Six talks on Buddhist Meditation

Kamalashila

1 foundation

Tonight we have the first of a series of six talks on 'Western Buddist Meditation'. I originally suggested giving a whole series because I thought, well, meditation is that important a subject. It could be described as the central practice of the whole of Buddhism. It is the practice that most of all characterises Buddhism. There is much that needs to be said about it, much that we need reminding of.

So what I hope to present to you all on these six evenings is an overview of Buddhist meditation. Meditation as it is practised by the many thousands of western men and women who are involved, in one way or another, with the FWBO, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order – and also by the seven hundred or so ordained members, men and women, of the Western Buddhist Order itself. And also meditation as practised more generally in Buddhist tradition. We may be in process of developing a Buddhist tradition which fits our Western culture, but that doesn't mean that we reject in any way the existing Buddhist tradition, which of course originated in Eastern civilisations like that of India. At present at least, our 'Western Buddhist meditation' is hardly distinguishable from anything which has been practiced in the East over two whole millennia.

In case you're new to Buddhism and meditation, I am sure you'll find such an overview of some interest. If you are already a practitioner of meditation, I shall be exploring some of the principles which underlie meditation practice, so that you can rethink your approach and I hope, generate a new vision, new confidence and renewed energy in your practice.

As regards Buddhist meditation in the West, the meaning of the word nowadays seems to have broadened beyond recognition. Just consider, for example: Meditation to enter samadhi. T'ai Chi and meditation. Catholic meditation. Transcendental meditation. Mindfulness meditation. Weekly Classes. Inner healing, relaxation, stress reduction, pain management. Creative healing and wisdom. Healing and Psychic Services. Meditation candles—for prosperity, healing, love, passion, and power. Each comes with an individual meditation card. Shambhala and Buddhist meditation practice and arts. Access Sahaja Yoga Chennai Meditation Center By Internet. Concentration & Meditation. Jewish Learning and Meditation. Synchronicity - technologies to promote conscious living, health and well-being through contemporary meditation. E-Mail your postal mailing address to receive our meditation course. International Meditation Institute Presents "Meditation Made Easy" - You will learn how meditation can enable you to bring health, wealth, success, and happiness into your life as you release stress, increase your awareness, and dramatically improve the functioning of your mind. Meditation Tapes. $30.00 Meditation And Mantra, Meditation And Music, Meditation Mantra and Music. Vipassana Meditation, Inner Sanctuary, Peace Meditation. Meditation For Starters, CD by Walters J. Tibetan meditation, Tara Puja Meditation & Practice. Brown Zen Community Schedule - 6:30 a.m. bowing meditation 6:50 a.m. chanting meditation 7:00 a.m. sitting meditation (30 minutes) 8:00 p.m. meditation instruction.

This list was what turned up first in a random search on the Internet. There were, in all, getting on for half a million references to meditation[i].

And looking at these, you can see why there is such an interest in meditation. Many people feel there is something seriously lacking in their lives. A lack of something they maybe don't know what, maybe it's samadhi, perhaps it's God, – at least, something vaguely transcendental. Some even seem to feel somehow damaged, that they stand in need of 'inner healing'. And we know people find it hard to relax, that they experience stress and pain. Surely many people really do feel impoverished, genuinely

feel they lack prosperity, feel lacking in love, even lacking in passion, lacking in power, success, happiness, and wisdom.

There is so much suffering in the world. Meditation seems to offer a way out of such sufferings. Indeed, that is exactly how the Buddha himself defined his teaching. But people often don't like to admit that they suffer, personally. Suffering can be a kind of social stigma. It's perhaps seen as a failure, and others may not want to associate with failures. People who admit they suffer might be looking for your sympathy – even, heaven forbid, your friendship.

Now in Buddhism it's considered quite OK to suffer. Suffering is normal. Suffering is natural. Suffering is inherent in conditioned existence. Suffering is therefore very much to be expected. Though suffering, in the way that Buddhism looks at it, doesn't necessarily involve something unpleasant. We suffer even when we are surrounded with pleasures. This idea might seem a little eccentric at first. But if you think about it, even the happiest person in the world cannot avoid some form of suffering. Even those who have the ideal partner, the ideal lifestyle, the ideal home, ideal children and ideal friends – even these have to experience the ordinary frustrations which all life has in common. Everyone sometimes has to come into contact with something very unpleasant. All of us sometimes have to lose what we love most of all. Each of us has to grow old and die.

We all had to be born, too. What a business that was! There was the business of growing up, and the business of being a teenager. And then we had to enter adulthood. To gradually discover, by trial and error, and mostly error, how to get on in life, how to survive. And once we'd worked all that out – many of us, we probably underwent some kind of midlife crisis, as soon as we got our first glimpse of the other end of our life. When we saw that it is going to end, and realised that we'll never become what we expected to become; and also knowing that – despite all we've been through – we still don't really understand any of it.

These same conditions apply to everyone, even to the happiest among us.

But yes, it's extraordinary to reflect that we have all been born. It's a very basic fact of life. I imagine most of us have completely forgotten the gory details. Me too… I suppose it must have been quite a trauma, both for me and my mother. I think she got rather a shock when I appeared. But I've definitely forgotten. I've also entirely forgotten pre-natal memories of growing in the womb. Tibetan commentators say that such memories are possible. And it seems reasonable to suppose that we all had at least some rudimentary consciousness at that stage.

At any rate, Padmasambhava, the man who founded Buddhism in Tibet, seemed to remember what it's like. His epic biography[ii] includes a lengthy survey, not only of the sufferings of birth, but also those youth, old age, and death. And to illustrate, I'm going to read some of it now, on life in the womb.

Padmasambhava recounts:

When the mother is hungry, it is as if the embryo were in a chasm,
shivering and anguished in the currents which are always growing.
When she is satiated, it is as if the embryo were pressed against a rock…
When the mother moves, the embryo seems to be shaken by the wind,
oscillating above and below, turning, turning, all dazed.
When the mother sleeps, it feels as if it were pressed by a mountain,
miniscule as it is and in the mother's body.
When the mother has eaten, it feels as if it were put under a lid.

According to traditional Buddhism, we've all been in this situation many, many times before. You'd think we'd remember. But anyway, the story continues, and next, of course, is the trauma of birth itself:

Now, with the head and feet in reverse, at the moment of birth,
because of the narrowness of the birth passage,
Mother and son take a half step toward the land of the dead…
The mother's birth passage, which is without bones, is forced to the limit of bony resistance.
And it seems to her that her body is bursting into a thousand pieces.
The child is held back, strangling, and the skin is scraped.
Pushed toward the outside as much as can be done,
He is broken in body and mind, as if hammered by a heavy ram.
When he falls on the bed, it is as if he were rolled

in a bundle of thorns.
Although he is dressed in a soft warm cloth,
it is no longer the soft, warm womb of his mother,
And scratches, discomfort, and pain come to him.
This treasure which the mother has received is like a small bird carried away by the falcon;
When the umbilical cord is cut, she feels strong pain in her heart.

Well, I can't speak for mothers, but it seems very clear that newborn children are experiencing *something*. Coming into this world is surely a very intense experience. And I seem to remember that growing up can be pretty intense, too. Even though I think most of us found ways of taking the edge off the intensity. Otherwise probably I'd be speechless; I wouldn't be able to speak about it all in this lighthearted way… So, now let me present: the sorrows of growing up.

Then increasing in size daily and monthly, the child grows,
Wetting himself and pouting,
His mouth dry, his stomach empty, his body cold, and his limbs swollen…
At [his] cries, the loving mother in her tenderness for her child
Turns her breast to his mouth…
Even after he grows to be a youth
She constantly watches over all his needs and desires.
He is always hungry and thirsty, to build his mind and body.
Careless, he is always getting filthy and always getting hurt.
He has many enemies and few friends in his heart, and he is always sleeping.
He is unobservant and anxious…
At three-day intervals, sadness overcomes his mind;
Even a single day suffices to upset him and desolate his heart.

