

## Lecture 156: Between Twin Sala Trees - Edited Version

There are many Buddhist scriptures: in Pali, in Sanskrit, in Tibetan, in Chinese, and so on. There are also many Buddhist traditions: Theravada, Sarvastivada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. And there are very many Buddhist teachings: about the cosmos, about meditation, about the mind, about mental states, about the nature of reality, about different kinds of living beings, about ethics--both personal and social, teachings even about the arts. In fact, there are so many scriptures, traditions, and teachings that one can sometimes get a little bewildered. Sometimes one might think how wonderful it would be if only all those books could be reduced to just one slim pocket volume that one could carry about all the time. How wonderful it would be if one could reduce those multitudinous chapters to just one chapter, all those verses to just one verse, or even reduce all those millions of words to just one magic word upon which alone one could ponder and continually reflect, knowing that if one did so one would be certain of gaining Enlightenment!

I have sometimes thought that this could be done, that perhaps all the teachings could be reduced to one teaching, in fact to just one magic, meaningful, word. That word would be 'impermanence'.

In a way, the whole of the Buddha's teaching is contained in that word. If you can understand impermanence then it is almost as if you will understand everything that the Buddha ever said. It is not surprising, therefore, that we are told that the trees and birds in Sukhavati<The Buddha Amitabha's Pure Land: according to some Mahayana schools, a sort of heavenly realm> have nothing else to say, nothing else to sing, than anitya (impermanence), anatta (selflessness), and dukkha (unsatisfactoriness). One might say that anitya, impermanence, would be sufficient since the other two principles are really contained in it. If we understand this one word, impermanence, in sufficient depth, we will see that the whole of the Buddha's teaching, both practical and theoretical, is implied therein.

We very often find, especially in the earlier portions of the Pali scriptures, that this insight into impermanence is expressed in terms of the realization that whatever has a beginning has an end, that whatever is born must die. If something has a beginning--and of course everything conditioned has a beginning--it must inevitably have an end. Sometimes this is expressed even more precisely and philosophically in the sentence: 'Whatever has by nature an origin, that also by nature has an end.' The end is not accidental, not grafted on: the end is inherent in something inasmuch as it has a beginning. Its beginning is its end; the fact that it is a 'beginning-thing' means that it is also an 'ending-thing'. If you are a 'born-thing', you are a 'dying-thing'.

In traditional Buddhist language, this realization is known as 'the opening of the Eye of Truth', or Dhamma-Chakkhu in Pali (Sanskrit Dharma-Chakshu). The opening of the Dhamma-Eye, the realization of the truth that whatever has by nature an origin has also by nature an end, is equivalent to Stream Entry. From this fact alone, we can appreciate the great importance of the opening of the Dhamma-Eye.

In the course of the Vinaya-Pitaka of the Pali Canon we meet Kondanna, one of the Buddha's first five disciples. It is in connection with him that we hear of the Eye of Truth for the first time. Kondanna had been one of the Buddha's companions earlier on in his career, when the Buddha was practising severe asceticism and self-mortification. When the Buddha gave up that extreme path, Kondanna, like the Buddha's other four companions at that time, left him in disgust and wandered off. The Buddha too went off by himself, and eventually gained Enlightenment.

After gaining Enlightenment, the Buddha thought first of sharing his discovery with his old teachers, but realized that they were now dead. He then thought of his old companions, and realized that they were staying at the Deer Park, at Isipatana, in Sarnath. So he went to them and, as the story goes, although they had determined not to show him any respect, they were quite unable to stop themselves from doing so when he actually arrived. The Buddha then sat down and talked with them.

They talked for an entire rainy season, the Buddha trying to get his old companions to see the truth that he had seen. This no easy task. He argued and expostulated; they discussed things vigorously. In the end the Buddha broke through and was able to communicate what he had been trying for so long to communicate. The first to realize that truth was this same Kondanna. He was the first among those five to get a glimpse of Enlightenment. The text says that when the Buddha had finished speaking, the 'pure and stainless Eye of Truth, the Dhamma-Chakkhu, arose in Kondanna,' and he realized that everything that has by nature an origin has also by nature a cessation.' In one overwhelming flash of insight, he realized the truth of impermanence.

At this point the text has a very interesting comment: 'Thus was the Wheel of the Dhamma set going by the Blessed One'. In other words, it had not really been set going until there was at least one Stream Entrant in the world. Before that the Buddha had been doing his utmost to communicate the Dhamma in words, and maybe in other ways too; but he had not actually set the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion. The Buddha had not really taught until there was one Stream Entrant in the world.

