Lecture 162: Buddhism, World Peace, and Nuclear War - Edited Version

GAUTAMA THE BUDDHA GAINED ENLIGHTENMENT at about the same time that Cyrus the Great captured the city of Babylon and founded the Persian Empire. Five years later he paid a visit to his home town, Kapilavastu, just inside the modern state boundary of Nepal.38 It was fortunate that he did so. A dispute had arisen between the S'akyans of Kapilavastu and their neighbours the Koliyans of Devadaha, to whom the Buddha was related through his mother, and, as a result of this, war was about to break out between the two peoples. The original cause of the dispute was comparatively trivial. Both the S'akyans and the Koliyans were accustomed to irrigate their fields with water from the River Rohini, which flowed between their respective territories, but that year it was obvious that there would not be enough water for them both. The Koliyans therefore proposed that they should have the water, on the grounds that their crops would ripen with a single watering. This proposal the S'akyans flatly rejected, saying that they would have no mind to beg food from the Koliyans later on in the year and that, in any case, their crops too would ripen with a single watering. Since neither side would give way, the dispute became very bitter and eventually blows were exchanged. To make matters worse, the Koliyans started casting aspersions on the origins of the leading S'akya families, saying that they had cohabited with their own sisters like dogs and jackals, while the S'akyans cast aspersions on the leading Koliya families, saying that they were destitute outcasts who had lived in the hollows of trees like animals. Reports of these aspersions soon reached the ears of the leading families themselves, who immediately came forth armed for battle, the S'akya warriors shouting `We will show the strength of those who have cohabited with their sisters!' and the Koliya warriors shouting `We will show the strength of those who live in the hollows of trees!'.

Thus it was that, one fine morning, the Buddha came to know that war was about to break out between his paternal and maternal relations. Realizing that unless he intervened they would destroy each other, he at once went to the place where the two armies were gathered. As soon as they saw him his kinsmen on both sides threw away their weapons and respectfully saluted him. When the Buddha asked them what the quarrel was all about, however, they were unable to tell him. Eventually, after cross-examining various people, the Buddha succeeded in establishing that the cause of the quarrel was water. Having established this, he asked `How much is water worth?' `Very little, Reverend Sir.' `How much are warriors worth?' `Warriors are beyond price, Reverend Sir.' Then said the Buddha `It is not fitting that because of a little water you should destroy warriors who are beyond price,' and they were silent.

Some features of this `Rohini incident' are only too sickeningly familiar to us today. They are, in fact, characteristic of disputes and wars from the Stone Age down to modern times. There is the same clash of vital interests between different groups of people, the same unwillingness to compromise, the same dreadful escalation from harsh words to isolated acts of violence, and from isolated acts of violence to preparations for full-scale war. There is the same fatal spirit of belligerence, the same readiness, on the part of large numbers of people, to fight without really knowing what they are fighting for. There is even, we note, the same irrelevant mutual vilification, suggestive of antipathies that have long lurked beneath the surface and now have an opportunity of breaking out. But there is also - and this is more encouraging - the same solitary voice of sanity and compassion that, if only we listen carefully enough, we can hear even today. There is the same appeal to reason, the same reminder of what is truly most valuable, that has been heard if not from the Stone Age than at least from the Axial Age, and heard, perhaps, with increasing frequency - regardless of whether men paid attention to it or not.

But although there are similarities between the Rohini incident and the situation in which we find ourselves today there are differences too. The quarrel between the S'akyans and the Koliyans involved only the inhabitants of two small city states living side by side at the foot of the Himalayas. The quarrel between the superpowers of the twentieth century involves hundreds of millions of people occupying continents separated by vast oceans and it affects, directly or indirectly, the whole world. The S'akyans and the Koliyans were armed, like the heroes of Ancient Greece, with swords and spears and bows-and-arrows, and they fought either on foot or from horse-drawn chariots. The superpowers are armed with a variety of nuclear weapons, i.e. they are armed with a variety of weapons capable of destroying life on a scale not only unprecedented in history but not even imaginable before the present century. The S'akyans and Koliyans could actually see each other across the waters of the River Rohini. They spoke the same language, even as they worshipped the same gods, and it was possible for one man to make himself heard by the warriors on both sides. Now it is possible for hundreds of millions of people to quarrel without actually seeing one another, and even to prepare to destroy one another without knowing, humanly speaking, who it is they are preparing to destroy. As for their all speaking the same language, they speak it neither literally nor metaphorically, even as they certainly do not worship the same gods, and despite our marvellously improved facilities of communication it is not really possible for one man to make himself heard by them all. Indeed, those same marvellously improved facilities of communication

are used, only too often, either for the exchange of insults or for the reiteration of positions known to be unacceptable to the other side. Thus facilities of communication are used for purposes of non-communication.

Highly significant as these differences are, there is one difference between the Rohini incident and the situation in which we find ourselves today that is more significant, perhaps, than any of them. Had war actually broken out between the S'akyans and the Koliyans there would have been the possibility of one side winning. No such possibility exists in the case of nuclear war between the superpowers. Even limited nuclear war would be so destructive of human life, and do so much damage to civilization and to the earth itself, that neither side could be victorious in any humanly meaningful sense of the term. Limited nuclear war must therefore be regarded as an absolutely unacceptable option. Full-scale nuclear war is even more unacceptable, if that is possible. Full-scale nuclear war is a prospect so frightful that no one with the slightest imagination can even contemplate it without an effort of will. All the deepest instincts of humanity recoil from it in utter horror. Full-scale nuclear war means nuclear holocaust, with hundreds of cities reduced to rubble, hundreds of millions of people burned or blasted out of existence, and millions more doomed to an agonizing death from the short- or long-term effects of nuclear radiation. Full-scale nuclear war means fire-storms and `black rain'. It means the destruction of the ecosphere. It means the death of the earth. It means the suicide of humanity.

