

Tape 92. Sangharakshita ' The Lamas of Tibet

Friends.

This evening, I'm going to say something on the subject of the Lamas of Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism is quite a popular subject for lectures and people usually are quite interested to hear something about the lamas of Tibet. In the course of the last ten or fifteen years, ever since the unhappy invasion of Tibet by the Communist Chinese, we have heard quite a lot about the lamas of Tibet, especially about the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama and various other incarnate lamas of that great Buddhist country. This evening we're going to try to understand what this expression 'the Lamas of Tibet' really means. What it really signifies. Now we must observe, to begin with that there is quite a lot of misunderstanding about the meaning of the word lama. So let's deal with the particular topic first - the meaning of the word lama. The literal meaning of the word is simply superior and it is said to translate the sanskrit word 'uttama', which also means that which is higher or that which is superior. So, lama means superior, and superior in the sense of that which is, or someone who is spiritually superior. So this idea of not only the superior, but that which is, or the person who is spiritually superior, introduces an extremely important idea ' an idea which underlies, in one form or another not only practically the whole of Tibetan Buddhism but practically the whole of Buddhism itself and, in fact, any system of spiritual life and spiritual thought. And that is the idea of what we may describe in a few words as the idea of spiritual hierarchy. Now, what do we mean by this' IF we want to explain it fully or at all deeply, we have, as it were, to go back to the beginning and we have to introduce the conception of what is usually known as degrees of reality. Or, if you like, degrees in existence. So perhaps degrees of reality or levels of reality is less open to misunderstanding. The idea is that the level of experience on which we at present are, which we usually occupy. That is to say, the level of waking experience, the experience through which the five senses experience through the lower mind. This is just one level, this is just one degree, this is one grade merely of experience of reality. Above this there are other, higher levels of existence ' of being, of consciousness, in a word, of reality. So that the whole of existence is as it were, like a great scale, or like a great stair on which we occupy the lowest level or the lowest rack, speaking in terms of human understanding and experience and consciousness. So this is the conception, to begin with, of what we call degrees of reality. At the lower levels, the lower rungs, are less real and those at the top most real, as it were, of all. So, in all spiritual systems, whether Buddhism or Hinduism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Sufism and so on, one gets this conception of the hierarchical system of reality. That there are degrees and grades of reality in the structure of existence itself. And this has an important corollary in terms of experience. If there are degrees of reality, it means that there are degrees of spiritual experience, even degrees of enlightenment, if you like, in accordance with the level or the degree of reality, which is being experienced. On our present level there is, as it were, objectively a certain level or certain degree or certain grade of reality ' a comparatively low one. Then on the subjective side, corresponding to that is our experience of that reality of that lower degree of reality, which in as much as it is an experience of a lower degree of reality, is itself an experience of a lower degree, a lower kind in the hierarchy of experiences. So objectively one has this hierarchy of existence, the hierarchy of the degrees of reality and subjectively one has the hierarchy of degrees of experience or even, ultimately levels of Enlightenment. So this being the case, we have also a hierarchy, as it were, of being. Those who live and move and have their being on the lower levels, they are beings occupying the lower reaches, as it were, of the hierarchy. Those who live and move and have their being on the higher levels, or even on the highest levels of all these represent beings who in the scale or hierarchy of beings occupy a higher place. So one has in the first place the hierarchy of the degrees of reality objectively, subjectively, the hierarchy of the degrees of experience and then, in terms of people, in terms of persons, the hierarchy of beings, even the hierarchy of spiritual beings, even the hierarchy of Enlightenment. So therefore, when we enter upon

