

The Higher Evolution of Man

Tape 79: Buddhism as the Path of the Higher Evolution

I think nearly everybody knows by this time that, so far as possible, I prefer to give complete courses of lectures, that is to say not just one single odd isolated lecture on one particular occasion but a whole complete course of, say, 6 or 8 or even 10 lectures. There is a reason for this, a very definite reason: the reason being that a course of lectures enables one to explore any given subject systematically, to cover all its aspects, to look at it from all possible, or at least many different, angles. It also affords one the opportunity of exploring that particular subject in depth. Not only that, we find as we go on from week to week, exploring now this aspect, now that aspect, penetrating a little more deeply, a little more deeply still, we find proceeding in this way that interest builds up, concentration even builds up from week to week; because each week we see just a few more pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, as it were, fitting into place. We see gradually, before our eyes as it were, chaos reduced to some sort of order, some sort even of harmony. Not only that, but each week adds to our information on that particular subject and not only adds to our information but deepens perhaps, we hope, our understanding of it. As the weeks go by, as we gather information, as we understand more deeply, we feel perhaps that we are getting somewhere, that we are beginning to see, beginning to understand. One might say, in fact, that following a course of lectures in this way is very much like going on a journey. Some of you may remember that last winter I spoke, in the course of the lectures, very much in these terms. In fact, I may even say that I rather overworked this particular metaphor and this is why I haven't been using it this year, this metaphor of the journey, even the pilgrimage.

But tonight I am afraid I am tempted rather to revert to this particular metaphor just at least for this week. And there is a special reason for so doing. That is that tonight we find ourselves half-way through our present journey, that is to say half-way through our current course. We have had four lectures. Four more, including tonight, are yet to come. Now when we are travelling to a certain place, when we are on a journey and when we find ourselves half-way there, what is it that we usually do? When we find ourselves half-way there, what we usually do, or would like to do, is to stop for a little refreshment. We like to stop and find, perhaps, a nice comfortable half-way house. But I am afraid that tonight I've no refreshment to offer. There is no half-way house here. In fact, I am going to offer, instead, a short recapitulation of ground covered so far, which some people find - far from being refreshment - rather hard, not to say unpalatable fare. Others, however, find a recapitulation of this sort rather useful, especially if they have been obliged to miss a lecture or if, even, they have come in as it were half-way through the course.

Recapitulation

Now we know that at present we are concerned with the Higher Evolution of Man. We have already understood, I hope, week by week more deeply, that this is the most important subject with which we could possibly occupy ourselves - the subject of the Higher Evolution of Man, our own potential higher evolution and development. We began, in the first lecture, by distinguishing what we now call the Lower Evolution and the Higher Evolution. And we saw first, before going into this distinction, that the whole of existence at all levels consists of one gigantic process of development, a development from lower to higher levels of being, of existence, of consciousness, even of organisation.

And we saw further, most importantly, that Man himself is included in this great process and that we can study Man, study ourselves, in two different ways, from two different points of view. We can study Man in terms of what he has developed out of, what he had grown up from, and this constitutes the Lower Evolution. We can study him, too, in terms of what he will develop into, at least what he *can* develop into, and this, this whole tremendous range of possibilities and potentialities lying now before us, above us, ahead of us, is what we call the Higher Evolution. The first, the Lower Evolution, we saw is covered by physics, chemistry, biology, whereas the second is covered by what, borrowing a term from Middleton Murry, we call the metabiological sciences, that is to say covered by psychology, 'religion', philosophy, by even the Fine Arts.

And we saw on our chart that the whole process of the Lower Evolution is covered by the section of the hypotenuse Point 1 up to Point 2. We saw that Point Zero represents the beginning, the start, the commencement of the whole evolutionary process. Then we saw that Point 1 represents the point of the emergence of human consciousness in the distinctively human sense. Then we saw that point 3 is the point at which the awareness of reality begins to dawn, and then we saw that the Point of Infinity is the culmination of the evolutionary process, that point of what, in Buddhism, we call Nirvana, the point of what we call Buddhahood, and so on.

We saw further that these points divide the whole evolutionary process into four distinct sections. These we called the Infra-human, the Human (primitive and civilised), the Ultra-human, and the Trans-human or even the Supra-human. In this way we saw that the whole process of evolution, from the bottom right up to the top, is covered, is comprehended. This means that we ourselves can see exactly where we stand. We saw that Man at the best at which we usually know him stands right in the middle of this great evolutionary process. Man stands, we may say, at the watershed dividing the Lower from the Higher Evolution, that is to say that Man stands, fairly and squarely, on Point 2. Most of us, we also saw, regrettably come considerably below this point, many being perhaps not very much above Point 1. This reminded us of the fact that, for the majority of people, humanity, the true human status, in the sense of development of a distinctively human consciousness and awareness, humanity is very much something still to be achieved. So much, then, for the first lecture which laid as it were the foundation, the basis, for the whole course, the whole series. And this is why I have recapitulated this first lecture in some detail.

Now let us proceed, much more briefly, to the next three lectures. In the second lecture we studied the *Axial Age*. That is to say we studied that very rich, very productive, very glorious 600-year period from 800 to 200 BC. We saw that this was the period of human history when the Higher Evolution really began. We saw that it was a period of intense spiritual awakening, intense spiritual creativity, practically over the entire civilised world. We saw, for instance, that in China it was the age of Confucius and Lao Tzu; in India, of the Buddha, Mahavira, and the Upanishadic sages; in Persia, of the great prophet Zarathustra; and in Palestine, of the Hebrew prophets. In Greece again it was the period, the age, of Socrates, Plato, their followers, friends and contemporaries. We saw further that all these figures, whether of China, India, Persia, Palestine, Greece, all these towering personalities had certain things in common, certain great characteristics in common. We saw that above all they were and are *all* individuals. We saw that they stood out and still stand out from the mass, not just members of the mass, not just members of the herd. We saw that they stood out, that they all were in fact what we called New Men. We saw that all had started, have started, in greater or lesser degree on the Higher Evolution of Man. And we saw, therefore, further that the Axial Age is of importance as the age of the emergence of the New Man. We closed this particular lecture by studying in some detail some of the characteristics of the New Man. We saw that the New Man is characterised by self-consciousness or awareness, by true individuality, by creativity, by aloneness and, only too frequently, also by unpopularity.

Then in the third lecture we dealt with another great phase of this whole subject of the Higher Evolution of Man. We dealt with *Art and the Spiritual Life* and by 'Art' we meant all the Fine Arts; spiritual life, of course, corresponding to the Higher Evolution itself. We tried to illustrate, in the course of this lecture, that the true artist, too, was a species of New Man and that he shared the characteristics of the New Man. We studied, too, the nature of art itself. We saw that art could be defined as 'the organisation of sensuous impressions that expresses the artist's sensibility and communicates to his audience a sense of values that can transform their lives'. The greater part of that lecture was an exposition, in fact, of this definition. We saw, for instance, that the true artist has access to higher states of consciousness, higher modes of being than the ordinary man. And we saw, too, how this all worked out in terms of our chart. We tried to see just where the artist stands. We were concerned, in this connection, with the two middle sections of our chart, that is to say from Point 1 to Point 3. In other words we were concerned with the higher section of the Lower Evolution and with the lower section of the Higher Evolution; and for the sake of clarity we transferred this particular section to a separate chart.

