

Lecture 103: The Symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life

What does one mean by the Tantric Path or one may ask what is the Tantra? People no doubt have all sorts of ideas, all sorts of understandings, even no doubt, all sorts of misunderstandings on this particular point, on this particular subject of the Tantra, and, this evening I don't want to attempt any formal definition. I hope to be able to communicate something, as it were, of the inner feeling of the Tantra or the feeling that is conveyed or that should be conveyed or suggested by this word 'Tantra'. But at this point, at this stage one thing I will say, and it is this: the Tantra represents that aspect of Buddhism that is concerned not with theories, much less still with speculations, not with formal religiosity, not with external piety, but concerned with the direct experience, in the depths of one's being, as it were, of what one truly and essentially is. Not 'is' just psychologically but IS. One might say existentially, metaphysically, transcendently, and this experience, insofar as the Tantric Path is concerned, cannot be mediated by concepts. Concepts can give no idea of it whatsoever, cannot indicate it in any way, cannot lead one to it in any way. But this experience, this direct experience, above, and beyond words, above and beyond thought, above and beyond the conscious mind, even the conscious personality, can be evoked, can almost be conjured up, releasing some partial glimpse, some distant reflection with the help of symbols, symbols of various kinds. The form and colour symbols, for instance which we shall call images in the widest sense of the term. The sound symbols, which we call mantras. And the enacted or acted out symbols, which we call rituals. In fact one may say that the whole Tantric path to Enlightenment is simply strewn with symbols. You as it were stumble over symbols at every step, and it is even of symbols, we may say that the Tantric path largely consists. But what is a symbol? Many people are preoccupied with that question too. What do we mean by a symbol? What do we mean by symbolism? These are very current terms, but ones which are often not very deeply understood. But here again I am not going to attempt any formal definition of what a symbol is. The nature of a symbol itself precludes the possibility of any such attempt. So in the course of the lectures, I shall allow as it were, the symbols to speak for themselves. All I shall be doing is, with the cooperation of everybody present, to try just to evoke the symbols, to conjure up the symbols, so that you can see them, as it were, so that you can experience them even for yourselves. But at this point I am going to say at least one thing, and that is: a symbol is not a sign. A symbol, any symbol does not stand for something that can or that could be known in any other way other than through the symbol. The symbol stands, we may say, for something which cannot be known in any other way. That's why you have the symbol. It's only through the symbol that you can get at or get to, or have any feeling for or of that which the symbol represents, but also which the symbol, in a sense is. The symbol therefore stands in a sense for something of which we are not yet conscious, something which we do not yet know, but for something of which we can become conscious, which we can know in a spiritual sense. Not something of which we can only become conscious, but something which we can realise, which we can realise with the help of the symbol. So symbols therefore, and especially, we may say, the symbols of the Tantric Path to Enlightenment, symbols, as it were, are not dead, inert counters; symbols, we may say, are full of energy, produce life, give birth to life, spiritual life in us. In a word, symbols are, by their very nature, creative. And this is why, for the next eight weeks, we shall be concerned with, we shall be exploring, even experiencing not just the symbols but the creative symbols, symbols of the Tantric Path to Enlightenment and we shall be concerned with them moreover not just as creative in the abstract, creative in the past, or creative in Tibet and India; we shall be concerned with them as creative for us, not as of just historical interest but as acting on us, energising us, even sparking off developments in our own spiritual life here and now, developments which will lead us in the direction, ultimately, of Enlightenment itself.#

Now tonight we're dealing with one of the best-known symbols or sets of symbols in the whole field of Buddhism, something in a way very familiar. We're dealing with the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. And we're starting the series with the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life for two quite definite reasons. In the first place the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life is only partly Tantric. It is only partly Tantric, as we shall see in a minute. Secondly the Wheel of Life itself is only partly symbolical. Now what do we mean by this? What do we mean by these two points? I've said that the Tantra represents that aspect of Buddhism which is concerned not with theories and speculations, not with formal religiosity but with direct experience of what one truly and essentially IS. One could also say that the Tantra represents the stage in the historical development of Buddhism in India which is concerned more with direct experience. Beginning about a century after the death of the Buddha; after what we call the Buddha's Parinirvana, Indian Buddhism as a whole, that is to say the total tradition of Indian Buddhism, passed through in the course of some fifteen hundred years, three great stages or great phases of development. First of all, lasting for roughly five hundred years, the phase or stage of development, which we call the Hinayana. Secondly the stage or phase of development, again lasting five hundred years, which we call the Mahayana. Thirdly and lastly the stage or phase, lasting another five hundred years, called the Vajrayana. Now the Vajrayana of course is the same thing as the Tantric Path. Now the first stage, the stage of the Hinayana, emphasised these aspects of the Buddhist tradition; ethical observance and psychological analysis. What was emphasised in the second stage, that is the Mahayana, was devotion, devotion to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and what we would call metaphysics, though it isn't quite the same thing as our metaphysics. And in the third stage, that of the Vajrayana, what was emphasised was the use of symbols, ritual and meditation. Now I have dealt with all this in some detail on other occasions so I'll say no more than this for the present. At present we're concerned with just one point here and that is that these three stages; Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana are successive, successive in time, but not successive in the sense

that a later stage entirely replaces an earlier one. The later stage we find, preserves in essentials, all the features of the preceding stage or stages in its own higher synthesis. Thus we find in the course of the development of Buddhism in India that the Mahayana incorporates all the essentials of the Hinayana and that the Vajrayana stage, the Tantric stage, incorporates the essentials not only of the Hinayana but also of the Mahayana, and this process of unfolding, if you like, applies to doctrines, to practices and also to symbols. The symbol of the Wheel of Life is not exclusively Tantric. We find it in the Hinayana traditions and Scriptures. We find it in the Mahayana traditions and Scriptures too. But it was included with all the other symbols that carried over as it were from the Hinayana and the Mahayana in the Tantric synthesis and imbued with the distinctively Tantric spirit. For this reason, we speak of the symbolism of the Wheel of Life or of the Wheel of Life itself as being only partly Tantric. Again the Wheel of Life is only partly symbolical. The Wheel of Life, as many of you probably know, is a very complex, a very composite structure, as it were, and some parts of this structure are true symbols, some are only illustrative. That is, they represent in pictorial form teachings which we already know from other sources. But tonight I intend to dwell more on the symbolical than on the illustrative elements of the Tibetan Wheel of Life.