the spiritual life, we automatically take our place in a hierarchy of spiritual beings. And when we take our place in the hierarchy of spiritual hierarchy, we find, inevitably that there are some being who are above us and that there are some, perhaps, who are below us. Usually of course we will find that most of the beings in the spiritual hierarchy are above us and very few, or even in some cases practically none at all, are below us. In other words, when we take our place in the spiritual hierarchy, most of the beings who are already members of that spiritual hierarchy are our spiritual superiors in as much as they belong to a higher degree, on a higher level of reality by virtue of their higher degree or level of spiritual experience. So, in relation to us they are spiritual superiors, on other words, in relation to us, they are what the Tibetans call lamas. Now this whole way of thinking we usually find is rather distasteful to the modern mind. The modern mind doesn't like to think in terms of anybody being as it were, spiritually superior. The modern mind tends rather to like to think that everybody is on the same flat level, it's all democratic, it's all, as it were, equal, that nobody is really superior to anybody else. Though it may be in an ultimate spiritual essence in respect of ultimate Buddhahood, nobody is superior or inferior to anybody else. But in terms of actual attainment, in term of actual manifestation of that inner essence, there is a very definite distinction. Some are higher and some are lower, and in the Buddhist tradition generally, a considerable importance attaches to the recognition of this sort of hierarchical principle. For instance, when one is ordained as a bhikshu, a Buddhist monk, one of the things they do immediately after the ordination is to take the time of the ordination. And they will tell you, for instance, that the time of your ordination is fifteen minutes past nine in the morning and such and such a day, of such and such a month, in such and such a year. They give the dates of course, according to the Buddhist calendar and the phases of the moon. And there is a reason why they do this 'because you may subsequently meet another monk and you may ask him 'Well, when were you ordained'' and you discover that he was ordained in the same year. So alright, you ask farther, 'which month'' You might even find he was ordained on the same day. So then you have to ask 'What time''. Then you may find that you were ordained fifteen minutes before he was, and that makes you senior to him by fifteen minutes. But the idea is that in the Sangha, there cannot be ever complete equality in respect of the position you occupy in the hierarchy, as it were in this case, not the spiritual hierarchy, but merely the ecclesiastical hierarchy 'someone is superior, someone is, as it were, inferior. Of course, in English by virtue of our very way of looking at these things, the words superior and inferior have got rather unpleasant connotations. It isn't quite like that in the East because there no one minds being inferior and no one objects to anyone being spiritually superior. So this particular tradition with regard to the bhikshu ordination and seniority in the Order illustrates the great importance in Buddhism which is attached tot his whole principle of what we may call spiritual hierarchy. But as I have said, very often in the West, in the modern West at least people find this principle rather hard to accept and they're not very happy at the idea that there might be lots and lots of people spiritually superior to them. But according to Buddhist tradition and Buddhist teaching, this sort of attitude, this sort of reluctance to recognise others as spiritually superior and therefore as deserving of respect and even reverence is a sign of what we would call egotism and it is emphasised that until this is overcome, 'til one is generally able to look up to those who are spiritually superior and adopt a more receptive attitude, very little spiritual progress is possible. At bottom, what one has to accept, as it were, is this whole principle of spiritual hierarchy, the fact that there are degrees of reality, degrees of spiritual experience, degrees of spiritual attainment and also, therefore, people who are spiritually superior as well as spiritually inferior.

Now the hierarchy of spiritual beings constitutes, we may say, a sort of chain. IN a chain, one link, as it were, depends on another. If you hang the chain vertically then the lower link will depend on the higher link, and so on all the way down that chain. So it's just the same with the chain of spiritual being, the being who constitutes or represents the higher degree. So in this way one has a chain of spiritual beings from the heights right down as it were, in to the depths. And this chain of spiritual beings is not a dead chain, as it were, but a living chain: all the link of which are interconnected. And not only that