Nuclear wars are fought with nuclear weapons. If even limited nuclear war is unacceptable it follows that nuclear weapons are unacceptable too. Nuclear weapons must therefore be abolished. They would still have to be abolished even if there was at present no intention, on the part of the superpowers and others who have produced them, ever actually to make use of their dreadful destructive capacity. So long as nuclear weapons exist in the world there will always be the risk of accidental nuclear attack due to mechanical failure or human error - not to mention sudden insanity in one or other of the seats of power - and so long as there is the risk of accidental nuclear attack there will be the risk of full-scale nuclear war. Thus we are obliged to regard the very existence of nuclear weapons as being tantamount, in the long term at least, to the actual use of those weapons. Control of nuclear weapons is therefore not enough. There is no way of ensuring that nuclear weapons are not used, and that a nuclear holocaust does not take place, other than by making sure that nuclear weapons no longer exist. So long as the superpowers and the small powers have their stockpiles of nuclear weapons prevention of nuclear war is no more than a pleasant dream. Indeed, it is a dangerous dream, since it tends to make us oblivious to the very real threat to humanity that the mere existence of such stockpiles represents. There is no one in the world, perhaps, who does not want peace (what peace really is I shall try to explain later on), but if one wants peace it is important to realize that even in the very limited sense of absence of nuclear conflict peace is impossible without the total abolition of nuclear weapons. Working for peace therefore involves, to a great extent, working for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and working for the abolition of nuclear weapons involves working for peace.

Peace of course means world peace. Even if the Rohini incident had led to war, and S'akyans and Koliyans had been killed by the thousand, hostilities would no doubt have remained confined to that particular stretch of the Terai. For thousands of years it was possible for some parts of the world to suffer all the horrors of what we now term `conventional war' while others remained profoundly at peace. It is highly unlikely that anyone in Magadha knew that Cyrus the Great had captured Babylon until many years after the event, and equally unlikely that anyone in the Persian Empire knew that King Ajatasatru had, shortly after the demise of the Buddha, defeated the Vriji confederacy, until long after that unscrupulous monarch had achieved his purpose. Even during the First and Second World Wars there were countries that were not affected, to any serious extent, by the events that were convulsing the rest of the globe. On the contrary, in some cases they even profited from them. But peace is no longer divisible in this kind of way. Peace has become a seamless garment, and the world has either to wear the whole garment or go naked to destruction. There can no longer be any question of a scrap of peace covering one part of the world's nakedness and not another.

This makes it impossible for us to think in merely geo-political terms. We have also to think in geo-ethical, geo-humanitarian, or geo-philanthropic terms. Since peace is indivisible, so that the stark choice before us is either world peace or no peace, one world or no world, we shall be able to achieve peace only if we realize that humanity too is indivisible, and if we consistently act on that realization. In other words, we shall be able to achieve peace only by regarding ourselves as citizens of the world, and learning to think not in terms of what is good for this or that nation-state, this or that political system, this or that ideology, but simply and solely in terms of what is good for the world, or for humanity, as a whole. There can be no peace - no world peace - so long as the governments and peoples of sovereign nation-states insist on regarding their separate, sometimes mutually exclusive, interests as paramount and to be pursued at all costs. Nationalism is in fact the curse of modern history. It is nationalism that was

responsible for the rise of sovereign nation-states, and it is sovereign nation-states that produced nuclear weapons in the first place, that produce and possess them now, and that have the power to unleash their destructive capacity upon mankind. Peace and nationalism are therefore incompatible. Nationalism is not, of course, the same thing as patriotism. Nationalism is an exaggerated, passionate, and fanatical devotion to one's national community at the expense of all other national communities and even at the expense of all other interests and loyalties. It is a pseudo-religion, an idolatrous cult that demands bloody sacrifices. Patriotism, on the other hand, is simply love of one's country, in the sense of an attachment to, and a desire to care for and protect, the place where one was born and grew up, and it does not exclude smaller or larger interests and loyalties, or honest pride in such things as one's own history and culture. Thus patriotism, unlike nationalism, is not incompatible with peace, even though peace goes beyond patriotism which, in the famous words of Edith Cavell, is `not enough'.39 This does not mean that in order to achieve peace we have to stop loving our own village or city, our own province, our own country, or our own continent, but rather that we have to love them because they are all parts of the world and because we love the world. It means that we have to identify ourselves with humanity, rather than with any particular section of it, and love humanity as ourselves. We have to feel for the different national communities, and the different ethnic and linguistic groups, the same kind of love that we feel for the different limbs of our own bodies.

Of this kind of love the Buddha, as he stands between the opposing S'akya and Koliya forces, is the supreme exemplar. The Buddha identified himself with both the S'akyans and the Koliyans, and because he identified himself with them both he could love them both. After all, even apart from the fact that he had attained Enlightenment and thus identified himself with all living things (not in any abstract, metaphysical sense, but in the sense of experiencing the joys and sorrows of others as his own), he was related by blood to both parties in the dispute. Through his father he was related to the S'akyans, and through his mother to the Koliyans. Among the warriors on both sides he had uncles, cousins, and nephews, besides old friends and childhood companions. Thus the Buddha's position was similar to our own. We too stand between opposing forces, though the forces with which we have to deal are as much superior to those of the S'akyans and Koliyans as the Buddha's sanity and compassion are superior to ours. Moreover, in our case we do not stand unambiguously between these forces but only too often identify ourselves with one or the other of them and are perceived so to identify ourselves. If peace is to be achieved, however, we have to identify ourselves with both parties, just as the Buddha identified himself with both the S'akyans and the Koliyans. Though we may not be related to them by blood in the way that the Buddha was related to his embattled paternal and maternal relatives, nevertheless we are related to them, inasmuch as we all belong to the same organic species, homo sapiens, and it should not be necessary for us to attain Enlightenment in order to realize this fact. If we identify ourselves with both parties and with humanity in this manner, then we shall be able to stand cleanly and unambiguously between the `fell incensed points' of the mighty opposites of our day. We shall be able to speak as the Buddha spoke, because we shall love as the Buddha loved. We shall be a voice of sanity and compassion in the world. We shall be able to appeal to reason. We shall be able to remind humanity, in its own name, what things are of greater value and what of less. We may even be able to remind it what is the most valuable thing of all.

