

Lecture 113 the Word of the Buddha (1972)

Today, as we've just heard, we are celebrating a festival. We are celebrating a festival which is generally known in the East as Dharmachakra Day, or, to give it its full, as it were official, title, Dharmcakra Pravartana Day, which means the anniversary of the Buddha's first turning the Wheel of the Dharma; and turning the Wheel of the Dharma is a traditional Buddhist idiom for the Buddha's first proclamation, in words of human speech, of the Truth that he had discovered at the foot of the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya some two months before.

So Dharmachakra Day, or Dharmacakra Pravartana Day, the anniversary of that first proclamation of the Truth, is evidently one of the most important occasions, one of the most important festivals, in the whole Buddhist year, and obviously it happens to be one of those festivals directly associated with the life of the Buddha. In the course of the Buddhist year we have all sorts of festivals, all sorts of celebrations. Some are associated with the life of the Buddha, with events in the life of the Buddha, others are not, and this happens to be one of those associated with an event, one of the most important events, in the life of the Buddha.

Many of you know, many of you will remember, that two months ago exactly we celebrated the Vaishakha Purnima, and this, of course, is the anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightenment, the anniversary of his realisation of the Supreme Truth; the day on which, to change the idiom somewhat, the New Man emerged from the mass of humanity. And this event, the Buddha's awakening to the Truth, the Buddha's realisation of the Truth, the Buddha's becoming a New Man, this had and still has a tremendous significance, spiritual significance, for all mankind, inasmuch as it constitutes a sort of turning point in the whole course of human history.

Now though this event happened some 2500 years ago, we know roughly the circumstances under which it took place, we know where it took place; and it took place at Bodh Gaya, or Buddhagaya as we sometimes say, which is situated in the present-day state of Bihar in north-eastern India. And this event, the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment, took place, of course, in the month of Vaishakha, on the full moon day of the month of Vaishakha, which corresponds to our April-May.

Now after his attainment of Enlightenment, after his awakening to that Supreme Truth, the Buddha spent, we are told by the tradition, altogether seven weeks in that same place - seven weeks in Bodh Gaya; and we are told that he spent his time sitting mainly at the foot of various trees. He'd spend a few days at the foot of one tree, then he'd move, spend a few days sitting at the foot of another tree. And in this way seven whole weeks passed, and we are told he hardly bothered about food, he hardly bothered to eat. Apparently two wandering merchants did offer him some honeycomb or something of that sort, but that's the only actual reference to food. He was above and beyond, as it were, at that time, any bodily considerations.

It wasn't just that he had gained Enlightenment - that was a tremendous thing to begin with, but it wasn't just that. Not only was there the question of attaining Enlightenment, realising the Truth, seeing Reality, but there was also, in addition to that, the if anything even more difficult task of assimilating that, of absorbing that, at every level of his being, in every aspect of his being. And it's in that great task, as it were, that he was spending those seven weeks immediately following upon the Enlightenment, absorbing that experience, assimilating that

experience, allowing it to transform and transmute every atom, every fibre of his being. After all, we may say that what had happened to the Buddha when he gained Enlightenment was the greatest thing, the most tremendous thing, that can possibly happen to any human being, any member of the human race: to be transformed from an un-Enlightened into an Enlightened human being. This, surely, is the biggest transformation that possibly we can undergo; so big a transformation, so great a transformation, indeed, that in a sense when we become Enlightened we cease to be in the ordinary sense a human being at all. We become an Enlightened human being, become a New Man, become a Buddha, which is an entirely new and entirely different category of existence.

Now I've spoken of this question, this task, of the assimilation of the Truth, of the assimilation of that Enlightenment experience by the Buddha at all levels and in all aspects of his being, and one very important aspect of that assimilation in the course of those few weeks was the development out of his experience of Enlightenment of what we can only call, in terms of ordinary human speech, compassion or *ikarunai* - compassion directed towards all those who were not, as he was, Enlightened, that is towards the vast mass of humanity, suffering from its own ignorance, its own psychological conditioning, its own bewilderment, its own confusion.

So as the result of as it were the assimilation of the Enlightenment experience in the depths of his emotional being, or in the depths of the emotional aspect of his being - his ordinary human emotion was transformed into something far higher, something far sublimer, something far nobler - then compassion, *ikarunai*, arose in the mind and in the heart of the Buddha, and he decided to make known to the rest of humanity for their spiritual benefit the Truth which he had discovered. And in the texts, in the traditions, at this point there follows the famous, the celebrated episode of Brahma's request.

We are told - it is put in a highly mythological form - that as the Buddha was sitting there, under one or another of those trees, as he was still meditating, as he was enjoying the bliss, as it were, of that Enlightenment experience, he saw as it were a great light, and he heard as it were a great voice. And he saw as it were a great form, the form of a mythological, as we would say, being that the Indian tradition calls Brahma Sahampati, the Lord of a Thousand Worlds: a being belonging to a very high plane of existence, but still not so high as the plane that the Buddha now occupied. Perhaps we can say that this was like a great, a sublime thought arising within the Buddha's mind, though at a level lower than that of actual Enlightenment or actual Buddhahood.

And the voice said, this form said, as it were: 'Now you are Enlightened. You have come to the end of the journey. You've reached your goal. You are at peace. You have got perfect knowledge. You have perfect bliss. But what about others? What about those who are still struggling below? What are you going to do for them?' And as the Buddha heard these words, as he saw that form, as he saw that light, a great upsurge of compassion took place in his heart. He looked forth over the world. He saw that there were some who were ready for the teaching, even though many were not, but still some were ready, and he decided that he would make known the Truth he had discovered. And he said to Brahma as it were, or to himself as it were: 'Wide open are the gates leading to the deathless state. Let those who have ears to hear put forth their faith.' And this was his decision to teach, out of compassion.

So, having decided to teach, the question arose: whom should he teach? Even a Buddha can't teach unless there's someone to teach - so, whom to teach? And his mind went back, his mind went back into the past, went back to two men who had been his own teachers in his very early days when he was still searching for the Truth. They had not known the Truth, they did not know the Truth, they were not able to show him the Truth, but they had helped him on his way to a great extent, and they were noble and high-minded men. So his first thought was, 'I shall teach them the Truth that I have discovered. They will appreciate it, they will understand it quickly. They were almost there, but not quite. I shall teach them first.'

