

## Lecture 91: The Individual, the Group, and the Community

Friends, as we know, as we all have experienced from time to time, people ask all sorts of questions about Buddhism, about the Dharma. They ask all sorts of questions about the Buddhist life, what is its nature, what are its characteristics, in what does it essentially consist. And if we consider these questions, if we try to answer these questions then the most that we can say in a few words is that the Buddhist life above all else is a committed life. Now what is it committed to? It is committed first and foremost to three things, or rather we should say it is committed to three ideals. In the first place there is the ideal of enlightenment, the ideal of a transcendental state, of wisdom which is one with compassion, compassion which is one with wisdom, a state of intuitive apprehension of what we can only describe as ultimate reality in its absolute depth and in all its manifestations. The Buddhist life is also committed to the ideal of the path to enlightenment, by path meaning the sum total of all those practices, all those procedures, all those methods, all those helps, all those exercises, which conduce in one way or another to the realisation of enlightenment, in other words what we also call the process or the path of higher evolution. And thirdly the Buddhist life is committed to the ideal of what we call spiritual community, which we can also call spiritual fellowship, the fellowship which consists in following in principle, in essence, the same path, and aiming ultimately in the same goal. And in traditional Buddhist terms, these three great ideals, through the realisation of which we are committed, are known as the ideal of the Buddha, the enlightened one, or if you like of Buddhahood-, the ideal of the Dharma, the path, the way, the truth, the teaching-, and the ideal of the Sangha, the order, the spiritual community.

Now it isn't very difficult to commit oneself or at least to think that one has committed oneself, even to believe that one has committed oneself, or even to commit oneself actually to some extent, but it is by no means easy to remain faithful to that commitment over a considerable period. There are so many difficulties, there are so many distractions, there are so many obstacles, there is so much of weakness and imperfection even within oneself, constantly getting in the way, so backsliding, recession from the original commitment only too easily happens. So to safeguard against this, to help prevent this if possible, constant reminders to ourselves and to others, to all of us, of our original basic commitment to these three ideals, are absolutely necessary.

Now we can remind ourselves in various ways. We can perhaps pin up a slogan on our shaving mirror, or put it on our desk, or hang it above our kitchen stove to remind us, or we can read something every day. There are various ways in which we can remind ourselves of our original commitment. But one of the best known, most time-honoured, and also most useful and effectual ways of reminding ourselves, and also a very popular and very enjoyable way, is with the help of, through the medium of festivals and celebrations.

So in the course of the Buddhist year we find a number of festivals and celebration which, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, remind us of our original commitment. And in the Buddhist year there are three Buddhist festivals that stand out as the most important, and they all happen to fall on a day or a night of the full moon. First of all we have the festival of the Buddha, the festival of the enlightened one, and this of course reminds us of the ideal of enlightenment, reminds us of the Buddha's spiritual attainment, reminds us that we too can attain, that we too can progress, that we too can evolve, that we too can in the end realise, and this great festival, the festival of the Buddha, the festival of the Buddha's enlightenment, is celebrated on the full-moon day of the Indian month Vaisaka, or Wesaka, or Wesak in Singhalese, corresponding to our month or months April to May.

Secondly, in the Buddhist year we celebrate the festival of the Dharma, the festival of the truth, or the festival of the teaching. And this serves to remind us of the second ideal, the ideal of the path to enlightenment, the path of the higher evolution. And this is celebrated on the full-moon day of the Indian month Asala, which corresponds to our June to July.

And then thirdly and lastly dedicated to the third ideal, there is the festival of the Sangha or the order, and this reminds us of the ideal of spiritual community or spiritual fellowship, the treading of the path together towards a common spiritual goal, and this is celebrated on the full-moon day of the month Kartika, corresponding to our October to November. Now, this year we are keeping up with our festivals rather well, and we have already celebrated the first two of these great days. And today, tonight especially, we are celebrating the third. And as part of our celebration we are considering the question of the individual, the group, and the spiritual community.

Now we notice that the first two of the three great festivals which I have described are associated with definite events in the life of Sakyamuni, the Buddha, the human historical Buddha who lived 2500 years ago. Buddha Day, Vaisaka, or Buddhajayanti as it's also called, is associated with the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment, sitting beneath the Bodhi tree according to tradition, at Buddhagaya when he was 35 years of age. And Dharma Day is associated with the giving of the Buddha's first discourse, his first

