

Lecture 102: The Archetype of the Divine Healer

Friends,

In the course of the last seven weeks we've been dealing not with conceptual material, as one usually does in the course of a series of lectures. We've been dealing with non-conceptual material. We've been dealing with parables, with myths, and with symbols. We've been dealing specifically with the parables, the myths, and the symbols of Mahayana Buddhism, that is to say with Buddhism in its universal perspective. Parables, myths, and symbols of Mahayana Buddhism in the White Lotus Sutra. And in the course of the seven lectures that we've had so far I have offered a certain amount of comment, certain amount of explanation, with regard to these parables, myths, and symbols, but on the whole we've not been trying to understand them intellectually. We've been trying rather to experience them, to feel them, been trying to allow these parables, myths, and symbols to speak to us; to speak not just to our conscious minds, but to speak to our hidden, even secret, depths.

Now tonight we come to something which though similar to what has gone before is at the same time a little different. We've been dealing with parables, myths, symbols. Well, tonight we come to an archetype. Tonight we come to the Archetype of the Divine Healer. Now although in the course of the last seven weeks we've been dealing with these parables, myths, and symbols, we've nowhere defined these terms, not even in passing. 'Parable' is a relatively well-known term, but 'Myth' and 'Symbol' are comparatively obscure. But at the same time we haven't tried to give any sort of definition of these terms, and this has been quite deliberate. I've tried to allow the nature of parables, the nature of myths, the nature of symbols, to emerge not from any formal definition but rather from concrete given examples, and it's this procedure that we're going to follow in the case of archetype. I'm not going to attempt to give any formal definition of what an archetype is or what an archetype may be. The term itself is of course moderately familiar to us. It's been popularised in recent decades through the work of Jung and his disciples and followers, but it's rather noticeable that Jung himself, though he has written quite a lot about archetypes, is rather chary of giving formal clear-cut definitions of what the archetypes are, or what the archetype is. Sometimes, indeed, describing archetypes he seems to say one thing, at other times describing archetypes he seems to say something else. So we're going to follow, as it were, in the footsteps of Jung, not only with regard to archetypes in general, but with regard to that archetype with which we're particularly concerned tonight, that is to say, the Archetype of the Divine Healer. We're not going to deal in definitions, we're going to cite different examples. We're going, we may even say, to conjure up, to call forth, if you like to invoke, different forms of this archetype, different manifestations of this archetype, and try even to see them visibly before our inner eye.

First of all we're going to conjure up one, or evoke one, from ancient Egypt. Thoth. Thoth was the name of one of the major Egyptian deities, and like all the major Egyptian deities Thoth, as the Greeks called him, is a very complex figure. He's a lunar divinity, that is to say he is associated with the moon rather than with the sun, and he's represented, so far as his body is concerned at least, in human form. But that human form carries an animal, or rather a bird, head. Thoth is represented with the head of the sacred Egyptian bird, the ibis, with a long curved bill. And this ibis head of Thoth is sometimes surmounted by a lunar crescent, and sometimes again by not just a crescent, but a crescent with a lunar disc superimposed upon it - in other words, the full moon and the crescent moon together. And Thoth in a sense is the wisest, the most intelligent, and in some ways the best of all the gods. And amongst other things Thoth is the inventor of all arts, all sciences, in fact the originator, the father, of culture and civilisation itself. And especially is he the inventor of writing, in this case of course of hieroglyphic writing. And he's the inventor too of medicine. He is the Divine Healer of the Egyptian pantheon. In Egyptian myth, in Egyptian mythology and legend, Thoth is especially associated with the gods Isis, Osiris, and Horus, who constitute a well-known Trinity. In fact in some legends Thoth appears as Osiris's vizier and scribe and record-keeper. And even after the tragic death of Osiris at the hands of the forces of darkness, Thoth remained faithful to him, faithful to his memory. It was he in

fact, again according to Egyptian myth and legend, who helped the goddess Isis to purify the dismembered body of Osiris. And when Horus, the son, the infant son, of Isis and Osiris was stung by a great black scorpion, it was Thoth in his capacity of Divine Healer who drove out the poison from the bite. Later on we read that Thoth cured Horus of a tumour and healed a wound inflicted on the god Set.

Now the ancient Greeks considered Thoth to be the counterpart of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, or rather they considered Hermes to be the counterpart, in terms of their own mythology, of Thoth. But really we may say that Thoth is much more like the Greek divinity Apollo. Admittedly Thoth is a lunar divinity, Apollo is a solar divinity, but Apollo, like Thoth, is the patron of the arts and the sciences, and Apollo, as we all know, because this tradition has descended even to our own time, Apollo is the patron of music and of poetry in all their forms. And as we know from surviving examples, even fragments, of classical and pre-classical Greek sculpture, Apollo is usually represented in the form of a beautiful young man in the prime of life. And Apollo again like Thoth is associated with the art, with the divine art, of healing. And in the case of Apollo this apparently is one of the consequences of his being a solar divinity, because light, sunlight, sunshine, is necessary to health and to restoration to health.

But though Apollo has these healing attributes in his capacity as solar divinity, the real Greek god of healing is Asklepios. And Asklepios, significantly, is the son of Apollo by a mortal maiden, so Asklepios is a sort of demi-god. Asklepios is sometimes represented as a serpent or in the form of a serpent, but more usually he's represented as a tall, well-built, middle-aged man, of very noble, very dignified, appearance, and with an extremely wise and compassionate expression, and I would say that some of the statues, some of the images, of Asklepios are amongst the most impressive, from a spiritual point of view, that have come down to us from classical antiquity. We know that the Gandhara image of the Buddha was modelled on the Graeco-Roman Apollo, but I can't help thinking that we might have achieved, or those artists might have achieved, even more impressive results if they'd started by modelling the Gandharan Buddha not so much on Apollo as on the figure of Asklepios. In Greek legend there are many stories of the miraculous cures wrought by Asklepios, and it is even reported that so great was his skill, so great was that divine gift of healing which he possessed, that he could not only cure diseases, not only restore the sick to health, but he could even bring back the dead to life. So much so was that the case, we are told, that the King of the Dead became anxious, became even angry, because fewer and fewer people were arriving in his realm. Not only that, but having arrived they were being rudely plucked back by Asklepios before the King of Death could get his hands on them properly, and that would not do. So he went to Zeus, the King of the Gods, and he complained, he bitterly complained that he was being deprived of his dues. So Zeus apparently had just one way of settling things - he just hurled a thunderbolt, and that was the end, according to legend, of Asklepios. But they had reckoned without Apollo, apparently, who was the father of Asklepios. Apollo was very very annoyed to say the least, so he slew the Cyclops that forged the thunderbolt with which Zeus destroyed Asklepios, and Zeus of course punished Apollo, but that's another story - that's how it goes on, just as on the earth among human beings.