Of course, this is a dreadful boy child, made up of slugs, snails and puppy-dogs' tails. According to the nursery rhyme, girls are made of sugar, spice and all things nice. But I don't think that makes life any easier. So let's move on. On to middle age. Padmasambhava represents middle age, the midday point of life, by pointing to the sufferings of life in general.

The upper class suffers from fear of the king.
The lower class suffers from having to obey and from being powerless.
The lame, the stiff-jointed, the deaf, the mute, the cretins, and the deformed suffer…
Husbands and second wives suffer harshly from quarrels with the first wife.
There are none who, if ill, do not suffer from disappointing treatments.…
Pious fathers and mothers suffer from great apprehension about their youngsters.
Young virgins suffer from fear of growing old.
Men and women, when eyes wander, suffer from jealousy.
When the laws are violated, the good as well as the wicked suffer, their hair on end.

Still more in detail, the multitudes suffer from famine.
Many suffer from floods, from droughts, from illnesses, from parasite.
Others suffer when theatened by fire, by water, by wild beasts, or by serpents.
When the times change, everything is scarce, overturned, soon a desert; suffering is in the country at war.

Humankind cannot bear very much reality. Perhaps that's enough for a while. But we can't stop yet: Padmasambhava is on a roll, he's relentless. He carries on, spelling out the miseries of aging.

When a number of years have passed and the parts of the body grow weak, one suffers.
The handsome splendor disappears and the pretty complexion fades.
The back, which was born straight, grows stooped.
The joints are now bent and the veins and tendons can now be seen.
The plump well-formed body fails; what remains is now disgusting…
On the cheeks, the masterpiece of the flesh, the rosy bloom vanishes.

Looking at the body, one can see it has become like twisted tanned leather.

During celebrations the old person is humiliated that he no longer has a leading part.
When he gets up, he can not stand; when he sits, he is exhausted…
At night he is prey to insomnia; there is no dawn for him;
He is sleepy during the day…
However well he may be situated, he has the feeling of being broken into pieces.
Taken to where it should flow, the urine escapes on the edge of the cushion.
The human heart not being kind, young people

despise him.

I'll spare you Padmasambhava's descriptions of the sufferings of death, which are perhaps a little too graphic. I'll just end with his final evocations of the sense of tragedy which pervades all human life.

Thus will end the scholar with his profound treatises.
Thus will end the prince and his subjects in happy agreement.
Thus will end the married couple tenderly united…

Like foam taken from the butter,
life, whatever it may be, is full of suffering.

Fear of meeting one's enemies is a great suffering.
Fear of losing one's beloved relatives is a great suffering.
Whoever has property suffers in watching over it; whoever has none suffers in seeking it…
Such is the lot of the beings of the six classes who have not overcome the nature of suffering.

[Pause]

"…Who have not *overcome* the nature of suffering". So it seems that despite all this tragedy, Padmasambhava sees the possibility of a happy ending. There is a way out of saṃsāra.

Saṃsāra is the infinite universe of unenlightened, ignorant existence. We create saṃsāra out of our spiritual ignorance. Saṃsāra is like the great ocean, teeming with various forms, who continually brush past each other like ships in the night. The endless round of perpetual wandering: now being born, now growing old, now dying. The way we continually move on in response to the conditions in which we find ourselves, the pleasures and pains; becoming now this, now that, always something slightly different. What we were up to ten years ago, what we'll be getting into in ten years time. Where we might be at in our old age. The process is eternal, unending, going round and round.

There is something dream-like about samsara. Our world is a place of continual digression and distraction. Kazuo Ishiguro, who wrote *The Remains Of The Day*, has described this wonderfully in his recent novel, *The Unconsoled*[iii]. A world renowned musician arrives in an Eastern European city. The citizens have high expectations for his visit. Reporters are continually waiting in the hotel foyer. He has a very full schedule of engagements. However we slowly become aware that he is not at all clear about this schedule. For some strange dream-like reason, he can never quite recall it. Which of course causes him, and many others, a great deal of anxiety. Not to mention the reader: the novel is the ultimate anxiety dream! He is constantly side-tracked by other people, other purposes, other people's needs. He eventually realises that he has not prepared his talk, the one the whole town has invited him to give. But on going to prepare it, he happens across someone he hasn't seen since he was at school, who badly needs just a little of his time. He cannot refuse; the old school friend needs to drive with him just a little way… he drives and drives… eventually ending up way out in the country in yet another situation. His talk is forgotten, and you, the reader, are feeling extremely anxious on his behalf. This kind of thing is continually happening throughout the whole story. There's this continual nagging sense of something extremely important that is being neglected. It was quite an uncomfortable book to read, I can tell you: it was rather close to the bone. This life may or may not be a dream, but there is something about life in which we are disoriented and lost in some very basic way. In which we continually feel as though we are being prevented from doing something vitally important – something which we cannot remember, because we are too distracted to think sufficiently deeply about what it might be.

In the FWBO it is a common practice for people to give their autobiography, and over the years I have heard many people tell their story. Before doing this for the first time, people often feel they have nothing at all to relate that is of interest to others. However when they actually tell it, it is almost always the case that their audience, and even the person themselves, is deeply moved by their story. However ordinary and uninteresting the story seems to the teller, it never is to the audience, and in the telling the teller often sees the great preciousness of their existence. I sometimes think our lives are like an epic poem, like the epic of Odysseus. We're wandering, wandering, eventually perhaps finding the way home after many years of distracting adventures.

I entitled this talk 'Foundation,' because I wanted to evoke the foundations of Buddhist spiritual practice, its basic ground. And Buddhist spiritual practice is a creative response to life. Not only one's to own life, but to the life of all beings. That response is an overwhelming desire to actualise one's potential for growth and development, so that one may come to understand the nature of life in its

fullness, and with the whole of one's being, and that one may do this in relation to others, with the welfare of all beings at heart. This growth and development, in relation to this vision of existence, is the business of the spiritual life. It's the business of the FWBO and all other Buddhist groups.

For men and women who make a lifelong commitment to the actualisation of this potential that they have, there are some special meditation practices. These are called the Foundation Yogas. And an important feature of these practices is that one imagines that one is in the company of all beings, as one meditates. It's as though one were doing it in public. Sitting to our left is our mother. To our right, our father. Behind us, encouraging us in this great endeavour, are all our spiritual friends, our brothers and sisters in the Dharma. In front of us are those people we find difficult. We don't make an exception even of our enemies. And behind, ranged all around, is everyone else. All men, all women, all animals, all beings of whatever kind, everyone alive is there. We remember that there are so many people alive now in the world.

This is quite a thought. There are, in fact, getting on for six billion *human* beings alone on this planet, and of course each one of them is alive at this very moment. Perhaps they're eating, or talking, certainly thinking, maybe laughing, maybe angry, maybe worrying. Right now, lots of them are fast asleep, dreaming. Some are experiencing heat, others cold. Some are experiencing pleasure, others pain. Some of them are even meditating. This is all really happening, and it's happening right now! I can tell you that just today, in the last 24 hours, about 150,000 people came to the end of their lives. Right now, they are being mourned by perhaps a million relatives. And also today, about 400,000 new ones have arrived fresh on the scene, they've just been born today, they're all rolling around in their little white nappies, together with all the hopes and expectations of millions of parents and doting relatives. And it's all going to happen again, tomorrow.

So it's in the midst of all this, that we meditate. No wonder yogis like Padmasambhava sometimes choose to meditate in cremation grounds and cemeteries. We meditate at the crossroads of humanity. This is the feeling we should have when we meditate. Meditate in response to the boundlessness, the unfathomability of the situation in which we actually live.

