

## Lecture 140: The Individual and the World Today

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..... and Friends,

Tonight, on this rather rainy Autumn night here in Auckland, and for the next two Wednesday nights, I'm going to be talking. And as you've just heard, I'm going to be talking about a new movement, or at least about a rather new movement. As you know we're all growing older all the time! I'm going to be talking about a new spiritual movement, in fact about a new Buddhist movement, that is to say a Buddhist movement affiliated to that great spiritual tradition which we know as Buddhism, but which calls itself in its own habitat simply the Dharma. In other words, I'm going to be talking about the FWBO. And in referring to the FWBO as a new spiritual movement, a new Buddhist movement, I'm using the term 'movement' advisedly. I'm deliberately avoiding the term 'organization', much less still 'society' or 'association', much less still the term 'group'. And I'm avoiding such terms because I'm not talking about just another organization, I'm talking, or I shall be trying to talk, about something which I can only describe as a sort of current, as a sort of stream, of positive, emotional energy, a current or stream of what we may call - using a term that is often used and often abused - spiritual energy. And I like to use this word current, as well as the word stream, because current suggests, one might say, electricity - if you touch it, you get a shock; if you touch Buddhism, you also get a shock; if you touch the FWBO, you'll certainly get a shock! So it's a current, it's a stream, of spiritual energy, and it's a current or stream that moves from higher to ever higher levels of being and of consciousness. It's a current or a stream which, with our co-operation, can take hold of us, can give us that shock, at least, and even, in the end, even eventually, transform, radically transform our lives, not only individually, but also, so to speak, collectively.

And this movement, this current, or this stream, is known as the FWBO, which stands for the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. And this FWBO is a new Buddhist movement, as I've already said, it's new, first of all, in the sense of recent, or at least comparatively recent. It was founded only in 1967, which means that it's now only twelve years old. It's also new in the sense that it is different, different from existing Buddhist groups, especially Buddhist groups in the West, in Great Britain, USA, Germany, and so on. In what way it is different we may be able to see later on in these talks. But the meaning, even one might say the inner meaning, of this new movement, the new spiritual movement, this new Buddhist movement, is revealed in its name: Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. So in my three talks here in Auckland, this autumn, I'm going to explore, I'm going to explain, the meaning of that name, both for the benefit for those who are hearing it for the first, or very nearly the first, time, and also for the benefit of those who've heard it many times but who might not yet have fully read what these four words really stand for.

I'm going to try to explain in what sense the FWBO is a movement of **Friends**, I'm going to try to explain in what sense it is a **Western** movement, not an Eastern movement, and in what sense it is Buddhist, and also in what sense it is an **Order**, not an organization, not an association or a society, not a group, but an Order. I'm going to try to explain this too. But in trying to explain these four terms - Friends, Western, Buddhist, and Order, I'm not going to be dealing with them in that very order. For the sake of convenience I'm going to deal first of all with the meaning of Western. Then I'm going to deal with the meaning of Buddhist, and finally with the meaning of Friends and Order together. So I'm going to deal with the first of these, that is to say Western, tonight. With the second next week, and with the third and fourth the week after that. So tonight we explore, we examine, the meaning of Western. So in what sense is our new Buddhist movement Western? Well, I've said that the FWBO was founded in 1967, twelve years ago, and it was founded in the UK, it was founded in England, and it was founded in London. In fact it was founded in the very heart of London. I don't know how many of you know London, perhaps quite a few of you do. But if you do it'll mean something to you, I'm sure, if I tell you that the FWBO saw the light of day - so to speak - only a few hundred yards from Trafalgar Square. And that really is the heart of London. And the FWBO started

in a tiny basement, not more than about I'd say twelve feet by fourteen, underneath a shop, in Monmouth Street, which is quite famous, some of you may know, in English literature. It crops up every now and then in 17th, 18th, and 19th century English literature as a place where they sold old clothes. Students of English literature here in Auckland may be interested to hear that. But anyway, in this basement, twelve feet by fourteen feet square, underneath this shop, in Monmouth Street, a few hundred yards from Trafalgar Square, with Nelson on his column, seven or eight of us used to meet just once a week, on a Thursday evening, for meditation. We used to meditate for an hour, together, and then we went home. Those of us who had a home of course - I didn't, being a monk. And that was how the FWBO started, that was the little seed from which everything sprouted, everything sprang. I don't know at the moment exactly how big we are but we have about twenty centres, about twenty communities, and about thirty supporting co-ops and business organizations, and we've spread to a number of countries. But that's where we started, that's where the little seed was planted. You might say we started almost like mushrooms, in this rather small dark cellar in Central London. But I mustn't go on reminiscing in this fashion, otherwise I shall be unable to get on to the main topic, so I won't go into all that tonight. That is another story, as they say.