But between the Rohini incident and the situation in which we find ourselves today there are, as I have pointed out, both similarities and differences. Some of those differences are very great, even if only in terms of scale. Though the implications of the incident are of universal significance, and although that significance has already emerged to a limited degree, it will have to be explored much more deeply if we are to appreciate the full extent of its applicability to the issue of world peace and nuclear war. In exploring the significance of the Rohini incident in this way we shall naturally have to go beyond the immediate context of the incident itself. We shall even have to go beyond the issue of world peace and nuclear war, though not beyond Buddhism, and at least touch upon closely related issues of even greater consequence to every individual human being and, in fact, to mankind as a whole. We shall have to touch upon issues on account of which the issue of world peace and nuclear war itself is of such overwhelming importance. In other words, we shall have to touch upon questions of ultimate significance for every `rational animal' or `thinking reed'.

Now what I have already said on the subject of Buddhism, world peace, and nuclear war, as well as what I am going to say, all rests on a single assumption. Some people would regard it as a very big assumption indeed, but I nevertheless hope it is an assumption you share with me, since otherwise it will be difficult for us to explore together the significance of the Rohini incident in the way that I have proposed. Indeed, it might even be useless for us to do so. The assumption to which I refer is the assumption that nuclear war, particularly full-scale nuclear war and nuclear holocaust, is not inevitable. It is the assumption that nuclear weapons can be abolished and world peace, in the sense of the absence of nuclear conflict, achieved. If that was not my assumption I would not be wasting my time and yours by talking to you this

evening. Admittedly the risk of nuclear war is very great. Admittedly world peace is very difficult to achieve. But as we contemplate the possibility - perhaps the increasing possibility - of nuclear holocaust we should not allow the sheer horror of the prospect to reduce us to inaction, like frightened rabbits mesmerized into immobility by the headlights of an approaching car. Neither should we allow ourselves to be seduced by the united siren voices of fanaticism, fundamentalism, and fatalism as they seek to assure us that nuclear holocaust is in fact the prophesied Armageddon and that instead of trying to avert it we should welcome it as the righteous judgement of an angry God on sinful humanity. Whatever other religions may believe, Buddhism, like secular humanism, believes that ills created by man - and many not created by man - can be remedied by man. This does not mean that it underestimates the difficulties involved, least of all those which stand in the way of the achievement of world peace through the abolition of nuclear weapons, and it certainly does not mean that it subscribes to the shallow optimism of which some forms of secular humanism have been guilty.

But it is time we returned to the figure of the Buddha, as he stands between the opposing S'akya and Koliya forces, and began our deeper exploration of the significance of that sublime incident as it applies to the situation in which we find ourselves today. One of the things that strikes us as we look at the pro-peace, anti-nuclear movement is that it is not a strong and unified body of opinion speaking with one voice about what has to be achieved and the means to its achievement. It is not a movement at all, so much as a motley collection of forces eddying more or less confusedly about matters of growing popular concern. Some of these forces even seem to be moving in contrary directions, as we can see in the case of the great debate as to whether nuclear disarmament should be unilateral or multilateral. All such differences are, of course, differences about means rather than ends. What the solitary figure, and solitary voice, of the Buddha serves to remind us of is the fact that if we are to speak of the opposing forces of our own day with any effect we have to speak to them as one man. We have to speak with one voice: we all have to say the same thing. At present our energies are divided to far too great an extent. Time that should be spent impressing upon the authorities that what we desire above all things is the total abolition of nuclear weapons is spent arguing with one another about the exact way in which they should be abolished - thus letting the authorities off the hook. The authorities in question are, of course, the governments of the various sovereign nation-states which possess, or are about to possess, nuclear weapons, including the government of this country. The way in which nuclear weapons are abolished is a matter of secondary importance, and one that can be finally settled only at international level, when the governments of nuclear and non-nuclear powers alike meet together and, in response to the irresistible pressure of world opinion, apply such wisdom as they collectively possess to the question of how best to lift the shadow of nuclear weapons and nuclear war from mankind. Until then we must simply keep up the pressure, firstly on our own government, and secondly on the governments of other countries to whatever extent we can. Such pressure should be massive, unanimous, and unmistakable, and we should keep it up until we see governments in general, and the governments of the nuclear powers in particular, making the total abolition of nuclear weapons their top priority. We should keep it up until we see the nuclear stockpiles dwindling. We should keep it up until the abomination of nuclear weapons disappears from the face of the earth, and mankind can breathe freely once again.

There are a number of ways in which we can bring pressure on a government to take steps towards the abolition of nuclear weapons, but which ones we adopt will depend on the kind of government with which we are dealing, as well as on the political and cultural history of the country concerned, and even on the psychological make-up of its people. Where parliamentary democracy prevails, and governments are elected by popular vote, it will be possible to bring pressure to bear simply by refusing to vote for any party, or any candidate, not unambiguously committed to working for the total abolition of nuclear weapons. Pressure can also be brought to bear by the persistent lobbying of members of parliament, by the presentation of petitions, by public meetings, marches, and demonstrations, by fasts and solemn vigils - even by `love-ins' and `be-ins'. By these and similar means the government should be left in no doubt as to what the wishes of the electorate really are. If it remains unresponsive to those wishes, or not sufficiently responsive - and the situation is one of extreme urgency, where every day is precious - then more serious measures should be taken and pressure brought to bear on the government by means of mass civil disobedience along Gandhian lines.

About one thing, however, we must be quite clear. In whatever way pressure is brought on a government to make the abolition of nuclear weapons its top priority, that pressure must be brought non-violently. Violence of any kind would be totally out of place on a march, or at a demonstration, or in connection with any other such expression of public opinion, the purpose of which was, ultimately, the achievement of world peace. The dove is not a bird of prey, and should what purported to be a dove be seen with bleeding flesh in its beak and claws one would rightly suspect that it was not a dove at all but belonged to some more ferocious species. Besides adopting only such means of bringing pressure on the government as are compatible with strict non-violence, we should also avoid wasting time and energy on empty gestures that

have no other purpose than to give expression to purely personal feelings of resentment and frustration - feelings which have, more often than not, no real connection with the issue with which we are supposedly concerned. Similarly, we should resist any temptation to use pro-peace, anti-nuclear activities for the furtherance of any sectional interests, however important to us personally those interests may be, and regardless of whether they are of a social, a party political, or an ideological nature. There must be no attempt to hijack the peace express. The abolition of nuclear weapons is of such transcendent importance for the future of humanity that, whether the pressure we are able to bring on governments is great or small, we cannot allow it to be weakened by any doubts as to the true nature of the interests on behalf of which it is being exerted. To weaken it in this way would be in the highest degree irresponsible, and a betrayal of the trust of mankind.

