

Lecture 109: The Symbolism of Colours and Mantric Sound

As one becomes accustomed to giving talks, to giving lectures on various occasions, not only, perhaps on Buddhism, but on other subjects as well, one starts learning various things, one starts noticing various things, about the lectures themselves, about the people who listen to the lectures, about their reactions, interest and so on. And one of the things that one learns, one of the things that one notices fairly soon, is that there seem to be certain words that have a rather special drawing power, that really attract people, that really rouse their interest and their curiosity. For instance, there is the word 'Secret'. Some years ago I was having a discussion with a friend of mine who was a publisher's reader and who had not only to read through manuscripts prior to publication or rejection, as the case may be, but also to advise the author, advise on among other things, the title. And this friend told me that if he thought that a book wasn't likely to sell very well - and he was in the oriental publishing line - then he advised the author to include the word 'Secret' in the title, because, he said, that always helped. As soon as people saw the word 'Secret', secret this or secret that, in the title, they were much more inclined to buy it. It seems as though people rather like the idea of penetrating into secrets, of finding out things that, they are not really supposed to know.

Then another word that rather seems to draw people is the word 'Sex'. If you include that it's sure also to be a draw. For some reason or other this word seems to arouse people's curiosity. Maybe they think that perhaps they are missing something. And, of course, another word that really draws people, that really gets them interested is the word 'Tantra' or the word 'Tantric', to say nothing, of course, of the word 'Symbolism'. And nowadays we can say that the word 'Tantra' and 'Tantric' is more popular than the word 'Zen', which I feel is rather losing its popularity. Why, I don't know.

But one of the most effective words that one can possibly encounter, one of the most effective words that one can use, it would seem nowadays, is the word 'Magic'. And this seems to have a very wide and very definite appeal indeed, especially when it's joined with one or another of the other words which I have mentioned. I remember this whole question of words of this kind, words with drawing power, words to be included in titles of lectures, was discussed among a group of us quite a few years ago down at our old centre at *Sakura* in Monmouth Street. And in the course of this discussion, I remember, one of our friends suggested that I should give a lecture with what he described as a really effective title, something that would really appeal to everybody, something that would draw everybody in, make them feel really interested. And the title of the lecture, he said, should include all the most spell-binding words. So we asked him what sort of title he had in mind. And he thought for a moment and then he replied, he said: "I think you should give a lecture on 'The Secret Symbolism of Tantric Zen Sex Magic Yoga'" *[Laughter]* He said that will really draw them! So I must confess that so far I have not got round to giving a lecture on this fascinating subject and I'm not even going to say anything about it tonight.

I'm not even going to say anything on the subject of magic really. But one cannot help referring to magic at least once in a series of lectures purporting to deal with the Tantric path to enlightenment, especially when one is dealing with the creative symbols of that path. And the reason is that if we study the Tantra, if we study the Indo-Tibetan Tantric tradition, we discover that a certain amount of its symbolism, perhaps quite a lot of its symbolism has its origins in magic, especially in, of course, Indian magic. And we very quickly come to see, we very quickly come to recognise, that in ancient times magical practices of all sorts were very very popular all over India. In fact one can say that they are very popular even today. Wherever one goes in India one encounters magical practices or references to magical practices every now and then. Now it must be confessed, it must be admitted, that this Indian magic, this popular Indian magic which one finds all over India even today, is not of a very elevated type. It's not particularly philosophical, it's not particularly spiritual, it's not really concerned with spiritual things, not as understood by most people, anyway. For the most part it's concerned with the attainment of purely worldly objectives with the help of supernatural, or at least supernormal, means and methods.

Let me give a few examples. Suppose, for instance, you live in a village, and suppose you have a sort of feud going with someone, suppose you are on very bad terms with them, you want to get them out of

the way, perhaps you'd even like to kill that particular person. But obviously, even in an Indian village, and quite a lot goes on in Indian villages, I can assure you, even in an Indian village, you can't very easily dispose of someone, kill someone, just by ordinary means, not unless you've got quite a bit of pull. So the average person, the ordinary person in a village, in circumstances of this kind will have recourse to magic. He'll have recourse to what is known as the rite of destruction, he'll have the rite of destruction performed for him by a practitioner in these arts, or he may perhaps even perform it himself and hope for the death of that particular person. I remember when I was staying in Kalimpong among the Nepalese there was quite a lot of magic of this sort going on. We'd call it, of course, black magic, and I remember on the night of the new moon very often we'd hear from my Vihara, from my monastery, the little drums some few hundreds of yards away, the little drums beating - tuck tuck tuck - tuck tuck tuck - tuck tuck tuck - you'd hear that sometimes all night, and you'd sometimes hear a horrible wailing and shrieking as the magician or sorcerer, the *jakri*, as they call him, danced beating his little drum and shrieking his incantations, maybe not to cause somebody's death, though that wasn't unknown, but certainly sometimes for a rather nefarious purpose. And I remember in that area, that if someone died suddenly quite often one could hear the death attributed to some kind of witchcraft, as we would call it, some kind of black magic. It would be said that someone or other perhaps had had performed this rite of destruction. So in India nowadays, and especially all along the Himalayan border and among the Nepalese, to say nothing of the Bhutanese and Tibetans, practices of this sort are not uncommon and certainly not unknown even now. But that's just one instance.

Suppose something of a rather different kind happens. Suppose, for instance, you have the misfortune to fall in love, and suppose you find that the object of your affections is not particularly responsive, doesn't show any particular interest in your approaches. So what do you do? Well, the time-honoured remedy is that you have recourse to love magic. And love magic, as you can imagine, is even more popular than the death magic, as it were. You perform or you have performed for you the rite of fascination. And the person that you are interested in is supposed just to come, just pulled by some sort of irresistible force, slowly and unwillingly perhaps, but he or she is supposed just to come as the result of that magic, as the result of the performance of that rite of fascination. And if one goes about India, as I have done, if people know that you are some kind of holy man, or sadhu, or teacher, or sanyassin, they'll come to you very often asking you if you have any magic powers and can do anything of this sort for them. And especially the young ladies will enquire whether you know anything about love magic, they are especially interested in that.