Now Asklepios was very much worshipped in ancient Greece; we don't always realise the extent of his cult. We think of the ancient Greeks worshipping Pallas Athene and Apollo and Zeus and Hera and Aphrodite of course, mustn't forget her, and that's about all. But the Greeks did have a very very important and powerful cult of their Divine Healer, Asklepios, and it's because of this that a very large number of statues of Asklepios have survived down to the present time. And we may say, and this is rather interesting, that the cult of Asklepios was both a religion and at the same time a system of therapeutics. And the doctors in ancient Greece were priests of Asklepios; the priests were the doctors, the doctors were the priests. And they had, or the cult of Asklepios had, a number of celebrated sanctuaries. They were centres of religious worship, they were centres of healing too; the two things were completely fused. And these great sanctuaries, which were celebrated all over the Grecian world, all over the Hellenic world, they were built outside towns, and they were built on sites which were especially healthy, and there people used to go for treatment, and worship, because the two were the same. And the method of treatment, or if

you like the method of worship, was very very interesting. Upon his arrival the patient would be ceremonially purified. You had to be free from sin, or if you had committed a sin you had to be purified from that sin, you had to be ceremonially pure, morally pure. And after that you were given a bath, or a series of baths (we know that in any case the Greeks were rather fond of baths) and then one would be required to fast, to abstain completely from food, and after that you'd offer up sacrifice to Asklepios. And having done all those things then one night, a night appointed by the priests, or physicians if you like, you would sleep in the temple, in some cases with your head near the feet of the image of Asklepios. And having been prepared in this way, and no doubt with great faith and expectation in your heart, and in great hopes of a cure from whatever disease it was you were suffering from, in the night, in the midst of your sleep, you would have a dream, and in that dream Asklepios himself would appear to you, you would see him. Not only see him, but hear him, because in the dream he would speak to you, he'd give you advice, either advice about your complaint or general advice, and in the morning you'd tell your dream to the attendant priests, and the priests would study the dream, they'd interpret the dream, and they'd then proceed to treat the patient according to their understanding of the meaning of the dream. This was the procedure.

Now a few years ago I happened to have the opportunity of visiting one of these famous old sanctuaries, and this was the one at Epidaurus. It was the most famous of them all. And very much to my surprise, I may say, I found that the atmosphere of this place was really remarkable. It really felt healthy. There was something in the air, something in the atmosphere if you like. It was calm, it was peaceful, it was positive, it was wholesome, and one could very well imagine a great sanctuary of healing being established on that spot. And I remember that strewn all around the archaeological area and in the little museum also there were tablets and fragments of tablets, votive tablets, offered by people, dedicated by people who had been cured of this or that disease, this or that complaint, after undergoing all those thousands of years ago the prescribed traditional regimen.

However, it's time that we left the West now for the East. It's time that we got back to Buddhism, time that we got back to the White Lotus Sutra, and time that we came to our parable for this week. This parable contains the Buddhist version of the Archetype of the Divine Healer. And this parable may be called quite simply the Parable of the Good Physician. It occurs in Chapter 15 of the sutra, or Chapter 16 according to the Chinese version. I'm going to deal with the circumstances in which this parable came to be related by the Buddha later on. It starts of course: Once upon a time, and that's, as we know by this time means out of time altogether.

Once upon a time there was a good physician. And this good physician was very highly skilled in the whole art and science of healing, and he was able to cure, we are told, all sorts of diseases. And it so happened that he had many sons. The text says ten, or twenty, or a hundred - you can take your choice apparently. And one day the good physician, the father, went away to a distant country, leaving his sons, ten, or twenty, or a hundred, behind him. And apparently they had access to his dispensary, to his store of medicines. So what did they do? They drank his medicines in his absence - probably thought they'd do them good. But those medicines happened to be poisonous, and having drunk them the sons all became delirious. And having become delirious they just fell to the ground, and they were just rolling on the ground in their delirium. And it was at this point that the father returned.

Now not all the sons had been equally affected by the poison. Some unfortunately had lost their senses completely, but others were still sensible to some extent. They were able to recognise their father, and they were very glad to see him, and they were able to explain to him what had happened. So what did the father do? He at once went out. He went among the fields and the hills and he gathered all sorts of herbs. And these herbs he pounded and he mixed, and he prepared a medicine. And he gave that medicine to his sons to bring them out of their delirium. So those who were still sensible to some extent, they took the medicine, they drank it, and bit by bit they recovered. But what about the others? What about those who lost their senses? They, in their delirium, were unwilling to take the medicine. In their delirium they said, as far as one could

make out, that they were really glad to see their father and they said that they wanted to be cured, but they wouldn't take the medicine. Some of them thought it was too nasty or they didn't like the look of it and so on. And why was this? The reason was that the poison deriving from the medicines they had originally taken, wrongly taken, had entered very deeply into their system. They'd completely lost their senses, so much so that they even said that their father's medicine, the one he now wanted to give them, was no good. So they continued in their delirium rolling on the floor.

