

191: Standing on Holy Ground

A couple of years ago I happened to find myself in Berlin. It was probably just my second or perhaps my third visit and of course I was visiting the British Gate, not the Brandenburg Gate but the Buddhist Gate. The Buddhist Gate is of course the name which has been given to our FWBO Centre in Berlin, apparently we could not call it the Berlin Buddhist centre because there was already a Berlin Buddhist Centre so it was decided by those responsible that our FWBO Buddhist Centre should be called the Buddhist Gate. I was there just for a few days, I was meeting people, doing a bit of sightseeing but of course inevitably before very long someone asked me if I would mind doing something for the Order Members and mitras, just for them. So I thought it over for some reason or other I didn't want to give a full-blown lecture, I didn't exactly want to give a poetry reading because after all it was Germany and even though so many people in Germany do speak excellent English it didn't seem quite fair to inflict a reading of English poetry on them especially not mine. So I decided that I would try a little experiment, I thought I would do something that I hadn't ever done before and just see how it worked out, whether people took to it or not. Well I said I didn't intend reading my own poetry but in a way that's what I ended up doing, but not reading lots of poems but reading just one of my own poems and explaining it line by line at some length. So this was the experiment I decided to undertake, to just take one of my poems, a short one, and explain it line by line, just go into it, it was after all a quite informal sort of occasion, so you may be wondering which poem did I choose to read and comment upon. Well the poem was the one which is included in my Complete Poems, the one called just 'Meditation', the one beginning 'here perpetual incense burns'. I read this poem, I explained it line by line, I had a very good translator in Anomarati, and I believe we really did go into that poem and the response from our German friends was very very positive, and I concluded that my little experiment had been quite successful. In fact I think I was quite surprised at how successful it had been. But not only that, there was something else. As I explained the poem, line by line, I think I took about 45-50 minutes to do so, its only a short poem as some of you may remember, I was surprised to find how much in fact there was to explain. I was surprised, even though I myself had written the poem, I was surprised how much there really was in the poem, and I think I can say that in the course of that 45-50 minutes, by way of explaining that poem line by line, by way of commenting on it, I managed to bring out, to draw out practically the whole of Buddhism. Because I hadn't really expected to do that and this of course gave me food for thought and I thought about it quite a lot afterwards in fact I've thought about it quite a lot since.

That little experiment made me appreciate, made me realise, that the poet or the artist, is not always conscious of exactly what he is doing, what he is saying, at least not always fully conscious of that. That is no doubt why Plato in *The Phaedrus*(?) speaks of poetic inspiration being a kind of madness, a madness that comes from the Muses, it doesn't come from you, not you in your ordinary everyday,

Quotidian(?) selfhood. Now when I wrote that poem, when I wrote 'Meditation', I didn't consciously or deliberately try to put all of Buddhism into it. I wasn't even really trying to write about Buddhism, it was a poem about meditation, it was a poem based, I suppose, on my own experience of meditation at that time. But none the less, though I hadn't tried consciously or deliberately to put any Buddhism into it, nethertheless if one looked closely enough, deeply enough, there was quite a lot of Buddhism in it. I managed to draw out so to speak, well practically the whole of Buddhism, certainly all the fundamental principles so far as I can remember, and last

year I had a similar kind of experience. As you probably know, I get lots and lots of letters, people send me all kinds of things, they send me cards of course and little presents, loads and loads of cards, they send me photographs, they send me very very long letters at times, they also send their theses from time to time, their MA and their PhD theses and one of them I remember was on some obscure branch of chemistry. The young man sent it to me, well I looked at it, I can't say that I read it, I don't think I could have understood it even if I had read it, but I think it is very nice that people think of me in this way, that they send even their thesis on some obscure field of chemistry.

But anyway, on this occasion, a young man in Finland sent me a copy of his MA thesis on one of my own poems and the poem was 'Hercules and the Birds'. Of course the thesis was written in Finnish which at first was rather frustrating, here was this fairly fat little volume, and Finnish is a totally different language, you can't make out a word, even if you know French and German and Italian and the rest you can't make out Finnish, it is really beyond you. So here I was with this tantalising thesis knowing that it was on my own poem, 'Hercules and the Birds' and I couldn't understand a word of it but fortunately someone came to the rescue, Sridevi came to my rescue and she very kindly sent me a summary of the thesis in English and when I read the summary, I must say I really was astonished because this young man writing this thesis had seen in my poem all sorts of things that I had not consciously put there. I had to admit when I read Sridevi's summary that those things definitely were there, I couldn't deny it. So I couldn't help thinking, remembering my Plato, when I wrote 'Hercules and the Birds', well was I mad? Or was I mad when I wrote 'Meditation'? Did they just come from the muses? Well perhaps I was just a little bit mad at the time, hopefully. But mad or not, this evening I am going to repeat the Berlin experiment, I am going to explain one of my poems, I am going to try to see what it was that I put into it without really knowing at the time what I was doing. I am not going to explain the poem 'Meditation', I've chosen another poem, I've chosen a poem called 'The Scholars'. I wrote this poem in Kalimpong in 1957, and you may or may not remember it, even if you have worked your way through the 'Complete Poems'. Even if you remember it, I'm pretty sure you don't know it by heart so I am going to begin by reading the poem. It is relatively short. It is called 'The Scholars'.