But another example: suppose you are very poor. Lots of people in India are very poor. So you live in a village, you've just got a miserable hut, a few pots and pans and pieces of cloth and an old bedstead, and that's about all you've got. But suppose you would like to grow rich, suppose you'd like to have lots of money, to be wealthy. But there seems to be no prospect of gaining wealth by the ordinary means. So what do you do? You perform, or you have performed, the rite of prospering, the rite of gaining riches, prosperity and so on. But in this case, in the case of the rite of prospering which you normally perform if you're very poor, there is just one snag: the snag is that these rites are usually rather expensive, especially if you have to pay for them to be performed on your behalf.

So, in this way, one finds that there are rites, magic rites for all sorts of worldly purposes current in India, especially current in the Indian villages from ancient times right down to the present day. There are rites for gaining offspring, there are rites for paralysing people, for just stopping them in their tracks, there are rites for pacifying enemies and evil spirits, there are rites for winning law suits, rites for warding off misfortune, rites for curing disease, and so on, all sorts of rites.

Now what happened was that the Tantra, the Indian Tantra, Indian Buddhist Tantra, took over quite a number of these rites. It didn't take them over in their crude magical form, just took over, as it were, the symbolism, gave the rites its own spiritual, Buddhistic, meaning, and among other things associated these rites of various kinds with different Buddha families. All the different Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and so on are organised into different groups, according to certain spiritual affinities which are known as Buddha families. For instance there is the vajra family, there is the jewel family, there is the lotus family, and we find that some of these rites came to be particularly associated with certain of these Buddha families.

And we find further that each rite, each of the important rites at least, came to be regarded as symbolising or embodying a certain kind of activity, not worldly activity, but what we can only describe as spiritual activity, even transcendental activity, that is to say the activity of the enlightened mind, the activity of Buddhahood. Because we find in the Tantra, there is the conception, or perhaps we should say experience of enlightenment not as something passive, not as something static or inert, not something into which you just sink and it receives you. In the Tantra there is the conception of enlightenment as essentially, as it were, active, as it were, almost vibrating, as it were, radiating in all directions, as active in all directions, even as dynamic, as expressing itself in various ways, in the form of various activities.

So we find that in the Tantra, in the Indian Buddhist Tantra the rite of destruction, for instance, the old magical rite of destruction, symbolises the enlightened mind's activity or function of destroying ignorance. Your real enemy is ignorance. So in the context of Tantric practice the rite of destruction assumes the meaning of destroying ignorance. And one of the principal functions of the enlightened mind is to destroy ignorance.

And then again the rite of fascination symbolises the activity or function of charming the hearts of all living beings. According to this way, of looking at things enlightenment, Buddhahood, the one mind, is not only truth, is not only reality, is not only the supreme good, is also the supremely attractive object, is what everybody really desires, whether they know it or whether they don't. So the enlightened mind, as it were, exercises on all living beings a sort of unparalleled fascination. You get this aspect of the enlightened mind, or this aspect of reality, elaborated very much in some forms of Hinduism, in Sufism too, in neo-Platonism, the Absolute as beauty, an absolute beauty, a pure beauty, a beauty that attracts through all things, all living beings. So that when one is attracted, as it were, by something beautiful, whether something in nature or whether something in art, what you are really being attracted by is the one transcendental beauty, as it were, of which all these particular beauties are reflections. So the rite of fascination represents something of this sort, the rite of fascination elevated, as it were, to the level of Buddhahood, to the level of the enlightened mind, and made to symbolise the enlightened mind's power of fascination over all living things.

And then again the rite of prospering. This symbolises another activity, another function of the enlightened mind, its capacity to develop, to mature, to bring to spiritual maturity the fact that it is encouraging, as it were, all the apparently unenlightened minds to grow in its own directions.

Well, so much for these rites and their elevation, as it were, into the context of the Tantra and the context of the enlightened mind. But we are not really concerned with the rites at the moment. It may be possible for us to deal with them on some future occasion. At the moment we are concerned with something else. We are concerned with the fact that the Tantra not only associates the old magical rites with different Buddha families, not only regards them as symbolising different functions, different activities of the enlightened mind, it also associates them with certain colours, associates the rites with certain colours, with colours that express the mood of these rites, the mood of that particular type or kind of transcendental activity. For instance, the rite of destruction, whether on the mundane level or the spiritual level, is said to be black. It's sometimes referred to as the black rite. The rite of fascination is said to be red, it's the red rite. The rite of prospering is said to be yellow, it's the yellow rite. And the rite of pacification is said to be white, it's the white rite. And as you already have gathered it is with the symbolism of colours that we are especially concerned tonight, though not only with the symbolism of colours, also with the symbolism of sound, mantric sound. Why we happen to be concerned with colours and sound, why these two are particularly linked, we shall be investigating a little later on.

For the moment, for the present, we are going to enter into the symbolism of colours. But while entering into the symbolism of colours, while speaking of the symbolism of colours, we must be careful not to interpret the word 'symbolism' too literally. It's not a question of trying to attach any rigid exclusive meaning to each and every colour. Rather, it's a question of, as it were, trying to conjure up, trying to feel, trying to experience whatever emotional and spiritual associations within the context of the Tantra the colours may possess. So we are going to do this now from the specifically Tantric point of view, in the light of the Tantric tradition for each of principal colours in turn.

We may find that the Tantric symbolism of colours does not always agree with the symbolism of colours in the West, or even with the symbolism of colours in other parts of the East, especially the Far East.

Alright then, let's start looking at, let's start thinking of, the colours. First of all, red, by which one means bright red, brilliant red. And red, as we know, is the colour of blood. If you see the sort of red colour you can't help thinking of blood. And because red is the colour of blood, it's the colour of life, it's the colour of physical life, at least. Or even by implication, by suggestion, of life in general. No blood, no life, no organic life. Now blood possesses temperature. Blood is hot. So red is the colour of warmth, we say, in fact, that red is a warm colour. In the first place it's the colour of physical warmth, but it's also the colour of emotional warmth. And we can even say that it's the colour of all the positive emotions. And in particular, according to the Tantric tradition red, pure bright brilliant red, is the colour of love.

