

## The Venerable Sangharakshita

### Lecture 112: The Way to Enlightenment

Friends,

Today, as in other years, we are gathered together to celebrate what Buddhists all over the world - mostly in the East of course, but even here in the West - regard as being the greatest event in the whole course of human history; and it isn't, of course, a material event; it's not the sort of thing that people perhaps usually celebrate on a national scale, it's not a battle or a conquest, or even a scientific discovery. What we're celebrating, what is being celebrated in so many other parts of the world at this moment, is a purely spiritual - one might even say transcendental - event. The event of the attainment of what has come to be called, in the Buddhist tradition, Perfect Enlightenment, samyak sambodhi, by Siddhartha Gautama. And this even occurred in North Eastern India, some twenty five centuries ago. Scholars aren't altogether agreed as to the exact year in which the Buddha was born, in which he gained Enlightenment, in which he passed away, but the general consensus of scholarly opinion nowadays is that the Buddha gained Enlightenment at the age of thirty five in five hundred and twenty eight BC (528 BC), and according to a very early Buddhist tradition, he gained Enlightenment, he awoke to the Supreme Truth, he became a Buddha, on the full moon day, or rather night, of the Indian month Vaisaka, which corresponds to our April to May, which is why we very often refer to this particular celebration as Vaisaka Purnima, the festival of the full moon day of the month Vaisaka. And Vaisaka in Pali is Vissaka and in Sinhalese it's Wesak, and in this way we arrive at the festival of Wesak, the full moon day of the month of April to May, commemorating the Buddha's Enlightenment. In other words, this is the occasion when we commemorate the day when, for the first time in history, in recorded history at least, an unenlightened being, an unenlightened man, became an Enlightened being, and Enlightened man. The day when he finally freed himself from all human conditionings, all human limitations, became, as it were, one with Reality, one with Truth, and became even we may say, a living embodiment of the Truth. So that after this great attainment of his, the Truth was manifested through him, in every word that he spoke, in every action, and even - perhaps above all - in his silences, as silently he communicated with his friends and his followers.

So today, not only today but also yesterday and tomorrow, all over the East, all over the Buddhist world, people are coming together in various ways, in small groups, in large groups, in very large groups, even as we have come together here this evening. And in all these different places, all these different countries, they are remembering the Buddha's great achievement and paying homage to his memory, and this they are doing in different ways according to their respective national, cultural, traditions. In some countries, as in Ceylon and Burma, you'll find people lighting candles and offering them to the Buddha. In Tibet you'll find them lighting butter lamps, especially one hundred and eight butter lamps, or one **thousand** and eight butter lamps, and offering them to the Buddha, offering them before the image of the Buddha. And in other parts of the Buddhist world, in other Buddhist countries you'll find people chanting, sometimes for hours on end, sometimes even all day and all night, chanting verses expressive of the praises of the Buddha, commemorating his great spiritual achievement. And of course in other places, on a more as it were social level, you'll find lots of people feeding the monks. In some Buddhist countries on all occasions of this kind this is a very popular - I was almost going to say pastime, feeding the monks. They gather together as many monks as possible, and monks by tradition are supposed to have very healthy appetites, and they line them up in rows, sitting on the floor, and they feed them; and the tradition is, at least in some Buddhist quarters, that the more the monk eats, the greater the merit that you gain [*Laughter*] so the more he eats, well, the more pleased you are, so hospitality obviously in these circumstances is not stinted, it's certainly not refused.

But elsewhere, in other places, more serious minded people perhaps will be listening to lectures, just as you are listening, perhaps listening to discussions, expositions, bearing on the Buddha's life and his teachings; and some people even, here and there, on this particular day will be meditating.

But in the midst of all these celebrations, in the midst of all the lighting of candles and offering of flowers and feeding of monks and listening to lectures, and even meditating, in the midst of all these activities of this particular day, there's a question which inevitably arises, arises at least in the minds of some people, and that is this - that we speak of the Buddha, we speak of the Buddha as having attained, on this Vaisaka Full Moon day, Enlightenment, Perfect Enlightenment, Supreme Enlightenment; we speak of him as having awoken to the Truth, of as it were having rent the veil of illusion, seeing Truth face to face in all its fullness, in all its perfection. But the question that still arises is this: how did Siddhartha Gautama attain Perfect Enlightenment, how did he become the Buddha? Surely this is a question that must arise in every thinking mind as we celebrate Enlightenment Day, Vaisaka Purina day today - how did the Buddha become Buddha? And this is the question with which we shall be concerned this evening, the question of how Siddhartha, Gautama, became the Buddha, the question of the Way to Enlightenment, the way

leading to that great experience, that great event in his life on account of which we remember him and commemorate him today. And this question, the question of how Enlightenment was gained, the question of the way to Enlightenment, what one must do, what path one must follow to **be** Enlightened, as the Buddha was Enlightened, this is not just a theoretical question. Of course people can approach it theoretically if they wish, as they can approach any question, even spiritual questions, theoretically if they wish, but essentially, basically, it is not a theoretical question at all. This is a question which is of, we may say, the greatest practical importance; because, as has already been suggested, the Buddha was not born Enlightened. He attained Enlightenment, Perfect Enlightenment, only after many years. Many years of struggle, many years of effort, even after making mistakes.

So the Buddha was, we may say the forerunner. He found the way. He was the pioneer, or we may say he blazed the trail, because not only did he gain Enlightenment himself, but he showed to others, he showed even to all men how they can follow the way, how they too can gain Enlightenment if only they make the effort. So when we speak of the way to Enlightenment we're not just speaking of the path which was followed two thousand five hundred years ago by the Buddha, but we're speaking of a path which we too can follow, here and now; follow that is if **we** do want to evolve, if **we** do want to develop, if we do want to make actual our full human potential, which is we may say, a more than human potential - a spiritual, even a transcendental potential.