Keeping up the pressure on our own and other governments until nuclear weapons are abolished is not the only thing that must be done, though it is probably the most crucial. Indeed, it is not only on governments that pressure must be brought to bear. We also need to bring it to bear on our fellow world citizens, and in particular on other members of our own national community. Here too pressure can be brought to bear in a number or ways, mainly by disseminating information about the danger of full-scale nuclear war and by helping people to develop a more positive attitude towards other national communities - especially if they too happen to possess nuclear weapons. Information about the danger of nuclear war, and about what the consequences of nuclear war would be for civilization, for the human race, and for life on this planet, should be disseminated as widely as possible and by whatever means. Such information is now readily available. It can be disseminated by means of the written or spoken word, as well as audio-visually. More specifically, we can write books and articles, make speeches, show films, hand out leaflets, put up posters, and buttonhole friends, acquaintances, and perfect strangers in pubs and at parties, on buses and trains, at our places of work, and even in the street. Those of us who have access to press, radio, and television are particularly well placed to disseminate information and have a special responsibility to do so. People can be helped to develop a more positive attitude towards other national communities by being encouraged to learn more about them. Knowledge will lead to understanding, understanding to sympathy, and sympathy to love. To be more specific here too, we can encourage people to study the history and culture of other countries, to read translations of their literature, and to learn their language. We can also encourage them to visit those countries for the purpose of business or pleasure, or for the sake of cultural exchange, and to develop personal friendships with as many of their nationals as circumstances permit. Above all, perhaps, we can teach people to practise the metta bhavana, or `development of (universal) friendliness', a traditional Buddhist method of developing an increasingly positive attitude towards all other living beings, including those persons with whom ordinarily we do not get on very well, or whom we may dislike or even hate. It is one of the fundamental postulates of Buddhism that the individual is responsible for his own mental and emotional states. This means that he can change those states - provided he really wants to do so and provided he knows the right way to go about it. If people were to take up the practice of the metta bhavana in sufficiently large numbers it could result in the development of a more positive attitude towards other national communities not only on the part of private citizens but on the part of governments too, and this would undoubtedly contribute to the reduction of international tension and thereby to the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Those of us who are Buddhists should, perhaps, give serious consideration to the possibility of our teaching the metta bhavana on a nation-wide scale.

In bringing pressure to bear on governments and on our fellow world citizens we should not, of course, forget to bring pressure to bear on our own selves. That we bring it to bear on our own selves is presupposed by the fact that we bring it to bear on others, since we can hardly expect others to disseminate information about the danger of nuclear weapons or to develop a more positive attitude towards other national communities unless we ourselves are prepared to do likewise. Those who take any sort of initiative, or give any sort of lead, should in fact be prepared to do more than they ask others to do. It is not enough simply to take the initiative, or give a lead. One must also set an example (setting an example indeed is the best way of taking the initiative, or of giving a lead), and in the present instance the example that is set has to be a very lofty one. It has to be an example of impartiality and detachment, an example of love for humanity as a whole, an example of genuine devotion to the achievement of world peace by non-violent means. It has to be an example of a sanity and compassion which, though it may fall very far short of the sanity and compassion of Enlightenment, is yet more nearly commensurate to the strength of the opposing forces between which we stand, and with which we have to deal, than is at present the case.

This brings us back to the figure of the Buddha, and to another turning in our deeper exploration of the significance of the Rohini incident in relation to the situation in which we find ourselves today. Besides the fact that it does not speak with one voice, what strikes us about the pro-peace, anti-nuclear movement is that its many different voices do not always speak the same language. When the Buddha asked the S'akya and Koliya warriors to tell him what the quarrel was all about they could understand the meaning of his question, and were eventually able to give him a reply. He in his turn could understand their reply,

and when he went on to ask them how much water was worth and how much warriors were worth they knew exactly what he was talking about and could reply accordingly. Similarly, they knew exactly what he was talking about when he told them it was not fitting that because of a little water they should destroy warriors who were beyond price. There was no problem of communication, as we call it nowadays. The S'akyans and the Koliyans, and the Buddha himself, all spoke the same language, both literally and metaphorically. When the Buddha wanted to know what the quarrel was all about neither the S'akya nor the Koliya warriors denied that they were quarrelling. Neither protested that they had simply staged a peaceful demonstration on which the warriors on the other side had proceeded to launch a vicious and entirely unprovoked attack. In the same way, neither the S'akya nor the Koliya warriors attempted to argue that `water' could mean `earth' or that in the case of the warriors on the other side `beyond price' really meant `worthless', or that there was in any case no question of destroying warriors but only of eliminating them. Thus the Rohini incident could be dealt with much more easily than the situation in which we find ourselves today, when the superpowers, unlike the S'akyans and Koliyans, do not speak the same language either literally or metaphorically and when, therefore, there is a problem of communication. In extreme cases, one superpower will even insist that the other superpower is saying no to a proposal when that superpower, no less emphatically, insists that it is saying yes. Such mutual miscomprehension would be laughable if it were not so tragic, and it is tragic because miscomprehension as chronic as this between superpowers armed with nuclear weapons could well cost us our lives.

