

Lecture 159: The Bodhisattva Principle - Edited Version

WE ARE LIVING IN THE MIDST of a great debate. It is a debate which, in one form or another, has been going on ever since simple consciousness evolved into reflexive consciousness or, in other words, ever since man became man. All civilizations have been involved in this debate, all cultures, and all religions. Some of the greatest triumphs of the human spirit are the product of this debate, and some of its most terrible disasters. Among the speakers in this debate, so to speak, on the one side or the other, have been names so well known to history that it is unnecessary for me to mention them. In the course of the last century, and particularly in the course of the last decade, this great debate has been growing in intensity, and involving an increasing number of concerned and thoughtful people in every quarter of the globe. On the outcome of this debate depends, perhaps, the future of humanity, for the debate is in fact nothing less than a debate between the forces of life and the forces of death, between creation and destruction, power and love, chaos and order, and the motion that is being debated, so to speak, is the motion 'Man is/is not a spiritual being with a spiritual destiny.'

The debate to which I refer does not take place in any one session, or at any one time, nor are the same participants always present. It takes place in a number of subsidiary sessions, as it were, in a number of different places, and one group of participants is constantly being replaced by another. Nor is that all. There are debates, and conferences, on the great debate itself, and it is in one of these that we ourselves are involved here today. For the last six years the Wrekin Trust has sponsored a series of major conferences concerned, in its own words, 'with different aspects of the emerging relationship between the mystical and the scientific experience of the nature of reality', and of this series the present conference is the sixth. We meet, as previous conferences have met, in the ancient and historic, indeed legendary, city of Winchester, with which some of our authorities identify Camelot, the capital of the illustrious King Arthur, and the seat of that goodly fellowship of the Round Table through which the once and future king strove to stem the tide of barbarism then flooding Britain. In later, perhaps more historic times, Winchester was the capital of the kingdom of Wessex, and the seat of the noble Alfred, who in a time of darkness was not only the ruler but the educator of his people, and after whom the building in which we are now meeting is most appropriately named.

Both Arthur and Alfred made contributions to the great debate of which I have spoken. We know on which side of the question they stood, whether they were for or against the motion, and their contribution was none the less effective for being expressed in deeds as well as in words. Today our task is infinitely more difficult than theirs. The forces of death have assumed forms incomparably more noxious than they ever knew, so that the forces of life are obliged to assume forms correspondingly more healthful and benign. If we are not to become the hapless victims of destructiveness without limit, power without restraint, and chaos without end, we shall need a richer and more abundant creativity, a purer and more ardent love, and a more harmonious and stable order, than the world has ever known before. This is not all that we shall need. The terms in which the debate is being conducted are today more complex than ever before. Many cultures are involved, many scientific disciplines, and many spiritual traditions. Many languages too are involved, both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense. We shall therefore need a greater open-mindedness than ever before, as well as a greater mental agility, and greater powers of sympathy and understanding.

So far this series of conferences has conducted its contribution to the great debate, or at least to the debate about the debate, mainly in terms of Western (i.e. occidental) culture. The overall title of the series, indeed, is 'Mystics and Scientists', and both the word 'mysticism' and the word 'science', together with their respective derivatives, are terms of Western cultural provenance. Moreover, the theme of last year's conference was 'The Evolution of Consciousness', while this year our theme is, of course, 'Reality, Consciousness, and Order'. All these are, again, terms belonging to Western culture, and in using them we are therefore speaking a particular language, both literally and metaphorically, and the fact that we are doing so determines, at least to an extent, the nature of our contribution to the debate as well as the conception we have of the debate itself.

That these conferences should speak the language of Western culture, and that their discussions should take place within a framework of Western cultural and spiritual values, is of course natural. The conferences themselves are held in the West, and they are attended (I think) by Westerners, whether by birth or by adoption. More important still, it is in the West that the great debate of which I have spoken has reached its highest pitch of intensity, generating shock waves that have travelled to the remotest parts of the world. Scientism, the Industrial Revolution, Capitalism, Parliamentary Democracy, Marxist Communism, and Secular Humanism, are all movements the effects of which are now felt, directly or

indirectly, throughout the whole 'global village', and all are movements of modern (i.e. post-medieval) Western origin. It was only to be expected, however, that sooner or later these conferences would begin to speak, or at least begin to understand, the language of some of the great non-Western cultures. It was only to be expected that they would eventually widen the framework within which their discussions took place, as I am sure the sponsors of these conferences would wish them to widen it. Even in King Arthur's day, a paynim was once admitted to membership of the Round Table. It was only to be expected that, sooner or later, Buddhism would enter into the discussions, even as it plunged, centuries ago, into the thick of the great debate itself. It was only to be expected that a Buddhist View should be heard in this hall.

In seeking to give expression to that View I am confronted by a serious difficulty. Like its predecessors, this conference brings together Mystics and Scientists, those working in the sciences with those following spiritual disciplines, and as I have already pointed out both the word 'mysticism' and the word 'science', together with their respective derivatives, are words of Western cultural provenance. As a follower of Buddhism, which historically speaking is an Eastern (i.e. oriental) cultural and spiritual tradition, with a highly developed and indeed sophisticated 'language' of its own, I therefore find myself wondering which of these terms is the more applicable to me and in what capacity I am here. A Scientist I certainly am not, for I am not one of those working in the sciences. Does this then mean I am a Mystic, as presumably it must mean if the terms 'science' and 'mysticism' are not just contraries but contradictories? Although I have followed Buddhist spiritual disciplines for many years, I have no more thought of myself as a Mystic than I have thought of Buddhism itself as 'a form of Eastern mysticism'. To me, as a Buddhist, terms such as 'mystic' and 'mysticism' are in fact quite strange, even alien, not to say repugnant, and in speaking and writing about Buddhism I prefer to avoid them. Notwithstanding the title of a well known book by Dr D.T. Suzuki⁴² - a writer remarkable for fluency rather than precision of expression - they do not really correspond to anything with which I am familiar within the field of Buddhism.

Such being the case it is obvious that I am here in neither of the two capacities in which I imagine the rest of you to be present. I belong neither with the mystical sheep nor with the scientific goats (perhaps I should say scientific wolves) but to a rather different breed that some of you may not have encountered before. In speaking to you on the 'Bodhisattva Principle: Key to the Evolution of Consciousness, Individual and Collective', and thus giving expression to a Buddhist View, I therefore speak neither as a Mystic nor as a Scientist, but simply as a Buddhist, leaving it to you to determine the extent to which my View as a Buddhist coincides with your View as a Scientist or a Mystic, a worker in the sciences or a follower of a spiritual discipline. In speaking as a Buddhist I speak as one who, having immersed himself in Buddhism for more than forty years, both in the East and the West, finds in Buddhism the Reality that works through Consciousness to achieve Order. To use Buddhism's own language, I speak as one who finds in Buddhism the Buddha who, together with the Bodhisattvas, works through the Dharma to create the Sangha - to create Sukhavati.

Yet though I speak as a Buddhist it is your language I shall be speaking today, the language of Western culture, not the language of Buddhism. Indeed, the fact that I speak to you as a Buddhist, and speak about Buddhism, means that I have started speaking your language already, for the terms 'Buddhist' and 'Buddhism' are not found in what I am obliged to refer to as Buddhism, both terms being quite recent Western coinages. It might even be said that I started speaking your language from the moment I agreed to address this conference not just on the subject of the Bodhisattva Principle, but on the subject of the Bodhisattva Principle as the Key to the Evolution of Consciousness, Individual and Collective, for the terms 'Evolution', 'Consciousness', and 'Individual', are terms having no exact equivalents in any of the canonical languages of Buddhism. Since to speak about Buddhism in any 'language' other than its own is, inevitably, to distort it, and even to misrepresent it completely, I shall be able really to speak to you about Buddhism - really to communicate a Buddhist View - only with the help of a certain amount of indulgence on your part. Though in a literal sense I am speaking to you in my own language, in a metaphorical sense I am speaking to you in a language that is not really my own, and am therefore at a disadvantage. Since I am meeting you half way by speaking as a 'Buddhist', and speaking about 'Buddhism', I hope you will meet me half way by concentrating your attention on the spirit rather than on the letter of my address. Without sympathy no human communication is possible, least of all when one is seeking to translate one's View, or one's Vision, into terms other than those in which it was originally conceived and expressed. With this by way of preamble, let me begin by making a few general observations on Buddhism.

The historical and the spiritual importance of Buddhism is, of course, beyond dispute. It is the major cultural and spiritual tradition of Asia, and what we most readily think of when mention is made of the Wisdom of the East. The image of the Buddha, seated in meditation beneath the Tree of Enlightenment, is one of the best known of all the religious symbols of mankind. Together with Christianity and Islam, which are younger than Buddhism by five and eleven centuries respectively, Buddhism is one of the three

great 'universal' religions of the world, that is to say, it is not an ethnic religion, like Confucianism or Shinto, but a religion whose message is in principle addressed to every human being qua human being, irrespective of caste, race, sex, social position, nationality, or culture. For centuries together Buddhism was, in fact, the religion of between one quarter and one third of the human race. As distinct from both Christianity and Islam, however, Buddhism is not a theistic but a non-theistic religion. In Buddhism there is no personal God, the creator and ruler of the universe. There is no divine revelation, in the sense of a communication of God's will to mankind either through the life and sacrificial death of his incarnate son or through the inspired utterance of his chosen messenger. There is no sacred book in the sense of an inerrant and authoritative record of that communication. There is no prayer in the sense of petition to, or communion with, a Heavenly Father. Such being the case, some people have doubted whether Buddhism is a religion at all. To them religion is essentially theistic, and a non-theistic religion therefore a contradiction in terms. Perhaps in the last analysis the question is simply one of definition. In any case, one nowadays hears talk, in some quarters, of non-theistic Christianity, of religionless Christianity, and even of Christian Buddhism, whatever that might mean.

