

## Lecture 139: The Taste of Freedom Urgyen Sangharakshita

Public lecture given in the Caxton Hall, London, on Thursday, 13th November 1980.

Mr. Chairman and Friends,

And let me begin by saying that as I look around the hall tonight I really do see quite a large number of friends in the fullest sense, not simply people who belong, so to speak, to the FWBO, to our own movement, but quite a lot of people whom I know personally and have in fact known for quite a number of years in some cases. After a long interval - it is about a year since I gave a lecture - a public lecture in London - after about a year it is a very refreshing experience indeed to see gathered together so many friends.

I'm going to start, as I often do, with a question. A question that might have come to your lips at some time or other during the past few years, even the past few months, even the past few weeks, from time to time, and that question is: 'What is Buddhism?' 'What is Buddhism?' There have been quite a number of attempts over the years to define, to describe, this protean term. It's been described as a code of ethics, as a system of ethics. It's been described as an Eastern philosophy, even as a form of Eastern mysticism. It's been described as a spiritual path. It's been described as a tradition. By some people, at least on some occasions, it's even been described as a religion. [Laughter] Worse still [Laughter], for the last hundred-odd years it's been described as 'Buddhism'. Until then, until about a hundred years ago, what we call nowadays 'Buddhism' was known simply as 'the Dharma'. Or, a little more elaborately, as 'the *Dharma-Vinaya*' if you like, the principle and the practice. But if we go back, if we go back to the beginning, if we go back to the Buddha, we find the Buddha, the Buddha himself, gave us what is probably the best definition of Buddhism, or rather perhaps I should say the best description; and the Buddha gave it in the form of an image, that is to say in the form of a figure of speech, not in the form of a concept, not in the form of an abstract idea, not a formal definition. The Buddha said simply that Buddhism, the *Dharma-Vinaya*, was an ocean. In fact he said it was a great ocean, a mighty ocean. And he is represented as describing Buddhism, describing the *Dharma-Vinaya*, in these terms in a Pali text called 'The Udana'.

I don't want to go into matters of detail; let's begin in the middle. The Udana tells us that it was a full moon night and that the Buddha was seated in the open air, surrounded by a great number, surrounded by a great host, of what the text calls 'bhikkhus'. The word 'bhikkhu' is usually translated as 'monk' or 'brother' but neither translation is really very satisfactory. We could, perhaps, better translate, translate even more literally, this word 'bhikkhu' as simply 'partaker'. That's what it actually means - a partaker. The Buddha was surrounded by a great number - a great host - of **partakers**. Partakers of what? Sharers of what? In the first place, partakers of the food of the land. They took just their share, given as alms; took just what they needed to keep them going from day to day. And partaker also of the spiritual life, sharer in the spiritual life. Sharer in it with the Buddha and with fellow - with brother - disciples. So the Buddha was seated on this occasion in the open air surrounded by a great number - a great host - of bhikkhus, of partakers. And the text tells us that they sat there silently together - not just for one hour - not just for two hours, as we might, but all night. And they didn't say a word. They didn't fidget. They didn't even blow their noses. We **could** say that they meditated together, but perhaps by the time you've reached that stage you don't even need to meditate. You just sit there, sit there all night. And further, the text says that towards dawn, just as day was about to break, a certain incident, into the details of which I'm not going to enter, a certain incident occurred, and as a result of this incident the Buddha gave a description of the *Dharma-Vinaya* in terms of the great ocean.

He said, addressing the partakers around him, that there were eight strange and wonderful things about the great ocean. First he said, that the great ocean flows down, it slides down, tends downwards, **gradually**. He said that there's no abrupt precipice as you make the transition from the land to the sea. The great ocean, he said, gets **gradually** deeper, little by little. Similarly, he said, in the *Dharma-Vinaya*, in his principle and practice, the training - the path - the course - the procedure - is gradual, little by little. There's no abrupt penetration of knowledge, he said. We could say, bearing in mind a lecture I gave some time ago, that the path is a path of regular steps.