Since they do not speak the same `language' it is difficult for us to speak to the opposing forces of our day in the way that the Buddha spoke to the S'akyans and Koliyans at the time of the Rohini incident. It is even difficult for all those who are involved in the pro-peace, anti-nuclear movement to speak with one another, since what for one is `pro-peace' and `anti-nuclear' for another may be `anti-peace' and `pro-nuclear', so that there is no agreement even about basic terms and, therefore, no real unity and of course no really united voice. Thus there is a serious problem of communication, not only between the superpowers, and between the sovereign nation-states both large and small, nuclear and non-nuclear, but also within the peace movement itself, as well as between the superpowers and other sovereign nation-states, on the one hand, and the peace movement on the other. There is also, of course, a problem of communication between the different races and religions of mankind, and sometimes this problem adds to, and complicates, that of communication between the superpowers. So chronic, indeed, has this problem of communication between the superpowers become that one is now faced by an actual `failure' of communication (in the sense in which one speaks of a failure of electricity) between large and important sections of the human race, and unless this `failure' can be overcome and communication restored - unless humanity, especially the superpowers, can learn to speak a genuinely common `language' - world peace will be very difficult to achieve and nuclear war very difficult to avoid.

We shall be able to overcome this failure of communication, however, only if we can understand on what it is really based. There is a lot that could be said on this topic, as well as on the topic of communication in general, but let us go straight to the heart of the matter without wasting time either on the commonplaces of the encounter group or the subtleties of the communications theory seminar. The failure of communication which is so striking a feature of our times is based, ultimately, on a breakdown of the notion of objective truth, that is to say, on a breakdown of the notion that truth is truth regardless of our subjective feelings about it and regardless of the way in which it affects our personal interests. That people do not, in practice, exhibit total loyalty to the notion of objective truth, even though they may uphold it in theory, is of course well known and widely accepted. Indeed, in the ordinary transactions of life due allowance is generally made for this fact. We no more expect the used car dealer or the estate agent to dwell as much on the less favourable features of the car, or the house, he is trying to sell us than we expect him to tell us a deliberate, downright lie. But even if people do not, in practice, exhibit total loyalty to the notion of objective truth, it is important that such loyalty as they do display to it is not allowed to fall below a certain point, since otherwise the transactions of ordinary life will become impossible. Unfortunately, it often does fall below that point. Loyalty to the notion of objective truth becomes selective. Actual lies may not be told, but those facts which are not in accordance with the feelings and interests of this or that individual or group are increasingly ignored, misrepresented, distorted, and suppressed. In extreme cases such facts are not allowed ever to have existed at all. From the stage where loyalty to the notion of objective truth becomes selective - that is to say, becomes that which is in accordance with certain personal or sectional interests - it is not a very big step to the stage where that which is in accordance with those interests becomes the truth. At this stage, therefore, there is a breakdown of the notion of objective truth. `Truth' is whatever happens to be in accordance with the interests of a particular class, sovereign nation-state, or ideology. Since there are many classes, sovereign nation-states, and ideologies, and therefore many different, even conflicting, interests, there will be not one truth but many truths. Thus there is not only a breakdown of the notion of objective truth but also a substitution of the notion of objective truth by the notion of subjective truth. Subjective truth in effect becomes, for a particular group, objective truth, and since there can be only one objective truth the objective truth of all

other groups - including what might be termed objectively objective truth - necessarily becomes untruth. Under these circumstances communication is impossible. Words no longer have the same meaning for everybody, and what one group regards as facts another regards as non-facts. There is a `failure' of communication. Indeed, those whose views and attitudes are not in accordance with the interests of a particular group are treated as non-individuals in the same way that facts that are not in accordance with these same interests are regarded as non-facts. Such an individual is not so much wrong as, in theory, non-existent, and since he is non-existent in theory it is only natural that he should very quickly become non-existent in practice too. Thus we arrive at a state of affairs such as is characteristic of the nightmare totalitarian world of George Orwell's 1984, where the three slogans of the Party are `War is Peace,' `Freedom is Slavery,' and `Ignorance is Strength,' where Newspeak is fast replacing Oldspeak, where history is being continually rewritten, and where a word from Big Brother can turn a person into an unperson overnight.

Fortunately, the 1984 which has actually come to pass is not wholly that of Orwell's grim foreboding. The nightmare has not yet come true to more than a limited extent. Nevertheless, the situation in which we find ourselves today is sufficiently alarming, and one of its most dangerous features is that we are faced by a failure of communication between large and important sections of the human race, particularly between the superpowers. As I have tried to show, this failure is based, ultimately, on a breakdown of the notion of objective truth, so that if communication is to be restored, and if the superpowers are to learn to speak the same `language', the notion of objective truth will have to be reinstated in its former central position in human affairs. Only if the notion of objective truth is reinstated in this way shall we be able to speak to the opposing forces of our day as the Buddha spoke to the S'akyans and Koliyans, because only then will it be possible for us really to communicate with them. Only then will it be possible to ascertain the facts of the situation. Only then will it be possible for the voice of sanity and compassion to make itself heard at last. Only then will it be possible to appeal to reason. Only then will it be possible to come to an agreement as to what things are of greater value and what of less. Only then will it be possible to achieve peace and avoid nuclear war by the total abolition of nuclear weapons. Until the notion of objective truth has been reinstated in its rightful position all our attempts to communicate, whether with one another or with the superpowers, are doomed to end in frustration. Though people may visit foreign countries by the score, and develop personal friendships with the nationals of those countries by the thousand, in the absence of a common reverence for the notion of objective truth all this will be of little avail. The reinstatement of the notion of objective truth to its rightful position therefore ranks as one of our most urgent tasks. To work for the reinstatement of the notion of objective truth is, in the long run, to work for the achievement of world peace, for it is one of the most important conditions upon which the achievement of world peace depends.

But even if world peace, in the limited sense of the abolition of nuclear weapons, is actually achieved, and the shadow of nuclear war lifted from mankind, this will certainly not mean that we have solved all our problems. If I have so far spoken of the achievement of world peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons as though the two things were practically synonymous this was only because the avoidance of nuclear war is our most immediate and pressing concern. Though there can be no world peace without the abolition of nuclear weapons, abolition of nuclear weapons is far from being synonymous with world peace in the full sense of the term. Nuclear weapons are not the only weapons in the arsenals of the sovereign nation-states. There are many others, some of them hardly less horrible than nuclear weapons themselves, and even if nuclear war ceases to be a possibility these could still do irreparable damage to civilization and inflict untold suffering on mankind. If peace in the full sense of the term is to be achieved we shall therefore have to work not only for the abolition of nuclear weapons but also for the abolition of conventional weapons too. We do not want to abolish nuclear weapons only to find ourselves in the same kind of situation that we are in today, minus nuclear weapons. Neither do we want to abolish them only to find ourselves in the same kind of situation that we were in yesterday, or even the day before yesterday. Though it will undoubtedly be an unspeakable blessing to mankind, and an infinite relief, the abolition of nuclear weapons is by no means enough. Even the abolition of both nuclear and non-nuclear weapons is by no means enough. Peace in the full sense of the term will be achieved only when disputes between sovereign nation-states, as well as between smaller groups and between individuals, are settled entirely by non-violent means.