Asked 'What is Buddhism?', off they go,
Consult the dictionaries, row on row,
Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali - German too,
As though it was the only thing to do,
Until we wish in all sincerity,
A second Burning of the Books could be.
Have they no other word for sick souls full
Of doubt than 'Read my latest article'?
Off with the shoes! 'Tis Holy ground! Depart!
Buddhism's in the life and in the heart.

So that's the poem. I can't remember exactly the circumstances but 1957, the year in which I wrote it was the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's Parinirvana and that was being celebrated all over the Buddhist world and especially it was being celebrated in India, there were all sorts of celebrations of different kinds, and I myself participated in some of them, as you may remember from the pages of my memoirs, and of course, in that year, many many books on Buddhism were published. Perhaps not

surprisingly, these books were of rather varying quality. Some were good, some were bad and some were so-so. Quite a number of them, I'm afraid, were really rather dry, not only dry, but they very often showed a complete lack of any real understanding of the Dharma. I think at that time, I must have read at least some of these books. I think that some of them must have, shall I say, rather annoyed me, hence the poem. I must have written it in a mood of some annoyance, but before I go on to explain it line by line, I want to say just a few words about the actual title, the title being of course, 'The Scholars'.

Dr Johnson, in his famous dictionary, distinguishes four meanings of the term 'scholar'. One, the scholar is 'one who learns from a master'; a scholar is a disciple.

Two, a scholar is 'a man of letters'. Three, a scholar is 'a pedant, a man of books'.

And four, a scholar is 'one who has had a lettered education'. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the primary meaning of the word is 'a learned person, especially in language, literature etc., an academic'. In the poem I am speaking of a certain type of scholar, corresponding more or less to Dr Johnson's pedant or man of books, and of course I am speaking of a certain type of Buddhist scholar, or rather perhaps I should say a certain sort of scholar in Buddhism, that is to say, I am speaking of someone, perhaps, who is learned in the history, the doctrine, the development, the archaeology and so on of Buddhism. Who knows perhaps the canonical languages and literature of Buddhism, literature in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan and so on, and who holds perhaps a teaching post in a university, in other words I am speaking of someone who is an academic in the field of Buddhism. And of course, such a person may not regard himself as a Buddhist. Sometimes you might find that the scholar is even somewhat hostile to Buddhism, but none the less you might find him teaching Buddhism at university level, you might even find him writing books and articles on the subject and he may even be regarded as an authority on Buddhism and it is with scholars of this type that my poem is concerned. That is to say is concerned with those who know a lot about Buddhism intellectually but who have little or no actual experience of it. That is to say, those who know a lot about it but who do not try to practice it and who don't even think of trying to practice it.

But it is time we proceeded to the poem itself. But just to refresh your memory, let me read it again.

The Scholars

Asked 'What is Buddhism?' off they go,
Consult the dictionaries, row on row,
Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali - German too,
As though it was the only thing to do,
Until we wish in all sincerity,
A second Burning of the Books could be.
Have they no other word for sick souls full
Of doubt than 'Read my latest article'?
Off with the shoes! 'Tis Holy ground! Depart!
Buddhism's in the life and in the heart.

So the first line of the poem envisages a certain situation, a situation in which someone has just heard about Buddhism and they want to find out more about it, they want to know what Buddhism is. So they start looking for someone to ask, someone who can tell them what Buddhism is, they start looking for an authority on Buddhism, so as we usually do in all sorts of fields of life, they start looking, they start turning to

the specialists, they turn to the scholars, the academics and ask them, not of course directly, but through their books, they ask them 'What is Buddhism?'. As I have said the poem was of course written in 1957 and at that time there were comparatively few books on Buddhism available, there were comparatively few translations of sutras, especially Mahayana sutras. I remember whenever a new translation of a Mahayana sutra came out we were very excited, it was a real gift, they weren't easily or readily available, there were very few of them, we valued those early translations, imperfect though they were, very very highly. But even the translations of the sutras were mostly the work of scholars who were not Buddhists, but we had no alternative, on many occasions, but to turn to the scholars, especially if we were living in the west.

Now it mustn't be thought that I am just criticising those early scholars, they certainly did their best, and so we should be grateful to them, at least something of the Dharma usually managed to shine through, to percolate through their writing, but on what were those writings based? When the scholars in the poem are asked 'What is Buddhism?' what do they do? They go and consult the dictionaries, the dictionaries of the canonical Buddhist languages, the languages in which the Buddhist scriptures are written. Also they consult dictionaries of modern European languages, not only that they consult them as though it were the only thing to do. So what does that all mean? I'll have to go into it a little.

But first of all a few words on the question of consulting the dictionaries, I don't want to give the impression that I think it's wrong to consult the dictionaries. This is very far from being the case, I think in fact that we should consult them very much more than in fact we actually do, in most cases. Most of us it has to be admitted, speak and write very badly, we have a very poor command of our own language and because we have a very poor command of our own language we can't communicate our thoughts and our feelings to others effectively and in this way all sorts of misunderstandings between people arise. Fairly often we've only a vague general sort of idea of the meaning of the words we use and sometimes of course we confuse words that sound alike, one confusion that really does irritate me sometimes is that between 'militate' and 'mitigate'. I discovered that confusion, that confused use of one of these words, believe it or not in yesterday's Daily Telegraph in an article by a quite intelligent person, where I hadn't really expected to find it. And then of course, people confuse 'affect' and 'effect'; one finds this even in writings on Buddhism.

