Lecture 130: The Moral Order and its Upholders

Most of you know, I think, that I returned to England from the East in 1964. At that time, at the invitation of Buddhists in London, I came on a short visit. I came, in fact, on a four-months' visit, but the weeks went by, the months went by, and eventually even the years went by, and it so happened, it so transpired, that I stayed for two whole years and a little more.

After a sort of farewell visit to India, I returned finally to this country in 1967: to be precise, I returned at the end of March in that year, and at the beginning of April we started up the FWBO, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.

So this means, among other things, that I happen to have spent more than half my whole adult life in the East, and mainly in India, though I did also spend some time in Ceylon, in Malaysia, in Nepal and in Sikkim; but mainly, during that period, I was in India. Now India, as I hardly need tell you - even those who haven't gone there will know this - India is a very different sort of place from England, and especially the old India, the India of tradition, is a very different sort of place. And it was, of course, in this India, the old India, that I was mainly interested. So that, having spent the greater part of those 20 years in India, in the old India, almost I might say immersed in the old India, I couldn't help noticing when I returned to England quite a lot of difference, quite a lot of difference between the respective ways of life and so on in the two countries, India, especially the old India, on the one hand, and England, or Britain, modern Britain, on the other. And not only did I notice differences, but I even felt differences. After all, in the course of those nearly 20 years in India, I had become, one might say, a bit of an Indian myself.

Now one of the things that I noticed was this, one of the differences I noticed was this. In India, one always seems to have so much more time. Things seemed to be done always, or nearly always, at a much more leisurely pace. People weren't so concerned, not so much concerned, about things like punctuality. Some of my Indian friends, I remember, used to make a sort of joke of this, they used to joke about what they called English time and Indian time. If, for instance, I asked them to meet me at two o'clock, they would ask, 'Do you mean two o'clock English time or two o'clock Indian time?' So two o'clock English time meant two o'clock; and two o'clock Indian time meant any time between two and four or even five or six. Sometimes in India even the trains used to run by Indian time rather than by English time. But, strange to say, from our point of view, no one seemed to mind very much. They'd just go on sitting there on the platform, with all their trunks and boxes and bags and sacks around them, eating various things, various refreshments, drinking tea, talking, chatting, passing the time quite happily, quite contentedly, until the train in its own good Indian time came along.

Now I understand from friends, from Indian friends who have just returned from India, that Mrs. Gandhi, capable woman, has changed all that now. The trains, I am told, now run according to English time; Indian time has become English time. And, when I hear this, I don't know whether to be pleased or whether to be sorry.

Now the fact that one had time in India meant that one could do things, could do the things that one wanted to do, in a different way, and this of course also applied to Buddhist activities. It wasn't simply a question of being able to do things at a much more leisurely pace. One could also do things much more spontaneously; that is to say, one could do things as and when one felt like it. One didn't have to think and plan and arrange very far ahead. For instance, I used to have the experience, quite often, of people coming along in the morning, maybe 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning, and asking me to give a lecture in the evening. People used not to ask you well in advance, because they knew that almost certainly you'd be free that evening anyway, so they didn't ask you until the morning of that same day. If you weren't free, if it did so happen, well, there were plenty of other speakers around who would be free; or, if they particularly wanted you, they'd just postpone the meeting until the next day. After all, people would be just as free to attend it tomorrow as they were today.

So I need not tell you that things are very different here in England. Here, when people ask you to give a lecture, they sometimes want to fix the date a whole year in advance. Now why is this? Well, they have to hire the hall, and halls are sometimes very difficult to get, especially, it seems, here in London. You have to book well in advance. For some of the best-known halls, so I am told, you have to book two or three years in advance. And then, of course, there is the advance publicity for your lecture or lectures; the designers and the printers - they want plenty of notice, because they are booked up with other work, other orders, perhaps even for months ahead.

So what does all this mean? It means that you, the speaker, have to give the title or the titles of your lecture or lectures well in advance. In other words, you have to think what you are going to say about six months before you actually say it. It's not enough to tell the organisers that you're going to talk about Buddhism, about the Dharma. You must give your title or titles, and these titles must give a fairly clear indication of what you are going to say, so that people can know whether they want to attend and listen to you or not.

Now something of this sort happened in the case of the present series of lectures. I don't think, at least so far as I know, I don't think there was too much trouble about booking the hall, or even about the advance publicity, by English standards, but there was certainly a little difficulty about giving the titles of the lectures, at least from my point of view, at least by Indian standards, the Indian standards to which I was accustomed for so many years. For several years, the *Sutra of Golden Light* had been very much in my mind. I'd been reading it and turning it over, reflecting upon it, for quite a long time, and gradually I came to feel very much like speaking on this sutra. And eventually I had a pretty clear idea of what I wanted to say, at least in outline. But I certainly didn't know exactly how I was going to say it. I was quite content to leave that till just a few days before each lecture. However, this was not possible. The titles of the lectures were needed, at least three or four months in advance; so this meant that I had to know at that time just how the material was going to be arranged, how it was going to be distributed, which topics would be dealt with in which lecture, and so on, and how they would be dealt with; because only then would it be possible to decide on the titles. Not only that, but all this had to be done while I was in the midst of conducting study retreats, while I was quite deeply immersed in various other aspects of the Dharma.

