Tape 119: Enlightenment as Experience and as Non-Experience

Mr Humphreys and Friends

Practically speaking, and we may say that Buddhism is nothing if not practical, practically speaking, Buddhism, as we call it in the West, or the Dharma, as we perhaps should more correctly call it, consists principally, one might even say essentially, of two things. It consists in the first place of a Path, a Way, and in the second place, it consists of a Goal, if you like an Objective. And the Path has been, can be, variously described. According to concepts, it is spoken of as the Noble or the Holy Eightfold Path, the Path not of eight stages, as sometimes the word is translated, but rather of eight members, eight factors. It's spoken of also as the Path of, sometimes, the Six or the Ten Perfections, Transcendences, or even Transcendental Virtues. And again, the Path, the Way is spoken of perhaps even more frequently as the Middle Way, the Middle Path between and above extremes. These are just some of the ways in which we speak of that Path. And then the Goal. The Goal is what we can only described in tentative words of human speech, as Buddhahood, Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. And Enlightenment itself can be thought of, can be envisaged, in various ways, in all sorts of ways: as Supreme Wisdom, as Absolute Gnosis, Insight into Things as They Really Are, also as Compassion, Infinite Compassion, the Plenitude of Compassion, Compassion that pours out in all directions simultaneously, on to all sentient beings. It can be spoken of, it can be thought of also in terms of Infinite spiritual even transcendental energy, radiating irresistably, in all directions. Also it can be spoken of, thought of, in terms of an utter, a complete purity, not as we understand purity, not just as purity in respect of evil, but even purity in respect of good. So in these ways, and in so many other ways too, can Enlightenment be thought of, can be spoken of . And we can think of it, we can speak of it, also as an experience. We can speak of it, think of it, as THE experience even, the culminating experience, the greatest of all experiences; if you like, as the experience to end all experiences. And it's with this that we're concerned tonight, with Enlightenment as Experience, and also as non-experience, which perhaps, you might be thinking, is something rather more mysterious, rather more recondite, even - and this is the sort of word that people love, and the sort of word that they expect - something esoteric. So what we're going to do in the course of the following hour and of course I mustn't forget our chairman's well-known love of punctuality, not only in beginning meetings, but also in concluding them, what we're going to consider in the course of the ensuing hour, is just some of the implications of thinking of Enlightenment in this way, thinking of it in terms of experience.

So first, what do we mean by experience? After all we use the term often enough. But what do we mean by experience? Usually experience is distinguished from thought, that is to say, from abstract thought, from conceptual thought, even though of course in a sense, thought itself is an experience. Now if we want to speak just very generally, basically, with regards to what experience is, we may say that experience is principally, is outstandingly, a matter of perception and feeling. Experience means the actual living through an event, not just looking at it, not just contemplating it, not just thinking about it, but actually living through that event, experiencing it, as we say. Experience also means, also suggests, real life as contrasted with the ideal life or the imaginary life or existence. So Enlightenment as experience means therefore Enlightenment as something which we actually perceive, which we actually feel, felt in the nerves and felt along the heart, felt in the blood, felt in the bone, not just something abstractly thought about or speculated about or imagined, or fantasised about, and something that we live through; enlightenment as experience is something that we live through. But when of course we experience enlightenment, we live through Enlightenment in a different way from the way we

live through any other experience. In the case of other experiences, we as it were come out at the other end, intact, or modified, to some extent. But in the case of the experience of Enlightenment, we do not come out at the other end. There is no end. Maybe there's an end of us, but that is another matter. We do not come out at the other end. In fact we may say, Enlightenment is something which is at it were a continuing part of our life after we experience it, or rather our life becomes a continuing part of Enlightenment itself. But how did we come to think of Enlightenment in this way? How did we come to think of Enlightenment in terms of experience? We mustn't think that this is the natural, the inevitable, the only way of thinking about things, thinking about Enlightenment, thinking in terms of experience. It is, if you look at it, a rather odd way of thinking. We might have become used to it, but that simply means that we've become used to it. There are alternatives. But how did we come to think of Enlightenment in this way? How did we come to make this statement that Enlightenment is an experience? And probably that is a statement with which no one would wish to disagree, not without being rather pedantic perhaps. So this way of speaking, that is of Enlightenment as experience, is not an Indian way, not an Indian Buddhist way, to speak of Enlightenment as an experience. In the Pali scriptures that is to say, in the ancient scriptures of the Theravada school, some portions of which come very close to the Buddha's original teaching, in the Pali scriptures there's no reference to Enlightenment as experience. That's something perhaps to ponder upon. They get along, in the Pali scriptures, without the need of speaking of Enlightenment in terms of experience. The very early Buddhists it seems, as far as we know, didn't think of Enlightenment in precisely those terms. Perhaps experience was implied, but it was never stated in so many words; in that sort of word, or in equivalent words - Enlightenment as experience; that was not their mode of thought. If we come on to, say, the Lankavatara Sutra, which as everybody knows, I'm sure, is one of the greatest of the Mahayana sutras; if we come on to the Lankavatara Sutra, we find that the Lankavatara Sutra speaks of something that it calls gatigocara. I'm not going to try to explain what gatigocara really means; it would take me much too far afield. But Suzuki does translate it as 'experience', which is very approximate indeed. I don't think that would get past a really strict scholar, not as an exact translation - gatigocara in the sense of as it were the 'experience' of aryajnana, that is to say, Noble Wisdom. And the Lankavatara also speaks of 'pratyatma gocara' which Suzuki translates as 'inner realisation', again a bit like, you could say, experience, but not very exactly so by any means. So even if we accept that the Lankavatara Sutra does in a way speak of Enlightenment in terms of experience, it's in a rather distant and almost equivocal sort of way; you could translate alternatively. And in any case the Lankavatara is quite a late sutra; in its present form it could not have been compiled more than, or less than, probably seven or eight hundred years after the time of Sakyamuni the Buddha. And we could even say perhaps that the Lankavatara, its teaching, its approach, its stress on what we call experience or on something corresponding to what we now call experience does reflect developments taking place in India analogous to developments taking place in the West very very much later. In Pali and Sanskrit, we can say, it's as difficult to speak of Enlightenment as experience, in our sense, as to say that all life is one. To say that all life is one maybe a justifiable or reinterpretation of Buddhist teaching, but you can't put it back into either Pali or Sanskrit. It represents a quite different mode of expression, a mode of expression which is a product of modern Western way of thinking. If we want to translate back into Pali or Sanskrit, 'Enlightenment is an experience' or 'all life is one', we can't do it, because we become involved not in translation but in re-interpretation, rethinking if you like even re-experiencing, making anew, which is of course one of the things you mustn't do according to some schools of Buddhism in the East; 'navakata'(?) as they call it, making new, is equivalent to heresy. But anyway we won't say any more about that at the moment.