But then he suddenly knew in his own mind that it was too late, too late so far as this life as it were was concerned, because the two were already dead. So he turned his mind then to five disciples that he had had, again in his early days when he was still struggling, when in fact he was practising self-mortification, self-torture, extreme austerities, fasting and so on. And he thought, 'These five, when I was still struggling, when I was practising asceticism, though they did leave me afterwards, still for a while they were very serviceable to me. So let me teach them first.'

So one sees here, in this episode, the Buddha's as it were spirit of gratitude. He felt grateful to his old teachers, even though he had had to leave them and find out the truth for himself. He felt grateful to those five pupils, those five ascetics; even though they had deserted him in the end they had been serviceable for a time. So he wanted to repay them, as it were, he wanted to share with them the great Truth that he had now discovered. So we see that even in the Buddha after his Enlightenment there was this great spirit of gratitude to those who had helped him in the earlier stages, in the earlier phases, of his career.

And there are other accounts which emphasise this still more. We are told, in fact, that the Buddha after his Enlightenment was grateful even to the tree underneath which he had sat when he gained Enlightenment, and we are told in one account that after the Enlightenment he stood a certain distance from the tree and he looked at it. He looked at it for hours and hours together, and he saluted it, saying as it were, 'At the foot of this tree I gained Enlightenment. This tree sheltered me, this tree shaded me. I am grateful to this tree. I pay respect to this tree.' So this was the Buddha's spirit of gratitude, even after his Enlightenment.

So having decided to teach these five ascetics, having come to understand within his own mind where they were, at the end of the seventh week after the Enlightenment the Buddha left Bodh Gaya. He set out for the place where the five ascetics were now living, and he had come to understand spontaneously as it were, intuitively, by means of his higher supernormal vision, that they were living at a place called Sarnath, which is near Benares, some seven or eight miles out of Benares. And they were living there in a beautiful deer park, where deer could live without fear of being hunted, which was a sort of sanctuary for the deer. And this place, Sarnath near Benares, was about 100 miles from Bodh Gaya - a distance, that is to say, of about a week's journey.

So the Buddha set out. He had one or two experiences, not to say adventures, on the way, but we are not concerned with those today. It took him just a week to get to Sarnath, to the Deer Park, so that he arrived there exactly two months after his Enlightenment. So as he entered the Deer Park, the five ascetics who had been his disciples, his pupils earlier on, some years

previously, saw him coming, and they started talking, not to say murmuring, among themselves. And one of them said: 'Here comes that fellow Gautama, whom we used to have so much faith and trust in - you know, the one who gave up asceticism, the one who went back to the easy life of the world, who actually started taking solid food, who betrayed the path of asceticism. All right, let him come if he wants to. We shan't show him any respect at all, not to a fellow like that.'

So the Buddha approached nearer and nearer. But, as the Buddha approached, strange to say they were unable to keep to their resolution. It was as though some strange force compelled them to rise to their feet and salute him and take his bowl and take his spare robe and offer him a seat. Because, even though they disapproved of him and thought he was just a runaway ascetic, there was something about him; there was something strange, something they'd never seen before, and they could not help being affected, being influenced by that.

So after the preliminary greetings were over, the Buddha, without wasting any time, coming straight to the point, said: 'I've found the Truth. I know the Truth. I am now Enlightened. Let me teach, let me share with you, the Truth that I have discovered.' But they wouldn't believe him. They said, 'Even when you were practising all those austerities and all that self-torture, self-mortification, you couldn't gain Enlightenment. And do you think you've gained it by following an easy course of life?' They apparently thought that meditation was an easy course of life. So they would not listen.

But the Buddha persisted. He reasoned with them, he argued with them, and in the end he succeeded in persuading them at least to listen to what he had to say; and then he taught them. He taught them all through the rainy season. The rains had just begun, so he taught them for the two, three, four months of the rainy season. They sat together, they talked, they discussed, they meditated, and by the end of the rainy season all five too had gained Enlightenment, had become New Men.

Now the day on which the Buddha arrived in Sarnath at the Deer Park and started teaching the five ascetics was, of course, being two months exactly after the Vaishakha Purnima Day, a full moon day - the second full moon day after the day on which the Buddha gained Enlightenment. And this full moon day, the second full moon day after the full moon day on which the Buddha gained Enlightenment, the full moon day on which he started teaching, is known as Ashardha(?) Purnima, that is to say the full moon day of the lunar month Ashardha, corresponding to our June-July. And it's this day which we are celebrating this evening; this is Dharmachakra or Dharmacakra-pravartina Day, the anniversary of the Buddha's first turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, his first proclamation, at least his first full proclamation of the Truth to human beings, the first showing of the Way, the Path to Enlightenment.

Now the Buddha taught the five ascetics. He taught them month after month all through the rainy season. But it so happens we don't know what he taught them. We don't know exactly what it was he said. We are told simply he discoursed with them, and the oldest accounts leave it at that. It's as though it was a profound mystery, a secret; and we went into the significance of this, some of you may remember, last year.

At a later date, it was sometimes said that the Buddha taught the five ascetics the Four Noble

Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Well, he may have done, but we don't know definitely. That's just a later, a much later, tradition; perhaps just an attempt to fill in the blank. Sometimes people don't like to leave a blank, they don't like any mystery, any secret, anything not known, so they fill it in with something or other, and this is what they seem to have done here. But personally I prefer to leave this particular blank empty.

Anyway, after the five ascetics had gained Enlightenment, having heard whatever the Buddha had to say, having intuitively perceived the Truth of it, the Buddha, of course, didn't stop there. He continued teaching. He taught for a very long time. He taught all sorts of people - hundreds, perhaps even thousands of people from all walks of life, up and down the length and breadth of north-eastern India in that sixth century BC - one of the most wonderful centuries in human history. And he taught for five-and-forty years, from the age of 35, when he gained Enlightenment, to the age of 80, when he passed away or, as we say, gained Parinirvana.

