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held at Vinehall School, Robertsbridge, Sussex, UK, by Sangharakshita.*

Lecture 135:

A SYSTEM OF MEDITATION

Upasakas and Upasikas:

We start with a question, and the question is: Where did Buddhism come from? Don't say India! *[Laughter]* Where, more correctly, did the Dharma, the truth as communicated by the Buddha, come from?

The short and very simple answer to that question, we can say, is that Buddhism, that the Dharma, grew out of meditation, that it grew out of the Buddha's meditation under the Bodhi tree, two thousand and five hundred years ago; grew, that is to say, out of meditation in the deepest as well as in the highest sense - not simply out of meditation in the sense of concentration; not even out of meditation in the somewhat higher sense of the experience of higher states of consciousness, but out of meditation in the sense rather of what we call nowadays in English 'contemplation' Out of meditation in the sense of a direct, total, comprehensive, in fact, all-comprehending, vision and experience of Ultimate Reality. It's out of that that Buddhism grew, that the Dharma grew. And it is by renewed contact with that, that Buddhism or the Dharma continually refreshes itself down through the ages.

We can say that the FWBO and the WBO grew also out of meditation, even if not in that exalted sense. And I personally remember very well the days when the FWBO and the WBO were just growing; or even, I may say, just beginning to grow - when they just passed the virtually embryonic stage. I remember how we used to meet just once a week, on a Thursday, I think it was - Thursday evening at seven o'clock, subsequently changed to half past six - used to meet once a week in a tiny twelve by twelve (or was it ten by twelve?) basement beneath a shop in Monmouth Street, in central London not very far from - in fact, a stone's throw from - Trafalgar Square. And there used to be in those days, the very early days, just seven or eight of us, just meeting every week, Thursday, seven o'clock, six thirty, just meeting and just meditating. As far as I remember we didn't even have any chanting in those days; or, even if we did, not very much. We just met there, we meditated for an hour or so, we had a cup of tea afterwards and a biscuit, *[Laughter]* and that weekly evening meeting was, in those days, the FWBO. Even the WBO had not yet come on the scene.

And gradually a few others joined us. We didn't advertise; we seemed to become known - a little known - by word of mouth. There was a poster up - a hand-written poster - in the window of the little shop, beneath which we used to meet. People passing by used to see it, used to venture into the shop on the pretext of buying incense; used to be inveigled sometimes downstairs into the basement to practise meditation, and a few of them stayed. So in this way, the little Movement; or the little class, I should say, grew. And after a while we started holding lectures - in fact series of public lectures - in hired halls in London. And then, greatly daring, we embarked upon our first retreats; and very, very pleased and satisfied with our success we were if some eighteen or twenty people turned up for a retreat; we thought that we were doing very well indeed.

And we went on that way for some year or two years or so, and in that way the whole Movement arose. But inasmuch as it all started with a meditation class held just once a week, we could say that the whole Movement arose out of meditation - arose as a result of those seven or eight, ten or twelve, then fifteen or twenty, people, meeting and meditating in that basement of a shop in Monmouth Street in Central London. I remember the scene very well indeed. I wonder how many of you do? Perhaps one or two or three at the very most. But I remember it very well indeed. I can see it in my mind's eye; I can even hear it. I can hear the traffic rumbling past upstairs! I can hear, also, people's footsteps passing to and fro above the grating almost immediately above my head. Little tripping footsteps of ladies, presumably, and the heavier, more solemn footsteps *[Laughter]* of men! But inside, inside that tiny, dimly-lit basement shrine - The Triratna Shrine and Meditation Centre *[Laughter]*, as we called it - it was very quiet and very peaceful, especially when we were all meditating. And, you know, when I look back, when I think back, it's really quite surprising it is really quite astonishing, that we should have, you know, done so well in such a small space and with such very limited facilities and so few people.

But we did have some really good meditations there. I remember that too. There was sometimes a really good feeling, a really good, as it were, vibration or even absence of vibration, in the air. And sometimes when I opened my eyes after a session and just sort of glanced around and saw the people sitting there - in those days, they nearly all sat on stools. Only the odd person who perhaps had gone to a Zen class at some time or other actually sat cross-legged on the floor; but be that as it may, whether they were on chairs or stools or whether they were on the floor sometimes, as I looked around, it seemed as though as they were sitting there with their half-closed eyes and the little smiles on their faces, it was as though there was a little bed of lotus blossoms growing in that underground basement, growing, as it were, in some wonderful subterranean pool. And the other day when I was thinking over this evening's lecture, looking through some of my old papers, I found a poem which I'd written after one such session. I must confess in advance it's not a very good poem [*Laughter*], and so it hasn't been published before, but this being a rather special occasion, and perhaps you might be in a rather forgiving mood, I thought I'd share this not-very-good poem with you just to give you some idea of what it felt like to be there, at 'Sakura' in that little basement in that meditation class in those days, at least sometimes. Perhaps it wasn't always quite as good as that. And the poem is dated: 28.11.67. In other words, it is half-way between the founding of the FWBO, which was founded about six or seven months before, and the founding of the WBO, which came into existence some five or six months later. And perhaps this little poem, inadequate though it is, shows to some extent what it was that we grew out of. Not, surely, out of meditation in the highest sense, but certainly out of some experience of meditation. We certainly were on our way. So here is the poem. It didn't have a title originally but the other day I gave it the title of 'White Lotusess'.