When this happened, when Kondanna had this great insight and the Buddha saw that he had had this great insight--that they shared one and the same insight between them--he was overjoyed. No longer would he have to keep his discovery to himself; it was now, to some extent at least, common property. At that moment, we are told, he let forth an udana, an inspired utterance, a song of ecstasy: 'Kondanna has understood! Kondanna has understood!' The Wheel of the Dhamma had been set rolling, and even he could not see where it would stop. Henceforth Kondanna was called Annata-Kondanna, 'Kondanna who has understood'.

It is interesting to note that the text says nothing about any further attainment beyond the opening of the Dhamma-Eye. It simply says of Kondanna that 'having attained the Dhamma, having understood the Dhamma, having immersed himself in the Dhamma, having left uncertainty behind, having escaped from doubt, having attained confidence and not dependent on others in the doctrine of the teacher, he asked for ordination.'<sup><Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga I, 6, 31, trans. Nanamoli></sup> And this the Buddha granted. We are told the same thing about all four of the remaining ascetics. In their cases the Buddha had a little more difficulty in breaking through, but he managed in the end. In their cases too the Dhamma-Eye arose; they too saw that everything that has by nature an origin has also by nature a cessation. They too asked for ordination, and they too were ordained. In all these cases it was the opening of the Dhamma-Eye that seems to have been the real turning point.

Let us therefore return to impermanence. Impermanence is all around us. Everything is impermanent; there is nothing that is not. We see the leaves fall and the flowers fade; everything is impermanent. But the most vivid and the most powerful form in which we encounter impermanence is in death, the dissolution of the physical body--especially in the death of someone near and dear to us.

Buddhism offers a number of practices which are intended to remind us of death, to remind us that, inasmuch as the physical body was 'put' together, one day it is going to fall apart.

There is, for instance, the Six Element practice (or at least the first four stages of that Six Element practice). Here, we reflect that whatever there is in us of the earth element is borrowed from the earth element which exists all around us in the universe. One day we will have to give it back. Similarly with the water element, the fire element, and with the air element: one day we are going to have to give them all back. That process of giving back, willingly or unwillingly, is the process of dissolution of the physical body, or death.

Then there are the ten so-called 'corpse meditations'. Here, you go along to a cremation, or charnel ground, and see corpses in various stages of decomposition. You then reflect that as they are, so too will you be one day, because you too are subject to death.

Then again, there is the relatively straightforward practice of the simple recollection of death. Here you just remind yourself that one day you will have to die, just as every other human being will have to die.

These practices all serve to remind us that human beings are subject to death: all must one day die. Even the greatest, even the best, even great heroes, must die--their power does not save them. Great artists and poets must die--their art and poetry does not save them. Sometimes these people die premature, even unpleasant, deaths. One thinks of Keats dying of consumption at twenty-five, of Shelley, drowned at thirty, one thinks--in Wordsworth's phrase--of 'mighty poets in their misery dead'. One thinks of Spinoza, a great philosopher, again dying of consumption at the age of about forty. They all die sooner or later, prematurely or in the ripeness of their years. Their political greatness, moral greatness, artistic greatness, philosophical greatness cannot save them.

Even the Buddha had to die. The Buddha was Enlightened, but he was an Enlightened human being, and every human being must die because every human being was born. Everything that has a beginning must have an end. It may seem strange that a Buddha should have to die, but inasmuch as he is human, or to the extent that he is human, he must die.

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta is the sixteenth sutta of the Digha Nikaya and gives an account of the last few months, and especially the last day--or rather night--of the Buddha's earthly existence. It is a composite

work consisting of a number of different episodes and teachings. I would like to investigate four episodes from this sutta. These are the episode of the Mirror of the Dhamma, the episode of the teaching of 'subjective' and 'objective' Refuge, the episode of the Untimely Flowers, and the episode of the Last Disciple. The first two episodes took place on the road to Kusinara, and the second two took place at Kusinara, or rather just outside Kusinara, in the sala grove of the Mallas--between the twin sala trees.

The episode of the Mirror of the Dhamma involves Ananda; in fact, all four episodes involve Ananda in one way or another, because Ananda accompanied the Buddha on his last journey and was present at the Parinibbana itself. Ananda emerges from the Pali scriptures as a vivid and lovable personality. He also seems to have had a very inquisitive mind--as we shall see.