So father wondered what to do. So he thought that as it was a desperate case he'd better play a trick, play a trick so as to get them to take the medicine. So he pretended to forget all about giving them any medicine, he said: Look here my boys, I'm now very very old, and the time of my death is at hand. I'm leaving my medicine with you, but I'm going away. If you take the medicine you'll surely get better, but that's up to you. I can't say anything; I'm going away. You won't see me again; I'm going to a distant place. So off he went, leaving the sons, in their delirium, with the medicine. And after a while a messenger came, very slowly, very sadly, and he said: I'm sorry to have to tell you your father is dead. Of course he wasn't really dead, he just sent the messenger to say so. But hearing this, hearing that their father, the good physician, was dead, all the sons were greatly distressed, and they reflected to themselves that if only our father was alive he would have had pity on us, he would have helped us, would have saved us, would have cured us, but now he's left us, he's gone away, he's died in a distant country. There's no one to help us, no one to look after us. So in this way they were lamenting, the tears were streaming down their faces, and they were saying to one another: Now we're orphans. We're all alone in the world, there's nobody to help us.

So they became so upset and so griefstricken and this continued for so long that they came to their senses. And having come to their senses they recognised the goodness of the medicine that their father had left with them, so they drank it and they were cured. And in due course, of course, father heard what had happened, and he came back and he showed himself to them, that he was alive and well after all. And this is the parable, the Parable of the Good Physician.

Now we'll keep ourselves in suspense just a little while as regards the meaning of the parable as a whole. We're going to consider first of all the physician archetype, or the archetype of the Divine Healer in Buddhism in general, including the White Lotus Sutra, and after that we'll go on to consider the parable as a whole in the context of the sutra, and finally we'll have to consider briefly the general significance of the parable and then of course conclude, conclude not only this lecture but the whole series.

So first of all the Archetype of the Divine Healer in Buddhism in general and in the White Lotus Sutra. In Buddhism in general it's the Buddha himself, Shakyamuni himself, who is the Divine Healer. If we read through the Pali Buddhist scriptures, or the Sanskrit scriptures, in their various translations, we shall find that the Buddha has a number of titles. In English we almost invariably say 'the Buddha', but in the original sources there are many other titles, many other ways in which the Buddha is addressed or referred to - the *Tathagata*, the *Jina*, *Bhagawan*, *Lokajyeshtha* and so on, not just the Buddha. There are many many titles, and among these titles there is one with which we are particularly concerned now, and that is the title *Mahabhaisajya*. *Maha*, as we know by this time, means 'great', as in Mahayana, so *Mahabhaisajya*. *Bhaisajya* is 'physician', 'doctor', so *Mahabhaisajya* is the Great Physician, and in the scriptures the Buddha is not only called the Enlightened One, not only called the One who has Attained, not only called the Lord, the Blessed One, not only called the Elder Brother of Mankind. He's also called the Great Physician, and this is very significant, very important, and of course it suggests to us something that we ought never to forget, and that is that human beings, that we are most of the time, if not all the time, psychologically and spiritually sick, in need of healing, in need of medicine, and the Buddha is the spiritual physician. The Buddha is the physician who treats the disease of humanity itself, and his teaching, the Dharma, is the medicine that he gives humanity to swallow.

Now that medicine is not always very palatable, sometimes it tastes rather bitter, as medicine

only too often does, but bitter or not it's certainly very very efficacious. Now we can pursue this matter in detail. We can take up the example of the Four Noble Truths. We all know the Four Noble Truths. These are amongst the central teachings of Buddhism. First of all there's the Truth of suffering. There's the Truth of the origin of suffering, Truth of the cessation of suffering, which is Nirvana, and Truth of the Way, the Eightfold Way, leading to the cessation of suffering. And these four Truths, which we find so often in the Buddhist texts, and which are the basis of so many expositions of the teaching, these four Truths are said by some scholars to be based on, to be derived from, a pre-Buddhistic medical formula, a formula found in ancient Indian medical works. And what is that formula? Disease; the ideology of the disease, that is to say the causation of the disease; the state of being cured, or made healthy; and the regimen leading to the cure, leading to the state of good health. So we can see the correspondence, we can see the parallelism, very clearly. The Truth of suffering corresponds to the state of disease. The Truth of the cause of suffering corresponds to the ideology of the disease. The Truth of the cessation of suffering, Nirvana, corresponds to the state of being cured, of being made healthy, made whole. And the Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering corresponds to the regimen leading to a cure.

And we may say, as we study the scriptures, that the Buddha's role as physician, as spiritual healer, is stressed in quite a number of his teachings, even of his parables. For instance there's that very very well-known parable, the parable of the man wounded by the poisoned arrow. This parable is found in the pages of the Pali Canon, and it relates, or rather the Buddha in this parable relates, how a certain man in battle was wounded by a poisoned arrow, and he was in danger of immediate death, but a physician was brought, and the physician took hold of the arrow and he was about to pluck it out of the wound, and the man said: Stop! He said: Don't pull it out. He said: Before you pull out that poisoned arrow, I've a question or two to ask. He said: I want to know a few things. I want to know who shot that arrow. I want to know whether he was tall or short. I want to know whether he was fat or thin, dark or fair. I want to know whether he was a Brahmin or Kshatriya or Vaishya or Shudra. I want to know what sort of wood the arrow is made from, what sort of bird the feather of the arrow was taken from. I want to know what sort of bow it was shot from, whether of wood or horn. So the physician said: My dear sir! Before I've answered all these questions you'll be dead! So this is the Buddha's parable of the man shot by the wounded arrow. It has a meaning that doesn't concern us quite at the moment, but in this parable too it's the Buddha who appears as the physician. The Buddha wishes to pluck from the poisoned wound of humanity that arrow of pain, that arrow of suffering, that is sticking in it. He is the good physician who is trying to heal humanity of its wounds in this way.