In other words people's vocabulary is often very limited. The total number of words in the English language is said to be somewhere between 400,000 and 600,000, quite a lot of words, but most of us use habitually only a couple of thousand, some people it's said use habitually only a few hundred words. So think how we overwork certain words, words like 'nice', 'have a nice day', 'a nice book', 'a nice meal', 'a nice film', 'a nice meditation'; almost anything can be nice. And then the other is 'fantastic'; this is a word that young people it seems a very fond of using, I won't give you any examples of that. And then 'devastated', every day I hear on the radio or read in the paper about people being devastated, someone loses his job, he's devastated, his football team doesn't win the match, he's devastated, his father dies he's devastated, well of course, he hasn't any stronger word to use because he used that word 'devastated' in so many different contexts, so a range of expression becomes fairly restricted. So a range of expression becomes fairly restricted and we therefore need to consult the dictionary much more than we do and if we consult the dictionary it will help clarify and refine our use of words and we will be able to express ourselves better and communicate better whether in speech or in writing. Of course if we consult the dictionary it will help us to think more clearly. Personally I must say I do

consult the dictionary quite a lot, in fact when I am writing whether it is writing memoirs or even a letter, I habitually consult three dictionaries, just to make sure. Because they don't always have quite the same definitions or explanations of words. I consult Collins (I'm not doing any advertising for them), I consult the Concise Oxford and I consult my dear old friend Dr Johnson's Dictionary, a facsimile copy of which a kind friend presented me with quite a few years ago. And of course for emergencies, when Collins, Concise Oxford and even Dr Johnson isn't of any help there is the great 12 volume Oxford Dictionary to fall back on. I also consult the Thesaurus.

When I am writing I ask myself the meaning or the meanings of the particular words I'm using, is it quite the right word? First thought are by no means always the best. I think any practising poet or practising writer can tell you that. So I ask myself does this particular word I am using or thinking of using convey the precise shade of meaning, of thought, of suggestion, of resonance I want to communicate. I ask myself this question with regard to almost every important word I set down on paper, especially if I am writing something like my memoirs. So these sort of questions when I am writing I ask myself all the time, and then of course there is the question of spelling, punctuation, syntax and grammar, I am not going to go into all that otherwise the lecture will sound too much like a lesson. So we need to consult the dictionary, the dictionary, we may say, is the writer's best friend, that is his best friend as a writer. And the dictionary is also the reader's best friend as a reader, because in your reading if you come across a word you don't quite understand, look it up, or make a note to look it up later on, otherwise you may well miss something of the author's meaning, miss a subtlety that may be quite important. I hope I am not labouring the point but as I said a little while ago, I get lots of letters from people, some of those letters are quite well written, a few of them are very well written, but I have to confess, not only letters but even reportings in to various journals I think I had better not mention, show that the writer has quite a poor command of his or her, usually his, own language. This can give rise to all sorts of problems, all sorts of miscommunications and therefore all sorts of misunderstandings, apart from the fact that it's not very pleasant to read clumsy or badly written items of any kind coming from whatever source. So I think the moral of it is we should be proud of our mother tongue whatever it happens to be and we should do our best to speak it and write it correctly, effectively and as beautifully as possible.

But it's time we got back to the scholars and to their use of the dictionaries. 'Asked 'What is Buddhism?' off they go, consult the dictionaries row on row, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali - German too'. So why do they consult them? Or rather what do I mean by saying in the poem they consult them? The Buddha's teachings, that is to say the Dharma, is found in the Buddhist scriptures, and those scriptures consist of words and the mere scholars think that if you have understood the words you've understood the scriptures. He thinks that if he's understood the words in which the teachings find expression he's understood that teaching itself, so he just consults the dictionaries in order to find out the meaning of the words and the meaning of Buddhism. Not only that but he consults the dictionaries as though it were the only thing to do. So in other words, within the context of the poem, 'scholars' means those people who think you've understood Buddhism when you've understood the words that Buddhism uses, especially the words that Buddhism uses in the Buddhist scriptures, when those words are contained in a book, a text or a palm leaf manuscript. So a scholar in this sense means one who believes you can know what Buddhism is without practising it, without experiencing it and without contact with others who also are practising it. Of course I am not saying that consulting dictionaries is of no help at all in our attempt to

understand Buddhism, that would be to go to the opposite extreme. What I am saying is that consulting the dictionaries is by no means enough, understanding the words in which the Dharma finds expression is by no means enough. The words by themselves are not the Dharma. This is perhaps why in the Lankaratara Sutra the Buddha is represented as saying that from the night of his Enlightenment to the night of his Parinirvana, he has not uttered one single word.

So much then for the first four lines of the poem, they envisage a situation, they describe what scholars, mere scholars do when asked 'What is Buddhism?'. They consult the dictionaries, they write books and articles based simply on knowledge of the words of the scriptures. But how do we feel when we get that sort of answer to our question, an answer just based upon words? Well we feel frustrated, sometimes we feel very frustrated indeed, we asked a serious question. Perhaps we really did want to know what Buddhism is. I personally met people who were actually put off Buddhism by the kind of books on Buddhism which they had read. The books were just too dry, too scholarly, too abstract, too academic, so what did they conclude? They concluded Buddhism is not for me. This is much less likely to happen nowadays, nowadays there are good books on Buddhism written by scholars who are also practising Buddhists. I am thinking of works like Reginald Ray's 'Buddhist Saints in India'. But at the time I wrote my poem, well quite a lot of the books on Buddhism that were available were written just by scholars, so naturally people sometimes felt very frustrated. In the biblical phrase they'd asked for bread and been given a stone.

