

## Lecture 106: The Cosmic Symbolism of the Refuge Tree and the Archetypal Guru

One of the things, at least, about which we can be quite sure, is the fact that there is in the world a great deal of misunderstanding. In fact, some people would even go so far as to say that the world itself is just one great big misunderstanding, not to say one great big mistake. We have, of course, to begin with, various misunderstandings, on our own part, of ourselves. It's after all a very wise man who understands himself. There is also misunderstanding of the world in which we live, the social world, political world, the world as such, the cosmos and so on, and, of course, also, there is misunderstanding of other people, the people with whom we come into contact, even the people that we think we know quite well. And amongst the various topics, we may say, on which there is in the world a great deal of misunderstanding is the topic of the spiritual life itself. And on account of this misunderstanding of the spiritual life, what the spiritual life is, what it consists in, there is also a certain amount of criticism. Criticism of the spiritual life itself, and also of those who are supposed to be leading spiritual lives. Now, one of the commonest criticisms of this kind, one of the commonest misunderstandings about the spiritual life, is that the spiritual life is escapism, I am sure that quite a number of you, as your friends and relations came to understand, perhaps rather dimly and distantly, that you were involved with something like Buddhism, something like spiritual life, couldn't help thinking, perhaps even couldn't help telling you, that you were practising escapism, that you were, in fact, an escapist. Now, I must admit that I have been trying for quite a while now to find out what people mean when they use this word escapism. It's a word one often hears, one often encounters. But people seem to find it rather difficult to say exactly what they mean when they say that spiritual life is escapism. I must also admit that when I sought light from the dictionary, I was unable to find it there, I couldn't find the word escapism even in the dictionary, at least, not in my dictionary which is the 1937 edition of Webster's New International Dictionary in four substantial volumes listing 300,000 words, it wasn't even there, not even in the addenda. But I did find in the course of my search for escapism, I did find the word 'escape', and the dictionary had quite a lot to say about the word 'escape'. And 'escape' was defined in its primary sense - there were several senses but this is the primary one - as *'to get away, as by flight or other conscious efforts. To break away, get free, or get clear, from or out of detention, danger, discomfort or the like. As "to escape from prison"'* So I was rather consoled by this, as it were. Consoled from my inability to find the word 'escapism', because it struck me that this word 'escape', as so defined, was quite a good description of the spiritual life. At least from a certain angle, at least from a certain point of view. It may not be the whole truth about spiritual life, but certainly a substantial part of it. Because, to begin with, in the spiritual life, one is, or should be, certainly making a conscious effort. One is certainly trying to break away; one is certainly trying to get free; one is certainly trying also to get clear. When one speaks of getting clear, one obviously has in mind all sorts of entanglements, all sorts of involvements, all sorts of rather complicated murkinesses that one is trying to get clear from.

So evidently this is very pertinent to the spiritual life and definition of the spiritual life. One is trying to make the transition from lower to higher states of being and consciousness. One is trying to develop, trying to evolve. This is what the spiritual life is all about. But why is one trying to do this? Why is one trying to escape? Why is one trying to develop, trying to evolve, trying to rise from a lower to a higher state of being and consciousness? One is doing this, one is impelled to do this, not to say compelled to do this, because one experiences the lower state, the state in which one is at present as restrictive, cramped, limiting, confined, unsatisfactory, even dangerous. One feels only too often, in one's present state of consciousness, one's present state of being, not to say one's present circumstances, one feels only too often as though one was under some sort of confinement, as though one was even in prison, or in a concentration camp. So naturally one has the feeling, one has the urge, to get out, to break out if necessary, to get free, to get clear and so on.

And in this connection, following this sort of line of thought and feeling we find in the Pali Canon, a very interesting passage attributed to the Buddha, in the course of which the Buddha is explaining, or trying to explain, to some of his disciples, what it feels like to be enlightened. Obviously, the disciples would be very curious to know, when you are there, when you have arrived. What does it feel like, what does it feel like to be a Buddha? What does it feel like to be liberated? What does it feel like to be enlightened? What does it feel like even to be an Arahant? So, the Buddha, apparently, on one occasion was trying to make this clear, trying to make clear the inner contents of the experience, at least to some extent, trying to convey, trying to communicate something of the feeling of it. And he didn't do it

conceptually, didn't do it or try to do it with the help of abstract ideas. But he introduced three similes, and he said: it's like this; suppose you've been carrying for a long time, for many miles, on a hot and dusty day an enormous burden, a great weight, a great load. Suppose you've been staggering on with it mile after mile, and then you are suddenly able just to put it down, to lift that load off your shoulders, off your head, maybe, as it's India, you just set it down, you are free from that tremendous, oppressive weight, you put the burden down. He says, being enlightened is just like that. You feel as though you have set down all your burdens, there is nothing for you to carry, there is no weight, there is nothing oppressing you, you are light, you are buoyant, you can, sort of, float free, as it were, enlightenment is like that, you've put down all the burdens. And then again, he says, suppose: you've been engaged in business, in some sort of trade, and suppose as the result of your business enterprise, or lack of enterprise you've got very heavily into debt, You owed a lot of money to different people and you didn't know where it was coming from, you didn't know how you'd be able to pay them and there all your creditors were knocking on your door, following you about wanting their money. And before you there was the prospect perhaps, of going to prison on account of those debts. And suppose, the Buddha said, one day you suddenly acquired, almost by miracle a large sum of money, you were able to discharge all your debts, pay off everybody, you didn't owe anybody anything, you could look everybody in the face, as it were, you are free from that terrible worry and anxiety. He said being enlightened is a bit like that. All your debts are paid, you don't owe anybody anything, you can look the whole world in the face as it were, you are free from debt. And then again, he said, it's like this, just like the case of a man who was shut up in prison for years on end and you can imagine what that is like, and suddenly one day the door is flung open and he is free, he can walk out into the sunlight and go wherever he pleases. The Buddha said being enlightened is just like that, you've escaped, as it were, from the prison of the world itself. So, in this way, the Buddha tried to make clear something of the feeling of the person who is enlightened. The enlightened person, the liberated person, feels absolutely light, feels buoyant, carefree, he may even strike the unenlightened as rather irresponsible, as not serious enough, as not taking life seriously enough. And at the same time the enlightened person feels completely unconcerned about the past. There's nothing left over from the past that he has to deal with, and he is not concerned about the future either. And above all, he feels absolutely free, because he has escaped, the enlightened person is one who has escaped.

So there is nothing wrong with escaping. Provided we take the trouble to use the word correctly, we can certainly describe the whole spiritual life as being, at least from one point of view, a life of escape, of getting free, breaking free, getting clear. But at the same time, that's not to say that there is no such thing as escapism at all. Or rather, that is not to say that there is isn't something, a certain attitude, to which the word escapism can be quite legitimately applied, something that needs, in fact, to be distinguished from actual escaping. One may say that if an escapee is one who breaks out of prison, or tries to break out of prison, the escapist is one who tries to forget the fact that he is in prison at all. The escapist is one who tries to pretend that the prison is not a prison, who tries to pretend that he is free when he is not free. And we can say that, broadly speaking, there are two kinds of escapism, and just for the sake of convenience we can label them the non-religious and the religious. Probably nowadays, non-religious escapism is the more common, the more popular. One may say that non-religious escapism consists in trying to forget the fact that one is in prison by becoming absorbed in whatever activities can be carried on within the prison walls. Religious escapism, on the other hand, consists in trying to forget the fact that one is in prison by becoming absorbed in books on how to escape from prison. Now, one cannot escape unless there is a means of escape, at least a ladder or a rope, or something of this sort, unless there is somewhere for you to escape to.