explicit teaching to humanity in the deer park at Saranath near Benares. But we find that the third great day, Sangha Day, is not so associated. It's not connected with any single one event in the life, in the career, of the Buddha. So what is it associated with? Why do we celebrate Sangha day on this particular full-moon day? Now in order to answer this question we shall have to go back somewhat in time, we shall have to go back right to the very origins of Buddhism, back not just to the life of the Buddha himself, but to the life of the Buddha and his disciples. And it's interesting in this connection to recall that the Buddha himself always gave great importance to his disciples, especially his enlightened disciples. There's one particular incident where someone wanted to make an offering of some rather valuable robes to the Buddha, and the Buddha said, "No, don't offer them to me, offer them to the Sangha," that is to say offer them to a number of my disciples, perhaps enlightened disciples. He said, "if you offer them to them the merit will be greater." So you can see the position the Buddha gave to his disciples. He certainly didn't claim all the credit, as it were, for himself. So this evening in this connection, we're going back not just to the life of the Buddha, but to the life of the Buddha and his disciples, his personal disciples. We're going back in imagination back to the jungles of India, to the villages and towns of India in those days, back to the early, the first, spiritual community that gathered around, that sprang up around, the Buddha. And as we go back, as perhaps we find ourselves there in the midst of those disciples and the Buddha, we find, we discover, that in those days the spiritual community around the Buddha, of which the Buddha was the centre, was divided into two great sections. We can give them any names that we like. There are traditional names, Pali and Sanskrit names, but I'm not going to use those names this evening. I'm going to call these two sections the sections of the full-timers and the part-timers. So who or what were the full-timers? The full-timers were those followers, those disciples, who'd cut off all connection with home, who'd left family, left secular employment, left civic responsibility, left political duties, had left it all, and they wore a distinctive dress, usually what we would call a saffron dress. It wasn't a robe. It was just the ordinary dress stained saffron with earth, with what is called geruamati. And they wore this dress so that as they went around from place to place people would be able to recognise them as people who'd given up the household life, and they subsisted on alms. They just stood each day with their begging bowl at the door of one house or another until they had collected enough food for their one or at most two meals of the day. And they spent all their time in study, meditation, discussion, and general practice of the Dharma. When I say study, it wasn't that they studied books because there were no books. If you wanted to study the Dharma you had to get hold of a monk, a full-timer, who'd heard it all, and who could repeat it, recite it, and you'd listen and you'd get it in that way from his mouth, and you maybe would commit it to memory, you'd become a sort of living book, a walking book, because there were no books of any other kind in those days. In other words we find the full-timers entirely and exclusively devoted to the higher evolution. They had no other care, no other thought, no other interest, no other enthusiasm, and these full-timers, as I've called them, later on in the course of Buddhist history, developed into what we now call monks and nuns.

Now who or what were the part-timers? The part-timers were those who remained at home. They married, they brought up families, they worked, they had civic and political responsibilities, but nevertheless they studied and practised the Dharma as best they could in their spare time. Other factors being equal, they didn't develop perhaps so rapidly as the full-timers, but at least they made some progress, in some cases even considerable progress. And in later days, at the later stage in the evolution of Buddhism in India, they were known as lay disciples.

Now these whole-timers, as I've called them, these whole-timers were wanderers. They wandered all the time from place to place. They didn't stay anywhere permanently. They went from village to village along the jungle paths, and from town to town, but they kept going, they didn't remain anywhere, didn't settle anywhere, didn't make friends and stay with them. And the Buddha is supposed, according to tradition, to have uttered in this connection this little verse in, of course, Pali:

*"The water is pure that flows; the monk is pure who goes.*

This was the little verse that he was supposed to have uttered in this connection. So the wanderers wandered, the full-timers wandered from place to place. They were peripatetic as we would say. They wandered up and down the length and breadth of India. And this is how they spent their time, externally. But there's one thing to remember: they couldn't wander quite the whole time. They couldn't wander for all twelve months of the year, much as they would have liked to do. They came up against the weather, just as in this country we sometimes come up against the weather. In India too, as even today, they came up against the weather. They had to take into consideration the Indian climate. They couldn't wander during the rainy season. The rainy season in India lasts for four months from July to October, and it comes

punctually, almost to the day even the hour practically sometimes, and it rains solidly for four whole months. Rain is just drumming down all the time, torrents and torrents of rain. You can't do anything, you can't go anywhere, you can't do any work, you can't do any work in the fields, except maybe just at the beginning plant your paddy, that's all. So it's a time of enforced inactivity. So wandering about from place to place, village to village during the rainy season is out of the question, even for wanderers. So the wanderers had perforce to remain stationed and settled for four months of the year. So in this way the wanderers, the full-timers, tended to divide their year into two parts, two unequal parts. The first part consisted of eight or nine months of wandering from place to place, and then there were three or four months of sheltering from the rains in one particular spot. So this was the pattern, eight or nine months of wandering, three or four months of taking shelter, with some friend, in a shed at the foot of someone's garden, under a tree, in a cave, either alone or together with other wanderers. This was the way things developed. And in this way there developed also what became gradually one of the best-known of all the institutions of Buddhism, one which is still very much with us, and this is called the institution of the Varsarvarsa, which we usually translate as the rainy-season retreat. Varsa is rain, especially monsoon rain, and arvarsa means to reside, to stay, or to have a retreat, if you like, so the institution of the rainy-season retreat. This is the way it began. And as I mentioned the full-timers, the wanderers very often took shelter together, two or three together, four or five together, ten or twelve together, in course of time scores, even hundreds together in one spot. And how did they pass their time? Well, of course they passed their time in study, in listening to instruction, teaching, discussion, meditation, and even the part-timers living in the locality would take advantage of this golden opportunity. Usually, the wanderers were on the wing. You just got some instruction as they were passing by. Maybe you had half-an-hour's discussion with them, but during the rainy-season retreat there were score of them maybe, all staying in one spot for three whole months, or four whole months. So the part-timers living in the locality, they used to come along. They didn't have much to do during the rainy season. So they used to associate with the full-timers during that period, asked them questions, gained instruction from them, and so on. And at the end of the rainy-season retreat there would be a great celebration, and this great celebration fell on the full-moon day of the month Kartika, October to November. And from very early times, it seems, that this great celebration with which the rainy-season retreat concluded, a celebration in which the full-timers and the part-timers joined, consisted of two principal parts. First of all there was what was called the pravara. Pravara was a sort of, not exactly ceremony, observance, in which everybody begged everybody else's pardon, because they'd been living together for three whole months, and in the course of three whole months with people staying together all sorts of tensions, and problems, and difficulties, and misunderstandings can arise. So the tradition was that before you parted, you got together and apologised for any mistake you might have committed, And the senior most full-time wanderer started, and he said, "Venerable sirs, if I have committed any mistake, or offended anybody, or said anything I should not have said in the course of the last three months, please accept my apologies." And then the next senior made the same statement, then the next, right down to the most junior, maybe seven or eight-year-old wanderer. And in that way they would resolve any problems or difficulties that had arisen, and they could go on their way happily. But before they went on their way happily, there was a second part of this great celebration, which was called katinacivaradana, and it consisted in the offering by the part-timers to the full-timers of robes. We call them robes now, but that has a very ecclesiastical sort of ring, just gave them new clothes, which they proceeded to colour. And obviously it was the appropriate time. Monks, or hill-timers had to be given clothes at some time or other. They didn't have the wherewithal to purchase them; they didn't spin or weave themselves. So the part-timers used to make themselves responsible for providing the full-timers with their clothes, or as we would say, their robes. So this was the day on which they gave them, once a year. You could give-at other times, but it was considered especially good, especially meritorious even, to give on this particular occasion.