In order to achieve peace - world peace - in this fuller sense we shall have to deepen our realization of the indivisibility of humanity, and act on that realization with even greater consistency. We shall have to regard ourselves as citizens of the world in a more concrete sense than before, and rid ourselves of even the faintest vestige of nationalism. We shall have to identify ourselves more closely with all living things, and love them with a more ardent and selfless love. We shall have to be a louder and clearer voice of sanity and compassion in the world. We shall also have to bring to bear on the governments and peoples of the world, and on ourselves, the same kind of pressure that was required for the abolition of nuclear

weapons but to an even greater extent. Above all, we shall have to intensify our commitment to the great ethical and spiritual principle of non-violence, both in respect to relations between individuals and in respect to relations between groups. Ever since the dawn of history - perhaps from the very beginning of the present cosmic cycle itself - two great principles have been at work in the world: the principle of violence and the principle of non-violence or, as we may also call it, the principle of love - though love in the sense of agape rather than in the sense of eros. The principle of violence finds expression in force and fraud, as well as in such things as oppression, exploitation, intimidation, and blackmail. The principle of non-violence finds expression in friendliness and openness, as well as in such things as gentleness and helpfulness, and the giving of encouragement, sympathy, and appreciation. The principle of violence is reactive, and ultimately destructive; the principle of non-violence is creative. The principle of violence is a principle of Darkness, the principle of non-violence a principle of Light. Whereas to live in accordance with the principle of violence is to be either an animal or a devil or a combination of the two, to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence is to be a human being in the full sense of the term, or even an angel. So far, of course, men have lived in accordance with the principle of violence rather than in accordance with the principle of non-violence. They could do this because it was possible for them to live in accordance with the principle of violence without destroying themselves completely. But now this is no longer the case. Owing to the emergence of superpowers armed with nuclear weapons it is now virtually impossible for us to live in accordance with the principle of violence without, sooner or later, annihilating ourselves. We are therefore faced with the necessity of either learning to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence or not living at all. Thus the possibility of nuclear holocaust has not only enabled us to realize the true nature of violence, by showing us what the consequences of violence on the biggest conceivable scale would be, but it has also given us a much deeper appreciation of the real value of non-violence.

It is because of this deeper appreciation of the real value of non-violence that we are able to realize what peace in the full sense of the term really means, as well as how the problem of its achievement is to be solved. Peace - world peace - is something we can hardly imagine today. We can hardly imagine a state of affairs in which disputes between groups and between individuals are settled entirely by non-violent means because all men alike are committed to the principle of non-violence and live in accordance with its precepts. Such a world, in which the principle of Light had overcome the principle of Darkness to so great an extent, would be a world that surpassed More's Utopia, Bacon's New Atlantis, Campanella's City of the Sun, and Morris's Nowhere as much as these dreams of an ideal world surpassed the real worlds of their respective days. Such a world would be a heaven on earth. It would be a world of the gods. But even the gods have their problems. Even if we achieved world peace in the full sense of the term we still would not have solved all our problems by any means. One problem that the gods have to face is the problem of leisure, or the problem of what to do with their time, and even though we have less leisure than the gods this is the kind of problem that faces us too. Indeed, it faces us in the still more acute form of what are we to do with our lives. It would be a thousand pities if, having achieved world peace in the full sense of the term, we were to make no better use of our time, or of our lives, than many of us do at present. In Tennyson's `The Lotos-Eaters' the gods - the gods of Homeric Greece - are imagined as lying beside their nectar and looking over lands wasted by plague, famine, earthquake, and war, and on a human race subject to the painful necessity of wringing a laborious subsistence from the cultivation of the soil. It would be a thousand pities if, when we had solved the problem of world peace, the gods were to look down on a world that in many respects resembled theirs only to see us playing bingo or watching third-rate television programmes. Idealists - or cynics - might even be tempted to wonder whether it was really worth while delivering humanity from the horrors of nuclear war only that it might fall victim to trivial interests and worthless pursuits. Thus even if we succeed in solving the problem of peace in the full sense of the term we shall still be faced - as we are now faced - with the even greater problem of what to do with our lives.

But even if that problem too had been solved, and we were living in a manner that was truly worthy of a human being, there would still be one problem that we had not solved. It would not be strange that we had not solved it, for it is a problem that the gods themselves, despite their nectar, are unable to solve. Indeed, it is a problem that no form of sentient conditioned existence is able to solve - so long as it remains merely conditioned. As we know from Tibetan Buddhist scroll-paintings of the Wheel of Life, there are six main forms of conditioned existence, or six main classes of sentient beings: gods, anti-gods, men, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in states of torment. These six classes of sentient beings occupy the six principal `worlds' or `spheres', and these worlds are depicted as occupying the six (or five) segments into which the third - and widest - circle of the Wheel of Life is divided. The first (and innermost) circle is depicted as being occupied by a cock, a snake, and a pig, symbolizing greed, aversion, and delusion, the three unskilful mental states that keep the Wheel of Life turning; the second circle is divided into two segments, one representing the Path of Light, the other the Path of Darkness; while the fourth and outermost circle is divided into twelve segments representing the twelve `links' that make up the entire process in

accordance with which one passes from one form of sentient conditioned existence to another. All four circles, and thus the Wheel of Life in its entirety, are supported from behind by a dreadful monster, whose four sets of claws are seen curving round the edge of the Wheel, while his scaly reptilian tail protrudes below and his bared fangs project over the top of the Wheel beneath fiercely glaring eyeballs and locks crowned with skulls. This dreadful monster is the demon of Impermanence, the demon of Death, who holds in his inexorable grasp not only the six worlds but the whole of conditioned existence, from the electron spinning about its nucleus to the extragalactic nebula receding from us at an unimaginable rate. He holds in his grasp the highest as well as the lowest heavens, the least evolved as well as the most highly evolved forms of earthly life, from the amoeba to homo sapiens. Even if we succeed in abolishing nuclear weapons, even if we achieve world peace in the full sense of the term, even if we live in a way that is meaningful and purposeful, we shall still have to face the problem of death. Whether we live in a hell or in a heaven on earth, we shall still see the demon of Impermanence, the demon of Death, glaring down at us over the edge of the Wheel.