So this is the way, this is the path, with which we're concerned. Not just the Buddha's path, not just the path that the Buddha followed, but the path that we too must follow if we wish to evolve, to develop even as he evolved and developed into a Buddha. So this is why we are concerned with this great question, with this great subject this evening. In other words, what we're really doing, and what we should be doing, is not just celebrating the Buddha's Enlightenment, as it were celebrating it as a thing of the past - we're reminding ourselves, as it were, on this occasion, that it's time that we started thinking about our own Enlightenment, if in fact we've not already started thinking.

Now there are two ways of approaching this subject. There are two ways of approaching the way to Enlightenment. We can approach it in the first place in terms of stages of progress. We can think of the way to Enlightenment as being like a sort of, if you like, road. Along the road you find so many milestones, marking the distance along which you've traveled. So in much the same way we can think of, we can speak of, the way to Enlightenment as consisting of so many different stages, and there are many accounts of this sort in Buddhist literature, Buddhist tradition. We speak, for instance, of the three great stages of the path to Enlightenment, that is to say the stage of Ethics, the stage of Concentration and Meditation, the stage of Wisdom - of knowledge an insight. And then again we speak in terms of the seven stages of purification. And in this way there are so many ways of sub-dividing, so many ways of classifying, so many ways of looking at, the successive stages of the path.

And secondly, we can approach the way to Enlightenment in terms of the actual events of the Buddha's life. In other words in terms of the events which culminated, when he was thirty five, in his attaining Enlightenment. So it's the second approach that is going to be adopted this evening. The second approach - that is to say approaching the way to Enlightenment through the actual concrete events of the Buddha's life - is much less usual, much less common, than approaching the way to Enlightenment through a sort of survey of the stages of the path. But it is, I feel, more appropriate to the present occasion.

So, first of all I shall be giving a resume of the traditional account of the Buddha's life - not the whole life, not the whole life of eighty years - but the events of the first thirty five years, that is to say from the Buddha's birth up to the attainment of Enlightenment, and this will give us a general idea of the way to Enlightenment; and then I'm going to take up for more detailed examination certain crucial events in his life, or groups of events in his life. That is to say events which have a very definite bearing on our own process of development and attainment of Enlightenment.

Now like the whole traditional account of the Buddha's life itself, the events, the special events with which we shall be dealing, are in substance historical - we know that they actually did happen - but at the same time they do contain, in the version which have come down to us, certain what we may describe as legendary elements, and these legendary elements as I've explained on other occasions, help to bring out the universal significance, the sort of inner spiritual dimension, of the events themselves, and they make it clear, among other things, that these events are not concerned just with the career of a particular person, however gifted, but they deal with, they describe we may say, the career, the potential career at least, of every man and every woman who wants to be an individual.

All right then, first of all the resume of the traditional account of the life of the Buddha. Very often books on the subject, books on comparative religion, will tell you that the Buddha was born in India, but this is not strictly correct. The Buddha was born in fact in Southern Nepal, the southernmost portion of what is

now the state or kingdom of Nepal; and the father of the Buddha we know was Suddhodana, and Suddhodana belonged to a tribe of people known as the Sakyans who had lived in that particular area, that is in the foothills of the Himalayas, for many centuries. The Buddha's father Suddhodana was apparently a leading man in the tribe or in the clan, and at the time of the Buddha's birth he seems to have been occupying the position of elected head of the tribe. Apparently the Sakyans had a sort of semi-Republican form of government and they elected a sort of raja, a king or president, who governed, who administered at least, for a period of some twelve years, after which they elected somebody else. So it seems that at the time of the Buddha's birth his father, Suddhodana, held this office, this twelve year office of raja of the Sakyans. So we can see from this that the Buddha was born into a quite prominent family of the Sakyans. The Buddha's mother was known as Maha Maya and she was the daughter of the chief of a neighbouring tribe which was known as the tribe of the Koliyas. And the Buddha happened to be born not in Kapilavastu where his father lived but in a grove, in a grove of sal trees in fact, at a little place called Lumbini, and this happened in the following way. It was then the custom, and it is still the custom in many parts of India, that the first child has to be born in the house of the mother's parents, so that when the mother-to-be feels her time approaching she goes to her own parents' house for the delivery of the child. So apparently this is what happened or was going to happen in the case of the future Buddha. His mother, Maha Maya, set out for her own father's capital city. She left Kapilavastu, which was her husband's city, and she was traveling, as far as we know she was being taken in a palanquin on the shoulders of four stout men, but halfway there, before she'd even reached her father's house, she was seized with the pangs of labour, she dismounted and in an grove of sal trees, at this little place called Lumbini in Southern Nepal, she gave birth to the future Buddha. And tradition tells us that she died seven days later back in Kapilavastu, and the Buddha was reared, was raised by his maternal aunt, that is to say by his mother's sister, whose name was Mahapajapati Gotami, whom apparently Suddhodana had also married.