So we may say that this particular kind of expression, speaking of Enlightenment as experience, is the product even of our own particular mode of experiencing, to use the word which is itself under discussion. It's part of the way in which we come to regard religion generally. We can even say it's part of the way in which we've come to regard life itself - thinking of it, speaking of it, in terms of experience, even stressing experience. Now how is this? I've no time for a detailed exposition; there must just be a few general points made, a few scattered hints, and no more. So let's take quite a broad view;let's have quite a broad sweep of history in Western Europe, and having that broad view, that broad sweep we can say that up to the time of the Reformation, religion in Christian Europe was a very, very much richer and more complex thing than it is today. Religion up to that time in the West - and I'm thinking of course mainly of the Christian religion which superceded earlier faiths - religion consisted of quite a number of different elements, quite a number of different aspects. For instance there was doctrine, theology, scholastic philosophy. There was ethics. There was ritual, sacraments, liturgy. There were great festivals, celebrations, pageantry, social institutions, folk customs, law (Canon Law for instance)

myth, legend, mysticism, asceticism, even marvel and miracle, all these things making up religion, going to make up religion up to the time of the reformation. And we can even include such things as painting, sculpture, architecture, music: all these were as it were incorporated and integrated into religion, into the dominant religious values, so that you had indeed a many splendoured thing - something very rich, something very complex, something very inspired. But that great synthesis did break down. With the Reformation came a change - again no time to go into details - and especially a change came about in the Protestant, or what afterwards became the Protestant, part of Europe. Doctrine became much more rigid. In fact there wasn't any one Christian doctrine any more; there were a number of conflicting and competing versions of the one true faith. Myth and legend, all the more colourful elements of religion, especially in the Protestant countries, gradually disappeared, and ritual dwindled we may say, to a ghost of its former splendid self. And in some areas, ritual was banished altogether. The fine arts became more and more secularised, the Church became separated from the State, religion became divorced from secular life, and it became more and more a matter of private morality and personal feeling. In England this trend was very much intensified during the Victorian period. The traditional religious doctrine of the origin of the universe and of man was very much undermined during the Victorian period, as we all know, by discover is in the fields of geology and biology, in particular undermined by Darwin's theory of evolution. And intellectually, for many good, serious, sincere people, religion, the Christian religion, became more and more intellectually untenable. For some, like Matthew Arnold, religion became simply morality 'tinged with emotion' as he calls it. The morality was often little more than social conformity. And the emotion was often very little more than a feeling of nostalgia for the lost faith. For others, we may say, religion became not morality tinged with emotion but rather emotion tinged with morality. And as the decades went by, that emotion became less and less faintly tinged with morality. And it was at this point say roughly one hundred years ago that Buddhism first really entered upon the scene. If we wanted a date we could fix upon eighteen seventy I think it's three. Someone may correct me perhaps; it might be four, the year of publication of Sir Edwin Arnold's celebrated poem, that very beautiful life of the Buddha, The Light of Asia; sorry seventy nine; I've been corrected from the chair. Seventy nine; if we want to fix a date, let it be 1879.

So we can already begin to see in what sort of way it was virtually inevitable that Buddhism would have been looked upon, at that time. It would have been looked upon either as a system of ethics, or as a particular kind of religious sentiment, as a particular kind of feeling as an experience. Buddhism would not, and in fact was not at that stage taken very seriously as a doctrine, as a philosophy, for want of a better word. The depths of Buddhist thought were not

plumbed at that time. They were not begun even to be plumbed, and we're far from plumbing them even today, a hundred years later. And as for myth and legend, certainly in those days people were not very ready to regard Buddhism or look upon Buddhism in those terms; they'd had enough of Christian myth and legend which had been dressed up as historical fact. They were in no mood in those days for myth and legend, or for religion or Buddhism as myth and legend. And as for such things as ritual, festivals, social institutions - the whole more colourful or popular side of religion or Buddhism, they would have been regarded as simply out of the question, even by the very very few who thought of themselves in those days as Buddhist in this country. After all, they might have said, had not the Buddha, good Protestant that he was, condemned rites and ceremonies as fetters? So some of these reasons for not regarding Buddhism very seriously as doctrine nor as legend or myth of ritual, some of these remain unthinkable for Western Buddhists even today. So for many Buddhism becomes a matter still of ethics or of experience. And therefore one tends to think of Enlightenment as experience. It might even be said that one might well have predicted, at the end of the last century, which forms of Buddhism would be the most popular in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century: Theravada and Zen - Theravada as representing a code of ethics, and Zen as representing experience. Now in the second half of the twentieth century, we may say, the Theravada has rather fallen behind as, as it were, an independent school. And Zen, we may also say, at least in some areas, in some quarters, is beginning to be displaced by something else. What that something else is may be seen later on.

