

Lecture 145: on Being All Things to All Men

Mr Chairman and friends.

Some of you, whether you've already seen the posters for these talks, or whether you've just heard the Chairman's announcement of the title of this talk this evening, some of you might be thinking that the title of tonight's talk has a rather familiar ring, "being all things to all men". It's as though one has heard it before. You might even be wondering which particular text, which particular Buddhist text, which particular sutra, this expression, this phrase, "Being all things to all men" comes from. Well I'm sorry in a way to have to inform you that it doesn't come from a Sutra at all. I must confess it comes from the Bible. In fact it comes from the New Testament. And if we turn as I trust we rarely do, to the New Testament, as I trust we rarely have need to do except when perhaps preparing talks, we find that the apostle Paul, of whom some of you might have heard, is writing to some people called the Corinthians, and these Corinthians in case you're not quite sure, these Corinthians were the Christians of the city of Corinth. It seems, reading between the lines so to speak that Paul, the apostle Paul had been having a certain amount of trouble with some of these Christians, some of these Corinthians, these Christians in the city of Corinth. And it seems as though he's in a way defending himself in the course of this letter, this epistle as it's usually called, defending himself against some charge or other.

So in the course of his defence, so to speak, he says, by way of justification it seems, that he has made himself every man's servant, in order to win over as many people as possible; in order to win over the Jews he has become like a Jew; in order to win over the Gentiles, that is to say the non-Jews, the heathen, he has become like a gentile. In short he says, he has become all things to all men, that happily some might be saved. Now you may be wondering why I have used a quotation from the bible, a quotation from the New Testament, from this letter of Paul, as the heading of a talk on a theme from a Mahayana Buddhist scripture. Well you could say that I've done it as an Upayakausalya - as a "skilful means" - after all some people like the sound of these old biblical, especially authorized version, Jacobean, post Shakespearian, phrases, even without knowing perhaps always exactly where they do come from. After all, they have become for better or for worse, a part of our English language.

So it might be that some people at least might be all the more inclined to come along to hear a talk with this sort of title, with this sort of familiar ring to the title. And moreover of course, the theme of tonight's talk is in fact Upayakausalya, or "skilful means" so that in a way, it seemed quite appropriate to give as a title to this talk, or rather to give this talk a title which was in a way itself a soft of skilful means, at least so far as some people are concerned.

So the theme tonight which has been indicated by this title, comes of course from *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*, or Teaching of Vimalakirti. As we saw not only last week, but also the week before, *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* is a Mahayana scripture. It's based on oral tradition, coming down from the time of the Buddha. It teaches the Bodhisattva Ideal, that is to say, it teaches the ideal of attaining supreme perfect enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. Last week our theme was taken from the first chapter of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* - last week you may recollect, those of you who were here, the scene was laid in Amarapali's garden or Amarapali's Park, on the outskirts of the city of Vaisali in North Eastern Indian, some 2500 years ago. And you may remember that on that occasion so to speak, we -met the Buddha, we met Ratnakara the Bodhisattva, as well as some 500 Licchavi youths, as well as Arahats, Bodhisattvas, and so on, all of whom made up the great assembly listening to the Buddha.

So this week, our theme is taken from the second chapter of the work, the second chapter of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*. On this occasion, in this chapter the scene is laid in Vaisali itself. And this time, this week, this evening, we meet Vimalakirti himself whose name means something like "immaculate repute", or perhaps better still "stainless glory". And he is described in the Sutra, in this chapter as an advanced Bodhisattva. In later chapters of the text as we may see later on in the series, he is described in even more exalted terms. But in this chapter, in chapter 2, he is described as follows.

The Sutra says of him,

"He was liberated through the transcendence of wisdom, having integrated his realization with skill in liberative technique, he was expert in knowing the thoughts and actions of living beings; and knowing the strength or weakness of their faculties, and being gifted with unrivalled eloquence, he taught the Dharma appropriately to each; having applied himself energetically to the Mahayana, he understood it, and accomplished his tasks with great finesse. He lived with the department of a Buddha, and his superior intelligence was wide as an ocean. He was praised honoured and commended by all the Buddhas, and was respected by Indra, Brahma, and all the Lokapalas. In order to develop living beings with his skill in liberative technique, he lived in the great city of Vaisali."

This is what the text in chapter 2 has to say about him. The translation by the way, the translation which I've read, is Thurman's translation about which I said a few words in the first talk. But you noticed this expression 'skill in liberative technique'; this is Thurman's translation of 'Upaya-kausalya' which is usually rendered as 'skilful means' and Thurman says in a note that he has chosen the word 'technique' in preference to the more usual, 'method or 'means' because it has a stronger connotation of efficacy in our technological world. Well, this may well be so, but I can't help wondering whether it connotes the right kind of efficacy in this particular connection, but however we will be going into that a bit later on.

The text goes on to describe Vimalakirti's practice of the Six Paramitas, the Six Perfections of the Bodhisattva. It says... perhaps I should just remind you what the Six Paramitas or Six perfections are so that you can follow this passage of the text more easily. The Six Paramitas of the Bodhisattva are first of all: generosity, then morality, then patience and tolerance we may say, then vigour or energy, concentration and meditation and finally, wisdom. So describing his practice as a Bodhisattva of these Paramitas or perfections, the text says:

"His wealth was inexhaustible for the purpose of sustaining the poor and the helpless; he observed a pure morality in order to protect the immoral; he maintained tolerance and self-control in order to reconcile beings who are angry, cruel, violent and brutal; he blazed with energy in order to inspire people who are lazy; he maintained concentration, mindfulness and meditation in order to sustain the mentally troubled; he attained decisive wisdom in order to sustain the foolish."

Now this is very important of course; the general description of Vimalakirti, the description of his practice of the Six Paramitas, the Six Perfections but we still haven't come to the real Vimalakirti so to speak. And we come to him now in a quite long passage, part of which I am going to read. The text says here:

"He" (that's is to say Vimalakirti) "wore the white clothes of the layman, yet lived impeccably like a religious devotee. He lived at home but remained aloof from the realm of desire, the realm of pure matter and the immaterial realm. He had a son, a wife, and female attendants yet always maintained continence. He appeared to be surrounded by servants, yet lived in solitude. He appeared to be adorned with ornaments, yet always was endowed with all the auspicious signs and marks; he seemed to eat and drink yet always took nourishment from the taste of meditation; he made his appearance at the field of sports and the casinos but his aim was always to mature those people who are attached to games and gambling; he visited the fashionable heterodox teachers, yet always kept unswerving loyalty to the Buddha; he understood the mundane and transcendental sciences and esoteric practices yet always took pleasure in the delights of the Dharma; he mixed in all crowds yet was respected as foremost of all; in order to be in harmony with people he associated with elders, with those of middle age and with the young, yet always spoke in harmony with the Dharma; he engaged in all sorts of businesses yet had no interest in profit or possessions; to train living beings he would appear at crossroads and on street corners and to protect them, he participated in government.

To turn people away from the Hinayana and to engage them in the Mahayana, he appeared among listeners and teachers of the Dharma; to develop children he visited all the schools; to demonstrate the evils of desire he even entered the brothels; to establish drunkards in correct mindfulness he entered all the cabarets."

It's a rather vivid translation you will agree! And there is quite a bit more to the same effect but I think we've already got, with the help of these few passages, a sufficiently clear and vivid picture of Vimalakirti, 'Stainless Glory', a picture of what was most characteristic of him, and the passage - this whole sort of descriptive passage about Vimalakirti - concludes by saying: "Thus lived the Licchavi Vimalakirti in the great city of Vaisali, endowed with an infinite knowledge of skill in liberative technique" (again Thurman's translation) in other words endowed with skilful means and the text goes on to describe how out of this very means, Vimalakirti manifests himself as sick, as ill and it is this sickness which leads to Manjusri's visit, as we saw last week and I think the week before also, and it's therefore this sickness of Vimalakirti's, this assumed sickness of Vimalakirti's, which is the starting point of the whole action of the sutra; but we are not concerned with that this week. We concerned with the picture of Vimalakirti that has emerged, we are concerned with the picture of Vimalakirti as he lived in the great city of Vaisali.

The main point of this picture as it's emerged so far is that Vimalakirti met everybody at his own level; met everybody even in his own environment, on his own ground, so that Vimalakirti in a far wider and deeper sense than Saint Paul was 'all things to all men'. Now the Mahayana, Mahayana Buddhism, attaches very great importance to this particular capacity, this particular quality, this ability to be all things to all men; it attached great importance to what technically was called 'Upayakausalya' or 'skilful means'; so much so in fact that 'skilful means' is ranked, is reckoned, as the seventh Paramita, the seventh Perfection. And as such as the seventh Perfection it became for the Mahayana the subject of an exhaustive study. And it was held, in the Mahayana tradition, that 'Upaya-kausalya' - skilful means - the practice of skilful means consisted essentially in the practice or the employment of three things.

First of all what were called the four 'Sangrahavastus' or elements of conversion; secondly, the four 'Pratisamvids' or analytical knowledges and thirdly, the 'Dharanis' or magical formulae.

I am going to say this evening something about each of these in turn because, between them, they'll give us a good idea of what skilful means really is, what it really is all about. But first of all I want to see why it is that the Mahayana, why it is that Mahayana Buddhism attaches such great importance to skilful means.

Last week, you may recollect, we saw that it's no use, no use at all, the Bodhisattva creating a pure land by his magic power - whether literally or metaphorically - and trying to hold people in it indefinitely in a sense almost by force; it's no use because people don't want to stay in the pure land indefinitely. It's all right for a little visit, it's all right for a weekend, but not to stay there indefinitely, not even to stay there for very long, people don't want that. They don't feel ready for the pure land, not just yet; they don't feel quite at home in it. So, as we also saw last week, the pure land has to be a joint creation; it has to be built by a number of Bodhisattvas working together; that is to say by a number of people inspired by the same ideal, the ideal of supreme perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all. In the same way, it's no use the Bodhisattva, however sincere, however well intentioned, approaching everybody every single man or woman in the same way, the same manner; it's no use the Bodhisattva trying to speak to everybody in, as it were, the same language, least of all, we may say, speak to them all in his own special Bodhisattva idiom. People are very diverse indeed; this is something which one realises more and more the older, the longer that one lives, people are very diverse - they have very different backgrounds. Buddhadasa gave you some glimpse of my own particular background, I don't think it's very similar probably to the background of anybody else this evening. We've all got our different background, our different conditioning; we've got our different of looking at things, our different attitudes of various kinds. We live under different conditions, under different circumstances, we've got different occupations, different interests, different tastes, different prejudices, we've even got different virtues. So the Bodhisattva to be effective, to be a real Bodhisattva - and a Bodhisattva who is not effective is not a Bodhisattva at all - the Bodhisattva has to take all this into consideration. In order to communicate with people he has to speak to them

in their own language, literally and metaphorically; more than that, in order to be able to speak to them at all in any way, in any sense, he has to establish contact with them and in order to establish contact with them, he has to appear like one of themselves; he has to 'be all things to all men'. And Vimalakirti exemplifies this and he exemplifies it, we may say, probably more than any other figure in the whole of Mahayana Buddhist literature with the possible exception of the Buddha himself. Vimalakirti appears among people like one of themselves; he appears among businessmen as a businessman, he appears among government officials a government official and above all, he appears as a layman among laymen. In reality of course he is quite different from other people, in reality he's an advanced Bodhisattva. But he doesn't make a point of being different. He doesn't as it were insist upon it: he doesn't insist upon being different. He doesn't appear, we may say, among people wearing his Bodhisattva gear so to speak. He doesn't appear among people nodding his three heads and waving his four arms, which he undoubtedly has, though this is what people expect. Very often, this is the sort of thing that people expect. They think that if someone is spiritually advanced, he will appear different from others in some rather obvious, striking, peculiar, eccentric, sort of way.

I've got a little story that illustrates this. It's a story from my Indian experience, in fact it's a story from my Calcutta experience. When I was in India, when I was in Calcutta, as I sometimes was from time to time many years ago, I happened to get to know a Bengali lady, who was quite religiously minded. And one day she told me an incident from her own early life, her own early experience. She told me that when she was a very little girl, I think when she was about seven or eight, her mother had once taken her to see the holy mother, that is to say Sharada Devi, the Consort of the very well known, the very famous Bengali mystic, Sri Rama Krishna. Sharada Devi by the way outlived him by many years, and she was believed to be in her own right a very advanced person spiritually speaking. So my friend's mother had told the little girl that they were going to see a real goddess, a Devi; "Devi" in Sanskrit, "Devi" in the Indian languages generally, can mean a lady, but it can also mean "a goddess", it can also mean a sort of spiritual person. So they were going to see a Devi, a real goddess. So the little girl - after all, she was only seven or eight - she was very excited at the prospect of seeing a real goddess; so far she had only seen them in the temples, only seen images of them. But here she was going to see a real goddess, and she'd heard, she'd read, quite a lot about goddesses, and at last she was actually going to see one. So the visit took place, and when they got back home from the visit, her mother asked her how she'd enjoyed it. So my friend said that she'd complained to her mother very bitterly. She said "You told me that we were going to see a real goddess, but all we saw was a little old widow wearing a white sari". So she told me that she'd been so very disappointed because she'd expected to see a real goddess. She said she'd expected to see the Holy mother much larger than life, with at least eight arms and with fire coming out of her mouth, just like one of these Bengali goddesses that you can see in Calcutta.

So we're usually unable to appreciate the fact that someone is spiritually advanced, if they just look like any other person - in this case the little girl was unable to appreciate the fact that Sharada Devi was a spiritually advanced person because she looked just like any other old Bengali widow.

So the Bodhisattva appears, appears like other people, but at the same time he doesn't make a point of being like other people. He doesn't insist upon that either. He doesn't act ordinary in a self-conscious sort of way. He is not like, we may say, those liberal Christian clergymen who remove their dog collar, go along to the local and try to behave as though they were one of the lads, up to a point. The Bodhisattva doesn't go around earnestly assuring people that he's just like everybody else. We could say that the Bodhisattva is simply himself. On the one hand, he doesn't behave in a special Bodhisattva-like manner. On the other, he doesn't simply pretend to be ordinary. He is ordinary; at the same time, he is a Bodhisattva. He is himself. And because he is being himself, he is able to approach people in a natural unself-conscious sort of way. Because he is able to approach people, he can establish contact with them. And because he can establish contact with them, he can communicate with them. There is no question of employing a special sort of technique, not even a liberative technique, and that's why I don't think that Thurman's translation of "Upaya" as "liberative technique" is a very good one. It makes it sound as though the Bodhisattva has some sort of trick up his sleeve, or as though he tries to win friends and influence people in a smart Dale Carnegie sort of way. Even the words "method" and "means" have that sort of connotation to a slight extent. But "Upaya", skilful means, is not really like that at all. "Upaya",

skilful means, is essentially a question of really being with people. it's a question of empathy, it's a question of being open to people, and encouraging them to be open to you, open with you.

There are several other misunderstandings about the nature of skilful means, especially as exemplified by Vimalakirti himself. In particular, there is a misunderstanding in connection with the fact that Vimalakirti lived as a layman, but we'll go into that a little later on.

So we've seen why it is that the Mahayana attaches great importance to skilful means. We must now turn to skilful means itself; that is to say skilful means considered as the seventh Paramita, the seventh Perfection. It's time I fulfilled my promise to say something about each of the three things in the practice or employment of which Upaya or skilful means consists. So first of all, I hope you're not going to be too put off by the technical terms, the Sanskrit and all that, we'll just take it in our stride.

First of all, the four Sangrahavastus or "elements of conversion". "Elements of conversion is the usual translation here. It's the one that I have used in the "Survey of Buddhism". But Thurman, the American translator of the text, Thurman has suggested a much better alternative translation, one that in fact brings out the real meaning of the term, the real meaning of "Sangrahavastu". He suggests it should be translated "means of unification". That is to say, means of unification of the spiritual community, or as he explains it, the four ways in which a Bodhisattva forms a group of people, united by their common aim of practising the Dharma. After all, the Bodhisattva's aim in making use of skilful means, in being himself the skilful means, is not simply to lead people to enlightenment individually - his aim is to enlist their co-operation in building the Buddhland for the benefit of all.

So what are these four means of unification? First of all, there's Dana, or giving. A very old friend indeed we may say. In fact such an old friend that you might be surprised to find Dana being mentioned here as part of the seventh Paramita. After all, Dana has a whole Paramita to itself so to speak, because Dana, or giving, or generosity is the first Paramita. But here, Dana has a special function to perform. The function of establishing positive contact with people. The function of creating spiritual friendship. The function of helping to form a spiritual community. Now we don't usually think of Dana in this way. We usually think of Dana in a more utilitarian way, so to speak: we give people something because they need it. But here, it's not quite like that, at least, not in the narrow sense. You give people things because you like them. You give people things because you want to be spiritual friends with them; because you want to form a spiritual community with them. Not of course that you give in a calculating sort of way, just in order to bring about those particular results. The whole process of giving in this way is completely natural, completely spontaneous: by giving someone a present, you give expression to your special awareness of them. You give expression to your positive feeling towards them. You give expression to your genuine concern for them. Giving in fact, is a form of communication. We could even formulate a general principle here, even formulate a sort of aphorism: we could say a spiritual community is characterized by the constant exchange of presents amongst its members. The exchange of presents strengthens the spiritual community. It's a natural expression of the life of the spiritual community. Not that you give to him because he gives to you, you all just naturally feel like giving to one another, so you express that feeling by the actual giving of gifts.

All right, second. The second means of unification is also something that might already be a little familiar. It's "Priyavadita" or "loving speech". I hope the word "loving" doesn't put you off. It could also be rendered as "affectionate speech". The Bodhisattva establishes contact with people by speaking to them in an emotionally positive manner. By speaking to them kindly. Affectionate speech therefore is the rule within the spiritual community. It's the rule among those who are engaged in building the Buddha Land. The Bodhisattva isn't afraid of giving expression to his affection for others verbally. He isn't afraid of letting other people know that he likes them. He isn't even afraid of telling them to their face that he likes them, just in case there's any doubt about it. Because, after all, some people find it very difficult to believe that somebody actually likes them. It might come as quite a shock to them even, because they aren't quite used to that sort of thing. But it's important to understand what is really meant by affectionate speech. it doesn't necessarily involve calling everybody "dear" or "darling". I heard something on the radio, just a little snippet a few days ago, an extract from some play, or some movie, I don't know, but someone with an

America accent was saying "I'm going to kill you right now, darling"! Not that addressing people as "dear" or "darling" is altogether excluded of course, but loving speech, speech certainly doesn't mean speaking in a weak, sentimental, sickly sort of way. The word, "priya" usually means just love, affection, in a quite ordinary sense, but here in we mustn't take this too literally. We have to consider the context. "Loving speech", "priya-vadita" or "affectionate speech" is after all practised by the Bodhisattva. It's practised as a means of helping to create the spiritual community, nothing less. It forms part of the seventh Paramita. In this context therefore, "loving speech" is the outcome, is the expression of transcendental wisdom, Prajna, because transcendental wisdom is the preceding, the sixth Paramita, so the love to which the Bodhisattva gives verbal expression, priya-vadita, is not just love in the ordinary sense, it's not ordinary human affection, it's not ordinary human friendliness, much less still is it a feeling of sexual attraction, or simple gregariousness. Here, in this context, love is an expression of spiritual insight. We may say that the Bodhisattva's loving speech is the expression of his delighted awareness of people's spiritual potential; his delighted awareness of the fact that they can grow, that they can grow together.

Thirdly, the third means of unification, "artha-carya" literally, "doing good". Doing good, that is to say, to others. it can also be translated as "beneficial activity" that is to say, activity for the benefit of others. "Doing good" perhaps, in our ears, nowadays, has a slightly dubious ring, a slightly dubious connotation. It suggests the "Do-gooder" and the Bodhisattva is certainly not a "do-gooder". He's not a professional doer to people of what he thinks is good for them. So what is arthacarya or "beneficial activity" then? What is the meaning of "beneficial" in this connection? It doesn't mean what is simply of benefit in the ordinary everyday worldly sense. It means what is of benefit spiritually. It means, whatever helps people to grow. Whatever helps them to develop. Whatever helps them to attain higher and ever higher levels of being and consciousness. So the Bodhisattva practises beneficial activity by giving people the Dharma. Sharing with them his own experience of the Dharma, sharing with them in a word, himself. It's not a question of teaching the Dharma in the ordinary sense. You cannot teach the Dharma in the same sort of way that History or Arithmetic for example, are usually taught. It's not simply a question of imparting knowledge, imparting information. The Bodhisattva teaches people in a different sort of way. Not that the imparting of information is of course excluded. He teaches them by encouraging them to grow, encouraging them to develop. His beneficial activity consists in his inspiring people to lead the spiritual life. Inspiration is very important. It has been said that inspiration is the most important single factor in the whole spiritual life. You may have all the information that you require; you may have all the facilities, all the opportunities; but if you don't have the inspiration, you don't get very far. So the Bodhisattva benefits people by inspiring them. He benefits them by sparking them off. He benefits them by communicating to them the emotional positivity, the excitement, the creativity, the sheer adventure, if you like, of the spiritual life. The Bodhisattva is like a candle which lights thousands upon thousands of other candles, after which they go on burning on their own fuel. Not only that, each of them in turn lights thousand upon thousands of other candles.

So fourthly and lastly, last of the means of unification, samanarthata or "exemplification". Here, the Bodhisattva's behaviour is consistent with his teaching. In other words, his teaching of the Dharma. His behaviour exemplifies his teaching. In a time-honoured phrase, he practises what he preaches, except of course, that he doesn't preach. The Bodhisattva is the living embodiment of all those qualities, the development of which he encourages in others. So we've seen that the Bodhisattva inspires people, inspires them to lead the spiritual life. But he doesn't just go around exhorting people to be inspired in a dull, flat, lifeless sort of way. He inspires them because he is himself inspired. But here a difficulty arises. Not so much for the Bodhisattva himself perhaps, but for those who are trying to be Bodhisattvas. What happens? We have, let us say, a vision. We have a vision of the ideal, we have a vision of spiritual perfection. A vision of supreme perfect enlightenment. A vision of the Buddha Land. We have this vision, there is no doubt about it, but we are not able to live up to it. Sometimes we fall very far short of it indeed. It's not that we don't sincerely believe in it, sincerely believe in the vision, even see it, even have a glimpse of it sometimes. It's not that we don't actually see it, at least partially, at least occasionally, but we do find it very difficult indeed to transform our lives, transform our being, from top to bottom in accordance with that vision. In other words, we come up against that well known dichotomy between the path of vision, and the path of transformation.

So what does this mean? Does it mean that because we cannot live up to our own vision, we

shouldn't speak about it to other people? Shouldn't try to communicate it to other people? Not at all. All that we really have to communicate is ourselves. All that we really can communicate is ourselves. This means that we must be completely honest with people. Without honesty, there is no communication, or at least there isn't complete communication. So let us speak to people about our vision, yes; let us communicate our vision to the extent that we can. Let us communicate our efforts to transform ourselves in accordance with it, in accordance with that vision; let us even communicate whatever successes we have so far achieved. But let us also if necessary, if occasion arises, let us also communicate our failures. In this way, we communicate honestly. In this way, we communicate completely. In this way we communicate ourselves.

In any case our vision is not a vision of some fixed and finite goal, our vision is more like a vision of constant progression, constant upward movement, constant transformation. It's more like a vision of ever increasing creativity, with no perceptible limit. So speaking about our vision really means speaking about that. When we exemplify our vision, this is what we really exemplify. The exemplification does not mean being the living embodiment of a particular point in the process of spiritual development, however high that point may be. It means being the embodiment of the principle of spiritual development itself to however limited an extent. It means surely, that we are at least making an effort to evolve.

So much then for the four means of unification. Now for the second of the three things, in the practice of which, or employment of which Upaya, or skilful means, consists, that is to say the four "Pratisamvids" or "analytical knowledges". "Pratisamvids" can also be rendered "infallible penetrations". "Knowledges" in any case is not a very satisfactory translation. As we shall see, one of these four Pratisamvids is not a knowledge in the ordinary sense at all. However, as analytical knowledges, I shall be referring to the Pratisamvids. What they really are will I hope emerge as we go along.

The four Pratisamvids, the four analytical knowledges, are one of those groups of terms taken over by the Mahayana from the Hinayana, and the Mahayana modified their meaning in accordance with its own outlook to some extent. I'm going to deal with them, deal with these four Pratisamvids, these four analytical knowledges, rather more briefly than I dealt with the four means of conversion, or four means of unification, except when there is something of special interest from the Mahayana point of view.

So first of all comes Dharma-pratisamvid, or analytical knowledge of phenomena as it's called - don't take that too seriously, it can also be translated as "analytical knowledge of principles"; and it consists in the realization of the truth or the reality of things, and I'm deliberately putting it a bit, so to speak, vaguely, a realization of the truth, or reality of things, independently of any conceptual formulation. Independent of words. According to the Dasabhumika Sutra, which is one of the most important Mahayana Sutras, dealing with the ten stages of progress of the Bodhisattva, According to the Dasabhumika Sutra, this particular Pratisamvid, Dharma-pratisamvid or analytical knowledge of phenomena or principles, includes knowledge of how the different Yanas, the different ways or vehicles of the Buddhist tradition all meet together, merge in one Yana, Ekayana. So what are these Yanas, these vehicles, or ways? Essentially, they're formulations of the Buddha's teaching in accordance with the needs of different kinds of people. In other words the Yanas themselves are Upayas, or skilful means, they all eventually meet together in one Yana, because, all are concerned in one way or another with the same thing, that is to say, with the spiritual development of the individual. And the more individuals actually develop, the greater the degree to which they actually develop, the more they realize their unity with one another. The more they realize that they're all following the same path. That all the different Yanas meet together in one Yana, Ekayana. But it's possible to realize this, only if one has gone beyond conceptual formulations. Gone beyond words. Only if one is personally in contact with the truth and reality of things.

Second, "artha-pratisamvid" or analytical knowledge of meaning. Realization of the truth, or reality of things is not enough. You might have been thinking it was a great deal. It is a great deal, but it's not enough, not enough for the Bodhisattva that is. The Bodhisattva wants to communicate the

truth or reality of things to other people. He wants that people should grow. He wants that he and they should all grow together. We mustn't after all forget that the four analytical knowledges are all part of the seventh Paramita, the Perfection of skilful means. But in order to communicate, one needs a medium of communication, one needs among other things, a common, rational framework. And this common rational framework is provided by the conceptual formulations of the teaching. For example, the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, Twenty four Links, Five Spiritual Faculties, and so on. In other words, provided by what may be called, within single inverted commas, 'The Philosophy of Buddhism'. It's also provided, the medium of communication is also provided, by the various things which the Bodhisattva creates by means of his magical power, but we're not concerned with that aspect of the matter at present.

So analytical knowledge of meaning means or consists in knowledge of the conceptual formulations of the teaching. Not knowledge of them simply on their own conceptual level, not knowledge of them for their own sake as it were; it is knowledge of them as a medium of communication of the truth or reality of things. A medium for the communication of spiritual values.

Thirdly, "Nirukti-pratisamvid" or "analytical knowledge of etymology". Now you might think that it's really strange, really odd that etymology is included here - it really does seem as though we are back in the classroom. It really does seem rather odd that the Bodhisattva should be required to have knowledge of etymology. But it's not really so strange. We've seen that knowledge of the truth and reality of things is not enough. The Bodhisattva wants to communicate, so he needs a medium of communication, and therefore he needs the analytical knowledge of meaning, that is to say, knowledge of the conceptual formulations of the teaching. In the same way, the analytical knowledge of meaning itself is not enough. Knowledge of the conceptual formulations of the teaching is not enough. The Bodhisattva needs to be able to give expression to his understanding of those conceptual formulations in words. And in order to do that he must have an understanding of the meaning of words. And this involves a knowledge of their etymology. So analytical knowledge of etymology is therefore necessary. It includes knowledge of several other things besides etymology itself, for instance linguistics, public speaking and literary composition.

This particular analytical knowledge is especially associated with the figure of Manjushri or Manjughosa, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. In fact, he is the embodiment of all four analytical knowledges. Those of you who are familiar with the Manjughosa Sstuti Sadhana, will remember how the colophon of the practice ends. It ends with these words: "And through this" that is to say, through the practice, "may all living beings gain power in the Jnana of the four Pratisamvids". So clearly there's a definite reason why the text concludes in this way.

Now command of language is essential to communication at any level, unless of course we happen to be telepathic. Unfortunately, people very often have a very vague idea of the meaning of the words they use. Only too often we fall back on a limited number of expressions, which constant repetition has rendered almost meaningless. Communication therefore is severely limited. Only too often, people seem to be grunting or squeaking rather than talking! The Bodhisattva therefore needs to have knowledge of the meaning of words. He needs to know their etymology. He doesn't need to know the meaning of words in just the dictionary sense of course, though even this is not to be despised. Concepts need to be related back to the experience of truth or reality which they formulate. In the same way, words need to be related back to the concepts of which they are the expression. And it's in this that the Bodhisattva's analytical knowledge of etymology essentially consists. The Bodhisattva is never misled by words. He is never carried away by words. He never gets lost in words. And this is because he uses words to express concepts, clear concepts, just as he uses concepts to formulate spiritual experiences, spiritual realities.

Fourthly and lastly, "Pratibhana-pratisamvid" or "analytical knowledge of courage". This isn't courage in the ordinary sense. It's courage in a rather special sense. You may have personal experience of the truth and reality of things, at least to some extent; you may have conceptual formulations of that experience clearly in your mind; you may even have the words with which to express the conceptual formulations, the ideas, in your mind. But all that even is not enough. It's not enough for communication. There's one thing still needed: Courage. Courage in the sense of courage and boldness in speech. Promptitude. Wit. It's not enough to have the words. Everybody's

got the words you might say. You must have them at the very moment that they're needed. You shouldn't have to search around for the words. It's no use finding the words a week later. But what is it that prevents us finding the words the very moment, the very second that they're needed? It may be poor memory of course. But more often than not it is simply lack of courage, lack of confidence, and therefore lack of promptitude, lack of ready speech, even lack of wit. So the Bodhisattva cultivates not only the analytical knowledge of phenomena, or principles, not only the analytical knowledge of meaning, and the analytical knowledge of etymology, he also cultivates the analytical knowledge of courage. He cultivates them all as means of communication, cultivates them all as part of Upaya-Paramita, the Perfection of Skilful Means.

It might be helpful, though perhaps a little saddening, a little sobering to contrast the Bodhisattva's practice of the analytical knowledges with our own shortcomings in this respect. We have to begin with little or no experience of the truth or reality of things. Our conceptual formulations, our ideas are vague, confused, unsystematic, not to say, incoherent and even meaningless. Our command of language is pitifully weak, inadequate, clumsy and halting. We are lacking in courage and boldness of speech, except when we are ignorant of what we are talking about! It's not surprising that we have difficulty in communicating. I happened to find, when I was thinking about this talk, I happened to find these very shortcomings where one might least expect to find them. I found them on the back cover of the American edition (thank heavens it wasn't the English edition) the American edition of Luk's translation of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* itself. So I'll have something to say about this, and then proceed to the third and last of the three things in the practice or employment of which, Upaya, or skilful means, consists. That is to say the Dharanis, or magical formulae, which I'm sure you're all waiting for.

The back cover of the American edition of Luk's translation of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* contains what is known in the publishing trade as "The Blurb" - a very expressive and appropriate word! And this "blurb" contains the following sentence: "It" (that is to say *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*) "is particularly applicable to Western Buddhist students because it expounds the practice that a layman may follow". Now when I first saw this sentence I could hardly believe my eyes. I thought "well so the Inconceivable Emancipation is the practice that the layman may follow. Transforming five hundred parasols into a single great canopy that covers the entire billion world galaxy, as we saw last week, is a practice that the layman may follow; emanating a golden Bodhisattva, and sending him to a distant Buddha Land to bring back thirty two thousand enormous lion thrones and then accommodating them all in one small house, is a practice the layman can follow, etc etc. One wonders what sort of layman the blurb writer had in mind. But I'm afraid there's something almost as bad on the front inside dust jacket of Thurman's translation. Here, the blurb says, interalia, "His message" i.e. Vimalakirti's message, "is particularly appealing to our secular age, because he was a man of the world, not a monk or a saint". One would have thought that if Vimalakirti's message appealed to our secular age, it would be a sure sign that it had been misunderstood. There is so much confusion of thought in these two short sentences from the two blurbs, that one hardly knows where to begin sorting it out. It's as though the whole of the rest of one's life isn't sufficient but I will make just one point.

The first sentence claims that *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* expounds the practice that a layman may follow. The second sentence alleges that Vimalakirti was a man of the world. The reasoning, such as it is, seems to be as follows:- Vimalakirti was a layman; Vimalakirti was a man of the world. Therefore Vimalakirti's teaching expounds the practice a layman may follow. Therefore Vimalakirti's message is particularly appealing to our secular age. But Vimalakirti was a not a layman - this is the whole point of the Sutra, or at least of the chapter from which we quoted at the beginning of the talk - chapter 2. Vimalakirti lived like a layman, lived as though he was a layman, appeared to be a layman, but that was only his skilful means. In reality, he was an advanced Bodhisattva - as the text says, "he wore the white clothes of the layman, yet lived impeccably like a religious devotee; he lived at home but remained aloof from the realm of desire, the realm of pure matter and the immaterial realm; he had a son, a wife and female attendants, yet always maintained continence; he appeared to be surrounded by servants, yet lived in solitude" etc., etc. This certainly doesn't sound as though Vimalakirti literally was a layman, literally was a man of the world. It's not very difficult perhaps to see how the whole misunderstanding has arisen. The "blurb" writers, whoever they were, creatures lurking in the publisher's office somewhere, simply didn't reflect on the real meaning of the words they used. They didn't realize what was meant by

such expressions as "Layman" "Man of the world". They didn't realize that they meant one thing when applied to Vimalakirti, but quite another thing when applied to the sort of people who might buy and read the English translation of the sutra. Vimalakirti was a layman only in a formal technical sense, the others really are laymen. The blurb writers didn't reflect on the meaning of words, on the meaning of the words they used because their ideas were confused; the reasoning seems further to proceed as follows: Vimalakirti's teaching expounds the practice a layman may follow. The layman doesn't have to give up anything; he lives at home with his wife, children, job car, dog, cat, telly, mortgage. Therefore Vimalakirti's teaching can be practised without giving up anything; here we probably come to the real crux of the matter; we come to the underlying mental confusion, we come to the underlying moral weakness. You don't have to give up anything; you can practice Vimalakirti's teaching without giving up anything; you can practice the sublimest spiritual teaching of the Mahayana without giving up anything; you can practice it without changing in any way; you can practice it staying right at home. You can practice it as an ordinary layman; you can practice it as a man of the world; Why? Because Vimalakirti was an ordinary layman, Vimalakirti was a man of the world. Fortunately, Vimalakirti made it quite clear whether one can in fact practice the Dharma without giving anything up. So what is it that one is least willing to give up? Well, it's the physical body; giving up the physical body means death; it means the loss of all the pleasure that we enjoy through the body. But what does Vimalakirti have to say about the body? What is Vimalakirti's attitude towards the body? this is made clear in the second half of chapter two.

You may remember from last week that out of his skilful means Vimalakirti manifested himself as sick, as ill; and thousands of people came to inquire after his health; thousands of people of Vaisali, The text mentions the king, the king himself came, the officials, the lords, the youths, the aristocrats, the business men, the townfolk and the country folk. In other words, many kinds of laymen came to see him and this was his teaching to those laymen. He says first of all:

"Friends, this body is so impermanent, fragile, unworthy of confidence, and feeble; it is so insubstantial, perishable, short lived, painful, filled with diseases and subject to changes. Thus my friends, as this body is only a vessel of many sicknesses, wise men do not rely on it. This body is like a ball of foam, unable to bear any pressure, it is like a water bubble not remaining very long; it is like a mirage born from the appetites of the passions, it is like the trunk of the plantain tree, having no core. Alas, this body is like a machine, a nexus of bones and tendons; it is like a magical illusion consisting of falsifications; it is like a dream, being an unreal vision; it is like a reflection being the image of former actions; it is like an echo, being dependent upon conditioning; it is like a cloud, being characterised by turbulence and disillusion; it is like a flash of lightning, being unstable and decaying every moment. The body is ownerless, being the product of a variety of conditions; the body is inert like the earth, selfless like water, lifeless like fire; impersonal like the wind and non substantial like space. This body is unreal, being a collocation of the four main elements; it is void not existing as self or as self possessed; it is inanimate being like grass, trees, walls, clods of earth and hallucinations; it is insensate being driven like a windmill. It is filthy being an agglomeration of pus and excrement. It is false, being fated to be broken and destroyed in spite of being anointed and massaged. It is afflicted by the four hundred and four diseases. It is like an ancient well constantly overwhelmed by old age; its duration is never certain, certain only is its end in death. This body is a combination of aggregates, elements and sense media which are comparable to murderers, poisonous snakes and an empty town, respectively. Therefore you should be revulsed by such a body, you should despair of it and should arouse your admiration for the body of the Tathagata."

And here the teaching takes a positive turn. Here Vimalakirti describes the highest spiritual ideal; he says:

"Friends, the body of a Tathagata is the body of Dharma, born of gnosis; the body of the Tathagata is a Tathagata is born of the stores of merit and wisdom, it is born of morality, of meditation, of wisdom; of the liberations, and of the knowledge and

wisdom of liberation; it is born of love, compassion, joy and impartiality; it is born of charity, discipline and self-control; it is born of the path of ten virtues; it is born of patience and gentleness; it is born of the roots of virtue planted by solid efforts, it is born of the concentrations, the liberations, the meditations and the absorptions. It is born of learning, wisdom and liberative technique; it is born of the thirty seven aids to enlightenment; it is born of mental quiescence and transcendental analysis; it is born of the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses and the eighteen special qualities. It is born of all the transcendences." (all the perfections that is.) "It is born from sciences and super knowledges; it is born of the abandonment of evil qualities and of the collection of all good qualities. It is born of truth, it is born of truth, it is born of reality, it is born of conscious awareness. Friends, the body of a Tathagata is born of innumerable good works; towards such a body you should turn your aspirations and, in order to eliminate the sicknesses of the passions of all living beings, you should conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect, enlightenment."

So, that was Vimalakirti's teaching to the laymen.

Now, for the third and last of the three things in the practice or employment of which 'Upaya' or skilful means consists. The Dharanis or magical formulae. The Bodhisattva has practised the four means of unification; he has practised the four analytical knowledges, but there is still something that he lacks - a touch of Magic; and this is what the 'Dharanis' represent. The traditional explanation is that the Dharanis are a sort of protective mantra. Usually they are rather longer than the average mantra; they are usually given to the Bodhisattva by a friendly deity and they are supposed to protect him from any danger he might encounter in the course of his work. For instance, protect him from blurb writers! Now, there is no reason why we should not take the traditional explanation quite literally, but nonetheless, broadly speaking, the Dharanis represent just what I said; they represent that touch of magic. A touch of the inconceivable; a touch of something which is beyond words, beyond thoughts, beyond even spiritual experience itself, to the extent that that spiritual experience takes place within the dualistic subject-object framework.

Now just one word more. Tonight we have been concerned with Upaya or skilful means, but we must never forget that Buddhism itself, the Dharma itself, is an Upaya or skilful means; the greatest perhaps of all skilful means. It's whatever helps us to grow; the Dharma is whatever helps us to grow, whatever helps us to develop but it's not a skilful means, it is not the skilful means in any abstract sense. A skilful means is a skilful means only to the extent that it is actually practised, actually put into operation. It's a skilful means only to the extent that it is embodied in the life of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva we may say, the Bodhisattva himself in his interaction with other people is the skilful means. The skilful means is not to be found in any book. If we want Buddhism, if we want the Dharma to spread therefore, we must ourselves be a skilful means. We must be in contact with people; we must be in communication with people; we must try to communicate our vision; our vision of the spiritual life; our vision of what man can become; our vision of the spiritual community, our vision of the Buddha land. But we'll be able to communicate that vision only to the extent that we are generous and open in our dealings with people, only to the extent that we speak to them kindly and affectionately; only to the extent that we succeed in inspiring them, in sparking them off; only to the extent we show that we ourselves are at least making an effort to evolve. Moreover, we shall be able to communicate our vision only if we have some experience of the truth and reality of things. Only if we think clearly, only if we can express ourselves adequately, only if we are full of courage and self confidence. And above all perhaps, we will be able to communicate our vision only if we have a touch of magic, a touch of the inconceivable, the beyond words, only then shall we be truly able to be "All Things to All Men".