Now we don't know very much about the childhood of the Buddha, that is to say his very early life. After all this all occurred some two thousand five hundred years ago. That's a very long time ago, and there's only one really authentic incident, as far as we can make out, which has come down to us from the period of the Buddha's early childhood, but it is very interesting and very significant in view of his later development, in view of his later spiritual attainment. Apparently one of the duties of the elected head of the Sakyan tribe or clan was to conduct the annual ceremonial ploughing festival. Now all over the world in the early days of civilisation when agriculture was so important the sowing of the seed, the sowing of the crop, in the spring, was of very great importance, not only of material importance, but as it were magical and mythic importance to the whole tribe, to the whole community. So the first ploughing was always undertaken by the king, the chief. This was one of the great duties of the old emperors of China, to inaugurate the annual ploughing, and it was still done by the emperors of Japan for instance, until very recently. So this was one of the duties of the future Buddha's father, to inaugurate the annual ploughing, and later legends tell us it was done with a golden plough drawn by beautiful white oxen and so on, etc., etc. - the storytellers always embroider if they get an opportunity. But this duty the Buddha's father did have. So the Buddha, on one of these occasions, one year, when he was very very young, was taken along just to be present, just to witness. So we are told that the Buddha, who probably was only about five or six or maybe even seven at the time, was just put to one side on a little bank in the shade of a jumbu tree to watch while his father performed the ceremonial ploughing. But what happened? We are told - the Buddha himself reminisces about this incident in a later discourse which his disciples remembered - what happened was that the Buddha, the future Buddha, sitting there in shade of the jumbu tree, had what we can only describe nowadays as a sort of mystical experience. He experienced what Buddhist tradition calls 'jhana' or 'dhyana', a higher state of consciousness, a sort of super-conscious state, while his father was ploughing; and he didn't even see the ploughing, he was quite oblivious to what was going on, and when the ceremony was over his father came to where the child was, and his mother, or rather foster mother came, and other people, they found him deeply absorbed, as it were, in this mystical state. And there's a rather interesting, perhaps symbolical, legend in connection with this incident. It's said that when he was put there, in the shade of the jumbu tree, it was noon, when the ploughing started, and when they finished the ceremonial first ploughing it was evening, but the later legend makers say that the shadow of the jumbu tree had not moved. In other words a sort of miracle if you like. But we can perhaps see the significance. We can't take it literally but what does it mean? This is just another example of the sort of inner spiritual dimension revealed by, or manifested by, or suggested by, the mythical, the legendary material. The shadow does not move. It's as though the sun stood still. What does that mean? Time stood still. For the Buddha, even for the infant Buddha, time stood still. He wasn't aware of the passage of time, so deeply was he immersed in that inner spiritual experience, that mystical experience.

So this is the one thing that we do know about the Buddha's very early life, about his childhood - that he had this mystical experience while his father was conducting the ploughing festival. And we shall see a little later on, the early mystical experience was of very great significance for him later on in his career.

But anyway, mystical experience or no mystical experience, he was brought up as a young Kshatriya. The Sakyans were all Kshatriyas, that is to say they were warriors. Indian in those days was divided into four great castes - the Kshatriyas or the warriors, the Brahmins or the priests, the Vaishyas, the traders and agriculturalists, and the Shudras who were just the labourers. Those four castes you still find in India today - they are now though sub-divided into some two thousand sub-castes. So the Buddha was born into this Kshatriya community, this community of warriors, of fighters, and he received the education appropriate to a young Kshatriya. We don't very often realize this. We very often, perhaps unconsciously tend to think of the Buddha as a young man, studying perhaps religion, studying philosophy etc, but there's no evidence of this sort at all. All that we really know about the Buddha was that he was educated as a young Kshatriya, he learned to fight, he learned to draw the bow, he learned to use a sword, he learned to use a spear, he learned to drive a chariot, and so on. This is what the Buddha's early education consisted of.

So this was how he grew up, as a young Kshatriya. But in a way it wasn't quite as simple and quite so straightforward as that. Shortly after the Buddha's birth his father, apparently, had had his horoscope cast. Now you know in India everybody, even now, has his son's or his daughter's, especially his son's, horoscope cast almost immediately after birth. There's hardly anybody even now, even among the Westernized so-called elite who don't have this done. A horoscope is cast. What's going to happen to the child? What's going to happen to the boy? What sort of life is he going to have? They want to know that. So even two thousand five hundred years ago the Indians, the Hindus, were very much into astrology, so the Buddha's horoscope was cast. We don't know exactly how it was done but we are told that the Buddha as a baby was placed in the arms of the sage, the Rishi, of (unclear), and he made his calculations, produced the horoscope, and he predicted; and he said that 'this child will have a remarkable future. I don't know exactly what he's going to be, but he's going to be something really outstanding. He's either going to be a great leader of men, a great fighter, a great warrior, great Kshatriya, and rule a wise domain, or else he's going to give it all up, and he's going to become a spiritual master, a spiritual teacher.'

So when Suddhodana, when the Buddha's father, heard this, he was deeply shocked and deeply upset. He like the idea of his son becoming a great ruler and conqueror but he didn't like the idea of him becoming a spiritual master or spiritual teacher at all. So he reflected, and that the older the Buddha grew the more he reflected and he thought, 'I don't want this boy developing any spiritual interests, I want him to grow up like me. I want him to be brave and courageous and fight and conquer, extend the territory of the tribe, become a great ruler, maybe conquer and rule the whole of India. I don't want him wasting his time over all this religious nonsense.' So he said he must be kept away from all that. He must be prevented from thinking. He mustn't see the facts of life, at least not see them too early. He must be preoccupied with worldly things, so his heart will be set on worldly things. So he issued orders, he issued instructions that the prince was not to be told anything about spiritual matters, he wasn't to be told anything about what the world was really like, he was just to be pampered with amusements and pleasure and luxury. And we are told - in fact the Buddha himself relates in one of his autobiographical discourses - how his father tried to tie him down to the world by providing three beautiful mansions - later traditions called them palaces - three beautiful mansions, one of the rainy season and one for the hot season and one for the cold season; and the mansions were well stocked with beautiful singing girls and dancing girls, and there was music and there was song, and there was drinking and dancing and pleasure, morning, noon and night. And in this way the future Buddha was passing his time, and he was even married. A girl was selected for him, called Yashodhara, and he lived with her happily and in this way for many years his life went on. But it seems that though he was, in a sense, accepting this sort of life, participating in this life, he wasn't really very happy, not really very satisfied, because we're told that when the news was brought to him that his wife had given birth to a son, what did he say? When he was asked what the boy should be called, he said, 'call him Rahula', which means a fetter. He said 'a fetter has been born to me.' Maybe he knew what they were trying to do, he sensed what they were trying to do - they were trying to bind him down, bind him down with pleasure, bind him down with property, bind him down with power, bind him down with pleasure, bind him down with family, bind him down with wife and child. He probably knew, he sensed, what was happening.

