

## Lecture 126: The Protectors of the Dharma

Madam Chairman and Friends

We don't always realise, I think, that the way in which the ancient Indians, including the ancient Buddhists, saw the universe, the universe in which we live, or if you like the way in which they imagined that universe, was very different from the way in which we usually see it. So how did the ancient Indians, the ancient Buddhists, see the universe? What did they see? Well, first of all they saw simply space. Nothing but space, infinite space. This was the first thing that they saw. Just space. And then, as they looked longer, as they looked perhaps more deeply, they saw diffused throughout space, throughout the infinity of space, air. And the air that they saw was blue air. So they saw diffused throughout the infinity of space, in all directions, simply this blue air. And as they looked again they saw within this air, within this blue air, two currents, saw in fact what they sometimes described as two blue winds, two blue winds moving in opposite directions, if you like blowing in opposite directions. And these two blue winds formed as it were two crossed vajras or *dorjes*. And each of these vajras or *dorjes* was several, in fact millions, of miles in length. So this is what they saw.

And then resting on those two vast crossed vajras or *dorjes* they saw a vast mass of waters. And these waters formed a kind of flat disc. And on these waters, towards the edge of the disc, they saw floating the four *dvipas*, the four continents or the four islands, each with its two subcontinents. And all four continents, and all eight subcontinents, had bases of solid gold. The eastern continent is the one called Videha. It's shaped like the crescent moon, and it's white in colour. The southern continent is called Jambudvipa, and it's shaped like the shoulder blade of a sheep, and is blue in colour. And this Jambudvipa is of course our own world, the world in which we live, the world of modern scientific geography. And according to the ancient Indians, the ancient Buddhists, Jambudvipa, our continent, our island, is the smallest of the four continents, only seven thousand miles in diameter. And its inhabitants, so the ancient Indians and the ancient Buddhists said, were rich and prosperous, and performed both skilful and unskilful deeds. The western continent is called Godanya. It's round in shape, like the sun, and it's red in colour. The northern continent is called Uttarakuru, and it's square in shape and green in colour. So these are the four continents, the four islands, as seen by the ancient Indians, the ancient Buddhists.

And right at the centre of the whole system there stands, or if you like there towers, Mount Meru, or Mount Sumeru. And it towers eighty thousand feet above the waters. And it extends eighty thousand feet below them. And it has four faces, rather like a pyramid, and each face is made of some precious substance. According to some accounts the eastern face is of silver, the southern face of lapis lazuli, the western face of ruby, and the northern face of gold. And surrounding Meru is an ocean 80,000 miles wide and 80,000 miles deep. And surrounding this there's a ring of golden mountains, 40,000 miles high and 40,000 miles wide. And surrounding this there's an ocean, an ocean of the same dimensions, and so on. Altogether there are seven circular oceans and seven rings of golden mountains. And as one moves outwards the dimensions of the oceans and the dimensions of the mountains diminish, though of course the diameter of the circles they form progressively increases. And the last ring of golden mountains is only 625 miles high and 625 miles wide. Outside this are the waters on which float the four continents and the eight subcontinents. And the entire system is enclosed by a great iron wall, and the purpose of this great iron wall is to keep in, to shut in if you like, the light of the sun and the moon and the stars. And this wall is said to be 312½ miles or perhaps yojanas in height, and more than 3½million miles or yojanas in circumference. And outside, outside that great iron wall there's only darkness, until another universe is reached. And there are thousands and millions of such universes throughout space, according to the ancient Indians and the ancient Buddhists. Each universe has its own Meru, its own continents, its own mountains, its own oceans. It has its own sentient beings; it has its own Buddhas, its own Enlightened beings.

But to return to our own universe, Meru is divided horizontally into eight tiers or eight levels. There are four tiers or four levels below the waters, and four above. And the four tiers below the waters contain the hells. These are occupied by various classes of tormented beings, suffering, experiencing, the results of their unskilful actions. And the four tiers above the water are inhabited by various classes of demi-gods. For instance the *yaksas*, or sublime spirits; the *nagas*, the serpents or dragons; and so on. And on or near the summit of Meru are the four great kings, also known as the four *lokapalas*, or four protectors of the world, one for each of the four quarters. It's these four kings, or four world protectors, who are the protectors who in chapter six of the *Sutra of Golden Light* come forward and promise to protect the sutra. So in tonight's lecture we'll be trying to understand what these protectors of the Dharma represent, and also what is meant by protecting the Dharma.