Now, the word katina means difficult, civara means dress or robe, and dana means giving . So it's called the ceremony or the observance of the difficult giving of robes. Now, why was it difficult? The usual explanation of this is that it was difficult, because you only had the opportunity once a year, and in most Buddhist countries the people are very eager to give things to the full-timers, or monks as we say nowadays, and this particular opportunity of giving robes at the end of the rainy-season retreat, so that the monks could go forth looking rather spick and span, this came only once a year, so it was a rather difficult sort of thing to achieve. There is, however, another explanation, which is based on a very late Burmese tradition, which goes on even down to the present day. In fact in Burma on this very day they will be doing this very thing which I am going to describe. This is something in which the ladies, the female part-timers especially concern themselves. What they do is this-. they sit up all night (bless their souls), they sit up all night, they don't sleep for 24 hours, and what are they doing? They're busy, their fingers are busy. They spin thread. That thread is made into cloth. That cloth is cut and made into robes, and those robes are then

dyed, all within the space of 24 hours. It sounds unbelievable, but they do it every year in Burma, the Burmese women, as a special sort of meritorious action, and this of course is difficult ... so it's called *katina* (or the difficult) *civara* (robe) *dana* (giving), and they do it just to show their devotion, how devoted they are to the full-timers, to the monks or to the *bhikkhus* as we say nowadays, and when they've actually done, you can imagine with what sort of satisfaction they present their robes to the monks, robes which 24 hours previously were just, well, not even threads. This is the extent to which they go. So this is said to be one of the reasons why it's called *katinacivaradana*. The Burmese believe that this tradition goes back right to the beginning, but that's a little bit daft.

Now of course change affects all things, affects even Buddhism, and we find that later on in the history of Buddhism, maybe after the death, after the Parinirvana of the Buddha, the wanderers, the full-timers, ceased to wander, or they wandered just occasionally, but they tended to settle down permanently in one place. It seems that at first, at the beginning of the rainy-season retreat, instead of going off on their wanderings they stayed on a bit longer, and in the end they stayed on so long, and the rainy-season retreat was coming round again, and they said, "well, it's not much use going off and wandering now, let's just stay put and observe the next rainy-season retreat." So in this way they started to stay permanently in one particular spot, and of course as they were staying permanently they could no longer stay in little temporary sheds, and at the foot of trees, and in caves. People started providing them with permanent accommodation, and this is how so-called monasteries arose. In the Buddha's day there was no such thing as a monastery. All that the full-timers had, including the Buddha, was little leaf shelters such as you find put up even in India even today for coolies, they used to stay in these, in someone's back garden. Sometimes rather naïve translators refer to the Buddha sitting in the doorway of his monastery, and you imagine a great palatial building, something like St Paul's Cathedral with the Buddha sitting there on the step maybe in the early morning, but there was nothing like that at all in the time of the Buddha, just little leaf shelters, or little bamboo and thatch cottages for the full-timers to stay in and live in or take shelter in. But even though the wanderers ceased to wander, and settled down in one spot, and absorbed a sort of permanent rainy-season retreat, the original rainy-season retreat retained all its original importance. So much so that the rainy-season retreat was observed all over the Buddhist world, even where there was no rainy season. When Buddhism went up to the deserts of central Asia, or when it went across to the wastelands of Northern China, or when it went to Tibet, there was no rainy season, but they went on observing the rainy-season retreat at that particular time, nevertheless. We might even say that the tradition has been continued in this country, because we have our Summer retreats. The Sarvastivadins of Central Asia, and the Chinese, by the way, didn't talk any longer of rainy-season retreat - that would have been ridiculous - they spoke of Summer retreat, and we have our Summer retreat even though it only lasts two or three weeks instead of for three or four months. And we can even say that after the wanderers, even after the full-timers, settled in one spot, and started inhabiting what became monasteries, the rainy-season retreat in India and elsewhere, the rainy-season retreat not only continued, it was even developed. And the rainy-season retreat, or the Summer retreat, became a period of particularly intensive effort on the behalf of all concerned, especially the full-timers. And they used to have, during the rainy-season or Summer retreat, more intensive meditation courses, or courses of lectures on the scriptures, or study classes in the scriptures. Everyone would be making much more of an intensive effort than usual during that period. Also it was very often the custom in a number of Buddhist countries that at the end of the rainy-season retreat, or towards the end of that period, ordinations would be given. Fresh people would be initiated as full-timers or as monks. And of course, at the end of this rainy season retreat also, this very intense period of practice and study, there would be the great celebration on the occasion of the *kartikapulma*, the full-moon day of *Kartika*.

So it's very easy now for us to see, for us to appreciate, how this particular day, the *kartikapulma* day, the last day of the rainy-season retreat, should have become *Sangha Day*, should have become the day especially associated with the spiritual community, the spiritual fellowship.