So he couldn't be, as it were, shut up in this way and the story goes on, the traditional account continues to say that he got as it were rather tired, rather discontented with just staying in these palaces enjoying these pleasures of the happy domestic household life; got tired of his sort of martial exercise, got tired of just shooting with the bow and arrow and practising with his sword - he got tired of all that - and one day he said to his charioteer, 'Let's go out. Let's go and look at the world. Let's see what's happening, see what people are doing.' So the charioteer said, 'But I'm afraid it's forbidden. The king has said you shall not go out'. But Siddhartha said, 'Never mind. I'll take the consequences. If the king says anything, all right, let him say it to me but let's go.'. So the chariot was yoked and out they went, out into the world. Well that is just outside the gate, to have a look at what was happening. As they went along on a nice bright, fine, sunny day what did they see just walking along by the roadside but an old man, a very old man. And of course the legend gives a very graphic description, and even now in India very often old

people look really old. They are bent, thin, withered, bones all sticking out, eyes trickling with rheum, and that's how the old man appeared to the Buddha. And the Buddha we are told, the future Buddha, was very deeply shocked, because his father had given instructions that all very old people were to be kept out of his way, because if he saw a very old person he might start thinking. So very old people had been kept away from the palaces, and we're told that the Buddha had never actually seen one. So when he saw the very old man sort of tottering along, looking as though he was going to just drop dead any moment almost, he said to the charioteer, 'Who is that? What is that?', and the charioteer of course who knew the world more than the Buddha did said, 'Well that's just an old man.' So the Buddha said, 'Well what's happened to him? Why is he like that? Why is he so bent? Why is he so thin? Why is he so withered? Why are his bones sticking out? Why is that fluid trickling from his eye?', and the charioteer said that 'it's natural, this is what happens. You don't have to **do** anything to get old, you just **get** old!' And then the Buddha said, 'Well, what about me? Will it happen to me? Will I get old too?', and the charioteer shook his head very slowly and sadly; he said 'The king, your father, the queen, your mother, your wife, I myself, you yourself, will all grow old. We all one day will be like this old man. We shall **all** be afflicted by old age.' And we're told that the Buddha felt like an elephant struck by a thunderbolt, and he sort of perspired with emotion and he said, 'Let's go back to the palace. Let's not go out any more today' and he was brooding over this.

Well you can see the significance of it. He may or he may not have seen an old man in this way. He might have seen perhaps many old men, but **not** seen them. That day, perhaps, he saw an old man as though for the first time, and we know from our own experience that this very often happens. We see a thing, we see maybe every day of our lives, just like we see the sun rising and the sun setting, but we never see, because we're not aware and we don't think. We see but we don't see. We are blind. So maybe that was how the Buddha saw. He saw spiritually the old man, an old man, for the first time in his life he realised, really realised, there was such a thing as old age, and it would inevitably come upon him. So back to the palace he went.

But a few days later he took courage again. He went out again, and this time he saw a sick man, a man with fever, lying by the roadside, and again in the same way he asked the charioteer, 'But what's happened to this man? What is wrong with him? **Why** is he lying there? Why is he twitching? Why is he shaking, shivering? Why does his face look so ghastly? Why are his eyes rolling so wildly? What has happened to him?' And the charioteer said, 'well he's just sick, he's ill, he's got fever.' And the Buddha who apparently had enjoyed blooming health until then said, 'But well has this happened just to him or does it happen to other people?' And again the charioteer said, 'All men, all women, are liable to sickness. They can be struck down at any moment, any moment health and strength may go.' So again the Buddha was put into a very deeply thoughtful mood and back he went.

But again after a few days, forth he went once more with the charioteer, and this time what did he see? He saw four men coming along and they were carrying something between them on a sort of stretcher, the poles of which were balanced on their shoulders. There was a man on the stretcher. The man was wrapped in a yellow sheet, his face was exposed and it looked all strange. He didn't move. He was expressionless, the face was expressionless, didn't say anything, was sort of stiff, eyes were closed; and the Buddha said to the charioteer, 'oh, that's very strange, why are they carrying that man in that way? Where are they going? What's he done? What happened?' So the charioteer said, 'That man is dead. He died. They are taking him to the burning ground. They are going to burn the body.' And again the Buddha asked, 'Well, does this too happen to everybody? Will everybody, as you say, die?' and the charioteer said, 'Yes, your father, your mother, your wife, your child, myself, yourself - everybody will die one day. There have been millions of men born since the beginning of the world. Every one of them has died. No doubt there will be millions more born in the future. Every one of them will die. Not a single living being can escape the cold hand of death. Death overtakes all.' So more sad, more sorrowful, more thoughtful, more we may say existentially anguished than ever, the Buddha returns to his palace to reflect on what he had seen and what he'd understood.

And again he went forth on another day with the charioteer, and this time what did he see? He saw a man coming along in the distance, and he wasn't wearing the usual white dress, he was wearing a yellow dress, and he was carrying a begging bowl and he looked very calm and peaceful. And, since his father had kept him away from all religious folk the Buddha didn't know who or what this was, so he asked his charioteer, 'Who is that?' And the charioteer said, 'This is one who has Gone Forth' - that was a technical expression. And the Buddha asked, 'Well Gone Forth from what?' And the charioteer answered 'Gone Forth from the world. Gone Forth from his home, gone forth from family. He has Gone Forth, he's left it all. He's devoting himself entirely to the search for truth. He's trying to find an answer to the riddle of existence.' So once again the Buddha was deeply impressed, and he was thinking over it all, brooding over it all in his palace and we're told the singing girls had no more charm for him. The dancing girls had no more charm for him. He paid them no attention. They tried to distract him, tried to amuse him, but it was all no good. He didn't want to be distracted, didn't want to be amused. He only wanted to think, he only wanted

to find out. And eventually he came to the conclusion that he too would have to Go Forth. He'd have to do what that man whom he'd seen had done, just to Go Forth, to leave everything and devote himself to the search for Truth, the search for Reality.

