

## Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal

### Lecture 72: The Buddha and Bodhisattva: Eternity and Time

Mr Chairman and Friends,

Last week we began our lecture by permitting ourselves, for a few moments a backward glance, a backward glance over the rather mountainous terrain of the Bodhisattva Ideal, that is to say the terrain which, or through which, we had and in fact have been travelling in the course of these last few weeks, in fact these two months. And as we looked back, as we looked back over the distance that we had traversed during this time, we saw that in this, as it were, mountainous terrain, one peak stood out, one peak seemed to dominate the rest. And this was the mountain peak of the Bodhicitta, the Will to Universal Enlightenment. And in retrospect we saw that all other aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal, all those other aspects, some of which we had touched upon and even explored, seemed, in retrospect, to group themselves around this particular one, this particular peak, just like so many lesser mountain peaks clustering, as it were, around one great peak that towers above them all and dominates the landscape.

We saw right at the beginning that the Bodhisattva was the ideal Buddhist, one who lives for the sake of Enlightenment, for the sake of the Enlightenment of all sentient beings, but we saw, almost from the very beginning, that the Bodhisattva becomes a Bodhisattva only by virtue of the arising, by virtue of the manifestation within him, of what we call the Bodhicitta. And this Bodhicitta we saw, again was not just a thought, not just an idea or a concept in somebody's mind. We saw, and again and again we were reminded, that this Bodhicitta is something Transcendental, something Universal, something which informs and pervades and flows through in a sense, the whole cosmos. And we further saw, both at the time and in retrospect, that this Bodhicitta, this Universal Will to Enlightenment, or this Will to Cosmic Enlightenment, has two great aspects; that it has a vow aspect and an establishment aspect. The first consisting of the formulation of certain vows, the import of which is universal, embracing all sentient beings. We saw, you may remember, that the Four Great Vows are a prominent example of this kind of thing. We saw also that the vow - singular or plural, represents the expression of the one, the Universal, Bodhicitta, in terms of the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva. While the other aspect, the establishment aspect we saw, consisted in the practise of the six *paramitas*, and these six *paramitas* we saw in some detail, over some three weeks, were made up of three pairs. First of all giving and uprightness - *dana* and *sila*, representing the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life. Then patience and vigour, representing, as we saw, the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' (single inverted commas) approaches to the spiritual life, and finally meditation and Wisdom, which we described as the internal and external dimensions, as it were, of the one supremely Enlightened mind.

And all these pairs of opposites - whether giving and uprightness, whether patience and vigour, or meditation and Wisdom - all these pairs of opposites, on their respective levels, in their respective contexts, the Bodhisattva synthesizes, balances, integrates harmoniously in his own life and work and character and endeavour and achievement. In his life we saw - and this again was insisted upon more than once - in his life there is no one-sidedness, no going to extremes.

Now last week we found ourselves still concerned with this Bodhicitta, still trying to get a glimpse, as it were of this great, this lofty, mountain peak dominating the entire landscape from a slightly different point of view, in a slightly different perspective. Last week we tried to go into the question of the Bodhicitta, not so much abstractly as concretely, because last week, you may remember, we were concerned with the Bodhisattva Hierarchy. In other words those individuals in whom the Bodhicitta progressively manifests itself. And we first of all tried to understand the general principle of spiritual hierarchy itself. We saw that it represented, this spiritual hierarchy represented, the thin veil, as it were, between ourselves and Reality, and at the same time we tried to understand the principle of Universal brotherhood, tried to understand the importance of having contact with what Buddhist tradition calls 'the spiritual friends'. And having done this, we turned our attention to the four kinds of Bodhisattva, who between them make up the Bodhisattva hierarchy.

We saw that in the first place there are Novice Bodhisattvas - those who genuinely accept the Bodhisattva Ideal, and who try to practise it, but in whom the Bodhicitta, as a spiritual experience, as a Transcendental experience, has not yet arisen.

And then secondly we saw that there were Bodhisattvas of the Path - those in whom the Bodhicitta had in fact arisen and who had attained any one of the first six out of the ten *bhumis* or stages of progress of the Bodhisattva path.

And then we saw that in the third place there were the Irreversible Bodhisattvas - those who are incapable of falling back into spiritual individualism and aiming at emancipation, nirvana, just for themselves alone. These Irreversible Bodhisattvas, we saw, become such by the realisation of 'Great Emptiness', the third of the four kinds of emptiness, 'Great Emptiness' in which all distinction, as between samsara and nirvana, conditioned and Unconditioned, all these distinctions are swallowed up and obliterated, so that in that realisation of the 'Great Emptiness', the

Bodhisattva finds, the Bodhisattva discovers, or the Bodhisattva sees, no separate nirvana, no Unconditioned separate from the conditioned, to which he can escape for his own sake, and in this way he becomes irreversible in the eighth *bhumi*.