There's another passage, there's another saying of the Buddha which we all know very well, or we ought to know it very well because I've referred to it on quite a number of occasions and I believe in the course of this series too. And the Buddha is speaking in this saying about ordinary people, that is to say about people who have not yet become even Stream-entrants, who are, we may say, lotus buds still stuck in the mud, who haven't really begun to open their petals. They might have thought about opening their petals, and thought about it a lot, but they haven't actually started opening them, so these people are technically called *puthujjanas*, which means, it's usually translated as '*worldlings*'. So the Buddha says very tersely and epigrammatically as it were, he says: All worldlings are mad. And apparently he meant that quite literally, that everybody who is not at least a Stream-entrant, a Stream-winner, definitely bound for Nirvana, is just plain mad, not even just neurotic, not even just a little bit touched, but apparently stark staring mad, so that the Buddha is not just a doctor, the Buddha is a mental doctor. He's the world's best mental doctor, we may say, and his teaching, the Dharma, Buddhism itself, we may describe if we wish as a sort of Transcendental psychotherapy.

Now we know from various considerations that the state of Enlightenment, the state of Buddhahood, has a number of different aspects. There's a Wisdom aspect, there's a Compassion aspect, there's a Power aspect, there's a Peace aspect, there's a Purity aspect and so on. And it's also well known that in the Mahayana, in the Great Way, in Buddhism in its universal perspective, these different aspects of Enlightenment, these different aspects of Buddhahood, are

as it were personified or individualised. They take on distinctive recognisable forms, even personalities. They become, or they're personified as, if we use this word personified not too literally, personified as individual Buddhas, individual Bodhisattvas. The Compassion aspect of Buddhahood becomes the Buddha or the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The Wisdom aspect becomes the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. The aspect of infinite light becomes the Buddha of Infinite Light. The aspect of Compassion, as we saw last week, becomes the Great Bodhisattva of Compassion, and so on.

And in the same way Enlightenment has its healing aspect, Buddhahood has its healing aspect. Buddhahood or Enlightenment is just like a great balm dropping down upon the wounds of humanity. And this healing aspect of Enlightenment, this healing aspect of Buddhahood, is personified in a great Buddha or Bodhisattva figure, personified in the figure of *Bhaisajyaraja* or *Bhaisajyaguru*, King of Healing or Teacher of Healing. And this King of Healing or Teacher of Healing appears sometimes as a Bodhisattva, sometimes as a Buddha. And as a Buddha he's known as *Vaiduryaprabha*, which means 'azure radiance', blue radiance, or rather, translating very literally, the radiance of the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli. And in art, especially in Tibetan Buddhist art, this Bodhisattva, this Buddha of Healing, this King of Healing, Guru of Healing, is depicted more or less in the same way as Shakyamuni, The Buddha, himself, but he's depicted not with golden complexion but with a deep brilliant blue complexion. His whole body is blue, though he wears the monastic robe like Shakyamuni, and in his hand he bears as his distinctive emblem an amlaki as it's called, an amlaki fruit. Now translators of Sanskrit and Tibetan texts call this an emblematic myrobalan - that's apparently it's name according to botany in the West. I've never come across a myrobalan personally, whether emblematic or otherwise, and I must confess that in India I don't remember having seen the amlaki fruit either, but we may say that it's a sort of highly medicinal fruit, said to be used at least in legendary times, in Indian medicine, so it very fittingly is the very distinctive badge, if you like, of this Buddha, of this Bodhisattva.

Now in Tibetan Buddhism *Bhaisajyaraja* has eight forms, and these eight forms are known as the Eight Medicine Buddhas, and they constitute a very popular set, and you see them every now and then in Thangkas, that is to say Tibetan painted scrolls. There's the main central figure in the middle, and around the seven other subsidiary or subordinate forms. And incidentally, while we are on the subject it may be remarked that in Tibet too as in ancient Greece there is, or there was at least until very recently, a close connection between religion on the one hand and medicine on the other. In Tibet until recently the physicians were lamas, and lamas were physicians. Near Lhasa there was a special medical monastery where medical lamas received their training. I've seen, by the way, some Tibetan medical texts, and I've got some very interesting anatomical diagrams and illustrations. Tibetan medicine on the whole we may say is based on, is in a sense a continuation of, the Indian system of medicine which is called *ayurveda*. The word *ayurveda*'s a rather interesting one. *Ayur* is 'life', *veda* means 'science', so in India traditionally medicine is called 'the science of life'. It's not just the science of curing disease, it's the science of how to live, how to live healthily, how to live physically in the best possible way. It rather reminds me of the ancient days in China when you paid your doctor while you were well. When you fell sick you stopped paying him. Tibetan Buddhist medicine also did include Chinese elements, including acupuncture, and I have heard Tibetan medical lamas claim that they could cure tuberculosis by means of acupuncture. Tibetan Buddhist medicine also made extensive use of consecrated pills of various kinds - in the West we're familiar with pills but hardly with consecrated ones - and also with mantras. Tibetan medicine operates with the help of mantras. Not only in Tibet but in many parts of the Buddhist world the monks traditionally dabble - in many cases that is the only word - in medicine, sometimes successfully, at other times unfortunately not so successfully. And usually, whether it's Tibet or Ceylon or Burma or China, the treatment is or was a combination of herbal remedies, often very efficacious, and what we would call faith healing or maybe spiritual healing. So we may say that in this respect traditional Buddhist medicine in the East, especially Tibetan, was not unlike that of the priests of Asklepios in the ancient Western world.

Anyway, let's get back to our subject. *Bhaisajyaraja* or *Bhaisajyaguru*, the King of Healing, the

Guru of Healing, appears as a Buddha, that is to say in Buddha form, in a sutra, that is to say a canonical text, a scripture, that bears his name, and in this sutra the Buddha relates to Ananda how *Bhaisajyaraja* made ages and ages ago twelve great vows, and as a result of these vows he established in the East what is traditionally known as a Pure Land. We heard something about this even last week. And of course all beings who came to be born in his Pure Land would be born and would live there free from disease. This sutra is a very interesting work but tonight we've no time for further details. What we are more concerned with is the fact that *Bhaisajyaraja* appears as a Bodhisattva, that is to say in Bodhisattva form, in the White Lotus Sutra itself, and he appears in three different chapters. He appears in Chapter 10, in Chapter 12, and in Chapter 22, or Chapter 23 in the Chinese version. In Chapter 10 he just appears, he doesn't take any active part. He's simply there the Bodhisattva through whom the Buddha, Shakyamuni, addresses the 80,000 great leaders of the assembly. And of course he addresses them on the importance of preserving the White Lotus Sutra. In Chapter 13 *Bhaisajyaraja* is one of the two Bodhisattvas who assure the Buddha that after his *Parinirvana*, after the death of his physical body, they will propagate amongst all sentient beings in all directions of space the White Lotus Sutra.