Second, the Buddha said that the great ocean is of a **stable** nature. It does not over-pass its boundary. Similarly, he said, even at the cost of life itself, the Buddha's disciples do not transgress the path of training he has laid down. In other words, in more familiar terms perhaps, they are **committed**; fully, wholly, totally, committed to the *Dharma-Vinaya*.

Third, the great ocean, he said, rejects a dead body. If a dead body is cast into the great ocean, the ocean throws it up on to the shore. In the same way the Sangha, or spiritual community of The Buddha's disciples, rejects someone who is not really, who is not truly, leading the spiritual life. Even, he said, if he is seated in the midst of the Sangha, he is far from the Sangha, and the Sangha is far from him. In more contemporary terms we may say that there can be no nominal membership of the spiritual community. You can't be an **honorary** member of the spiritual community. Sooner or later a merely nominal member will have to, inverted commas, 'leave'. He'll find himself literally outside.

Four, when the rivers reach the great ocean, the Buddha said, they lose their former names and lineages. From then on they're not called Ganges, and so on, they're called simply 'Great Ocean'. They become part - their waters become part - of the Great Ocean. In the same way, those who go forth from home to the homeless life, in or under the *Dharma-Vinaya* proclaimed by the Buddha, lose their former names and their former lineages, and they are called in the words of the Pali text itself 'ascetics, *samanas* who are sons, who are daughters, of the Sakyan', that is to say who are disciples, followers, of the Buddha. They become part of the spiritual community. They become, so to speak, merged with the spiritual community, but without losing their individual identity, their spiritual identity. The Buddha, of course, spoke in terms of **caste** identity, that's the identity that you lose. He spoke in terms of losing one's name, losing one's lineage as Noble or Brahmin or Merchant or Serf, upon Going Forth. The Noble, the Brahmin, the Merchant and the Serf were of course the four main castes, hereditary castes, of the Buddha's day, and we can extend that; we can amplify that, we can speak in terms of losing our **national** identity. Because in the spiritual community there's no question of national identity, there's no question of being English, or Irish, or Scottish, or Welsh, no question of being British, or American, or Indian, or Australian, or Finnish, or Dutch. In the spiritual community one is simply an individual, a true individual. One is simply a spiritually committed human being, relating as such to other spiritually committed human beings.

Fifth, whatever streams fall into the great ocean, whatever rains fall, the great ocean remains the same. There's no shrinkage or overflow in the great ocean. This may not be quite literally true, of course, because in the Buddha's day, people did not, it seems, know anything about polar ice-caps. However, that doesn't really matter. We're concerned with what the simile, what the comparison, is meant to illustrate. We're not concerned so much with the factual accuracy of the details of the simile. So let us say, let us assume, that the great ocean remains the same. In the same way Nirvana remains the same. However many partakers attain Nirvana, whether few or many, Nirvana remains the same. However many may, so to speak, disappear into it, Nirvana does not shrink, does not overflow. It remains the same.

Sixth, the great ocean, the Buddha said, has one taste - the taste of salt. It has a saline taste throughout. And similarly the *Dharma-Vinaya*, His principle-cum-practice, has one taste, the taste of Release, the taste of Emancipation, the taste of Freedom.

Seventh, the great ocean contains all sorts of gems. Or, as the English poet Gray puts it:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear.

Similarly, the *Dharma-Vinaya* of the Buddha contains all sorts of precious gems of spiritual teachings, contains such spiritual teachings as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Five Spiritual Faculties, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Eightfold Path, and so on.

And, eighthly and lastly, the great ocean, the Buddha said, is the abode of great creatures, even the abode of monsters. The Buddha, or at least the Pali text, at least the Udana, is a little uncertain about marine biology here. Evidently the Buddha - or the Udana - means creatures like sharks and whales, besides more mythological creatures. But similarly, the Buddha goes on to say, the *Dharma-Vinaya* is the abode of great creatures, it's the abode of Stream Entrants, of Once-Returners, of Non-Returners, Arhants. And we could add, though the text does not go on in this way, we could add the abode also of Bodhisattvas, and Mahasiddhas, the abode of Gurus and Devas, Dakas, Dakinis, and Dharmapalas.