Now, I say love, but I'm not particularly happy about this word, because nowadays the word love seems to mean almost anything. It's one of the most abused words in the dictionary. So perhaps, we'd better give up using it for a while, maybe turn to the Tantric word, the Sanskrit word. The Tantric word which I am roughly rendering as love is 'raga' or rather 'maha-raga'. Now raga in the ordinary literary or psychological context means 'passion', it's a rather strong, not to say violent word. And maha-raga which is the Tantric word for what we might call love, maha-raga therefore means 'great passion'. Now, we must be rather careful about this word 'great'. The word 'great', the adjective 'great' has a rather special meaning in Buddhism, especially in the context of the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. 'Maha' usually stands for, or at least suggests, the voidness or sunyata. And sunyata, as we know, is one of those multi-meaningful Buddhist terms that are very very difficult to translate. Sunyata means emptiness, it also means fullness, it means the relative, it also means the absolute. Probably the best way we can translate it in this context is just 'reality', 'truth', if you like. 'The ultimate', 'the transcendental'. All this is suggested or implied by the word 'sunyata', 'the absolute reality'. So, maha, this term, this adjective, maha - great, suggests that whatever it is prefixed to partakes of the nature of sunyata, has, as it were, been purified by passing through the flames, as one may say, of the sunyata experience. So, if one has the word 'maha' or the prefix 'maha' placed before any word, it suggests that that word is not to be understood in its ordinary signification, that it represents something which has been, as it were, merged with reality, or plunged into reality, or purified by the experience of reality. So if you have, for instance, the word Mahayana, it doesn't just mean the big Yana as opposed to the small Yana, it means the Yana of the Absolute, the Yana of the Ultimate, the Yana which consists in the experience of ultimate reality, which is heading in the direction of ultimate reality. And if we have, for instance, the expression 'maha-sattva', Bodhisattva Mahasattva', as you get in the Diamond Sutra, for instance, maha-sattva doesn't just mean a great being, it means a being whose whole nature has been transformed through immersion in the experience of sunyata, in the experience of the Absolute. This is what is meant by maha-sattva or great being, an enlightened being in a sense, a transcendentalised being, a sunyata-ised being, we may even say. So, 'maha-raga', maha-raga in the context of the Tantra doesn't mean just great passion in the sense of an excessive passion, it means a wholly spiritualised emotion, an emotion which has, as it were, lost nothing of its emotionality, it's still an emotion, but it's, as it were, a purified emotion, an emotion which has been plunged into the depths of sunyata, plunged into the depths of the Absolute, into the depths of the Ultimate, and had its nature, its inner nature, thoroughly transformed. So, this is what is meant by 'maha-raga' or great passion in this sense. It's a spiritualised, even spiritual, even transcendental, passion or emotion. We can even describe it, if we have to describe it, as a sort of uninterrupted stream of powerful, positive feeling, as we can only describe it, a stream that flows spontaneously from the very heart of the enlightenment experience, flows in the direction of all living beings. This is 'maha-raga'. And this especially is suggested, is symbolised, by this colour red. Red means love, maha-raga.

And then yellow. Yellow is the colour of sunshine. Yellow is the colour of the ripened grain, whether it's wheat, as in this country, or rice, as in India. So, yellow, especially a deep, rich, golden yellow, is the colour of harvest. So yellow is also the colour of growth, the colour of maturity, the colour even of perfection. And in a primitive and agricultural community, such as we often find in India even today, a good harvest, when there is much grain, much rice in this case, a good harvest means prosperity, means even riches. So yellow which is the colour of harvest is also the colour of riches, is the colour of abundance and profusion and plenty, and by association it comes to be the colour of abundance, of

profusion, of plenty, not in just a limited material sense, but in a spiritual sense as well. Yellow signifies abundance of good qualities, abundance, especially, of merits. And being the colour of riches, being the colour of abundance, yellow is also the colour in the Tantra of whatever is rare, whatever is precious and whatever is valuable. And because what is rare, what is precious, gives delight, yellow is also the colour of whatever gives delight, it's the colour of exuberance, it's the colour of beauty. So yellow in this way comes to be associated with beauty of every kind, physical and spiritual. And eventually yellow comes to represent, the colour yellow comes to represent, at the highest level, the inexhaustible wealth, the inexhaustible riches, of the enlightened mind, of reality itself. Yellow represents at this level the incessant productivity and creativity of the enlightened mind, a creativity that not only flows but even overflows, overflows in a sort of shower of plenty, a spiritual shower of plenty, onto all living beings. So this is yellow in the context of the Tantra.

And then green. Green is the colour of grass. Green is the colour of the tender shoots of the young rice in the ricefields. Green is the colour of the great forests. We may even say that green is the colour of nature, of Mother Nature. And for this reason green is the colour of rest and repose and tranquillity. It's the colour of safety and succour, and where there is safety, well there obviously, there is freedom from danger, freedom from distress, freedom from fear, worry, anxiety. So we find that green is also the colour of refuge, of Going for Refuge, of finding refuge, the colour of shelter, the colour of protection. But we also find that green is the colour of harmony, of balance and of equilibrium. And more than that, it's also paradoxically, green is also paradoxically, the colour of action, the colour of activity, especially of action taken to restore a disturbed equilibrium, to restore an equilibrium that has been temporarily lost. And for this reason, because green is the colour of action taken in the interests of equilibrium, green is the colour of justice, and it's even the colour of karma. It might seem rather strange to say this, but karma is, as it were, green. So one may say that green therefore represents the whole harmonising and reconciling and balancing aspect of the enlightened mind, that aspect of the enlightened mind which, as it were, rounds off the corners, brings things together, smooths our irregularities, balances, adjusts, introduces harmony and so on. And also, perhaps not unnaturally green represents, the colour green represents, the restorative aspect of the enlightened mind, its healing aspect.

And then blue. Blue is the colour of the sky, is the colour especially of the deep blue cloudless sky. And when we pronounce this word sky, what do we think of? What is suggested? What is suggested is vastness, limitlessness, even infinity. So blue has these overtones, these suggestions too. And when we think of the midday sky, especially the midday sky in the tropics, the blue cloudless sky, the absence of clouds suggests freedom, freedom from all obscurations, there is nothing but the sky, only the sky, completely brilliantly blue. We don't often see this in this country. We see it in India, we see it in Tibet. There is just this great dome, this vast dome of pure deep brilliant blue. And it certainly has a very very strong effect on one. And no cloud, nothing obscuring, not a fleck of cloud anywhere in the sky. So blue, through its association with the sky, the cloudless sky, comes to represent, comes to symbolise, truth, truth, as it were, in its nakedness, truth unclouded, truth unveiled, truth just like the blue sky, shining and infinite.