The episode took place at a little place called Nadika, where the Buddha was staying at the 'Brick Hall'. The Buddha had a large number of disciples in that area, so no sooner had the Buddha and Ananda settled down than Ananda went off to visit them. On his return he told the Buddha that a bhikkhu and a bhikkhuni, as well as quite a number of lay disciples, had all died since their last visit. Having an inquisitive mind, however, Ananda was not content just to give the Buddha this information; he wanted to know about the destiny of those deceased people. Where had they been reborn? Had they even been reborn at all? The Buddha--and one can imagine him heaving a sort of sigh here--tells Ananda what he wants to know.

It seems that quite a lot of people have died, so the Buddha's account takes rather a long time. When he has finished, he tells Ananda that it is becoming wearisome to have to go into this sort of thing every time someone dies. He therefore says that he will teach him how to work these things out for himself. He will teach him the Mirror of the Dhamma.

Although there is much that could be said about the Mirror of the Dhamma itself, I am actually concerned here with another point--one that arises in connection with this teaching. I am concerned with the number of lay disciples in that place who had, according to the Buddha, become 'Non-Returners', 'Once Returners', and 'Stream Entrants'. The Buddha tells Ananda that the bhikkhu, having become an arahat, would not be reborn at all; the bhikkhuni had become a Non-Returner; one lay disciple had become a Once-Returner; one lay disciple had become a Stream Entrant. Then, he says, there were fifty-seven more lay disciples who had become Non-Returners, more than ninety who had become Once-Returners, and more than five hundred who had become Stream Entrants--all in one place, and all apparently since the Buddha's last visit.

All this clearly suggests that Stream Entry, at least, is not such a very rare occurrence as is generally supposed. On the strength of this passage alone, we must conclude that Stream Entry is well within the reach of the serious-minded practising Buddhist, whether living as a 'monk' or 'nun', or as a lay person.

Now comes the episode, or teaching, of 'subjective' and 'objective' refuge. The Buddha and his monk-disciples customarily spent eight or nine months of each year wandering from place to place. Then, for the duration of the rainy season, they would settle in one place. On this particular occasion, they stayed for the three months of the rainy season at the village of Beluva.

While they were staying there, perhaps because it was the rainy season, the Buddha became very ill. However, thinking that it would not be right for him to pass away without taking leave of the order, he made a strong effort of will and suppressed his sickness. He had been staying during this time in a vihara, a lodging--probably a little cottage with no more than one room. On his recovery he came outside and sat in the shade, perhaps just enjoying the fresh air and sunshine.

As he sat there, Ananda came up to him. Ananda was quite disturbed by the thought of the Buddha's passing away, so the Buddha took advantage of this opportunity to make certain points, and to give him certain exhortations. In the actual words of the scripture, the Buddha said: 'Therefore, in this regard, Ananda, abide self-reliant (attadipa), taking refuge in yourself, not taking refuge in others, reliant on the Dhamma, taking refuge in the Dhamma, not taking refuge in another.' <Digha Nikaya 16> This was the Buddha's exhortation.

There seems to be a sort of contradiction here. On the one hand one is being asked to take refuge in oneself--and on the other hand one is being asked to take refuge in the Dhamma. On the one hand there is what I call 'subjective refuge', and on the other there is what I call 'objective refuge'.

Unfortunately, the passage which immediately follows does not help us very much. Here the Buddha simply says that one takes refuge in the self and in the Dhamma by the practice of the four foundations

of mindfulness, the four satipatannas: mindfulness of the physical body, mindfulness of sensations, mindfulness of thoughts, and mindfulness of dhammas (dhammas here meaning: mental objects, doctrinal categories or realities). In this way, apparently, the subjective and objective refuges are to be reconciled.

But, to go a little further than this, we could say that 'subjective refuge' represents thinking of the spiritual life in terms of personal--or individual--development, while 'objective refuge' represents thinking of the spiritual life in terms of devotion to a supremely worthwhile object. Actually, we have to have both, and we have to hold them in balance.