So so far in the White Lotus, in these two chapters, *Bhaisajyaraja* has played a very minor role. In chapter 22 however he moves to the centre of the stage, as it were. Now this chapter in which *Bhaisajyaguru* figures so prominently is not strictly speaking a part of the Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment as outlined in our second lecture. Last week we saw that the Avalokitesvara chapter, devoted to the great Bodhisattva of Compassion, probably represents an incorporation into the White Lotus sutra of different, possibly later, material. And the same is the case with regard to this chapter, chapter 22, in which *Bhaisajyaraja* appears; it isn't connected with the action of the sutra as a whole, it's a later chapter, and it appears to have been incorporated at a date subsequent to that of the writing down of the sutra as a whole. However, traditionally this chapter forms part of the sutra and it is of interest for quite a number of reasons.

A certain Bodhisattva in this chapter asks the Buddha about *Bhaisajyaraja*, about the King of Healing, and the Buddha tells his story. He tells it at some length; I'm only going to give you just a few details of it. The Buddha says that in the remote past, ages and ages ago, *Bhaisajyaraja* was the disciple of a Buddha called Radiance of the Sun and the Moon. And this Buddha, this ancient Buddha, Radiance of the Sun and the Moon, preached the White Lotus Sutra, and *Bhaisajyaraja* heard at that time this preaching and he was greatly delighted by it. He was overwhelmed with joy, ecstatic, and he wanted to express his gratitude to that Buddha, Radiance of the Sun and the Moon, in an extraordinary, an unprecedented, manner. So he thought, Well, everybody offers flowers, everybody offers incense, flags, decorations, money. What can I offer that is most precious, that is most dear, to which I am most attached? And then he had a sort of flash of inspiration and he thought: I'll sacrifice my own body, because that's what is most precious, most dear. I'll sacrifice that. So he prepared himself. He didn't do it suddenly and impulsively. He drank lots and lots of scented oil until he became as it were perfumed, his whole body was exhaling, exuding fragrance. And he soaked his clothes, soaked his robes, also in oil. And then he just set fire to himself by spontaneous combustion. And we're told he burned for twelve thousand years, burned like a lamp in honour of that Buddha, and died, and shortly afterwards was reborn and grew up. And that Buddha in whose honour he'd burned himself, out of gratitude towards whom he'd burned himself, the Buddha of the Radiance of the Sun and the Moon, he was still alive, still preaching. So again he became his disciple, not only that, he became his chief disciple, not only that, after the *Parinirvana* of that Buddha he superintended his cremation, he attended to all the ceremonies, and he erected, we are told, for his relics, 84,000 stupas. But he still felt he hadn't done enough. Most people, having erected 84,000 stupas, would think, well, that was quite enough even for a Buddha, but this particular Bodhisattva still wasn't satisfied, he wanted to do something more. So this time we are told he burned his two arms, and they burned for 72,000 years, and that was the Bodhisattva, the Buddha says, who is now *Bhaisajyaraja*. And the Buddha, according to this chapter which not everybody would accept as really canonical, according to this chapter the Buddha says that if one worships a Stupa by burning a finger or a hand or even a toe that is very meritorious, even more meritorious than offering all one's possessions. Now this may seem a rather shocking sort of note to strike, this burning of a finger

or burning of a hand or even burning a toe. It doesn't in some ways, one might think, sound very Buddhist. It seems as though we're rather straying from the middle path, because the Buddha said, or is supposed to have said, in his very first, what some people describe as his first sermon - dreadful word which must have put a lot of people off it - the Buddha said in that first discourse: Avoid extremes. Don't inflict suffering on yourself, don't practise self-mortification; don't also practise self-indulgence. Follow a middle path. So in this chapter it seems, if we take it at its face value, that the Buddha himself has strayed away, at least in precept, from the middle way. But as I've said already this chapter is not strictly speaking part of the Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment and does perhaps represent, or probably represents, an incorporation of later material. At the same time some of you may be thinking, some of you may be feeling, that all this has a familiar ring - burning oneself, offering oneself up as a sort of sacrifice in this way. It's as though we'd heard it all before, and very likely we have, not so very many years ago, because there was, you may remember, the case, or the cases, of those Vietnamese monks who some years ago burned themselves in Vietnam, and some of you might even have seen the pictures. I myself remember seeing - I was in India at the time - pictures of these monks burning themselves, and one of them in particular was very very impressive, I remember, and I saw it in colour. And it depicted an elderly monk - well, not only elderly, he was old, he was well over 70 - and he was sitting cross-legged on the ground and there was a car not very far away. He was apparently in the open street. And he was blazing, he was absolutely on fire - apparently he'd soaked himself in petrol. But he was just sitting there as though meditating. He was perfectly upright, features were perfectly calm, just as though he was meditating. And this American cameraman happened to be on the spot, just happened to be passing by, and he took this picture. And this old man left apparently a letter behind saying why he was doing this, and apparently he did it completely self-possessed, completely calm, and completely mindful.