Tonight I'm concerned just with the fact that the FWBO was started in the West, started, that is to say, in the midst of a particular kind of society, started, even, in the midst of a particular kind of civilization. Not the sort of civilization I'd been living in in India for twenty years. Something very different indeed. A civilization which differs from all previous civilizations in history, which differs from them in being, first of all, secular, and secondly, industrial. And though this peculiar modern civilization, this Western civilization of ours was started in the West, it is certainly not confined to it, because in the course of the last hundred and fifty years or so it's spread to most parts of the globe. It's even spread to **some** extent to India, as I saw in the course of the twenty years that I spent there. The world of today is the Western world, or **a** Western world. It's a world which is either Western, or in process of Westernization, that is to say secularization and industrialization, though there are signs that the process is being resisted, to some extent, sporadically, just here and there - for instance, quite recently in one or two of the Islamic states. So when we say that our new Buddhist movement, our FWBO, is Western, we don't mean that it is just geographically located in the West, or that it was started, geographically speaking, in the West. We mean primarily, we mean basically, that it has arisen under the conditions of Western civilization, modern Western, that is to say secular and industrial, civilization. Arisen under conditions which though they originated in the West, started in the West, are now virtually world-wide. And it's with those conditions that the FWBO tries to cope. It tries to make the Buddhist way of life, it tries to make the spiritual life - or even, we might say, dropping all such terminology - tries to make the truly human life - possible, under those conditions, under conditions of that sort. So the FWBO is Western **in this sense**. It's Western in the sense that it is concerned with the world of today, not with the world of yesterday, however bright, however beautiful, that world in some respects may have been. It's not concerned primarily with the world of traditional religious culture. The world of traditional religious culture is a very beautiful world - I saw something of it in India, saw something of it in Malaysia, amongst my Chinese Buddhist friends. But that world has gone, and, it seems, gone for ever.

So the FWBO does not look back, is not nostalgic, it doesn't hark back to this beautiful, romantic, traditional, religious culture of the past. It looks forward. And in this sense also it's new, in this sense - we might say, also - it's young. The old usually look back to the past. As you get older - in fact this is a sign that you're getting older, really older - the sign is that you start thinking more about the past than about the present, or even about the future. You start indulging in nostalgia. But the young look forward to the future.

Now the world today, which is the Western world, has certain special problems, problems that didn't exist in the past quite in the way that they exist now. They're not completely new problems, but they're problems which happen to be more acute now, which face us, which confront us even, in a more urgent form. And the solution of which is therefore more urgent. Now all of you, I'm sure, can

think of some such problem. Some will immediately think of economic problems, others will think of ecological problems, according to your particular interest. But what is the biggest of all these problems, biggest at least in human, and even spiritual terms? The biggest of all the problems that we face today, that the **world** today faces, is the problem of the individual. Not that the individual himself, or herself, **is** a problem, really, except of course to those things, or those institutions, to which it is the business of the individual, so to speak, to be a problem. The real problem is that of the **survival** of the individual. Something threatens the survival of the individual. It's very difficult for the individual to survive nowadays, to exist nowadays, to grow, to develop nowadays. So what is it that threatens the survival of the individual, in this Western world, in the world today? Well, that which threatens the survival of the individual is clearly, in one word - not a four-letter but a **five**-letter word - the group. The group. And the FWBO is Western in the sense that it is a spiritual movement of Buddhist origin, concerned with the protection of the individual from the group. The individual needs to be protected, the individual as such - and this might be a new idea to some people. We're familiar with the idea that **children** should be protected, we're even familiar with the idea that **animals** should be protected, but what about the individual? We sometimes forget the individual. We don't real that the individual too needs to be protected nowadays - protected from the group.

So the FWBO, as I've said, is Western in the sense that it's a spiritual movement concerned with the protection of the individual, the protection of the individual from the group. And that's why I'm explaining the fact that the FWBO is Western in terms of '*The Individual and the World Today*', which is the actual title of tonight's talk. The individual and the world today means the individual as threatened by the group. As threatened with extinction, not to say extermination, by the group. But one might ask has it always been like this, has the individual always been threatened by the group? And in any case, of course, what exactly do we mean by the group? Clearly I'm using this term in a rather special sense, a rather special way, not quite in the ordinary sense, not quite in the ordinary way. And also, what do we mean by the individual? That also is not quite so clear as might appear at first sight. What do we mean by the individual? So to explain this, to explain what is meant by the group, what is meant by the individual, we have to go back a bit in history, even into pre-history, and we have to attempt a few definitions.

