattva Ideal, to the realization of the Bodhisattva Ideal, and who makes a real, a genuine, even a tremendous effort to practise it. And such a Novice Bodhisattva may even have taken what is called 'Bodhisattva ordination', might even have formally, publicly pledged themselves to the fulfilment of the Bodhisattva Ideal, but about this Bodhisattva Ordination we shall be saying something towards the end of the lecture.

The point to remember about the Novice Bodhisattva is that, despite his acceptance of the Bodhisattva Ideal, an acceptance which is not intellectual, despite his deep and his genuine, his heartfelt acceptance of it, despite his efforts to practise it, in the case of the Novice Bodhisattva the Bodhicitta has not actually arisen, not yet arisen. In other words he hasn't, as yet felt as an overwhelming experience, he hasn't yet felt this urge to Universal Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, taking complete possession of his entire being. In other words, we

may say perhaps - and this isn't said unkindly - we may say that the Novice Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva in every respect except the one that is most important. He has got all the rest of the equipment but the Bodhicitta itself, the Will to Enlightenment, as a direct, a dynamic experience - when the breath, as it were, of the Bodhicitta blows through the individual and makes him a Bodhisattva, that Bodhicitta has not yet arisen. But the Novice Bodhisattva, by virtue of his acceptance, his genuine acceptance, by virtue of his effort to practise the Bodhisattva Ideal, is genuinely a Novice Bodhisattva and is on the way, has set his foot on the path. And we must admit that most sincere followers of the Mahayana, whether in the East or the West, they fall into this category of Novice Bodhisattva.

The Novice Bodhisattva, among other things, devotes a great deal of time to studying the Mahayana scriptures, those which deal with the Void, with Emptiness, with *sunyata*, with the Ideal of the Bodhisattva, with the *paramitas*. He devotes a great deal of time to the study of these scriptures. He tries to absorb them. He, as it were, soaks himself in the spirit of these texts. He may not read very much, in the sense of not reading many volumes, not reading commentaries and expositions; he may read just a very few volumes, a few pages even, but he reads them again and again, and he steep himself in the spirit of them and tries to feel them, tries to make the teaching, as it were, one with his own mind and one with his own heart. And it is the traditional practice in many parts of the Mahayana Buddhist world that the Novice Bodhisattva should learn some of these scriptures, some of these profounder teachings like the *Heart Sutra*, actually by heart. And not only that - not only learn them by heart and not only repeat them from time to time, especially say at the end of a meditation, but should even make copies of them. Making copies of scriptures is a practice to which the Mahayana attaches very great importance. It doesn't mean writing hastily, it doesn't mean writing by hand simply because you haven't got a printing press. It means writing, producing, in your own hand, because this is in itself a sort of contemplation, a sort of meditation. You have to concentrate so that you can form the letters beautifully, so that you don't miss any words, so that you don't make any spelling mistakes. You concentrate, and then you are all the time thinking of the meaning, at least something of the meaning is percolating through into the conscious mind. Sinking perhaps drop by drop, into the depths of your unconscious mind, influencing, transforming. So great importance is attached traditionally to this copying of texts. Not just copying even, but even illuminating, just as in the West we find, in the Middle Ages, in the monasteries, the monks spent hours, days, weeks, months, years illuminating manuscripts - burnishing them with gold, decorating them with red and blue, and all sorts of beautiful pictures and designs. Only the other day - I can't resist this little digression by the way - I was looking through a volume of French miniature paintings of the Middle Ages, and I was quite astonished to discover one of them which might almost have come out of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It was an illustration to an illuminated manuscript, called 'The Hours of the Duke of Rohan', I think, as far as I recollect. And this was a picture, this was an illustration, of the dead man face to face with his judge, and this wasn't done in the traditional sort of Renaissance style of Christian art at all, Christian religious art at all. It wasn't done like that. You just saw the corpse of the dead man. It was done very very realistically and it lay at an angle diagonally across the page, and it was, well just like a corpse. You could hardly have anything more corpse-like than that. It was done with gruesome realism, and then, as it were, breaking upon it, you had a sort of explosion of blue studded with golden stars, and in the midst of that was the face of the judge. Those of you who have read the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* will at once recognize the sort of thing, and you had the impression of this blaze of blue light, and all these stars, then the face, the golden-haloed face of the judge, breaking in upon, as it were, the vision, the inner vision of this dead man. So this is the sort of thing that one has in mind when one speaks of illuminating texts, whether they're Christian texts or whether they are Buddhist texts - this is the sort of love, this is the sort of care, this is the sort of devotion which traditionally is lavished upon them. Because this studying and this reading and this learning by heart and this making of copies is all done as a labour or love, it's done as a *Sadhana* as they say in India, it's done as a spiritual discipline, and not just so you can do as many as possible as quickly as possible.