First, however, let us just complete our survey of the ancient Indian and ancient Buddhist universe. Above Mount Meru are the heavens, the various heavens of the gods. According to some accounts these heavens begin 80,000 miles above the summit of Mount Meru, so you must just imagine them there, as it were, 80,000 miles above the summit of Mount Meru. First of all the heaven which is called the heaven of the thirty-three, that is to say the thirty-three gods, the thirty-three Vedic deities, and their leader is Indra, the king of the gods of the thirty-three. And he, we are told, occupies a wonderful palace in the midst of this heaven. Next come the Suyima gods, as they are called, and next after them the heaven of the Contented gods. And then there's the heaven of the gods that take delight in their own creations. And then again there's a heaven of gods who take delight in the creations of others. Altogether there are six heavens, and all these heavens belong to the plane of desire, the plane of sensuous desire. You may remember that according to Buddhist teaching the whole of conditioned existence is divided as it were horizontally into three great planes or levels: first of all the plane of sensuous desire; then the plane of pure form, if you like archetypal form; and then thirdly the formless plane. And all the realms, all the heavens, that have so far been mentioned, including the human realm, fall within the plane of sensuous desire.

And all six heavens of desire are inhabited by both male and female gods, or if you like by gods and goddesses. And therefore according to Indian, according to Buddhist tradition, in each of these heavens there's the possibility of sexual gratification, but the higher one ascends the more refined in form that gratification becomes, just as the heavens themselves, the higher one goes, become progressively more refined. In Indra's heaven, we're told, as in the realm of the four great kings, and among human beings, sexual gratification is achieved through copulation; among the Suyima gods simply by holding hands; among the contented gods by means of a smile; among the gods who delight in their own creations by prolonged gazing; and among the gods who delight in the creations of others, by a mere glance - there that is quite sufficient.

Now above the heavens of sensuous desire, with their male and female gods, or their gods and goddesses, are the heavens of the world of pure form. These are inhabited by, according to some accounts sixteen, according to other accounts eighteen classes of Brahma gods of the world of pure form. First of all gods in the company of Brahma, then gods in the retinue of Brahma, then great Brahma gods. And these heavens, these three heavens, of the form plane, collectively correspond to the first *dhyana*, the first state or stage of superconscious, especially as experienced in meditation. Then we have the gods of lesser light; then the gods of limitless light; and then the gods of light and sound, or sonant light, light which is also sound, or sound which is also light. And these three heavens collectively correspond to the second *dhyana*. And then gods of lesser purity; then gods of limitless purity; and then gods of radiant purity. And these heavens collectively correspond to the third *dhyana*, the third superconscious state. Now there are still seven more classes of Brahma gods left, so you can imagine how many heavens and how many classes there are - according to other classifications, though, not seven but nine. I'm not going to enumerate all the names of these different kinds of Brahma gods, but their heavens collectively correspond to the fourth *dhyana*. The last five heavens, however, are collectively known as pure abodes, and it's into these pure abodes that are born all those who on earth have broken all five lower fetters, and attained the path of no return, that is to say the path of no further rebirth in the world of human beings, or indeed in any of the realms inferior to the pure abodes. Now all the heavens of the Brahma gods, all the heavens of the plane of pure form, are inhabited only by masculine divinities, or if you like by angels, and they appear there, as it were, spontaneously, without the necessity of copulation or the process of gestation, without the necessity of parents. Now above the heavens of pure form with their angels are four heavens of the formless plane, inhabited by gods without form; and these collectively correspond to the *dhyanas* five to eight, that is to say the four formless *dhyanas*, or four formless superconscious states.

Now even yet we've not quite finished this rapid survey of the ancient Indian and ancient Buddhist universe. We must come down a little to finish it. In fact we must come down quite a long way, down to the heaven of the thirty-three, the heaven of Indra, that is to say 80,000 miles above the summit of Mount Meru. And in the air at this level we find the circle of the eight goddesses, that is to say the goddesses of sensuousness, garlands, song, dance, flowers, incense, lamps and perfumes. And they occupy positions, these eight goddesses occupy positions in the eight principal directions of space; and all are young and of beautiful appearance, and all of different colours - white, yellow, red, green and so on. And they all hold in their hands articles corresponding to their natures and their names. Then, immediately outside these goddesses, also suspended in the air in fixed positions, are the seven precious things plus the vase of treasure - in other words the seven most valued possessions of the universal monarch: the precious wheel, the precious gem, precious queen, precious minister, and so on. And then finally in the inmost circle, immediately around Mount Meru, are 1) the sun, with its chariot drawn by ten horses; 2) the moon, with

its chariot drawn by seven horses; 3) the precious umbrella of sovereignty; 4) the banner of victory. And finally in the centre of it all, in the heaven of Indra, in the palace of Indra, is heaped up the entire treasure of gods and men.