And he taught, according to the records, even on his deathbed. Even when he was about to pass away there was just one last person who wanted to see him, to speak with him, and Ananda, the Buddha's attendant and disciple, said to him, 'What is this? The Buddha is dying. This is not the time to come and speak to him.' But the Buddha heard this from inside, and he said to Ananda, 'Don't stop him, let him come in. I know that he will perceive the truth very quickly, even if I speak only a few words.' So in he came. The Buddha taught him very briefly, and he was the last to be personally as it were converted by the Buddha.

So after the Buddha had passed away, after the Parinirvana, the teaching did not die; the teaching was continued, the teaching carried on. It was handed on, handed down, by his disciples. And what we have to realise, what we have to appreciate, is that at this stage the teaching was still an oral tradition. It was handed down by word of mouth from teacher to disciple; then the disciple becomes a teacher in his turn. He hands it on to his disciple, and he hands it on to his. In this way, for quite a long time after the Buddha's death, the teaching was handed on, handed down, by oral tradition. This continued for several hundred years, for upward of 500 years. We don't always appreciate this. They didn't start scribbling books about Buddhism all at once. They handed it down as an oral tradition, by word of mouth. So if you wanted to learn about Buddhism, you had to find someone at whose feet you could sit and learn it from him, face to face. They handed it down like this for nearly 500 years, and then - or maybe a bit before then - the teaching started to be written down, maybe when people's memories started getting less good than they had been in earlier days.

Now the Dharma, the teaching, as taught personally by the Buddha by word of mouth to his disciples, and as transmitted orally by the disciples after the Buddha's Parinirvana, and as written down much later on in the form of scriptures - this Dharma is known by a special term, and this term is Buddhavacana, which means 'the Word of the Buddha', the utterance of the Buddha, if you like the speech of the Buddha. And it's with this word of the Buddha that we are concerned this evening. We are going this evening to explore the more usual meaning of the term as well as try to realise some of the deeper implications.

Now Buddhavacana is iubuddhau-vacanai - let's emphasise that. It's the word, the speech, the utterance, of the Buddha. So let's go into that a little first. What does one mean by Buddha? Buddha isn't just a personal name like Gautama or Ananda or Rahula. Buddha is a title, and it

means 'one who knows', 'one who understands'. It means 'one who has realised Truth', 'one who has realised Reality.' So the word, the utterance, of a Buddha, one who knows, really knows, truly knows, knows in the depth and knows on the heights, knows in all aspects and all modes. The word or utterance of such a person is not like that of an ordinary person, not like the word or the utterance of someone who is not a Buddha. The word of the Buddha, the Buddhavacana, is the expression in terms of human speech of what we can only describe as an Enlightened state of consciousness. Even though we know the meaning of Buddha, Buddhavacana, word of the Buddha, we don't always realise this. We tend perhaps unconsciously to think of the Buddha as speaking in much the same way as an ordinary person speaks, because after all he uses much the same language, much the same words.

But this is not all. There is more in this, as it were, than meets the eye. Behind the Buddha's words, behind the Buddha's utterance, behind his speech, there is something that is not behind our words, our speech, even though they may be the same words, the same speech. Behind the Buddha's words there stands as it were the Enlightened consciousness, the Buddha-mind. And therefore, for those who have ears to hear, his words, the word of the Buddha, express that Enlightened consciousness, that Buddha-mind.

But - and here's another thing that we must understand - those words which the Buddha uses, which express the Enlightened consciousness, the Buddha-mind, though they express it they do not express it directly. We shouldn't think as it were that here's the Enlightened state of consciousness, the Buddha-mind, and straight out of that, as it were, come words expressive of that Enlightened state of consciousness, that Buddha-mind. It isn't so as it were simple, so easy, so straightforward, as that, because intervening between the Enlightened state of consciousness, the Buddha-mind, and the expression of that Enlightened state of consciousness, that Buddha-mind, in terms of ordinary human speech, there are several intermediate stages, intermediate levels of being, of experience. And these stages, these levels, also are included in principle in what we call Buddhavacana, and they represent the deeper, or at least some of the deeper, implications of the term. So let us see what they are.

First of all, of course, there is the level, if we can call it that, a level beyond all levels, of the Enlightened Mind itself, the Buddha-mind. We use the expression, we use the term, but it's very difficult for us to have any idea of what this is like, because there in that Enlightened consciousness, in that Buddha-mind, there is no subject, there's no object. All that we can say, though even this is misleading, is that it's just pure, undifferentiated awareness that is absolutely as it were void, that is absolutely luminous, it is one continuous as it were mass of spiritual luminosity, and that it is also as it were what we can only describe as completely, deeply, ultimately, absolutely satisfying, and that therefore it is peace and bliss beyond all human understanding; and not only that, that it is above and beyond space, time, and also in that, we may say, everything is known because in that there is nothing to be known. We can only describe it, perhaps, more metaphorically, as being a sort of vast, a shoreless ocean as it were, an ocean in which millions of universes are just one tiny wave, even just a single drop of foam in that, on that, and this is the Enlightened Mind, the Enlightened consciousness, the mind, the consciousness, of a Buddha, something virtually inconceivable by the ordinary consciousness, dominated as it is by the subject-object distinction.

Now within as it were this Enlightened Mind - and we can only speak of it in terms of space and

time, even though it transcends space and time - within as it were this Enlightened Mind, there arises, in time but out of time as it were, the desire (not being afraid to use this word desire), the desire to communicate; the desire, that is to say, to communicate itself - Enlightenment desiring to communicate Enlightenment. Because after all there's nothing else that it has to communicate. What else can it communicate? Enlightenment can only communicate Enlightenment.