So, so much for the way in which we regard religion, for the way we've come, almost insensibly, to think nowadays, in the West, of religion, including Buddhism, in terms of experience. Now, what about the way in which we regard life itself? In other words, the organised life of the human community - social life in the very widest sense, along with its various aspects, political, economic, cultural, domestic. How do we feel about this? now often it must be confessed that when it comes to life, many of us don't feel very much at all. If we feel anything, when it comes to life, if you like Life with a capital 'L', life in general, or just life, we feel confused. We feel bewildered. Life is so very complicated, or has become so very complicated. And I'm sure many of us feel at times as though we have become caught up in a vast system, even a vast machine, which has become far too big and far too complex for us to understand, or to do anything at all about. All sorts of things happen all over the world all the time. And we it seems have very little, sometimes absolutely no control over them whatever. But there they are, happening all the time all over the world. And we've no control over them, usually, almost always, even when they most deeply and most intimately affect our own lives. In respect of those events we are powerless. We're impotent. We can do nothing. We're helpless. The juggernaut, as it were, of events - world events, global events - rolls on; we can do nothing, even if the wheels are crushing us, crushing the life out of us, we can do nothing. And very often that is the sort of feeling we have about life -that we can do nothing. So we feel helpless, impotent, frustrated. At the same time, very often, for many of us, life seems to us a very dull and very routine affair. We go along, we rumble along, or we creep along tracks which have been placed down for us, not by ourselves, but for us, before even we were born, perhaps before even our parents were born. You know the round: school. You didn't ask to be sent to be school usually. School! When school ends, well what? Work! One form or another, one level or another. Then, inevitably, marriage. And, as inevitably, for practically everybody, after marriage, mortgage!. And, not quite so inevitably nowadays, of course, for reasons I need not mention, children! And of course, still more work, perhaps promotion, if you're lucky, which of course means more work again, and then retirement, redundancy, and death! And this of course is what life, ordinary life, social life, human life, means for most people, certainly for most men. I think the women, sometimes at least, have it

a little easier than that. And apparently... words of protest [i.e. from audience: transcriber]...alright! Accepted! And apparently there's no alternative. The wheel has caught you; the wheel has got you in its grip,and it rolls on and on. I saw today that .....to mind(?) [interference scrambles one or two words on the tape here] a very striking picture in the Burne Jones exhibition; it was called "The Wheel of Fortune"; i think it should've been called "The Wheel of Misfortune" - a vast wheel turned by a rather stern-looking female figure, with helpless male figures strapped on to it, and it was just turning, and turning, inevitably, and inexorably. So this is what life means, for most people, for men, and, let us say, for women too, usually, unfortunately.

Now, I've mentioned work, work in the sense of gainful employment. And it's quite a thought that we devote more time, and more energy, to work in this sense than to any other single activity in our lives. With of course one exception: sleep. And for only too many people, work is dull, repetitious, exhausting, and boring. There's no joy in it for the people who do the work, no sense of fulfilment, no feeling of creativity, and no real outlet for their energy. Some people are as it were bursting with energy but they can't put it into their work. That energy is not appropriate to that work, is not needed in that work. So there's no outlet very often for their energies. So what is the result of all this? What is the result of this sort of experience of life? The result is, the overriding effect is that people, too many of them these days, feel frustrated; they feel impotent, and they feel, deep down, very resentful. But again only too often, they're not in a position to express that resentment. The expression of resentment only too often is a luxury that the worker cannot afford. Only too often of course there's no one around anyway in the vast impersonal concerns of today, no one around to vent it on. Can't express their resentment without - and sometimes this does happen - without engaging in criminal activities, criminal violence. There's a small minority of people who sometimes do. So gradually what happens is, gradually we lose contact with our feelings, and when we lose contact with our feelings, we lose contact with ourselves. And when we lose contact with ourselves, we lose contact with life. We become dull, tired, mechanical, dead. We become walking corpses. Zombies. And we all know this very well. We've seen it quite often enough. We've seen it, at least something of it, to some extent, in our own selves from time to time, and also in others. And that great poet, that great visionary William Blake, saw it nearly two hundred years ago, at the time of the grimey dawn of the Industrial Revolution in this country. And he says:

I wander thro' each charter'd streetNear where the charter'd Thames does flowAnd mark in every face I meetMarks of weakness, marks of woe.

And we can see those same marks on the faces of the people in the tube as we go home tonight - "Marks of weakness, marks of woe"- if we look. And the only difference is, two hundred years after Blake, the only difference is that those marks are, if anything, graven deep. So the situation we may say is bad enough. But of course, we are human, we do have energy deep down, however perverted, however distorted, and we don't always take things lying down, and quite rightly so; we try to do something about the situation, something about our lives. So we look about us for something to relieve the boredom, to relieve the dullness, the sense of frustration. We look around us for something that will give us a bit of excitement, a bit of amusement at least, a bit of a thrill, something that will make us feel more alive, something that will take us out of ourselves, something that will help us forget everything, at least for a while. So in this way we turn to food, glorious food. We turn to sex, we turn to alcohol and other drugs. We turn of course to that famous institution, the TV set. And we turn, in the case of some people, to the more expensive dress, to the bigger and better car, or the more powerful and more noisy motorbike.