Now I'm not going to say very much by way of explanation, trying to tell you what the symbols mean, but I've very probably going to elaborate and amplify even, even extend some aspects of the symbolism itself. So, let us begin with a description. Let's try to see the Tibetan Wheel of Life. In the first place it's a wheel, is it not? A wheel consisting of four concentric circles, that is to say, four circles of different sizes, one inside the other. And the first, the innermost circle represents the hub of the wheel. And in the hub of the wheel we see three animals. We see a cock; we see a snake, rather venomous-looking, and we see a pig, usually a black pig. And these three animals, the cock, the snake and the pig are arranged head to tail in a sort of triangle, a sort of triangular relationship if you like, and each animal is biting the tail of the animal in front. So this is the first circle, the hub, with the three animals.

The second circle, outside the first one, is divided into two equal halves, two equal segments. One segment is white. The other segment is black. And in the white segment we see various human beings and these human beings are moving upwards as though on a celestial escalator and they're moving upwards with very happy, very peaceful even very joyful expressions on their faces and we see that they're decently clad. In the Tibetan illustrations of course we see that both the men and the women wear long garments called chubas which reach from their throat right down to the ankles and long sleeves and the women of course wear multi-coloured aprons, sometimes called rainbow aprons and in their hands these happy, peaceful, joyful people moving upwards, ever upwards, carry rosaries and prayer wheels and they are telling their beads, reciting mantras on the rosaries and they're whirling the prayer wheels. We call them prayer wheels but the actual term is mani wheel. Om mani padme hum, the Jewel in the Lotus. But what about the black segment of the black half. If we look there we shall see something rather different. There too we shall see human beings but are they really human? We see them plunging headlong downwards as though into a pit, plunging downwards with expressions of fear, horror and terror and they are all naked and they're all chained together. That's the second circle. The third circle is the biggest. The third circle is divided into six segments, more or less equal.

In the first segment, right at the top of the circle we see the World of the Gods; we see heaven, opening before our eyes; we see a world of pleasures, a world of delights; we see the Gods living in beautiful palaces, among beautiful trees, beautiful gardens, living in a place, in a world, where every wish is instantly gratified. As soon as the desire or wish for something floats into your mind however vaguely, however obscurely, there that thing itself is in front of you, in your hands and in your mouth or on your body just as you please, just as you wish. This is how the Gods live, in heaven.

And then, in the second segment, moving clockwise, we see the World of the Asuras, the anti-gods, the Titans and these are all fierce and war-like beings. They're usually depicted as stoutly and strongly built, well-muscled and not to say heavily built, and they're engaged in perpetual warfare with the Gods and they're fighting especially for the possession of the celestial tree. The Kalpetaru or Kalpebikkshu (?), the magic tree which grants all wishes, which fulfills all desire. So this is the world of the Asuras, the Titans, the Anti-gods.

And in the third segment, carrying on in a clockwise direction we see the world of the Pretas, the World of hungry ghosts and they're all naked and all horribly deformed. They've got enormously swollen bellies, very, very thin necks and mouths no bigger than the eye of a needle and they suffer all the time from ravenous hunger and they grasp all the time at food and at drink and try desperately to cram in into their mouths, their needle-eye mouths, but as they grasp and as they cram, the food and the drink turns into excrement and into liquid fire so that they cannot eat and they cannot drink.

And then in the fourth segment right at the bottom of the circle we see the world of tormented beings, we see Hell and in the middle we see a fierce figure sitting enthroned and this is Yama-Raga (?), the King of Death, dark blue in colour, clad in a tiger skin and surrounded by flames and as he sits there he holds in his hand a mirror; this is the mirror of karma and as beings are dragged before him, beings who have just died, he looks into the mirror and there, just as it were standing there, waiting while he looks into the mirror and he sees

everything, everything that they've done, everything that they've said or everything that they've thought he sees - he sees it all and he just looks. And if they've done evil, if they've done more evil than good in the course of their preceding life then he orders them to be taken away and punished, tormented. So therefore in this segment, in this world, in hell, purgatory, because it isn't a permanent state, we see guilty people suffering various torments, torments in some cases so terrible that we can hardly bear to think about them, much less still to describe them and the sound of wailing and roaring and gnashing of teeth and lamentation fills the whole place.

And then in the fifth segment we see - the world of animals, wild animals, domesticated animals and they're shown all in pairs, male and female and they're shown living a very peaceful, a very idyllic existence, almost the lion with the lamb, hum? It isn't in fact, at least in Tibetan Buddhist art, a very Darwinian picture here. There's no nature red in tooth and claw. You don't even see them preying on one another. Perhaps it's intended to show the animal's life from the animal's point of view, because after all the animal doesn't worry what's going to happen tomorrow. The animal lives just for today, peacefully, happily. If he's going to be eaten tomorrow, well, he just doesn't know, he doesn't think about it.