So these are the eight strange and wonderful things about the great ocean, the eight strange and wonderful things about the *Dharma-Vinaya*. And tonight, obviously, we're concerned with the sixth of these eight, we're concerned with the fact that the *Dharma-Vinaya*, what we've got into the habit, unfortunately, of calling Buddhism, has the Taste of Freedom.

What then is this taste of freedom? What is freedom? That is perhaps a question that we ask ourselves even more often than we ask ourselves: what is Buddhism? The word for 'freedom' in the original Pali text of the Udana is '*vimutti*' and it's equivalent to the Sanskrit '*vimukti*'. It can be translated as 'release', or 'emancipation', or also as 'freedom'. The word for 'taste' is '*rasa*', which means juice; taste; special quality; flavour; relish; pleasure; essential property; extract, and essence. We'll come on to that shortly.

Now in recent times we've heard a great deal about freedom, usually, of course, in connection with civil and political liberties; and we have therefore come to think of freedom in a certain kind of way. We've come to attach a certain meaning to the word. But in speaking tonight of 'the taste of freedom', I'm not really concerned with the meaning of the English word as such. I'm concerned with the English word only as a provisional equivalent of the Pali word. I'm concerned with freedom in the sense of '*vimutti*'. So what is *vimutti*? Before going into **this** question I want to say just a few more words about the Udana passage in which the Buddha describes the *Dharma-Vinaya* in terms of the great ocean.

You remember that the Buddha says that there are eight strange and wonderful things about the great ocean, and that similarly there are eight strange and wonderful things about the *Dharma-Vinaya*. And one of these things is, of course, the fact that the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, and that the *Dharma-Vinaya* has one taste, the taste of Freedom. For the moment I want to concentrate on these two epithets, 'strange' and 'wonderful'. You might have missed them, might have overlooked them, but I want to give them their full force. The great ocean is **strange**. The great ocean is **wonderful**. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is **strange**. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is **wonderful**. What does this mean? How is the great ocean strange? We must remember where it was that Buddhism, as we call it, arose. We must remember where it was that the Buddha taught. He taught in the valley of the Ganges. In other words, he taught many hundreds of miles **from** the great ocean. So far as we know the Buddha himself had never seen the great ocean, and the vast majority of his disciples had never seen it either. They heard rumour of this great ocean, this great body of water, far greater than any river, even the Ganges itself. They knew it only by hearsay. So to them the great ocean was a foreign, an unfamiliar element. And it was the same, it is the same, with the *Dharma-Vinaya*. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is strange to us. We could go further, we could elaborate on that. The spiritual life is strange to us. The Unconditioned is strange to us. The Transcendental is strange to us. It's something of which we have only heard. It represents a foreign element. It's not our native element. the Buddha himself is strange to us. The Buddha is 'The Stranger'. He comes, as it were, from another world, another dimension. He stands at our door, perhaps, but we do not recognise him. Even the Spiritual Community is strange to us. Strange, that is, if we are not ourselves true individuals, if we are not spiritually committed. So the great ocean is strange. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is strange.

How is the great ocean wonderful? It's wonderful in its vast extent. It's wonderful in its perpetual movement. It never rests. It never stands still, it never stays, not even for an instant, not even the tiniest particle of it. It is ever in movement. It's wonderful in its uninterrupted music; the sound of the sea. It's wonderful in its ever changing lights and colours; the blue and the green and the mauve, the purple, the gold. It's wonderful in its unfathomable depth. And it's particularly wonderful when we see it for the first time. When we come into contact with it for the first time, when perhaps we swim in it for the first time, when we plunge in, maybe on a hot day, maybe on a cold day, but we plunge in. We move our arms and we move our legs and for the first time in our lives we're swimming in the great ocean; or at least paddling. [Laughter]

