

Lecture 167: Discerning the Buddha

Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis, Mitras and Friends.

Today, tonight, we've come together for a celebration. And in accordance with the Buddha's well-known injunction, we've come together on this occasion in large numbers, that is to say in comparatively large numbers. If I happened to be speaking in India on the occasion of Wesak and there were only four or five hundred people present, I should be very surprised indeed. But this is of course not India, this is Britain, this is London, so we have not quite so many people as we might have in India. But relatively speaking, yes, we've come together in large numbers, and I'm very glad, I'm very happy, to see that on an occasion like this we can come together in large numbers. And of course we've come together on this occasion to celebrate what is traditionally known as the Vaishaka Purnima, that is to say, the full moon day of the month, the Indian month, of Vaishaka, corresponding to our occidental April and May. And this particular day, this particular festival, of Vaishaka Purnima, is known very often simply as Wesak, Wesak, Wesak being the Sinhalese corruption or abbreviation of Vaishaka. I remember some forty years ago I first heard of Vaishaka Purnima simply as Wesak. As Wesak it's tended to stick in my mind ever since.

But whether we come together in relatively large numbers or relatively small numbers, it's very important to understand why we have come together and what it is that we're celebrating. You may be thinking it's rather late in the day, quite literally, for me to be talking in this sort of way. But the fact is that there is, it seems, a certain amount of confusion as to what Vaishaka Purnima, or what Wesak, actually is, and therefore perhaps it's not altogether clear what we're celebrating, even though we're celebrating it, and have been celebrating it, so enthusiastically. Wesak, for instance, is sometimes called the thrice sacred festival. I remember in India whenever you were invited to take part in a Wesak celebration, whether as a speaker or in any other capacity, they always invited you to take part, or participate, or honour with your presence, or grace with your presence - those were the Indian expressions - the 'thrice sacred day' or the 'thrice sacred festival'.

So why is Wesak sometimes described, or in some quarters described, as the thrice sacred festival? Is it possible to be thrice sacred? - surely once is enough! But there is a reason. The reason is that, according to some sources, Wesak, or the Vaishaka Purnima, is the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, the birth of the historical Buddha at Lumbini, the anniversary of his attainment of his Enlightenment, sambodhi, at Buddha Gaya, and also the anniversary of his attainment of what is called Maha parinirvana at Kusinara. And according, as I've said, to some sources, all of these events - the birth, the attainment of Enlightenment and the final passing away, the Maha parinirvana - all took place on the Vaishaka Purnima Day - not, of course, in the same year, but in different years. And this is of course in a way quite a coincidence.

But one must observe that this tradition of a thrice sacred Wesak, a thrice sacred Vaishaka Purnima, rests on a very late tradition. The tradition seems to have originated in Ceylon, and from Ceylon - that is to say Sri Lanka - it seems to have spread to the other Theravada countries of the Buddhist world. The rest of the Buddhist world, that is to say the northern Buddhist countries, the Mahayana Buddhist countries, do not think in terms of, do not speak in terms of, a thrice sacred Vaishaka Purnima. The rest of the Buddhist world celebrates only the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment on the Vaishaka Purnima day, or on Wesak. The rest of the Buddhist world, that is to say the non-Theravada Buddhist world, celebrates the birth and the attainment of the parinirvana on the part of the Buddha, on other days of the year, and this in fact does seem to have been the original, the ancient Indian Buddhist tradition. One might of course think that that is more reasonable, that the Buddha should have been born and attained Enlightenment and attained Parinirvana on different days, in fact different Purnima or full moon days.

So it's this tradition that we follow in the FWBO, in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. We follow the tradition of the greater part of the Buddhist world, the eastern Buddhist world, and therefore today we are celebrating the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment, which is to say that we're celebrating the Buddha's transformation from an unenlightened to an Enlightened,

a fully Enlightened, a supremely Enlightened, being. We're celebrating his realization of, we may say, the ultimate truth and reality of things. We're celebrating his becoming the object of refuge for all living beings. We are thus today celebrating something which is of very great importance and very great significance not only to the Buddha some two thousand five hundred years ago, but also here and now to ourselves. Because if the Buddha had not attained Enlightenment on that Vaishaka Purnima night, if he hadn't gone through all those stages of the spiral as so beautifully described this afternoon by Padmavajra in his talk, there would have been no Buddhism. For Buddhism we may say, or the Dharma as it is more traditionally called, represents the Buddha's attempt to communicate to the unenlightened his own experience of Enlightenment, his own realization of the ultimate truth of things.