And then, in the sixth and the last segment, we see the world of men. And here there are human beings, buying and selling, reading, talking, meditating on the trees and finally being carried as corpses to the cremation ground.

So these are the six segments; these are the six worlds, but there is one more important feature of this circle. This whole circle, this third circle, which hasn't yet been mentioned. And that is that in each of the six segments, in each of the six worlds there appears a Buddha, a Buddha figure. Of a particular colour and each Buddha offers to the beings in each of whose world he appears a particular thing that they need.

In the world of the Gods there appears a white Buddha, a pure white Buddha with face and neck and hands just like snow and he is holding a musical instrument, an Indian musical instrument called a vena (?) which we could translate as a lute and he's playing to the Gods in heaven a melody, a sweet melody, a penetrating melody, a meaningful melody. He's playing the melody of impermanence, the melody of nothing lasts, the melody of all is evanescent.

In the world of the Asuras, in the world of the anti-gods, the Titans, there appears a green Buddha, a Buddha of a beautiful emerald green. And he holds in his right hand a sword, a flaming sword, a sword all on fire. And this he brandishes or shakes at the asuras as they're fighting. This is the sword of Transcendental Wisdom.

Then, in the world of the Pretas, the hungry ghosts, there appears a red Buddha, a Buddha of a beautiful ruby red and he showers upon the Pretas, upon the hungry ghosts, food and drink, clouds of food and drink, which they can actually eat, they can actually consume.

Then again, in the world of tormented beings there appears a Buddha the colour of smoke, blueish-grey and he regales the beings in Hell with umbritta (?) which is nectar or ambrosia, the drink or the food of the Gods.

Then in the world of the animals there appears a blue Buddha, a Buddha of deep dark blue, and he's showing something to the animals, something which he holds in his hand. What is he showing to them, displaying to them? He's showing them a book.

And finally there appears, in the human world, a yellow Buddha, a saffron-coloured Buddha or even like a golden Buddha. And he carries, he bears the twin insignia of the spiritual life in ancient India: the begging-bowl and the staff with three rings.

Now what does these six Buddhas, appearing in the six realms, the six gatis (?) represents? They represent the introduction into the symbolism of the Wheel of Life, of a Mahayanistic element, the element we may say of great or absolute compassion, but more about that later on.

Now the fourth and the last circle of the Wheel, the Wheel of Life, contains the greatest number of segments; it contains twelve segments. And in each segment there is a tiny picture, like a little miniature. So in clockwise order from the top these are:

- 1 a blind man with a stick
- 2 a potter with a wheel and pots
- 3 a monkey, climbing a flowering tree
- 4 a boat with four passengers, one of whom is steering
- 5 an empty house with six apertures
- 6 a man and woman embracing
- 7 a man with an arrow stuck in his eye
- 8 a woman offering drink to a seated man
- 9 a man gathering fruit from a tree

- 10 a pregnant woman
- 11 a woman in childbirth
- 12 a man carrying a corpse to the cemetery on his back

So these are the four circles of the Wheel of Life, the Tibetan Wheel of Life and we see that the whole Wheel is gripped by a monstrous, as it were, demoniacal figure. The head of this figure peers over the top of the Wheel and its hands and feet which are clawed, firmly grip the sides, and below we see its scaly reptilian tail. The monster wears however a sort of crown, a crown made up of five human skulls. And these five human skulls represent an introduction into the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life of a Tantric element, an element of what we may call radical transformation. We shall have something to say on this element in Lecture 5 of the series on the Symbolism of the Cremation Ground and the Celestial Maidens. And outside the Wheel, to the right, above the monster's head, appears the figure of the Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, the human historical Buddha, floating on clouds. And he's pointing, pointing with the finger, pointing to the Spiritual Path, the Path to Enlightenment. And on the left, also above the monster's head, appears the white full moon. And in the full moon appears the figure of a hare. And this is the Wheel of Life, the Tibetan Wheel of Life.

I've described it as it is or was depicted on the walls of temples, monasteries and on painted scrolls all over Tibet and the adjacent especially Himalayan area. What does it mean? What does the Wheel of Life mean? What do all these circles and segments mean? What do all these symbols mean? Even, what do all these illustrations mean?

Now I'm not going to say what it means, not going to say what the Wheel of Life means. In any case much of it cannot be explained at all. The symbols at least cannot be explained at all. I'm going to ask you, therefore, to look at the Wheel of Life again. Not only look AT it but look INTO it, because the Wheel of Life is not in fact a picture, not in fact a painting at all. The Wheel of Life is something else, something quite different. The Wheel of Life is a mirror. It's a mirror in which we see - what else should we see - ourselves. We could even say that the Wheel of Life is made up not of four concentric circles, but of four mirrors, each mirror bigger than the last. Or we could say that looking, we look into the mirror four times. And each time we look into the mirror we see more and more of ourselves, realise more of ourselves, experience more of ourselves. The Wheel of Life, we may say, is in fact a sort of magic mirror or even a sort of crystal ball into which you can gaze.