but according to not only the general Buddhist teaching but specifically the Tibetan Buddhist teaching, up and down that chain 'living chain of spiritual beings, there run all sorts of spiritual influences and as it were, currents from below there runs, or rises, as it were, a current of reverence of devotion even a current of worship. This is going up all the time from the lower degrees. The beings or the person who are lower down in the spiritual hierarchy up towards those who are in a higher position. Then from above descending there is all the time a current, as it were, of what the Tibetans call 'chin lap' which means - it's very difficult to translate 'a sort of blessing or if you like, even grace, or a sort of spiritual transmuting force or power, and this is coming down all the time. So you get this picture, as it were of the spiritual hierarchy, the hierarchy of spiritual beings, some lower, others higher., the lower depending upon the higher and these spiritual currents and influences running up and down the devotion ascending and the blessing, the grace if you like, descending. Now, according again to the Tibetan tradition, the descending force, the blessing or the grace, takes a certain concrete form and it is essentially this which is known as the Teaching 'the guidance upon the path. Usually we think of teaching in more intellectual, in more conceptual terms, we think that the teaching means the Four Noble Truths or teaching means the Twelve Links of the Conditional Coproduction or the teaching means the Wheel of Life or the teaching means the Three Characteristics, but these are only external forms, these are only as it were, conceptual formulations. What the teaching really is, according to Tibetan Buddhism, is a sort of current of spiritual force of spiritual energy descending from higher planes to lower planes, descending from those who are spiritually superior to those who are spiritually inferior, descending in such a way as to help them and guide them. The doctrinal teaching is only one of the external forms, only one of those manifestations of this, so a lama therefore is not only a spiritual superior, but also a spiritual teacher and this in Tibet is the real meaning of the word. So that when we speak of, or when we refer to, the Lamas of Tibet, what we really mean, what we really refer to are the spiritual teacher of Tibet. Now before going into this in a little detail, I want to clear up one or two misunderstandings. The word lama by Western writers and travellers is used rather loosely. A lama does not mean a monk. Very often the word lama is used as though it meant monk but this is not what it means. A lama may be a monk and monk may be a lama, but lama itself does not mean monk.. For the word monk there are other terms in Tibetan, the most general term is trapa (' which means simply student. If you're a Tibetan and you see lots of what we would call monk walking along the road, if you wanted to call attention to them, you would say to your friend 'Look at those trapas walking along the road'. You wouldn't say 'Look at those lamas'. This would be considered quite inappropriate. So trapa is the general word for monk, then for the technically fully ordained monk, the Bhikkhu as he is called in Pali or Bhikshu in Sanskrit, the Tibetans say gelong, and for the sramanera, the novice monk, they say gitsul, and for the full upasika, what we call lay brother or lay sister, they say gerye. And the Tibetans never mix up these different categories, what is a lama, what is a monk, what is a novice, these are all clearly even sharply distinguished. But as I've said some Western writers and travellers have created considerable confusion by speaking of all monks indiscriminately, as it were, as lamas. Some confusion has also been created by the fact that some writers speak when referring to Tibetan Buddhism speak of married monks. Now if by monk you mean bhikshu, a married monk is really a contradiction in terms. What they're really referring to is not a married monk but a married lama and there are married lamas in Tibet and a married lama is not a monk but a spiritually advanced layman who is functioning as a spiritual teacher. Usually, especially in the Gelugpa tradition, a lama, a spiritual teacher, is a monk but among the Nyingmapas and Kagyupas, it very often happens that the lama or the spiritual teacher is a layman who may in some cases be married. So these are just one or two of the misunderstandings which ought to be cleared up in connection with this term lama or in connection with the 'lamas of Tibet'.

Now let us go back to our main topic. The Lamas of Tibet therefore are the spiritual teachers of Tibet. Now the general Indian word for a spiritual teacher is guru. So lama