I know, in a way, all this quantity… it's enough to put you right off. It's too much, it's overwhelming. We can't conceive of six billion people as actual people. Actually, I wonder if we can conceive of them even numerically. I can maybe visualise in my mind a hundred, or even a thousand, even a whole football stadium – and some of those can hold well over a hundred thousand. But I can't imagine a million people very clearly, well I suppose ten football stadiums-full, if you can do that – OK, I certainly can't imagine a billion. And I can't imagine the *life* of even a thousand – I can't take in all their lives, going on day by day. I can have a go, but I can't really do it. To be honest, I sometimes find it hard to put myself even in one other person's shoes. Even someone I've known all my life.

So these considerations are an important foundation for spiritual life. However, I don't suppose the vast majority of people take up meditation with any immediate idea of 'responding to the cries of the world.' I certainly didn't – if I was responding to any cries at all, they were my own. I'm talking about something which raises a big question somewhere in the background of our lives. Our response to the big picture. It's perhaps something that for many people becomes more conscious as they practice. Or it might flash upon us all at once. What that 'big picture' actually is, is really rather hard to describe, it's a kind of vision of existence, and I may well not have described the way it strikes you. But whatever it is, however unconscious, however tentative, something starts us off on the Buddhist path. We just see something about life, and we decide it's important to act on it. Buddhism speaks in terms of the path of vision and the path of transformation. Vision is seeing, in some way, the potential of the spiritual life for us. Transformation is when we work to make it actual. We need both vision and the will to actualise the necessary transformation in our lives.

And this is our subject matter over the next five weeks. I'm going to be speaking about the transformation of ourselves in terms of gravitation, unification, illumination, transformation, and finally exemplification. I'm sorry if these single word titles are a bit cryptic. By gravitation I mean *our* gravitation – what we gravitate towards. That needs transforming. By unification I don't mean something political or geographical, I mean *our* unification, the unification of our consciousness. Illumination means insight, Transformation is what happens when insight deepens, and Exemplification refers to our whole life of meditation, especially in relation to others.

But for the rest of tonight's talk I'm going to talk about the essentials of meditation practice. What meditation essentially is, and how it can help us change ourselves. It's important that we recognise from the very start that *that* is what we shall be doing: changing ourselves. Often, people don't really want to change, they feel happy enough with themselves as they are, thank you very much.

So it needs to be made clear that meditation is a process of *discovery*. Through regular meditation we become increasingly aware of what actually goes on in our mind – things we didn't previously know were there. We increase our awareness of ourselves, and we do so quite deliberately. We meditate by habitually concentrating the attention within. Every day, at least, we train the mind to focus on one significant object. This object stimulates and focuses our awareness. In theory the object of a meditation can be any old thing; but in practice, some objects are much more effective than others in inducing concentration.

Meditation brings the mind together in one piece, when usually our attention tends to be scattered in all directions. Mental life can be rather like that anxiety dream, in a way. Our thoughts are constantly being tempted away by this or that interest. In fact we soon discover that meditation is not just a matter of paying attention, it's also one of dealing with emotion. Because it's our emotions and our feelings that usually drive our attention. If we're really feeling rather bored when we meditate, our mind will tend to look for something which can be relied up to engage our emotions, for example sex – or maybe food – or maybe something else, but it's our desires and interests which control us most easily. So if changing ourselves involves unifying the mind, making it more of one piece, then we have to pay attention to all the different emotional pulls to which we are susceptible.

Perhaps for the time being that's enough to show that meditation is a very thorough and intensely practical undertaking. There's nothing more immediately practical than altering the basic material of one's mind and life. Yet with something practical, it is also important to understand the essential principles of what we are doing. Exactly *why* do we meditate? As in all things, we will not get very far without a clear idea of our purpose.

Meditation was called, by the Buddha, *samyak vyāyama,* which translates roughly as 'perfect effort', the practice of perfecting one's spiritual efforts. What I have been describing involves a great deal of energy, it involves effort. But what kind of effort? The effort to transform our states of mind. The Buddha described four different aspects of this transformative effort. With regard to unwholesome states, it is to eradicate any unwholesome states currently present in the mind, and to prevent new ones from arising. With regard to wholesome states of mind, it is the effort to maintain any wholesome states already in the mind, and to develop new wholesome states. So eradicating and preventing negative states, maintaining and developing positive states. These four right efforts, as they are called, are, you can say, Buddhism in a nutshell. They need to be engaged in throughout the whole Buddhist path of ethics, meditation and insight. Eradicating and preventing what is unskilful, maintaining and developing what is skilful. All the time, in every situation, not just in meditation. But what makes them principles of meditation in particular, is because in meditation one is in a position to work directly on one's mental states. All Buddhist practice involves developing the mind either directly or indirectly. When we practice ethical precepts, the effect on the mind is indirect. We do a good action, say something kind, act with consideration, and this action has a good effect on our mind. But in meditation we are working on the mind directly, the mind itself is working on the mind.

First of all when we meditate, we usually have to get beyond a certain amount of distraction and negativity. So as we break through that distraction, let go that negative emotion, we are eradicating the unwholesome states which happen to be there when we sit down to meditate. That's the *first* right effort. And then, we may well find new distractions arising as we sit there. So if we don't allow these to arise, if we sit loose to them, or counteract them in some other way, then we are fulfilling the second kind of right effort: we are preventing new unskilful states from arising in our mind. Then, once this is established, we may well find ourselves starting to concentrate the mind, and to generate positive emotions. So we are now developing new wholesome mental states which were not there before; this is the third right effort. And then we simply maintain that, keep the concentration, keep making an effort. Though at this stage it usually requires less energy, we still need to maintain a certain effort, otherwise our meditation can still slide back into distraction. By the way I'm using this word 'effort', but I hope it's clear that at this stage it is quite subtle. It mainly consists of the effort to remember what you're trying to do.

One important point needs to be made with regard to the unskilful states of mind that one needs to eradicate. It is that they are identical with the saṃsāra. I didn't make it clear before that saṃsāra is essentially our unenlightened state of mind. It's that unenlightened state objectified as a world, a world inhabited by other unenlightened beings. We inhabit a a mode of consciousness which tends continually to react in a cyclic mode, which goes round and round in circles. This is the Buddha's vision of the dependent nature of our unenlightened mind, and therefore also of the world of unenlightened beings.

In this, the Buddha saw that we experience a number of factors that are just given. They just happen to us, we have no control over them. Then again, other factors exist over which we do have control. If we learn to exercise control of these, we can change ourselves, change our consciousness, transform our mode of existence. Effecting this transformation is the movement towards nirvana. When we don't do that, we revolve in saṃsāra. So what are the factors over which we have no control? Well, for example, there is the fact that we have been born. We didn't have any control over that. We arrived here, and that was that. There is the fact that we 'have' a body. There is the fact that we possess consciousness (or that consciousness possesses us, whichever way round it is, I'm not always sure). Our ideas about how we come to have these things are not clear, but anyway we do experience this body, and this consciousness. As an aspect of this body, as part of the overall body package, we have senses and the different kinds of consciousness which exist because of them. Consciousness arises because of the very basic fact that as an important part of our body we have eyes and ears and noses and brains. It means we see things, hear things; it also means that from birth, perhaps even before, these impressions are stored somewhere, rather mysteriously, and that all this is strung together, amazingly, so that the world makes some kind of sense.