So it's the same with the *Dharma-Vinaya*. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is not simply vast in its extent - it's **infinite**. The *Dharma-Vinaya*, the principle and the practice of the Buddha, is a shoreless ocean. We can see no end to it. And it's not something fixed, rigid, static, unmoving, unchanging. It's full of life, it's full of movement, it's continually adapting itself to the needs of living beings. And it's continually speaking to us, this ocean of the *Dharma-Vinaya* - it's singing to us, it's playing its own inimitable music to us, in its own indescribably appealing and fascinating way. Not dull, not uninteresting, but alive with all sorts of brilliant and tender lights, all sorts of vivid and delicate colours; alive, we may say, with the radiantly colourful forms of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Dakas and Dakinis. And it's so deep, this ocean of the *Dharma-Vinaya*, that we can never hope to fathom its depth. So the *Dharma-Vinaya* is wonderful in all these ways, but we don't usually think of it in this kind of manner. But this is what it's really like. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is wonderful, the Buddha is wonderful. As the Matriceta, or as Matriceta himself says in his 'Five Hundred Verses of Worship':

What steadfastness!

What conduct! What form, what virtues;

In a Buddha's qualities there is nothing that is not wonderful.

The spiritual community is wonderful. Spiritual life is wonderful. It's wonderful that we can sit and meditate together. It's wonderful that we can live in residential spiritual communities. It's wonderful that we can work in team-based right livelihood projects. It's wonderful that you are all listening to me here tonight. *[Laughter]* It's wonderful that I am speaking to you. *[Laughter]*

So the *Dharma-Vinaya* is indeed wonderful, strange and wonderful. But we don't **usually** experience it like that. After a while we start experiencing the *Dharma-Vinaya*, Buddhism, spiritual life, as something old and familiar. It's old hat, it's a stage we've gone through when we were young, and naive. *[Laughter]* It's said that familiarity breeds contempt. It's probably more true to say that familiarity breeds indifference. In the case of the *Dharma-Vinaya* familiarity breeds indifference only when we've been familiar simply with words, with concepts and external forms; with the words, concepts and external forms in which the *Dharma-Vinaya* finds expression, but with which it is not to be identified. But if we had been familiar with the **spirit**, as we may say, of the *Dharma-Vinaya*, if we've had even a little **taste** of it, we would see the *Dharma-Vinaya* as more, and more, and more wonderful. It's important, therefore, to keep alive this feeling - this sense that the *Dharma-Vinaya* is a wonderful thing. According to Plato, philosophy begins with a sense of wonder. Certainly there's no spiritual life without an ever continuing sense of wonder, a sense of wonder with regard to the *Dharma-Vinaya*.

But we can go **further** than that. The Udana goes further than that, the Buddha himself goes further than that. After describing the eight strange and wonderful things about the *Dharma-Vinaya*, the Buddha says,

These then are the eight strange and wonderful things about the *Dharma-Vinaya*, seeing which again and again, Bhikkhus (partakers) take delight in this *Dharma-Vinaya*.

I want to concentrate on these two points, too. I want to give them also their full force.

First the Bhikkhus, the Partakers, the followers, the disciples, see the strange and wonderful qualities of the *Dharma-Vinaya* again and again, never become tired of them. Just like some people see a film **again and again**, never become tired of it. In the same way the partakers, they see the *Dharma-Vinaya*, look at the *Dharma-Vinaya*, hear the *Dharma-Vinaya*, again and again, never become tired. The more they see, the more they hear, of the *Dharma-Vinaya*, the more wonderful it appears.

And second the Bhikkhus, the Partakers, the Buddha says, **take delight** in the *Dharma-Vinaya*. The *Dharma-Vinaya* is not only wonderful but enjoyable. It's enjoyable because it's wonderful. It's wonderful because it's enjoyable. Spiritual life is enjoyable. Meditation is enjoyable. Living in a residential spiritual community is enjoyable. Working in a team-based right livelihood project is enjoyable. Having our faults pointed out is enjoyable. Being thrown in at the deep end is enjoyable! Not being allowed to rationalise is enjoyable. *[Laughter]* It's important to remember this, *[Laughter]* - that in every way the *Dharma-Vinaya* is enjoyable. Buddhism, to use that term, is enjoyable. It's something in which seeing again and again we take delight. I hardly need point out how greatly this differs from the usual conception of 'religion' and 'religious life'.