Well, this is the universe, the universe as seen by the ancient Indians, including the ancient Buddhists. And as I said at the beginning, it's very different from the universe as we see it today. However, it has its own validity. I remember quite a few years ago, when I was in Kalimpong, I asked a Tibetan lama whom I met about this very matter, and the question I put to him was this. I asked him which he thought was true. I'd come to understand that he was studying Western subjects - English, arithmetic, geography. So I asked him which he thought was true, the traditional Indo-Tibetan picture of the universe, or the modern Western one. He was a very young lama, in fact he was the reincarnation of a very famous Gelugpa lama, but his reply, though he was so young, was not only very cautious, but quite correct, I thought. He said, 'The two pictures are both useful for different purposes.' I wouldn't like to comment on the usefulness of the modern Western picture, but there's no doubt about the usefulness of the traditional Buddhist picture, at least in the past, and at least so far as its own definite spiritual purposes are concerned. It's this universe which provides the cosmological background of the Buddha's teaching. It's this universe which is present, explicitly or implicitly, in the Buddhist scriptures, especially perhaps in the Mahayana sutras. And it's a universe which is certainly present in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. which is one of the reason why I've spent some time describing the main features of that universe.

In chapter six of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, for instance, which is the chapter with which we're mainly concerned tonight, the Buddha himself speaks of the whole triple thousand, great thousand world sphere, in which there are a hundred million moons, suns, great oceans, Sumerus, etc. And he also refers to the different classes of gods of the three planes of conditioned existence, all of whom are found in all the universes of that world sphere. Above all, however, the traditional Buddhist picture of the universe provides the symbolism, the concrete symbolism, on which is based a good deal of meditational and devotional practice, especially in the Vajrayana, that is to say in what is known as Tantric Buddhism.

One of the most important of all Vajrayana practices is what is known as the offering of the mandala. Mandala means literally circle, and in this context it means the whole circle of mundane existence, the whole circle, the whole round, of conditioned existence as represented in the Buddhist picture of the universe. What the Vajrayana follower does is this. In the course of his devotions he builds up, he constructs, a three-dimensional model of the universe complete with Mount Meru, the four continents and so on; and this model, this model universe, he offers up to the Buddha, or more generally offers up to the guru, together with suitable prayers and suitable meditations, especially after receiving teaching, or after receiving initiation. After all, one has received the Dharma. One has received something which is infinitely precious, something that is going to transform one's whole life, so what are you going to give? You have received the Dharma, the Dharma has been given to you, so what are you going to give? Not give in return, but give because you feel like giving, because you feel so grateful. Clearly you are going to give everything that you possess, including your own life, your own self. Indeed, you feel that if you were master of the whole universe, you would give that, that you would want to give that. So this is what you do. You give the universe; you offer the universe. Because it's only by making such an offering that you can express what you feel. In other words, you offer up the mandala. For you at that moment the mandala is the universe; the universe is the mandala. So when you offer the mandala, you offer the universe. This is what the Vajrayana follower does.

But it's time for us to leave the Vajrayana follower. It's time that we got back to the four great kings, time that we got back to the four world protectors. As we saw, they live on Mount Meru. According to some accounts they live on or near the summit of Mount Meru. But according to other accounts they live on four subsidiary peaks half way up, or if you like half way down. And they stand fronting the four directions of space, north, south, east, west. And they protect the world against whatever dangers may be coming from those four directions. And in particular they protect the continent that lies in their particular direction. Each of the four kings is of a particular colour. Each is king of a particular horde of non-human beings. I may have something to say about the significance of this later on.

So let's take a look at these four great kings; let's try to see them, to imagine them as the ancient Indians, the ancient Buddhists, saw them or imagined them. First of all there's Drdharmastra. Drdharmastra's name means 'Upholder of the land', upholder of the country, and he's white in colour, and he's the protector of the eastern quarter. He's also king of the *gandharvas*, the heavenly musicians, and of the *pisacas*, or vampires. Then there's Virudhaka, whose name means simply 'Growth'. He's yellow in colour, he's the

protector of the southern quarter, and he's king of the *pretas* or hungry ghosts, as well as of the *kumbhandas*. Then thirdly there's Virupaksa. His name means 'He of the bulging eyes' or 'He of the wrathful eyes', and he's red in colour. He's the protector of the western quarter, and king of the *nagas*, the serpents or dragons, as well as of the putanas, or fever-spirits. Finally there's Vaisravana, whose name means 'Greatly learned'. He's green in colour. He's the protector of the northern quarter, and king of the *yaksas* or sublime spirits, and of the *raksasas*, the flesh-eating demons.