And we turn even, almost in desperation, to spectator sport, including blood sports. I heard a woman on the radio saying that she lived for hare coursing, she loved to see it. It was the only thing in life, she said, worth living for. Life would be nothing without hare coursing, she said. And she said it over the radio. And in the same way we turn to the passive, and I underline this, the passiveenjoyment of music, and art. And we may even, as I suggested earlier on, to sadism and to violence. So to all sorts of things we turn in our search for relief from our boredom, to all sorts of things, from the sublime to the sordid, from Beethoven to bingo. Now some of the things I've mentioned of course are not bad in themselves. It's the use that we make of them which is bad. It's the use that we make of them that could be described probably as neurotic, or in more traditional Buddhist terminology, as unskilful. And because the use we make of these things, even the things which are not intrinsically so, because the use we make of them is neurotic, is unskilful, they don't really work as reliefs for boredom, for frustration. So in the long run what happens is we feel more empty, more frustrated, and more drained, more exhausted than ever. Now there's no need to insist on this point. There's no need to flog the horse, as it were. In one form or another, to a greater or lesser extent, what I've been describing is a familiar phenomenon of modern life, of all of our lives to some extent. So the way in which we regard life is rather ambivalent. On the one hand, we find life, we feel life, oppressive, burdensome, frustrating, stultifying; but on the other we expect from life something that will alleviate that frustration, expect something compensatory, expect an experience in the modern sense of the term.

So we can now begin to see how the way in which we regard religion and the way in which we regard life link up. There's this common emphasis eventually on experience. And this is why it's as it were natural, inevitable that we too think of Enlightenment in terms of experience. We may say that for purely historical reasons, we're predisposed to think of religion, think of Enlightenment, in terms of experience. On account of the general nature of modern life, we're on the lookout, as it were, for experience - an experience, theexperience that will transport us out of that life, even out of ourselves. So that we're not only in a position of naturally thinking in terms of experience, we also have a neurotic need for experience, as an alleviation of our boredom and frustration. So we come to place great emphasis on experience, and we place this emphasis on experience, why? We place it because we are alienated from experience. Actually we're experiencing all the time; everything is experience. Why this emphasis on experience? Why this need, this craving for experience? That emphasis isn't healthy. We emphasise experience, we crave for experience, because we are in fact alienated from experience. And this is true again, to a greater or lesser extent, of quite a number of people nowadays. And it's true we may say of many who turn for their particular brand of experience to the various spiritual traditions of the world, including, perhaps especially, those of the East. We might even say it's particular true of such people. How is this? Many such people have already tired at least of some of the more usual forms of distraction. They found them wanting. Such people may in some cases even have dropped out of ordinary social life, and economic life perhaps altogether, maybe because they were too weak to cope, or too sensitive to cope. And now they're left, as it were, on their own, on their own, except of course in some cases, for the odd famous relationship. And they feel dull, they feel empty, feel more dead than alive, and eventually they feel that they can't stand it any longer. They're ready to try anything to relieve this dullness and emptiness, this inner aching void. So, they start haunting spiritual groups, religious and occult bookshops, and even meditation classes. They take up astrology, they take up magic, and witchcraft, white, black, grey; they take up occultism, the Cabbala, the Vedanta, Sufism, Taoism, take up, also, Buddhism -take up anything that might take them out of themselves, anything that might give some meaning, some shadow of meaning at least to their lives, anything that might give them an experience. Not so long ago I had quite an interesting experience. Nowadays, as many of you know, I don't live

in the city of London. I've found a very quiet corner of England - I'm not going to tell you what corner it is - but I'd like it to remain quiet, and I don't very often come down to London, come down just occasionally. Not so very long ago, on one of these visits, I happened to go along, one afternoon, to a rather well-known occult and Oriental bookshop in north London. And rather to my surprise it was absolutely full of people, even though it was a weekday afternoon, absolutely full. And I noticed that all of these people were totally oblivious to one another. They all had their eyes riveted, not to say glued, on the bookshelves. And quite a number of them were young people. I couldn't help noticing, just as I stood there on the threshhold as it were, I couldn't help noticing that the whole place seemed pervaded by a quite heavy, oppressive sort of atmosphere, which seemed to me rather strange. And as I, you know, instantaneously reflected, I couldn't help wondering: well where have I encountered this atmosphere before? So heavy, so oppressive. And suddenly it flashed on me; I remembered. Two years before I'd been in a very large, very new department store in Plymouth, in the food section, and standing about, almost like waxworks, were a number of stout elderly women with shopping bags, shopping baskets. They were all standing there quite motionless, just gazing fixedly at the food. And they were gazing with what can only be described as dull reptilian greed. And it dawned on me that it was that same greed that I saw in the bookshop, that I felt in the bookshop, greed for experience, for pabulum, a neurotic craving, one might say, for experience.

But at this point I'd like to make a rather important distinction, a distinction between what I call 'attainment', and what I'd like to call 'acquisition'. Attainment is the result of the gradual extension of our own real being and consciousness, an extension into higher levels and new dimensions. And this in a sense is a natural process. But acquisition is quite different. Acquisition I would define as the attempted appropriation of the higher level, of the new dimension, by and for ourselves as we at present are. And this is an unnatural and an unrealistic - because eventually unsuccessful - process. It can't possibly succeed in the long run. Attainment is like the growth, like the gradual unfoldment and flowering of a healthy plant. Eventually the flower is produced; it comes forth from the branch. But acquisition is like a plant which has stopped growing. So what do we do? Because the plant has stopped growing? We tie a flower on to it, a flower that has been stolen from somebody else's garden, from some other plant; or perhaps it's even a wax or a paper flower that we tie on. So the neurotic craving for higher spiritual experience and, as I said, the neurotic craving - not the deep genuine aspiration - the neurotic craving for higher spiritual experience is a form of acquisition. It's an attempt to tie on to the barren branches of our own lives somebody else's flower, even the Buddha's own golden flower, the flower of Enlightenment. Attainment is just a matter of growing. Acquisition is a matter of grabbing. It's a sort of smash and grab raid conducted on the Absolute. But sometimes things are even worse than that. Sometimes people don't even grab. After all there's a sort of spirit in grabbing; you know, there's a sort of boldness. You can't help grudgingly admiring the bank robber, for instance, in our weaker moments. But sometimes it's worse than grabbing. Sometimes people don't grab even; they just expect. They lie back as it were with their mouths open; they adopt a completely passive attitude; they look upon the experience as something that has to be given to them, has to be fed to them, something for which they don't have themselves to do anything at all. In fact some of them in extreme cases even resent the idea that they should have to do anything at all. They think that spiritually speaking even Enlightenment or as it were the universe owes them a living. The universe owes them an experience, even the experience.

