

Lecture 141: Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism

Urgyen Sangharakshita

Mr Chairman and Friends,

In the course of these three talks we're looking, as you've just heard, at a new spiritual movement. We're looking in fact at a new Buddhist movement, a movement of comparatively recent origin, a movement called the FWBO; or to give it its full title the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. And in the course of these three talks spread over these three weeks we're just trying to understand the general nature of that movement. And we're trying to understand the nature of that movement through, or with the help of, an understanding of the meaning of the name 'Friends of the Western Buddhist Order' itself. And last week we tried to understand, we tried to explore, in what sense this movement, this new spiritual movement is Western. Because it's called the Friends of the **Western** Buddhist Order. And we saw that it's called the Western Buddhist Order not just because it happened to arise in the geographical West, not just because it started in London, but because it arose under the conditions of modern Western civilisation; a civilisation which is in fact nowadays virtually worldwide; a civilisation in which unfortunately - unfortunately for us - there has arisen a serious imbalance between the individual and the group. And the title of last week's talk was therefore *'The Individual and The World Today'*. And in the course of that talk we saw very briefly that nowadays the individual, the individual as such, is very much threatened by the group. And we saw that the balance between the individual and the group, the group and the individual, needs to be restored. And we further saw that Buddhism could help us, the teaching of the Buddha could help us to do this, to restore that balance; to give the individual in the modern world, in the Western world, more of his due. And we saw that Buddhism could help us to do this because Buddhism recognises the value of the individual; recognises the value of each individual, and places in fact the individual in the very forefront of its teaching. We saw that Buddhism essentially is concerned really with nothing but the individual, the individual human being, the individual man and woman and his or her development as an individual. And we further saw that unfortunately Christianity, the traditional religion of the West, could not help us very much in this direction, because Christianity as it has developed in the West over the centuries is very much on the side of the group, and has little or no respect for the individual. And in any case in Christianity, as in all theistic religions, the individual is overshadowed by God, by this tremendous omnipresent - if you like oppressive - personality of God, and feels even crushed by that. So this is what very briefly we saw last week.

Next week we shall be dealing with the meaning of '**Friends**' in Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, and the meaning also of '**Order**'. We'll be trying to see in what sense our new movement is a movement of Friends; in what sense it is an Order. And in this connection next week we'll be dealing with the question of *'Commitment and Spiritual Community'*.

Tonight we're trying to understand in what sense our new movement, our new spiritual movement, is specifically a **Buddhist** movement. But before I do that, before I go into tonight's subject proper, I'd like to try to clear up two possible misunderstandings that might have arisen out of, or as a result of, last week's talk.

The first possible misunderstanding is in connection with the individual. I spoke, as you may remember, of our being an individual - spoke even of being a **true** individual - of developing as an individual. But when I spoke in terms of the individual, when I spoke in terms of **being** an individual, I did not mean by that, being an **individualist**.

So the question that arises, the question on which I'd like to spend just a few minutes, is what is the difference between being an individual and being an individualist. This is quite important, in a way it's quite crucial. An individual is one who has developed a higher degree, a higher level, of consciousness - at least what we call 'reflexive' consciousness. The individualist on the other hand still shares, so to speak, the consciousness of the group. In other words the consciousness, the level of consciousness which manifests in all members of the group. But the individualist has in a manner of speaking a larger share of this group consciousness than other members of that group. And the individualist therefore asserts his or her own interests at the expense of those of the group. In other words at the expense of other what I called last week 'statistical' individuals. The individual, therefore, is alienated from the group in what we may call a vertical direction; whereas the individualist is alienated from the group, so to speak,

horizontally. The individualist is a sort of fragment of the group broken off from the group and reacting - even rebelling - against the group. The individualist, we may say, is a sort of one-man group. Really it's a contradiction in terms, like a one-man band. But that's really what the individualist is. He's a one-man group. Or if you like, the group writ small. The individual on the other hand has passed or begun to pass beyond the group, which means beyond the group consciousness; he's no longer limited by the group consciousness.

So much for that possible misunderstanding. The second possible misunderstanding relates to the traditional Buddhist teaching of '*anatta*' or '*anatman*' which some of you in the course of your explorations of Buddhism might have come across. '*Anatta*' or '*anatman*' literally means 'no-self', or even 'non-self' depending on the translation you prefer. And it's said, if you read any sort of textbook of Buddhism, it's said that Buddhism recognises - as I've been insisting - the value of the individual; that it places the individual in the forefront of its teaching. But it might be objected that this, to say this, contradicts the teaching of 'no-self' or 'not-self'. It might be said that this teaching of '*anatta*' or '*anatman*' denies the very existence of the self; denies the existence of the individual; treats it as an illusion. So what happens then to the individual and the development of the individual?

The difficulty, we may say, is more apparent than real. Because the '*anatta*' teaching or the '*anatma*' teaching does not really deny the existence of the self. The Buddha in fact denies that he says that the self does not exist. He says this specifically. What the '*anatma*' teaching or the '*anatta*' teaching does deny is that there is an **unchanging** self. And it does this for two reasons. It denies that there is an unchanging self, with the emphasis on the unchanging, because an unchanging self would contradict Buddhism's basic teaching of the impermanence - which means the changeful nature - of all conditioned things. And secondly, because if the self was unchanging, the **development** of the self, the **development** of the individual, would be impossible. And this would make the spiritual life itself impossible, and Buddhism itself impossible too.