And if there had been no Buddhism, if there'd been no Dharma, if there'd been no such communication from the Enlightened to the unenlightened mind, there would have been no Buddhists, and we should not be here today. Where we should have been, where we might have been, is perhaps impossible to speculate. I certainly, personally speaking, could not say where I would have been today, if I'd been still in this world at all, if there hadn't been the attainment of Enlightenment by the Buddha, if there hadn't been such a thing as Buddhism, such a thing as the Dharma, such a thing as a Vaishaka Purnima to celebrate. I can certainly not say where I would have been. I might have been doing almost anything, and probably that applies to the vast majority of you.

Had it not been for the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment, had it not been for the Buddha's communication of the content of that Enlightenment, to the extent that he was able to communicate it, today we wouldn't have the noble eightfold path to follow, we wouldn't have the six paramitas to practise. It's very unlikely that we should have been able to find out, to discover, these things for ourselves, even though we might be able to understand them, even practise them when they were pointed out to us by another. So we really do have a very great deal to celebrate today, on this occasion. We really do have a very great deal indeed to rejoice over, and I hope that in the course of the day people have been really heartily rejoicing.

I can't help thinking, in fact, of an ancient Indian sculpture, a picture which I saw in a book on Indian art quite a few years ago, but which remained in my mind. This particular sculpture showed to begin with one of the symbols of the Buddha's presence. You may know that in the very early days of Buddhism the Buddha was not actually represented in a naturalistic sort of way. There was no figure of the Buddha. There was certainly no Buddha image. But there were various symbols representing the presence of the Buddha. For instance there were various sculptures of the life of the Buddha, representing different episodes in the life of the Buddha, and the presence of the Buddha was indicated by an appropriate symbol.

If the artist wanted to depict the Enlightenment, say, he wouldn't depict the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree as we have in our applique thangka on this occasion. The artist would represent simply a Bodhi tree, simply represent the tree under which the Buddha gained Enlightenment. And then perhaps other creatures, other beings, ranged around. You might even see Mara lifting his club against the Buddha, but you wouldn't see the Buddha - you'd just see the Bodhi tree. That stood for the presence of the Buddha. And in the same way, when the artist depicted or represented the episode of the Buddha's first teaching, the first communication of truth to the first five disciples, there would be no figure of the teaching Buddha. There would be a wheel, a Dharmachakra - because in Buddhist idiom on that occasion the Buddha set rolling the wheel of the Dharma, so you'd see the wheel of the Dharma, and you'd see round about the five disciples, the first five disciples, apparently listening to the wheel, because the wheel represented the Buddha. And in the same way you'd have a pair of footprints. I had something to say about footprints this afternoon.

So this particular sculpture of which I speak, a picture of which I remember seeing, represented the Buddha, so to speak, being worshipped. But there was no Buddha. There was no figure of the Buddha. I forget which particular symbol was placed in the centre of the sculpture - it may have been the wheel or it may have been the footprints, I forget which - but whatever the symbol was, whichever it happened to be, it was placed on a sort of throne. It was enthroned. And the

throne was surrounded by bands of devotees. There were monks, there were nuns, there were laymen, there were laywomen, and they all had their hands joined together above their heads, and they were all making offerings - offerings of flowers, offerings of garlands, offerings of fruits, or offerings of scarves, all sorts of offerings - and they were making them in all sorts of ways.

But not only that. What struck me most of all about this particular representation, this particular sculpture, was the fact that all these figures of men and women, monks and nuns, laypeople and people in the monastic wing of the Sangha, they all expressed in so many different ways an absolute joy. You had the impression that they were absolutely overwhelmed with joy. And out of this joy they were worshipping the Buddha and making offerings. They were overjoyed, one might say, that the Buddha had gained Enlightenment, that he was teaching the Dharma, that he had taught the Dharma. One gained the impression that they felt that the fact that the Buddha had attained Enlightenment, the fact that the Buddha had taught the Dharma, communicated the Dharma, was an event of overwhelming importance, one might say almost of cosmic significance, and therefore they were expressing their joy, expressing their happiness, in this exultant and really spectacular manner. It wouldn't perhaps be an exaggeration to say that the artist had depicted these figures in such a way that they seemed mad with joy, if you can think of Buddhists really being mad about anything. But yes, in a manner of speaking they seemed mad with joy. And on this occasion, on this particular day, we ought to be feeling ourselves just a little bit of that joy, just a little bit of that joy that the Buddha has attained Enlightenment and that the Buddha has communicated the Dharma, and that we can benefit from that Dharma which he has communicated.

