Lecture 184: The 24 Nidanas

Venerable Sirs and Friends

Yesterday evening Sharon shared with us some of her extreme experiences. She spoke about her experiences in the slums of Calcutta, with which I am also somewhat familiar, and also her experience in the Sydney Opera House, which I've seen at least from a distance. And while she was speaking I couldn't help remembering a few of my own extreme experiences, some occurring quite a while ago, and some even very recent. Those of you who've taken the trouble to read the biographies of the teachers may have noticed that under my own biography it says, in part, `After the war he stayed on in India and adopted the life of a wandering ascetic, travelling on foot from place to place, and meeting and talking with many eminent spiritual teachers.

Well, this was indeed an extreme experience. Yes, I was a wandering ascetic, a freelance wandering ascetic. That was before I took any Buddhist ordination, though I was actually a Buddhist at that time. I wore very simple yellow - well, in the West we call them robes, which creates altogether the wrong sort of impression. Robes are something rather grand, something splendid. But these were just two pieces of yellow cloth. In fact, they were two pieces of white cloth that I'd dyed myself with gerua mati, which is a sort of earth which is used by Indian ascetics to dye their robes - sorry, to dye their clothing.

And I didn't have any money, walked from place to place. Of course I was shaven-headed, though after a while I let my hair grow. It grew right down to my shoulders, and it looked I think really quite wild. I was very young then, of course. And I had all sorts of extreme experiences - sometimes slept in ashrams, sometimes slept on people's verandahs, sometimes slept on railway station platforms, sometimes slept at the side of the road. And yes, that was quite an extreme experience, and one which I still cherish and remember with great affection.

And of course the other extreme is - well, staying here. Quite a contrast. But anyway, we won't say anything more about that. But, just to revert for a moment to my life as a wandering ascetic, you can imagine I couldn't carry much with me. In fact most of that time I had a very small cloth bag which contained my total worldly possessions: a small towel, a small brass pot for what Indians always call one's ablutions, and one or two books. Perhaps for me the most ascetic part of that ascetic experience was being limited to one or two books, because by nature I'm a great reader. I love reading. I read all the time. I read far too much. I'm sure my Zen friends would strongly disapprove of this, at least to the extreme that I carry it. I had just these one or two books. I'd started off with a small library, but even a small library is very heavy, so it had been reduced eventually to one or two books.

And one of these books was the Dhammapada. The Dhammapada has always been one of my most favourite Buddhist texts. Some people tend to skip it over; they think it's rather simple, rather elementary. But it is far from that. The little verses are pregnant with meaning, sometimes with very deep meaning, and the meaning is always very very relevant. The Dhammapada, though I was acquainted with it before, was in fact the very first Buddhist text that I acquired on my arrival in India in 1944, which is exactly fifty years ago. And I remember where I bought it. I bought it in the Buddha vihara in New Delhi, which I afterwards visited as a monk a number of times. And I carried that dog-eared little volume around with me for years and years and years. And I referred to it constantly.

So when I was thinking about this talk, when I was trying to grapple with this very recondite topic that we've been allotted for this conference, my thoughts turned to the Dhammapada, and my thoughts turned to a verse in which the Buddha says that it is happiness to meet with good people. And he goes on to give a comparison. The Buddha says meeting with good people is like meeting with kinsfolk - meeting, that is to say, with one's nearest and dearest. Now of course in our modern age meeting with kinsfolk isn't necessarily a happy experience. Things have rather changed, it seems, since the Buddha's day. But let's take it that meeting with good people is like meeting with kinsfolk.

But I think it's an even greater happiness to meet with good people when those good people happen to be fellow Buddhists. And I'm therefore very happy to be here today and to be taking part in this conference. I'm happy to have the opportunity of speaking on `The nature of reality: Buddhism as transformation'. I'm happy to have an opportunity of emphasizing the transformational potential of the Buddhist view of reality on our everyday lives.

But before I actually begin I must congratulate Lepan Clode and his associates at Arizona Teachings for having organised this conference, and I must congratulate them very warmly for the excellent arrangements that they've made for us, both teachers and students, both senior teachers and junior teachers. When I first encountered this phrase, I wasn't quite sure what it meant. Apparently I was classed as a senior teacher - but I concluded that it simply meant that I was an old teacher. The junior teachers were the young teachers. I can certainly claim to be an old teacher, because with the exception of Roshi I'm the oldest teacher here. So whether you're an old teacher or a young teacher, a senior teacher or a junior teacher, doesn't really matter so much. What is more important is the quality of the teaching.

I remember in this connection a verse which I heard quite often in India, a Sanskrit verse taken from the Hindu tradition. And it goes, as far as I can remember, something like this. `The teacher and his disciples are sitting under a tree. The teacher is only sixteen years old. The disciples are all old men. The teacher speaks. The disciples attain Enlightenment.' I think it's from the Dakshana murti spotra. ?

So it's not just age that counts. In fact, to refer to the Dhammapada again, there's a little verse in the Dhammapada which goes `One is not a thera - that is to say a senior monk - simply because one has spent so many years in the monastic order. If one has not practised the Dhamma during that period, one is called' - and Bhante there will give us the Pali for this - `old in vain'. So we don't want to be old in vain, we don't want to be young in vain; we want to practise the Dharma.

But to come back to this conference, I think conferences of this sort have quite an important part to play in what I think we've come to call Western Buddhism, by which I suppose we mean Buddhism studied and practised under Western conditions. Conferences like this enable us to have a much broader view of the total Buddhist tradition. They give us, I think, a livelier appreciation of the riches, the unbounded riches, of that tradition. They enable us to get to know one another personally, even to make friends with one another. They help us to realise what we have, how much we have, in common as Buddhists, regardless of the particular tradition that we happen to belong to or to follow.

At this point I have a slight correction to make. This is not in my biography, but in the little publicity brochure for the conference that was put out, I believe, some time ago. This little brochure relegates me to the Mahayana. No doubt this was for the sake of symmetry, schematization, because yes, we have Bhante Gunaratana for the Theravada, we have Aitken Roshi, a very distinguished representative of Zen, and we have Chetsang Rimpoche for the Vajrayana. So we have Urgyen Sangharakshita, naturally, for the Mahayana, and in this way the four principal forms of Buddhism extant in the West are very neatly covered.

But - well, organisers have to tie up things somehow, but in my case this is not quite correct. I must say I don't regard myself as a Mahayana Buddhist - that is to say, I do not identify myself exclusively with the Mahayana tradition. I have no less appreciation for the Theravada, for Zen or Ch'an, and for the Vajrayana in its various forms. They are all in their so many different ways among the glories of Buddhism. But I don't identify myself with any of them exclusively. I've had teachers belonging to many different traditions. So I prefer to think of myself as being simply a Buddhist. And it's therefore as a Buddhist, not as a Mahayanist, that I'm addressing you this morning.