And this again the Buddha makes clear in a very important passage in the Udana, this, you may remember, is the book of the breathed out utterances of the Buddha. And in this particular passage, the Buddha, on one occasion called his disciples together, spoke to them in a particularly solemn and impressive manner. Sometimes, we know, the Buddha would not wait for people to ask a question, he himself took the initiative, sometimes he felt like communicating something to the disciples. So he used to call them together and then he'd say whatever he wanted to say on that occasion. And on this occasion he said, gathering them together 'O monks there is a state, a sphere, call it what you like, which is unborn, which has not come into existence, which was there all the time, unmade, uncompounded, eternal, absolute, there is such a sphere, such a state, if you like, such an entity'. And

then he went on further to say, if that did not exist, if there was not that state or that sphere or that entity, unborn, unmade, eternal, absolute, then there would be no means of escape from that which is born, made, compounded, relative, phenomenon. It's because that absolute principle, if one calls it so, exists that escape is possible.

So we find, in Buddhism generally, that the idea of escape is closely connected with the idea of refuge. And refuge the dictionary defines as 'that which, or one who, shelters, protects from danger, distress, calamity etc, a place inaccessible to the enemy'. And it's with this idea of refuge that we are concerned tonight. Because tonight we are concerned with the symbolism of the 'Cosmic Refuge Tree and the Archetypal Guru'.

Now, in Buddhism as a whole, refuge, means of escape, place to escape to, as it were, is provided by what we call the Three Jewels, about which I said something last week. In other words, provided by the Buddha, the enlightened teacher, the Dharma, the teaching, the Sangha, the spiritual community of disciples. They between them represent the means of escape from the lower to the higher level of being, consciousness, experience. Not only are they the means of escape, they also represent, they also embody, if you like symbolise, what we escape to. And those who have had anything to do with Buddhism as such, for any length of time, know that the act of what we call Going for Refuge, Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha is the central act of the whole Buddhist life, the central act of the spiritual life itself. Technically speaking, it's Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha that makes one a Buddhist. So therefore, for the Buddhist tradition, Going for Refuge is identical with the spiritual life itself, the following of the spiritual path itself. Now, all this is common ground to the three Yanas, that is to say the three successive phases, or stages, of the development of Buddhism in India, the Hinayana, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. All these three Yanas venerate the Three Jewels, go to the Three Jewels for refuge. But at the same time there is a difference. There's a difference in the way they look at the Three Jewels. The Hinayana looks in one way, the Mahayana in another, and in the case of the Vajrayana, the Tantra, there is a very distinctive way of looking at the Three Jewels, the Three Refuges, indeed. So much so, that the Tantra eventually set up, in addition to the Three Refuges of the general Buddhist tradition, three special, as it were esoteric, Tantric refuges.

Now, we'll have to go into this a little before we can begin to describe the cosmic refuge tree. We find that the Hinayana conception of the Three Jewels, or Three Refuges, is comparatively simple and straightforward. For the Hinayana the Buddha, the first of the Three Jewels, the first of the Three Refuges, is simply an enlightened human being. And, of course, he is a historical figure, living some 2,500 years ago. And as a result of his own spiritual struggles, his own spiritual endeavours he came upon, he rediscovered the path to Nirvana, to enlightenment, and thereafter he showed that path, that way, to others in his teaching, guiding his disciples to the same spiritual experience, the same realisation, the same enlightenment that he himself had attained. And the Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, according to the Hinayana, is, of course, dead and gone. And what remains of him is simply his memory. And that memory can still guide and inspire. And the Dharma, the second of the Three Jewels or Three Refuges, for the Hinayana, the actual teaching of the Buddha, what the Buddha, the human historical figure of Gautama, or Sakyamuni, actually said. And according to the Hinayana, the Dharma the teaching, the instruction, was handed down by word of mouth for hundreds of years, then written down in the form of what we now know as the Hinayana Canon, The Theravada Pali Scriptures especially. And the Hinayana tradition strongly believes that, if one follows this teaching, then one will gain enlightenment, even as the Buddha gained enlightenment. As regards the Sangha, the third jewel, or third refuge, according to the Hinayana there are two sections of the Sangha, partly overlapping. There is the Arya Sangha, or noble, or elect Sangha, which is a purely spiritual body consisting of the enlightened and partly enlightened disciples of the Buddha, past and present. And then there is the Bhikshu Sangha, or Community of monks, - the full-timers. So this represents very broadly and briefly the Hinayana conception of the Three Jewels or Three Refuges.

Now, the Mahayana, the second great phase, if you like the central phase of the development of Buddhism in India, didn't quite so much change the Hinayana conception of the jewels, didn't quite so much change it as we may say, universalise it. The Mahayana tried to see the Three Jewels, the Three

Refuges in what we may call a universal perspective. They tried to see, they tried to understand to begin with, what the Three Jewels were in principle, what they really meant, what they really involved. They tried to express that in the most universal manner possible. So in accordance with this general outlook, the Mahayana did not see the Buddha simply as a historical figure. They didn't see him just as someone who lived in India 2,500 years ago. For the Mahayana the Buddha is a spiritual principle, if you like a transcendental principle, the principle of enlightenment. But when we say principle, we mustn't misunderstand. It's not a question of anything abstract, anything conceptual. When we speak of the Buddha as being for the Mahayana a spiritual principle, we mean rather that for the Mahayana the Buddha is, as it were, the living image of enlightenment, abstracted, as it were prescinded from history having, in a sense, anything to do with history, existing, if you like outside space and outside time. So this is what, for the Mahayana, the Buddha represents, this spiritual principle, this living embodiment of the ideal, if you like, of enlightenment itself quite apart from the 'where' and the 'when' and the 'by whom' of any particular attainment of enlightenment by anybody in history.

So the Mahayana sees the Buddha therefore, outside history, outside space, outside time, as endowed with all imaginable perfections, virtues, qualities and so on, and they see 'aim living, as it were, in a sort of spiritual world, not living so much on the stage of history, but living even in a transcendental world, an ideal world, a world which is, as it were the expression in terms of a cosmos, of what the Buddha himself spiritually is. And in the Mahayana scriptures we get all sorts of very lavish, very beautiful descriptions of this ideal world, this Buddha-world, as it were, this pure world, in which the Buddha, the Buddha principle, the Buddha ideal, or if you like, the archetypal Buddha, lives. And it's usually described in terms of light and colour. The Mahayana scriptures don't go in so much for abstract descriptions, but rather for concrete ones. They speak even in terms of beautiful jewelled trees, they speak in terms of surfaces of lapis lazuli, traversed by golden cords, they speak of music, they speak of coloured lights and so on trying to give some sort of impression, to create some sort of impression of what this ideal world is in the midst of which the Buddha, the central figure of this ideal world, lives. So this is the Mahayana conception of the Buddha or the Buddha principle or the Buddha ideal, something transcending history, something archetypal, something universal, something cosmic.

