

Lecture 124: The Bodhisattva's Dream

One of the things that we have to admit, perhaps rather sadly, is that we don't, that is to say most of us don't, spend very much time in reflection, in quiet reflection, whether at home sitting perhaps quietly in our own sitting room or outside, maybe sitting under a tree in the park. But most of us just don't have time for reflection. Perhaps there are too many other things of various kinds for us to do. But if we do happen to reflect, if we do happen to have time for reflection, time to turn things over in our mind just a little more seriously, a little more deeply, than usual, then we'll come to see, we'll come to understand, certain things, certain things about ourselves. And we may even come to acknowledge certain things about ourselves. And in some cases it may happen that we may come to acknowledge in our moments of reflection, of truth and sincerity with ourselves, things which are not altogether pleasant to acknowledge, not altogether pleasant or creditable to accept.

And one of these things that on reflection we may be forced to acknowledge is the fact that we, as human beings, only too often take quite a lot of things for granted. By this I mean that there are certain things that we know we possess, that we know we have, certain things that we know we experience, that in a way we are quite sure that we experience, but of the value and the significance of which we are more often than not totally unaware. So much so indeed, so unaware are we, that it's almost as though we did not experience them, did not possess them. So far as we are concerned we might just as well not possess them. So far as we are concerned we might just well not possess those things or have those things at all. And in this respect only too often we are like a child. We are like a child that, in its infancy, when it's very very young indeed, is given a pebble, or what seems to be a pebble, an ordinary pebble. So the child grows up playing with the pebble, plays with it perhaps every day, plays with it perhaps every hour - but it is so used to the pebble that it does not take any particular care of it, does not attach any particular value to it, and does not realise in fact that it is not a pebble at all, does not realise that what he or she has been given is in fact a priceless precious stone.

Now one of the things that we take for granted, only too often take for granted, is life itself. We fail to understand the value and the significance of the fact that we are alive. After all, we might just as easily be dead, or rather we might just as easily have never existed at all. But we do exist. We may say that there was some unique, some unrepeatably combination of circumstances and here we are, we are here. We may say it was a billion, billion, billion to one chance, but the chance has come off and we are alive. We are sitting here and surely we feel how wonderful and how exciting this is that we're sitting here, this incredible miraculous chance has come off.

And this is surely the sort of realisation, the sort of experience, that the old Zen monk had. You remember there's that little poem which he uttered on this occasion when he had this realisation. He said or he sang or he chanted: 'How wonderful! How miraculous! I draw water and I carry fuel.' So he realised apparently that hitherto he'd taken life for granted, he'd taken his ordinary, everyday life for granted. He failed to realise its value and its significance. Of course he was drawing water and he was carrying fuel, and these are very simple, very basic human activities - one might even say they are quite primitive activities. And one might further say that it's very doubtful that even a Zen master would have been able to say 'How wonderful! How miraculous! I catch the train to the office in the morning, I watch the telly at night.' It's very doubtful if even a Zen monk, even a Zen master, would be able to say that.

And another thing that we take for granted is just our ordinary human consciousness, that is to say the normal waking state, in which - I believe - we all are now. We take for granted the fact that we can actually see things. We take for granted the fact that we can actually hear things. We take for granted the fact that we can think - those of us who do think! We take for granted that fact that we can actually be aware. We fail to realise, more often than not, the extraordinariness of it all. And in the same way we take sleep for granted, such a wonderful thing, such a refreshing thing as sleep. We take it for granted, unless, of course, we are one of these unfortunate people who have to swallow sleeping tablets every evening before going to bed.

And many people, of course, take their dreams for granted. Many people think, as we know, that dreams are simply the result of indigestion. You eat too much cheese at night - this is what our grandmother used to tell us - you get dreams, especially bad dreams. Or people think that dreams are just a confused or just a jumbled reminiscence of the previous day or of the previous days, so they don't think any more about them than just that.

But if we reflect, if we reflect even a little, we come to see that dreams are quite strange things, that the dream state is quite a strange thing. After all, in the dream state the physical sense organs are not functioning, the eye is not functioning, the ear is not functioning - the eyes are closed, the ears are, as it were, closed - but nonetheless in the dream state we see sights, we hear sounds, we even smell, we even taste. In the dream state we're not conscious of the physical body, we are quite oblivious of the physical body, but nonetheless in the dream state we do seem to have a sort of body. We are free to move about, free to go places, in fact we seem to be even more free than when we were awake. We're free to go apparently anywhere, in any sort of way. In dreams sometimes, we can even fly.

And then in dreams we experience a different kind of time. In dreams we experience a different kind of space. We even experience a different kind of world. Usually, of course, the dream world is a recognisable extension of the world of everyday waking consciousness - but sometimes it is not. Sometimes the dream world is a completely different world. Sometimes it's a world of which we have had no previous experience in any form. And in such cases, it's as though we were not really in the dream state at all. It's more as though we passed through the dream state into quite another state, quite a different kind of state of consciousness, quite another mode of being, even passed into a higher state of consciousness, a higher mode of being. Usually, of course, we think that higher states of consciousness are accessible only from the waking state, but this is pure assumption on our part, not to say even pure prejudice, just one of the things that we take for granted, about which we don't think, on which we don't reflect. The fact is that we can have access to these states, these states of higher consciousness, from or through the dream state.

