

## Lecture 105: The Symbolism of the Sacred Thunderbolt or Diamond Sceptre of the Lamas

Friends,

From very early times man has been deeply impressed by different aspects of the world in which he lived - different aspects of nature, different natural objects, by different natural phenomena. From the very earliest times, from the dawn practically of human consciousness, man, lifting up his eyes to the heavens, has been impressed and deeply impressed by the splendid vision of the sun, the moon, the stars, the whole sky, even by storm. He has been impressed too by the sight of towering mountains, swift-flowing rivers and waving trees. He has been impressed by the curious, the splendid, the dangerous, the fascinating forms of animals and of birds. And taking an even wider view, an even wider prospect, he has been impressed too by the sight of the ocean in all its magnificence and by the sight of the earth. He has been impressed too by various things found in the ocean, in the depths of the ocean, and in the earth: impressed by the curious forms and structures and shapes of rocks and minerals, impressed, as he began to master the science of metallurgy, impressed by the various glittering metals that he dug out from the bosom of the earth, and by various precious stones.

In the course of time as history advanced, as civilisation developed, he started refining the metals, cutting and polishing the precious stones, and giving to them, giving to the precious stones especially, different names. Some he named as diamond, others as ruby, and then emerald, sapphire, opal, pearl, cornelian and scores and scores of others. And as he named them, as he came to appreciate them, to value them, it was as though a whole new world of light and colour, of radiance, was revealed to his eyes. And sometimes it must have seemed - and we do know from some of the later records that it certainly seems like to this to some people later on - sometimes it must have seemed that these rare precious stones, these jewels were the most beautiful and wonderful material things in existence, the rarest, the most precious.

And as civilisation developed, as culture flourished, precious stones, jewels, were used to adorn the persons of kings and high priests, as well as to decorate, in various ways, religious images. And eventually we find the precious stone assuming itself a sort of religious significance, even a sort of symbolical significance. It was found, it was felt that the jewel, the precious stone stood for something. Stood for something, as it were, rich and rare, something beautiful, something precious, something even remote and mysterious, something not quite of this world, even eventually something Transcendental. And myth and legend started speaking of jewel, of the precious stone, started speaking, for instance, of 'the pearl of great price', started speaking of 'the island of jewels', started speaking, even, of 'the philosopher's stone'. And we find this sort of symbolism, the symbolism of the jewel, the symbolism of the precious stone, practically in all traditions. We certainly find it in Buddhism, and we find it from the very earliest times, from the very dawn of Buddhism in this historical epoch, and we find it not only at the beginning, at the birth, as it were, of Buddhism, but we find it, we find this sort of symbolism, lying, we may say, at the very heart of Buddhism.

We think especially of what tradition has called from the beginning 'The Three Jewels'. What in Buddhism could be more fundamental than this? The Three Jewels are of course: the Buddha, the Enlightened teacher, the embodiment in human form of the ideal of Enlightenment; and then the Dharma, the truth, the way, the path, the teaching, which leads one, which guides one, naturally - with or without benefit of catastrophe - in the direction, ultimately, of Enlightenment; and then the Sangha, which is the spiritual community, the brotherhood, the fellowship, of all those who are treading the path, practising the Dharma, striving to realize the ideal of Enlightenment. These are the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the three fundamentals of Buddhism.

But they are spoken of, and spoken of from the beginning as 'The Three Jewels', so we may ask

ourselves why is this? If we have been into Buddhism for any length of time, we have probably got so used to speaking of the Three Jewels that we have stopped wondering, if in fact we ever did wonder, why they are so called. But why do we speak, why does tradition speak, of 'The Three Jewels'. Why do we call the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha 'The Three Jewels'? Why not simply 'The Three Fundamental Principles', or why not 'The Three Essentials'? Or why not stick even to 'The Three Refuges', because they are called that too? Why do we speak of them as 'The Three Jewels'?

It's as though the tradition did not want, at this point, in connection with this topic, did not want to give us, did not want to convey to us, any idea, any abstract idea, any concept. It's as though the tradition wanted to leave us, in respect to these fundamental things, leave us with a sort of spiritual impression, leave us with an image, something concrete, not something abstract, wanted to leave us with an image of, as it were, something beautiful, something colourful, something sparkling, something infinitely precious. And therefore tradition speaks of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha as 'The Three Jewels'.

And then going a little further on in the tradition, in the same tradition, coming to the Mahayana form of the tradition, we find 'the jewel in the lotus'. This is one of the most famous symbols in the whole range, in the whole field, of Buddhism. It's a symbol to which I devoted a whole lecture some time ago. I think about two years ago. We've no time to go into the meaning of that symbols at the moment. Also in the same Mahayana tradition, there is what we call 'the wish-fulfilling jewel', the cintamani, or the jewel that grants all our desires. It's a jewel which, according to myth and legend, if you hold it in your hand and wish, you at once get everything you desire. But there's only one jewel that can really give you everything you desire and this according to the Mahayana is the Bodhicitta, or the will or the aspiration to Enlightenment itself.

And then again coming from the Mahayana to the Vajrayana, to the Tantra, we even have a jewel-Buddha or jewel born or jewel producing Buddha, whose name is Ratnasambhava, 'The Jewel-Born One', or 'The Jewel-Producing One', and he, as many of you know, is one of the five so-called Dhyani Buddhas, archetypal Buddhas, suprahistorical Buddhas, who preside over different spiritual families, and this particular Dhyani Buddha, Ratnasambhava presides over a whole jewel family. And one of the members of this jewel family is a Bodhisattva figure called Jambhala, who is popularly regarded as a sort of god of wealth, and he is represented as rather stout, deep yellow coloured figure, and he grasps in his left hand a mongoose, which is of course an Indian animal that lives on snakes, and the mongoose is shown, iconographically, as vomiting jewels - there's a whole stream of jewels pouring from its mouth as Jambhala gently squeezes the mongoose.

