Lecture 132: A Vision of Human Existence

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Mr. Chairman and friends:

In this present short series of lectures we're concerned with the four things, the four great things, we may say, which the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order has to offer. Four things that the modern man or the modern woman very deeply and genuinely needs. In the last lecture which was the first in the series, we dealt with 'a method of personal development'. We tried, to begin with, to understand what exactly personal development is and how meditation in particular can be a method, even **the** method of personal development. We saw in some detail the way in which the higher meditative consciousness, the dhyana consciousness, differs from our ordinary everyday consciousness, We surveyed, even, the various states of higher consciousness, of dhyana consciousness, and we spoke at some length of the stages of, in plain English, integration, inspiration, permeation, and radiation, and we saw further how the development of universal friendliness - one of the most widespread and popular of all the different methods of Buddhist meditation - is actually practised. In other words, we may say that our emphasis last week, or rather in the last lecture, was predominantly of a practical nature. We were concerned more with the practical side of things, the practical side of the spiritual life, but tonight's lecture is going to be, we may say, somewhat more theoretical. Nevertheless, don't be alarmed by this word, 'theoretical'. We may say that the theoretical is practical in its own way. How is this? If we look around, we see that there are all sorts of people existing in the world, people of different types, people of different temperaments; and these types, these temperaments, have been spoken of, have been classified, in various ways. We have, for instance, the classification - the very well known classification - into the introvert and the extrovert. Buddhism has its own classifications of psychological types, in fact, it has several of them. Perhaps one of the oldest and most primitive is the division, the classification of people, especially people on the spiritual path or beginning to be on the spiritual path, into what are called the 'faith followers' and what are called the 'doctrine followers'.

Now what do we mean by these two terms? How do these two kinds of followers differ from each other? The faith follower, as the very name suggests, is guided much more by feeling; if you like, by emotion. Is moved by feeling, is moved by emotion, responds, more often than not, very quickly. If, for instance, you tell someone who is a faith follower by temperament or by inclination, about meditation, then more often than not, without further ado, he or she will take up the practice and they'll take up the practice simply because it appeals to them. They like the sound of meditation. They like the feeling of meditation and that is, as it were, quite enough for them. They take it up at once, they practise it, they get into it, they don't ask too many questions, they don't want to know the why and the wherefore of it all and very often people of this sort of temperament, the faith follower, will be attracted not simply by the meditation, by the idea of meditation, spontaneously attracted, but will be attracted also by the person teaching the meditation. The faith follower attaches great importance not only to feeling, not only to emotion, but also to people; is very much influenced by people and drawn to people. The doctrine follower is of quite another type. The doctrine follower, as perhaps his name also suggests, is guided much more by thought, is guided much more by reflection, by sometimes even prolonged and detailed consideration, and the doctrine follower is unlikely to take up any particular practice including the practice of meditation unless he or she has first of all understood quite thoroughly what it is all about and how exactly it works, even why it works. The doctrine follower will usually want to know what are the general principles involved, what are the general principles of which the practice - in this case the practice of meditation - is a particular application or particular exemplification. The doctrine follower, in other words; the person of that sort of temperament; wants to know the philosophy behind the practice, the philosophy **underlying** the practice, the philosophy that gives, in his view, **meaning** to the practice which constitutes a reason for practising whatever has been explained, and only when he has understood that, only when he knows the philosophy, will he take up the particular practice, whether meditation or anything else, and follow it.

So we may say that the last lecture, the first in the series, was addressed rather more to the first kind of person, addressed rather more to the faith follower and this one, tonight's lecture, will be addressed rather more to the second kind of person, in other words to the doctrine follower. However, at the same time, we mustn't conclude, we mustn't assume, that the two types - the faith follower and the doctrine follower - are necessarily mutually exclusive. The two temperaments or rather the two attitudes may indeed even at times alternate in one and the same person. Sometimes we ourselves may be more like one, at other times more like the other. So today, tonight, we are dealing with the second great thing that the Friends