So, what I said in last week's talk does not therefore contradict the teaching of '*anatta*'. But we must be careful not to think that because development is possible that there is an unchanging individual who develops. We may say that the subject of the verb 'develop' is in reality a linguistic fiction.

But now let's go back to the meaning of 'Buddhist'. In what sense is the Western Buddhist Order a Buddhist movement? In what sense is the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order a Buddhist Movement? Well, very clearly it depends on what we mean by Buddhist; and that depends upon what we mean by Buddhism. And there are so many different versions of Buddhism; there are so many different interpretations. In fact the word 'Buddhism' itself represents an interpretation. Buddhism was not originally called Buddhism. It was certainly never called Buddhism in India. It was certainly never called Buddhism by the Buddha. It was called the '*Dharma*' in Sanskrit, or '*Dhamma*' in Pali. And the word '*Dharma*' or '*Dhamma*' means Reality. It means Truth, it means Law; it means Doctrine, it means Teaching. Or, one may say, it represents Reality, or Truth as communicated in the form of a teaching from the enlightened to the unenlightened mind. And the originator of this '*Dharma*', this - so to speak - vision of Reality as a teaching is of course the Buddha, Gautama the Buddha. He communicates to his disciples, to his followers, Reality, a truth which he has personally experienced; the experience of which constitutes his enlightenment. And therefore the Buddha is the spokesman, in fact the best spokesman, for the Dharma; the best interpreter of, so to speak, Buddhism.

So what does the Buddha say that the Dharma is? What does the Buddha say that Buddhism is? And here, in this connection, we can refer to an episode in the Pali scriptures. The Buddha himself was asked this very question. He was asked What is your Dharma? What is your teaching? And he was asked by somebody called the Mahaprajapati-Gotami, and she - as perhaps some of you know - was the aunt and also the foster-mother of the Buddha himself who brought him up as a child after the death of his own mother, which happened when he was only a few days old. And subsequently Mahaprajapati Gotami, the Buddha's aunt and foster-mother, had become a follower of his teaching. She'd not only become a follower of his teaching but she'd Gone Forth, as we say, after hearing his teaching from his own lips; she was so much impressed by it that she wanted to devote her whole life to it, she wanted to give up all her other interests and connections and ties. She simply wanted to practise the Dharma. So she went forth, she left home, she left her husband - the Buddha's father - she left her family, left the city of Kapilavastu, she went forth wandering from place to place, meditating and seeking to practise the Dharma. But she was not at that time in direct contact with the Buddha, so that there was a certain amount of confusion in her mind, She wanted to practise the Dharma but she wasn't quite sure what the Dharma was. And some of us sometimes at least may feel in that sort of position - of wanting to practise the Dharma,

wanting to practise the Truth and put it into operation but not being quite sure, perhaps not being at all sure, what the Dharma or what the Truth actually is.

So Mahaprajapati-Gotami was in this sort of situation. She was in contact with some of the Buddha's disciples, some of them disciples of long standing, and she used to ask them what the Buddha taught. But unfortunately they gave different interpretations, they said different things from different points of view. So in the end she decided that there was only one thing to do, which was to go and ask the Buddha himself what he actually did fundamentally teach. So she made the long journey to where the Buddha was at that time and she asked, as it were point blank, she asked - 'What is your Dharma?' She asked Him 'How can we **know** your Dharma, how can we know what you actually do teach? What's the criterion?' So the Buddha told her - and I'm going to read a translation of what according to tradition is what He actually said to Mahaprajapati on this occasion. He said:

Gotami, those things of which you know, these things lead to passion, not to dispassion; to attachment, not to detachment; to amassing, not to dispersal; to ambition, not to modesty; to discontent, not to content; to association (*that is to say, association with the group*), not to seclusion (*that is to say, not to seclusion from the group*); to idleness, not to energy; to luxury, not to frugality - of them you can quite certainly decide: This is not the Dharma, this is not the Vinaya, this is not the Master's teaching.

But those things of which you know, these things lead to dispassion, not to passion; to detachment, not to attachment; to dispersal, not to amassing; to modesty, not to ambition; to content, not to discontent; to seclusion (*from the group*), not to association (*with the group*); to energy, not to idleness; to frugality, not to luxury - of them you can quite certainly decide: This is the Dharma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Master's teaching.

So this, in the Buddha's own words, is the criterion; this is the principle. The Dharma is whatever contributes to the spiritual development of the individual; whatever the individual finds in his or her own experience does actually contribute to his or to her own spiritual development as an individual.

So individuals here in this passage, as in others, are clearly seen as living, growing and developing things. And some of you, in this connection, may remember the Buddha's vision - so to speak - of humanity after His enlightenment. You may remember that immediately after His enlightenment He was very undecided for a while as to whether he should actually teach the Truth or the Reality which He had discovered, or not. He realised it was something very deep, very difficult, very abstruse. But eventually He decided that He would go forth and teach, He would communicate the Truth which He had discovered to other living beings. And then He, as it were, opened His eyes and He looked out over the world to see these living beings to whom He had decided He was going to communicate the Truth. So, how did He see them?

