

Lecture 153: Fidelity

Gunavajra, all other members of the Western Buddhist Order, both present and absent, visible and invisible. Those of you who have read, or at least dipped into, my book of memoirs, entitled '*The Thousand Petalled Lotus*', and even those of you who haven't read it, or even dipped into it, will be aware that I spent quite a few years of my life in a place of which you might not otherwise have heard, called Kalimpong.

Kalimpong is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas in the state of West Bengal in India, and I lived there some four thousand feet above sea level, and within sight - within almost daily sight - of the snows of the Himalayas for some fourteen years. And Kalimpong was, and of course still is, a rather out of the way place. It's rather off the beaten track, unless of course you are a trader doing business between Lhasa and Calcutta, or unless of course you are a mule, carrying the goods from Lhasa or Gyantse down to Kalimpong. But even though it was a rather out of the way place, as the years went by I came to have quite a number of visitors. At first just visitors from Darjeeling, visitors from Calcutta, visitors from other parts of India, eventually even visitors from Europe, visitors from America, Australia - I don't remember any visitor from New Zealand - but from many different parts of the world. And some of these visitors I remember very well indeed. Some of them are going to figure in the second volume of my memoirs so I won't say anything about them this evening.

But there's one I do want to mention. He came usually from a place called Wardha, right in the middle of India. He was a quite elderly man at that time, and he was a Buddhist monk. He'd been a Buddhist monk for quite a number of years, but he was better known in India as a journalist, as a Hindi journalist. I won't go into that now. But he used to come up to Kalimpong quite frequently, and he always used to come and see me, and he had one characteristic which I remember especially, which was that he very much loved his daily walk. Now this is not a usual characteristic of Indians. They don't usually go in for a daily walk; they usually avoid exercise. But he, who was a Punjabi by birth, he was rather fond - in fact he was very fond - of his daily walk, and whenever he was in Kalimpong he would insist on having a walk every afternoon. But he also liked to have a companion on his walk, because he was very fond of talking and he had an unending flow of anecdote and all sort of things, comments. But in Kalimpong it was very difficult for him, among his Indian friends, to find a companion in his daily walks. Because he usually used to like walk for about two or three miles, every afternoon. So eventually, to cut a long story short, he latched onto me. He came to understand that I wasn't averse to a walk. So he got into the habit of calling for me at about four o'clock or five o'clock every afternoon, and he'd say. "come on, let's go for a walk", so we'd go for a walk round the hills of Kalimpong; along the long winding roads and lanes of Kalimpong, and I came quite to enjoy - even to look forward to - these walks, and he was indeed a quite entertaining companion. I must say there wasn't much that was very monk-like about him. I sometimes used to wonder why on earth he had become a Bhikkhu at all, why he'd bothered. But anyway there he was in his yellow robes with his shaven head, with walking stick striding along. He must have been fifty two or fifty three then, and he had this unending flow of comment and anecdote and reportage and everything of that sort.

And I used to hear all sorts of things from him that I might not have otherwise heard. All sorts of things about India, and Indian life and politics, and Buddhism and Buddhist politics and social life, literature, the world of Hindi - which was quite a world to which he particularly belonged, and sometimes just ordinary anecdotes and stories about everyday life in India.

And I remember there was one story which he told me which made a sort of impression on me at the time, as it made clearly an impression on him, because he wanted to tell me this story. It was something that actually happened, quite recently and which came within his personal knowledge, and it had happened in Calcutta, just shortly before he came up to Kalimpong, so it was fresh in his mind; and for some reason

or other it seemed to be on his mind. So I heard this story in the course of the first walk that we had after he came up to Kalimpong on that occasion. I heard that true story, and the story went like this. He had heard it from a person in Calcutta, who was a friend of both the parties concerned in this story. And the parties concerned were two college students. You know Calcutta is a place with the enormous university. And there were lots of colleges there and there were tens of thousands of students of all subjects. So Calcutta, especially central Calcutta, is quite a university city. So there were these two students - both Bengalis - a boy student and a girl student. They were both science students apparently as far as I remember. And as it sometimes does happen even in traditional India - though their parents had nothing to do with it - they happened to fall in love. This is of course a very old story! They fell in love. It had something I think to do with conducting experiments together in the laboratory, they were looking at each other over the test tubes, and you know what happens if you look at someone over the test tubes! But, in India, the course of true love never runs smooth, because in India there is not supposed really to be any such thing as true love. In India there is no such thing as true love at all, officially. There are only arranged marriages. What they in India still rather quaintly call 'free love' doesn't really exist. Marriages - well marriages aren't made in heaven in India, they are made on earth by your parents and grandparents, and they are careful to choose someone of the right sort, which of course means among other things someone from the same caste, the same sub-caste. Though in this particular instance, in the case of these two people - this boy, this girl - they happened to come from different castes, quite different castes. So there was no question in their case of love leading to marriage. That was out of the question. They just couldn't marry. They knew that they couldn't. They knew that their parents would never consent.

