

Lecture 104: The Tantric Symbolism of the Stupa

I think everybody knows that the Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, the founder of the spiritual tradition that we now know as Buddhism, lived in India some 2500 years ago. And 2500 years, 25 whole centuries is rather a long time as human history goes. Nevertheless, though the Buddha lived all those years, all those centuries ago, we do know, even today, quite a lot about him. We know quite a lot about his life, about the events of his life, what he did, what happened to him. We know quite a lot about what we can only call, using a rather unfortunate word, the personality, the character of the man himself. We know also quite a lot about his teaching, so many traditions of the teaching have come down to us, so many forms of it, so many expositions of it, of one kind or another. We also know, quite a lot, not only about the Buddha himself, but about his various disciples, about the men and the women and even the children, who, in the course of his 45 years of ministry followed him, were influenced by him, influenced by his teaching, influenced by his example. We know quite a lot about the Bhikkhus, about the Bhikkhunis, about the Upasakas, about the Upasikas. I am deliberately using the Pali and Sanskrit words, because the English translations as monks, nuns, etc, usually create such a very misleading impression. But we know quite a lot about them all, all these, or many of them, these disciples, some kings, some nobles, some garland sellers, garland makers, sweepers, scavengers, merchants, traders, priests, we know quite a lot about them too. And we know quite a lot about the sort of impression the Buddha made on his contemporaries, what people thought of him, how they reacted to his teaching, how they reacted to his influence, how they reacted to the fact that up and down the roads of India, there was walking, could be seen every day, a man who was enlightened. We know what they felt about that, we know that some were very much impressed, were carried away almost by their enthusiasm, that there was walking about in the world in flesh and blood, on two feet, as it were, an enlightened human being. But there were others, we know, who were not at all pleased, did not like the idea at all and criticised and reviled the Buddha, we know that as well. There were some who thought of him as 'the Buddha', the Enlightened one - others who thought of him as someone who had happened to leave his home, the Sakyas and was wandering about as religious mendicant. Some thought of him just as an ordinary teacher, others again thought of him as nice kindly old gentleman, others as a great yogi, others as a great miracle-worker, and so on. We know from the scriptures, from the traditions, that the Buddha created on the minds of his contemporaries all these impressions. We know too, quite a lot, not only about the Buddha, not only about his disciples, his contemporaries, about the impression he created, we know quite a lot about the general conditions of times in which he lived in India, in north eastern India. We know quite a lot about the political conditions, about how there was a general shift from a republican to a monarchical form of polity. We know quite a lot about social conditions, or the caste system, stratification of society, and so on, about the economic condition of the country, what sort of trade, what sort of business was carried on, by whom, where. We know about the trading connection that extended all the way to Babylonia, perhaps even further than that. All these things we know.

But amongst all these things that we know about the Buddha, about his disciples, about his times and so on, as regards the life of the Buddha itself, we know most of all about and in connection with two particular episodes. And these episodes are: the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment when at the age of 35 the supreme at last dawned upon him in meditation, and about, what we call, his Parinirvana, which is the Buddhist expression for the Buddha's final passing away from the physical body, the dissociation, as it were, of that supreme enlightenment experience from the physical body in connection with, perhaps even through which it was originally attained. For the second of these two events, for the Parinirvana, that is to say, for the final passing away there is indeed a special section of the scriptures devoted. We have a scripture, we have a text, that is to say a Sutra called 'the Maha Parinirvana' Sutra, sometimes translated as the book, or the scripture of the Great Decease, or rather, perhaps I should say, Sutras, because the text, the scripture exists in several versions, in several recensions, and this great work, this great scripture, the Maha Parinirvana Sutra, or Maha Parinibbana Sutta, or Suttanta, as it is called in Pali, contains a very detailed, a fairly connected account of the last few months of the Buddha's earthly life. It follows him, as it were, step by step, it tells us where he went, who he met, how he discoursed, what teaching he gave, and the whole story, the whole account contained in this Maha Parinirvana Sutra constitutes, a very solemn and a very moving story indeed, because by that time, by the time embarked upon that last journey described in the Maha Parinirvana Sutra, the Buddha was an old man. He was an old man of 80, he had a long, he had had a very eventful life, and he knew that he was going to die, he knew that he was going to pass away, he knew that, enlightened though he was, he was not exempt from the general doom of humanity, that he had to die. But being the Buddha, being the Enlightened One, he remained calm, he remained perfectly objective, he simply thought: inasmuch as I am going to die, and he knew apparently exactly when it was going to be, what should I do? What is it fitting for me to do? And he reflected, we are told, that it would not be fitting for him to pass away, for him to die, to attain Maha Parinirvana without first having said 'goodbye' to his friends and disciples and companions and giving them his last words of exhortation and advice.

So having observed what is called the rainy season retreat, that period of retreat during the rainy season, when making, as it were, a virtue of necessity, one remains indoors, in the monastery, in the Vihara, meditating or quietly talking with friends, having completed that rainy season retreat, his last rainy season retreat, the Buddha, with Ananda, as his sole companion, set out on a quite extensive tour of north-eastern India. And as the Maha Parinirvana Sutra proceeds, as the story unfolds, as we get nearer and nearer to the end, we may say that the final episode of the story is particularly sublime and particularly moving. We see the Buddha and Ananda arriving at a place called Kusinagara. Kusinagara, the present day Dhyuria, is just a few miles now from the Nepalese border.