*As the last gong-stroke dies away,
Shiver after shiver,
Into the deep silence,
Opening my eyes I find myself,
In a green-mossed underground cave,
Over-arching still waters.*

*Whereon
White lotuses, half-open,
Are peacefully smiling.*

So that's the poem; and that was the experience which we had there ten, eleven, years ago, at least sometimes.

And since then, since those early days, meditation in various forms, has always been an integral part of our activities; an integral part of the activities of the FWBO and the WBO, even as it is and always has been an integral part of Buddhism itself. I need hardly tell you that all Order Members meditate regularly. So do many Mitras and Friends. And there is a very notable example of this, I may say, in Holland, There is a group of people there, in a place called, I believe, Nijmegen, where a group of people who came into contact with the FWBO quite a few years ago now, through a retreat held in Holland, meet together for meditation and meditate quite regularly on their own at all, without the regular assistance or inspiration, if you like, of any Order Member. They just keep on meditating almost, I might say, year after year,

And all those who meditate, whether Order Members or Mitras or Friends, whoever they may be, wherever they may be, they all experience, from time to time at least, some state, some stage, of higher consciousness above and beyond what they normally experience, either during the waking state or during the state of sleep. One and all, we may say, they have found, in meditation one of the most effective means of self-transformation. Through meditation or with the help of meditation, we dissolve the old self, and we create, as it were, the new. And especially do we find that meditation in the sense of contemplation in the sense of insight into Ultimate Reality, especially do we find that that is the most effective means of permanent self-transformation.

As well as attending to the practice of meditation we have attended, to some extent, to the theory. We've even had lectures on meditation, and these have dealt, more often than not, with the different methods of meditation as well as with the different stages, the different levels of meditative experience, And in particular we have tried to go into, we have tried to make clear, the nature of the Four Dhyanas, the four superconscious states: that is to say, the four lower Dhyanas, the four lower superconscious States. And we have tried, in lectures, to cut through, as it were, the tangle of the traditional explanations and traditional terminology; tried to find out and to communicate something of what the Dhyanas really mean, what they really are, what one is really experiencing when one contacts, when one enters into, these four

so-called lower Dhyanas; which, I may say, are within the reach of everybody who meditates systematically and regularly.

Some of you may remember that we have devised fresh English names perhaps more truly communicative, perhaps more meaningful and significant for these Dhyana states than the original Pali and Sanskrit terms. Some of you may know that we have learned to speak, in the first place, of a stage of integration, a stage when everything comes together. Usually everything is so scattered, so torn into bits, so fragmented, so split; but in this stage of integration everything starts coming together, everything starts flowing together very smoothly, very beautifully. All these scattered bits and pieces of ourselves, strewn, as it sometimes seems, all over the place, are brought together, are knit together, are woven together into something much more beautiful and harmonious than before. So there is this stage of integration when all our energies even, conscious energies, unconscious energies, even maybe a few supra-conscious energies - they all start flowing together; just like a great river fed by many streams flowing on to the ocean, and we ourselves feel much more harmonious, much more 'together' - there's a very good, expressive, popular word, much more together - in every sense and on almost every level. So we have learned to speak of this first Dhyana as a stage or level of integration. That is the foundation, that is the beginning.

And then we speak of the Second Dhyana as a stage of inspiration. In the midst of the integrated state, there springs up, there wells up, from some even higher level, or if you like, deeper level, some fresh source, some new element just bubbling up, bubbling up, and feeding us, feeding that integrated state, introducing something even higher, even better, ever purer, even nobler. And sometimes it comes bubbling up so strongly, so forcibly, comes out even like a great fountain that we feel inspired, as we say; we feel carried away, we feel uplifted, we feel elated in a good positive sense. We feel the divine breath, as it were - as, in the old days, poets sometimes used to express it - we feel ourselves inspired. And this is surely a very great and a very noble and a very important state: to feel inspired. Someone said to me some time ago; some months ago; in connection with classes that she was happening to take under the auspices of the FWBO; she said - it was an Order Member, I think - that the most important thing, she'd realised, in connection with classes was inspiration. You could even say, paraphrasing a well-known saying that there are three things necessary if you want to take a class: first, Inspiration, second, Inspiration [*Laughter*], third, Inspiration! If you haven't got inspiration, if you are not an inspired class-leader, an inspired meditator an inspired Order Member, you can know your Abhidharma backwards; you know, you can have all your Pali and Sanskrit terminology off the tips of your fingers like that, or the tip of your tongue. You can be a very good person, a very solid, worthy, person, but if you haven't got that touch of inspiration people won't come again, very likely. So inspiration, this stage of inspiration, to be inspired, to be in a state of inspiration at least sometimes, is very, very necessary. So this is the second Dhyana state: to be uplifted by something beyond our ordinary, conscious experience.