So there arises this desire within the Enlightened Mind to communicate with the non-Enlightened mind, to communicate on the level of the non-Enlightened mind, and this desire on the part of Enlightenment, the Enlightened consciousness, to communicate with the non-Enlightened consciousness on the level of the non-Enlightened consciousness, this desire we can identify as compassion. And this communication at this highest level as it were, is very, very subtle. There is nothing obvious, nothing gross about it. It's like a sort of tremor, a sort of vibration, very subtle, that passes between the Enlightened Mind and the mind that is just a little short of Enlightenment. And we can think of this tremor, we can think of this vibration, in imaginative terms, not to say metaphorical terms. We can think of it as an extremely subtle sound; not sound in the ordinary sense, not gross physical external sound which we can hear with our physical ears, not even sound that we can hear with our inner ear in the ordinary psychological sense. We can think of it, as it were, as sort of primeval, primordial, mantric sound; not gross, not material, something which on the spiritual plane is equivalent to what we know as sound. And it's this, this tremor, this vibration, this sound, this soundless sound, even, which is the Buddhavacana in the highest sense of the term. This is the as it were vibration or sound given off as it were by the Buddha-mind, by even Reality itself. And the Buddha-mind, the Enlightened consciousness, we know, is not limited by time, it soars beyond place, and therefore it gives off this sound all the time in all places.

And some traditions, some Indian traditions, identify this sound, this primordial sound, this cosmic sound, with the mantra OM. Not 'OM' as pronounced by any human voice, by any human tongue, but a subtle, an inner, a spiritual OM which can sometimes be heard in meditation or in other higher states of consciousness. One can hear it even coming from all things, all objects, all phenomena of the universe, because the Buddha-mind, the Buddha-consciousness is as it were behind them all, behind all those objects, behind all those phenomena, even in them, and shines through them all, sounds through them all. One can even say, as we've said before, the Buddha-mind, the Buddha-consciousness, the Enlightened consciousness, is like the ocean, and the phenomenal objects are like the waves, the foam. And it's as though every wave, every drop of foam, all the objects, all the phenomena in the universe are saying all the time this mantra OM, and nothing but OM.

And hearing this sound, hearing this mantra, one listens to the word of the Buddha; and hearing it, listening to it, one hears everything is in this sound, this undifferentiated sound, and one understands everything. No words are necessary, no thoughts are necessary. There isn't any need for images. There's this one primordial sound, sounding forth as it were from the Buddha-mind, the Buddha-consciousness, Reality. One hears all, understands all, knows all, just from this sound OM coming from everything everywhere all the time. And this, as I've said, is the Buddhavacana in the highest sense, on the highest level.

So after that, from that, we have to come down a step, or as it were the Enlightened Mind has to come down a step, come down to the next highest level, the level of images, level of

archetypal images, images of the sun and the moon, images of light and darkness, images of the heavens and the earth, images of birds and beasts and flowers, images of rain and wind and thunder and lightning and the stars, images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, images of gods and goddesses, images benign and wrathful, images of all sorts of monstrous shapes, images perhaps above all brilliantly coloured, luminous, shining, brilliant; images arising, as it were, out of the depths of infinite, universal, cosmic space. Not images created by the individual human mind; not even perhaps images created by the collective consciousness or collective unconsciousness. Perhaps images not created at all; images which are as it were coeval, co-eternal, with the Enlightened consciousness itself - at least so far as this particular level of communication is concerned. And these images, too, reveal everything, tell everything. They reveal it, they tell it, in terms of form, in terms of colour. Here in the world of images, on the level of images, no thoughts are necessary, no ideas are necessary, no words are necessary. Communication is perhaps not so subtle as it is on the highest level, the level of mantric sound, but it's still far subtler, far more comprehensive, than anything we ordinarily experience.

And then we come down one step further. We come down now to the level of conceptual thought. But we must remember that it is still the Enlightened Mind, as it were, coming down. It's not a question, it's not a matter, of the un-Enlightened consciousness expressing itself in terms of thought. Conceptual thought is a common medium; it's common both to the Enlightened and to the un-Enlightened mind, and of course conceptual thought is created by the un-Enlightened mind, but it can be used, it can be taken over, it can even be transformed by the Enlightened Mind in accordance with its own higher purposes, and this gives us as it were a clue to the nature, the real nature, of what is sometimes called Buddhist philosophy or Buddhist thought. Buddhist philosophy or Buddhist thought does not consist of the speculations of the un-Enlightened minds of ordinary, relatively nominal Buddhists. Buddhist philosophy, as we call it in the West, Buddhist thought, is an attempt, perhaps a series of attempts, on the part of the Enlightened Mind, the Buddha-mind - whether that of Gautama the Buddha or others - to communicate with un-Enlightened minds through the medium of concepts, so that doctrines like that of conditioned co-production, *ipratitya samutpadai*, have to be understood in this light, not just as purely intellectual excogitation but as efforts to communicate through the conceptual medium on the part of an Enlightened Mind trying to reach an un-Enlightened mind.

And lastly we come down to the level of words. Some people, of course, say that one cannot really separate words and thoughts, and certainly the connection between the two is very close. It's closer than the connection between images and thoughts, but nevertheless they are not quite the same thing. We do sometimes have thoughts which we do not or even cannot put into words, even subvocally.

So, having explored to some extent these four stages, these four levels, we can now see the enormous gulf, as we may say, that separates the Enlightened Mind, the Enlightened consciousness, the mind of the Buddha, from its expressions in terms of ordinary human speech. We can see through how many levels the Buddha had as it were to descend after his Enlightenment before he could even speak to the five ascetics, before he could teach them. No wonder, coming down as he had to do through all those levels, it took him not less than eight weeks: from the level of the Enlightened Mind itself down to the level of mantric sound (not that he came down, as it were, leaving behind the other stage - it's coming down without leaving behind); and then from the level of mantric sound to the level of archetypal images, from the

level of archetypal images to the level of thought, and from the level of thought to the level of words. And the Word of the Buddha or Buddhavacana consists of all these four things; consists of the primordial mantric sound, consists of the archetypal images, the concepts, and the words.