means guru and when we speak of the lamas of Tibet we really mean the gurus of Tibet. Now when we say 'of Tibet', what exactly do we mean' Tibet is of course a Buddhist country. So when we speak of the gurus of Tibet, we mean those who are gurus or spiritual teachers within the context or within the framework of Tibetan Buddhism. But then the question which arises is 'what do we mean by Tibetan Buddhism' And this is a very big question indeed. But broadly speaking, we may say that Tibetan Buddhism is a direct continuation of Indian Buddhism, Indian Buddhism in its totality after fifteen hundred years of development. As I've mentioned I think only yesterday, Indian Buddhism lasted for about fifteen hundred years, from about 500 BC to about 1000AD and during these 1500 years, it passed through three great phases of development, each of which lasted for about 500 years. First of all, it passed through the phase of Hinayana Buddhism or basic Buddhism, then through the phase of the Mahayana or developed Buddhism and then through the phase of the Vajrayana or esoteric Buddhism as it is sometimes called. Now during the first phase, during the Hinayana phase, the phase of basic Buddhism, Buddhism went from India to Ceylon, so the Buddhism of Ceylon represents Indian Buddhism of that first phase of development. Buddhism went to China during the second phase, the Mahayana phase, the phase of developed Buddhism. So Chinese Buddhism represents Indian Buddhism in that particular stage of its development. In other words, Hinayana plus Mahayana. But Buddhism went to Tibet during the third of the three great phases in the development of Buddhism in India, that is to say during the phase of the Vajrayana or esoteric Buddhism. So what went to Tibet from India was not just Hinayana which went to Ceylon, not just even Hinayana plus Mahayana, just as went to China but Hinayana plus Mahayana plus Vajrayana. In other words, basic Buddhism plus developed Buddhism plus esoteric Buddhism also. And this is why, as I mentioned the other day that Tibetan Buddhists themselves very often refer to Tibetan Buddhism as Triyana Tibetan Buddhism ' the Tibetan Buddhism of the three yananas. That is to say Hinayana plus Mahayana plus Vajrayana. We find all these elements in Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is very often referred to as Mahayana Buddhism but it isn't just that. It's Hinayana plus Mahayana plus Vajrayana all integrated into a single system. These three yananas are not by the way, mutually exclusive. According to Tibetan tradition, they represent three successive phases or stages of spiritual progress as well as three successive stages of historical development of Indian Buddhism itself.. I've gone into all these matters in other lectures, other talks so I'm not going to elaborate this evening. But the point that I want to make, the point which is important and relevant here is that the lamas or gurus of Tibet, are gurus in a three-fold sense. They are gurus in the Hinayana, gurus in the Mahayana and gurus in the Vajrayana. And by this one does not mean that they are three different kinds of gurus, but that they are one guru, as it were, functioning in three different ways or on three different levels, that of the Hinayana, that of the Mahayana and that of the Vajrayana. Now when a lama or a guru or a spiritual teacher is functioning on the Hinayana level he's known in Sanskrit as the upajaya, or the preceptor. This is the technical term for the lama or the guru as functioning on the level of the Hinayana, the upajaya or the 'preceptor'. And traditionally in Buddhism in the Hinayana, the upajaya is what we call a senior monk, a senior bhikshu, one who has completed at least ten years as a fully ordained monk in the order and it is such a upajaya who gives to others the Refugees and the Precepts. And within the Sangha within the monastic community it is he who presides at the time of conferring monastic ordination. If you want to be ordained as a Buddhist monk, as a Buddhist bhikshu you have to gather together at least five fully ordained Buddhist monks, in the same place, and amongst them there has to be one who is senior, one who is able to function as upajaya or lama, or guru within that particular context of the Hinayana and then the ordination can take place. Within the context of the Hinayana the lama also teaches the Dharma in the sense that he teaches basic Buddhism and gives instruction in elementary concentration and meditation. So this is what is meant by the lama functioning within the context of the Hinayana as the upajaya are as the preceptor.

Now on the level of the Mahayana, or within the context of the Mahayana, the lama or

guru appears as or functions as what is known as the Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva, we may say very broadly, is one who has attained a high level of spiritual perfection who occupies quite a high place in the spiritual hierarchy who's gone very far, as it were, who is nearing Nirvana, but who is at the same time renounces Nirvana for himself. The idea at the back of this statement is that as one progresses in the spiritual life, as one dissociates oneself more and more from the things of this world, from the samsara it becomes possible for one, as it were, to complete the dissociation to cut oneself off from the world, from the samsara, from other beings, and to remain in a state of spiritual peace and calm even happiness, quite apart from the other beings of the Universe. And this is what Buddhism calls a sort of individual or private Nirvana, away from the sufferings and miseries of the world. So this sort of possibility is open to the Bodhisattva when he reaches a certain level of his spiritual development. But he doesn't follow that particular path or that particular way. The Bodhisattva decides to remain, as it were, in contact with beings, within the samsara and to devote his spiritual energies, to devote the spiritual knowledge and experience and understanding which he has acquired to helping others within the samsara to make spiritual progress themselves 'to become free.