And the Buddha and Ananda on their arrival there, make their way to a grove of sal trees. Sal trees are particularly beautiful trees. They have very tall, very straight, smooth stems, rather short branches, not too many of them, and beautiful big pale green leaves. So, the Buddha and Ananda make their way to a grove of sal trees. And we are told that this grove of sal trees belonged to a certain tribe, a republican tribe, well-known to the Buddha, containing many of his disciples and followers, known as the Mallas. And when the Buddha and Ananda reach the sal grove of the Mallas, the Buddha is very tired. He's been walking, perhaps every day, for many months, he's been exerting himself to the utmost, expending his last few ounces, as it were, of his energy, visiting his friends, visiting his followers, talking with them, giving his last words of exhortation and advice. So he is very, very tired - and he asks Ananda to prepare for him a couch between two sal trees. So this Ananda does. Apparently he takes off his own outer robe which is rather thick, he makes a sort of rough couch from it, and on this couch, at the foot of the sal tree the Buddha lies down. And then, according to the Maha Parinirvana Sutra, a sort of, we may say almost miracle takes place, it's not the time for those sal trees to bloom, but suddenly they break out into blossom. And sal trees have beautiful big white flowers, pure white flowers, and usually plenty of them. So these sal trees, these two sal trees, above the Buddha, towering above him, they break forth into untimely blossom. Not only that, we are told, or so the Maha Parinirvana Sutra goes on, these white blossoms, these white flowers starting raining on to the Buddha's body, and the text says, the scriptures says, it was as though the trees, the sal trees were actually worshipping the Buddha, raining down these white flowers in worship, almost as though nature herself was worshipping the Buddha before his departure. And the text goes even further than this, it says, down from the sky, down from the heavens, there came falling heavenly frankincense so that a beautiful odour pervaded in all directions and again, listening one could hear ethereal music sounding in the sky, the music of gods and goddesses floating upon the clouds, all worshipping the Buddha. But then, what does the text go on to say? What does the Maha Parinirvana Sutra go on to say? It tells us that the Buddha was not in the least impressed by all these miracles, by the flowers falling down, the incense falling from the sky, the gods singing thier songs and playing their instruments in the heavens, he wasn't in the least impressed by all these miracles. Perhaps, we can say the Buddha, after 45 years, was rather tired of miracles, and he just looks up, as it were, and he tells Ananda that all this that's happening, the white flowers falling down, the incense falling from the sky, the heavenly music in the sky, he says, all this does not truly constitute worship of the Buddha, of the enlightened one, and he says to Ananda, he who would worship me let him simply follow my teaching, that is the true worship. This is what the Maha Parinirvana Sutra tells us, what the Buddha said in this connection. And after a while, the sutra goes on to say, Ananda asks, - it's a practical question, he is a practical man -, he can't help thinking ahead, - he asks, Lord, when you are dead, when you have attained parinirvana, what should be done with your body? How should it be disposed of? And what does the Buddha say? He says: Ananda, don't bother about that, don't worry about that. He says: get on with your own spiritual development, that is far more important. But he says that there are faithful lay followers, priests and nobles and traders, they will attend to the disposal of the Buddha's physical remains. So we how objective, in a sense, how severe was the Buddha's attitude, he wouldn't tolerate any sentimentality, he wouldn't tolerate, even for a moment, losing sight of what was really and truly of importance, namely one's own spiritual development. But Ananda, who is not yet enlightened, finds it very difficult to accept this kind of objective attitude, and we are told by the Maha Parinirvana Sutra that Ananda was, in fact, very upset, disturbed at the prospect of the Buddha's departing from the world. And we are told that he was so upset and so disturbed he could not even remain with the Buddha, he went away, he went a short distance away, and he was leaning on a post, or maybe leaning on the trunk of a tree and he was weeping, and he was saying to himself: I still have so much to learn and my teacher, who was so kind to me he is about to depart. And saying this he was weeping, leaning up against the post or the tree.

And meanwhile we are told, that other disciples had arrived, other disciples had gathered around the Buddha, knowing he was about to depart, and the Buddha noticed that Ananda was absent, Ananda was no longer there, and Ananda, normally was always with him. So the Buddha asked: Where is Ananda? So the others said: He's gone a little distance away, he's upset, he's disturbed and this is what he is saying, he's weeping. So the Buddha said: Let Ananda be sent for. So they sent for Ananda, one of them went, took him by the hand, brought him into the presence of the Buddha, and the Buddha consoled him. The Buddha said: Ananda, don't feel any regret that you haven't yet gained Enlightenment, that you are not yet enlightenend as I am. You will be, before very long. Shortly after my parinirvana, in fact, you too will gain Enlightenment. And turning to the other disiciples the Buddha praised Ananda for his various qualities, the tact with which he handled visitors, especially. And by this time, by the time all this had happened, it was the middle of the night. And everybody knew that the Buddha was about to depart, it was only a matter, perhaps of hours. So they were all sitting around, very silent, very solemn in the middle of the night in the sal grove of the Mallas, waiting for the parinirvana. And as they were waiting, in the midst of the silence, in the midst of the solemnity, an unexpected visitor arrives. The Buddha can't even die in peace, a visitor arrives, who wants to see the Buddha, even at that moment. But Ananda prevents him, Ananda says: What are you asking, the Buddha is about to pass away, none can see him now, it's too late. It so happened that the Buddha overheard this conversation, and he called to Ananda, and he said: Ananda, let that man approach. His name, by the way, was Subadra, he was known as Subadra the wanderer. Let him approach, he is a simple man, a straightforward man, as soon as I explain the truth to him, he will understand. So let him come near. So Subadra approached, he had a brief discussion with the Buddha, and he developed, as a result of that discussion, spiritual insight. And he was the last of the Buddha's personal disciples, Subadra, the wanderer.

And by this time the end was fast approaching. The Buddha, as it were, rousing himself, gave his final exhortation to his disciples, especially he told them, especially he insisted on the fact that they should not think that they had lost their teacher. Many of them were thinking, as he knew, many of them were even saying: our teacher is about to depart, we will not have any teacher after the Buddha has passed away. But the Buddha says: you should not think like that. I have left a teacher with you, I am leaving a teacher with you, the teacher that will be with you all the time. And that teacher is the teaching itself, the Dharma itself will be your teacher, the Dharma that I have taught. And the Buddha suggests, that he is spiritually present in the teaching, in the Dharma, so that we you are in contact with the Dharma, you are in contact with a spiritual tradition, you are in contact with the Buddha himself. And having given them that exhortation he reminded them that all things were impermanent, it's not just the Buddha who has to die, the Buddha who has to pass away, all beings, all things, everything is transient, everything is impermanent, everything, one day, will pass away, everything conditioned, everything phenomenal, just like the water of a great river, - everything is impermanent, therefore, he said, Oh monks, develop mindfulness, develop awareness, do not, as it were, fall asleep.' And then the Buddha passed away into the state of deep meditation, and from that state of deep meditation he passed away. And that is the parinirvana, the parinirvana, the final passing away of the Buddha, the final dissociation of the enlightened consciousness from the physical organism.

But so far as the Maha Parinirvana Sutra is concerned that is by no means the end of the story. The Buddha passes away, the physical body of the Buddha is left lying there on a couch beneath the twin sal trees, those of the disciples who are as yet unenlightened are very upset, some weep, some lament, but those who are enlightened as the Buddha himself, they just go on sitting calmly round the corpse, their minds are not disturbed, even by the passing away of the Buddha. And as they sit, as the hours pass by, as the dawn comes, the Mallas, in whose sal grove they are all sitting, the Mallas come to hear the great news that the Buddha has passed away. And in the course of the next few hours, the next few days, they arrange for the Buddha's physical body to be cremated with royal honours. And after the body has been completely consumed by the fire, they search among the ashes and they collect fragments of bone. And these fragments of bone, these relics, they place, they seal in a golden jar. And they worship the relics in this golden jar with flowers and with perfume and with hymns of praise.

And while they are so engaged messengers arrive, messengers from north, south, east and west, messengers from various kings, from various nations, various peoples, tribes. And these messengers are all demanding a share of the relics, the relics of the Buddha, the bone fragments. But the Mallas are not very pleased about this, they are not ready to part with them, because they say: the Buddha, the Enlightened one passed away in our territory, therefore, his physical body, the relics, the fragments of bone, these belong to us. So they refused to part with them. So the kings, and the nations, and peoples and tribes, they marched up with their armies to claim a share of the relics, and prepared if necessary to fight to the death for their share of the relics. And very nearly a battle did take place. But there was at least one wise man around, and he talked with the representatives of these various kings and tribes and peoples, he maybe, made them see reason, and in the end they agreed to appease division of the relics. So the golden jar was opened, and the relics were very reverently divided into 8 equal portions. The Mallas got one portion, and the various kings and tribes and peoples and nations they got the others, and in this way everybody was happy. And they all too away their share of the relics to their own territory, and then shrined them with very great honour. And how did they enshrine them? They heaped up, above them, in some chosen spot an enormous mound of earth. And it's these mounds which were subsequently known as stupas.