And then again of course, the Novice Bodhisattva has to meditate, and especially he meditates on the *Four Brahma Viharas*, that is to say he practises developing love towards all sentient beings - *metta*, and then *Karuna* - compassion; then *Mudita* - sympathetic joy; and finally equanimity - *Upeksa*, perfect peace and steadiness and evenness of mind. It is said that the Bodhisattva or the would-be Bodhisattva, especially the Novice Bodhisattva, should especially devote himself to the practice of the '*Four Brahma-Viharas*' which form the foundation, later on, for his development of the Great Compassion which characterizes the truly great, truly developed Bodhisattva.

And then of course he directs his attention to the practise of the *paramitas*, the Perfections - giving, uprightness and the rest - though at this stage we cannot strictly speaking call them *paramitas* because they haven't been conjoined as yet with Wisdom. And of course the Novice Bodhisattva performs, in some cases every day, performs the 'Sevenfold Puja', which we also recite as you know, perform as you know, at the conclusion of our gatherings every Friday as well as on other occasions. And again the Novice Bodhisattva cultivates the 'Four Factors' for the arising of the Bodhicitta, as mentioned by the Acarya Vasubandhu. And of course he tries to be straightforward, helpful, friendly, sympathetic in all the dealings, in all the affairs of daily life.

So this is the Novice Bodhisattva. One who genuinely accepts, who sincerely practises the Bodhisattva Ideal. Who is deeply committed to it, but in whom as yet the Bodhicitta, the Will to Enlightenment, has not yet arisen, not yet manifested. One who is about, perhaps, to break through into that great experience.

Then secondly 'Bodhisattvas of the Path'. And I have referred to the 'Ten *Bhumis*', the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's progress up to supreme Enlightenment; and these 'Ten *Bhumis*' are divided into two sections. The first section consists of the first six *bhumis*, that is to say *bhumis* one to six, and the last section consists of the remaining four, in other words, seven to ten. Now Bodhisattvas of the Path are those who have attained to, who have developed, any of the first six *bhumis*. That is to say if you reach the first *bhumi*, you're a Bodhisattva of the Path. If you come to the second or the third or fourth or the fifth or the sixth, if you come as far as that then you're a Bodhisattva of the Path, and the Bodhicitta, in this case, the Will to Enlightenment, has arisen. It arises in the first *bhumi*, or rather upon the arising of the Bodhicitta, one is said to enter upon the first *bhumi*. And the Bodhisattva of the Path has therefore also made his Vow, or Vows, and has embarked upon the really serious practice of the *paramitas*, the Perfections.

Incidentally, I should also observe that, according to many Mahayana traditions, the Stream-Entrant the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, and the Arahant of the Hinayana teaching are all included here and regarded as Bodhisattvas of the Path - they are made, as it were by the Mahayana sort of honorary Bodhisattvas. So far, of course, they have all been aiming at individual Enlightenment, but according to the Mahayana one can change over at any time, even if one has progressed along the path of individual emancipation right up to the end, it's always possible to see something further ahead, the possibility of rising to the level of Supreme Buddhahood, Enlightenment for the sake of all, and then, on the basis of one's previous practice of the individual path, rising to that particular practice as well.

So these are the Bodhisattvas of the Path, those in whom the Bodhicitta has arisen and who are treading the first to the sixth stages of the Bodhisattva Path, the first to the sixth *bhumis*, practising all the time vigorously of course the *paramitas*.

Now thirdly the 'Irreversible Bodhisattvas', and with the Irreversible Bodhisattvas we're beginning to ascend into really rarefied heights. The arising of the Bodhicitta within the individual is in itself, the manifestation of the will, the cosmic will within the individual to Universal Enlightenment, the Enlightenment, the Emancipation of all, this is in itself a sufficiently tremendous experience, but the achievement by the Bodhisattva of this stage of Irreversibility or non-retrogression is an experience greater still. We may say that Irreversibility represents, within the context of the Mahayana, an extremely important aspect of the whole spiritual life. It represents, it stands for the aspect of non-retrogression, not failing back, not falling away.