Not only that. I'm going to do my best to avoid Pali and Sanskrit terms which may not be familiar to you. And I'm going to speak, or try to speak, in reasonably plain, straightforward English. Now this may not be so easy for me as you might have thought, because a lot of my thinking about Buddhism is done in Pali and Sanskrit, and I find sometimes that it's very difficult to find

appropriate terms in English for the Pali and the Sanskrit terms. Nonetheless it has to be done. The Chinese did it for their language, the Japanese did it for their language, the Tibetans did it for their language, so we have to do it for our language, if that language is English. If you're interested in finding out the Pali and Sanskrit original terms for some of the expressions I'll be using, you'll be able to find them in my books anyway.

The subject of the conference is of course a very important one: The nature of reality - Buddhism as transformation. Nothing less than that. So here we're confronted by three great themes, three tremendous themes, for one little lecture, or two little lectures. Reality: think what that might mean, just let your mind dwell on it just for a moment. Or rather, don't let your mind dwell on it. Reality. And then Buddhism. And then transformation. It's these themes that we're investigating in the course of this conference, and investigating this morning and this afternoon.

The three themes are of course interconnected. They're interconnected because the Buddhist view of reality has the effect of transforming us, transforming our lives. So where shall we begin? Where shall we find our point of entry? Well, let's begin with Buddhism, because out of the three this is in a way the most accessible. Let's begin with Buddhism. And let's go back to basics. The term Buddhism is of course from Buddha, and Buddha is from a Pali/Sanskrit root meaning simply `to know' or `to understand'. A Buddha, therefore, is one who knows. He's one who understands. And by the way, perhaps I should mention that Buddha is not a proper name. We should always use the definite or indefinite article before it; it's a title.

So a Buddha, the Buddha, is one who knows, one who understands. And originally, in pre-Buddhistic times, and perhaps even in the early days of Buddhism itself, Buddha meant simply `a wise man'. In the Dhammapada sometimes the word occurs in this sense, sometimes it occurs in the more distinctively Buddhistic sense. But in the Buddhist tradition generally this word Buddha, meaning `wise man', came to have a very special meaning. It came to mean one who knows reality, ultimate reality - one who knows things in their depths or, as it was often expressed, one who has achieved knowledge and vision of things as they really are, not as they appear, things as they really are.

Yesterday Bhante Gunaratana touched upon this distinction between seeing things as they really are and seeing things as they only appear. Siddhartha Gautama, the prince of the Shakya clan, became a Buddha in the Buddhist sense when he gained under the bodhi tree this knowledge and vision of things as they really are, attained it in its completeness, in its totality, in its all-comprehendingness. And when he knew that reality, that ultimate reality, he was transformed, he was transfigured. He became the Buddha.

The nature of the reality, the vision, the knowledge of which he attained, we shall be looking at later on. For the present I just want to stay with the term Buddhism. As we've seen, Buddhism is from Buddha. But what, we may ask, is the relation between the two? We can of course say that Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha, and that's quite correct - plus, of course, the interpretations that have gathered around that teaching in the course of so many centuries in so many countries at the hands of so many great Buddhist teachers. But to say simply that Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha doesn't really help us very much. It doesn't go deep enough.

For instance, why does the Buddha teach? Whom does the Buddha? `Teach' is after all primarily a transitive verb. One doesn't just teach. One teaches someone, or one teaches a number of persons; one doesn't just teach. In the Buddha's case he teaches us. He teaches those who are not Buddhas. I don't think anyone would disagree that we are not Buddhas. He teaches us, those who are not Buddhas; or in the more traditional phrase, he teaches gods and men, all sentient beings. Thus Buddhism, we may say, is a communication. It's a communication from the Buddha to those who are not Buddhas. It's a communication from the Enlightened mind to the unenlightened mind. And the purpose of that communication, that great communication, is not theoretical, not academic. It's highly practical, it's practical in the highest conceivable degree. Its purpose, the purpose of that communication, is to enable those who are not Buddhas to become Buddhas, to enable the unenlightened mind to transform itself into an Enlightened mind.

And it's because the purpose of the Buddha's communication is practical that he likened his teaching to a raft. This is a very famous teaching, a very famous parable in the Pali scriptures. The function of the raft is to carry one across the river. I've seen some of these great Indian rivers. You stand on one bank, you can't see the other bank, they're as broad as that. So the function of the raft is to carry one across the river. The river of course has a symbolical significance; it's the river, the ogre, as Bhante Gunaratana was explaining yesterday, of samsara. Once one has reached the opposite bank one is free to discard the raft. The raft is only a means to an end. It's not an end in itself.

And this is one of the most striking and most important of all the Buddha's teachings: that Buddhism itself, our so greatly loved and cherished Buddhism, the Dharma itself, is just a raft. Religion is just a raft. It's for getting across, not for carrying with one when one has crossed over and reached the further shore. That's an extreme. But of course there's another extreme to be avoided, and that is not actually using the raft to cross the river at all. And this extreme is much more common. Some people board the raft but they don't ply the pole. They start making the raft a bit comfortable. They start building walls, maybe a little roof; then they install furniture and cooking utensils, bring on board their wives and families and friends. They turn the raft into a house, and they moor it very securely to this shore. They don't like any talk about releasing the mooring or the anchor.

There are other people who just stand on the shore, stand on the bank and they just take a good steady look at that raft. They say `It's a fine raft. It's a magnificent raft - so big, so solid, so well constructed, so impressive.' And they take out their measuring rod or their tape, they measure it. They can tell you the exact dimensions of it. They can tell you the sort of wood it's made of, and where and when that wood was felled. They can tell you all about the raft. And they produce a beautiful monograph on Buddhist rafts which sells like hot cakes, which even enters the best seller list. But it's only a book about the raft, and they've never even perhaps set foot on that raft.

And of course there are other people who think, well, that old raft's a bit plain, not very attractive, a bit rough and ready. After all, it's just a lot of logs lashed together. So they paint it and decorate it and cover it with flowers and make it look quite pretty. But they also don't ever get on board. They don't ever start using that pole and ferrying themselves across to the other shore.

So all these are extremes. But there's another lot of people - they claim that they've inherited the raft. They claim that the raft happens to be their ancestral property, it belongs to them. So they don't have to do anything about it, don't have to board it or use it. It's just there; it just belongs to them. It's enough, quite enough, that they simply possess it.