So let us look now into that mirror, into that crystal ball. Look into it even not just four times but as many times as may be necessary. And let us have the courage to see ourselves. And the first time we look, look into the mirror, what do we see? We see an animal, we see three animals; we see the cock, we see the snake, we see the pig. There we are, looking into the mirror. And what do we see? We see the cock, the snake, the pig. Of course usually there is an explanation. Usually we are told that these represent greed, aversion and ignorance and that these three mental poisons are present in our own hearts. These is what we are usually taught, huh? This is how the whole thing is usually explained. But this, if I may say so, is letting us off far too lightly. We may say that this sort of explanation represents a kind of defensive rationalisation. It is after all, much more of a shock when we actually look into the mirror and we see not the allegedly human face that we expected but the face of a bird, of a cock, the face of a reptile, a snake, the face of an animal, a pig. That's us. We see just that, in the mirror. In other words, we have a direct experience of our own animal nature. We're just an animal. Even just a beast. We see that we're really not always quite so human, so civilised as we had thought. We look in the mirror and we see our own animal nature. And this, this realisation is the beginning of spiritual life. We see ourselves, as it were, as we really are on that as it were lowest level. At rock bottom as it were, we see ourselves as we are; we accept ourselves as we are; we go on from there.

Now what does that mean? What does the going on from there mean? Well, to begin with it means that we take another look in the mirror. We take a second look after we get over the shock of the first, after we have seen the animal face or faces in the mirror. When we've recovered from that shock, when we've seen and accepted what we've seen the first time, we take a second look into the mirror. And what do we see this time? We see two paths. One goes up, the other goes down. It's as simple as that. One white, the other black. We see in other words that we are faced with two alternatives. We can either go up or we can go down. It's as simple as this. We can either evolve or not evolve. Evolve or regress: the choice is before us. And it's before us we may say every minute of the day. Every situation in which we find ourselves, shall we go up or shall we go down? Shall we ascend? Shall we descend? Follow the white path or follow the black path. It's up to us to decide.

So suppose we decide, after thinking it all over, to go up, to follow the white path, to evolve. So then the question arises, how to evolve? What must we do to evolve? What constitutes the next step? Having made that choice, taken that decision, now the nature of the next step depends on where we are now. So we have to find out where we are now. So we look into the magic mirror for the third time and what do we see this time? We see the World of the Gods, the World of the Titans, the World of the Hungry Ghosts, the World of Tormented Beings, the World of Animals and the World of Men. What does this mean? This means that we see where we are. We see where we are at any given moment or over any given period of time. Sometimes when we look into

the mirror we see a happy, smiling or peaceful, cheerful face; we see the face of a God. Sometimes we see an angry aggressive face, the face of an Asura. And sometimes when we look in the mirror we see a famished, hollow-eyed face, with a pinched mouth and dissatisfied expression, the face of a Hungry Ghost. On other occasions we see an unhappy, miserable even tormented face, the face of someone in Hell and again when we look sometimes we see the face with a long snout or whiskers or big sharp teeth or a tail; the face of an animal and sometimes when we look in the mirror we see just an ordinary human face. But whatever we see, at any given time, any given moment, whatever we see in the mirror, we see ourselves.

Now let's go into this a little more. I've spoken of the six segments into which the third circle of the Wheel of Life is divided as six worlds, six realms. We've spoken of them as actual realms of existence into which living beings are re-born as a result of their karma and in which they remain, in which they live, until that karma has been exhausted. And that's quite true, but it's only half the truth. The six segments of the third circle also represent six states of mind, six states of mind which we can experience here and now in the course of the present human existence. And sometimes we experience these states of mind so strongly that for the time being we seem actually to be living in another world, in heaven or in hell or among the hungry ghosts. In other words, we experience them almost as states of being, rather than just as states of mind. So let us look at each of the six worlds in this light. That is to say look at them as states of mind or being rather than as realms of existence.

So first of all the World of the Gods. The World of the Gods represents a sort of happy, pleased state of mind, a state we may say of relaxation, of content, of repose. It's the state in which everything seems to go smoothly, to flow smoothly, a state in which there are no obstacles, no difficulties and no problems. It's also a state of aesthetic experience, of artistic enjoyment. It's even the state of meditation in the more limited sense of the term, meditation as an experience of higher states or stages of consciousness, not directly accessible to the Transcendental. So this is the state represented, the state of mind represented by the World of the Gods. And then secondly, the World of the Titans. This is the aggressive competitive state of mind. Here there is lots of energy, maybe too much energy which all turns outward. There is restlessness, there's suspicion, there's jealousy. And as we saw earlier on the Asuras are fighting for possession of that wish-fulfilling tree. So this state of mind, the Asuras state of mind is one that strives after higher and ever higher standard of living, increased and yet more increased wages and so on. It's a state we may say of assertive egotism, a state in which one wants always to be better than others, be more distinguished than others, superior to others, a state in which one even wants to control others, exercise power over others, dominate others, domineer over others and so on. That's the Asuras' state of mind.

And then there is the World of the Hungry Ghosts. This is the state of neurotic desire. So when is desire neurotic? Desire is neurotic when it seeks from its object more than the object by its very nature is able to give or even something quite different from what the object is able to give. Let me take for example the neurotic desire for food. Sometimes people gobble down huge quantities of food, especially sweet things. For they don't really want food at all. Food is a substitute for something else. They're after something else. They want something else, and psychologists tell us that people who consumer unnecessarily large quantities of food for psychological reasons, especially sweet things are really craving, are really wanting affection, not just the food, not really the food at all. And we find that neurotic desire in this sense is very often present in personal relationships, especially personal relationships of the more intimate kind. To such an extent in some cases that it looks like one hungry ghost trying to devour another. So that's the Preta's, the hungry ghost's state of mind.

And then the world of the Tormented Beings. Well, this is the state of acute mental suffering, the state of nervous frustration, of mental breakdown, the state even ultimately of insanity, and it's brought about in various ways. For instance by long continued frustration of natural human impulses. It's brought about by sudden unexpected bereavements, by unconscious mental conflicts and so on, all adding up to intense mental suffering. This is the state represented by the beings in Hell.