So they didn't know what to do. They felt that they couldn't live without each other. Hmm. Well that's what they felt - that they couldn't live without each other. That they had to marry or they had to die. So, my friend told me, in the course of this walk, that they decided on a suicide pact. They'd both commit suicide - at the same time. They weren't for one reason or another, able to commit it in the same place. That would obviously have aroused suspicion and they might have been prevented, but they agreed, they entered into a sort of pact to commit suicide - same day, same time. So this is what happened. They did - or rather one of them did. The boy kept his side, so to speak, of the pact. He swallowed poison, and he died. But you may be wondering, what about the girl? Well, the friend who related this story to me told me that the person who had told him about it, told him that the day after the boy had committed suicide, the girl was seen laughing and talking with other male college students. This was the story he told me.

So it had made quite an impression on him, and this is what he wanted to tell me. And I must say, having heard this story from him, it made, in a strange sort of way, something of an impression on me. Not that I was by any means, of a romantic disposition, even in those far off days! But it did make some sort of an impression - a sort of echo lingered. I kept thinking about it. So in the end what I decided to do was to turn it into a short story. So I did turn it into a short story. I wrote out the story that this friend of mine, this Indian Bhikkhu, had told me, as a short story as best I could. And I called this short story "*Fidelity*".

Now I must admit, I must confess, it wasn't a very good story. As a short story it wasn't really very good at all. I realised this as soon as I had written it, and it was therefore never published, as two or three other little stories of mine were. But that story, "*Fidelity*", is still somewhere among my papers, in my study upstairs. And, I must admit again I haven't thought about that story for quite a few years. But I did think about it quite recently. I thought about it quite recently because I have been thinking about this very subject of fidelity, and I've been thinking recently about this subject of fidelity on account of certain incidents that occurred, and of which I came to hear, a year or two ago. There is no need to tell you what those incidents were - that isn't particularly relevant - and in any case I don't propose to write a short story about them. It seems my short story writing days are over. Instead, instead of writing a story, instead of writing a short story about these incidents, I decided to give this talk.

Now in the course of a talk, in the course of some hour or hour and fifteen minutes, it won't be possible for me to exhaust this subject of fidelity. It won't even be possible for me to treat it very systematically. All that I want to do this evening is to offer for your consideration, some ideas that have occurred to me recently, taking as my point of departure so to speak, the incidents to which I have referred.

As I have been thinking over this subject of fidelity, it has seemed to me, more and more, that fidelity is really quite an important quality, quite an important human quality. In fact I have been coming to the conclusion, little by little, that fidelity is one of the qualities of the True Individual, or of one who is trying to become a true individual; trying to become, that is to say, a truly human being.

Most of you - well all of you I think - will be well aware that this concept of individuality, of True Individuality is absolutely central to the spiritual life, at least to the earlier stages of the spiritual life; and in the FWBO, right from the beginning we have been very much concerned with this particular concept of individuality or True Individuality. And we've been concerned, therefore, with those qualities, those characteristics, which are qualities or characteristics of the individual. Those of you who've been with us a long time, those of you who've been involved in the FWBO for twelve, thirteen, fourteen years, will remember that to begin with, we saw that the individual was aware - even that the individual was one who was aware, one who was self-conscious. You may remember that we saw, in some very early lectures of mine, that the individual was one who was aware of self, that is to say aware of the physical body, its position, its movements. Aware also of emotions, whether positive or negative, and so on, and aware also of thoughts - aware of ideas, concepts, reflections, reasonings and so on. So this was awareness of self. And then the individual - the True Individual - was one who was at the same time aware of nature, aware of his or her material surroundings, aware of the environment. And then thirdly, the individual was one who was aware of other people, other human beings, other individuals. And fourthly and lastly the individual - the True Individual - was one who was one who was aware, however distantly, of Reality itself. Thus in this way we spoke of these four different kinds of awareness - we called them '*dimensions of awareness*' - awareness of self, of nature, of other people and of Reality. So the individual was one who was aware.

But at the same time we saw that the individual was more than just one who was aware. The awareness of the individual was more than just an awareness. The individual was aware of being aware, so that the awareness that characterized, the characterizes, the individual, is what we call a reflexive awareness. The individual is self-conscious not in the ordinary colloquial sense, but in the sense in which self consciousness is tantamount to reflexive consciousness or reflexive awareness. Now this is all very familiar ground, or at least it should be very familiar ground, so I've covered it very very rapidly. I don't want to spend much time going over it. For in this way we saw, at the very beginning, that the individual was aware- the individual had self-awareness, self-consciousness or reflexive consciousness.