I remember a rather sad case of this sort of thing. It happened soon after the mass conversion to Buddhism of Dr Ambedkhar's followers. I remember I had a very good friend who was himself a follower of Dr Ambedkhar, he was either about my own age or a little older and he was a good friend of mine, I could say I was quite fond of him. He was a little skinny sort of man, a little bit fiery, and he happened to be a lecturer in Pali in a college in Bombay. So after the mass conversion, he thought we should start up classes on Buddhism in the college where he happened to be teaching and he asked for my cooperation and I agreed to help him. Perhaps I should also mention, just to throw a little light onto the type of person he was, some years later he got into his head that we should do just what the Buddha did, so he decided he'd get married, he'd have one son and then he'd leave his wife and son and become a bikkhu. Well he was a very determined sort of person and, believe it or not, that is exactly what he did. He did get married, he did have one son, I suppose he thought it very lucky it wasn't a daughter, and a little while later he went forth, he became a bikkhu, and I continued to know him as a bikkhu. But that development lay some years in the future.

Anyway we got together a class in Buddhism and it was divided into two parts, and I was supposed to give a little talk on Buddhism in the first part and he was going to teach Pali grammar during the second half. So we got along 30 or 40 people to begin with and we had to start at 8 o'clock because the people who mostly came along were mill workers and they didn't finish work until 8 o'clock in the evening. They were mostly illiterate, they had converted as part of Dr Ambedkhar's programme of mass conversion, they didn't know anything about Buddhism, some of them hardly knew how and why they'd been converted but anyway they thought they should know something about Buddhism, they really did want to know. So we had them coming along. So I gave my little talk and then afterwards my friend the professor, the lecturer in Pali, he would start giving his lesson in Pali grammar, and he used to go on and on and on. After a few weeks my Dharma talk got squeezed out completely, it was Pali grammar and Pali grammar, Pali grammar, because he thought the Buddhist scriptures are written in Pali, (because he was a Theravadin), and if you want learn

Buddhism you've got to read the Pali scriptures, and if you want to read the Buddhist scriptures, well you've got to know Pali and if you want to know Pali, well you've got to do the grammar. He was very logical and a very determined person so here he was night after night hammering away at the Pali grammar. He used to make these people, these poor tired men, after a full day's work, recite all these declensions and conjugations and get them all by heart. He drilled them like anything and afterwards he'd say to me 'Ah Sangharakshita, I love teaching Pali grammar'. But the result was, after a few weeks nobody came anymore. Nobody came anymore.

So I thought this really does illustrate, in a very graphic way, at a very basic level, the sort of thing that I've been talking about. These people wanted bread, well they wanted roti, they wanted chapati, but my friend, with the best of intentions, he only gave them a stone. At that stage he was just a scholar, a very good one, he knew his Pali grammar back to front, he was ablaze with enthusiasm when he was doing all this declining and conjugating but the others just didn't catch afire. So we lost, he lost all those students who might have imbibed something of the Dharma, they must have felt really quite puzzled as to what was going on, they must have felt a bit frustrated, even a bit angry. If they did, well, I wouldn't blame them. So that's the sort of situation that I envisage in the next lines of the poem. The scholarly abstract books haven't answered our questions, they haven't told us what Buddhism really is so we throw them aside, get rid of them, or we don't come to the Pali grammar class anymore. We may even want to burn those books, I was going to say, those Pali grammar books, but I don't think those poor people even got so far as to even look into a Pali grammar book, well most of them couldn't read anyway. So we feel more and more frustrated if we're in that sort of situation until "we wish in all sincerity, a second burning of the books could be". That's putting it rather strongly of course, but it is after all, a poem not prose but if we are deeply disappointed we do feel strongly. I forget which particular burning of the books I had in mind when I wrote this particular poem. It may have been the burning of the books which took place in China 213 BCE, under Shin Hwang Te. It may have been that which took place in India in 1197 CE when the Turkish Muslim invaders sacked the great monastic university of Nalanda Mahavihara, that great library with all those treasures of Buddhist literature, sutras and shastras and other works in palm leaf manuscripts, which is said to have burned for six whole months. There must have been hundreds of thousands of valuable works consumed. So for the purpose of the point it doesn't really matter which particular burning of the books I had in mind and in any case, nowadays we're faced by a rather different problem. Nowadays we're not frustrated because we get stone instead of bread. Nowadays we get too much bread. That is to say, there are too many good books on Buddhism available. Books that we would like to read, maybe quite scholarly, but based on a certain amount of spiritual experience. Also, there are really too many reliable translations, too many in the sense that there are more of them than we really have time to read.