And then, even higher, third Dhyana: what we've learned to call, what we've learned to think of as the stage of permeation. Here, the inspiration has completely taken you over; you are just the mouth-piece, as it were the servant, of the inspiration. The inspiration is you; you are the inspiration. You are the living embodiment of that. You are thoroughly permeated by it. And because you are permeated by it, as you look around it is as though the whole world is permeated by it, too. So you see that inspiration, you see that higher state, inside and also outside. You are in it; it is in you. So this is the stage of permeation. It is as though you are - what shall we say? - you are a hollow, balloon-like figure filled with water and also you are floating in water. If I say, 'floating', it means 'on', but you are in water, immersed in water; all that is separating the water inside from the water outside is that thin integument of rubber or whatever it is. So this is the stage of permeation, and the water corresponds to the previous higher state of inspiration. Now it is in you and you are in it. The stage of permeation.

And above and beyond even that: the stage of what we have learned to think of and speak of as radiation. You are so positive now that you become radiant. You know when somebody smiles, it can radiate. So your whole personality can, as it were, smile; your whole personality can, as it were, radiate. And I noticed this once or twice recently, when we have had a speakers class up in Norwich once a week. Some of the speakers, new though they were, giving, perhaps in some cases, their first talk, did radiate; it was very noticeable; something did come forth from them. So just imagine this raised to a higher and higher level, a higher and higher power, that you radiate, as it were, from this higher state of consciousness, from this Dhyana state. You as it were diffuse your positivity throughout your environment. This is a very much higher stage still.

So this is the sort of way in which we have been trying to as it were 'naturalise' Buddhism; not to speak of the Dhyanas in a very abstract, analytical, psychological sort-of way, not even so much, perhaps, nowadays, in terms of poetic metaphor, but in this very plain, straightforward way. Speaking of these

higher stages of consciousness as the Stage of Integration, the Stage of Inspiration, the Stage of Permeation, and the Stage of Radiation. So this is the sort of way in which, over the last couple of years, perhaps, we've been talking about meditation in lectures and in the course of study retreats.

But tonight I am going to do something rather different. I'm going to take up the different methods of meditation current in the Order, current in the Movement, and see in what way they link up into a series. In fact, into what I have called - perhaps a trifle ambitiously - a system. That is to say, an organic system, a living system, not a dead, mechanical system put together in an artificial manner. And if we can see this, if we can see how the different methods of meditation current in the Order, current in the Movement, link up into an organic, a living, system, this will help us in our individual practice of meditation and it will help us also as and when we teach meditation in a class under the auspices of a Centre, or just to a few friends gathered around.

I don't propose to take up absolutely all the methods of meditation that are current amongst us, but certainly all the more important and widespread and well-known ones. And in this way I hope to be able to give an outline of the system of meditation. The details you should be able to fill in for yourselves from your own experience.

So what are these more important and well-known methods of meditation? Well, in the first place, as you all know very well, the Mindfulness of Breathing, which we did this morning. And then there's the Metta-bhavana, the development of universal loving kindness. We are surely covering here very familiar ground indeed, but we can't cover it too often, perhaps. The Metta-bhavana we are going to do tomorrow morning. Then there is the Just Sitting, about which one can't say anything more than that when one Just sits, one just sits! And again, there is the visualisation practice, the visualisation of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva together with the recitation of the mantra of that Buddha or Bodhisattva. Then, the Recollection of the Six Elements; the Recollection of the Nidana Chain. These are the methods with which we are really concerned.

All of you have practised some of them, and some of you might have practised all of them. But you might not be very clear as to how, if at all, they are related, how they link up, how they are inter-connected.

There is, of course, the arrangement of the five basic methods, about which I think some of you - those of you who were studying the text 'Dhyana for Beginners' have been going into in the morning. Arranged in this way, each of the five basic methods of meditation is the antidote to a particular mental poison.

Meditation on Impurity, for instance; the so-called Corpse Meditation; is the antidote to greed, craving.

Metta bhavana, the development of universal loving kindness, is the antidote to hate.

Mindfulness, whether of the breathing process or of any other physical or mental function, is the antidote to doubt and distraction of mind.

Recollection of the Nidana Chain is the antidote to ignorance.

Recollection of the Six Elements is the antidote to conceit.