So we are told, the story continues, in the middle of the night he left home. When everybody was sleeping, when the whole city was silent he crept out of his palace. He told no one except the faithful charioteer. The charioteer had the horse saddled. The Buddha mounted the horse, the charioteer seized hold of the tail, trotted behind, and forth they went out of the palace, out of the city. And we are told that they rode all night until they came to the borders of the Sakya territory, and there the Buddha cut off his long flowing black hair and cut off his beard and, just at that moment, when he was doing this along came a beggar. Just at the crack of dawn, and the Buddha said to the beggar, 'Will you change dresses with me?' So the beggar saw that the Buddha was wearing richly embroidered princely robes with a lot of gold and silver on them, so he said, 'Well, surely, gladly.' So they changed robes, changed dresses. The beggar put on the prince's robes and went off in them very happily and the prince put on the beggar's robes and then he said goodbye to his faithful charioteer, said goodbye to his faithful horse, sent them back, and he went on alone. Traveled on on foot alone. Went into the jungle, plunged we may say into the jungle. And in the jungle there lived teachers, yogis. He thought perhaps they would know the answer to his questions. They would be able to show him the way. So he spent quite a long time with them, studied their teachings, practised according to their instructions, but he wasn't satisfied. He felt that, 'No, this is not the truth. What they have to tell me, what they have to teach me is very good but there's something beyond, something more that they don't know, that they haven't realized. I must find that.'

### **End of Side one Side Two**

He said, as it were, 'I can't give it a name. I don't know what it is, but I must carry on my search, I must find that, I must know that.' So he left the teachers, he left the yogis, and we are told that he started performing, he started practising terrible austerities. In India in those days there were many people who believed that if you tortured the flesh sufficiently, if you wore yourself away almost to a shadow with your self-mortification, you would come nearer to the truth. The thinner became the veil of flesh, as it were, the more brightly the light of the spirit would shine through. So the Buddha, for a while, followed this path. He stopped taking solid food, just a little gruel occasionally, every few days. One or two grains of rice and so on, and all the time he was practising yoga exercises of various kinds. And we are even told that in his austerity for quite a long time he went completely without clothes, he went about naked. He ate his food, when he did eat any food, very tiny quantities, from his bare hands. He didn't even use a bowl or anything of that sort. And during this period when he was subjecting himself to these terrible austerities, he had many, we may say even terrifying spiritual experiences or maybe psychological experiences. In later life, when he was reminiscing to his disciples he spoke about them sometimes and, for instance, he said that on one occasion he was staying in the depths of the forest, in the depths of the jungle all alone, for miles around there was nobody, and it was dark and it was silent. And he said as he was sitting there in the depths of the forest in the middle of the night he heard a twig break, he heard a leaf fall, and at that moment he said a terrible panic, fear and dread overcame him. He was absolutely seized and possessed by this feeling of sort of nameless fear. So he said this happened again and again and what did he do. He said, 'I didn't do anything. If the fear came when I was walking up and down I continued walking up and down. If the fear came while I was sitting I continued sitting. If it came when I was standing' (because at this time he didn't ever lie down) 'if it came while I was standing I continued to stand, and eventually it passed away.'

So in this way in his old age he gave a sort of glimpse into the sort of experiences that he had in his very early days when he was practising asceticism. And this went on for months, perhaps even years - we don't know the exact period - but eventually to such an extent had he driven himself that in the end the body simply revolted. Sometimes the body is wiser than the mind. The body just gave up, he collapsed, he fainted. He fell into some water and he was rescued. And when he came to he said to himself, 'this is all ridiculous, this is not the way. I'm getting no nearer to the truth.' He'd invested, as it were, all that spiritual capital, or at least psychological capital, in his austerities, but he didn't hesitate to admit he'd made a mistake, a big mistake. He'd been wasting his time. That was not the way. Austerities and self mortification did not lead to truth. So he started again taking solid food. And what happened then? We are told that the Buddha had, that he'd attracted, as it were, five disciples. Or perhaps we should call them five admirers. They admired him for his asceticism, for his self mortification, and they thought that if we keep close to him, when he gains the truth as the result of his self mortifications and austerities, we'll be the first to benefit. So maybe we don't need to make so much of an effort. You know, he's making the effort, he'll find the truth and when he's found it he can share it with us. So they stuck close to him and they were waiting for him to realize the truth by virtue of his austerities and self mortification. So imagine their disappointment when he started taking solid food. They were absolutely disgusted, and when he took a spoonful of rice they said, 'He has returned to the luxurious ways of the world. We are leaving him. He's

not the man that we thought he was', and they left. And the Buddha was left all on his own. Everybody now had forsaken him, he was completely on his own, but he fared on alone without those five admirers. No doubt he could very well do without them. And eventually traveling, journeying around northern India he came to a spot in the present day state of Bihar called Uruvela. He thought this is a pleasant spot, there's a river, there are beautiful shady trees, I'll sit and I'll practise here. And as he sat with a river flowing very pleasantly by, the cool breeze blowing, in the shade of a tree, he suddenly recollected his early childhood experience, that mystical experience which had just come spontaneously like that. And he said to himself, 'perhaps that is the way. Let me see'. So he sat and he as it were just let the experience come. He didn't try to force it, he let it come, and it started coming, and as it started to come, as he was sort of getting into it, a cowherd's wife from a neighbouring village brought him some milk rice to nourish him, to strengthen him. He took that. A grass cutter gave him plenty of grass to sit on so he made himself comfortable and he settled down, and he just gave himself up, as it were to this experience, this mystical experience that was just coming. And the experience became deeper and deeper. He as it were plunged into it more and more, and in this way he went through a whole range of experiences, stage after stage, level after level, of superconsciousness. And we don't know how long he sat. We don't know how long he was there. It may have been days, it may have been weeks, it may even have been months; but we do know that eventually this, as it were, spontaneous mystical experience reached its peak, reached its culmination on the Vaisaka Purna night, and he became then what we now call Enlightened, he became The Buddha.