On this separate chart we saw that the line 1 to 3 represents, within the general evolutionary process, the scale of artistic development. Like the previous chart, the hypotenuse on this chart is divided by point 2; in other words, the point of the emergence of self-consciousness, distinctively human consciousness in the higher sense. And then we saw that each of these two sections can be subdivided, so that we have points 1(A) and 2(A). 1(A) represents the average human consciousness, half-way between the lowest human consciousness (represented by point 1) and the what we may describe as self-consciousness in the more highly developed human sense. Point 2(A) represents the highly artistic consciousness, the consciousness of the true artist or even of the artistic genius. In this way we find this section of the hypotenuse divides into four sections. Section (a) was the stage of no art at all, (b) was folk art, (c) was the level of the fine arts, and (d) was the level of supreme artistic achievement. We saw further that the majority of artists, the majority of artistic work, fell into the section 2 to 3, the majority of artists coming in (c) and just a few in (d), a very few indeed of whom - just a few, perhaps - penetrated, at least sometimes, even beyond point 3.

Last week we studied *Religion: Ethnic and Universal*. Once again, we covered an immense amount of ground. We took as our starting point the question of the disappearance of Buddhism from India. We saw that there were five principal reasons for this: 1. centralisation of monastic life; 2. dependence on and eventual failure of royal patronage; 3. hostility of the Brahmins; 4. partial absorption of Buddhism by Hinduism; and 5. the Muslim invasion. We then went on to consider the characteristics of Ethnic Religion and of Universal Religion. We saw that ethnic religion was basically collective, practised by Man not as an individual but as a member of a group, of a community; and we saw that Universal religion was individual, practised by the individual as such, not practised by the individual as a member of a group. We then proceeded to classify existing religions. We saw that Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism, and Shinto, for instance, were all ethnic religions and that they belonged as such to the Lower Evolution of Man. Then we saw that Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, were universal religions and belonged, therefore, to the Higher Evolution. We touched on various other points as well. We saw that universal religions always emerge, arise, in the midst of ethnic religions, and that they are in some sense continuous with them. The universal religion speaks the language, as it were, of the ethnic religion in whose midst it arises. In so doing it refines that language but at the same time there is a danger; that danger being embodied in the rule, or the law, if you like, that a universal religion becomes - inevitably, it seems - in course of time transformed into an ethnic religion. It becomes not individual any longer but collective. We saw that this had happened with Christianity, saw that this had happened with Buddhism, due to the operation of what I called the gravitational pull. At the same time we saw that the universal religion cannot cut itself off completely from the ethnic. The universal religion has its roots deep down in the ethnic, just as the Higher Evolution has its roots in the Lower Evolution. We saw, too, the importance of continuity, how it was important that the universal religion should be in complete continuity with the ethnic religion, so that one can look back, as it were, over one's previous spiritual, religious history - the spiritual, the religious history of the community, the nation - and trace it right back to the beginnings. And we saw that so far as the West is concerned that continuity of religious life had been sadly interrupted by militant Christianity which sought to destroy Paganism wherever it penetrated. And we saw, too, that nowadays it is important for us in the West to try to establish or re-establish contact with our pre-Christian, Pagan roots. I even went so far as to say that there must be, in a sense, a revival of paganism and only then could Buddhism flourish, on the principle of 'no root - no flower'. And it was on this rather provocative note that we closed last week. So, so much for the first four lectures. I am sorry to have hurried you through all this material so rapidly but we really must get on now to the subject matter of the evening.

Buddhism As the Path of the Higher Evolution

We come tonight, of course, to the beginning of the second half of the course, to the subject of *Buddhism as the Path of the Higher Evolution*. Now those who have been following closely, week by week, will, I think, have noticed something. We have been, of course, concerned throughout with the subject of Evolution, of development, of growth; been concerned especially

with the subject of the Higher Evolution. But you may have noticed that each week we have been concerned with it within a more and more restricted field or context. In the first lecture we were concerned with the whole evolutionary process, both the lower evolution and the higher evolution; which means that we were concerned with a period of hundreds of millions of years, beginning with the first dawns of life upon this planet, right up to Man at the highest conceivable pitch of his development. In the second lecture we were concerned with a much more limited period. We were concerned with a period of human history which is a period of simply half a million years, and within this period we were concerned especially with the Axial Age - and so on. I am not going to apply this to the remaining lectures. But I want just to emphasise, to draw attention to this point: that each week we have been concerned with a more and more restricted field, a more and more restricted context.

At the same time we have found, you may have noticed, that the more restricted the context, the higher the level. In other words, our journey, week by week, has been not along a straight line, on a level as it were; not even up the hypotenuse of a triangle, as our chart has suggested. Our journey week by week, our progress, has been up rather the side of a pyramid, if you like up the side of a mountain, so that the higher we climb, the narrower becomes the diameter of the pyramid, of the mountain, or the peak up which we are climbing. So eventually, as we progress further, as we progress higher, eventually we shall find ourselves standing on simply a pin-point, right at the top, with only empty space, only the sky as it were, only infinity above us. But that is not tonight.

Tonight we shall be dealing, for the first time, specifically with Buddhism. So far we have been concerned with much more general considerations. But tonight we begin to be concerned with Buddhism specifically. We shall not be concerned with it, not be dealing with it, technically. Certain important items of Buddhist teaching will be introduced in the course of the lecture but we shall try to express them directly in English, which isn't very easy, without going through the medium of Pali or Sanskrit, or Chinese or Japanese or Tibetan, or any other of those rather puzzling oriental languages. Those who are interested in knowing the technical terms in the original, will find them in one or another of my books.

Now the first question that confronts us when we come to Buddhism, very naturally, is: What is Buddhism? It is a question that people very often ask. I have often been asked it, some of you may have been asked it, too. What is Buddhism? People have all sorts of strange ideas, all sorts of suspicions even, one may say. They wonder all sorts of things about it. They wonder, for instance, whether it is an Eastern cult of idol worship - this is some people's impression; or a system of philosophy; or a code of ethics, of good behaviour; or a way of life; or perhaps a collection of oriental fairytales. In particular, of course, people wonder whether or not Buddhism is a religion. Whether Buddhism is or is not a religion is to a very great extent just a question of definition. If one defines religion in terms of belief in, worship of, a supreme being, a personal God, a Creator, as a dictionary defines the word 'religion', then Buddhism very clearly is not a religion. But if one does not define religion in this way, if one defines religion more broadly, more loosely, more freely, more flexibly, then Buddhism can be considered as a religion, *but* a non-theistic religion, which of course for some people is a contradiction in terms. But I must admit, I must confess, that I prefer nowadays not to speak of Buddhism as a religion at all. I prefer not to use the terminology, even, of religion in connection with Buddhism at all. But I must admit it is very difficult to find an alternative for this word 'religion'. But I think we must find an alternative somehow because the word 'religion' seems to have, for many people at least, all the wrong connotations. As soon as one pronounces this word 'religion', people cease to take you seriously it seems, sometimes. They at once start thinking of something narrow and stuffy and unpleasant and dogmatic. They start thinking, for instance, of the Lord's Day Observance Society. They start thinking of clergymen in dog-collars and fatuous grins.