So in Buddhism we find that the value and the significance of the dream state is fully recognised, especially in the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. And we may say that the value and significance of the dream state is twofold. In the first place, the dream state shows that it is possible for us to experience a state of consciousness other than the waking state. This is quite a simple fact, but its significance is quite profound. The dream state shows us that it is possible for us to experience a state of consciousness other than the waking state. Consciousness is not confined to the waking state as we usually think it is. And in the second place, in the case of certain dreams we are shown that we can experience states of consciousness or modes of being which are not only different from the waking state but even higher. And it's for this reason that we find that dreams sometimes play an important part, an important role, in the spiritual development of the individual, in the process of his spiritual transformation. And sometimes this higher experience in a dream state plays even a quite crucial role, and this is the kind of situation that we find in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. And this is why we're concerned tonight with the Bodhisattva's dream.

The series as a whole, of course, as you've heard, is concerned with the transformation of life and world in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. And as I mentioned last week, transformation of life, of individual life, of self, is represented by chapter three of the sutra, that is to say the chapter of confession, and transformation of world is represented by the chapters in which various gods and goddesses come forward and promise to protect the sutra. In tonight's lecture, as well as in next week's lecture, we're concerned with the first of these. We are concerned with the transformation of life, transformation of self, and concerned therefore mainly with chapter three of the sutra. And at the beginning of this chapter we find the Bodhisattva Ruchiraketu falling asleep. And while he is asleep he has a wonderful dream. It's not an ordinary dream, it's what the American Indians call a big dream, a dream of vast archetypal significance. In fact the dream is a spiritual experience, even a transcendental experience. But why should this Bodhisattva, why should this Bodhisattva Ruchiraketu have this dream? Why should he have this experience?

Now in order to understand this we have to go back to the previous chapter of the sutra. And it's at the beginning of this chapter that we meet Ruchiraketu for the first time. His name, by the way, means beautiful comet or even beautiful streamer. And Ruchiraketu the Bodhisattva lives in the city of Rajagrha, which in the Buddha's day was the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. And Ruchiraketu lived there at the time of or in the day of the Buddha, and he was a follower of the Great Way, that is to say a follower of the Mahayana. Not only a follower of the Mahayana, the Great Way - he was in fact a Bodhisattva, that is to say he had dedicated himself to the attainment of supreme Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. And according to the sutra Ruchiraketu is quite an advanced Bodhisattva. I don't know whether you know very much about Bodhisattvas or about the difference between Bodhisattva who are advanced and Bodhisattvas who are not advanced etc., but Ruchiraketu apparently was quite an advanced Bodhisattva. For instance, the sutra tells us that in previous lives he'd rendered great service to a previous Buddha, that he'd planted roots of merit, that is to say he'd performed innumerable skilful actions, and he is in fact highly respected, even revered, by hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas. You notice the Mahayana sutras go in for these very, very large figures indeed.

Nevertheless, though Ruchiraketu is a Bodhisattva, though he is even an advanced Bodhisattva, though he is revered by all these Buddhas, Ruchiraketu has a problem. It's not a personal problem. It's not a psychological problem. It's a problem about the Buddha. He can't understand why the Buddha should have such a short life, only eighty years. Now we probably would not find this a problem. We'd think it only natural that the Buddha should not live to more than eighty years. If the Buddha lived any longer than that we might think that a bit of a problem. But not so Ruchiraketu. For Ruchiraketu the fact that the Buddha lives only eighty years is a problem. And he reasons like this. He says or he reflects that the Buddha in his teaching, in his discourses, has said that there are certain causes why one has a long life, just as there are certain causes why one has a short life. In fact the Buddha has said, so Ruchiraketu reflects, so he remembers, that there are two main causes for long life, two courses of action that if you follow, you would ensure for yourself in future existences long life. So what are those two causes, what are those two courses of action? First of all, that you refrain from killing living beings - that is of course the first precept - and secondly that you give away food. You give away incredible quantities of food if you want to live long in your future life. So these two things: you must refrain from killing living beings and you must give away food, even if it's only tea and biscuits after the lecture.

Now the Buddha himself, Ruchiraketu knows, has refrained from killing living beings for innumerable lifetimes - the text in fact says for many incalculable hundreds of thousands of millions of aeons, which is clear enough! And the Buddha, in all those previous existences, has also adhered to the ten skilful actions. And not only that, he's actually given food to living beings. Not only given them food - he's given them all sorts of internal and external objects of enjoyment, nutriment, pleasure. He's even gone so far, in some of his previous existences, the Buddha has even gone so far as to sacrifice his own flesh, his own blood, his own bones and marrow in order to feed other beings, as when, according to the famous Jataka story, he fed the starving tigress and her cubs with his own flesh and food. So the Buddha has done all these things, Ruchiraketu knows, and if the law of karma is true, if the Buddha is to reap under the law of karma the results of all his actions of refraining from taking life, of giving an abundance of food, of sacrificing his own flesh and blood to others for food, then the Buddha should surely have an immeasurable length of life. He should live at least for a few million years, but no - the Buddha's measure of life is only a miserable eighty years.