So this is what is meant by the guru, by the lama, the spiritual superior within the context of the Mahayana. Here he appears as the Bodhisattva. Not only does he renounce, according to Tibetan tradition, his own individual Nirvana, , but he voluntarily allows himself as it were, to be reborn on this Earth, in another human body, so that he is able to continue his work of helping and guiding and teaching other living beings. Now this sort of idea, this sort of Bodhisattva Ideal is common to all the Mahayana countries. You find it in China, you find it in Japan, you find it everywhere else. But in Tibet, it has been given a very special development. The Tibetans, one finds are a very practical people, they are not satisfied with generalities, they're not satisfied with abstractions, they want to come down to details, as it were, they want to know things in truth and in fact. So the Tibetans weren't satisfied as it were, with just being told in general, in a sort of general way, that Bodhisattvas renounce their individual Nirvana. Bodhisattvas allow themselves to be reborn on Earth and to take human form to help others. The Tibetans wanted to know 'well, where are they' and 'who are they'. They wanted to try to identify, to locate them, almost, we may say, to hunt them down. So in this way there developed among the Tibetans, in Tibetan Buddhism, in the course of the last few hundred years, the institution of what became known as the Tulkus or what we call in English, the incarnate Lamas. They're not so much incarnate lamas as incarnate Bodhisattvas. And the most famous of these of course are the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, though there are many others and a lot of books, quite a number of books, describe the way in which they are discovered and identified and installed, and trained and taught and so on. Now, I would say myself, because it is also my observations and studies that in Tibet itself, in the course of generations there has arisen a certain amount of confusion, in the popular mind, on this question on this subject, of the incarnate lamas. Nowadays, Tibetan Buddhists usually think that if a certain child can be positively identified as the re-incarnation of a certain deceased abbot or teacher then he's automatically a tulku, an incarnate lama, or Bodhisattva, but strictly speaking, that is not so, because you'd have to prove to begin with that the original abbot or the original teacher was himself a Bodhisattva before you could speak of his re-incarnation as being an incarnate Bodhisattva. So very often the Tibetans tend to think that anybody who can be identified as the rebirth or re-incarnation of somebody else, is automatically an incarnate lama. So in this way many of the merely identified reincarnations are popularly regarded as incarnate Bodhisattvas. So in this way in the whole of Tibet, one had in the old days about 2000 people who were popularly regarded as incarnate lamas. I regret to say that out of all of them there is only one woman. Apparently they were all men, but this is neither here nor there, that's just by the way. But it would seem to me, as I've said, that the Tibetans nowadays make the mistake of identifying as an incarnate lama those who are merely identified as re-incarnations of deceased abbots and so on. I remember once in a lecture, Mr. Christmas Humphries put the matter rather well, he said that most incarnate lamas were really the sort of equivalent, as it would be in this country of the