I remember (this is a little recollection of mine) that soon after I returned to this country from India, a friend of mine took me to the cinema to see a film. And I remember that at a certain point in this film a clergyman appeared, his face appeared on the screen, and as soon as his face appeared on the screen everybody laughed. Now this I think is very significant. He didn't open his mouth, he didn't say anything, he didn't even look absurd or foolish. He was just a clergyman

in a dog-collar, but as soon as people saw his face, everybody in the audience laughed. Well nowadays, it seems, they even laugh at the Pope. And one may say that when people start laughing at you, you are finished - because laughter is the great dissolver of projections. And this is why we find dictators and totalitarian regimes generally are often so hard on the satirical cartoonists. They can stand, perhaps, attacks, criticism, even savage criticism, but they cannot survive people's laughter. And this is perhaps why the Catholic Church hated Voltaire¹ so much, because he taught people to laugh at antiquated superstition rather than to fear it.

Now although I prefer not to speak of Buddhism as a religion, I must confess that my own practice in this connection has not been very consistent. I recently had the experience of listening to the tape of a lecture which I gave some two years ago. I was listening to it quite happily and peacefully and suddenly I got a great shock, because I heard myself saying on this tape, in the course of this lecture, saying quite emphatically that Buddhism was a religion. This is what I was saying two years ago. Now obviously it had to be understood, this remark had to be understood, in context. What I meant, I gathered, was that Buddhism included emotional and devotional elements. By saying that it was a religion, I was trying to say that it wasn't a purely intellectual system, it wasn't just a philosophy in the academic sense. But at the same time, I would prefer now not to speak of Buddhism as a religion, not even as a universal religion. So if one is not to speak of it as a religion, if one is not to define it as a religion, then still the question arises, What is Buddhism?

Now I prefer to speak of it as the Path of the Higher Evolution. That is to say, it represents at increasingly higher levels a continuation of the evolutionary process itself. We may say that Buddhism is, in fact, the evolutionary process become, in and through the individual, conscious of itself, become self-conscious, become aware. Religion is the evolutionary process's consciousness, in and through the individual, of what evolution is all about. One can put it in this way, too. Now this is not the way, I think, in which we usually conceive of Buddhism but this is essentially what, in fact, it is.

In Buddhism, historically speaking, there are all sorts of doctrines, teachings, philosophies, disciplines, practices, but all these are secondary. There are moral rules, devotional observances, rituals, but all these, too, are secondary. Even, we may say, the practice of meditation, important as it is, is secondary. What is important in Buddhism, what is important for Buddhism, is that Man, Man himself, should grow, should develop, in a word - should evolve. It is not even a question of thinking, not even a question of knowing, it is not even a question of doing, it is much more profound, much more fundamental than that. Essentially, it is a question of being, of becoming, becoming - in the language of Mrs Rhys Davids, that very distinguished scholar of Buddhism in modern days - a 'more', and from a 'more' becoming a 'most'. In other words Buddhism is a question of following the Path of the Higher Evolution. Now this way of looking at, of thinking of Buddhism is fully in accord with the teaching of the Buddha himself.

One can recall in this connection an incident, which I have referred to more than once in the past, of Mahaprajapati who was the foster-mother of the Buddha, the Buddha's aunt. She became, after the Buddha's Enlightenment, a disciple, a follower of the Buddha. She became a nun. She tried to practise the teaching, to learn the teaching, but she became confused. The Buddha had so many disciples wandering about in different parts of India. She met a number of them. She tried to learn what the Buddha's teaching was. One monk said this, one monk said that. One gave this interpretation, one gave another interpretation. So Mahaprajapati Gautami became confused. In the end she decided to go to the Buddha himself, to learn from the Master's own lips what Buddhism was, what the Dharma was, what the teaching was, what the message of the Master was. So with great difficulty, she journeyed on foot hundreds of miles, came into the presence of the Buddha and with clasped hands she asked him, 'Lord, what is your teaching? How can we know what is your teaching? There are so many different versions, so many different interpretations. How are we to know which is the correct one? How are we to know what you really, truly taught? What is the criterion of your teaching, your Dharma?' In other words, she was asking what is Buddhism, how can we know, how can we recognise Buddhism? His reply was quite unambiguous. He said,

Whatever conduces to purity, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to freedom, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to decrease of worldly gains and acquisitions, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to simplicity, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to contentment, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to individuality, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to energy, that is my teaching.
Whatever conduces to delight in good, that is my teaching.

So we see the kind of criterion that the Buddha gives. It is a pragmatic² criterion. There is no mention of any particular doctrine. This is very important. He doesn't say 'The Four Noble Truths are my teaching.' He doesn't even say 'The Noble Eightfold Path is my teaching.' He doesn't mention any particular doctrine or practice. He indicates a trend, a tendency, a development; no mention of any particular doctrine, particular practice. He says, in effect, that whatever, *whatever* conduces to the spiritual growth of the individual, to the spiritual development of the individual, whatever works out in practice in this way, that is the Buddha's teaching. Not this specific formulation, not that specific formulation, but the spirit of them all, the spirit that works through, that breathes through them all; the spirit of development, of evolution, of progress, of growth. This pragmatic criterion laid down by the Buddha himself is a criterion that we should not be afraid to apply. We should not be afraid to apply this criterion even to those doctrines and practices which have come down to us as part of the Buddhist tradition. The Buddhist tradition is a very old one, a very ancient one, 2500 years old. Coming as it has done down the stream of time, Buddhism has gathered, we may say, many accretions. There have been many developments which perhaps are nothing to do with the spiritual life. They all come down to us at the present. We are confronted by numberless traditions, numberless presentations of the teaching, all found as part and parcel of Eastern Buddhism. We have, as it were, flowing in upon us the traditions of Indian Buddhism, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan Buddhism; Mahayana, Theravada, Zen, Tantra; so many teachings, so many practices. But we mustn't be afraid, as I have said, to apply to them all as they confront us, as we confront them, we mustn't hesitate to apply to them this criterion that the Buddha has laid down. We have to ask ourselves, regarding them, the great question: Do they really help? They may be very great, very beautiful, they may have helped many people in the past, but the question that we must ask and answer is: Do they help us now? Are they of any assistance to us now in the process of following the Higher Evolution? And I would say that we must not hesitate to reject whatever does not help or assist us in that process of the Higher Evolution; or at least should not hesitate to put it aside at least for the time being. Though, of course, all the time we should make sure that we are not putting it aside simply because we do not want, really, to evolve, to develop.