And then fifthly, the world of the Animals. This is the state of purely sensual indulgence, the state in which one is interested in only food, sex and simple material comforts, pleasures and convenience of life. And when these are satisfied one is quite gentle, quite tame as it were, quite harmless, but when they are not satisfied, when they are frustrated, then one becomes rather dangerous, rather like the wild animal, hum?

And then lastly, sixthly, the world of men. This is the stage distinctively human consciousness, the state of consciousness which is neither ecstatic nor agonised, neither fiercely competitive nor mindlessly sensual nor yet neurotically desirous, the state in which we're aware of our own self, aware of other people, a state in which we satisfy in a reasonable manner objective human needs, but at the same time see that they have their limitations; a state in which we devote ourselves to spiritual development. This is the truly human state, but it's a state which most 'human beings' only intermittently or perhaps never experience.

And if we wanted to sum up in a rather epigrammatic manner, we could say that the World of the Gods equals the world of higher aesthetic enjoyment, whether achieved by the fine arts or by meditation.

The world of the Titans represents or equals the world of politics, business and trade unionism. The world of hungry ghosts equals the world of romance or symbiotic personal relationships. The world of tormented beings equals the world of mental illness, and the world of men represents or equals the world of truly normal human beings leading truly human lives. However this is a little in passing. It's time we got back to the main thread of the discussion.

We've looked now into the mirror for the third time. We've seen where we are. We've seen for the moment whether we are a god or a titan or a hungry ghost, a tormented being or an animal or a human being. And when we've seen where we are we know which is the next step that we have to take. And that takes us back to the six Buddhas, that is to say, the six Buddhas appearing in the midst of the six worlds; one Buddha to each world. And these Buddhas, according to the Tibetan Buddhist teaching, are all manifestations of the Bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the Bodhisattva who embodies, as it were, the compassion aspect of the enlightened or the enlightenment experience, the compassion aspect of Buddhahood itself. Or we may say that the figure of Avalokiteshvara, the one who looks down with compassion, represents absolute love and absolute compassion. Each of these six Buddhas, these six manifestations of Avalokiteshvara, holds, as we saw, some particular object, something needed by the beings of the world in which he appears. Now what each Buddha holds, the particular object that each Buddha holds, indicates the next step to be taken by a person, by a being in a certain state of mind.

Now let's follow this up; let's go into it a little more. As we saw, in the world of the gods there appears a white Buddha and he holds a vena or lute, and he plays the melody of impermanence. Now what does this mean? It means that when we are in the state of aesthetic enjoyment, of higher ascetic enjoyment, the next step for us is to remind ourselves that it doesn't last, to remind ourselves that such enjoyments, such aesthetic enjoyments, however great, is not to be mistaken for the Supreme Bliss of Enlightenment or Nirvana, to remind ourselves that though things seem to be going well now, though we seem to be happy, pleased, contented, joyful, delighted, we still have a long way to go; there still remains a long way to go. We as yet haven't reached Nirvana. And this brings us to the point, the point that is very much insisted on in the general Buddhist tradition and in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the point that prolonged happiness can be spiritually dangerous if not disastrous. If we're happy all the time, contented all the time, things go easily all the time, we have it our own way all the time, there are no problems, no obstacles, if we're in this state of affairs all the time, in this state of mind, what happens; we tend to become self-satisfied, hum, complacent, even careless, even unmindful, and we tend to forget that we are mortal, that life is short, that time is precious. And this applies even to the enjoyment of the experience, the higher aesthetic experience, of meditation itself, meditation in the narrow sense of the term, as well as of the enjoyment of the fine arts. We need to go as it were from the heights, from the pinnacles even of our mundane, in this case aesthetic, experience to the experience of the Transcendental. And it's interesting incidentally to note that the white Buddha plays the melody of impermanence on a vena, huh? He plays the melody of impermanence, that is to say, he doesn't stand up among the gods, among these sort of people and deliver a lecture on impermanence; he plays a melody on a lute. That melody is itself the melody of impermanence, it communicates the message of impermanence, just that melody. This reminds me of the story of Ashvagoshā (?), the great author of the 'The Awakening of Faith'. He was not only a great philosopher and great spiritual teacher, apparently he was a great musician. He went all over India in mediaeval times, huh? All over India, playing upon a lute, a vena, and Yuan Chan (?) who visited that area, followed in his footsteps as it were a few centuries later and tells us in his memoirs of his sojourn in India that the effect of Ashvagoshā's (?) music was such that when people heard him playing upon his vena they at once got a sense of 'It's all impermanent!'. They at once got a sense of 'Everything conditioned is unsatisfactory!'. They at once got a sense of 'All worldly things are unreal, insubstantial. Nirvana is the only reality. Just by listening to the music, they got that sort of feeling, that sort of impression, that sort of experience. There weren't even any words to the music. It was music without words, if you like, songs without words, huh? But the music, the melody itself condensed that. So it's the same in the case of the white Buddha playing on the vena the melody of impermanence to the gods, waking up those who are in this higher admittedly but somewhat complacent and self-satisfied state of higher aesthetic experience, awakening them up to higher transcendental truths and realities through the medium of the vena, in other words through an artistic medium, in other words not through a philosophical, religious or intellectual medium, but through an artistic medium.