And then we saw that there are Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya*, who are Buddhas in fact in Bodhisattva form. Some of them being human and historical and others purely archetypal, but all of them representing different aspects of Enlightenment, different aspects of Buddhahood. We saw that Avalokitesvara, for example, embodies the aspect of Compassion; Manjusri the aspect of Wisdom, and so on. And we closed last week with just a few words about the Bodhisattva ordination.

Now that's a rather rapid survey of quite a lot of ground, but it should suffice to prepare the way for what we have to say this evening.

And this evening we are still concerned with the Bodhicitta, this Will to Enlightenment, this Will to the salvation, the emancipation, the liberation, of all. But again we are concerned with the Bodhicitta in a somewhat different way. So far in the course of this series we have dealt only with the relative Bodhicitta. You may remember that quite early in the series the distinction was introduced as between the Absolute Bodhicitta and then the relative Bodhicitta, but the Absolute Bodhicitta was just briefly mentioned, and we have in fact all the time been dealing in detail, explicitly with the relative Bodhicitta.

Now today we are going to deal with the Absolute Bodhicitta. As I've said it's been mentioned briefly in a very general way before but we haven't really, we haven't truly, said anything about it. The subject has been anticipated slightly last week in speaking of the Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakaya* and the connection may become obvious a little later on.

Now obviously it isn't easy to approach this subject of the Absolute Bodhicitta. The relative Bodhicitta is difficult enough to deal with, difficult enough to get a glimpse of, even from afar off, but obviously the Absolute Bodhicitta is very much more difficult indeed to approach. It's difficult even to get a glimpse of a glimpse of the Absolute Bodhicitta. So perhaps we should work our way into the subject gradually, little by little, step by step, until perhaps we have some, however remote, however indirect, perception of the nature of the Absolute Bodhicitta, and also have some perception, in the words of the title of today's lecture, some perception of the Buddha as well as of the Bodhisattva, of eternity and time.

Now in the course of the previous lectures, one cannot but have received certain impressions. You know how it is when you go along to lectures. You don't usually go along with your notebook. You just get a general impression. Some thing sort of sinks in, something settles down, as it were, within you, from the lectures, but you may not remember very much in detail, and if you were questioned you might not be able to reproduce very much in detail or even in outline; but at the same time there are these broad general impressions that persist, that remain. And one of these is, surely, that as a result of hearing, as a result of listening to these talks, these lectures, you will think of the Bodhisattva as following a certain way of life. You will think of the Bodhisattva or the would-be Bodhisattva as performing, for instance, the 'Sevenfold Puja'; you will think of him as developing the Bodhicitta, the Will to Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings; think of him as making his 'Four Great Vows', practising the *Paramitas*, and so on. You will think of him as living and working and unfolding in this way. In other words you will think of him as treading a certain path. And in the same way, you will think of him undoubtedly as aiming at a certain goal - the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, the goal of Supreme Buddhahood. These at least are the sort of impressions with which one will be left after sitting through, after listening to, this course of lectures.

And these impressions, though very general - not to say vague - as far as they go are, of course, perfectly correct. It's true to say that the Bodhisattva follows a path, what we call the Path of the Bodhisattva, and it's true that the Bodhisattva does aim at a goal, the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. But though this is true, though these impressions are correct, there is at the same time a sort of danger; and the danger consists in the fact that these expressions, as when we speak of the Bodhisattva as following a path, arriving at a goal - these expressions are in fact metaphorical. We don't always realize that, we don't always realize how much of our thought, how much of our speech, how much of our communication is metaphorical. It's not to be taken literally; it is suggestive. It's meant to stimulate, even inspire. It's not meant to communicate in a clear-cut, scientific, sort of quasi-mathematical fashion. So there is the danger that we may forget this and there's the danger that we may start taking these metaphors - these metaphors with the help of which we try to make clear what is going on in the spiritual life - the danger is that we may start taking these somewhat too literally and trying to press them to logical conclusions.

Now let us look into this just a little more closely. Suppose that we're walking along the road - something that often happens to us. So in due course, having covered a certain distance, having covered a certain ground, in due course we arrive at our destination, which is, say, a house. This is a simple enough situation, a simple enough sort of experience, but what are the facts involved? What are the facts of the situation? The facts of the situation are that

we have changed our position, but we have changed it on the same plane, as it were, on the same level, as it were. And the house therefore is, in a sense, a continuation of the road, because it is on the same level, the same plane.