But it's time we got back to Freedom, freedom in the sense of '*vimutti*'. What then is '*vimutti*'? In order to understand this we shall have to see what place *vimutti* occupies in the complete scheme of spiritual self-development. And we can do this by looking at the series of the Positive *Nidanas*, as I call them. These *Nidanas* represent stages of spiritual development. They're called *Nidanas* or 'links' because each one arises in dependence on the one preceding; arises, we may say, even out of the **fullness** of the one preceding. Thus, and some of you at least will be familiar with these formulae:

In dependence on suffering arises faith and devotion.  
In dependence on faith and devotion arises satisfaction and delight.  
In dependence on satisfaction and delight arises rapture.  
In dependence on rapture arises tranquillity.  
In dependence on tranquillity arises bliss.  
In dependence on bliss arises *samadhi* (a word I'm not going to try to translate).  
In dependence on *samadhi* arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are.  
In dependence on knowledge and vision of things as they really are arises  
disengagement, disentanglement.

In dependence on disengagement or disentanglement arises dispassion.

In dependence on dispassion arises *vimutti*.

In dependence on *vimutti* arises knowledge of the destruction of the biases,

and knowledge of the destruction of the biases is equivalent to, tantamount to Enlightenment. It represents the goal and consummation of the entire spiritual life. It represents the complete overcoming of the conditioned, the mundane - and by implication it represents the complete realisation of the Unconditioned and Transcendental. There's no time for me to give you any details of these links or stages, these *Nidanas*. I've explained them fully on other occasions.

At present I'm concerned with just one thing: I'm concerned with the place of *vimutti* in the whole series, the place of *vimutti* in the complete scheme of spiritual self-development. We can at once see one thing. *Vimutti* occupies a very high place. In fact it's the penultimate link, the penultimate stage. *Vimutti*, therefore, is not what we ordinarily understand by 'freedom'. It goes far, far beyond it. It goes far beyond any question of political and civil liberties, far beyond freedom in the ordinary psychological sense. So let us look into this a little more deeply. Let us try to understand exactly how it is so.

In dependence on rapture arises tranquillity. In dependence on tranquillity arises bliss. In dependence on bliss arises *samadhi*. These four *Nidanas*: rapture, tranquillity, bliss, *samadhi*, represent the process of what we usually call meditation. Meditation, that is to say, in the sense of an actual experience of higher states of consciousness, not meditation just in the sense of preliminary concentration. It's meditation in the sense of what is technically called '*Samatha*' or 'Calm', calm with a capital 'C'. Now the next link or the next stage, the next *Nidana* after *samadhi* is knowledge and vision of things as they really are, and the formula for this is: in dependence on *samadhi* arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are, and this stage, this link, this *Nidana*, is extremely important. The transition from *samadhi* to knowledge and vision of things as they really are is **absolutely crucial**. It represents a turning point, even **the** great turning point in the spiritual life. It's the point at which our most refined, our most blissful, our most beatific experience of the conditioned, of the mundane, is succeeded by our first experience - there's no other word for us to use here - our first experience of the Unconditioned, of the Transcendental. Knowledge and vision of things as they really are thus is a form of what is technically called '*Vipassana*' or 'Insight'. Now *Vimutti* is the fourth stage on **from** knowledge and vision of things as they really are. The fourth stage on. In between come disengagement or disentanglement and dispassion. So what does this mean? It means that there's no *Vimutti* without Insight. Or, if you like, there's no real Freedom without Insight. Freedom cannot be a blind thing. Now, when knowledge and vision of things as they really are arises, when we make that crucial transition, that transformation from Calm to Insight, something happens. In traditional Buddhist language 'we enter the stream', we become what is called a 'Stream Entrant'. And as that happens, or as we do that, or as that happens to us - all these expressions have here the same meaning - at the same time we break, or there are broken, what are called the first three Fetters, the first three of the fetters that bind us to the lower, grosser levels of mundane existence. We become free from the first three Fetters. We become what is technically called an *Arya Pudgala*, or True Individual. Thus we see that only the True Individual can be free. You can be free only **if** you are a True Individual. You can be free, really free, only if you break the first three Fetters. Only that will give you a real Taste of Freedom.