So blue, this sort of blue is also the colour of Reality, the colour of the Absolute, the colour of the Ultimate. And speaking of clouds, when there are clouds in the sky, we know that clouds come and go, they are on the move all the time. But the sky, the sky behind, the sky underneath, remains unchanged all the while. So blue is not only the colour of reality, the colour of truth, it's the colour of reality in its aspect as the Eternal, the Unconditioned, that which does not change, that which remains always the same, all the time the same, but, as it were, out of time. Blue represents what remains when all the transitory things, which are like clouds, have passed away. So blue, this deep bright blue, represents not even an aspect of the enlightened mind, it represents the enlightened mind itself. Blue.

And then white. What is white the colour of? White is the colour of snow, it's the colour of the snow peaks of the Himalayas. And these snow peaks have remained untrodden, we may say, from age to age, perhaps one or two of them trodden nowadays occasionally once every few years, but nothing really to mention. They remain, for all practical purposes, as it were, untouched, unsullied. So we find that white, the colour of snow, the colour of the peaks of the Himalayas, white is the colour of peace, the colour of

purity. It's the colour of freedom from disturbance, freedom from agitation. It's the colour of removal of all obstacles, removal of all difficulties. So white represents the calming, the pacifying, aspect of the enlightened mind, represents the enlightened mind as the allayer of all ill, remover of all sorrow. We can perhaps quote here the words of the poet:

*'Peace after war,
Port after stormy seas,
Ease after toil,
Are things to greatly please'.*

So white represents this peace, this peace that greatly pleases, par excellence, represents even, we may say, the peace that passes all understanding.

And then black. Black is the colour of night, the colour of midnight. Black is the colour of charred wood, the colour of the charred wood of the cremation ground. So black stands for death, stands for destruction. But in the context of the Tantra not just physical death, it stands for spiritual death as well, stands for the death, the destruction of the ego, of ignorance, the death of all that stands in the way of the enlightenment experience. This is black, a sort of deep shining, coal black.

So much then, very briefly, for the symbolism of colours, the associations of colours, at least for the principal colours in the Tantra, in the Tantric tradition. There are, of course, other colours which occur in the Tantra, in Tantric art, meditation and so on. For instance there is grey, there's brown, there's orange, there's light blue, there's even pink and pale green. But their associations, perhaps, are rather less definite than those of the principal colours, and, in any case, we don't really have time to explore them tonight.

Now, we've spoken of these colours, we've spoken of red, of yellow, of green, of blue, of white, of black, spoken of all these colours. But these colours do not exist, as it were, in the air, do not exist in the abstract, least of all in the Tantra. Colour is always found in association with an object. A colour is always the colour of something. And we must also remember, incidentally, that it's not just a question of the symbolism of the colours, but also of the significance of whatever it is that the colour is the colour of. We've already seen that different colours are assigned to different magic rites, or, as they became for the Tantra, with different activities and functions of the enlightened mind. We've seen that the rite of fascinating is red, the rite of destroying, black, the rite of prospering, yellow, the rite of pacifying, white. In much the same way, we saw in the second lecture in this series, that a different colour is assigned to each of the five elements. The element earth is yellow, the element water is white, fire, of course, is red, air, perhaps rather strangely for us, is pale green, and space or ether is golden, or sometimes the colour of the rainbow. Last week too, you may remember we saw that each of the four islands, or four continents of traditional Buddhist cosmology has a colour. We saw that the eastern continent is white in colour, the southern continent blue, the western continent red, the northern continent green, And in the same way we find that definite colours are assigned to all sorts of other things as well in the Tantric tradition.

You may remember that in the first lecture on the symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life we spoke of the six worlds or six spheres of conditioned existence, that is to say, the six worlds, or six spheres into which beings can be reborn as a result of their deeds, a result of their karma. And we also saw that these worlds represent mental states which can be experienced here and now in this life. Now, I didn't mention the fact then, but in general Buddhist tradition, and especially Tantric tradition, each of these worlds, each of these spheres is assigned or is associated with a definite colour, particularly with light of a certain colour. For instance, the world of the Gods is associated with a dull white light, the world of the Titans is associated with a dull red light, the world of the Hungry Ghosts is associated with a dull yellow light, the world of Tormented Beings with a smoke-coloured light, the Animal world with a dull green light, and the human world with a dull blue light. So all these colours associated with these worlds, these spheres, as well as with many other things. So, why is this? Why all these colours carefully assigned to so many different things. Why are the colours always mentioned? Even made prominent? We may say that it's as though the Tantra was trying to tell us something in this way, by this means, was trying to

remind us of something, something which only too often we forget. The Tantra is, as it were, trying to remind us that everything in the universe, as perceived by us, has colour, or is experienced by us as possessing colour. Not only possesses colour, as it were, but is, as it were, alive and glowing and radiant with colour. And because everything in the universe, everything that we see, has colour, everything affects us in a certain way, a way that we can only describe as emotional. Now this fact is only beginning to be understood in the West, but it has been known to the Tantra for centuries. Sometimes, of course, we may wonder whether colours are really all that important, whether they really make all that difference. But it isn't really very difficult to convince ourselves that they are important, that they do or would make a difference. Suppose we just, for instance, use our imagination. Suppose, let us say, that the sky instead of being blue was always green, say a bright emerald green. And suppose the trees instead of being green and also yellow in autumn, were always all through the year a bright red and the grass also a bright red. Now how would we feel, going out into the country, under this brilliant emerald green sky with all these red trees and red grass around us. We'd feel, I'm sure, quite different, feel emotionally quite different, because of the difference of these colours of nature all around us.