Since Buddhism is certainly non-theistic, and possibly not a religion, some people, again, have not only doubted whether it was a religion but have even wondered whether it was not a form of Science. Thus one occasionally hears talk of something called Scientific Buddhism. Buddhism is supposed to be 'scientific', or even a 'scientific religion'. This misunderstanding is sufficiently serious, even though not sufficiently widespread, to warrant correction. Buddhism is certainly not scientific in the sense that anticipations of modern scientific thought, and even of actual scientific discoveries, are to be found in ancient Buddhist texts, thereby somehow 'proving' the truth of Buddhism, as Scientific Buddhism at its most naive has been known to assert. Such an assertion is little more than a clumsy attempt to appropriate, on behalf of Buddhism, some of the immense prestige of modern Science, and betrays a lack of confidence in Buddhism as a spiritual tradition. Buddhism is 'scientific' only in the very limited and indeed metaphorical sense of being imbued with the scientific spirit, i.e. with that spirit of open-minded inquiry that in the modern West is associated with Science rather than with religion, as well as in the sense of being empirical rather than dogmatic in its approach to the problems of existence - which in the case of Buddhism means strictly human or, more correctly, strictly sentient existence. Buddhism is non-scientific to the extent that it recognizes the 'existence' of a transcendental Reality with regard to which Modern Science, in the person of its official representatives, is at best agnostic. (There are, of course, signs that the monolithic materialist unity of Science is beginning to crack, as this conference itself bears witness.) This transcendental Reality can actually be experienced by man, a human being who experiences it in the highest degree being known as a Buddha, or Enlightened One. Buddhism also differs from science in making use not only of the intellect but also of the emotions. Indeed, according to Buddhism the problems of existence can be solved, and transcendental Reality be experienced, only when reason and emotion unite and there comes into existence a higher spiritual faculty variously known as Vision, Insight, and Imagination. In other words, transcendental Reality is to be experienced by the whole man, functioning with the utmost intensity at the height of his unified being.

Risking an oversimplification, one might say Science represents the extreme of objectivity and reason, whereas Mysticism represents the extreme of subjectivity and emotion - in this context, emotion purified by spiritual discipline.⁴³ Science seeks to reduce the subject to the object, Mysticism to absorb the object in the subject. Buddhism, following here as elsewhere a Middle Way, represents a dissolution of the subject-object duality itself in a blissful, non-dual Awareness wherein that which, without, is beyond the object, coincides with that which, within, is beyond the subject, or, in other words, wherein that which is most exterior coincides with that which is most interior. When expressed in terms of objectivity, this blissful, non-dual Awareness appears as Wisdom; when expressed in terms of subjectivity, it manifests as Compassion - Wisdom and Compassion being the twin 'attributes' of Buddhahood or Enlightenment.

Besides the one represented by 'Scientific Buddhism', there are other misunderstandings of Buddhism. As I discovered on my return to England in 1964, after spending twenty years uninterruptedly in the East, mainly in India, such misunderstandings are extremely persistent and very difficult to account for. Though Buddhism has been known in the West for well over a hundred years, the blurred and shifting 'image' of Buddhism that flickers on the screen of public consciousness is hardly a positive one. More often than not Buddhism appears as cold, bleak, inhuman, and anti-social. It is seen as a system of rigid asceticism which, by means of a great mass of prohibitions and restrictions, seeks to bring about the extinction of all human desires and the achievement of a state of passionless calm indistinguishable from death. For some people the mere mention of its name immediately brings to mind high walls surmounted by rows of spikes, darkened rooms, and joyless lives. 'Are you allowed to go out of the monastery?' 'Are you allowed to speak to other people?' 'Who sent you to England?' These were some of the questions which, on my return to England, I was asked by editors of women's magazines and members of the general public. When I explained that I could go out of the monastery whenever I wished, and speak to whoever I thought fit,

and that I had come to England entirely on my own initiative, my questioners were clearly surprised. (I should mention that in those days I was shaven-headed, and wore my yellow robes constantly, not just for ceremonial purposes as I do now.) At the same time, Buddhism is also seen as strange, exotic, colourful, weird, and mysterious. Indeed, in recent years the image of Buddhism as a system of rigid asceticism has been partly overlaid - perhaps in the United States more than in Britain - by more fascinating images of absurdity (= 'Zen') and erotic abandon (= 'Tantra') - thus adding to the confusion. But rather than spend any more time correcting misunderstandings, or telling you what Buddhism is not, let me try to tell you, in the clearest and most general terms, what Buddhism is. Let me try to draw for you a picture of Buddhism that will obliterate, once and for all, the old misleading images. This will give us a means of approach to the Bodhisattva Ideal, and enable us to see why it is the key to the Evolution of Consciousness.

Speaking in the clearest and most general terms, then, Buddhism is a Path or Way. It is a Path leading from the impermanent to the permanent, from sorrow to happiness, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of perfect wisdom. This is the Path for which the Buddha himself, in the days before his Enlightenment, is represented as searching. For the sake of this Path he went forth from home into homelessness. For the sake of this Path he sat at the foot of the Bodhi Tree. This is the Path he discovered at the time of his Supreme Enlightenment, this is the Path which, after initial hesitation, he made known to mankind. In his own words, as recorded in the Dhammapada,

Walking this Path you shall make an end of suffering. This is the Path made known by me when I had learnt to remove all darts.

This Path it was that, for the forty-five years of his teaching life, in one formulation or another made up the principal content of the Buddha's message. The formulations were indeed very numerous. Perhaps the most basic was that of the Path as consisting of the three great stages of right conduct (s'ila), meditation (samadhi), and wisdom (prajna).

Great becomes the fruit, great the advantages of meditation, when it is set

round with (i.e. supported by) upright conduct. Great becomes the fruit, great the advantage of wisdom, when it is set round

with meditation.44

Such was the gist of the 'comprehensive religious talk' which the Buddha delivered in eleven out of the fourteen places he visited in the course of the last six months of his life. No less important, and even better known, is the formulation of the Path as Eightfold, that is to say, as consisting in the gradual extension of Perfect Vision - the vision of the transcendental - successively to one's emotional attitude, one's communication with other people, one's actions, one's means of livelihood, one's energy, one's recollection, and one's overall state of being and consciousness. Much rarer is a formulation which in fact occurs only once in the Pali Canon. This is the formulation of the Path in terms of the Seven Stages of Purification - ethical, emotional, intellectual, and so on. Together with right conduct, meditation, and wisdom, this formulation provides the double framework of Buddhaghosha's great exegetical work the Visuddhimagga or 'Path of Purity', the standard work of Theravada Buddhism, i.e. of the Pali-Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

In the Mahayana scriptures many other formulations are found. Some of these are extremely comprehensive in scope, so that with them the Path begins to take on a more universal character. Among these more comprehensive formulations the most important, both historically and spiritually, is that of the Path of the Ten Perfections, the Ten Perfections being Generosity, Right Conduct, Patience and Forbearance, Vigour, Meditation, Wisdom, Skilful Means (= Compassion), Salvific Vow, Strength or Power, and Knowledge or Transcendental Awareness. This Path of the Ten Perfections is, of course, the Path of the Bodhisattva, 'he whose nature or essence is Bodhi' (interpretations vary), the great spiritual hero who instead of aiming at the inferior goal of individual Enlightenment, i.e. Enlightenment for oneself alone, out of compassion seeks to attain the universal Enlightenment of a Buddha, so as to be able to deliver all sentient beings from suffering. For the accomplishment of this sublime purpose he practises the Ten Perfections not for one lifetime only but for an unthinkable number of lifetimes, being reborn in many different worlds, and on many different planes of existence. In this way he traverses the ten great 'levels' (bhumis) of spiritual progress - another formulation - from that called 'the Joyful' right up to 'the Cloud of Dharma', at which stage he becomes a Buddha. Thus he fulfils the Bodhisattva Ideal, as it is called - an ideal which the Mahayana regards the historical Buddha as himself exemplifying. Yet another formulation of the Path found in the Mahayana scriptures is that of the eleven 'abodes' (viharas), which

are, also, stages of spiritual progress traversed by the Bodhisattva, and which coincide to some extent with the ten 'levels'. Perhaps the most comprehensive of all formulations of the Path is that of the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism, according to which the total Path consists of nine 'ways' (yanas) which between them cover all the three major yanas, i.e. the Hinayana, the Mahayana, the Vajrayana, conceived not only as stages in the historical development of Indian Buddhism but as stages in the spiritual evolution of the individual Buddhist.