What, then, are the three Fetters? I've spoken about them on a number of occasions before. I've written about them, rather technically. But tonight I'm going to describe them in very general terms, even in very basic terms, if I may say so, down to earth terms. In those terms the three Fetters are:

- (1) The Fetter of Habit.
- (2) The Fetter of Superficiality.
- (3) The Fetter of Vagueness.

And I'm going to say just a few words about each in turn.

**The Fetter of Habit.** The dictionary defines 'habit' as 'the tendency or disposition to act in a particular way.' Thus habit is a matter of action. Action, however, is an essential part of ourselves, not something just added on. In fact, according to the *Dharma-Vinaya*, we **are** our actions. What we usually think of, what we usually refer to, as a person is the sum total of his or her actions, actions of body, speech and mind. And the person does not exist apart from them. The fact that we have a tendency or a disposition to act in a particular way means, therefore, that we have a tendency or a

disposition to **be** in a particular way. And thus we are not just the sum total of our actions, we are the sum total of our habits. We are our habits. We could even say that we ourselves, each one individually, we ourselves are simply a habit - probably a bad habit. *[Laughter]* The person we think of as George or Mary and recognise as acting in a particular way is simply a habit that a certain stream of consciousness has got into, just like a knot tied in a piece of string. But since it has got into it, it can get **out** of it, it can become free from it. So breaking the Fetter of Habit means, essentially, getting out of the habit of being the kind of person we were, or even are. Just getting out of the habit of being that particular kind of person. It's only a **habit** you've got into. You don't **have** to be the way you are! There's no necessity about it!

So breaking the Fetter of Habit means getting rid of the old self. Getting rid of the past self, throwing it into the dustbin. It means becoming a New Man, it means becoming a True Individual, one who is aware, emotionally positive, responsible, sensitive, creative. It means becoming continually creative, continually re-creative of our own self. The Buddhist doctrine of no-self, incidentally, the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*, does not mean so much that we never have a self, it means rather that we always have a **new** self. Always have a new self. And, ideally, each new self that we have should be a better one than the last. That's what we mean by progress.

Now, it's not easy to get out of the habit of being the kind of person we were, the kind of person we are. It's not easy to get rid of the old self, not easy to get rid of the past self and to become a New Man, and one of the reasons for this is - other people. Not only have we ourselves got into the habit of **being** in a particular way, but other people have got into the habit of experiencing us as being in the habit of being in a particular way! So the sum total of people who experience us as what we **were**, rather than as what we **are**, is what we call the 'group'. It is in this sense that the group is the enemy of the Individual, that is to say the enemy of the True Individual. The group will not allow the True Individual to emerge from its ranks. It insists on dealing with him not as he is but as he was, and to this extent the group deals with someone who no longer exists. You may experience this sometimes when you re-visit your family after an interval of several years.

So breaking the Fetter of Habit means becoming free from the old self, free from the past self. It means becoming free from the group, that is to say free from the influence, the habit-reinforcing influence of the group. It doesn't of course necessarily mean that we break off actual relations with the group.

Two. **The Fetter of Superficiality**. The word 'superficiality' is derived from 'superficial'. Superficial is defined as 'of, relating to, being near or forming - the surface'. Hence 'displaying a lack of thoroughness and care'. And 'only outwardly apparent, rather than genuine or actual'. So in the present context, superficiality means acting from the surface. Acting from the surface of ourselves, acting without thoroughness or care, acting in outward appearance only, rather than genuinely or actually. Now why do we act in this way, superficially? What is the **reason** for our superficiality? The reason is that we are divided. More often than not the conscious, rational surface is divided from the unconscious emotional depths. We act out of intellectual conviction but we do not succeed in carrying the emotions with us. Sometimes of course we act out of the fullness of our emotions. But then only too often the rational mind holds back, perhaps even does not approve. In either case we do not act totally, we do not act with the whole of ourselves, and therefore we do not really act. We are not **wholehearted** in what we do, and this state of affairs is very general. We could say that superficiality is one of the greatest curses of the modern age. Matthew Arnold, more than a hundred years ago, spoke of 'our sick hurry, our divided aims' - and that just about describes the situation. We are in a hurry, a sick hurry, yet our aims are divided. We don't really and truly **do** anything. We don't do it with the whole force of our being. When we love, we don't really love, and when we hate, we don't really hate. We don't even really think. We half-do all these things. And it's the same, only too often, when we take up the spiritual life, when we try to follow the *Dharma-Vinaya*. We meditate with only **part** of ourselves. We communicate with only **part** of ourselves, and we work, perhaps, only with **part** of ourselves. We go for Refuge even, as we think, only with **part** of ourselves. And consequently we don't get very far. We don't really grow, we don't really develop, we don't carry the whole of our being along with us, so to speak. A small part of us is prospecting ahead. But the greater part is lagging far behind. So breaking the Fetter of Superficiality means acting with the **whole** of ourselves, acting with thoroughness and care; acting genuinely and actually. It means, in a word, **committing** ourselves to the spiritual life, committing ourselves to being a True Individual.