Now it is only too easy, too fatally easy, to think of the Bodhisattva's Path and the Bodhisattva goal in the same sort of way, rather literally. It's only too easy to think of the Bodhisattva's path, leading up, as it were, to Buddhahood as though to the door of a house. We think of the Bodhisattva as going along step by step, stage by stage, and one day he comes up against this great and wonderful door or gateway of Nirvana, all glistening and pearly and golden and there it is, just like coming to the door of a house, and he just enters, he just goes in. And this is the way in which we think of these things, these experiences and we can't in a way help it. But it isn't really like that at all. When you come to the end of the Bodhisattva path, when you come in fact to the end of the spiritual path, you don't find a gate, you don't find a doorway - you don't find any sort of house, any sort of spiritual, any sort of celestial mansion waiting for you. So what do you find? When you get to the end of the path, you don't find anything at all. You don't find anything at all - there's just nothing there. The path just ends. The path just comes to an end. The path just stops, and there you are at the end of the path with nothing there. The path, as I've said, just ends. So you find yourself, as it were, (again a metaphor so don't start taking it literally), you find yourself at the edge of a precipice. The path has gone on nicely, step by step, stage by stage, mile after mile, and you had counted all those milestones, and you were expecting to arrive in comfort at the door, the entrance of a great house, a mansion, but no - you find that the path ends right at the edge of a precipice. And there you are standing right on the edge of the precipice, and the precipice goes down not just a few feet, or even a few miles, it just goes down to infinity. Now what is one to do?

The Zen people, who are also involved here, the Zen people put it another way. The Zen people say that the spiritual life is like climbing up a flagpole. So eventually with great effort - and the flagpole is supposed to be rather slippery, if not deliberately greased - by fate or circumstances - eventually, with a lot of effort and struggle you get to the top of the flagpole. It goes up a very very long way we are told - this particular flagpole. So when you get to the top what happens? Well when you get to the top you can't go any further up - obviously, and it is also impossible to come down. Why is it impossible to come down? Because beneath, below there's the Zen master standing with a big stick! So you dare not come down, and you can't go up. And, worst of all, at the top of the flagpole there is no cosy little platform on which you can settle down, like St. Simeon Stylites or anything like that. There is nothing there, there is just empty space. So you're afraid to jump of course. So you can't go up, you can't go down, you can't stay there, and you can't jump off. So what is one to do? This is what the Zen people put to one. Well, it's quite impossible to say. One just can't say. No statement is possible. So I'm afraid I shall have to leave you all on the top of the flagpole!

We are not concerned this evening with that particular predicament, not concerned with it, that is to say, directly, but only as illustrating the sort of the point that I'm trying to make, namely that 'path' and 'goal' are discontinuous. Contrary to what we usually think, contrary to our usual metaphorical mode of description, Enlightenment is not reached by following a path. Enlightenment is not reached by following a path. In the sense that at the end of the path there's Enlightenment staring you in the face. Well no such thing happens, no such thing occurs, no such thing takes place. At the same time this does not mean that the path should not be followed. Paradoxically enough, one follows the path knowing it doesn't lead anywhere, doesn't arrive anywhere. However, we're not concerned this evening with that either. What we are trying to say, what we are trying to point out, trying to make clear is the fact that the path and the goal occupy, as it were, different dimensions. One, we may say is the dimension of time and the other is the dimension of eternity, and one will not arrive at the one by the indefinite prolongation of the other; by the indefinite prolongation of time going on and on and on in time indefinitely you never reach eternity, you never get to eternity. You never reach that other dimension. It's rather like or it would be like trying to arrive at a two-dimensional figure by the prolongation of a one-dimensional line: however far you may go in that direction, prolonging the line, protracting the line even to infinity, you never will arrive at a two-dimensional figure.

So the two - eternity on the one hand, time on the other, and goal on the one hand, the path on the other - these are discontinuous, discrete as we may say.

Now the Bodhisattva, about whom we've been speaking over the last few weeks, the Bodhisattva represents the dimension of time, because - obviously - the Bodhisattva path is followed in time. It's something that happens, this following of the path in time - it has a past, and a present and a future; it doesn't go beyond time. But the Buddha represents the dimension of eternity. The Buddha represents the goal, and the goal is gained out of time. One reaches the end of the path in time, but one shouldn't think that one attains the goal in time: one can attain the goal out of time or one can put it another way and say that the goal is eternally attained.