Now I've said that Buddhism is a communication, a communication from the Buddha to those who are not Buddhas, from the Enlightened mind to the unenlightened mind. And such a communication is not easy to make, even for a Buddha, because between the Buddha and the worldly person there is a tremendous gap. We can't really conceive how tremendous that gap is. It's all very well for us to say we're potentially Buddha, we're potentially Enlightened. But those usually are just words. We don't know, we don't realize, don't see, the vast extent of the gulf which separates us, the unenlightened person, from the Buddha, the Enlightened person.

Sometimes people talk about the Buddha in a very familiar sort of way, almost as though he was their next-door neighbour and they knew him very well - they knew all about him, knew about his realization and his Enlightenment, and just what it consisted in. But this is really, if you think about it, a sort of profanity. We don't really know the Buddha, we don't understand the Buddha. There's a vast gulf between his ultimate realization and our own experience.

So it's very difficult even for a Buddha to bridge that gap, to make contact with the unenlightened mind, make real contact. In the Mahayana there's a very beautiful myth about the descent of Avalokitesvara or descent of Kshitagarbha into the depths of hell. That hell isn't necessarily another world; it's this world. And it represents the difficulty that the Bodhisattva, that the Buddha has in establishing real contact with our unenlightened, our mundane mentality.

(bit missing?)

He hesitated whether or not to communicate or to try to communicate. Let me just read you the Pali Canon's account of this episode. It's found in the Vinaya-pitaka, the first of the three pitakas, and I'm going to read from Bhikkhu Nanamoli's translation from the Pali. And I must just warn you that in this translation the word Dhamma, which can be rendered in various ways, is rendered as Law. We could also render it as Reality or Truth or Teaching. So this is the passage.

`Now while the Blessed One was alone in retreat, this thought arose in him. `This Law that I have attained is profound and hard to see, hard to discover. It is the most peaceful and superior goal of all, not attainable by mere ratiocination, subtle, for the wise to experience. But this generation relies on attachment, relishes attachment, delights in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth: that is to say specific conditionality, dependent arising. And it is hard to see this truth, that is to say stilling of all formations, relinquishing of the essentials of existence, exhaustion of craving, fading of lust, cessation, nibbana. And if I taught the Law others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me.' Thereupon there came to him spontaneously these stanzas, never heard before:

Enough of teaching of the Law
That even I found hard to reach,
For it will never be perceived
By those that live in lust and hate.
Men dyed in lust, and whom a cloud
Of darkness laps, will never see
What goes against the stream,
Is subtle, deep and hard to see, abstruse.

Considering thus, his mind favoured inaction and not teaching the Law. Then it occurred to Brahma Sahampati, the ruler of a thousand worlds, who became aware in his mind of the thought in the Blessed One's mind, `The world will be lost. The world will be utterly lost. For the mind of the Perfect One, accomplished and fully Enlightened One, favours inaction and not teaching the Dharma. Then, as soon as a strong man might extend his flexed arm, Brahma Sahampati vanished from the brahma world and appeared before the Blessed One. He arranged his robe on one shoulder as a sign of respect, and putting his right knee on the ground and putting his hands palms together towards the Blessed One, he said, `Lord, let the Blessed One teach the Law. Let the sublime one teach the Law. There are creatures with little dust on their eyes, who are wasting through not hearing the Law. Some of them will gain final knowledge of the Law.'

When Brahma Sahampati had said this, he said further, `In Magadha' - which is where the Buddha gained Enlightenment - `In Magadha there has appeared till now impure law, thought out by men still stained. Open the deathless gateway. Let them hear the Law the Immaculate has found. Ascend, O Sage, the tower of the Law. And just as one sees all the folk around who stand upon a pile of solid rock, survey, O sorrowless all-seeing Sage, this human breed engulfed in sorrowing that birth has at its mercy and old age. Arise, O Hero, Victor, Knowledge-bringer, free from all doubt, and wander in the world. Proclaim the Law, for some, O Blessed One, will understand.

The Blessed One listened to Brahma Sahampati's pleading. Out of compassion for creatures he surveyed the world with the eye of an Enlightened one. Just as in a pond of blue, red or white lotuses some lotuses that are born and grow in the water, thrive immersed in the water without coming up out of it, and some other lotuses, that are born and grow in the water, rest on the water's surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water come right up out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it, so too he saw creatures with little dust on their eyes, with much dust on their eyes, with keen faculties and dull faculties, with good qualities and bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear in the other world, and blame as well.

When he had seen he replied `Wide open are the portals of the deathless. Let those who hear

show faith. If I was minded to tell not the sublime Law that I know, 'twas that I saw vexation in the telling.'

Then Brahma Sahampati thought: I have made it possible for the Law to be taught by the Blessed One. And after he had paid homage to him, keeping him on his right, he vanished at once.'

So that's the episode. This episode represents a crucial point in the Buddha's life. It represents a crucial decision on his part. To communicate or not to communicate, that was the question. It was a crucial question not only for him. It was crucial for the world. It was crucial for what we know as Buddhism. It was crucial for us. If the Buddha had not decided to communicate, if he had not decided to teach, where would we be now? We'd certainly not be here this morning, wherever else we might be.

A lot could be said about this episode, the episode of Brahma's request, as it's generally called. It contains a lot that we need to reflect and meditate upon. There is, to begin with, the question of who is Brahma? And also, why did the Buddha have to be requested to teach? What does that mean? For the moment I'm going to draw your attention to just one thing, just one particular feature of the episode. The episode brings together the three great themes with which this conference is concerned - that is to say, the theme of reality, the theme of Buddhism, and the theme of transformation.

The Buddha speaks of the Law, or Truth, or Reality he has attained to, a Reality that is profound and hard to see, that is the most peaceful and superior goal of all, that is hard to discover, that is not attainable by mere ratiocination, that is subtle and for the wise to experience. Then Brahma Sahampati begs the Buddha to proclaim that reality, and the Buddha eventually agrees to do so. And here we have the beginnings of Buddhism - at least the possibility of Buddhism, even the promise of Buddhism. And finally we have the pond of red, blue and white lotuses, some of them immersed in the water, some resting on the water's surface, and others coming right up out of the water and standing clear of it. In other words, we have the theme of transformation.

Thus all these three themes are present in this episode: reality, Buddhism, transformation. In other words, we have what is communicated - that is to say the Law, Truth, Reality, Dhamma. We have how and why it is communicated - that is to say we have Buddhism as the means of personal transformation. And we also have to whom it is communicated - that is to say, all sentient beings, ourselves.