So Ruchiraketu has a problem. And he's very worried, as people usually are when they have a problem, very concerned and very perplexed. Now as I have said Ruchiraketu's problem is probably not our problem. We probably wouldn't be bothered by that particular problem - we don't have that sort of faith. But we do have problems, problems of our own, problems even of our very own. One could go so far as to say that there is no spiritual life without problems. Problems are a means of development, even a means of transformation. Now when I say problems, I mean problems. By problems I don't simply mean difficulties, little passing difficulties that looks so big and so important at the moment. Difficulties can be met simply by using our intelligence, by making an even greater effort - that's how you meet, that's how you settle, that's how you sort out difficulties. But problems, real problems, problems which are deeply and genuinely problems, these have to be solved in quite another way, as we shall see. A problem, as distinct from a difficulty, is something that cannot be solved on its own terms, yet the terms cannot be changed. Strictly speaking, a real problem cannot be solved at all - that's the beauty of it. At the same time, it must be solved.

And we see this quite clearly in the case of Ruchiraketu. He believes that under the law of karma, the performance of certain skilful actions will result in long life, and he believes that the Buddha has performed those actions, performed them to an immeasurable extent. But at the same time he knows that the Buddha does have a very short life, only eighty years. So it's not possible for Ruchiraketu to change the terms of the problem. He cannot doubt the law of Karma. He cannot doubt that the Buddha has performed the appropriate skilful actions for innumerable lifetimes. But he cannot deny also that the Buddha's life is short. So the situation in which Ruchiraketu finds himself, is one, logically absurd and, two, psychologically and spiritually intensely unsatisfactory, uncomfortable, painful and distressing.

In other words, the sort of situation he finds himself in is of the type reflected in the Zen koan. And koans, as we all know, cannot be solved. If you clap your hands together you produce a sound, but what is the sound of one hand clapping? That's a koan. Or you come into the Master's room for an interview perhaps, or maybe for some other purpose, but you're not carrying anything, your hands are quite empty, and the Master asks 'What are you carrying?' and you reply 'Nothing' and the Master says 'Well, put it down, then.' If you don't comply immediately you apparently get thirty blows. Perhaps the famous of all koans, at least in the West, is the goose and the bottle. There is a goose, we're told, in a bottle. We're never told

how it got there, of course. The goose is fully grown, the neck of the bottle is very narrow, and the problem is that you have to get the goose out of the bottle without damaging the bird and without breaking the bottle. In other words, you can't change the terms of the problem. And in Zen monasteries students sweat for years over these problems, over these koans.

For us of course, here in the West, such koans are not really koans at all. We simply read about them in books on Zen or we hear them in Zen lectures. They're not problems for us. We certainly don't sweat over them, we certainly don't lose any sleep over them. A real koan, we may say, is something that springs up quite naturally from your own life, your own thought, your own experience. It's something you can't get rid of, something that you're stuck with, something that is inseparable from your own life, your own self, your own personality, something that is in a sense you, impossible contradictory you, problematic you - that's the real koan. But how do you solve the problem, the insoluble problem? How do you resolve the absurdity of it all, the discomfort, the distress? What happens? Well, the sutra tells us what happens, or rather it shows us, in this case, what happens.

His house - after all, Ruchiraketu is a householder Bodhisattva - his house, the house in which he was sitting and thinking about the Buddha, thinking about his problem, his house became vast and extensive. In other words, his house simply expanded. What a wonderful experience! You're sitting at home and your house suddenly expands. This is what happens to Ruchiraketu. His house expanded, and not only that, the entire house was transformed into beryl. (Beryl is a sort of precious stone, usually green in colour, rather like an emerald.) And the house also becomes adorned with numerous divine jewels. And all this, the sutra tells us, was a transformation due to the Tathagatha, the Buddha. What this means we shall see in a minute. At the same time the house became filled with perfumes. The expanded house transformed into beryl, adorned with divine jewels, became filled with perfumes.

And then something even more wonderful happens. In that house there appeared in the four directions four seats, if you like four thrones, made of divine jewels. And on those seats, on those thrones, appeared mats also made of divine jewels and fine cotton cloth. And on the mats appeared lotuses adorned with numerous jewels. And on the lotuses appeared four Buddhas: in the east, Akshobya; in the south, Ratnakuta; in the west, Amitayus; in the north, Dundubhisvara. And at the same time the whole city of Rajagrha became filled with light. The whole universe became filled with light. And all beings in the universe became possessed of divine happiness. The blind had their sight restored. The deaf became able to hear. The mentally disturbed were restored to their senses. The naked were clothed. The hungry were fed. Disease, deformity, disappeared. And, as the sutra says, on a large scale in the world there was an appearance of miraculous things.