And the Dharma, the teaching, is transmitted through all these things, on all these levels - not just through ordinary words. And it's important to remember this. The Tantric tradition, the Tantric tradition of Tibet which was originally the Tantric tradition of India, in fact emphasises this point, that not all transmission of the teaching is through the medium of words. It emphasises it in a rather different way but with much the same meaning. The Tantric tradition of India and Tibet right down to the present day speaks of three modes of transmission of the Dharma. It speaks first of all of what it calls the mind transmission of the Jinas - the Jinas are the Buddhas, the Enlightened Ones, whether Gautama the Buddha or others - and here the transmission takes place from mind to mind, from heart to heart, from consciousness to consciousness. There are no words. There's no thought. It flashes directly, as it were, intuitively, telepathically, from one mind to another. He as it were looks at you and you know it, and that's the end of the matter. Neither says anything, neither thinks anything, but the transmission takes place on that purely mental or even spiritual level, the mind transmission of the Jinas.

And then the sign, the transmission, of the Vidyadharas. The Vidyadharas are the great Tantric initiates, the Tantric masters. They are not Buddhas, they are not fully Enlightened, but they are inconceivably great spiritually, by our standards. And here on this level the transmission is by signs, through actions and through gestures, as in the famous Ch'an story the Buddha holds up a flower. He says nothing, he holds up a flower; it's an action, and somebody understands. Most of them don't, but one disciple understands the action. So far as he is concerned, the transmission takes place through gesture.

And there are some Tantric initiations, even today, where the master just points. He doesn't say anything, doesn't explain anything; he just points, and the disciple, if he is receptive, gets it, and that's that - again. No words, no discussion, you've got it, it's been pointed out to you, directly pointed out - because you have to be really alert to catch this pointing out.

And then thirdly and lastly, right at the bottom of the list, the words transmission of the Acharyas: ordinary teachers, Enlightened to some extent, not fully Enlightened, who faithfully hand on the tradition, the teaching, through the medium of ordinary human thought and speech.

And all these are valid transmissions. You can get the Dharma, the spirit of the Dharma, the heart of the Dharma, in all these three ways, in any of these three ways: directly, telepathically; through signs and gestures; through words. It can come to you, it can reach you, in all these modes. iButi, of course, the lower the level of transmission, the greater the possibility of misunderstanding. If it flashes directly from mind to mind, there is no question of misunderstanding, because there's not even a question of understanding. If there's not even any understanding, how can there be any misunderstanding? It's just direct, like that. Even a gesture is relatively free from misunderstanding, but there is some possibility of misunderstanding here - not exactly misunderstanding, but maybe you don't quite see what is pointed to, you see something a bit different. Whereas on the level of words possibilities of

misunderstanding, even in the matter of the transmission of the Dharma, are very great indeed.

Now we've spoken of the Enlightened Mind, the Enlightened consciousness, as communicating on the level of words, which as we have seen is the lowest level of all. We've spoken of the words transmission of the Acharyas. But so far we've said nothing about the written word, nothing about the sacred scriptures. We've already seen that the Buddha taught orally; he didn't write down anything, he didn't write any books, his disciples didn't write any books - not for a long time, for hundreds of years, maybe nearly 500 years. The Dharma, the teaching, was transmitted by word of mouth, and then only after that was it gradually, bit by bit, not all at once, written down; and apparently some things were never written down at all, and even after 2500 years have never been written down. They are still transmitted by word of mouth, right down to the present.

Now when the orally transmitted teaching is written down, whether after 500 years or 1000 years, it becomes the sacred scriptures. And these sacred scriptures also, the literary records of what was originally an oral tradition, are known as the Word of the Buddha, Buddhavacana; in fact, very often the word is used primarily in this sense, in the sense of the scriptures, and the deeper implications of the term are sometimes, in some circles, even forgotten. So let us now take just a glance, a very swift glance, at these Buddhist scriptures, the written records of the oral tradition of the Buddha's teaching. We're going to consider them in their main categories, roughly in the order in which they appeared as literary documents; and the period of time involved, the period during which they appeared, became written down, is nearly 1000 years. Broadly speaking, the more exoteric teachings seem to have been written down first, the esoteric ones, or more esoteric ones, later on or perhaps not even at all.

The first division, first to be written down, apparently, was the monastic code, Vinaya. This consists essentially of rules, rules of conduct, rules of behaviour, for monks and nuns, and this is the most exoteric portion of the teaching and therefore, apparently, it was the first to be written down. The rules in the Vinaya are of two kinds. There are rules for monks or nuns leading a wandering life, wandering from place to place, living on alms and so on; these rules are known as the bhiksu pratimoksa and bhiksuni pratimoksa. And, secondly, there are rules for monks or nuns living in permanently residential communities, and these rules, and the explanations of the rules and commentaries on the rules, these are known as the skandhakasi or the Chapters. And the chapters cover all sorts of subjects. There's a chapter on ordination, a chapter on the fortnightly meetings of the monks or nuns, a chapter on how to observe the rainy season retreat. There's another chapter on the use of leather for shoes - he didn't even neglect this sort of topic. There's a chapter on medicine and food, a chapter on material for robes, sleeping regulations, and rules for sick monks. There's a chapter on proceedings in case of dissension, a chapter on duties of monks under suspension, a chapter on dwellings, furnishings - they seem to have got furnishings rather quickly - lodgings, and order of precedence among monks. And there's a chapter on settlement of disputes, and a chapter on schisms. So chapters on all these topics and lots more.

Now besides the rules themselves, in the Vinaya, in the monastic code, in this branch of the Buddhist scriptures, there's a great deal of commentarial material - commentaries on the rules, explanations and expositions of the rules - and also a lot of general historical, biographical and anthropological material. In fact, the Vinaya, the whole Vinaya literature, which is very bulky,

is probably our richest source of information as regards the general condition of India, north-eastern India, in the Buddha's time. Also here and there, even in the Vinaya literature, some discourses are included.

Now as far as we can see, as far as some modern scholars can see, some of the material in the Vinaya, including some of the rules, apparently is not fully and literally the actual word of the Buddha. This material seems to have been added later by the disciples, and their additions and explanations at some later stage seem to have been incorporated with the word of the Buddha itself, but this, of course, applies, we may say, to practically all branches of the scriptures. So much for the monastic code, the Vinaya.