Now this morning we're concerned mainly with the first of these; we're concerned with Reality. We're concerned with that the experience of which transformed the Buddha from an unenlightened into an Enlightened being. It is this that we're here to investigate. But first of all a few words about the lotus pond. This is really a most remarkable simile. It represents the Buddha's vision of humanity. The Buddha sees human beings as being in different stages of development. He sees human beings as growing. He sees them, we could say, as being in different stages of transformation.

We find the same kind of simile in the White Lotus Sutra, which is one of the great Mahayana sutras, as I expect most of you know. We find it in the White Lotus Sutra in that famous parable of the raincloud, which is also known as the parable of the plants. And the raincloud, of course, is the raincloud of the Dharma, in the sense of the Buddha's teaching; and the plants are all sentient beings. And the rain of the Dharma falls, the rain of the Buddha's teaching falls, on all alike, equally - not more to some and less to another. The rain of the Dharma, the rain of the Buddha's teaching, falls on all alike. But they all grow and develop in accordance with their different natures and their different capacities. And once again the emphasis is on growth, development, transformation.

This reminds me of another passage in the Pali Canon in which the Buddha is talking to and about his disciples. And he's enumerating their different distinctive qualities. Sometimes people think that if a teacher has disciples, all the disciples must be alike, even little copies of the teacher. And sometimes Buddhist art gives this impression. You see a picture, a figure of the

Buddha - yellow robe, shoulder-bag, bowl, ushnisha - and then you see a whole row of little disciples, and they all look exactly like the Buddha, except for the ushnisha. I'm sorry about that; that's a Sanskrit word meaning the bodhic protuberance at the top of the head. So the disciples all look the same as the Buddha - same shaven head, same little yellow robe, same shoulder-bag, same begging bowl, same meek expression.

So you get the impression that disciples are sort of clones of the guru. That's a very big mistake. And we see that it's a big mistake in a passage in the Pali Canon where the Buddha is praising his disciples. We might think, well, the usual thing is for the disciples to praise the teacher; and sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. But the Buddha praised his disciples, and he said `Look, there's Sariputta. Sariputta is the greatest of you for wisdom, capacity of exposition. And Ananda? - well, the greatest for popularity and friendliness. It's Ananda who introduced women into the Buddha's Sangha. So the women thereafter, the bhikkhunis in India, they regarded Ananda as a sort of patron saint, and they used to take his image in procession, according to ?Yuan Chan? And then the Buddha singled out another disciple as the greatest for austerities; another greatest as a preacher. And, because some disciples naturally had greater qualities than others, in the end the Buddha had to scrape the barrel a bit and he mentioned one disciple as the disciple who always managed to collect the greatest quantity of alms when we went on his alms round. So even he was the best at something.

So in this way the Buddha praised his disciples. He praised them for their different distinctive qualities. And yes, it was true of the Buddha's disciples. If you read the Pali scriptures - I'm afraid some Buddhists rather neglect the Pali scriptures - but if you read the Pali scriptures and you read them as human documents, you'll come across so many of the Buddha's disciples, and they're so different, their characters are so different, their qualities are so different. Sariputta and Moggallana, though great friends, so different; Ananda is different again; Kassapa is different again. Ananda is very amiable, he's very popular. Kassapa's a bit grumpy, at least that's the impression one gets. And well, some disciples are rather shy and retiring, others are rather forward and active.

So it's always the same with disciples. If they're real disciples they'll grow in accordance with their own nature. And this is what the parable of the raincloud and the plants in the White Lotus Sutra brings out very well. When the rain falls the tree grows and becomes a bigger and better tree - or maybe, since we're in Arizona, I should say cactus. I don't know whether cactuses require water or not, but anyway they grow. But a cactus never grows into a eucalyptus. However much you water it, it'll never grow into a eucalyptus. And a eucalyptus will never become a cactus. In the same way, someone of a more devotional temperament will usually never become someone of a more intellectual temperament. They'll stay pretty much the same right up to the end, even though both of them will be Enlightened. One will be an Enlightened devotee, and the other will be an Enlightened intellectual, even an Enlightened academic, though that's rather difficult, I think. One may be an Enlightened monk; another may be an Enlightened householder - but Enlightened.

So this is also quite important - that though as lotuses or any other kind of plant we grow, we grow in accordance with our distinctive natures. The nearer we come to Enlightenment, the more different from one another we become. You might think that's a paradox, but it isn't. The nearer you grow towards Enlightenment, you don't grow more like one another as persons; you grow more different. But at the same time communication between you improves. I'll leave you with that paradox for the moment. But yes, the simile of the lotuses and the parable of the plants in the White Lotus Sutra, they convey the same sort of emphasis. They convey, they communicate, an emphasis on growth, development, transformation. They remind us that human beings can change. They can change from worse to better, and from better to best.

To take a few examples from the scriptures and Buddhist history, Angulimala, who'd murdered nearly a hundred people, became an Arhant in his present life. That should give us a great deal of material for thought. I don't suppose there's anybody here who's ever killed anybody. Perhaps those who were in one or another of the recent wars have done so. But in the case of Angulimala he'd murdered a hundred people. There's a great story behind that which I won't go into, but he

became an Arhant.

And then in Tibet hundreds of years ago there was a certain black magician who'd been guilty of the death of about three thousand people. But he became the greatest of the Kagyupa saints. That, of course, was Milarepa. And if we look at Indian history we see the example of Ashoka. Ashoka was a great king, he wanted to unite the whole of India under his rule. He slaughtered thousands, hundreds of thousands of people. Then he experienced remorse. He started going against the grain, as it were. He changed. And he became known as Dhamma-asoka, `righteous Ashoka', one of the great benefactors of Buddhism. He changed; he turned round completely, as his rock edicts tell us.

And this change in all these people and so many others was brought about not by the grace of God. It was brought about by a change in the direction of the human will, a change originated within the human psyche itself. Because man is responsible for his own spiritual destiny. He is free to develop or not to develop, just as he or she wishes. Circumstances may hinder, may even appear to crush us, but in the last resort no circumstance can ever deprive us of our inner, our basic freedom of will, or in a word just our freedom. And this is what the Buddha saw when he saw that pond of red and blue and white lotuses. And this is what the parable of the White Lotus Sutra, the parable of the plants, also tells us.

But it's time I returned to this theme of Reality, to the theme of that the experience of which transformed the Buddha from an unenlightened to an Enlightened human being. As we've seen, the Reality to which the Buddha attained was profound and hard to see. It was the most peaceful and superior goal of all. Not only that. It was not attainable by mere ratiocination. It was subtle, incredibly subtle. And it was for the wise to experience. Nonetheless it had to be communicated. A bridge, however frail, however slender, had to be flung across that abyss separating the Enlightened from the unenlightened mind.