We usually - and up to a point quite justifiably - think of the Buddha as an historical figure, and this is quite correct as far as it goes. And we think of the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment as an historical event. We say, for instance, it took place two thousand five hundred years ago - we might even name the year, might even name the day. So we look upon the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment as something occurring in time, within this dimension of time. And so long as we make it clear that we're speaking popularly, conventionally, then this isn't altogether wrong. But then only too often we go on to think of Buddhahood itself as existing in time. And this is

quite wrong, this is altogether wrong because though the Buddha as historical person may exist within time, Buddhahood itself exists outside time: Buddhahood itself exists in what we call the dimension of eternity. We can in fact think of the Buddha himself as existing simultaneously on two different levels: on the level of time, as a human, historical figure, and on the level of eternity, as Reality. And we can think of him as existing also, in addition to these two, in an intermediate, as it were archetypal realm. And this brings us of course, as some of you may have perceived, brings us at once to what is known in Buddhism as the *Trikaya* doctrine, the doctrine of what some scholars are pleased to call, as I mentioned the other week, 'the Buddha's three bodies'.

Now this doctrine has been, and still is, much misunderstood. *Trikaya* does literally mean 'three bodies', or 'three personalities', or 'three individualities', but the literal meaning of the term is not to be taken too seriously. It's not really a question of three bodies, much less still is it a question of three Buddhas, but rather of one Buddha, or one Buddha-nature, functioning on three different levels, three different planes.

First of all they're what we call the *Nirmanakaya* - the first of the so-called 'three bodies'. This term literally means 'created body', or 'body of transformation'. And this is, or this represents the Buddha as functioning on the human, historical level, as subject to birth, old age and death. And the *Nirmanakaya* therefore obviously corresponds to Gautama the Buddha, to Sakyamuni, whom we know as an historical figure.

Secondly, there is the *Sambhogakaya*, which literally means the 'body of mutual enjoyment'. It is sometimes rendered more poetically - less accurately, but more truthfully - as the 'glorious body' of the Buddha, or 'body of glory'. And this is the archetypal Buddha form. This is the form in which or the form under which the Buddha is perceived by advanced Bodhisattvas dwelling on a much higher level of consciousness, a much higher meditative state, a *dhyana* or *samadhi* state, much higher than that on which we usually function and operate. And this is the form - this archetypal form of the Buddha - is the form under which the Bodhisattvas are said to 'enjoy' him or to 'enjoy' the vision of the Buddha.

And this particular body, this particular *kaya*, the *Sambhogakaya*, the 'body of glory', the 'glorious body', has a number of different aspects, a number of different facets. The principal aspects are five in number and these are known as the 'Five Jinas', or 'Five Conquerors', or if you like, more simply, the 'Five Buddhas'. And they appear often in Buddhist art: sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. And it is important to remember that they don't represent the human historical Buddha, but different aspects, different facets, of this glorified Buddha, or this archetypal Buddha, existing on this higher, this archetypal plane, in between the plane we usually experience and the plane of Absolute Reality. I am going to say just a few words about each of these 'Five Jinas' or 'Five Buddhas' in turn.

First of all there is *Vairocana*. The name meaning 'The Illuminator'. Sometimes called 'The Great Sun Buddha', because just as the sun illumines the physical cosmos, so the archetypal Buddha, Vairocana, illumines, as it were, the whole spiritual cosmos. And he is represented in Buddhist art as being of a dazzling white colour, and his hands are in the teaching mudra - or more technically, the *dharmacakrapravartana mudra*, the *mudra* of turning the wheel of the Law, turning the wheel of the Truth, which is just like this. And he holds in his hands at the same time an eight-spoked golden wheel - which is obviously a sort of solar symbol. And when Vairocana, the Illuminator, is represented in a mandala - in a circle of these archetypal forms - he usually occupies the central position.

Secondly comes *Akshobya*, 'the Imperturbable' who is represented as being of a dark blue colour, just like the blue midnight sky on a very clear night, especially in the tropics, as you might imagine it without any stars. A deep dark rich blue colour, the colour of Akshobya, 'the Imperturbable', one who cannot be moved, as it were. And his right hand is in the *mudra* which is called *bhumisparsa*, touching the earth, calling the earth to witness. I have spoken about this in another context - I'm not going to elaborate upon it now. And his emblem is the vajra, the thunderbolt, the dorje. The symbol of indestructible strength and power. The dorje which represents Wisdom, the Wisdom which smashes everything which opposes it, which destroys all error and all illusion. And Akshobya is associated with the East.