Now, the Tantra not only assigns different colours to different material things, to the five elements, the four continents, not only assigns them to the worlds and to the magic rites, it goes even further than this. It does something even more significant. The Tantra, the Tantric tradition assigns colours to the bodily forms of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In Buddhist art, traditional Buddhist art and especially in Tantric Buddhist art, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and so on are never envisaged naturalistically, they are not meant to tell you, as it were, what a Buddha or Bodhisattva actually looks like on the material, on the historical plane. It's a symbolic, not a naturalistic, not a representational art. And as part of this way of envisaging Buddhas and Bodhisattvas the Tantra sees them all as brightly coloured, brilliantly coloured. It sees a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, for instance, as being bright red in colour or deep blue in colour, or pale green in colour, always a definite colour. This might seem rather strange to us that you have a Buddha with an emerald green face and body, or a Buddha with a ruby red face and body, or a sapphire blue face and body, and so on. But this is how the Tantra sees all these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and so on, as brilliantly, as brightly coloured in this way. Every Buddha, every Bodhisattva has a colour, is a colour, is a sort of luminous transparent colour.

Now, in the course of these lectures we've already had occasion, quite often, to refer to this, or at least to notice this. I think, in fact, there's been a reference to something of this sort in almost every lecture. I've referred, for instance, more than once, to the Five Buddhas, the five, as it were, archetypal Buddhas; there's Vairocana, the illuminator, he's the white Buddha, Buddha of the centre, then there's Aksobhya, the imperturbable, he's the deep blue Buddha, the Buddha of the east, then there's Ratnasambhava, the jewel-born one, the yellow Buddha, Buddha of the south, and Amitabha, the infinite light, the red Buddha, the Buddha of the west, and lastly Amoghasiddhi, the unobstructed success, the green Buddha, the Buddha of the north. So they all have definite colours. When you pronounce the name of Vairocana, Buddha of the centre, you think of the white Buddha, when you pronounce the name of Amitabha, Buddha of infinite light, you think of the red Buddha. You see, as it were, a white Buddha figure, pure white, a red Buddha figure, pure bright red, and so on. And not only think of them in this way, but, as it were, see them, see these colours. And in the course of the lectures so far we've have described a white Vajrasattva, and it was said that his colour, according to tradition is white, just like the snow on which the sun is shining. And then we had the red Sarva-Buddha Dakini, red in colour, ruby red and so on.

Now why is this? Why does the Tantra assign colours in this way? Why does it see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in this way, sort of in technicolour, you may say, brilliantly coloured, brightly coloured in this way, just as though they were all made of jewels one might say. Why do we have in the Tantra this vast array of brilliantly coloured transcendental forms? Forms of Buddhas, forms of Bodhisattvas, forms of Yidams, forms of Dakinis, forms of Dharmapalas, all brilliantly coloured? And not only that, some of these Buddhas, some of these Bodhisattvas, have many different forms, not just one form. Take, for instance, Tara, one of the most popular Bodhisattva figures, she has twenty one different forms. And what about Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. He has, according to some traditions, one hundred and eight different forms. And these different forms don't all have the same colour. Different forms even of the same Buddha, the same Bodhisattva, often have different colours. And the difference

of colour is in each case significant. So why is this? Why is so much importance attached in the Tantra to the colour of these transcendental forms, why is it always mentioned, emphasised, even insisted upon? The red Buddha, the white Buddha, the red Dakini, the white Bodhisattva and so on. Why, we may ask, does the Tantra's symbolism of colours culminate in this sort of way?

Now, to understand this we have to go back to the fundamental emphasis of the Tantra. And that emphasis, as we've seen more than once is on direct experience. This is what the Tantra is all about, not about theories, not about speculations, not about philosophy, about direct experience, The experience of what? Well, in a word, the experience of oneself, one's own self as one really and truly is in the depth, the ultimate depth, of one's being. But how is this experience, this experience of oneself in one's integrity, one's metaphysical integrity, how is this to be achieved? Well, among other things, according to the Tantra, as according to other Buddhist traditions, with the help of meditation, with the help of a systematic approach to higher states of consciousness, suprarational states.

And as we know there are very many different methods, many different paths, of meditation. And the Tantra has certain methods of its own, in some cases developed from Mahayana methods. And one of the best known of the Tantric methods of meditation is what we call visualisation. Visualisation of a Buddha, visualisation of a Bodhisattva or a Dakini or Dharmapala and so on. So, what does this mean? Why this visualisation? What does it represent? One can only say that, as it were, to begin with, there is the enlightened mind. There is the mind, as it were, of the Buddha. There is Buddhahood, ineffable and absolute. And this ineffable and absolute Buddhahood, this enlightened mind, this one mind, this Ultimate Reality possesses, as it were, so many different aspects. This is the only way in which we can think of it, conceive of it, as, as it were, possessing different aspects, different facets. There is an aspect of love, absolute love, an aspect of compassion, infinite compassion, an aspect again of beauty, an aspect of absolute peace, an aspect of pure wisdom, an aspect of absolute spiritual power and sovereignty. And each of these aspects of that one mind, that enlightened mind, that Buddha mind, that Reality, each of these aspects, according to the Tantra, can be, in fact, even, in a sense, is personified, or is even a person, a particular form, Buddha-form, Bodhisattva-form. Love, for instance, is personified as Kurukule, Compassion personified as Avalokitesvara, Wisdom personified as Manjushri. Primeval purity, purity from the beginning, from the beginningless beginning, above and beyond time, this primeval purity is personified as, or is, Vajrasattva. So, one has, as it were, this abundance, this supra abundance of spiritual forms, divine forms, if you like, transcendental forms, appearing, as it were, on the horizon of Tantric Buddhism. And what happens? One selects one or another of these forms, one or another of these Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and so on, possessing a particular colour and so on. One selects, or one's guru selects, selects a form, selects a Buddha, selects a Bodhisattva, according to the spiritual needs of the individual, the disciple. Selects a form that corresponds to something he especially needs to develop, or something towards which he is especially inclined, maybe love, maybe wisdom, power and so on. And then the selection having been made the disciple learns to practise, learns to meditate, starts by concentrating, and then visualises in, as it were, the meditation, sees in the meditation the form that has been selected, practises until he can see it with his mind's eye, as it were, or in his mind's eye, see it clearly, see the colour, shape, insignia, dress and so on. But perhaps more than any other part, more than any other aspect, he sees the colour.