And if you get rid of these five poisons, these five mental poisons; if you get rid of greed or craving, if you got rid of hate, if you get rid of doubt, and distraction and ignorance and conceit, then you are well on your way indeed. In fact, you are quite close to Enlightenment.

So here, in this arrangement; that of the five basic methods, the arrangement, the relationship is, as it were, spatial. It is not progressive; you don't as it were, progress from one method to another. They are all, as it were, on the same level, arranged like a sort of pentad.

But what we need is a progressive arrangement; an arrangement that takes us forward step by step and stage by stage, and it's this that we are concerned with now. We are concerned with the methods of meditation as a definite progressive sequence, a cumulative sequence. So if we concern ourselves with them in this way, well, which of the methods of meditation comes first?

Well, you have probably guessed already. First comes Mindfulness of Breathing - our old friend, Mindfulness of Breathing - which constituted, I am sure, for many of you your first introduction to

meditation. This is usually the first method of meditation that we teach in the FWBO (unless, of course, you happen to come along, more or less by accident, when it's the week for Metta) but usually it is the Mindfulness of Breathing that comes first. There are various reasons for this. This is, as it were, - as you know very well - what we call a 'psychological', method, inverted commas. Psychological in the sense that one can look at it, the newcomer can look at it, psychologically; that is, it doesn't bring in any distinctively Buddhist teaching; doesn't say anything about the Buddha, doesn't say anything about the Dharma or the Sangha or Enlightenment, or Going Forth, or anything of that sort; it's just a psychological method. So this is why we present it, or one of the reasons why we present it, first of all; why it is the first method that we teach usually in our classes. And, of course, it is very important inasmuch as it's the starting point for the development of mindfulness in general; that is to say, mindfulness with regards to all the activities of life. We start by being mindful of our breath, of our breathing process, process of breathing in and breathing out, but that is only the beginning; we have to try to extend this, enlarge this, until we are aware of all our bodily movements. As we are moving from left to right, left to right, aware exactly what we are doing, where each part of our body is, where we are, with whom we are, aware of the world around us, aware of people, aware, ultimately, of Reality itself.

But we start with the Mindfulness of Breathing, And mindfulness is also important because it is the key to psychical integration, and that is the real reason why we usually start teaching meditation by teaching this particular method: Mindfulness of Breathing - it's the key to integration. To begin with, when we come - I might even say staggering along to our first meditation class, maybe from the office, maybe from home or wheresoever, we don't have any real individuality. We are usually just a bundle of conflicting desires, even conflicting selves, loosely tied together with the thread of a name and an address! *[Laughter]* Desires and selves, both conscious and unconscious, So what does mindfulness do? Even the very limited mindfulness that we practise when we practise Mindfulness of Breathing. It helps bring them together to bind them together; it at least tightens the string a little bit, so that they aren't so loose in the middle; it makes more of a definite bundle *[Laughter]* of these different cravings and selves, more of a recognisable identifiable bundle. And even if we practice it a bit more, carry it a bit further, the practice of mindfulness helps to create real unity and real harmony between the different aspects, as they have now become, of ourself. In other words, it is through mindfulness that we begin to develop, begin to create, true individuality. And an unintegrated individuality is a contradiction in terms. Individuality is essentially integrated. And unless we can integrate, unless we are really individuals, which means integrated, there is no real progress, because there is no commitment. You can't commit yourself unless there is just one individuality to commit itself; only an integrated person can commit himself, because then all your energies are together, all flowing in the same direction. One energy, one interest, one desire, is not working against another, or is not in conflict with another. So awareness, mindfulness at so many different levels, is so important. It is the key to the whole thing.

But there is a danger. In fact, there are dangers at every step. But here, at this step, there is a particularly big danger, and the danger is that in the course of our practice of mindfulness, in the course of our practice of awareness, we develop what I have come to term 'Alienated Awareness', which is not true mindfulness, not true awareness. Alienated Awareness arises when we look at ourselves, or are aware of ourselves, so to speak, from a distance, without actually feeling ourselves, without actually experiencing ourselves. So as well as practising awareness, as well as practising Mindfulness, it's very important that we establish contact with our feelings, contact with our emotions, whatever they are; especially establish contact with our positive emotions - if, of course, we have any, or can develop any. For the time being, as a sort of second best, we may have to establish contact with what we call negative emotions, but it's better to establish, it's far better to establish contact - real, living contact with our negative emotions and feel them and experience them and acknowledge them -which doesn't mean indulging them - than to remain in that alienated state and not experience our feelings, our emotions, at all.