He saw them, we are told, just like a bed of lotus flowers. It was as though He saw a vast bed of lotus flowers spreading out in front of Him as far as the eye could reach in all directions; and this was humanity, this was the human race. And some of these lotus flowers, some of these beings, some of these people if you like, were sunk in the mud, He saw them sunk in the mud. Others had risen just a little way out of it, were struggling free. And others had broken free of the mud, had even in fact risen, their heads had risen above the surface of the water and their petals were open to receive the light of the sun. So this is how the Buddha saw them, this is how He saw humanity in this great vision of His after the enlightenment. He saw them all as beings, as individuals if you like, as people in different stages of development; all growing but needing the sunlight of the Dharma in order to grow, in order to develop further.

And in another passage, in fact in another text, in a great Mahayana sutra called the *White Lotus Sutra*, the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, there's another, in a way complementary and very beautiful comparison. Here, individuals are compared not just to lotus plants emerging or in process of emerging from the mud and from the slime and the water; they are compared to different kinds of plants altogether; compared to leaves, compared to grass, trees, flowers, shrubs; and the Dharma - the Buddha's teaching - is compared to a great rain cloud. And you probably know how it is in India; for many, many months it is very hot, it is very dry; everything is very withered, everything is very parched, and then suddenly at the beginning of the rainy season a great black cloud arises in the midst of the sky. There is thunder and there's lightning and the rain falls; it falls very heavily and very steadily day in and day out, sometimes for weeks on end. And when that rain falls in that way everything grows. Everything that formerly was so dry and

so withered and so parched starts springing, becomes green again. All the leaves, the grass, trees, flowers, shrubs, everything just grows. And everything grows in its own way. The tree grows as a tree, the shrub grows as a shrub, the grass grows as grass, the flower grows as a flower; each grows in its own way. And this also is very important, because the Dharma, just like the rain cloud, gives us just the nourishment that we need. It leads us from where it finds us. Its starting point, so far as we are concerned, is where we are now. Because everybody in his or her own way needs the Dharma.

And this is what we find the great Tibetan poet and mystic Milarepa saying in one of his songs : that everybody needs the Dharma, yes, but they need it, so to speak, in their own way. I'll just read you a few of the verses which he sang on a certain occasion. We have got to have them, I'm afraid, in an English translation which isn't particularly poetic, but maybe you can just imagine Milarepa putting his hand to his ear and just singing these words to a very beautiful melody. He says:

Superior men have need of Dharma.
Without it they are like eagles;
Even though perched on high,
They have but little meaning.

Average men have need of Dharma.
Without it they are like tigers;
Though possessing greatest strength,
They are of little value.

Inferior men have need of Dharma.
Without it they are like pedlars' asses;
Though they carry a big load,
It does them but little good.

Superior women need the Dharma.
Without it they are like pictures on a wall;
Though they look very pretty,
They have no use or meaning.

Average women need the Dharma.
Without it they are like little rats;
Though they are clever at getting food,
Their lives have but little meaning.

Inferior women need the Dharma.
Without it they are just like vixens;
Though they be deft and cunning,
Their deeds have little value.

Old men need the Dharma.
Without it they are like decaying trees;
Growing youths the Dharma need,
Without it they are like yoked bulls.

Young maidens need the Dharma.
Without it they are but decorated cows;
All young people need the Dharma,
Without it they are like blossoms shut within a shell.

All children need the Dharma.
Without it they are as robbers pursued by demons.

Without the Dharma all one does lacks meaning and purpose.
Those who want to live with meaning,
Should practise the Buddha's teaching.

So this is Milarepa's song. And it makes clear that the meaning and purpose of life for the individual is to grow; is to develop, to become a true individual, to rise to a higher level of consciousness. And this is what the Dharma, this is what Buddhism, helps us to do. In fact the Dharma is whatever helps us to rise

from wherever we are now, and whatever we are now. The Dharma is therefore defined as whatever contributes to the development of the individual. This is the criterion.

Now it might sound rather too broad, not to say vague and general. But this is not really so because the Dharma - the Buddha's teaching - is embodied in various spiritual practices. And this is made clear in another episode in the Pali scriptures. In this particular episode we are reminded that in the Buddha's time there were a number of spiritual teachers in India. Sometimes we think that it's only nowadays that there are all sorts of spiritual teachers travelling around, but it was just like that in the Buddha's day too in India. They didn't of course travel around by jet in those days: some of them flew through the air by means of their supernormal power - so we are told - but otherwise they resorted to ordinary methods of locomotion. And one of the best known of the teachers other than the Buddha in the Buddha's day in India was Nigantha Nataputa, as he is called in the Pali texts, who is usually identified with Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. And he died shortly before the Buddha. And after his death his pupils, his followers - that is to say the monk followers - split into two parties, into two factions. And they disagreed about what their master, Nigantha Nataputa, had actually taught. And they almost came to blows about it. So Ananda, who it seems was a bit of a gossip, so to speak, and used to collect the news and retail it to the Buddha, told the Buddha about this. And Ananda added - being a rather practical-minded sort of person - he added that he hoped that there would be no such disputes after the Buddha himself had gone. That is to say no disputes among the Buddha's followers about the **Dharma**.