So what was the result? The result was that the titles of the lectures in this series aren't quite so specific as they might have been. I wanted, I must confess, to leave myself a little room for movement when the time came, not to say a little room for manoeuvre. Some titles, indeed, seem to be rather more like labels than titles, and one or two might even be considered a bit misleading. This applies, perhaps, to the title of tonight's lecture, which is 'The Moral Order and its Upholders'. Now some people might be under the impression that I am going to talk about the Festival of Light, about Lord Longford and Mrs. Mary Whitehouse. If so, then I'm afraid they are going to be disappointed, because I don't regard these two worthy people as being in any way the upholders of the kind of moral order with which I am concerned and with which the *Sutra of Golden Light* is concerned.

The basic theme of the present series is, of course, transformation: transformation of life, that is to say of the individual self, and transformation of world, that is to say transformation of the human world, the world to which we belong. Transformation of self and world by the Golden Light, which is the light of Truth, the light of Reality, the light of the Buddha, the light which is in fact Truth, is Reality, is the Buddha. And life is transformed when one becomes receptive to the Golden Light, when one allows oneself to be permeated by the Golden Light, when one becomes as it were transparent to the Golden Light. More specifically, life is transformed when one transcends one's problems, when one dies to the old life, the old self, and when one vomits up all the evil which is within one, when one confesses. The world also is transformed when it becomes receptive to the Golden Light, when the various human activities of which it consists place themselves at the service of the Golden Light, that is to say when the people engaged in these activities carry them on in such a way that they conduce to the spiritual development of the individual.

Now in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, as we have seen, this idea finds expression in the motif, as we may call it, of protection. Various gods and goddesses come forward. These gods and goddesses represent different kinds of energy, represent different departments of human life and activity. The Four Great Kings, for instance, represent the lowest level of spiritual energy, represent that energy which stands, or if you like flows, midway between the higher spiritual energies on the one hand and the purely earthly energies on the other. The great goddess Sarasvati represents culture, especially ethnic culture. The great goddess Sri represents wealth and riches. And so on. And each of them, each of the gods and goddesses, promises to protect the Sutra; in other words, each places the energy of the department of human activity which he or she represents at the service of the Golden Light.

Now in the course of these lectures I have not been able to deal exhaustively with the *Sutra of Golden Light*. I haven't even been able to deal exhaustively with the theme of transformation of life and transformation of world in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. All that I have been able to give is a rough sketch, not a finished picture, and even the rough sketch is not really complete. There are quite a few departments

of human life, of human activity, still untransformed, and it is with one of these that we are concerned tonight.

Tonight, however, no god comes forward and promises to protect the Sutra. No goddess comes forward, even, though we do meet, briefly, the Four Great Kings again. Tonight, in this last lecture of the series, we are concerned with chapter 12 of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. It is the chapter entitled 'Chapter on Instruction concerning Divine Kings'. Which department of human activity it seeks to transform will be obvious, I hope, as we go along.

The chapter opens with a salutation, a salutation to a Buddha with a very long name, so long I am not going to attempt to repeat it; a Buddha, however, that we have already met before in a previous chapter, the chapter on Sri. The Buddha Sakyamuni is also saluted, as well as the goddesses Sri and Sarasvati. We are then introduced to two kings, King Balendraketu and his son King Ruciraketu. Now we are not told if this Ruciraketu is the same as the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu whom we encountered in chapters 2 and 3. That is the Bodhisattva, you may remember, who had the problem, that is to say the problem about the Buddha's length of life. It is also the Bodhisattva who had the marvellous dream, the dream of the Drum of Golden Light, the drum from which came forth the confessional verses which make up the nucleus of the whole Sutra.

Now in this chapter 12, at the beginning of this chapter 12, King Ruciraketu has just been consecrated or, as we would say, crowned. He has just been installed as king, presumably by his father. This apparently was the custom in ancient India: each king consecrated his successor and then retired. More often than not, he went off into the woods and mountains and became a hermit, became an ascetic, passing the rest of his days in contemplation. So, before leaving, the old king naturally gave the new king, the young king, very often his own son, some good advice. So this is what we find King Balendraketu doing. He tells his son King Ruciraketu that there is a textbook, a textbook for kings called 'Instruction concerning Divine Kings'. He further says that his father, King Varendraketu, explained it to him when he was consecrated, and he adds that for 20,000 years he has exercised sovereignty according to its teaching (in those days, they lived much longer, apparently), and he is now going to explain that textbook to Ruciraketu.

But first he relates how the textbook originated. He says once upon a time the divine kings held a meeting. They met on a great mountain, a mountain called Vajrakara, and Brahma, the teacher of the goods, was also present, as well as the four world-protectors, that is to say the Four Great Kings. And on that occasion the Four Great Kings question Brahma. They ask him to solve their problems, to remove their doubts, and they put jointly, collectively, a question; and their question is this: 'Why is a king, though born among men, called "divine"? And for what reason is a king called a "divine son"? If he is born here in the world of men, he should become king, but how will a god exercise kingship among men?'