Now in the world of the Asuras there appears a green Buddha, and he brandishes a flaming sword and this is the sword of wisdom, of transcendental wisdom and what does this represent? It means that when we are in this state of competitiveness and aggressiveness, the next step for us is to develop intellectual insight, insight into truth and reality, and this brings us to a very interesting point. It's a point briefly discussed by Dr. Conze in an essay on Hate, Love and Perfect Wisdom. The Asura-like person, the Titan, the anti-god, the enemy of the gods is dominated by Hate. But Hate in Buddhist tradition we are told, hate has an affinity for Wisdom, or even Wisdom has an affinity for Hate. There is a very close connection between the two. If you've got lots of anger and hatred, strange to say in a sense, you're near to Wisdom, you can fairly easily develop Wisdom, Wisdom in the sense of intellectual penetration into truth and reality, as a spiritual experience, not just intellectual knowledge in the ordinary sense. And how is this? But what is the characteristic of hatred, we are asked? The

characteristic of hatred is to seek to destroy the hated object. If you really hate something if you really hate someone, what do you want to do? You want to destroy them, you want to finish them off, you want to annihilate them, to smash them to smithereens, huh? To make just one big nothing where they were before. That's what you want to do. That is the characteristic of hatred, hum? You may not always admit it to yourself, but this is what you'd like to do sometimes to something or someone that you hate. So this is the characteristic of hatred: to destroy, to kill, in the widest sense of the term. And what about wisdom? Transcendental wisdom? The characteristic or the function of Wisdom, of Transcendental Wisdom, is to destroy, to kill, to annihilate.

To destroy what? Kill what? Annihilate what? Conditioned existence itself. Everything that is unreal or illusion and so on. To break through, to smash through, to reduce to dust, to powder, everything which stands in its way isn't reality, isn't truth, isn't Buddhahood, huh? And this is why, again a bit of symbolism, anticipating another lecture, this is why Transcendental Wisdom is symbolised by the thunderbolt. The thunderbolt is supposed to be the most powerful thing of all, that smashes all obstacles, that destroys all obstacles. So prajna, transcendental wisdom is symbolised by the thunderbolt, huh? We have the Vajracchedika, Prajna Paramita Sutra, that sutra, that discourse on the perfection of wisdom, transcendental wisdom, that cuts like the thunderbolt or the diamond. So therefore to destroy, the characteristic of wisdom, as of hatred is through the characteristic of destruction, of destructiveness, huh? In one case unskilful, the other highly skilful. That we find, this affinity between hatred and wisdom, transcendental wisdom, and we do see in fact very often, that people with bad tempers, people who tend to get rather angry rather easily, people with hot tempers, very often have well developed, not to say highly developed, intellects. I must say quite frankly in passing that I've noticed this among oriental scholars, scholars specialising in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese studies, specialising in Buddhism, all about love and meditation and all that sort of thing, higher spiritual experiences from a scholarly point of view, they've nearly always been bad-tempered and quarrelsome to a very remarkable degree, especially among themselves. And if I may even say so, a good example of that is Dr. Conze himself who is celebrated not only for his tremendous scholarship, wonderful acumen, intellectual penetration, but also for his rather hot, not to say (dramatic pause) peppery temper. So that if Dr. Conze is giving a lecture you have to be really careful, huh, er, because sometimes he he really does come back, eh, at people, especially if they've asked, he thinks, a foolish question. He doesn't spare you at all, eh? And unlike some other kinder people. So this is just an example. It's as though the energy which is in hatred, the destructive power which is in hatred, the tremendous force which is in hatred, can be diverted into purely intellectual channels, can be used for the discovery and realisation of truth. But incidentally in the little essay that I mentioned, Dr. Conze points out that the Perfection of Wisdom tradition itself is particularly associated with the Buddha Akshobya (?). We've just mentioned six Buddhas but there is another set of five archetypal Buddhas, also very, very important, huh? And this Buddha Akshobya, the Imperturbable one, is said to preside over the hate family, huh? That is to say he is the patron Buddha of people of predominantly choleric temperament and he's the very Buddha who is associated with the Perfection of Wisdom and no other Buddha. So Dr. Conze points this out and it certainly gives us food for thought. It further illustrates the fact of the affinity between hate and wisdom. This is perhaps why amongst all these kind good-natured people in our own Movement, we tend to produce very few intellectuals or scholars, huh? Maybe we need a little more anger and hatred around before we can do that, huh? But it does seem a fact that this Asura type person cannot only fight with the gods, can as it were fight with truth itself, conquer truth itself in some ways, at least through the intellectual approach, more effectively than other people who may be easier to get on with, hum?

Now thirdly, in the World of the Pretas, in the world of the hungry ghosts, there appears a red Buddha and he showers the pretas, the hungry ghosts with food and drink, with food and drink that they can actually consume. Now what does this mean? It means that when we are in a state of neurotic desire the next step for us is to get back to objectivity, which also means getting back to the present. We must see what the desired object is actually able to give us, see what it is not able to give us, also see what it is we really desire, whether it is really the object or not and where the desire is coming from. And eventually we have either to give the desire its proper satisfaction or just resolve it.