So today we are celebrating the most important event in the Buddha's life, and celebrating therefore the most important festival in the whole of the Buddhist year. Now since the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment was the most important event in his life, it's only natural that in the course of ages quite a number of traditions should have clustered about that event. It's natural that a number of different teachings, teachings by the Buddha himself, should have come to be associated with that particular event. And this evening, on this particular occasion, I want to deal with just two of these, two of these traditions, two of these teachings. One of them at least I know is already well known to at least some of you, and I suspect that the other may not be familiar perhaps to any of you.

Now both of these traditions, both of these teachings, are found in what is called the Samyutta Nikaya. Samyutta Nikaya is usually translated as the Book of the Kindred Sayings- that is to say, sayings on the same subject by the Buddha. And the Samyutta Nikaya is a book of the Pali Canon. The first of these two traditions or sayings is also found elsewhere in the Pali Canon, and interestingly enough, the second of these traditions or teachings follows in the Samyutta Nikaya immediately after the first.

In this first tradition, or perhaps we can say this first episode, the Buddha has just attained supreme Enlightenment. It's the time immediately following upon that attainment. And he's staying, according to this particular text, he's staying at a place called Uruvela. And he's staying in a very pleasant spot. We're told he's staying on the banks of a river, staying on the banks of the river Neranjara. And he's reflecting. He's just attained Enlightenment, and he's reflecting. And how is he reflecting? What is he reflecting? What train of thought, what train of ideas, is passing through his mind?

He's reflecting that the Dharma, which may translate as 'law' or 'truth' or 'reality' - the Dharma that he has just realised, that he has just discovered, is very difficult to understand. Reflecting, he says to himself, 'This Dharma, this truth, this reality, which I've realised is peaceful, sublime, not a matter of mere reasoning, not a matter of mere dialectic. And it's subtle. It's intelligible only to the wise, the truly wise.' This is the way in which the Buddha reflects after the Enlightenment.

Not only that. He further reflects that people, ordinary people, the average man, the average woman, they're very attached. They're very attached in particular to the pleasures of the senses.

pleasures coming through the eye, ear, nose and so on - in fact, they delight in the pleasures of the sense. They're absorbed in them. They don't take anything else, perhaps, very seriously. And for such people, absorbed as they are in the pleasures of the senses and the lower mind, it'll be very difficult for them to understand the Dharma, the truth or reality that he has discovered. And therefore, he further reflects, it may well be a waste of time for him to teach, to try to teach, the Dharma that he had discovered to them. This is the way in which the Buddha reflected. These are the trains of thought that occurred to him after the Enlightenment.

Well, some of you know the story. Some of you know the story very well, and you know that after the Buddha had reflected in that manner, someone appeared before him. And this was none other than the god, the great god Brahma Sahampati, which means Brahma the lord of a thousand worlds. He appears before the Buddha and he begs the Buddha very humbly to teach the Dharma that he has discovered. And he tells the Buddha that there are in the world at least a few people whose eyes are covered with just a very little of the dust of the passions, and they, he says, will surely listen to the Dharma if the Buddha proclaims it to them.

And we're then told, the Samyutta Nikaya tells us, that the Buddha thereupon surveys the whole world with what is called his Buddha eye, his transcendental vision, and he sees that beings, the beings of the world, are in different stages of development. He sees, as we saw this afternoon, that they're just like lotus plants. Some plants are sunk below the surface of the water. Some have risen to the surface itself. And some stand above the water, absolutely unwetted by it. So the Buddha sees humanity, sees the whole human race, as being in these different stages of development. And so seeing, he agrees out of compassion to teach the Dharma. And he addresses Brahma Sahampati in verse. The verses are very beautiful in Pali, very rhythmical, but I can only read you an English translation. The Buddha says, 'Open for them the door to the deathless state. Let those that hear release their faith.' The commentators interpret this expression 'release their faith' in two different ways - there are two different ways of looking at it. 'Release their faith' can mean 'let them let go of their wrong faith' and it can also mean 'let them free up their right faith'. Let them give up their faith in teachings which do not lead to Enlightenment, and let them release their faith with regard to teachings that do lead to Enlightenment. Not long afterwards, the Wheel of the Dharma starts rolling. The Buddha starts teaching.