of the Western Buddhist Order has to offer, the second great thing that people need, today perhaps more desperately than ever, which is ‘A Vision of Human Existence’, and clearly from its very title, one can understand that this lecture is addressed more to the doctrine follower than it is to the faith follower, or rather perhaps to those who happen to be, at least tonight, in a thoughtful and reflective, rather than in an emotional or devotional mood. Now you may wonder to begin with, you may wonder having heard the title of the lecture, why one speaks of a **vision** of human existence, why this word 'vision'? Why is this word being used? Why not speak, for instance, of a philosophy of human existence? Surely that would have been more intelligible, more understandable, even more appealing, more appropriate. I have, as a matter of fact, already spoken of someone wanting to know the philosophy behind the practice of, say, meditation, but that usage was simply provisional. One may as well come straight to the point and say that in Buddhism, in the Buddhist tradition, there's no such thing as philosophy. This may come as rather a surprise to some of you at least. You might have thought that there was such a thing as Buddhist philosophy, but actually in Buddhism we find there is no such thing as philosophy.

In fact, in the Indian languages, including the languages of the Indian Buddhist scriptures, that is to say Sanskrit and Pali, there's no word for philosophy, there's no word corresponding to philosophy, either literally or even metaphorically. There is indeed a word in Sanskrit, a word in Pali which is often - or at least used to be often - translated as ‘philosophy’, but in fact it does not mean that at all. It means something quite different from that. So what is that word, that word which is or at least was translated from the Sanskrit, from the Pali, as 'philosophy'? That word is Dassana (Pali) Darshana (Sanskrit). So what does Dassana mean? Dassana comes from a word meaning 'to see' and Dassana means: 'that which is seen'. It means a sight, a view, a perspective, even a vision. So this clearly is not by any means the same thing as 'philosophy'. The word 'philosophy', as we all know, as we were all told at school practically, literally means 'love of wisdom', but more generally it is understood to mean a 'system of abstract ideas'. [It] suggests something thought rather than seen. But Dassana however is very much a matter of direct experience and direct perception. Dassana represents not something mediated by concepts. Those of you who have read a little in Indian traditions, in Indian spiritual literature, may have heard of the 'Sat Dassana'. 'Sat' means simply 'six'. 'Sat Dassana' is usually translated as 'the six systems of Indian philosophy'. Really it should be Hindu philosophy. But these are not six systems of abstract ideas. If we were to understand them in this way, we should misunderstand them very seriously indeed. The Sat Dassana, 'the six systems', as they are usually translated, are in fact six different ways of looking at life or six different ways of looking at existence. We may say, six sights or six views, six perspectives, or even six visions. The mode of expression may be conceptual in both Hinduism and Buddhism; it very often is: but the content of the expression is not conceptual at all. The content is a direct perception of things. The content is a vision.

Now in Buddhism the term is not 'Dassana', the term is 'Drshti', 'Drshti'(Sanskrit), and this term 'Drshti' also comes from a root meaning simply 'to see’, so Drshti also means a sight, a view, a perspective, a vision, and Buddhism traditionally distinguishes two kinds of view, two kinds of vision. Let's forget all about the Indian terms, the Sanskrit and Pali terms, and call them from now onwards, 'wrong view’ and 'right view’. So Buddhism distinguishes - and it's a very important distinction - between these two: 'wrong view' and 'right view'. So what is the difference between the two, wrong view and right view?

In order to understand this, in order to get some glimpse of this, let us look at the question of sight; sight in the literal sense; because a view, whether wrong or right, is after all a kind of seeing, metaphorically speaking. So let's look at this question of sight in the literal sense. We may say that there are two kinds of sight: there's quite obviously bad sight and there's good sight. We can either see things badly or we can see them well. Again in the quite literal sense; nothing mystical, nothing mysterious here. So what is bad sight? Unfortunately, nowadays, lots of people have it, so what is it? When do we see things badly? Bad sight, we may say, is sight or vision which is, in the first place, weak. We don't see very far, we don't see very distinctly. Our sight, our vision, is said to be weak. And then, bad sight is blinkered, it's restricted to a very narrow field. We see simply what is just straight in front of our nose. We don't see what is to this side, we don't see what is to that side. Much less still do we see all the way round. So bad sight is blinkered sight, sight restricted to a very narrow field. And then, three, bad sight is distorted sight, distorted vision, as when we look through a distorting medium; look, say, through a piece of bottle glass or through a stained glass window which makes everything look red and purple and blue and so on, or when we look, or when we see things through, a thick fog. So this is bad sight in the quite ordinary sense. Sight which is weak, blinkered and distorted; and good sight is quite obviously the opposite of all this.

