Lecture 99: Symbols of Life and Growth

I'm going to start tonight by being what many people would consider very English, and that is to say I'm going to start by talking about the weather, or rather not so much about the weather in the strict sense, but about the seasons, the seasons of the year. In the West, including this country, we have of course four quite distinct seasons. We've got spring, we've got summer, autumn, and winter. And at the moment as you know we are coming, we hope, to the end of winter, and to the beginning, again we hope, of spring.

But this particular pattern, this four-season pattern, isn't universal, a fact that we very often forget. In India, for instance, there are three seasons in the year, and each season lasts about four months. To begin with, you have the cold season, when it's cold all the time. It's a little bit like our summer in this country, except that there's no rain. Secondly in India you have for another period of four months the hot season. And the hot season is very hot indeed. There's no rain at all, not even a drop; and as the weeks, as the months go by, and it seems to get hotter and hotter and hotter, you see all the vegetation becoming brown, becoming dry, shrivelling up, and you see for the most part the leaves dropping off the trees, and even any vegetation that you do happen to see around is very very dry and very very dusty indeed. And as you walk over the earth you notice that the whole earth is not only dry but baked hard almost like brick. And as one comes to the end of the hot season you see that great fissures, great cracks appear in the earth. Sometimes they're so wide and so deep you have to be careful as you walk along that you don't fall into them. And not only that but everywhere you go there is a thick dust, especially where there are cattle, where there are cows about kicking up this dust, and very often the whole air, the whole atmosphere, is a sort of dull yellow colour in consequence.

And then thirdly and lastly there's the rainy season, the monsoon, and during the rainy season of course it does nothing but rain, with just very very few bright sunny intervals. And one rather remarkable thing about the Indian seasons, especially about the beginning of the rainy season, is the fact that the seasons begin quite abruptly, especially the rainy season. You can almost tell, I won't even say the day but the hour when it begins. It begins quite suddenly, and in the case of the rainy season you suddenly see a huge dark cloud. A minute before it was all hot, it was all bright, it was all dry, and then quite suddenly, with quite miraculous speed, this huge dark cloud appears, and in the course of just a few minutes the whole sky becomes first of all overcast, then a deep sort of greyish blue, and then finally becomes almost black, and on every side you see lightning flickering and flashing, and in a few minutes' time terrible crashes of thunder, which seem to roll from one end of the sky to the other, meet your ears. And then as you listen, after perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes you hear a noise, you hear a great sound, just like the rushing of a tremendous wind. And then after that down comes the rain. We think it rains in this country, but in comparison with the rainy season in India it doesn't rain at all, because there the rain comes down in great bucketfuls all the time, and it doesn't stop, very often, for days and even weeks together. Underfoot the water is swirling all the time, and the ground becomes very often a great sea of mud. The rivers become more and more full; their waters turn yellow and very often they start overflowing their banks. And here and there in the villages you find the mud walls of the huts collapsing and even sometimes whole villages are swept away.

But then again quite suddenly, just a few days, sometimes, after the rainy season has begun, a rather wonderful thing happens, and that is that the whole land, which formerly was all yellow, all parched, all dry, without any vegetation except a few brown leaves or brown blades, suddenly becomes completely and entirely green, and vegetation of every kind springs up just like magic, and you see that in the rice fields, the fields are entirely filled with emerald coloured shoots, and even the most stunted bushes and shrubs burst into leaf, and plants like the bamboo and the plantain, which we call the banana, they shoot up quite a number of inches in a single night. In the evening time when you go to bed it's so high, you get up the next morning, it's up there, and that happens every night until it's shot up, in the case of the bamboo, to a tremendous height. So every living thing, every shrub, every tree, every bush, every plant, each in its own way just starts growing.

And this is the sort of scene, this is the sort of picture that one can see in India every year, especially in Northern India - not quite the same pattern in South India, but especially one sees this in Northern India during the months, of course, July to October. And this sort of scene, this rainy season scene, is very often described in Pali and Sanskrit literature, is very often represented in art, especially in the Mogul miniature paintings, this sort of scene. And it's this sort of scene also that is depicted in the first of the two parables from the White Lotus sutra with which we shall be dealing this evening. This

evening we're dealing, to begin with, with the parable called 'The Parable of the Rain Cloud'. It's also sometimes called the Parable of the Plants, and together with another parable that we shall be citing a little bit later on, it constitutes one of the symbols of life and growth with which we're concerned in this week's lecture.

Now both our parables for the evening occur in the fifth chapter of the White Lotus Sutra, and in both of them it's the Buddha himself who is again speaking. And at the commencement of this first parable, the Buddha compares himself to a great rain cloud that rises in the sky at the beginning of the monsoon season. Now so far, last week and the week before, I've been summarising the parables of the White Lotus sutra; some of them are very very lengthy. But tonight I'm going to give you the parable of the rain cloud or the parable of the plants in full in the words of the Sutra itself. And I'm going to read from an English translation of Kumarajiva's Chinese translation, which, as I mentioned in the second lecture, has very great literary merits. The Buddha says:

> *It is like unto a great cloud rising above the world, covering all things everywhere, a gracious cloud full of moisture. Lightning flames flash and dazzle, voice of thunder vibrates afar, bringing joy and ease to all. The sun's rays are veiled, and the earth is cool. The cloud lowers and spreads, as if it might be caught and gathered. Its rain everywhere equally descends on all sides, streaming and pouring unstinted, permeating the land. On mountains, by rivers, in valleys, in hidden recesses, there grow the plants, trees, and herbs, trees both great and small, the shoots of the ripening grain, grape vine and sugar cane. Fertilised are these by the rain, and abundantly enriched. The dry ground is soaked. Herbs and trees flourish together. From the one water which issued from that cloud, plants, trees, thickets, forests, according to need receive moisture. All the various trees, lofty, medium, low, each according to its size, grows and develops roots, stalks, branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits in their brilliant colours. Wherever the one rain reaches, all become fresh and glossy. According as their bodies, forms, and natures are great or small, so the enriching rain, though it is one and the same, yet makes each of them flourish.*
>
> *In like manner also the Buddha appears here in the world like unto a great cloud universally covering all things. And having appeared in the world He, for the sake of the living, discriminates and proclaims the Truth in regard to all laws. The great holy world-honoured One among the gods and men, and among the other beings proclaims abroad this word:*
>
> > *'I am the Tathagata, the most honoured among men. I appear in the world like unto this great cloud to pour enrichment on all parched living beings, to free them from their misery, to attain the joy of peace, joy of the present world, and joy of Nirvana. Gods, men, and every one, harken well with your mind. Come you here to me. Behold the peerless honoured one. I am the world-honoured who cannot be equalled. To give rest to every creature, I appear in the world and to the hosts of the living preach the Pure Law, sweet as dew, the one and only law of deliverance and Nirvana. With one transcendent voice I proclaim this truth, ever taking the Great Vehicle as my subject. Upon all I ever look everywhere impartially without distinction of persons, or mind of love or hate. I have no predilections, nor any limitations. Ever to all beings I preach the law equally. As I preach to one person, so I preach to all. Ever I proclaim the law, engaged in naught else. Going, coming, sitting, standing, never am I weary of pouring it copious on the world, like the all-enriching rain, on honoured and humble, high and low, law keepers and law breakers, those of perfect character and those of imperfect, orthodox and heterodox, quickwitted and dullwitted. Equally I rain the law rain unwearyingly.'*

Now the general import of this parable, the Parable of the Rain Cloud, is obvious, and there's no need for me, I think, to comment much on any of its specific details as I was doing in the case of the previous

two parables with which we've dealt so far. I want to spend the greater part of our time this evening dealing with some of the more general implications of the parable. First of all, the parable is a symbol, one of the symbols, of life and growth. It describes how rain falls from the cloud, and how as a result all the plants, all the shrubs grow. And they all grow - and this, as we shall see later on, is very important - they all grow in their own way.

But if we recollect the previous parables with which we've dealt so far, we shall probably see, we shall probably recollect, that they also are symbols of life and of growth. That is to say, the Parable of the Burning House, with which we dealt the week before last, and the Parable of the Return Journey with which we dealt with last week. Indeed we can go so far as to say that the whole White Lotus Sutra itself, and not just the parables it contains, the whole White Lotus Sutra itself is a symbol of life and of growth. And this is why in the second lecture in this series I described it as the 'Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment', because as we saw then it depicts a universe, a realm of being, in which all individual beings whatsoever are moving forward, moving in the direction of Enlightenment. It depicts a universe in which Arahants are becoming Bodhisattvas and Bodhisattvas are becoming Buddhas. It represents a sort of upward trend of the whole creation.

And this state of affairs is reflected in individual parables. It's reflected in the Parable of the Burning House. You may remember that the children of the parable are enticed out of the burning house by their father, who promises them all sorts of toys, and that eventually they all ride in wonderful decorated bullock carts. In other words, in the parable the children, that is to say sentient beings, are depicted as moving from a lower to a higher state of existence, depicted as moving from the conditioned to the Unconditioned, from a state of suffering, at least potential suffering, to a state of everlasting bliss and peace and happiness.
And it's the same with regard to the Parable of the Return Journey. In the Parable of the Return Journey we see the poor man coming closer and closer and closer to the rich man, becoming more and more like him, and in the end being acknowledged as his son and inheriting his wealth.

So in both cases, in both parables, there is growth, there is development, there is onward and upward movement. So a question therefore arises, the question being: What is it, then, that distinguishes tonight's parables as embodying symbols of life and growth? In what way do they differ from the previous parables that they are specifically described as symbols of life and growth, whereas the previous parables haven't been so described, at least not specifically? Now the difference between them is a quite simple matter, because in tonight's parables the symbols of life and growth which occur in both parables are what we may describe as vegetable symbols. That is to say, the whole process of spiritual development, of the Higher Evolution, is represented in terms of the growth, the unfolding if you like, of a plant.