This is their question put to Brahma, the teacher of the gods. Now clearly a word of explanation is needed here. Apparently it was the ancient Indian custom to address kings as '*deva*', much as we say 'Your Majesty'. *Deva*, of course, means god with a small g, means a divine being, a divine one. We find this usage, for instance, in the Pali Buddhist texts. The Buddha himself, for instance, addresses King Bimbisara as '*deva*'. Translators usually render this as 'Your Majesty', which rather obscures the point; it's rather misleading. So the Four Great Kings are asking why the king is addressed in this fashion, as '*deva*'; after all, he is to all appearances a man, so why is he addressed as a god, why is he addressed as '*deva*', god, divine being? So the remainder of the chapter consists of Brahma's reply to this question, and the reply is very interesting, not only for what he says but for the way in which he says it, for the terms in which he says it.

He uses, in fact, two kinds of terms. If you like, he speaks in the course of his reply two languages, and we can call these two languages the mythic and the conceptual, or if you like the mythic and the rational. We mustn't, by the way, forget the general situation in the midst of which Buddhism arose, or in the midst of which the transcendental truth of the Dharma was originally proclaimed, originally communicated. Broadly speaking, very broadly speaking, the age in which the Buddha lived was an age of transition. It was an age of transition from the old to the new, from old values to new values, from the ethnic to the universal, from the group to the individual. Now the group spoke as it were the language of myth. The individual spoke the language of concepts, the language of reason. The Buddha himself spoke, as far as the existing records show, the language of reason. Later, the individual, the Buddhist individual, learned to speak the language of myth, learned to adapt it to his own individual higher spiritual purposes, but that

is another story. As a literary document, Brahma's speech, or the chapter in which Brahma's speech is embedded, of course belongs to a period 1,000 years later than the Buddha himself, but it reflects very clearly the process of transition from the old to the new, from Vedic Hinduism to Buddhism. Brahma therefore gives, in effect, two replies to the Four Great Kings, or he gives the same reply twice in two different kinds of terms, two different languages, the language of myth and the language of concepts, even the language of doctrine.

Now we are going to deal with each of these in turn. Brahma first says that, having been interrogated, he will speak for the good and the welfare of all beings. He will speak of the origin of kings born in the abode of men. He will explain how they become kings in their regions. So first comes the more mythic explanation. Brahma says:

> Under the blessing of the divine kings, he will enter the womb of his mother. Having first been blessed by the gods, he afterwards enters her womb. Although as king he is born and dies in the world of men, yet since he comes from the gods he is called a divine son. The Thirty-three divine kings have given a portion to the king. Hence his sonship to all the gods, for the lord of men has been magically created.

So here Brahma makes four statements, and they are not all logically consistent - not that this really matters; after all, we are concerned here with myth. The first statement is that the king comes to this earth from the world of the gods. He is, as it were, a god incarnate. That is the first statement. Second statement: before entering the womb of his future mother, he is blessed by the divine kings, blessed by the gods. Third statement: the Thirty-three divine kings have each given a portion of themselves to the king; in other words, the king is fashioned as it were from their substance. And fourth statement: the king has been magically created. Presumably this means that the king possesses what is called an illusory body, a body which is perceived by others but does not really exist, that has no real empirical existence; it is just like a mirage seen in the desert or like the illusory elephant conjured up at the crossroads by the magician.

Now, though somewhat inconsistent, these four statements all clearly convey one thing, which is that the king is not an ordinary man; that there is something divine about him, that he is indeed a divinity. Now this belief, strange as it may sound to us, was widespread in a certain period of ancient history, the period which I have called in another lecture, in another series, the Age of Divine Kingship. Traces of it are found even in modern times, however, including here in England. The belief, that is to say, that the king was a sort of divine being was particularly strong in ancient Egypt and Sumeria and, in a somewhat different form, in China, and it was certainly strong at one time in India; but by the Buddha's day it had already begun to decline, and a more rational justification of the nature and function of kingship was needed, and it's this that Brahma now proceeds to give.

The mythology of ancient Indian kingship is a very interesting subject, and I wish we were able to go into it in greater detail, in greater depth, but we have no time. So, continuing his speech, Brahma says:

> For the sake of suppressing what is unlawful, a destroyer of evil deeds, he would establish beings in good activity in order to send them to the abode of the gods. Whether a man or a god, a Gandharva, a lord of men, a Raksasa, an untouchable, he removes evil deeds.... The king has been blessed by the gods in order to show their fruition and fruit. The king has been blessed by the gods as belonging to the present world to show the fruition and fruit of deeds well done and of deeds ill done. For when a king overlooks an evil deed in his region and does not inflict appropriate punishment on the evil person, in the neglect of evil deeds lawlessness grows greatly, wicked acts and quarrels arise in great number in the realm.

There then follows a graphic description of what happens when the king overlooks an evil deed, when he does not inflict the appropriate punishment. We'll come back to that shortly. Meanwhile, I want to take Brahma's more rational explanation of the nature and function of kingship sentence by sentence.