Well these are just some of the implications of thinking of Enlightenment in terms of experience. And these implications are in all conscience serious enough. I must confess I brought them out in a somewhat extreme and not to say exaggerated form, and I've done this for definite reasons:

in the first place so that we can understand quite clearly what those implications are, the implications of that particular way of thinking, thinking in terms of experience, and also because the exaggeration could be of practical concern to all of us, all of us that is, and I think that includes practically everybody present, who turn for guidance to the Eastern spiritual tradition, particularly those who turn to Buddhism. After all, we've all inherited from own indigenous, Western, post-Christian cultural tradition a particular way of looking at things, a particular way of looking at religion, a way that very very often emphasises feeling and experience. And also we're all, to a greater or lesser extent, affected by the modern world in which we live. We arethe modern world, to some extent. So to some extent all of us are alienated. Practically everybody sitting here to some extent is alienated. We're alienated from ourselves, and we're alienated from life. And we're all looking therefore for compensation. And therefore it's clear, it must be clear, that we do approach Buddhism, those of us who do approach it, with very mixed motives indeed. Partly with healthy motives, no doubt, but partly also with unhealthy and unskilful motives. In principle no doubt each and every one of us would wish to think in terms of attainment, but only too often we act and behave in terms of acquisition. No doubt we would sincerely wish to grow, but only too often we end up simply trying to grab. So perhaps it would help if quite consciously we even stopped thinking in terms of experience, at least for an experiment for a certain length of time, maybe weeks, months, years - stopped thinking in terms of experience at all and started speaking in terms of non-experience, started thinking even of Enlightenment itself as non-experience. We'll see what this means in a minute.

First I just want to draw your attention briefly to some of the more disastrous consequences of the kind of attitude that I've been describing - thinking in terms of experience, thinking in terms of religion, of Enlightenment in terms of experience. And this will highlight the dangers to the spiritual life in thinking in this sort of way, and also underline, I hope, the desirability of an alternative approach. Now if our attitude is one of neurotic craving, if we are passive, and demanding, if we expect to be given a spiritual experience, then our expectation will take at least three forms. We'll expect the experience to come from somewhere, or from someone, or from some thing, possibly from a combination of all three. And on account of this threefold expectation, the expectation of an experience being given to us from somewhere, someone, something, we fall victim to three syndromes. We can call these the syndromes of pseudo-spiritual exoticism, pseudo-spiritual projection, and pseudo-spiritual technism. i want to devote just a few words to each of these in turn and then turn to more positive matters.

First of all: pseudo-spiritual exoticism. We expect this great experience to come from far away, from as far away from us as possible. We sometimes expect this experience to come fro outer space, at least from the East, that is, if we live in the West. If we live in the east, and if we suffer from this same syndrome, we expect it to come from the West. I remember reading about some young Japanese Buddhists. They said they liked to sing Protestant Christian hymns in their temple, and when they were asked why they said they were so exotic. But we do just the same sort of thing. For instance Buddhism itself was, at least in origin, historically speaking, we can't get round that fact , and it comes to us more often than not wearing an Eastern dress, an Eastern garb, not to say Eastern decoration, comes to us wearing - Buddhism comes to us wearing - an Indian dress, or a Japanese dress, or a Tibetan dress, a very beautiful, attractive, glamorous, and fascinating dress, and we really are fascinated by this dress in which Buddhism comes to us, and very often, if we're not careful, we're more interested in the dress than what is inside the dress, that is Buddhism itself as a universally valid spiritual teaching, a teaching which in its essence is neither of the East, or the West, but for all time, all space, for man, for all forms of sentient life even. if we're not very careful we think that Buddhism is the dress. We think that if only we can

get hold of a little scrap of this dress, a little relic, as it were, then everything will be all right. And I'm sorry to say that some Easter teachers, or perhaps I should say, some teachers coming form the East, an purporting to teach, encourage this sort of attitude, encourage this sort of fantasy; it makes them feel good. It flatters even some times, we may say, quite bluntly, their own nationalistic prejudices. They too, in the course of centuries, have come to think that the dress is Buddhism, or the dress is Vedanta, or the dress is Sufism, as the case may be. But pseudo-spiritual exoticism doesn't stop even here. There are quite a few more ramifications. Some people start thinking, start saying that East is good, and West is bad. The East is spiritual, my dear, spiritual, the West is grossly materialistic. They even speak, and I read this in a book, in so many words, just a few weeks ago, that there're two different minds. There's an Easter mind, and a Western mind. And the Easter mind of course is a highly spiritual mind, whereas the Western mind is a grossly materialistic mind. Now this, we may say, is an absolute travesty of the facts. Of course, there are highly spiritual teachings in the East, especially so far as Buddhism is concerned, and of course we can learn form these teachings. Of course we can be, we should be, immensely grateful and thankful that we've been brought into contact with them, but our concern should be or our concern with them should be a concern with truth, not a concern with the exotic.