And in the same way, for the Mahayana, the Dharma, is not just the teaching of the historical Buddha, not just the words uttered in some obscure northeastern Indian dialect by Gautama, or Sakyamuni, not just words which have been written down in books, as scriptures. For the Mahayana, one might say, the Dharma is the great stream of spiritual influence, that pours all the time from the eternal, the archetypal Buddha, the Buddha principle or the Buddha ideal. And it's an influence that can be felt not only in north-eastern India 2,500 years ago, but even here and now at any time, in any place, if one is spiritually receptive, that can be written down in books at any time, made therefore into, as it were, new scriptures. This is the Mahayana conception of the Dharma, an everlasting spiritual influence, a stream of influence, if you like, not just something written down in books, not just a teaching.

And in much the same way for the Mahayana the Sangha, still consisting of two sections, though these two sections, we may say, are continuous. First of all, the Sangha consists, for the Mahayana, in what are called the Bodhisattvas, beings of advanced spirituality, those who dwell upon higher levels of being and consciousness, who will actually hear, at least sometimes, the words of the eternal Buddha, who are attuned, as it were, to the Dharma in the Mahayana sense as a sort of effluence of the Buddha nature, sounding eternally on higher planes of existence. This is the Bodhisattva Sangha. And then, lower down, as it were, on this earth, as it were, there are those who look up to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, those who aspire to be like them, those who contemplate them, those who are devoted to them, those who wish to be drawn up to the Bodhisattva level, who have that aspiration, whether they may be monks or lay people, whether they may be male or female, spiritually advanced or not spiritually advanced, so long as they have this upward aspiration, so long as they wish to be Bodhisattvas, to become Buddhas, to incorporate the Buddha principle, manifest the Buddha principle, they are also part and parcel of the Sangha in the Mahayana sense.

So this is just some indication of how the Mahayana looks upon the Three Jewels. Now what about the Vajrayana, what about the Tantra?

What is their attitude, what is their outlook upon the Three Jewels? Now to begin with, just as the Mahayana accepted the Hinayana outlook upon the Three Jewels, but universalised it broadened it, widened it, in the same way, the Vajrayana, the Tantra, accepts not only the Hinayana outlook on the Three Jewels, but the Mahayana outlook too, accepts their interpretations of the Three Refuges. But one must not forget, as was pointed out earlier on in this series, one must not forget, that the Tantra is concerned above all with direct experience. So the Tantra said, as it were, especially with regard to the Mahayana interpretation of the Three Jewels or the Three Refuges, said, as it were: what does all this amount to in terms of direct experience? said, as it were, your conception of the Buddha, of the Buddha nature, the Buddha principle, the Buddha ideal, your conception of this archetypal Buddha living in this archetypal world of divine splendour - this is very beautiful, it's very wonderful, very impressive, no doubt very true, but we haven't seen that Buddha, we have to admit it, we haven't seen any Buddha at all, whether archetypal or historical, we haven't even caught a glimpse of a corner of that Buddha's robe, and maybe we have no hope of having a glimpse of it. And as for the Dharma, we haven't studied the scriptures, there are hundreds and thousands of scriptures, we haven't listened to the eternal Buddha, we haven't actually encountered this great stream of spiritual influence, we haven't risen to that level, and we've certainly never seen a Bodhisattva in our lives, and we probably wouldn't recognise a Bodhisattva, even if we saw one. So this is the actual situation, this is our actual experience, says the Tantra. So the Tantra goes on to ask, as it were, if we've no actual experience of the Three Jewels either in the Hinayana sense or in the Mahayana sense, well, what have we got? Are the Three Jewels therefore totally non-existent for us, is there nothing in our experience corresponding to them? Are there no points in our experience at which we make contact with the Three Jewels?

The Tantra said, as it were, at what points in our experience do we encounter the Three Jewels? This is the question that the Tantra asked, assuming that we have some contact with them, even though we haven't got any experience of the Hinayana and the Mahayana ways of looking at the Three Jewels. Where, in our experience, at what points in our experience do we encounter them? Confining ourselves to actual experience. And the answer for the Tantra is provided by the three Tantric refuges, or the three esoteric refuges. The three esoteric refuges, the three Tantric refuges, represent those points in one's own actual experience, one's spiritual experience, if you like, where you actually encounter the Three Jewels.

So what are these three Tantric refuges? What are these three esoteric refuges? They are first, the Guru, two, the Yidam, and three, the Dakini. So let's look at each of these in turn.

First of all, the Guru. Guru here means, one's own personal Guru, the Guru with whom one is in personal contact, preferably in regular personal contact, the Guru from whom one receives inspiration, guidance, teaching and so on, but from whom especially, one receives Tantric initiation. And Tantric initiation, as we saw in the second lecture in this series, consists essentially in the transmission of power, or activation of one's own energies as a result of the impact of the greater energies of the Guru, at the time especially of the Tantric initiation. So as far as the Tantra is concerned, therefore, the Guru is the Buddha. The Tantra points out, as I mentioned earlier, one has never met the Buddha, one has never seen the Buddha, whether historical or archetypal, Buddha is only a concept for one, one has no experience, has even no insight into what Buddha means. But one has contact with, one is in touch with the Guru. So one can say therefore, that the Guru represents, according to the Tantra, represents within the field of the disciple's actual experience, the Buddha principle, so that according to the Tantra, to the extent that one is in contact with the Guru, one is also in contact with the Buddha, indeed with all Buddhas, with the Buddha principle itself, and one receives through the Guru the spiritual influence of all the Buddhas. So this is the Tantric conception of the Guru the first of the three Tantric, or esoteric refuges.

And then the Yidam. Yidam is a Tibetan word and it means literally 'oath-bound', bound by an oath. And it's sometimes translated as 'guarantor', one who guarantees, one who guarantees, as it were, that the disciple will eventually gain enlightenment. Yidam is equivalent to, though it isn't an actual translation, of equivalent to the Sanskrit term '*ishtha devata*' which means one is chosen or selected divinity. In other words, the Yidam is that special aspect of the Dharma, that special aspect of enlightenment or reality, if you like, through which the disciple approaches the enlightenment

experience. But the Yidam is not a concept, not anything abstract, not an idea. The Yidam is an image, so nothing concrete. The Yidam is, in fact, a figure, a figure of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, embodying one particular aspect, or attribute if you like, of Buddhahood or the enlightenment experience. For instance, there is Amitabha, the red Buddha, the Buddha of infinite light and eternal life, - he can be a Yidam. Manjugosha, the golden coloured Bodhisattva of Wisdom with the flaming sword. Then Tara, the saviouress, white or green in colour carrying lotus flowers; and Vajrasattva, the embodiment of the innate purity of one's own transcendental mind, one's own one mind. These are all, or these all can be Yidams.