First, though, a word about *devas* or gods. In the Vedas, that is to say in the most ancient Hindu sacred books, or what were later on written down as books, the *devas* are on the whole personifications of natural

phenomena. There is, for instance, Suriya the sun god; there is Indra the god of rain, in particular the god of the violent thunderstorm. There is Ushas) the goddess of the dawn, and again there is Agni the god of fire, particularly the sacrificial fire. There are the Maruts, the wind gods; all gods, goddesses, of natural phenomena, personifications of natural phenomena. Later, however, there arose gods that personified ethical and spiritual qualities, gods like Mitra and Varuna; even deities that personified human activities and human functions like the goddess Vac, speech, to whom reference was made in the fifth lecture on 'Buddhism and Culture'.

Now when we meet some of these gods a few hundred years later, in the Buddhist scriptures, we find a great change has taken place. The gods in the Buddhist scriptures are no longer personifications of natural phenomena. They are no longer to be feared, no longer to be propitiated. The gods in the Buddhist scriptures are beings like ourselves, only happier, more powerful, and much longer-lived. So what has happened? What has brought about this change? Well, the change has been brought about by the introduction of the law of karma, by an understanding of the law of karma, or if you like by an extension of the law of karma. It is not always realised, I think, that the law of karma was not known to the most ancient Ariyans. Apparently it wasn't known in the Vedic period. It is briefly referred to in one of the most ancient pre-Buddhist Upanishads, but it's referred to as an esoteric teaching, the teaching about karma. It is only in Buddhism, and perhaps in Jainism too, that karma is placed in the forefront of the teaching and described in a full and detailed manner.

The law of karma is, of course, one form of the still more comprehensive law of conditionality. The law of conditionality applies to all conditioned existence whatsoever, to all compounded existence, to everything that is not the absolute. The law of karma applies to all sentient existence. It applies wherever there is consciousness, that is to say wherever there is mind and will. Briefly stated, the law of karma says that skilful action is productive of happiness and unskilful action is productive of suffering. Skilful actions are those which are free from greed, free from hatred, free from delusion; which are, on the contrary, accompanied by content, friendliness and wisdom. Unskilful actions are those which are not free from greed, hatred and delusion; which are accompanied by them, even which spring from them. Traditionally, as I think everybody knows, the law of karma is not envisaged as operating just within the context of the present life. It is envisaged as operating over a whole series of lives; that is to say the law of karma, traditionally speaking, is bound up with the fact of rebirth. Traditionally, the two always go together.

The law of karma also operates at all levels of conditioned existence. A human being can therefore be reborn as a god, can be reborn as a god as a result of performing skilful actions while on earth, and a god can be reborn as a human being. Human beings can also be reborn as *asuras*, infernal beings, hungry ghosts and so on. According to the popular version at least of the teaching, human beings can even be reborn as animals, that is to say as a result of performing unskilful actions. Now all this is depicted in the so-called Tibetan Wheel of Life, which is very well known, so that I don't really need to elaborate. It's time that we returned to chapter 12 of the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

We are now in a better position to understand Brahma's second explanation of why kings are addressed as '*deva*', that is to say the more rational explanation, the explanation in more rational terms. As I said, we'll take it sentence by sentence.

First of all, Brahma says, in his second, more rational, explanation or reply to the question of the Four Great Kings: 'For the sake of suppressing what is unlawful, a destroyer of evil deeds, he would establish beings in good activity in order to send them to the abode of the gods.' As we have already seen, the king has come from heaven; the king is a god reborn o earth as a man. This is common ground to both of Brahma's explanations, the mythical and the rational. In the mythical account, however, there is no explanation of how the god became a god. No explanation, in fact, is needed. A god is a personification of natural phenomena.

In the rational account, however, an explanation is needed, and this explanation is given within the framework provided by the law of karma. A god has become such as a result of skilful actions. Originally he was a man, but he performed an extraordinary number of skilful actions, so after death he was reborn in a higher heavenly world, reborn as what we call a *deva*, a god; and in that higher heavenly world he enjoys greater happiness and greater power, and he also lives for a very long time, even for thousands of years. But eventually the karma that caused him to be reborn as a god is exhausted, and he is reborn again

on earth. However, as a kind of secondary result of all his skilful actions, he is not reborn as an ordinary man. He is reborn as a very prominent man, a leading man, reborn as a king.

Now all this is common ground to all forms of Buddhism. There is not one, perhaps, that would not accept it in total, though they might place on it varying degrees of emphasis. But the *Sutra of Golden Light* has a point of its own to make. As a result of his past history - we could even say his previous positive conditioning - the king has a natural inclination towards skilful actions. He performs skilful actions himself, and he encourages others to perform them. Not only that; as king, he suppresses what is unlawful, what is against the moral order. He destroys evil deeds. He establishes beings in skilful, meritorious activities.