And the early texts, the early traditions try to give us some idea of what was involved, try to give us some idea of the content of this experience, but of course it was very very difficult. Sometimes they gave one account, sometimes they gave another. But one of the accounts says that in the first watch of the night the Buddha as it were looked back, he looked back into the past, looked back millions of years it seemed, looked back over the whole course of human history, evolution, his history, his evolution, and we are told that he saw all his previous lives. Saw how he'd been this man here, that man there, what he'd done, what he'd suffered in consequence. He looked back and he saw the whole course of his previous conditionality, we may say, and he saw that it was all done with, all ended - he'd overcome conditionality. And then we're told that in the second watch of the night he looked as it were all around, all around the universe, and he saw beings of every kind - human beings, animals, even beings in higher worlds, and he saw with regard to every one how they arise, how they pass away, how they are reborn, all in accordance with what they'd done. In other words in accordance with what their karma was. And he saw this happening at every level of existence, mundane existence, from the lowest to the highest.

And then at last, we are told, in the third watch of the night he directed his mind to the destruction of the asravas. 'Asravas' means 'biases', the natural biases of the mind. We might say the deep rooted, the deep seated tendency of the mind towards conditioned existence rather than towards the unconditioned; the bias of the mind towards unreality rather than towards reality. And there are three of these asravas according to Buddhist tradition: the bias towards worldly experience; the bias towards existence as a separate ego-centred personality, and the bias toward ignorance, that is to say ignorance of spiritual truth, ignorance of reality. So his mind he directed to the destruction of these asravas, the destruction of these biases, and by the morning, when the sun rose, we are told, they'd all been completely destroyed, and Perfect Enlightenment had been attained. Siddhartha Gautama had become The Buddha.

So much then for the life of The Buddha. That is to say of that part of it with which we're concerned this evening. And this life so far from birth to Enlightenment, the whole course of the Buddha's experience, will give us, I hope, some general idea of the Way to Enlightenment.

But now let's take a closer look. Let us direct our attention to certain specific events or groups of events in The Buddha's life. Let's examine them in greater detail and see, at the same time, what significance they have for us and for our own process of development and evolution.

As we've already seen, there are, there were, many events, many incidents in the life in the Buddha up to the age of thirty five - I've given only a summary - there were very many more. And it's not easy to select from the riches of that life, because all the events of The Buddha's life in a way are significant, all of them mean something, all of them, even, mean much, but this evening we're going to consider just six incidents, or just six episodes, and see how they apply to our own lives, the process of our own development as individuals on the Way to Enlightenment.

So what six are these? First of all the seeing of the four sights. Secondly, the Going Forth from home into homelessness. Three, the giving up of the princely dress. Four, the performance of austerities, and five abandonment by companions, and finally, six, acceptance of help. Each one of these six events is in substance historical but each at the same time has become the nucleus of a whole rich complex of myth

and legend, and each therefore assumes - each of these events therefore assumes - a universal significance; has, that is to say, a direct bearing on the condition of every evolving or potentially evolving human being.

So first of all the seeing of the four sights. That is to say the Buddha's seeing of the old man, the sick man, the corpse and the wanderer. Seeing them for the first time, or as though for the first time. Now what does this mean? What does this signify? To understand this properly we have to go back a bit to the time, in the Buddha's life, before he saw the first four sights, and we saw how his father had secluded him from the world, shut him up practically in those three mansions, those three palaces with the singing girls and the dancing girls and the nightly exercises, exercises with the bow and arrow and the sword and the spear. So he'd been secluded in this way, secluded from the world, or we may even say secluded from real life in a sense, or even secluded from reality. And it's rather interesting to notice that in Buddhist literature, in Buddhist metaphor, in Buddhist myth and symbol, the father very often represents ignorance, just as the mother very often represents thirst or craving. One, as it were, more intellectual, the other more emotional. So the Buddha, we may say was as it were shut up by ignorance, enclosed by ignorance, which is a sort of father, psychologically speaking, of living beings, who live in unawareness. And because he was shut up by ignorance, because he lacked the wider perspective, the vision of reality, the Buddha at that time lived in a world of his own, a little world of his own. He did not know what was going on outside. Perhaps he didn't even know that there was a world outside, not effectively know anyway. He was occupied with himself, occupied with his **own** world, occupied in pleasures and amusements of every kind.

And there's a similar picture we may say - some of you may remember this - a similar picture in the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra, the Sutra of the White Lotus of the Good Dharma; the Parable of the Burning House. Those of you who have heard the lectures on the Parables, Myths and Symbols of the Mahayana in the White Lotus Sutra may remember this particular parable - the Parable of the Burning House. You may remember it starts in a very elaborate fashion by describing the house in which the elder lived, a huge crumbling mansion, and how the elder had a number of children, and these children were all playing in the house, and one day the house caught fire, and it was blazing merrily, but the children did not realize that it was on fire, they did not realize it was burning and blazing - they did not realize that they were in danger. They just went on playing as usual, amusing themselves with their toys and other things. So in the White Lotus Sutra the burning house, the house on fire, is of course this world blazing with old age, disease and death, and the elder's children are of course all living beings, all human beings. In other words ourselves. Because while the cosmos, while conditioned existence itself is at it were on fire; when we're in a sort of existential situation, instead of seeing that, instead of realizing that, doing something about it, we just go on playing. We're immersed in our usual trivial pursuits. And if one looks around one sees that so much of the time people are really immersed in very trivial things. Most of the time they do not live as human beings really ought to live. They are occupied with things much of the time that are unworthy of the attention of a serious thinking human being, of a moderately aware human being, and it's only too easy to slip back, even when you have seen a little bit of the light, had a little glimpse of reality, it's only too easy to slip back and just get back into the old ruts and the old round of foolish and trivial amusements and occupations. Not being aware of the real situation. Not being aware of the **real** meaning and the **real** purpose of human life, and simply going on wasting our time.