More than that. The demon of Death glares at us not only individually but collectively. He glares not only at you and at me but at the whole world, the whole earth. Whether or not nuclear war is averted, we shall still have to die, each one of us; the human race will still have to go the way of the dinosaurs; civilization will still have to collapse, the earth itself will still have to come to an end, even if after thousands of millions of years. Indeed, the very solar system to which the earth belongs will come to an end, as will the galaxy of which that solar system forms part. All conditioned things are impermanent. Whatever comes into existence must one day cease to exist. Thus the solution of the problem of world peace and nuclear war does not really solve anything at all. We still have to face the problem of death. Even though the Buddha was able to prevent the S'akyans and Koliyans from destroying each other on that morning twenty-five centuries ago, he could not save them from death itself. In the case of the S'akyans, he could not even save them from an untimely death at the hands of their enemies. So thoroughly had his paternal relations been converted to the principle of non-violence that when, some years later, they were attacked by the King of Kosala, they decided to offer no resistance and were massacred to a man - thus giving us, for the first time in history, an example of personal - as distinct from political - pacifism.40 It was not fitting, they declared, that the relations of the Enlightened One should commit the sin of taking life.

Not only could the Buddha not save the S'akyans and Koliyans from death, he could not save himself from death. Truth to tell, he did not wish to save himself from death or even to prolong his earthly existence to the extent that, according to tradition, he could have prolonged it had he been requested to do so. Forty years after the Rohini incident, therefore, when the S'akyans themselves were dead and when the ashes of his two chief disciples, S'ariputra and Maudgalyayana, lay beneath their memorial mounds, the Buddha came to the little wattle-and-daub township of Kusinagara and lay down between the two sal trees in the sal grove of the Mallas to die or, in traditional Buddhist phrase, to enter into pari- nirva-na, a state as much beyond non-existence as it is beyond what we call existence. And having lain down between the twin sal trees, with his head to the north and his feet to the south, he did, at the age of eighty, die. No miracle intervened to save him. Having traversed all eight dhyanas or `meditations' his consciousness came down to the first dhyana; having come down to the first dhyana it traversed the first four dhyanas a second time and then, as it passed from the fourth dhyana and entered parinirva-na, the Buddha died. His body was cremated, and the ashes placed beneath a memorial mound. The Buddha had to die, as we all have to die, and there was no resurrection, whether on the third day or any other day. In connection with the sublime scene in the sal grove the notion of a bodily resurrection indeed appears, if I may say so, a little cheap, as indicating an inability to accept the fact of death, or a clumsy attempt to negate the fact of death on its own level instead of transcending it. The Buddha had to die, as we all have to die, because he had been born, and because even for him there could be no exception to the rule that, birth having taken place, death must inevitably follow. Even his Enlightenment could not save him, any more than our knowledge, or virtue, or riches, or friends and relations, can save us. When the messengers of death come, willing or unwilling, ready or unready, Enlightened or un-Enlightened, we have to go.

Only too often we try to ignore this fact. We refuse to face the problem of death, as though we hoped that by our not looking at the monster with the fiercely glaring eyeballs we could ensure his not looking at us. We may even try to convince ourselves, and others, that it is morbid to think about death. The truth of the matter is that it is morbid not to think about death. Not only do we in fact know that we must die, but it is the one thing about ourselves that we really do know. However unsure we may be about other things, we can at least be quite sure of this. Not to think about death is therefore to deprive ourselves of the most certain knowledge that it is possible for us to have. It is to deprive ourselves of the one thing on which we can rely absolutely. Moreover, not to think about death is to deprive ourselves of the possibility of knowing what we really and truly are. Indeed, it is to deprive ourselves of our very humanity. All conditioned things are impermanent. All sentient beings are subject to death. Man is the only being (in the sense of the only form of terrestrial life) who is not only subject to death but also aware that he is subject

to death. Man is the only being for whom death is a problem. Indeed, man may be defined as the being for whom death is a problem. For him to ignore the face of death, or to refuse actually to face the problem of death, is therefore to be untrue to his own nature. It is not to be a human being in the real sense of the term.

The Buddha certainly did not refuse to face the problem of death. He faced it, in fact, quite early in life. According to what became the standard traditional account, he faced it when, as a young S'akya warrior of the ruling class, he drove out from the luxurious mansion in which he lived with his wife and infant son and saw, for the first time in his life, an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. On seeing them he realized that although young, healthy, and very much alive, he too was subject to old age, disease, and death. He also realized that being himself subject to birth, old age, disease and death, sorrow and corruption, he sought what was subject to birth, old age, disease, death, sorrow, and corruption, and thus lived an unethical and unspiritual life. In other words the Buddha, or Buddha-to-be, became aware of the fact of death. He faced the problem of death. But there was another sight that he saw for the first time, and that was a yellow-robed wandering `monk' who had gone forth from home into the homeless life. On seeing him the Buddha-to-be realized something else about himself. He realized that although he was subject to birth, old age, disease, death, and corruption, and sought what was of like nature, he could change; he could seek, instead, what was not subject to birth, old age, disease, death, and corruption, and thus lead an ethical and spiritual life. He could seek nirva-na. He could seek the Unconditioned. In other words, he became aware of the possibility of there being a solution to the problem of death and that the finding of that solution was somehow connected with the homeless life. Accordingly he left home, sat at the feet of various teachers, none of whom could satisfy him for long, practised extreme self-mortification, realized the futility of self-mortification, adopted a middle way, refused a half share of a kingdom, and eventually, at the age of thirty-five, sat down under a peepul tree at what afterwards became known as Buddha Gaya. While meditating he realized that death arises in dependence on birth, and that birth, i.e. rebirth, arises in dependence on craving, i.e. craving for continued existence on this or that plane of conditioned being. He realized that when craving ceases birth ceases, and that when birth ceases death ceases. With the cessation of craving one attains nirva-na, or the Unconditioned. One attains a state of irreversible spiritual creativity in which there is no birth and no death because in passing beyond the `cyclical' and entering upon the `spiral' order of existence one has transcended all such pairs of opposites. Paradoxically, though the Buddha had solved the problem of death he still had to die beneath the twin sal trees forty-five years later. But it did not really matter that he had to die. Because he had eradicated craving and the other unskilful mental states that make for birth, i.e. for rebirth, he had solved the problem of birth, and because he had solved the problem of birth he had solved the problem of death in the sense that he would not have to die again.