But above all, above all in Buddhism we have in this field of jewel symbolism, as it were, we have the vajra. And it's with this vajra that we are concerned tonight when we speak of 'The Symbolism of the Sacred Thunderbolt or Diamond Sceptre of the Lamas'.

Now first of all the word 'vajra' itself. What does it mean? The word 'vajra' has a double meaning in Sanskrit. It means in the first place a 'thunderbolt', and not just any kind of thunderbolt, it means in particular the thunderbolt of Indra, who, according to Indian mythology, is the king of the gods. Now Indra, or Sakra as he is sometimes also called, is a very ancient Indian divinity. If we turn to the Rig Veda which goes back perhaps to about 800-1000 BCE - it's one of the main texts of orthodox Hinduism - if we go back to the Rig Veda, we shall find, in the Rig Veda quite a number of hymns to the god Indra or Sakra. So that in the Vedas, and in Vedic mythology generally, he is quite an important figure. And we can understand from these hymns, in which he is described and praised, we can understand that Indra is a god of the storm. And especially he is the god of the dark storm clouds that bring the rain, particularly the seasonal rains, on which the very existence of agricultural India depends. Sometimes in Indian poetry the storm clouds that come up when the rains are about to begin are referred to as 'Indra's cows'.

And in art Indra is depicted as a very robust and powerful figure riding on an enormous elephant, and brandishing in his right hand the thunderbolt or vajra. And of this thunderbolt, of this vajra, Indian mythology says that it is the most powerful thing in existence: nothing can stand against it - no weapon, no armour, nothing at all. It's absolutely irresistible. And with this irresistible weapon, the vajra, the thunderbolt, Indra annihilates his enemies, annihilates, according to the Rig Veda, the demons of drought and thirst. So vajra means, in the first place, 'thunderbolt', especially Indra's thunderbolt.

And in the second place, vajra means 'diamond'. The diamond is the hardest of all precious stones: it cuts everything, but nothing can cut it. The diamond also is absolutely pure, absolutely incorruptible - it does not rust like iron - it cannot be soiled, cannot be stained, by anything; it remains pure, remains untouched, remains undefiled even under millions of layers of dust and dirt.

So we can now begin to have a general idea of what the vajra represents. The vajra is something that combines the qualities, the attributes of the thunderbolt and the diamond. The vajra is something infinitely powerful, something that is capable of overcoming all obstacles, something that smashes through all obstacles, something immutable, something irresistible, something indestructible, and also something that is absolutely pure, that remains the same, remains pure under all conditions and in all circumstances, and, in addition to this, it's something supremely brilliant and glorious and wonderful. So vajra is both diamond and thunderbolt. If you like it's the diamond-thunderbolt or the thunderbolt-diamond.

But in Buddhist art, in Buddhist iconography, whether three-dimensional or two-dimensional, the vajra is always represented, even though it conveys the ideas of both thunderbolt and diamond, represented as a kind of stylized thunderbolt, it's not represented as a diamond, not represented as a jewel. And it's in this form, the form of a stylized thunderbolt, that we find the vajra in the Tantra, especially find it in Tantric ritual. In this context, the context of Tantric ritual, the vajra is the ritual implement that the lama, the guru or teacher, usually holds in his right hand. And because the vajra, the ritual vajra or the ritual implement, the vajra, is held in the right hand, and because it represents among other things spiritual power, spiritual sovereignty, even spiritual authority, it's sometimes referred to as 'the diamond sceptre', and it's with the symbolism of this ritual implement, the vajra, this stylized sacred thunderbolt, or diamond sceptre of the lamas, that we are not concerned.

First of all just a few words about vajra in general. Broadly speaking, the image, the symbol of the vajra is peculiar to Tantric Buddhism. But we do find, nevertheless, important anticipations of this image much earlier on in Buddhism. And I am going to deal very briefly with just two or three of these, because they will give us some idea of some of the early symbolical associations that the Tantric vajra image or vajra symbol came to assimilate.

First of all, Vajrasana or vajra-asana. We find references to this from very early times indeed. Vajrasana means 'diamond seat'; sometimes rendered 'diamond throne'. So what is this 'diamond throne', this Vajrasana? To understand this we have to go back a little, back to the biography of the Buddha, back to the Buddha's Enlightenment. We know that the Buddha gained Enlightenment, became the Buddha, awoke to Reality, at the age of thirty-five, at a place now known as Bodh Gaya in the state of Bihar. And according to tradition, the Buddha gained Enlightenment, awoke to the Truth, sitting at the foot of a great peepul tree. And the spot on which he sat, the spot at the foot of that great peepul tree, came to be known quite early in the history of Buddhism as 'the diamond throne', or Vajrasana. As a matter of fact Tibetan Buddhists, you will find, still refer to Bodh Gaya as Dorje Den, which means simply Vajrasana in Tibetan.

Now why was this? Why was the spot on which the Buddha sat when he gained Enlightenment known as or termed the diamond throne? Well we are told, according to tradition, that it was so called because

all the previous Buddhas in previous world cycles had sat there and gained Enlightenment. But, one might well ask the further question, well why had they even sat there? Why not on some other spot? What started this whole tradition, what was the basis of it, what was the foundation of it? And to understand this, we have to go a little into traditional Buddhist cosmology - not one of the most popular aspects of Buddhism, but one which for some people at least can be quite fascinating.