And it's with the stupa that we are concerned this evening. Now, we are not concerned with the stupa in general. That is a very vast subject into which we can't enter now. We are concerned specifically with the tantric symbolism of the stupa. Though when we speak of the tantric symbolism of the stupa it suggests, that there is a non-tantric symbolism of the stupa, that the stupa, at least, in some of its forms, contains symbolic elements which are not of tantric provenance. And this is, in fact, the case. The stupa, the stupa which originated from these great mounds of earth heaped up over the relics of the Buddha, the stupa has a history, throughout Asia coterminous with the history of Buddhism itself. Wherever Buddhism went, there went the stupa. One might even say that the stupa is the most important and the most ubiquitous of all Buddhist architectural forms. Usually when we think of Buddhist art and Buddhist architecture the first thing that we think of is the Buddha image. That seems most characteristic, most representative. But this is not, in fact, the case. The stupa is even more ancient than the Buddha image, even more characteristic of Buddhism than the Buddha image. The Buddha image, we know, did not come into existence in India until several centuries after the parinirvana. There was a period of several hundred years during which there was no such thing as the Buddha image, no cult of images, no veneration of images, no keeping of images, or installation of images of the Buddha. In fact, we may say, there was, amongst the early Buddhists, a general feeling almost against images of the Buddha, against representations of the Buddha in this way. There was a general feeling that the Buddha, Buddhahood could not be represented by any image. They thought, as it were, they felt, as it were, what is the Buddha? The Buddha is an enlightened being, one who has realised the truth, reality, the ultimate, the absolute, - he is the embodiment of that. And how is that to be represented? How can that be conveyed? How can that feeling, how can that experience be conveyed? Just by a representation of a human physical body? The Buddha is far above that, in his inner essence he is something transcendental, something ineffable, something which cannot be represented in any way, in any

earthly, in any material medium. The Buddha is beyond all that, he transcends all that. So how can there be, how should there be an image of the Buddha? They remembered moreover that the Buddha had said, even during his lifetime, that people could not see him, could not truly understand him or fathom him inasmuch as his nature was so deep, so vast, so incommensurable, and that even after death it would be more difficult still to fathom him. So in this way, for such reasons as these, for several hundred years after the parinirvana of the Buddha there was no representation of the Buddha in art, there was no Buddha image at all. But the stupa, the stupa came into existence we may say within days after the parinirvana, certainly within a week, or we can even say that the stupa was already in existence even before the parinirvana, even before the time of the Buddha. Because even before the time of the Buddha in India, in ancient India, it was the custom, when a great man died, when a king died, when a maha purushu died, that great mounds of earth would be heaped up over his remains. And we know, in fact, that this was the general custom in many parts of the world throughout, what we may describe as the heroic age. We find this custom among the ancient Greeks, that of erecting a great mound of earth over the remains of some hero, we find it even among the ancient Britons. We find these heaps of earth heaped over the remains of the dead in the form of what we call barrows, which are found in many, many parts of England, long barrows and round barrows. The word 'barrow', incidentally meaning, mountain or hill or mount, a word akin to the Germanic and Danish 'berg' and akin also to the Sanskrit 'vrihant' which means 'high'. And it was, in fact, because it was an existing custom, because it was the custom to show honour to the memory of dead kings in this way, by heaping up mounds of earth over their physical bodies, after their death, it was because of this that the Buddha's followers erected stupas over the remains of the Buddha. In other words their feeling was to treat the Buddha after his death as though he had been a great king. In fact, they felt a king he was, not an earthly king, but a king of a spiritual world, a spiritual domain, a king of truth, or Dharma raja, Dharma raja being one of the Buddha's titles.

According to the Tibetan tradition, or rather according to an ancient Indian tradition preserved in Tibetan sources, the question of the building a monument, as it were, over the remains of the Buddha after his death, had been rooted even during the Buddha's lifetime. And we are told according to this tradition that the disciples, while the Buddha was still alive had come to him and they had asked: what sort of monument, what sort of mound, what sort of stupa, if you like, they should erect over his remains after his death. And according to this tradition, according to this account, the Buddha had responded in a rather Zen-like sort of way. He didn't say anything, he didn't tell them anything, didn't describe anything, he just showed them. So what did he do? He was wearing three robes, tichivara, that's the standard set, as it were, one round the waist, one over the shoulder, and there is an extra big and thick one which is used sometimes as a blanket, that is to say, at night, sometimes as a sort of cloak, especially in the rainy season, if one happens to be going about. So he took this thick outer robe, this cloak, and he folded it into four. And then he folded it into four again. So in this way, folding and folding the robe, he produced a sort of rough cube of cloth. And having done that he took his begging bowl, the bowl with which he went for alms into the villages begging his food, he took his begging bowl, which was probably black and lacquered, and he placed the begging bowl upside down the folded robe. And he said: make my stupa just like that. And this, in fact, is what, later on the disciples actually did. And this is the simplest form of stupa, the earliest form of stupa, in other words, a cube form, surmounted by a sphere or sometimes a hemisphere. This is the earliest, most primitive form of the stupa.

Later on, as the centuries rolled by the stupa became much more complicated. In fact, it became very complex indeed. It became architecturally, even artistically, more complex, and also very much more complex in meaning and significance. And eventually, after several hundred years of development, not only in India, but in Ceylon, and Burma and Tibet and China and Japan it became, in various ways, a sort of 3-dimensional symbol of the teaching itself, the Dharma itself, so that, we may say, to write the history of the stupa, as it went all over Asia, is practically to write the history of Buddhism itself. And the stupa became more and more complex, architecturally, artistically, and in its meaning, partly by way of progressive incorporation of symbols. For instance, the sphere, of the hemisphere, eventually became surmounted, fairly early in the history of the Indian stupa, became surmounted by a square, box-like structure, sometimes surrounded by a railing. And this square, box-like structure placed on top of the sphere or the hemisphere represents the Vedic, that is to say the pre-Buddhistic, Brahmanical or Hindu fire altar, the altar on which the sacred fire was kindled. And again eventually, this box-like structure, this fire altar, this half, if you like, came to be surmounted by an honorific umbrella, or ceremonial umbrella, in fact, it came to be surmounted by three or more umbrellas, one on top of the other. Sometimes there were 9 umbrellas, one on top of the other. Sometimes there were 13. And these multiple honorific umbrellas represented the tree of life, the cosmic tree, the tree beneath whose branches, according to some of the accounts, the Buddha sat on the night of his original great enlightenment. So we can see that all sorts of associations, all sorts of significances became to be associated with the stupa, and the symbolism of the stupa. The 13-fold umbrella, for instance, which we find crowning the stupa very late in the history of its development, the 13-fold umbrella represents the 13 stages of spiritual progress through which the Bodhisattva passes on his way to supreme enlightenment.

But we are not concerned with all this at present. I have dealt with this, at least in part and in some detail in some cases on previous occasions in previous lectures. Tonight we are concerned with the tantric symbolism of the stupa, in other words, we are concerned with the specifically tantric elements which became incorporated into

the stupa during the Vajrayana, or tantric phase of development of Buddhism in India. And I have spoken about the development of the stupa in general only by way of providing a certain amount of background information for those who might not have been familiar with the subject before, because after all, one won't get very far with the tantric symbolism of the stupa, if one doesn't even know to begin with what a stupa itself is.