So let me make just a few suggestions as I'm sure quite a few of you must find yourselves nowadays in this sort of position. So first suggestion, read, if you possibly can, books written by Buddhists, books in which scholarship is subordinated to understanding and practice and experience of the Dharma. Second suggestion, read books that concentrate on the basic Buddhist teachings, on the Four Noble Truths, on the Noble Eightfold Path, on conditioned co-production, on the Bodhisattva Ideal, the Bodhisattva path and so on. Don't bother with material dealing with obscure schools and teachings. Third suggestion, read Buddhist scriptures. One gets the impression that some Buddhists, not necessarily within the FWBO, read almost anything except

the Buddhist scriptures, so read the Pali canonical texts. Read the Digha Nikaya, the Majjhima Nikaya, the Dhammapada, the Sutta Nipata the Udana and read the great Mahayana sutras. The Pali texts will give you a vivid idea of the actual life of the Buddha, give you a vivid idea of the Buddha as a historical person, as a historical personality, living in India about 500 before the common era, the kind of conditions under which he lived and worked and taught and associated with his disciples. The Mahayana sutras, some of them at least will give you an impression, a very vivid impression, very often, of the grand, as it were, archetypal background of Buddhism. The Mahayana sutras are full of inspiring, archetypal imagery. They transport one, so to speak, to other worlds, worlds full of light and colour and music and beauty, far transcending the world in which we live, but of which nonetheless our world, at its best, in the person of some human individuals, can be at least a distant reflection. So we shouldn't even just read the scriptures by ourselves or to ourselves. We should sometimes at least read them aloud, read them perhaps in a ritual context so that the reading of the scriptures becomes a definite spiritual exercise in itself. And then, fourth suggestion, select, even specialise. I think this is particularly important, especially from the practical point of view. Some of us read far too much, which sometimes means we read hastily and superficially. And when I say some of us read far too much I'm afraid I have to include myself in this category, but fortunately, some years ago, I had a lucky escape because I spent twelve whole years in Kalimpong and I didn't have access to many books, including books on Buddhism. For one thing, I didn't have the money to buy them. If I spent two rupees on a book, well that was quite a big item of expenditure. And of course, in the area in which I lived, there was no public library, but somehow I managed to collect, I managed to put together, I managed to build up a small collection of books, mainly on Buddhism, perhaps a hundred volumes and those hundred volumes are the nucleus of the present Order library. Most of these, most of these hundred volumes I read again and again. I got to know them thoroughly, both books about Buddhism and translations of the Buddhist scriptures and this is what I suggest you try to do. Build up a small collection of Buddhist literature of your own. It doesn't have to be one hundred volumes. It need be only ten or twelve, but whatever the number, get to know them thoroughly. Read them again and again. Discuss them with your friends. Don't always go running after something new, the latest publication, or the latest theories about Buddhism. So these are my suggestions to you.

Now there's another quite important aspect to the whole question and that is the aspect of temperament, especially spiritual temperament. I want to go in to that just a little. In Buddhism traditionally, there are several classifications according to temperament but this evening I'm concerned with only one of them, but it's one that will be familiar to many of you, especially if you've studied chapter fifteen of The Three Jewels. According to this classification, persons are of three spiritual types. First of all there is the faith follower, then there is the doctrine follower and finally there is the body witness. The faith follower is the devotional type of person, I the type of person who experiences strong feelings of love and devotion towards the ideal, especially perhaps as embodied in the figure of the Buddha, the archetypal Buddhas, the archetypal Bodhisattvas, the great teachers and so on. A faith follower, a person of this type, is very fond of puja and chanting and perhaps of religious music. This sort of person likes to go on pilgrimage and incidentally, just recently, the last few weeks, I've had quite a few postcards from India from people, Order Members, Mitras and friends, who are on pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places and they seem

to have a very good time in the very best sense. Several of them have written to the effect that seeing the places where the Buddha lived, seeing the places where the Buddha taught, has made the Buddha and his teaching very very much more alive for them than it was before. And of course, yes, it's people of this kind of devotional temperament, especially perhaps the faith followers, who love to go on pilgrimage and remember the Buddha and make their knowledge of the Buddha and his life more vivid in this particular way. The faith follower also seems to feel the need for personal contact with the teacher, not just to read the teacher's books. The faith follower likes to have personal contact with the teacher whenever possible and the faith follower also likes to serve fellow disciples because the faith follower thinks, well, we're all followers of the same teacher, to serve the teacher's disciples, in a way, is to serve the teacher himself. So the faith follower has this sort of attitude of service, especially to fellow disciples. So I think you can recognise the type, so as to speak, the faith follower, the devotional type of person.

The doctrine follower is the more intellectual type of person, and I'm using the word 'intellectual' here in a quite positive sense. In modern times it does sometimes assume a rather negative connotation, but I don't have that connotation at all in mind. I use the word entirely in a positive sense. The doctrine follower feels a strong need to understand the Dharma. For the doctrine follower it is not enough to love the Dharma, and to serve the Dharma, the doctrine follower wants to understand it. So the doctrine follower is fond of studying the sutras and the shastras, pouring over them line by line, and of course consulting the dictionary a lot. The doctrine follower is interested in Buddhist philosophy, he wants to know all about Madyamika and the Abhidharma, and the Yogacara, and all the subtle shades of difference between them and their various subscores and sub-scores. He enjoys discussions about Buddhist metaphysics and Buddhist epistemology and all that sort of thing. And he enjoys discussion and argument with other intellectually inclined people. He doesn't perhaps experience much in the way of devotional feeling. He usually respects his teacher but he doesn't feel so great a need of contact as the faith follower does. He's quite happy to get his knowledge mainly from books, from the sutras and the shastras.

The body witness is the meditator or yogin. I won't try to explain why he's called body witness, I do explain it in *The Three Jewels* but it's a little complicated, so I'll just call him the body witness. The body witness is the meditator or yogin; the body witness is the person of contemplative temperament, the person who is primarily interested in his own inner experience. He's not especially interested in ideas, or books or ritual. He has no wish to study Buddhist philosophy and very often he enjoys silence, he enjoys living alone, preferably in the midst of nature. The body witness may have a strong feeling for his teacher, especially at the beginning of his spiritual career, because in meditation, especially if you specialise in meditation, personal guidance is usually necessary.