Thus the Buddha could face the problem of death when he saw his first corpse, and because he could face it - because he could look at the monster with fiercely glaring eyeballs without shrinking - he could also find the solution to the problem of death. In our case it usually takes much more than the sight of a single corpse to make us realize that we too are subject to death. It takes much more than the sight of a single corpse to convince us that death is a problem. In our case we are able to ignore any number of corpses, especially if we only read about them in the newspapers or see them on television. Even if we do become vaguely aware of the problem of death we usually hope, no less vaguely, that we can somehow solve it without having to solve the problem of birth, just as we usually hope, with the same vagueness, that we can somehow achieve peace without having to give up violence. In other words, we usually become aware of the problem of death only to the extent of hoping - or perhaps praying - for the impossible. So far as the problem of death, at least, is concerned, it is a true saying that `What men usually ask of God when they pray is that two and two should not make four.' But now all that has changed. We have begun to realize that we cannot have peace without abolishing war. We have begun to realize that we cannot have birth without also having death. We have, in short, woken up to the problem of death. In fact, we have woken up to it to a greater extent than ever before in history. The reason for this is not far to seek. The reason is that we, the human race, are now faced by the possibility of full-scale nuclear war. We are faced by the fact that each one of us may at any time meet with a premature, painful, and horrible death, and that the whole human race may be destroyed. It is the realization of this frightful fact that has had, upon some of us at least, the same kind of effect that the sight of his first corpse had upon the Buddha. It has made us aware of the problem of death. It has made us aware that the fundamental problem is not the abolition of nuclear weapons, or even the achievement of world peace in the full sense of the term. The fundamental problem is not living in a way that is worthy of a human being in a purely material sense. For a human being worthy of the name, the fundamental problem is the problem of death, and the real significance of the possibility of nuclear holocaust that now confronts us is that it sharpens our awareness of this problem to a greater extent than has ever before been the case. The possibility of nuclear holocaust thus represents not only the greatest threat that humanity has ever faced but also the greatest opportunity. Formerly it was possible for some men to dwell in peace while others were at war. It was possible for some men to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence while others lived in accordance with the principle of

violence. It was possible for some men to face the problem of death while others ignored it. Now this is no longer the case. The possibility of nuclear holocaust means that we must all dwell in peace, all learn to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence, all become more aware of the fundamental problem of death. It means that we must all rise to our full stature as human beings - or perish.

What, then, are we to do? Once again we look at the figure of the Buddha, not only as he stands between the S'akyans and the Koliyans but as he stands beside - and above - the Wheel of Life. In some Tibetan Buddhist scroll-paintings the Buddha is depicted in the top right-hand corner, well outside the Wheel, with one arm raised, and pointing in an upward direction. He is pointing out the Way - the Way to nirva-na, the state where there is no death because there is no birth. What we have to do is to realize not only the significance of the Rohini incident, and the meaning of the Buddha's exchange with the S'akyans and Koliyans, but also the significance of that solitary wordless gesture. We have to solve both the problem of world peace and nuclear war and the problem of death. The very enormity of the problem of world peace and nuclear war indeed serves to make us - if we have any imagination at all - more aware than ever of the problem of death, and unless we can solve the problem of death even the solving of the problem of world peace and nuclear war would, despite the unexampled magnitude of such an achievement, be only the most magnificent of our failures. We must therefore not only abolish nuclear weapons, achieve peace in the full sense of the term, and learn to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence, as well as deepen our realization of the indivisibility of humanity and restore communication by the reinstatement of the notion of the objectivity of truth, but we must also eradicate craving, transcend both birth and death, and attain nirva-na, or the Unconditioned.

The situation in which we find ourselves today is dangerous in the extreme, perhaps more dangerous for humanity than at any other period in history, and time is running out. Whether we shall be able to achieve world peace and avert nuclear war we do not know. We can but do our best in a situation which, to a great extent, is not of our own personal making. But whether we succeed in achieving world peace and averting nuclear war or not we shall still have to die, still have to face the problem of death. If we solve the problem of death it will not, in the most fundamental sense, matter whether we solve the problem of world peace and nuclear war or not - though, paradoxically, if we do succeed in solving the problem of death then we shall, in all probability, succeed in solving the problem of world peace and nuclear war too. In any case, if we solve the problem of death, the problem of birth, the problem of craving, then we shall be able to live in the world as the Buddha and his disciples lived. We shall be able to join them in chanting those celebrated verses of the Dhammapada, the first three of which the Buddha, according to tradition, recited to the S'akyans and Koliyans by way of admonition immediately after he had prevented them from destroying each other:

Happy indeed we live, friendly amid the hateful. Among men who hate we

dwell free from hate. Happy indeed we live, healthy among the sick. Among men who are sick

(with craving) we dwell free from sickness. Happy indeed we live, content amid the greedy. Among men who are greedy

we dwell free from greed. Happy indeed we live, we for whom there is no attachment. Feeders on

rapture shall we be, like the Gods of Brilliant Light. Victory begets hatred, (for) the defeated experiences suffering. The tranquil

one experiences happiness, giving up (both) victory and defeat.41

If we can chant these verses from the very depths of our hearts then we shall be living in accordance with the teachings of Buddhism, and working together for what we all most ardently desire: the achievement of world peace and the avoidance of nuclear war.