And for the disciple who practises, the whole of the Dharma is contained in, embodied in his Yidam. It's all, as it were, concentrated into that, that image, that figure, whether it's the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, the Buddha of infinite Light, and so on. So the disciple. the Tantric disciple directs all his attention to that. He doesn't bother so much about scriptures, studies, teachings, doctrines, dogmas, the centre of his attention, spiritually speaking, is occupied by the figure of the Yidam. He becomes, as it were, familiar with the figure of the Yidam, he makes the acquaintance of the Yidam. Sometimes in the course of Tantric initiation the Guru says to the disciple, when for instance, the Guru may be giving the initiation, let us say, of Tara, after giving the initiation of Tara the Guru says to the disciple: 'I've now introduced you to Tara, I've said, as it were, to you 'this is Tara', and I've said, as it were, to Tara 'this is the disciple', now, you know each other, there's a connection between you. Tara is now your Yidam', and so on. This is what one is very often told. And when one has acquired, as it were, a Yidam in this way, one not only keeps the Yidam at the centre of one's attention, spiritually speaking, one actually visualises the Yidam in meditation, one sees the Yidam, as it were, before one, with one's spiritual eye, one's inner vision, one contemplates the Yidam, becomes absorbed in it. And becoming absorbed in the Yidam, one absorbs at the same time the spiritual qualities and principles and experiences which the Yidam represents, which the Yidam is. And eventually, after also one has recited the mantra of the Yidam, eventually one becomes one with the Yidam, one is absorbed into the Yidam, or the Yidam is absorbed into oneself, but one becomes one with the Yidam. If one has been practising with the Yidam, say, of Manjusri you absorb the Wisdom, the Transcendental Wisdom that Manjusri represents, which Manjusri is. If your Yidam has been Tara you acquire, you develop the purity, the tenderness, the compassion, which is Tara. If you've been having, say, Vajrapani as your Yidam, then you acquire the energy, the strength, the courage, if you like the spiritual ferocity, that Vajrapani stands for.

So this is the Yidam. This is the whole Dharma, the whole teaching, as it were, boiled down into a single, concrete image or figure with which one becomes, as it were, spiritually intimate, and which one eventually incorporates or into whom or into which one is oneself incorporated. And this Yidam is the ishta devata, the chosen divinity. But who chooses, what chooses? Not your conscious mind. This is the most important point, that the Yidam is chosen by your nature, by your needs, by your spiritual requirements, by your weaknesses even, which have to be corrected. So you can't be trusted, that is your conscious mind can't be trusted, to chose. So, usually the Guru does it for you, the Guru points out the Yidam to the disciple and says: 'oh, yes, this would be, or this is your Yidam, this is what you need. This is the divinity chosen by what you are, not by what you think or what you want, but what you are! And the Guru knows what you are better than you know it yourself. So the Yidam is pointed out in this way by the Guru. The Tibetan tradition even says it's better to leave it to chance than to chose yourself. Chance is more likely to be right.

Then thirdly, Dakini. Dakini literally means, sky-being, spacebeing, if you like. But we are not concerned with the literal significance of the word at present, we are probably going into it next week when we consider 'the Symbolism of the Cremation Ground and the Celestial Maidens'. Celestial Maidens, here, by the way, means Dakinis. Within the present context, the context of the refuges, the Tantric refuges, the esoteric refuges, within this context, Dakini signifies something like spiritual companion. But spiritual companion in a rather special sense. Someone whose company, contact with whom, one finds spiritually stimulating and energising. Someone, therefore, whose company helps release, to spark off, one's energies, especially spiritual energies, helps to release them, to spark them off, for the purposes ultimately of the spiritual life itself. And such a companion, such a spiritual companion, according to the Tantra, can be either male or female, Dakini is the feminine form of the

noun, and the masculine form is Daka. So just as the Guru represents within the context of one's own actual experience the Buddha principle, just as the Yidam represents within the context of one's own spiritual experience the Dharma principle, in the same way, the spiritual companion, the Daka or Dakini represents, or is the special embodiment of, the Sangha. But just as the Yidam needs to be selected by the Guru, in the same way the Daka or Dakini, the spiritual companion, needs to, be selected by the Guru. In fact according to strict Tantric tradition, the Daka or Dakini, has not only to be selected by the Guru, but initiated by him as well, by the same Guru, because the disciple, obviously, may make mistakes. He may think that he is being spiritually stimulated, when he is only being amused and distracted. And, of course, if the spiritual companion happens to be of the opposite sex, then the disciple may think he's found a Dakini, when he's only fallen in love. This is quite a different matter.

So these are the three Tantric refuges, or the esoteric refuges, the Guru, the Yidam, the Dakini. And from what I've said about them, no doubt we can already understand, that these three Tantric refuges these esoteric refuges, are not Three Refuges in addition to the existing refuges i.e. the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha. It's not as if we've got refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, then refuge in the Guru, the Yidam, the Dakini, it's not like that. The Guru, the Yidam and the Dakini represent what the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha represent, here and now, in terms of our own, actual experience, as we try to follow the path.

Now after these preliminary explanations, it's time we came on to give a description of the Cosmic Refuge Tree, some account also of the archetypal Guru, as well as a few words about Guru yoga. Now, to begin with, I'm afraid, there is a disappointment for you, because we discover that the refuge tree is not really a tree at all. Though refuge tree is what it's called in Tibetan. It's much more like a sort of plant. In fact, it's a sort of lotus plant. So let's, as it were, close our eyes and imagine the refuge tree as it appears in the Tibetan Tantric tradition. And, of course, whenever one visualises, one sees first of all, a great expanse of blue. This represents not just the sky, it represents the complete absorption of all thoughts, of all wandering thoughts. Thoughts have all been absorbed into a sort of higher dimension, a higher dimension of consciousness, undifferentiated, pure, immaculate, represented by that blue sky, that expanse of blue, very vivid, brilliant, shining, and so on. And then in the midst of this expanse of blue, one sees a great rainbow coloured cloud, a beautiful cloud flashing and glowing in all the colours of the rainbow. And from the midst of this cloud, this rainbow coloured cloud, there rises up a vast tree-like stem several hundreds of feet high. And from this stem, this central stem, there emerge four great branches, one for each of the four cardinal points. And both, the central stem, hundreds of feet high, and the four branches, both of them terminate in enormous lotus flowers, so that altogether in the centre and at the four cardinal points, altogether there are 5 of these enormous lotus flowers. So that the whole thing, the whole tree, the whole plant, the whole lotus plant looks something like a gigantic candelabrum. And as we look at this structure, at this plant, at these 5 lotuses, we see that the lotus flowers are all covered with figures. We see that in fact, there are hundreds of figures, swarming, as it were, all over the lotus flowers, rather like bees, mostly human-type figures. And I am going to try to describe them now in a general sort of way, these figures on these five great lotus blossoms, and I am going to describe them according to the Nyingmapa tradition. There are other traditions, slightly different from the Nyingmapa tradition, as we shall see a bit later on.

So, first of all, the southern lotus, the lotus, that is to say, immediately in front of us, with the central lotus and the northern lotus, as it were, in line behind it. The southern lotus. Now on this we see usually only three figures in a row and these figures are the Buddhas of past present and future. In other words, the human historical Buddhas. First of all, there is Dipankara, the light-maker, or light-bringer, the Buddha of the remote past. Then there is Sakyamuni, our own Buddha, as it were, the Buddha of the present, the present generation, the present age, the present aeon. And then there is Maitreya, the Friendly One, the Buddha of the future, the Buddha yet to be. And they are all standing there on that front southern lotus, side by side, they are all clad in saffron coloured robes, sometimes they bear begging bowls and so on. So these are the figures on the front lotus, the southern lotus. And next, second, we have the western lotus, the lotus to one's left. And on this, there are rather more figures, usually some ten or twelve. Here we see the figure of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Samantabhadra, Kshitigarba, all the great Bodhisattvas, in fact. And they are all depicted, all represented, as youthful, slender, graceful, beautiful, with smiling

expressions, long, black flowing tresses clad in silks and jewels, and all wearing magnificent, jewelled head-dresses. So these, these great Bodhisattvas represent the Mahayana Sangha. And they all occupy the western lotus.