Secondly, there are what we may call the dialogues and discourses of the Buddha; this is the second branch of the scriptures, the second category. There are about 200 of these. Some are long and some are short, and they are arranged for the most part in two great collections: a collection known as the Collection of Long Discourses, and the collection known as the Middle-Length Discourses. And in the Pali recension of this material, there are 34 long dialogues or discourses and 152 middle-length ones. And these, between them, cover all aspects of the moral and the spiritual life, and some are of anthropological interest, some of mythological interest and even autobiographical interest, because in some the Buddha recounts his own experiences in his own earlier life. So it's a quite rich and slightly miscellaneous collection.

Thirdly, third category, there are what we call the anthologies - anthologies of sayings of the Buddha, usually quite short. And there are two particularly big anthologies containing between them thousands of sayings. There's an anthology of sayings arranged according to subject matter; for instance, there's a little collection on 'Sayings on the Gods', another little collection on 'The Sons of the Gods', then another on 'The Kingdom of Kosala', on 'Mara the Evil One'. The Buddha's sayings on these subjects have all been brought together under one heading. There's a collection on, for instance, nuns, then on brahmins, then sayings of Vangisa, one of the most gifted of the Buddha's disciples, who was a poet; a collection of sayings on the forest, on gain and honour, on similes, on views, on Stream Entry, on the defilements, on the heavenly musicians, on Moggallana - another disciple; on the four foundations of mindfulness, and so on; collections of sayings on topics of this sort, arranged according to topic.

And then there's an anthology of sayings arranged numerically, that is to say a collection of things of which there's only one, then a collection of things of which there are two, of which there are three, and so on up to eleven. For instance, under four, under the number four, you get the Buddha's sayings on 'The four things leading to liberation from the conditioned existence', 'The four kinds of purity of a gift', 'The four kinds of thoroughbred' - thoroughbred horse, apparently - 'Four Dhyanas' or states of higher consciousness, the four brahma viharasi - that is to say, love, compassion, joy and equanimity, and so on. They are arranged in ascending numerical order.

Then there are, in addition to these - and of course I am summarising very rapidly - a number of shorter anthologies. There's the iDhammapadai, which is especially well known, the iSutta Nipatai, the iUdanai, which means the verses breathed out in a state of emotional exaltation; then the iTtivuttakai, the Sayings of the Buddha - 'Thus He Said' or 'Like That He Said'. And then there's the Sutra of 42 Sections. And this material, the shorter anthologies, are arranged in

various ways, usually according to subject matter. So these are the anthologies.

Fourthly, there's the category of the Birth Stories and Glorious Deeds. This is perhaps the most widely popular of all branches of Buddhist scripture - popular especially among the lay people, even today, in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Tibet. These birth stories and glorious deeds are very popular, because this literature, this branch of the scriptures, consists entirely of stories, very interesting, very fascinating stories, very often, even just as stories: stories about the Buddha and stories about his prominent disciples. But stories with a difference: not stories about the Buddha's present life or the present lives of the disciples, but stories about their previous lives before this life. And the stories about the Buddha's previous lives are called Jatakas or birth stories, and the stories about the previous lives of the disciples are called Avadanas. And these stories, whether Jatakas or Avadanas, all illustrate the workings of the law of karma, the law as it were of moral, psychological recompense operating over a whole series of lifetimes. They show how one's moral and spiritual gains are conserved, as it were, from one life to the next.

Now the Jatakas, the birth stories, the stories about the Buddha's earlier lives, are much more numerous than the Avadanas or the stories about the previous lives of disciples; and the Pali collection, which is the biggest one, contains 550 Jataka stories. Some of them are the length of short novels; you could print several of them in one, say, Penguin volume, just separately; it would be big enough, long enough for that. And the Jatakas usually follow a standard pattern. They are divided into four parts. First of all comes the introduction, which is called the story of the present, and this relates the particular occasion on which the Buddha, from whom of course all this material is supposed to issue, told his disciples the Jataka story in question, describes how something happens; he called them all together and then he told them this story. And then secondly, there's the prose narrative or story of the past, which is the Jataka story proper. And then thirdly, there are the verses which we find in each Jataka story, which generally form part of part 2. And then fourthly and lastly, there's what's called the connection, in which the Buddha identifies the personages in the story of the present, including himself, with those in the story of the past. For instance, he says after telling the story of the past: 'Well, Ananda, you were such-and-such in that past story, and I was such-and-such.' And sometimes the stories aren't very complimentary even to the Buddha himself. He seems to be, as far as we can tell, telling the truth about his own previous lives, in which he isn't always shown as very saintly. I believe in one Jataka story the Buddha was even a robber, which shows that there's hope for all.

Many Jataka stories are in fact old Indian folk tales, taken over by the Buddhists and adapted to their own particular purposes. In fact, the Pali Jataka book with its 550 stories has been described by Rhys-Davids as the most reliable, the most complete, and the most ancient collection of folklore now extant in any literature in the world. And the Jataka stories, the Avadanas too, have exerted all over the Buddhist East a tremendous moral and spiritual influence. It's here that people, ordinary Buddhists, in these countries, get their moral and spiritual inspiration - from these stories. And very often the stories are made into dramas, made into miracle plays, mystery plays, and right down into recent times in Tibet they were staged, they were acted, performed in the courtyards of the big monasteries on special occasions. And even Lama Govinda describes them in one of his books - how he saw rough Tibetan mule-drivers with tears streaming down their faces as they watched the Jataka story in which the Buddha in this particular previous life just sacrifices everything for the sake of

Enlightenment. And they're so moved by this story as it's depicted, as it's enacted, that they can't even help shedding tears. And this is the sort of effect, the sort of influence, that the Jatakas have exerted on the Buddhist masses, as it were, all down the centuries.