The number and importance of these abstract formulations of the Path should not blind us to the fact that the Path also finds vivid concrete embodiment in actual human lives, whether as depicted in the scriptures or as recorded by profane history. The Path in truth is the pilgrim, and the pilgrim the Path, so that 'Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become the Path itself.' Travelling on a path implies a journey, and it is of a journey that both the scriptures and history often speak. Thus in the Gandavyuha or 'Flower-Array' Sutra the youth Sudhana, in order to achieve what the text calls 'the highest knowledge of Enlightenment,' goes on a journey that takes him to various parts of India and in the course of which he visits more than fifty spiritual teachers. Similarly, in the Prajnaparamita or 'Perfection of Wisdom' Sutra (the version in 8,000 lines), the Bodhisattva Sadaparudita or 'Ever-Weeping', advised by a divine voice, goes east in search of the perfection of wisdom, encountering many adventures on the way until, in the city of Gandhavati, he meets with the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata and hears his demonstration of the Dharma. On a more mythic level, in the Saddharma-pundarika or 'White Lotus of the True Dharma' Sutra the journey is a return journey not unlike that of the king's son in the Gnostic 'Hymn of the Pearl'. In more strictly geographical terms there is Yuan Chwang's famous pilgrimage from China to the West, i.e. to India - and Monkey's. There is also Basho's 'Journey to the Far North.'

Though the promised picture of Buddhism has now been drawn, and though the rough outline of the Path has been filled in with details of abstract formulations and concrete embodiments in actual human - and animal - lives, this is by no means enough for our purpose. If we are really to understand what Buddhism is we must understand what the Path is in principle, i.e. must understand what it is that makes the Path the Path. In order to understand this we shall have to go back, so to speak, to the fundamental principles of what, in the absence of any more suitable term, we are obliged to call Buddhist philosophy. This will bring us close to the very essence of Buddhism and to the heart of this address.

Philosophy takes for its object all time and all existence. It is the science which, as metaphysics, investigates the most general facts and principles of reality (the dictionary definition). The fundamental principles of Buddhist philosophy, from which all its other principles derive, are therefore principles that embody its understanding of the nature of existence in the most general sense - though in the case of Buddhism this understanding is the product not of systematic reflection on sense experience but of direct spiritual vision. According to Buddhism the nature of existence is best described in terms of change, or becoming. This does not mean that existence changes, in the sense of being subject to change but distinct from it, but that existence itself is change, is becoming. One of the fundamental principles of Buddhism, therefore, is that which finds embodiment in the well known equation 'Existence (or Reality) = Change (or Becoming).' This change or becoming is not fortuitous, but takes place in a certain fixed manner, in accordance with a certain definite law. (Not that the law really exists apart from the changing physical and mental phenomena it is said to govern. The law simply describes the way in which physical and mental phenomena behave in accordance with their inherent nature.) The general formula for this law, a formula which according to the Pali scriptures goes back to the Buddha himself, is that 'This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises. This not being, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.' The law is thus a law of conditionality or, in more specifically Buddhist language, it is a law of dependent origination or conditioned coproduction, as the term pratitya-samutpada is variously translated. Just as existence is change, so change is conditionality. The Vision that Buddhism sees - the Vision that the Buddha saw on the night of his Enlightenment - is a vision of existence in terms of an infinitely complex, constantly shifting network of physical and mental phenomena, all arising in dependence on certain conditions and ceasing when those conditions cease.

Universal though it is in scope, however, the law of conditionality is not uniform in operation - not all of one same kind, so to speak. Within the infinitely complex, constantly shifting network of physical and mental happenings - within the totality of existence - it is possible to distinguish two distinct trends or types of conditionality. In the one case there arises, in dependence on the immediately preceding factor in a 'dependently originating' series, a factor which is the opposite of the preceding one, as when good arises in dependence on evil (or vice versa), happiness in dependence on suffering, death in dependence on birth. In the other case there arises, in dependence on the preceding factor, a factor which far from being the opposite of the preceding one, and thus negating it, is what may be termed its positive counterpart, so that it actually augments it, as when joy arises in dependence on happiness, rapture in dependence on joy, bliss in dependence on rapture. One trend or type of conditionality consists in a rotary

movement between pairs of factors which are opposites, and the order of conditionality is therefore said to be cyclical in character. The other consists in a cumulative movement between factors which are counterparts or complements, and the order of conditionality is therefore said to be progressive. The first trend or type or order of conditionality Buddhism sees as a wheel endlessly turning round - a wheel of birth and death. The second it sees as a spiral constantly ascending - a spiral of spiritual development. We are now in a position to understand what the Path is in principle, and therefore what Buddhism really is. The Path is in principle identical with the progressive order of conditionality. The Path is essentially an ascending series of mental factors or mental states.

That the Path is in principle just this, that it is just this that makes the Path the Path, might have been obvious, to a limited extent, even in the case of the specific formulations of the Path already mentioned, such as the Noble Eightfold Path and the Path of the Ten Perfections. In the case of certain other formulations, almost equally well known and scarcely less important, it is more obvious still. Indeed, it could hardly be more obvious. It is crystal clear. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment, for example, are a series of mental states and spiritual experiences consisting of recollection or awareness, investigation of mental events, energy or vigour, rapture, 'tension-release', meditative absorption, and tranquillity or equanimity, each succeeding factor arising in dependence on the factor immediately preceding it and carrying that factor, so to speak, to a higher power of itself. Here the upward, cumulative movement of the progressive order of conditionality is particularly noticeable. It is no less noticeable in the second half of what is undoubtedly the most comprehensive formulation of the whole process of dependent origination or conditioned co-production to be found in the entire extent of the Pali canonical literature, a formulation which includes both the cyclical and the progressive orders of conditionality in one gigantic synthesis. This most comprehensive and therefore philosophically most significant formulation is a twenty-fourfold one, consisting of twelve factors or 'links' (nidanas) successively arising in accordance with one trend or type of conditionality and twelve factors or 'links' successively arising in accordance with the other. Placed end to end, so to speak, the two sets of factors or two halves of the formulation, one 'cyclical' and the other 'progressive' in character, form a single continuous series. The factors or 'links' that make up the first half, which does not concern us here, are traditionally regarded as illustrating the process of human birth, death, and rebirth. The factors or 'links' that make up the second half exemplify the Path. Here the series of mental and spiritual experiences consists of faith (in the sense of a positive emotional response to spiritual ideals), tranquillity, satisfaction and delight, rapture, 'tension-release', bliss, concentration, knowledge and vision of things as they are, disentanglement, dispassion, freedom or liberation, and knowledge of the destruction of the defilements. In this formulation, as in that of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the upward, cumulative movement of the series is unmistakable, and the fact that the Path is in principle identical with the progressive order of conditionality therefore clearly established. Even without a proper understanding of such terms as 'tension-release' and disentanglement, the meaning of which is far from evident at first sight, the nature of the Path as essentially an ascending series of mental factors or mental states can be strongly felt.

If we look closely at the series of mental and spiritual experiences that makes up the second half of the twenty-fourfold formulation of the principle of conditionality, the series beginning with faith and ending with the knowledge of the destruction of the defilements, we shall see that this in turn consists of two halves, or two sets of factors or 'links' placed end to end. One set consists of seven factors, i.e. faith, tranquillity, satisfaction and delight, rapture, 'tension-release', bliss, and concentration. The other set consists of five factors, i.e. knowledge and vision of things as they are, disentanglement, dispassion, freedom or liberation, and knowledge of the destruction of the defilements. Between the two sets of factors there is a world of difference. The difference consists in the fact that while both sets are progressive, in the case of the set consisting of five factors the forward, cumulative movement characteristic of the progressive order of conditionality is irreversible, whereas in the case of the set consisting of seven factors that movement can actually be reversed. From this it follows that the point of transition from one set of factors to the other, i.e. the point at which in dependence on concentration there arises knowledge and vision of things as they are, is of crucial importance in the spiritual life. One who reaches this point, the point of no return as it is called, cannot fall away from the Path: he can only go forward. Such a person becomes what in the Hinayana form of Buddhism is known as a Stream Entrant or, in the slightly differing context of Mahayana, as an Irreversible Bodhisattva.

The fact that the series of mental and spiritual experiences beginning with faith and ending with knowledge of the destruction of the defilements consists of two different sets of factors or 'links', one reversibly and the other irreversibly progressive, means that it is possible to distinguish, within the totality of existence, not two trends or types of conditionality but three. Conditionality can operate by way of a rotatory movement, by way of a movement that is both cumulative and dispersive, and by way of a movement that is only cumulative. In other words, there is a trend or type of conditionality that is cyclical, a trend or type that is both progressive and regressive, and a trend or a type that is irreversibly progressive.

Moreover, inasmuch as existence itself is conditionality, and conditionality existence, the fact that there are three kinds of conditionality means that there are also three kinds of existence. Substituting a static for the dynamic model, one could say that there is a stratification of existence, so to speak, into three different planes, each plane being governed by one or another of the three trends or types of conditionality. Using popular rather than traditional Buddhist terms for these planes one could speak of them as the worldly plane, the spiritual plane, and the transcendental plane. The worldly plane is governed by the cyclical trend or type of conditionality, the spiritual plane by the trend or type of conditionality that is both progressive and regressive, and the transcendental plane by the trend or type that is irreversibly progressive. In traditional Buddhist terms, the three planes (or realms) are those of sensuous desire, of archetypal form and of no-form, and the transcendental or nirvanic plane. The first plane is inhabited by the inferior gods, human beings, anti-gods, hungry ghosts, and hell beings; the second by the superior gods, and the third by Stream Entrants and the rest of the Holy Persons, by irreversible Bodhisattvas, Bodhisattvas of the dharma-kaya, and by Buddhas. The worldly plane, or plane of sensuous desire, is represented by the figure of Mara, the Evil One; the plane of archetypal form and of no-form by the figure of Brahma, the lord of a thousand worlds, and the transcendental or nirvanic plane by the figure of the Stream Entrant or the irreversible Bodhisattva. Spiritual life and spiritual development consists, according to Buddhist tradition, in the gradual ascent through all three planes or realms, from that of sensuous desire to that of archetypal form and of no form, and from that of archetypal form and of no form to the transcendental or nirvanic plane or realm, so that one's life is successively governed by the cyclical, both progressive and regressive, and by the irreversibly progressive, trends or types of conditionality. Subjectively, the spiritual life consists in an ascent through mental factors and mental states, i.e. consists in the actual development of such factors or states. Objectively, it consists in an ascent through worlds or realms or planes. In the latter case, despite the spatial nature of the model, we should not think of the three planes as being in reality spatially separated. The three do in fact interpenetrate.