Good sight is sight which is strong, as when we see for a great distance and see very clearly, very distinctly. It is sight which is unblinkered, which has a very wide field of vision, which sees all the way

round, and it's sight, it's vision, which is undistorted, which does not see things through any distorting or refracting medium, which sees them directly without any intermediary. So perhaps, on this basis, with the help of this distinction between sight - bad sight and good sight in the quite ordinary sense - we can see something of the difference between wrong view and right view, Wrong view is view which is, in the first place, weak. So what do we mean by wrong view being weak? We mean that it doesn't have any energy behind it. And where does that energy usually come from? That energy comes from meditation; meditation in the sense of the dhyana experience. So our vision, our insight into things, as it were, is weak when it does not have behind it the concentrated force, the concentrated energy, of the meditation experience. In other words, the energy, the force, that we derive from meditation, from our meditation experience, from the dhyana state: this energy, this force, transforms a purely conceptual understanding of the truth into a matter of direct experience. So if this is not there, if this energy, this force of meditation, is not behind our vision, not behind our sight, then our sight, our vision, our view, is weak. We don't see very deeply into the true nature of things, we don't see things clearly, we don't see them distinctly, we don't see them as they are.

And secondly, the wrong view is blinkered, it's limited to a very narrow range of experience, it's limited to what we experience through the five physical senses and the rational mind. It's confined to these and it generalises from this very narrow range, it draws conclusions from this very narrow range. It's unaware of other possibilities of perception, other possibilities of experience. On the quite ordinary everyday level, we have, for instance, the example of the man, let us say, who is interested only in a very narrow range of things. His interests are very very narrow. He is interested by only his job, his family, football pools and so on. That about exhausts his interests. There's no interest in world affairs, no interest in the arts, no interest in personal development, so his experience is limited and he sees existence itself, life itself, simply in terms of his limited existence.

And thirdly, wrong view is distorted. Vision can be distorted in all sorts of ways. It can be distorted by emotion. We see things quite differently when we are in a happy mood from what we see them when we are in a gloomy mood and obviously if we dislike someone, we see all sorts of faults, whereas if we like somebody, then we see in them all sorts of perfections, perhaps which they don't in fact possess. And in the same way, our vision is distorted by prejudice of various kinds, prejudice on account of race or class or religion or nationality.

So this is wrong view. It's view which is weak, which doesn't have the force of meditation behind it, which is blinkered, limited to a narrow range of experience and distorted by one-sided emotions and by prejudices. Right view is obviously the opposite of wrong view.

Right view is view which is strong and powerful, which has behind it the concentrated energy of meditation so that it gives rise not just to a conceptual understanding of things, but to a direct experience of the truth, and for this reason it doesn't remain on the surface but penetrates deep into the heart of things and sees everything clearly and distinctly. In the same way, right view is the view which is unblinkered and unlimited. It ranges over the whole field of human experience. It's not confined to what can be experienced through the physical senses or the rational mind. If it generalises at all, it generalises from the entire range of human experience - in all fields, at all levels. And lastly, of course, it is undistorted. Not distorted by emotion, not distorted by prejudice. It sees things as they are. So this is right view and as I mentioned earlier on, Buddhism regards the distinction between wrong view and right view as being of supreme importance. So why is this?

A view does not exist in the abstract. So far I've spoken in terms of views: wrong view and right view; but views don't exist, as it were, up in the air. Views are always **somebody's** view, somebody's views. There's no sight without somebody who sees that sight. There's no sight without a seer. No view without a view**er**, at least from the common sense point of view, without going into metaphysics. So inasmuch as there are two kinds of view, wrong view and right view, there are two kinds of people. There are people who have wrong view and there are people who have right view. There are people whose view of existence is limited, restricted and distorted and there are people whose view is unlimited in extent, unrestricted in scope and without any distortion whatsoever.