We know that in Buddhism there is no such concept as a personal God, a supreme being, which means that there is no such thing as a creator. And because there is no creator, obviously, there's no act of creation. So the question arises: How, according to Buddhism, did the universe come into existence? If it wasn't created by God, because there is no God, how did it come about, how did it happen? The Buddhist teaching of course is that the universe evolved, evolved over a vast period of time, over millions upon millions upon millions of years, or aeons even. I've no time for details but when we can begin to understand what is happening there is as it were at first, throughout the whole of what we know as our universe, a sort of what the texts call a 'fire mist', a thin fire mist diffused in all directions. It's possibly what we would now describe as a vast mass of incandescent gas. And we are told that after millions of years had gone by this fire-mist, this vast mass of incandescent gas, started cooling, started condensing, started solidifying, and in it there was one spot, one place where it started cooling, started condensing, started solidifying, and this point where that whole process started subsequently became the central point, the spiritual axis, of the whole world. It was the first point, we are told, to emerge at the beginning of the cosmic process, and it will be the last to disappear at the end of the cosmic process. And it's seated on this spot, we are told, that the Buddha, a Buddha, any Buddha in this world system gains Enlightenment. This is, or this is what became, the diamond seat or the diamond throne.

Now from this little excursus into traditional Buddhist cosmology - which has also, we can clearly see, symbolical overtones - the vajra is associated with the symbolism of the central point. And this symbolism of the central point is of course a whole subject in itself. The vajra therefore is suggestive of centrality, suggestive of axially, of stability, of imperturbability. It is not surprising, therefore, in view of these considerations that the vajra is the special emblem of Aksobhya. Aksobhya, you may recollect, is the dark blue Buddha, the Buddha of the eastern quarter, and his name means 'The Unshakable', or 'The Imperturbable'.

Now Aksobhya is also associated with the Mental Poison of hatred or aversion. Each of the 'Five Buddhas' is associated with one particular Mental Poison. So Aksobhya is associated with hatred or aversion. And hatred in turn is associated with Wisdom, as we saw the week before last in our first lecture. And this brings us to another of the associations of the vajra, its association with Wisdom, or prajna. Or more specifically with Prajnaparamita, 'the Perfection of Wisdom' or 'Transcendental Wisdom', by which is meant the Wisdom which intuitively Absolute Reality directly. And Prajnaparamita, the Perfection of Wisdom, Transcendental Wisdom, is one of the most important themes of the Mahayana. It is dealt with principally in a group of scriptures, a group of discourses by the Buddha which are known as Prajnaparamita sutras. There are more than 35 of these, both long and short. One of the best known and most important of them is what we call or what we know as the Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita sutra, or 'the discourse on the Transcendental Wisdom that pierces like the thunderbolt or cuts like the diamond'.

So what is it that Transcendental Wisdom pierces? What is it that it cuts? It pierces, it cuts, our illusions, our wrong ideas, our false notions, our projections. We can even generalize so far as to say that Wisdom, Transcendental Wisdom, Prajna, Prajnaparamita, is destructive. We can say that Reality is destructive. It's destructive of our intellectual assumptions, usually so facilely made; it is destructive of our psychological conditionings, in which usually we are enmeshed; destructive of our emotional hang-ups, to which, very often, we are so attached: destructive, in short, of ourselves as we are at present. And we don't always appreciate this, we don't appreciate that Wisdom is destructive, that Reality is destructive,

that the experience of Reality is destructive. We tend to think of the experience of Reality as a sort of pleasant extra, something added onto, quite sort of comfortably added onto, what we already are. But it isn't like that at all. We may say that the experience of Reality, Reality in its truth, in what the Tantras call 'its nakedness', is much more likely to be a rather shattering experience - at least until one gets used to it. In fact, we can even go so far as to say that any experience which is shattering has an element of Truth and Reality in it. If it shatters, it's real. If it doesn't shatter, suspect whether it is real.

So this energetic, this destructive aspect of Reality, of the Enlightenment experience itself, is embodied in the awe inspiring figure of Vajrapani. Vajrapani means 'Thunderbolt in Hand'. Vajrapani belongs both to the Mahayana and to Tantric Buddhism. He has many forms, some peaceful, some which are called wrathful. But in Tibet the wrathful forms were far more popular than the peaceful forms. He is depicted in art, in painting and sculpture, as stout and strong, with a powerful body, dark blue in colour and with also a protuberant belly, and thick, short limbs, and he wears a crown, a crown of human skulls, and his dark blue, stout, powerful body, is generally naked except for ornaments of human bone. Sometimes he is draped in a freshly-skinned tiger skin. And he has three eyes - two in the usual places and one in the centre of his forehead, and they are all red-rimmed and all glaring ferociously. And the whole expression of his face is one of terrific anger, and he is surrounded by a halo of flames, and he's trampling on something, trampling on someone, trampling on two figures, usually on figures representing ignorance and craving. He is trampling triumphantly on them because he has destroyed them. And his right arm is raised, and in his right hand he grasps, as though ready to hurl, the vajra, the diamond thunderbolt, the thunderbolt diamond.

And it's to the details of the symbolism of this vajra that we must now turn. But first of all let me give you a little description, or better still, let me show you a picture, which I hope is here behind me, or perhaps best of all let me show you thing itself, the vajra or dorje. Looking at it, whether we look at this picture, whether we look at the thing itself, we can see quite easily how the vajra is constructed, how it's put together. We can see of what formal elements it consists. In the middle there is a sphere, and this is the handle of the sceptre, if you like. And then out of this sphere, on either side, there grow two lotuses, sometimes four-petalled, sometimes eight-petalled. From each of these two lotuses there spring five ribs or spokes - in some vajras there are nine. One spoke is central, so that a rod appears to run right through the whole vajra, like a sort of axis. The others, the other four, fan out in the four cardinal directions, then they turn inwards and they converge onto the central spoke. Now the lower outward-turning section of the four spokes looks like a bit of foliage, looks a bit leafy, but it's not really foliage at all. This comes out a little bit in this picture. It's really the head of a strange beast. And the upper inward-turning section emerges from the open mouth of the beast. In some vajras we can see this very clearly, but in others the head of the beast has become so stylized as to be virtually unrecognizable. I see in the case of this vajra you can barely recognise the head of the beast, it really does look like foliage, but on the top of this bell, the beast is in fact much more beast-like. Here in our picture it's more beast like still.