So what did the Buddha say in reply to that? The Buddha replied that such a thing was impossible. He said that He was confident that there were not even **two** monks among His followers who would describe the teachings that He had given them discordantly. And what were those teachings?, He said. He reminded Ananda what they were. He said the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, this was one of those teachings - that is to say Mindfulness of the body, of the feelings, thoughts and realities. And then the Four Right Efforts, that also he reminded Ananda of, that also He had taught: that is to say:

- (1) the Effort to prevent the arising of unskilful mental states that have not arisen,
- (2) the Effort to abandon unskilful mental states that have arisen,
- (3) the Effort to develop skilful mental states that have not arisen, and,
- (4) the Effort to maintain in existence those skilful mental states that have already arisen in one.

And then He went on to remind Ananda about the Four Bases of Success, the Five Spiritual Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Noble Eightfold Path - all these things constituted the Dharma that He had taught and about which He was confident there would be no dispute after His death even between **two** of His disciples.

So what do we notice about this list of teachings that the Buddha gives here? The list of teachings that, as it were, sums up His Dharma. We notice that they are all practical. They are all in fact actual practices. There is nothing theoretical here. The Buddha says nothing about *nirvana*, nothing about *sunyata*, nothing about the mind; He does not even mention conditioned co-production or dependent origination. It is as though He is saying that the teachings that He has given His disciples were all practical teachings, and therefore they were unlikely to describe them differently. After all, practical teachings involve certain practices and these experiences would be the same for all those who practised, and therefore they would be unlikely to disagree. It is much the same, we may say, in ordinary life. We disagree about theory but we don't very often disagree about practice. We might disagree, for instance, about the nature of electricity. Well, we are unlikely to disagree about how to mend a fuse. So similarly, the disciples **might** disagree about theoretical teachings, but they could hardly disagree about practical teachings, provided of course that they'd actually practised them. So the Dharma is therefore embodied primarily in spiritual practices - things that you actually do.

There is another interesting point which arises in connection with this episode. Despite what the Buddha had said, Ananda was not reassured, he was not satisfied, he was still worrying about what might happen after the Buddha's death. So he brought up another point; he said: Well, even though they all agree about the teaching, there might be disputes about livelihood, there might be disputes about the code of rules - in Pali, the Patimokkha - the hundred and fifty rules observed by the monks, still observed in many cases. So what did the Buddha say? And this is very important. The Buddha said: A dispute over livelihood, or a dispute over the code of rules is a trifling matter. It's only disputes over the Path, or disputes over the way of practice that would be disastrous.

So we have now seen what is meant by Buddhism; what is meant by Dharma. So we can begin to see in what sense the FWBO is a **Buddhist** movement. It's a Buddhist movement in the sense, first of all, that we are concerned with the individual. Buddhism is concerned with the individual, in fact values the individual in a way, I think, that no other teaching does. And Buddhism, or the Dharma, is simply whatever helps that individual to grow. Whatever helps him to develop from lower to higher levels of being and consciousness. At the same time this Dharma doesn't represent just a vague general principle of growth. It's embodied in specific spiritual practices.

So much, then, is clear. But a question arises. The FWBO, as we saw last week, is a Western spiritual movement, a Western spiritual phenomenon. It seeks to practise Buddhism under the conditions of modern Western civilisation. Secularised, industrialised civilisation. But historically speaking at least, Buddhism is an Eastern religion. It originated in the East. It originated in India. And for two thousand five hundred years it's been virtually confined to the East. It's only quite recently, in the course of the last hundred years in fact, that it has become known in the West at all. So what is the relation between Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism? This is the question that arises, the question of Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism which is of course the title of our talk tonight.

Now, before going into this I want to go back just a little bit. I want to go back and deal with a question that might possibly have arisen in the minds of some of you. I might almost say, it **ought** to have arisen. Buddhism, we have seen, is whatever contributes to the development of the individual. But is Buddhism confined, one might wonder, is Buddhism confined to what is labelled Buddhism, so to speak? Could we not say that whatever contributes to the development of the individual is in fact Buddhism; or at least part of Buddhism? Could we not say that?

Well, in this connection I want to say just two things by way, so to speak, of illustration. There are some people in the FWBO, especially in England, who get a great deal of inspiration, as Buddhists, from certain Western poets and philosophers, and so on. An inspiration which in fact helps them in their spiritual life as Buddhists. Perhaps I can mention a few of these poets and philosophers, some of the more popular ones among our Friends in England. There is first of all Goethe; then there is Blake. There is Schopenhauer. There is Nietzsche. There is Plato. There is D.H. Lawrence; and there is Shelley. Quite a miscellaneous collection, you might think! Other people, other Friends, get inspiration from Western classical music, especially from Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. And this is quite in order. And one can count such inspiration certainly as part of Buddhism in the wider sense.

I'm not of course saying that people like Goethe, Blake and so on - great as they were - were as enlightened as the Buddha was. I am not saying that their poetry or their philosophy can take us as far as Buddhism can, as the Dharma can - that is to say Buddhism, the Dharma in, as it were, the narrower sense. But at present we have to recognise that most people, most people in the FWBO certainly, are still at a quite elementary stage in their spiritual life. And they need the help which is appropriate to this stage. And perhaps in this connection I can quote the well-known words of Gampopa, the great Tibetan mystic. He says:

The greatest benefactor is a spiritual friend in the form of an ordinary human being

That is to say 'ordinary' compared with the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. And even Goethe and Blake were ordinary by that standard.