At this point we might venture on a generalization that traditional Buddhism does not actually make, or at least does not make in quite the same way. Inasmuch as existence consists of three planes or three realms, and inasmuch as these three planes or three realms are all governed by the law of conditionality, it could be said that each plane or realm comes into existence in dependence on the one immediately preceding, i.e. the plane of archetypal form and of no form in dependence on the plane of sensuous desire, and the transcendental or nirvanic plane in dependence on the plane of archetypal form and of no form. That Buddhism sees this movement from one trend or type of conditionality to another as taking place within the life of the individual has already been pointed out. The generalization consists in extending the process from the life of the individual to the life of the universe, so to speak, or from the sphere of psychology - in the broadest sense - to the sphere of cosmology. In modern Western terms, the generalization consists in seeing a parallel, or even a partial coincidence, between the process of spiritual development as depicted in traditional Buddhist teaching and the course of human evolution as described by modern science.

For Buddhism the idea of there being a parallel, or even a partial coincidence, between these two processes, is not a wholly fantastic one, as we can see by briefly referring to what modern scholarship regards as the historical origins of the Bodhisattva Ideal. In the great autobiographical discourses of the Pali Canon the Buddha often describes experiences as belonging to the period before his Enlightenment, and whenever he does this it is as a Bodhisattva, in the sense of a seeker after bodhi or Enlightenment, that he invariably refers to himself. Thus the term 'Bodhisattva' originally referred to the historical Buddha in his pre-Enlightenment days. But of course the Buddha or Buddha-to-be had lived even before being born as the son of Suddhodhana and Mayadevi, and had been a seeker after bodhi or Enlightenment even then.... Gradually the use of the term Bodhisattva was extended and came to refer to the Buddha in these previous existences of his, existences in which he had practised the Ten Perfections, and his life as a Bodhisattva came to be regarded, for historical and doctrinal reasons into which I cannot enter now, as representing the ultimate spiritual ideal for all Buddhists. Details of these previous existences are given in a class of works known as Jatakas or Birth Stories. Jatakas are of two kinds, canonical and non-canonical, the latter being by far the more numerous. In the canonical Jatakas the Buddha-to-be is invariably depicted as a famous sage or teacher of ancient times, or as a righteous king. That is to say, he is depicted as taking the lead, whether in the sphere of ethical and religious life or in the sphere of political activity. In the non-canonical Jatakas he is depicted in a number of different ways, for instance as a caravan leader, a master mariner, a family priest, a tree spirit, a god, an ascetic, an elephant trainer, a thief, and a gambler. He is even depicted as an animal. In whatever way he is depicted, here too he is always the most outstanding member of his group or class, and besides practising the Ten Perfections displays, in human and non-human existences alike, exceptional qualities of responsibility, initiative, and enterprise. Here too the Buddha-to-be is always depicted as taking the lead.

Thus although there was 'no Darwinian rise from lower to higher forms' in the repeated births of Gautama Buddha there was certainly not 'a mere jumble of metamorphoses', as an eminent Victorian orientalist believed.⁴⁵ A parallel, even a partial coincidence, between the process of spiritual development and the course of human evolution, can indeed be seen. In the case of the canonical Jatakas there is an ascent, Darwinian or otherwise, from lower to higher, and this process is continuous with that of the Buddha's search for Enlightenment. In the case of the noncanonical Jatakas, though there is no question of 'a mere jumble of metamorphoses' this does not mean that they are arranged in such a way that the stories of the Buddha's previous existences form one continuous, progressive series analogous to the biological series of organic forms, or even that they could be arranged so as to form one.⁴⁶ What it really means is that, despite their immense variety, all the non-canonical Jatakas follow the same pattern and exemplify the same principle. A Jataka is a Birth Story. In every story there is a hero. This hero is always the most outstanding member of his circle, and always takes the lead. Moreover this hero is none other than the Bodhisattva, i.e. the Buddha himself in a previous existence, and a Bodhisattva by definition is one who seeks after bodhi or Enlightenment and practises the Ten Perfections. Thus the hero, or the being who represents the growing point of evolution within each group or class of beings, is at the same time the being who follows the Path. The course of human - and animal - evolution and the process of spiritual development are parts of one and the same upward movement of life and consciousness. We are therefore justified in speaking in terms of a Bodhisattva principle at work in every form of existence, from the lowest to the most lofty. As I have commented elsewhere, 'the urge to Enlightenment is immanent in all forms and spheres of life, from the humblest to the highest, and manifests whenever a kind and intelligent action is performed.'⁴⁷

This upward movement of life and consciousness, of which the course of evolution and the process of spiritual development both form part, is one that on planet Earth alone has continued for hundreds of millions of years. From the human point of view the most important point in the entire vast and complex movement is that at which sense consciousness evolved into reflexive consciousness or, in Buddhist terms, at which in dependence on sense consciousness reflexive consciousness arose. At that point man became man, i.e. an animal who in some respects resembled a man was succeeded by a man who in some respects resembled an animal. Reflexive consciousness means individuality. Individuality means spiritual development. (When I speak of individuality I am not, of course, speaking of individualism, a very different thing. I am speaking of the possibility of taking responsibility for one's own life.) Spiritual development means the development of consciousness, that is to say, it is essentially an ascent through mental factors and mental states. Evolution from amoeba up to man-like animal is sometimes spoken of as the Lower Evolution. Similarly, evolution from animal-like man up to Buddha or Enlightened man is sometimes spoken of as the Higher Evolution. The Lower Evolution is a collective process, the Higher Evolution is an individual process. The one takes place unconsciously rather than consciously, and its course is erratic and uncertain; the other takes place consciously rather than unconsciously, and its course is more direct and definite. While one is measured in aeons, the other can be telescoped within a single human lifetime. Since the Bodhisattva principle, as I have called it, is at work in every form of existence, Lower Evolution and Higher Evolution are in reality continuous. The Buddha-to-be is identical with the human or animal hero of the Jatakas, and the human or animal hero of the Jatakas is identical with the Buddha-to-be. Striking what may well sound like an unfashionable Hegelian note, we might even say that in the Higher Evolution the Lower Evolution attains self-consciousness, and that this self-consciousness is the Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva this self-consciousness.

Though Lower Evolution and Higher Evolution are continuous this does not mean that there are no qualitative differences between them. Some of these differences have been indicated. The most important difference is that whereas the Lower Evolution is unconscious rather than conscious the Higher Evolution is conscious rather than unconscious. As I have already said, spiritual development means the development of consciousness, or an ascent through mental factors and mental states. In other words, whereas Lower Evolution is a development in respect of material form, Higher Evolution is a development in respect of mental and spiritual attitude. Lower Evolution takes place on the plane of sensuous desire, Higher Evolution on the plane of archetypal form and of no form and, eventually, on the transcendental or nirvanic plane. It was therefore only to be expected that those formulations of the Path in which the Path was most clearly seen as being in principle identical with the progressive order of conditionality should be the very formulations in which the Path most clearly consisted of a series of mental and spiritual experiences. It was only to be expected that Buddhism, as a Path or Way, should be concerned with the development of consciousness, and that in the course of its long history it should have devised a number of methods that were helpful in this connection. These methods are of two kinds, direct and indirect. The direct or subjective method, in which the level of consciousness is raised by working directly on the mind itself, is what is known in the West as meditation. As is well known, Buddhism is particularly rich in this field, some methods of meditation being the common property of all Buddhist traditions, while others are peculiar to one tradition only, or to a group of traditions.

Particular instances are intelligible only in the light of general principles. Buddhism sees in the figure of the Bodhisattva the highest embodiment of that urge to Enlightenment which is immanent in all forms and spheres of life. That urge becomes conscious, so to speak, in the process of the Higher Evolution, which in turn finds its fullest and clearest expression in the Path, particularly in that part of it which consists of the development or evolution of consciousness. Except in the light of the Bodhisattva, who embodies the common principle of them all in its clearest and most concentrated form, expressions such as Higher Evolution, Path, and development of consciousness remain unintelligible, or at best only partially intelligible. In the Bodhisattva, Buddhism finds its highest expression and its ultimate meaning. The Bodhisattva is indeed the meaning of human life, even the meaning of existence. Hence it is not surprising that the Bodhisattva principle should be regarded as the key to the evolution of consciousness, in fact the key to every manifestation of the progressive order of conditionality. By 'key' is not meant a scientific explanation of the evolution of consciousness, or of anything else, but a concept, or an image, in the light of which the whole process can not only be rendered intelligible but brought within a wider, more 'cosmic' context.