Now we come to something very different; now we come to the fifth category of Buddhist scriptural literature, the Abhidharma - very different from the Jataka stories. There are no stories here at all, not even any figures of speech; they are strictly banished. The word Abhidharma is usually explained as meaning the higher teaching or the further teaching of the Buddha. So in what sense is it a higher or a further teaching? The Abhidharma - the Abhidharma branch of the Buddhist scriptures - gathers together the teachings found in the dialogues and discourses and in the anthologies, and it treats them in a much more systematic, as it were scientific and abstract, fashion. It eliminates all the personal references. It banishes history, banishes biography, mythology, banishes rhetoric - no figures of speech, as I said, no poetry; and it also, very importantly, defines the meaning of all technical terms used. The Abhidharma is also much concerned with the analysis and the classification of mental states. It goes into tremendous detail, psychologically speaking, and it also tries to give a complete, a systematic, account, mainly in psychological terms, of the whole course of progress, the whole path to Nirvana.

Now there are two main collections of Abhidharma works. There's one produced by the Sarvastivadins and one produced by the Theravadins, and each collection consists of seven books, seven great works, very extensive, each and every one of them. But they are not the same seven books. They are two separate sets. There's a certain amount of similarity between them, similarity of method, but on the whole they are quite different. Some schools of Buddhism, I should mention, do not regard the Abhidharma as being literally the word of the Buddha, even though they agree that there is some trace of Abhidharma method in the dialogues and the anthologies; but many of the schools do not regard the Abhidharma as the word of the Buddha but as the product of later scholastic activity. So that's the Abhidharma.

Sixthly, the Mahayana sutras. This is one of the biggest and the richest divisions of the Buddhist scriptures. A sutra, of course, means a discourse delivered by the Buddha, or the literary record of a discourse delivered by the Buddha, and a Mahayana sutra is one dealing wholly or mainly with specifically Mahayana teachings, that is to say with isunyatai or the voidness, with the Bodhisattva Ideal, with the One Mind, with the Trikaya or three bodies of the Buddha, and so on. And there are several hundred such Mahayana sutras. Some are very long, very long indeed, several volumes each; others are very short, even down to a page or two. Some of the Mahayana sutras are written, or written down, in a very quiet, philosophical style, and others are full of myth and symbolism and marvels and even magic. And I'll mention just a few of the most famous and important Mahayana sutras. First of all, *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines*. With one exception, possibly, this is the oldest of all the Perfection of Wisdom texts, and as the title suggests it deals mainly with *iprajnaparamitai*, the Perfection of Wisdom or Transcendental Wisdom, or the wisdom that goes, that carries one, beyond. It deals also with the kind of person developing *iprajnaparamitai*, that is to say it deals with the Bodhisattva; and it deals, this *Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines*, with the object of perfect wisdom, which is of course *isunyatai*, the void, Reality itself. And it stresses, again and again, the subtle, the elusive character of this wisdom. It stresses its non- conceptual, its transconceptual, its paradoxical nature and character.

Next, another great Mahayana sutra, the *iSaddharma Pundarikai*, the White Lotus of the True Teaching, the White Lotus of the Real Truth. From a literary point of view, this is one of the most marvellous, one of the most impressive, one of the most magnificent of all the Mahayana sutras, and it conveys a profound spiritual meaning. But it conveys it, for the most part, in entirely non-conceptual terms. There's no abstract teaching, no philosophy, no conceptual statements. The *iSaddharma Pundarikai* is full of parables, it abounds in myths, it's replete with symbols. And we've described some of these in a series of lectures given about two years ago on 'The Parables, Myths and Symbols of the White Lotus Sutra'. Through these parables, myths and symbols, the White Lotus Sutra teaches that in its essence, in its true nature, the Buddha is eternal, above space, above time, and it also teaches that there's just one great way to Enlightenment, that is the Mahayana, for all living beings, and that all living beings are in fact, whether they know it or not, all following this path and will all in the end gain Enlightenment, become Buddhas. This is spiritual optimism, we may say, at the highest possible level.

Then there's another great Mahayana sutra, the *iLankavatarai*, teachings given by the Buddha in the course of his visit to the island of Lanka in the midst of the ocean; and here there's no systematic arrangement, no systematic presentation, but the whole text is of really great psychological and spiritual significance. It teaches, amongst other things, that the three worlds, the whole of phenomenal existence, the whole of conditioned existence, are nothing ultimately but one Mind, one absolute and ultimate consciousness, to which everything can be as it were reduced, of which everything is the manifestation, the expression, in one way or another. And it stresses that one needs actually to realise this, not just talk about it, not just think about it, not even meditate upon it, but realise it for oneself within oneself, that everything is just mind. And in order to realise in this way, to see in this way, to experience in this way, there must be a profound, a radical transformation; our whole mental apparatus, our whole psychological system, conditioned as it is, must be as it were put into reverse, turned upside down, transformed. And this is called the turning about, *iparavrittii*, in the deepest centre of consciousness, from the relative to the absolute, from mind as split up and fractured into all sorts of individual minds to the One Mind, which is everybody's mind. So this is the *iLankavatara Sutra*.

Then there's the *iLalitavistarai*, which means the extended, the amplified account of the Buddha's *ilalitasi*, sports, as it were playful activities, spontaneous activities - because after his Enlightenment, at least, there was no question of *ikarma* or anything conditioned; it was all playful, sportful manifestation of his Enlightened essence. And this, the *iLalitavistarai*, is a sort of highly imaginative, poetic biography of the Buddha, and it's on this *iLalitavistarai* that Edwin Arnold based his famous Buddhist poem on the life of the Buddha, *iThe Light of Asia*.

And then another Mahayana sutra, the *iGandhavyuha Sutrai*, Discourse on the Cosmic Array; and this gives an account of a pilgrimage undertaken by a young man called Sudhana, a young seeker after truth. And in the course of his pilgrimage, his long pilgrimage all over India and beyond, he visits more than fifty teachers, and these teachers are of many different kinds. They include Bodhisattvas, monks, nuns, householders, there's a physician, there's a perfume seller, there's a sailor, there are two kings, several children, a number of deities, and also a hermit. And they all teach him. He learns something from each and every one of them. But eventually he comes to south India, to the Vairocana Tower, and this is a very mysterious episode. In the Vairocana Tower he meets the Bodhisattva Maitreya, and here he receives as it were his final

initiation. Here he has a vision of the Absolute Truth. He sees the whole universe, the whole cosmos; he sees everything in it, and he sees everything reflecting, as though in a mirror, every other thing. He sees everything in the universe as it were passing through, interpenetrating, every other thing, just like beams of light mutually intersecting, everything like this [gesture?], not separate, not marked off, not demarcated, not solid, but everything fluid and flowing, everything as it were flowing into every other thing all the time, everywhere. This is the sort of vision he has in the Vairocana Tower in the Gandhavyuha Sutra.