We all know from our own experience how difficult it is to advance on the path, how difficult it is to make a little progress. Some of us might even look back over the last few years, what to speak of the last few months, and look back a little sadly, thinking, "There hasn't been all that change. We're still more or less the same person that we were then. Where's the progress?" Progress is very difficult to make on the spiritual path. We measure our progress by inches, not by miles, we may say. But difficult as it is to advance, difficult as it is to put one foot in front of the other, how easy it is, on the other hand, to fall back, to backslide, even a mile or two. And we find this especially in the sphere, we know, of meditation. We may get on quite well, we may be going along nicely for a few weeks or a few months, and then it happens that we don't sit just for a couple of days. And when we sit on the next day we find that we are right back where we were months before. I'm sure everybody has had this experience, once or twice at least, in their life, in their spiritual life so far.

So this sort of principle, this fact of the danger of falling back and falling away applies at all levels of the spiritual life. It's only too easy for us to fall back, to sink back to a lower, to an inferior, level. So it becomes important for us to reach, from time to time, within a particular context at least, a point upon the attainment of which there is no danger of falling back - it is important to reach firm land where we can stand and from which we don't regress.

And in the case of the spiritual life in general, this point, this point after attaining which we don't, we can't fall back, this, in the case of the spiritual life in general is what we call the point of Stream-Entry, entering the stream which bears us eventually to Nirvana itself. And once we reach this point, once we enter the Stream, in the context of the general spiritual life, then there's no danger of ever falling permanently back into the round of existence, into mundane life. Now those of us who have studied a little of the Theravada or Hinayana teaching, the basic Buddhist teaching, know that Stream-Entry is achieved by breaking asunder, by snapping, by bursting, the first three of the 'Ten Fetters', the Ten Fetters which bind us down to the Wheel of Life, to the round of conditioned existence itself.

And these, first of all belief in self. Belief that I am I and that this is final, this is fixed, that there's nothing higher, that there's nothing beyond. The conviction that there is no such thing as a universal consciousness, a universal mind, an absolute Reality, outside of me - that I am the terminus, as it were. I am that point upon which, as it were, all the ends of the earth, all the end of the world come, that my existence, my personal individual existence, is something fixed, final, irreducible, ultimate; and this is how we feel most of the time. Sometimes a little chink is made, sometimes a little rent is made. We see through ourselves something greater than ourselves, but usually we

believe in ourselves in this narrow, limited, egoistic sense. We believe in ourselves as identified with the body, as identified with the lower mind, as identified with the thinking principle, the *vijnana*, the *manas* and son on. And we really think that this is real. We are blind to any higher vision, blind to any more ultimate selfhood, any wider more universal mind or consciousness. So this belief in self in this sense, belief in the ego-self, taking it as ultimate, this is a fetter, this has to be broken before we can enter the Stream and break through into this higher, this wider dimension of being and consciousness.

And then the second fetter is doubt. Not doubt in the sense of an objective, cool, critical enquiry: that sort of doubt - if you like to call it doubt - Buddhism encourages. But a sort of soul-corroding scepticism - that won't settle down in anything; that is full of doubts and fears and humours and whimsicalities, and that won't be satisfied, and doesn't really want to know, and shies away from knowing; which won't really try to find out and then complains that it doesn't know. This sort of scepticism, this sort of *vicikitsa* as it's called, this is a fetter and this, this again must be burst through must be broken for Stream-Entry to be possible.

And then the third fetter is what is known as 'attachment to moral rules and religious observances'. If you're too moral you can't get Enlightened. I'm not saying that if you're immoral you get Enlightened more easily!. But if you are so moral, you're so good, you're so holy, you're so pure, that you think a lot of yourself on that account, and you think that you really are something, if you think you really are somebody and really are doing something and that you've got somewhere, and that this is ultimate. And that those who don't do what you do, don't keep the rules that you keep, well they're nowhere, they're nothing, they're miserable sinners. If you have this sort of attitude, this rigid attitude, then you are in the grip of this third fetter of attachment to moral rules and religious observances. You get this sort of thing in Sabbatarianism, the sort of attitude which forgets the words of Christ, that 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath', the attitude which regards the Sabbath as an end in itself. And you get this sort of attitude, I'm sorry to say, even in some forms of Buddhism. I think I mentioned before that a dispute rent the whole of the Burmese Sangha for a century as to whether, when a monk went out of the monastery, he should cover this shoulder or whether he should leave it bare. And this issue split the Sangha, rocked the Sangha in Burma for a whole century, and books and articles and pamphlets and commentaries were written about it; and I believe even now it isn't settled. It's now settled only in the sense that they've agreed to differ. So really this is a matter of attachment, dependence upon moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves.