Then one goes round to the back, to the northern lotus. And what does one see on the northern lotus, at the back, behind the central lotus? One doesn't see any figures at all. So what does one see here? One sees on this lotus an enormous pile of books. And they are not, of course, ordinary books, not western type books, they are enormous, Tibetan manuscript, or zylograph volumes, great big heavy volumes. And usually there are 108 of them, and they of course represent the scriptures or the Dharma. So here is the Dharma in the form of all these great printed volumes on the northern lotus right at the back, a great pile of them. Then coming round to right hand side, to the side that's on our right, we arrive at the eastern lotus, and on this eastern lotus also there are ten or twelve figures. But the ten or twelve figures on the eastern lotus are rather different in appearance from the ten or twelve figures on the western lotus. These figures are all old. They are often wrinkled and bald-headed. They are all clad in saffron robes and they carry staffs, monastic staffs, and among them we see Sariputra, the Buddha's chief disciple, Modgallana, Kassapa, Ananda, and so on. In other words, we see all the great Arahant disciples of the Buddha, the historical Buddha. So they represent the Hinayana Sangha.

Finally, we come to the central lotus, and the central lotus is much bigger and much more splendid than the other four. And on the calyx of that lotus, which is said to be like a great mountain of gold, we see the figure of Padmasambhava, that is to say, the great Tantric Guru of India and Tibet, the founder of the Nyingmapa tradition. And he is seated cross-legged, he is clad in very rich, colourful and princely garments, and he wears on his head the famous lotus cap, which terminates in a vajra and a vulture's feather. And in his left hand, which rests in his lap, he holds a skull-cup. And the skull cup is filled with something that looks like blood. And in his right hand he holds a golden vajra. And in the crook of the left arm there is a long staff with streamers, a staff surmounted by three severed human heads. and a trident. And his expression is benign and Compassionate and smiling, though not without a touch of ferocity. So this is the figure of Padmasambhava, seated cross-legged on the calyx of the central lotus. And from the calyx of this central lotus there open out layer upon layer of petals, and these petals from the centre, or opening from the centre to the outside, they form as it were, tiers, and on these tiers there sit an absolute multitude of figures. And first of all, immediately below Padmasambhava on the innermost outward folding lotus petals, there sit figures of various Gurus, mainly Gurus of the Indo-Tibetan spiritual tradition, Gurus of the Nyingmapa lineage, though also Gurus of other lineages, like Milarepa and one's own personal Gurus. One sees them all sitting there on the tiers of petals, seated crosslegged, all these Gurus. And some of them are wearing monastic dress of various kinds, others are wearing nothing at all. Some are wearing the tall red Pandit cap, others are wearing square caps, others have no caps at all, maybe bald, maybe with long flowing hair, some are holding books, others are holding the vajra and the bell, some seem to be preaching, others seem to be meditating, others again are making strange ritual gestures and others are drinking wine. Some of these Gurus, if one looks at them closely, one sees, look very holy, very pious with calm contemplative expressions, but some of the Gurus again have a quite disreputable appearance - don't look even respectable at all So one sees in this way, on the petals of the lotus, on the tiers upon tiers of petals immediately below Padmasambhava, beneath the feet, if you like of Padmasambhava, Tantric Gurus of every conceivable kind. In a large representation of the refuge tree there may even be hundreds of them.

And then lower down on the next set of petals come the four orders of Tantric divinities, that is to say divinities - Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and so on - belonging to the main sub-divisions of the Tantra, and these are really the Yidams, or all these can be used as Yidams, or selected, or chosen as Yidams. And there are several hundred of them. Some are peaceful with smiling faces, others are wrathful with ferocious terrifying expressions some of the Yidams have two arms, some have four, some have sixteen, some have thirty two. Some of the Yidams are bright red in colour, others are green, others are blue, others are yellow, others are black. Some of them have human heads, one or more, others even, a few, have heads, of animals. These are the Yidams. it's impossible to mention even a few of their names, but they all represent different aspects of, or embodiments of different aspects of the Dharma, represent different possibilities of approach to the enlightenment experience.

And then below the Yidams, on yet more layers of petals unfolding from that central calyx, one sees dakas and dakinis, i.e. the spiritual companions. And they are all represented, as usually in Tantric art, as young, usually sixteen years of age, beautiful, for the most part naked or nearly so, and underneath them on yet more petals or tiers of petals, one sees guardian deities or Protectors of the Dharma, usually very fierce in form. And these represent, these protectors or guardians represent, the powerful spiritual influences that shield the Tantric disciple from psychic danger and disaster. Usually, when one receives an important, that is to say a powerful, Tantric initiation you are also given the initiation of the guardian who, as it were, wards off from you any undesirable spiritual or psychic influences that may get in the way of your practice or even may be, perhaps, stimulated by your practise. So these are the guardians, the protectors of the Dharma, they are all powerfully built, very strong-looking, and they are of different colours, and they are all wrathful or ferocious in appearance and they are armed with weapons of many different kinds. Some of them indeed trample underfoot the enemies of the Dharma.

Now one might think that the refuge tree was already rather overpopulated, we've got three Buddhas in the front, Bodhisattvas to the left, Arahants to the right, piles of books behind them. In the centre we've got Padmasambhava, hundreds of Gurus, Yidams, dakas and dakinis, guardians, hundreds upon hundreds of figures altogether, but we haven't done - there are more. still, and where? There are more above the head of Padmasambhava. These are the Gurus, as it were, of the purely spiritual lineage, the telepathic lineage, where initiation, teaching, etc., is instructed, or is imparted, just telepathically - mind to mind, heart to heart. So here, in this lineage, above the head of Padmasambhava one encounters the archetypal Buddhas, one sees the figure of Amitabha, the red Buddha, with his begging bowl, Amitabha, the Buddha of infinite light and eternal life. And above him still, higher yet, one sees the figure, the shining white figure of Vajrasattva, and above even Vajrasattva one sees the dark brown figure of the Adi-Buddha, the primordial Buddha, Samantabhadra, the All-Good, cross-legged, naked, and clasping to his bosom his feminine counterpart.

So this, in brief, is the cosmic refuge tree, according to the Nyingmapa tradition. And as one looks at it, as one sees these 5 lotuses and all the figures on them, one sees the central calyx, or the calyx of the central lotus, the figure of Padmasambhava and all the archetypal figures above him, one can see that the whole refuge tree follows a sort of pattern: it's formed, we may say, by the intersection of two great dimensions; by the intersection of a horizontal dimension with a vertical dimension. One dimension is the exoteric, the other is the esoteric. And the horizontal, the exoteric dimension, consists of or comprises, the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the vertical, the esoteric dimension, consists of, comprises, the Gurus, the Yidams and the dakas, dakinis and guardians. So one can see at once, therefore, that the refuge tree, the cosmic refuge tree, represents in very vivid, in very concrete form, the whole conception of refuge. It represents the conception of refuge in its historical background, in its universal perspective and its immediate practical application. And we therefore find that the symbol of the cosmic refuge tree is one of the richest and most complex in the whole field of Tantric Buddhism. It's a symbol, we may say, that would repay the study of a lifetime. if you took just one Tibetan painted scroll of the refuge tree you could spend your whole life studying it, doing research into it, writing a book about it, to say nothing of course of practising it.