So, these are the three temperaments, the faith follower, the doctrine follower and body witness. And it would appear, that in the Buddhist tradition, the differences between these three kinds of spiritual temperament hold good on both sides of stream entry, though tradition is not all together clear on this particular point. It would also seem, that under certain conditions it's possible to change, to switch from one kind of temperament to another, but I'm not going into that now. At present I'm concerned with one important question in particular, which is 'is studying the Dharma, is reading Buddhist literature necessary to the same extent for people of all three temperaments?' Well this could be considered an important practical question. Well, apparently it is not necessary, it would seem that there is a great deal of difference

between their needs in this respect. The Dharma follower, the doctrine follower, of course, does study and think quite a lot. He reads many books, perhaps writes many books. The faith follower studies and thinks much less, reads, perhaps, just a few favourite books, often of a devotional nature. The body witness may study hardly at all. The body witness once he gets really deeply into his meditation may not read a book even from one year to the next. But here a word of warning perhaps is necessary. One should not rationalise one's failure to study. One shouldn't say 'Oh, I'm a faith follower, oh I'm a body witness' as a way of excusing one's laziness with regards to study. If one is really a faith follower one will not show it just by not studying, one will show it by being very very devoted. The same in the case of the body witness, one will not show one is a natural meditator just by not studying, one will show it by meditating a lot, at least when one gets the opportunity.

But here another important question arises, perhaps even more important than the previous one, and the question is: 'Do people of these three kinds of temperaments, the devotional, the intellectual, the meditative, make the same spiritual progress?' That is to say assuming that they make the same kind of effort under roughly the same kind of conditions. I'm going to answer this question with the help of another threefold classification, one with which many of you will also be familiar. That is the classification of the three kinds of prajna, or wisdom. First of all there is the wisdom that comes by hearing the Dharma, or in modern times, by reading the Dharma in the form of the sutras. Secondly, wisdom which comes by reflecting on the Dharma, that is to say, reflecting on what one has read so that one understands it. And three, thirdly, wisdom which comes by meditating on the Dharma which one has read about and which one has understood and reflected on. These three prajnas, these three wisdoms are usually understood to represent three different degrees of wisdom. In the first, the wisdom based on hearing, one simply knows about the Dharma, one accumulates information about the Dharma. In the second, through reflection, one understands what one has informed oneself about and reflected upon. And in the third, through meditation, one realises it. One understands what one has informed oneself about and reflected on and in the third, through meditation one realises it.

So here, in this particular explanation of this classification the first two wisdoms are mundane and it is only the third, what is called the bhavana mye(?)prajna is transcendental, only the third leads directly to enlightenment. So that's the usual explanation.

There's another way of understanding these three prajnas or wisdoms. Here the difference is not in the wisdom itself. The difference consists in the approach to that wisdom. Here there is only one transcendental wisdom, not three, not three degrees of wisdom, but there are three different ways in which that one wisdom, that one transcendental wisdom can be approached and realised. It can be approached and realised equally through intense faith and devotion, after all the Buddha does say in the Sutta Nipatta, 'by faith the flood is crossed', that is to say the flood of mundane existence. That same transcendental wisdom can equally be approached and realised through intense and prolonged philosophical reflection and of course it can be approached and realised through intense meditation. The first is the approach of the faith follower, the second is the approach of the doctrine follower and the third is the approach of the body witness.

I could say quite a bit more about this particular correlation, but I think I'll have to leave it for another time, I've already strayed quite far enough away from the point itself, quite a long way, one might say, from the scholars, so we will have to retrace our steps a little. We got on to the question of the three wisdoms as a result of

discussing the three temperaments. We saw that not all practising Buddhists are equally interested in study, that is to say Dharma study. Before that I gave four suggestions for such Dharma study. I gave these suggestions for those who might feel overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of Buddhist literature now available and who were wondering how to resolve that issue. So if those suggestions of mine are followed perhaps we won't feel frustrated and won't be tempted to give up study all together and we will certainly not wish for a second burning of the books.

So we come to the next two lines of the poem, which are 'Have they no other word for sick souls full of doubt than read my latest article?'

'They' are of course the mere scholars in Buddhism but who are the 'sick souls full of doubt'? They are of course in the poem, those who ask the scholars 'What is Buddhism?' Perhaps we ourselves were among those 'sick souls full of doubt' once upon a time. But what do the scholars say when they are asked by these people 'what is Buddhism?' ? They just say 'read my latest article'. Read the results of the latest scholarly research into Buddhism, maybe the date of the Buddha or whether this particular text was really by the Buddha or not. They are usually unable to say very much more than that. So, we ask for bread and we're given stone. Not only that, more often than that, we are given a very small stone. As I mentioned at the beginning, I must have been rather annoyed when I wrote this poem, and you may have noticed when I read the whole poem, that as it proceeds there is a mounting sense of indignation almost. This indignation reaches a climax in these two lines: 'have they no other words for sick souls full of doubt than read my latest article?'