Something may be good as a means to an end - meditation is good, a moral life is good, charity is good, studying the scriptures is good. These are all good a means to an end); but as soon as you set them up as ends in themselves, then they become hindrances, and this is a fetter, and it's a fetter that's very difficult to break indeed, but when you break it, this third fetter, then you enter the Stream. So once you've overcome, once you've transcended this belief in your self as you now experience yourself - as something fixed and final; once you overcome scepticism, doubt, in the sense in which I defined it; and once you surmount, once you surmount, this attachment to rule and ritual and religious observances - not that you give them up but you're not attached to them, you use them as means to an end - when you've broken these three fetters, then you enter the Stream.

Now in the case of the Bodhisattva, he is no longer in danger of falling away from the Bodhisattva Ideal. This is only when he achieves what we call Irreversibility. And the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible only in the eighth *bhumi*, the eighth stage out of the ten. So look what a long way the Bodhisattva has to go before he can be completely sure that he's going to persevere to the end. So he becomes Irreversible in this eighth *bhumi*, that is to say Irreversible from full Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Up to that point, till he becomes Irreversible, there's always the danger, not that he'll fall away from the spiritual life itself no - that danger he has overcome long before - but there is the danger that he'll fall back into spiritual individualism: that he'll give up trying to become Enlightened, trying to become a Buddha for the sake of all, slip back into spiritual individualism in the sense of seeking to gain Enlightenment just for his own sake.

After all, if one takes it seriously, one must recognize that the Bodhisattva Ideal, is very very difficult. You are aspiring to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. Obviously you are not in contact with all living beings, only with a minute fraction of them, and that's bad and that's difficult enough sometimes, and you are also trying to be feeling compassion for all living beings - that's your Bodhisattva Vow, and that's why you want to gain Enlightenment, so that you can lead them out of their misery and their suffering. You have to feel compassion. But to feel compassion sometimes even for the few dozen people that you meet, even this is difficult enough, because people can be very trying, they can be very foolish, they can be very weak, they can be very misguided. So even the Bodhisattva of the Path, right up to the eighth *bhumi*, even the Bodhisattva of the Path, one who has got up even to the seventh *bhumi*, what to speak of the sixth or the fifth, may be tempted sometimes to give them all up in disgust, in despair, as a bad lot. He may think. You can't do anything for them, and decide that, "well never mind. I'll just get on with my own Enlightenment and my own emancipation - let them do what they like." Sometimes he might put it even more strongly than that! And he may, having given up the Goal of Supreme Buddhahood, Universal Enlightenment, he may even achieve individual Emancipation, Arahantship, Nirvana. But in relation to his original Goal of Supreme Buddhahood for the sake, for the benefit of all, this represents a falling away, it represents a failure. For the Bodhisattva Nirvana represents a failure. So one can realize from this how high the Ideal is set.

So how does the Bodhisattva become Irreversible? It's something which won't concern us for a very long while really, but at least let us see what the scriptures have to say. Broadly speaking, the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible by the realization of 'Great Emptiness', *Maha-sunyata*. You may remember that we dealt with this to some extent last week. And last week we saw that *maha-sunyata*, Great Emptiness, is the third of the four principal kinds of *sunyata*, emptiness or voidness.

First of all, the 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. The fact that the conditioned is empty of the characteristics of the Unconditioned. Then, there is 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned', in the sense that the Unconditioned is empty of the characteristics of the conditioned. And then there's 'Great Emptiness', which is the emptiness of the very distinction, the non-ultimate validity of the very distinction between, conditioned and Unconditioned, so that they are both reduced to one non-dual Reality, transcending both Nirvana and samsara. And then, finally there is 'Emptiness of Emptiness', *sunyata-sunyata*, in which even the idea, wherein, even the idea, the conception, even the experience of emptiness itself vanishes away - the finger, however transparent, disappears, and you've only got the full moon, with nothing pointing to it.

Now in what way is Irreversibility connected with the realization of 'Great Emptiness'? What is 'Great Emptiness', if one can say at all. 'Great Emptiness', is, as we have seen, essentially a realization of the emptiness of the distinction between conditioned and Unconditioned. When the experience of 'Great Emptiness' dawns one realizes, one sees clearly that neither the conditioned nor the Unconditioned is really a separate, independent Reality. One sees that the distinction between the two - that this is conditioned, this is Unconditioned, this is the world, that's nirvana - one sees that this distinction, useful though it may be provisionally, at the beginning, for practical purposes, is not ultimately valid. That when you go deeply into the conditioned you encounter the Unconditioned; that when you go deeply into the Unconditioned you encounter the conditioned. So therefore, with the experience of 'Great Emptiness', one gives up the distinction of conditioned/Unconditioned, reduces them, as it were, to one common, non-dual Reality.