And thirdly comes *Amitabha*, which means 'The Infinite Light'. And Amitabha is red in colour. It's usually represented as a beautiful, deep, rich red, very much like the colour of the setting sun when it's seen, as it were, through a little mist, just before it actually sets. And the mudra of Amitabha is the meditation mudra, with one hand simply resting upon the other. And his emblem is the lotus, which is the symbol of spiritual rebirth, and he is associated with the Western direction.

Fourth, *Ratnasambhava*, 'The Jewel Born', or 'The Jewel Producing'. And he is golden-yellow in colour. And his right hand exhibits the *mudra* of giving, of generosity - the *varada mudra* - the mudra of supreme gifts, is especially the gift of the Dharma itself. And his emblem is the jewel. And he is associated with the South.

And then fifthly and lastly, *Amoghasiddhi*, which means 'Unobstructed Success', or 'infallible Success'. And Amoghasiddhi is a dark green colour, and his right hand exhibits the *mudra* of fearlessness: he says, as it were,

"Fear not! Be free from fear!" And his emblem is the double dorje - two thunderbolts or two vajras crossed. He is associated with the North.

As we saw the week before last, these 'Five Buddhas' are also associated with the Five Wisdoms, but into this we are not going today. Now these Five Buddhas - the white and the dark blue and the red and the yellow and the green - these Five Buddhas are so many different aspects of the *Sambhogakaya*, the archetypal Buddha form, the body, as it were, of glory. And there are many other aspects. These five are only the five chief ones, there are scores, even hundreds, even thousands of aspects, far too numerous to mention, but all of them, as it were, archetypal: all existing on this higher archetypal plane, intermediate, as it were, between ordinary earthbound human consciousness and the level, as it were, of the Ultimate, of the Absolute Reality.

So all these are out of time as we usually experience it, but not out of time altogether: occupying, as it were, a time scale different from that of our normal waking consciousness. We ourselves are not always altogether out of touch with this archetypal world, this world, as it were, of the *Sambhogakaya*. We may say that we touch sometimes the fringes of this archetypal world in very deep meditation, in some dreams, sort of archetypal dreams, and perhaps in aesthetic experience also of a more truly visionary nature.

So this is the *Sambhogakaya*, the second of the Buddha's Three Bodies - the 'body of mutual enjoyment' or 'glorious body'.

And thirdly and lastly comes the *Dharmakaya*. Usually translated as 'body of truth', though this is not indeed a very satisfactory translation. A more accurate rendering would be 'the aspect of Absolute Reality'. The *Dharmakaya* represents Buddhahood as it is in itself, or the Buddha as he is in himself. And the *Dharmakaya* therefore represents the real, the true, the genuine, the ultimate, Buddha. Not the human Buddha, not the historical Buddha, not even the archetypal Buddha. And therefore we find the Buddha saying in the *Diamond Sutra*, in a verse which is very famous in the Buddhist world and often recited:

*Those who by my form did see me,  
(form meaning the human historical form)  
And those who followed me by voice  
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,  
Me those people will not see.*

*From the Dharma should one see the Buddhas,  
From the Dharma bodies comes their guidance.  
Yet Dharma's true nature cannot be discerned,  
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.*

So this is what the Buddha says in the *Diamond Sutra*. That the Buddha is saying that the Buddha is not really his physical body, nor even his archetypal form, the Buddha is the *Dharmakaya*. The Buddha is, as it were, Reality.

Now the message of another great Mahayana text, the *Saddharma-pundarika*, is similar. In fact in a way it's even more explicit. I don't know how many of you have seen or have read this particular sutra, but it is worth pointing out that this sutra, the *saddharma-pundarika* which means 'the White Lotus Flower of the Good Doctrine', this particular sutra employs the non-conceptual mode of communication. We have seen, on more than one occasion that there are two modes of communication - one conceptual, through abstract ideas, concepts, and the other non-conceptual, the other speaking the language of parable and myth and so on and this the language which the *Saddharma-pundarika* speaks predominantly. And I have in mind a particular episode, when suddenly, according to the text, millions of Bodhisattvas appear from the earth. You can imagine how staggered everybody was! There they were, sitting round the Buddha under a tree somewhere in northern India, and maybe a few hundred of these ascetics and monks and maybe householders, a few princes and so on, a few merchants, and suddenly, we are told, out of the fissures of the earth, there came millions of Bodhisattvas - quite an extraordinary sort of thing to happen, even during the lifetime of the Buddha!