Three. Lastly, **The Fetter of Vagueness**. We all know what vagueness means. We all know what a vague person is. But what is the **reason** for the vagueness? Why should anyone **be** vague? We're

vague when we are undecided. We're vague when we don't **want** to decide. We're vague when we don't want to commit ourselves, and the vagueness is, therefore, a dishonest vagueness. After all, spiritual life is very difficult. Growth and development is often a painful process, even though it is enjoyable. [Laughter] So we tend to shrink back, we tend not to commit ourselves. We keep our options **open**, as we say. We keep up a number of different interests, a number of different aims on which we can fall back, and we allow ourselves to oscillate between them, even to drift between them. At all costs we remain **vague**, woolly, cloudy, dim, indistinct, faint. [Laughter] Breaking the Fetter of Vagueness therefore means being willing to think clearly. It means being willing to think things out, to think things through. It means being willing to see what the alternatives really are. It means being willing to sort out our priorities. It means being willing to make up our minds. It means being willing actually to choose the best, and to act wholeheartedly upon that choice. It means not postponing the moment of decision.

These then are the Three Fetters: the Fetter of Habit, the Fetter of Superficiality, the Fetter of Vagueness. And these fetters are broken by means of Insight, by means of the knowledge and vision of things as they really are. Or, if you like, they are broken by our becoming creative, that is to say, self-creative, creative of our own new self; committed and clear.

Creative, committed and clear.

And when we develop Insight, when knowledge and vision arises, we enter The Stream, the stream that leads directly to Enlightenment; we become a Stream Entrant. And being a Stream Entrant, we are a True Individual. And as a True Individual we can experience *Vimutti*, we can enjoy the Taste of Freedom.

So two main points have emerged so far. The first, that only the True Individual is really free. And second, that we become a True Individual only by developing Insight, by breaking the three Fetters. We become a True Individual only by becoming creative, committed and clear. In speaking of the taste of freedom we must bear both these points in mind.

But there is another point that requires our consideration. The Buddha used the expression 'The Taste of Freedom' with regard to the *Dharma-Vinaya*. 'Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so the *Dharma-Vinaya* has one taste, the taste of Freedom.' What does this mean? It means that the *Dharma-Vinaya* is pervaded, wholly pervaded, by the taste of freedom. It means that every part of the *Dharma-Vinaya* has the taste of Freedom. The *Dharma-Vinaya*, of course, consists of a great many things, perhaps more things than in the Buddha's own day. It consists of all sorts of teachings, all sorts of practices, all sorts of institutions. It consists of philosophies, concentration techniques, ethical systems, rituals, arts, culture. But there is a question that must be asked of all of them. Do they have the taste of freedom? Do they help us, directly or indirectly, to become free, *Vimukta*? Do they help us to develop Insight? Do they help us to break the three Fetters? Do they help us to become True Individuals? Do they help us to enter the Stream? If they do not they are no part of the Buddha's teaching, no part of the *Dharma-Vinaya*. We must admit that there are many things in present-day Eastern Buddhism with regard to which we cannot answer these questions in the affirmative. There are many things that do not have this Taste of Freedom, many things in the Theravada, many things in Tibetan Buddhism, many things in Zen. This is why, in the FWBO, we do not identify ourselves exclusively with any one form of traditional Buddhism. We follow the Buddha's **own** advice and accept as His teaching only what actually helps us to grow, only what actually has the Taste of Freedom.