Why does he do this? He does it, we are told, so that as a result of such activities they may be born, beings may be born, reborn, in the world of the gods: that is to say, in the world from which he himself has come. I want to point out here a rather interesting parallel. It's a parallel with the *Bhagavad Gita*. So far as I am aware, it's not been pointed out before. The *Bhagavad Gita*, of course, is a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna; it is part of the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. It consists of 18 chapters, and in chapter 4 Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna that both of them have been born many times before. The difference is, he, Krishna, remembers his previous lives, his previous births; Arjuna does not. And then Krishna says: 'When righteousness declines, when unrighteousness increases, then I appear for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, for the establishment of Dharma, I am born age after age.' This is perhaps, at least in India, the most famous verse in the entire *Bhagavad Gita*. It is the foundation of Hindu *avataravada* or the belief in the successive descents, or as we might say incarnations, of God, that is to say God here with a capital G.

But there are two important differences between this text and the *Sutra of Golden Light*. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it's the Supreme Being himself who descends, descends according to general Indian tradition as Rama, Krishna and so on; and he descends of his own free will. In Buddhism, of course, there is no supreme being. The descent takes place within the framework of conditioned existence. It's from a higher to a lower plane of conditioned existence, from heaven to earth, and it takes place under the law of karma. Moreover, Sri Krishna speaks of himself as coming 'for the destruction of the wicked'. Brahma, however, speaks of the king as 'the destroyer of evil deeds'. I notice, by the way, that in the Penguin Classics translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Juan Mascaro translates 'for the destruction of the evil in men'. However, the original definitely says 'for the destruction of the wicked', *duskritan*.

But let us go on. Let's go on to the next sentence in Brahma's speech, in Brahma's more rational account. He says: 'Whether a man or a god, a *gandharva*, a lord of men, a *raksasa*, an untouchable, he removes evil deeds.' The connection here is not quite clear; the grammar, in fact, is not quite clear. 'He' could refer to the king. In the previous sentence, Brahma has been talking about the king. He says: 'he would establish beings in good activity' etc. - 'he' would establish, the king would establish. In this case, the present sentence would mean that the king discourages all classes of sentient beings from performing unskilful actions. However, it's more likely that the sentence is a sort of interjection: 'he removes evil deeds' is to be understood more as 'one removes evil deeds'. In other words, it doesn't matter what class of beings one belongs to, doesn't matter what position in society one occupies, whether one is a man or god, *gandharva* etc.: one can still perform skilful actions, one can still remove evil deeds. In other words, one has the possibility of a higher heavenly rebirth. Understood in this way, the sentence is an affirmation of the basis on which Brahma's rational explanation of the nature and function of kingship rests. In other words, it is an affirmation of the law of karma.

It is also possible to understand the sentence in another way. It doesn't matter what the king's origin is, doesn't matter what caste he belongs to by birth. The main thing is that he removes evil deeds. If he does that, he is a king. This, of course, is very much in accordance with the whole general spirit of Buddhism as a universal

religion. According to orthodox Hinduism, only one who belongs by birth to the *kshatriya* caste should be king, just as only one who belongs to the brahmin caste by birth should teach.

The next sentence is very short: 'The king is the parent of those who do good deeds.' What does that mean? It means that those who do good deeds have nothing to fear from the king. The king will look after them and protect them. More than that: by encouraging people to perform good deeds, the king becomes

their father in righteousness. Morally speaking, he stands in a sort of parental relation to them. I'll probably have something more to say about the parental function in a more literal sense later on.

The following two sentences say practically the same thing in different words, so we'll take them together. Brahma says: 'The king has been blessed by the gods in order to show their fruition and fruit. The king has been blessed by the gods as belonging to the present world to show the fruition and fruit of deeds well done and of deeds ill done.' Now these sentences comprise the essence of Brahma's speech, the essence of the whole speech, the essence of the Instruction concerning Divine Kings, the essence of King Balendraketu's advice to his son King Ruciraketu. The matter is expressed still more clearly later on in Brahma's speech, when he says: 'He is called king because he acts in various ways in order to demonstrate the fruition and fruit of acts that are well done or ill- done.'

Now what does this mean? It means that the social order should reflect the law of karma. The social order should be the mirror of the law of karma. Under the law of karma, skilful actions result in happiness; unskilful actions result in suffering. It should be the same within the social order: skilful actions should be encouraged, unskilful actions should be punished. In other words, the social order should be a moral order, and the upholder of that moral order is the king. Each king is responsible for upholding it in his own region. We can now see, perhaps, why the lecture is entitled 'The Moral Order and its Upholders'.

Now at this point a question arises. Why should the social order be a moral order? Why should the social order reflect the law of karma? There is quite a lot that could be said in reply to this question. I am simply going to deal with it from the standpoint of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. We will then return again to chapter 12 of the sutra and see what happens when the king does not uphold the moral order; see what happens when he overlooks an evil deed.

First, however, I want to draw your attention to a very simple principle, even more simple and fundamental in a sense than the law of karma. Actions have consequences. Actions have consequences. We often forget this. We do things without thinking; perhaps we do them on the spur of the moment. We don't realise that what we are doing will have consequences, consequences for our own self, consequences for others; perhaps even very serious consequences.