We also saw that the individual - the True Individual - was emotionally positive. That he was characterized by emotions of friendliness, compassion, joy, faith, devotion. And later on - perhaps even a few years later - we saw, as our understanding of the nature of individuality grew and developed, we saw that the individual was responsible. He was aware that actions had consequences. He was aware that he was responsible for his actions, and therefore responsible for the consequences of his actions. We saw too that the individual was sensitive, independent or autonomous, and receptive. And more recently we've come to see that the individual is characterised by imagination. And in this way, little by little, year by year, our list of qualities of the individual, our list of the characteristics of the individual - the True Individual - has increased, so that it's now quite a long list. There are several qualities in fact that I haven't mentioned. While I was preparing this talk, while I thinking about this talk, I just jotted down all the qualities or characteristics that I thought could be described as qualities or characteristics of the individual. There were altogether about twenty of them - so clearly there are quite a few that I haven't mentioned - but which it

isn't necessary on this occasion to mention.

Now these qualities or characteristics of the individual - of the True Individual - are not mere attributes of individuality. They are not something, so to speak, external to it in the sense of having been added on to it from the outside. These qualities, these characteristics, represent different aspects, even different dimensions, of individuality itself. And our list of qualities or characteristics of the individual, is increasing because our understanding of the nature of individuality is gradually deepening. And now, on this occasion, it's deepening or broadening, if you like, to include what I've chosen to term 'fidelity'. Fidelity is a quality or characteristic of the individual.

Now, the literal meaning of the word is not difficult to understand. According to that indispensable companion of every speaker and writer, the dictionary, fidelity means the quality of being faithful. It means faithfulness. It means loyalty, but this assuredly does not really help us very much. We have to ask ourselves what fidelity is as a quality of the individual. What is it that makes it a quality of the individual? We have also to ask what the objects of that fidelity are? Also, what the obstacles to that fidelity are, or if you like the enemies to fidelity? And perhaps also, we have to consider what the tests of fidelity are?

This will give us a rough framework for our discussion of the subject. But you should not think that I am going to give you this evening, the first and the last words on the subject and all the words in between. Individuality, we may say, is incommensurable; it cannot be measured, cannot be weighed, cannot be estimated. It's unfathomable and inexhaustible. And that applies, no doubt, to the qualities or characteristics of individuality. So I am going to simply offer you some ideas on the subject of fidelity, ideas that you will have to work on or work out yourselves. Ideas that you'll have to relate to your own experience and your own behaviour.

Now, I spoke of a framework for discussion, and framework is of course a sort of spatial image. It doesn't suggest any particular temporal or logical sequence. The contents of a framework, of any framework can be enumerated, can be deployed in any order, provided that the enumeration or deployment is complete. So I shall not be dealing with the questions that I have raised in connection with fidelity in quite the same order in which I actually did raise them.

I am going to start with what seems to be the easiest question - or at least the most accessible - which is "What are the objects of fidelity?" The objects of fidelity. In other words, who or what is one faithful to? The objects of fidelity, so far as I can see, are three in number - or rather perhaps, there are three headings under which all the different kinds of fidelity can be included. First of all, there is fidelity to oneself. Secondly, there is fidelity to ideals. Thirdly, there is fidelity to other people. I did think of enumerating fidelity to one's given word separately, but on reflection I decided to include it under fidelity to oneself, though it could be also be regarded as a form of fidelity to oneself and others. So we've just three objects, or three kinds of objects of fidelity. I may have something to say about fidelity to one's word later on.

Probably you all have some idea at least about what is meant by fidelity to oneself. This can also be expressed in terms of being true to oneself. I'm sure most of you know those lines of Polonius to Laertes in Hamlet where he says, "*This above all, to thine own self be true, and it will follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.*"

So being true to oneself means consistently acting, speaking, and thinking in accordance with what is best, what is highest, in oneself - or in accordance with one's own best or highest interests. It involves seeing oneself as it were objectively, though not in any sort of cold-blooded fashion. It consists in being consistently faithful to one's own real interests, in the highest and fullest sense. This is fidelity to oneself.