The group, of course, came first. That is to say the group came before the individual, before the true individual. What does the anthropologist tell us? The anthropologist tells us that man has always lived in groups. It's pretty obvious. Man has never lived on his own, he's always lived in groups. The group was necessary to survival. And this was true not only of man but of his prehuman ancestors as well, they lived in groups, of various sizes, containing anything from a dozen to two or three dozen members of various ages, and of course of both sexes. And they formed, in this way, a sort of extended family group. And this pattern, this prehuman pattern, this primate pattern, was followed by man. But with a difference. In the case of man, the group gradually became bigger. Extended families merged to form tribes, and tribes merged to form nations, and nations eventually founded states. States even merged to form empires, and the whole process extended over a period of many hundreds of thousands of years, gradually accelerating towards the end, when we reached the period of recordable, datable history, which begins about 8000 BC.

But whether the group was large, or whether the group was small, the group in essence, in principle, remained unchanged. And from the point of view which I'm at present adopting, we can define the group as a collectivity organized for survival, that is to say its own survival, its survival as a collectivity, a collectivity organized for survival, in which the interests of the individual are subordinated to those of the collectivity. The group, the collectivity, is also a power-structure. It's a structure in which the ultimate sanction is force, not sweet reasonableness, but force. I've gone into all this in a lecture on '*Authority and the Individual in the New Society*', which is available here in Auckland on tape, so I need not repeat what I've said in that lecture. The group, the collectivity, not only made survival possible for its members; in the case of man it made it possible for them to enjoy higher and higher levels of material prosperity. Even higher and higher levels of culture. It made possible the emergence

of folk art and ethnic religion. It made possible the emergence of civilization. The group, the human group, made possible all this, but there was a price to be paid, a price to be paid by the individual, or proto-individual. So what was that price? What price did he or she have to pay? The price was conformity, conformity with the group. The individual was regarded as being essentially a member of the group - that was the definition of the individual: a member of the group. The individual had no existence separate from the group, or apart from the group. And of course groups are of various kinds. Let me give you an illustration of this from my own experience - I've mentioned that I was in India for twenty years. I had many Hindu friends, followers of the Hindu religion. And some of them were very orthodox, that is to say rather old fashioned, Hindus. And some of them used to be very puzzled by the fact that I did not have a caste. And sometimes in my very early days they used to ask me, before they got to know me, 'what is your caste?' I had to belong to a caste. And when I said I don't have a caste first of all because I was born in England, where we don't have castes, though we may have classes, which is rather different, and secondly because I'm a Buddhist, and in Buddhism we do not recognize the system of hereditary caste. And they used to say, but you **must** have a caste. Every human being, every man, must have a caste. They could not conceive of someone who did not belong to a particular caste, who did not belong to one of the two thousand odd castes of Hinduism. They could not conceive of someone who did not belong to a **group** of some kind. There's something parallel to this in the West when we cannot conceive of someone who is not of a particular nationality, but caste is even harder, even straighter, even stricter, even tighter, we may say, than that.