And when Ruchiraketu saw the four Buddhas he was amazed, he couldn't believe his eyes, and he felt, we are told, extremely happy, glad, joyful, and delighted; and he paid homage to those Buddhas, those four Buddhas. And they made him, by a sort of association of ideas they made him recollect the virtues of the Buddha, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, but that made him think of his problem again, his problem that how is it that the Buddha should live only for eighty years. He became obsessed with his problem again. So these four Buddhas, sitting on their four thrones in the four directions, the four Buddhas became aware of what he was thinking. They became aware that his mind was troubled, aware that he had a problem; and being Buddhas, they became aware also of what that problem was, of what he was thinking. And they all as it were told him not to think in that way, not to think like that. They told him that the Buddha's length of life was immeasurable, not limited to eighty years, not limited at all, immeasurable. They told him in effect not to identify the Buddha with his physical body, with his human frame. They told him in effect the Buddha is Buddhahood; and Buddhahood transcends time, and hence Buddhahood cannot be measured. The Buddha does not have an immeasurably long life in time. In the depth of his being he does not live in time at all.

And as soon as the four Buddhas had said this, had made this known, made this clear to Ruchiraketu, innumerable gods and Bodhisattvas came together in Ruchiraketu's house, and the four Buddhas proclaimed the truth of the matter to them all in a series of verses. There then follows in the sutra a subsidiary episode involving a Brahmin called Kaundinya which also demonstrates (the subsidiary episode) the Buddha's length of life. So having understood this, having understood that the Buddha's length of life is in fact immeasurable, having had his problem solved, Ruchiraketu is extremely happy, and he becomes filled, we are told, with noble bliss. At the same time innumerable beings develop the will to Enlightenment, and the four Buddhas then disappear; the chapter comes to an end.

So what does this mean? Our minds can't help asking this sort of question. It's difficult for us to take it in, just to absorb it, just to receive it. Our mind starts working. What does it all mean? Well, in a sense, of course, it all speaks for itself. Above or beyond or below our rational mind, the sutra does as it were get through, it does manage to speak to us, it does produce an effect, it does produce an impression. We receive the meaning as it were bypassing the rational mind. But the rational mind also wants some explanation. It wants to know the meaning, even though not much explanation really is required. So I'll give just a few hints, just a few pointers, regarding the meaning of it all.

To begin with, there is an expansion. Ruchiraketu's house expands. So what is the house? The house is everything that belongs to us. It's our personal framework. It's our habitual state of consciousness - that's our house. So this expands. In other words, if we have a problem, or when we have a problem, we cannot solve that problem with our present state of consciousness. Indeed, in a sense the problem is a product of that state, an expression of that state, even an extension of that state. So there must be an expansion of consciousness beyond the problem. And horizontal expansion is not enough; there must be a vertical expansion as well. In other words, there must be expansion not only into different states of consciousness, but into higher states of consciousness. The house therefore is transformed into beryl and becomes adorned with numerous divine jewels. Before it was made of wood, made of brick, made of stone, and decorated perhaps with plasterwork, but now it's made of precious stones. Before it was opaque, but now it's translucent, or at least semi-translucent.

In other words, there's been a transformation from the ordinary waking consciousness to the meditative consciousness. Ruchiraketu is in fact now in a state of *dhyana*. And in Buddhism, as in all spiritual traditions, higher states of consciousness, *dhyana* or *dhyana*-like states of consciousness, are associated with light and are symbolised by light. They're also associated with jewels, symbolised by jewels. Jewels are not only bright and shining, they're also colourful, glittering, dazzling, beautiful, and they therefore fitly represent a consciousness that is not only higher than the ordinary but more fascinating, more attractive, more beautiful, and also more precious, more valuable. Incidentally, while we are on the subject as it were, we find that ordinary dreams are always in black and white, but big dreams are in vivid colour. And in the same way, in the visualisation practices that some of us do great importance is attached not only to the visualisation of light but to the visualisation of colour. We visualise for instance a green Buddha - not just a Buddha, not just the Buddha. We visualise for instance a green Buddha, a vivid emerald green, glowing Buddha, or a red Bodhisattva; and the colours when we visualise in this way must be rich and glowing, just like those in a stained glass window through which the sun is streaming, only softer and more diaphanous. Sometimes these colours, these lights and colours of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that we visualise in this way in a certain kind of meditation are compared to the colours of the rainbow or to sections or fragments of the rainbow.

Now you'll have noticed that Ruchiraketu is sitting inside his expanded house. In other words he's completely surrounded by the higher state of consciousness. He's completely inside, completely within the higher states of consciousness. And this of course reminds us of the Buddha's simile for the fourth *dhyana* state. His simile of the fourth *dhyana* state, most of you I think will recollect, is a man who has taken a bath on a hot day and sits completely wrapped in a pure white sheet. That's the symbol, that's the simile rather, or illustration, for the fourth *dhyana* state.

And we find much the same sort of symbolism in Tibetan Buddhist iconography. For instance you have a painting of a deity, painting of a Buddha, painting of a Bodhisattva, and you see that among things he sits surrounded by a halo of coloured light. Though you might think, looking at the picture, looking at the painting, looking at the *thangka*, that this halo of coloured light was a two-dimensional circle rather like a rainbow, this is not in fact the case. The halo of coloured light really represents a cross-section of a three-dimensional shell.