Sometimes when one starts visualising one just sees an undifferentiated patch of colour, just sees the colour, and then the colour gradually assumes a certain definite form, the form of the Buddha or the form of the Bodhisattva. But to see the colour, to feel the colour even is very very important in this type of practice. Because the colour it is that gives one the feel, the inner feeling, if you like, of that particular aspect, that particular Buddha, that particular Bodhisattva. And this feel of it, of him, or of her, which the colour gives, is something that cannot be put into words, something that is very subtle, very indefinable, But in course of time, if one say is visualising, if one is concentrating on, meditating on, say, a red Buddha, or a green Bodhisattva, or a white Dakini and so on, in course of time, as a result of that practice, as a result of the visualization of that particular figure with that particular colour - above all with that particular colour - a rather strange, a rather peculiar effect, is experienced, as a result of that practice. I remember quite a few years ago someone asked me, I think this was in Kalimpong, what it is that one experiences as the result of doing the meditation, that is to say, visualisation practice, of the Green Tara. What does one experience? This was the question. So, on that occasion I replied that what

one experiences is the spiritual equivalent of greenness. This is what one experiences. But one can also turn this round, and one can say that greenness, that the colour green represents the colour equivalent, the equivalent in terms of colour of the spiritual experience otherwise known, in its, as it were, personified form as Tara. And that spiritual experience is, of course, an experience of tenderness, compassion and so on, the very quintessence in fact, of tenderness and compassion.

Now, when in the course of this kind of meditation one experiences the greenness, experiences the greenness as a colour and as more than a colour, as a symbol, then one may say, to that extent one experiences Tara. One may say that the colour becomes a sort of vehicle for the experience of a spiritual quality, a spiritual state which the colour symbolises. But this sort of thing, one must say, can be really understood only from one's own practice and experience.

So, generalising, we may say, that the visualised figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas represent, or are, the form and colour symbols of particular aspects of the enlightened mind. And through the form and colour symbol one experiences, or one can experience, the spiritual principle which the symbol embodies. One even comes into contact with that principle, one even assimilates it, realises it. But the form and colour symbol is not the only kind of symbol. There is another kind of symbol in this context, in this connection known as important. And what is that?

It is sound, especially mantric sound. And this brings us to the second part of our subject. We are concerned not only with the symbolism of colours, but with the symbolism of colours and mantric sound.

But what is mantric sound? What is a mantra? One knows that there are many misunderstandings on this point. Mantra used to be rendered as 'magic words'. Just as 'mandala' used to be rendered as 'magic circle'. Sometimes even now, 'mantra' is translated as 'spell', which doesn't help very much. The traditional explanation defines 'mantra' as 'that which protects the mind', man-tra, that which protects the mind. Well, this is undoubtedly true, of course, the mantra if you recite it protects the mind. But so does every other spiritual practice, so this doesn't help us very much. Essentially, we may say, the mantra is just a sound symbol, just as the figure of a Buddha or Bodhisattva is a form and colour symbol, a symbol that is to say of a particular aspect of enlightenment, of a particular aspect of the enlightened mind, a symbol of a particular spiritual experience. Now this sound, this mantric sound is not only external as pronounced by the voice, but internal. In fact, we may say, mantric sound is more internal than external. Mantric sound is not a matter of physical vibrations. Sometimes, of course the efficacy of mantras is explained in this way, that if you recite such and such a mantra you produce physical vibrations of, say, 250,000 a second, and another mantra 300,000 a second, and so on, so the one that produces 300,000 physical vibrations is more powerful, more spiritually efficacious than the one that produces only 250,000 etc. But this is much too crude and materialistic. And this sort of view of the efficacy of mantras has rightly been ridiculed by Lama Govinda who says that if mantras were a matter of physical vibrations, well all you should do is to get a Gramophone recording of mantras, and just play it over and over again and get all those wonderful spiritual benefits and effects.

But mantra, mantric sound is not a matter of just physical vibrations, it's not a question of the actual physical sound of the mantra when you pronounce it. The mantra is essentially an inner sound, an inner vibration. One could even say that the mantra is really an inner feeling. Not that the sound, the external physical sound, of the mantra in the ordinary sense has no place at all. It's not that mantras should not be recited aloud. But the gross recitation, as it were, is only a means to the experience of the subtle. The relation between the two, the gross external, as it were, verbal repetition of the mantra and the inner subtle repetition, the feeling of it going on, is not unlike that between a picture of the Buddha or Bodhisattva, a painted picture, and the same figure as actually visualised in the meditation experience. In each case the gross leads to the experience of the subtle, or acts as a sort of catalyst.

Now, mantras, practise with mantras, recitation of mantras occupies an extremely important place in the Tantra. In fact, the Tantra was originally known as the Mantrayana, the way or the vehicle of the mantras. And it was so called to distinguish it from the Mahayana, which was known as the Paramita Yana, the way or the vehicle of the practise of the perfections, the transcendental virtues, the perfections of the

Mahayana, the transcendental virtues practised by the Bodhisattva, that is to say the famous six - giving, morality, patience, energy, vigour, meditation and wisdom. The term Vajrayana as replacing Mantrayana came into use only much later. Vajrayana representing the more advanced and radical development of the Tantric tradition. Now progress is said to be more rapid in the Mantrayana than in the Paramitayana. Of course people always are interested in rapid progress, and in a sense quite rightly so. Now why is this? Why is progress said to be more rapid in the Mantrayana than in the Paramitayana? The Perfections, we may say, represent a complete scheme of ethical and spiritual development. But they are aimed more at the conscious mind, at least in the early stages of their practice. But the Mantrayana, on the other hand, is directed much more to the unconscious depths. And the Mantrayana aims at contacting the spiritual forces which are latent in those depths, those forces which are ultimately different aspects of the enlightened mind, aspects that are personified, or better still crystallised, in the form of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and so on. And these forces, these forces latent in the depths, the unconscious depths of the mind, can be contacted, according to the Tantra, through the joint practise of visualisation and invocation, visualisation of form and colour, invocation with mantric sound.

But why just these two? Why just visualisation and mantric sound? Why are colours and mantric sound so important? We'll come to this in a minute and after that describe in detail an actual visualisation and invocation of a particular divine form and then conclude.