All this brings me, quite incidentally, to a rather important point. It isn't directly connected with the subject matter of the lecture but it might be appropriate to mention it now. Many of you know that I personally have had now some five years' experience of teaching in the West, after some 20 years of experience in the East. That is to say, experience of teaching Buddhism. And I must say that in the course of these five years of teaching, or trying to teach, Buddhism in the West, I have come to certain quite definite conclusions. It is quite clear, quite obvious to me that there are some traditional teachings and practices of Buddhism which are helpful in the West, which are of assistance to us in following the Path of the Higher Evolution. And it is equally clear that there are some traditional teachings, doctrines, practices which are not helpful to us in the West in that particular way. I feel therefore that the time has come for us to consolidate all the helpful things into a single, as it were, intensive practical course with exercises. The theoretical background, the theoretical foundation of this course will be some, at least, of the principles explored and expounded in this particular course of lectures. At present I am giving quite serious thought and consideration to this matter, that is to say to the working out of this single, intensive, practical course with exercises. It may be possible to put it into operation next year, perhaps at one of the retreats, perhaps on some separate occasion. But let us get back to our subject.

The Buddha's teaching, I hope you have understood, is meant, is designed, is planned, to assist human growth, to stimulate the whole process of the Higher Evolution of Man. Not an end in itself, it subserves an end, that end being this Higher Evolution of Man. We may say that the

Buddha, in fact, saw men as essentially living and growing things. This way of looking of his, this vision of his of humanity is brought out very clearly in a famous incident which occurred after the Enlightenment, after the Buddha had attained to the Supreme Truth, after he had become one, as it were, with Reality. We know, according to the accounts which have come down to us of that great event, that great experience, that at first he was not exactly unwilling to disclose the truth that he had learned, that he had experienced, but he was very, very much aware of the difficulty of communicating it and very doubtful whether anybody would, in fact, be able to receive it. So we are told his mind inclined to quiescence, to transcendental rest, not going forth, not communicating to the world what he had discovered.

And then we are told further that a sublime spiritual being, in the form of Brahma Sahampati - perhaps a sort of mythological symbol of a process arising in the Buddha's own Enlightened mind - appeared before him and, with folded hands and bowed head, requested him to preach, saying that there were in the world just a few beings whose eyes were covered with only a little dust: they would hear, they would understand, they would practise, they would follow. So we are told that upon Brahma making this great request, or upon this train of thought, if you like, passing through his own Enlightened mind, the Buddha opened his eyes, his spiritual eyes, and he looked forth out over the world and he saw the whole mass of humanity, saw them in various stages of development, saw them living, growing, we are told, just like a bed of lotus flowers. He saw the whole human race like one vast lotus bed: a mass of leaves, acres of leaves, miles of leaves, and after the leaves the stalks rising, out of these stalks the flowers. We are told that the Buddha saw that there were some lotus flowers sunk still deep in the mud, others just emerging from the mud, others standing clear of the mud with the lotus flowers opening their petals to the light, to the warmth of the sun. And seeing this, seeing that although many, although most, in fact, were sunk in the mud or hardly emerging from the water; seeing at the same time that there were a few struggling to emerge, a few that had in fact emerged some distance, for their sake therefore the Buddha decided, he resolved, to preach his doctrine and to enlighten the world. This particular episode also makes it clear that the Buddha's teaching is addressed to the minority because it is only the minority, or a minority, at any one time that is capable of becoming New Men. We find, incidentally, the same imagery of growth and development, the same plant imagery even, in the *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra*, one of the most famous Mahayana Buddhist texts or scriptures. There the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma, is compared to a great rain cloud that arises with thunder and with lightning at the beginning of the rainy season; a great raincloud that overspreads the whole sky, overcasts the whole horizon and sends down rain in abundant showers. And all living beings, in this great Sutra, in this comparison, are compared to herbs and shrubs and trees. And the Buddha says that as the rain falls, as the rain of the Dharma falls, as that spiritual nourishment descends upon them, they are all nourished by it, all strengthened by it, all enabled to grow each in its own different way.

So with this emphasis on growth, on development, it is not surprising that we find in Buddhism the figure of the Path, of the Way, at the very centre of the Buddha's teaching. Buddhism is itself a Way. In traditional terms it is the way to Enlightenment, the way to freedom, the way to Nirvana. In Nepal, for instance, even today we find that Buddhists are not called Buddhists, they are called *buddha-margis*, which means followers of the Way of the Buddha. It is also interesting to note in this connection that the followers of Christ were not originally called Christians. They were called the people of the Way. And it is significant perhaps that this term, the people of the Way, rather quickly dropped out of use. Now in Buddhism, in the Buddhist teaching, in the Dharma, we find several different versions, a number of different versions of the Path or of the Way. We find, for instance, the Path as *The Noble Eightfold Path* which constitutes the last of the Four Noble Truths. Then we find that there is *The Path of the Bodhisattva*, the one who aims at Enlightenment for the sake of all, a path that consists of the practice of the six or the ten Spiritual Perfections. With both of these Paths we have dealt in previous courses of lectures; in fact, a whole course of lectures has been devoted to each of these two versions of the Path. Traditionally both of them are of the greatest importance, but there are various other less well-known formulations of the Path, not so well known but equally important. There are, for instance, the *Seven Stages of Purification*, there are the *Seven Bodhyangas* or the seven successive links in the process of attainment of Enlightenment. And all these formulations make one thing abundantly clear. They all make it clear that Buddhism is essentially a Path, a Way to

be followed, a Way from lower to higher states; and that the practice of Buddhism consists in following this Way, following this Path, achieving higher and higher levels, higher and higher states of being and consciousness. It is a way culminating at Point Infinity on our other chart, that is the point of Nirvana, the point of Buddhahood, the point of the full emergence of the New Man, as we call him, in all his glory.

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Now tonight, I want to deal with one particular formulation of the Way. It is not among those already mentioned. In fact it isn't very well known at all. It is mentioned only once in the Buddhist scriptures and it has been, unfortunately, ignored throughout the whole history of Buddhism in the East. Attention was first drawn to this formulation of the Way in modern times by Mrs Rhys Davids, that great Pali scholar, and then by Dr Beni Madhab Barua, a very great Indian Buddhist scholar. I have, as many of you know, made considerable use of this formulation in the course of my own teaching and it is indeed of the first importance. It is the formula of what we call *The Twelve Positive Nidanas* or *Links*. And this particular formula of the Twelve Positive Nidanas or Links illustrates the Spiral as opposed to the Cyclical type of conditionality. The cyclical type of conditionality is illustrated by *The Wheel of Life*, particularly by the outermost circle of the Wheel of Life which is divided into twelve segments representing the twelve nidanas or links of the chain of conditioned as opposed to unconditioned existence.