In our own movement that balance is possibly tilted in favour of the subjective refuge--though I think that this has started to change. We tend to think in terms of something being good for one's own personal spiritual development, in a rather 'precious' sort of way. We tend, perhaps, to ignore the needs of the objective situation. One hears, for instance, of people not attending some business meetings because they don't feel in an 'organizational mood' that morning. Going to the meeting, they seem to think, would be detrimental to their spiritual development. However, as I have said, this has started changing, and people's approach is beginning to be rather more balanced. More weight is being given to the needs of the objective situation, more weight is being given to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, more weight is being given to other people.

Thirdly, we have the episode of the 'Untimely Flowers'. This episode took place in the sala grove near Kusinara, and it took place, as did the succeeding episode, between the twin sala trees. Let us try to visualize the scene.

The Mallas, the tribal people in whose territory Kusinara was situated, had planted two parallel rows of sala trees, running from east to west. At the eastern end of the two rows, between the last two trees, was a kind of platform which was apparently used for meetings. The Buddha lay down upon this with his head to the north and his feet to the south. Lying down, as he usually did, on his right side, his head to the north and his feet to the south, he would have been facing west, looking right down the great avenue of sala trees. Had you been walking up this avenue, you would have seen the Buddha lying between the last two sala trees right at the very end--a very impressive sight.

We should perhaps note that the Buddha passed away in the open air. According to tradition the Buddha was also born in the open air, gained Enlightenment in open air, and often taught in the open air. In other words, he lived very close to nature throughout his life.

While the Buddha was lying between the twin sala trees, something strange happened. The Buddha himself drew Ananda's attention to it. Here are the exact words of the Pali text:

Then said the Exalted One to the venerable Ananda:

'See, Ananda! All abloom are the twin Sala trees: with untimely blossoms do they shower down on the body of the Tathagata, they sprinkle it, cover it up, in worship of the Tathagata. Moreover, heavenly frankincense comes falling from the sky, showers down upon the body of the Tathagata, sprinkles it and covers it up, in worship of the Tathagata. And heavenly music sounds in the sky, in worship of the Tathagata, and heavenly songs are wafted from the sky in worship of the Tathagata.

Yet not thus is the Tathagata truly honoured, revered, respected, worshipped, and deferred to. Whosoever, Ananda, be he brother or sister, or lay-brother or lay-sister,--whosoever dwells in the fulfilment of the Dhamma, both in its greater and in its lesser duties,--whosoever walks uprightly in accordance with the Dhamma,--he it is that truly honours, reveres, respects, worships, and defers to the Tathagata in the perfection of worship.' <Ibid. p.347>

Although the heart of the matter seems to be that true worship of the Buddha consists in the practice of his teaching, there is a danger of a misunderstanding. The passage seems to fit in very neatly with our Western, rationalistic way of thinking, our rationalistic pre-suppositions. The passage might seem to be saying that the offering of flowers, lights, and candles is unnecessary. But this is not what the passage is saying at all.

It is true that the offering of flowers and so on is by no means any substitute for the actual practice of the Buddha's teaching: the practice of morality (sila), the practice of meditation (samadhi), and the practice of wisdom (panna). But this does not mean that we should not offer those flowers. Offering flowers is an expression of devotion and thus strengthens devotion. If we do not feel any devotion then we will probably not practise the teaching.

We must also remember whom the Buddha was addressing. Ananda seems to have been an emotional rather than intellectual type of person. Perhaps he was sometimes carried away by his feelings and needed to be reminded that feelings, even devotional feelings, were not everything.

Our position in the modern West is quite different. Many of us find it quite easy to understand the Dhamma; we even find it easy to practise it up to a point. But we find it very difficult to experience strong devotional feelings. Some of us hardly know what devotional feelings are--they are just things we hear or read about! As a consequence, sooner or later, our spiritual life comes to a halt, or at least stagnates very badly. Unlike Ananda, and unlike those sala trees, we actually need to offer all the flowers we can, even great armfuls of them. We should certainly not take this passage as condoning a purely rationalistic attitude to spiritual life.

Finally, we have the episode of 'the Last Disciple'. The name of this last person to be 'converted' by the Buddha himself was Subhadda. Subhadda was a wanderer, a paribbajaka, and just happened to be in the vicinity of Kusinara when he heard that the Buddha was about to pass away. Thinking that he should not miss such an opportunity, he came to where the Buddha was staying.

Ananda, not wishing the Buddha to be disturbed at such a time, would not allow him to get close enough to the Buddha to speak with him. Overhearing their conversation, however, the Buddha asked Ananda to let Subhadda approach, and the Buddha and Subhadda entered into conversation. The Buddha taught, and Subhadda was, as we might say, 'converted'. Being converted, he went for Refuge, asked for ordination.