Secondly, regardless of the inspiration one may get from these other sources, the principal source of inspiration for the FWBO is nonetheless the Buddha and His teachings. Because that is where we get our **idea** of what constitutes development from. That is where we get our ideal of human enlightenment, about which I spoke in the course of my last visit to New Zealand, to Auckland in fact, some four years ago. So whatever help we get from other sources must be in accordance with that, in harmony with that, and must lead us in that direction - in the direction of human enlightenment. And this is why we call ourselves Friends of the Western **Buddhist** Order rather than something else.

But now let us proceed with the question of Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism. I say 'Eastern Buddhism', I use the expression 'Eastern Buddhism', but the first thing that I have to say is that there's no such thing. There's no such thing as Eastern Buddhism. What in fact one has is a number of Eastern **Buddhisms** in the plural. And broadly speaking there are now in the Buddhist world, in the Eastern Buddhist world, four of these now extant. There's South East Asian Buddhism first; then next, secondly,

there is Chinese Buddhism; thirdly there is Japanese Buddhism; and fourthly there is Tibetan Buddhism. And I am going to say just a few words about each of these in turn.

First of all South East Asian Buddhism. South East Asian Buddhism is found in Ceylon, in Burma, in Thailand and in Cambodia. Also here and there in Singapore, Malaysia, etc. And South East Asian Buddhism belongs to the Theravada school. And its scriptures are contained in the Pali Tipitaka in some forty-five volumes in the Royal Thai edition.

Secondly, Chinese Buddhism. This is found in mainland China, in Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, and parts of Singapore and Malaysia. I am of course ignoring recent political developments which have certainly altered the situation, though we don't yet know to what extent exactly. Chinese Buddhism of course belongs to the Mahayana school, belongs to what we may call general or non-sectarian Mahayana. And the scriptures of Chinese Buddhism are contained in what is called the Tsa-Tsang, or Three Treasuries corresponding to three Pitaka in fifty-five volumes, though **these** volumes I should tell you are very much bigger than the volumes of the Pali Tipitaka. In this particular collection there are no less than one thousand six hundred and sixty-two independent works, a few of them are almost as long as the Christian Bible.

Thirdly there is Japanese Buddhism. Japanese Buddhism of course is found in Japan, also in Hawaii, and among Japanese immigrants in mainland USA. Japanese Buddhism comprises various schools of what may be described as sectarian Mahayana. The best known schools probably are Zen and Shin. There are also various modern schools developed even in the present century. The scriptures of Japanese Buddhism are the Chinese Tsa-Tsang, or Three Treasuries, plus various Japanese works according to sect. In practice the sectarian works may sometimes displace the Tsa-Tsang.

Fourthly and lastly there is Tibetan Buddhism. This is found in Tibet, Mongolia, Sikkim, Bhutan, Ladakh, parts of China, even in parts of the USSR. Again I am ignoring recent political developments. Tibetan Buddhism consists of four main traditions, all following all three Yanas - that is to say: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana; and differences between these four occur mainly in respect of Vajrayana lineages that is to say Tantric lineages. And their scriptures are all contained in the Kangyur, which means the Buddha-Vacana or Buddha Word in one hundred or one hundred and eight (according to the edition) xylographed volumes; plus special collections like the Ringchen Terma for the Nyingmapas or the Milarepa Kabum in the case of the Kagyupas.

So these are the four extant Eastern Buddhisms. There are various intermediate forms; in fact all sorts of intermediate forms and sub-forms and sub-sub-forms, but for the sake of simplicity I have ignored them. So for practical purposes Western Buddhists find themselves confronted by **four** Eastern Buddhisms. They don't find themselves confronted by just one monolithic Eastern Buddhism with completely unitary features. And incidentally - and this is just by the way - they do not find themselves confronted by an Eastern mind, or by Eastern psychology. I don't know how many psychologists are present, and I do not know whether any of you might like to challenge me about this, but in my opinion this whole talk of an Eastern mind, or Eastern psychology, is a complete myth.

Some writers speak of the Western mind and the Eastern mind as though they were two completely different minds. And it is suggested that it is very difficult for one mind, the Eastern mind, to understand the other, the Western mind, or vice versa. And Buddhism is supposed to be a product of the Eastern mind. And this is why, sometimes, we are told that it is difficult for Westerners to understand Buddhism, because it is a product of the Eastern mind, and here we are trying to understand it with a Western mind. Now speaking from my own personal experience, and I have spent altogether twenty years in the East, I have found no evidence whatever for any such belief - that there was an Eastern mind as distinct from a Western mind; or an Eastern psychology as distinct from a Western psychology. I found wherever I went, whether I was associating with Indians or Tibetans or Mongolians or Thais or Sinhalese - or even Europeans - I could understand them, and they could understand me. Buddhism, admittedly, is difficult to understand, but not because it's a product of the Eastern mind. It's difficult to understand because it is the product of the **enlightened** mind; a mind which transcends the conditionings of both the East and the West.

Another popular myth which I might as well mention while I'm at it is that there is a spiritual East and a materialistic West. But this is another myth. The West is no more materialistic than the East. One might say that the West is simply more successful(?) - and let us put a question mark here - in pursuit of materialism.