Now I have selected the formula of the Twelve Positive Nidanas or Links for a definite reason. I have selected it because it brings out very clearly the fact that Buddhism is essentially a path, a Way, in fact the Path of the Higher Evolution. I am going to deal with each link, each *nidana*, in turn, paying more attention to the earlier than to the later links. The later links cover much the same ground that we shall be covering next week in the lecture on *Stream Entry: the Point of No Return*. But before we begin, before we start on these twelve links, just a word of warning. Figures of speech, metaphors, similes, are very useful things. They often throw a flood of light. But we mustn't take them too literally, mustn't press them too logically or try to work them out too logically. This can be misleading. We speak, for instance, of 'following the path' but we mustn't, therefore, fall into the trap of thinking that we ourselves are one thing, 'the follower of the path', and the path is something distinct upon which we are treading. This is not so. This is not correct. We ourselves *are* the path, potentially. We must develop the path within ourselves. This is the advantage of the metaphor of the lotuses, the plants, because it makes it clear that it is our own growth, our own development with which we are concerned; not with the travelling over a path the stages of which change while we ourselves remain unchanged. It isn't like that. But we ourselves change as that path is followed. Following the path means changing ourselves, means growing ourselves, like the lotus, like the plant.

The Twelve Positive Nidanas

Now for the Links. Each link represents, of course, a successively higher stage of spiritual development or stage of higher evolution and each succeeding link arises in dependence on the preceding one, grows out of it, as it were, as the leaf grows out of the stem, as the flower grows out of the leaf, and so on.

Now the first link, the first nidana, the first stage, if you like, of the process of Higher Evolution is simply *Suffering*. This might come as a shock to some of you, that the spiritual life begins with suffering; that the Higher Evolution begins with suffering. It is as though suffering gives us a shock. Through suffering we become aware. We may be going on very nicely, very smoothly in a sense, very happily, pleasantly, but only too often not with awareness, not with any spiritual sensibility or sensitivity. But then a jolt comes. A shock comes. We suffer, and this jolt, this shock of suffering as it were wakes us up. We realise sometimes that we've been living in a dream, in the midst of an illusion, that we weren't seeing things as they were. But suffering wakes us up. We begin to see them as they are. We begin to be more aware. And without awareness there is no spiritual life, in fact there is no truly human life even. Without awareness, Man is just a mass of blind animal reactions, and such a person, without awareness, a mass of blind animal reactions, we can describe perhaps as humanoid rather than human. Now suffering is not just painful experiences. Suffering is not just the toothache or the cut finger. Suffering, we may say, is also the unsatisfactoriness, the inadequacy of ordinary life. Even pleasant experiences become ultimately unsatisfactory, unsatisfying. We may have everything that apparently is necessary to make us happy, to make us contented with our lot, but the fact remains we are not happy, we are not satisfied, we are not contented. We may have good health, a pleasant job, a satisfactory home life, interesting hobbies, pleasant friends, and so on, but we are still not satisfied, still not contented. It is as though right in the middle of our heart there is some space unfilled, empty. This, we may say, was certainly the Buddha's own experience in the early stages of his life, and that's why he left home. If anybody had everything, it was the Buddha. Even if we leave aside legendary trappings and additions, it is pretty clear that the Buddha was born into a wealthy, highly respected family, that everything was, as it were, laid on for him from his earliest days. He had beautiful mansions in which to live. He had a wife, a child, social position, even political power, the possibility one day of ascending the throne, succeeding his father. But at the same time, we know that the Buddha was not happy and it was because he was not happy that he left all that, left his home, his wife, his parents, his child, and went out into the world to solve that question of human happiness, of human suffering.

This, too, we may say, is the experience of quite a number of people. If they are honest with themselves, they have to admit that they are not really happy, they are not really satisfied, not really contented. Oh yes, job may be going all right, promotion may be going all right, salary may be increased, everything all right at home, children all right, no sickness, hobbies all right, friends all right, holidays all right, mortgage payments all right, nothing going wrong, but at the same time not really happy, not really contented. But the majority of people, though they experience this, though they have this sort of feeling of something missing, of something lacking, of something wanting, even gnawing at their hearts sometimes, most people just smother it, just cover it over; they try to convince themselves that they are happy, they *must* be happy because they've got all the things that make people happy. What is it that they want? They try to say, 'No, this is foolishness. I'm just being silly, it's just my delusion. Of course I'm happy.' But then a little voice, a little whisper comes from deep within their hearts and says, 'But you're not really happy.' And they say, 'Yes I *am* happy, so there!' And the little voice says again, 'No you're not really happy, are you?' and you don't like to listen to this little voice. You put your fingers in your ears and you say, 'Of course I'm happy and *that's that!*' and off you go and do whatever you want to do. So most people smother it and stifle it in this way. But it's there underneath, sometimes building up, sometimes painfully pressing, sometimes festering as it were like a secret sore, like an abscess, almost like a cancer - but a positive cancer.

So we shouldn't stifle it, shouldn't smother it. Rather, we may say, we should cherish our dissatisfaction. It is this that makes us restless and it's when we become restless that we go in search of something higher, some better satisfaction, some better contentment, some greater

happiness. Of course, we don't know at first what we are looking for. That's the ridiculousness of it, the beauty of it also, that's the meaning of it, too. We don't know what we are looking for. Man is really on the path, or beginning to be on the path, we may say, when he is looking for something, he doesn't know what. But if we go on looking long enough, if we search hard enough, eventually, as though by some irresistible spiritual law, we come into contact with something higher, or we come into contact with a symbol, an echo, a reflection, of something higher; come into contact with a book that speaks to us, a picture, a person - and then a response goes forth from us and it's as though we said to ourselves, in the depths of our being, in the depths of our heart, after our long search, after our long strife, that this is *it*. This is what, unknowing, I wanted, was looking for all the time.

I remember in this connection a story that was told to me of her own life by a woman who became eventually a Buddhist nun. She was a Frenchwoman and she had led a rather active, rather vigorous intellectual academic life at the Sorbonne in Paris. She was a student for a while, then she was teaching, she was mixed up with all sorts of student activities and she was violently anti-communist. This was about 20 years ago and she used to go around with a pair of ice-skates with which to defend herself if she was attacked. She was a rather militant sort of woman, not to say aggressive, and she'd say, 'Well, I thought if I carried along this pair of ice-skates, if anyone was to try to do anything with me I'd soon slash them across his face.' This was the sort of woman she was. So she said one day she went to a museum, a museum of oriental art, and she left her skates outside - she wouldn't need them there. She was safe in the museum. And she was going along the galleries, or rather striding, I imagine, along the galleries. She was a rather sort of masculine sort of woman, striding along, looking to left and right, rather fiercely as she usually looked, and suddenly she saw an image of the Buddha. It was a Khmer image and you probably know these Khmer images are particularly beautiful. They have very peaceful, very silent faces, with very mysterious smiles, rather full lips, rather broad lips, not altogether beautiful by our standards perhaps, curved at the corners in a very mysterious and a very beautiful, a very haunting smile. The whole expression of the face was intensely peaceful. So this image and the face of this image just arrested her. She just stopped, stopped dead in her tracks, she said. And she just stood there looking at it. And she told me that she stood looking at this image without moving, almost without blinking, for 45 minutes. She said she could not take her eyes off it because she said the impression of peace, the impression of tranquillity, of wisdom, of knowledge which emanated, which streamed as it were from those features, was so strong that she couldn't pull herself away. She said that experience, that glimpse changed her whole life. She felt that she had found what, unconsciously, she had been looking for all the time. And she became in the end a Buddhist nun. That's not the end of the story but that's another story.