But, as I've said, if we can establish contact with our positive emotions, if we can only have positive emotions, that's so much the better, and it is here that the metta bhavana and similar practices come in. This is the next step - not even just Metta or loving kindness by itself, but also the other Brahma Viharas; that is to say Karuna or Compassion, Mudita, sympathetic joy, and Upeksa calm and tranquillity, equanimity as well as Saddha, or faith, All of these are based on Metta or loving kindness. Metta, we may say, loving kindness, friendliness in a very deep and positive sense, is the fundamental positive emotion. As the years go by, as I come into contact with more and more Order Members, more and more Mitras and more and more Friends, and even people outside, I see more and more clearly and more and more definitely, the importance of positive emotions in our lives, whether spiritual lives or worldly lives. I would say that the development of positive emotions - emotions of friendliness, joy, peace, faith, serenity - is absolutely crucial for our development as individuals. It's, after all, the emotions which keep us going.

We are not kept going by abstract ideas, we are kept going by our emotions, and it is our positive emotions which keep us going on the Spiritual Path, which give us inspiration, enthusiasm and so on, until such time as we can develop Perfect Vision and be motivated by that. So positive emotions in the fullest sense, are of particular importance within the Order and within the Movement in general. We should have strong feelings of Metta towards our own self - don't forget that - to begin with, and others; should have strong feelings of spiritual fellowship - and when I say 'strong feelings' I mean strong feelings, not something tepid and lukewarm and halfhearted and faint-hearted, but really warm; even, if you like even a little hot! *[Laughter]* And strong, not feeble. And this is one of the reasons why we have our monthly Order Metta Bhavana, which is not some occasion on which we sit down once a month in the evening and just think about other Order Members scattered all over the globe: "Yes, you've got six or seven in New Zealand, and there's one in Holland, and there are seven or eight up in Finland" *[Laughter]* No, Not that. "And so many at Sukhavati, and so many at Amaravati.." No. It should be more and better than that. I mean, we sit down and we actually feel with them, and with a strong feeling of warmth and friendliness and harmony and even unity with them all. This is what the monthly Order Metta Bhavana should mean, should be, And then not only Metta not only friendliness or lovingkindness, but also compassion - should feel that too - amongst ourselves towards one another; sympathy for those in difficulties, for those who are going through a 'difficult phase', as we sometimes say - a favourite phrase; and nearly everybody goes through it some time or other; if not this year, next year *[Laughter]* ; if not this week, next week. Some of you, I know very well, were going through it last week! *[Laughter]* Not to say, the day before yesterday We know this! Everybody has their turn, as it were; everybody has this difficult phase that they go through occasionally. So if you aren't yourself going through a difficult phase and somebody else is, be sympathetic - I mean, wisely sympathetic; I don't mean indulgent. Don't use that as an opportunity for asserting your own, relative, temporary, superiority to that sort of thing. Pride, we know, cometh before a fall. But be sympathetic; be understanding; do what you can to help; if you can't help, at least keep out of the way! *[Laughter]* And be kind. Be kind to Mitras! Be kind to Friends! Don't regard them as a nuisance with which you've somehow got landed or lumbered! *[Laughter]* All these Mitras and Friends who are around these days! After all, you were in that position once yourself. So be very kind to beginners. You know, the person who may be just coming along for the first time. He's never seen a Buddhist before. He's never seen a meditation Centre before. You know, the poor nit, he doesn't even know what a kesa is! *[Laughter]* He doesn't know what it means when he sees this white thing hanging round your neck. He thinks maybe it's some sort of handkerchief! *[Laughter]* So, you know, just understand his position, be sympathetic, you know; be kind. I mean, this is very very elementary, but I'm sorry to say that such exhortations are often necessary so let us just remember. If the newcomer comes along, be welcoming, be sympathetic, be hospitable. Speak a few words of welcome, don't go on with your informal committee meeting in the corner ignoring the newcomer. You know, just remember what it's like to be new. And practise also sympathetic joy. Rejoice in the merits of other Order Members, especially those who are doing better than you are yourself; just feel pleased and happy. Don't experience feelings of competitiveness or resentment, and don't have any sort of false sense of superiority or seniority or anything like that. And then, of course, there is Upekkha, calm, equanimity tranquillity - a very positive emotion indeed. In English, 'equanimity' or 'tranquillity' sounds so uninspiring or so uninteresting, but it isn't really like that. Equanimity, in the true sense, is based on the feeling, the experience, of equal metta towards all. If you have this equal Metta. this equal lovingkindness, towards all, this equal sympathetic joy, this equal compassion, then, on that very stable basis, you can develop equanimity, and that will give you a wider perspective. You'll be able to survive the ups and downs that inevitably occur in connection with one's own work for the Movement; and this feeling of equanimity in the true sense, more importantly, will keep you in touch with what we have recently started calling 'The Greater Mandala', which circumscribes the little mandala of one's own personal interests and activities, however good and however worthy. And of course, we also need another positive emotion. We need faith and devotion, to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha - we need inspiration.