In terms of Western thought, the Bodhisattva principle is the principle of perpetual self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is the ultimate nature of Higher Evolution and Lower Evolution alike. Self-transcendence is the ultimate nature of existence. Above all, it is the true meaning of everything that goes by the name of religion, spiritual life, development of consciousness, and so on. Further than this it is perhaps not possible for me to go, at least not on the present occasion. Let me therefore conclude this Buddhist View with a few remarks on the subject of consciousness, individual and collective.

Individual consciousness, which is broadly equivalent to reflexive consciousness, is the consciousness appropriate to the truly human, i.e. consciously evolving, individual. Such an individual is characterized by awareness, emotional positivity, responsibility, intelligence, creativity, spontaneity, imagination, and insight, and his consciousness is of the corresponding type. Collective consciousness, in this context, is not group consciousness, i.e. is not the consciousness common to a number of living beings who have not yet attained to individuality - even though the Bodhisattva principle is as much the key to the development of collective consciousness in this sense as it is to the development of individual consciousness or, indeed, to the development of collective consciousness in the sense in which I am using the term in this context. For collective consciousness in this latter sense there is really no suitable term in the English language, or indeed in any other European language, unless the Russian sobornost comes near it to some extent, which is why I generally enclose the two words within single inverted commas. Collective consciousness, in the present context, is a special kind of consciousness common to, in a sense even shared by, a number of truly human individuals who follow the same spiritual disciplines and have the same spiritual ideals, or who are engaged in the same creative activities. Collective consciousness in this sense is as much above individual consciousness, taken separately, as group consciousness is below it. The Bodhisattva principle is the key to collective consciousness in this higher sense in that the Bodhisattva, even though appearing as an objectively existing personality, in reality transcends the distinction between subject and object, self and others.

'Collective consciousness' is the consciousness appropriate to what we in the Western Buddhist Order have come to speak of as the Spiritual Community - giving this term a special meaning which it does not possess in ordinary English usage. By the Spiritual Community - the Order - we mean a group, as we have necessarily and misleadingly to call it, of truly human individuals who have Enlightenment, the Path, and the Spiritual Community itself as their ideals or who, in traditional Buddhist language, go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Of this Spiritual Community the Bodhisattva is the spirit, even as the Spiritual Community is the expression, at least to some extent, of the Bodhisattva principle in the world. It is the Bodhisattva who, from the Beyond which is within as well as from the Beyond which is without, leads the Spiritual Community, on the Path, to Enlightenment. The Bodhisattva always has led, and always will lead. We see him in the Jatakas as the hero, the being who represents the growing point of evolution within each group or class of beings. We see him always taking the lead. In some of the great Mahayana sutras we see him establishing what is known as the Pure Land, or ideal environment for the pursuit of the spiritual life. We see him as Avalokitesvara, Lord of Compassion, whose eleven faces look down upon the sufferings of sentient beings in the eleven directions of space, and whose thousand arms are outstretched to help. We see him as Manjusri, Lord of Wisdom and Eloquence, who with his right hand whirls above his head the flaming sword of knowledge, that cuts asunder the bonds of ignorance, while with his left he presses the book of the Perfection of Wisdom to his heart. We see him as Vajrapani, Lord of Might, whose blazing thunderbolt cuts through the obstructions of the cyclic order of conditionality and opens up the way for the progressive order. We see him - we see her - as Tara, Lady of Salvation, who delivers from all dangers, temporal and spiritual. We see, in fact, the Glorious Company of Bodhisattvas, who are the Spiritual Community in the highest sense, of which our earthly Spiritual Community is a pale

and indistinct reflex. We see him - we see them - as embodiments of the Bodhisattva principle, key to the evolution of consciousness, individual and collective.

In giving expression here to this Buddhist View, I have had to speak, for the most part, the language of Western culture. Whenever I slipped, as I am sure I slipped more than once, into a more characteristically Buddhist idiom, I may well have ceased to be comprehensible - assuming, of course, that I was comprehensible in the first place. I have also had to speak, as a Buddhist, to an audience consisting of Mystics and Scientists, of those following spiritual disciplines and of those working in the sciences. In so doing it has been necessary for me to leave many threads hanging loose, to present the conclusions without the reasoning that has led to those conclusions, and to make use of concepts for which there is, perhaps, no emotional equivalent in your own experience, as there is in the spiritual experience of Buddhists. Nonetheless I hope I have been able to communicate to you something, at least, of the spirit of Buddhism. If this conference is to make any contribution to the great debate in the midst of which we are now living, and if we ourselves are to make any contribution to this conference, we must be able to communicate with one another, and, as I reminded you at the beginning of this address, without sympathy no human communication is possible. When the tide of barbarism was flooding Britain Arthur founded the Round Table. In a time of darkness Alfred translated The Consolation of Philosophy. Today our Round Table must include all who are in any way concerned with Reality, Consciousness, and Order, and we must translate our own special holistic vision more and more into the terms of a common language intelligible to all. Only in this way, perhaps, will the ultimate triumph of the forces of life, of love, and of order, be assured. Only in this way will the truth that man is a spiritual being with a spiritual destiny be finally vindicated.

Lecture 164: THE GLORY OF THE LITERARY WORLD - Edited Version

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE RENAISSANCE that would be brought about by the discovery, in the nineteenth century, of the treasures of oriental literature, would be incomparably more glorious than that which had been ushered in during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the recovery of the classics of Greece and Rome. Whether that prediction will be fulfilled it is difficult for us, in the middle of the penultimate decade of the twentieth century, to be sure, but we can at least be sure that there is a possibility of its being fulfilled. The treasures of oriental literature have indeed been discovered, that is, discovered by the peoples of the West, and have proved to be even richer than was originally supposed. Not only have they been discovered, but many of them have been made more generally available by being translated into the major occidental languages, especially English. Thus today, less than two hundred years after the discovery of those same treasures, we find that hundreds of thousands - perhaps millions - of people in Europe and the Americas are able to read, in their own tongue, some of the greatest works of Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, and Persian literature. What people read cannot but affect them, and what affects hundreds of thousands - perhaps millions - of people cannot but affect the civilization and culture to which they belong, at least in course of time. We may therefore say that the second, more glorious renaissance that, it was predicted, would be brought about by the discovery of the treasures of oriental literature, has in a sense already begun, even though it has begun on a very small scale, and to a very limited extent, and though we cannot be sure whether the process will ever be completed.

There are, of course, differences between the two renaissances. The first was ushered in by the recovery of the classics of Greece and Rome, whereas the second hopefully is being brought about by the discovery of the classics of India, China, Japan, Tibet, and Persia. Moreover, in the case of the first renaissance the Greek and Roman classics were in most instances recovered from the hands of a people (i.e. the Byzantine Greeks) whose religion - and culture too, to a great extent - was quite different from that of the authors of those classics, whereas in the case of the second renaissance the treasures of oriental literature have in almost all instances been discovered among people whose spiritual outlook was broadly identical with that of the ancient poets and sages by whom that literature had been produced. This latter circumstance has meant that the discovery of the treasures of oriental literature has been associated with the discovery of those who were, so to speak, the natural heirs to those treasures and who were therefore in a position to help us appreciate their value and significance. When the Italian humanists recovered the Dialogues of Plato, for example, they did not recover any living Platonists along with them; but when British orientalists discovered the Bhagavad Gita they at the same time discovered many learned and pious Hindus who had studied and practised its teachings. In other words, whereas the humanists recovered books the orientalists discovered both books and men, that is, men who were the living representatives of the tradition to which the books belonged. Another difference between the two renaissances is that the actual number of Sanskrit,

Pali, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, and Persian classics discovered in the course of the last two hundred years far exceeds the number of Greek and Roman classics recovered during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

In view of all these differences it is obvious that if the second renaissance succeeds in coming to maturity it will be not only more glorious but more thoroughgoing and more far-reaching in its effects than the first. Indeed, it will be more glorious precisely because it is more thoroughgoing and more far-reaching in its effects. However, it is not with the vast subject of the two renaissances that I propose to deal on the present occasion. I do not even propose to deal with one of them separately. My purpose is much more modest. All I propose to do is to offer a few more or less random remarks on one particular aspect of the renaissance that has been brought about by the discovery of the treasures of oriental literature - a renaissance in the midst of whose very tentative beginnings we are all, to some extent, now living.

As I have already indicated, the treasures of oriental literature are to be found in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, and Persian. These are the six principal languages involved. If we look at the corresponding literatures, however, we shall see that, taken in their respective totalities, Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan literature all have much more in common with each other than any of them has with Persian literature. These five literatures thus form a kind of natural group. If we look again, we shall see that what the five literatures have in common is the fact that they are all, to a greater or lesser extent, Buddhist literatures. Indeed, in a number of cases a work that is a classic of Buddhist literature in one language is also a classic of Buddhist literature in another language, into which it has been translated. This is particularly the case with Sanskrit Buddhist literature, on the one hand, and Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist literature on the other. In England we are not unfamiliar with the phenomenon, the Authorized Version of the Book of Job and Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, for example, being as much classics of English literature as the original works are classics of Hebrew and of Persian literature.