Now this particular tradition or this particular episode is important for quite a number of different reasons, but I'm not going into all of them this evening. I want to draw attention to just one point. The Buddha has attained Enlightenment. In his own words he has 'penetrated the Dharma'. He has penetrated something which is hard to understand. So having penetrated the Dharma, having understood the Dharma, how, or in what way, does he characterise this Dharma? How does he describe this Dharma? Well, he describes it as consisting in the fact that - to quote again - 'This is conditioned by that. That all that happens is by way of a cause.' In other words the Buddha describes the Dharma in terms of what came to be known as pratitya samutpada, or dependent origination, also known as conditioned coproduction in English. The Dharma is pratitya samutpada. Pratitya samutpada is the Dharma.

Now for most of you this will be very familiar ground. But of course perhaps we can't go over this very familiar ground too often. But since it is very familiar ground I don't have on this occasion to go into it very much, certainly not in detail. I just want to remind you of one thing, and then we'll pass on to our second tradition, or second episode. Pratitya samutpada, or conditioned coproduction, is of two kinds. One is symbolised by the wheel and the other by the spiral. One represents, or is represented by, rather, the round of birth and death and rebirth, and the other is represented by the successive stages of the spiritual path, especially by the successive stages of the transcendental path. One is represented by what we've come to call the reactive mind, and the other by what we've come to call the creative mind. One consists in a process of action and reaction between factors which are opposites, while the other consists in a process of accumulation, we may say, between factors the succeeding one of which augments the effect of the preceding one.

Now the fact that the second kind of pratitya samutpada, the second kind of dependent origination or conditioned coproduction, is of this kind has a number of quite important

consequences, and we shall have occasion to deal with one of them just a little later on. Anyway, now for the second tradition or the second episode with which we're concerned this evening, from the Samyutta Nikaya. Here too the Buddha is staying at Uruvela. He's staying on the banks of the river Neranjara. And here too he has just attained Enlightenment. In fact this particular episode, though it comes after the first one in the Samyutta Nikaya, appears actually to have occurred before it, chronologically speaking. According to the Theravada tradition the first episode, the previous one, took place in the eighth week after the Buddha's Enlightenment, whereas the second one, the one that we're concerned with now, took place in the course of the fifth week.

Be that as it may, here too the Buddha is reflecting. So on this occasion, in this episode, how is he reflecting? He's reflecting - and here I'm reading from the English translation of this passage - he's reflecting 'It is ill to live paying no one the honour and obedience due to a superior. What recluse or brahmin is there under whom I could live, paying him honour and respect?' Now this is surely extraordinary. Let me read the passage again. The Buddha is reflecting, 'It is ill to live paying no one the honour and obedience due to a superior. What recluse (sramana) or brahmin is there under whom I could live, paying him honour and respect?'

Well, yes, as I said, this is surely extraordinary - but so far as I know, no one has ever commented on the fact. This seems to be another of those neglected passages of the Pali Canon the significance of which is not realised. Just consider. The Buddha has just attained Enlightenment, supreme Enlightenment, but what is he doing? He's wondering under whom he could live paying him honour and respect. The Buddha's attitude here seems to be diametrically opposite to our own. Nowadays, it seems, people do not want to live under anyone paying them honour and respect. Nowadays, it seems, we believe in equality. Some people don't even want to be polite and courteous to others.

Not only that. Not only is the Buddha's attitude here diametrically opposite to our own. It also appears to upset traditional ideas, traditional Buddhist ideas, about the Buddha - even to upset traditional Buddhist ideas about Enlightenment itself. But let us continue with the episode. Perhaps things will become a little clearer. The Buddha reflects further. This passage is cast in a rather repetitious style, so I'll condense it a little. The Buddha's reflections are concerned with four things. They're concerned with what is known as the training in ethics, the training in meditation, the training in insight or wisdom, and the training in contemplation of knowledge of emancipation. His reflections, his further reflections, are concerned with these four things.

And as he reflects, he sees that there is no one in the universe more accomplished in these things - that is, training in ethics, training in meditation, and so on - than he is himself. No one is more accomplished. No one among the gods, even the greatest of the gods, even Brahma Sahampati; no one among human beings - no recluse, no sramana, no brahmin. In other words, the Buddha himself, he sees, is the highest living being in the universe, the highest living being in terms of spiritual development and insight and understanding. The Buddha stands at the head of the whole spiritual hierarchy.