So a casteless individual, for the orthodox Hindu, is inconceivable. [And of the?] man who is essentially a member of the group, an individual, who doesn't belong to the group, whose being is not as it were totally **submerged** in the group, who has something of himself **outside** the group, who doesn't fully **belong** to the group, it's rather difficult to conceive of. Now, because the individual was essentially a member of the group, he doesn't think for himself. He thought, and **felt**, even, just as the group did, and he acted as other members of the group acted. And it didn't even **occur** to him that he could do anything else. It doesn't occur to your orthodox Hindu that you need not have a caste, it's possible for you not to have a caste. In much the same way in the West I'm afraid, very often, we almost think it's not possible for you not to have a nationality, even a class. And the group member, as such, was perfectly content with this sort of state of affairs, because the group member wasn't, and isn't, an individual, in the sense of being a true individual. He's got a separate body (or she's got a separate body) but there's no really separate, no independent, mind. No separate, no independent, consciousness. The group member shares in the group consciousness, so to speak. And we sometimes call this sort of individual simply the statistical individual. He can be counted, he can be enumerated, but he doesn't really exist as an individual in the true sense. He's simply a group member. But at some stage in man's history something happened, something remarkable happened. A new type of consciousness started developing, a new type of consciousness that we usually call reflexive consciousness, or self-consciousness, or self-awareness. And reflexive consciousness is contrasted with simple consciousness. In simple consciousness you're aware of sights, you're aware of sounds, you see sights, you hear sounds, etc. You're aware of trees, houses, people, books, flowers, but you're not aware of **being** aware. When you're not aware of **being** aware, this is simple consciousness. But in reflexive consciousness, consciousness as it were doubles back upon itself, and one is aware of being aware. And when one is aware of being aware, one is conscious of oneself as an individual, conscious of oneself as separate from the group. One is conscious of one's ability to think and feel and act differently from the group, even against the group, and an individual of this type is a true individual, that is to say, one who is self-aware. Not only self-aware but also emotionally positive, full of good will towards all living beings, who is also spontaneous, creative, that is to say not determined in his thinking, feeling, acting, by previously existing mental and emotional psychological patterns, whether his own or those of other people. And an individual, the true individual, is also one who is responsible, aware of his own needs, aware of others' needs, and prepared and willing to act accordingly. And true individuals started appearing on the stage of history in relatively large numbers, in the course of what we call - using Karl Jaspers term - *the Axial Age*. *The Axial Age*, a sort of crucial turning point in human history - hence the term axial - is - or was - a three-hundred-year

period extending very roughly from about 800 BC to about 500 BC, and these true individuals, who started appearing during that period, in relatively large numbers, appeared in Palestine, in Greece, Persia, India, and China, in fact in nearly all the great centres of civilization of that time. And some of them were great thinkers, others were prophets and mystics, others again were poets, sculptors, and founders of religions. In Palestine we have such figures as the prophets Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Amos, as well as the author - the unknown author - of the book of Job. In Greece we have Pythagoras, and the great philosopher Plato, we have the Attic dramatists, we have the great poet Pindar, we have the sculptor Pheidias, and so on. In Persia the prophet Zoroaster, in India the Upanishadic sages like Yagnavalkya. We have Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, we have the Buddha, and in China we have Confucius and Lao Tse, the two most important individuals to arise in the whole history of Chinese culture.

So the Axial Age was a period of efflorescence of the individual in this sort of way, of true individuals, and some of these true individuals went far beyond self consciousness or self-awareness merely, some of them at least developed what I've sometimes called Transcendental consciousness, and even Absolute consciousness. So from the Axial Age onwards, we see at work in history - in human history - in cultural history - religious history - spiritual history if you like - two factors. On the one hand there's the individual and on the other there's the group. The true individual and the group. And also various free associations of true individuals, but that again is another story, and I'm not going into it tonight.

And between the individual - the true individual - and the group, there was always a sort of tension. The group pulling in one way, in the direction of conformity, the individual pulling in the opposite direction, in the direction of nonconformity, or freedom, or originality, or spontaneity. So that there was a sort of tension, even, we may say, a sort of creative tension. Or we may say again that there was a sort of dialectical relationship between the individual - the true individual - and the group. The group provided the individual with his raw material - so to speak. We find this for instance in Greek literature, in Greek drama. We find that Greek myth, Greek legend, which was a collective product (Jung might say a product of the collective unconscious), provided the dramatists with stories, which they adapted in such a way as to give expression to their own unique, their own highly individual, vision of life, vision of existence. On the other hand the individual influenced the group, reacted upon the group, so to speak, and raised it, at least momentarily, to a higher level. That is to say raised statistical individuals, belonging to the group, to a higher level, brought them nearer to true individuality, at least momentarily.

And this sort of dialectical relationship, between the true individual and the group, the group and the true individual, the one acting on - reacting on - the other, continued, or was in force, for about - broadly speaking - two thousand years. And it was a lively, a healthy, sort of relationship, we may say, this dialectical relationship between the pair of them. Though sometimes it broke down, as when for instance the medieval Catholic Church started persecuting heretics, that is to say those who dared to think differently from the church. The church of course by this time was no longer a spiritual community as it originally had been - at least to some extent - but simply a religious group, that is to say a sort of ecclesiastical power structure. On the whole, however, such exceptions, such regrettable exceptions apart, for about two thousand years the relation between the true individual and the group continued fairly healthy, generally speaking the group at least tolerated the individual, provided he didn't impinge too uncomfortably, or in too gadfly-like a fashion, on the group. But during the last two hundred years, we may say, a change has taken place. A change has taken place to such an extent that a serious imbalance now prevails. An imbalance between the individual - the true individual - and the group. And there are various reasons for this. I can only summarize some of the more important of them. First of all, the population of the world, the population of practically every country, has greatly increased in recent years, even during the last hundred years, even during the last forty years. While I was in India, twenty years, the population of India doubled. Doubled. That's quite a thought. So because we've got all these more people in the world, almost everywhere, it's become much more

difficult to get away from one's fellow men. However much you may love your fellow men, you like to get away from them at least sometimes, but it's nowadays much more difficult to get away from your fellow men, much more difficult to get away from the group. And this is especially the case in small densely populated countries like Holland, and like the United Kingdom.