And the Buddha, when he saw all these millions of Bodhisattvas issuing from the fissures of the earth, he said, addressing the other ordinary human disciples, "Oh yes, these are all my disciples. I've taught and trained them all." So the ordinary human disciples expressed, according to the sutra, their astonishment when they heard the Buddha claiming to have taught and trained these millions of Bodhisattvas who had appeared in this miraculous manner, and they said, "But look here, you were Enlightened only forty years ago. And we recognize, we admit that you've been working pretty hard! Teaching all sorts of beings and you haven't really wasted any time, but these millions of Bodhisattvas, that's a bit too much to ask us to believe. How could you possibly have trained so many of them? Some of these Bodhisattvas are not just ordinary novice Bodhisattvas, they've been following the Bodhisattva path for ages, for kalpas, hundreds of lives, thousands of years, so how can they possibly be your disciples?" They said, "It's just like a young man of twenty-five pointing out a collection of centenarians, all men of a hundred, and saying, 'They're all my sons.' It's just impossible."

So at this point, according to the sutra, the Buddha makes his great revelation, the one towards which the whole sutra has been working up, as it were, a revelation which is the keynote of the sutra. And the Buddha says, "Don't think that I was Enlightened forty years ago. That is just your way of looking at it. I am eternally Enlightened." And when the Buddha makes that statement obviously it isn't the *Nirmanakaya* speaking, it's not the *Sambhogakaya* speaking - it's the *Dharmakaya* speaking. In other words it's the real Buddha speaking, the eternal Buddha speaking or Buddhahood itself speaking, not any particular person, not any particular individual, however great.

So when one speaks of the eternal Buddha, or when the *Saddharma-pundarika sutra* speaks in terms of the eternal Buddha, one is not to understand the word 'eternal' in the sense of indefinitely prolonged in time, but rather in the sense of being outside time altogether. And this means therefore that for the *Saddharma-pundarika*, as for the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha symbolizes the dimension of eternity, or symbolizes Reality as existing outside time. And this is why we speak of 'The Buddha and the Bodhisattva: Eternity and Time'. The Buddha here represents this dimension of eternity, the dimension above and beyond, or outside, time.

And similarly therefore the Bodhisattva represents the dimension of time, or represents Reality - represents even Buddhahood - as manifesting in - though this again is metaphorical - time. And it isn't very difficult to understand how this should be so, how the Bodhisattva should represent or symbolize the dimension of time, because, as we have seen, the Bodhisattva follows the path, engages in certain activities, originates, that is to say, a certain sequence of thoughts and words and deeds, and this sequence is progressive. In other words the Bodhisattva manifests the relative Bodhicitta to an ever increasing degree, and all this - this whole process - takes place in time. And this is the process of what we've elsewhere called the process of the Higher Evolution, or rather it's the upper reaches of the Higher Evolution.

But we can take a view even broader than this. We can regard the Bodhisattva as symbolizing the whole evolutionary process, the whole process of life going on to higher and ever higher forms, symbolizing not only the Higher Evolution itself, but even the lower evolution - the evolution that is to say from the very beginnings of life up to man in his unenlightened state, just as the Higher Evolution is the evolution, the development, of man from the unenlightened to the Enlightened state, the state of Buddhahood. We can regard all this as being, in a way, one continuous process; or at least we can regard the process or the course of the Higher Evolution as arising in dependence upon the lower one.

And this view, we may say, this interpretation we may say, is supported by the *Jataka* stories. The *Jatakas*, many of you may know, are one particular branch of Buddhist canonical literature (there are also many non-canonical *Jatakas*) And traditionally the *Jatakas* are stories of some of the previous lives of Gautama the Buddha. You all know, you all understand that Buddhism traditionally teaches rebirth, or what it popularly known in the West as reincarnation, and this of course applies to the Buddha himself - the Buddha had innumerable previous lives, previous existences according to tradition. And the stories of some of these previous lives are given in that branch of literature which we call the *Jataka* stories, and these *Jataka* stories show how, from life to life, the Buddha or the future Buddha, the Bodhisattva, advanced in the direction of Enlightenment.