However, back to Western Buddhists and the four main Eastern Buddhisms. These four Eastern Buddhisms are differentiated from one another mainly in two ways. First of all according to the school of Buddhism, that is to say the doctrinal school of Buddhism, to which they belong. And secondly according to the culture, the regional culture, even national culture, with which they are associated. And the second of these is probably the more important, at least from a practical point of view [since, as a consequence, the Buddhism that most people come across in the West although Buddhist] actually in content, in practice is not Buddhism. In fact we could say that many Western Buddhists never encounter Buddhism at all. What they in fact encounter is a particular school or sub-school of Buddhism associated with a particular national or regional culture. For instance the Theravada, which is associated with South East Asian - specifically Sinhalese - culture, this is what we experience, this is what we encounter. Or Zen associated with Japanese culture, and so on. Actually the situation is even more complicated than that. So how is that? Well, Buddhism arose in India. India has got a very rich, a very powerful, a very ancient culture. So from the beginning Buddhism, as soon as it emerged from the Buddha's mouth, so to speak, was associated with Indian culture, indeed with Indian cultures. Because in the course of the fifteen hundred years that Buddhism was alive in India Indian culture went through several different phases of development, each with very strongly marked characteristics.

So from the beginning Buddhism was associated with Indian culture. And then Buddhism as we say 'went' from India to China. But what actually happened? Did Buddhism, just Buddhism, go from India to China? What went from India was Buddhism plus **Indian culture**. And then in China Buddhism assumed certain Chinese characteristics, culturally speaking. And then of course Buddhism went to Japan. But again what was it that actually happened? What went from China to Japan was Buddhism plus Indian culture, plus Chinese culture, And in Japan Buddhism assumed certain Japanese cultural characteristics. So today Japanese Buddhism consists of Buddhism plus Indian culture, plus Chinese culture, plus Japanese culture; and it is this 'Buddhism', inverted commas, which goes, as we say, to the United States of America, or Britain or even New Zealand. And sometimes the Buddhism succeeds in penetrating all these layers of culture which are superimposed upon it; sometimes it does **not**. Sometimes it does not.

So what is the position; what is one to do? What does the Western Buddhist have to do when confronted by these different Eastern Buddhisms? Well, the first thing that he has to do is to learn to distinguish what is really Buddhism from what is South East Asian or Chinese or Japanese or Tibetan or even Indian culture. Not that there is anything wrong with any of those cultures. They are often very beautiful, very beautiful indeed, but they're not the same thing as Buddhism; not the same thing as the Dharma. So that when we say that the FWBO is a **Buddhist** spiritual movement, we do not mean that we've adopted some particular form of Eastern culture. Though at the same time this does not necessarily mean that we reject Eastern Buddhist culture. **Some** of that culture; some of that culture does express the spirit of Buddhism. Take for instance the Japanese art, the very beautiful, the very inspiring art of flower arrangement. This surely expresses something of the spirit of Buddhism, and in the FWBO we are very happy to adopt **this** kind of Eastern culture. But we adopt it because it is Buddhist, because it helps us in our spiritual development, not just because it's Eastern, not just because it is Japanese.

Some Western Buddhists unfortunately are unable to make this distinction between Buddhism and Eastern culture. They **think** that they are attracted in some cases by Buddhism, but in reality they are attracted not by Buddhism, they are attracted to an exotic oriental culture. Sometimes they think that they are trying to be Buddhists, but in reality they are just trying to **be** - which means to copy - Indians or Japanese or Tibetans; or at least to look like them. This is quite harmless, of course. There's no harm in dressing up as an Indian or pretending to be a Japanese or imagining that you are a Tibetan. It's quite harmless except to the extent that it represents an alienation from one's own culture. It has nothing to do with actually being a Buddhist in any real sense.

But in some parts of the West, and certainly in England and I suspect in the States, we have a very strange situation because all four main Eastern Buddhisms have been introduced, and they all have Western followers. And all these followers are supposedly Buddhists. But they all follow different Eastern cultures: South East Asian, Japanese, Tibetan, as the case may be. So they are unable to live together. They are unable to practise Buddhism together even though they are all Western Buddhists.

And we had an example of this sort of thing in the FWBO some years ago not very long after we had started. Not far from London there was a group of English Zen - Japanese Zen - Buddhists, and they wanted to join one of our FWBO communities. So after quite a bit of discussion we agreed, though personally I had my doubts and misgivings. But anyway we thought that we would give it a try. So this group of English Zen Buddhists, I think there were four or five of them, they moved into our community.

But almost at once a difficulty arose because they refused to join in the Puja, that is to say the evening devotions. And why was this? Because our Puja, our FWBO Puja was in Pali and English; mostly in English. And their guru had told them, so they said, that they should do their Puja only in Japanese. So while the other members of the community did their Puja in English and Pali in the shrine, these English or Japanese Zen Buddhists all waited outside; they wouldn't even sit in the shrine and listen, and their guru incidentally was an English woman who had spent some time in Japan. So this was the sort of situation that one had.

I'll give you just another example connected with this same guru. Japanese culture is what sociologists call a 'shame' culture. In Japanese culture shame is used as a technique of social control. Our Western Christian culture is probably a guilt culture. *[Laughter]* In Japan, that is to say in traditional Japan, suppose a young person - and in Japan, in traditional Japan one gathers a young person is very much a young person - suppose a young person misbehaves; suppose he is noisy or he slams the door. What happens? An older person will proceed to imitate him; greatly exaggerating. If the young person has been noisy the older person will be four or five times as noisy. If he has slammed a door the older person must go and slam it three or four times very, very loudly. So the young person then feels very ashamed. He realises that he has been corrected in that way, he feels very ashamed and he desists from that particular misbehaviour. Now this technique, this technique of control through shame, was transferred to the Japanese Zen temple. If the disciple misbehaved, the master imitated. Supposing during the meditation the disciple slouched, well the master if he noticed would immediately slouch right over. The disciple would notice, feel very ashamed, pull himself up straight, and in that way he'd learn. And this technique was called 'mirroring'. I don't know if anyone's heard of it. It's very well known, very popular in Japanese Zen Buddhism. It's called Mirroring.

So the guru I am talking about happened to pass through London some years ago. And it seems she didn't like very much what some of the English Buddhists, who hadn't been to Japan - poor creatures - were doing. So, what did she do? She started mirroring them. She started mirroring them. But the English Buddhists, not being Japanese after all, didn't understand what she was doing. Her head monk, who I believe was an American who was accompanying her, also started mirroring. I remember that he thought that English Buddhists on retreat ate far too much. So just to teach them a lesson he started mirroring them. He took a second helping of everything just to show them how greedy they were. But what happened? The English Buddhists thought that the poor fellow must be hungry! So they gave him a third helping of everything. *[Laughter]* And the guru, I was told, was quite annoyed. She said the English Buddhists were very stupid. They couldn't appreciate her wonderful mirroring technique. But one might say - perhaps one shouldn't say - that she was the stupid one because she couldn't understand that mirroring was a part of Japanese culture. It had nothing to do with Buddhism. And it wasn't appropriate in the West.

Anyway there is no need to labour the point. It should be sufficiently clear by now.

The FWBO is definitely a **Buddhist** spiritual movement, but it does not confuse Buddhism with any of its Eastern cultural forms. In the same way, the FWBO does not identify itself exclusively with any particular sect or school of Buddhism. Not with the Hinayana; not with the Mahayana; not with the Vajrayana. Not with the Theravada, or Zen, or Shin, or Nyingmapa. It's just Buddhist. At the same time it does not reject any of the sects or schools that have arisen in the course of the long history of Buddhism. It appreciates them all and it seeks to learn from them all. It takes from them whatever it finds contributes to the spiritual development of the individual in the West. For instance in the FWBO we teach, as regards meditation practices, the Mindfulness of Breathing, the mindfulness of in and out breathing; and the Metta Bhavana, the development of universal loving kindness. These practices, these techniques, we take from the Theravada tradition. We recite the Sevenfold Puja; this is from the Indian Mahayana. We chant mantras; this is from the Tibetan tradition. And then of course there is our emphasis, our famous emphasis, on the importance of work in the spiritual life. And this is of course a Zen, even a typically Zen, a characteristically Zen emphasis. You know the great Zen master in China said a day of no working is a day of no eating. I don't know whether any of our Friends have ever gone without eating for a day, but I think they don't very often go without working for a day. So we also have certain emphases, in the FWBO, which are not found in any extant form of Buddhism. There's an emphasis on right livelihood. There's an emphasis on Going for Refuge. And then there is our principle of 'Back to the Beginning', or 'More and More of Less and Less' which needs a whole talk to itself so I'll say no more about it now.

But at the same time, though we take what we need for our spiritual development from all these sources, our attitude is not one of eclecticism. Eclecticism is a purely intellectual attitude. We take different things, yes, from different forms of Buddhism according to our actual spiritual needs - not in accordance with any preconceived intellectual ideas. We take whatever will help us grow under the conditions of Western life. And we adopt much the same sort of attitude towards the Buddhist scriptures. There's an enormous number of these, as you have already gathered; we can't possibly read them all. In fact we are not meant to. They represent the same basic teachings in varying degrees of expansion and contraction. So we read and we study intensively whatever we find most helpful to us in the spiritual life. And in the FWBO study texts are drawn from all sources: from Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan. For instance, the *Udana*, which is found in the Pali *Tipitaka*; the *Bodhicaryavatara*, which is a Sanskrit Mahayana work compiled in India; the *Dhyana for Beginners*, which is based on the lectures of a great Chinese master. And then *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, the work of a Tibetan master; the *Songs of Milarepa*, the songs of one of the greatest Tantric yogins of the Buddhist tradition.

So from all this, in these various ways we can begin to see the nature of the relation between Western Buddhists - or at least Western Buddhists in the FWBO - and Eastern Buddhism, that is to say the various Eastern Buddhisms.

But perhaps at this point another question arises. It's agreed - let us say - that the FWBO does not follow Eastern Buddhism as such; does not follow Eastern Buddhist culture. But the question is, is it trying to create a distinctively **Western** Buddhism? Is it trying to express Buddhism in terms of **Western** culture? Well, the answer is both yes and no. It depends on what one understands by Western culture. We are not against Western culture as such. I mentioned earlier on that some people in the FWBO are inspired, and greatly inspired, by Goethe, Blake and so on; and this is completely acceptable because there are affinities between different aspects of the work of these great poets and philosophers, and certain aspects of Buddhism. But this is not true of Western culture as a whole, especially current Western culture, including our social and our economic systems. Western culture as a whole, as it at present stands, is quite incompatible with Buddhism. So there's no question of our seeking to express Buddhism in terms of that culture. It's more a question of Buddhism, Western Buddhism, finding expression in a new Western culture: that is to say a culture which would in its own way, on its own level, help people to develop - if not spiritually at least psychologically. And in creating that culture we would of course keep the best elements of the traditional Western culture. But a lot would have to go.

So far as the FWBO is concerned there's no question of our simply finding a little niche for ourselves in the contemporary Western world without trying in any way to change that world. It's not just a question of studying Buddhism and then in all practical matters doing what everybody else does, living as everybody else lives. This is one of the things that makes the FWBO a new Buddhist movement - that it isn't content to inhabit a little niche.

Last week I mentioned that the FWBO was founded in 1967 in England, and I mentioned that it was different from the existing Buddhist groups then in England, in fact perhaps in the West generally. And this is one of the things that make it different, that it isn't, so to speak, a niche Buddhism. In England when the FWBO was started there were two different kinds of Buddhist groups. First of all, there were the groups run by Eastern Buddhists who had come over for that purpose, that is to say Sinhalese Buddhists, Tibetans, Thais and so on. These all propagated Buddhism in a particular Eastern cultural form or setting. And sometimes I'm afraid they propagated Eastern culture rather than Buddhism. And secondly, there were groups run by English Buddhists, and these tended simply to study Buddhism, to read books, listen to lectures; and maybe in some cases practise a little meditation - not very much. I remember being told on my return to London in 1964 by a leading Buddhist in London that English Buddhists weren't able to practise more than five minutes' meditation at a time; and I was on no account to try to give them more, it would be just too much for them. So that was the level, that was the standard at that time. People tended simply to study Buddhism, read books - lots and lots of books - about Buddhism, hear lots and lots of lectures, talk about Buddhism, practise a very little meditation (in **some** cases); but in their everyday life they lived just like everybody else. Everybody else, that is to say, of the same class which was usually of course the middle class. They had the same social, the same economic, the same political ideas and ideals as the non-Buddhists of their own class. Being a Buddhist didn't make any difference to them in any of these areas, and usually they didn't even practise Right Livelihood, didn't even think of practising it. Not only that; they studied Buddhism, yes; but often they didn't study it from the Buddhist point of view. In many cases they didn't even think of themselves as Buddhists. They studied Buddhism, strange as it may sound, from the Christian point of view. Or at least with unconscious Christian conditioning.

This is still going on. Only yesterday, only yesterday I got a letter from one of our friends, one of our Upasakas in London: from Sukhavati in fact - from our London Buddhist Centre - and apparently a group of students with their tutor had paid a visit to Sukhavati from the Open University; there were four or five students with their tutor. And apparently they had all sorts of strange ideas about Buddhism and were completely confused, including the tutor who was a Methodist minister. And their text book, the text book for their course on Buddhism, for their study of Buddhism, was written by a Belgian Jesuit priest. [Laughter] And according to this text book, and this is what they had learned, the Theravada was annihilationist; the Mahayana was corrupt and degenerate; and the Vajrayana was just magical nonsense. So, no wonder that they were confused. But this is still the sort of thing which is going on in these so-called academic circles,

But at any rate when I returned to England in 1964 and then from 1964 to about 1967 it was almost as bad in ostensibly Buddhist circles. English Buddhists, for instance, studied the Pali scriptures, and they said that the Pali scriptures were the word of the Buddha. But then they went on to say that **only** the Pali scriptures were the word of the Buddha, and the other Buddhist scriptures were not the word of the Buddha, and that one couldn't question anything that the Pali scriptures said. Because the Buddha was enlightened and the Buddha had said everything that was in the Pali scriptures. In other words these English Buddhists were in fact Pali fundamentalists. They adopted towards the Pali scriptures the same sort of attitude that Christian, especially Protestant, fundamentalists adopt towards the Bible. They transferred their Christian attitudes from Christianity to Buddhism. There was no real change.

So the FWBO, I hope, adopts a different attitude. It tries to see Buddhism from the Buddhist point of view. It seeks to create a new Western civilisation and culture, one which will express Buddhist spiritual values, one which will help the individual to develop instead of hindering him; which will create a spiritual community and a new society. And I may be able to say something about that next week when we consider '*Commitment and Spiritual Community*'.

Meanwhile, this week we've covered quite a lot of ground. We've seen that the FWBO is a Buddhist movement in the sense that it's concerned with the individual. We've seen that Buddhism, according to the Buddha, is whatever helps the individual to grow. We've further seen that Buddhism is not limited to whatever is labelled 'Buddhism'. At the same time that it's not just a vague general principle of growth, but that it is embodied in specific spiritual principles and practices - practices such as those of meditation. We have also seen that the FWBO distinguishes sharply, if you like, between Buddhism and Eastern Buddhist culture. And that it is not limited to any sectarian form of Buddhism, but appreciates and seeks to learn from, to gain inspiration from, all forms of Buddhism without exception; and that it seeks to create a new Western culture based on genuine Buddhist values; that it seeks to see Buddhism **in terms** of Buddhism - that is to the individual evolving in the direction of what we can only call Enlightenment.

And from all this, the nature of the relation between Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism should be clear. It should be clear in what sense the FWBO is a new Buddhist spiritual movement.

Checked October 2000