Now all four kings are powerfully built, all of defiant mien. They all wear armour, and they're all often represented in Buddhist art. They're usually found inside the vestibule of the temple, either depicted in fresco on the wall, two on each side of the entrance to the main hall, or in the form of free-standing, often quite gigantic images. And it's these four kings, these four great kings, who now appear at the beginning of chapter six of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. They not only appear but they promise to protect the sutra, or rather they promise to give encouragement to those monks who keep the *Sutra of Golden Light*, and to protect the kings who patronise its promulgation.

So who are these four great kings? What do they really represent, and why do they appear in the sutra in this way, and what does their promise mean? Before trying to answer these and similar questions let us recall whereabouts in the sutra we are. Let's see how far we have come. You may remember from the first lecture that chapter one of the sutra is simply introductory. It tells us that we are on the Vulture's Peak, near Rajagrha, with the Buddha and a great multitude of deities of various kinds. Ananda asks a question, and the Buddha replies praising the *Sutra of Golden Light*. In chapter two we meet the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu. He lives in the city of Rajagrha and he has a problem. He cannot understand why the Buddha should have such a short life. However, the house in which he is sitting expands. It becomes made of beryl and adorned with precious stones. And four Buddhas appear and explain to him that the Buddha's length of life is in fact immeasurable. So Ruciraketu's problem is solved.

However, he has not yet fully assimilated the higher spiritual insight represented by the four Buddhas and their teaching. He has not been completely transformed. So at the beginning of chapter three he falls asleep, in other words passing into a completely different state of consciousness. And while asleep he has a dream. He sees a golden drum shining just like the sun. He sees also innumerable Buddhas, all sitting on thrones of beryl under magnificent jewel trees. And he sees a man in the form of a brahmin beating the drum. And from the drum comes forth a series of verses of confession. There's a prayer for the progress of all sentient beings coming from the drum. There's the Bodhisattva Vow. There are confessions of evil and also rejoicings in merits and praises of the Buddha, all coming from the drum, coming from the golden drum in Ruciraketu's dream. Chapter five is called Abundance of Lotuses, and in it the Buddha tells a certain goddess about a king who in the remote past praised the Buddhas of past, present and future, and made the Bodhisattva vow. And this king is apparently Ruciraketu in one of his previous existences. Chapter five is on emptiness. It's a brief account of the *sunyata* teaching. It's not directly connected with the main theme of the sutra, therefore we're not concerned with it in these lectures.

So this brings us to chapter six, the chapter on the four great kings. So far in this series we've been concerned almost exclusively with chapters two and three. We've been concerned with Ruciraketu; we've been concerned with his problem, concerned with his dream and we've dealt with both of these in the second lecture, the Bodhisattva's dream. We've also been concerned with his confession of evil, that is to say with his vomiting up of the evil that was in him, that prevented him from attaining supreme Enlightenment. And with that we dealt last week, when we considered the spiritual significance of confession. In other words, we've so far been concerned with the development of the individual, with the transformation by the golden light of the individual life, the individual self. Tonight the golden light begins to extend its influence. Tonight we begin to make the transition from transformation of life to transformation of world, and as you might have guessed, this transition is associated with the appearance of the four great kings.

The four great kings are apparently already present in the assembly, but so far they've made no contribution to the proceedings. Now, at the beginning of chapter six, they rise to their feet, they salute the Buddha, and they speak. And in the course of the whole chapter they speak a number of times, as does the Buddha. As I pointed out in the first lecture, this is the longest chapter in the whole sutra. It occupies one-fifth of its total length. But at present, that is to say tonight, we're only concerned with the opening speech as it were, of the four great kings. And in this opening speech the four great kings make two statements and four promises, or four vows. First they extol the merits of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. Secondly they declare that the *Sutra of Golden Light* nourishes them. Thirdly they promise to rule by the Dharma, to

exercise their sovereignty over the different classes of demi-gods in accordance with the Dharma. Fourthly they promise to protect the whole of Jambudvīpa. Fifthly they promise to protect the monks who protect the sutra, that is to say the *Sutra of Golden Light*. And sixthly and lastly they promise to protect the kings who patronise the monks who proclaim the sutra.