People of the first kind, people who have wrong view, are known technically in Buddhism as *prthagjanas* or ordinary folk, and the others, those who have right view or right views, are known as the Aryas or the spiritually noble. We could say that the first are those who are without any degree of personal development, who have not had recourse to any method of personal development, who have not worked at all on themselves, who are, as it were, just as nature made them. And the second are those who have

attained some degree of personal development, who had recourse to one or another method of personal development and who have worked on themselves and were not as nature made them: they remade themselves, recreated themselves, remodelled themselves, at least to some extent. The first kind of people, the ordinary folk with wrong views, are, of course, in the majority, and the second, the spiritually noble people with right views, are in the minority, But it's possible to change from one category to the other. The Prthagjana can become the Arya, the ordinary person can become the spiritually noble, and one does this by developing awareness, by cultivating positive emotions, by raising the level of consciousness and above all, by discarding wrong and developing right view.

Now so far I've spoken simply of **two** kinds of view, wrong and right. But really there are three and the third is perfect view, or rather, we may say, not perfect view but perfect vision. Perfect vision is right view developed to the fullest possible extent. It's the total vision of the total man at the highest conceivable level of his development. Perfect vision is vision without limits. It's the unconditioned vision of the unconditioned reality, the vision that transcends space and transcends time, that transcends in fact the ordinary framework of perception, transcends the subject-object relation itself, and perfect vision is, of course, the vision of the Enlightened One, the vision of the one who sees with Wisdom and also with Compassion. Perfect vision, thus, is the vision of the Buddha. So the question which arises is what is this vision of the Buddha? How does the Buddha see things, what is the **content** of his vision? **We** see things, for the most part, wrongly. Our view is wrong view. Only occasionally do we have just a **flash** of right view. Not only that, not only do we have most of the time, much of the time, wrong view in various forms; we rationalise our wrong views. We present them in systematic conceptual form and these are all our so called 'worldly philosophies', our various 'isms and 'ologies.

But how does the Buddha see? What is His vision of existence, in particular His vision of human existence? If we can have at least some glimpse of this, we shall be momentarily raised to that level, at least in thought, at least in imagination, and we shall be able to see exactly where we ourselves stand. We shall have a true ‘philosophy’, (inverted commas), that will give meaning, will give purpose, to our lives, which will enable us to understand the general principles that underlie the whole process of personal individual development. So let's start with a very familiar picture, the picture of the Buddha beneath the Bodhi Tree, 2,500 years ago. Enlightenment has just been attained. The Buddha has seen his great vision, his vision of human existence, the vision that afterwards he was never to lose, the vision which was in a sense identical with the experience of Enlightenment itself. But no sooner had he seen this great vision, no sooner had he gained Enlightenment, than at once, in a sense, a problem arose. A problem arises, which is how is he to communicate that vision, how is he to communicate that vision to other men, unenlightened men? And according to tradition - and here we touch on something very profound and very mysterious indeed - according to tradition, the Buddha felt at first that what he had seen, the vision that he had seen, the Enlightenment that he had attained, the truth that he had realised, could **not be communicated**. What he had experienced was very, very deep, was very subtle, was very profound, was very sublime, and people, he saw, were given over to sensual pleasures, they delighted in sensual pleasures. In other words, their view was weak, their view was restricted, their view was distorted and they would not be able to understand. So what happens? According again to the tradition, according if you like to the legend, the god Brahma, the lord of a thousand worlds, intervenes and he points out to the Buddha, in highly dramatic fashion, as it were, that for want of the Buddha's vision, the world will perish. There's a verse in the Old Testament which says 'where there is no vision the people perish’, and this is more or less what Brahma Sahampati said to the Buddha. ‘Where there is no vision the people will perish. But share your vision, share the truth that you have experienced with the world.’ So, we are told, the Buddha looked out over the world with his spiritual eye, and he saw as he looked that people were in different stages of development and that there were **some** who would understand, some whose eyes were covered just a little with dust, and he therefore decided to teach, decided to **communicate** his vision.