This is our consciousness; along with consciousness arises many kinds of experience, but according to the Buddha one of them is crucial, and this is the experience of feeling. Everything we sense, whether we sense it in the outside world of material objects or in the internal world of ideas, everything has some feeling connected with it. Ideas, and sights, and sounds – each one registers something on a scale of pleasure and pain. Some sensations are *very* painful. Others are *very* pleasant. And some of them are just OK. In fact, the vast majority of feelings are pretty neutral. Now, this phenomenon of feeling is not something we can control. Certain sense experiences simply *are* pleasant, others simply *are* painful, others don't register much at all. These feelings will be different at different times, of course. The food we normally find pleasant, or a person we usually find pleasant, or a place we usually enjoy, can, on another occasion, give rise to pain. So we are speaking about specific, momentary instances of feeling. The point is that each specific feeling that we have simply *happens* to us. We can't control the kind of feeling it is. We can sometimes control the original sensation, because there are some sensations we can choose to have or not to have. We can choose to eat or not to eat a particular food, or meet a particular person. But we can't choose how each moment of those experiences is going to feel on the scale of pleasure and pain.

Now what makes this experience of feeling so crucial is what comes next. What happens when we feel pleasure or pain? What usually happens is that we now want something: we produce a desire. If it was a pleasurable feeling, we want more. If we don't want it again immediately, we make a mental note that we'll try to repeat the experience some time in the future. If it's pain, we make a mental note to avoid that one next time round. Now obviously in itself this taking of mental notes is not necessarily an unhealthy thing. We need to avoid danger. But we should also remember that in doing it, we are also conditioning our future. Every time we decide, somewhere deep inside, that we'd like to repeat an experience, or that we don't want to repeat an experience, our life changes slightly. We become a person who tends to go more in this direction, and more away from that direction. So here we have to watch our human addictive tendencies. Generally, our whole life tends to become constellated around our likes and dislikes, around what brings us pleasure and doesn't bring us pain.

This is not necessarily an unhealthy thing. The trouble is, the things which give us pleasure and don't bring us pain are not automatically good for us. In fact we quite often get it wrong. Whether it's the people we like, or the particular behaviours to which we get attached. This is something we need to think deeply about. We need to rethink our approaches to pleasure and pain, observe more closely our behaviour in response to pleasure and pain. Buddhist teaching says that due to ignorance we tend to respond to feelings of pleasure with craving, and to feelings of pain with hatred. These are the two classic unwholesome emotions which cloud our minds, distort our perception, and spoil our relations

with others. For example habitual craving may cause us to exploit others, when getting what we want becomes more important than their well-being. Habitual hatred tends to isolate and alienate us from others, so this, in its turn, may cause us all kinds of internal psychological difficulties.

Our Buddhist practice is designed to oppose these addictive tendencies, so it's important for us to know what we're up against. So let's now summarise the whole *paticca samuppada*, the whole cyclic process of samsara. When, having been born with a body and consciousness of a particular kind, we come into contact with the outer world of things and the inner world of impressions and ideas, we experience feeling. To this feeling, we need to learn a more creative way of responding. Otherwise, deepening attachment (or repulsion) leads to becoming this or that; and this leads, in one's next existence, to birth with those particular tendencies strengthened, whatever they may be. Which is at least a reasonable explanation of why children, even from the same parents, are sometimes born so different in their temperaments and interests. This is what is happening right now to all those six billion people on this planet, as they are born, as they live and as they die, as well as to countless other humans and animals and whatever throughout the entire universe.

Buddhist meditation practice is to become fully aware of the nature of samsara, and in so doing free ourselves from it and move towards nirvana. Tonight I've described the state of samsara from several points of view: there's been the doctrinal point of view, the point of view of *pratityasamutpada* or dependent arising. We've been reminded of universal suffering in terms of birth, youth, middle and old age. I've spoken of it in these objective terms, as something out there. I've also spoken about it, just a little, in more subjective terms, when I spoke of samsara in terms of the analogy of the distracted, anxious dream. Now I want to conclude by stressing the importance, for practice, of this subjective samsara. For samsara is not just out there, it's 'in here,' too. In fact for all of us samsaric beings, the real samsara arises in and through our individual minds. Samsara is something we mutually create.

I've spoken of the four right efforts as the principle behind Buddhist meditation. Developing the positive emotional states which lead to nirvana, eradicating the negative mental states which perpetuate the samsara. But we can only do this to the extent we are aware of ourselves. So behind our spiritual efforts, there needs to be the development of awareness, or mindfulness. We develop mindfulness in the four areas of the body, our feelings and emotions, our subjective moods, and the objects of our attention. Awareness of what we are actually doing with our body, this body that is so central to our experience. Whether we're walking or sitting down or opening a door. This is a very important key to our experience, and very often we forget it. Awareness of what we are actually feeling – we've ver already seen, tonight, the crucial role of feeling for the whole way our lives change over time. Awareness of our moods – if we know we're in a grouchy mood, we know that we need to be careful. If we know we're on our very best form, we should also know that we need to be careful, for it's often then that we make our worst slips. And finally, awareness of what it is we are actually conscious of, precisely what it is we are actually thinking, or looking at. This, and in fact all these four foundations of mindfulness, takes some application to develop, but it is of the essence of the spiritual life. Developing awareness is the essential foundation of meditation.

And our developing our fourfold mandala of awareness is also another way of responding to the position we are in as a human being. In tonight's lecture I am stressing very strongly the unsatisfactory nature of existence, and how the Dharma is a positive response to that universal unsatisfactoriness. That that is the foundation of our practice, as it was for the Buddha himself. I hope has also become clear that the response that is the Dharma is not only one of aversion, one of getting away from suffering. That is just one side of it. The Dharma is also a response of attraction. The Dharma is beautiful; to see the Dharma is to be irresistibly attracted by its beauty. Our responses to beauty are interesting and complex, sometimes even rather dark. Sometimes when we see something beautiful we want it for ourselves, but at the same time we also feel that we could never have something so beautiful: not us. But the Dharma is not only the most beautiful thing there is, it is also ours for the taking.

So we can also respond to the beauty of bringing alive the fourfold mandala of awareness in our lives, the beauty of developing one's potentiality for Enlightenment. The beauty of becoming aware of ourselves, and in the process becoming aware of how it is for others, too. For all these inconceivable billions of others, all trapped, to varying degrees, in samsaric patterns. All living lives which, to

varying degrees, are unsatisfactory. There is beauty in this, too, despite the tragedy, since we realise that each one of these inconceivably many beings also possesses this great potential. We befin to realise in much more detail in what this potential consists. It is as thought each of them possesses a priceless treasure that they don't even know about. This awareness transforms our appreciation of human suffering. We realise that we also are holding this priceless jewel. We realise that, now we have noticed what it is we are holding, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to others. We can actualise that potentiality by practising the Dharma. At this point, as we look upon the universe of unsatisfactory lives, we are transformed by universal compassion into the archetypal Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokitesvara. Holding at our heart the wish-fulfilling gem, we begin to formulate our great wish. And this is our foundation.

2 unification

Unification, or one-pointedness of mind, or simply concentration, is perhaps what we associate most with meditation. I can remember in my teens doing a factory job for a while, and I remember that in the lunch breaks I'd take my sandwiches out by the river and read *Concentration and Meditation,* by Christmas Humphries. Then, I'd sit there and meditate before returning to my plastics moulding machine. The work was completely repetitive. It involved the opening and closing of a sliding door every twenty seconds or so, and removing a hot, limp plastic artefact from the mould. I did it for several months, from nine to five with lunch and two tea breaks. I'm not sure that repetitive mechanical work is necessarily a bad thing. I found I could think and reflect while I was doing it, and I know I felt the meditation considerably stimulated my thinking and reflection.

Anyway, what was I trying to do? What is concentration of mind? In particular, what is especially characteristic of *meditative* concentration?

If it is characterised by all our energies being directed strongly towards some object, then is meditative concentration similar to what we experience when playing football, for example? Or even watching it on the television? When all our energies are powerfully directed towards the ball, scudding here and there? Or what about when we're doing our knitting? Carefully watching the needles and those fiddly little loops of wool? Or when we're balanced on a high wire hundreds of feet over New York? Or when we're driving around, eagle eyed, looking for a parking space? Or when we're aiming a high powered rifle, cooly focussing through our telescopic sights? Or when we are watching a good film, so absorbed that time seems not to exist? In all these activities, a very strong concentration is required.