And if we don't realise this, if we don't see this, then we don't really see the Buddha as Buddha at all. We don't really discern the Buddha. We may think that we discern the Buddha, but what we discern is not really the Buddha himself at all. Let me just go into this for a minute. I spoke a few moments ago about India. And in India many Hindus think of the Buddha as what they call the ninth incarnation, the ninth avatara, of the Hindu god Vishnu. This is how they see him. And they see him in this way because the category of divine incarnation or category of avatara is a familiar one to them. They think of Rama, for instance, as an incarnation, an avatara. They think of Krishna as an incarnation, an avatara. So to them it seems natural that the Buddha should also be an incarnation, an avatara. But seeing the Buddha in this way, they don't really see him at all, because the concept of divine incarnation in the Hindu sense is quite foreign to Buddhism, quite foreign to the Buddha's own teaching, and has no place in it.

But in the West we find much the same sort of thing happening. Here in the West in this connection we have two principal categories. There's the category of God - with a capital G in

this case - and the category of man, man in the sense of human being. The Buddha, when we look at him from a Western point of view, whether as a Buddhist or as a non-Buddhist, the Buddha obviously isn't God. After all, the Buddha didn't create the universe. So since the Buddha isn't God with a capital G, and as there are only two categories really, we think that he must be man. But man of course, from a Western point of view, whether Christian or ex-Christian, is not the highest being in the universe. God is the highest being in the universe. So we find it difficult to see the Buddha as the highest being in the universe. Even if we are Buddhists, even if we don't believe in God. If we don't believe in God, we see a sort of God-shaped empty space. And we see the Buddha as smaller than this God-shaped empty space. This God-shaped empty space is enormous. It towers up into the sky. And here's the Buddha as it were underneath - he's very much smaller.

And we see things in this way, we see the Buddha in this way, because there's a category missing in Western thought, we may say. And that is the category of the Enlightened man, the Enlightened human being. An Enlightened human being, according to the Buddhist tradition, is a human being who has realised the ultimate truth of things, one who has penetrated the Dharma. Such a human being is known as a Buddha. And according to Buddhist tradition, according to Buddhist teaching, a Buddha is the highest living being in the universe. There is no one higher than a Buddha, no God with a capital G looming over him, so to speak. And if we realise this, then we see the Buddha, we discern the Buddha. Discerning the Buddha means seeing the Buddha as he really is, seeing him as an Enlightened human being, seeing him as the highest living being in the universe.

So having understood this, we can now come back to the Buddha's reflections in this second episode. The Buddha sees that there is no one in the universe more accomplished in ethics, meditation, and so on, than himself. He sees quite clearly that he is the highest living being in the universe. We could say that at this point the Buddha discerns the Buddha, and discerns him as the Buddha. As the Buddha is himself the highest living being in the universe, there is no one under whom he could live paying him honour and respect. That surely is clear enough. After all, one lives under someone in this way in order to learn from them. But the Buddha is more highly developed than any other living being. He has nothing to learn, spiritually speaking, from anyone. So there's no point in him living under anyone.

But - and this is very important, very significant - but the Buddha, even so, doesn't give up. The Buddha still wants to live under something, paying it honour and respect. So he reflects still further. And he reflects - again I'm quoting from the scripture - 'This Dharma, then, wherein I am supremely Enlightened, what if I were to live under it, paying it honour and respect?' And at this point Brahma Sahampati, lord of a thousand worlds, appears. And he approves of the Buddha's decision, and he tells him that all the Buddhas of the past lived only under the Dharma, honouring and respecting it. All the Buddhas of the future will do likewise.

Well, we may say this really is an astonishing passage. It shows that even a Buddha needs, in a sense, 'needs' within single inverted commas perhaps, 'needs' to honour and respect something. Even a Buddha needs to worship something. This suggests that worship is not just a spiritual practice, not just a practice that leads to Enlightenment, and which can be forgotten after Enlightenment has been attained. Worship, or worshipping, it seems, is an integral part of the Enlightenment experience itself. We may say, paraphrasing, that the Enlightened mind is a worshipping mind no less than it is a loving and compassionate mind. The Enlightened mind is a worshipping mind, and therefore we have to think in terms of a worshipping Buddha. We're familiar, very familiar, with the idea of a meditating Buddha. We're very familiar with the idea of a teaching Buddha. Buddhas of this type are often represented in Buddhist art. We're even familiar with the idea of a walking Buddha - at least, some of us are - or a standing Buddha. But we're certainly not familiar with the idea of a worshipping Buddha. This type of Buddha is probably not represented in traditional Buddhist art at all, or at the most represented very rarely indeed.