These are just a few of the great Mahayana sutras, but there are many, many more. We've no time even to mention their names.

Then, the seventh and last branch of the Buddhist scriptures, seventh and last category, the Tantras. It's more difficult to say anything about the Tantras than even any other branch of Buddhist literature. The Tantras deal not with theory but with practice, and they deal with it in a highly miscellaneous fashion. They are not systematic treatises or discourses. They are written, if you can use that word even, in a very cryptic, even in a deliberately misleading way. You're not meant to be able to read a Tantra and understand it - and that's very obvious if you get hold of a Tantric text. You're not supposed to read, much less still practise, the content of the Tantra at all without initiation by a guru. The guru takes out from the Tantras what he thinks you may need, and he arranges it, he organises it, for your personal practice, and initiates you accordingly. So that's all perhaps one can usefully say, certainly on this occasion, about the Tantras.

So these are the seven main categories of the Buddhist scriptures: the monastic code, the dialogues and discourses, the anthologies, the birth stories and heroic deeds, the Abhidharma, the Mahayana sutras, the Tantras; and between them they constitute the Buddhavacana or Word of the Buddha in its most external and exoteric sense. And I think, as you will have seen already, that this is an enormous mass of material, this Buddhist literature, these Buddhist scriptures, these records, these literary records of the oral teaching. They constitute, in fact, a whole library.

At present they exist in three main collections. There's the Pali Tipitaka, there's the Chinese San Tsang, and there's the Tibetan Kangyur. The Pali Tipitaka is of course in the Pali language, which is based on an old Indian dialect, and the Pali Tipitaka is the scriptural basis of the Buddhism in south-east Asia, that is Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and so on. And the Pali Tipitaka contains versions of the first five categories of Buddhist scriptures. It contains a version of the monastic code, contains dialogues and discourses, anthologies, birth stories and heroic deeds, and the Abhidharma. But in the Pali Tipitaka there are no Mahayana sutras and no Tantras, and practically all the Pali Tipitaka has been translated into English.

The Chinese San Tsang consists of Chinese translations, that is to say translations into the Chinese language, mainly from Sanskrit, and this collection is even more voluminous than the Pali Tipitaka. It contains versions of the first six categories of Buddhist scriptures; in other words it contains everything, or versions of everything, except the Tantras, though one or two Tantras are included in early sutra form. Perhaps not more than five per cent. of the San Tsang has been translated into English.

The Kangyur consists of Tibetan translations mainly from the Sanskrit, and it contains all seven categories of Buddhist scriptures, so that it's in this sense the most complete collection of Buddhist scriptures. What proportion of the Kangyur has been translated into English it's very difficult to say, but it must be very small indeed.

So from all this we can see how extensive the Buddhist scriptures are - and, of course, it's very easy to get lost among them. It's even easy to get lost among the English translations, comparatively few even as they are. It's very easy to become confused as to what to read and what not to read, and it's even easy to forget what the Word of the Buddha is in a deeper sense. Among the words, among all the words, you miss, or you lose, the Word. In other words, it's easy to forget the spirit or Buddhavacana. You can read and study so many scriptures, you forget all about the Word of the Buddha. And this spirit of the Buddhavacana is very difficult to put into words.

Perhaps, as we draw near the end of this lecture, it can be put into an image, into a sort of archetypal spiritual image, or perhaps we can say it will even appear as an image, because the spirit of the Buddhavacana is embodied in the figure of the Bodhisattva Manjughosa, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom; and the name means 'He of gentle speech'. Manjughosa, He of Gentle Speech, is also known as Vagisvara, or Lord or Sovereign of Speech. iVagi [ivaki?] is the same word, it's the same root, as we get in ivacanai - ivaki and ivaci are identical. So Vagisvara, the Lord of Speech, the Sovereign of Speech. And he appears, as it were, in the midst of the dark blue, almost the midnight sky, and he appears seated cross-legged on a magnificent lotus throne, he appears in the form of a beautiful youth, sixteen years of age, and tawny-coloured, a sort of rich yellow colour, with long, black, flowing tresses, clad only in silks and jewels. And he carries, he wields, in fact, in one hand a flaming sword, a sort of scimitar which streams with fire; and in the other he holds, in fact he presses to his heart, a book, the scriptures - especially, we are sometimes told, the scripture of the Perfection of Wisdom; and he is surrounded by an aura of golden light, surrounded by rainbows. And he, this figure, Manjughosa, Vagisvara, Lord, Sovereign, of Speech, is the embodiment, is the archetype of the Word of the Buddha.

And one can go even further than that, even higher than that. The Word of the Buddha is embodied not only in the figure of a Bodhisattva but in the figure of the Buddha himself, in the figure of the Buddha of the White Lotus Sutra; because he, we are told in that sutra, is seated eternally on the spiritual Vulture's Peak, seated, that is to say, on the very summit of mundane existence, and there he eternally proclaims the Dharma, proclaims the White Lotus Sutra, proclaims it not in words as written down in the text of the sutra, proclaims it not even in images as described in the text of the sutra, but proclaims it on that level, on that highest pinnacle of existence, proclaims it in terms of pure mantric sound, proclaims it as the primordial vibration as it were of Reality itself; so that whether meditating, whether reading the scriptures, but whenever we are silent, whenever we are still, we too can pick up that vibration, coming as it were from the height, the pinnacle of existence, coming from the Buddha Mind, the Enlightened Consciousness, Reality itself, and picking it up finally, subtly, gently; picking it up, we can ourselves begin to vibrate in accordance with it, in harmony with it, and we too can hear in that way, to that extent, in the very depths of our being, or - what is the same thing - on the very height of our being, in the deepest and the highest and the truest and most comprehensive sense, can hear the Word of the Buddha.