So what is it that makes me, in the poem, I don't feel indignant now, but, in the poem, what makes me indignant? In the poem people are not asking 'what is Buddhism?' just for fun. The question is not just theoretical, they desperately want to know, they want an answer that will enable them to give meaning to their lives, because they are psychologically and spiritually sick. They suffer, they're full of doubts, they ask themselves: 'What is the purpose of life? Does life have a meaning at all? Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? Is death the end or not? Is there something more than this ordinary, human life, this humdrum routine?' Perhaps they've heard somewhere, somehow that there is an answer to such questions in Buddhism so they ask 'what is Buddhism?' and unfortunately they often ask the question to the wrong people, they ask the mere scholars, not perhaps directly but through their books, though this is less likely to happen nowadays than it was in the past. And the scholars give them an answer that is no answer, in effect the scholars fob them off. And it's this that makes me indignant in the poem. I'm indignant that scholars should be so blind to people's real needs, so insensitive, so indifferent, sometimes so complacent, thinking that they are the great authorities on Buddhism. Sometimes they even smile, in some cases, at the idea of actually practising it. And, of course, it's not just the scholars, the scholars in Buddhism, who are at fault in this kind of way. There are pundits, there are know-alls of this kind in every walk of life, especially perhaps in the media. People who don't realise the extent to which many ordinary people are looking for an answer to the real problems of life. Such people, such pundits and know-alls of the media as I've called them are unsympathetic when such people, ordinary people, try to work out a solution to the problems of life for themselves.

A few weeks ago, there was a rather disgraceful example of this kind of attitude. It involved someone called Glen Hoddle when he expressed his views on reincarnation. Some of you may have heard of Glen Hoddle, I must admit that I hadn't heard of him before, but I gathered from various sources, that he was quite an important person and one commentator remarked that this Glen Hoddle was the second most important man

in England, second only to the Prime Minister. Anyway, important or not it seems he expressed some views on the subject of reincarnation. And the pundits of the media, they came down on the poor man like the proverbial ton of bricks. His views were denounced as preposterous, offensive, insulting, idiotic and so on. And the very idea of reincarnation was described as bizarre and ridiculous. Admittedly Glen Hoddle's views on reincarnation were a bit muddled and they didn't quite agree with Buddhist teaching on the subject. But after all, the poor man was only trying to make sense of life for himself, he was only trying, in his own way, to work out a philosophy. But his critics didn't appreciate that, and of course his views eventually cost him his job. He had the wrong theological opinions. So much for our tolerant, liberal society. So once again, I couldn't help feeling rather indignant.

This brings me to the last line of the poem but one. 'Off with your shoes! 'Tis holy ground! Depart!' So the first four lines of the poem envisage a certain situation, a situation in which the scholars are asked 'what is Buddhism?' and in which they simply go and consult their dictionaries. The next two lines describe our reaction to their response. We feel disappointed, frustrated, even angry. In the next lines I ask a question, I ask if the scholars really can do no more than advise us to read their latest scientific paper on Buddhism. The question is, of course, rhetorical, I'm merely saying, well, they can't really help us at all. So in the next line I address the scholars directly and I say 'Off with your shoes! 'Tis holy ground! Depart!' Now what is this holy ground? This holy ground is the human soul, and I'm not using the word 'soul' in any strict theological sense. I'm using the word 'soul' for that deeper, more essential part of ourselves, that feels and suffers and aspires. I could also use the word 'heart' and Keats, the poet John Keats, you may remember, speaks of 'the holiness of the heart's affections'. So what do I mean by saying to the scholars 'Off with your shoes!?' What I mean is - show respect for people's feelings, especially their deeper feelings. Take their questions seriously, take them seriously, even if they can't express themselves very well, even if they are a bit muddled in their thinking. And this applies not only to scholars in the field of Buddhism. It applies to the pundits and know-alls of the media as well, and it applies to us. We may disagree with people's views but we shouldn't abuse people on account of those views, and we shouldn't ever describe the views themselves as offensive or insulting or bizarre etc., these are purely subjective judgments and tell us nothing about the validity or invalidity of the views themselves. But I haven't quite finished with that line. The last word is 'Depart!'. It is not enough that the mere scholars should show respect for people's feelings. They are in fact, one might say, incapable of showing respect for them; they're oblivious to them, so the best thing they can do is to remove themselves from the scene altogether. They can't answer our question, they can't tell us what Buddhism is, they have nothing at all to do with Buddhism in the real sense, they are totally irrelevant, so the best thing they can do is simply to disappear. 'Take off your shoes! 'Tis holy ground! Depart!'

So we are now very near the end of the poem. There is only one line left. But before we go onto that last line, I want to say something about the previous line from a somewhat different point of view. I want to look at the image I have made use of in the line 'Take off your shoes! 'Tis holy ground!' In the East, of course, Buddhists and Hindus take off their shoes when entering a temple or a monastery. But I wasn't thinking of that. Don't those words 'Take off your shoes! 'Tis holy ground!' have a slightly familiar ring? Haven't you heard them somewhere before? Well, you probably have. Because they come from the Bible, they come from the Old Testament. So let me read you the passage. It is Exodus 3, 1-5.

"Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian and he led the flock to the back side of the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush and he looked and Behold, the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he'd turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said 'Moses, Moses' and he said 'Here am I' and he said 'Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.'