So sometimes, meditation teachers make comparisons between meditation and such absorbing activities. I have done it, too. I am doing it now, in fact. But the comparisons don't communicate very well an essential quality that you experience in meditation: a certain quality of self-awareness. Actually a really good film or play can, occasionally, evoke that special self-awareness, but normally we are as it were lost in the action. Perhaps the best comparison is that of being very absorbed in a good conversation – especially if we are required to describe clearly what we mean, or what we feel. It is as though to concentrate fully in meditation, one needs to be in good communication with oneself. And that in full concentration or *dhyana*, that communication somehow goes beyond words. You might say that meditation is like developing the harmony which can arise out of good communication. One is first developing the harmony between the disharmonious factors within one's own mind; one may then learn how to be in harmony with reality in general.

The process of developing harmony within one's own mind happens in three stages.

First there is the stage of distraction, during which one has very little control over what is happening. Here one experiences one or more of the five *nivaranas* or hindrances. For example, it may be our energies that are out of focus. We're physically out of harmony, out of synch. We're too dull and sleepy to concentrate. Or we're too speedy, too restless, too stimulated. It's also quite likely our distraction has an emotional cause: we're out of harmony emotionally. Our real interest is caught up somewhere else, and our mind is occupied with that, not with the meditation; or we may perhaps be too angry to turn our mind to the object of the meditation practice. Or we may simply not *wish* to break off from the normal business of life: we may just *want* to think about whatever is on our mind, or follow the natural promptings of our senses. Or it may be that the problem is more of a rational nature. It's our thinking that is disjointed and disharmonious. We may actually doubt the value of meditation, and so feel unable to make even a temporary commitment to it.

Thus our reason, our emotion and our energy may all hold us captive in this stage of distraction. In fact, it's quite common for people to spend most – I don't like to say all – of their meditation time doing this. But this is not because the mind takes a long time to get concentrated, as we sometimes suppose. The mind doesn't take a long time to get concentrated. The mind can instantly become fully concentrated. No, the reason for our distraction is that our mind has not been properly prepared. This is really why we experience these five hindrances. For the great majority of our time, we actually live in the hindrances– they are our mental home, our normal place of refuge. Attempting to concentrate the mind in meditation simply reveals our actual mental states much more clearly than usual. If we

could only live in a way which did not stimulate these hindrances, we would quite naturally experience a continually concentrated state of mind.

Of course this is easy to say, but hard to do. It isn't at all easy to establish such a way of life, but if we know what the key factors are, we can work towards it. It can be done. The key factors are mostly ethical ones. You can see this if you think about what the hindrances mostly consist of. There is anger; craving; excessive mental preoccupation; doubt; overexcitement; dullness and dissipation. Where do these states of mind come from? Well, they come from us. They come from the way we behave. Our behaviour stimulates them. So if we really want to have a clear, concentrated mind, and be prepared for meditation, so that we spend little or no time in the stage of distraction, we will need to start changing our living habits, change the way we related to others, change the way we react to the pleasures and pains of existence. Change so that there is less anger, less craving, less mental preoccupation, etc. I know it is a very big project, bigger then anything else we're likely to be faced with in our lives, but then the benefits are superior to any other kind of benefit available.

We need to realise this and make the decisions which will actualise those benefits. In other words, more familiar words perhaps, we need to go for refuge, in our meditation, to the spiritual ideal. Go for refuge to actualising our potentiality for Enlightenment. Go for refuge to all the teachings and methods of practice available – our learning, our reflecting and our meditating. Go for refuge to all those supporting and guiding our efforts in going for refuge. It is this basic spiritual decision to trust the practice and engage in it with all our heart and mind, that can produce those changes in our lives. This decision, reaffirmed in each moment, is the very essence of meditation practice.

Of course, in support of this, there are also more practical conditions which help bring out the mind's potential for concentration. They are less important, because if we are quite consciously Going for refuge, then we will have a confidence which can override even very great practical difficulties. But practical conditions can still count for a lot, so that if we truly going for refuge in our meditation, then we'll want to do all we can to make sure we have the best possible. Just as an example, regularity can make all the difference – if we are in the habit of meditating every day, at the same time, we have a tremendous advantage. For many of us, physical conditions can also make a difference – if there's a lot of noise, it can be very hard not to be distracted. And the time of day makes a difference. How we eat, what we read, our communication – there are all kinds of small factors like this, and each person needs to experiment to find out what's best for them. This is what is so good about organised meditation retreats. It's so easy. The centre puts it together. You just go out to the country for a few days and there's no noise, and there's a regular programme, and you can get into meditation.

And on retreat, you're free. You've usually put the time aside. You've made sure you have the time, the freedom to engage fully with the practice. So that worries about that phone call you need to make, or work you need to do, all that doesn't come up in your meditation and turn into the hindrance of restlessness and anxiety. So away from retreat, too, this is another important factor – you need to be free to engage fully with the practice.

So it's true that very often we aren't all that well prepared, but even if we make just a little effort to be prepared, it does make a difference. It's partly also that the effort to be better prepared strengthens our resolve to meditate. The fact that we decided we'd try to be better prepared means that when we sit down on that meditation cushion, we really feel like making the most of our opportunity. And that feeling is more than half the battle. We actually *want* to meditate, and that isn't always the case.

Even then, meditation can still be something of a battle. But it's particularly when it gets difficult that our preparation really pays off. You have more energy to persevere in the practice. Because if you've been persevering against the hindrances all day anyway, in your preparation for meditation, then you're already much more self-aware. You're already experiencing yourself more deeply. So when a hindrance like restlessness and anxiety arises, you can actually recognise it when it happens. That ability to recognise is the advantage you need, because then you can do something to calm down a bit. Usually we don't even notice what's happening.

So this is very important, that we get established in experiencing ourselves all the time, so that we are always prepared for meditation. Then we shall be able to make much better progress against distraction in our meditation. It's then that we can more easily find the second stage, that point where concentration gets a little easier.

Through that preparation, we've overcome some of our attachment to the five hindrances. That might seem strange, that we can actually prefer negative and painful mental states, but this is just what we do when we permit distraction. Still, now, as we sit in meditation, something in us is lightening up, and

we just don't experience the same conflict. Our energies start to flow more, and the practice becomes enjoyable and easy. This state of relative harmony is called 'access concentration'. We can still lose this state easily enough, but if we're relaxed about it — don't get too excited and then go rigid with panic about losing it – we can usually stay in access concentration for a while. This is because we are now in a position in which we more easily recognise when we start getting distracted, and so pull ourselves out of the distraction.

And if we are patient, and persistent, and engage fully and wholeheartedly in the meditation, then eventually we enter the third stage, the stage of full concentration otherwise known as dhyana. We know when this is happening, because the meditation becomes much easier still, and very enjoyable indeed – far more enjoyable than it was in access concentration. Access is comparatively peaceful, but this really *is* peaceful. We experience all kinds of good mental and physical sensations. Priti and sukha, for example. Priti is a kind of thrill of ecstasy which is partly mental, but mainly physical. The mind is filled with joy, sometimes quite suddenly, taking one by surprise, and there is a physical aspect which is like one's skin standing on end and tingling with pleasure. Or sometimes you might feel the muscles of your heart or your abdomen sort of twanging with a great wave of pleasure which just surges through your body. This priti isn't necessarily so dramatic; it varies from one person to another and can be quite subtle. Sukha is a bliss. It is a deeper, more satisfying enjoyment. It is sometimes translated as 'happiness'. Then, accompanying these emotional qualities of the state of dhyana is an increased unification of the thinking part of your mind, that is of your *vitarka* and your *vicara*. Vitarka is when you simply call something to mind – for example, the practice you are doing. "Oh yes, I'm doing the Mindfulness of Breathing"; that thought is vitarka. Vicara is when you start thinking about it, going into more detail. For example, we might think, "Hmm – I'm losing it because I'm rushing, I need to find a way to calm down." At the level of dhyana there isn't any distracted thinking going on; it's mostly about the practice. At the level of access there may be some discursive activity going on in the background, but it really is in the background and you can just let it play itself out. Your energies are firmly engaged with the practice, so that your vitarka and your vicara are very calm and quiet. In the three dhyana stages higher than the first, there is no vitarka/vicara at all¸ no thinking – or if there is any, it is very very subtle indeed, certainly very different from our ordinary thinking.