Now to act without thinking of the consequences of actions is irresponsibility. To act bearing in mind the consequences of actions is responsibility. To the extent that one acts responsibly, to the extent that one is responsible, one is an individual; to the extent that one acts without responsibility, one is not an individual. If one wants to be an individual, wants to become an individual, then one must learn to act responsibly; must remember that actions have consequences; must be mindful of the law of karma; should understand why the social order should be a moral order. So why should the social order be a moral order? I have already answered this question to some extent. If the social order is a moral order, then by observing that moral order we are at the same time performing skilful actions. Such a social order is a training ground, as it were, in skilful actions. If we perform skilful actions we shall accumulate merit, and if we accumulate merit we shall be reborn in a happy heavenly state, that is to say be reborn as a god.

Now suppose the social order really is a moral order. Suppose the king really does his duty, in other words does not overlook any evil deed. Suppose all his subjects observe the moral order, suppose they all perform skilful actions. What will be the result? What do you think? They will all go to heaven. They will all be reborn as gods. And what will that mean? The ranks of the gods will be strengthened. We mustn't forget that there is a constant battle going on in the universe between the gods and the *asuras*, battle between the positive and the negative forces, that is to say positive and negative forces within the conditioned, within the *samsara*. Sometimes the gods are victorious, sometimes the *asuras* are victorious. The gods, therefore, have a sort of vested interest, as it were, in human beings performing skilful actions, because if they do this they will be reborn as gods and the ranks of the gods will be strengthened. They will be then more likely to overcome the *asuras*.

So the traditional Buddhist point of view is that the maintenance of the moral order on earth is of cosmic significance. It helps keep the balance in favour of the positive forces in the universe - one could even say, in favour of the spiritual forces in the universe. Now as we saw in our third lecture in this series on 'The Spiritual Significance of Confession', the spiritual is not the same thing as the Transcendental, so we shouldn't confuse this battle between the gods and *asuras* with the conflict between the Golden Light on the one hand and the darkness on the other, the conflict between nature on the one hand and Enlightenment

on the other. As I said, the first is a battle within the conditioned, but the second is the conflict, the much more serious and radical conflict, between the conditioned and the Unconditioned; or rather, the conflict between the negative part of the conditioned and the Unconditioned. The positive part of the conditioned is on the side of the Unconditioned, as it were. The gods are on the side of the Buddha, skilful actions are on the side of Enlightenment, the ethical is on the side of the Transcendental, *sila* and *samadhi* are on the side of *prajna*, the moral order is on the side of the spiritual community.

However, I am going too fast too far. Let's go back to the individual, to the responsible individual, the individual who performs skilful actions; or rather, let us go back to individuals in the plural. The moral order can be described as a network of ethically responsible individuals, of people who act responsibly towards their own selves and responsibly towards one another; people, that is to say, who try to do what is best, truly best, for themselves and others. It's a society in which everyone acts in an ethically responsible manner. It's a society which is totally a moral order, which clearly, faithfully, and fully reflects the law of karma. Perhaps no human society has ever been totally a moral order; certainly no large human society. A few small societies might have been, at least for a short time, but large or small all human societies are to some extent moral orders.

This means that we are obliged to act in an ethically responsible manner, at least to some extent; obliged to perform skilful actions, obliged to pay some heed to the law of karma. In other words, we develop as individuals. And this is why the social order should be a moral order, because it helps people to develop - ultimately helps them to develop spiritually. We cannot develop without becoming ethical individuals, without developing some sense of responsibility towards self and others. But it's difficult, very difficult, to be an ethical individual in an unethical society, so society must help the individual; society must be a moral order. In other words, it must reflect the operation of the law of karma.

Now what is the first human society with which we come into contact when we enter this world? Well, we all know, or we should know: it's the family. The family, that is to say the human family, is not just a biological unit. The family should also be a moral order. It should reflect the larger moral order of society just as society itself should reflect the ideal moral order which is the law of karma. So who are the upholders of the moral order within the family? Obviously, the parents. We can say that parents are divine kings on a small scale. They educate their children in the observance of moral norms. They teach them that actions have consequences. It's not just a question of socialising the child: it's a question of giving children some understanding, however rudimentary, of the law of karma, some training, however elementary, in the performance of skilful action. And this will help the child to become later on a true member of a society which is also a moral order, and will help him to develop as an individual, and we find, according to the Pali scriptures, the Buddha himself doing this, this very thing. We are told that one day when he was out walking, maybe going for alms, the Buddha passed a group of boys, small boys. And what were they doing? Well, as small boys will, whether it's India or England or anywhere else, they were tormenting a crow which had broken its wing. So the Buddha went up to them and he asked them whether they would like to be treated like that? So they replied no, of course not. So the Buddha then said if they would not like to be treated like that themselves, why then treat others like that? He said the crow doesn't like it, either. So the boys understood, and they let the crow go free.

It's well known that children need to know where they stand, what they can do and what they cannot do, what actions will be approved, what actions will be disapproved, even punished. If the parents laugh when the child is naughty one day but get angry with him the next for just the same piece of naughtiness, then the child becomes confused - may even become anxious. He just doesn't know what to do. So it's much the same with adults, even. We need to feel that certain actions will definitely be followed by certain consequences. We need to exist within an order; best of all, to exist within a moral order, though psychologically speaking, at least, almost any order is probably better than no order at all.