Well, so much then for the historical origins of the festival we're celebrating today. It's time now that we started looking just a little more deeply, for a short period at least, into its meaning. It's time we started asking ourselves what the *Sangha*, order, spiritual community, really is. And especially we have to ask ourselves in this connection in what way the spiritual community differs from the group. Now this evening, I'm not going to wind bit by bit into the subject, I'm going to plunge straight into it, straight into the heart of it, and I'm going to plunge into it with two aphorisms, because even if you happen to forget the rest of the lecture, these two aphorisms will perhaps stick.

Firstly, a spiritual community consists of individuals. Two, a group does not consist of individuals. These

are the two aphorisms. And, of course, at once a very important question arises, and that is, what is an individual?

I'm going to try and answer this question first of all in more traditional terms, in terms of traditional Buddhist thought and teaching, and then briefly in more contemporary terms.

Now, those of you who come along regularly, especially those who come along to meditation classes and retreats, know that we cite, that we chant something called the *Ti Ratana Vandana*, which means the Salutation to the Three Jewels, the salutation to the three ideals, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. So we're concerned just at the moment with the third of these three salutations, the *Sanghavandana*, the salutation to the Sangha, the salutation to the order, or the salutation to the spiritual community. And in the course of this salutation, we describe the Sangha, or spiritual community of those who are disciples of the Buddha, as being possessed of certain characteristics. We say, "*Supatipanno bhagavato savakasangho ujupatipanno bhagavato savakasangho*," and so on. We say, in translation, that the spiritual community of the Buddha's disciples proceed happily, they proceed straightforwardly, they proceed harmoniously, and they proceed in a disciplined manner. And we further say, in the course of our recitation, that this Sangha, this spiritual community, consists of four pairs of persons, making altogether eight persons, and these persons are technically known in Buddhism, these four pairs, these eight persons, are technically known as *aryas*. *Arya* is usually rendered noble, superior, but we can best render it, perhaps, as individual. In fact this is how the salutation describes the members of the Sangha, as *purisapuggala*, as people who are individuals. And the four pairs that make up the spiritual community, the Sangha, are first of all the stream entrant, of whom there are two kinds, the once-returned, of whom there are two kinds, the non-returned, of whom there also two kinds, and the Arahant, or the worthy one, the one who has reached the goal, of whom also there are two kinds. And these four pairs of individuals represent the four main stages of spiritual progress, of higher evolution, the four main stages in the development of what we may describe as true individuality, starting from the first major breakthrough right up to the attainment of enlightenment, or Buddhahood, itself. Now I'm not going into all these details today. I've described them more than once elsewhere. Tonight we're concerned with just one point. We're concerned with the point that one enters each of these stages, the stage of the stream entrant, the stage of the once-returned, and so on, one enters upon each of these stages by virtue of the fact that one has broken certain spiritual fetters, and altogether there are ten fetters, fetters that bind us down to conditioned existence, fetters due to which we are unenlightened rather than enlightened, fetters which we may say bind us in the cave of ignorance. And out of these ten fetters, the stream entrant breaks fetters one, two, and three: that makes him a stream entrant. The once returned weakens fetters four and five. The non-returned breaks fetters four and five, and the Arahant in a tremendous burst of energy, as it were, he breaks the remaining five fetters and gains full enlightenment. In other words the *Arya*, the lowest member of the spiritual community, the humblest member if you like, the *Arya* is an individual who has broken at least three fetters. That's the absolute minimum. In other words, unless you've broken at least three fetters out of the ten, you cannot be an *Arya*, you cannot be an individual, you cannot be a member of the Sangha, the spiritual community, in the highest sense. So let us see what these three fetters are, and they will give us a minimum criterion for determining whether or not anyone is an individual.

Now what's the first spiritual fetter that must be broken if one wants to be considered an individual. Well it's what is called in Sanskrit *satkayadrshiti*. *Sat* is real or true, *kaya* is body, *drshiti* is view. That doesn't help us very much. It's usually translated as personality-belief, the fetter of belief in a personality, but it's a particular kind of personality-belief, it's the belief that one's present personality, one's present existence, one's self as one is here and now is something fixed, is something final, unchanging, even absolute. And one may conceive of oneself, thought of in this way, that one just continues as one is beyond death, or that one is just sort of chopped off at the time of death and ceases to exist. *Satkayadrshiti* is very often explained, especially by Western writers on Buddhism, in purely philosophical terms, as though this particular fetter consisted in a certain kind of philosophical belief, or belonging even to a certain school of philosophical thought with regard to the nature of the self, or the nature of the 1, as though it consisted in adherence to a certain doctrine about the self but it isn't really that at all. We may say that this particular fetter is much more like a deeply rooted, largely unconscious, attitude. And of course the attitude can be rationalised in philosophical terms, thought very often it isn't. And basically the attitude is one of 'I am what I am and I can't be changed. There's nothing that can be done about it.' Suppose I've got a bad temper, well I've just got a bad temper, there's nothing that can be done about it, that's that, it's a sort of basic fact of my existence, my nature, it can't be changed. I was just born that way, so I've just got to live with it, and other people presumably have got to live with it. And sometime people even take a sort of pride in not being able to change, and even sort of almost boast sometimes, or used to, "Well, I'm just what God made

me. What can I do about it? I can't help it" In the same way if I'm irritable and bad-tempered, or if I tend to be possessive, I can't help it, I'm just made that way, that's what God made me, and maybe they even suggest sometimes it's a sort of sin to try to change God's handiwork, it's pretty good as it is. But we know that it isn't God that is responsible, it's our own self-conditioning that is responsible. But this is the sort of attitude, often unconscious attitude, that people have. I'm all fight as I am, not only all right I couldn't change, I can't change, so you take what you are now as really fixed, really absolute, really ultimate. And we might theoretically admit the possibility of a bit of change here and there, but we can't really imagine any deep or basic or very thoroughgoing change in ourselves. If we think of ourselves as being really radically changed and then try to imagine what we should then be like when we're radically changed, well we're pretty much as we are now, we can't imagine anything more than that or beyond that. So this is the first sort of spiritual fetter, that we are what we are and there is nothing that we can do about it, satkayadrshdi. And this sort of attitude prevents all spiritual progress, all higher evolution whatsoever, and we can only become, or begin to become an individual if we break this fetter.