Not so long ago I had a quite interesting conversation with a friend of mine - an old friend of mine - whom I happened to meet in Sydney after many years - who was born in Holland. And for some reason or other, somehow or other, we got talking about the aggressiveness of Dutch people. I happened to mention that lots of Dutch psychotherapists whom I had met were very aggressive people, and she said, Oh yes, lots of the Dutch clergy who came to see her husband who was a bishop, Swedish, were also rather aggressive she felt, and she said being Dutch herself, she could understand that, and she thought she knew why it was. She said she thought it was because Holland was such a little, tiny country, with so many people - I believe there are fourteen million of them now - cooped up so to speak in this little tiny country - they're so close together, so tightly packed, they get rather irritable, they get rather aggressive. They have to assert themselves. And the very same thing actually was mentioned in a letter I got from a Dutch Friend (with a capital F) only a few days ago. She said how lovely it was to go to England and have so much space! But even England is getting crowded, even England is cramped, because England is so small, and the population has grown. It is so small. As the Americans say, if you're not careful you fall off the edge of it! Because the Americans are used to a great big country. So this is what has happened. The population of the world has so greatly increased, it's much more difficult to get away from your fellow man, especially in these small densely populated countries like Holland and the United Kingdom, and some smaller areas in some of the bigger countries. Of course this is not a problem that you have in New Zealand. I believe in New Zealand if anything, according to today's paper, your problem is likely to be rather the opposite, you're likely to have more room than you really care to have, and fewer people, perhaps, than you care to have. But even if you are a true individual to that extent that you even have to get away from your fellow New Zealanders, well, you can always go to the west coast, the west coast of South Island, which I saw myself only a week or two ago, and which is certainly not very densely populated.

So this is the first factor. Increase of population. And then secondly, there's increase in the power of the corporate state. The corporate state we may say, nowadays, is the group *par excellence*. The corporate state controls so many aspects of our lives. I need not enlarge on this, I'm sure you're all well aware of that fact. And in most states, in most countries of the world, this control, on the part of the state, the corporate state, is increasing rather than decreasing. It's increasing - I was almost going to say - every day. But not only that. These corporate states now divide the whole world between them. There's no portion of the Earth, the Earth's land surface, which is not controlled by one or another corporate state. They've even started staking out claims to the sea. So you can't get away from the corporate state. There used to be spaces, nice empty spaces, *terra incognita*, in between corporate states, where you could go if you wanted to get away from the state. But those spaces no longer exist. The corporate states have extended their boundaries until their boundaries come right up against one another, and there are no spaces in between, there are no spaces anywhere in the world, where no state exercises any authority. So every individual has to belong to a state, whether you like it or not. There a few wretches, unfortunate miserable people, who've been declared stateless. Well, this condition of statelessness of the individual is considered a terrible calamity, because you've just got to belong to a state. You've got to have a passport. You've got to have a visa. Without these things you can't travel from one state to another. And this is a fairly recent development. Passports, it seems, came into general use only after the First World War. Before that it wasn't necessary, at least not so necessary, to have but now they are really indispensable.

And then thirdly there's the growth of modern technology. This is in many ways a good thing, but it has its disadvantages, because it means that among other things the state, the corporate state, can keep track of its citizens more efficiently. Many states now have what are called I believe data banks. They

can take a citizen's name, or number, and run it through a computer, and the computer just like that, in no time at all, will tell you, or tell whoever is operating the computer, the date of birth of that person, when he last paid his taxes, how many parking offences he has ever committed, where he spent his holiday last year, whether he's ever had the measles, etc., all this sort of information is at once available, and having this information, the state having this information, finds it more easier to control, to exercise control, over the individual.