Now it's not possible tonight to deal with all aspects of the tantric symbolism of the stupa. There are one or two quite important ones which I shall be omitting. We shall concern ourselves tonight with 3 of the main elements, these three elements representing 3 important aspects of tantric Buddhism itself, or even 3 main features of the tantric path to enlightenment. We'll concern ourselves tonight, with the symbolism of the five elements in the stupa, the symbol, or symbolism of the vase of initiation, and the symbolism of the flaming drop.

First of all then, the symbolism of the 5 elements. So the 5 elements are the 5 standard elements ... (6?) ..., they are earth, water, fire, air and space, and out of these five elements the first 4, that is to say earth, water, fire and air are material elements, and between them they make up the so-called material universe, earth, water, fire, air. And in Buddhist thought, of all schools, these four, these material elements, or so-called material elements, earth, water, fire, air, these are collectively known as 'rupa'. Rupa, in turn, is the first of what we call the five skandhas, the five aggregates, or the five heaps, if you like, into which the whole of conditioned existence or phenomenal existence can be divided, is divided by Buddhist tradition. The other skandhas, simply for information are, first of all, vedana, or feeling, samja, or perception, samskara, or volitions, and vijnana or states of consciousness. And those five aggregates, these five heaps which between them comprise the entire conditioned world, the entire phenomenal world, these are the five heaps of our standard translation of the Heart Sutra. You may remember that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara coursing in the deep course of the wisdom that has gone beyond looks down from on high, and what does he see, as he looks at the phenomenal world, as he looks at conditioned existence? He sees only five heaps, five aggregates, he sees only rupa, or form; vedana, or feeling; samya, or perception; samskara, or volitions; vijnana, or states of consciousness; he does not see a self, he does not see an ego. This is the point of looking down, he sees only the voidness, he sees only the emptiness of these five heaps, he sees that in their own being, their svabhava they are empty.

Now, rupa used to be translated as matter. Early translators of Buddhist texts into western languages were, as it were, feeling their way. It was a very unfamiliar world, a very unfamiliar thought world in which they found themselves, groping amidst the Buddhist texts. And they translated rupa, wherever they encountered it, whether in Sanskrit or in Pali as matter, matter as opposed to mind. But this is very, very misleading indeed, in fact, it's quite wrong, as we shall see shortly. Rupa, literally means 'form'. It represents what western philosophers call the objective content of the perceptual situation. Now, what does this mean? It means that we have an experience, or putting it more technically, there is a perceptual situation, a situation in which perception takes place. For instance, we see a flower, or we hear a melody. There is a perception, there is an experience, and in the perception, in the perceptual situation, in the experience we can distinguish two elements, - we can distinguish, first of all what we ourselves contribute to the experience, to the perceptual situation, for instance, there is a sensation of colour, say red or white, we contribute that, there is a sensation of sweetness, or harshness of sound. That sweetness, that harshness is our contribution. There is a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of satisfaction, that's also our contribution. But in that perceptual situation, in that experience there is something that we ourselves do not contribute. There is something that the experience seems to be an experience of. There is something to which the perceptual situation seems to refer, something to which it seems to point, and this something, as yet unknown and unidentified, is what we call, technically, the objective content of that perceptual situation or that experience. And it's this, this objective content that Buddhism calls rupa or form. And it's very important to understand that Buddhism does not interpret this rupa, this objective content of the perceptual situation in terms of matter as opposed to mind. In Buddhism, in any case, there is no mind-matter dualism, least of all is there a mind-matter dualism in the tantra. Now, rupa, form, as the objective content of the perceptual situation, is not only perceived, but perceived as possessing certain qualities, experienced as possessing certain qualities, or experienced in certain ways. And there are four qualities, four main qualities or principal qualities, and these are technically known as mahabhutas, mahabhutas, - what this word means we shall see in a minute. Rupa, or the objective content of the perceptual situation is perceived as, first of all, something solid, and resistant. It's also perceived as something fluid and cohesive. It's perceived as possessing a certain temperature, it's perceived as light and moving. And these four qualities of rupa are symbolised, in Buddhist thought, in Buddhist tradition, Buddhist art, symbolised by the four so-called material elements, by earth, water, fire and air. They are not, as it were, things, one mustn't think that earth here means a lump of earth, or water means the water that you get out of the tap and so on. Earth, water, fire and air are symbols for these main qualities of rupa, i.e. of the objective content of the perceptual situation. In other words, whatever there is of solidity and resistance in a particular perceptual situation, this is symbolised by earth, whatever there is of fluidity and cohesiveness in that situation is symbolised by water, whatever in that situation possesses temperature is symbolised by fire, and whatever possesses lightness and motility is symbolised by air. And these four, these four qualities of rupa, of the objective content of the perceptual situation, these four, as I have already said, are technically known as mahabhutas.

Mahabhutas literally means great or primary elements. And they are called great or primary elements, because they are the basis of the other, the secondary elements of rupa. All the other elements derive from these four

primary ones. But there are other interpretations, very, very interesting interpretations, very interesting meanings which suggest certain things to us, suggest certain aspects of Buddhist thought which are very important and significant. The word mahabhuta doesn't only mean great primary element, that's just the most obvious meaning of the word. Mahabhuta also means 'a great magical transformation', or a great magical feat (?), such as a magician performs when he makes you see a certain thing as another thing. So this is called a mahabhuta, a great magical transformation or a great magical feat. Mahabhuta also means a great ghost, in the sense of some horrible haunting spirit. So how is this? How does these meanings fit in with this business of rupa and its qualities, its primary qualities?

So what does a magician do in this case? He transforms, for instance, clay into gold. What is, in fact, clay, he makes you perceive as gold. Or, he makes you perceive water even as fire. In the same way we experience rupa, the objective content of the perceptual situation, as earth, as solidity, as water, as fire, as air. But water is in itself, if it is, in fact anything at all, that we don't know and we don't experience. We don't, as it were, experience the clay, we don't even know whether there is any clay there, we only experience the gold. And in the same way, we are told, the ghost, the great ghost, which is here a yakshini, a terrible female sprite, appears one dark night as a beautiful maiden. So you don't know that it's a terrible female sprite who might gobble you up the next morning, you think it's a beautiful maiden. So you experience just the beautiful maiden. You do not experience the ghost reality underneath. And it's the same in this case too. What rupa is in itself we don't know, we don't experience, we only experience through our five senses these four great elements, these four primary qualities.

So much then for the material elements. What about the 5th element, what about space? Space, in Buddhist thought, in Indian thought, in this context, is that which contains the other four elements. Space is that which contains earth, water, fire and air. In a sense, space is what makes earth, water, fire and air possible. It's the possibility of their existence, or we may say space is that which supports, which makes possible the existence of the whole, so-called material universe. So in a sense, therefore, in Buddhist thought, in Indian thought, space is regarded as somewhat more real or more ultimate than the four material elements, than earth, water, fire or air. I may be touching on this a little bit later on, depending on how much time we have left.

Now all this, all this talk of rupa, of 5 skandhas, which is, after all very elementary Buddhism indeed, very basic and very fundamental, all this talk of perceptual situations and so on, all this might strike one as a little abstract, even though it's necessary for a proper understanding of the subject. Let us now come to something rather more concrete.