So what happens when the moral order breaks down, when it breaks down in society at large? What happens when the king overlooks an evil deed? what happens when an evil deed is not followed by its appropriate result? To find this out, we must go back to our chapter, back to Brahma's speech, and the picture which he paints is a grim and terrible one. It's a picture of a society which is not a moral order, a society which is therefore to that extent not a society at all. I won't read out everything that Brahma says, but just enough to give you some idea of what happens when the moral order of society collapses.

Brahma says: ‘When a king overlooks an evil deed in his region and does not inflict appropriate punishment on the evil person, in the neglect of evil deeds lawlessness grows greatly, wicked acts and quarrels arise in great numbers in the realm. The chief gods are wrathful in the dwellings of the Thirty-three when a king overlooks an evil deed in his region. His region is smitten with dreadful, most terrible acts of wickedness, and his realm is destroyed on the arrival of a foreign army, his enjoyments and houses. Whoever has accumulated wealth, by various evil acts they deprive one another of them. If he does not perform the duty on account of which he has kingship, he destroys his own realm, just as the lord of elephants tramples on a lotus-pool. Unfavourable winds will blow; unfavourable showers of rain will fall; unfavourable will be planets and asterisms, likewise moon and sun. Crop, flower, fruit and seed will not properly ripen. Famine will arise where the king is neglectful. Unhappy in mind will the gods be in their dwellings when the king overlooks an evil deed in his region. All the kings of the gods will say to one another: "Unlawful is this king, for he supports the side of the lawless." This king will ere long anger the gods. Through the anger of the gods his region will perish. There will be destruction by the weapon in the region where there is lawlessness. Wicked acts, quarrels, diseases will arise. The lords of the gods will be angry. The gods will ignore him. His realm will be ruined. The king will come to grief. He will find himself separated from his loved ones, from brother or son, separated from his beloved wife. Or his daughter will die. There will be showers of meteors, likewise mock suns. Fear of foreign armies and famine will increase greatly. His beloved minister will die and also his beloved elephant. As soon as they have died, his beloved horses and female camels will likewise die. They will carry off one another’s house, enjoyments, wealth. In every district they will slay one another with arms. In the regions there will be disputes, quarrels, evil acts. An evil demon will enter the realm. There will be severe disease. After that the venerable will become lawless. His ministers and attendants will become lawless. After that there will be respect for the lawless person and there will be constantly oppression of law-abiding beings. Where there is honour for lawless people and oppression of the law-abiding, there three things go wild: asterisms, water, and winds. Three things perish when there is acceptance of lawless people: the savour and strength of the good Law, the strength of beings, and the savour of the earth. Where there is honour for untruthful people and dishonour for truthful people, there will be three things: famine, thunderbolt, and defilement. After that there will be no savour or strength in fruit or crop. Many beings will become ill in those regions. Large sweet fruits in those regions will become small, bitter and sharp. Play, laughter and pleasure, things previously enjoyable, will become feeble and unenjoyable, fraught with hundreds of troubles. The moist nature and the savour of crops and fruits will disappear. They will not satisfy the body, the senses, or the elements. Beings will become of bad complexion, of very little strength, and very weak. Having eaten much food they will not attain satiety. After that they will get no strength, prowess or energy. Beings in those regions will become without prowess. Beings will become disease-ridden, oppressed by various illnesses. There will arise evil demons, asterisms and various Rakshasas. A king would be lawless if he stood on the side of lawlessness: the three spheres in the circle of the whole triple world are harmed. Numerous such evils arise in those regions when a king is partisan and overlooks an evil act. If he overlooks an evil act, a king does not exercise his kingship according to the duty for which he was consecrated by the lords of the gods.’

So this is what Brahma says. Brahma then goes on to stressing the strongest possible terms the importance of the king fulfilling his duty, that is to say being an upholder of the moral order. Well, as I said, the picture which Brahma paints of what happens when the moral order breaks down is a grim and terrible one, but some of you may have noticed something. It’s a picture which is not entirely unfamiliar. Certain features of it we recognise only too well, because we ourselves are living today in a society which is not a moral order. It’s not that the moral order has broken down equally everywhere, but it has certainly broken down to a great extent in many parts of the world, in many areas of human life. This is not to say that large numbers of people have all at once become deliberately wicked. People are probably much the same as they always were, but the situation has changed.

To begin with, the spiritual values on which the moral order was traditionally based are no longer so widely accepted. Science and technology seem to have made them irrelevant. In some parts of the world, in some societies, those values have indeed been openly attacked and overtly rejected, and even where that has not happened spiritual values are not really important to significant numbers of people. The moral order of society therefore has no real, solid foundation. It continues out of force of habit, as it were, and that cannot go on for very long. Then corporate life has become not only larger but more impersonal. Sometimes it’s very difficult to find out who is responsible for what, who has done what. Things just happen - even things which affect us personally quite a lot - but we cannot trace them back to anyone in

particular. Nobody accepts responsibility. They are nobody's actions. This is particularly true of government departments, perhaps, as well as of large business firms.

Then again, corporate life has become very complex, not to say complicated. Social life, life as a member of a human society, has become very complex, just like an enormous Persian carpet, except of course that there is no pattern. There are just thousands and thousands of threads running in all directions, and it's very difficult to see where any particular thread begins and ends.