So this illustrates what I have been talking about. We look, we search, for we know not what, but something higher, something more deeply satisfying, more deeply contenting, and eventually we do find it, we do come into contact with it and then we are thrilled, as it were, moved to the very depths of our being, shaken, as it were.

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This brings us to the second link, and this is simply *Faith*. Not faith in the sense of belief, believing something to be true for which there is no rational evidence; not even faith as a merely emotional state, though certainly faith is an emotion. Faith, we may say, in this sense, in the context of the Path, in the context of the Higher Evolution, is the response of our total being, not just the head, not even just the heart, but the whole of ourselves, totally, responding to something higher, to something beyond, to something transcendental. This is faith, in this context. It is the desire, the urge if you like, the longing to give ourselves to that completely, not holding ourselves back. Usually, of course, we give with one hand and take back with the other. We give on Sunday or we give on Friday evening, and take back on Monday morning or Saturday afternoon. This is what usually happens. But faith is not like this. Faith is a giving of ourselves completely and entirely to the transcendental, or the seed of the transcendental. It is, we may say, the response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe, the one setting the other vibrating by its proximity. And for Buddhism, of course, faith means faith in the Three Jewels because these represent, for Buddhism, the highest values of existence. The Buddha represents the perfect

embodiment, in human form, of the highest spiritual ideal. He represents, he symbolises the New Man, the culmination of the process of the Higher Evolution. And then the Dharma, or the Teaching, the second of the Three Jewels, represents the Path, the whole course of the Higher Evolution. And the Sangha, the third jewel, represents the spiritual community of those who have embarked or are in process of embarking on the Higher Evolution. And faith, in this context, is the response, is our total response to these values. When we see the Buddha, the embodiment of the Ideal, the Dharma, the embodiment of the Path of the Higher Evolution leading to the realisation of that Ideal, and the Sangha, the community of those who are actually themselves embodying that Path and reaching towards the realisation of that Ideal, then we feel faith. That faith manifests itself in an actual commitment and it is this commitment which, in traditional technical language, we call Going for Refuge.

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Thirdly comes *Joy* or *Delight*. We've found what we were looking for, at least we have begun to find it. And because we have found it or have begun to find it, after a long search, a long quest, perhaps after much suffering, trial, error, mistakes, confusion, having found it we are pleased, we are contented, we are even exhilarated, and we feel a great gratitude and a great devotion. We feel thankfulness for the gift of the Teaching and we feel like expressing that feeling. We feel love for spiritual teachers, for companions on the way, and more than that, our contact with something ultimate, our contact with the spiritual, especially as embodied in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, begins to transform our lives; begins to take over our lives, we may say, so that we become less self-centred, living less for ourselves. We become more generous, more ready to give, not just to give things, but to give even with oneself, to give of oneself. We find, too, that neurotic desires become resolved. We find that compulsive habits of smoking and drinking are just given up, just drop off. We find ourselves, perhaps, disinclined to eat meat. We might even want to change our eating habits altogether and follow a more natural, more healthy regimen or diet. We practise Right Livelihood. We try to lead a simple and a harmless life. And all this, too, makes us feel happy, makes us feel contented and carefree. We feel at peace with ourselves and because we are at peace with ourselves we feel at peace with others, too. We enjoy a good conscience. We sleep well at nights. But this doesn't mean of course that there is any complacency or self-satisfaction.

Now I must say, in fact I must emphasise, that Buddhism attaches great importance to this particular stage, this stage of Joy and Delight. Buddhism points out that a bad conscience blocks spiritual progress. And this is why in Buddhism there are many what we call Services of Confession, as in the Sevenfold Puja, so one can say, 'I've made these mistakes, I've done such and such a thing that I should not have done, or failed to do something that I should have done.' So you admit it, you confess it, you bring it out into the open, you recognise it and you try to resolve it. And in this way, any feeling of guilt that one may have on account of that matter is purged and one's joy and one's delight are restored.

Now in the West, unfortunately, people only too often suffer from irrational feelings of guilt. There is a rational feeling of guilt. If you've really done something wrong, of course you should feel uneasy about it. But there are, too, irrational feelings of guilt especially with regard, say, to matters of sex. And the responsibility for these irrational feelings of guilt rests, very largely, with the Churches, with orthodox Christianity. Such feelings must be resolved, otherwise there is no real possibility of any spiritual progress.

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Fourthly, *Rapture* or *Ecstasy*. This is an emotion of very intense joy, something which is experienced not only mentally but even physically, and this rapture, this ecstasy, we are told, has five degrees of intensity.

- i) the slight thrill of rapture, of ecstasy, accompanied by the standing of the hairs of the body on end. This is the first degree

- ii) a momentary electrifying stimulation of the whole psycho-physical organism, just like a flash of lightning.
- iii) a flooding emotion descending on the whole body like, we are told, the repeated breaking of waves of the ocean on the shore. You know how the waves of the ocean come in again and again, one after another, thundering and breaking on the shore. In the same way, we are told, in this third stage, this flooding emotion descends again and again on the whole psycho-physical organism, as it were beating it, as it were descending thunderingly upon it and shaking it, perhaps, to its foundations but shaking it most pleasurably, most delightfully.
- iv) the surcharging of the whole body, as of a mountain cave swept by a mighty flood of water. It's a sort of total inundation.
- v) transporting rapture or transporting ecstasy, which is rapture, ecstasy so intense that the body is actually lifted from the ground. In the records of all religions, there are accounts of saints, mystics who during the course of prayer or meditation through this intensity of rapture or ecstasy have been quite literally lifted from the ground. So this is the highest degree, the highest stage of this rapture, of this ecstasy.

Most people, we may say, have at least some experience of this sort of thing, of rapture, of ecstasy, sometimes when we see a beautiful natural scene, when we see, say, a sunset, or when we listen to some beautiful piece of music. In fact we may say that there is some resemblance between the artistic experience and this rapture, this ecstasy. It is not unlike, in a way, the surge of inspiration which is felt by the artist welling up within him at the time of creation. He feels a sort of rapture, a sort of ecstasy. It may be very difficult what he is doing. It may be giving him all sorts of trouble, whether it's a painting or a poem or a piece of music he's composing. But at the same time, in the midst of it all, there is a sort of lift, a sort of rapture, there is a sort of ecstasy out of which he is creating, on account of which he is creating.

Psychologically, we may say, rapture or ecstasy represents a resolution of complexes. It represents the freeing of blocked energy. There is so much energy in us that most of our energy, unfortunately, is blocked for various reasons, in various ways. And when it is unblocked, when the energy comes, as it were, rushing up then it is the uprush of this energy that produces the feeling of rapture, the feeling of ecstasy. Therefore the removal of such blockages is of very great importance if we are to reach this stage. This removal of blockages quite often happens naturally, spontaneously, in connection with meditation. And this is one of the reasons why, in the course of meditation, people sometimes weep. It is on account of the release of energy brought about by the thawing, as it were, the melting of blockages which have kept the energy frozen.