And unless we have positive emotions in this sort of way, unless we have plenty of Metta, plenty of Karuna, plenty of Mudita, plenty of Upekkha, plenty of Saddha, then there won't be any real life in the Order. Positive emotion, we could say, speaking in an ordinary sort of way, leaving aside transcendental things, that positive emotion is the life blood of the Order. If there's no positive emotion in the Order, there's no life in it at all, and no life, therefore, in the Movement. So the development of positive emotion in each one of us, and in all of us in association with one another is absolutely crucial. And therefore the Metta bhavana as the basic positive emotion is absolutely crucial.

But, suppose we have developed in the first place mindfulness; suppose we have developed all these wonderful and glorious positive emotions: suppose we are individually a very aware, positive, responsible, person; supposing you are even a True Individual - at least psychologically speaking - supposing you have

got as far as that, then what comes next? What is the next step after that? Once you've become aware and mindful and emotionally positive.

Well, the next step is death! [*Laughter*] The happy, healthy individual which you now are, or were, must die! Or, in other words, the subject/object distinction itself must be transcended. The mundane individuality, pure and perfect though it may be, must be broken up. And here the key practice is the Recollection of the Six Elements. And the Six Elements, as I think we know, are Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether or Space, and Consciousness. These are the Six Elements. And there are other practices also connected with the Six Elements. Other practices also which help us to break up our present, even aware, even emotionally positive, mundane individuality; practices like Recollection of Impermanence, Recollection of Death, also the Sunyata meditations, including the meditation on the Nidana Chain. But these latter meditations - the Sunyata meditations, the meditation on the Nidana Chain - these can become rather abstract, not to say intellectual. The Recollection of the Six Elements, the giving back of the Earth Element in our physical body to the Earth Element in the universe; the giving back of the Water Element in our physical body back into the Water Element into the universe, and so on. Relinquishing in turn Water, Fire Air, Ether, Space, even our so-called individual or individualised consciousness: this is the most concrete and most practical way of practising at this particular level, this particular stage. This is the key practice here; the key practice for breaking up our sense of relative individuality. We can say, even, that this Six Element Practice is itself a Sunyata meditation, because it helps us to realise the Voidness of our own mundane individuality. It helps us to die. There are many translations for the word 'Sunyata': sometimes it's translated 'Voidness' sometimes 'Relativity'. Guenther renders it as 'Nothingness', but 'Sunyata' could well be rendered 'Death' because it is the death of everything conditioned. And it is only when the conditioned individuality dies that the unconditioned individuality - as we can call it - begins to emerge.

In meditation, we know, as we go deeper and deeper, we often experience a sort of great fear. Sometimes people shy away from this fear, but it is quite good to allow oneself to experience that fear. And the fear occurs when we feel what may be called 'the touch of Sunyata', the touch of Reality, on the conditioned self. And the touch of Reality on the conditioned self feels like death. In fact, it is death, for the conditioned self, so the conditioned self, so we, feel afraid.

Now the recollection of the Six Elements and the other Sunyata meditations are Vipassana or Insight meditations, whereas the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Metta Bhavana are Samatha or pacification-type meditations. Samatha develops and refines our conditioned individuality, but Vipassana breaks down that individuality, or rather, perhaps we should say, it enables us to see right through it.

But when the mundane self has died, what happens? What happens is, next, that what we may call, in not very traditional language, the Transcendental Self arises, out of that experience of the death of the conditioned self, the mundane self. And how does that Transcendental Self arise? It arises in the midst of the sky, in the midst of the Void, where we see a lotus flower; and on the lotus flower there is a seed in the form of a letter. This letter is what we call a bija mantra. And this bija mantra is transformed into a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva figure. And here, obviously, at this stage, we come onto the visualisation practices. The visualised figure before you; the figure of a Buddha, the figure of a Bodhisattva, sublime and glorious though it may be, is, in fact, you - is the new you - you as you will be if only you allow yourself to die. You may remember that when we do the full visualisation practice, at least in certain forms, we recite and meditate upon, first of all, what is called the Sunyata mantra which goes:

OM SVABHAVASUDDHAH SARVADHARMAH SVABHAVASUDDHO' HAM

meaning 'OM, all things are pure by nature. I too am pure by nature.' Here 'pure' means 'Void', means 'pure of all concepts', 'pure of all conditionality' because we cannot be reborn without passing through death. To be a little elliptical, there's no Vajrayana without Mahayana; and Mahayana is the yana of Sunyata, the experience of 'Sunyata'. And this is why my old friend and teacher, Mr. Chen, the Ch'an hermit, Tantric hermit in Kalimpong, used to say "Without the realisation of Sunyata the visualisations of the Vajrayana are only vulgar magic."