In the same way, in society, thousands upon thousands of events are happening, thousands upon thousands of things are happening, but it's very difficult to trace any one event through its entire course. It's very difficult to know what has caused what. Very often we don't even know whether a particular factor in the situation is cause or is effect, and the result of all this is we feel that we are living in a world where actions do not have consequences; where certain causes are not invariably followed by certain effects - at least, not in the human world. We feel that we are not living in a society which is an intelligible moral order. We feel that there is not much point in performing skilful actions, that it doesn't matter what you do: actions have no consequences, no real moral consequences, at least none that one can either experience or observe. And we thus cease to be ethically responsible, and to that extent we cease to be individuals; not only cease to develop, even actually deteriorate. And not only that, we feel that we do not count personally. We feel that the society at large takes no notice of us, as it were, doesn't take us into account, doesn't listen to what we say even when we can say it. Consequently we feel frustrated, we feel powerless, we feel resentful.

So what can we do? How can the moral order of society be restored? We no longer have any kings - not kings in the old sense - so we cannot exhort them to uphold the moral order as Brahma does. So what are we to do? Well, there is only one thing that we can do. We ourselves have to become the upholders of the moral order, to the extent that we can within our own sphere of influence. We ourselves have to become divine kings. Those who are individuals or who are trying to be individuals have to get together, have to establish an ethical order on a small scale among themselves; that is to say, have to establish a smaller moral order within the larger non-moral order, and within that order, that smaller moral order, we have to behave responsibly towards our own selves and towards one another; have to strengthen our sense of ethical responsibility, increase our awareness of the law of karma. To the extent that we can do this, we will become individuals, and when we become individuals we'll be able to act more effectively in the larger world, to act as individuals, act with ethical responsibility. And the moral order to which we belong will give us the strength to do this.

Now this moral order is what I call the positive group. It is not the spiritual community, but it is the basis on which the spiritual community can be established. It doesn't represent the transformation of the world, any more than the development of a sense of ethical responsibility represents the transformation of life, the transformation of the individual self, but it is the basis of that transformation, just as the development of a sense of ethical responsibility is the basis for the transformation of life, the transformation of self - that is, total transformation.

Now, despite its fearful warning of what happens when the king overlooks an evil deed in his region, when he fails to uphold the moral order, Brahma's reply, Brahma's speech, Brahma's reply to the questions of the Four Great Kings, closes on a positive note; closes with a description of what will happen if the king does uphold the moral order. He says [that] the gods will be joyful. Asterisms, moon and sun will move properly, the winds blow at the proper time, rain fall at the proper time, and the abode of gods become full of immortals and sons of immortals. The realm becomes full of plenty. The king becomes famous and easily protects his subjects. So in this way Brahma's speech closes on a positive note.

So perhaps we should close on a positive note, too; not only close this lecture but close the whole series. At the beginning of the lecture I referred to the establishment of the FWBO, which took place nearly 10 years ago; and this means that next year, in the month of April, we'll be celebrating our tenth anniversary. I don't know what I shall be doing then. I don't know what we shall be doing then, how we shall be celebrating that tenth anniversary. I rather think that I myself will be away somewhere in seclusion, perhaps in a cave (metaphorically speaking); perhaps studying and reflecting on the *Sutra of Golden Light*. But of one thing we can be certain: we will all be looking back and trying to assess what we have done in the first 10 years of our existence, trying to understand what we have done. Basically we have done only two things, or have tried to do only two things: first, to transform our own lives, and second to transform the world. We've been doing the first through meditation classes, retreats, yoga, study, communication, work

and so on, and we've been doing the second on a very small scale through various forms of team-based right livelihood. And I've no doubt that in the coming months, in the coming years, these team-based forms or these forms of team-based right livelihood will continue to grow, grow until they make a substantial impact on the surrounding society, the surrounding world.

In the course of the last 10 years, we've learned many things, but perhaps the most important is this: that there is only one way of transforming life, one way of transforming the world, and that is by making them receptive to the Golden Light, the light of the Transcendental. It is only this light that can really transform, and I hope that the present series of lectures has helped us to see this a little more clearly. I hope that we now have a better understanding of what is meant by transformation of life and transformation of world in the *Sutra of Golden Light*. It is fitting, I think, that we should conclude in the words of the sutra itself:

> By the exposition of the Suvarnaprabhasa [the Golden Light] may the ocean of evil be dried up for me; may the ocean of acts be destroyed for me; may the ocean of impurities be destroyed for me; may the ocean of merit be filled for me; may the ocean of knowledge be purified for me. By the excellent splendour of flawless knowledge may I become the ocean of all virtues. Filled with jewel-like virtues, with the virtues of enlightenment, by the power of the Suvarnaprabhasa and its Confession, may there be for me splendour of merits; may the splendour of enlightenment be pure for me. By the excellent splendour of flawless knowledge may there be splendour of body for me. By the shining of the splendour of my merit may I become distinguished in the whole triple world. Continually endowed with the power of merit, a deliverer from the ocean of woe, and like a sea of all blessing, may I proceed to enlightenment in a future aeon.

Both now and in the years to come, may this be the aspiration of us all.

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