Now fourthly in the World of tormented beings there appears a smoke coloured Buddha. And he regales the beings in hell with amrita (?) with nectar, with ambrosia. Now what does all this mean? There are two meanings here, a bit contradictory and one is rather profounder than the other. The less profound meaning is this: it means that when we're in a state of suffering, of intense suffering, especially mental suffering, the next step for us is simply to gain respite from suffering, to gain some sort of ease, huh? At least some sort of relaxation. For many people that's the best that they can do in the circumstances, and very often, when we're in a state of intense mental suffering, the only thing we can think of is some rest, some respite, huh? But there is another meaning, a better meaning, in some way a more demanding, a more challenging meaning as well as a more profound meaning and it's connected with this word amrita (?). We've been told that the smoke coloured Buddha regales the beings in hell with amrita (?). Now amrita (?) is usually translated nectar or ambrosia but it is also in many Buddhist texts a synonym for nirvana itself, of enlightenment itself, often spoken of as the amatapadam (?), the amrita (?) pada, the state of nectar, the state of ambrosia, the deathly state, the eternal state, huh? So the smoke coloured Buddha gives the beings in hell, gives as it were not just ambrosia, not just nectar, he gives them as

it were, Nirvana, hum, gives the enlightenment, gives them Buddhahood. Now what does this mean? It means that when we are in a state of intense suffering, the next step is to gain nirvana. It's as though there's nothing left for us to do, there's no other hope. All worldly hope has failed, all worldly hope has foundered. There's nothing left for us to do about our suffering except - GO - as it were straight to enlightenment, straight to Nirvana. It's as though there were an affinity even between intense mental suffering and susceptibility to higher spiritual attainment. We'll go into this in greater detail in a minute when we come to a highly interesting teaching preserved in Chinese Mahayana tradition.

Now let's go on, fifthly, to the World of Animals. In the world of animals appears a blue Buddha and he's showing the animals a book. Why a book? What does the book mean? It means that when we're in a state of barbarism and savagery, the state represented by the animals, the next state for us, the next step for us, is simply to become civilised, to make ourselves acquainted with the arts and the sciences, with the cultural life of mankind, because these things have a refining influence, and it's difficult, if not impossible, to go from a state of barbarism, of mental savagery, straight into the spiritual life, the life of spiritual development. And we see historically that Buddhism in the East was always a bearer of culture. It took not only the spiritual teaching of Buddhism all over Asia, but it took Indian culture, Indian higher culture, and it did this for quite definite spiritual reasons, that the secular culture even, the humanistic culture, if you like, formed a sort of foundation for the whole higher spiritual life and higher spiritual development, and this is why we're often told in Mahayana texts that the Bodhisattva, the ideal Buddhist should be a master of arts and sciences, even handicrafts, and this idea is very much embodied in the figure of Manjugosha (?), the great Bodhisattva of wisdom who presides over the arts and sciences.

Now sixthly and lastly, in the World of Men there appears a yellow Buddha, a saffron-coloured Buddha, and he carries a begging bowl and a three-ringed staff. Now what does this mean? The begging bowl and the three-ringed staff are the insignia of the religious mendicant and therefore of the spiritual life in general, and it means that when we find ourselves in a truly human state, the next step for us is to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the task of spiritual development. Once we've reached the human state, experience the human state this should be our main interest in life. Now I could say very much more about this but there is no time; time is getting short. I want now to pass on to the Chinese Mahayana tradition, which I mentioned a little while ago. I also want to look just a few more times into the mirror before we conclude.

One of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism is that all sentient beings are in possession of Buddhahood, that above and beyond time, above and beyond phenomenal particularity, in a sense out of time, all beings even ARE Buddha, ARE enlightened, and within time are capable eventually of gaining enlightenment. But beings are not all equally capable at any given moment, at any given time, in any given state, of gaining enlightenment. Some are more capable than others. And this is expressed in the terms of some people being endowed with more Buddha seeds than others, these Buddha seeds representing various potentialities which can be actualised within a certain limited very definite period of time, perhaps in this life itself. In Buddhist teaching generally, especially in Chinese Mahayana teaching, there are three kinds of seed, three kinds of potentialities in sentient beings. There are good seeds, bad seeds and Buddha seeds. You notice that there is a distinction between the good seeds and the Buddha seeds. Because you're good, you're not necessarily Buddha, because if you're Buddha you can't help being good, presumably. So there are good seeds, bad seeds and Buddha seeds or sometimes it's expressed as red seeds, meaning the good seeds, black seeds, meaning of course the bad seeds, and yellow seeds or golden seeds, even, that is to say the Buddha seeds. And these seeds represent respectively our potentialities for good, our potentialities for evil and our potentialities above and beyond good and evil for enlightenment. And all seeds are present in all beings, all kinds of seeds. We've all got in us red seeds, black seeds, yellow seeds. But they're present in us, present in different beings in varying proportions. And here we come back to the six kinds of beings, beings in six worlds or six different states of mind. Because in each world, in each state of three kinds of seed are present in certain definite quantities, and this leads to some rather surprising conclusions. Now there should be somewhere around a chart to help us. I'm not quite sure where it's been put (?) Here we are. How we see here the six worlds or six states arranged just as they were described when we were dealing more directly with the Tibetan Wheel of Life, the third circle. Hum? First of all at the top we see the world or state of the gods. We see there that there are no black seeds. The gods have no potentiality for evil, huh? And god-like people, huh? There's no good people, really good people, almost goody-goody people that have no potentiality for evil. They couldn't hurt a fly. No, not deliberately. There's a great deal of red seed because they're very, very good indeed, huh? Happy, holy, contented, peaceful, kind etc. Red seed is predominant, but we see there's very little yellow seed. Surprisingly the potentiality for enlightenment for Buddhahood is very limited, hum?

Then two, going clockwise we come to the world or state of the Asuras or Titans. Well, we see that that's made up or the seed here consist of two thirds black seeds, roughly one third red seeds and there's only one single yellow seed, one single Buddha seed, hum?

Right, come down to the world of the pretas or the state of hungry ghosts. There's no red seed at all there. Hum? No red seed at all. There's a predominance of black seed but there's quite a lot of yellow seed. Right.