So we see that the vajra consists of four formal elements: there's a central sphere, then there are two four or eight petalled lotuses; then two sets of five spokes; and finally the head of the strange beast, eight times repeated. We are going to look at the symbolism of these elements one by one.

First of all, the central sphere. The sphere is a universal symbol. The sphere represents completeness, totality, perfection. The sphere therefore represents Reality. In Mahayana Buddhism the word which most generally is used to denote Reality is sunyata, which literally means 'voidness' or 'emptiness'. But it's not emptiness in the sense of 'vacuity' or 'nothingness'; it's emptiness in the sense that there is nothing to be identified as 'this' or 'that' by the rational mind, nothing that can be described as 'being' or 'non-being', 'existence' or 'non-existence': it, Reality, is beyond thought, beyond speech, is ineffable.

A little while ago we saw that even before the rise of Tantric Buddhism the vajra had become for the

Mahayana a symbol of Transcendental Wisdom, that is to say of the wisdom that intuitively Reality. And later on the vajra becomes a symbol of sunyata, or a symbol of Reality. Not only that, it becomes a symbol of anything connected with Reality, or a symbol of that aspect of a thing that is conterminous with Reality. And in this way we find the Tantric path to Enlightenment itself coming to be spoken of as 'the Vajrayana', in other words the path or the way or the vehicle of the vajra. So what does this mean. It means the path of Reality, the path of direct experience of Reality, of experiencing oneself as one really and truly is. The path that is to say on which nothing matters except the direct experience, the path on which one is prepared to abandon external traditions, if necessary, abandon conventions of every kind, even those of Buddhism, even those of the Tantra itself; it is the path on which you no longer care what people think of you; and according to some Tantric sayings it's the path on which you may at times appear to other people either completely mad, or just like an animal, or even as a ghost.

And in the same way that the Tantric path came to be spoken of as the Vajrayana, the Tantric teacher came to be spoken of as the vajra-guru or the vajracarya, which means 'the real guru', 'the true guru', or if you like 'the authentic guru', 'the guru with direct experience', the guru who is concerned only with direct experience. Or we could paraphrase it and say, 'the guru who means business', or even 'the no-nonsense guru'. The vajra-carya, the vajra guru. And the vajra guru or vajra carya, the no-nonsense guru, doesn't mind what he does to the disciple, he doesn't mind at all - they can go mad or they can jump over precipices - provided what he does to the disciple pushes the disciple in the direction of direct experience, gets him away from words, gets him away from theories, gets him away from books, gets him away from his own ideas, away from himself. He doesn't mind what he does to you. Just as Marpa dealt with Milarepa. He didn't mind what he did to him. He got him doing all sorts of very difficult, and even dangerous and hard things, and frustrated him and tormented him, and in the end purified him of all his sins and he gained, eventually, Enlightenment. So Marpa is a good example of the Tantric guru, the vajra-guru or vajra-carya.

And in the same way the epithet vajra came to be attached to various other things as well. Enlightenment itself, bodhi, came to be spoken of as vajra-bodhi, not just bodhi but vajra-bodhi. The heart or the mind set on Enlightenment came to be called the vajra-citta, if you like the adamantite citta. And similarly that aspect of one's own being in which one is identical with the vajra-Reality came to be spoken of as one's vajra-kaya, usually translated as 'diamond body' or 'adamantine body', but here kaya means something like 'individuality', even 'personality'.

And then on another level entirely, one finds the initiatic community spoken of as the vajra-kula. What does this mean? Kula literally is 'family', family in the ordinary sense and also, more especially, spiritual family. A kula is a community of people following the same spiritual path, the same spiritual tradition, usually, also, under the same spiritual master. And vajra-kula is a spiritual community in a very special sense. A vajra-kula is a community of people, a spiritual community of people, dedicated to direct experience of Reality. They're not together for social reasons, not together to discuss texts, not together for the sake of argument, not together just to mull over their personal problems: they are dedicated simply to the direct experience of Reality, and they're infused also with a common spiritual power. We may say also that the vajra-kula is a community, a spiritual community in which communication is completely authentic and completely real. This is why it is said, symbolically, very often, that in the vajra-kula everybody is naked - no clothes, no veils, nothing to conceal, completely open, and I shall be having something to say on the spiritual significance of nakedness in lecture five when we come to 'The Symbolism of the Cremation Ground and the Celestial Maidens'.

We also have vajra-git or vajra-gita. Gita is 'song', and the vajragita is the song sung by the Tantric master - or sometimes a whole series of songs, a whole cycle of songs - and they are songs expressive of the spiritual master's direct experience of Reality. Songs which sort of burst from their lips out of the fullness of their spiritual experience, and we may say in passing that many of these Tantric masters,

especially those in India during the Indian middle ages, were very unconventional figures indeed. They didn't look at all like gurus, they didn't behave at all like gurus, they didn't speak like gurus. Very often people didn't know that they were gurus. They often used seemed to have wandered about like wandering minstrels, sort of troubadours. They didn't teach in any formal way; they simply sang, they went about singing. Sometimes they'd sing without you asking, sometimes they'd just sing, whether, as it were, you liked it or not! They sang out of the fullness of their hearts, out of their spiritual experience - they sang these vajragitas. That was their way of communicating, that was their way, if you like, of teaching.