local vicar reborn. SO this just about sums it up in most cases. Very, very few out of the 2000, one would say can really be regarded as incarnate Bodhisattvas. Maybe the Dalai Lama, and the Panchen Lama and just a few others, some of whom I've known, but perhaps not many more than that. Now on the Mahayana level, as Bodhisattvas, the lama is a teacher in two ways. First of all he is a teacher by virtue of his mere presence in the world among people. Tibetans attach very great importance to this, the fact that there is in the world a spiritually superior being, a lama, a guru or, in this case, a Bodhisattva. The mere fact that he is here is itself a great thing. He doesn't necessarily have to do anything, he doesn't necessarily have to say anything or teach anything. The Tibetans believe by virtue of the mere fact that he is here, that in the midst of ordinary people, there is someone who is extraordinary, who is spiritually more gifted, spiritually more highly attained, this mere fact itself carried its own influence and its own blessing. So therefore they regard it as of the utmost importance that these people should just, as it were, be in this world, just be here with us regardless of what they say the guru or lama, as Bodhisattva within the context of the Mahayana functions as a teacher of the Mahayana itself and especially of what is called the Sunaytavada, the philosophy of the Mahayana, and of the Six Perfections which lead to Buddhahood, that is to say Dana or Giving, Sila or Ethics, Shanti or Patience, Virya or Vigour, Samadhi or Meditation in the higher sense, and Prajna or Wisdom, also in the higher sense. Again, the guru or lama, as Bodhisattva in the context of the Mahayana gives to others the Bodhisattva Vow and Ordination, and the Bodhisattva Precepts. Now this is on the comparatively ecclesiastical level but it does have its own function and its own importance. Now on the level of the Vajrayana, the lama functions as what is known as the Vajracharya, or as we may translate it, the Tantric Guru, and this is the real, the ultimate meaning of lama in Tibet, the Tantric Guru. Lama as preceptor, that's provisional, lama as Bodhisattva, even that is provisional but lama at Tantric Guru, Tantric Teacher, this is the real meaning of the world lama, the ultimate meaning at least of the word lama in Tibet. If a Tibetan Buddhist says to you or says to anybody, 'That is my lama' or 'So-and-so is my lama', he means that is his Tantric Guru. He doesn't mean that he has taken the precepts from him, he doesn't mean he is studying Buddhist philosophy with him, he means he has received from him Tantric Initiation or Wong as it is called. Now the guru or the lama is of great or even we may say of supreme importance for all stages of the Buddhist life but especially is this the case in the Vajrayana or in the Tantra, the lama appears as a fourth refuge. In all other forms of Buddhism we have got Refuge in the Buddha, Refuge in the Dharma, Refuge in the Sangha, but in Tantric Buddhism in the Vajrayana one has also Refuge in the Guru and this fourth refuge comes first. Tibetan Buddhists always say when they take the Refuges 'To the Lama for Refuge I go', then they say to the Buddha for Refuge I go, the Dharma, the Sangha. That really it's a fourth refuge, they do say that the lama refuge is the esoteric or the esoteric form of the first refuge, the Buddha refuge. What is Buddha in general in relation to the whole Buddhist tradition in relation to you individually is what they call lama. But they consider this so important that they separate this esoteric aspect of the Buddha refuge and make it into a fourth or rather, into a first refuge preceding refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. And we may say that Tibetan Buddhists do regard the Vajrayana lama, the Tantric Guru as in a way, a sort of Buddha. If you read the life of Milarepa for instance, you find that Milarepa always regarded his teacher Marpa as a Buddha or as the Buddha. So this sort of attitude is very strongly encouraged and indicated in Vajrayana Buddhism, that one should regard one's Tantric Guru as the Buddha himself and respect and revere him accordingly. And this is why it's a tradition in Tibetan Buddhism, especially with regard to the Vajrayana, that one never finds fault with or criticises not only one's own Tantric Guru, but anybody's Tantric Guru or even any spiritual teacher in general and this one of the reasons also why the Tibetans, certainly, at least within the context of Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism, require the absolute obedience of the pupil to the teacher. Now the classic example, of course is that of Milarepa. Some of you might know the story of Milarepa's life, his early days were passed in a rather sinful fashion. He practised Black Magic and killed a number of people in this way and was in general rather disreputable and then he had a change of heart and he came within the influence, not to say into the clutches of a very