And then fourthly, there's our higher standard of living. This is also a good thing up to a point. But it does make us dependent, dependent on the group. We're dependent on the group for such good things of life as motor cars and television sets, not to speak of petroleum and electricity because it's very doubtful if we could manufacture or produce them by ourselves. Generally we're so helpless, so dependent, we can't even grow our own food, or make our own clothes. We're dependent for all these things on others, that is to say, we're dependent on the group. So we can formulate a sort of principle: the higher our standard of living, the bigger and more complex the state to which we have to belong. And therefore the more control it exercises over our lives, and the less freedom we have. We could even say that there's a sort of paradoxical situation. If we have a car, for instance, well, we have greater freedom - that is to say we have greater personal mobility - but that freedom is taken away from us in certain other respects by the fact that in order to possess and to drive a car, we have to be part of a society which among other things is geared to the production of cars, which may not necessarily be the best kind of society. So for all these reasons, and others, we see there's a sort of imbalance between the individual and the group.

I've mentioned only the corporate state. As I've said, it's the group par excellence. But within the corporate state there are so many other smaller groups. The corporate state is in fact a sort of interlocking system of such groups, and some of them are very powerful indeed, in comparison to the individual. There's the political party, there's the trades union, the chamber of commerce; there's the church, the bank, the school, and some of these impinge on us in certain respects more strongly and more directly than the corporate state itself. So what are we left with? We're left with a virtually powerless individual, in a virtually all-powerful state. The group has practically overwhelmed the individual. The individual feels, very often, that he's quite unable to influence the group, even in those matters which most closely concern his own life. So this is the state of affairs in the world today, especially in the Western democracies, and in the Communist states, not to mention various military dictatorships. And it's a state of affairs which is becoming more and more widespread. And I gather, from some of the things that some of my friends have said, some of the things I've seen in newspapers also, during the last two months, that it's spreading even to New Zealand. And I think I can detect some change in this respect, since my last visit four years ago.

So what is the result of all this? The result is that the individual, the true individual, is dissatisfied. The statistical individual very often is not dissatisfied, very often he's happy with what the group provides, whether it's bread and circuses, as in the days of the ancient Roman Empire, or motor cars and television sets as today. His only complaint is that he'd like to have more of them more frequently. But the true individual, or potential true individual, is dissatisfied. In extreme cases he's even frustrated, he's even angry, and his frustration may sometimes find expression even in violence. And we all know that violence is on the increase in our cities. I'm not saying that frustration of the kind I've mentioned is the sole cause of this violence. There are other causes, other factors, but this is certainly one factor.

So what are we to do? We must tackle the fundamental problem. We mustn't rest content with any superficial tinkering about with the problem. We must tackle it at its roots, and we have to correct the imbalance that has arisen between the individual and the group. We have to **restore** the balance between the individual and the group. And we need, therefore, a philosophy, a way of looking at things, which gives us the perspective within which we can see the **possibility** at least of doing this. And this means that we need a philosophy that recognises the value of the individual. A philosophy that

shows the individual how to grow. In other words, how to be a **true** individual. And this is where what nowadays we call Buddhism, and what anciently was called the Dharma, comes in. Because Buddhism places the individual in the very forefront of its teaching. The Buddha's teaching is concerned solely with the individual, both alone and in free association with other individuals. And it shows the individual how to grow, shows him, by means of actual concrete methods, sometimes, how to develop awareness. How to develop his emotional positivity, how to live spontaneously and creatively, how to accept responsibility for himself and for others. In other words it shows him how to be more and more of a true individual.

And the Buddha himself, we may say, Gautama the Buddha himself, the original teacher, the rediscoverer of the Dharma, we may say, was, and is, an example of a true individual. An individual of the highest kind, what we call an **Enlightened** individual, an Enlightened human being, an individual who has developed not only reflexive consciousness, but also the higher, the Transcendental, consciousness, and even the Absolute Consciousness. And if we look at the Buddha's life, if we take even a cursory glance at it, we can see how the Buddha's individuality demonstrated itself, evinced itself, right from the beginning. Quite early in life he cut himself off from the group. That was the first step he took of any significance. He cut himself off from the group. He left his parents, left his wife and child, left his city, left his tribe, and he even gave up his social position. He wandered alone from place to place. And he joined various religious groups - cults as we might say nowadays - but in the end he cut himself off from them too. Because they also were hindrances, they also were groups. And he was left entirely alone, entirely alone, in a way that perhaps no one had ever been alone before. And being alone he was able to be not anything sort of magical and mysterious, or divine, or with great theological significance; being alone he was able to be himself, being himself he was able to be an individual, and being an individual - looking at things as an individual, seeing things as an individual he was able to see the Truth, for himself, able to **experience** it for himself. Being able to see the Truth, he was able to become what we call a Buddha, an Enlightened individual. And having become an Enlightened individual, he was able to help others to become such. And in this way, from that **moment** almost, we may say, the power of the group was diminished, the power of Mara was diminished, the power of the gravitational pull of conditioned existence was diminished. In the Buddha's time, in the Buddha's day, the power of the group was not so very great compared with what it is nowadays, but all the same the Buddha's teaching was needed. The Buddha's example was needed. It's needed in fact - we may say - whenever and wherever the survival of the individual is threatened, wherever there's an imbalance between the individual and the group, especially when that imbalance is as extreme as it is today in the West, as it is in the world today.