We find a rather interesting parallel to this in the Pali Buddhist scriptures themselves in the case of the Buddha himself. There is a whole section of the scriptures called The Udana. And what does Udana mean. Udana literally means 'the outward-going breath'. The in-and-out-going breath is called 'anapana', the outward going breath is the Udana. So the book of the Udana consists of little verses breathed out by the Buddha at times of great spiritual exaltation. Something happened, as it were to the Buddha, say his Enlightenment and various post Enlightenment experiences, some tremendous experience - something with a tremendous spiritual Transcendental pressure surged up within him - and he had to speak out, sometimes to the gods, sometimes to men, sometimes just to himself, into the air, as it were, out just to the cosmos at large. And he breathed out these inspirational even verses, or you might even say suspirational verses, these Udana.

And the vajra-gitis of the vajra caryas, these wandering minstrel type figures in medieval India were of much the same kind. They were engaged in all sorts of yogic practices, meditation, all sorts of unconventional practices, communication and so on. Sometimes they stayed in hermitages, sometimes in the jungle, sometimes in cremation grounds, sometimes they just lived at home with their wives and families; sometimes they plied trades, sometimes they lived on alms etc., but all the time there was a stream, a current of spiritual practice and spiritual experience going on, and sometimes it came surging up, they could not, as it were, contain it. It had to come out in some form, find some expression - in words, in music, in song and in this way you got. This is where the vajra-giti, the diamond-songs, come from. There are several collections of these vajra-giti in Tantric literature. The most celebrated is Sarahapada's Doha Kosha or Collection of Songs.' The songs of Milarepa continue the same tradition.

Then again we find the term, the epithet vajra applied to various objects used in the Tantric ritual. In all Buddhist ceremonies, in all Buddhist rites, flowers are offered. This is a very common practice, and the flower which is offered in the Tantric ritual is known as the vajra-pushpa, or the diamond flower. So what does this mean, why not just a flower? Why do they call it the vajra-pushpa? It means that when you offer the flower, when you place that flower on the altar, when you place that flower at the feet of the Buddha, you have at the same time to experience the Ultimate Reality of the flower, experience what the flower really is, what the flower really means. You offer the vajra-pushpa: you offer not just the phenomenal flower but the Transcendental flower - the flower in its Transcendental essence at the same time. You experience what the flower really is in the depth of its flower-being, as it were, and you offer that.

And similarly with the vajra bell, the vajra ghanta, and with everything else it's vajra this, vajra that. So what does this mean? It means that in the Tantric ritual everything that you touch, everything that you handle, everything that you offer, everything that you do, is imbued with this sense of Ultimate Reality. You experience Ultimate Reality as existing in its very depth. You don't just touch a bell, you touch the vajra-bell; you don't just offer a flower, it's a vajra flower, you don't just light incense, it's vajra incense, you're not just sitting in an enclosure, it's a vajra enclosure, you're not just pouring water from pots, it's vajra water and vajra-pots all the time. Everything vajra. Everything imbued with Reality, everything imbued with the experience of Reality. You experience everything, as it were sacramentally, in its Ultimate depth, in its Ultimate essence, in the Tantric ritual, the Tantric ceremony.

And this is a sort of model, it's a sort of paradigm of what one's life in the world should be. The ritual concentrates everything within a certain area, it creates a sort of ideal world. That's all right for the time being. Just like going on retreat, conditions are ideal for the time being, but back you must come into the world. Whatever you experienced in the ritual area, within the mandala, as it were, whatever you experienced in the retreat, you have now to experience in the midst of your life in the world, experience in the world at large.

So this is what the multiplication of this vajra epithet means: that one must experience everything, all the time, under its vajra aspect, live, as it were, saturated by the experience of Reality.

But there is one thing used in the ritual that doesn't have the vajra epithet, which isn't vajra this or vajra that - and that is the vajra itself. It's just Vajra. If you like, it's the only thing that isn't real because it's Reality. And this Reality, of course, is symbolized by the middle portion, the central sphere of the vajra.

Now we come on to the four-petalled lotuses or eight-petalled lotuses. And as we can see there are two of these, one growing out of each side of the central sphere. So what do they mean? What does the lotus in general mean? First of all let's go back briefly to the central sphere just for a minute. It's not just a sphere in the abstract, as it were. It hasn't just a geometrical significance. It's more concrete, more living than that. It's also an egg or a seed. And as such, as egg or as seed, this spherical central portion of the vajra represents not just Reality but Reality as source, Reality as the source, the ultimate source of the whole of existence. So we can now see the meaning of the two lotuses. The lotus in general symbolizes birth, growth, unfoldment, development, especially harmonious growth, unfoldment and development' and the two lotuses growing out of opposite sides of the central sphere represent the emergence from the undifferentiated or non-differentiated reality of the basic duality of existence; they represent the initial, as it were, primordial fissure or splitting of Reality into two great poles, two great halves, two great worlds. Perhaps the most useful expression for these two poles, these twin poles, is yang and yin. They correspond roughly to spirit and nature, purusa and prakrti, light and darkness. But we mustn't think that this emergence of the lotuses, this splitting of Reality, is something that takes place in time, that takes place at a particular point of time, say at the beginning of things. It takes place all the time.

Now once the process of growth and unfoldment has started, as it were it continues and continues, and it continues until it reaches the very limit, until two whole worlds, two whole cosmoses have come into existence. And these two worlds are represented by the third formal element of the vajra: represented by the two sets of five spokes, including the central axis.