The individual, if he's a real individual, knows that progress of any kind means change, and change means that something must go, something must die. If you want to change yourself it really means that you want to die, you have to accept the death of the old self if you want to produce a new self. And that's the only way it can come about- So if you can't accept the fact, can't recognise the fact, that the old self has to die, must die, before the real individuality can emerge, then you're still fettered by this spiritual fetter of satkayadrshdi, but if you can see that this fetter must be broken if the true individuality is to emerge, if one is to grow and develop, then you accept this fact quite serenely and quite happily as a necessary condition of progress.

So this is the first spiritual fetter that has to be broken, satkayadrshdi, belief in oneself as something fixed and unchanging and given as it were.

Arid then secondly, what we call vishikitsa. This is usually translated as doubt, perplexity, or uncertainty, or even sometimes by some scholars as scepticism, but these are not very helpful renderings. Vishikitsa is much more volitional than intellectual. Vishikitsa is really inability to commit oneself, or even we may say unwillingness, even reluctance, to commit oneself, or perhaps we can say that one does commit oneself but then one changes one's mind. And what does this mean? It means, really, that one is not integrated, one isn't a self, isn't an individual yet. One is a sort of loose association of selves - I've spoken about this before - almost like the waves of the sea, one wave rising up and another sinking down, and there are hundreds of waves doing this all the time, So in the same way we are sort of condiris, a sort of loose association, a sort of loose collection of selves that are sort of coming into operation and going out of operation, alternating with one another, and so on. So one self happens to commit the whole personality, as it were, but then that self subsides, another self pops up, and that self rescinds the commitment, and this is what is happening all the time. One self decides something-, another self decides against it. And we're certainly all familiar with this sort of state of affairs, and it's one of the reasons we know why some people can't meditate. One self wants to meditate, another doesn't. One self sort of gets going and is meditating, dragging along the rest of the personality and all of the other protesting selves, but then it sort of weakens and it goes under, and some other self, or collection of selves even, arises, gains predominance for the time being, and you can't meditate any more, you're sort of distracted, your mind wanders, and so on. So this sort of thing, this inability to commit oneself totally because one is not fully integrated, is a spiritual fetter. And this particular spiritual fetter is responsible in people's lives for a great deal of drift, a great deal of indecision, and a great deal of sheer waste of time, and if one doesn't break this fetter one can't be a real individual. Being an individual means unifying all ones selves, and only a unified person can really and truly commit himself, and only one who has committed himself to the higher evolution can progress.

Now, thirdly and lastly, third spiritual fetter, silavrata-paramarsa, and this means quite literally, dependence on moral rules and religious observances. In themselves, of course, there is nothing wrong with the moral rules, nothing wrong with the religious observances; it's the dependence on them that constitutes the fetter. And dependence doesn't mean utilising. It doesn't mean utilising the rules of morality, doesn't mean utilising religious observances; it means treating those things as ends in themselves, and not as means to an end, to the end of enlightenment. And, of course, why do we do this? Why do we tend ever to treat moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves? Of course, we don't do it consciously, we do it unconsciously. It may be that we don't really want to evolve at all, but we sort of go through the motions of wanting to evolve. But why do we even bother to go through the motions? Why do we bother to observe the moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves, not treating them as means to an end? Well, partly, it's just through sheer inertia, but partly because we're getting something

else out of them. We're getting out of them, or out of our observance of them, something which has got nothing to do with their true purpose, their true function. We may be getting acceptance by other people, may be getting even respectability, may be getting security, sense of belonging because we're doing the things that other people do, and so on. We all know how true this is of many conventional religious activities in the West, such as church-going. Ideally you go to church to praise God, but many people just go because it's the custom to go in their particular social circle, it looks good, it establishes your credit in the community, and so on. And we even find this, we may say, in things like meditation classes. The purpose, the function, of a meditation class is to meditate, but if one isn't careful one finds oneself coming along not to meditate - that's the price you have to pay for coming along - but maybe to enjoy the social atmosphere, and meeting your good friends, and so on, and since you have to meditate in order to get that, OK, you meditate. But maybe you don't really come to meditate, but you're quite prepared to go through the motions for the sake of what else you get out of that particular occasion, even if you have to sit in an uncomfortable cross-legged position before you can get on, after a while, with what you've really come for. And all this constitutes, from the spiritual point of view, a fetter, using moral rules, religious observances, etc., as ends in themselves, or means to some purpose that they weren't really intended to serve. If one wants to be a real individual one must break this particular spiritual fetter too, and treat the moral rules and religious observances as means to an end, the end of one's own higher development and evolution.

Now, this doesn't mean that one should go to the opposite extreme. This doesn't mean that one should discard all these sort of helps whatsoever. This is sometimes an extreme that people go to. They think that they can get along without religious observances, and so on, and maybe they can, but one must be very careful that one doesn't discard these traditional helps before one is really ready to discard them.