Now what the significance of this is we shall see presently. First of all I want to point out that this sort of symbolism, if you like this plant symbolism, flower symbolism, is much more common in Buddhism, in the Buddha's teaching, than is generally supposed. If we go back to the time of the Buddha's Enlightenment, or rather to the time immediately after the Buddha's Enlightenment, if we go back to the time when out of compassion he decided not to keep the truth he had discovered to himself, but to make it known to other living beings, if we go back to that period, that incident, then what, in the scriptural records, do we find? We find that after he had made his great decision, after he had decided out of compassion that he would teach, that he would make known the truth, that he would share with others his own vision of reality, he looked out over the world, we are told, and he saw the whole mass of humanity in a sort of vision. And how did he see them? In what form did he see them? We are told according to the text that he saw them just like a great bed of lotus flowers. He looked out over the whole world, he saw the whole human race, and they seemed to him just like plants, just like lotus plants. In other words, he saw them as being in different stages of development. And the text goes on to say that he saw that quite a lot of these lotus plants were sunk deep in the mud, that they hadn't yet come to the surface, that they were deep down in the water, not only deep in the water, but right deep down in the mud - you could hardly see their buds, they were so submerged; but that there were other lotus plants that had begun to grow, that had come to the surface, that had started lifting the tips of their buds at least above the surface of the water; and again there were other lotus plants which stood free of the water, which had started to unfurl their petals, and there were just a very very few that were on the point of bursting into bloom.

So that right at the beginning of the Buddha's career, right at the beginning of the Buddha's ministry, we see this very beautiful picture, we see this very beautiful vision, according to which the human race is seen in these plant terms as it were, as being in different stages of development, different stages of growth and unfoldment.

And then again if we turn to Tibetan Buddhism we find a very similar sort of symbolism. We find it in the symbolism of what the Tibetans call the wheels, or what we sometimes call, in the West, the psychic centres. And these psychic centres in Tibetan Buddhism are usually either four or five in number, though sometimes seven are enumerated. But whether four or five or seven, they are always symbolised by lotus flowers, symbolised by lotus flowers of different sizes, different colours, and with different numbers of petals. And these psychic centres, these lotuses, are represented as being situated at different points up along the median nerve within the human body. For instance, there's supposed to be one at a point corresponding to the stomach, the solar plexus, another at the heart, another at the throat, another at the head, and so on. And one of the assumptions, or one of the presuppositions of the type of spiritual practice which utilises this specific symbolism is that with meditation, especially with certain esoteric meditation practices, within the human organism, even within the human body, a current, a very powerful current, of energy, of upward moving energy, is generated. In Sanskrit, in Sanskrit Buddhism that is to say, this upward moving current of energy within the human body or the human psychophysical system, is called *chandali*, which literally means 'the fiery one', and it corresponds to the Tibetan *'tummo'*, about which some of you may have heard - it's usually translated in English as 'psychic heat', which doesn't really tell us very much about it. And it's more or less the same thing as what the Hindus call the *'kundalini'*, which means 'the coiled-up one', in other words the potential energy. And this fiery one or coiled-up one, this *chandali* or *kundalini* or *tummo*, this potential energy, is very often represented as a serpent. And again the symbolism is that as this current of energy, this very powerful current of energy, passes up the median nerve, it passes at the same time through these different centres, these different lotus flowers, as it were, and as it moves upward, as it passes through them, the centres become activated, and this is symbolised by the lotuses, the lotus flowers, opening. And the higher up one goes, the bigger and more beautiful becomes the lotus which opens in this way.

Now I'm not concerned at the moment with the question of whether this system, whether this symbolism if you like, of the psychic centres and the current of energy is to be taken literally or only metaphorically or even symbolically. There are a number of different opinions on this point. What I'm concerned with at the moment is with the symbolism of the lotus here. Very clearly the whole process of spiritual growth, the whole process of spiritual life and development, is symbolised again in these sort of vegetable terms, symbolised in terms of life, symbolised in terms of growth.

And then again in later Buddhism there are quite a number of what we call Bodhisattvas, beings who've taken a vow to gain supreme Enlightenment or Buddhahood not for their own sake but for the benefit of all sentient beings, and these Bodhisattvas are often depicted in Buddhist art. And one of the most popular of these Bodhisattvas is the one known as the White Tara. She's called the White Tara because she's depicted completely white in colour. And the White Tara is a very beautiful, very graceful female figure, seated in *siddhasana* usually, and clad in the usual silks and jewels of a Bodhisattva, and having a very smiling expression. And like all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Buddhist art, she is associated with or even carries a certain emblem. And in the case of the White Tara this emblem is the white lotus. In fact, if we look closely we see that the White Tara figure carries not just a lotus but a whole spray of lotuses, and here's there's a very interesting point to notice, a point which most people don't usually observe, even those who are quite familiar with this figure and this symbolism. If we look at the spray, the lotus spray carried by the White Tara, we find that it contains a lotus bud, completely closed, secondly a half-open bud or half-open flower, and lastly a fully open flower, these three. Now what does this represent? One explanation is that these three represent the three Buddhas, that is to say the Buddhas of the past, of the present, and of the future. But whether or not that is so we can see that these three, the bud, the half-open flower, and the fully open flower, represent the whole process of growth and unfoldment which is the spiritual life itself.

Now one may ask at this point why it is that the White Lotus Sutra in Chapter Five introduces, as it were <u>suddenly</u> introduces, this, as it were, vegetable symbolism. Why does it start talking in terms of plants and their growth? No doubt some people would say it's accidental, it just happened like that. But

I don't personally believe that. I believe that the introduction of this sort of symbolism of life and growth at this point has a very definite purpose. I think it's intended as a corrective, Now one may ask a corrective to what? It's intended as a corrective to the previous parables when taken literally. Now if one looks back at the previous parables, what does one find? One finds in the Parable of the Burning House that the children are induced to come out of the building. First they're inside the building, and then later on in the parable they're outside the building. So what has happened? - a change of place. A change of place has occurred. They were inside the house, now they're outside the house. And it's the same in the Myth of the Return Journey. The poor man comes home. First of all he's in a distant country and then he's nearer at hand, he's in his father's city, and then in his father's house, so here too there is a change of place.

Now the general meaning of both these parables is quite clear, especially when they're taken in the full context of the Sutra itself. But even so, there's a danger. There's a danger that unthinkingly we shall take certain details in the parables rather too literally, and in this way, again unthinkingly, misinterpret the whole process of the spiritual life. In both parables the children and the poor man are represented as making a sort of journey. In the first case it's a short journey, from inside the house to outside; in the other, it's a comparatively long journey, but both, both the children and the poor man, are represented as moving in space, if you take the parable literally, as moving in space. Now one may ask, what is the characteristic feature of movement in space? The characteristic feature of movement in space as such is that the moving object changes its position but it does not itself change. In other words, whatever change takes place is external, it is not internal. Now we know, we've surely understood by this time, that the whole spiritual life is a process of development. It's a development of life - that's the lower evolution; it's a development of consciousness - that's the Higher Evolution. And development is of course a kind of change. Now if the parables are understood literally, then the whole process of spiritual development, of the Higher Evolution, will be understood in terms of external change, and not in terms of internal change, which means that we shall, as it were, consciously or semi-consciously think of the self as passing through experiences, having experiences, traversing stages, but as it were itself remaining through it all unchanged.

Now you might think that I'm rather labouring this point, or you might even think that I'm rather flogging a dead horse. But the misunderstanding does represent a very real danger, a danger that anybody is likely to encounter or even to succumb to. It isn't very difficult to study Buddhism; it isn't very difficult to study the whole of it, at least in outline. It isn't very difficult to study the history of the Buddhism, to become acquainted with all the doctrines, and to study the different steps and stages of the path, and one can even in this way think of oneself as actually traversing them. But all the time one will only be traversing them mentally. Now with regard to very very far on stages like the stage of Nirvana itself, we may be sort of aware that our understanding of it is only theoretical; but we may not be so clearly aware, in fact if we're not careful we certainly will not be so aware, that even our knowledge, even our understanding of the earlier stages is also quite theoretical, and that we're not passing through those stages in actual experience, but only passing through them mentally, that is to say externally. There's no internal change taking place at all. And it's to prevent this sort of misunderstanding that the Sutra, the White Lotus Sutra, at this point introduces what I've called its vegetable symbolism. In other words, at this point, or from this point, it replaces the symbol of the path, the symbol of the journey, by another symbol, the symbol of the plant. In the symbol of the path, in the symbol of the journey, there are two factors apparently. There's the path itself, and then there's the person treading the path. The path is one thing; the person treading the path is another. But in the symbolism of the plant, there's only one factor. The previous two factors as it were come together; they fuse, they join. And the plant itself is the process of growth and of development. So here there's no possibility of any such misunderstanding. Instead of thinking of ourselves as traversing a path, we now think of ourselves as plants, as living and as growing things, and that the only question that arises here is: What stage of development have we reached? As we look at ourselves, what do we think? Do we think that we're buds, maybe still submerged in the water if not in the mud, or that we are half open flowers, or do we perhaps even think that we're in full bloom?

Now I've mentioned that we're concerned tonight with two parables, and it's time that we introduced the second one, and this is the Parable of the Sun and Moon, and this also represents a symbol of life and growth. This parable is parallel, as it were, to the symbol or the Parable of the Rain Cloud. But this one, unlike the Parable of the Rain Cloud, is not elaborated, in fact it's very short. It's even more like

a simile than like a proper parable. So I'm going to read again from the text of the sutra. This parable or simile follows immediately after the previous one, and the Buddha himself is still speaking. I'm going to read from Kern's translation from the Sanskrit text, and as you'll see it's a very short passage indeed. The Buddha says:

> *'And further, Kasyapa, the Tathagata* (that is to say the Buddha), *in his educating or maturing creatures is equal (i.e. impartial, and not unequal, not partial). As the light of the sun and moon, Kasyapa, shines upon all the world, upon the virtuous and the wicked, upon high and low, upon the fragrant and the ill-smelling, as their beams are sent down upon everything equally, without inequality, so too, Kasyapa, the intellectual light of the knowledge of the omniscient, the Tathagatas, the Arahants, the preaching of the true law proceeds equally in respect to all beings in the five states of existence, to all who according to their particular disposition are devoted to the Great Vehicle, or to the Vehicle of the Pratyekabuddhas, or to the Vehicle of the disciples. Nor is there any deficiency or excess in the brightness of the Tathagata knowledge up to one's becoming fully acquainted with the Law.'*

So this is the passage, this is the parable, or this is the symbolism. Now here we may say the symbolism is universal. There's a symbol of the sun, a symbol of the moon, symbol of light. And in Buddhist tradition generally, especially in Tantric Buddhism, this sort of symbolism is embodied especially in the figure of Vairocana. Vairocana is one of the so-called five Dhyani Buddhas, and he usually occupies the centre of the five Buddha Mandala, a Mandala being an arrangement of five symbols or figures, four at each of the four cardinal points and one at the centre. So usually Vairocana occupies the central position. And the name Vairocana means simply 'Illuminator', and in the Vedas, the pre Buddhist Hindu scriptures, Vairocana is one of the names of the sun. And in Japan we find, in Japanese Buddhism, Vairocana is known as Dinichi(?) which means 'the great sun Buddha'. And in art he's represented as being brilliant white in colour, just like the sun at its brightest, and he's shown holding his emblem which is a golden wheel, a golden wheel with eight spokes, the eight-spoked golden wheel of the Dharma. And the mudra, the position of his fingers, is what is called the wheel-turning, the *Dharmachakrapravatana*, and this symbolism, this mudra, is associated with the Buddha's first discourse at Sarnath, his first teaching, and it represents the dissemination of the truth in all possible directions, just like the beams of the sun going in all directions of space. And in art again the throne, the lotus throne, on which Vairocana is sitting is supported by lions. This is reminiscent of what is called the Buddha's lion roar, *singhanada.* The Buddha, we are told in the scriptures, preaches his truth, his Dharma, with a lion-like roar, *singhanada*, so what does this mean? In Indian mythology we're told that when the lion roars in the jungle at night all the other beasts fall silent. So the Buddha says in the same way when truth is expressed, when truth is given utterance to by the Buddha, then all other partial truths or untruths fall, as it were, silent. So Vairocana's lotus throne is supported by lions. The lion itself is of course by the way a solar symbol.

We also get solar symbolism embodied in the figure of Amitabha, who is of course the Buddha of the Western quarter, and his name means 'the infinite light'. We may say that Vairocana, the illuminator, represents the sun at midday, the sun at its meridian shining in the midst of the vast expanse of cloudless blue sky, but Amitabha is associated with the setting sun, with the West, and Amitabha is therefore represented in art as being a deep rich red colour.

Now both the rain cloud and the sun help the plants to grow. The action of moisture and the action of heat have on the plant the same sort of effect. So to this extent the general meaning of the two parables is identical, and we can therefore deal with their general implications together. But before we do that, just one detail from the Parable of the Rain Cloud in particular.

You remember that the Buddha says that the great plants whose trunk, stalk, bark, twigs, pith and leaves are moistened by the water from the cloud develop their blossoms and fruit. And this particular passage, this particular verse, brings us back to something that I was saying two or three years ago in connection with the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path.

Now in books about Buddhism, especially books written in English about Buddhism, there are many references to the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path; you can't get away from it, and quite rightly so. But

it very often is misrepresented and misunderstood. One is given as it were a picture of a path divided into eight sections, eight stages, so that you go through this one, then you come to number two, you go through that, then you go through number three, and so on. But it isn't really like that at all; it's not at all like that. There's no question when one follows the Noble Eightfold Path of traversing eight successive steps or eight successive stages. One may say that it's much more like putting forth one after another eight successive shoots or eight successive branches. After all, the Eightfold Path is called in Pali and Sanskrit *atthangikamarga*. So *Anga* doesn't mean a step, it doesn't mean a stage. It means a limb, it means a shoot, it means a branch. It isn't a step or a stage at all. So what is at the back of this sort of image of the Noble Eightfold Path is not a sort of treading or stepping from stage to stage to stage, or going as it were from one rung of a ladder to another. The sort of image that one should get, or the impression one should get, in one's mind is much more like that of sap flushing up through the tree when the rain falls. And in the context of the Eightfold Path, as we still have to say, rain is represented by the first of these *angas*, the first of these shoots, which is Perfect Vision, or transcendental consciousness. In other words, when one gets one's first glimpse of the transcendental consciousness, when for the first time transcendental consciousness develops within one, when one has one's first experience of that, an experience above and beyond the limitations of one's ordinary self, then that, little by little, affects and influences all other aspects of one's being, it permeates all other aspects of one's being. It spreads to one's emotional life, spreads to one's speech, spreads to one's activities, one's whole way of earning a living, one's whole way of life, one's mental state in general, and so on. So this is the sort of idea behind this symbolism of the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path. It's not following a path step by step or stage by stage. It's imbibing a certain inspiration, having a certain experience, and then allowing that to permeate gradually all aspects of one's life and all aspects of one's being, until one is permanently, as it were, saturated in that experience at all levels, all aspects, and when that happens one reaches the eighth step or *anga* as it were, which is the Perfect Samadhi, or the Perfect Enlightenment, the Enlightenment of a Buddha, when one is fully and completely transformed.

But anyway, this is by the way. Now let's come on to the general implications of the two parables. And the first thing that strikes us of course is that both the rain cloud and the sun are absolutely impartial; this in fact is stressed in both of the parables. The rain cloud gives the same water, the same moisture, to all; and the sun gives the same light and the same heat to all. They don't give more to some plants, less to others. They don't give some plants a purer or brighter light, or a heavier shower of rain. All the plants that there are on the earth receive exactly the same water and exactly the same light and heat. So in the same way, in principle the Buddha gives the same teaching, communicates the same reality, the same truth, the same higher state of consciousness, to all living beings. The teaching though has different forms, just as the rain consists of a number of individual drops. But all the forms have one and the same meaning, just as all the raindrops have one and the same essence, and one and the same taste. Now in this parable, or rather in the first of these parables, the Parable of the Rain Cloud, in this connection the Buddha uses in this context the word *ekarasa*. '*Eka*' means 'one'; '*rasa*' means taste or juice or essence. And it's interesting to note that the very same word in a very similar connection is used by the Buddha in another parable altogether, a parable that occurs in the Pali Canon, the Pali Scriptures, and this is the Parable of the Great Ocean. And this parable throws considerable light on the meaning of the teaching, the one teaching that the Buddha communicates to all. And in this parable in the Pali scriptures the Buddha says that the great ocean, the *Mahasamudda*, has one taste. He says, you can go anywhere you like. You can go to the North or to the South or the East or the West, and you can take a handful of water from that great ocean anywhere you like throughout its extent, and if you taste it there's one taste, whether you take the water from here or whether you take it from there, and that is a salty taste, *lonarasa* in Pali. Wherever you take the water of the ocean from it tastes salt. It isn't salt here and sweet there and bitter somewhere else; it's salt all the way through. And he says: it's just the same with my teaching, with my doctrine. Whatsoever part of it you take up, whatsoever part of it, whatever aspect of it you examine, it's got one taste, *ekarasa*. And he says, 'what is that? It's *Vimuttirasa'*. And vimutti means 'liberation'; it means freedom; it means emancipation.

In other words, whatsoever aspect of the Buddha's teaching one looks at, it's got one essence, one taste, one meaning, one purpose, one effect if you like; and that is a liberating one, an emancipating one. It helps us to get free from our conditionings. There are many different presentations. There's the Eightfold Path itself. There's the Five Spiritual Faculties. There's the Three Refuges. There's the teaching about suffering, teaching about impermanence, teaching about no self. There are all sorts of

methods of practice - mindfulness of breathing, metta bhavana, contemplation of the impurities, the brahma viharas; there's Theravada, there's Zen. But all of these, all these teachings, all these traditions, all these practices, have got one aim, one object, one purpose, one taste only, and that is to help individual human beings to become free, to become free from their conditioning, in other words to grow and develop spiritually. So from this it follows - and this is a very important corollary indeed - from this it follows that the Buddha's teaching is not to be identified with any one particular formulation. You can't say that the Buddha's teaching is the Noble Eightfold Path and just that. You can't say that the Buddha's teaching is simply what you get in the Pali canon and just that. You can't say that the Buddha's teaching is just Zen, or is just Theravada, or that it is just what Professor so and so says it is. You can't identify Buddhism with any one individual formulation, much less so with any one individual school or one individual sect. You can identify Buddhism, you can identify the Buddha's teaching or message only with that spirit, that one same spirit, of liberation, of freedom from conditionedness, that pervades all these formulations, just as the taste of salt pervades all the waters of the ocean. Whether it's the teaching of the Eightfold Path or the teaching of the Bodhisattva Marga, the Perfections, whether it's this meditation practice or that, if it helps forward, if it does help us become free from our conditioning, to become free, then this is part and parcel of the Buddha's teaching. And when we study the teaching, when we read about Buddhism, whether it's the scriptures that we're reading or books about Buddhism, books about the scriptures, it's very important not only to remember this but to try to feel this, otherwise all our study and all our reading and all our knowledge will be in vain. It's very important that when we read the scriptures or when we hear about the Buddha's teaching we don't just pay attention to the words. We don't just pay attention to the ideas, don't just pay attention to the concepts, but try to feel, as it were through the words, through the ideas, through the concepts, through the images, through the symbolism, that which informs and pervades and gives life to them all, that is the experience of freedom, of emancipation, from all conditionings whatsoever; in other words, feel or experience at least to some degree the absolute consciousness of the Buddha, the Enlightened consciousness, the Perfect Buddhahood, the essence of mind, if you like, from which all the teachings originally came.

Now in the parables we've seen that the water is the same for all. The rain falls on all alike, the sun shines on all alike, not more for some and less for other plants. But the plants themselves are all different. Some plants are big, other plants are small. Moreover, they're of many different species, no doubt hundreds, thousands of different species, but they all receive the rain, they all receive the sunlight, and they all, according to their different natures, grow. But though they receive the same rain, the same light, though they all grow, they all grow in different ways. A tree grows up into a tree, a flower grows up into a flower, a rose bush produces big red blossoms, a crocus bulb produces small yellow ones or small white ones. In the same way some plants as they grow shoot up into the air, others as they grow creep along the ground, and others again clasp bigger and stronger plants, but they all grow, they all grow according to their own nature.

And it's just the same, the parable says or suggests, it's just the same with human beings. They all receive the same truth, they all hear what is in principle the same spiritual teaching, and they all grow; but the strange, the astonishing, and also the wonderful thing about it is they all grow in different ways. They all grow according to their own nature, they don't grow according to somebody else's nature. They all hear, they all imbibe the same teaching, believe in the same teaching, in a sense follow the same path, but what happens? They go off and do what seem to be completely different things, but they're all growing. Some people, as they grow, will go more and more deeply into meditation. They spend most of their time meditating, not much contact with other people, perhaps no contact with other people. But others again according to their nature as they grow may take up, say, social service, social work. Others again may burst forth into song, as it were, may start writing poetry or painting pictures, and others, perhaps the majority, will simply go on being themselves, only more and more so, without displaying any particular, specific talent. But they'll all go on growing, they'll all go on developing, and we may even say that they'll go on becoming more and more different from one another as they grow and as they develop; but at the same time very paradoxically they'll also become more and more like each other, because they'll all be becoming more aware, more sensitive, more compassionate, and of course more alive.

So this means, or this suggests at least, that in the spiritual life, in the course of which people grow and develop truly, there can be no question of regimentation. It's reasonable to expect that with a little

effort, with a little endeavour, human beings, even all human beings, will grow, will develop, but it isn't reasonable to expect all human beings to follow the same pattern of development, and this unfortunately is often forgotten. We find something, or discover something, or come across something for instance, that we ourselves find very helpful to our own development, to our own growth, but we tend to think that everybody else will, or even that everybody else ought to, find it helpful too. And if we're not careful, we shall even start insisting that they must find it helpful. And of course sometimes the opposite is the case. For us, we discover, something is not helpful, at least not at present, so we refuse to recognise that it may be helpful to other people even though it isn't helpful to us.

And I must confess that when I came back to this country in 1964 after spending twenty years in the East, I found in the Buddhist movement in this country as it then was quite a lot of this sort of thing. I found, for instance, that there were some people who found, quite rightly, meditation very very helpful indeed, and they therefore devoted a number of hours every day to the practice of meditation. But they tended to declare that the practice of studying the scriptures, or reading about Buddhism at all, was completely useless. They said: 'Nobody should read, nobody should study, they should only meditate, and nobody who called themselves Buddhist should be expected or allowed to do anything else, just meditate for many hours a day as possible.' If you did that you were a Buddhist. If you didn't, well, you just weren't. But other people, I found, preferred study, and these people, who tended to be a bit bookish, these people tended to say that people in the West, being tense and full of problems and rather difficult in all sorts of ways, were not ready for such a sublime and spiritual practice as meditation at all, and therefore they said that people should be encouraged to study the literature and discouraged from meditating, or at any rate meditating too much. And in fact some people in those days used to say that meditation was dangerous, and they used to say that if you insisted on meditating, then five minutes at a time was quite enough - and this was one view. And again I found that there were other people who were rather against ritual, anything even ceremonial or even colourful. They didn't find it helpful themselves for one reason or another so they tended to say that it was bad in general. Not only that, they tended to say that nobody wanted it anyway, which I soon found was not at all true.

And in the same way one often finds that certain people find the approach to Buddhism or to the truth or to the Higher Evolution represented by some particular school or tradition helpful, but unfortunately they don't just make use of that method or that approach; they become rather sectarian, they say well this school, this particular tradition, and only this, is really Buddhism, and if you want to be a Buddhist then you've got to follow this and this alone, otherwise you aren't really a Buddhist at all. Well, if one adopts this sort of attitude it's really just as bad as orthodox Christianity, in fact it represents, we may say, a carrying over of Christian attitudes into Buddhism and Buddhist life itself.

Now the text, the White Lotus Sutra text, says that the rain falls and the sun shines on the good and the bad alike. And I want now to as it were paraphrase this, or rather to transpose it to a somewhat different context. I want to say that the rain falls and the sun shines on the religious and the non-religious, or if you like the secular, alike. Now what does this mean? What does this change mean? It brings us to a very important feature of the modern world, the contemporary world, the world in which we live. Formerly in history, certainly for the last couple of thousand years in the West, all communities and cultures were as it were officially religious, and within these communities, within these cultures, there was only one way in which one could develop oneself, in which one's consciousness could develop, and that was by having recourse to the traditional religious means, by having recourse that is to say to prayer or meditation or the sacraments, and so on. In other words, formerly, if one wanted to evolve, if one wanted to develop, one had necessarily to be a religious person and do it in the religious way. One had to be pious, or one had to be a religious scholar, or one had to be a mystic, and so on.

But the important point is, the important development is, that this is no longer the case. A great change has taken place; it's been going on for some time. It began in the West, we may say, at the time of the Renaissance, when thought, when philosophy, when art, started separating itself, some would say emancipating itself, from the tutelage of religion. And the whole process, which was accelerating anyway, became greatly accelerated after the Industrial Revolution, so that we find a situation today throughout the West, or most of the West, and this is beginning to be the case in the East also, we find a situation in which communities and cultures are secular rather than religious. We find for instance that art is secular art; it has got no direct connection with conventional or traditional religion. Literature is very definitely secular literature. And this brings us to a very important point indeed. It brings us to

the point that the Higher Evolution, despite this change, despite this development, is still possible, and it brings us to the point that the Higher Evolution now, in the modern world, under modern conditions, especially in the West, can take place not only in religious but also in secular terms.

In other words, the rain falls on both alike, the sun shines on both alike, on the religious and on the secular. In fact, we can go even further than this. We can even go so far as to say that nowadays in the West for most people the sort of development, the sort of evolution, the sort of spiritual progress that we have in mind is even more likely to take place in secular terms, or within a secular context, or by secular means than by conventionally and traditionally religious ones. In fact we have to face up to the question, if not the problem, that all that goes by the name of religion, or all that is traditionally or conventionally associated with the word 'religion' has nowadays very little appeal or very little attractiveness for the vast majority of thinking people. One can even go so far as to say that the opposite is the case, the converse is the case, that if you go to church you're probably not very interested in religion, and if you are very interested in religion, well, the less likely you are, maybe, to go to church - to put it very crudely. So therefore one cannot sometimes help wondering whether it wouldn't be better to present the whole question, the whole issue, of the Higher Evolution of Man not any longer in conventional religious terms, but even in secular terms, and it maybe that more people would then be attracted, more people would then be able to participate and benefit from those particular teachings. It may be that one day we shall have to conclude that in sticking to traditional religious forms, including Eastern religious forms, that we're being unimaginative and unrealistic, and perhaps even excluding, or at least not very much encouraging, some people who might otherwise have become involved and also have benefitted from whatever one has to offer.

Now so far I've been dealing with the general implications of both parables, the Parable of the Rain Cloud and the Parable of the Sun and Moon. But it's time now I think to draw attention to a distinction, and after that we shall conclude. Now this distinction is not exactly a difference, because we can say that the symbolism of the rain cloud and the symbolism of the sun are complementary. They represent slightly different emphases, different accents. The rain cloud gives water, gives moisture; the sun gives light, gives heat. And if we borrow terms from the Chinese tradition, which many will be familiar with in the form of the I Ching, we can say that the one, the rain cloud, the water, the moisture, is yin, and the other, the light, the heat, the sun, is yang. And the first, that is to say the yin, the water, the moisture, is associated with the depths, with the soil, with the earth; and the other, the yang, is associated with the heights, with the sky.

Now what does this mean? If we press it as far as this, then what does it mean? It means that in the course of our development, in the process of our growth, the individual must be nourished, but must be nourished from both below and above. In other words, quite literally the individual is like the plant. The plant sucks its moisture from the earth up, and it gets the heat and the light from above. So it's dependent on nourishment from below, through the earth; it's dependent on nourishment from above, from the sky, from the sun. So it's just the same with the individual human being in the course of his or her development, growth. He or she must be nourished from below, must be nourished from the unconscious depths; and also must be nourished from the supraconscious heights.

If we translate into much more simple, not to say simplified, terms, we can say that we must be nourished not only from and through emotion but also reason; not just reason alone, but also emotion. Usually in presentations of Buddhism in the West it's the rational aspect which is usually emphasised, sometimes emphasised exclusively. We're told about Buddhist thought, Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist metaphysics, Buddhist psychology, Buddhist logic - and sometimes it all seems very dry and academic and intellectual indeed. But the other side, the other aspect, is no less important - for many people perhaps even more important - the whole side represented by myth, symbol, and the imagination, and the emotions, and vision. And this is one of the reasons why we're currently dealing in this series of lectures with the parables, myths and symbols of the Mahayana in the White Lotus Sutra. Some time ago it occurred to me that it might be a good idea to compile an anthology of Buddhist parables and myths; we don't have any such thing. We've got lots of anthologies - at least ten or twelve anthologies - of doctrinal teachings, conceptual formulations of the Buddha's message, but there's not one anthology of parables and myths and symbols.

So it's partly to make up for this deficiency that we're having this course on the parables, myths, and

symbols of the White Lotus Sutra, and it is also why this evening we're dealing with symbols of life and growth. Because it isn't enough to understand intellectually, isn't enough to understand the Buddha's teaching intellectually, isn't enough to understand the process of the Higher Evolution intellectually. Well, anybody who can read and has a moderate intelligence, can do that. It's also important to feel the whole thing, and we have to ask ourselves again and again not just: Do I know? Do I understand? but Do I feel? Do I, as it were, vibrate with this. We might even ask ourselves: Do I really feel like a plant at the end of the hot season? Is this how I feel, say, after a day's work or when I've been immersed in the ordinary daily round? Do I feel as it were all dry and withered; do I really feel in need of something? Do I really feel about to take something in? And when one comes in contact with the truth, or when one comes in contact with the Buddha's teaching, does one actually feel as though one was being refreshed by a great shower of rain? Does one really feel that one is sort of drinking in something after having been dry and thirsty for a long time?

Or again, when one comes in contact with that teaching and that truth, does one really feel as though one has come in contact with the sunshine? We know that during the months of winter, to come back to the weather and in this way come full circle, we know that we very often feel rather dull and tired and even miserable because the sky is grey every day and there's a bit of fog and mist and damp about, and we're not very warm, we're rather cold, and we look forward to the spring, we look forward to the sunshine, we look forward to our summer holidays, and the first beautiful, bright, warm weekend, when we feel that spring is really on the way, and we see the little buds begin to open, and we see the flowers here and there in the parks and in our gardens, well, how happy we feel. We feel as though there's a new spirit rising within us. So we must ask ourselves, well, when we come in contact with the Buddha's teaching, or with the truth, or anything to do with the Higher Evolution, do we feel like that? Do we feel as though we've come in contact with a sort of spiritual sunshine and we're drinking it in? Because if we don't feel like this, if we don't respond in this way, it means our approach is still just more or less intellectual.

So it's important that one should actually feel oneself living and feel oneself growing just like the plant when the rain falls and the sun shines, feel oneself growing, feel oneself expanding. And if one does this, if one can feel in this way, then one can say, one can claim, that one's birth as a human being will not have been in vain, and then one will be oneself, we can say, a symbol, a living symbol, of life, a living symbol of growth.