So how did the Buddha do this? How did he communicate the Reality he had discovered to unenlightened human beings. Now we may say that there are two principal modes of communication. One can communicate through the mode of concepts and one can communicate through the medium of images. In the Pali scriptures the Buddha tends to make the greater use of the medium of concepts, though images - parables, myths, similes - are by no means lacking. In some of the Mahayana scriptures the Buddha tends to make much greater use of the mode of communication which consists of images, though here again concepts are by no means absent, and a few of the Mahayana sutras are communicated almost entirely through the meaning of concepts.

In the present account in the Pali scriptures the Buddha communicates through concepts. And in particular he communicates through the concept of what we've come to call in English conditionality. He has already given a hint of this in his account of his solitary reflections before the appearance of Brahma Sahampati, when he was disinclined to teach, disinclined to communicate. But this time he spoke of the Reality he had discovered as `specific conditionality', as Nanamoli translates it, `dependent arising'. It can also be rendered as `the originating of things in dependence on conditions' or more simply as `conditionality'.

And this, we really need to remind ourselves, is the basis concept of Buddhism. To the extent that Buddhism is reducible to a concept, it's reducible to the concept of conditionality. The whole of Buddhism, both theoretical and practical, is founded on this concept - not founded on it as a concept, of course. Buddhist philosophy is founded upon it; Buddhist meditation is founded upon it. The Buddhist life itself is founded upon it.

What then is this concept? In what does it consist? Well, this concept of conditionality is two things, or represents two things. First of all, it represents an expression of the Buddha's experience of Reality. It's an expression of the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. It is not something that the Buddha has merely thought out. It's not something that the Buddha has reasoned out, excogitated. It's an expression, a direct expression, of his Enlightenment experience. It doesn't represent a philosophy in the Western sense of the term. Though I've

spoken of Buddhist philosophy as being based on it, that too - Buddhist philosophy - it's not philosophy in the Western sense. Buddhist philosophy, as we call it, as an attempt at the further, more detailed elucidation of the Buddha's vision of Reality.

Second, the concept of conditionality is an expression of the Buddha's experience of Reality in conceptual terms, or if you like in terms of abstract ideas. Concepts, abstract ideas, are a means of communication. And the Buddha had to give expression to his experience of Reality somehow. He had to give expression to it in conceptual terms if he was to say anything at all. At the same time, he had to give expression to that experience of Reality by means of a concept that would be intelligible to ordinary unenlightened people. Because we can certainly have an intellectual understanding, up to a point, of the concept of conditionality. He had to give expression to his Enlightenment experience through the medium of a concept that would actually communicate, a concept that would also provide a basis for the eventual attainment of Reality by the ordinary person.

So that concept is the concept of conditionality, or we may say universal conditionality. And I hope this part of my talk hasn't been too abstruse. But unless we grasp this point we won't understand the nature of Reality, and we won't understand Buddhism and we won't understand the process of transformation.

Now the concept of conditionality, or conditioned co-production, as it's more generally called by writers on Buddhism in English, has quite a number of different formulations. Some of these formulations are simple, and others are complex. The simplest formulation is a purely abstract one. This is the basic formulation, we may say, at least in conceptual terms, and it runs like this. A being present, B arises. In the absence of A, B does not arise. That's the fundamental principle, that's Buddhism in a nutshell. If anyone asks you for Buddhism in a nutshell, and they don't want it in one word, because that word would be conditionality, they want it in a couple of phrases, couple of sentences, just tell them `A being present, B arises. In the absence of A, B does not arise. That's the essence of Buddhism.' - and let them work it out for themselves. Because if they're sufficiently intelligent they could; it's all there.

Tape no. 181 - The Twenty-four Nidanas, Sangharakshita (Second tape, side 1)

But the Buddha, even the Buddha, had to make a few concessions. He had to explain it in rather more detail and probably the best known formulation of the principle, the concept, of conditionality is that of the Four Noble Truths, about which we heard quite a lot yesterday - that is to say, the truths of suffering or unsatisfactoriness, of the cause of suffering or unsatisfactoriness, which is craving; the truth of the cessation of suffering or unsatisfactoriness, that cessation being the equivalent to Nirvana; and the truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering or unsatisfactoriness, the way leading to Nirvana. In other words, in terms of this formulation, craving being present, suffering arises; craving not being present, suffering does not arise. Here the suffering that does not arise is mental suffering. You can have physical suffering - even the Buddha could hurt his foot. In fact, Devadatta wounded the foot of the Buddha with a splinter of rock and the Buddha suffered pain. There's also a passage in the Pali Canon - one of my own teachers, Bikkhu Kasyapa, with whom I studied Pali and Abhidhamma, was very fond of referring to this passage.

In this passage, the Buddha is teaching his disciples and he's seated cross-legged and, well, he teaches a long time and his back starts aching. Even a Buddha's back aches. The Buddha's back started aching. So Sariputa happened to be there and, well, the Buddha didn't just grin and bear it as some teachers might say we ought to. The Buddha said, 'Sariputa, my back is aching. Please take over the teaching. I'll just lie down.' So, my teacher, Kasyapji, used to be very fond of referring to this incident because, as he emphasized, it illustrated the humanity of the Buddha - not humanity in the sense that the Buddha had human weaknesses in the mental or emotional sense, the Buddha didn't have those; but he had physical weaknesses. He had an ordinary human body and that body, as he grew older, suffered and he felt the pain.

So we make a distinction in Buddhism between physical pain and mental pain. Mental pain ...

Oh, I did promise not to introduce Pali or Sanskrit, but anyway, the Pali for the mental pain is domenasa. (?) So there is a distinction between physical and mental pain. When you gain Enlightenment there's no mental pain, there's no emotional pain, turbulence or anything of that sort but there may be physical pain. But when you are Enlightened you bear the physical pain, as the Buddha bore it, with equanimity, we're told. Anyway, that's by the way. Craving not being present, suffering - mental suffering, avoidable suffering - does not arise. Now incidentally, this is not to say that suffering being present, craving must have arisen. It's very important to grasp this distinction: it's not to say that suffering being present, craving must have arisen, because this would amount to karmic determinism. There are some sufferings that are not due - especially physical sufferings - that are not due to your previous unskilful mental actions, whether in this life or in any previous life.