Well, so much for the more traditional Buddhist answer to the question, what is an individual" An individual is an Arya, one who is prepared to change, who accepts the necessity to change, who is even prepared to die, one who has unified all of his selves, and who can therefore commit himself decisively with the force of his whole being to the higher evolution; also one who regards religion and ethics as means, not as ends in themselves, and treats them accordingly.

Now let us try to answer the question in more contemporary terms, but we must be very brief here because we still have quite a bit of ground to traverse.

First of all, in more contemporary terms, the individual is one who is self-conscious. He is aware of what he is doing, and why. He is aware of his own subjective emotional states and thoughts. He is well aware of the extent to which he has been conditioned by his upbringing, his environment, his early experiences, his particular skills and associations, and so on. He is aware of his own basic motivations. He is aware of what is happening between him and other people, he is aware of relationships. And above all he is aware of his own irreplaceable uniqueness, as one of an infinite number of foci, of universal consciousness.

Secondly, the individual is one who is independent, not the victim of his own unconscious urges, not emotionally dependent on other people, not dependent on a group, quite happy even when on his own when he may be, in Buddhist phraseology, wandering alone even as the horn of the rhinoceros is single, who doesn't mind differing from other people, who doesn't mind thinking his own thoughts even though nobody else is thinking them at all and wouldn't dream of thinking them. But at the same time the individual does not want to show people how independent he is, because this is a form of dependence. Some people, we know, can't feel independent unless they are making others feel how independent they are, and there is much so-called independence of this kind around. Also independence does not consist in a refusal to accept one's own objective physical limitations. Elderly people, I'm afraid, especially very elderly people are rather liable to fall into this particular pitfall. They can't do certain things for themselves sometimes, but they won't allow themselves to be helped, and they say sometimes, "I've always been independent, and I'm not going to change at my age." This was never real independence, one may say. So self-consciousness and independence are the principal characteristics of the individual from a more contemporary point of view.

One could also mention other characteristics. One could say that the individual is one who is sensitive, who is sympathetic, kind, compassionate, intelligent, objective, creative, but we've no time to go into these characteristics as well. I think I've said enough to show, both from a traditional and a more modern point of view, what exactly an individual is. So let's come back to our first aphorism: a spiritual community consists of individuals, so just to see what a tall order that is.

If you want to have a spiritual community, you don't need a common roof, you don't need a building at all, you don't need a common dress, list of rules, and so on. If you want to have a spiritual community, then you have to have individuals first, and it's quite hopeless and quite useless to try and have a spiritual community unless you have your individuals first. There's a proverb which says, "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs." So in the same way you can't have a spiritual community without breaking your so-called individuals and having real individuals to form your spiritual community with. And when we say we need individuals, of course, it's individuals in the way in which I've already described. Where there are individuals in this high sense, there will be spiritual community, Sangha, order, and so on, and where there are no individuals there will be no spiritual community, call it by whatsoever name you please. All that you will really have will be a group, even though it's a group maybe several millions strong. And of course groups, we know, are of many different kinds, large and small. There's the family group. Family group is of two kinds: there's the nuclear family and the extended family. Then there's the tribe, there's the race, there's the nation, there's the linguistic group, there's the political party, the trade union, the church, and also there's the caste, the class, the club, and the business firm, all these different kinds of groups. Some groups, of course, one is born into, has to be born into, others one joins. And those into which one is born seem to be more group-like than those which are voluntarily formed and which you can actually join if you want to. And sometimes, of course, the two kinds, the groups into which you have to be born and those which you just join, overlap to some extent.

Now, at this point, a couple of questions arise. If the group, if a group, if any group, does not consist of individuals, then what does it consist of? And two, what should be the attitude of the individual towards the group, or towards a group, or towards groups in general. So, let's deal with each of these questions in turn.

What does the group consist of? Well, it consists of people who are not individuals, in other words not individuals in the sense defined, and in Buddhism there's a special term for them, a special name for them, they're called *privagshenas*, which can be translated as ordinary folk, and they are sharply contrasted in Buddhism with the *aryas*, the true individuals. And this is rather interesting. In English we don't have a proper term, really, for members of a group, a term which really distinguishes them from individuals, real individuals, but in Pali there is this sort of nomenclature, the *Arya*, the individual, and the *privagshina*, the ordinary folk. And as I said they are sharply distinguished. And this is something that doesn't fit in with our contemporary modern democratic ideas at all. We like to think that everybody is the same, everybody is equal, and we tend to resent any suggestion that some people might be more developed than others, and that some might be and others *privagshenas* and so on, but this is absolutely fundamental to the whole traditional Buddhist way of thinking, and even though we don't have in English any particular word, any particular term, for people who are just members of groups, who have not developed real individuality, we can perhaps call them, and this is only a suggestion, statistical individuals. They are individuals in the sense that they can be counted separately. In other words they've got separate bodies, they've even got separate votes, but they don't have separate minds of their own. Their minds such as they are, are usually submerged, as it were, to speak metaphorically, in the group mind, even the group soul. They're not really self-conscious, or only in a very rudimentary way, and they're not, certainly, independent. And they tend to think, and feel, and act together with other members of the group, not as individuals.