So secondly, pseudo-spiritual projection. Here we expect the experience to come not from just somewhere else but from someone else. And we know that personal relationships are usually much more intense, much more loaded than non-personal ones, and hence this particular syndrome is much more dangerous than the last. The person from whom we expect the experience is of course the great guru. You yourself have to do nothing. All you have to do, miserable wretch that you are, is to believe in him, believe that he can give you the experience. Just like that, just give it. Of course the experience can't be given by just an ordinary man, not even by an ordinary run-of-the-mill guru; it can be given only by a very great guru indeed, a guru who is God, or equivalent, at the very lowest a guru who is the incarnation of god, the representative of God on this earth. So otherwise you don't get your experience, if you don't believe that. Not only that. because you need to believe so much in this particular person, this great guru, you cannot tolerate, you cannot entertain doubt. You cannot tolerate any criticism of your great guru, and criticism is understood as anything that doesn't accept him as God, that criticism. Everybody has go to believe in him just as you do. If necessary they must be made to believe. It's all for their own good anyway! But how do you know that the great guru is God, or Buddha, or Enlightened? How do you know that? Well of course you know it; it's quite easy, it's quite simple: because he says so. And in this way a very dangerous situation develops, which can be summarised as: the bigger the claim the guru, the great guru, makes, the more likely it is that some people will believe him. That is to say the people who need to believe. And there are quite a lot of such people about nowadays who need to believe in this sort of way. And the great guru therefore very quickly rakes together quite a large following. Of course sometimes people do try to turn even an ordinary guru into the great guru. They see more in him than is actually there. He may be a good man, he may be an experienced man, but they see in him, on him, more than is objectively there. In other words they project, and in some cases the guru, if he isn't quite all that he should be, succumbs to their projection. sometimes he doesn't. But if he doesn't, then very often the followers are very disappointed, they feel rather let down, they even become angry if he refuses to accept their projection, if he refuses to allow them to build him up into the great guru. So they leave him; they continue their search for the great guru, for someone in whom they can believe, someone who will give them the experience that they want, or at least promise to give it. Now all this is very sad. I must say quite frankly that sometimes when I hear of certain things, i can't help feeling deeply ashamed, ashamed of what is sometimes, and nowadays

increasingly often being done, in the name of the Eastern religions, even in the name of Buddhism, ashamed of the way in which the weak-minded and the credulous are being deceived and exploited by all sorts of personalities, peripatetic around the world - the guru globe trotters of the twentieth century. It's much worse in the US than it is here. It's not all that bad in common sense Britain; not all that bad. it's much worse in he States. Not so long ago I just happened to be turning over a copy of a fringe newspaper published somewhere in California; they always seem to be published somewhere in California. it was full of announcements of, by, about, from, great gurus. They were all advertising themselves like so many brands of soap powder, or making tremendous claims or asking for support, for belief. And it's against this sort of thing that we have to guard ourselves. And guarding ourselves means seeing where the source of the trouble lies. it isn't in the great guru so much; it's in ourselves, in our own weakness, our own passivity, our own wish to have things done for us, our own neurotic craving for experience, an experience that somebody else must give us, as a free gift instead of we ourselves growing into it as a result of our own individual responsible effort and exertion

Alright, thirdly and lastly, pseudo-spiritual technism. This consists in attaching exaggerated importance to particular methods of practice, especially with particular methods of meditation, particular concentration techniques. We think that if only we can only find theright one, thetechnique, themethod, the one infallible one, it'll automatically give us theexperience. Sometimes of course we think we have found the right one, and we become very dogmatic and very intolerant about that. We want to dismiss, or we try to dismiss all other methods as worthless, useless, only our own technique, only the method that we ourselves have recourse to is the right one, the good one, the only one that is of any use. And we forget that there are so many different methods of meditation, so many different concentration techniques, especially in Buddhism. Buddhism is very rich in this field and all of them work. Every single one of them has been tried and tested for centuries. Every single one of them works. So why did one practise this? One method may be more suited to a particular temperament, or particular stage of development, but we can never say that any one method is intrinsically better than any other. In the course of my own experience in the West I've encountered pseudo-spiritual technism on quite a number of occasions. I've encountered it, I certainly encountered it when I first came back to this country ten years ago as Mr Humphreys has reminded me; I certainly encountered it in connection with what used to be called at least the vipassana meditation. And I'm sorry to say that I've also encountered it in connection with Zen. Some practitioners of these methods, and I .....ify (?) some, not all, tend, I'm sorry to say, to be rather contemptuous of other forms of meditation practice, and think that if one is not practising their particular favourite method, or is not meditating at all. And this attitude is very unfortunate; it only serves to encourage neurotic over-valuation of one particular technique.

Well, so much for our three syndromes, so much for the consequences of thinking of religion, thinking of Enlightenment too literally and too exclusively in terms of experience. So what is the alternative? The alternative of course is to think of it in terms of non-experience, and we do find some trace of this way of thinking in the Pali Canon, the Pali scriptures. For instance, in the Pali scriptures, in the Dhammapada we encounter this expression, this phrase: "Nibbana is the supreme bliss". "Nibbanam paramam sukham". Nibbana is the supreme bliss. So a question that arises is: what difference is there between this bliss - the bliss -of Nirvana, and ordinary bliss - worldly bliss - even heavenly bliss - What difference is there between the two, Nirvanic bliss - and ordinary bliss - non-nirvanic? And in course of time the answer came forth that worldly bliss -is the kind of bliss -that depends upon contact, contact between the sense organs and the mind, on the one hand, and their respective physical and mental objects on the other. Worldly bliss

-arises in dependence on some sort of contact, some sort of object coming in contact with some sort of subject. So we could say that worldly bliss depends upon experience. Worldly bliss -is a form of experience. but we're told Nirvanic bliss -is not so dependent. Nirvanic bliss -does not arise in dependence upon any form of contact at all. Nirvanic bliss -is not the product of contact. When all contact ceases, that is Nirvana, that is the bliss -of Nirvana. So Nirvana is not an experience; we can only describe it as a non-experience. Nirvana is the experience you have when you've stopped experiencing. Nirvana or non-experience is also described in terms of cessation, nirodha, as the entire, the complete, the remainderless cessation of the conditioned. And so far as we are concerned that means the cessation of experience, for all our experience is conditioned. We don't know any other kind of experience; we know only conditioned experience. We don't know unconditioned experience. For us unconditioned experience is a contradiction in terms, a logical impossibility. So to the extent that we think of Nirvana or Enlightenment as cessation therefore we must think of it as non-experience.