Now, in the course of the last hour or so, we've had quite a lot to say about freedom, quite a lot to say about *vimutti*, quite a lot to say about the Taste of Freedom, but we've not had very much to say about taste itself. It's interesting that the Buddha uses the word 'taste' in this connection - the **taste** of freedom. He doesn't speak of the **idea** of freedom, he doesn't speak of the **concept** of freedom, he speaks of the **taste** of freedom. We could say that he speaks of the *Dharma-Vinaya* as having the taste of freedom only because he has already spoken of the great ocean as having the taste of salt. But why did he speak of the great ocean in this way in the first place? Presumably the Buddha selected certain qualities of the great ocean because they enabled him to emphasise certain qualities of the *Dharma-Vinaya*. He spoke of the great ocean as having the taste of salt because he wanted to make it clear that the *Dharma-Vinaya* had the taste of Freedom. In other words, wanted to emphasise that Freedom was something to be **tasted**, something to be **experienced**. So let us look at this a little more closely.

We've seen that the Pali word for taste is '*rasa*'. *Rasa*, in the first place means 'juice'. Juice, of course, is a liquid, a fluid, and a fluid is something that flows. It's something that has no fixed form.

And freedom also is like that, *vimutti* also is like that. It's not something fixed and specific, it's not something conditioned. On the contrary it is absolute and unconditioned. Similarly with the *Dharma-Vinaya* itself. The *Dharma-Vinaya* has the taste of Freedom, it's pervaded by the taste of freedom, it is in fact, we may say, an uninterrupted, spontaneous flow of spiritual and transcendental states. That flow may crystallise into different teachings, practices and so on. But it is not to be identified with them. *Rasa* also means just - not juice, but taste. And taste, of course, is a matter of direct experience. To say that the *Dharma-Vinaya* has the taste of freedom means that if you practise the *Dharma-Vinaya* you will have the direct experience of freedom, you will become free. Again, *rasa* means 'special quality'. The direct experience of freedom is the special quality of the *Dharma-Vinaya*. It's the quality by which you can recognise it. If it doesn't have this quality it isn't the *Dharma-Vinaya*, just as if something doesn't taste sweet it can't be sugar. So this special quality gives the *Dharma-Vinaya* its special **flavour**, as it were. So *rasa* also means flavour. With practice we begin to appreciate this flavour, we begin to relish it, we begin to take pleasure in it, we begin to enjoy it. *Rasa* therefore means relish and pleasure. In addition it means essential property. The experience of freedom is **essential** to the *Dharma-Vinaya*. There's no *Dharma-Vinaya* without it. Whatever else you may have, if you don't have the experience of freedom, you don't have the *Dharma-Vinaya*. And finally *rasa* means extract or essence. If you boil the *Dharma-Vinaya* down, so to speak, what do you get? If you go on boiling and boiling and boiling this vast ocean until you get a single drop, what do you get? What is that drop? You get freedom, you get *vimutti*. If you want to reduce the *Dharma-Vinaya* to one word, what is that one word? It is the word 'Freedom', the word '*Vimutti*'.

So we've covered quite a lot of ground tonight and it's very nearly time to conclude. We began with an image, so let us end with an image. We began with the image of the great ocean. Let us end with another image, the image of something equally great, if not greater. Let us end with the image of space. The image of the sky. A sky infinite in extent, deep blue in colour, and perfectly pure. In the midst of this image there is **another** image. We see a figure flying through the sky. It's a naked red figure. It's a female figure with long black hair streaming out behind her, and her face is uplifted in ecstasy and there is a smile on her lips. She is what is known in Buddhist tradition as The Dakini, the Lady of Space. And she is absolutely free. She is free to fly in any direction - north, south, east, west, up, down. She is even free to stay still, because hers is the liberty of infinite space. She enjoys the Taste of Freedom.

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