Now, what should be the attitude of the individual towards such people, towards groups, or a group, any group? Or perhaps we can put the question a little differently. What should be the attitude of one who is himself trying to become an individual? And the answer is twofold. In the first place as far as he possibly can he should cut himself off from the group, cut his ties with the group, and this will involve, at least at first, actual physical dissociation, and this is what is called in Buddhism traditionally, *provrugia*, which means going forth, going forth from the home, from the tribe, from the community, from the state, from the nation, going forth on your own, cutting yourself off from the group, from all groups. And this is what the Buddha did when he left home. This is called his great renunciation, *abinishkomina*, his great going forth, his *provrugia*. So he left his family, left his tribe, left his state, even left his former religion into which he had been born. So when this happens one ceases to be a member of a group, and one ceases to depend on the group. One becomes a sort of lone wolf, becomes an individual on one's own. So as far as the group is concerned, really and truly, one doesn't any longer exist, one just isn't there, one is dead. This by the way is very dramatically represented in orthodox Hinduism in the traditional ritual by means of which one becomes a full-timer, a wanderer, according to Hindu tradition. What does one do? In Hindu tradition one kindles a fire, a sort of sacred fire, and one pours libations into the sacred fire with mantras, and then you put into the fire certain personal possessions, and you end up with two things. Every orthodox Hindu layman, as we would say, has a little tuft of hair growing on his crown. It's called his *Tiki*.



Some irreverent Europeans call it his pigtail, but it's very short, and it's sometimes curly. But it's snipped off and it's put into the sacred fire. And last of all, if he's a caste Hindu, he takes off his sacred thread which makes him a Brahmin or Kshatriya or Vaisha, and even that is thrown into the sacred fire and is consumed. In other words he even gives up caste. And this is a tremendous thing for a Hindu, because Hindu social life is absolutely pervaded by caste, you can't get away from it. Whether you want to marry, or dine, or go out with anyone, caste, caste, the whole time, what is your caste? Are you lower caste? Are you higher caste? Are you maybe untouchable, or unseeable even, what is your caste? Caste is absolutely ubiquitous and all-pervading in Indian social life. But on this occasion the initiate gives up his caste, he gives up his social identity itself, and this, as I've said, is a tremendous thing in India. And what does he do after that? He isn't finished by any means. He then performs himself his own funeral ceremony. He acts as the priest of his own cremation, and it's just as though he has died, and the new self as he is now, he performs the funeral ceremony of the old. And according to Hindu tradition thereafter he is civilly dead, he has no civil rights, he has no rights under law, he cannot inherit property, because he doesn't exist. He's just passed over. If there's any property to be inherited, well it goes to his son if he had one, or to his brother, but he just doesn't exist any more. He cannot go to law. Whatever you do to him he can't take recourse to the law, because the law - not in modern India but in former traditional India - the law does not recognise his existence; he's dead; he's gone, and he can't get married, because no woman could marry a ghost. So he's absolutely civilly dead. He doesn't belong to the group any more. So far as the group is concerned he just doesn't exist. So this is a rather terrible and striking sort of illustration from the Hindu tradition, which is kept up to a great extent, even today. And it illustrates in this very dramatic, and very tremendous way, that if you want to be a real individual you have to cut yourself off from the group, and so far as the group is concerned just no longer exist, that is to say on their terms, their group terms.

And in the second place one who is trying to become an individual should encourage others also to become individuals. One can't absolutely physically cut oneself off from contact with people who are members of groups even though they are not individuals, one can't do this completely permanently. One may even have to remain very, very nominally a member of a group. But all the time, in a sense, one will be doing one's best to disrupt it, to encourage people who are now just members of groups, participating in the group mind as it were with no minds of their own, one would encourage them as much as one can to become individuals.

In this sort of life, there's always the possibility, always the danger, of self-deception. Sometimes you may say to yourself, "well, what does it matter? I need not actually go away physically. I'm just sort of free of it all in my mind," but you don't ever really know whether you are free of it in your mind unless you make at least sometimes in some respects the experiment. You might say, "well, I can get on perfectly well without my family," but how do you know? Try it. Just go abroad for a year or two years, and see if you can really get on without them. You don't know until you've made the experiment. You might say, "I'm quite happy living anywhere in the world. I don't want to live in England." Well, you go and live in Iceland, or you go perhaps and live in some South Sea Island, and see if you're equally happy there, in a totally different environment. Or see if you're equally happy even though you're not speaking English maybe for months on end, speaking a totally different language, and not seeing anything familiar, or anything that you've been used to since your childhood or since your birth. So it's very easy to say, as it were to yourself, well it's enough to dissociate yourself subjectively from group attitudes, you don't actually have to go away from any particular group. But one really needs to be sure of this, and one can only be sure of it if you make the experiment and separate yourself at least from some groups sometimes, and see how you actually do fare on your own.

Now, I know that I presented this contrast between the spiritual community, which consists of individuals, and the group, which does not consist of individuals, rather sharply, and rather starkly, but this is, I feel, absolutely necessary, because it's very necessary and very important that we should know what it is that we are actually looking for, what we're actually in search of, whether we are looking for a spiritual community that we can belong to through becoming ourselves an individual and qualifying in that way, or whether what we are really looking for is just a group. Now, it's not that there's anything wrong in wanting to belong to a group. The need, the desire to belong to a group, is very, very strong in man. It has a very, very long history. Just think how far back human ancestry goes. It goes back a full million years. And man we know is descended from the primates, and his primate ancestry goes back 20 million years, and during the whole of that period, during that 21 million year period as ape, as ape-man, as man-ape, and man, man as he then was has lived as a member of a group. So there's a long history of this sort of thing behind us, in our blood, and in our bones as it were. And until just a few thousand years ago, out of 21 million years, the group to which all these ancestors of man belonged was of a certain type. It was