There's no political, no economic, solution to such a problem. There's only a spiritual solution, that is to say a solution that takes into account, which deals with, the individual, though of course that solution, though not political, though not economic, will have, if put into operation, political and economic implications and consequences. But it has to be a solution that emphasizes the value of the individual, that respects the individual. How many people respect the individual? You can meet so many people who don't respect you as an individual, who don't even **see** you as an individual. You can go into a shop, go into a government office, try to deal with the people there; they don't see you as an individual. They see you as something else, a sort of public zombie I suppose, just drifted in. But the solution that we need is a solution that sees the individual, that respects the individual, that allows the individual even to make his own mistakes. That doesn't hold the individual's hand all the time, so to speak. And this sort of attitude is very well illustrated by an incident in the Buddha's life. There was a Brahmin, it seems. (In the Buddhist scriptures Brahmins are always popping up, like Mara.) A Brahmin came to the Buddha, and he asked whether the Buddha did not teach all his disciples equally, teach them all the way to Nirvana, and the Buddha said, 'yes, I do, I teach them all the way to Nirvana, the way to Enlightenment, the way to true individuality'. And then the Brahmin asked, 'but do they all, equally, attain Enlightenment? Do they all become actually true individuals?' And the Buddha said, 'no, some do, some don't.' So the Brahmin was rather puzzled, and he asked,



‘well, why is this? They all get the same teaching, why don’t they all real Nibbana? Why don’t they all become true individuals?’ So the Buddha said, ‘let me give you an example.’ He said, ‘there’s the city of Rajagriha’ (apparently it was nearby). He said, ‘you know the city of Rajagriha, you know the **way** to the city of Rajagriha, so suppose two men come to you, and they both ask, please tell me the way to Rajagriha. Supposing you give quite detailed instructions - go along this road, pass that bush, turn that corner, go through that grove of mango trees, and then you’ll get to the city. Suppose you give both of them these instructions, these directions, and suppose one follows your directions and arrives, but the other does not follow your directions, he just makes some mistake or is careless, and he doesn’t arrive, so then what happens?’ The Buddha said to the Brahmin, ‘would it be your fault? Would you be to blame for that?’ So the Brahmin said, ‘no, if after I had explained the way, if I’d given the proper directions, and one of them found the way but the other did not find the way, it wouldn’t be any fault of mine. I wouldn’t be to blame, I am only the shower of the way. I only give the directions.’ So the Buddha said, ‘it’s the same in the case of the Buddha, it’s the same in my case, I’m only a shower of the way.’ The Buddha is only the shower of the way, but it’s up to the individual to follow that way, to decide for himself whether he’s going to follow that way or not. So this sort of attitude - we may say - shows tremendous respect for the individual. It shows great confidence in the **potential** of the individual, and it shows appreciation of the fact that the individual cannot be forced. He must **want** to change, he must **want** to develop. All that one can do is to show him how, show him an example, encourage him, if you can even **inspire** him, but one can do no more than that. You can’t force him, you can’t bribe him, can’t threaten him, you can only show him the way. That is to say if you are an individual, and trying to deal with him as an individual you can only show him the way and leave it to him to follow or not to follow. And this sort of attitude is the basis of Buddhism’s well known tolerance. Buddhism, it seems, is very deeply conscious of human differences, very deeply conscious of the fact that we’re not all the same, we’ve got our different temperaments, our different characters, our different characteristics, our different ways of looking at things. We cannot always see things in exactly the same sort of way, and therefore we have to be allowed to develop, each one of us, in his own manner, in her own manner, and for this reason, in the whole of its history of 2500 years, Buddhism has never persecuted anybody for his beliefs. There’s no such thing as heresy in Buddhism. There is such a thing as wrong views, that is to say views which hold us back and prevent us from developing, but these wrong views are to be corrected, if they’re to be corrected at all, by discussion, not by force. Force has absolutely no place in Buddhism, no place in the spiritual life.