Now the object of the Buddha's honour and respect, the object of his worship, is the Dharma. And this Dharma which is the object of the Buddha's worship and respect cannot be the Dharma

in the sense of the Buddha's teaching. In any case, at the time of this particular episode the Buddha has not as yet taught anything, has not as yet taught anybody. So the Dharma here referred to, the Dharma of which he speaks in this passage, in this episode, must be the Dharma in the sense of Law with a capital L, principle, truth, reality. In other words, the law or principle or truth or reality of which the Dharma as taught, the Dharma as formulated, is an expression in words in accordance with people's needs. It must be the Dharma in the sense of the object or content of the Buddha's own experience of Enlightenment.

And this is in fact what the Buddha says. As we saw, he says 'This Dharma, wherein I am supremely Enlightened, what if I were to live under it, paying it honour and respect?' But here a certain difficulty confronts us. If you worship something, it means that what you worship is higher than you. And here the Buddha worships the Dharma, therefore the Dharma is higher than the Buddha. But in what sense is the Dharma higher than the Buddha? After all, has the Buddha not realised the Dharma, penetrated the Dharma? Is it not the Dharma itself wherein he is supremely Enlightened?

So in order to understand the matter a little, we shall have to go back to our first episode. There, as we saw, the Buddha speaks of the Dharma that he has realised as being very difficult to understand. And he also describes this Dharma as consisting in the fact that this is conditioned by that, that all that happens is by way of a cause. In other words, as we saw, the Buddha describes the Dharma in terms of dependent origination or conditioned coproduction. And as I reminded you, conditioned coproduction is of two kinds, one symbolised by the Wheel of Life, the other by what we may call the spiral of spiritual development, as embodied in the successive stages of the spiritual path. We're concerned with the second of these, because after all in attaining Enlightenment the Buddha has freed himself from the Wheel of Life, and it doesn't, in a sense, concern him personally any more.

In the spiral of spiritual development there is a certain sequence of positive mental states or experiences. And the best known formulation of this sequence runs as follows - it'll be very familiar to at least some of you. This is just the formula:

'In dependence on suffering arises faith. In dependence on faith arises joy. In dependence on joy arises rapture. In dependence on rapture arises calm. In dependence on calm arises bliss. In dependence on bliss arises concentration. In dependence on concentration arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are. In dependence on knowledge and vision of things as they really are arises dispassion. In dependence on dispassion arises withdrawal, or disentanglement. In dependence on withdrawal, or disentanglement, arises freedom. In dependence on freedom arises knowledge of the destruction of the asravas - all unskilful, negative states.

Many of you will of course be familiar with this sequence. This sequence represents the rationale of spiritual life and of the spiritual path. And it consists, as many of you know, of two sections. The first section consists of seven nidanas or links as they are called from 'in dependence on suffering arises faith' to 'in dependence on concentration arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are'. All these nidanas, all these seven nidanas, except the last one, though positive, though skilful, are mundane. Though they are part of the spiral of spiritual development, they are part also of that part of the spiral which is at the same time a part of the Wheel of Life. One can, therefore, fall back from this section of the spiral after having attained it.

The second section of the spiral consists of only five nidanas, that is to say the nidanas from 'in dependence on knowledge and vision of things as they really are arises dispassion' to 'in dependence on freedom arises knowledge of the destruction of the asravas'. All these nidanas, all these five nidanas, are positive and transcendental, and from this section of the path, this section of the spiral, one cannot fall back. Having attained it, one can only go forward. Hence the importance of the seventh nidana, that is to say, 'in dependence on concentration or samadhi there arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are. It's important because this nidana marks a transition. It marks the transition from the mundane to the transcendental. The arising of knowledge and vision of things as they really are, or Insight, is also known as Stream-entry.

One enters the stream that leads directly to the ocean of nirvana. One passes what is known as the point of no return.

Now an interesting question arises. The twelfth nidana is 'in dependence on freedom arises knowledge of the destruction of the asravas'. This is what happens when one attains Enlightenment, as we say, when one becomes an Arhat or a Buddha - in the Buddha's own teaching the two appear to have been more or less synonymous - that is to say Arhat and Buddha. So the question that arises is this. Is the twelfth nidana really the last? This is really a question for the thoughtful Buddhist. If this question occurs to you, you've really been taking your study of the Dharma quite seriously. Is the twelfth nidana really the last? Could the spiral process not continue even beyond that point?