So the main characteristics of dhyana are the emotional, that is, priti and sukha, and the cognitive, that is, vitarka and vicara. The fifth is *ekagrata* or one-pointedness of mind. This is a bit like the unification of our consciousness as a factor in itself. There is a sense of growing integration and unification. The mind is all pointing in the same direction.

You could say the mind is all going for refuge, at least all of it is doing that at the moment. The decision to change yourself has been taken down to a deeper level, and the present contents of your mind have all come in line with that decision.

It is the presence of these five characteristics which show us that our consciousness is in a state of dhyana. Though dhyanas have different flavours –dhyana is not limited to the five factors of dhyana. There are likely to be other states of mind too. There will be no negative emotions, but there are almost certain to be other positive emotions, like faith, metta, joy, and inspiration.

I won't say much more about all the different levels of dhyana tonight. The details can seem rather technical. But overall, as you get deeper into a state of meditation, you find the combination of dhyana factors changes, aside from any other emotions giving a special flavour to the mind. In the second dhyana the vitakka and vicara drop away, so that your mind is characterised just by ekagatta, the ecstatic pleasure or priti, and sukha. At the third dhyana level, the priti drops away and you experience just bliss, that is sukha, and the ekagatta. At the fourth, the quality of the bliss deepens, and it becomes upeksha or equanimity, so that there is just upeksha and ekagatta, one pointedness of mind. These, upeksha and ekagatta, now remain as the characteristics of jhana throughout the remaining four higher dhyana levels beyond the first four I've just described. In a sense they are extensions of the fourth jhana. They are known as the arupa- or formless dhyanas, whereas the first four are known as the rupa dhyanas, the dhyanas of the realm of form. The realm of form, or rupaloka, is the normal state of being and consciousness for us humans, as it is also according to tradition for animals, hungry ghosts, asuras, beings in states of suffering, and certain devas or gods. We have bodies that are visible and have a certain shape. The inhabitants of the arupaloka or formless world, or the world of exceedly subtle form, have no shape, though they may manifest as light or perfume, so their bodies, if not completely formless, are exceedingly subtle. These are of course the great devas and Brahmas.

But we'll have to come back to the first dhyana. Here we are unified, one person. Our emotional and cognitive energies are going for refuge together to something higher; a unification of the will has taken

shape. We can use any meditation practice as a medium for achieving this unification of energies. Some, traditionally, lead only to access concentration. The Mindfulness of Breathing meditation is perhaps the most straightforward medium for developing the dhyanas, though for some people the Metta Bhavana and other Brahmavihara Bhavanas are even better, since they work so directly on positive emotion. However, we talked about Metta Bhavana last week, so this week it's time to talk about Mindfulness of Breathing.

There is a short sutta in the Pali Canon which gives a detailed discussion of the practice of Anapanasati, that is, the Mindfulness of Breathing. It's called the Anapanasati Sutta, and it's the 118th discourse in the Majjhima Nikaya. According to this sutta, the practice can be broken down into four stages, each of four substages. There is a stage at which attention is paid most of all to the physical aspects of the breathing. The next focuses on the feeling aspect. The third stage focuses on the mind itself, and the final stage looks at specific objects of the mind, so that it becomes a kind of vipassana or insight meditation.

These are not stages in quite the same sense as we have in the FWBO with our four stage Mindfulness of Breathing, in which we mark the out breath with a count, mark the in breath with a count, experience the flow of the breath, and finally experience the touch of the breath at the nose. The stages of the Anapanasati Sutta are a kind of guide to the way the practice can deepen. And it does this without mentioning the dhyanas at all. Some people have understood this to suggest that the Buddha never actually taught the dhyanas, and asserting that this is particularly old sutta, one which in particular has not been altered in the process of writing down from the oral tradition[iv]. However there are many suttas just as old as the Anapanasati, in which the Buddha does teach the four dhyanas, and there is no evidence that there is anything special about it. It just doesn't mention the dhyanas. So perhaps we can conclude that the Buddha had more than one way of approaching meditation, and that it maybe isn't necessary for us to be too concerned about whether or not we develop dhyana, so long as we deepen our concentration. And in any case, the experiences which the sutta describes can easily be interpreted as dhyanic experiences. It certainly speaks of the dhyana factors of piti and sukha.

So I'll go through these four fourfold stages. First of all, the four stages of experiencing the physical breath. First of all, the Buddha says:

"Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit[v]'... And how?… here, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out'.

1. Breathing in long, he understands, 'I breathe in long'; or breathing out long, he understands, 'I breathe out long.'
2. Breathing in (or breathing out) short, he understands, 'I breathe in (or out) short'…
3. He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and breathe out) experiencing the whole body [of the breath].'
4. He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and breathe out) tranquillising the bodily formation.'"

So as you meditate, know when your breath is long, and when it is short. In other words, just experience each breath exactly as it is. Is this a long one, or a short one, what's it like? Each breath is, in a way, unique. It can be long or short, or somewhere in between. So just experience it as it is. Notice, too, the quality of the breathing. A breath may well seem to be 'short' when we are unaware of it. We're not that sensitive to it, still pretty distracted, so it just seems like a gasp, with no quality to it; air just comes in and goes out. In, out; In-out. Here, we're not really engaging. But our breathing may seem longer when we are paying attention to its details. Our mind is now sufficiently receptive to notice all the details, so there is more to the breath. So it's as though it's 'long.'

So by comparing these two experiences of the breath, we gradually tune in to the overall experience of the breathing. We familiarise ourselves with the sensation, get deeper into the experience. So next, we make sure we are experiencing the whole breath-body, the whole volume of the breath. I'm sure you know from experience that it's quite possible, when you're doing this practice, to slightly forget what you are doing, so that it's as though the object slips a bit, and what you are now concentrating on is not quite the breath any more. Maybe you are starting to think about something else at the same time, so that the actual experience of the breathing fades a little into the background. So make sure that it is actually the breath you are concentrating on. The breath is something objective, external to you, the subject. Experience the actual body of the breath as different from the rest of the body. It's as though there were a 'breath body' moving inside the flesh and bones body.

Finally, we 'breathe in (and out) tranquillising the bodily formation.' Bodily formation or *kayasankhara* may be understood passively, to mean our physical formation, that is as our flesh body as opposed to our breath body. It can also be understood actively as 'that which forms the body' or 'the conditioner of the body. ' So the breath body moving inside is seen as something that *conditions* the flesh body which contains it. The state of our breathing affects the relaxation of the whole physical system. When it's rough and ragged, the body is not relaxed. When it's gentle and light, the body becomes quiet and calm. In the language we were using just now, the breathing is becoming increasingly 'long'. As we become more aware of the breathing, it relaxes even more. And as a result, the whole organism, the whole body tends to calm down. So the breath, becoming calm, calms the body. The calming breath is the body-conditioner, the condition which calms the body. Breath and body are mutually conditioning each other all the time; they are part of one another.

Now secondly, the different stages of the feeling aspect of the breathing.

5. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) experiencing rapture' (i.e. *priti*).'"

6. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) experiencing pleasure' (i.e. *sukha*).'"

7. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) experiencing the mental formation.'"

8. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) tranquillising the mental formation.'"

Now that the breath and the body have become calm, one experiences, along with the breathing, priti and sukha. These arise due to one's being in a more concentrated state of mind. Presumably this is a dhyana state, though the sutta doesn't use this terminology. But actually we could also be experiencing the beginnings of priti and sukha in a pre-dhyana state, in access concentration, and in fact to do this can be a help in deepening one's concentration. The general point, though, is that we now give attention to these feelings and emotions, and enjoy them along with the detailed awareness of the breathing. In experiencing them, we experience their differences, we compare them and evaluate the experience of them. We've already seen that priti is relatively coarse; it is stimulating. But it is not itself very helpful for concentration – it is a kind of by-product of the process of concentration. Sukha is subtler and gentler and more satisfying. It deepens concentration. Still, it is the more sober of the two qualities, whereas priti is more fun. It is exciting. And so, like all such things, we can be a bit attached to it. So in this stage we experience the differences more clearly, see the greater value of sukha, and let go any feelings of attachment to priti. In this way the concentration can get more calm and more peaceful. So then, when as the sutta says, 'I shall breathe in (and out) experiencing the mental formation', or *samskara*, it means that through the previous stages we have started getting acquainted with the way the feelings condition the mind. So now, along with the breathing, we are starting also to experience the mind and its relationship to the feelings of piti and sukha. As the concentration deepens, piti gets absorbed into sukha, sukha becomes the stronger of the two, and this change is reflected in the state of the citta. We see how this change conditions the citta, the mind, see how it becomes more peaceful and happy. So in the final stage we ' breathe in (and out) tranquillising the mental formation.' That is, having seen how this process of tranquillisation takes place, through the refinement of the feelings, through priti being absorbed into sukha, we have the experience and confidence to engage more deliberately in the process.

You can see, I hope, that this process takes place very naturally – the sutta is in a way just describing something that happens of its own accord. However, knowing it can help us to allow that natural unfoldment of concentration to take place, rather than inhibiting it as we usually do.

OK, we'll go on to the third process, the mind or heart process, the process of *citta*. It is as follows.

9. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) experiencing the heart.'"

10. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) gladdening the heart.'"

11. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) concentrating the heart.'"

12. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) liberating the heart.'"

So, 'experiencing the heart.' What kind of state are we in, as we concentrate on the breathing? No doubt we are in first dhyana, but now we assess ourselves with each breath. Are we subtly influenced by craving, hatred or delusion? It would have to be subtle, otherwise we could not be in a concentrated state at all. Are we distracted or concentrated? Presumably, we're concentrated. Is this the ultimate state of mind, could there be anything better than this? Presumably, there's more. Is the citta liberated, or is there still some subtle clinging? Presumably there is.

So this stage is one of acknowledging very clearly where we are actually at. Then with each in and out breath we 'gladden the heart.' The word is pamodaya or delight – it's one of the nidanas in the positive series. It is the feeling you get when you know you've done things right, when you've got a clear conscience. You can look back and think, "I'm glad I did that," not in a selfish, self-congratulatory way, but it's just a simple fact. You can sometimes be delighted with yourself, and this is what we do at this stage. We can delight ourselves. Sometimes when we meditate we can get a bit dry and wooden, it all seems like too much hard work. But here, we delight the mind, delight the heart, by recollecting that what we are doing in meditating and practising the Dharma is excellent in so many ways. This delighting in the Dharma renews our energy, and enables us to concentrate much more strongly. We are able to put ourselves heart and soul into the practice, and this is what it means by 'concentrating the heart.' Then 'liberating the heart.' We begin to let go some of our attachments to ideas of 'me' and 'mine.' We begin, in other words, to enter the realm of insight or vipassana. The final stages take this further. They are as follows:

13. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) contemplating impermanence.'"

14. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) contemplating fading away.'"

15. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) contemplating cessation.'"

16. "He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in (and out) contemplating relinquishment.'"

I won't say too much about these because here the meditation becomes an insight meditation, and I want to concentrate on insight or vipassana in my talk next week. Impermanence, Fading away, cessation, relinquishment: the words are anicca, viraaga, nirodha, and pat.inissagga. All aspects of deepening insight which enable us to strengthen the process of liberation from samsara which has already started.

So I think these four fourfold stages of deepening meditation give us quite a good idea of what is involved in both samatha and vipassana meditation, and of what the benefits of meditation are.

Meditation practice is at the centre of an overall path of development, and should not be seen as isolated from it. We always need to refer back to the four Right Efforts and the going for Refuge, and ask: am I actually trying to change myself through this practice? Am I going for Refuge in this practice? Whenever we realise that we're no longer doing so, we should reflect deeply on what we really want, and recover our going for Refuge again. But part of this work of unifying the mind lies outside the sitting meditation practice. It has to, even for practical reasons. Very few of us have the opportunity to meditate full time, even if we'd like to. Anyway, full time meditators at least have to eat and go to the toilet, and they even sometimes have to do other things as well. So for all of us the 'in between' practice, what we do in between sessions of meditation, is of very great importance.

The guiding principle of 'in between' practice is the development of awareness. The self awareness and vision which we have brought into being through meditation should be diminished as little as possible by what we do between practices, and ideally it should be increased – it is actually quite possible to increase it. But usually outside meditation our awareness and vision are very vulnerable to being diminished through distraction. When we are meditating, in potential at least we have complete control over our mind. But when we leave our meditation cushion, we are open to many distractions which are not of our own making. Through our meditation we will be strengthening our mind, and gaining more control over our tendency to be distracted, but there is inevitably going to be a constant struggle as one moment we gravitate towards distraction, and the next we pull ourselves back.

To watch over this area is the job of Mindfulness, or sati. Awareness of what we are doing, plus our motivation and purpose in doing it. Unless we watch what we are doing in this way, we will constantly be losing what we gain in meditation, and in meditation we will always be starting again from point zero.

The basic faculty of Mindfulness is something we exercise quite naturally, because it is essentially the faculty of memory. At least at the moment, at least at this stage of our lives, we can remember who we are, can remember our name and our language, can remember our friends and relations, remember where we are going and where we have come from, remember how to do all the things we need to do. This memory is what gives us our continuity in life, gives us our identity and our sense of purpose. The Buddhist practice of sati-sampajañña just applies this basic human faculty to the spiritual life.

From a spiritual point of view too, we need a sense of continuity and a sense of identity, need a sense of what we are trying to do, and why. Practising mindfulness, we identify ourselves as a committed

Buddhist practitioner, as a proto-Bodhisattva; we remember that that is what we are. We remember that we go for Refuge, that we wish to develop the four right efforts, want to eradicate and prevent unwholesome states of mind, maintain and develop good states of mind. And we remember why we go for Refuge – remember the insight and the vision which has convinced us that this is what we want. So we now keep a watch and ward over our whole existence. In particular, we monitor those four areas mentioned in the Anapanasati Sutta: monitor what we do physically, monitor our feelings and emotional reactions, monitor our general state of consciousness, and monitor the content, the objects of our consciousness.

In the Anapanasati Sutta, the Buddha says that doing the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation helps develop these four foundations of Mindfulness. Through developing such a close acquaintance with our breathing, we become much more intimately in touch with ourselves. And obviously to develop these four foundations in ordinary life will also support our practice of meditation – it'll support any meditation practice, but it will support especially, of course, the Mindfulness of Breathing practice.

It'll support our whole spiritual life, in and out of meditation, because that's exactly what it is. Just as the practice of spiritual friendship, and the practice of the four right efforts, can be said to sum up the whole spiritual life, so also can the four foundations of mindfulness. Because we don't just 'monitor' our body and our feelings; we don't just monitor our subjective mind and our objects of mind. Mindfulness is not something merely passive, just a mirror held up to our existence. It isn't just 'being in the present moment', like a plant. The four foundations of mindfulness sum up the whole spiritual life, with an emphasis on the word *life*, because it is what keeps us alive spiritually. Mindfulness is the practice of remembering our going for Refuge and expressing it in our deeds. Remembering always to liberate ourselves from every act, word, thought and emotion that has become habitually unwholesome.