Let me give you an example to make this clear. Supposing the halo has three bands of colour - say there's a band of red, then a band of white, and then a band of blue. So what does this mean? This means that the deity is sitting inside first of all a shell of red light, a three-dimensional shell of red light which surrounds him or her on all sides, and this shell of red light is inside a shell of white light. And this shell of white light is inside a shell of blue light. So if you take a cross-section, what do you get? You get a halo as it were, a two-dimensional halo as it were, with these three bands of colours, red, white, and blue. But actually what you have is these three shells one inside the other, of different kinds of coloured light. And sometimes the texts dealing with this subject speaks of the deity as sitting inside a series not of shells of coloured light, but of tents, tents made of silk of different colours. There may be as many as seven tents

and seven colours. The significance, the general significance, is the same. So you can see that we come here quite close to Ruchiraketu sitting inside his vast and expanded house made of beryl and adorned with numerous divine jewels.

Now the transformation of Ruchiraketu's house is said to be due to the Tathagatha, that is to say, due to the Buddha, due to the Buddha's power. And how are we to understand this? It's not simply that the Buddha, the human historical Buddha, has worked a miracle. Of course, on the factual level, on a factual plane, a miracle has taken place. Miracles are always happening in the Mahayana sutras, as we know. But what is the meaning of the miracle? Don't forget, Ruchiraketu is confronted by a problem, that's the starting point - a problem that he was quite unable to solve, the terms of which he was unable to change. At the same time the problem was extremely painful, so painful that he was quite unable to endure it. So when we're in this sort of situation, as some of us are sometimes, what happens? - assuming, that is to say, that we are on a spiritual path, and that the problem, whatever it is, has arisen out of our efforts to develop spiritually, to evolve spiritually.

What happens is that a new factor comes into operation from a deeper level of our being, or if you like from a higher level of our being, a level of which we are not conscious, at least not conscious as ours. And this new factor is represented by the Buddha. After all, we are potentially the Buddha, Ruchiraketu is potentially the Buddha - not, of course, that one should use such expressions at all lightly. But he has reached the end of his conscious resources. He has had to call on, to call up, call down, resources of which he is not conscious. So this is what happens. The Buddha as it were intervenes. The problem is solved, the problem is resolved, by the intervention of a higher factor, a factor which enables Ruchiraketu to rise up to a higher level of consciousness. And this factor is something that operates from within the as yet unrealised depths or heights of his own mind, his own being.

Now within the house, in the four directions, appear four lotus thrones, and on the thrones four Buddhas. In other words, there appears a *mandala*, a mandala of four Buddhas, and Ruchiraketu himself occupies the centre of the mandala, but he is not yet a Buddha. The names of some of these four Buddhas may be unfamiliar to you; their names were subsequently standardised as it were in the Vajrayana. In the east appears Akshobya - now we are familiar with that name. It means the Unshakeable, the Imperturbable. In the south appears Ratnakuta. This means Precious Comet or Precious Streamer. Subsequently it was standardised as Ratnasambhava, which means the Jewel-Born One. In the west there's Amitayus, which means Immeasurable Life - Immeasurable Life is of course a form of Amitabha, or Immeasurable Light. And finally, in the North we have Dundubhisvara. Dundubhisvara means Lord of the Drum, and he was subsequently standardised, or his name was standardised, to Amoghasiddhi, the Unobstructed Success.

Now this four-Buddha mandala appears within the expanded house. In other words, what happens is that within the higher state of consciousness, the state of consciousness symbolised by the house, the expanded house, the house of beryl, the house decorated with divine jewels - within the house, within the higher state of consciousness, there appears a still higher state of consciousness. Within the meditative state there appears the state of contemplation. Within the *dhyana* or *samadhi* state there appears Wisdom. Within the context of what's technically called *samatha* or calm, there appears *vipassana* or Insight. Within the context of spiritual experience there appears Transcendental experience - in other words, experience directly connected with ultimate reality. Sparked off by his problem, Ruchiraketu has undergone a profound transformation indeed, and this transformation is of course an individual affair, an individual matter. It is Ruchiraketu's own life that is transformed, his own self, his own consciousness.

But there is of course an objective counterpart to all this. Corresponding to transformation of life, corresponding to transformation of self, there is transformation of world. And so we find the city of Rajagrha is filled with a great light, the whole universe is filled with a great light. The blind see, the deaf hear, and so on. In this chapter of the sutra, as in the next, we're concerned with the transformation of life, transformation of self, but here in this passage the sutra is anticipating the other aspect of transformation, in other words transformation of world. This aspect, of course, as I explained last week, is covered by the chapters of the sutra in which various gods and goddesses come forward and promise to protect the sutra. We'll be dealing with all that later on in the series. Meanwhile we are still concerned with Ruchiraketu.

The four Buddhas of the mandala represent different aspects of the higher spiritual awareness, the higher transcendental awareness, and these four Buddhas speak to Ruchiraketu, they communicate with Ruchiraketu. Ruchiraketu becomes aware of them as they are aware of him; something passes between them, something of their awareness as it were impinges on him. He experiences as it were flashes of their

awareness, and his problem is solved on this higher level. Now there's much more that could be said about the meaning of this chapter, but it's time we passed on, because this chapter is in any case introductory to the one that follows, chapter three.