But perhaps the most important formulation of conditioned co-production, according to my thinking at least, is the twenty-four-fold one. Well, we've got five-fold ones, we've got ten-fold ones, twelve-fold ones, and we've got the twenty-four-fold one. I'm not going to go through all these -fold ones; I'm just going to mention the twenty-four-fold one. But before I go on to speak about the twenty-four-fold formulation of conditionality let me just say a few words about conditionality in general. The fact that a thing is conditioned means it's not independent - it is dependent - and because it is dependent it has no absolute existence of its own. In Buddhist terms, it has no own-being - it's dependent on its being on something else or other things. It's existence is only relative - that is to say, relative to some other thing or things. It does not have an absolute non-existence, because it arises; you can't deny that it arises. So it doesn't have an absolute non-existence. At the same time it does not have an absolute existence, because it ceases. This of course exemplifies the teaching of the Middle Way. Let me repeat this, because the idea may be new to some of you. It doesn't have an absolute non-existence or let us say phenomena do not have an absolute non-existence, because they arise and we experience them. At the same time, phenomena do not have an absolute existence, because they cease and we experience this too.

So conditionality, the principle of conditionality, is neither existent nor non-existent in the absolute sense. And because it is ... Because it represents neither an existence in the absolute sense nor a non-existence in the absolute sense it is said to be empty or void - that is to say, it's empty of existence and it's empty of non-existence. And of course if one goes a step further, as the Mahayana especially does, well it's empty of the very distinction between existence and non-existence. But this emptiness or voidness of conditionality can be expressed in positive terms - that's 'positive' within single inverted commas. Some Buddhist schools describe emptiness or voidness in this positive sense as a pure, a non-dual, luminous awareness. It's an awareness which is not the awareness of any subject, nor is it the awareness by any subject of any object. It's just an undifferentiated, unlimited mass of awareness, which is blissful, which is utterly transparent, and within which there's not even a shadow of the distinction between subject and object. Emptiness or voidness can be described in positive terms, in this sort of way, provided one doesn't take the description too literally. Take it, as the Zen tradition says, just as a finger pointing very, very tentatively - very tremblingly, even - at the moon - except, of course, there's no finger, no pointing, and no moon; you have to remember that too. That's probably as far as thought and speech can go.

So let's get back to our twelve ... our twenty-four-fold formulation of conditioned co-production. This conditioned co-production, we must remember, is an expression of Reality as perceived by the Enlightened mind and in this Reality there are, as it were ...- this Reality that is expressed as conditionality or conditioned co-production - in this Reality there are two trends, two great principal trends. There's a cyclical trend and there's a spiral trend. The cyclical trend constitutes what we call, metaphorically, the Wheel of Life - that is to say, the wheel of birth and death and rebirth, best known in its Tibetan pictorial or iconographic form as the Wheel of Life, bhavachakra, (?) about which we heard and saw something yesterday. The spiral trend of conditionality constitutes in principle the Path. These two trends, the cyclical and the spiral, represent two different types or modes of conditionality. In the first type, the B which arises in dependence on A, is the opposite of A - as when death arises in dependence upon birth, pain arises in dependence upon pleasure, and vice versa. In the second type of conditionality, the

spiral, the B which arises in dependence on A, adds to or augments A. It doesn't react to an opposite; it increases the A - as when, in meditation, happiness gives rise to joy, joy gives rise to bliss, and so on. So the cyclical trend is based on the first type of conditionality; the spiral trend is based on the second.

Now, the cyclical trend or Wheel of Life is described as consisting of twelve links, not all of which are always listed in the texts. I'm going to just run through them rather quickly. First of all, ignorance: we heard something about this also yesterday, usually explained, as it was explained yesterday, as ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. Then, in dependence on ignorance there arise 2) the propensities: these are the volitional actions of body, speech, and mind that make for further existence within the Wheel of Life. Then, in dependence on the propensities there arises 3) consciousness, in the specific sense of the consciousness that arises in the womb of the mother at the moment of conception. Then, in dep ... dependent on consciousness there arises 4) name and form, roughly translatable as mind and body - in other words, the whole psycho-physical organism. In dependence on name and form arise 5) the six bases: these are the five physical sense organs plus the mind, the mind being considered as the organ for the perception of mental objects. In dependence on the six bases there arises 6) contact: this is contact between the five physical senses and the mind and their respective physical and mental objects. Thus there is contact between the eye and forms, the ear and sounds, and so on, and of course contact between mind and mental objects or ideas.

In dependence on contact there arises sensation and/or feeling and this is of three kinds - these were mentioned also yesterday: pleasant, painful, and neutral, and they can be experienced through all the six senses, including the mind. In dependence on sensation/feeling there arises thirst or craving. I think it's better not to render this ... the original Sanskrit or Pali word as desire - that can lead to confusion. The literal meaning is 'thirst' - I'll give you the original Pali/Sanskrit word here: the Pali is tanha, the Sanskrit is trshna (?) - literally it is thirst but metaphorically it is craving. And this is of three kinds: craving for sensuous pleasure, craving for continued personal existence, and craving for non-existence. The last might seem rather strange but some people, as perhaps unhappily we know only too well nowadays, do crave for non-existence, to blot everything out, to obliterate everything. That's one of the reasons, I think, why some people commit suicide: so, craving for non-existence. In dependence on craving there arises 9) grasping or clinging, and this has four different objects: grasping at or clinging to sensuous pleasures; clinging to philosophical theories; and clinging to moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves - here the emphasis is on the clinging. Then there's clinging to the notion of a permanent, unchanging soul or self. In dependence on grasping or clinging there arises 10) becoming, in the sense of re-becoming within the Wheel of Life, whether within this human world or any other world. This link, this tenth link, is sometimes understood as representing the intra-uterine period of human life: the period, that is to say, between actual conception and actual birth. According to some Buddhist schools, including those of Tibet, it represents the intermediate state between ... the bhardo, in Tibetan ...between death and rebirth. That's the difference of view between some of the different schools. But, be that as it may, in dependence on becoming there arises 11) birth: that is to say rebirth. And finally, in dependence upon birth, there arises decay and death, together with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

So these are the twelve links that make up the cyclical trend of conditionality and every serious student of Buddhism needs to be well acquainted with them - needs, in fact, to study them thoroughly. I've given only the briefest possible outline; I've done little more than enumerate these twelve links. But I suggest that if you're a serious student of Buddhism you learn the Pali or Sanskrit terms for them. We should be able to recite these terms from memory, almost like repeating a mantra. We should reflect on them systematically; we should meditate on them - otherwise, there's not much hope of our really understanding what Buddhism is all about. In the Buddhist tradition, in fact, there are methods of meditating systematically on the twelve links; I've no time to go into that now.