Now, there are many different kinds of visualisation practice, many different levels of practice, many different levels of experience. There are many different Buddhas, many different Bodhisattvas, dakas, dakinis, dharmapalas, which one can visualise - there's no time for details this evening - but the particular practices most widely current in the Order pertain to Sakyamuni - whose visualisation, by the way, we shall be doing this evening - to Amitabha, Padmasambhava, Avalokitesvara, Tara, Manjughosa, Vajrapani,

Vajrasattva and Prajnaparamita; and every Order Member has, of course, his or her own individual visualisation practice, the mantra pertaining to which they received at the time of ordination, and the relevant texts, as many of you know, are gradually being circulated. As we can get them translated and duplicated. And I would personally like all the more experienced Order Members to be thoroughly familiar with at least two or three different kinds of visualisation practice. And as you know - you might already have seen the photographs which are up outside the shrine-room - as you know we are hoping to have a meditation centre in Wales, in North Wales, at Tyn-y-Ddol. And when that place is ready, we plan, or we hope to have there, courses, short special courses, in the different visualisation practices from time to time. Meanwhile, we have been holding such courses occasionally elsewhere whenever we could. We'll also be doing other visualisation practices, apart from that of Sakyamuni, in the evenings before the puja, in the course of this convention. The general significance of visualisation practice is particularly clear in, or comes out with particular clarity in the case of the Vajrasattva Sadhana. Vajrasattva is a Buddha appearing in Bodhisattva form. He is white in colour; white for purification; and here the purification is achieved, the purification is realised, or consists in the realisation that, in the ultimate sense, one has never become impure. One is pure from the beginning; pure, if you like, from the beginningless beginning; pure by nature; pure essentially; and for someone, for anyone, brought up in a guilt-ridden culture like ours in the West, this sort of statement must surely come as a great revelation, a great, positive shock; that in the depths of your being you are pure of all conditionality - or, rather, that you are pure of the very distinction between conditioned and Unconditioned and hence you are Void.

Vajrasattva is also associated with death; not only with spiritual death, but also physical death. I could say quite a bit more about this, but it isn't really the proper time to do so. I should like, however, to point out the connection here with the Tibetan Book of the Dead. In Tibetan, the so-called Book of the Dead is called the Bardo Thodol, which means 'liberation by hearing in the intermediate state'; hearing, that is to say, the instruction of the Lama seated by your erstwhile body, and explaining to you what is happening to you after your death, in the intermediate state. The intermediate state is intermediate between physical death and physical re-birth. But meditation itself is also an intermediate state, because when we meditate when we really meditate, meditate in the true sense, we die. And of course, in the same way, death - physical death - is a meditative state. Death is a state, we may say, of enforced meditation; of enforced samadhi. And in both intermediate states - the one between death and rebirth, and the one which occurs in meditation - in both intermediate states - we can see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, even mandalas of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; and these are not outside us; these are the manifestations of our own true mind, manifestations of the Dharmakaya. And we can, as it were, identify with them, and thus be spiritually reborn; reborn, as it were, in a Transcendental mode of existence. If we don't succeed in identifying in this way, then we are simply reborn in the ordinary sense; that is to say we fall back into the old conditioned self.

However, I've said, I think, enough about this. I hope that we can now begin to see the whole system of meditation, at least in outline: can see that there are four great stages, four great turning points. So let me briefly recapitulate these, then I'll make one comment, raise three possible questions, and then conclude.

The first great stage is the stage of Integration. That's the first thing you must do in connection with meditation - integrate. Integration is achieved mainly through Mindfulness of Breathing, as well as with the help of mindfulness and awareness in general. Here, in this stage, we develop an integrated self.

And then secondly; second great stage; the stage of emotional positivity, and this is achieved mainly through the development of Metta, Karuna, Mudita, and so on. Here, the integrated self is raised to a higher, more refined, at the same time more powerful, level, symbolised by the beautiful blooming white lotus flower.

And then there is the stage, thirdly - third great stage - of spiritual death, achieved mainly through the Recollection of the Six Elements, as well as through the Recollection of Impermanence, Death, and so on. These also help as well as do the Sunyata meditations. Here that refined self is destroyed, or, rather is seen through, and we experience the Void, experience Sunyata, experience spiritual death.

And then, fourthly there comes the stage of spiritual rebirth; and this is achieved through the visualisation and mantra recitation practice, Abstract visualisation, as we may call it, also helps; that is to say the visualisation of geometric forms and letters.

So this, very briefly, very broadly, in outline, is the system of meditation at least so far as we have so far gone in the Order and in the Movement. And it surely provides us with quite enough to be getting on with.

And these, of course, are the stages through which we have to pass: the stages of integration, of emotional positivity, of spiritual death and spiritual rebirth. These are the stages through which we are passing.

Now for the comment and the questions. The comment is that meditation does not stand alone. Meditation is one of the methods of spiritual development, even though it is, perhaps, the most important inasmuch as it acts directly on the mind. But in addition to meditation, there are many other supporting disciplines. There's Puja. There's Right Livelihood. There's spiritual friendship. There's Dharma study. We mustn't forget them. We mustn't forget their role. And we shall be hearing about some of these in the context of the three symposia later on in the Convention.