Now at the beginning of chapter three, what do we find? How does chapter three open? It opens with these words: 'Then indeed the Bodhisattva Ruchiraketu slept.' Well, that's rather an anticlimax, surely. Ruchiraketu has had all these wonderful experiences. His house expands, he sees the four Buddhas, the Buddhas speak to him; then he goes to sleep. But of course we must be on our guard. The dream that Ruchiraketu has, that he's going to have in this chapter, the Bodhisattva's dream, is no ordinary dream, and similarly his sleep is no ordinary sleep. In order to understand it, in order to understand his sleep, we must take a closer look at what happened in the previous chapter, and then we'll be in a position to pass on to the dream itself.

In the previous chapter, as we have seen, Ruchiraketu has a whole series of experiences, of spiritual experiences, of Transcendental experiences, and as a result of those experiences he is transformed. But the experiences are not complete. The transformation is not complete. And we can understand this from various indications. First, Ruchiraketu himself occupies, still occupies, the centre of the mandala. He sees the four Buddhas, east, south, west, and north, but he himself is not yet a Buddha. He only sees the Buddhas. The innermost core of his being, what makes Ruchiraketu, is not yet transformed. Buddhahood, clearly as he sees it, sublimely as he sees it, truly as he sees it, is still something external to himself. It's still something out there. And his realisation, therefore, though genuine, is still as it were mental, still as it were in the realm of mundane consciousness. It has not yet completely permeated, completely transformed, all aspects of his being. And moreover, his problem is still with him, even in the midst of the mandala of the four Buddhas, his problem is still with him. It's true that he now has the solution to his problem, but so long as you have the solution to the problem you still have the problem. What you have to do is to forget both problem and solution. Only then have you really solved your problem. And this is what happens now.

'Then the Bodhisattva Ruchiraketu slept.' And, as I've said before, it's no ordinary sleep. It represents the complete erasure, the complete obliteration, the complete blotting out, of the old self, the old consciousness. In Shakespeare's phrase, it is the sleep of death. Not the sleep of physical death; it's the sleep of spiritual death. It's not the death that comes when we have shuffled off this mortal coil. It's the death that comes when we've abandoned all previous conditions. In other words, if we want to develop spiritually, we must die. If we want to be completely transformed, as distinct from merely peripherally transformed, we must die. We've probably heard of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as the *Bardo Thödol* is known in the West. Well we may say this *Sutra of Golden Light* is also a book of the dead. We may say that every Buddhist scripture is a book of the dead, because every Buddhist scripture, every Mahayana Sutra, asks us to die, because every Buddhist scripture, every Mahayana sutra, wants us to be transformed. That's why the scripture, that's why the sutra, is there at all, as the agent or the instrument of that transformation. If we're not prepared to die, we cannot be a Bodhisattva. We cannot be a Buddhist. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is concerned with spiritual death in the context of physical death. But we have to be ready to experience spiritual death at any time. We have to be ready at any time to give up the old life, the old self, the old consciousness, have to be ready to forget the old problems and the old solutions. We have to be ready to make a completely fresh start, otherwise we cannot be totally transformed.

So then the Bodhisattva Ruchiraketu slept. And in the middle of his sleep he had a dream. He saw a golden drum, a drum that shone just like the sun in the mid-day sky, a drum that radiated brilliant golden light throughout the whole of space. And he also saw in all the directions innumerable Buddhas, and these Buddhas were seated on thrones of beryl, under trees made of jewels, at the head of assemblies numbering many hundreds of thousands. And Ruchiraketu saw a man in the form of a Brahmin beating the drum. And while the drum was being struck, verses came forth, and these verses are the celebrated verses of confession that make up the greater part of this chapter. It's these verses that are the original nucleus, the centre of energy, of the entire sutra. And as one might expect, this being a dream, the verses don't seem to come forth in any particular order. There's no logical sequence. They just flow forth, they stream forth from the golden drum, as the golden drum is struck by the Brahmin, like a great stream of golden light, and they can be divided into ten main sections. And all the time of course it is the drum speaking. It is the golden light speaking. The golden light is the sound of the drum. The sound of the drum is the golden light. It's what Coleridge called 'a light in sound, a sound-like power in light', and both the drum and the golden light are part of Ruchiraketu's dream, are Ruchiraketu, are in Ruchiraketu. So it's also Ruchiraketu who is speaking - not the old Ruchiraketu, but the new Ruchiraketu.

The first section of these verses, these confessional verses, is a prayer, a prayer that by the sound of the drum, the world and all living beings may progress. In other words, it's a prayer for the complete transformation of life and world. In the second section we have the drum speaking as Ruchiraketu, or Ruchiraketu speaking as the drum, and making the Bodhisattva Vow. The drum, or Ruchiraketu speaking as the drum, vows to attain supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all, vows to dedicate himself to the great task of life and world transformation. So we see that the influence of the golden light is beginning to make itself felt. The third section is a lengthy confession of faults. Ruchiraketu acknowledges all the unskilful actions which have hitherto prevented him from realizing his ideal, from being a Bodhisattva, a real Bodhisattva, from becoming a Buddha. And this is followed in the fourth section by a promise to worship the Buddhas in the ten directions. This section is in effect a more detailed statement of the Bodhisattva Vow. And among other things Ruchiraketu undertakes to expound the *Sutra of Golden Light*, or rather the confessions which he refers to simply as the Golden Light.