So how does he do this, **how** does he communicate his vision? We may say that the Buddha communicates in four ways, four different ways.

First he communicates by **concepts**, that is to say by means of abstract ideas. And this is perhaps the commonest means of communication, especially today.

Secondly, he communicates by **symbols**, communicates in terms of myth, in parables, images - that is to say, figures of speech, metaphors and similes. And these may be - in fact later on, were - pictorially represented.

Thirdly, the Buddha communicates by his **actions**, that is to say he communicates by his life; if you like, by the lessons of his life; as when, for instance he tended the sick monk, a very well known episode, or when he remained unruffled when a mad elephant was released against him. Or when, according to another tradition, he simply held up a golden flower and said nothing - just held up that golden flower - then also he was communicating. Even when he walked simply along the road, he was communicating by the way in which he walked, We mustn't forget that communication is not always verbal; teaching, even, is not always verbal. There's a very interesting little anecdote in this connection, from the Jewish tradition: it's said that a certain seeker, a certain spiritual seeker, went to see a great Rabbi, sometime in the 18th century apparently, and he was asked afterwards why he had gone, and the questioner apparently expected that he had gone in search of some great truth and teaching, some explanation of the Kabbala perhaps. So the spiritual seeker said 'I went to see the Rabbi just to see how he tied up his shoe laces.' He went just to see that, because from that, from the way in which the Rabbi tied up his shoe laces, he could learn quite a lot; simply by tying up his shoe laces on his old boots, the Rabbi - because he was a great Rabbi - really communicated. So similarly, one might say one could go to see how the Buddha wore his robe. Even the way he wore his robe would have a meaning. Even by wearing his robe in a certain fashion, he would be communicating.

And then fourthly, the Buddha communicated by **silence**. Complete silence; no words; not even any action. The Buddha just sits there, he doesn't **say** anything, he doesn't even **do** anything, he just simply **is**. Or perhaps we should say he neither is nor is not, nor both nor neither. He communicates by his mere presence which is of course, a non-presence, etc. You've also read all those books on Zen and you can fill in all the gaps. *[Laughter]* So this sort of communication is very difficult to receive, this silent communication is very difficult to receive, if only because we won't just listen. We have to stop speaking ourselves, stop even **thinking** ourselves, stop even **being** ourselves, in a sense, before we can receive that silent communication.

So tonight I'm not going to say anything about the third and the fourth kinds of communication. I am going to deal with the Buddha's communication of his vision of human existence by means of concepts and by means of symbols. But in both cases we must remember that what the Buddha sought to communicate was a vision, was a direct experience. So let's go back. Let's go back to the figure of the Buddha seated beneath the Bodhi tree. What did the Buddha see? In a word, he saw that everything was changing, He saw that everything was a process, or rather, that everything was process. And He saw that this was true, this held good at all levels: not only was there process on the material plane, there was process also on the mental plane. There was nothing anywhere in the world, nothing anywhere in conditioned existence, that did not change, that was not process. This was true of the whole of conditioned existence. It was true of all forms of life. Nothing remained the same for two consecutive instances. Everything was subject to change. Everything was pure process, everything flowed. In terms of Indian thought, the Buddha saw that there was in reality no such thing as 'being', no such thing as 'non-being' even. He saw that there was nothing but a vast 'becoming'. But he saw more than this. He saw the truth of change; he saw that things arise and then pass away, but he also saw that this change was not fortuitous. He saw that things do not arise and pass away by chance, by accident. Whatever arises, arises in dependence on conditions; whatever ceases, ceases because those conditions cease; and the conditions are, as we would say, purely natural conditions. There's no room here for any such explanation as 'the Will of God'.