famous guru called Marpa who was very, very strict and very, very severe. So he set Milarepa building houses. He didn't set him studying the scriptures or even practising meditation, he set him building houses, in all sorts of odd places, on the tops of hills roundabout, and he made Milarepa carry the stones on his shoulders and Milarepa, through carrying these stones on his shoulders, developed great sores. So when he showed these to his guru all the guru did was to show him how to fold a piece of sacking in order to cover up the sore and carry the stone on the sacking just in the same way that donkeys were loaded with stones. Milarepa carried on his work in this way. And he built his first house and then the guru said it was all wrong and made him pull it down again. And in this way he built several houses for the guru and they all had to be pulled down, all except the last one. So in this way he was subjected to various trials and to various austerities until as the guru said, all his sins were thoroughly purified and only after that he got initiation. So this life of Milarepa is often cited as an example of how the disciple should behave towards the guru. There's another well known example in the Life of Milarepa where Marpa the guru celebrates a great feast and gives a great initiation to all his disciples and the practice, the tradition is that in Tantric Buddhism, that when you receive a Tantric initiation, you have to make offering and if it's a very important offering or very important initiation rather, you have offer everything that you have in order to get it, that is to say all your property, all your money, all you household furniture, your pots and pans, and your rice and your barley, even your beer, everything has to be offered to the guru. Because the attitude you're trying to express is that what you are going to receive is so precious that it requires everything you've got in return, as it were. So Marpa one day celebrated an initiation of this sort and his disciples came and one came, a very old disciple came ' a very old man from a long distance and he brought all his possessions with him, all his wives and his children and his flocks and his herds and sacks of rice and sacks of barley and barrels of beer and all sorts of things, even gold and jewellery ' offered them all to the guru on the occasion of the initiation. But Marpa wasn't pleased in the case of this particular disciple and his offerings. He said, 'This isn't good enough, it won't do.' So the disciple said to Marpa, 'What do you mean?' Marpa said, 'You haven't brought everything.' So the disciple said, 'Yes, I think I have.' So Marpa says, 'No, just think again.' So the disciple thought and thought and thought and then he remembered there was an old she-goat, it was so old it couldn't walk so he thought 'That's no good for the guru, can't do much with an old she-goat that can't even walk.' So he'd left it behind and hadn't brought it to offer. So the guru said, 'Back you go and get it.' So he had to go about 500 miles back to get the old she-goat. So back he went and everybody had to wait until he came back carrying it on his shoulders and then the guru said, 'Yes, now you've offered everything, now you can have the initiation.' And so this is what sort of person Marpa the guru of Milarepa was. And this little story also illustrates the importance of devotion to and obedience to the guru especially the Tantric Guru. And one might mention, incidentally that there is in the Tibetan Tantric tradition, a special yoga which is called the Guru Yoga. And the purpose of this yoga is to help one to attune oneself to the mind and the heart of the guru and make one receptive to his spiritual influence. The Tibetans, especially in this Tantric context, believe that it isn't enough just to learn certain teachings from the guru. It isn't even enough to do as he tells you but your heart must be tuned in, as it were, to the guru's heart so that you know automatically spontaneously what he wants you to do and you behave accordingly. That's why it's sometimes said in several Buddhist contexts there are three kinds of disciple. The first kind, the guru tells him to do something, they don't do it. The second kind, the guru tells them to do something that they do it. And the third kind, they do it without having to be told. And it's the third kind of disciple who the Guru Yoga is meant to form. The kind of disciple who knows intuitively, instinctively, as it were, what the guru wants him to do because he's tuned in, as it were, to the mind and the heart of the guru, and receptive to his spiritual influence. This is why the Tibetans, or rather, the Tantric tradition has the Guru Yoga, as it is called, which tunes the disciple in not just to his personal guru, but the guru of his guru, and his guru, and his guru and so on, right back to the beginning, right up the chain, as it were, right up the hierarchy. Now this Guru Yoga I should mention, it's perhaps worth mentioning, follows immediately after