But here we may say we stand at the Everest and Kanchenjunga of Buddhism; and here the air is very clear, but the air is also very cold, for most of us. So perhaps we had better go a little lower down. Perhaps we'd better try to find some other alternative to thinking of Enlightenment in terms of non-experience, some other alternative to thinking of religion, something more positive, something more concrete, something m ore helpful to the fulfilment of our own real human needs. I'm going to suggest, not one alternative, but three, all very closely linked. Some of them, I'm afraid, may not be very popular nowadays. The three alternatives, ways of thinking of religion as non-experience I'm going to suggest are growth, work, and duty. I'll say a few words but each and then conclude.

First of all growth; one could also say 'growing'. The image, the form of growing is, of course, the plant, and plant imagery as we know figures very prominently in Buddhism, very prominently in Buddhist tradition and literature particularly. Think of the Buddha's initial vision of humanity as he sat under that Bodhi tree after the Enlightenment -if Enlightenment has an 'after'. And he looked up over the whole world; he saw the whole of humanity; and how did he see them? He saw them, we're told, as a great bed of lotuses stretching in all directions, lotuses in different stages of development. Some sunk down in the mud, some halfway up through the water, some risen to the surface, some standing in the sunlight, with open petals drinking in the light of the sun. He saw all living beings in this way, as plants, as lotuses in different stages of development. And we may say that this great vision, this great vision of humanity as a bed of lotus plants, this great vision stayed with Buddhism throughout its two thousand five hundred years of history. We know that in Buddhism in the course of centuries upon centuries there were many great philosophical developments. Who knows that in all conscience they were sometimes dry, and abstract enough. We know that much of scholasticism, much of formalism, crept into Buddhism later on, but Buddhism never forgot, never in any area, in any part of the Buddhist world quite forgot, at any time, the Buddha's great vision of that bed of lotuses standing there in the early morning sunlight. As we saw, after his Enlightenment, Buddhism never forgot that image of growth, of growing. And the image assumes many different forms; we think, for instance, of the lotus throne, that many petalled lotus throne on which Buddhas and Transcendental Bodhisattvas innumerable sit, and teach, and meditate, and radiate. We think of the Refuge Tree, that great tree, that great lotus tree with a central trunk and four great branches, on all of which are many tiers, many petals, lotus flowers, on which again sit Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arahants, Gurus, Yidams, and Dakinis. And we think, perhaps above all, of the White Lotus Sutra's of the herbs and the plants, also known as the Parable of the Rain Cloud. And this parable, or the Buddha in this parable sees humanity as being like plants of many different kinds, not just all lotuses even,

but all sorts, all kinds of plants: shrubs, trees, herbs, grass, flowers large and small, simple and complex. And when the rain of the Dharma falls out of that thundering rain cloud, in the midst of the sky, when the rain of the Dharma falls with universal refreshment, then they all grow, all those plants, all those trees, herbs, shrubs, grasses, but they all grow - and here is great addition to the teaching in this parable -they all grow in their own way, according to their own individual nature. The grass becomes far more beautiful grass, the tree become a more abundant and many-leafed tree, the flower become s a still more beautiful flower, the shrub a more splendid plant; they all grow according to their own individual nature, in this great parable of the White Lotus Sutra, and they receive the rain of the Dharma.

But no need to multiply examples. This is an aspect of the Dharma that I've talked on more than once before. But we can say I think that there are quite a number of advantages of thinking of religion (if we do have to use that word - sometimes I'd rather not!), thinking of it in terms of growth rather than in terms of experience,and seeing ourselves, feeling ourselves as plants, drinking in the Dharma as a plant drinds in the rain. Growth is a total thing. All of us is growing all the time, or should be growing. There's no question of working our way up to growth. The process is absolutely continuous; growth doesn't lie at the end, or only at the end of the process. If we are working our way up we are growing. All effort is growth. Religion, again to use that word, or the spiritual life, is or is like the plant, and Enlightenment is the flower. In a sense the flower is separate from the plant, but also in another sense, perhaps not another sense, the flower is part of the plant. The flower is natural product - the culmination of the growth - of the plant itself. It cannot be stuck on to the plant from outside prematurely before the plant has reached the appropriate sage of development, when the flower naturally comes forth. So the plant, we may also say, is the Path, and the flower is the Goal. And you can reach the goal only by following the Path. You cannot grab the Goal as if it were apart from following the Path. The Goal is no more separate from the Path than the flower is separate from the plant.

It is a great image, that of the plant and the flower, but images, however beautiful, however appropriate, also have their limitations. Alright we are plants; we grow; we burst into bloom even, we gain Enlightenment. But a flower fades. A flower loses its petals, but the spiritual life is not like that. So we have to stretch our imagination quite a bit further; we have to expand and develop our image, and we have to say that when the flower of Enlightenment blooms, that flower does not fade. Its petals do not fall; the rest of the plant may drop away - the stalk, the leaves, but that flower remains, remains on its own. Remains as it were suspended in the sky, floating. We cold even say that the whole plant has become a flower. Moreover this flower, like other flowers, contains seeds and as that flower is suspended there, floats there in the sky, in the heavens, those seeds grow into plants produce flowers, and all those flowers too remain suspended, floating in the sky, in the heavens, so that eventually as this process continues and continues and continues throughout infinity and eternity, the whole of space becomes filled with flowers. This is the kind of vision we see in some kinds of meditation: the whole of space filled with a vast network of flowers, great flowers, golden lotus flowers, and all the time that network is expanding; it's expanding to infinity in all directions, that great golden network of lotus flowers. That's what the Buddhist life is really like.