So the Buddha, therefore, not only saw the truth of change, not only saw that all was process, he saw the law of conditionality, and this law, the law of conditionality, is the fundamental principle of what we can only call Buddhist thought. And though it's the fundamental principle of **all** Buddhist thought, it can be stated in a very simple form; which is: **A being present B arises. In the absence of A, B does not arise**. And this is, of course, the famous principle, the famous law, that Ashvajit proclaimed to Sariputra on a certain famous occasion. Ashvajit, as I expect most of you know, was one of the Buddha's first five disciples. Those who had originally left him when he gave up self-torture but whom he reclaimed after his Enlightenment. And Sariputra was, at that time, just a wandering ascetic, looking for a teacher, looking for a teaching, and Sariputra meets Ashvajit. They are both wanderers and Sariputra is very much impressed by the appearance of Ashvajit. He seems calm, he seems happy, radiant. So he asks, 'Who is your teacher?', the standard question in ancient India. Even nowadays you often get asked this question, 'who is your teacher?' And 'what teaching does your teacher profess?' That's the second question. So what does Ashvajit say? Ashvajit says, 'I'm only a beginner. I don't know very much, but what I do know, I shall tell you' and he, thereupon recites a verse, a verse in Pali and the verse goes like this. We still have it in the scriptures.

Of those things which proceed from a cause,
the Tathagata has explained the origin.
Their cessation too, he has explained.
This is the doctrine of the great ascetic.

And in the original Pali this has a much more impressive and powerful sound, than it has in English. 'This is the doctrine of the great ascetic', and with one possible exception this is the most famous verse in all the Buddhist scriptures and it's often regarded as a summary of the Dharma, 'of those things which proceed from a cause, the Tathagata has explained the origin. Their cessation too he has explained. This is the doctrine of the great ascetic'. And we find this verse very frequently engraved on monuments and on seals throughout Indian Buddhist history, and on hearing this verse recited by Ashvajit, Sariputra at once attained a high degree of spiritual insight.

Now conditionality is not all of the same kind, not all of the same type. There are two great orders of conditionality at work in the universe and at work in human life. We can call the first the **cyclical** order and the second, the **spiral** order, or the reactive order and the progressive order. Now what do we mean by these terms? How do the two orders of conditionality differ, the one from the other? In the cyclical order of conditionality, there is a process of action and reaction between pairs of factors which are opposites. For instance, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, loss and gain, and within the wider context of a whole series of lifetimes, birth and death. In the spiral order, on the other hand, there is a gradual progression as between factors which progressively augment each other. Here the succeeding factor augments the effect of the preceding factor, rather than counteracting it or cancelling it out. For instance, in dependence upon pleasure arises, not pain, but happiness. In dependence upon happiness arises, not unhappiness, but joy. In dependence upon joy, delight. In dependence upon delight, bliss. Then rapture, then ecstasy. And in the life of the individual human being, these two orders of conditionality, the cyclical and the spiral, are reflected in two different kinds of mind: what we call the reactive mind and what we call the creative mind. Not that there are literally two minds, of course, rather there are two different ways in which the mind, the one mind, can function. Two ways in which we can function: reactively and creatively. To function reactively means to re-act, which means, not to act at all. To react means to be essentially passive. It means to respond automatically to whatever stimuli are presented to us. To function creatively, on the other hand, means to act, to originate, to bring into existence something that was not there before; whether that something be a work of art or a higher mental state, a higher state of consciousness. To function reactively means to be mechanical. To function creatively means to be spontaneous. When we are reactive we go on repeating ourselves: repeating the same old pattern of our lives; doing today what we did yesterday, doing this week what we did last week, doing this year what we did last year, even doing this decade what we did **last** decade. If you even extend the context, doing in this life exactly what we did in all our previous lives.

But when we are creative we change ourselves, not only change ourselves, we **develop** ourselves. We become new men and new women. Personal development, therefore, with which we were concerned last time, personal development therefore is based on the spiral, progressive type of conditionality. It means ceasing to live reactively, learning to live creatively and this, of course, is by no means easy. It requires among other things, awareness, awareness in particular of the two kinds of conditionality; not simply as abstract principles, but as concrete alternatives actually confronting us. And, of course, they don't confront us just once or twice in a lifetime - they confront us practically every minute of the day. Because every minute of the day virtually we have to choose whether to react or whether to create. Suppose, for instance, someone speaks to us a little unkindly. Well we can either get angry or feel hurt - in other words react - or we can try to understand what has happened, why he or why she spoke like that. Can try to sympathise, try at least to be patient. In other words, we can be creative. If we do the first, if we react, we'll remain as we are or even deteriorate, but if we do the second, if we create, we will take a step forward in our personal development.