So let us come on now to them, the two sets of five spokes, and what do these mean? In a general way, of course, they stand for the two worlds, the two cosmoses, the two poles, of yang and yin, but let's be a bit more specific than that. The first set, or one set at any rate, one set of spokes, stands for the 'Five Buddhas'. There is a spoke in the centre, the axis as it were, and there are four other spokes at the four cardinal points. Now it's the same with the Five Buddhas. There's a Buddha in the centre and a Buddha at each of the four cardinal points. Now who are these Five Buddhas? I will say only a few words about them now, because I will be dealing with them in detail in the last lecture when we come to 'The Symbolism of the Five Buddhas, "Male" and "Female"'.  
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First of all there is Vairocana. Vairocana occupies the central position. He is white in colour. His name means 'The Illuminator'. 'Vairocana' was originally an epithet of the sun - it occurs as such in the Rig Vedas, so Vairocana is sometimes called 'The Great Sun Buddha'. He bears in his hands an eight spoked golden wheel, 'the wheel of the Dharma', so this is Vairocana, the Illuminator.

Secondly, there is Aksobhya. He occupies the eastern quarter and he is dark blue in colour. His name



means 'Unshakable', or 'Imperturbable'. He holds as emblem the vajra itself. Sometimes he changes places with Vairocana and then he occupies the centre of the circle. So this is Aksobhya

Thirdly, Ratnasambhava, whom we have already mentioned. He occupies the southern quarter and he is golden-yellow in colour. One should try to see these Buddhas in one's mind's eye as I described them, one by one taking their places in the 'mandala', as it were. And his name means 'The Jewel-Born', or 'Jewel-Producer', and he holds the jewel as his emblem.

Then fourthly, there is Amitabha, who occupies the western quarter and he is red in colour. His name means 'Infinite Light' and his emblem is the red lotus.

Fifthly and lastly, there is Amoghasiddhi, who occupies the northern quarter, who is green in colour, whose name means 'Unobstructed Success', and whose emblem is a double vajra, that is to say two vajras crossed.

These Five Buddhas of five different colours in these five different directions correspond to these five spokes and make up the world of yang, make up the archetypal world, the ideal world, the world of meditation, the world of Enlightenment.

This first set of five spokes, in addition to standing for the Five Buddhas, also stands for the 'Five Wisdoms'. The Five Wisdoms, of course, are associated with the Five Buddhas and are sometimes spoken of as the Wisdoms of those Buddhas. The Buddha represents in image form what the Wisdom represents in concept form.

First of all, there is the Wisdom of the Dharmadhatu. This is Absolute Wisdom, and it's associated with Vairocana, the white Buddha, the Buddha of the centre. Dharma means here 'Reality'; dhatu means a 'field', or 'sphere', or 'world' or 'cosmos'. And the Dharmadhatu or the experience of the Dharmadhatu or the Wisdom of the Dharmadhatu means the vision or the experience of the whole of existence, conditioned and unconditioned, as pervaded by one Absolute Transcendental Reality. It means seeing the world as it were, seeing the whole cosmos, the whole universe, as it were, as the playground of the Absolute. This is the Wisdom of the Dharmadhatu.

Then secondly, there is the Mirror-like Wisdom, or, we may say, objective Wisdom, which is associated with Aksobhya, the dark blue Buddha, the Buddha of the east. It is the Wisdom that merely, that simply, reflects. It sees everything, just like a mirror reflecting all forms, but it sees, just as the mirror reflects, things as they are - there is no distortion. The surface of the mirror is perfectly flat, perfectly smooth, flawless, there's no distortion in the reflection, and the reflections come and go - the mirror doesn't hang onto the reflections, they don't stick - so the Mirror-like Wisdom is like that, it sees everything perfectly, clearly, objectively, and is attached to nothing.

Then thirdly, the Wisdom of Equality, or Wisdom of Sameness, sometimes translated as 'The Wisdom of Identity', which is associated with Ratnasambhava, the golden yellow Buddha, the Buddha of the south. This is the Wisdom that sees one Absolute Reality everywhere in everything, sees everything as sunyata, the voidness, the emptiness. Sees, as it were, that all the waves of the ocean are equally water, are equally the ocean itself. So that this Wisdom, the Wisdom of Equality or Sameness, feels the same love, the same Compassion, for all.

Fourthly, The Distinguishing Wisdom, or the Wisdom that sees the uniqueness of things. This is associated with Amitabha, the red Buddha, the Buddha of the west. This Wisdom represents the fact that the eye of Enlightenment sees things in their oneness, yes, but it also sees things in their diversity - there is no one-sidedness. One sees everything as one, everything as the same, everything as one Ultimate

Reality; at the same time one sees everything in its minute concrete particularity, individuality, uniqueness. There is no contradiction between the two. One sees both at the same time - everything the same, everything utterly different. One has, as it were, this double vision of Reality.

Fifthly and lastly, the All-Performing Wisdom, or All Accomplishing Wisdom, the Wisdom of activity, the Wisdom that gets things done. This is associated with Amoghasiddhi, the green Buddha, the Buddha of the north. Now this Wisdom, the All-Accomplishing Wisdom, is not activity in the sense of planning and organizing; it's spontaneous activity, it's activity that's like play or like dance, which just comes freely bubbling up, as it were freely and spontaneously.

So this is the meaning, this is the symbolism if you like, of the first set of five spokes, representing the world of yang, the spiritual, the ideal, the archetypal world. They represent or it represents the Five Buddhas and their Five Wisdoms.

So now let us now turn to the second set - if you like the bottom set - of five spokes. These represent three things, or rather three sets of five items. In the first place, these five spokes represent the 'Five Elements': earth, water, fire, air, space. They also represent the 'Five Aggregates' of conditioned existence: form, feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness. Finally they represent the 'Five Mental Poisons': infatuation, aversion, conceit, passion and envy.