We are speaking of five elements, earth, water, fire, air, space. Each of these elements is associated with a particular colour and a particular geometrical form. Earth is associated with the colour yellow and with the cube form. Water is associated with the colour white and with spherical, sometimes, hemispherical form. Fire, naturally, is associated with the colour red and with the conical form, or pyramidal form. Air is associated with pale green, and, also with a sort of hemisphere, a hemisphere with its flat surface uppermost, sometimes it's a sort of bow-like shape, - and space is associated with the flaming drop that we'll be considering later on.

After this sort of preliminary survey we can begin to see how the five element symbolism was incorporated into the structure of the stupa by the tantra. What the tantra did was very simple and rather drastic. It placed the geometrical forms associated with the 5 elements, that is to say, the cube, the sphere, the cone, the inverted hemisphere and the flaming drop one on top of the other. And just to help us visualise this, we've got I think, a chart. This is what the tantra did with these 5 geometrical forms associated with the 5 elements. It places them one on top of another. So that we see that the Tantra did not merely incorporate the 5 symbols or the 5 elements into the structure of the stupa, it came to regard the stupa as a whole, essentially, consisting of them, built up from them. In other words, the Tantra regarded the stupa as architectural symbol of the whole so-called material universe, the whole of nature, the whole cosmos as existing in space. The stupa becomes for the Tantra, in this way, through this development, the embodiment of the whole so-called material universe, the whole material cosmos as existing in space.

But having done this the Tantra went even further. It gave the symbolism of the five elements, and the symbolism of the stupa itself, and even more deeply tantric significance. And how did it do this? We can see that the Tantra placed the geometrical forms associated with the 5 elements one on top of the other, in a certain order, beginning with earth. And this order is not arbitrary. There is a reason in this order, there is a reason why earth comes first, then water, then fire and so on. The symbols are arranged in the order of the increasing subtlety of the elements which they represent. You get the grossest at the bottom, the subtlest at the top. Water, for instance, is subtler and more refined than earth, fire is subtler and more refined than water, air is subtler and more refined than fire, and space, right at the top, is the subtlest and most refined of all. And this suggests something, or rather it suggested something to the Tantra, to the tantric sages, the tantric teachers. It suggested that what was true of the so-called material world, the material universe, was also true of the world of mind. The material universe of earth, water, fire, air and space, some elements, some levels, as it were, are grosser, coarser, others more refined, more subtle, and it's just the same in the mental world, mind too, spirit too has its levels. There are lower levels, there

are higher levels. And transposing the whole symbolism, transposing the stupa itself from the material plane to the mental and spiritual plane, these mental and spiritual levels too could be symbolised by the five elements. In this way, for the Tantra, the stupa comes to be a symbol, not only of the world without, the material world, but of the world within, the world of mind, the world of successive levels of consciousness, successively higher stages of consciousness, or rather we may say of successively higher stages in the transformation of psycho-spiritual energy.

But let's go into this just a little more, remembering that we are now not in the so-called material world, but in the mental and spiritual world, in the psycho-spiritual world, and that the five elements now symbolise different levels, different stages in the development, in the transformation of psycho-spiritual energy. We are now in the world within, not the world without. So earth, in this world within, in this world not of matter but of energy, psycho-spiritual energy, - what does earth represent? Earth represents static energy, energy which is potential rather than actual, or even energy which is blocked, energy which is obstructed. And many people, unfortunately, are very familiar with this state, a state in which your energy is blocked, in which it is obstructed. Unfortunately it's the state in which only too many people live much, if not most of the time. You feel you've got energy somewhere inside you, lurking within our perhaps, but it's blocked, there is no way out for it, there is no channel through which and by which it can express itself. Perhaps not only blocked, not only obstructed, not only shut up there, like fire in a volcano that's been sealed, but actually even repressed. Energies are pressed down, pressed back, not allowed to come out, and eventually they can't come out. And sometimes this whole process of blocking and obstructing and repressing and suppressing goes on for years. So what happens to all that energy? It starts congealing - and it congeals only too often into a hard solid, cold lump, or mass - and the person in whom energy congeals in this way, hardens in this way, into this hard, solid, cold lump, such a person becomes progressively more and more petrified, more and more rigid, more and more hard, more and more cold, more and more unresponsive, uncommunicative, unexpressive, unalive and so on, more and more dead. This is the state of the earth, the state of this blocked, repressed energy - and, of course, occasionally, from time to time, just to relieve the tedium, there may be an explosion. And little bits and pieces of rock, of rather hard substance go flying in all directions, but usually this doesn't do very much good. Afterwards, it's practically the same as ever it was. And even if people are not actually blocked, not actually obstructed, if there is no actual repression, not even any suppression, even so the majority of people, unfortunately, are able to utilise only a fraction of their potential energy. This is what most people don't realise, that every single human being is a unit of energy. But if, for instance, our unit of energy is consisting of, a hundred or a thousand or whatever it is you measure such energy in, perhaps they are using only forty or fifty of those units of measurement at any given time, there are hundreds, even thousands of units which are not being used, not being utilised. So therefore, we remain in the state of earth, static energy, energy which is potential rather than actual, sometimes blocked and obstructed, even repressed. So here we are in a state of earth, this is our experience, that of earth.

And then water. What is water? Water is a state of slightly freed energy, slightly loosened energy, energy that has begun to be a little bit loosened up, because water, unlike earth or rock, moves, it flows, it moves, it flows from side to side on approximately the same plane, the same level. Of course, it can flow down, but it can't flow up, not under its own power, as it were. And in this state, in this stage, in much the same way, there is a small amount of energy that gets free and it, sort of, goes backwards and forwards, from side to side. It doesn't get very far, it goes to a certain distance, then it comes back again. Then it goes back to the first point, then back again to the other one, and it goes just backwards and forwards like this, in other words, it moves between pairs of opposites. This energy, this water state, as it were, flows between, say, love and hate, attraction and repulsion, hope and fear, pleasure and pain, in other words, energy at this level, is confined to a very narrow circle of interests, it's very reactive, in a very narrow, very limited sphere. It's a little bit free, but only within certain, very definite limits. Just like a cow tethered to a post, she can eat the grass up to a certain point, but not beyond that, when the grass that side has finished, she has to go to the other side of the post, as far as she can. That's the state of water, energy just partly liberated, partly free, just a little bit loosened up.

And then fire. Fire is energy too. Fire is energy which is moving in an upward direction. And here, when we come to this level, this stage, something is really happening. Energy is bubbling up. Energy is being liberated, being freed. And it's being liberated in ever greater and greater quantities. And because of this, because of this regular liberation of energy in greater and greater quantities, the whole level of one's being and consciousness are steadily rising, and then maybe, at this stage, at this level, a fire, as a feeling, an experience of overwhelming joy, ecstasy, bliss and so on. And here one finds, when this is happening, the fire is blazing, as it were, energy is soaring upwards, then, even without benefit of psychotherapy, mental conflicts are resolved, problems are transcended, become just like dreams, just like bits of smoke flowing in all directions, or little sparks - and this is also a state, therefore, we may say, of continuous creativity, something being produced, something higher and ever higher, all the time. And this is the state, this state of fire, this is the state of higher and ever higher spiritual experience, when one soars higher and higher. It's the state, we may say, of the artist, the real artist, the true artist, and the mystic, not in their ordinary everyday lives, but at their peak, when they are creating, when they are experiencing, reaching out to that which is beyond, when the flame is soaring right up into the sky. So this is the state of fire, of energy being progressively liberated in an upward direction, in ever greater and greater and more transporting quantities.