In section five there's a second confession of faults, rather shorter than the first. In section six there's a brief rejoicing in merits, rejoicing in the merits of all those beings who are performing meritorious deeds. In the seventh section there is the third confession of faults, the shortest of all. Section eight is taken up with praises of the Buddhas, and here we find that solar imagery is very conspicuous. For instance, instead of the Buddha, He is 'the Buddha-sun, removing the obscurity of darkness with his rays of Compassion' and 'He is a fully enlightened sun.' Also, 'With meshes of beams full of glory, merit, and splendour, he stands amid the darkness like the sun in the three worlds.' Section nine contains more aspirations, good wishes, and rejoicing in merits. And section ten, the last of the sections, declares the advantages of worshipping the Buddha by means of these verses of confession.

So from this brief summary, this brief analysis, we can see that the main subject matter of the verses is the confession of faults, though this is balanced as it were by the Bodhisattva Vow, by praises of the Buddha, and by rejoicing in merits. We can see, or perhaps at least some of us can see, a resemblance between these verses and chapter two of Shantideva's *Entering the Path of Enlightenment*, the *Bodhicaryavatara*, so that what we really have here is a rudimentary and unsystematic but very beautiful sevenfold puja. We'll be dealing with the content of the verses next week when we consider the spiritual significance of confession.

This week we are concerned with the dream itself. And once again there's no question of a detailed explanation. Once again we can give only a few hints, a few pointers. To begin with the dream is a dream. That is to say on the level of the literal meaning of the sutra, it is a dream. It represents a state of consciousness other than the waking state. But on the level of the real meaning of the sutra, this state is not just a different state, it's a higher state, so what happens in the dream therefore is to be understood as pertaining to a higher order of reality. Secondly, dreams, ordinary dreams or dreams in the ordinary sense, are the product of the activity of the subconscious mind, or of the unconscious mind. They represent an influence that operates below the threshold of consciousness. Ruchiraketu's dream therefore represents the working out of his spiritual experiences at a deeper level of his being, not just the mental level. In other words, if seeing the mandala of the four Buddhas represents for Ruchiraketu the path of vision, the dream represents the path of transformation, *bhavana-marga* in the full technical sense. Ruchiraketu's total being is beginning to be transformed. And the symbol and the centre of that total transformation is the drum, the golden drum which he sees at the beginning of his dream.

But why a drum? Why a drum of all things? There is perhaps a reason for this, or at least a thin thread of connection, a thin thread of connection with the previous chapter. You'll remember that the Buddha that appeared on the lotus throne in the direction of the north was Dundubhisvara. And Dundubhisvara means the Lord of the Drum. And the drum is a very ancient symbol in Buddhism. Shortly after his Enlightenment, the Buddha declared that he would go to Benares, to Karshi, and he would there proclaim the Dharma; and the expression he used for proclaiming the Dharma, for teaching the Dharma, was to beat the Drum of the Deathless, the drum of Nirvana, the drum of the Absolute. And the word for drum which he used is the same word, *dundubhi*. So perhaps as I've said there is a thin thread of connection. We cannot be sure, because after all we are dealing with a dream. Perhaps though Ruchiraketu's dream was sparked off by a vague reminiscence of the Buddha of the north, Dundubhisvara, the Lord of the Drum. And perhaps that is why the drum appeared to him as he slept, and with it all the traditional associations of the drum.

Be that as it may, we can at least be sure of one thing, which is that the drum does not have one single assignable meaning in Ruchiraketu's dream. Like all true symbols it has many meanings, and at the same time it is more than its meaning, more than all its meanings. The drum is the Absolute, if you like it's the

Truth, it's the ultimate reality. Of course, it's circular in shape, the drum's circular in shape, and in many spiritual traditions, the circle or sphere symbolises perfection. The jewel, the round jewel, the pearl for instance, has the same general significance. But the drum is also the Buddha, the Buddha himself, the historical Buddha who proclaims the Dharma even as the drum shines with its golden light.

And the drum is not only the historical Buddha. The drum is also the eternal Buddha of the Mahayana, who is the sun as it were to the spiritual universe. Also the drum is the Buddha who occupies the centre of the mandala, the missing Buddha, the fifth Buddha, the Buddha in the middle. And then, of course, the drum is Ruchiraketu himself as mentioned earlier - not the old Ruchiraketu, the new Ruchiraketu, the Ruchiraketu who is in process of being completely transformed. And again the drum is the sun, and associated with the drum as the sun is the rich solar imagery of the Indian tradition. Going back to Vedic times, it's imagery that reminds us at times of the hymns of the so-called heretic Egyptian Pharaoh, Ahknaten.

The drum is round, it's golden in colour, it's made of gold. And it radiates golden light. The colour of gold is itself significant, gold being the colour of incorruptibility, the colour of immortality, the colour of eternity, the colour if you like of eternal life; it's the colour of the Absolute. And finally the drum is the sutra itself. The drum is the *Sutra of Golden Light*, especially the nucleus of the sutra, that is to say this third chapter, these verses of confession. Now there's much more that could be said about the symbolism of the drum as it appears in Ruchiraketu's dream, but I think I've said enough to give at least some idea of its significance, to give perhaps some feeling of its significance - a significance that is not confined to words. In any case, it's time we passed on to other things that Ruchiraketu saw in his dream and then we must think of concluding.