I dealt with the first two sets last week, that is to say the Five Elements and the Five Aggregates, so I am not going to say anything about them now. I will, however, say just a few words about the third set, that is to say the Five Mental Poisons - not a very pleasant list, I am afraid.

First of all, there is infatuation. This is dullness, stupidity, unawareness, unmindfulness. Also mental confusion, bewilderment. It's a sort of basic spiritual ignorance and darkness. A state that is, as it were sluggish and at the same time chaotic. This is infatuation.

Secondly, aversion. This covers such things as dislike, hatred, enmity and ill-will, the desire to harm another, the craving for revenge. It consists in a general way, we may say, in a negative, inimical attitude towards other living beings. This is aversion.

And then conceit. This consists in comparing oneself with others, thinking of others as superior to oneself, or inferior to oneself, or even equal to oneself. And we see here that humility, according to this teaching is a form of conceit. Egalitarianism too is a form of conceit. This might give food for thought to political thinkers.

Fourthly, there is passion. Passion is insatiable craving for pleasure, for enjoyment, for amusement, for luxury. It is uncontrollable sexual desire. An is attachment to material things.

And fifthly, envy. Envy is grudging others their good fortune, feeling displeasure and uneasiness at their happiness. It is an attitude of carping. Refusal to give recognition, refusal even to appreciate.

So we can begin to see in some detail from all this what the two sets of five spokes stand for. The first set of five spokes stands for the world of Enlightenment, stands for the Five Buddhas, for the Five Wisdoms. And the second set of five spokes stands for the world of non-enlightenment, stands for the five elements, the five aggregates of conditioned existence, the five mental poisons. But both, both worlds are aspects of one and the same Ultimate Reality - both have emerged, both poles have emerged, both the yang pole and the yin pole, have emerged from that Reality - and both, therefore, both worlds, despite their divergence, also correspond, they are in correspondence, and they correspond not only in general but in particular.

The Five Buddhas correspond to the Five Elements; the Five Wisdoms correspond to the Five Mental Poisons, but more than that there is also a one-to-one correspondence as well. Vairocana, the Illuminator, for instance and his Absolute Wisdom correspond to form among the Aggregates, to earth among the elements and to infatuation among the Mental Poisons; Aksobhya and his Mirror-like Wisdom correspond to 'water' among the Elements, to 'perception' among the Aggregates, and to 'aversion' among the Mental Poisons, and so on. We can work out all the rest, I am sure, for ourselves.

In other words, the two worlds, the world of Enlightenment and the world of non-enlightenment, though separate, are connected. There is a principle of unity running through them both, just as there is a central axis running through both halves of the vajra. And this principle of unity exists on a very deep level, the level of Absolute Reality itself. But it can be made to operate, according to the Tantra, on other levels as well. The yang forces and the yin forces, the forces of Enlightenment and the forces of non-enlightenment can be united, can be integrated; the Five Mental Poisons can be transmuted into the Five Wisdoms; the two worlds can be made to interpenetrate, to fuse. And to achieve this union, this transmutation, this interpenetration and fusion is the work of the Tantra, and is technically known as 'yuganaddha', or two-in-oneness. At the highest level it is the two-in-oneness of Wisdom and Compassion - or Wisdom and Skilful Means, Nirvana and Samsara.

And this brings us to the fourth and last formal element in the symbol of the vajra. That is to say to the head of the strange beast, eight times repeated. Now who or what is this beast? It's a beast out of Indian mythology, a beast often used as a decorative motif in art and architecture, and it or he is known as 'the makara'. Makara is usually translated as 'crocodile'. Now what on earth is a crocodile doing on our vajra? Now it's not very difficult to see. After all what is a crocodile, what is the characteristic of a crocodile? A crocodile is an amphibious beast; it's at home both in the water and on the land. So the makara, the crocodile, is a symbol of the union of opposites - it brings together both the water and the earth. And this is why it figures here on the vajra.

Incidentally, for those who are interested, makara corresponds to the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, and Capricorn is sometimes represented by a fish-goat, in other words by another amphibious beast, a beast which combines both - the fish goes down to the depths, the goat climbs up onto the heights of the rocks, the mountains, the fish-goat. So another beast with a dual, or even amphibious, nature. We also find that the vajra contains altogether ten spokes, five plus five, and Capricorn is the tenth sign of the Zodiac. So there may or may not be any meaning in this, but someone may care to investigate.

Now this whole subject amphibious beasts, beasts with dual nature, is rather interesting. There are various other amphibious beasts in Buddhist mythology, and in this connection there is a quite interesting story. It's to the effect that various pairs of animals originally were inveterate enemies. First of all the garuda and the naga. The garuda is a sort of great eagle, and it feeds on nagas, sort of snakes, not exactly snakes, dragon snakes, snake dragons or even gods and there's war between the two. You see the fierce garuda, with its enormous parrot beak, gripping an unfortunate naga in its claws. This is a very common motif. So the garuda and the naga are deadly enemies.

And then the otter and the fish are enemies too obviously, the tiger and the deer, and many many others. And they'd been enemies, as I said, from the very beginning of things. But one day, we are told, something happened, something wonderful happened, something affecting, influencing, the whole world, and what was that? Gautama the Buddha became Enlightened. So the effect was at once felt everywhere, we are told. Everywhere there was a wonderful feeling of love, and kindness and compassion, flowing as it were from the Bodhi tree where the Buddha sat. It was so great, so wonderful, so strong, it affected even the animals, even those who were inveterate enemies. So what happened? The garuda and the naga became friends, the fish and the otter, they became friends, the tiger and the deer,

they became friends, and so on. Not only that, they went even further than that. They not only became friends, they mated. Not only mated, produced offspring. In other words produced hybrid offspring, so that you got a sort of garuda-naga, a sort of eagle-snake; an otter-fish, half fish half otter; a deer-tiger, head of a deer body of a tiger sort of thing. You've got these strange hybrid beasts. In Indian art, in Indian mythology, including Tibetan art and Tibetan mythology, these hybrid beasts of various kinds came to be regarded as symbols, on a spiritual level, of union of the opposites.