So if you saw this picture, or even heard about this incident or other incidents - there were seven altogether, including one nun - you may have wondered why they did it. Why did they set themselves on fire in this way? Well, the reason was very simple. They did it because they wanted to draw attention to the fact that in Vietnam there was no religious freedom for the Buddhists, because in those days there was a Roman Catholic regime and Buddhism, though it was the religion of the majority of the people, was practically prohibited. And I did come to know quite a lot about the situation there because I had staying with me beforehand and at the time a number of Vietnamese monks, staying with me, that is to say, in Kalimpong, and I had become aware of the situation some time earlier when one of the monks, who is now the Rector of the University, Buddhist University, in Saigon, translated one of my own books into Vietnamese. He happened to be staying with me - and this was in the middle 50s - and he translated into Vietnamese from English a short biography that I had written of Anagarika Dharmapala, who was the founder of the Mahabodhi Society of India and the Mahabodhi Society of Ceylon, and the reviver of Buddhism in modern India. And he told me that when he went back to Vietnam in a few months' time he'd get it printed and published. So when I saw him again about six or eight months later I naturally enquired: What about my book? What about your translation? and he said: Well, I'm sorry to tell you it could not be published. So I asked: Well, why is that? He said: I'm afraid the local Catholic Bishop has prohibited it. He said: We're not free in our own country. Buddhism is the traditional religion, but we're not free.

And some time later, you may remember, Buddhists in Saigon wanted to celebrate *Buddhajayanti*, the Buddha's birthday, and were not given permission by the Catholic authorities. They were not even given permission to fly the Buddhist flag, and that upset them because only a few weeks earlier the Cardinal Archbishop's birthday had been celebrated and the Vatican flag was flying everywhere, but the Buddhist flag was prohibited, and Buddhists were not allowed to take up processions in the streets of Saigon on the Buddha's birthday, on the Buddha's Enlightenment day. Not only that, but all the major educational institutions were of course Catholic and if you wanted admission well you had to become a Catholic, you couldn't just go as a Buddhist. And Buddhism was systematically discouraged, not to say persecuted, by the Diem regime. So these monks felt that there was nothing that they could do except draw the attention of the whole world to the fact that Buddhism was suppressed and persecuted in Vietnam by the

dominant Catholic minority, by this very dramatic action of sacrificing themselves. And this was the reason, the immediate reason, for it. They just wanted religious freedom in Vietnam for Buddhism.

But the background, the, we may say, ideological background, or even spiritual background, of their action was provided by this chapter of the White Lotus Sutra. We mustn't forget that Vietnamese Buddhism is a branch of Chinese Buddhism, and in Chinese Buddhism, and therefore in Vietnamese Buddhism, the White Lotus Sutra is very highly honoured indeed. Vietnamese Buddhism, by the way, is rather interesting. We don't hear much about it, but it is rather interesting because it combines two major Chinese forms of Buddhism. It combines Ch'an, what we better know as Zen, with Pure Land Buddhism, what we know in Japanese terms as Shin. In Vietnam they're traditionally a combination of Ch'an and Shin, which makes Vietnamese Buddhism rather distinctive. It's also interesting to note that not only is the White Lotus Sutra highly honoured in China, Buddhist China, and its cultural dependencies, including Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and so on, but at the time of their Bodhisattva ordination Chinese monks and Vietnamese monks have to burn themselves. I don't know whether anybody has ever seen a Chinese or Vietnamese monk. They shave their heads, or nearly shave their heads, and when the head is shaven you will see on the crown a number of scars - there may be five, there may be seven, and so on - a number of scars. And they have these scars because when they are ordained - they get first of all the monastic ordination and then the Bodhisattva ordination - when they are given that second ordination, the Bodhisattva ordination, pellets of perfumed wax are placed on their heads and then they are lit, and mantras and prayers are chanted very very loudly, and they kneel with their head, their crown as it were, on fire, and these five or seven pellets of scented wax have to burn down into the scalp. Some say it's very painful, but they bear the pain - they clench their fists, they try to concentrate on the mantras, and in any case there's a very loud chanting going on from everybody present. Some say they don't feel anything at all, but they all go through this ceremony. And the next time our friend Tien Chow comes to London, he being a Vietnamese monk and friend of mine, if he is well-shaved - and he's very short, so you can look quite easily! - you'll notice that he has these scars, as every Vietnamese monk and nun, and every Chinese monk and nun, also has. And this tradition derives from this particular chapter of the White Lotus Sutra.

And I remember that while I was in India I knew a Chinese monk who used to burn himself all the time. He lived at Kusinara, where the Buddha passed away, and he lived in a tree - he never came down - he lived in a tree, he lived up the tree on a little platform, and he lived there all the time. People brought him food and every few days he'd put a candle on his arm or on some other part of his body, light it, and let it burn down into the flesh, and he was covered with burns. Now I'm not saying this is very Buddhistic. I'm just citing it as an example or an illustration, but it's rather interesting that the Buddhists thought he was rather going to extremes, they weren't quite happy about him, but he was very very highly venerated by all the Hindus in the surrounding villages and they thought he was a real holy man, and they weren't so impressed by the other Buddhist monks who didn't burn themselves in this way.

So we can understand now that the action of those Vietnamese monks who burned themselves, and the form that that action took, the form that their protest took, was not arbitrary. We can see it, we can understand it now against a background of tradition, the Chinese Buddhist tradition, which includes the White Lotus Sutra, and not only that, we can understand that their action is even a reminder to us. It's a reminder to us essentially that we should be prepared to sacrifice life even for the Dharma if necessary, and it's very easy for us to forget this because we, frankly, have it so easy. In some countries today it's very difficult to follow a religion, using that term just for the sake of convenience. There are some parts of the world where it's not easy to be a Buddhist, not easy to be a Christian, and so on. You're driven sort of underground. You live in fear of a knock on the door. But here we can just follow anything we like - this religion, that religion, a religion, no religion, do as we please - so we don't always appreciate our good luck. We don't always appreciate the rights that we enjoy, and so therefore we become a bit lazy, we become a bit indifferent. We don't take it all very seriously, and maybe we're not always aware of the fact

that we could, under certain circumstances, be placed in a situation where we had to choose between our religion or death.