However, it's time that we dealt with the Buddha's communication of his vision of human existence in terms of symbols. So let's go back, go back to the figure seated beneath the Bodhi tree. Once again, what did the Buddha see? And here, we may say, he saw two things. First he saw a great wheel. This wheel embraced the whole of conditioned existence. It contained all living things, and this great wheel is constantly turning. It turns by day and it turns by night. It turns life after life. It turns age after age. We cannot see when it first began turning and we cannot see, as yet, when it will cease turning. Only the Buddha, only **A** Buddha sees that. And this wheel, this great wheel, which is coterminous with the cosmos - which embraces the whole of conditioned existence and all living beings - this wheel is turning, is revolving on a hub. A hub made up of three creatures, and the three creatures are: a red cock greedily

scratching the earth; a green serpent, its red eyes glaring with anger, and a black pig ignorantly wallowing in the mud. And these three creatures themselves form a circle, and each bites the tail of the one in front. And surrounding the hub, surrounding the three creatures, surrounding the first circle of the wheel, there is a second, larger circle, and this is divided vertically into two halves. On the right, there's a white half and on the left, a black. And in both halves. there are figures of men and of women. The figures on the right are moving upwards, almost we may say, **floating** upwards, as though to the sound of music, and they all have rapt blissful expressions; and some as they move upwards, as they float upwards, are holding hands and all are gazing upwards, gazing upwards to the zenith. The figures on the left, on the other hand, are moving downwards. In fact, they are not only moving, they are falling, they are plunging headlong. And some are holding their hands to their heads and all have expressions of anguish and terror. Some are naked and deformed, and some are chained together, and they are all falling.

The next circle of the wheel is by far the largest. It's divided by five spokes into six segments. And in each segment a whole world, or worlds, is depicted or, if you like, a whole plane of consciousness, a whole state of mind. Right at the top we see the gods. They live in wonderful palaces. They're provided with all manner of delights; and for them existence is just like a pleasant dream. And some of them, some of the gods, the higher ones, have bodies not made of anything material, not even of any subtle matter; they have bodies made entirely of light. They are radiant, they are shining, and they communicate by pure thought. Next, going round this circle in clockwise order, we see the Asuras. The Asuras live in a state of constant hostility, constant jealousy. They are always fighting, always competing. They all wear armour, they all grasp weapons and they are fighting. They are fighting for possession of the fruits of the wish-fulfilling tree. Then, in the next segment down, we see various species of animals: fish, insects, birds, reptiles, mammals. Some large, some small, some peaceful, some predatory, and we notice that they are all in pairs - male and female - and they are all in search of food. And right at the bottom, in the bottom segment, we see beings in states of suffering, beings in torment. Some are freezing in blocks of ice; others are burning in the flames; some are being decapitated; some sawn in two; some are being devoured by monsters. Then in the next segment up, we see the hungry ghosts. They have enormous swollen bellies, but thin necks and tiny needle-eye like mouths, and all are ravenously hungry; but, whatever food they touch turns either to fire or to filth. Then in the last segment, we see human beings. We see houses and lands, we see gardens and fields. Some people are cultivating the earth, ploughing, sowing, reaping. Some are buying and selling, some are giving alms, some are meditating.

So these are the six segments of this circle of the wheel, these are the six worlds, the six planes of consciousness, the six kinds of mental state. But the inhabitants of these worlds do not remain in them indefinitely. They disappear from one segment; they reappear in another. Even the gods, though they stay a very long time in their world, they too disappear and reappear somewhere else.