Now for the three questions which are your questions rather than mine. That is to say, questions which might have arisen in your minds - I rather hope they have arisen - while listening to the lecture.

First of all: Where does ordination come in? Secondly, Where does the arising of the Bodhichitta come in? And three: What about the Just Sitting practice? Haven't we forgotten that? These thoughts, these questions, have surely passed through your minds. So let's deal with each of the three questions in turn, very briefly and then conclude.

So first of all: where does ordination come in? 'Ordination'. of course, means Going for Refuge. Going for Refuge means commitment. And commitment is possible on different levels. We shall be going into that in the lecture on 'Going for Refuge' later on in the Convention. Theoretically speaking one could be ordained without ever having practised meditation. Theoretically. But I'd say that it's highly unlikely. As far as I know, it hasn't happened so far! *[Laughter]* One cannot commit oneself - which is what ordination means - unless one is reasonably integrated. Otherwise you commit yourself to that and tomorrow you withdraw the commitment, because the total being was not involved. You also cannot commit yourself unless you've a certain amount of emotional positivity. Otherwise, you've nothing to keep you going, so you can't commit yourself. And there should also be, for commitment, for ordination to be possible, at least a faint glimmer of Perfect Vision. Or at least the reflection of a glimmer of Perfect Vision. It won't be nearly enough - that glimmer or reflection of a glimmer - to make you a Stream Entrant, but nevertheless it's something of that Order, something of that nature, that's necessary. So ordination would therefore seem to come somewhere in between the second and the third of the main stages of meditation. Or one might say, it comes when one has just begun to enter on the third stage; that is to say, the stage of spiritual death; or when one was at least open to the possibility of experiencing that spiritual death. This, of course, all is according to the Path of Regular Steps. We know that there is also a Path of Irregular Steps.

So, second questions where does the Arising of the Bodhichitta come in? 'Bodhichitta' means, of course, 'Will to Enlightenment'. It is not an egoistic will; it's more of the nature of a supra-individual aspiration, and it arises only when the individuality in the ordinary sense, to some extent, has been destroyed or seen through. The Bodhichitta, the Will to Enlightenment, is the aspiration to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all. That's how it's usually, popularly phrased. Not that there is a real individual seeking to gain Enlightenment for the sake of real others. The Bodhichitta arises, we may say, beyond self and beyond others, though not without self and others. It arises when the mundane self is destroyed or seen through, but before the Transcendental self, as we may call it, has really emerged. It arises when one is no longer seeking Enlightenment for the so-called self, but has not yet fully dedicated oneself to gaining it for the so-called other. The Bodhichitta therefore arises in between the third and the fourth stages; that is to say, between the stage of spiritual death, and the stage of spiritual rebirth. The Bodhichitta is the seed of spiritual rebirth. And there is a sort of anticipation of this at the time of the Private Ordination when one receives the mantra, On this occasion the mantra is the seed of the seed of the Bodhichitta. After all, when one is ordained one has Gone Forth; one's ordination is a Going Forth. One has gone forth from the group, at least psychologically, if not physically; one has died to the group; one aspires after Enlightenment. And surely one aspires not just for one's own sake but for the sake, ultimately, of all? And it isn't surprising, therefore that at that time some faint reflection of the Bodhichitta should arise, at least in some cases.

So - third question - What about the Just Sitting practice? Well, what about it? It's difficult to say anything about it, because, as I remarked earlier on, when one Just Sits, well, one just sits! But at least one can say that there is a time when one just sits. And times, also, when one does not just sit; times, that is to say, when one is doing other things. And one of the times when one does not just sit is when one is practising other meditations; that is to say, meditations other than Just Sitting. (If, of course Just Sitting can be described as a meditation practice.) That is to say, when one is practising other meditations such as the Mindfulness, the Metta, the Recollection of Elements and so on. And in all of these other meditations conscious effort is required. But, one must be careful that this conscious effort does not become too willed,

even too will-full, and in order to counteract this tendency, in order to guard against this possibility, we can practice Just Sitting. In other words, practice just sitting in between the other methods, so that there is a period of activity, during which you are practising say, the Mindfulness of Breathing or the Metta, and then a period of, as it were, passivity, receptivity. Then a period of passivity; a period of activity. So in this way we go on. Passivity; activity. Activity; passivity. Passivity; activity. Activity; passivity. *[Laughter]* In this way we go on. Mindfulness - Just Sitting. Metta - Just Sitting. Recollection of the Elements - Just Sitting. Visualisation - Just Sitting. In this way we can go on all the time, having a perfect rhythm as it were, and achieving in this way a perfectly balanced practice, taking hold of; letting go. Taking hold of; letting go. Grasping; opening up. Grasping; opening up. Action; non-action. In this way we achieve a perfectly balanced practice of meditation a perfectly balanced spiritual life, and in this way the whole system of meditation becomes complete.