Now at this point somebody might raise an objection. They might agree that in the world today there is a serious imbalance between the individual and the group, and they might agree that this imbalance, this very serious imbalance, needs to be corrected. They might further agree that this can be done only by spiritual means, not by political or economic means. But they may ask, why do we have to bring in Buddhism? Why should we not do it with the help of Christianity, which is after all traditionally the religion of the West? So I want to say just a few words about this and then we have to think of concluding. I personally do not think that Christianity can help us correct the imbalance between the individual and the group, and mainly for two reasons; the first reason being that Christianity is on the side of the group. Christianity has no respect for the individual, and this is amply shown by its history. Whenever, and wherever, Christianity has gained political power, it has persecuted those who think differently, those who think for themselves, those who try to be individuals. I need not give you a long historical recital - we’ve only to think of the enormities perpetrated by the Inquisition, we’ve only to think of the horrors of the Albigensian crusade, or the wars of religion in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, or the burning of witches, that is to say old women, at the stake. And why were they burnt? Because the Bible said ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’. Even today, in democratic countries, Christian pressure groups are at work, trying to get laws passed which would compel non-Christians to conform to Christian ideas of right and wrong. And therefore I say that Christianity has no respect for the individual.

Further, secondly, Christianity believes in God. It believes in a supreme being, in an all-powerful, all-knowing, creator of the heavens and the earth. Buddhism of course - I need hardly tell you, does not believe in God. Buddhism is what we call a non-theistic religion. It teaches that belief in the existence of God is in fact a wrong view, a view that prevents us from developing as true individuals. And why is this, why does it prevent us? Well, we have to ask ourselves what is God? If we look at it closely, if we forget the more theological definitions, even the more abstract philosophical definitions, if we try to look more realistically, more psychologically, more existentially, at God, we have to conclude that God is simply the most powerful member of the biggest conceivable group. And we find in fact that God enforces group values, or is represented as enforcing group values, such as obedience, conformity, and respect for the powers that be. Further, people are encouraged to fear God. They're encouraged to feel guilty if they disobey his commands, and in this way they're lamed, and crippled, psychologically and spiritually, sometimes for life. They become in some cases, as I've seen myself, only too often, unable to develop, unable to think for themselves. And people generally do not realize what a disastrous effect their Christian upbringing, their Christian conditioning, has had on them, until - sometimes - it's too late, especially their belief in God. They realize it only when they try to break free of it, when they try to develop, when they try to become individuals, so I do not think that Christianity can help us, in **any** way, to correct the imbalance between the individual and the group. I don't think it can help us solve the problem of the individual. Christianity in fact, I would say, has contributed to that imbalance. It's exacerbated that problem. Now it might of course be said that the Christianity I've been talking about is not **true** Christianity. Well, it's the Christianity of history, it's the only Christianity really that we know, and it's this Christianity with which we have to deal, it's this Christianity which has oppressed us as individuals in the past, and which still oppresses us when it gets the opportunity. It **might** be possible to imagine a better Christianity, but this Christianity would have to fulfil four conditions. As a matter of interest let me just give them to you. They're the outcome, I may say, of a great deal of thought on my part over the last few years. This better Christianity would have to fulfil these four conditions:

First, it would have to entirely dissociate itself from the Old Testament, what W. Aldous Huxley called 'that savage, bronze-age literature'.

Secondly, it would have to give up the belief in God. Some Christians have in fact already done this, as adroitly and as theologically - so to speak - or atheologically as they can, with their 'death of God' theology.

Thirdly, it would have to regard Christ as a teacher, not as a saviour.

And fourthly, they'd have to improve on his teaching.

Until we have a Christianity of this type we'll just have to bring in Buddhism. We shall have to bring in something like the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. In other words, a new spiritual movement that seeks to protect the individual from the group, that tries to correct the imbalance between the individual and the group, and that tries to solve the problem of the individual and the world today.

And this spiritual movement will have to be a 'Buddhist' - put inverted commas there if you like - a Buddhist movement, because Buddhism, because the Dharma, recognises, as I think perhaps no other teaching does, the value of the individual, shows the individual how to grow, how to become more and more of an individual, allows him to develop in his own way, moreover gives him the example, the inspiring example, of the Buddha, as it were the supreme individual, gives him the support of the Sangha, or spiritual community, of other individuals, with whom he is in direct personal contact. But nonetheless, all the same, it's not easy to be a Buddhist. Least of all is it easy to be a Western Buddhist. After all, Buddhism, historically speaking at least, is an Eastern religion. So what, if any, is

the relation between Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism? That is the question with which we shall be dealing next week.

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