Now spiritual individualism into which there's always the danger, up to the eighth *bhumi*, of the Bodhisattva slipping back. Spiritual individualism is based on dualistic thinking. Spiritual individualism is based on the idea that there is an unconditioned 'up there', 'out there', separate from the conditioned, to which one can aspire, to which one can escape, as it were, by oneself. So that when one realizes 'Great Emptiness', or when the Bodhisattva realizes 'Great Emptiness', he sees, he realizes, that it is not so. He awakens, as it were, from dualistic thinking as though from a dream, and he sees that all this talk of conditioned and Unconditioned, and getting from 'this' to 'that' - it's all unreal, there's no such thing. He sees it quite clearly, he sees through all this. It's just like a game that he's been playing - this getting out of the conditioned into the Unconditioned, whether to go by himself or whether to take others with him, whether to come back or not to come back or stay there - he sees it's all a dream, it's all a make-believe, and he wakes up from this dream of dualistic thinking into the light, into the reality, of the one mind, the non-dual mind, the non-dual Reality, whatever one might like to call it. And he sees that in its ultimate depth the conditioned is the Unconditioned - there's no line, no division, between them whatsoever. He sees, in the words of the *Heart Sutra*, that *rupa is sunyata and sunyata is rupa*, and he sees no difference between them whatsoever. So there's nothing to escape from and there's nowhere to escape to. And he sees the utter absurdity therefore of the very idea of individual emancipation, and in this way, by realizing the import of 'Great Emptiness' in this way, the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible. He can't fall back to individual emancipation because he sees there's no individual emancipation to fall back to.

Now the scriptures give us - especially the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures - give us various signs of Irreversibility. If anyone wants to know whether they've become Irreversible or not, well here's your opportunity! And we are told by the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures that the Irreversible Bodhisattva, if asked about the nature of the ultimate Goal, always includes in his reply a reference to the Compassion aspect of that Goal and of the spiritual life: he doesn't speak just in terms of nirvana, just in terms of individual emancipation - he always includes a reference to Compassion, a reference to other sentient beings. And in this way he is known to be Irreversible, whether he's studied the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras or not. And then the Irreversible Bodhisattva, we are told, has all sorts of archetypal dream experiences. In a dream he sees himself, as it were, as a Buddha preaching the Dharma, surrounded by Bodhisattvas. Or he may see himself practising the *paramitas*, and we are told that he may especially see himself sacrificing his life, having his head cut off, and feeling quite happy about it in the dream - not afraid or upset at all. And these are others signs that he has become Irreversible. And finally another sign of Irreversibility is that the Irreversible Bodhisattva never wonders whether he is Irreversible or not.

Now fourthly and lastly, the 'Bodhisattvas of the Dharmakaya', and here we really do find ourselves on a wholly Transcendental plane. We find ourselves beyond thought and we should find ourselves beyond speech too. But perhaps something can be conveyed.

In Buddhism there are many words - quite a large number of words for Ultimate Reality. Buddhism is very rich in these words. In English we can only say 'God', 'Reality', 'Truth', and then we about come to an end, or maybe 'the Absolute' - though people don't usually refer to that in everyday conversation - but Buddhism is very rich in terms, in words, for Ultimate Reality. And each word, each term, represents or embodies a particular aspect, and each one

has its own special flavour, its own particular, special connotation or shade of meaning. And the word *Dharmakaya* - we are speaking of course of Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya* - *Dharmakaya* is one of these words. The scholars - bless their hearts, we may say! - translate it literally as 'Body of Truth' and they leave it at that. And we are told that it's the third of the three bodies of the Buddha. You are imagining the Buddha having three bodies, a 'Body of Transformation' and a 'Glorious Body', and then he's got a 'Body of Truth', and you think of them as one on top of another or maybe side by side - you are not very clear. So this is a way in which these words, these concepts, are translated. But this sort of translation, this sort of rendition really conveys nothing at all. *Dharmakaya* really means, as far as we can put it into a few words, it means Reality, Ultimate Reality as constitutive, or as the constitutive essence of Buddhahood and Bodhisattvahood. It means Reality, Ultimate Reality as the fountainhead as it were of Enlightened being and Enlightened personality, as the fountainhead from which, as it were, Buddha forms and Bodhisattva forms come welling up inexhaustibly and immeasurably.