what are known as the Four Preliminary Practices or the Four Foundation Yogas our Mula Yogas. These are, first of all, Taking the Refuges with various prostrations and visualisations. In the Hinayana and in the Mahayana, one simply recites 'To the Buddha for refuge I go, to the Dharma for refuge I go, to the Sangha for refuge I go' three times. But in the Vajrayana, in Tantric Buddhism, what they do is they visualise, first of all, what they call a Refuge Tree. You visualise a great tree rooted in the earth and its branches spreading to the heavens, like I described the other day and sitting in the branches of the tree on various levels, the practitioner visualises the lamas or gurus of his particular hierarchy. His own guru, say in the middle and his guru above him, and his guru above him, then other great gurus like Padmasambhava and Milarepa and Marpa, all distributed over the branches of the tree. So the practitioner visualises all this, he clearly sees all this as it were, in meditation and then he starts bowing down, making a full prostration just as I described this morning, and reciting at the same time formulae which mean I take refuge in all the gurus, in all the lamas, the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the sacred scriptures and so on. And this he does many, many times, even up to 100,000 times and this is the first of the Preliminary Practices. It's a rather strenuous practice incidentally. And then, second of the Mula Yogas, the second of the Foundation Yogas or Preliminary Practices is what is known as Developing the Bodhicitta (the will to Enlightenment). And this consists in reciting the Bodhisattva vow up to 100,000 times, reciting it with concentration, as it were, in meditation, reciting either the Fourfold Great Vow or any other formulation of the Bodhisattva's Vow or aspiration to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. One is supposed to recite it over and over and over again until it really becomes part of one's mind and consciousness. Then the third Preliminary Practice, the third Mula Yoga is the Recitation of the Mantra of Vajrasattva and this is especially practised for the purpose of purification. Not only to purify one from all sins from all faults of various kinds, but also to reveal, the manifest to one the fact that one's basic, one's essential, one's intrinsic nature remains pure all the time, was pure from the very beginning and is never stained whatever one does or whatever one says, or whatever one thinks subsequently. So this mantra of Vajrasattva has a hundred syllables, it's a very lengthy mantra as one goes on reciting it together with visualisations of Vajrasattva, the Buddha or white Bodhisattva, and also with various other mantras and bowings down and so on, and various visualising exercises. So this is the third of the Mula Yogas. Then lastly, the fourth of the Mula Yogas is the offering of the Mandala. Here the mandala means a sort of symbolical representation of the entire Universe. And the idea is that one builds this up, three-dimensionally, this symbolic representation of the Universe, and then offers it to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and lamas and teachers and so on. The idea being that out of devotion one offers to the Buddhas and teachers everything in the Universe and there's a verse which one recites at the same time. Now there are several ways of doing this, there is what is called the Great Offering of the Mandala, the Middle Offering of the Mandala, and the Little Offering of the Mandala. The Little Offering of the Mandala is simply not using a three-dimensional model but simply making a mudra with one's fingers. It's usually done (I'll show you how it's done, it's usually done just like this). This is supposed to represent the whole universe because you've got Mount Sumeru in the middle, the centre of the Earth, according to traditional Buddhist cosmology and you've got the four seas, two seas here and two seas there all round. So this represents the Universe. So what the Tibetans usually do when they practise this, they give a little rice in each of the palms, they lift their fingers or their hands up in this way, in this mudra and then they recite the verse which means, 'I offer the whole Universe to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the gurus'. This is the simplest way of doing the mandala offering. But if they want to do the Great Offering, they use fresh rice every time they make the Mandala but this is perhaps going into a bit of detail. But the reason or the idea behind it, I think is quite clear. So in as much as the lama or the guru functions in all these ways, one can see he is of very, very great importance in the whole context of Tibetan Buddhism. But we may say it's the Vajrayana or Tantric Guru who is the most highly regarded. In the Hinayana, the lama is a spiritual teacher, the Mahayana, we may say, a spiritual presence, but in the Vajrayana, in Tantric Buddhism, the lama functions, or the Tantric Guru functions as the

bestower of spiritual power and this power is bestowed at the time of what is called Tantric Initiation or Abhishekha (as it is called in Sanskrit) or what the Tibetans call Wong-kur. And this initiation, this Abhishekha or Wong-kur, is fourfold, for the body, for the speech and for the mind and for the unity of all three. And the idea is that this power or this force, if you like, this spiritual power, or spiritual force, which one receives from the lama, the Tantric Guru at the time of Tantric initiation, enables one eventually to transmute one's body, speech and mind and their unity, into the body, speech, mind and their unity of even a Buddha. So, this is why not only in Tibetan Buddhism generally, but especially in the context of Tantric Buddhism, the lama is regarded as being of the very utmost importance and significance. Now in the course of this talk, we've covered quite a bit of ground and we've touched in passing upon quite a number of topics which should perhaps have been treated of dealt with more elaborately, but perhaps even so, we can begin to understand by what is meant by the lams of Tibet, the gurus of Tibet of the spiritual teachers of Tibet.