Fidelity to ideals is not so easy to explain. Fidelity to ideals does not mean necessarily fidelity to ideas. So what then is the difference between the two; between idea and ideal? Some of you no doubt will know, that D.H. Lawrence very vigorously denounced ideals. He denounced ideals as opposed to life and opposed to creativity. But he seems to have confused ideals with just ideas. An ideal may be defined as a regulative model for human existence. But - and this is the important point - this model is not imposed upon human existence from without - its derived from human existence itself. An ideal brings the basic trend or, if you like, the true nature of that existence more clearly into awareness, more clearly into consciousness, and thus it intensifies that trend - that basic trend. It raises it, we may say even, to a higher power of itself. And in this way, ideals are instruments of human development, instruments of human evolution. Ideals can of course - or human beings holding ideals can of course - lose touch with the concrete human situation, lose touch with concrete experience, and when that happens of course ideals cease to function as ideals, they become, we may say, dead ideals, and dead ideals we are not really ideals at all. Dead ideals are simply ideas, and it's then right that we should rebel against them and reject them.

So fidelity to ideals means consistently acting, speaking, and thinking in accordance with the regulative model, or models, of human existence. It means being true to the basic trend or true nature of that existence, especially as that trend is reflected, intensified and amplified in consciousness or awareness. Thus we can say, fidelity to ideals eventually becomes virtually indistinguishable from fidelity to oneself. In fidelity to oneself, the emphasis is more subjective. In fidelity to ideals it is more objective.

Now fidelity to other people is perhaps more easy to understand, at least superficially. In feudal society there is the fidelity of the retainer to his overlord. In domestic life there is the fidelity of the wife to the husband; and in the broader sphere of social life there is the fidelity of friend to friend. There is also the fidelity of servant to master. So these examples serve to show the nature of fidelity to other people. It means consistently behaving, speaking and thinking in accordance with the way in which one has defined oneself in relation to other people. It means behaving as one has undertaken to behave, to them. Fidelity is thus the consequence of a voluntary act. Therefore one can speak of a good mother, let us say, or a good slave, but one cannot speak of a faithful mother. In fact one doesn't speak of a faithful mother; and one cannot speak of a faithful slave, because the relation of mother to child, or the relation of slave to master is not one that is voluntarily entered upon. It's imposed - by nature in the one case, by society in the other. So perhaps the general nature of fidelity is now reasonably clear. What is not so clear, is what makes it a quality of the individual as such. What makes it even part of the very definition of the individual. And it's that we now have to consider. What is it that makes fidelity a quality of the individual?

In order to understand this, we will have to go a little more deeply into the nature of individuality itself. The first quality of individuality as we saw, is self-consciousness or self-awareness, or reflexive consciousness. This is fundamental. We could even go so far as to say that self-consciousness or self-awareness is the essence of individuality. But what exactly do we mean by self-consciousness? Self-consciousness means that we can see ourselves objectively. It means that we can see ourselves as others see us, though not quite of course in Burnes' sense of course. We can see ourselves in the same sort of way that others see us. We can become the object of our own thought. Thought however is not limited. Thought is not limited by time and space. Our body is limited by time and space, but our mind is not so limited, our thought is not so limited. So through thought, we can therefore abstract ourselves, so to speak, from the conditioned under which we at present exist. In particular, we can think of ourselves, we can form an idea of ourselves as existing, in the past - as having existed in the past - and as going to exist in the future. We don't just have an awareness of ourselves in the present; we have, as it were, a sort of quasi-awareness of ourselves as having existed in the past, as existing even in the past and as existing in the future. Self-consciousness therefore involves a degree of separation, not to say alienation even, from the present. It is because we have self-consciousness, it is because as individuals we are self-conscious, that we can think of ourselves as doing something in the future. And because we can think of ourselves as doing

something in the future, it's possible for us to say in the present that we will do something in the future. In other words it is possible for us to make a promise. An animal can't make a promise. If our self-consciousness is weak, if our reflexive awareness is weak, we will not be able to keep that promise. We'll not even really be able to make that promise. We may say the appropriate words because they are expected of us, but they will not really have, for us, the significance of a promise. And of course, we often find people behaving in this way, even in the FWBO. They make a 'promise', inverted commas, but they don't keep it. In fact they don't even really make it. And that is because self-consciousness is weak. In other words individuality is weak. And it's the same in the case of fidelity.

We've seen that fidelity involves consistency. Whether in the case of fidelity to self, fidelity to ideals, or fidelity to other people. It involves consistently behaving in a certain way. Now consistency implies continuity in time. It means behaving in the same way over - or if you like through - a longer, or shorter, period of time. Indeed it means more than this. It means consciously and deliberately behaving in the same way over or through a period of time. But in order to be able to do this, we must have an idea of ourselves as continuing to exist in time. We must have an idea of ourselves as existing in the past and in the future as well as in the present. In other words we must have self-consciousness. We must be individuals.