The most important part of that part of Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan literature which is also Buddhist literature is what is traditionally known as the Tripitaka or 'Three Collections' (literally 'baskets') of the Buddha's teachings, that is, the Sutra Pitaka or Collection of Discourses, the Vinaya Pitaka or Collection of Monastic Discipline, and the Abhidharma Pitaka or Collection of Further Doctrine. In Tibet and its cultural dependencies the Tibetan version of the Tripitaka is known as the Kangyur or '[Translated] Word of the Buddha'. This designation draws attention to the fact that the contents of the Tripitaka are traditionally regarded as Buddhavacana, the word or utterance of the Enlightened One. Buddhist literature, whether in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, or Tibetan, thus falls into two great divisions, one consisting of works composed by the Buddha's disciples, immediate or remote, the other consisting of works purporting to embody the Buddhavacana, either in its original form or in translation. It is this latter group of works that comprises what I have termed Buddhist canonical literature, by 'canonical' meaning that the literature in question is traditionally regarded as Buddhavacana. Besides being the most important part of Buddhist literature, this Buddhist canonical literature is probably the most valuable of all the many treasures of oriental literature that have so far been discovered. Such being the case it is to be expected that it will make an especially significant contribution to the second, more glorious renaissance that the discovery of those treasures hopefully is bringing about, and it is on the subject of Buddhist canonical literature that I therefore propose to offer a few remarks on this occasion.

In offering these remarks on this particular aspect of the second renaissance, as I have called it, I shall not be trying to give you a resume of The Eternal Legacy, useful as that might be. I shall not even be trying to determine the exact nature of the contribution that Buddhist canonical literature is likely to make to the second renaissance. Instead, I shall be seeking to share with you a few reflections on Buddhist canonical literature as literature.

Before I can do this, however, it will be necessary for me to deal with a possible objection. We know that the Buddha himself wrote nothing. We know that he taught orally, and that before being written down around the beginning of the Common Era his teachings were preserved entirely by oral means. But the word literature means 'writing'. If the canonical literature consists of works purporting to embody the Buddhavacana, therefore, is it not a contradiction in terms to speak of Buddhist canonical literature? The objection is more apparent than real. Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are universally regarded as works of classical Greek literature: indeed, they are regarded as its greatest works; but there is no doubt that both epics existed as oral compositions for centuries before they were committed to writing in the sixth century BCE. From this it is obvious that literature, which a modern dictionary defines as 'written material such as poetry, novels, essays, etc.' and as 'the body of written work of a particular culture or people', includes both material that was written down at the time of composition and material that was written down

subsequently, after it had been preserved by oral means for a longer or a shorter period. No contradiction in terms is therefore involved in speaking of Buddhist canonical literature.

What, then, do I mean when I speak of sharing with you a few reflections on Buddhist canonical literature as literature? What sort of difference of attitude does such an emphasis imply? In any case, what is literature, in the real as distinct from the merely formal sense of the term, and in what other way or ways could one approach Buddhist canonical literature if one does not approach it as literature? In discussing these questions I shall, in fact, be doing what I proposed to do and sharing with you my reflections on Buddhist canonical literature as literature, so that when the discussion is complete I shall have little more to say on the subject, at least for the present.

Let me begin with a few definitions, that is, definitions of literature, since it is on the question of the real nature of literature that the whole discussion hinges. These definitions will enable us to see to what extent we are justified in approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature. According to Carlyle, literature is 'the thought of thinking Souls'. There is no doubt that the great being who was so deeply moved by the sight of an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a wandering ascetic that he left home in quest of Supreme Enlightenment was a 'thinking Soul' in the fullest sense of the term, and no doubt that the Buddhist canonical literature - the Buddhavacana - contains what we may well describe as the Buddha's thought - especially if, with D.H. Lawrence, we understand by thought not just the manipulation of abstract ideas but 'a man in his wholeness wholly attending'. The next definition does not bear quite so directly on the present discussion, but it is of considerable general interest. 'Literature, taken in all its bearings', says William Godwin, the author of *Political Justice*, 'forms the grand line of demarcation between the human and the animal kingdoms.' One is reminded here of the fact that in Tibetan representations of the Wheel of Life the blue Buddha is depicted showing the inhabitants of the animal world a book. The book stands for literature. It is the possession of literature, rather than the possession of language, that distinguishes man from the animals, for even though it may be argued that animals can, in fact, speak (as distinct from making inarticulate noises), it can hardly be argued that they can write books. Moreover, if it is literature that forms the line of demarcation between man and animals that line will be formed most definitively by that literature which, in the terms of the previous definition, is the thought of the most deeply thinking Soul. This would appear to suggest that inasmuch as the Buddha is traditionally regarded as the deepest thinking Soul known to history Buddhist canonical literature is not only literature but literature par excellence.

Though in certain respects very illuminating, both these definitions - Carlyle's and Godwin's - are at the same time rather narrow. A much more comprehensive definition is provided by the classical scholar J.W. Mackail, who writes 'Language put to its best purpose, used at its utmost power and with the greatest skill, and recorded that it may not pass away, evaporate, and be forgotten, is what we call, for want of a better word, literature.' This definition must be examined clause by clause. To begin with, literature is 'language put to its best purpose'. But what is the best purpose to which language can be put? From a Buddhist point of view the answer to this question is to be found in the exhortation with which the Buddha sent his first sixty disciples out into the world. 'Go ye now, monks,' he is reported as saying, 'and wander for the gain of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, and for the welfare of gods and men.... Preach the Dhamma ...; proclaim a consummate, perfect, and pure life of holiness. There are beings whose mental eyes are covered by scarcely any dust, but if the Dhamma is not preached to them, they cannot attain salvation.'⁴⁸ In other words, the monks are to preach - are to make use of language - in order that beings endowed with awareness may be enabled to live the holy life (*brahmacariya*) and attain salvation, and they are to do this out of compassion. Thus the best purpose to which language can be put is to communicate salvific truth (*dhamma*). Buddhist canonical literature contains this salvific truth. Hence Buddhist canonical literature is literature in the most real sense of the term.

Next, literature is 'language used at its utmost power and with the greatest skill'. There is no doubt that in communicating the salvific truth the Buddha stretched the language that was available to him to the utmost limits of its capacity. There are, indeed, those who maintain that Middle Indic was in fact insufficient for his purposes, much as the English language 'sunk under' Milton. Thus Buddhist canonical literature is literature in this sense too. Finally, literature is 'language recorded that it may not pass away, evaporate, and be forgotten'. That Buddhist canonical literature is literature in this sense is obvious. After being preserved entirely by oral means for nearly half a millennium, the salvific truth communicated by the Buddha was committed to writing for the benefit of future generations. In the case of the Pali Tipitaka - the Theravada version of the Buddhavacana - this took place in Sri Lanka towards the end of the first century BCE. 'The text of the three Pitakas and the atthakatha thereon did the most wise bhikkhus hand down in former times orally,' says the *Mahavamsa* or 'Great Chronicle' of Sri Lanka, 'but since they saw that the people were falling away (from religion) the bhikkhus came together, and in order that the true

doctrine [saddhamma] might endure, they wrote them down in books.’⁴⁹ Whether by oral or literary means, the preservation of the Buddhavacana has indeed been ever regarded as the special responsibility of the Monastic Order.

This more comprehensive definition not only gives us a better understanding of the real nature of literature, not only helps us to see to what extent we are justified in approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature; it also suggests that Buddhist canonical literature is, in fact, literature ‘writ large’, in the sense that by approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature we in fact endow the concept of literature with a fuller and richer content than it possessed before. It is therefore interesting to note that Mackail concludes by saying of language ‘put to the best purpose’ and so on that it is ‘what we call, for want of a better word, literature.’ For want of a better word! It is almost as though he felt that the phenomenon he had so carefully defined so far transcended what was ordinarily understood by the term literature that a more appropriate word was really needed. Might one suggest that that more appropriate word would be one that was reminiscent of the term Buddhavacana or, if that was considered as representing too high an ideal for the phenomenon in question, one that was reminiscent of what the poet-monk Vangisa, in verses addressed to the Buddha, spoke of as ‘deathless speech (amata vaca)’ - that deathless speech which is, at the same time ‘truth (sacca)’?⁵⁰

Nowadays we are not accustomed to thinking of literature in this kind of way. We are not even accustomed to thinking of poetry in this kind of way. Though once defined as ‘the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds’, poetry seems to have become, in the hands of some recent practitioners of the art, the record of the worst and most depressing moments of the worst and most deeply disturbed minds. In other words literature - including poetry - nowadays tends to be ‘clinical’: it is a record of symptoms - of symptoms of disease. So much is this the case that we often find it difficult to think of literature, and indeed the arts in general, in any other way. We find it difficult to think of literature in terms of Mackail’s definition, especially when this is commented on from a Buddhist point of view, and still more difficult to understand what is meant by that fuller and richer content with which, it is claimed, the concept of literature becomes endowed when we approach Buddhist canonical literature as literature. Let me therefore read you a section from Lu Chi’s rhyme-prose Essay on Literature. I had intended to read this a little later on, when the definitions of literature had all been dealt with, but perhaps I had better read it now and deal with the two remaining definitions afterwards. Lu Chi was a Chinese writer who lived from 261 to 303CE. His essay is in eleven sections, and I am going to read the fourth section, entitled ‘The Joy of Writing’. Since writing here means nothing less than the creation of literature, what Lu Chi has to say about the joy of writing will at the same time show us in what kind of way he thinks of literature.