Now we're not really concerned with the first of the two statements, that is to say the statement concerning the merits of the sutra, though I should perhaps make one point. The sutra is extolled by the four great kings on various grounds, and these grounds are mainly of two kinds - spiritual and worldly. For instance, the sutra is extolled because it has been taken care of by multitudes of Bodhisattvas and bestows supreme blessings upon all beings; but also because it repels foreign armies, and removes hunger and illness. In other words, the sutra is extolled by the four great kings in effect because it transforms life, transforms self, and transforms the world.

Now the second statement of the four great kings is even more important, and it's with this that we're very much concerned. The four great kings declare that the *Sutra of Golden Light* nourishes them. In their own words: 'When, dear Lord, this excellent Suvārnabhāsa, King of Sutras, is being expounded in detail in the assembly, by merely hearing this law, and by the nectar-juice of the law, the divine bodies of us four great kings, together with our armies and retinues, will wax with great might. In our body there will be produced prowess, strength and energy. Brilliance, glory and splendour will enter our body.'

Now what does this mean? How is it that the hearing, the mere hearing of the sutra, should have this effect on the bodies of the four great kings? What does the hearing of the sutra mean? In order to understand this we'll have to understand more deeply who the four great kings are and what they really represent. There are principally four points to be made here. First, the four great kings occupy the lowest of the heavens of the plane of sensuous desire. They're definitely heavenly beings, but of a very low order, in fact of the lowest order. But from the point of view of the world this has decided advantages. On the one hand they, the four great kings, are in touch with the beings that inhabit the earth; not only with men but also with the various kinds of non-human beings. They thus occupy an intermediate position. They occupy a kind of borderland between the more crude and the more refined levels of the plane of sensuous desire; or if you like they occupy an intermediate position between the more chaotic and turbulent and the more orderly and harmonious levels of this plane. They occupy a position on the frontier as it were, the frontier between the heavens and the earth, the frontier between the crude and the refined, the frontier between the chaotic and the harmonious. Because they are in direct contact with the earth, they're in a position to intervene in its affairs. But because they're in direct contact with the heavens, in fact belong to the heavens, their intervention is sure to be of a positive nature.

Second point: the four great kings are leaders of different hordes of non-human beings. These non-human beings are of very many different kinds, of all sorts of shapes and sizes and even colours. Some are very beautiful, or at least they are capable of assuming beautiful forms. Most, however, are horribly deformed, misshapen and ugly. There are the nagas or serpents, the dragons. They're associated with water and with treasure. They can make themselves large or small, visible or invisible. They often have a good understanding of the teaching, but they don't practise it. There are also the yakshas, who are rather terrible, and often of enormous size. Then there are the gandharvas, so called because they live on perfumes - in the same way that human beings live on solid food, they live on perfumes. And they're musicians, musicians in the palace of Indra, king of the gods in the heaven of the thirty-three. And the *gandharvas* are said to be very uxorious.

There's also the *asuras*. These are fierce, war-like spirits, that are constantly fighting the gods, that is to say the gods of the heaven of the thirty-three. They're sometimes compared with the giants of Greek mythology. The male *asuras* are extremely ugly, but the female *asuras* are very beautiful. Then there are the *garudas*. These are enormous golden-winged creatures like eagles, and they feed upon *nagas*; they feed upon the serpents or dragons. Then the *kimnaras*. The name *kimnara* means 'What? Is it a man?' and they're so called because they resemble men to some extent, so when people see them they're not sure whether they're men or not, or whether it's a man or not, if there's just one. So they say 'What? Is it a man?' 'Kimnara?' So *kimnara* they are called. According to some authorities they have horns on their heads. According to other authorities they have men's heads and birds' bodies. And like the *gandharvas*, they're musicians in the palace of Indra. The males sing, the females dance.