We also find the same sort of thing happening in connection with the communication exercises. We find barriers and blockages broken down, resolved. We find that in these exercises people don't cry, they usually laugh. But it's the same thing, whether you weep in meditation or you laugh in the course of communication exercises, it's the same thing: it's blocked energy being released, being freed, bubbling up, as it were, in the form of a minor rapture or minor ecstasy and this is experienced, of course, as something pleasurable. And we may go so far as to say that the spiritual life itself should be ecstatic. If you have gone through these earlier stages, first of all the stage of suffering, then the stage of faith, then the stage of joy and then the stage of rapture or ecstasy, if you've got as far as this, your whole life should, in fact, be ecstatic. Spiritual life, religious life, in fact, should be ecstatic. It shouldn't be an affair of long faces or gloom or pseudo-seriousness. These, we may say, are the product, in the religious sphere, of the wrong sort of conditions, product of, we may say, repression, product even, cause even of neurosis - but nothing at all to do with the Higher Evolution. The Higher Evolution calls for all our powers, all that is best in us, frees all our energies, and the result of that is this experience of rapture, or ecstasy.

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Fifthly, *Pacification or Calming Down*. This is a higher stage still and it represents the calming down of the physical side-effects of the rapture, the ecstasy. The rapture, we saw, had two effects: the physical and the mental. So in this stage of pacification, the physical side-effects such as, say, the standing of the hair on end, are calmed down; not because the rapture or ecstasy has become less but because it has become more, because it is so great now that the physical body cannot contain it, cannot express it. By the time we reach this stage, our spiritual experience should have become very profound and comprehensive indeed and comparatively little of it should be visible externally.

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Sixthly, the stage or the link of *Bliss*. This is a stage, we may say, of a state of pure happiness, unalloyed happiness, and it represents the complete unification of all our emotional energies. It is not only a state of bliss, it's a state of peace, of harmony, tranquillity, of love, of compassion. In this state we find all the positive emotions blended. There is no negative emotion whatsoever. There is no hatred, no fear, no anxiety, no craving, no jealousy, no possessiveness, no enmity, and so on - certainly, at least not in the conscious mind; even the unconscious mind has been purified to some extent.

So this link, we may say, this link or stage of bliss represents an extremely important aspect of the spiritual life, the importance of which is often not sufficiently recognised. It represents the very important fact that we must be, in our lives, I was going to say in our spiritual life, but in our lives even, emotionally positive, not emotionally negative. We owe it to ourselves and we owe it to others to be on all possible occasions emotionally positive and not emotionally negative. And in this way we shall contribute to the raising of the level of consciousness and being, not only of ourselves but of everybody with whom we come into contact. Unfortunately we find people's lives are only too often bound up with negative emotions. They are riddled with fear, anxiety, jealousy, possessiveness, hatred, all this and suspicion. And their whole lives are passed only too often in a sort of dark cloud of negative emotion. So we have to struggle to get free from this and be very sharp on ourselves, very hard on ourselves, even, and not allow negative emotions to develop; to develop only positive emotions of love, joy, compassion, peace and so on. Only too often we find even the religious life, the organised religious life, is bound up with negative emotion. I don't want to say too much about this because, as I've said, preoccupation with negative emotion is itself negative.

But I remember once I heard, perhaps I shouldn't mention any names but I will do just for once, I heard not so long ago, speaking on the radio, interviewed on the radio, the Rev Ian Paisley, and I listened to his voice, the tone of the voice was enough. One didn't want to hear what he had to say, the tone was enough. The tone of the voice told you that what he had to say embodied negative emotion, nothing positive. So we find only too often that religious life, organised religious life, is bound up with negative emotion and in this connection, looking back on the history of Europe, we think of the Inquisition,³ we think of all the witch burners, the witch hunters, that terrible disastrous chapter lasting for hundreds of years of European religious history. But perhaps it is better not to think of it. It is better perhaps to forget the hideous nightmare of those years, those centuries. Better to be on all possible occasions, in all possible ways, emotionally positive.

It is no accident, perhaps, that what we may describe as the motto of Buddhism, the motto of the Buddha's Teaching is this little phrase, *sabbe satta sukhi hontu* which means 'May all beings be happy', 'may all beings be blissful'. It is as simple as that. In a way, this is the sole wish, the heartfelt wish of Buddhism. It's not just words, not just something to repeat and recite. We may say that the aspiration, the very positive aspiration of Buddhism is for all beings to be emotionally positive; that there shouldn't be any fear, that there shouldn't be any hatred, any jealousy, any suspicion, any possessiveness; that everybody should be emotionally positive, that they should be happy, blissful, that they should be full of love, compassion, peace, joy, devotion, faith, because positive emotion is an essential part of the Higher Evolution. If you can only get people to be emotionally positive, if you can get them out of the rut of their negative emotions, if you can, as it were, take them by the scruff of their necks and pull them out if necessary, out

of their negative emotion, out of their self-pity, out of their jealousy, out of their possessiveness, out of their anxieties, out of their worries - if you can only lift them above all these things, out of all these things, clear of all these things, if you can only in some way or other imbue them with positive emotion, powerful, strong, then they really are on the path already of the Higher Evolution.

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Seventhly, *Concentration*. This link, this stage, is based on an important psychological principle, which is that when we are completely happy, completely blissful, then all our emotional energies are unified. And when our emotional energies are unified, we are concentrated. The happy person is the concentrated person. A happy person is not restless; may do quite a lot, may go about quite a lot, say quite a lot, but the happy person is not restless. In the same way, we may say that the concentrated person, the person who is unified, whose energies are unified, is a happy person.

And all this is related to the practice of meditation, because meditation begins with concentration. But we know only too well how difficult many people find concentration, find meditation. This is really because they are not happy. The more difficult a person finds concentration, the more difficult they find meditation, the less happy they are likely to be. Their emotional energies are not unified. Concentration is not just a matter of the forcible fixation of mind. It is not just sitting down and forcing your mind on to a single point. If one does that - and one can do that - then one risks a sharp reaction from one's unconscious. Concentration really, we may say, is concentration of the whole being, not just of the mind, not just of the conscious mind, not just of thought, not just of intellect. Concentration is the concentration of all the energies of one's being - emotional, intellectual, volitional - on a single point, so that all the energies are streaming and flowing towards that point and bringing themselves to bear fully on that point. This is the reason, mainly, for the importance of preparation for meditation. You can't sit down and simply switch your mind on to the object of concentration. You have to prepare, to pave the way, and this is why so many people find that under the comparatively ideal conditions of the retreat it is so much easier very often to concentrate, to meditate. We have, first of all, to disengage our energies from other things, to direct them, as it were, into one channel. And when our preparations for meditation are complete, when we have paved the way properly, then the concentration exercise, whether the mindfulness of breathing or any other, just puts the finishing touch and we're away.

Four Levels of Concentration

Now there are various levels of concentration. Four are usually distinguished, and for each of them the Buddha gives a simile, a very beautiful simile. I have recounted these things before but I make no apology for repeating these similes. The four stages, with their similes, represent four stages in the progressive unification of our energies. We had a diagram last winter to illustrate this, perhaps we will produce it and even print it again.