Now Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya* are of two kinds, though really at this level, this Transcendental level one can't speak in terms of differences or kinds at all. The first kind of Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya* consist of those who, after Enlightenment, after becoming Buddhas, retain their Bodhisattva forms - though being in Reality Buddhas - so that they can continue working in the world. And secondly, those who are aspects, or direct emanations, if you like, of the *Dharmakaya* and have got no human previous history. So these two kinds make up the Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya*. They are all, as we may say, archetypal forms of Buddhahood or the Buddha mind or the Enlightenment essence. And all these archetypal forms, these great and these glorious forms of Bodhisattvas, reveal one or another aspect, manifest or embody, incarnate one or another aspect of the one Buddhahood. And there are literally hundreds of these forms. In some kinds of meditation you imagine a vast, an infinite blue sky, free of cloud, and you imagine as it were mandalas - circles, sacred circles, symbolical circles - containing tens, hundreds, even thousands of these Bodhisattva forms, filling the firmament and filling the heavens. And these make up the innermost circle as it were, these Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya*, make up the innermost circle, as it were, of the whole Bodhisattva Hierarchy, and I'm going to mention just a very few of them.

The majority of these Bodhisattva forms, these Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya* are represented as young men, usually very young men, of slender, graceful appearance, and very often with long flowing hair, and decorated with ornaments of gold, silver and so on, and representing altogether, we may say, the aspect of beauty and richness of the *Dharmakaya*, its sort of superabundant welling forth and manifestation and efflorescence.

Amongst the most prominent amongst all these Bodhisattva figures is Avalokitesvara, which means 'the Lord who looks down', and he looks down in compassion, he represents the Compassion aspect of Enlightenment. One can think of this in terms of, for instance, a great blue sky. Suppose you see a great blue sky, completely empty, completely void, nothing but blue sky stretching to infinity, and on that blue sky or in that blue sky you see appearing in that sky just ... not even a face, just features, features just sufficient to express a smile, a smile of compassion - and this, we may say, is the Compassion aspect of Reality, this is Avalokitesvara. Avalokitesvara as many of you know appears in the *Heart Sutra*, the heart of the Perfection of Wisdom, and iconographically is represented as being white, pure white in colour, and as carrying a lotus flower, symbolizing spiritual birth or spiritual rebirth. And his face is usually alive with a very sweet, a very compassionate, smile. And one foot is tucked under in the posture of meditation, showing that internally he is deep in meditation; and the other hangs loose, representing his readiness to step down at any moment into the turmoil of the world to help other living beings. Because as I explained the other week, in the Bodhisattva these two aspects of inner recollection, tranquility and meditation, and external activity - these are not contradictory, these are different aspects of the same thing.

Now there are many different forms of Avalokitesvara. There are one hundred and eight forms altogether, all different, all distinct. One of the most famous of these is the eleven-headed and thousand-armed or thousand-handed form. To us it perhaps seems a little grotesque, but the symbolism is very interesting. It is said that once the great Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was contemplating the sorrows of the world, the miseries of sentient beings, their death, sickness, suffering by fire, flood, famine and so on, bereavement, separation, war, shipwreck; and he was overwhelmed by a Great Compassion, to such an extent that he was weeping. And he went on weeping so violently, we are told, that his head just shivered into pieces, into fragments, into eleven pieces, eleven fragments, and each became a head, each became a face. And there were eleven of them because there are eleven directions of space (north, south, east, west, the intermediate points - that makes eight; up, down, and in the centre, so eleven altogether) meaning that Compassion is looking everywhere - while it's looking here it can also look there. It can look on this side at the same time as that side. It looks in all directions simultaneously. That is compassion. And he has a thousand arms - I think they stopped at a thousand only because the artists couldn't represent any more. The Bodhisattva of Compassion has a million arms, and at the end of every arm there's a little hand, a hand stretched out to help. So in this particular form, in this particular way, with the help of this particular symbol, Buddhism tries to express the nature of Compassion, that it's looking in all directions and trying to help in all conceivable, all possible ways. So this is Avalokitesvara, representing the Compassion aspect of Buddhahood, of Enlightenment, of the *Dharmakaya*.