Come right down to the bottom to the world or state of tormented beings. Hell. Well, here we find a situation practically the same as that of the hungry ghosts. There's no red seed. There's a definite predominance of black seed, but there's even more yellow seed than there is in the world or state of the pretas. See what that means in a minute, huh?

Then fifthly coming up on the other side, the world or state of the animals. There's very little red seed. They don't really have a very happy time of it, there's a predominance of black seed. And a small amount of yellow seed, about twice the amount of the red seed, huh?

And then sixth and lastly there's the world of men, state of men, human state. Here we see three kinds of seed present in roughly equal proportions.

Though some of you have no doubt got the message or some of the messages, let's underline some of the conclusions which follow from all this. Some of them are really quite obvious. We see to begin with that the Asuras, the angry, warlike, competitive, fierce hostile people have got the smallest potentiality for Buddhahood, huh? In other words, if you're involved with highly competitive business dealings or if you're in politics etc, you're lacking all but the very smallest potentialities for enlightenment, huh?

The gods though, strange to say, have a smaller potentiality for enlightenment than either the hungry ghosts or the tormented beings. In other words if you're undergoing a period of intense mental suffering you're much more likely to gain enlightenment or Buddhahood than someone who's having a very easy, pleasant, aesthetic time, hum? It's very difficult, in other words, to gain enlightenment from a state of happiness, unadulterated happiness. It's much easier, comparatively, though still very, very difficult, to gain enlightenment from a state of intense suffering. It's as though the suffering acts as a sort of catalyst, even makes us more aware. We often find that we're undergoing a rather serious illness, when there's something wrong with us physically, when we go through all sorts of physical changes and painful experiences, huh, and are maybe rather mentally upset, we very often have spiritual experiences that we don't very often get at other times in other ways. It's as though a sort of tension is created, a sort of sensitivity is created; we become more susceptible to higher spiritual experiences and influences at that time - of physical stress and even - of mental stress, mental suffering. Now there's a lot more that could be said about this and on this point, on the closeness, as it were, between intense mental suffering and spiritual experience, the relationship between intense mental suffering and potentiality for enlightenment but we've not got enough time and in any case perhaps, the whole chart speaks for itself. If we study it or just look at it huh, just look at all those coloured dots, those coloured seeds, the black, red and yellow, there are quite a few messages beyond words and beyond thoughts even that'll come across to us.

So, we've taken by this time, taking rather a long time over it, we've taken our third look into the mirror, hum. We've seen where we are. We've seen the mental state we are in. We've seen the next step to be taken according to that state. Now we must take a fourth look into the mirror. And what do we see this time? We see the old man with his stick; we see the potter with his wheel and pots; the monkey climbing the flowering tree and so on. We see in other words the twelve nidanas or twelve links. Briefly we see how it all happens, how it all comes about, see how we pass from one state of conditioned existence to another, one conditioned state of mind to another, see all the different stages of the process, see how it all happens, how it all comes about. In other words we see the whole process of what we sometimes call the REACTIVE mind, the whole mechanism of the re-active mind, and seeing it, really seeing it, at this stage, as we look for the fourth time into the mirror, we are free from it. We've seen through the mind and we pass beyond. And then after a while we look in the mirror again.

And what do we see this time? This time we see the monster. We come face to face with death, with the fact of universal, of cosmic impermanence. We see that conditioned existence, that is to say existence that comes into being in dependence on causes and conditions, is not only impermanent, but is not ultimately real. Is not absolutely real. But we see also at the same time even more than that. We see further than that, deeper than that. In the depths of the unreal, in the depths of the unreality of conditioned existence we see as it were gleaming there, like a pearl at the bottom of the sea, we see - the real, the ultimately real, the absolutely real. Right in the depths of the unreal, huh? Constituting even as it were another dimension of the unreal itself, not even really separate from the - the unreal. So we look even again into the mirror.

And what do we see now? This time we see the Buddha. Maybe not up there in the right-hand corner but right in the centre of things we see the Buddha. We see enlightenment itself. We see, in Mahayana terms, our own original face. We experience directly what we truly and essentially are. In the depths of our being. We see our own original face. And then what do we see? We see the Bodhisattva. Not only the Buddha. The Bodhisattva. The hare in the full moon is the Bodhisattva, in other words is the Buddha, in one of his previous incarnations, the incarnation in which, according to the Jatakas (badly recorded), he sacrificed his body in the fire to provide

a meal for a hungry guest. And as so often in legends of this sort, the guest turned out to be Indra, the king of the gods in disguise. So he restored the hare to life and as a reward, huh, he drew his picture, hum, in or on the full moon as an everlasting testimony to his spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice. So, according to Indian legend you see the hare in the moon - even today - and you think of the Bodhisattva, you think of his generosity, you think of his self-sacrifice. In India it's not the old man in the moon, it's the hare in the moon.

But what is meant by Bodhisattva? Bodhisattva is not just a person, not just a personification, Bodhisattva means, or seeing the Bodhisattva, means, seeing the spirit of enlightenment at work in the world process, the cosmos, and seeing ourselves, to the extent that we lead a spiritual life, as part and parcel of that. We see first of all the Buddha, that is our own original face Buddhahood, but OUT OF time and then we see that same reality, that same Buddha, that same Buddha principle at work IN time, at work through time, through the cosmic process, the process of the higher evolution, we see the Bodhisattva.

Then we look for the last time in the mirror and now what do we see? We don't see anything at all. We don't even see the mirror - the mirror itself - has disappeared. There's nothing to see. There's nobody to see it. And yet at the same time, mysteriously, everything is seen. Everything is heard. Everything is understood. Everything is realised. We can say that the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life has been transcended. We can say that the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life has been fulfilled.