But before that just a few more words about mantras in general. It's possible on this topic to be very technical, to go into all sorts of details, to classify mantras in various ways and so on, but I don't propose to do this. I'm going to give a short simple description of what a mantra actually is. And this description might even add up to a definition. First of all, a mantra is a string of syllables. These syllables sometimes, though not always, form a word or words, or include a word or words. And these words, when they do occur belong to the Sanskrit language. And it's customary not to translate mantras, to leave them entirely in, to the extent that they are in Sanskrit, in that language. Now, it's sometimes said that mantras are never translated, but this isn't quite correct. Occasionally under certain circumstances they are. Now, whether forming words or not forming words, the syllables of the mantra are confined to the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, and there are sixty four letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. So in the first place the mantra is a string of syllables, a string of letters from the Sanskrit alphabet, including sometimes, but not always, words of the Sanskrit language. Secondly, mantras are not really susceptible to logical analysis, to conceptual analysis. In a sense, mantras are meaningless. That's what they are all about in a way. For instance, take the Tara mantra. The Tara mantra is rather strange, rather odd, rather peculiar. It represents just a series of modifications, not to say modulations, of the vocative form of the name Tara itself, that is to say 'Tare' And there is no analyzable meaning, you are just sort of juggling with the sound of the name. Some mantras, however, do contain words which have some meaning, for instance there's that famous mantra: 'Om mani padme hum'. So, 'mani' means 'jewel', 'padme' means 'in the lotus', So 'mani padme' means 'the jewel in the lotus', so you can translate that, or at least that part of the mantra, you can't translate the initial 'Om' or the concluding 'Hum'. But to say that the mantra means that the jewel is in the lotus, even though this is a perfectly good philosophical meaning, with all sorts of ramifications in Buddhist thought and practise, this doesn't give you the real, much less so the total, meaning of the mantra, that mostly gives you just a facet of it, not even the most important.

Some mantras again do include the name, the personal name of the Buddha or Bodhisattva to which, as it were they belong, as well as variations on that name. So really, mantras cannot be logically analysed, they don't have a meaning in the ordinary conceptual sense. At best they suggest something, even when they do contain words which have a sort of assignable meaning.

Thirdly, and most important, the mantra is a sound symbol. It's a symbol of a particular divinity, Buddha or Bodhisattva etc. That is to say, it is the equivalent of that divinity in terms of sound. If that divinity could become a sound, which according to the Tantra, he can and does, then that sound is the mantra. And, of course, there is external sound and internal sound. Just as the visualised image is equivalent in terms of form and colour, so the mantra is equivalent in terms of sound. So, one can say that the mantra is therefore, in a sense, really the name of the divinity. The mantra may not include the name of the divinity in the ordinary sense, but that doesn't matter. When we call a person by name he comes, and

when we invoke the particular divinity, Buddha and Bodhisattva and so on with a mantra, the divinity appears, or manifests, or becomes in a sense present. So in this sense the mantra is the name of that particular divinity, that particular Buddha or Bodhisattva, his or her sound symbol, his or her equivalent in the world, as it were, of sound, of mantric sound, especially internal sound.

Fourthly, the mantra is given by the Guru, it's given at the time of initiation. If it's not given in this way, it's not a mantra. In fact, one may say that initiation consists, either wholly or in part, in the giving of a mantra, or the mantra. Usually one repeats the mantra three times after the guru, and in this way energy is transmitted, power is transmitted, as we saw in an earlier lecture. Mantras are, of course, sometimes printed in books. This nowadays very often happens and you can read the books, read the mantras, you can start reciting. You may even get some benefit, but what one is reciting is not a mantra. Mantra includes as part of its meaning that you get it, that you are empowered to use it, by the Guru. If you get it in any other way, it may be a good religious practice, but it isn't Tantric recitation of the mantra. Incidentally, you don't necessarily get it even from a human living Guru, you can get it in dreams or even in the course of meditation from a sort of Guru figure or even from a Buddha, Bodhisattva and so on. But the usual method, of course, is to receive it from a living human teacher, a Guru.

And fifthly and lastly, the mantra is something that is repeated. You receive the mantra from the Guru, but you must repeat it, repeat it with the energy that the guru has transmitted to you. If you don't do this then the energy is eventually lost. Sometimes it's said that if you neglect to repeat the mantra for three years, I mean seriously repeat it, then the energy that you were given originally is entirely lost, and re-initiation is required. But if one repeats regularly then the energy increases and eventually repetition becomes spontaneous, it just goes on and on without conscious effort.

Well, so much for the mantra. Now, let's return to the question that we asked, then describe an actual visualisation and invocation and conclude.

Why are colours and mantric sound so important? Why do they figure so prominently in Tantric spiritual practice, especially Tantric meditation, and why just these two? Just colour and mantric sound? What is the connection between them? Now it isn't really very difficult to understand this. We know that we have five senses - sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch - and through these five senses we experience the external world, the material universe. Through the sense of sight we see visual forms, through the sense of hearing we hear sounds, through the sense of smell, odours, through the sense of taste, flavours, and through the sense of touch, tangibles. And as we saw last week all these senses, these five physical senses are to be dedicated to enlightenment. Now the first two senses, sight and hearing, are more highly developed, at least in human beings than the other three. Indeed they are much more highly developed, they are much more subtle and are much more refined. We can even say much more spiritual. It's not difficult to understand this. We know that sight and sound provide, as it were, the raw material for a greater part of the fine arts, The visual arts are all based on the sense of sight, music is based on the sense of hearing and sound, even poetry is based to some extent, at least, on the same sense, on the sense of hearing, on sound. But it's interesting that there are no fine arts for the other senses. There are no arts that are based on smell or taste or touch, not fine arts anyway, that take their raw material from them. So we find that sight and hearing are more closely connected with higher states of consciousness and with spiritual life than the other senses.

For this reason we find that form and colour and sound, mantric sound, are able to act as symbols, symbols of higher spiritual experiences, symbols of different aspects of the enlightened mind, symbols of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Now, these senses are not only gross but also subtle, and we may say that the subtle counterparts of sight and hearing are more highly developed than the subtle counterparts of smell and taste and touch. And it's with subtle sight, subtle hearing, that we see in meditation the forms of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and hear the mantras. We do sometimes experience the subtle counterparts of other senses too, they are sometimes operative, but only very feebly and very intermittently. You may, for instance, smell a perfume that isn't physically there, or feel, say a breeze that is not physically blowing, but these are quite exceptional.