And then there's Manjusri. He represents the Wisdom aspect. He is depicted in the same sort of way as Avalokitesvara, except that he is a beautiful golden colour, or orange, or tawny colour, and he carries a sword and

a book. A sword in one hand, a flaming sword which he whirls above his head, with which he cuts asunder the bonds of ignorance and the knots of karma. All that sort of knotty tangled stuff which is tripping us up all the time, he just cuts through it with that flaming sword of Wisdom. And he carries a book in the other hand, close to his heart or next to the heart very often. It is a little book of the Perfection of Wisdom. We are not told whether it is the *Diamond Sutra* or the *Heart Sutra* - that's left to our imagination, but it represents the Perfection of Wisdom teaching which the Bodhisattva of Wisdom holds especially close to his heart. And his legs are crossed in the meditation posture, the lotus posture, because Wisdom springs, as the Dhammapada also teaches us, from meditation. And Manjusri, this golden Bodhisattva with the flaming sword and the book, he is the patron of all the arts and the sciences. If you want to write a book, if you want to paint a picture, perhaps you want to compose a piece of music, you invoke, in traditional Buddhism, you invoke Manjusri. And his mantra, the *arapachana* mantra, is repeated for retentive memory, for understanding of the Dharma, for eloquence, power of speech, and so on. So this is Manjusri, the Wisdom aspect of Enlightenment, the aspect, the golden aspect which dispels, just like a sun, dispels the darkness of ignorance and non-understanding.

And then there's Vajrapani, and he represents the Power aspect. Not power in the usual sense of political power and power over other people, not that. But just power, spiritual Power in itself. And Vajrapani, though he has a peaceful form, is usually depicted in a wrathful, in an angry form, because it's the spiritual power which has to destroy, which has to crush the darkness of the forces of ignorance, and Vajrapani appropriately is usually represented in a dark blue colour, and he's not slim, he's not slender, he's not graceful; he has a stout, thick body, he has a very protuberant belly, and very thick short, heavy limbs, and his countenance expresses extreme anger and he has long white teeth or tusks. And usually he is represented as naked except for ornaments of either human bone or something of that sort or a tiger skin, and he carries in one hand a *vajra*, a thunderbolt, with which he crushes and pierces and destroys the forces of ignorance, as well as - if he has a number of hands - various other weapons. And he is crowned, this terrifying figure is crowned, with five skulls, representing the 'Five Wisdoms'. And one foot is uplifted, in act to crush and trample all the forces of conditioned existence which separate us from the light of the truth. And of course he is surrounded by a great halo of flames, all flickering and burning and roaring, and again destroying the darkness of ignorance. So this is Vajrapani, the power aspect of Enlightenment or Buddha nature or *Dharmakaya*. That aspect with destroys and breaks up conditioned existence, which rends the veil of ignorance and which scatters all the forces of darkness.

And then, by way of contrast, there is Tara. And she is the spiritual daughter - here we have a female Bodhisattva form - I won't say female Bodhisattva, because Bodhisattvas have gone far beyond distinctions of male and female, but they may appear some in a male form and others may appear in a female form; sometimes now one, now the other - it does not make really any difference - but Tara is the spiritual daughter of Avalokitesvara and therefore a female Bodhisattva form. And she's usually either white or green in colour, and according to a very beautiful myth or legend she was born of the tears of Avalokitesvara as he wept over the sorrows of existence. It is said that he was weeping so much one day that a great pool was formed from his tears, and that in the midst of the pool there came up a great white lotus, and the lotus opened and there was his spiritual daughter, Tara, the great female Bodhisattva or female Bodhisattva form, representing the very essence, indeed the quintessence, of compassion. And very often she carries, she bears a white lotus flower, sometimes a blue lotus flower, depending on the particular form. And in her white form she is studded, as it were, with seven eyes, seven beautiful eyes, which just look at you from different parts of her body (there are two ordinary eyes of course, then a third one in the forehead, one in each of the two palms, and one in each of the two soles of the feet). And this means something, this means - after all Tara represents the quintessence of Compassion - but it's not foolish, sentimental Compassion. There is nothing blind about it, it sees. True Compassion, even in its remotest operations, is informed by awareness and mindfulness and knowledge, which is more than can say of some people's compassion, or pity - sometimes it just makes things worse, and that's why there is the little saying, that sometimes it takes all the wisdom of the wise to undo the harm which is done by the merely good, or the merely pitiful.