Now I've mentioned that we often fail to keep promises and I've explained why this is so. In the same way, we are often unable to be faithful. We are unable to maintain our fidelity; whether to ourself, to our ideals, or to other people. In other words there are obstacles to fidelity. So let us look at these a little. This will enable us to understand the nature of fidelity better. Also, enable us perhaps to understand the nature of self-consciousness and individuality better, because, in a general way we are unable to maintain our fidelity due to a lack of self-consciousness and lack of individuality.

Now at this point I am going to narrow down the field a little. I am going to discuss the obstacles to fidelity in terms, simply, of fidelity to other people, even in terms of fidelity to one other person. And it won't be difficult afterwards to apply what is said in this connection to the obstacles to the other kinds of fidelity, that is to say, fidelity to oneself and fidelity to ideals. So I am going to discuss obstacles to fidelity to another person - or enemies to fidelity to another person. Now one form of fidelity to another person is sexual fidelity. Now we all know what that means, at least in a superficial sense. It means confining one's sexual activity to that other person. Now, what we call promiscuity is the antithesis of fidelity. That is to say more precisely, sexual promiscuity is the antithesis of sexual fidelity. I don't suppose anyone will quarrel with that statement. Now we all know what sexual promiscuity is, at least again in a superficial sense. It's usually understood to mean not confining one's sexual activity to one other person. It means engaging in sexual activity with a number of different people, of course at different times. Here, a misunderstanding generally arises. In this particular department of life, misunderstandings are usually rife! There are, of course, degrees of promiscuity. People usually understand the precise degree of promiscuity to be determined by the number of sexual partners one has, at of course different times. But that is not really the case. Promiscuity does not consist in mere multiplicity of sexual relations. Promiscuity, properly defined, is non-continuity of sexual relations. Sometimes people ask me how many people one must have sexual relations with over a certain period, to qualify as promiscuous; whether five, ten twenty or more. But that is really beside the point. The essence of promiscuity consists in the fact that one does not have sexual relations with the same person twice consecutively. So that the most completely promiscuous person would be the one who, over however long a period, never has sexual relations with any partner more than once. So now you know! But why raise these questions? Why this particular exercise in scholasticism?

Well, the reason is, that it has been said, that with respect to sexuality, one's sexual life, there are three possible lifestyles; the monogamous, the promiscuous and the celibate. And that each of these has two forms; a neurotic form and a non-neurotic or psychologically healthy form. And it has been further said

that an individual, or one who is trying to be an individual, may follow any one of these lifestyles, provided he follows it in its non-neurotic form. This is what has been said. This is what no doubt you have all heard. So far so good. But I have just said, a few minutes ago, that promiscuity is antithetical to fidelity. I have also said that fidelity is a quality of the individual. So it would seem that there is a certain contradiction or incompatibility here. It would seem that the individual cannot in fact follow a sexually promiscuous lifestyle. But the difficulty is more apparent than real. It is quite impossible for all the relationships of one's life to be continuous. But some of them must be continuous. Otherwise one will not be self-conscious, one will not be an individual, at least not to that extent. One will not continue to grow as an individual. One's sexual relationships can be non-continuous only if one has strong non-sexual relationships which are continuous, i.e. in relation to which one practises fidelity. Obviously in such a case these non-sexual relationships must be very important to one. They must come very near the centre of one's mandala. Otherwise if one's non-continuous, i.e. promiscuous, sexual relationships are more important to one than one's continuous non-sexual relationships, one is in a very difficult position. However I didn't really intend to say so much about promiscuity. I just wanted to guard against possible confusion.

So let us get back to the obstacles to fidelity, i.e. obstacles to fidelity to another person. Let's get back to the enemies to fidelity; and these are two in number. One is a near enemy; the other is a far enemy. The near enemy of fidelity is attachment, and the far enemy is distraction. So let us see what each of these means in the present context. Let's see how each is an obstacle to fidelity. We all know what distraction is. We experience it almost every time we try to meditate. Distraction is something that forces itself on our attention when we do not really want to pay attention to it. That's what a distraction is. For instance we may be trying to concentrate on the process of our in and out breathing, but there may be traffic passing outside, and the noise of the traffic, so to speak forces itself on our attention. We are almost forced to listen to it. We are distracted by that. Sometimes, of course, the thing that forces itself on our attention is something that, at another time, we would be very glad to pay attention to. It may be something that ordinarily we very much like or very much enjoy, something that appeals to very basic interests and desires in us. There is no need perhaps for me to give examples. The distraction then becomes very strong indeed and very difficult to resist. Now it is characteristic of a thing that is distracting us, that it is actually present at least in the form of a thought. The person who is the object of our fidelity - our overall fidelity, let us say - may not be actually present. And the impression that is produced by something that is present is very vivid. The impression produced by something that is not present - other factors being equal - is not so vivid. It may be even quite faint. Thus a present object may cause us to forget an object that is not present, at least for the time being. A present person may cause us to forget a person who is not present, who is absent; may cause us to act in fact as if they did not exist. Thus there is a breach of continuity in our relationship with that other person, and this is the essence of infidelity. Present impressions have triumphed over our sense of continuity, in respect of our relation with that other person, through past, present and future. In other words, triumphed over our sense of the continuity of our relationship with the person who is the object of our fidelity.