Writing is in itself a joy, Yet saints and sages have long since held it in awe. For it is Being, created by tasking the Great Void, And ‘tis sound rung out of Profound Silence. In a sheet of paper is contained the Infinite, And, evolved from an inch-sized heart, an endless panorama. The words, as they expand, become all-evocative, The thought, still further pursued, will run the deeper, Till flowers in full blossom exhale all-pervading fragrance, And tender boughs, their saps running, grow to a whole jungle of splendour. Bright winds spread luminous wings, quick breezes soar from the earth, And, nimbus-like amidst all these, rises the glory of the literary world.⁵¹

Writing is ‘Being, created by tasking the Great Void’. It is hardly necessary for me to tell you that nowadays we do not usually think of writing in this kind of way, and perhaps not everybody did even in fourth and fifth century China. Lu Chi’s conception of the writer, especially the poet, and of the use of literature, is on a level with his conception of writing. The first section of his essay, entitled ‘The Motive’, opens with the ringing declaration:

Erect in the Central Realm the poet views the expanse of the whole universe, And in tomes of ancient wisdom his spirit rejoices and finds nurture.⁵²

‘The poet views the expanse of the whole universe.’ This is surely reminiscent of Plato’s famous definition of the philosopher as ‘the spectator of all time and all existence’, though it will be noticed that the poet’s spirit rejoices and finds nurture in ‘tomes of ancient wisdom’. Thus the poet is not simply an untutored child of nature. He is also deeply versed in traditional philosophy. As for Lu Chi’s conception of the use of literature, this is the subject of the concluding section of his essay. I was going to read only the first two lines, but it is so important and so evocative that I think I had better read it all:

The use of literature Lies in its conveyance of every truth. It expands the horizon to make space infinite, And serves as a bridge that spans a myriad years. It maps all roads and paths for posterity, And mirrors the images of worthy ancients, That the tottering Edifices of the sage kings of antiquity may be reared

again, And their admonishing voices, wind-borne since of yore, may resume full

expression. No regions are too remote but it pervades, No truth too subtle to be woven into its vast web. Like mist and rain, it permeates and nourishes, And manifests all the powers of transformation in which gods and spirits

share. Virtue it makes endure and radiate on brass and stone, And resound in an eternal stream of melodies ever renewed on pipes and

strings.⁵³

No doubt there is much that could be said on the conception of literature that emerges from these quotations from Lu Chi's remarkable essay, but any commentary must be reserved for some future occasion. For the present I am concerned with the section entitled 'The Joy of Writing', and the two other passages I have read, only to the extent that they give us a general idea of what is actually meant by the concept of literature having a 'fuller and richer' content. In Lu Chi's own words, I am concerned with them only to the extent that they give us a glimpse of 'the glory of the literary world'. Let me, then, now proceed straight to the two remaining definitions.

The first of these will not detain us long, since it has much in common with Mackail's definition, though expressed with a succinctness that makes it particularly memorable. 'Great literature', says Ezra Pound, 'is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.' Here the distinction between oral and recorded literature seems to be ignored - perhaps because Pound considered it unimportant. Unlike Carlyle, Godwin, and Mackail he does, however, distinguish (at least by implication) between what is great literature and what is not great literature, the latter presumably being language that is charged with meaning only to a moderate degree.

Our last definition of literature is concerned with the relation between the spoken and the written word. According to Robert Louis Stevenson 'Literature in many of its branches is no more than the shadow of good talk.' The operative word here is 'shadow'. Good and even great as literature may be, in many of its branches it is to good talk as the shadow to the substance. What makes the written record of an oral communication so much more 'shadowy', in some instances, than the oral communication itself, is the fact that in oral communication the language of words is supplemented by the language of gestures, of facial expression, of intonation, and in short by the total impact of the personality of the speaker on his auditor. This is certainly the case with the Buddhist canonical literature, which indeed is no more than the shadow of the Buddha's 'good talk'. ('Good talk' could, in fact, be regarded as the English equivalent of dhamma-katha, usually translated as 'pious talk'.) What the Buddha communicated by virtue of the impact of his Enlightened personality on the unenlightened personalities of his disciples far outweighed what he was able to communicate to them simply by means of words. The Buddhist canonical literature, however, contains only the words. In reading that literature, therefore, we should never forget that although the Buddha stretched Middle Indic to the utmost limits of its capacity he was still far from being able to communicate his 'Vision of Truth' in its fullness by purely verbal means. Buddhist canonical literature thus partakes of the same limitations as all literature, including even poetry. Though much is conveyed, there is much that is not - indeed cannot be - conveyed by words. Speaking of his experience not of truth but of beauty, Marlowe's Tamburlaine gives magnificent expression to this fact in lines that I have already quoted in *The Eternal Legacy* and which I make no apology for quoting again.

If all the pens that ever poets held Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts, And every sweetness that inspired their hearts, Their minds, and muses on admired themes; If all the heavenly quintessence they still From their immortal flowers of poesy, Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive The highest reaches of a human wit; If these had made one poem's period, And all combin'd in beauty's worthiness, Yet should there hover in their restless heads One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least, Which into words no virtue can digest.⁵⁴

It is because language - and therefore literature - is unable to communicate experience in its fullness that the Buddha declared in the Lan.kavatara Sutra that from the night of his Supreme Enlightenment to the night of his Final Passing Away he had not uttered a single word.⁵⁵ He had not uttered a single word because he had been unable to give full expression to his profound inner experience - in a sense, had not been able to give expression to it at all. Words alone, therefore, cannot reveal the secret of the Buddha's teaching. In order truly to understand that teaching we have to rely not merely on words but on the spirit (artha) as opposed to the letter (vyanjana) of the Dharma. As some of you will know, this is one of the four reliances (pratisarana) of the Vimalakirti-nirdesa and other texts. However, I digress. It is time we got back into the main track of the discussion.

The real nature of literature having transpired from the definitions provided by Carlyle, Godwin, Mackail, Pound, and Stevenson, particularly as commented on from a Buddhist point of view, it is clear that we are fully justified in approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature. Indeed, it is clear that in approaching Buddhist canonical literature in this way we in fact endow the concept of literature with a fuller and richer meaning than it possessed before, at least in recent times. What, then, does it actually mean, in practical terms, to approach Buddhist canonical literature as literature? Let me take as my point of departure a similar kind of approach to the canonical literature of another religion, as encountered by me in my own early life.

In 1940 I was in Torquay. It was the time when, as a result of reading *Isis Unveiled*, I had realized I was not a Christian. One day, in the window of a bookshop in the main street, I saw a new publication on sale. The publication in question was *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature*. It was a large, thick volume, and since it lay there open I could see that it was printed like an ordinary book, the text not being divided into the usual numbered verses. At that time the idea that the Bible could be read as literature was comparatively new, at least to the wider reading public. It was certainly new to me. From school and church I had imbibed the idea that the Bible was essentially a repository of texts. Texts lay side by side in the Bible like bullets in a bandolier, and these bullets could be fired off at anyone with whom one happened to be having an argument, whether about religion or about anything else. To quote a text - or texts - from the Bible settled the matter. This kind of attitude still prevails, of course, among fundamentalist Christians of all denominations. Reading the Bible as literature meant, so far as I remember, reading it in much the same way as one would read the works of Shakespeare, and the layout of the volume that I saw in the window of my Torquay bookshop was intended to facilitate this process. It was intended to encourage one to think of the Bible as a book rather than as a collection of bullets, and to approach it accordingly. Thus *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature* was the Bible designed to be read for enjoyment. It was the Bible designed to be read as a whole - or rather as a series of wholes - rather than as chopped up into bits in the form of numbered 'verses'. It was the Bible designed to be read, in the case of some of its books, as poetry rather than as prose. It was the Bible designed to be read for its own sake rather than for the sake of some ulterior purpose. To the fundamentalist, reading the Bible in this way was irreverent, even blasphemous. How could one possibly read the Bible as one read the works of Shakespeare? The Bible was the Word of God. How could one possibly compare profane literature, however great, with literature that had been inspired, even dictated, by the Holy Spirit?

At this point I had intended to read you the section on 'The Joy of Writing' from Lu Chi's *Essay on Literature*, which shows that the difference between so-called profane literature, on the one hand, and canonical literature or 'scripture', on the other, is far less than the Christian fundamentalist, at least, supposes. Since I have read that section already, as well as other passages from the same work, let me pass from *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature* to the question of what it actually means, in practical terms, to approach Buddhist canonical literature as literature, without further delay, taking 'The Joy of Writing' as having been read at this point.

In Buddhism there is, of course, no such thing as fundamentalism in the full-blown Christian sense. Buddhists have never chopped up the Buddhist canonical literature into bits and used the bits as bullets in the way Christians have done. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that in some Buddhist circles there exists a sort of quasi-fundamentalism that could, if it were allowed to develop, be as much of a hindrance to our approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature as Christian fundamentalism is to the appreciation of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature*. This quasi-fundamentalism takes the form of appealing to the authority of the canonical literature in support of a particular belief or practice but only in a general way, i.e. without actually citing any individual text or texts. An appeal of this sort is usually couched in such language as 'the Buddha says', or 'according to the Tipitaka', or 'it is stated in all the Sutras and Tantras'. This quasi-fundamentalism is strengthened by the fact that in many parts of the Buddhist world the beautifully written and richly bound volumes of the canonical literature are often ceremonially worshipped rather than read - even in the case of those very bhikkhus and lamas who appeal to their authority in this manner. This is not to say that there is anything wrong in making the volumes of the Buddhist canonical literature an object of ceremonial worship. Such is far from being the case. But ceremonial worship of the volumes of the Buddhist canonical literature is no substitute for the actual reading of that literature. Unless we read the canonical literature we cannot understand and practise the Buddha's teaching and - what is of particular relevance to the present discussion - unless we read the canonical literature there can be no question of our approaching it as literature.