Now fourthly and lastly, we come to Vajrasattva. Vajrasattva, the last great Bodhisattva with whom we are concerned, represents the aspect of Purity. Not ordinary purity, not physical purity, not even moral purity, not even spiritual purity. Not any purity that can be attained. Vajrasattva represents primeval Purity, the Purity of the mind from the beginning, the stainless, sparkling purity of the mind which has remained unsoiled and untouched from beginningless ages. It's not a question that we purify our mind through spiritual practice. We may purify the lower mind, because the lower mind can become soiled, but we never purify the Ultimate Mind, because the Ultimate Mind never becomes impure. We purify ourselves truly by waking up to the fact that we've never become impure, that we were pure all the time. And this primeval purity of the mind or this aspect of primeval purity, purity above and beyond time, purity above and beyond the possibility of impurity, this is represented by Vajrasattva.

And Vajrasattva is usually represented as pure white, as a sort of dazzling white, like the sunlight reflecting from the snow, and he is usually represented as completely naked - not even with any Bodhisattva ornaments. And the mantra, the one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva is invoked and meditated upon, recited for the purification of one's faults, or one's purification from the impurity of thinking that one is not primevally pure. And many important practices are connected with Vajrasattva, and they're all included in what's called the 'Vajrasattva Yoga',

which makes up one of the 'Four Foundation Yogas' of the Tibetan Buddhist Tantra, about which we spoke a few months ago.

Now as I mentioned, there are many, many Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya*, but these few must suffice by way of illustration, by way of example - Avalokitesvara representing the Compassion aspect, Manjusri the Wisdom aspect, Vajrapani the power aspect, Tara the quintessence of Compassion aspect, pure Compassion aspect; and Vajrasattva the aspect of primeval purity, purity of the mind which has never been touched or soiled, which is eternally, everlastingly the same. And all of these Bodhisattva forms, all of these Bodhisattva figures, these Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya*, we are told Ultimately, in the last resort, in the last analysis - which is not an intellectual analysis - are simply different aspects of our own fundamentally, basically Enlightened mind, our own immanent Buddha mind.

Now just a few words as promised about the Bodhisattva ordination and then we must close. The Bodhisattva ordination is not just a ceremony. Bodhisattva ordination is, we may say, the natural expression of the arising of the Bodhicitta, the Will to Enlightenment, and as such the Bodhisattva ordination occurs or takes place usually in the first *bhumi*, which is when the Bodhicitta itself arises. But as a ceremony, as something performed or undergone externally, it may be taken at any time, even by the Novice Bodhisattva. In the case of the Novice Bodhisattva, he takes the Bodhisattva ordination, as it were, in anticipation of the arising of the Bodhicitta, and therefore the taking of the Bodhisattva ordination in this way is included among the conditions in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises.

The Bodhisattva ordination consists of two parts. First of all there is the taking of the Bodhisattva Vow, usually in the form of the 'Four Great Vows'. And secondly there is the acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts or principles governing the behaviour of the Bodhisattva. And there are different lists of these precepts, these Bodhisattva precepts, in different branches of the Mahayana scriptures. They have all been extracted and compiled and classified from the Mahayana scriptures and they are expressive of a more specific, a more detailed application of the Great Vows themselves. The taking of the Bodhisattva Vow as a part of the ordination, the Bodhisattva ordination corresponds, on its own higher level, to the Going for Refuge. And the acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts corresponds to the taking of the five, or the ten, ordinary precepts.

As many of you know the Bodhisattva ordination is the third of the four degrees of ordination which we have in the Western Buddhist Order. The first degree is that of lay brother or lay sister; the second degree is that of senior lay brother or senior lay sister; the fourth is that of the full time bhikshu, or lama, or master etc. But it must be emphasized, it must be pointed out, that the Bodhisattva ordination, which comes third, does not represent the conferring of any spiritual status. Spiritual status in fact, we may say, in fact cannot be conferred. Bodhisattva ordination doesn't even imply a recognition of spiritual status. Bodhisattva ordination represents a public pledge by the person concerned that he or she will do their best to live up to the Bodhisattva Ideal. 'Public' here means 'in the presence of the Buddhist spiritual community', especially in the presence of other members of the Order. Whether at the same time the Bodhicitta arises, that is a quite different matter, and it's obviously very difficult for other people to know, whether, in any given case, in the case of any given person, the Bodhicitta has or has not arisen.

But for most of us, even for those who are interested, the Bodhisattva ordination lies a long way ahead. In most cases one's immediate objective in this context is the first or the second degree ordination. So for the time being, therefore, we have to be content to contemplate, as it were from afar off, the glories of the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.