But then, even when we're occupied in this way, even when we're wasting our time, something happens. In the Buddha's case when he was shut up in his little world, when in a sense he was wasting **his** time he saw the four sights; and in the case of the children in the parable, as you remember perhaps, they eventually hear their father's voice calling them, calling them to come outside, outside the burning house. So what does this mean? This all means that shut up though we may be in our own private world, occupied with very trivial personal things, interests and amusements of various kinds, occupied as we are in this way, occupied though we are in this way, one day something happens. Something catastrophic, even something terrible, and our little world is shattered, or at least it's badly cracked, badly dented, damaged, and we can't go on living in it - at least not so comfortably living in it - any more. It's as though reality has started breaking in, and we begin to see things as they really are. It's as though we were living inside a shell - if you like in an egg - as though we hadn't even been born. We were still living inside the egg, living very happily playing and amusing ourselves but then there's a great crack, there's a great crash, and even if the egg shell isn't completely shattered, there's a big broad crack and we look out of that crack into another, into a wider world; and sometimes after an experience like this we feel as though we'd awoken from a dream. When we're dreaming we're immersed in the dream. It's very vivid, it's very real, but when we wake up it's nothing. After a few minutes, or at most a few hours, it's not even a memory. So it's just like that when we have this sort of shattering experience, when something happens to us to disturb our small private world, something erupts into it, cracks it, even smashes it. When we start seeing things outside, start seeing things as they really are it's as though we'd awoken from a dream. And we look back at our previous life, our old life with its silly trivial pursuits and we think well how could we have lived in that way? We even think well was that really me? Was I really living like that? Was I really so foolish? Was I really so mistaken? Was I really so deluded? Sometimes you might find it almost impossible to



believe that that was you. A former life seems unreal, and so therefore as a result of this sort of happening we lose interest in our old pursuits. We start behaving differently, and very often of course it happens that people notice. They start noticing we're not the same as we used to be, we've changed, and very often of course they think there's something wrong with us. They even ask us what the matter is. Maybe they think that we're ill. Sometimes, privately at least they think that we're not quite in our right minds, because we're not doing all the things that we used to do, not taking interest in the things we used to take interest in; not doing things that other people are still doing.

Now very often the event which shatters our private world is an unpleasant experience, maybe an experience of bereavement. Someone that is dear to us dies, or we're disappointed - maybe a job that we were expecting to get doesn't come our way - something of that sort. Or having been in the rut, as it were, so long we just start getting sort of discontented and dissatisfied anyway. Sometimes of course the breaking through, the smashing of our little world comes about in a somewhat more pleasant way. Maybe we get some new insight due to our, maybe, study of literature, through poetry or music or something of that sort, but usually at least in a sense, after it all starts happening, the experience tends to be somewhat painful, somewhat catastrophic, because we're shaken, we're disturbed. The old patterns, the old moulds are broken or cracked.

So this brings us to our second event. That is the Going Forth from home into homelessness. So what does this mean essentially? It means that we separate ourselves from the group. The group, the collectivity - not the group on the sense of a real spiritual group - the collectivity is still living in the world of delusion, the world that we've left behind or are struggling to leave behind. In a sense even the collectivity is itself a world of delusion. Its members, the people who live in that world, members of that group, have a certain amount of contact with one another, but there's no **real** contact, there's no genuine communication. Only too often in that world, as it were, relationships are based on misunderstanding, on mutual exploitation, on projection, and very rarely it happens in that world, the world in which most people live most of the time, the collective world. Very rarely does it happen that anyone really sees another person as they really are, and certainly they do not see the wider and richer world outside.

But someone who has, as it were, had a glimpse of this wider, this richer world, through the crack of the shell, who is beginning to break free from the group, beginning not to be conditioned by the group, he can no longer function simply as a member of the group, so he has to separate himself from the group to which he belongs. In the case of the Buddha he literally leaves home, he Goes Forth from home into homelessness. He leaves father and mother, or foster mother, child and wife, leaves tribe, leaves even the tribal territory. And he goes at night. And what does this mean? This going at night. When everything is dark. In the night no one can see. No one can see you going. In other words the people in the group do not see, as it were, the person who is leaving the group. They don't really know what he is doing. They can't even see him. He's sort of not there for them. He's incomprehensible to them.

So what is the significance of all this? Probably the significance is fairly obvious. It means that we have to dissociate ourselves from the group as such. Dissociate ourselves from merely collective humanity. Resolve our identification with the group. So the purely practical question arises - how are we to do this? Now how we do it depends on the nature of the group. So let's take a look at just a few of the forms that the group takes.

The most familiar one, the one that springs most immediately to mind is of course the family group, the blood group if you like, the immediate blood group. So how do we leave this? Well we leave it when we leave home. At least we begin to leave it when we leave home, and maybe everybody should leave home in a quite literal sense as soon as they're old enough to do so. And once you've left home, literally, you can as it were sort of take a look at your home from a distance. Say take a look at your parents from a distance. While you're with them, while you're in the home with your parents one can say you never really see your parents, you don't really know them at all, because you think of them just as your parents and they're much more than that. You think of them just as mother and father. But after you've moved away, after you've stood a bit on your own feet, then you can begin to see your parents - your mother and your father and other relations - as individuals, or at least as potential individuals, not just as your parents. And not only that but you can insist on being treated by them, yourself, as an individual, not just as their son or their daughter or their brother or their sister or their grandchild of their cousin, or their nephew or niece. Once you've left the home, you've dissociated yourself from the family group, you can, as it were, insist on being treated yourself as an individual. And when you go back home, when you go back to visit your parents, you probably notice - many of your I'm sure have noticed this - that without your being able to help it very often you sort of slip back into comparatively infantile attitudes. When you go back home, it very often happens, you cease to be yourself. You become a son or a daughter, and when you're a son or a daughter and identified with this role, you are no longer yourself. So in order to be yourself you have to be away from the home in most cases. And when you go home even you have to insist on being treated

as an individual, treating others as individuals, and not slip back into that role of being just son or just daughter and so on. Be yourself even when you are at home. Be yourself even with your parents, and most people I know will appreciate that this is a very difficult thing to do indeed.