So, the twelve links represent a somewhat more detailed explanation of the origin of suffering. They are, in fact, an elaboration - as you probably will have noticed - of the first and second of the Four Noble Truths: that is to say, the truth of suffering or unsatisfactoriness and the truth of

the origin or cause of suffering or unsatisfactoriness, which is, broadly speaking, craving. But, fortunately for us, the process can be reversed; the links can be enumerated negatively - that is to say, enumerated in reverse order. With the cessation of birth, decay and death does not arise; with the cessation of becoming, birth does not arise; and so on, back to 'With the cessation of ignorance, the propensities do not arise.' Thus the twelve links, taken in reverse order, also represent a detailed explanation of the cessation of suffering. They are, of course, an elaboration of the third and fourth Noble Truths: the truth of the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, the way leading to Nirvana.

But we mustn't forget that there are twelve more links. We mustn't forget that the most important - in the sense of the most comprehensive - formulation of conditioned co-production is a twenty-four-fold one. These twelve 'positive links' - as I personally call them - very often are forgotten. They seem to have been forgotten from very early times. They are mentioned only in two or three places in the Pali Canon, the Pali scriptures, and so far as I know they are not mentioned in the Mahayana scriptures at all and this is rather unfortunate. We hear a lot about the first set of twelve links but we hardly ever hear about that second, positive set and this is unfortunate because it helps to give the impression in some quarters that Buddhist spiritual practice is primarily negative: that it consists simply in getting rid of craving, getting rid of clinging, and so on. So, it's important not to forget the twelve positive links and, in any case, these represent the spiral type of conditionality and without them our picture of Reality - Reality as represented by the principle of conditionality - is incomplete. Moreover, without them the Path, the spiritual path, has no rationale.

So what then are the twelve positive links? Let me enumerate these too, very briefly. First of all, suffering: well, you might think that not very positive but actually it is - we learn a great deal from suffering. So the spiral starts with suffering - the path starts with suffering - both physical and mental, because in dependence on suffering, there arises 2) faith. Happiness is not a problem. If you're happy, if you're in a state of bliss, you don't say, 'Well, why am I happy? What's made me happy? Why should I be happy?' - you don't say that. You're happy to be happy. But if you suffer you start wondering, 'Why am I suffering? Why should I suffer? Why me?' And if you believe in God, well, you start praying to God, 'God, why are you making me suffer?' - you blame it all on God. So, if you suffer you start looking for a cause. If you suffer, you realise that the things that are making you suffer aren't things which can give you real happiness; Reality doesn't reside in them - so you start looking for something else. You start looking for something higher, something more satisfactory, something more inspiring, something more sublime - and perhaps your eyes come to rest on the figure of the Buddha, or you become acquainted with the Teaching, and you feel them, you respond. So in this way, in dependence on suffering, there arises faith.

Faith is so important - faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Faith, in Buddhism, isn't belief; it's not intellectual assent to a particular doctrine or dogma. Broadly speaking, we may say that faith represents the wholehearted emotional response that we experience when we come into contact with something, someone, that represents a higher mode of being, a higher mode of existence - something absolutely beyond - and our whole heart, our whole being, goes out towards that. That's faith. So, in dependence on suffering, there arises faith.

And in dependence on faith, there arises 3) joy. You're so happy that you've found something in which you can have faith - not just belief, but faith - something to which you can respond with your whole being, to which you can commit yourself. You're so happy, you're overcome with joy. So, in dependence on faith there arises joy. And in dependence on joy - because, after all, we are on the spiral now - there arises rapture. You sing and you dance perhaps -you're carried away. You're mad with it, like those mad Ch'an monks - perhaps they've reached that stage or even gone beyond it. So, in dependence on joy, there arises rapture. But then, in dependence on rapture, there arises , well, a word which we can only really translate as 'serenity'. The exuberance of rapture dies down; the external manifestations - the psycho-somatic manifestations - of rapture die down. You're just left with a very deep, inner rapture which is so deep it doesn't require outward expression. And then, that intensifies further: in dependence upon serenity in that sense, there arises bliss. The Dhammapada says, ' Nirvana is the supreme bliss.' - so you're on the path

of bliss.

And then, in dependence on bliss, there arises - as the seventh link - concentration. That's rather interesting. If you experience bliss you've no problem with concentration. Concentration, in this context, doesn't mean the forcible fixation of attention. If you reach this stage or this level of bliss you're spontaneously and naturally concentrated, because if you're as blissful as that, well, who wants to stray away from it? It would be senseless. This reminds me of a little incident - again, in the Buddha's life - showing the interdependence of concentration and bliss. A certain king came to see the Buddha - came probably with his army, his attendants, his wives, concubines, Court physician, and so on - and they got talking. And the king is looking at the Buddha, who is living in this little hut - because in the Buddha's day they didn't have magnificent monasteries and, when you come across the term vihara in translations of Buddhist texts, you mustn't think of a magnificent building. Vihara really means just a lodging and it's usually just a little mud hut with leaves on the roof. So, here was the Buddha staying in this little hut and the king came to see him. And the king must have thought that the Buddha was having a pretty miserable time because the king said, 'I think I am more happy than you.' The Buddha said, 'No, I think I am more happy than you.' And the king said, 'No, it's impossible! You've got nothing; I've got everything. I'm the more happy.' The Buddha said, 'No.' The king said, 'Prove it!' The Buddha said, 'Can you sit still, enjoying perfect happiness and bliss for a week?' The king said, 'No.' The Buddha said, 'Can you sit still, perfectly still, enjoying complete bliss for a day?' The king said, 'No.' and the Buddha said, 'Can you sit still, enjoying complete bliss for an hour?' The king said 'No.' and when he said 'No.' of course he realised that he was defeated and the Buddha said, 'Well, I can sit perfectly still, enjoying complete bliss, not only for an hour, not only for a day - I can sit for a whole week, enjoying complete bliss.' And why was that? Why could the Buddha sit still, without moving, for a whole week, enjoying that bliss? - because the bliss was so absorbing. Where there was bliss there was concentration; where there was concentration there was bliss. So, concentration, here, in this context, doesn't mean - as I said - forcible fixation, forcible one-pointedness of attention. It means the natural concentration which comes - which accompanies - intense, inner bliss. (End of side 1 of 2nd tape)

You can't have the knowledge and vision of things as they really are by just an intellectual effort with just a tiny fraction of your energy. But when you experience bliss as one of these links and when that bliss gives rise to your concentration, the whole of your energy, your whole ... your total psycho-physical energy is behind the thrust of your insight, your clear vision, and then you attain knowledge and vision of things as they really are, as an actual spiritual, Transcendental experience and not as a mere intellectual understanding. This is known sometimes in English as 'penetrative insight' or, as I've said, 'clear vision' and it's not anything merely theoretical or intellectual. We could perhaps call it 'transformative insight'. With this link the process of the permanent, irreversible transformation of the individual begins: you can't fall back into lower states of existence after you reach this point. And then, in dependence on knowledge and vision of things as they really are, there arises - the original Pali or Sanskrit word is very difficult to translate - it can be rendered as 'disengagement' or 'disentanglement'. You disengage from or disentangle yourself from, quite naturally, all negative unskilful mental states and attitudes, as well as from the activities associated with such states and attitudes. One is no longer interested in such things. You don't have to give them up; they just drop off quite naturally. And then, in dependence on disengagement or disentanglement, there arises 10) - well, we can only translate this as 'passionlessness', but it's not a negative state. It's a state of positive, vibrant, Transcendental equanimity. And then, in dependence on passionlessness, there arises 11) liberation: a state of utter spiritual freedom. The Buddha once declared that just as the Ocean had one taste - the taste of salt - so his teaching had one taste - the taste of liberation. And finally, in dependence on liberation, there arises 12) knowledge that all the mental poisons have been eradicated, have been destroyed, for good. And this is tantamount to the attainment of full Enlightenment.