Here we are concerned with just one point, a point not actually mentioned in the text itself, but in Buddhaghosha's commentary to the sutta. The text speaks of the Buddha granting Subhadda's request for ordination by telling Ananda: 'Ordain him'. The commentary then tells us exactly how this was done: what Ananda did, and what the Buddha did on that occasion. This is very important, because it is clearly based on a very ancient tradition. Here is the passage:

The Thera (Ananda), they say, took him (Subhadda) on one side, poured water over his head from a water vessel, made him repeat the formula of meditation on the impermanency of the body, shaved off his hair and beard, clad him in the yellow robes, made him repeat the Three Refuges, and led him back to the Exalted One. The Exalted One himself admitted him then into the higher rank of the brotherhood, and pointed out to him a subject for meditation.<from Buddhaghosha's commentary to the Parinibbanasuttanta, Digha Nikaya ii, 153>

This is particularly interesting because there is a distinct parallel with our own ordination procedure in the Western Buddhist Order. According to Buddhaghosha, Subhadda is first made to go for Refuge, then he is given a meditation subject, his hair and beard are shaved, water is poured over his head, he is clad in yellow robes, and, finally, he is accepted into the ranks of the Sangha. All of these elements, except one, are found in our own private and public ordination ceremonies.

First of all there is the Going for Refuge. This is found in both the private ceremony and the public ceremony. Then there is the giving of a subject for meditation; this is found in the private ordination ceremony when one is given a visualization and mantra recitation practice. Thirdly comes the shaving of hair and beard. This is not found in the case of the Western Buddhist Order (though some men do sometimes have a very close crop just before ordination). Then comes the pouring of the water; that is found in our public ordination ceremony. Fifthly, being clad in yellow robes corresponds to the investiture with the kesa<a strip of white silk emblazoned with a Three Jewels motif> found in the public ordination ceremony. Sixthly and lastly, of course, one's reception into the ranks of the Sangha occurs in the course of the public ordination ceremony.

There is thus only one item that is not found in our own ordination procedure, and just one item in our own ordination procedure which is not present in Subhadda's case: the giving of a new name.

All this is quite significant in view of the fact that, in the FWBO and in the WBO, we try to go back to the origins of things, try to base ourselves on what is fundamental in the Buddhist tradition. It is of further interest that T. W. Rhys-Davids, the translator of the Digha-Nikaya, has a judicious note on this commentarial passage: 'According to this, no set ceremony for ordination (Sangha-kammam), as laid down in the Vinaya [which of course developed some time later], took place; and it is otherwise probable that no such ceremony was usual in the earliest days of Buddhism.'*Ibid.*> The implications of this statement demand to be very well pondered indeed.

The day on which we commemorate the 'great passing away', or Mahaparinibbana, of the Buddha, is one of the major Buddhist festivals of the year. In recent years, however, I do not believe that we in the FWBO have paid as much attention to this occasion as perhaps we could have done. I would therefore like to conclude this talk by making a few suggestions as to how the day might be marked.

Firstly, if at all possible, we should observe the Parinibbana Day throughout the day. We should read the Mahaparinibbana Sutta aloud in the shrine room, and chant the Vajrasattva Mantra. It is perhaps not necessary to read through the Mahaparinibbana Sutta in its entirety on this occasion; one could read only those sections which have a direct bearing on the events leading up the Parinibbana itself.

The chanting of the Vajrasattva mantra could be performed at intervals throughout the day. But why the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva? Why not the mantra of Tara, or Manjushri, or Vajrapani, or Padmasambhava? The answer is quite simple. Vajrasattva is connected with death. The manner in which I first discovered this takes me back to 1958 or '59, when I was living in Kalimpong.

On one occasion I went up to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, to see Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche, who was one of my Tibetan teachers. He was staying at the Palace Temple, on the outskirts of Gangtok. Upon arriving I was ushered into an antechamber and asked to wait for about half an hour. When I was ushered into his presence he received me, as always, in a very kindly and fatherly sort of way, and apologised for having kept me waiting--adding, by way of explanation, that he had been performing the Vajrasattva puja and recitation of the Vajrasattva mantra on behalf of a lama friend who had just died. As he talked a little more about this, I came to understand that Vajrasattva was connected with death.