All right so much for leaving the family group. Then the social group, leaving the social group, giving up social activities which are, as it were, merely social - the ordinary, conventional, run-of-the-mill social activities. The dull boring parties. If you don't find them dull and boring of course well obviously you're not yet thinking in terms of being an individual, and things of that sort. We have to admit, we have to recognize when we look at ordinary conventional social life, as so many people lead it, that it's completely worthless and trivial, and no one who is seriously concerned about his or her own personal individual development can have any part or parcel in it. And of course another thing that we have to do is, socially speaking as part of our dissociation from the social group, is cutting down on merely social talk and gossip. Now this is absolutely chronic in most ordinary social circles - talking about someone who's got a new job and somebody else has got a baby, and so on and so forth. So much time is spent, lost and wasted in this way. The Buddha even went so far as to say to his disciples on one occasion, when you meet together do one or two things - either you keep quiet completely or you talk about the Dharma. You talk about those things which are conducive to your individual spiritual development. One might even go so far as to say that it's much better to be quite literally on one's own than involved in the wrong sort of social life.

And then there's the economic group. You are connected economically with the group mainly through your job, if you have a job that is or when you have a job. So when you have a job, if you want really to develop as an individual you mustn't identify completely with your job. A lot of people do this. They don't just think well they do this job, they do this work - they think they **are** that. They **are** say a bricklayer or they **are** a stockbroker or they **are** a teacher. They completely identify with that particular economic activity. They might identify themselves with a particular firm like the Japanese do, or identify themselves with the union to which they belong. If of course the job also happens to be a vocation, well that's quite a different matter, but if it's just earning money, if it's just a job, then one certainly shouldn't identify with that. And of course that means that one should spend as little time as possible actually working. Some people think this rather almost revolutionary, but this is something that we have to face up to and accept. That if we are really serious about our spiritual life and spiritual development we need a lot of **time** for it, and that means not spending so much time working. In other words it means just getting a part-time job and spending the rest of our time meaningfully. Of course there lots of people nowadays who do get, who do keep part-time jobs, but unfortunately so many of them, having provided themselves with a wonderful opportunity of further development just don't utilize it at all. They've got a part-time job, they've got plenty of time, many hours every day, but they just waste it - maybe stay in bed very late, get up very late, just talk, gossip with their friends, do a few things, do a bit of shopping, maybe look at the newspaper and then it's bedtime. Maybe listen to a few records before they go to bed - that's all they ever do. They don't utilize their free time, their spare time, but which is their **real** time for activities devoted really to their own personal individual spiritual development, but this is what we should do as part of, or an aspect of, our dissociation from the economic group.

And then there's the cultural group. We usually think there's just our own cultural group but there are many cultures in the world other than the one into which we are born, and we can emancipate ourselves from the cultural group, the cultural group into which we were born, in two ways: first of all by study, and secondly by travel. If we study the products of other cultures, if we make ourselves acquainted, maybe, with the literature of another culture, or say the music of another culture or even the social customs of another culture, we broaden our own outlook, we cease to identify with a particular culture, the one in which we were born, and much more so if we travel. If you travel, if you go and live especially, in a foreign country, a different culture - maybe in India or Japan or America - then you'll see how lots of your own habits, your own ways of thought, your own attitudes, were just the product of your environment - there's no inherent intrinsic validity in them at all. It's no more sort of natural, no more a basic law of the universe to eat say with a knife and fork than to eat with fingers; but in this country if you're born practically using a knife and fork you think this is **the way** to eat. You don't question it. You look rather horrified perhaps if someone starts eating with their fingers, but in India you get used to this sort of thing, a different culture. So travel is one way of, as it were, emancipating oneself from identification with the cultural group into which one happens to have been born.

And then there's another group - the political group, but I'm not saying anything about the political group at the moment. It's obviously a subject in itself, and in any case in about a month's time I'm giving a special lecture with some bearing on this subject, a special lecture on current world problems - the Buddhist view. We'll be giving some information about that later on, but it'll deal among other things with the political implications of the group.

Well so much for Going Forth from the group. Now thirdly the giving up of the princely dress. Now what does this mean? The Buddha had left the group. He's left home. He's left society, and that means he's given up, he's left his position in society, and one's position in society - certainly in those days; to some extent in these days - one's position in society was indicated by one's dress. The Buddha wore the dress of a prince, beautifully ornamented, decorated and so on, so he gave up that dress. In other words he gave up his social identity, his identity as a Kshatriya, as a member of the Shakya tribe. He gave up his social identity, because this was not his **real** identity. He hadn't yet found his real identity. Ideally, we may say, the Buddha perhaps should have remained without any clothes at all, but he did this, as we know, later on in his career. Meanwhile he just wears the clothes of a beggar, because a beggar is socially nobody. Socially a beggar doesn't count, he just doesn't exist. You haven't got anything, no property, no money, no influence - well you're just nobody. So a beggar is just nobody, so the Buddha changes dress with a beggar, someone who is nobody, who has no social role. In other words the Buddha gives up his social identity. So this is what anyone must do who wants really to evolve - give up their social identity. In more modern terminology must give up identifying with their persona. 'Persona' is a term introduced into modern psychology and modern thought by Jung, and 'persona' means 'mask'.

[Break in tape which excludes the other incidents!]

Well these are the six incidents in the life of the Buddha. This we may say is the Way to Enlightenment. We have to see the Four Sights. We have to get at least a glimpse of things as they really are outside our own little world. We have to Go Forth from home, from the group. We have to cease to identify ourselves with the group in any of its forms. We have to give up our persona, our social self - stop wearing our mask. Have to find out who we really are, not only psychologically but spiritually. Have to develop a real individuality, true individuality. Have to enlist the energies of the total psyche - not just try to do things with an effort of will in the light of the understanding just of the conscious mind. Have to be prepared to travel on alone if necessary. And have to be ready to accept help when it comes, however humble the form in which it may be offered. And if we can do all these things then we may be able to traverse the remaining stages of the Way to Enlightenment and we may even find ourselves one day - perhaps in the distant future - sitting one Vaisaka full-moon night beneath our own Bodhi tree, and find, perhaps very much to our surprise, that we're Enlightened.