But rich and detailed and glowing as the refuge tree is we've still not quite finished, there's still something missing, a few details to be filled in. For instance, up in the sky, on all sides, all round the refuge tree, above the refuge tree, we see clouds, and on the clouds there are floating gods and goddesses all making offerings to the refuge tree, offering flowers, lights, incense, parasols and so on. But more important still, right in the foreground, where you might easily miss it, there is a single, tiny human figure, just one, confronting, as it were, all those Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Gurus, books and so on, one single, tiny human figure. And this figure has his back to the spectator. In some paintings you just see the upper part of his body, just head and shoulders, and you can see, if you look closely that his hands are clasped above his head like that. And you can see on his wrist a rosary. And he appears to be prostrating himself, Prostrating himself in the direction of the refuge tree. So, who is this? This figure is oneself, oneself in the act of Going for Refuge. And it's with this figure that we come at last from description of the refuge tree to practise.

Now, as I have already indicated, the refuge tree is depicted in Tibetan painted scrolls. They are rather difficult to come by, because they involve quite a lot of work, as you can well imagine, when there are hundreds of little figures, but one does come across them, and some that I have seen, I would say, are among the masterpieces of Tibetan religious art. They are very rich in detail, every figure, even though it's no bigger than perhaps 1/4 inch in height is painted meticulously in finest detail, as though almost with a single-hair of the brush. And the total, the overall effect, is so rich and so detailed and in a way, so awe-inspiring as to be quite overwhelming. But the painted scroll of this kind, the painted scroll of the refuge tree, is not just for purposes of decoration, not just for decorating the shrine or the temple. It's not even just for general devotional purposes, it's intended as a guide to actual visualisation. Visualisation is a very important Tantric spiritual exercise. And the refuge tree is visualised, sort of spiritually recreated, seen with one's own inner vision, in the course of a very important Tantric practice, a practice which is known as 'refuge-taking' and prostration practise. It's one of the four mula yogas or foundation yogas of the Vajrayana. These four foundation yogas are practices or exercises that one must go through before one can embark on the practise of Tantric meditation proper. So I am going to give a brief account now of the refuge taking and prostration practise. Now, I am going to give it according to one particular tradition, I'll talk about that in a minute.

What one does first of all is simply to visualise, to see with one's inner eye, the refuge tree, to build it up, as it were, bit by bit. So one begins, as I mentioned earlier, by seeing just the expanse of blue. In the midst of the expanse of blue, the rainbow coloured cloud, and then out of the cloud there springs the central stem of the lotus plant, four branches grow out corresponding to the four cardinal points, the four lotuses bloom, the figures assemble, and in this way, one builds up the whole refuge tree, figure by figure almost until it is complete. And one is supposed in the end to see it clearly before oneself, as one sits there in meditation, concentrating and meditating. But if one can't visualise it very well, if all that one gets is a sort of occasional glimpse of a single figure or a leaf of the tree, even if one can't actually see it all there, with one's inner eye, with one's inner spiritual vision, one should feel that it's all there, feel that all those figures are there and so on. And especially one should feel, or if possible, see, the central figure of Padmasambhava and be particularly aware of him, because, for the Nyingmapa tradition, he is the embodiment of all the refuges, exoteric and esoteric. So, once one has got the refuge tree into view, or once one has got the feeling of it being there, Padmasambhava being there, in the heart of it, at the midst of it, one then has to feel, as it were, that Padmasambhava, the central figure, embodies in his own in person, all the refuges, that he is the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the Guru, the Yidam, the Dakini, that they are all, as it were, concentrated in this one central figure, this awe-inspiring central figure of Padmasambhava. And then one has to have a heart-felt feeling that until the attainment of enlightenment, until the attainment of Buddhahood, one goes for refuge to Padmasambhava as the embodiment of all the refuges, goes for refuge with one's whole being, one's body, speech and mind, all one's energies, as it were, flow in that direction. And at this point, when one does a regular practice, one repeats aloud certain verses expressive of one's Going for Refuge to Padmasambhava as the embodiment of all the refuges. And after each recitation of the verse, or series of verses, one prostrates oneself once. This is the prostration part of the practise. And one prostrates oneself in the following manner: one joins one's hands which are supposed to represent a lotus bud, and having joined one's hands in this way one touches with the joined thumbs, first the centre of one's forehead, then one's throat and finally one's chest, one's heart. Having done that, one, as it were, drops onto one's knees, shoots one's hands forward, shoots one's legs back, and finds oneself in this way flat on the floor, thrown, as it were, in front of the refuge tree. And one does this, reciting the verse or verses and then prostrating in this way 100,000 times. Not all at once, you are allowed to spread it over a certain length of time, but you should do at least 100 recitations and prostrations daily until the total is complete.

This is the refuge taking and prostration practise. And it's a rather strenuous exercise, as one may well believe, and Tibetans believe that it's a cure for tuberculosis, that may well be.

Now, when one prostrates, one doesn't just prostrate, one even just keep the visualised refuge tree in mind, seeing it or feeling it, there is something else that one has to do or feel. As one prostrates oneself, as one goes down, as it were, flat in front of the refuge tree, one has to imagine, one has to feel, that all living beings whatsoever, especially all human beings, are prostrating with you, are doing the

exercise along with you. For instance on your right hand side you imagine your father, on your left hand side your mother, and behind your father all the men in the world, behind your mother are all the women in the world. Sometimes you imagine them in some forms of the tradition on each shoulder, as though you are sort of carrying them, father on this shoulder, mother on that, and behind all your friends and acquaintances, in front all your enemies, and as you prostrate, as you recite your verses, they all recite, they all go down with you.

So that the whole creation, as it were, is doing the practice, reciting the verses and prostrating in front of the refuge tree with you. You, as it were, are taking the lead, but everybody is doing it, the whole cosmos is involved, and this is one of the reasons why we speak of the cosmic refuge tree, not only because it embodies all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Gurus, dakinis and so on, of the three periods of time past, present and future and beyond, but also because the whole of creation, as it were, to use that rather un-Buddhistic word, is involved in the practice through your sort of imaginative identification. So this is how one practises, this is what one feels, 'I'm not doing it on my own, it's not just for me; everybody is doing it with you. And, of course, you can interpret this psychologically: you've got all sorts of things coming from, as it were, father, and all sorts of things coming from mother. Quite literally sometimes, psychologically speaking, you've got father sitting on this shoulder and mother sitting on that shoulder, and you can't do anything about it. You can't get rid of them, alright, if you can't get rid of them, never mind, let them all go together with you in that prostration. Let the whole world, let all sentient beings, be involved. So in this way one goes on, one does the recitation followed by the prostration 100 times or 200 times or 1,000 times, whichever number of times you want to do it for that particular session, and then you stop, you sit down cross-legged again as though for meditation, and you continue seeing, or at least feeling, the refuge tree. And if possible you see, or at least you feel, at the conclusion of your session, a white light shining forth, a white light shining from the body of all the refuges in front of you, white light streaming from the central figure of Padmasambhava, white light streaming from the Buddhas, from the Bodhisattva, from the books, from the Gurus, from the dakinis, from the guardians, the Yidams, the archetypal Buddhas, white light streaming from them all. And this white light, this pure dazzling white light falls onto oneself - falls onto one's father and all men, falls onto one's mother and all women, and takes away all their defilements, all their defilements, faults, psychological conditionings etc., etc., are all dissolved into light, transformed into light, and this light is drawn back into the body of the refuges. And after that all the figures on the four lotuses, at the four cardinal points, are all absorbed into the central figure of Padmasambhava. All the Buddhas, all the Bodhisattvas, the books, the Gurus, the Yidams, the dakas and dakinis, the archetypal Buddhas, they all dissolve into this central figure of Padmasambhava, so that only Padmasambhava is left, as it were, suspended in the midst of that blue void. And after he has remained there for a few minutes you see him also dissolve into the blue void, so that in the end only the blue void is left. So this, in brief, is the refuge taking and prostration practice the first of the four mula yogas or foundation yogas.