Now all this may sound rather abstract, almost as though we're not talking about human beings at all. But I want to get the principle of the matter clear. You should be able to work out the concrete applications for yourself. We usually say that the person who yields too readily to the impressions of the moment has a weak character. We could also say that he or she has a weak sense of individuality, a weak self-consciousness. In other words, has very little continuity of purpose. He or she is easily distracted. A person of this type cannot practise fidelity. Distraction is the far enemy of fidelity.

All right, what about the near enemy? The near enemy of fidelity is attachment. It's called the near enemy because fidelity and attachment look very much alike, at least to the superficial observer. We may be very much attached to another person. We may be neurotically attached to them, but here there is no question of fidelity. No question of fidelity because one has no self-consciousness, no self-awareness and therefore

no real individuality. One is attached to someone in the present - one has no consciousness of past or future. One's attachment in the present is simply prolonged, or if you like multiplied, indefinitely. One does not really experience one's relationship to the other person in this case as something persisting through time. One is therefore incapable of fidelity, one simply remains attached, and that is quite a different thing from fidelity. Now distraction and attachment are of course not just obstacles to fidelity to another person; they are also obstacles to fidelity to oneself and fidelity to ideals. But I will leave you to work that also out for yourselves. Order Members, one might say, should expect to have to do a little homework sometimes.

I want to pass on to something which is perhaps even more interesting. I want to pass on to the tests of fidelity. I am going to discuss this too in terms of fidelity to other people - even in terms of fidelity to one other person. Now what is a test? What do we mean by a test? A test is a situation or an experience that reveals the true nature of a thing, which reveals whether it's the genuine article or only an imitation, perhaps even a poor imitation. Thus, traditionally gold is tested by fire. Fire reveals whether a certain yellow metal is gold or something else. So what are the situations or experiences that test fidelity, especially fidelity to another person? What is it that enables us to distinguish between say fidelity and attachment? The real test of fidelity is separation - that is to say physical separation. When we are separated from someone in this way, the relationship is transferred, at least for the time being, from the physical to the mental plane and its continuity becomes, again at least for the time being, exclusively a mental continuity. Now of course, everybody knows it's much more difficult for us to live on the mental plane, than it is for us to live on the physical plane. And this is because sense consciousness is much stronger in us than is self-consciousness or reflexive consciousness. Consequently it's only too easy for the relationship we have, at least for the time being with someone on the mental plane to be interrupted by a relationship with someone else on the physical plane. It's only too easy for us to fall into infidelity. Once again I am putting all this rather abstractly, but I want to continue to make clear how fidelity is related to self-consciousness. Fidelity is possible only to the extent that we can envisage our relationship with the person from whom we are separated, continuing in or into the future.

This means we must be able to envisage ourselves as existing in the future. We must, so to speak, be able to project ourselves into the future, and this is impossible without self-consciousness. So separation is not only the test of fidelity, it's also the test of self-consciousness. It is the test of fidelity because it is the test of self-consciousness. Separation reveals on what level our relationship with another person really exists - whether it is only or predominantly physical or both physical and mental. Fidelity is possible only to the extent that a relationship is a mental relationship - in mental of course I include the emotional. Physical separation can therefore be taken as an opportunity for developing and intensifying the mental side, the non-physical side that is to say, of a relationship, and this would intensify one's self-consciousness or self-awareness, and this in turn will enhance one's individuality in the true sense of the term.

Now what do you think is the most extreme form of separation? Well, the most extreme form of separation obviously is death. And death therefore in a way is the ultimate test of fidelity, the ultimate test of self-consciousness. One might even say that fidelity includes awareness of death, because self-consciousness includes awareness of death. If you can imagine yourself existing in the future, you can also imagine yourself not existing in the future. Animals cannot do that. The animal cannot imagine itself existing in the future. It cannot imagine itself therefore as not existing in the future. Only human beings can do that, because it's only a human being who has self-consciousness. To be human is to be aware of death. To be an individual is to be aware of death. There is no individuality without awareness of death. And all the qualities or characteristics of the individual therefore include awareness of death. Or at least have something to do with death, and fidelity is no exception. The story which I told at the beginning had something to do with death. Death was the test. I am going to tell you now another story of fidelity also involving death, or at least a report of death or the risk of death. This is a story with a rather different

ending.