And then air. You might think, having come to the stage of fire, just going up and up indefinitely, you couldn't go any further than that. But by no means, there is air. So what is air? Air is energy too, it's energy which is freed, but it's not freed simply in an upward direction like fire, it is freed in all directions at the same time. Air is energy which radiates in all directions at once from a central point. Air is energy which is pouring from an inexhaustible central fountain, pouring, just as light and heat pour, in our universe from the sun. And there is no limitation whatsoever. It's pouring in all directions, at the same time, forever. This is air, energy liberated in all directions.

And then space, space. Here, energy is in a state altogether beyond words. It's gone, as it were, into another dimension, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth dimension, it's gone almost beyond thought. We can say that space is the state in which, as it were, energy, having propagated itself in all directions to infinity remains eternally propagating itself.

So these are the five elements in this other, this higher, this psychospiritual sense. These are the successive stages in the transformation of psychospiritual energy as symbolised by the stupa, the tantric stupa. It may, perhaps, be a bit much to take in all at once in this sort of way, so let me give, and this just occurs to me in passing, let me give a sort of simile. For the state of the individual, in each of these successive stages in the transformation of energy, what an individual is like in the state of earth, then what he is like in the state of water, in the state of fire, and so on.

So what is it like, what is he like? Alright, state of earth. Here you are like someone bound tightly hand and foot. I am sure most people experience this or felt like this some time, you are bound tightly hand and foot, you can't move, you can't stir. Maybe you are blindfolded too, you can't even blink your eyes, you can't even wiggle your little finger, there is nothing you can do, you can't make any movement. Your energy is completely blocked. This is the state of earth. But then someone comes along and cuts your bonds, takes off the bandage from your eyes, - and where do you find yourself? In a little cell, about 6 feet across. So you can move, you can lift your arm, you can raise your leg, you can move, you can actually walk, you can walk up and down in that little cell, 6 foot this way, six foot that way, walk up and down all day if you like. In other words, there is a little energy moving about within a very narrow, very circumscribed space. It can go up to this wall in that direction, to that wall in that direction. That's all. This is the state of water, of energy feebly oscillating between pairs of opposites - and sometimes calling it even freedom. So water. Fire. What happens to an individual in this state, or this stage? He succeeds in making a hole in the roof - and like some of those Tibetan yogins about whom we used to hear so much, he goes floating up through the hole, in an upward direction, out of the present, up and up and up, right into the clouds, just up, straight up. This is obviously the state of energy liberated in an upward direction, fire. And then air. In this stage he discovers that he doesn't have to go merely up, he can go sideways, in other directions, he can even go down and come up again, and then continue his upward ascent, if he likes. He can go towards any of the points of the compass. But here, I'm afraid, our analogy rather breaks down, because, in the state of air, you go in all directions simultaneously. So if you like, if you can imagine him as a sort of magician, or a yogin with even greater occult powers, he multiplies himself, there is not just one of him, there are millions of him, and they are all going in different directions from this central point, all over the universe, right into infinity forever. That's the state of energy liberated in all directions, or air. And then beyond that, there is space, - I am not going to try even to extend the analogy to space. Words and talks simply break down here, you are left to your own imagination.

So these, as I said, are the successive stages in the transformation of psychospiritual energy, from earth to water, from water to fire, from fire to air, from air to space. These are the stages of the tantric path to enlightenment, stages symbolised by the 5 elements as incorporated into the tantric symbolism of the stupa. Now there is very much more that could be said on this topic. I could describe, for instance, the various meditation practices which are connected with, or based on, or which utilise the 5 elements and their symbols. There is no time for that tonight. We'll soon have to proceed to consider the symbolism of the vase of initiation. But before we do that just one more point in connection with the symbolism of the 5 elements.

We've seen that in the Tantra the stupa is the architectural embodiment not only of the world of so-called matter, but of the world of mind, the world of psychospiritual energy as well. But more than that even. Eventually, for the Tantra the stupa becomes identified with the human psychospiritual organism itself - and a parallelism, as it were, is established between the elements on the one hand and what are called the chakras on the other. Chakras or wheels are centres of energy, of psychospiritual energy situated at various points up along the spiritual equivalent of the median nerve. This spiritual equivalent of the median nerve, *abha dhuti* in Buddhist terminology, tantric terminology. And the chakras, which are strung out, as it were, out along that central that median nerve *Abadhuti*, are often symbolised by lotus flowers, lotus flowers with a larger or smaller number of petals. And as the energy ascends, as it goes from one stage to another, from lower to higher stages, lotuses burst into bloom. Now the chakras, the wheels, the centres of psychospiritual energy are strung out along the median nerve - it is sometimes reckoned there are 7 in number, - sometimes reckoned there are 5 in number, sometimes 4, sometimes even as 3 in number, - it all depends on the type of spiritual practice that you are doing, the particular number of chakras that you require for that particular purpose - you don't have to use all of them all the time, it's rather like

a piano, you don't have to use all the notes at the same time, you can select, as it were. But the Buddhist Tantra we may say, usually operates with the set of 5 chakras, 5 centres of psychospiritual energy. The first of these, the bottommost one is situated at four fingers breadth below the navel, the second is situated at the navel itself, the third at the heart, the fourth at the throat, the fifth in or on the head. Now the first of these chakras, the one 4 fingers breadth below the navel, is associated with the element earth, the second, the one at the navel itself with the element water, the third at the heart with the element fire, the fourth at the throat with the element air, the fifth in or on the head with the element space. There are various other sets of correlations, for instance, with the letters of the alphabet, but there is no time to go into all that now. So in this way, through this associated symbolism, as it were, the stupa comes to represent the human body, the human body in the posture of meditation. And we can see a hint of this in the Nepalese stupa. The Nepalese stupa has painted on the harnica (?), on the sides of the harnica, the box-like structure which surmounts the spherical portion of the stupa, pairs of eyes, in the place, as it were, between the 4th and the 5th chakras, so that you get the impression as though there is a sort of human figure, maybe a gigantic human figure seated inside the stupa with his centres, his psychic centres at points corresponding to the cube, the sphere and so on, and the eyes looking out at you, all the time over the landscape - a rather awe-inspiring sight, especially when the stupa is several feet high.

So much then for the symbolism of the 5 elements. Now, we come on to, rather more briefly, the symbolism of the vase of initiation. Last week we saw that the Tantra is concerned with experience, with direct experience of what one really and truly is - and from what I have been saying so far this week it should be obvious, it should be evident that the Tantra thinks of this experience in terms of the transformation of psycho-spiritual energy. For the Tantra therefore, the spiritual life starts with the development of one's energies, the initial activation of one's energies, especially one's spiritual energies. We don't often think of the spiritual life in this way, we think of it in terms of thinking something, or feeling something, or even doing something, or joining something, or even committing ourselves to something, but the Tantra thinks of the beginning of spiritual life as stirring up of energies, psychospiritual energies, the initial activation of these energies. That's where the tantric path starts, when your energies have been aroused, activated. How? Here we are in a state of earth, at the most in a state of water, occasionally a spark of fire, - we don't get much further than that - how are we to activate our energies, our psychospiritual energies, how are we to stir ourselves up? We may be feeling like a lump of clay, saturated with a little water and slightly warmed in front of a fire, - we may be feeling like that, so how are we going to get ourselves stirred up, energised, activated, swung into operation, as it were, how is that going to take place? What has the Tantra got to say about this? Well, the Tantra is very clear, it's very unambiguous, it says: through initiation.