There are very many other kinds of non-human beings. There are vampires, nightmares, ghosts, ghouls, bogles, fever-spirits, and so on. I've no time to describe them all in detail, but between them they represent

the whole mass, as it were, of gross, chaotic, turbulent, earthly energies, energies that swirl about, as it were, on this earth plane of ours; energies that only too easily can assume negative and destructive forms. And of all these different kinds of non-human beings, the four great kings, are the leaders and sovereigns. Each king rules one particular group, one particular legion if you like. As we saw earlier on, Drdharashtra, the protector of the eastern quarter, rules the *gandharvas*, or heavenly musicians, and others. Virudaka, the protector of the southern quarter, rules the hungry ghosts and others. Virupaksa, the protector of the western quarter, rules the dragons and others. We'll have a few words to say about the special significance of this fact later on. Vaisravana, the protector of the northern quarter, rules the *yaksas* or sublime spirits, and others. In other words, the four great kings keep the gross, turbulent, chaotic energies of the earth plane under control. They're not able to change them. They're not able to transform them. But at least they're able to prevent them from getting too much out of hand.

And it's only the four great kings who are in a position to do this, who are in a position to render this kind of service. The gods of the higher heavens, the *brahma* gods, for instance, certainly could not do it. Their energies are much too refined. They've no point of contact with *nagas* and *raksasas* and *yaksas* and so on. Perhaps they're not even aware of their existence. So the four great kings perform a very useful service. They belong to the heavens, but they're in touch with the earth, and they're therefore able to keep the very powerful natural energies of the earth under control, and prevent them having a disruptive effect on the human world.

Thirdly, the four great kings are protectors. They're protectors of the world, protectors of the four quarters. But what are they protectors against? The four great kings themselves make this clear in their first speech. Addressing the Buddha they say, 'We will rout the hordes of *bhutas* who are pitiless, whose minds are without compassion, who take their glory from others.' *Bhutas* are evil spirits. They're the forces which are hostile to humanity, which are inimical to spiritual development. They are the energies which are unable to accept, which refuse to accept, the control of the four great kings. So what can the four great kings do about them? All they can do is to keep them at bay, to keep them out. And this is why they stand, this is why the four great kings stand on either side of the entrance to the temple, the entrance to the shrine; why they stand in the vestibule - that is to say, neither inside the temple proper, nor outside it - in between.

After all, what is a temple? A temple is not just a building. A temple is an enclosed space. A temple is a sacred space. It's a space where sacred actions, if you like symbolic actions, are performed. It's a space within which only integrated energies are allowed to appear. The central position in the temple is occupied by the Buddha, or by an equivalent figure such as Padmasambhava or Avalokitesvara. And other positions are occupied by other figures - Arhats, Bodhisattvas, spiritual teachers, gods and goddesses, all harmoniously grouped around the Buddha or other central figure. Even the *nagas*, even the *yaksas* and other non-human beings may have a place, may be included in the assembly, as it were. It depends on just one thing - whether they truly worship the Buddha, whether they go for Refuge. The temple is therefore also a mandala, that is to say a harmonious arrangement of psychological, spiritual and Transcendental energies around a common central principle, around a central principle which is also the ultimate principle: the principle of Enlightenment. So the four guardian kings are therefore also guardians of the mandala, guardians of the four gates of the mandala. They prevent the entry of any hostile force, prevent the entry of any unintegrated energy - that is to say, of any energy that is not prepared to align itself on its own level and in its own way with the principle of Enlightenment. The four great kings, we may say, are the guardians of the threshold. Their function is therefore of extreme importance. On the one hand they keep out, they have to keep out, the hostile unintegrated forces; otherwise the harmony of the mandala would be disrupted. On the other hand they have to not keep out the energies which really are integrated and are ready to be admitted; otherwise the richness, the potential richness of the mandala will be impoverished.

Now the spiritual community is also a mandala. The Order is also a mandala. So here too the four great kings have a function. Disruptive energies must be kept out, otherwise the spiritual community will be destroyed. But positive integrated energies must be allowed in, must be welcomed, otherwise the spiritual community will not grow.

Fourth and last point: the four great kings are immensely powerful. This point is brought out very well in paintings and images. The four great kings are usually depicted as men in the middle of life, or perhaps even a little past the middle of life - mature rather than young - and very powerfully built, often with enormous bulging muscles. In some ways they rather resemble the Herakles of Greek mythology, but unlike Herakles, the Roman Hercules, they are clad in armour. And they represent enormously powerful, positive energies, but energies which are not very spiritual, not very refined, but at the same time not quite

earthly. Such energies are sometimes described as crude, and crude they are, in comparison with the more spiritual, more refined energies of the higher planes. But crude energy is not to be despised. Crude energy has an essential part to play in the world. The world cannot do without it; indeed, the spiritual movement cannot do without it, this crude energy. The energy represented by the four great kings is not only enormously powerful. It's also an extremely free energy, an extremely active energy. It's not blocked, it's not repressed, it's always available. It's available to keep the turbulent earthly energies under control and to repel the anti-spiritual forces.