Besides seeing the drum, Ruchiraketu saw innumerable Buddhas all sitting on thrones of beryl under marvellous jewel trees, all teaching the Dharma to large assemblies. And here we see there's a parallel with an episode of the previous chapter, the episode in which after Ruchiraketu had seen the mandala of the four Buddhas the great city of Rajagrha became filled with light, the universe became filled with light. The blind saw, the deaf heard etcetera. In other words, the world was transformed. And now in this chapter, in Ruchiraketu's dream, the world is not only transformed. The world is completely transformed, the world is totally transformed, the world has become in Ruchiraketu's dream a Pure Land, a Pure Land like Sukhavati, like the Abounding in Bliss. And in a Pure Land there are only Buddhas and disciples of Buddhas, and everyone is either teaching the Dharma or listening to the Dharma, or being all silent together thinking about the Dharma, realizing the Dharma.

But more than that, the world in Ruchiraketu's dream has been so completely transformed, so totally transformed, that it is no longer world. The golden light of the drum fills the whole of space. The innumerable Buddhas and their assemblies also fill the whole of space. The transformed self interpenetrates the transformed world. There is no self; there is no world. No subject, no object. The two have become fused; the two have become interfused. And there's a suggestion of this interfusion in several places in the confessional verses, as when we are not sure if it is the drum that is speaking or Ruchiraketu who is speaking, or both or neither.

The third and last thing that Ruchiraketu saw in his dream was a man, a man in the form of a Brahmin beating the drum - and while it was being beaten, the confessional verses came forth. A man in the form of a Brahmin. But surely this is strange. After all, what is a Brahmin doing in a Bodhisattva's dream? But we mustn't forget that in the early days of Buddhism, the Brahmin or *brahmana* and the term *bhikkhu* were practically synonymous. Both represented, or both as used by the Buddha represented, the spiritual ideal. In the *Dhammapada* for instance, that well-known text, we find a *Brahmana Vagga*, a chapter on the Brahmin, and here the Brahmin stands for the man devoted to the spiritual life, to spiritual development, stands even for the enlightened man, even as does the *bhikkhu*.

But perhaps there is another reason for the presence of the Brahmin in Ruchiraketu's dream. The Brahmin is a pre-Buddhistic figure. Originally the Brahmin was the priest or the shaman of the invading Aryan tribes, and he's therefore a very ancient, a very arcane figure. The Brahmin is a figure that goes back to the beginning. In the literal sense, to go back to the beginning is to go back in time, but metaphorically, to go back to the beginning is to go out of time altogether. Taken in this sense the figure of the Brahmin indicates, or at least suggests, that whatever happens in the dream happens outside time, that the ultimate significance of the dream is transcendental.

Now the first time that I personally read this sutra, I saw the Brahmin as a white-robed man, and when I read the sutra again later on I was rather surprised to find that it did not in fact describe the Brahmin as white-robed, though I had in fact thought that it had done so. In India brahmins traditionally wear white, especially for religious ceremonies (*upasakas*, lay members of the Order, also wear white), and the white-robed figure therefore represents the one devoted to spiritual development. I was also reminded of the man wrapped in the white sheet who illustrates our experience of the fourth *dhyana*. These, of course, are purely personal associations, but perhaps they are of some significance.

Ruchiraketu not only sees the man in the form of a Brahmin, but he sees him beating the drum. And as he beats the drum the confessional verses come forth. In other words, the spiritual devotee does something. He gathers up his strength, he lifts the hammer, and he strikes. He beats on the drum, he beats on the Absolute. It's rather like what Yeats said, I believe, of William Blake: 'He beat upon the wall, Till Truth obeyed his call.' So the Brahmin beats on the drum, beats on the Absolute, and what happens? There's a response. The drum speaks. Reality speaks. The confessional verses come forth. The drum is a sun. In earlier Indian traditions the sun is compared with a golden disc, with a golden door, a golden door into a higher world, a door that could be opened. But in order to open the door, what must you do? You must knock - and that is what the Brahmin is doing, that is what Ruchiraketu is doing. He is beating on the golden drum, knocking on the golden door, and he is getting a response - he is getting the confessional verses.

Well, tonight we too have been knocking on the golden door - we too have been beating the golden drum, beating the sutra - and perhaps we too have got a response. Perhaps we too have discovered something. In the course of this not much more than an hour we've covered quite a lot of ground. And we've been concerned mainly with the transformation of life, the transformation of self. We've seen that that process of transformation may start with a problem, an insoluble and intractable problem, a problem that compels us to rise to a higher level of consciousness, a level at which we see the solution of the problem. But this is not enough. The transformation must be a complete transformation. It's not enough to see the solution of the problem; we must forget the problem. We must forget the old life, forget the old self, must undergo spiritual death. Because only then, when we've undergone spiritual death, will the process of total transformation begin. And it's that process and the result of that process which is symbolised by the golden drum. Perhaps we've seen more than that tonight. Perhaps we've seen that we too can be transformed. Perhaps we've seen that we too can see the golden drum, see the golden light. Perhaps we've seen that we too can share the Bodhisattva's dream.

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