So these then are the twelve positive links and these go to make up the spiral trend of conditionality, and we need to study these links too, thoroughly. We need to reflect and meditate on them too. And, above all, we need to practise them and to cultivate them, because I've spoken of them as arising but, of course, they do not arise of their own accord. We have to cause them

to arise, one by one, by means of our own sustained, conscious effort and practice - an effort that has to be kept up over quite a number of years. As I've already mentioned, the twelve positive links are often forgotten and this means that the spiral type of conditionality is forgotten and, hence, there's only a limited, one-sided understanding of the nature of conditionality and a limited understanding, therefore, of Reality so far as this finds expression in the principle of conditionality.

But the fact that the twelve positive links are often forgotten, as such, does not mean that there are no positive spiritual teachings or practices in Buddhism - that, there certainly are. We have the Seven Factors of Enlightenment - some of which actually coincide with some of the positive links - and we have the Six or the Ten Perfections, or Transcending Virtues, practised by the Bodhisattva, and so on. But these are not explicitly connected with the spiral type or spiral mode of conditionality. They're not understood as an expression of the spiral type of conditionality and, hence, there's no understanding of what the Path, spiritual path, the Transcendental path, is, in principle, at least on the positive side. But it's not enough, even, to understand this. We have to connect the spiral type of conditionality with the cyclical type; we have to connect the twelve positive links with the twelve other links. I'll do this briefly and then we'll conclude for this morning.

Buddhism, of course, accepts rebirth. It teaches that we have lived before birth and will live again after death. And in this way we have a sequence of three lives - that is to say, the past life, the present life, and the future life. And in Buddhist tradition the twelve cyclical links are understood ... that is to say, the twelve cyclical links of conditioned co-production are understood to be distributed over these three lives: the past, the present, the future. The links 'ignorance' and 'the propensities' belong to the past life, in the sense that it's because of spiritual ignorance and the actions based on that ignorance that we're born again in this life. 'Consciousness', 'name and form', 'the six bases', 'contact', 'sensation or feeling', 'thirst or craving', 'grasping or clinging', and 'becoming' all belong to the present life. And 'birth' and 'decay and death', obviously, belong to the future life.

Now these same twelve links are further distributed into two groups - or sub-divided into two groups - and these two groups are known as the 'action process' and the' result process' - and the word for 'action' here is karma in it's simple meaning of karma. The links belonging to the action process represent what we do - they are volitional actions, whether of body, speech, or mind - and the links belonging to the result process represent what we experience as a result of what we do or have done - they are passive and receptive, not active. 'Ignorance' and 'the propensities' constitute the action process of the past life, because it's as a result of them that we've come into existence in the present life. 'Consciousness', 'name and form', 'the six bases', 'contact', 'sensation or feeling': these constitute the result process of the present life. They represent the given of existence; they're not volitions. 'Thirst or craving', 'grasping or clinging', and 'becoming' constitute the action process of the present life, because they're all volitions and they are productive of future karmic consequences. So thus we have, over the three lifetimes - past, present, and future - a sequence of action process/ result process, action process/ result process, alternating. First there's the action process of the past life; then there's the result process of the present life; next, the action process of the present life; and finally the result process of the future life. I hope this doesn't sound too complicated - after all, it is what we are doing, what we are living, so we ought to be able to understand it. It's quite simple once you get used to it.

But, before we close, just one more classification - just one more. You will have noticed that there are three points of transition. There's the point where the action process of the past is succeeded by the result process of the present. Then there's the point where the result process of the present - that is the present life - is succeeded by the action process of the present. And then there's the point where the action process of the present is succeeded by the result process of the future. And all of these three points are very, very, very important. The first and the third represent the point of transition from one life to the next: from the past life to the present, and from the present life to the future. The second point, however, represents the point of transition from the cyclical type of conditionality to the spiral type: that's why it's so important. It represents the point at which the Wheel of Life ceases to revolve or from which it at least starts slowing

down. How is this?

You'll remember that the last link of the result process of the present life is 'sensation or feeling' - pleasant, painful, or neutral. Nothing wrong with 'feeling', nothing wrong with 'sensation'. But what happens? We react to the feeling, react to the sensation. We respond to the pleasant feeling with thirst or craving; we respond to the unpleasant feeling with aversion; and we respond to the neutral feeling with indifference. In other words, we set up volitions - we create fresh karma - and it's karma which binds us again to the Wheel of Life. So what we have to learn to do is to experience feeling,sensation, in the broadest sense, without allowing it to give rise to thirst or craving. And this is why 'mindfulness' - awareness, recollection - is so important in Buddhism: mindfulness or awareness, that is to say, of experience, of what we're actually experiencing in the way of sensation or feeling, without volitional reaction - that is to say, unskilful volitional reaction. Mindfulness helps us to replace thirst or craving by faith, the first of the twelve links representing the spiral type of conditionality. Faith, we may say, is the positive counterpart of craving. We'll be going a bit further into that this afternoon.

Meanwhile, before we go on to our session of questions and answers - we should have a little time left - let me just remind you of the ground that we've covered this morning. We've seen that Buddhism is a communication, a communication from the Enlightened to the unenlightened mind, and we've seen that this communication has a practical purpose of helping the unenlightened to transform themselves, to become Enlightened. Conceptually speaking, communication takes the form ... the Buddha's communication to the unenlightened takes the form of the teaching of conditionality and this has two forms: the cyclical and the spiral. The spiritual life, the following of the Path, is based upon the second of these - the spiral type of conditionality - and therefore we need to make the transition from the one to the other. And we do this when feeling is succeeded, not by craving or aversion, but by faith - faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

(Transcribed by Vijayanandi, April 1997)