Some of you may remember that I've touched upon this same question in the Survey, in the Survey of Buddhism. From that famous exchange which the Buddha had with the bhikkhuni Dhammadinna, it would seem that knowledge of the destruction of the asravas is not necessarily the last nidana. There seems to be no reason why the spiral process should not continue indefinitely. Dhammadinna, in that same exchange with the Buddha, that one stopped with knowledge of the destruction of the asravas because one had to stop somewhere. So nirvana is not so much a fixed state as a sequence of irreversible transcendental states, each one more nirvanic to the last.

So perhaps now we can begin to see the answer to our question. Let's get back to that. That is to say, the question of in what sense is the Dharma higher than the Buddha. That's the question from which we started out. Even though the Buddha was the highest living being in the universe, even though he had progressed further up the spiral than anyone else, there were still reaches of the spiral which he had not as yet explored. In other words, attaining Enlightenment does not mean achieving a fixed, determinate state, however high. It means becoming involved in the transcendental process, a process that is irreversible. And this is why it was possible for the Buddha to live under the Dharma, paying it honour and respect. The Dharma here is the law, principle, truth, or reality of conditioned coproduction, especially that law or principle represented by those unmentioned nidanas which the Buddha has not as yet attained, nidanas which to us, or from our point of view, are really quite inconceivable. And this is why it is possible for the Buddha to be a worshipping Buddha as well as a meditating Buddha and a teaching Buddha. And this is why worship is so important, even more important than perhaps we had previously supposed.

So let us look into the matter, this matter of worship, of paying honour and respect, a little more closely. In the episode with which we have just been concerned, the word for honour and respect is 'garava' (?) and it means, according to the dictionary, reverence, respect, honour, esteem, veneration, worship. So the connotation of the term is clear enough. It clearly suggests the kind of positive attitude which we should naturally adopt towards something or someone we see or experience as higher than ourselves.

So what is it that we see as higher than ourselves? Obviously we see the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as higher than ourselves, but is there anything else? Is there anything else that can be an object of honour and respect? Now it's very interesting to see in this connection that Buddhist tradition speaks of a group of six garavas, that is to say six respectable or venerable or worshipful objects. So what are these? I'll give their names just in Pali for the moment. According to the Pali Canon they are Satta, Dharma, Sangha, sikha, appamada and patisantara.

The first three of these, that is to say Satta, which means literally teacher, Dharma and Sangha of course correspond to the three jewels or three refuges. So we're quite familiar with them at least as objects of veneration or objects of worship. I shan't therefore say anything about these three garavas - I'll just concentrate on the second group of three. But before doing that I'll say just a word about the very first garava, that is to say, Satta. This is of course equivalent to Buddha. The Buddha is called Satta deva manusannam, or 'teacher of gods and men'. So the term Satta for the Buddha, or shasta (?) in Sanskrit, occurs very frequently in the Pali scriptures. It's often said 'The teacher said this' or 'the teacher said that'. The Pali scriptures, in fact Buddhist

scriptures generally, don't always use the term Buddha. Sometimes they use the word Tathagata. Sometimes they use the word lokajyestha, and so on. Similarly they often use the word Satta or shasta, which means simply teacher. But of course we don't usually speak of Satta, Dharma, Sangha. We usually speak of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

So why is there a difference here? The reason I think must be that we experience the Buddha personally mainly in his capacity as teacher. And in our particular case we experience him in his capacity usually through the scriptures. And therefore we respect him mainly as teacher, supreme teacher, teacher of gods and men. We must also remember that in ancient India very great respect was always paid to the teacher, not just the spiritual teacher but even to what we would call the secular teacher. In the West in recent decades the term guru has become very popular; it's also become rather debased. And in the West this term guru is generally used in exclusively spiritual or pseudo-spiritual sense. But this is not the case in India. In India the ordinary schoolteacher or college professor is spoken of as one's guru. One can even speak of one's guru in economics, or something of that sort, or the guru who taught you ABC. And in Buddhism parents are also referred to as gurus or as acaryas, which means the same thing - in fact they're called - in some cases parents are called the first gurus, or first acaryas, because your parents, your mother and your father, are the first people from whom you learn anything. So in Buddhist tradition one respects one's parents not just because they are one's biological parents, but also because they are one's teachers, one's first or original teachers.