So we're now in a rather better position to understand who the four great kings really are, and what they really represent. We've seen that they occupy the lowest of the heavens of the plane of sensuous desire, in other words occupy an intermediate position between the higher heavens and the earth. We've seen that they exercise control over the hordes of non-human earthly beings; that they repel inimical forces; and finally that they are immensely powerful. In other words, the four great kings represent the forces of balance and harmony in the cosmos, especially on the all-important borderland between the human world and the heavenly world; or if you like between the psychological and the spiritual. They represent, indeed, the four great kings represent indeed the possibility of transition from the one to the other.

So we're now in a position to understand the meaning of their second statement, their statement that the *Sutra of Golden Light* nourishes them. We shouldn't take this sentence of theirs, this statement of theirs, in an exclusively literal sense. What nourishes them is the golden light itself, the light of the Transcendental. So what does this mean? It means that the positive energies of the cosmos, the energies that make for balance and harmony, however powerful they may be, cannot sustain themselves, cannot nourish themselves. They have to be sustained, have to be nourished, can only be sustained, only be nourished, by the Transcendental. Left to itself a positive energy, however powerful, will sooner or later pass over into its opposite, will sooner or later become negative.

And this principle has important implications. On the level of the individual human life it means that there's no such thing as purely psychological positivity, that is to say a positivity whose support, whose inspiration, comes only from a psychological source. There's no purely spiritual positivity, even. The only true lasting positivity is that which has its ultimate sanction in the Transcendental. Not only that. Nourished by the Transcendental, positivity will be more positive even on its own level than it could possibly have been without it. As the four great kings say, 'In our body there will be produced prowess, strength and energy. Brilliance, glory and splendour will enter our body.' Here body does not mean body as distinct from mind. Body here means the whole personality, the whole being. In other words, nourished by the golden light the four great kings will be greater and more king-like than ever, and they'll exercise their distinctive functions more effectively than ever. Similarly, one who goes for Refuge will not only develop spiritually, but will become more of a human being. Distinctively human qualities will be nourished by the spiritual, nourished by the Transcendental. We could almost say that you cannot be a human being unless you go for Refuge. Ultimately it is only the Enlightened man who is the perfect man. In Christian terms only God can be man.

On the level of collective human life, there can be no healthy culture, no healthy civilisation, without some basis in Transcendental values, however deeply hidden those values may be. A purely secular life, a purely secular culture, a purely secular civilisation, is really a contradiction in terms. I hope to go into this at some length in a subsequent lecture in this series. For the present I'll say just one thing, just to prevent misunderstanding. The fact that a secular life, a secular culture, is an impossibility certainly does not mean that we in the West are flung back into the arms of orthodox Christianity. There are other alternatives.

Now having declared that they are nourished by the Law, nourished by the Dharma, the four great kings make four promises, four vows. We've already seen what these are. One, they promise to rule by the Dharma, to exercise their sovereignty over the different classes of demi-gods in accordance with the Dharma. Which means that their rule will not be an expression of arbitrary egoistic will. It will be an expression of spiritual power, not their own power but the power of the Dharma. They will simply be the channels through which this power is transmitted, through which it reaches the hordes of non-human beings. And in being such channels they will be all the more truly themselves.

Two: they promise to protect the whole of Jambudvipa. Jambudvipa is the known material world, it's the human world, so the four great kings promise to keep out all hostile forces, all forces that threaten to disrupt the fabric of a positive, healthy, human society - that is to say, a society in which it is possible for the individual to develop. At present the services of the four great kings are very badly needed. In fact, at

present their strength is being strained to the utmost, especially in our western quarter. Hostile forces, we may say, are trying to break in at a number of points.

Third: the four great kings promise to protect the monks who proclaim the sutra, who read or recite it, and who explain its meaning. They promise to give them their encouragement. This can be understood in two ways - objectively and subjectively. Objectively it means that the grosser energies of the cosmos will cooperate with the monks in their work of proclaiming the sutra, of making known the golden light. Subjectively it means that the monks themselves will utilise their own grosser psychophysical energies for this purpose, means that they will integrate such energies. After all, one needs a lot of energy to proclaim the Dharma - not only spiritual energy; even physical energy, even physical stamina. So this too the four great kings promise to give.