A few years later, in the winter of 1966-67, I had a rather strange experience in this connection. I was back in Kalimpong, having spent two years in the West. By now I had decided to settle in England, and was in Kalimpong on a farewell visit, staying at my Triyana Vardhana Vihara.

One night I woke up at about two o'clock in the morning. I really did wake up--this was not a dream or a vision. Everything was bright as if I was in daylight. I sat up on my bed and, looking down towards the side of my bed, I saw a great pit in the floor that certainly had not been there the previous evening. I looked down into the pit. Standing there was an old friend--one who had been dead for several years.

The pit must have been just over six feet deep because he was about six feet tall and was completely contained in the pit. For some minutes I just looked. I knew that he was dead, of course. I also knew that something was wrong and that something had to be done. But what? That was when I thought of Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche and what he had told me about the Vajrasattva Mantra.

Sitting up on my bed, I started repeating the Vajrasattva mantra. As I did so, the words of the mantra--in Tibetan characters--came out of my mouth. They came out of my mouth and formed a sort of garland, or chain, which went right down into the pit and then looped back up again--just within reach of the person in the pit. My friend caught hold of this garland, and so pulled himself out of the pit. He then disappeared.

At that moment I suddenly heard horns being blown just outside. Only then did I remember that it was the night of the new moon and that the Jogis were abroad. The Jogis are a particular caste or sect of the Nepalese, a very strange people. A hereditary duty has been imposed upon them to go around at certain times of the year, on the night of the new moon, to collect the souls of the dead. The Nepalese people keep away from them. Dogs keep away from them too--even the fiercest dog will not touch them. In the morning they come to the houses that they have been clearing of spirits, and you are supposed to give them a little raw rice and some money. Most Nepalese people are so afraid they just throw the money and rice to them from a distance and retreat as quickly as they can.

Since that experience I have had a certain amount of faith in the Vajrasattva mantra in this connection. Vajrasattva is associated not only with death, but with 'hell'--not hell in the Christian sense, of course, but in the sense of lower states of temporary suffering. And Vajrasattva is perhaps associated with hell because he is associated with death, at least so far as 'ordinary' people are concerned, people--that is to say--who have not attained Stream Entry.

To return to the observance of Parinirvana Day, the day should be an occasion for remembering not just the Buddha's Parinirvana, but also other deceased persons, especially Order members, mitras, and Friends who have died in the course of the previous year or so. We can perhaps place their photographs on the shrine, below images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and gurus. Their full names and the dates of their death should be read out either during or before a Sevenfold Puja<A collective devotional practice usually performed at the end of a day's events>. We can also commemorate the friends and relations of Order

members, mitras, and Friends. If anybody wants to bring along the photograph, or hand in the name, of anybody near and dear to them who has died, especially during the course of the past year, they should be free to do that.

There are a number of positive reasons for this suggestion. First of all, the significance of the Parinirvana Day itself will be enhanced. Secondly, we will be reminded that everyone dies, whether Enlightened or unenlightened. Thirdly, in the case of deceased Order members especially, we will be reminded that physical death does not interrupt the spiritual connection. The spiritual community, in the broadest sense, consists of both the 'living' and the 'dead'. In this way we shall be helped to transcend the limitations of the physical body, enabled to realize that the spiritual community is not limited by space and time, and that, in a sense, the dead are not really dead. Fourthly, a commemoration of this sort will help bereaved Order members, mitras, Friends, and others to come to terms with the fact of death, and come to terms with the fact that they have lost, as it seems, someone near and dear to them. Fifthly, commemorating other people who have recently died will help to remind us that, inasmuch as we may be separated from those near and dear to us at any moment, we should compose our quarrels.

One sometimes hears people saying, 'I am so sad, not just that the person has died, but that we could not resolve a certain misunderstanding before they died.' It might have been one's father or mother, one's brother or sister, or a friend, or a fellow Order member or mitra, but you feel sorry that that breach, that wound, has not been healed and that the person has died without the two of you having been reconciled. Death may come at any time; it does not always give advance warning. So if there is any misunderstanding unresolved, we should settle it immediately.

In ten days time we shall be observing that anniversary of the Buddha's Parinibbana. I hope that what I have said here will, among other things, help to make it an even more significant occasion than usual. I hope that it will give us an even deeper insight into the truth of impermanence. I hope it will give an even deeper realization of the inevitability of death. I hope it will enable us to be 'present' with the Buddha on that occasion, between the twin sala trees.