Now we can go even further than this. The union of opposites is sometimes represented also in the form of an androgynous human being. Now what does this mean? It means a figure, a form, which is half-male and half-female. Uniting the two, the two opposites. In Hinduism, if I may say so, this is represented a trifle crudely. You see a figure, a human figure, and it's divided right down the middle: and this side is male and that side is female - both quite unmistakably so. But in Buddhism, usually, it is done rather more subtly. We very often find that if we look at the figures, the images, the pictures, of these so-called 'male' Bodhisattvas, we find that they have, on occasion, female physical characteristics. I sometimes have had the experience showing friends, that is non-Buddhist friends, different Buddhist images, especially images of Bodhisattvas, and they have looked at the images, and even taken them up and handled them, and said, 'Oh, isn't she lovely!' And I have said, 'No, it's a he; it's a male Bodhisattva.' But it isn't really even male. The Bodhisattva, as it were, combines the two, combines both characteristics, the so-called masculine and the so-called feminine. However we are going into all this somewhat more extensively in the course of the last lecture.

It's time now we got back to our vajra. Perhaps now we have a general idea of its symbolism. The vajra represents Absolute Reality. It represents the basic polarity of existence. It represents the two worlds, the two spheres, that grow out of that polarity, the world of spirit and the world of nature. It also represents the union of opposites. Above all, perhaps, the vajra represents power, spiritual power, the power, we may say, that is inherent in Reality itself, the power, the spiritual power, that smashes through all the obstacles to Enlightenment, the power that springs from, the power that is generated by, in the case of our experience, the union of opposites.

But saying all this one must not forget one thing, which is that the vajra, as we are studying it now, is a ritual implement. It is something to be used, something to be held in the hand, in the right hand. And as one holds it, as one uses it in the Tantric ritual itself, if one does it properly, if one feels it properly, one has, as it were, and experience. One experiences Reality, one experiences the power of Reality, one experiences what one truly and authentically is, one becomes what is known as Vajradhara, the holder or the bearer of the vajra, the holder or the bearer of spiritual power, of the power of Reality, even of Reality itself. One becomes, holding the vajra, what one always was.

Now Vajradhara is the Adi-Buddha, or primeval Buddha, of the Gelugpa and Kagyupa schools of Tibetan Buddhism. He is usually depicted as white or pale blue in colour. He wears a crown and his arms are crossed on his breast. In one hand he holds the vajra, in the other the bell. This is Vajradhara, the bearer of the vajra.

But there is another figure, even better known than Vajradhara, and that is Vajrasattva. Let's give a brief description of Vajrasattva and then close.

Vajra is of course the vajra. Sattva means 'an individual being'. In this context, that of the name Vajrasattva, sattva is sometimes understood as 'consciousness'. So Vajrasattva means 'the being whose consciousness is thoroughly saturated with the experience of Reality and the power of Reality'. This is what is meant by Vajrasattva. Vajrasattva is one who is the living embodiment of Reality, the one who unites both Wisdom and Compassion.

The figure, Vajrasattva, was originally a Bodhisattva, and he is always represented in Bodhisattva form, even though he is in essence a Buddha. He is represented usually as a young man, a young man in what the Indians regarded as the most attractive period of life, that is to say a young man of sixteen. And he is represented clad only in bracelets, necklaces and rings, and with long black tresses. The colour of his body is dazzling white, just like, we are told that it's just like the bright sunshine shining on the snow. The expression on the youthful face is beautiful and compassionate. And In his hand he bears the vajra, and this vajra he presses against his heart.

And when one meditates, when one visualizes, one sees this figure of Vajrasattva, brilliantly white with his vajra in the middle of the sky before us, see him as it were above our heads, see very clearly, very vividly. And we see further in his heart a deep blue letter or syllable - HUM. Around this letter, clockwise there revolve the letters, the blue or the white letters, of the hundred-syllabled mantra, the mantra of Vajrasattva, and this mantra is emitting rays of light. And then we see further from this syllable HUM and from these letters there fall, there drip as it were, drops of nectar. And all these drops, thickly falling, converge into a sort of stream. And this stream, this stream of nectar, very cool, very refreshing, very beautiful, very cleansing, falls onto the crown of one's own head, flows down through the body, flows down through the median nerve, flows down through all the psychic centres, flows through all the nerves extending from the psychic centres. Flows down through the whole system, the whole psychophysical, the whole psychospiritual system, and as it flows, it washes out, washes away all impurities and all defilements. And as one's impurities, as one's defilements are washed away, as one feels them washed away, one feels cleansed, one feels pure, one feels bright, one feels resplendent, crystalline; one feels, one begins to recover what is called one's original purity, one's original nature. One sees, one realises not just that one has become pure, one sees, one realises that in the depth of one's being one never was defiled, one realises that in the depths of one's being one was pure from the beginning, absolutely pure, not touched, not stained, by anything at all.

And as one sees and as one realizes that, one becomes gradually suffused with the sense of Reality, the sense of the Absolute, suffused even with the power of Reality; one becomes Vajrasattva, one becomes invested with the vajra, invested with the sacred thunderbolt, invested with the diamond sceptre of the lamas.