Now scholars have had a look at these *Jataka* stories - you know what scholars are like, they sort of probe and they penetrate and they turn over and they ask all sorts of awkward questions - so scholars in the West have had a look at these *Jataka* stories, and they've discovered that quite a number of them are old Indian folk tales, that have been turned into *Jatakas* by the simple process of identifying the Buddha with the hero. It's rather as though in the West we had taken all Aesop's Fables, and identified, say, Christ, five hundred years later, with the principal character in each fable, and regarded the fable as being a birth story, telling the story, of one of the previous lives of Christ. So this is what the Buddhists, the early Buddhists did, apparently, with a vast

mass of Indian folklore: they turned these folk stories into *Jatakas* by the simple process of identifying the Buddha with the hero of the story, and this applies particularly to the non-canonical *Jatakas*. It doesn't apply in quite the same way to the canonical *Jatakas*, but there's only about thirty of them, not more, whereas there are well over five hundred and fifty non-canonical *Jataka* stories.

So this whole subject has occasioned quite a lot of discussion among scholars, especially as some of the folk tales are in fact animal fables. So the result is if you take it literally that the Buddha is identified as having been the particular animal who is the hero of that particular story. And some scholars ask of course whether Buddhists take all this quite literally, whether we are in fact to think that the particular hero, who might have been a hare, or a deer, or a lion, or a goat etc., really represented the Buddha as he was in his own previous existence, his own previous life. Now we need not be quite so literal minded. In some parts of the Buddhist East they are literal-minded and they do quite honestly regard the *Jatakas* as really and truly representing or depicting the actual previous lives of the Buddha. Simple minded people everywhere take things in this way, and so Buddhists in the East often think that the hare *Jataka*, for instance, in the course of which the Buddha is born as a hare and sacrifices his life, represents a real historical previous life of the Buddha. But we need not be quite so simple minded as that. But we can say, adopting the more intelligent point of view perhaps, that the *Jatakas* quite clearly represent or depict a sort of evolutionary process, because in each *Jataka* there's a situation, there's a story, there are a number of characters,

and in each *Jataka* there is a hero. In other words there's someone, a man or an animal, who stands out from the rest, who stands above the rest, as it were, who is more advanced than the rest, and who therefore may be said to represent, in comparison with the rest, a more advanced, a higher stage of evolution. And it's significant that this particular figure, this hero figure, is identified with the Buddha. And this means that this figure represents at that particular stage that same evolutionary - here 'lower' evolutionary - urge which ultimately resulted in the 'production', single inverted commas, of a Buddha, that is to say a *Nirmanakaya* Buddha in the future.

Now just as the end result, as it were, is symbolized by the Buddha, so this evolutionary urge itself is symbolized by the Bodhisattva, and the Buddha of course in the *Jatakas* is always referred to as the Bodhisattva. And we are told that the hero of the story was in fact the Bodhisattva. In other words, the Buddha to be.

Now to get back to what we were previously talking about, we have therefore two principles: we've a principle of Buddhahood out of time, in the dimension of eternity, and we've a principle of Bodhisattvahood in the dimension of time. One, the principle of Buddhahood, eternity is transcendent, the other, the principle of Bodhisattvahood, in time, the principle of growth, evolution, development, is immanent. The one, the first represents perfection eternally complete, eternally achieved. The other represents perfection everlastingly in process of achievement, in the world order, through the evolutionary process. And the two are discontinuous. The one does not lead into the other. They are discontinuous, discrete.

Now the question which arises is "Can we leave them like this?" Is this the last word that can be said on the subject, that here you've got Buddha, there you've got Bodhisattva, there you've got eternity, there you've got time, discontinuous, discrete. Is this the last word that can be said on the subject? Well certainly not according to the Mahayana, and especially not according to the Tantra. There's no question though of merging one into the other. The solution isn't as easy as that. It isn't saying, "Well time is illusory, merge it in eternity," or, "Eternity is illusory, merge it in time." No. They both are, irreducibly there - Buddhahood, Bodhisattvahood, eternity, time - they can't be merged, the one in the other. So it isn't a question of doing that.

Rather, according to the Mahayana and again especially according to the Tantra, it's a question of realizing both of them simultaneously. In other words realizing Buddha and Bodhisattva simultaneously, eternity and time simultaneously. Seeing everything as eternally achieved and at the same time eternally in process of achievement. Seeing that these two do not contradict each other. One may say one has to see that everything moves but nothing moves. Sometimes one may have that feeling, that sensation, one is moving, one is walking perhaps, even running, but nothing moves. The two are there both, in a sense, contradictory - movement but no movement - but they're both there - one can deny neither of them.

In the same way, one may say the Buddha sits eternally beneath the Bodhi tree. The Buddha has always sat beneath the Bodhi tree and always will sit. At the same time the Bodhisattva is eternally practising the *paramitas*, the Perfections, life after life to infinity, and that these two, Buddha and Bodhisattva, represent different aspects of one - one might even say the same, Reality. And it's the realization of this - the realization of Buddha together with Bodhisattva, eternity together with time, no movement together with movement - it's the realization of this that constitutes the arising of the Absolute Bodhicitta, though at the same time there's no question of 'arising'.