So perhaps this is the real meaning of this *Bhaisajyaraja* chapter of the White Lotus Sutra, whether it's a later incorporation or not. What it really means is, what it really asks us is: Are we prepared, if circumstances require, even to give our life for the sake of the principles, the spiritual principles, that we believe in? It's not a question of throwing away our life, not a question of making some grand spectacular theatrical gesture, but a question of whether we are prepared, or would be prepared, to stick to our principles even at the cost of life itself. However, it's time we got back to our parable, back to the Parable of the Good Physician. Before we do that, however, I should remark that the archetype of the Divine Healer appears in another parable, another parable in the White Lotus Sutra, and that is in chapter 5, after the Parable of the Rain Cloud, but as this parable, in which the Buddha again appears as physician, is a little obscure, I'm not going into it now.

Alright, now let's come on to the Parable of the Good Physician and consider it in the context of the sutra, and then comment on just a few details. You may remember that the parable occurs in chapter 15, or chapter 16 of the Chinese version. And this chapter, chapter 15, constitutes the climax of the whole Drama, as we've called it, of Cosmic Enlightenment. It contains the Buddha's great revelation to his disciples, to the assembly, to humanity, the revelation of his eternal life, the revelation of the fact that in truth, in principle, in fundamental essence, he transcends time, he's eternal. And it's with this great revelation that the sutra halfway through is lifted, as it were, from the plane of time up into the plane of eternity. You may remember from lecture 2 that in the previous chapter the whole universe had quaked and trembled, and then from the space below the earth a great host of Irreversible Bodhisattvas had issued, and they greeted the Buddha, Shakyamuni - not just greeted him, greeted him as their teacher, and he'd greeted them as his sons, as his disciples. And the whole great assembly was astounded, amazed, and they said among themselves: But look, the Buddha, Shakyamuni had gained Enlightenment only forty years ago. How could he possibly in that short time, that short space of time, have trained, have matured, such an incalculable host of Irreversible Bodhisattvas. Not only that, but some of these Bodhisattvas, they said, belong to past ages, ages millions of years ago, belong to other world systems. So they can't understand it, they can't understand how all these Irreversible Bodhisattvas who've suddenly appeared should be the Buddha Shakyamuni's disciples. They say: It's like a young man of 25 claiming as his sons a whole lot of centenarians.

So it's in reply to these doubts of theirs that the Buddha makes in this chapter his great revelation, and he says, you may remember, that he did not gain Enlightenment just forty years ago. He attained it an incalculable number of millions of ages ago. In other words he is saying he - and it's not of course now Shakyamuni the historical figure speaking, it's the Buddha principle speaking - he says he is eternally Enlightened, that he's all the time teaching, all the time preaching, in many different forms, in many different world systems, appearing now as Dipankara, now as Shakyamuni, and so on; says he's not really born, doesn't really attain Enlightenment i.e. Enlightenment is not limited to the plane of time; and also says that he does not really die, doesn't really go away, only appears to do so. It's just the physical body that disappears. The Buddha principle, the Buddha nature, that doesn't disappear, that is eternally present, even though invisible. But he says the physical body disappears after a certain length of time for a definite reason. It's not just because the Buddha has grown old. He dies, as it were, to encourage people. He says if he remained physically present with them in the flesh, as it were, all the time, people wouldn't appreciate him, and because they didn't appreciate him they wouldn't follow his teaching. And it's to illustrate this point that he tells now the Parable of the Good Physician, the parable that we've heard already, and the good physician in the parable is of course the Buddha himself, and his ten, or twenty, or a hundred sons are sentient beings in general, especially his disciples. And the delirium into which they are thrown represents all the negative emotions and distorted views of Reality by which we are overpowered. And the herbal medicine he makes for them when he returns and discovers their condition, this is the Dharma.

So it's not difficult to interpret the parable. I'm not going to go through it line by line, as it were - that isn't necessary - but I'm going to comment on just a few details. First of all, the good physician goes to a distant country. The father goes away from the sons, the father is separated from the sons, and this separation represents the state of alienation, alienation from one's true nature, if you like alienation of the lower self, represented by the sons, from the higher self, represented by the father, the physician. It's the same state of alienation about which we heard in connection with the Parable of the Return Journey, where the son again goes away from the father, or the Parable of the Drunken Man and the Jewel, where the drunken man goes away from his friend, and is only subsequently found by him. We've dealt with this, this whole subject of alienation in these parables, in lecture 4, so I'm not saying anything about it now except that, as I believe I said then, this separation has no beginning in time. The beginning of the parable, the Once upon a time therefore takes place outside time. Once upon a time means, as it were, forever, outside Time.

Now again we're told the sons become delirious by drinking the father's poisonous medicines. They're poisonous, but they're medicines. Medicines are good, but they're good, they do you good, only if you take them properly; otherwise they do harm. It's as if the parable suggests there's nothing wrong with the emotions, nothing wrong with thought, nothing wrong with the physical body even. It's when they are misdirected, misused, that the trouble starts. And it's even the same with the Dharma. The Buddha leaves the Dharma, as it were, with us, having preached it. The Dharma's meant to help us, the teaching is meant to help us, but if we misuse it, it can even do us harm.

I remember one of our summer retreats, we had along a young lady who was delighted with one particular Buddhist teaching. She really loved the *anatta* doctrine, and as soon as she came she said: Ah! That's what's converted me to Buddhism. There's no self, there's no soul - and she was really plugging this for all she was worth. There's no ego, there's no I, there's no me, I'm just not there, I'm just not here. I am not. And she went on and on in this way. And of course being at the retreat she had to do quite a bit of meditation, and one day she came to me rather slowly and thoughtfully, and she said: I've just found out something in the meditation. So I said: What's that? She said: I know now why I like the no-self doctrine. So I said: Why? She said: Because I hate myself. I like to hear I'm not there. I like to cancel myself out. It's just an expression of my self-hatred. So she was making the wrong use of that doctrine, that teaching, no doubt true - she was using it to confirm her own self-hatred, which isn't a good thing, and that's the sort of thing that people do, they misuse the teaching, they misuse the doctrine in this way.