The first comparison that the Buddha gives, *the first simile, illustrating the first stage of concentration or higher consciousness, is that of soap powder and water*. The Buddha says, suppose you take soap-powder, which apparently they did have in Ancient India, and suppose you mix it, knead it with water. You've got two things: the soap powder, dry, hard, and the water, fluid. You mix the two together into a ball, and you mix them in such a way that every grain of the soap powder is saturated in water. And you mix them in such a way that there is not one single drop of water extra, leaking out as it were. It is just one mass, one ball of soap powder, fully saturated in water. So this represents the first stage of concentration, and of course it represents the stage, we may say, of unified consciousness. It represents the stage of the union of positive and negative forces within our conscious mind - we may say, represents the unification of what the Chinese tradition calls the yin and the yang principles within the conscious mind. It is a state, therefore, of harmony, of integration, of peace. This is the first stage of concentration. It is as though the energies of the conscious and the energies of the unconscious mind were brought together, unified and harmonised, just like the soap powder and the water in the Buddha's simile.

The second simile illustrating the second stage of concentration is that of the subterranean spring. The Buddha said, imagine, as it were, a lake of water fed by an underground inlet, there's a subterranean spring, the waters of which bubble up into the lake and keep it continually fresh and pure. So the waters of the lake represent that unified conscious mind, or represent the mind as unified, the conscious and the unconscious unified, integrated. Then into that unified, that integrated consciousness there bubbles up something from deeper levels, or, if you like, higher levels. So this simile represents the infusion of a supra-conscious state into the ordinary, unified conscious state.

Thirdly, there is the illustration or the simile of the lotuses bathed in water. The Buddha says, imagine lotus flowers growing in the water, bathed in the water, saturated by the water. This represents the ordinary unified conscious mind, not just percolated by the supra-conscious state, not with the supra-conscious state just trickling into it, as it were, but as fully permeated by that and living in it, dwelling in it, as though in an element. So this represents a higher stage still.

Then there is *the fourth simile, for the fourth state of concentration, which is that of a man wrapped in a white sheet after taking a bath.* And this represents a state of complete insulation from lower states of consciousness. One is fully identified with the higher state and the lower states are all around and one is insulated from them. Sometimes we find this when we come away from a retreat. In the course of the retreat we have become, as it were, saturated with some higher consciousness, some higher element. And when we go out from the retreat, when we come back into the city especially, we can feel this insulating us from the atmosphere around, so that we don't feel it at first, we don't react to it at first, we are not even conscious of it at first. But this immunity, this insulation, unfortunately doesn't last: it fades away into the light of common day, unless of course we can go on, go on to the next stage or link.

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The Eighth stage or link, is the stage of *Knowledge and Vision of Things as They Really Are*, and this is the stage when awareness of Reality dawns. This is a stage of crucial importance because it marks the transition, in traditional Buddhist terms, from meditation to wisdom; from the spiritual, even psychological, to the transcendental. It is in this stage that we start escaping from the gravitational pull, the tug of conditioned existence. And we begin in this stage to feel the gravitational pull of Nirvana from in front of us, from before us, even though it operates from a great, a tremendous distance. So after reaching this stage, after we have had that one definitive - not final but certainly decisive - vision of Reality, awareness of Reality, there is no danger of our falling back permanently into the world. So this point, this stage is also called the Point of No Return. That is, of course, the subject of our lecture next week. I shan't say anything more about it now.

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In fact, I am going to deal with the remaining links of the series rather more briefly because for the present they are, for the vast majority of people, of academic interest only. The ninth stage, the ninth link, is that of *Withdrawal*. Not psychological withdrawal, not negation, not rejection, but spiritual withdrawal: a movement of withdrawal from conditioned existence as such; an attitude of sitting loose to life. In this stage, or when one has reached this stage, one does what is objectively necessary to be done but one is not subjectively, not psychologically caught up or involved.

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The tenth link, *Dispassion*. This is a state, a very high state, of complete imperturbability, of complete balance, at a very high level. It is a state like that of the Buddha beneath the Bodhi tree before he gained Enlightenment, before he attained Nirvana; a state that nothing can disturb, nothing can disrupt. It is a state of complete peace, complete harmony, equilibrium, balance; but not anything negative, something, as it were, positive like vibrating, pulsing with life, something we can hardly conceive of, something that we cannot help thinking of in negative terms.



Eleventhly, the stage of *Freedom*, spiritual freedom, transcendental freedom. A state of complete and utter spontaneity, of uninterrupted creativity wherein there is no reactivity, no reactive mind whatsoever.



Twelfthly and lastly, the state or stage of *Knowledge of the Destruction of the Poisons*. The poisons represent the last dregs of subjectivity within us, the last dregs of unawareness. But in this stage, one has resolved them all. There is nothing left to resolve. One's mind is now one great clarity, one great luminosity, one great shining luminous Void, if you like, a void which is full from top to bottom. In this stage one is free, completely, absolutely, unconditionally free, and one knows also that one is free.



So these are the twelve links. They represent, as I have tried to make clear, a process of continuous heightening and expansion of being and consciousness, far beyond what we already know and experience. A heightening, an expansion to the very limit, to infinity. And these links embody, the series of these links embodies the Way, the Path of the Buddha. By presenting them, by describing them, by in imagination going over them, we answer, in fact, the question: what is Buddhism? These links make it clear that Buddhism is not anything narrow, not anything negative and not a religion in the sense that we usually give to that term. These twelve links make it clear that, in Buddhism, the whole evolutionary process becomes, as it were, self-conscious, becomes aware. When therefore we consider Buddhism as the *Path of the Higher Evolution*, we are doing justice to Buddhism, to the Buddha's teaching itself. We are also explaining, illustrating, elucidating the nature of the Higher Evolution, and it is just this that I hope I have been able to do in some measure tonight.

Revised May 2002



NOTES - to Tape 79
(taken from Collins English Dictionary)

1. **Voltaire**: a pseudonym of François-Marie Arouet, 1694-1778, French writer, whose outspoken belief in religious, political, and social liberty made him the embodiment of the 18th century Enlightenment. His major works include *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) and the satire *Candide* (1759). He also wrote plays, such as *Zaïre* (1732), poems, and scientific studies. He suffered several periods of banishment for his radical views.

2. **Pragmatic**: 1. advocating behaviour that is dictated more by practical consequences than by theory or dogma. 2. *Philosophy*. of or relating to pragmatism. 3. involving everyday or practical business. 4. of or concerned with the affairs of a state or community. **Pragmatism**: 1. a philosophical movement holding that practical consequences are the criterion of knowledge, meaning, and value. 2. the condition of being pragmatic.

3. **Inquisition**: a judicial institution of the Roman Catholic Church (1232-1820), founded to discover and suppress heresy. **Heresy**: 1. an opinion or doctrine contrary to the orthodox tenets of a religious body or church. 2. any opinion or belief that is or is thought to be contrary to official or established theory. 3. belief in or adherence to unorthodox opinion.

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