And this, of course, raises, at once, a further question, what is initiation? Tantric initiation, that is. In Tibetan, where the Tantric tradition flourished in great richness in various forms right down to the present day, or into the present century, in Tibetan language, the word for initiation is 'wongkur', sometimes for short, 'wong'. And 'wongkur' is generally translated either as consecration or as empowerment. And the word literally means, the word 'wongkur' literally means 'transmission of power or energy', even the giving of power or energy. This is what 'wongkur' means. And it corresponds, though it isn't an exact translation of, it corresponds to the Sanskrit term, the Sanskrit tantric term, 'abisheka', a sprinkling or baptism with water. And this 'wongkur', this transmission of power, this gaining of energy, or activation of energy, if you like, is a transmission from the guru to the disciple. And this is why among other reasons, this is why, the guru is so important in Tantric Buddhism or the Vajrayana. He is very important in all forms of Buddhism, but, if anything, he is more important still in the Vajrayana, in the context of Tantric Buddhism. In Tantric Buddhism the guru isn't just a teacher. He may teach, on the other hand, he may not. He is not an explainer of texts, not an expounder of the scriptures, though he may explain, he may expound. On the other hand, he may not. In Tantric Buddhism, the guru, the Vajraguru, as he is also called, is essentially one who activates the psychospiritual energies of the disciple, who stirs him up, who arouses his energies, who has a sort of impact on him in such a way that his energies cannot but be aroused, inasmuch as there cannot but be a sort of energy response. Now we know in our everyday experience that different people have different kinds of effect on us. We meet some people, spend a few hours with them, maybe the day with them, unfortunately, and how do we feel at the end? We feel dull, we feel depressed, maybe our best friends, but still, we feel thoroughly drained, washed out, not to say wiped out, we wish we hadn't gone to see them, wish we hadn't even got to know them, we feel drained of energy and vitality. This is the effect that some people have on us, the effect that we have on other people too sometimes. But other people, on the contrary, seem to have a sort of stimulating effect, we spend a few hours with them, or a day with them, or a weekend with them, we feel brighter, more cheerful, more energetic, more vigorous, in a word, more alive. They've stimulated your energies in a highly pleasurable way. Now the Tantric guru, the Vajraguru definitely belongs to the second category of person. The Tantric guru, the Vajraguru stimulates one's energies in the very highest sense, stimulates the psychospiritual energies at a very high level indeed. He stimulates them or he activates them, but though we use the word stimulate, though we use the word activate, the word 'wongkur' does, however, literally mean not an activation or stimulation, but a giving, an imparting, a bestowal of power, of energy as though something literally passed at the time of initiation from the guru to the disciple, as though a portion of the guru's energy passed from him to the disciples. And strange to say, contrary to many scientific and even psychological notions of ours in the West, this is what the disciple sometimes, actually experiences at the time of initiation. He doesn't feel that

he is being stimulated or activated, he feels that something is passing from the guru to him. Some portion, as it were, of the guru's energy is being transmitted to him, a sort of charge of spiritual electricity, if you like, he is getting a sort of spiritual shock from the guru. Or he may feel, in a subtler sort of way, not this, but he may feel as though a sort of ray of light had passed from the guru to him, especially from the heart of the guru to his heart, he may even see sometimes a ray of light or what seems to be a ray of light, he may not be able to understand it, make head or tail of it, - it seems so strange, but this is what happens or seems to happen, something passes, something is transmitted, some portion of energy, some shock, some spiritual electricity, some light, some ray of light from the guru to himself.

And the initiation also, is sometimes compared to the planting of a seed, the planting of the seed of knowledge and spiritual experience in the heart of the disciple by the guru. So here also, something is actually put in, as it were. Something is actually planted, in this case the seed. The guru plants, of course it is said, that after that the disciple has to tend and water it and weed it himself, by his own spiritual efforts.

Now I said earlier on that the Sanskrit equivalent for Tantric initiation, for 'wongkur', is 'abisheka', meaning a sprinkling with water, a baptism. And this reminds me, this word, the literal meaning of this word reminds one of the original Indian, ritual context of Tantric initiation, that the rite is distinct from the spiritual substance, if, in fact, the two can be so distinguished. The Tantric rite of initiation, wongkur, transmission of power or energy, seems to have been developed from the ancient Indian ritual of the consecration of kings. In the course of the consecration ceremony the king was sprinkled with water from pots, from a number of pots, in fact, water was literally poured on him, his coronation was almost like a sort of shower bath with priests and people of that sort pouring water over his head and down his body from all directions, I think, from 8 directions at once. And what does this represent? It represented this pouring of water over the king from these pots by the priests, it represented the investment of the king with all the powers and all the authority of supreme sovereignty. Water, here, is a symbol too. Water is associated with the depths, it's associated with the powers, with the energies of the depths, it's associated with the powers, with the energies of the depths, the powers and the energies that are in the depths. So water, therefore, all over the world, practically, in universal symbolism becomes a natural symbol of these powers and of these energies, so that pouring water over someone means investing them with the energies and the powers and the authority that the water represents, that the water symbolizes. And just as, by virtue of that consecration, by virtue of that investiture, that investment, that pouring of water, just as an ordinary man, not necessarily even the son of the previous king, but an ordinary man, almost anyone from the street, anyone who has conquered at least, becomes king, in the same way, having been initiated, having been empowered, having been energised, by the guru, by the Vajraguru, the disciple becomes virtually a Buddha. After the initiation the full initiation, the disciple is supposed to think of himself as a Buddha, not in an egoistic sense, but in a much sublimer and more spiritual sense than that.

So one sees here a sort of link, a sort of tie-up between the whole ancient Indian ceremony of the consecration of a king and the Tantric initiation, both being an investment with authority, both constituting a transmission of power, in one case material power, in the other spiritual power. Of course, this sort of language can sometimes be very misleading, and I remember in this connection a little experience of my own many, many years ago, when I started studying and getting into the Tantras, which, as Upasaka Vangisa mentioned at the beginning, was in Kalimpong. This must have been in the middle fifties. I heard quite a lot about wong and wongkur, Tibetans were always mentioning these terms, Tantric initiation, they were always going off into the mountains somewhere to get Tantric initiation and so on. So I started asking my Tibetan lama friends: what is tantric initiation? I had heard of initiation in general, but what was tantric initiation - at that time there weren't even any tantric texts translated into English, so, what is tantric initiation, I asked a number of lamas and other friends. And they all said more or less the same thing, they said: it is becoming like a king. So, this didn't make any sense to me at all then, - becoming like a king? How was that? What did that mean? They wouldn't give, in other words, any abstract or, as it were, conceptual reply to the question. Tantric initiation was becoming like a king, of course, a spiritual king, a Buddha, being invested with spiritual power, spiritual energy, even spiritual authority. And this way of replying, one may say, was a good example of the use of symbolic, rather than conceptual language. And the tantras often use this sort of language, the language of symbols, concrete images, not concepts, not abstract ideas.