So sometimes we ought to ask ourselves: What is it in Buddhism that especially appeals to us? What is it we especially like, or don't like? Is it all that glamorous ritual? all those lovely flowers on the altar, those beautiful images, all brightly polished, shining with *Brasso*? - is that what it is? Or is it that meditation where you can sit down in all that lovely peaceful atmosphere, and just glide away into some nice comfortable dreamy womb-like state? Is that it? Or is it all those books we can read, and all those interesting intellectual things you can find out about the Five Skandhas and the 84 different types of consciousness; is that the sort of thing that you love? Is that what Buddhism means to you? Or is it all that beautiful art, all those lovely Thangkas which those poor dear lamas are still painting in India all along the Himalayas? Or what is it? We have to ask ourselves: What is it that we like, and why?

Again the parable says the sons who have lost their senses say they want to be cured but they won't take the medicine. Now this is a very common situation indeed. I remember when I was in India I used to go around here and there, and especially meet lots of Hindus. And when a Hindu comes to see you he doesn't ask about the weather. He says, as though his whole heart is in it: Swamiji, please tell me how I can become Enlightened in this very life, now if possible, preferably. And he just waits for the answer. But of course he isn't serious, not in 999 cases out of a 1000. It's just sort of good religious form to ask this sort of question. He's no intention of trying. He'd be horrified if you really told him and expected him to follow your advice. So people ask for a teaching, or ask for a cure, ask for the medicine, but they don't want it. Sometimes it's

the last thing they want, and this reminds me of another story, this time from Japan. I know I've told it before. I know it's on some other tape, but that was a long time ago, so we're going to have it again.

As I've said, this story is from Japan, and it concerns a very devout old woman, and she was a follower of the Pure Land school. When she died, she didn't want to be born again in this dirty wicked old earth. She wanted to be reborn in the Pure Land, in the Pure Land of the Buddha of Infinite Light. She wanted to be reborn from a beautiful purple and gold lotus flower and just sit there, ages upon ages, just listening to the Buddha of Infinite Light preaching. That's all she wanted, and she wanted to die quite quickly so that she could be reborn there as a result of her prayers and her meditations and so on. And every morning she used to go along to the temple, and used to kneel down and prostrate herself in front of the great image of the Buddha of Infinite Light. She'd say: Oh Buddha, Oh Buddha of Infinite Light, please take me quickly! Please take me away from this wicked world. I'm so fed up with it. I'm so tired, I just want to die and to be reborn in your Pure Land. So every morning she'd come and she'd pray in this way and weep, shed tears, prostrate herself and beg to be taken to the Pure Land, beg that she might die and be reborn there. So there was a certain monk in that temple who noticed her behaviour - you could hardly help noticing it because she used to pray very loudly and make her petition very loudly. So one day he thought: All right, we'll see. So he stationed himself behind the image, and she came as usual, she bowed down, prostrated herself: Oh Buddha of Infinite Light, please take me. Please take me to your Pure Land. So a voice came booming out from behind the image, or from the image, as she thought: I shall take you now! So when she heard that Buddha's voice, as she thought, she let out a shriek. She fled. She said: Won't the Buddha let me have my little joke?

So that's the story. We ask for the medicine, but we don't really want it. Then the parable says: Their grief at their father's supposed death brings the sons to their senses - and this brings up a point I've often mentioned before which is No development without suffering. It's as though we can't evolve without suffering. We can't evolve just with joy and happiness all the time. It doesn't mean that there's pain and suffering all the time, but it does mean that without some pain, some suffering, there's no development, no Higher Evolution. This is not to say, unfortunately, there's no suffering without development, no suffering without evolution. This isn't the case. But certainly it is the case for the vast majority of people most of the time, that without some stress, some pain, some suffering, to as it were spur them on, there's no real serious development.

All right, so much for the parable in the context of the sutra, so much for our comments. Now let's just take a quick glance at its general significance and then we have to conclude. What is then the general significance of the Parable of the Good Physician? What is its significance apart from the sutra? Well, we can state this very briefly indeed. It says, as it were, that we're most likely to develop when we realise that we are on our own, when we realise there's no God to save us, there's not even any Buddha to help us. We're just individuals, or potential individuals, and as such we can evolve only by our own efforts. The Higher Evolution by its very nature is an individual affair. It involves an individual effort. Not that we have no contact with others who are similarly situated, who are similarly striving. We do have such contact, it's a very rich contact, very rewarding contact, very stimulating, very inspiring, but it's no substitute for self effort. The biggest compliment that a father pays his children, a compliment which some fathers unfortunately are not willing to pay, is to leave them alone, to let them get on with it by themselves, make their own mistakes, garner their own experience. And in the same way the biggest compliment that the Buddha pays humanity is to disappear. If we want to find him, we'll just have to rise to a higher level, to the level of Eternity, the level on which he's always preaching, always preaching this same White Lotus Sutra.

So we come now to the end of the lecture. We come also to the end of the series. For the past eight weeks now we've been studying the Parables, Myths, and Symbols of the Mahayana in the White Lotus sutra, not just studying them, we may say, exposing ourselves to them, allowing ourselves to be influenced by them, even to be carried away by them. And during these weeks, at least while attending, at least while listening to these lectures, we've been living in a different

world. We've been living in a world of timeless truth, living in a world of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. We've been witnessing a great drama, what I called the Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment, and now it's all over, but over only in a sense. The lecture, the lectures, may be finished, but the Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment goes on. The White Lotus Sutra goes on. Not only that. Not only do they go on, but we ourselves are part of the drama. All living beings, in fact, are part of the drama, and one day, remote as it may seem at present, one day we too shall be predicted, as it were by some divine voice, to Supreme Enlightenment. We usually think that it's time to listen when somebody speaks, but the real time to listen is when somebody stops speaking. The real time to listen is when there is no sound. The real time to listen is when there is absolute silence. Because if we listen long enough we will hear not a sound but more than a sound. We shall hear the voice of the Buddha, the voice of the eternal Buddha, and then we shall hear and see for ourselves all the Parables, Myths, and Symbols of the White Lotus Sutra.