So what have we here? What is an image from the Bible doing in a poem about Buddhism? As I mentioned I wrote the poem when I was in India, in Kalimpong, in 1957. I was, of course a Buddhist, I'd been a Buddhist for twelve years. But though I was living in India I was a western Buddhist and it was as a western Buddhist that I wrote the poem. But what is a western Buddhist? I've dealt with this question before in other lectures. Very briefly, in those other lectures I said that a western Buddhist is one who seeks to practice the Dharma under the conditions of modern, western civilisation. That is to say a civilisation that is predominantly industrialised, urbanised and secularised. But that is by no means the whole story. A western Buddhist is also one who, as a westerner, has a western cultural heritage and that heritage is a very, very rich one. That heritage includes the legacy of classical Greece and of ancient Rome. That heritage includes the Renaissance, the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the Romantic movement and very much more. That heritage includes countless masterpieces of art, literature, music and architecture and so on. And as western Buddhists we can not ignore that great heritage, we certainly cannot repudiate it. There is so much that is inspiring and uplifting in it. There is so much in it that stimulates our imagination and deepens our understanding. But what of Christianity? Where does that fit? Surely that too is part of our heritage? Even as western Buddhists? Here it is important to make a vital distinction between Christianity as a religion and Christianity as a culture, or more precisely between Christianity as a doctrinal, not to say dogmatic system and Christianity as a body of cultural expressions of various formal kinds. Christianity as a religion is definitely not part of the heritage of the western Buddhist. We should be very clear about this. Christianity is theistic, Buddhism is non-theistic and the two are quite incompatible. And there are other fundamental differences; I need not go into those differences now. But Christianity as a culture may, however, be part of the cultural heritage of the western Buddhist.

Let me give you an example, an example from my own experience as a western Buddhist. When I was very young I read Homer's *Iliad* and I was fascinated by the story of *The Iliad*, I was fascinated by the personages, the characters that I encountered in *The Iliad* and especially, for some reason or other, I was fascinated by the gods and the goddesses who appear in the course of *The Iliad*. Zeus, Hera, Pallas Athene, Aphrodite, Aries. I was fascinated by these gods and goddesses and I thoroughly enjoyed reading the great poem, reading about them, and I've read the poem many, many times since. It has become part of my personal cultural heritage but I'd never believed in the literal existence of the gods and goddesses of *The Iliad*. I've never worshipped them as an ancient Greek or Roman might have done. *The Iliad* is part of my cultural heritage; it's not part of my religious heritage. Similarly, two or three years later when I was still quite young, I read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, that great epic. I was very fascinated by this too, I was fascinated by the story and I was

fascinated by the characters. And who are the characters in Milton's *Paradise Lost*? Well there's God, God's one of the characters. The Messiah, Jesus. There's Satan, Adam and Eve. There's Sin and Death who are personified. But I did not believe in the literal truth of the story of *Paradise Lost* in the way that many Christians still do. And I certainly did not believe in the literal existence of the different characters, for me God was as real or as unreal as Zeus, or Apollo or Aphrodite. So *Paradise Lost* is part of my cultural heritage, it is not part of my religious heritage so in that way Christianity is part of my cultural heritage as a western Buddhist. The Bible, especially in the authorised version is part of my cultural heritage. If I read it I don't read it as the word of God, I read it as literature, I read the Old Testament, if I read it at all, as ancient Hebrew literature, just as I read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* as ancient Greek literature. Not only that, my cultural heritage is part of me, it enters into what I write, it enters into my poetry. This is not of course to make any great claims for my poetry. At the beginning of the lecture I referred to my poem 'Hercules and the Birds', the one on which the Finnish student wrote his thesis. Hercules is an ancient Greek hero, a demigod, who eventually becomes a god; he was worshipped throughout the Greco-Roman world for many many centuries. But though I wrote that poem about Hercules, I don't believe literally in his existence as a god and I certainly don't worship him. In my poem I simply make use of the image of Hercules, because this image enables me to express something that I want to say. So it is the same with the image from the Book of Exodus that I use in the poem 'The Scholars'. It helps me to express something, the Bible as literature is part of my cultural heritage and its images and characters are part of my cultural heritage, part of my language so to speak so that they enter into my poetry quite naturally. There's no need for western Buddhists to be afraid of Christianity. Much as we may reject Christianity as a religion, there's no need for us to reject it as a culture.

This brings me to the last line of the poem; 'Buddhism's in the life and in the heart'. You'll notice that I distinguish between 'life' and 'heart'. 'Heart' we may say is the principle of vitality, it is the seat, metaphorically, of the emotions, especially of our deeper emotions. Well, life represents the expression of that principle, the principle of vitality, in action. So in what way is Buddhism in the heart? When is Buddhism in the heart? Buddhism is in the heart when we go for refuge. The mere scholar does not go for refuge, however learned he may be, he does not really understand the Dharma, can't really answer the question 'what is Buddhism?'. So no use going to him. And when is Buddhism in the life? Buddhism is in the life when our going for refuge finds expression in the day to day observance of the five or the ten precepts, when it finds expression in an ethical lifestyle, in spiritual friendship and so on. There's a lot obviously that I could say on going for refuge and on the precepts but I'm not going to do so, because we've reached ground, holy ground, that will be familiar to all of you. So I will conclude with just a few reminders. Let us remember that mere scholars are not authorities on Buddhism. Let us remember to consult the dictionary. Let us remember my four suggestions for the study of the Dharma. Let us remember that people are of different temperaments and approach the Dharma in different ways. And let us remember not to be dismissive of people's attempts to make sense of life, however clumsy those attempts may appear to be. And let us remember that as western Buddhists we have a western cultural heritage. And above all, let us remember that Buddhism is not just in books, not just in words. Buddhism is in the life and in the heart.