Before that though, I want to mention another test of fidelity and that is isolation. Isolation in the sense of being in a minority, even, or perhaps especially, a minority of one. And this kind of test applies particularly to our fidelity to ideals, though it can also apply to fidelity to another person. It's very difficult really to stand alone. This is the real test of individuality. It's very difficult to hold on to one's ideals - whatever those ideals may be - when everyone around you is trying to persuade you to abandon them because they are wrong, or inopportune or out of date or not fun. You are in a very difficult position when your ideals, your very ideals - what is most precious to you perhaps - cuts you off from everyone else; everyone else in the family, everyone else in the locality, the country, everyone else in your culture - perhaps even, you suspect sometimes, everyone in the world. Perhaps even if you believe in God, cuts you off from God. Then you really are in difficulties. You really are in a difficult position when everyone else scorns you on account of your ideals - derides you, ridicules you on account of your ideals - and that sort of isolation is a very terrible thing. Human beings will do almost anything to avoid that - usually. So isolation is a real test of fidelity, and especially fidelity to ideals. There is a very good example of this sort of fidelity in Milton's *'Paradise Lost'*. It's the example of - some of you may remember - the angel, Abdiel. Abdiel finds himself by some mischance, some misunderstanding, among the rebel angels, and is in the uncomfortable position of disagreeing with their rebellion, their rebellion against God, and he is the only one in the whole vast assembly of millions of rebel angels who so disagrees. There is no time to tell the whole story, but after giving us the speech in which Abdiel denounces Lucifer and the rebel angels, Milton comments on his fidelity in these memorable lines. Milton says

*"So spake the seraph Abdiel, faithful found.
Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single.*

*From amidst them forth he passed
Long way through hostile scorn
Which he sustained superior
Nor of violence feared ought.
And with retorted scorn
His back he turned on those proud towers
To swift destruction doomed."*

So this is what Milton says in praise of fidelity, to one's ideals as exemplified by the angel Abdiel.

So now for our second story of fidelity and death. And this story comes from an opera - from Beethoven's *'Fidelio'*. Fidelio means of course, the faithful one. Fidelio is the name assumed by Leonora, the wife of Floristan, who is a noble Spaniard. Floristan has apparently aroused the enmity of Pizzaro, the governor of a gloomy medieval fortress, which functions as a sort of a prison for political offenders. And Pizzaro has seized Floristan - he has confined him in the deepest and darkest dungeon of the fortress, and he spreads abroad a report of Floristan's death. And everybody believes that report. Everyone except Leonora. Leonora can't believe that her husband is dead. She determines to gain entry to the fortress and save him. So what does she do? She disguises herself as a young man and she takes the name of Fidelio. She gets work in the fortress as assistant to Rocco who is the chief jailer. Of course Rocco has a daughter

and of course the daughter falls in love with the supposed young man. And this gives rise to the usual operatic complications! And it's at this point that the opera opens. I've no time this evening to tell the remainder of the story in full, but Pizzaro learns that Fernando, the minister of state, is coming to inspect the fortress. And he therefore decides to murder Floristan before the minister of state can arrive. So he posts a trumpeter on the battlements to give warning of Fernando's approach, and he orders Rocco, the chief jailer, to kill Floristan. But Rocco refuses.

So Pizzaro then orders him to go and dig Floristan's grave. And he says he will kill Floristan - he will stab Floristan - himself with his own hands. So Rocco digs the grave, ready for Floristan, and Fidelio, that is to say Leonora, as his assistant has to help him dig the grave, that is to say the grave of her own husband. Well, the scene changes to Floristan's cell. And Pizzaro is just on the point of killing - of stabbing - Floristan when Leonora throws herself in front of him and says he must kill her first. And it's that moment that the famous trumpet call is heard. Those of you who know that musical phrase will probably hear it in your mind at this moment. The minister of state arrives. Pizzaro is arrested and Floristan and Leonora are reunited. And the writer on this opera says, "As a drama and as an opera 'Fidelio' stands almost alone in its perfect purity, in the moral grandeur of its subject and in the resplendent ideality of its music." So, "the moral grandeur of its subject". Well, what is its subject? Well, it's what I've been talking about this evening. It's subject is fidelity. When Floristan disappears and is rumoured to be dead, Leonora doesn't start looking for another husband. She doesn't start thinking in terms of a 'new relationship'. She goes in search of Floristan. She risks her own life to save him. So fidelity is tested by death, in more ways than one, and it passes the test in this case. Now I could say quite a lot more about the significance of this story, but I must pass on. Incidentally I've never actually seen 'Fidelio', that is to say, seen the opera, and I wonder if any of you have. The *[distortion on tape - two or three words unclear]* various overtures to it are of course very well known, but the opera itself does not seem to be performed very often. Perhaps the moral grandeur of its subject is a bit too much for modern audiences. Perhaps fidelity is out of fashion. If so perhaps the fact is of significance, especially as fidelity is one of the qualities of the True Individual.