Now, I've said that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and so on embody various aspects of the enlightened mind,

embody various spiritual principles, spiritual experiences. Now, when we visualise form and colour and recite the appropriate mantra, we are then approaching the aspect of the enlightened mind, or the spiritual principle, the spiritual experience, as it were, from two different angles, through the medium of two different spiritual senses, in other words, we are, as it were, converging from two different directions. And because we are doing this, because we are converging through these two mediums, these two subtle senses, from these two directions, we are much more likely to experience the principle or the aspect in which we are interested. It's rather like, we may say, holding something between two fingers instead of just touching it with one finger. And this is why in the Tantra both visualisation and the recitation of the mantra are important and why both are found together. One is approaching, as it were, the same principle, the same experience, from these two different angles, trying to contact from these two different directions, trying to contact from this direction, as it were, through the medium of form and colour which one visualises, and from that angle, that direction, as it were, through sound which one hears, and both converge and eventually build up the inner spiritual experience. And this is why both are found together, why we have among the Creative Symbols of the Tantric Path to Enlightenment a symbolism of colours and a symbolism of mantric sound.

Now I've said quite a lot about colours, quite a lot about mantras, though not very much in view of what could be said. But all this is rather general, not to say theoretical. So I want to close now with a concrete example, a concrete example of how the Tantra utilises the symbolism of colours and mantric sound. I'm going to give a sort of résumé of the Manjughosa Sadhana, the spiritual practice connected with Manjughosa, the sweet voiced one, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

It begins, as all such exercises begin, when one sees before one with one's inner spiritual vision, a vast blue sky, nothing but blue. Blue sky in all directions. And one sees this, concentrates on this, in a way is absorbed into this, becomes one with this. And then in the midst of this sky, eventually, one sees massing rainbow tinted clouds, sees them drifting together forming a sort of throne if you like. And then in the midst of these clouds, framed even by these clouds, one sees a pale blue lotus throne with beautiful unfolding petals. And on this pale blue lotus throne there is spread what is known as a moon mat. It looks like a sort of oval, a sort of ellipse, because one is seeing it, as it were, from the side. But it's white and very very brilliant, just like the moon. And on this moon mat there is seated cross-legged the figure of Manjughosa, the sweet voiced one, the Bodhisattva of wisdom. And he appears in the form of a beautiful sixteen year old youth, sixteen being the ideal age as far as beauty is concerned, according to the Indian tradition. And this figure of Manjughosa appears as a deep rich yellow colour. And one sees the colour not as something, as it were, opaque, not like a sort of paint on a wall, one sees it as luminous, even transparent, even diaphanous, sees it like something reflected in a mirror, sees it like a section of rainbow, very delicate, very tender, not gross, not obvious, as it were.

So this is how one sees the Bodhisattva Manjughosa in that yellow colour, very delicate, diaphanous, rainbow like, reflection like. And the figure is clad in the silks and jewels of a Bodhisattva, and spreading on his shoulders there are long black tresses and on his head he wears a garland of five pale blue lotus blossoms. And the face, we see, has a smiling and compassionate expression. And this figure of Manjughosa, the sweet voiced one, sitting there on that moon mat, sitting there on that pale blue lotus throne, beautiful yellow in colour, luminous, as it were, transparent, we see him as the embodiment of Transcendental Wisdom, see him as Vagisvara, the lord of speech, see him as the patron of the arts and sciences. And we see that his right arm is uplifted, and in his right hand flourishing it above his head, he holds the flaming sword of Knowledge with which he cuts off the bonds of karma, ignorance and so on. And in his left hand pressing it to his heart he holds a book of the Perfection of Wisdom, Transcendental Wisdom. And the whole figure is surrounded by a brilliant aura, or halo of blue and green and golden light. And then we see that at the heart of the Bodhisattva Manjughosa, the Embodiment of Wisdom, we see a letter, a seed syllable '*Dhih*' which represents or embodies the essence of Wisdom and it's sort of fiery orange golden in colour. And from this fiery orange '*Dhih*' in the heart of the Bodhisattva Manjughosa, from this there comes a ray of amber coloured light, and this ray of amber coloured light from that syllable '*Dhih*' falls onto the top of our own head. And from there it passes down into our heart. And then along that ray from the heart of Manjughosa into our heart there descends the mantra, or rather the letters of the mantra, in this case the mantra being '*OM A RA PA CHA NA DHIH*' '*OM A RA PA CHA*

NA DHIH', and this mantra embodies Wisdom, Transcendental Wisdom, the Wisdom of Manjughosa, the Wisdom which is Manjughosa.

I have no time to say anything about the mantra or even about the Wisdom which it represents, but having received the mantra into one's heart, one goes on reciting it. This is the proper method, the proper procedure. And as one recites it, as the mantra goes on being repeated in the heart in this way, having come down that ray of amber coloured light from the heart of Manjughosa whom one is still visualising, one feels more and more that one is, as it were, absorbing wisdom, that wisdom is flowing, as it were, from Manjughosa into you, into your own heart, into your own being, that ignorance is being dispelled, being dispersed, that you are being transformed, that you are developing Knowledge, developing Wisdom, becoming transformed, transmuted into the image of Manjughosa. And as one does this, as one visualises the form, as one repeats the mantra, then one feels more and more a sort of presence, a sort of spiritual presence, a sort even of Transcendental presence, the presence of Manjughosa. And again one becomes, as it were, more and more like that presence, one assimilates that presence, or that presence assimilates oneself. But in any case, in either case, the gap, as it were, between the two is diminished. It's as though Manjughosa, the embodiment of Wisdom and you are coming closer and closer together, are even perhaps merging, or at least touching, as though you are in direct contact, in process of becoming Wisdom itself. And when that happens, or when that begins to happen, then one is realising the wisdom aspect of the enlightened mind, and through that aspect, through that Wisdom aspect one is entering into the enlightened mind itself, and one is beginning to understand, to some extent at least the symbolism in the Tantra of colours and mantric sound.