simply an extended family group, a small tribe, maybe thirty, forty or fifty members strong. This is how our ancestors lived for a vast period of time until very, very recently indeed, and only very recently was that comparatively simple situation complicated by the rise, only after all 8 or 10 thousand years ago, of what we call civilisation. Before that what happened? What was the situation? Let's just try to imagine it, whether it's in time of the primates, or the ape-men, or the men-ape, or even of human beings themselves before 8 or 10 thousand years ago. You just had groups of, well, I was going to say people but we don't really have a proper general term but you'll understand what I mean, you just had groups of people wandering about enclosed by vast spaces, enclosed by vast forests, and only very occasionally coming into contact, very peripheral contact, with other similar groups. For instance, suppose we had all been living say 20000 years ago or 100 thousand years ago, or a million years ago, or let's go further back and imagine we were primates and living say 10 million years ago, well, there would have been just this little sort of group, this little tribe of us all interrelated, people of different ages and sexes and so on, and there wouldn't have been anyone near us maybe for scores of miles, and we wouldn't have come into contact with anyone outside this group except very occasionally, and all our contacts, all our relationships would have been just this group, and all around just nature, and occasionally a contact with some other group some other tribe. And this is how we would have been living. And this is how we, our ancestors, have been living for 21 million years. It's only the last 8 or 10 thousand years that we've been living in a different way, a way as I've said complicated by the rise of civilisation, so it's not surprising that we still feel the need to belong to that old sort of group, and contrive in one way or another to belong, even in a distorted manner, to such a group. And of course today the situation is more complicated and more distorted than ever before in history. You see, the trouble nowadays is, from a certain point of view, we find ourselves belong to groups which are either much too small, or much too big. On the one hand there is the nuclear family into which we are born, mother, father, maybe one or two brothers and sisters. But this sort of nuclear family is a quite late, a quite recent development in human history, and even now it's by no means found everywhere in the world. And it's so late and so unusual, this sort of nuclear family, so sort of exceptional and aberrant, that it's not surprising that psychologists say that it's a sort of breeding ground for neurosis. On the other hand, groups nowadays are so big that we can't possibly have contact with all the members of them. Especially, we think of the nation state. That's the biggest group of all, perhaps. So here we are as it were, suspended almost, between a group which cramps us, i.e. the nuclear family, and a group which is so big as to be meaningless, i.e. the state, with a number maybe of other very large equally unsatisfactory groups of which we have a sort of partial and intermittent membership which don't really satisfy us. But what man wants, or all man wants sometimes is just a group that he can belong to as in the good old days, when he roamed the forests or lived in the little village. All he wants is 30, 40, 50, or maybe if he's very ambitious and greedy, 60 other people with whom he's in real live contact all the time, whom he knows personally, with whom he has a genuine sort of relationship on that sort of group level. Preferably people with whom he can also live and work. And this sort of need, this need to belong to a group of this sort, in this way, cannot be by-passed, we can't just pretend it doesn't exist, because after all man has to develop stage by stage and step by step. So nowadays it's not only a question of creating a spiritual community by helping to create individuals, it's also a question of establishing groups in which healthy group members, potential individuals, will develop.

And this brings us, to conclude shortly, this brings us back to earth as it were, brings us back to ourselves, brings us back to our own movement. And we may say that our own movement, organisationally speaking, consists of two parts, or if you like two levels. The first is what we call the FWBO, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. This we may say is the healthy, positive, growing group, open to anybody who cares to come along and join in. And secondly there's what we call the WBO, the Western Buddhist Order, which is just the spiritual community, which is open to those who are prepared simply to commit themselves to the higher evolution, who want to become real individuals, and who signify their commitment by formally accepting the three refuges, as we call them, commitment to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and the ten precepts of behaviour. Of course, though there are these two sections, these two wings, these two levels, it's not possible to draw a hard and fast line between the two. They overlap, they interflow, even interfuse, but they're distinct, nevertheless. And all the activities conducted under the auspices of what we call the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, or the Friends for short, meditation classes, lectures, communications courses, retreats, these are all conducted by members of the spiritual community, members of the Western Buddhist Order. And the presence of the spiritual community in the midst of the group, the presence of the order in the midst of the Friends as we may say, ensures that the group does not become a group in a narrow, closed sort of sense.

Now whether members of a spiritual community or members of a group, we need to be in regular external physical contact. Under modern conditions it's difficult for us to live and work together, highly desirable

though that may be. But at least we can meet regularly, but to meet regularly especially in fairly large numbers, we need a regular meeting place. And as I think everybody knows for the past five months we've been as a movement virtually homeless. We have as you nearly all know been meeting here once a week, but this we are not able to continue after Christmas, because this place is needed after that for other purposes. So we have, therefore, very urgently - and here we come down to something very practical and immediate indeed - we have very urgently to find new premises for our activities if possible, for all our activities. Ideally we need a large house on rent, fairly centrally situated, with at least one room large enough for a meeting like this, and if possible also with residential accommodation. If we are able to secure such premises then all our activities can continue, meditation classes can continue, lectures can continue, communications courses can continue, and very much else also can be done. And in this way, this place, this new centre, this new Sakura as we sometimes call it, will become a living centre, a growing centre, an expanding centre, a centre, a place where people can meet, where they can feel a real group, where they can practise together, and where they can start becoming individuals, and by becoming individuals help create in the midst of the group, a spiritual community. So all this means that we, or those of us who take this movement at all seriously, really need in the immediate future, to bestir ourselves, not only to help find premises, but also to help find, to help raise the wherewithal necessary for acquiring and running the premises. And if we can do this, all of us between us, in the course of the next few weeks, certainly within the course of the next two months, then our participation in today's function, in today's celebration will have been truly meaningful, and we will have shown that we've understood what was meant by the individual, what was meant by the group, what was meant by the spiritual community. We will have shown in fact our appreciation of the ideal of the Sangha, the ideal of spiritual fellowship.