Even the quasi-fundamentalism that exists in some Buddhist circles is not easy to eradicate, however. Indeed, it may be said that despite the fact that in Buddhism there is no such thing as fundamentalism in the full-blown Christian sense, the possibility of fundamentalism exists wherever a canonical literature exists, irrespective of whether that literature is regarded as the Word of God or as the written record of the

utterance of a supremely Enlightened human teacher. Such being the case, it should be possible for us to apply the same general principles that were responsible for the appearance of the large, thick volume of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature* in the window of that Torquay bookshop forty-five years ago to the Buddhist canonical literature. More than that. It should be possible for us to utilize my explanation of what *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature* was, in fact, designed to be read for, in such a way as to enable us to understand what it actually means, in practical terms, to approach Buddhist canonical literature as literature. Thus, to approach Buddhist canonical literature as literature means, in the first place, reading the canonical literature for enjoyment. This does not mean reading it for the sake of amusement, or simply to while away the time. Reading the canonical literature for enjoyment means reading it because, in so doing, we find ourselves immersed in an emotionally positive state of being such as - outside meditation - we hardly ever experience. Reading the canonical literature for enjoyment means reading it without any sense of compulsion. We do not have to read it. Whether as represented by the *Dhammapada* or the *White Lotus Sutra*, the *Middle Length Sayings* or the *Perfection of Wisdom 'in Eight Thousand Lines'*, the Buddhist canonical literature is not a sort of prescribed text on which we are going to be examined at the end of the year and rewarded or punished in accordance with how well - or how badly - we have done. Reading the canonical literature for enjoyment means reading it because we want to read it. It means reading it because we have an affinity for it, and are drawn to it naturally and spontaneously. Having said this, however, I must add that I always find it a little strange when someone who professes to be a committed Buddhist does not read at least some parts of the canonical literature for enjoyment, especially if he or she enjoys reading other kinds of literature.

To approach the Buddhist canonical literature as literature also means reading it as a whole. This does not mean reading the whole of that literature (it is in any case fifty times more extensive than the Bible) but rather reading this or that item of canonical literature as a whole. Reading the *Sutta-nipata*, or the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa*, for example, in this manner, means reading it not piecemeal, not concentrating on the parts at the expense of the whole, but reading it in such a way as to allow oneself to experience its total impact. Only if we read it in this kind of way will we be able to grasp the fundamental significance of the work or, if one likes, its gestalt. This is particularly the case, perhaps, where the work in question possesses a definite artistic unity and where it has been cast in poetic form. In the latter case, to approach the Buddhist canonical literature as literature means, of course, reading it as poetry. It was one of the special features of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature* that it printed the poetical books of the Old Testament as poetry, which gave them a rather Whitmanesque appearance, instead of chopping them up into numbered bits as though they were prose. (Not that even prose should really be treated in this way.) In the case of Buddhist canonical literature there is no danger of works, or parts of works, that are in poetic form being chopped up into numbered bits - at least, not when they are printed in the original. The danger is that when they are translated into a modern language they will be translated not into poetry but into prose and read accordingly. I shall be returning to this point later on.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, to approach the Buddhist canonical literature as literature means to read it for its own sake rather than for the sake of some ulterior purpose. The ulterior purposes for the sake of which it is possible to read the canonical literature are very numerous. I shall mention only a few of them, leaving you to think of the rest for yourselves. Buddhist canonical literature can be read simply for the sake of the languages in which it has come down to us, that is, it can be read with a view to furthering our knowledge of linguistics. Similarly, it can be read for the sake of the light it sheds (particularly in the case of the *Agamas/Nikayas* and the *Vinaya-Pitaka*) on the political, social, economic, and religious condition of India at the time of the Buddha and his immediate disciples. Buddhist canonical literature can also be read for the sake of its contribution to comparative religion and mythology and to the intellectual history of mankind. It can even be read for the purpose of refuting Buddhism, as when a Christian missionary reads it before going off to work in a Buddhist country. With the possible exception of the last, there is nothing actually wrong in reading the Buddhist canonical literature for the sake of any of these purposes. But the fact remains that they are all ulterior purposes - ulterior, that is, to the purpose that the Buddhist canonical literature itself exists to subserve and for the sake of which, therefore, it should really be read.

The purpose that the Buddhist canonical literature exists to subserve is the happiness and welfare - the highest happiness and highest welfare - of all sentient beings, and we read that literature for its own sake when we read it with this in mind. The Buddhist canonical literature is, after all, the *Buddhavacana*, the word or utterance of the Enlightened One. It is a communication from the heart and mind of an Enlightened human being to the hearts and minds of those who are as yet unenlightened. It is a communication from the Buddha to ourselves. Reading the canonical literature for its own sake therefore means reading it in order to listen to what the Buddha has to say to us - which means listening seriously. Indeed, we cannot really listen in any other kind of way. Some of you know that I have more than once said of the poets - especially the great poets - that far from merely indulging in flowery language they in

fact mean exactly what they say, and that they are trying to communicate to us something which they think worth communicating. How much more so is this the case with the Buddha, and how much more seriously, therefore, ought we to listen to the words of the Buddhavacana! How much more seriously ought we to read the Buddhist canonical literature!

This, then, is what it actually means, in practical terms, to approach the Buddhist canonical literature as literature. It means reading the Buddhist canonical literature for enjoyment, reading it as a whole, reading it - wherever appropriate - as poetry rather than as prose, and reading it for its own sake rather than for the sake of some ulterior purpose. But before bringing these reflections of mine to a close I would like to make it clear that when I speak of approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature I do not mean to imply that that literature is all equally literature, or all literature in the same sense of the term. A distinction made by De Quincey will be useful here. According to De Quincey, there are two kinds of literature. 'There is first the literature of knowledge, and secondly, the literature of power. The function of the former is - to teach; the function of the second is - to move; the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the mere discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding of reason.' In another place De Quincey goes so far as to suggest that the literature of knowledge is not really literature at all. 'All that is literature seeks to communicate power: all that is not literature seeks to communicate knowledge.' In the last analysis the difference between the two kinds of literature, or two kinds of communication, would seem to be one of degree rather than one of kind. Literature is not all equally literature, nor all literature in the same sense of the term, in that some works of literature communicate more power - and therefore move us more - than do others. In the case of the Bible, the Book of Job moves us more than the Book of Leviticus, even though the Book of Leviticus contains a great deal more information about the ancient Jewish sacrificial system. Thus the Book of Job belongs to the literature of power. It is literature proper. It is 'great literature'.

Applying this to the Buddhist canonical literature, we may say that the Maha-parinibba-na Sutta moves us more than does the Dhatu-katha (I am taking extreme examples to make the distinction clear), the Vimalakirti-nirdesa more than the Suvikrantivikrami-paripriccha, and the 'Confession' chapter of the Suvarna-prabhasha Sutra more than the 'S'unyata' chapter of the same work. Thus the Maha-parinibba-na Sutta, the Vimalakirti-nirdesa, and the 'Confession' chapter of the Suvarna-prabhasha Sutra all belong to the literature of power, while the Dhatu-katha, the Suvikrantivikrami-paripriccha, and the 'S'unyata' chapter of the Suvarna-prabhasha Sutra all belong to the literature of knowledge. Since it is the literature of power that constitutes literature in the real sense, or great literature, reading the Buddhist canonical literature as literature therefore means reading such works as the Maha-parinibba-na Sutta rather than such works as the Dhatu-katha. Indeed, we might even go so far as to say that just as literature is not all equally literature so canonical literature is not all equally canonical literature, and that it is the more truly canonical the more deeply it moves us. This is not to say that, from the Buddhist point of view, there is a real distinction between teaching, which according to De Quincey is the function of the literature of knowledge, and moving, which according to De Quincey is the function of the literature of power. From the point of view of Buddhism, the Buddha teaches by moving, because his 'teaching' is addressed not to what De Quincey calls 'the mere discursive understanding' or what we might call the alienated intellect, but rather to what De Quincey calls 'the higher understanding of reason' or what we might call the heart, in the sense of the deepest part of our being, or the spiritual intuition, or the whole man. Reading the Buddhist canonical literature as literature therefore means reading it as the literature of power and allowing ourselves to be moved by that power to the fullest possible extent.

One last point. I have said that when works, or parts of works, of Buddhist canonical literature that are in poetry are translated into a modern language there is the danger that they will be translated into prose and read accordingly. The danger consists in the fact that poetry is the literature of power par excellence, which is the reason why poetry is capable of moving us to a far greater extent than prose, so that when poetry is translated into prose it loses much of its original power and, therefore, much of its capacity to move. In reading works of Buddhist canonical literature in translation we should be careful to read them, wherever possible, in translations which do justice to their poetic quality. Otherwise we shall be unable to read them as literature in the fullest sense and thus will not be moved by them to the extent that we might have been.

If we are able, however, to read poetry as poetry, if we are able to understand the real nature of literature, if we are able to see to what extent we are justified in approaching Buddhist canonical literature as literature, and able to see what it actually means, in practical terms, to approach it in this way, if we allow ourselves to feel the power of works like the Maha-parinibba-na Sutta and the Vimalakirti-nirdesa, then we shall obtain at least a glimpse of the glory of the literary world, and gain a better understanding of the real nature of Buddhist canonical literature.