Now, as I indicated earlier, I've described all this according to Nyingmapa tradition. But there are several other traditions. There's the Kagyupa tradition, there's the Gelugpa tradition, but for all these traditions the refuge tree is the same, or more or less the same, there are just a few variations from tradition to tradition and school to school. But there is one variations between the schools, between the traditions, which is quite important. It's not a variation in principle, but certainly a variation in the particular embodiment of the principle. In the Nyingmapa tradition, as we have already seen, the calyx of the central lotus is occupied by the figure of Padmasambhava. It's occupied by Padmasambhava because Padmasambhava is regarded as the founder of this school, the Nyingmapa school, Nyingmapa tradition. But for the Kagyupas, for the Kagyupa tradition that central position, on the calyx of the central lotus is occupied not by Padmasambhava, but by the figure of Milarepa. And in the case of the Gelugpa tradition that same position is occupied by the figure of Tsong-Ka-pa. Now, Milarepa, in the Kagyupa tradition of the refuge tree is depicted as either white or green in colour. He's depicted green, with a green complexion, because, according to his biography, he lived for years on end on nothing but nettles, so his whole body, his whole complexion became green. And he is represented also as naked except for a small piece of cotton cloth, his only covering in the bitter cold of the Tibetan winter, in the Himalayan ranges, some 20,000 feet above sea level, well above the snow line. And his hand is held to his ear to indicate that he is singing, his mouth is also half open, he is singing, of course, one of his

famous songs, one of the songs of Milarepa. So this is how his famous songs, Milarepa is represented, at the centre of the refuge tree according to the Kagyupa tradition.

Tsong-ka-pa, the founder of the Gelugpa tradition, is a rather different type of figure. He's a little severe in comparison with Milarepa, not to say orthodox. And he is clad in the monastic robes of red and yellow, he wears a yellow tall pointed Pandit cap, the special cap worn at the time of giving initiation, his hands are in the mudra of exposition or teaching, he was a great teacher, a great commentator on the scriptures, and from his shoulders there seem to sprout two lotus flowers, on one lotus flower there is a flaming sword, on the other a book, of the Perfection of Wisdom. These, of course, are the insignia of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, that is to say, Manjusri or Manjugosa. And Tsong-ka-pa is believed, by his followers, to be a manifestation of this Bodhisattva, Manjusri or Manjugosa. Incidentally, I may observe just in passing, that Gelugpa representations of the refuge tree are rather different in character, at least artistically speaking, from the Nyingmapa ones. All the items are the same, all the items are there, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, Guru, Yidam, Dakini, archetypal Buddhas, they are all there, but the arrangement of these figures, the disposition of these figures in the Gelugpa tradition is much more rigid and much more geometrical. And from a distance if you see a Gelugpa representation of the cosmic refuge tree, from a distance it's as though Tsong-ka-pa is seated in the midst of the four arms of a cross, and on closer inspection you see that the arms of the cross are made up of scores of tiny figures. Sometimes they seem to be sitting in sort of little cubicles or compartments. It all suggests the greater degree of schematization, not to say even rigidity.

Now, for their respective traditions, for the Nyingmapa tradition, for the Kagyupa tradition, for the Gelugpa tradition, the figures of Padmasambhava, of Milarepa, of Tsong-ka-pa, represent the Guru par excellence, or we may say the ideal Guru. We might even say that these figures for their respective traditions, for their respective followers represent the archetypal Guru. In other words, each of them represents, for the tradition concerned, the embodiment of the Guru principle, the principle of Guruhood in its perfection, or the Guru principle universalised, though at the same time concretised. Just as the Mahayana Buddha embodies the Buddha principle in its perfection, so the figure of Padmasambhava for the Nyingmapas, Milarepa for the Kagyupas, and Tsong-ka-pa for the Gelugpas embodies the Guru principle in its perfection. And each again is the embodiment of all the refuges, as we have already seen in the case of Padmasambhava, he embodies in one single figure all the refuges he is all the Buddhas, all the Dharmas, all the Sanghas, all the Gurus, all the Yidams and all the dakinis and all the archetypal Buddhas, they are all embodied in this one central awe-inspiring figure. And also each archetypal Guru figure, or each embodiment of the archetypal Guru, is the source of the particular Tantric tradition to which one's own Guru belongs.

And this brings us to a very important topic, brings us to the topic of the Guru yoga, But to make this clear we have to say, first of all, a few words on the subject of lineage, and this is a very important aspect of the whole Tantric Buddhist tradition, as well as an important aspect of Chan or Zen, though in the case of Chan or Zen, or at least Zen, it seems to become rather artificial and stereotyped, at least in modern times. Now, I have said in an earlier lecture that the Tantric Guru is one who gives Tantric initiation. And Tantric initiation, as I insisted on that occasion, is not the giving of a teaching, not the explanation of a doctrine, it's the transmission of power, it's the transmission of energy. This is what Tantric initiation essentially is, or, if you like, it's the stimulation, the activation of energy. Though the actual experience may be much more than that of a transmission, a giving of energy. It's also like, we are told, the planting of a seed. At the time of initiation, of Tantric initiation, the Guru plants a seed, plants a seed in the soil, as it were, of the heart of the disciples. The seed comes from outside, as it were, the seed comes from the Guru but the disciple has to tend it, cultivate it, water it, give it light and heat, he himself. And eventually, if the disciple does this, the seed will sprout, grow into a plant, the plant will produce flowers, the flowers will bear fruit. And eventually one will find the whole plant blossoming into a full grown lotus, a lotus of thousand petals, which is enlightenment itself. By that time the disciple's energies will have become fully activated, the disciple will have become endowed with the plenitude of spiritual power, will have become, as we saw the other week, Vajradhara, the bearer of the vajra, Vajrasattva, the vajra-being, the adamant being. In other words, by that time, by the time the thousand petalled lotus has opened and all his energies have become activated and operative, the disciple himself has become a Guru.

So having become a Guru, the disciple, or former disciple, the new Guru, in his turn, will be able to transmit power, to activate, to stimulate, and his disciple in turn, and so on. So a sort of chain reaction is set up, beginning with the original Guru, in this case Padmasambhava. And this spiritual chain reaction, from generation to generation of masters and disciples and masters and disciples is called a lineage, a line of transmission, if you like. But it's important not to misunderstand this. We talk of lineage, we talk of transmission, we talk of handing down. But we are not to imagine, we are not to suppose, that there is any thing which is transmitted, that the Guru gives you something and you hand it on to somebody else and he hands it on to somebody else. The lineage, the transmission is not like that. Much less still is it a question of transmitting a robe, or giving someone a certificate, as one finds nowadays sometimes happens. But what is transmitted? It is what we can only describe as a sort of current of spiritual energy, spiritual electricity even, a direct experience which is sparked off. Also, we should not think of the transmission from generation to generation, as a sort of one to one process, not one Guru to one disciple, and that one disciple becoming a Guru, and then transmitting to one other disciple, not that. Any Guru may have or have had many Gurus, received many initiations, many transmissions, and all the energies of all these transmission, as it were, converge in him, like many rivulets, all converging into a great river. And the Guru, when he transmits, when he initiates, he transmits all these energies. Again, and this is another important point, the Guru does not lose energy by transmission. He doesn't transmit energy and then not have any energy, or less energy, left for himself, if anything, we may say, in transmitting, in communicating energy, power, spiritual power, the Guru gains. Sometimes it is said in the Tantric tradition that the giving of initiation to a worthy disciple is very helpful and very beneficial to the Guru. But this brings us to a rather esoteric aspect of the subject into which we have no time to enter now.