Anyway, it's time we came down to earth, back to a sense of place and time - time we got back to the plant. Time we got back to the individual struggling to grow, back that is to say, to ourselves. As the Parable of the Herbs and Plants reminds us, the plant needs rain. But it needs quite a number of other things too if it is to grow. It needs sunshine, it needs perhaps wind, it needs soil, with everything the soil contains. It needs even so humble a thing as manure. Maybe

it needs a bit of pruning from time to time, a bit of trimming, or protection from creepy crawly things, or protection from wild animals; it may even, if it is not too proud to disdain the aid, it may need a stick to support it for a while. In other words, growth depends on a complex of favourable conditions, and this brings us to a very important point indeed. to the point, to the fact that we need to situate this business of growth, this process of growth within a wider and ever wider context. And this means again a much fuller and richer conception of Buddhism itself.

Buddhism is not just ethics, not just meditation, great and important as meditation is. Buddhism is a lot more things than those two. Buddhism is a doctrine, a teaching, even a philosophy. It is a myth, a whole series of great myths. It's a body of legend. It's social institutions, it's festivals and celebrations, it's art, or the arts. It's ritual, and it's work. d as Buddhists we need to be nourished by all these things. We may need more of some than others, depending of course on the kind of plant we are. And in the same way we need, as Mr Humphreys has suggested in eh course of his opening remarks, we need all the different forms of Buddhism. Not in the rather mutually exclusive, occasionally sectarian form in which they exist in at least some parts of the East. We need what is essential in them all, what is basic in them all, what is living in them all, what is nourishing in them all for us as we try to grow in the light of Buddhism here in the West.

Perhaps the Triyana Buddhism of Tibet offers us a model here. Tibetan Buddhism is unprecedentedly rich. But of course in the case of Tibetan Buddhism there is the danger of exoticism, the danger that we'll be drawn more by the colourful garb than by the living universal spiritual essence. And in any case, of course it is significant that Tibetan Buddhism at least in some quarters, ha begun perhaps to replace Zen as the single most popular form of Buddhism in the West, Europe and America. It is a sign perhaps that Western Buddhists no longer get sufficient nourishment either form the dry bones of contemporary Theravada or the cold tea leaves of modern Zen. Perhaps - and this is only a suggestion - perhaps the T'ien Tai Buddhism of China would be an even better model for us than Tibetan Buddhism, and of course the T'ien Tai Buddhism of China continued in Japan as the Tendai tradition, one of the ----(?) schools there today, is not Triyana, it is Ekayana, not three ways, even though convergent, but one, from the beginning, in principle.

However, there's no time to explore all this this evening. Let's pass on to the subject of work. Time is getting very short, so we'll just have to deal with this very much more briefly. Work. By work I don't mean gainful employment. I don't mean wage-slavery. I mean the productive expenditure of energy. This is the true, the noble meaning of the word work, the productive expenditure of energy, which is a happy and a joyful and a creative thing. And work in this sense is the exact, the precise opposite of passivity, and inactivity, and 'expecting'. It's the direct opposite of the neurotic craving for experience, so that if we work, we shall grow, if we work productively. But what is the most productive kind of work?The most productive kind of work, the most productive expenditure of energy, is work for the Dharma - if possible full time work. And work for the Dharma doesn't just mean giving lectures and taking classes, up front, not everybody is equipped to do that. We may say bricklaying for the Dharma, cooking and cleaning for the Dharma, painting for the Dharma, raising funds for the Dharma, typing for the Dharma, which is all work for the Dharma, a productive expenditure of energy through which you grow, and grow rapidly. And for work of this sort we need a wider and wider context, especially when many of us are involved. And that wider context is the Sangha, the Spiritual Community in the widest sense, not just those who are technically and officially monks: the whole Spiritual Community, all those who are treading the Path of the Buddha. And at the beginning of this

lecture I did say that Buddhism consists of two things, the Path and the Goal, or the Goal and the Path, the Buddha and the Dharma. But there's also this third thing, which I didn't mention at the beginning of the lecture, and that third thing is the Sangha or Spiritual Community, the Community of all those who are seeking to attain the Goal, those who are treading the Path, who are growing, who are working, working for the Dharma, and working together.

And this brings me to our third and last alternative, duty - not a very pleasant or a very popular word, very often, in the ears of the current generation. Duty. But what is one's duty?It's all right to speak in terms of duty, but what is one's duty? What is the duty of a Buddhist? What is the duty of one who has Gone for Refuge? What is the duty of a member of the Spiritual Community? One's only duty is to work, to do whatever can reasonably be , or in some cases, in some circumstances, unreasonably, expected of one in the situation in which one actually is. Let me quote Goethe here, one of my favourite authors to quote. Goethe said: "What is thy duty? The claims of the day". But, let me add, the claims of the larger day, the wider context. And as Goethe also says, "How can a man learn to know himself?" And he answers his own question in this way. "He can learn to know himself", he says, "never by meditating" and what here he means by meditating - reflecting, "...never by meditating but by doing. Endeavour to do thy duty and thou wilt at once know what in thee lies". And if we do our duty as Buddhists, if we work as Buddhists, work for the Dharma, we will know ourselves as Buddhists. In fact, as time goes on, eventually, we shall know ourselves as Buddhas. We will gain Enlightenment, gain Enlightenment as experience, gain Enlightenment as non-experience, and both, and neither.