Now, there is only one more circle left, and this is the outermost one. This is the rim of the wheel; and it's divided into twelve segments, and in these segments we see twelve pictures, twelve scenes: stages of the process by which living beings pass from segment to segment of the previous circle. In some cases they reappear in the same segment. So in clockwise order, these twelve segments, these twelve pictures, these twelve scenes are:

1) A blind man with a stick.
2) A potter with a wheel and pots.
3) A monkey climbing a flowering tree.
4) A ship with four passengers, one of whom is steering.
5) An empty house.
6) A man and woman embracing.
7) A man with an arrow in his eye.
8) A woman offering drink to a seated man.
9) A man gathering fruit from a tree.
10) A pregnant woman.
11) A woman giving birth to a child.
12) A man carrying a corpse to the cremation ground.

So this is the wheel, the ever revolving wheel, the Wheel of Life, and this is the first thing that the Buddha saw. And the Wheel of Life is clutched from behind by a fearful monster; half demon, half beast. His head peers over the top, and he has three eyes, long fangs, and a crown of skulls, and at either side of the wheel appear his clawed feet and his tail hangs down below. But there's something more. Above the wheel to the right, there's a figure, a figure in a yellow robe, and he's pointing, he's pointing to a

space. He's pointing to a space between the seventh and the eighth segments of the outermost circle of the wheel. He's pointing to that space, he's pointing to the space between the picture of the man with the arrow in his eye and the picture of the woman offering drink to a seated man. And here in this space, as it were, rising out of this space, we see the second thing that the Buddha saw in his vision of human existence. And what is that? It's not so much a symbol as a **group** of symbols. It seems to change its form as we look at it. At first it seems like a path, a path that stretches far away into the distance, a path that winds, winds now through cultivated fields, now through dense forest. A path that traverses swamps and deserts, traverses broad rivers and deep ravines, a path that winds around the base of mighty mountains on the tops of which rest clouds. A path that disappears eventually over the horizon. But the symbol changes. The path seems to straighten out. The path, as it were, stands upright; the path becomes a great ladder or a stair; a ladder that stretches from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. It's a ladder of gold, a ladder of silver, a ladder of crystal. But again the symbol changes. The ladder becomes slender, becomes solid, becomes three dimensional, becomes green in colour. It becomes the stem of a gigantic plant, a gigantic tree, and on this plant, on this tree, are enormous blossoms. The blossoms lower down are relatively small, those higher up are very much bigger. And at the very top, the very top of the plant, the very top of the tree, shining like a sun, is the biggest blossom of all. And in the calyxes of all these blossoms, there sit all kinds of beautiful and radiant figures: figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Arahats, figures of Dakas and Dakinis and the rest.

So this is what the Buddha saw. This is what the Buddha saw as he sat beneath the Bodhi tree. This was his vision of human existence as communicated by concepts, as communicated by symbols. And the significance of the vision is quite clear. It's a vision of possibilities, it's a vision of alternatives. On the one hand, there is the cyclical type of conditionality. On the other there is the spiral type of conditionality. On the one hand, there is the reactive mind. On the other, the creative mind. One can either stagnate, or one can grow. One can either remain seated, as it were, and accept the drink from the hand of the woman, or one can refuse the drink and stand up on one's own two feet. One can either continue to revolve passively and helplessly on the wheel, or one can follow the path, climb the ladder, become the plant, become the blossoms. Our fate - as we saw in the last lecture - our fate is in our own hands.

The Buddha's vision of human existence, therefore represents a challenge. And those who take up the challenge will find themselves forming the nucleus of a new society. And it's with this new society, of course, that we shall be concerned in our next lecture. Nowadays there is a great deal of woolly thinking in the world. There are many different kinds of wrong view and they all represent rationalisations in one way or another of a limited range of experience. What we need nowadays, perhaps more than anything else, is Right View. What we need is Perfect Vision: the Vision of the Buddha. Because if we have this vision we can grow, we can develop. Without it, we may well perish. So a glimpse of this vision, at least, is one of the four things that the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order has to offer the modern man, the modern woman, and it's a glimpse of this same vision that I've tried to share with you tonight. And it remains to be seen who will take up the challenge that it represents.

Checked October 2000