However I want to pass on. I want to pass on from a Western story to an Eastern story, from an opera to a sutra. So what is this sutra? Well, it is the *Amitayur Dhyana Sutra*; the sutra of the meditation on Amitayur, the Buddha of infinite life. So here in this sutra we also find a fortress - we also find a dungeon - we also find a prisoner. We also find a faithful wife. We find much more. We find the Buddha. We find the Dharma, and we find the Sangha. What has happened is that Ajatasatru has seized the throne of Magadha. He has imprisoned his father, the righteous old king Bimbisara and he intends to starve him to death. And so he forbids anyone to approach his father. But Videhi, the chief consort of the king and the mother, as it so happens, of Ajatasatru, disobeys these orders. She visits Bimbisara, and she manages to smuggle food to him, and keep him alive. In other words she remains faithful to Bimbisara. But unfortunately Ajatasatru learns what is happening, he learns what she is doing, and he is very very angry indeed. So angry that he threatens to kill his mother - he actually draws his sword on her, but he is dissuaded from that terrible deed, and he simply imprisons her. And she then, in her prison appeals, prays in a sense, to the Buddha who is staying on the vulture's peak, not very far away, just a few miles away. So not only is she a faithful wife, she is also a faithful disciple of the Buddha, and she begs the Buddha to send his disciples, Ananda and Maudgalyana, to visit her. So the Buddha hears her plea with his divine ear, and he does more than she asks. The Buddha himself appears before her, in a sort of vision we may say, together with Ananda on the one hand and Maudgalyana on the other. He appears before Videhi resplendent with rainbow light, there in the prison cell. And Videhi tells him that she is dissatisfied with this world - well might she be! And she asks the Buddha to teach her how to meditate on a better world, a world where actions are pure. So the Buddha by means of his supernormal power shows her many, many pure lands. And Videhi sees all these pure lands and she says that she would like to be born in the pure land of Amitayus; the Buddha of eternal life, who is also of course Amitabha, the Buddha of infinite light, and the Buddha - our Buddha Sakyamuni - there in the prison cell, teaches her sixteen meditations that

will enable her to be born there, in that pure land of Amitabha or Amitayus, called '*Sukhavati*'. And the description of these meditations makes up the greater part of the sutra.

So here too we see how fidelity is tested by separation, even tested by death. Videhi remained faithful to Bimbisara even at the risk of her own life. Videhi possessed the quality of fidelity. She was an individual. Because she was an individual, she could Go for Refuge. She could see the Buddha and his disciples before her. She could hear the Dharma. Ultimately, fidelity means fidelity to The Three Jewels. Fidelity to oneself is ultimately fidelity to the Buddha. Fidelity to ideals is ultimately fidelity to the Dharma. Fidelity to other people is ultimately fidelity to the Sangha. And fidelity of this supreme kind is embodied in the figure of Tara, that is to say *Samayatara*, which Lama Govinda translates as '*the faithful Tara*'. All Bodhisattvas however, are faithful. They are faithful to all beings. And their faithfulness is without limit in space and without limit in time. They are, we may say, embodiments of perfect fidelity. They are individuals in the fullest and highest sense.

So, if we want to be individuals, then let us practise fidelity. Let us be faithful to ourselves, faithful to our word, faithful to our promise. Let us be faithful to our ideals, faithful to our experience, faithful to our work, faithful to the path of the Higher Evolution. Let us be faithful to other people, faithful to our friends and fellow workers, faithful to our teachers. Ultimately, let us be faithful to The Three Jewels. Let us overcome all obstacles - all obstacles to fidelity. Let us pass all tests. Let us be more and more embodiments of fidelity.

Without fidelity there is no continuity. Without continuity there is no development, and without development there is no spiritual life. So let us add fidelity to our list of qualities or characteristics of the individual. Fidelity, we may say, is a human need, because development is a human need. Fidelity is part of human nature, of human nature, because development is part of human nature. So let us not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the present. Let our awareness extend over past, present and future. Let our awareness transcend time altogether. Let it ultimately reach out to the infinite light and eternal life of the Buddha - which are the Buddha.