Now, in early Indian tantric tradition, the tantric initiation, following, no doubt the royal precedence, was performed with the help of the water, of or from 8 different pots, - one pot was dedicated to the Buddhas, one to the Bodhisattvas, and so on, water from 8 different pots, - and even now, or until recently in Tibet, the lesser initiation, as it's known, or the little wong, which is known as the 'bung wong', initiation of the or with the water jar or vase, is performed in this way. In Sanskrit, the 'bumba' is known as the 'amrita kalasha', the pot or jar, or vase containing the nectar of immortality. And owing to this sort of initiation, the water jar or pot or vase, the bumba, the amrita kalasha, often stands for initiation in general. When you see this symbol, this waterpot, which has a certain stylised design, it at once suggests to you initiation, because even now, as I said, in the course of the little wong, as it's called, at a certain point in the ritual the jar, the vase is placed on or against your head.

But now, let's come back to the stupa, - we've left the stupa standing there, - we mustn't forget about the stupa, - back to the tantric symbolism of the stupa. Let's look at the Tibetan version of the stupa which is a very highly developed version. We'll find that in the case of the Tibetan stupa, the basic symbolism of the stupa, the 5 element symbolism especially, has been modified in various ways. And we'll find that the sphere, or the hemisphere of the stupa has been changed, has undergone modification, not to say transformation, in fact, it's been replaced. It's been replaced by a vase of initiation, by a bumba, by amrita kalasha. So, it's no longer, now a symbol of the element water, even in a very high sense, it's not just a symbol of partially liberated energy, it now becomes, as the amrita kalasha, as the vase of initiation, it now becomes, this second section of the stupa, a symbol for the plenitude of transcendental powers and energies, a symbol of the life-giving stream of the bodhicitta or will to enlightenment, a symbol of the spiritual influence of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas poured out upon humanity. So the incorporation of the vase of initiation into the tantric symbolism of the stupa is of very great significance indeed. It suggests various things, it suggests that the progressive transformation of psychospiritual energy is the central business of the spiritual life. It reminds us of the need, in the course of our spiritual life and development, for initiation, initiation in the tantric sense. It reminds us too of the need for the good friend, the guru, the Vajraguru, and finally, it reminds us that the spiritual life, the transcendental life consists both in receiving and in giving.

Now thirdly and lastly we come on, more briefly still, to the symbolism of the flaming drop. In the case of the symbolism of the 5 elements we are concerned with the stupa as a whole. In the case of the symbolism of the vase of initiation we are concerned with the main central portion of the stupa, and now, with the symbolism of the flaming drop we arrive at the very summit, at the summit, that is to say of the developed Tibetan version of the stupa. And this developed Tibetan version of the stupa is generally known as a chorten. I'll very briefly describe it, ignoring for the moment the chart over there. First of all there comes a cubic substructure, representing, of course, the element earth, but in the case of the Tibetan chorten, it's not just the plain cube, the cube is surmounted by 4 steps, each narrower than the one below. And on the top step there stands the pot shaped, or vase of initiation shaped central portion, representing the element water, especially in its higher aspect. This portion, that is to say, assumes the form of the vase of initiation. And this pot shaped, central portion, this vase of initiation, is crowned by a tall cone, very often notched, representing, of course, the element fire. And on top of the cone there rests a small upturned hemisphere, representing the element air. And on top of the plain surface of the hemisphere which is of course, uppermost, there stands a white moon crescent, and in the inner curve of the white moon crescent there is balanced a red sun disc. And from the top of the red sun disc there rises the flaming drop, representing the element space. Now, what does all this mean? A clue is provided by the colour of the moon crescent and the colour of the sun disc. The moon crescent is white, the sun disc is red, in other words, the moon crescent is the same colour as the pot shaped central portion of the stupa lower down representing the element water, and the sun disc is the same colour as the conical portion representing the element fire. This is no coincidence, because the relation between the white moon crescent and the red sun disc is the same as the relation between, lower down, water and fire. Moon and sun, on the one hand, and water and fire on the other, represent the same energies, the same energies but at higher and lower levels respectively of manifestation. What energies are these? We can call them the solar energies and the lunar energies. The Chinese termed them yang and yin. Sometimes they are referred to as masculine energies and feminine energies, but this can be very misleading, because the distinction has nothing to do with the distinction between masculinity and femininity in the ordinary conventional sense. According to the Tantra, these energies, solar energies and lunar energies, can be seen, in the human psychophysical organism, as 2 nerves, one to the left of the median nerve, the other to the right. The one on the left in the Buddhist Tantra is known as lulama and is white in colour corresponding to the moon and to water, and the one on the right is known as rasana, and it's red in colour, and this corresponds to the sun and to fire. And according to the tantric tradition or practice which I am very, very briefly summarising here, the energies in these nerves, as it were, solar energy on the one hand, lunar energy on the other, are made to unite, unite, at the base, as it were, of the central nerve, the median nerve, and then forced up through it, if you like, conducted up through it. And as the united energies reach the chakras, one after another, reach the psychic centres, these psychic centres open, - energy is liberated, the lotuses burst into bloom. And what does this mean? I'm summarising rather rapidly a very vast area of spiritual practice. But what does it mean? It means, that according to the Tantra, spiritual life consists in the progressive unification of solar and lunar energies at higher and ever higher levels of being and consciousness. There must be a unification of conscious and unconscious, a unification of reason and emotion, a unification of meditation and action, a unification of individualism and altruism. And now, what of the symbolism of the flaming jewel? The flaming jewel is the product of the unification of the white moon crescent and the red sun disc, it's the product of the unification of the solar and lunar energies in their highest and most refined, most spiritual forms. And these forms are known in Buddhist tradition as, wisdom and compassion. By wisdom is meant here insight into reality, direct experience of reality itself, the ultimate, without any obstruction, any hindrance, any illusion, any delusion, seeing of it face to face, seeing the truth, entering into the truth, sporting, as it were, in the truth, - and compassion here means an overwhelming feeling of love for all living beings whatsoever, together with the desire to help them when they are in difficulties. So the flaming jewel, as a unification of these two, a unification of white moon crescent and red sun disc, a unification of wisdom and compassion, the flaming jewel symbolises the bodhicitta, the will to enlightenment, that which makes a Bodhisattva a Bodhisattva, symbolises it not only in its inception, but in its

fulfillment as well. And this fulfillment is known, of course, as perfect enlightenment, enlightenment of a Buddha.

But this whole question of unification and integration is of very greatest importance in tantric Buddhism, so important, in fact, that I am not going to rest content, as it were, with just briefly sketching one aspect of it at the very end of this lecture. We'll be dealing with it much (?) systematically, more comprehensively, next week, when we come to the symbolism of the sacred thunderbolt or diamond sceptre of the lamas. But meanwhile, and (?) inadequate though this little sketch has been, meanwhile we've seen the place it occupies, seen the place that this whole experience of unification and integration occupies, in the tantric symbolism of the stupa. We've seen moreover the place occupied in that symbolism by the symbolism of the 5 elements, as well as by the symbolism of the vase of initiation, - and so seeing we have, I hope, understood certain things, or developed a feeling of and for certain things, or even been moved by the symbols with which we've been concerned, been moved by earth, water, fire, air, space, the vase of initiation, the white moon crescent, the red sun disc, the flaming jewel, the tantric symbolism of the stupa.