Now the idea of lineage is not just an idea, it's not just of historical interest, it's not just nice, as it were, to be able to trace your spiritual descent back to Padmasambhava. Lineage is a truth, as it were, a fact, as it were, which can actually be experienced as a living spiritual reality. And to help one experience this is the purpose of the Guru yoga. And the Guru yoga has got many forms, some of them rather complex. And I am going to describe one or two of the simpler, more exoteric forms of the Guru yoga and then conclude.

One begins with a transformation. One transforms oneself. One transforms oneself into a mass of light, one feels, one imagines that one is nothing but light, that one's body, one's bones, flesh, blood, marrow, skin, heart, mind, thoughts, are all transformed, transmuted, into pure, brilliant, blazing light, a mass of light. And this light gradually assumes a certain form, assumes the form of a figure, an image, known as Vajrayogini, assumes, that is to say, a beautiful female form, whether the disciple is here male or female doesn't matter. The disciple assumes, having transformed himself or herself into a mass of light, assumes this beautiful female form, brilliant red in colour, and naked except for ornaments of human bone. And this beautiful red, naked female figure which one has become, which one now is, which one feels oneself to be, is surrounded by a halo of rainbow coloured light extending in all directions. Now the assumption of the female form here is significant, it suggests receptivity to the Guru's influence. The disciple is, as it were, especially at the time of initiation, female in relation to the Guru. And red, of course, in Tantric tradition, is the colour of love, pure brilliant red, the colour of love, of passion and of fascination. And the nakedness of the figure represents sincerity and openness and freedom from all disguises. And the ornaments of human bone represent renunciation, freedom from attachment, fearlessness in the face of death and so on. So feeling oneself, seeing oneself in the form of Vajrayogini, one visualises on one's head, feels on one's head one's own personal Guru. Above him one sees, one feels - one can imagine, if one likes - that one is seeing all this as though in a mirror one sees, one feels the figure of the great Guru Padmasambhava. Above Padmasambhava one sees or feels the figure of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Absolute Compassion. Sees him not in his more usual two-armed or four-armed form, one sees him in a very special, very important form with eleven heads and 1,000 arms extending in all directions, representing the omnipotence and omnipresence of compassion. And above even Avalokitesvara in this eleven-headed and 1,000-armed form one sees the figure of Amitabha, the red Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life, and around one visualises the scriptures, Gurus of India and Tibet and so on, but one's attention, one's main attention is fixed on the line of Gurus above one's head, above Vajrayogini's head, oneself being now Vajrayogini - one's personal Guru, Padmasambhava, Avalokitesvara, Amitabha. One concentrates on, one sees very clearly,

one feels this line, this lineage extending from the top of one's own head upwards into space. And seeing the feeling them, one, as it were, prays to them all. One prays for their blessing, prays that one may gain enlightenment, prays that one may gain enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. And one does this, recites the prayer, that is to say, 100,000 times altogether.

Then, the topmost figure, the figure of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life, the topmost figure, dissolves into light and becomes absorbed in the next figure down, the figure of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Then the figure of Avalokitesvara dissolves into light, is absorbed in the figure of Padmasambhava, then the figure of Padmasambhava is dissolved into light and absorbed in the figure of one's own Guru. And next one sees radiating from the form of one's own Guru on one's head as Vajrayogini light, brilliant light, radiating in all directions. And one feels, one experiences the compassion, the kindness of the Guru and feels his blessing, his *adistana*, as it's technically, called descending upon one. One feels this, one experiences this.

But this is not enough. This is only the preparation. In the Tantra one wants more than a blessing, one wants initiation, that is to say Tantric initiation, one wants the transmission of power, spiritual power. What else does one do next? One visualises a white 'OM', a white 'OM' on the Guru's forehead. And from this white 'OM' on the Guru's forehead there issues a ray of pure white light. And this falls onto one's own head centre and so falling bestows the jar or vase of initiation. And one feels all one's sins of body, one's sins of action wiped out. One feels enabled now to practise the Mahayoga, one feels that the seed of the Nirmanakaya Buddha has been sown. And then one visualises at the throat of the Guru a red letter 'AH', and from this red letter 'AH' at the Guru's throat there issues a ray of burning red light, and this ray of burning red light falls on one's own throat centre conferring the secret initiation, wiping out one's sins of speech, enabling one to practise the Anuyoga, also sowing the seed of the Sambhogakaya. Then at the Guru's heart one visualises a deep blue 'HUM', and from the 'HUM' there issues a ray of what is called smoky blue light, light blue like the colour of a cloud of smoke. And this falls on our own heart centre, confers the wisdom initiation, wipes out sins of mind and enables one to practise the Attiyoga, the supreme yoga and also sows the seed of the Dharmakaya of a Buddha.

Finally, from the Guru's three centres, simultaneously there issue rays of rainbow coloured light, and these rays of rainbow coloured light all fall at the same time on one's own three centres, that is to say, on the head, the throat and the heart, thus conferring the knowledge initiation and wiping out sins of body, speech and mind together, and sowing the seed of the capacity for sharing in the Svabhavakakaya, the self-existent body, the unity of the previous three. At the same time one spontaneously gains the power of experiencing absolute samadhi. Then one sees, one feels, the Guru descending through the crown of one's head, down the median nerve, into one's own heart and taking his seat there, taking up, as it were, his abode there. And at the same time, at the same time that the Guru descends into one's heart, one feels, coming down through one's body, through one's whole psychophysical organism, a flood of what is called knowledge nectar. One feels as though one has absorbed Transcendental Knowledge, Transcendental Wisdom, feels as though one is filled with nectar, feels it filling one's whole body, one's whole organism. And as that happens the Guru in one's heart is transformed into the light of great bliss, transcendental bliss, overwhelming, absolute ecstasy, and one feels one's body, one's speech and one's mind becoming one with the body, speech and mind of the Guru. And in that state one remains as long as one possibly can. And having so remained one concludes with a prayer. And it's with that prayer that we are also going to conclude our study, or perhaps I should say our visualisation, of the Cosmic Refuge Tree and the Archetypal Guru: With the help of one of my own Gurus I translated this prayer many years ago when engaged in some of these practices. So the prayer runs as follows:

O my own immediate holy Guru, O great jewel abiding within the lotus of my heart, may you never separate from me, but remain inseparable.  
Grant me accomplishment of body, speech and mind.

Throughout all births may I have an excellent Guru. And from him never separated may I practise the holy Dharma. And fully accomplishing the good qualities of the path and the stages may I speedily attain the Vajradhara state.

From this evil mind of mine quickly liberated, may I speedily become the Guru Buddha, and may I lead all beings, without exception, to the Guru-Buddha's abode.

O, holy Guru, as are thy body, length of life and abode, so also may I be.