Now the essence of this Absolute Bodhicitta is very beautifully expressed in certain Tibetan verses. These verses have never been published; they were privately translated some time ago. They are part of a *sadhana*, that is of course a spiritual practice, which is known as '*The Confounder of Hell*'. And the Confounder of Hell is one of the titles of Vajrasattva, and this particular practice is a form or part of a form of Vajrasattva Yoga. These texts - both the main text and the condensed version were translated in Kalimpong, as it so happens, almost exactly ten years ago, within a matter almost of days, and I'm going to read these verses because they give one a very good idea, so far as one can have an idea at all about the nature, the content, of the Absolute Bodhicitta.

They start off with a sort of mantra-like exclamation about which I'll say a word first. And the mantra-like exclamation is "*E MA O*", which is sometimes pronounced quickly as a single word - *EMAO*, like that, and it comes at the beginning of certain verses or certain things to be recited in the Tibetan tradition, and it's meant to express extreme wonder. You remember Plato said that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder, so one might even say that the spiritual life begins with a sense of wonder. When you come into contact with, when you come across anything numinous, transcendent, overwhelming, overpowering, your reaction is one of wonder and astonishment. You're impressed - as I say almost overwhelmed by that. So the verse, each of the verses starts in this way, with this exclamation of wonder and astonishment at the vision, as it were, of the Absolute Bodhicitta which is about to dawn on one. So:

*E MA O*  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Deepest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*  
*Within the birthless all things take their birth,*  
*Yet in what's born there is no birth.*

*E MA O*  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*  
*Within the ceaseless all things cease to be,*  
*Yet in that ceasing nothing ceases.*

*E MA O*  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*  
*Within the non-abiding all abides,*  
*Yet thus abiding there abideth nought.*

*E MA O*  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*  
*In non-perception everything's perceived,*  
*Yet this perceiving's quite perceptionless.*

*E MA O*  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*  
*In the unmoving all things come and go,*  
*Yet in that movement nothing ever moves.*

So these are the verses expressing the essence, as far as it can be expressed of the Absolute Bodhicitta. And these verses are to be recited and meditated upon in the course of one of these forms of the Vajrasattva Yoga. They represent, as you can see, as you can understand, two different aspects of reality. They bring together, they juxtapose in a single vision - they blend if you like, without confusing, two different aspects of Reality. Reality as existing out of time in, as it were, eternity, and Reality as progressively revealed in time.

Now it's very difficult for the mind to go beyond this point. But this doesn't mean that the Absolute Bodhicitta is too rarefied, too remote for us to practise, at least to some extent. To begin with, we have to realize that however long time goes on, time never reaches eternity; time just goes on and on. - time, we may say, does not go beyond time. There's no question of any getting nearer and nearer to eternity as time goes on, any nearer to the Absolute, any nearer to Buddhahood, which is in the dimension of eternity. So that in say a million years we'll be no nearer to eternity than we are now, no nearer to Buddhahood - no nearer to Enlightenment, just by going on and on in time. We'll be no nearer at all.

So this sounds pretty hopeless. That however long you go on in time you never get there, you never reach eternity, never reach Buddhahood. It's a different dimension. But it isn't really as hopeless as it looks, because you can turn it the other way round and you can say that at this very moment we're as near to Enlightenment, to eternity, as we shall ever be. We might even say that even a Bodhisattva, on the very threshold of Enlightenment, just a minute before he gets it, is no nearer really than we are at this moment. And this is really something to meditate upon, something to ponder. That every moment is the last moment. After all every moment is the last moment, whether it's this moment, or the next, or whether it's a moment occurring after a million years. Every moment is the last moment, and beyond the last moment there's only Buddhahood. Whether it's this moment or the moment that comes in a million years when perhaps we're on the threshold of Enlightenment. There's only this moment, and after this moment there's only Buddhahood. So every moment in fact, though we don't know it - if we did know it what a terrible reaction there would be! - that every moment we find ourselves at the top, in fact, of the flagpole, and all that we have to do is ..... well, what?!

So you can see that we've gone quite a long way tonight. At the same time we haven't gone anywhere. We've completed our journey, our journey along the Bodhisattva path. At the same time we've realized that the goal of the journey is eternally achieved and eternally in process of being achieved. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva, eternity and time, are one - or are not two. And with that insight achieved, we bring to an end our exploration of Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal.