

## Lecture 148: The Mystery of Human Communication

Mr Chairman and friends.

In the course of the second talk, which I think some of you at least may remember, was on 'Building the Buddha Land', we saw that space is infinite. We saw also that infinite space is occupied by infinite world systems. One thousand world systems we saw make up one small universe. A thousand small universes make up one middling universe. A thousand middling universes make up one great universe. And what is called a "Buddha Land" or a "Buddha-field" "Buddha-ksetra" corresponds to one or more of these great universes. And a Buddha Land or a Buddha-field is so called because it represents, because it comprises, the sphere of influence of one particular Buddha, or enlightened one. That Buddha, so tradition informs us, is responsible for the spiritual development, the spiritual maturation of all the living beings within that particular vast area - that particular Buddha Land or Buddha-field. And Buddha Lands, or Buddha-fields, we are further informed, are mainly of two kinds: some are pure, and some are impure.

Impure Buddha Lands are those which contain, which accommodate, all six realms of sentient existence: that is to say the realms of the gods; the anti-gods or Asuras; the hungry ghosts; the beings suffering in states of hell, or perhaps we should better say purgatory; animals, and men. Pure Buddha Lands, pure Buddha-fields on the other hand, are those containing only gods and men, or only gods and Bodhisattvas. The best known of all pure lands, as we saw in the course of that talk, is Sukhavati - the Happy Land, the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, the Buddha of the West.

There beings are born from magnificent lotus flowers. As the beings within the as yet unfolded flowers become aware of where they've been reborn, then the petals open, and they find that they're in Sukhavati. And there, they've nothing to do but to listen to the Dharma - to hear the Dharma. Nothing to do but grow. Nothing to do but develop.

So much we saw in the course of the second talk in this series. And tonight, in Chapter 10 of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*, in the Chapter entitled "The Feast brought by the Emanated Incarnation" we find ourselves introduced to another Pure Land - not Sukhavati this time, but another Pure Land, and this is the Pure Land called - I'm afraid it has rather a long name as places and people in Buddhist scriptures only too often have this Pure Land is called Sarvagandhasugandha which means "Sweetly fragrant with all fragrances". Or you can also translate it as "Sweetly perfumed with all perfumes". It's located in the zenith - that is to say in the upward direction. And it's infinitely distant from our own wretched, impure Buddha Land. The text says that it is beyond as many Buddha-fields as there are sands in 42 Ganges rivers! That takes quite a bit of imagining. It's very very far indeed. And this Buddha -land, this Buddha-field, is presided over by the Buddha Sugandhakuta, which means "Heap of Fragrance" or "Heap of Perfume" and in that Buddha Land, the trees emit a wonderful fragrance - emit a fragrance we're told, that surpasses all other fragrance, whether human or divine, of all the Buddhafields, of all ten directions. We're also told that even the names of Arahats, and Pratyekabuddha are unheard of there. The Buddha Sugandhakuta we're told, teaches the Dharma to an assembly consisting exclusively of Bodhisattvas. And in that universe, in that Buddha Land, all the houses, the avenues, the parks, the palaces, are made not of brick and stone, not even of marble, not even of jewels as they often are in the Mahayana Sutras, they're all made of various perfumes. And the fragrance of the food even, eaten by those Bodhisattvas in that Pure Land pervades, permeates, innumerable universes.

So this is the description that we are given. This is the Pure Land to which we are introduced in Chapter 10 of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*. But how does this wonderful Pure Land come into the picture so to speak? What is its precise connection with *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*? What is its connection with the mystery of human communication? In order to understand that, we'll have to go back to the beginning of the chapter.

At the end of the previous Chapter, at the end of Chapter 10, we were left, you may recall, perhaps feeling rather astounded, we were left with Vimalakirti's thunder-like silence, and we might have thought that it would have been rather difficult to follow on from that. Might have thought that almost anything, however sublime, however impressive would have been an anticlimax after that tremendous climax, after the thunder-like silence of Vimalakirti. But it's not really so difficult to follow on from apparently. Not while we have Sariputra, because at the beginning of this Chapter

Sariputra is worrying again. The text says "Thereupon the Venerable Sariputra thought to himself "If these great Bodhisattvas" that is to say those actually present with him, with Vimalakirti, with Manjushri, "if these great Bodhisattvas do not adjourn before noontime, when are they going to eat?"

At the beginning of Chapter 6, Sariputra was worrying about chairs. Now he's worrying about food. But why noontime? Well, Sariputra is a monk, he's an Arahant, and Arahants apparently are monks - we're not so sure about the Bodhisattvas. And according to the Hinayana Vinaya, or monastic law, monks are supposed to finish eating before noon. otherwise they just have to wait until the following morning when they can't eat until they can clearly distinguish the lines on their own hand by means of natural light. And this rule is still observed in many parts of the Buddhist world. I know this because I observed it myself for quite a number of years, and in this connection, in connection with this rule, in connection with what some of the monks used to rather irreverently call the "twelve o'clock business", I had several interesting experiences. I noticed for instance the behaviour of some of the other monks. If food had not made its appearance by 11.30 they became very uneasy. Usually of course monks are dependent for food on the laity. Some monks I found started feeling uneasy if the food had not appeared by 10.30 And a few started worrying about lunch as soon as they'd finished breakfast. I could relate quite a number of anecdotes in this connection but we'll keep them for some other time. I'm simply concerned to give a little bit of background to Sariputra's question, the question with which Chapter 10 opens, the question about food. I should make it clear though, incidentally, that the Sariputra of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* is not really the same figure as the relatively historical Sariputra that we encounter in the pages of the Pali scriptures. He simply represents within the context of the Mahayana Sutras, the narrow, rather literalistic, Hinayana attitude or approach which had been developed in some Buddhist circles, an attitude which the Mahayana tries to correct.

So here we see Sariputra worrying about food. So once again we see Vimalakirti taking Sariputra to task. He knows what Sariputra is thinking of course, and he says,

"Reverend Sariputra, the Tathagata, the Buddha, has taught the Eight Liberations. You should concentrate on those liberations, listening to the Dharma with a mind free of preoccupations with material things; just wait a minute Reverend Sariputra, and you will eat such food as you have never before tasted".

So this is how the Pure Land is called "Sweetly Perfumed with all Perfumes", this is how it comes into the picture. Vimalakirti puts himself into a state of deep concentration. He exerts his magical power, and as a result of this the whole assembly is able to see the Pure Land called "Sweetly perfumed with all perfumes", the Pure Land of the Buddha Sugandhakuta or "Heap of Perfumes". They see it in the way that I described a few minutes ago. They see it as consisting entirely of perfumes. Now as they're all looking, as they're all gazing in wonder as you may well imagine, something happens. Something happens in the Pure Land called "Sweetly Perfumed with all Perfumes" - you notice I'm sparing you the Sanskrit.

Buddha Sugandhakuta sits down there with his Bodhisattvas to a meal. Apparently it's 11.30 in that Buddha Land too, as well as here on earth. And the meal is served by a class of deities, a class of gods called "Gandavyuha" which means "gloriously perfumed". All these deities we are told, are devoted to the Mahayana. Vimalakirti then asks if anyone would like to go to that Buddha Land and bring back some of their food. But nobody's willing to go. In fact they're restrained from offering to go by the supernatural power of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. Manjushri of course wants Vimalakirti to perform a magical feat. And this is what Vimalakirti obligingly does. By means of his magical power, he emanates an incarnation Bodhisattva, an Incarnation Bodhisattva of youthful appearance, adorned with all sorts of auspicious marks and signs, and so beautiful that he outshines the whole assembly. Now there's quite a lot that could be said about this emanated incarnation, this Bodhisattva, especially as providing a link between the Pure Land called "Sweetly Perfumed with all Perfumes" and our own world. But we must press on with the story. Vimalakirti tells the emanated Incarnation to go in the direction of the zenith. Tells him to go to the Pure Land called "Sweetly Perfumed with all Perfumes". Tells him to bow down before the Buddha Sugandhakuta, and directs him to say that Vimalakirti asks for the remains of his, the Buddha Sugandhakuta's meal, because he's directed to say, with these remains, Vimalakirti will

accomplish the Buddha-work in the universe called Saha, that is to say the universe, the Buddha Land called Saha, or "suffering" or "tribulation" which of course is our own world, our own universe.

Well to cut rather a long story short, the Emanated Incarnation, goes to that distant Buddha Land, gets the food, is in fact given it in a perfumed vessel, and brings it back to Vimalakirti and he comes back not only with the food, not only with the vessel; with him come 90 million Bodhisattvas! And Vimalakirti of course makes room for all of them in his house. And the perfume, the fragrance of the food that's been brought spreads throughout the entire great city of Vaisali, spreads in fact throughout a hundred universes, and within the city of Vaisali, everybody notices this wonderful perfume. They're amazed, they're filled with wonder, they're filled with joy, they're filled with elation and they feel purified by that, purified in body, purified in mind, and they all come flocking to Vimalakirti's house and they sit down. All the gods we're told come too - gods of the earth, gods of the Desire Realm, gods of the Realm of Pure Form, they all come, all are attracted by that wonderful fragrance, that wonderful perfume, the perfume of the food that the Emanated Incarnation has brought from that far-away Buddha Land and everybody is then given of that food to eat.

Vimalakirti says as he gives that food, as he distributes it, "Reverends eat of the food of the Tathagata, it is ambrosia, perfumed by the great compassion, but do not fix your minds on narrow-minded attitudes lest you be unable to receive its gift". Everybody then eats; everybody is of course satisfied, completely satisfied by the food, but though so much has been eaten and there are so many people, so many beings, so many tens of millions of beings, to eat the food is not at all depleted. Having eaten that food, having eaten that wonderful perfumed ambrosia, everybody experiences a wonderful bliss, a wonderful ecstasy and the perfume emanates from the pores of the skin of all of them. And the perfume that emanates is similar to that of the Pure Land called "Sweetly perfumed with all Perfumes". Vimalakirti then asks a question. He asks the Bodhisattvas who've come from that Pure Land how the Buddha Sugandhakuta teaches his Dharma; and they reply "The Tathagata" the Buddha, that is to say the Buddha of that universe, that Pure Land, "the Tathagata does not teach the Dharma by means of sound and language. He disciplines the Bodhisattvas only by means of perfumes. At the foot of each perfume tree sits a Bodhisattva and the trees emit perfumes like this one. From the moment they smell that perfume, the Bodhisattvas attain the concentration called "Source of all Bodhisattva virtues". From the moment they attain that concentration, all the Bodhisattva virtues are produced in them."

These Bodhisattvas then ask Vimalakirti how the Buddha Sakyamuni, that is to say, our own Buddha, as we call him, teaches the Dharma in his world. And I'm going to read the whole of the reply, it isn't very long. Vimalakirti says,

"This is how our Buddha, Sakyamuni, teaches the Dharma in this World. "This is hell; this is the animal world; this is the world of the Lord of Death. These are the adversities. These are the rebirths with crippled faculties. These are physical misdeeds, and these are the retributions of physical misdeeds. These are verbal misdeeds, and these are the retributions of verbal misdeeds. These are mental misdeeds, and these are the retributions of mental misdeeds. This is killing, this is stealing, this is sexual misconduct, this is lying, this is back-biting, this is harsh speech, this is frivolous speech, this is covetousness, this is malice, this is false view; these are their retributions. This is miserliness, and this is its effect. This is immorality, this is hatred, this is sloth, this is the fruit of sloth; this is false wisdom and this is the fruit of false wisdom. These are the transgressions of the precepts, this is the vow of personal liberation; this should be done, and that should not be done. This is proper and that should be abandoned. This is an obscuration and that is without obscuration. This is sin and that rises above sin. This is the path, and that is the wrong path. This is virtue and that is evil. This is blameworthy and that is blameless. This is defiled and that is immaculate. This is mundane and that is transcendental. This is compounded and that is uncompounded. This is passion and that is purification. This is life and that is liberation."

Thus by means of these varied explanations of the Dharma, the Buddha trains the

minds of those living beings who are just like wild horses; just as wild horses or wild elephants will not be tamed unless the goad pierces them to the marrow, so living beings who are wild and hard to civilize are disciplined only by means of discourses about all kinds of miseries".

Well, there follow further exchanges between Vimalakirti and the Bodhisattvas, that is to say the Bodhisattvas who have come from the Pure Land called "Sweetly perfumed with all Perfumes". However I'm not going to say anything about all that. We've already I think gone sufficiently far into this chapter. There's much already that could be commented on. For instance the significance of the Emanation Bodhisattva's bowing down when he arrived in that other Pure Land. The significance of the remains of the meal being asked for and given. The significance of the meal itself. The significance of the Ambrosia or "Amrita", the Nectar of Immortality, of which the food consists. The significance of the vessel in which the food is contained. Doesn't one as it were detect here echoes, reflections of say, the grail? The significance of the fact that the food is not depleted, even though millions of beings are fed. etc., etc. But I'm not going to say anything about any of these things. I'm going to concentrate on just one topic, the topic which has some connection with our theme this week. Some connection with the mystery of human communication.

Vimalakirti asked the Bodhisattvas, as we've seen, "Noble Sirs, how does the Tathagata Sugandhakuta teach his Dharma?". And the Bodhisattvas reply that the Tathagata does not teach the Dharma by means of sound and language. He disciplines the Bodhisattvas only by means of perfumes. What a nice way of being disciplined! The Buddha Sugandhakuta that is to say, teaches the Dharma, nothing less than that, teaches the Dharma, by means of perfume. Perfumes are his medium of communication. How strange! How extraordinary! So this is our topic: Perfumes as a means of communication. It may throw some light on communication in general, and we'll then go on to a related passage in Chapter 11 entitled "Lesson of the destructible and the indestructible". But first of all, the perfumes.

I'm going to deal with the topic under three main headings: Perfumes in general; the symbolism of perfume; and perfume as a means of communication.

All right, first of all, perfumes in general. There's quite a lot that could be said under this heading, but we have to be brief. Perfume is a kind of odour, a kind of scent, a kind of smell, but what is odour? We have five physical senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. And each is associated with a particular sense organ. Sight is associated with the eye, hearing with the ear and so on. And smell is of course associated with the nose. Or rather it's associated with the olfactory nerves, the endings of which are within the nostrils. In the same way each physical sense is connected with a particular kind of sense object. Sight is connected with form - Rupa, that is to say with shape and colour. The ear is connected with sound, and smell of course is connected with odours. When sense organ and sense object come into contact with each other, the appropriate sense consciousness or Vijnana arises. That is to say, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch arise, provided of course the senses are not defective.

Now in the case of smell, we notice a rather curious thing. There doesn't have to be any direct contact here between the sense organ and the sense object. Between that is to say the nose and for example a rose in a distant garden. What happens? The rose in a distant garden emits thousands upon thousands, it may be millions of tiny invisible particles, and some of these particles, enter our nostrils and come in contact with the olfactory nerve endings, and we then have the experience with what we call the experience of smell. We're said to smell the rose. We'll see the significance of this a little later on. Now we have five senses. But they're not all equally well developed. Sight and hearing are developed most, in human beings that is. But there may be an explanation of this in terms of man's biological evolution. His other senses are less well developed. And the sense of smell is perhaps developed least of all. In this respect man differs very much from certain other animals. A dog's sense of smell for instance is very highly developed indeed. Perhaps more highly developed than his other senses. It's been said in fact that a dog experiences quite a different world from what we do, and he therefore lives in quite a different world from what we do.

The dog lives in a world of odours. When the dog puts his nose outside the door, what happens?

He experiences hundreds of different smells coming from all directions. And all these smells are quite vivid, and quite distinct, one from another. They all mean something to him. No wonder the dog gets excited! Some human beings of course have a more highly developed sense of smell than others, but it's not developed to the same extent as in the case of dogs and certain other animals.

All normal human beings however, are able to distinguish one smell from another, at least within a limited range of perception. In particular, they're able to distinguish what we call a good smell from what we call a "bad smell", they're able to distinguish a perfume from a stink! This has led to such things as the manufacture of all sorts of artificial odours, and these are used in various ways. They're used in social life, used that is to say, when we want to make ourselves more attractive, or less offensive, to other people! And especially, so we're told in the case of women, to attract members of the opposite sex.

They're also used in religious life. When we want to create a particular kind of psychological atmosphere, and this suggests a definite connection between certain odours and certain mental and emotional states. So far as I know, the subject has never been systematically investigated, but it's very interesting that in all religions, there is some use made of some kind of incense or other in connection with certain ceremonies, certain observances. However, it's time we passed on to the next heading which is "the symbolism of perfume".

I mentioned that smell, the experience of smell, depends upon the transmission of tiny invisible particles to the olfactory nerve endings. Odour or scent, or perfume is therefore an extremely subtle thing. We can't see it, we can't hear it. None the less, it's very definitely there. Perfume can therefore be a symbol. It can be a symbol for something very subtle, very delicate, something quite intangible, yet something that is very definitely there, that can be perceived, that can produce certain effects, that can affect us from a distance even. It can be a symbol, perfume can be a symbol for a very subtle influence, a very subtle emanation. So what is the subtlest of all influences, the subtlest of all emanations? The most difficult to perceive yet in a sense always present, present like radio waves in the air? According to the Mahayana, it's the influence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The influence if you like of enlightenment, or to speak metaphysically, though still symbolically, the influence of the absolute. And what is this influence called? This influence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? This influence of enlightenment? It's called compassion, or more correctly, Great Compassion. This Great Compassion is not just an individual emotion, at howsoever high a level. It's a sort of transcendental emanation, we may say, of the transcendental reality itself. That is to say of that reality with which the Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas are as it were at one. When in the mythic language of *The Vimalakirti Nirveda*, Chapter 10, this reality is called "Amrita". There's a very concrete symbol for it: ambrosia or "Nectar of immortality" and this ambrosia is perfumed: it's perfumed with Great Compassion. And Vimalakirti therefore says to Sariputra and the great disciples when giving them the ambrosia, "Reverends, eat of the food of the Tathagata, it is ambrosia perfumed by the Great Compassion." In the Pure Land called "Sweetly perfumed with all Perfumes" Sugandhakuta and the Bodhisattvas regularly feast on ambrosia, that is to say they feast on reality, they live on reality, get nourished by reality, and therefore they're pervaded by the emanation of reality, pervaded by the influence of reality, they're pervaded that is to say, by the perfume of compassion. That whole Pure Land in fact is pervaded by it. Everything in that Pure Land in fact is made of it, made of compassion, made of perfume. The text says, "in that universe all the houses, their avenues, the parks, and the palaces are made of various perfumes". That is to say, are made of spiritual influences. Are made of transcendental influences, transcendental emanations, are made of compassion.

That Pure Land is a land, is a universe of purely spiritual, purely transcendental, influences. Power in the sense of force does not exist there in howsoever subtle a form. So we can begin to understand something of the meaning of Vimalakirti's bringing the food, bringing the ambrosia, from the Pure Land of Buddha Sugandhakuta. We can begin to see something of the meaning of the fact that the fragrance of the food brought permeates, pervades, the entire great city of Vaisali; permeates and pervades throughout one hundred universes. We can begin to understand the nature of its effect on the people of Vaisali, but there's no time to enlarge on all that now. We're simply concerned with the symbolism of perfume. With perfume as a symbol of the influence so to speak, of transcendental reality. We find this same symbolism in a very important and historically influential text of far eastern Buddhism called "The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana". The

Mahayana here meaning something like "great principle", not just any, or not just a particular form of Buddhism. "The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana" is not a Sutra, that is to say not a discourse, represented as being a discourse by the Buddha, but a Sastra, that is to say a text attributed to a great Buddhist teacher posterior to the Buddha himself. In this case the teacher is Asvaghosa. The text survives only in Chinese translation, and according to some scholars, it was actually composed or written down in China. "The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana" speaks of ultimate reality as "Tathata" or Bhuta-Tathata. Tathata means simply "suchness" Bhuta Tathata means the "suchness of things". Ultimate reality is "such as it is". It cannot be described. If you ask what is reality, what is the absolute, what is the ultimate? "It's such as it is!" You can only say that it's characterized by "suchness" or "such-as-it-iness" - it can't be described. So "The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana" speaks of ultimate reality as "Tathata" or "Bhuta-tathata - "suchness" - the suchness of things. And this ultimate reality, the Tathata is spoken of in "The Awakening of Faith" as "perfuming" conditioned existence. That is to say something of itself rubs off, so to speak, onto conditioned existence. A few tiny infinitesimally tiny "particles" (lots of inverted commas here) are transmitted, and we are therefore able to perceive ultimate reality, however, faintly, in the midst of conditioned existence. And perceiving it, we are able to strive towards it.

Not only that. According to "The Awakening of Faith", not only does ultimate reality "perfume" conditioned existence, conditioned existence "perfumes" (if that is quite the right word!) ultimate reality. Because it is "perfumed" by conditioned existence, ultimate reality manifests compassion. Compassion is its response. This is a very profound conception, but again there's no time to enlarge on the matter. In any case, at present, we're concerned with perfume as a symbol of the far reaching influence of ultimate reality simply. And as I've said before, perfume is a very suitable symbol for this sort of influence. It's a very suitable symbol for great compassion, because this sort of influence is very very subtle, very very delicate, and we know this, perhaps to a limited extent, from our own experience. Especially if we practise meditation. A time comes when we perceive, when we become aware of something that we can't describe, something that we can't define, something which doesn't come under any of our mundane categories, yet at the same time, there's nothing vague, there's nothing cloudy about it. It's intensely vivid, and intensely real, just like a strange perfume. Like the perfume of some unknown flower - a flower belonging to some unknown botanical or horticultural species. And we might say it's the perfume of the thousand petalled lotus itself - the lotus that blooms in the Pure Land; the lotus that is identical with the ambrosia.

So the fact that we can have this sort of experience means two things, or rather two things follow from it. First, just as we can perceive odours only because we have a sense of smell, have an olfactory organ, that is to say the nose, in the same way we can perceive the perfume, the subtle perfume of ultimate reality only because we have within us a kind of transcendental sense; only because we have within us something that has an affinity with the transcendental, something that is akin to the transcendental; something to which the particles of the transcendental can be transmitted. This is what the Mahayana in a general way calls "Tathagata-Dhatu" - that is to say, the element of Buddhahood.

The second thing that follows is that this transcendental sense of ours can be developed. It can be made more sensitive and more refined; so much so that eventually it will be able to tell us where the perfume is coming from, and in which direction we have to go to find its source.

All right, now for the third and last heading - "Perfume as a means of communication". Everything has odour, at least every organic thing has odour. Vegetation has odour. I noticed this when I was in New Zealand a few months ago, especially when I was in the New Zealand bush. I couldn't help noticing that very distinctive spicy smell of the New Zealand bush, very sweet, yet at the same time, sharp and refreshing, even stimulating; very different from anything that one can experience here in England.

Coal has an odour; food has an odour; I need hardly tell you that. People have an odour. Of course, here one begins to tread on rather delicate ground. This is something that one is not supposed to talk about. Women have a different odour from men. Children have a different odour from adults; and very young people have a different odour from very old people. I wonder if you've noticed this. People of one part of the world have a different odour from people of another part of the world.

Every individual in fact has his own distinctive odour; distinctive natural odour that is to say - I'm not taking cosmetics etc. into consideration. And dogs, to come back to them, can recognize this distinctive natural odour of the individual even if humans cannot. Humans of course can develop the capacity - and we hear that some so-called primitive peoples have done this at least to some extent - and it's possible that all human beings originally had this particular power, but subsequently lost it, especially when man started living in settled communities, as it were away from nature, comparatively speaking.

Now the individual's distinctive natural odour is due to various factors. It's due for instance to the type of food he eats. If you're a vegetarian, you smell quite differently from what you do if you're a carnivorous human being. And I'm told, I've been told by my Indian friends, my vegetarian Indian friends in India, that on occasions, they're not able to bear being too near Westerners, because of the smell, the smell, they believe, of the meat that they've eaten. And then another factor is age. And then the state of one's physical health. It's sometimes said that you can smell sickness. And we also have the expression "the smell of death", and I'm sure some of you have experienced this, you can smell when death is coming, you can smell when someone is going to die. I don't mean get killed in an accident, but when they're going to die, either due to sickness or old age, something of that sort.

But from the point of view of human communication, the most important factor here is the mental state, or rather the emotional state, because emotional states produce all sorts of physical reactions. I don't want to suggest a sort of mind-body dualism in the literal sense - probably the two are just aspects of a single process, but the physical reaction is responsible for various glandular secretions, and these secretions have a particular odour. For instance, there's the "smell of fear"; the "smell of anxiety"; and this can be actually perceived - and not only by animals, also by ordinary human beings. We don't often have occasion to speak in terms of an actual odour of more positive emotions - probably because they are less powerfully and pungently developed. It's well known though, that a perfume similar to that of roses, or jasmine, sometimes is perceived in connection with meditation; not only by the actual meditator, but also by other people present in the room. So we shouldn't be surprised that perfume can be a means of communication. We shouldn't be surprised that the Buddha Sugandhakuta. does not teach the Dharma by means of sound and language, he disciplines the Bodhisattvas only by means of perfumes.

Now it might be objected that this sort of communication takes place on a very high spiritual level - indeed on the transcendental level itself. Here perfumes are the means of communication between Buddha and Bodhisattvas, so it might appear that there's not much relevance here to ordinary human communication, and that after all is the ostensible theme tonight - "the Mystery of Human Communication". So there's a few points to be made here. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are human beings - they are enlightened or, so to speak, partially enlightened human beings, and their communication, however, rarefied, is a form of human communication, and as such, it can be developed by us too. Moreover, the significance of perfume as a means of communication is also illustrative. We tend to assume, as between human beings, that communication is possible only in terms of words, and language, and it therefore comes as rather a shock to us when Vimalakirti says the Tathagata does not teach the Dharma by means of sound and language. We probably can't help wondering when we first encounter this statement how he does teach it then, if not in words, and language, and we get perhaps a still greater shock when Vimalakirti goes on to say "he disciplines the Bodhisattvas only by means of perfume".

Perfume is an alternative means of communication. That is the important point. The important point is that other means of communication are possible, not just words and language. And this brings us to Chapter 11 of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* entitled "Lesson of the Destructible and the Indestructible", or rather to a passage in that chapter.

At the beginning of the Chapter, Chapter 11, there's a change of scene. We are no longer in Vimalakirti's house, or rather we are no longer in that throne-filled empty space where Vimalakirti's house was. We're back in Amrapali's Park, back in Amrapali's beautiful garden, we're back with the Buddha, and Ananda, and the rest of the assembly, and the Buddha of course is teaching the Dharma. And as he teaches the Dharma at the beginning of this chapter, the park, the garden, becomes larger and larger. Not only that, the entire assembly is suffused with a beautiful

golden light, and Ananda is rather surprised. He asks the Buddha what it means. And the Buddha replies that it means that Vimalakirti and Manjushri are coming, they're on their way, they're coming with a great multitude, and a few seconds later they all arrive. In fact Vimalakirti magically transports his entire assembly, thrones and all, and Ananda, after they arrive, notices the perfume, so he asks the Buddha where it comes from, and the Buddha says "It emanates from the pores of all the Bodhisattvas". Sariputra hastens to add that it emanates from their pores too - that is to say the pores of the Arahats, and he explains what happened. He says "Vimalakirti obtained some food from the Pure Land called "sweetly perfumed with all perfumes" and the perfume emanates from the bodies of all who partook of that food".

There then follows a conversation between Ananda and Vimalakirti about perfume in general, about food. And Ananda then says to the Buddha "Lord, it is wonderful that this food accomplishes the work of the Buddha" and the Buddha replies in a very important passage. He says:

"So it is Ananda! It is as you say Ananda! There are Buddha-fields that accomplish the Buddha-work by means of Bodhisattvas, those that do so by means of lights; those that do so by means of the tree of enlightenment; those that do so by means of physical beauty, and the marks of the Tathagata. Those that do so by means of religious robes; those that do so by means of food; those that do so by means of water; those that do so by means of gardens; those that do so by means of palaces; those that do so by means of mansions; those that do so by means of magical incarnations; those that do so by means of empty space; and those that do so by means of lights in the sky. Why is it so Ananda? Because by these various means, living beings become disciplined. Similarly, Ananda, there are Buddha-fields that accomplish the Buddha-work by means of teaching living beings words, definitions, and examples, such as 'dreams', 'images', 'the reflection of the moon in water', 'echoes', 'illusions', and 'mirages'; and those that accomplish the Buddha-work by making words understandable. Also, Ananda, there are utterly pure Buddha-fields that accomplish the Buddha-work for living beings without speech, by silence, inexpressibility, and unteachability. Ananda, among all the activities, enjoyments and practises of the Buddhas, there are none that do not accomplish the Buddha-work, because all discipline living beings. Finally, Ananda, the Buddhas accomplish the Buddha-work by means of the four Maras, and all the eighty-four thousand types of passion that afflict living beings."

The Buddha then goes on to speak about various matters, and he concludes by speaking about the actual lesson of the destructible and the indestructible, which gives the title to this chapter. But we're not concerned with that now, we're concerned with the passage which I've just read, because what is the Buddha saying in this passage? He goes in fact much further than we've gone so far. He says that there are many alternative means of communication - that is alternative to words and language. Not just perfumes; it's possible, he says, to communicate through Bodhisattvas; perhaps Vimalakirti did this when he sent that golden emanated Bodhisattva. It's possible to communicate through lights. It's possible to communicate through the Bodhi tree, and in this connection we may recall the example of early Indian Buddhist art, which depicted for example the Buddha at the moment of his enlightenment, but didn't actually represent the human figure of the Buddha, but showed just a tree - the Bodhi tree. The Bodhi tree communicated the fact that the Buddha was there. This may or may not be an example of what the Buddha was talking about in this passage, but no doubt it has some bearing on it. It's possible, the Buddha says, to communicate by means of robes, food, water, gardens, magical incarnations, empty space, and lights in the sky. Some people might think the Buddha was referring to flying saucers here, because flying saucers are supposed to be an attempt on the part of extra-terrestrial beings to communicate with men on earth. It's possible to communicate, the Buddha also says, through silence. And Vimalakirti himself certainly does this, as we've seen earlier on, in the case of his "thunder-like" silence.

So there are all these alternative means of communication, with just a few of which we are familiar. Words and language are not the only means of communication. We need to be reminded of this because we tend to be over dependent on words, and language. That is to say we in the West. The tendency is perhaps not quite so pronounced in the East, or in the South, that is to say in Africa, but I don't want to generalize too confidently. We feel only too often that we haven't really expressed ourselves unless we've put it all into words, unless we've spelled it all out in full

verbal detail. And educated people are perhaps particularly prone to this vice. I'm not suggesting that we should not be articulate. Mumbling is not a virtue; mumbling is not a means of communication. I'm not suggesting that we should not express ourselves clearly and correctly. Of course we should. But we should not think that when we've put something into words, it has necessarily been fully expressed. We should not think that there are no alternative means of communication.

Quite often in fact we do not rely entirely on words; though we may not always be aware of the fact. I was reminded of this recently in an interesting sort of way. As you know, we have every now and then, usually at Padmaloka what we call Study Retreats, or Study Seminars. And the proceedings of these seminars are tape recorded. I think now we've got about six hundred hours of seminar material on tape. And the tape recordings are transcribed, and the transcriptions are edited, usually I'm afraid by me. And in the course of doing this editing work, I quite often compare the transcription which I've got in front of me to read, with the actual tape-recording and the first time I did this I had quite a surprise. I noticed that there was a big difference, that is to say a big difference between the transcription and the actual tape recording. In the case of the transcription, there was a whole dimension missing. One had only typed words on the page. In the case of the tape recording to which one listened, one had the words plus the way in which the words had been used. One had the tone, one had the pace, one had the pitch, and these things were all parts of what the speakers wanted to say. They were all alternative means of communication. Not only that, I was comparing transcript with tape recording. Comparing the bare words with words plus sounds - plus the sound of the voices. But suppose, suppose instead of tape recording the seminars, we had video-taped them, suppose we had not only words plus sounds, but words, plus sounds, plus the appearance of the speakers - that is to say gesture, expression and so on, we would then have an even better impression of what people had actually said, in the sense of what they actually wanted to communicate. I've since talked about this sort of thing with several people - talked about it in connection for instance, with the Buddhist scriptures. In the Buddhist scriptures, we often have only the Buddha's words. We do not have his tone of voice. We do not have the look with which he said something. We do not have the Buddha himself saying it, we have only the words, and that must surely make a big difference.

And this brings us to an important point - the point with which perhaps I'd better begin to conclude. Means of communication are not just alternative. That is to say, we cannot always express ourselves equally well through one means of communication as through another. The different means of communication are therefore complimentary and supplementary. The more means of communication we have at our disposal, the better. So let us learn to communicate in terms of perfumes; let us learn to communicate in terms of silence. Let us learn to communicate in terms of lights in the sky. It's been said that when we learn a new language, we acquire a new soul. We can say things that we could not say before. I know from my own experience there are some things I can say in Hindi, I can't say them in English. Some languages are more suitable for certain purposes than others.

There's the well-known story of the Emperor Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the 16th Century. He was once asked it seems, what language he usually spoke, and he said that when he spoke to his courtiers, he spoke in French; when he spoke to his mistress he spoke in Italian; when he spoke to God, that is to say when he said his prayers, he spoke in Spanish, and when he spoke to his horse he spoke in German. But German was not then a very cultivated language apparently, or perhaps it was the horses that weren't very cultivated! So it's the same in the case of additional means of communication. We can say things that we could not say before. We aren't simply enabled to say the same thing in a different way, we are enabled to say different things. It's like having an additional sense. And that additional sense reveals to us more of the universe. It's well known that our perceptions are very limited, that is to say our physical perceptions. The eye can perceive only certain colours. The ear can perceive only a certain quite narrow range of sounds. Our nostrils can perceive only a very few odours. It's the same with our mental perceptions, that is to say with the perceptions of our ordinary conscious minds. They too are very limited, and in any case, they function entirely within the distorting overall framework of the subject-object relation. It's important therefore that we acquire new senses, so to speak. It's important that we acquire new means of communication - additional means of communication. It's important that we very much enlarge the total range of our being and consciousness. The mystery

of human communication is perhaps even greater than we had supposed.