But it's time we passed on to the second group of garavas, time we passed on to sikha, the first of this second group of three. In Sanskrit sikha is siksha, and it means study, it means training, it means discipline. Basically the fact that sikha is a garava means that we should respect what we study, or respect what we train in. We should be able to respect it. We can respect something only if, only to the extent that, we see it as being higher than ourselves. So this suggests that we cannot really study something in the Buddhistic sense unless we see it as higher than ourselves, unless we see the study of it as helping us to grow, helping us to develop, just like the rain or the sunshine. In Buddhism there are traditionally three studies or three trainings. There's first of all the study of the higher ethics; there's the study of higher states of consciousness; and there's the study of the higher wisdom. And these 'studies', in inverted commas, help us to grow more, much more, than anything else does. But there are of course all sorts of other things that help us to grow, also help us to develop as human beings - such as the fine arts, spiritual friendship, and so on. These too, we may say, are studies in the Buddhistic sense, and we must therefore honour and respect them too. If we cannot honour and respect something, it's not really worth studying in the Buddhistic sense, the sense of sikha. Such study won't really help us.

And then second of this second group of three garavas, there's appamada. This too is an object of garava - respect, veneration, even worship. Appamada means 'non-heedlessness' - that is to say, it means 'mindfulness' or 'awareness'. It's a very important quality indeed in Buddhism, as I think everybody knows. It constitutes the subject of the famous second chapter of the Dhammapada, which is devoted to it. But why should appamada, non-heedfulness, mindfulness - why should it be regarded as an object of respect? This is a very interesting question, and the answer is in a way very simple. We should respect those spiritual qualities which we are trying to develop. We shouldn't think lightly of them. If we think lightly of them, if we don't really respect them, we won't succeed in developing them. In other words, we should respect our own spiritual practice, whether that practice be of mindfulness or of any other spiritual quality that we're trying to develop. But why, one might further enquire, is only mindfulness mentioned in this particular connection? And it is only mindfulness that is mentioned no doubt because mindfulness plays a really crucial role in the spiritual life and development of the individual.

Now for the last of the six garavas. And this is patisantara. Patisantara is a word that most of you probably haven't encountered before. Patisantara. And it's a very interesting word, with a wide range of associated meanings. Patisantara comes from a root meaning 'to spread', and its literal meaning is 'spreading before'. That doesn't really help us very much, does it? - 'spreading before'. But there is a roughly corresponding expression in the English language itself. Have you ever spoken of having, or being given, a spread, even a good spread? Perhaps you had a good spread today. A good spread. So what is a good spread? What does this rather colloquial expression

mean? Well, a good spread is a sort of feast, isn't it? It's the sort of thing you have in the dorm in your school days. You open up your surreptitious tuck boxes and you have a good spread after lights out with your friends.

So a spread is a sort of feast, and it's presumably so called because a spread is a whole lot of food spread out before you - in the West, usually on a table. So patisantara has much the same sort of meaning. Patisantara means 'spreading before' in the sense of friendly welcome, kind reception, honour, goodwill, favour, friendship. Because if someone comes to see you and you spread out all these goodies before him or her, well, clearly you're giving them a very friendly welcome indeed, a very kind reception. So patisantara means spreading before in the sense of this friendly welcome, this kind reception, honour, goodwill, favour, friendship - this is what the dictionary tells us. And the spreading before can be either material or spiritual. It can relate to food, it can relate to material things, or it can relate to spiritual things. There can be a spreading before people of spiritual things too. So this word patisantara is therefore very rich in meaning, and it covers a very important aspect of human life, including spiritual life. But why should patisantara be spoken of as a garava? Obviously because patisantara is a quality we need to develop, and therefore it's a quality that we should look up, a quality that we should venerate, a quality that we should revere.

So these are the six garavas. There's quite a lot more that could be said about them and perhaps some of you would like to take up the study of the six garavas, this particular set of terms, in the course of a study group. But the six garavas certainly do illustrate the importance of the place that respect, honour, veneration, worship, et cetera, do occupy in the spiritual life. As we've seen this evening, respect - paying of respect, paying of honour - occupied an important place in the Buddha's own spiritual life, not just before his attainment of Enlightenment, but even afterwards. So we can see that the Buddha is not just a meditating Buddha, not just a teaching Buddha. He is also a worshipping Buddha, and it's important that we should remember this. It's important that we should see the importance of discerning the Buddha in this way. And it's particularly important that we should see this on the present occasion, when we are after all celebrating the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment. But we're not just celebrating it, but perhaps are, certainly will be, worshipping the Buddha. And we may say that the greater the place that we can give in our lives, in our own spiritual lives, to paying honour, to respect, to veneration, to worship, the more certain we can be that one day we shall attain whatever the Buddha himself attained. The more certain we shall be that one day we shall be able to worship as the Buddha himself worshipped.