And fourthly they promise to protect kings who patronise monks who proclaim the sutra. Here of course 'kings' means governments, means kings who patronise monks, that is to say means social and economic and political systems which assist spiritual development, systems which are in fact organised to this end. Such kings, kings who patronise the monks, patronise the monks who proclaim the *Sutra of Golden Light*, perform in their respective kingdoms the same function as the four great kings perform in the cosmos at large. It's only natural therefore that the former should be protected by the latter. They represent the same spirit, the same principle on different levels of operation. We'll have something to say about this in the last lecture of the series, when we consider the upholders of the moral order.

So we can now see quite clearly what the four promises, or four vows, made by the four great kings in general represent. We can see what is meant by the four great kings listening to the sutra, what is meant by them undertaking to protect the sutra. It means that the four great kings submit themselves to the sutra, submit themselves to the Dharma. The hordes of non-human beings submit themselves to the four great kings, or are made to submit. Similarly the four great kings submit themselves to the golden light. In other words, the earthly energies submit to the heavenly energies, and the heavenly energies submit to the Transcendental energies, which means that we're introduced here to the profound principle of spiritual hierarchy. The four great kings can even be said to symbolise this principle. They exercise sovereignty over what is below them. At the same time they willingly accept the sovereignty of what is above them. The four great kings therefore also represent the principle of world transformation. The world can be transformed, truly transformed, only if it submits to the golden light, only if it is receptive to the golden light; that is to say, only if it organises itself in such a way as to assist the manifestation of the golden light in the life of the individual.

Now it's not only the four great kings who come forward and promise to protect the sutra. In subsequent chapters, chapters subsequent to chapter six, other deities come forward and make similar promises. In particular, three goddesses come forward. These are Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, Sri, the goddess of wealth, and Drdha, the earth goddess; and they too promise to protect the sutra. The four great kings' promise represents the general principle of transformation of the world through submission to the golden light, and the three goddesses' promises represent the working out of that same principle in different spheres of human life and human activity. And what these spheres are, and how that principle works out in them, we shall be seeing in the course of the next three lectures.

I want to conclude tonight with a few remarks on something I touched upon earlier on, and that is the subject of dragons - that is to say, the *nagas* or serpents. Recently I was reading a book, a Buddhist book, written by a Chinese Buddhist monk who is still alive. And he made in passing the statement that dragons are not so common nowadays as they used to be. However, I must say straight away I don't agree with him. I think they are if anything commoner than they used to be, at least in some parts of the world. So how is this? You may remember that the protector of the western quarter of the world is Virupaksa. You remember that Virupaksa is the protector of our quarter of the world. He's associated with the western direction, with the western region, like Amitabha, like Avalokitesvara, in fact like the whole lotus family. And which class of non-human beings is Virupaksa the leader and ruler of? He's the leader and ruler of the dragons and others. Now what exactly are the dragons? We mustn't confuse them with our own Welsh dragons, or British dragons. We mustn't confuse them with the dragons that were killed by King Arthur and his knights. The Buddhist dragon is quite a different kind of creature. According to Buddhist tradition dragons are highly intelligent. You may not believe this, but they really are. They often have a very good understanding of the Dharma, a very good understanding indeed, but they don't practise the Dharma. In particular, they don't observe the precepts. And this is why perhaps in Indian Buddhism, in Indian Buddhist art, dragons are represented more often than not in serpent form - that is to say, with big heads



and long thin bodies, and of course no arms and no legs. So why is this? - no arms and no legs, what does that mean? Well, no arms and no legs because dragons, serpents, don't do anything. They can only think, they can only understand, they never practise - so they don't need arms and legs, we may say.

So we can perhaps now see why I don't agree that dragons are not so common as they used to be. In the west dragons are very common indeed. In the west we have lots of people who understand the Dharma very well, who know all about *sunyata*, all about Zen, all about the one mind, all about the Abidharma, all about the esoteric Tantric teachings, especially the esoteric Tantric teachings, but who never even think of practising the

Dharma. Such dragons are very common in some Buddhist circles.

We may even have a few of them in the audience here tonight. They can take human form.

So what does this mean? What does this imply? Well, it means that we need to invoke the help of Virupaksa, the protector of the western quarter. In other words, we have to bring our dragons under control. We have to bring our one-sided intellectual activity under control. We have to start practising the Dharma. We have to start being receptive to the Dharma, being receptive to the golden light. If we do that, then we will be able to transform our own life, our own self, and also we'll be able to cooperate in the transformation of the world. And if we can do that, then we too shall be, in our own much smaller sphere, one of the protectors of the Dharma.



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