The practice of mindfulness, then, is one of directing and unifying the will. In the Buddha's simile in the Dhammapada, farmers direct the precious water through special channels through the fields so that all the crops' roots receive moisture. Those who make arrows take great pains to make them straight, so that they fly in a perfect arc to their destination. And carpenters use all their skill in exactly shaping their timber to the job in hand. In the same way, the wise control the activity of their minds in fine detail, by directing and redirecting its natural will. It is the nature of the mind to go where it will. This is a fact of existence and there is nothing in the universe that can change it, not even a Buddha. The skill is in training our will so that we want wholesome things, things which are liberating. So that when the mind does its natural thing, and goes wherever it wills, it turns out that this will is of spiritual benefit to all. In our mind we create channels, the channels that are our habitual patterns of behaviour, thought and emotion; channels which can become beneficial if we unify the energy of our will, and retrain it away from the old, unwholesome habits.

It will obviously take some time to unify the energy of our wanting with our going for Refuge. To really change ourselves we need, over a period of time, gradually to bring together all our resources, all the resources which the four foundations of mindfulness represent: resources physical, emotional, and cognitive. Bodily energies, emotional responses, views, perceptions, even moods – all these need to start to come together, to work together in unity and harmony. We need to get them to do this. But how? Well, we can practice mindfulness – if we do that all the time there is no doubt that this will be the effect. The Buddha said that if one really practised mindfulness fully, day and night, even just for one single week, one would gain Enlightenment. However most of us can't sustain such a level of practice. We need to work up to that degree of focus, maybe over some years.

There is another important way in which we can unite all the forces of the will, and bring about this unification of body, emotion, and cognition. This is through the whole area of prayer and ritual.

We don't use the word prayer very much in the FWBO, though the idea is not uncommon in Tibetan Buddhism. I wonder if we wouldn't find it very useful if we did, too. Our western associations with the word prayer seem to be the problem, since they invoke a relationship with an all-powerful deity, a creator god. This is, of course, a notion Buddhism specifically rejects. There may exist powerful deities, but no God is all-powerful, and no god created the universe. It seems that any such god is unenlightened, and subject to karma and rebirth like anyone else in samsara.

So if there are Buddhist forms of prayer, what forms do they take? In Christianity, there is petitionary prayer, confession, intercession, praise and thanksgiving, adoration, and unitative prayer. All of these take place in some sort of dialogue with God, so can there be a Buddhist version, a non-theistic version?

Well, take petitionary prayer, for example. I don't know whether or not the press reports are as fair and objective with respect to other Buddhist groups as they are to the FWBO, but we are told by the press that there exist Buddhists who chant mantras for the sake of obtaining top careers, and such icons of materialistic success as Porsche cars. Apparently it works, and I can well believe that it does. Surely this is simply a way of focusing one's desire. If one is very strongly motivated and single minded, then – all other things being equal, and assuming, of course, that one has the requisite talent and the opportunity – then one is likely to get what one wants. For better and for worse, that is. For bundled with the karma of wanting a Porsche that badly, must come a vipaka, a karmic result: that is, the mental feeling that desire arouses. What that feeling is, and the likely reactions to it, will of course vary according to the individual – and I'm not going to say any more on that topic, because we are in danger of getting distracted away from the petitionary prayer that helped produce the Porsche in the first place. Surely this is what it is, a petitionary prayer; except in this prayer, formulated within a Buddhist framework, I presume no God has been petitioned. I don't know what is the rationale for the Porsche prayer, and I have come to assume that such press stories are to at least some extent unjust. But I think as Buddhists we could say that what is invoked are simply the forces of the universe. One is simply focusing one's desire. In this particular case, if it's true, one could possibly also be inflating one's desire in a way that could become unskilful. But in this focusing of desire I think we can also discern a potential which is positive. One can pray that one will change, that one will become more ethical, that one will listen more carefully, that one will be more kind, that one will be capable of telling the truth. And this kind of prayer needs no God to make it work, in just the same way that a Porsche prayer needs no God to make it work. It works to the extent that your praying has made it important for you. In principle, if personal change is really important to you, you'll find a way to do it, by hook or by crook. Prayer, in this sense, is a way of keeping its importance in mind; a way of maintaining our mindfulness of it.

Prayer in this sense is surely very similar to the entreaty and supplication section of Shantideva's Sevenfold Puja. And I can also see echoes of confession, intercession, praise and thanksgiving, and adoration in the Sevenfold Puja. It is just that a creator God is not invoked; we don't consider that at all necessary or realistic. The fact that one opens one's heart and confesses has its own effect. The fact that one wishes what is truly good for all beings has it's own very powerful effect. It's the same with worship of the Buddha and the Dharma. It just has an effect, which happens quite naturally. Certainly an effect on one's own mind. It may well have a secondary effect on others' minds, and I don't see why there may not also be some more universal effect created simply by generating and clarifying our wishes and motivations.

Prayer of this kind, and ritual which sets such prayer in a colourful, dramatic context of music and poetry, is something which impresses itself on the mind, and in this way can keep one's practice alive. It can encourage one to keep practising mindfulness, and meditation. It can remind us of the spiritual path.

That reference to unificatory prayer in the Christian tradition has reminded me of a possible misunderstanding that the title of my talk might encourage. The spiritual path *is* a path of unification, but the goal of the spiritual path is not – in the words of that awful joke about the Zen Master and the hot dog salesman – to 'make us one with everything'. Or at least, 'oneness' is not a particular goal of Buddhist meditation. The Buddha was once asked what was the path to union with God, or Brahma, and he was quite happy to teach it, in his own way. So he taught the four dwelling-places of Brahma, the four Brahma-Viharas of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. To him, to do this was to become one with all life in the sense that one had the deepest possible awareness for it and related to it in the deepest possible way, in the sort of way that people imagine God might do. The difference in Buddhism is that one realises that one cannot leave such important responsibilities to anyone else. One has oneself to become as a god, to develop the great love and compassion, and the sense of responsibility, which one might associate with God, plus one additional and essential factor which is enlightenment. This may sound rather a lot to aim for, even sound quite absurdly sublime. Yet it does actually describe the cosmic scale and scope of Buddhist endeavour, and the spiritual stature of the Buddha himself.

No, I used the word 'unification' to indicate the aspect of integration that takes place in the process of one of the two principal kinds of Buddhist meditation, that is *samatha*. Samatha is that meditation which promotes unification and integration of all the forces of body, communication, and mental activity, so that they are under the control of the meditator. So that they can be used to develop insight into whatever reality might turn out to be.

That is next week's topic. Tonight we've been considering the unification of our mind in meditation, and we've looked at it in the three stages of dhyana, access concentration and distraction. We thought about the factors which might keep us in a distracted state of mind, and so make us unprepared for meditation. Factors over which we need to keep watch and ward through the practice of mindfulness, like the state of our going for Refuge, the state of our will and emotion. We briefly considered practical conditions, like when and where we practice. Then we thought about the signs of progress in meditation, the characteristics of access concentration and dhyana. And next we considered how we might apply all this in the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation, as taught in sixteen deepening stages by the Buddha in the Anapanasati Sutta. In particular, we considered the first twelve stages, as we become aware of the state of our breathing, allowing it to calm the body, and also allowing the still body to still the breathing. As we allow ourselves to feel the pleasant feelings connected with this relaxing of body and allow this pleasure to calm the mind; and then, as we experience the mind itself more intimately, we then gladden, concentrate, and liberate the mind. Coming out of this unification of mind in meditation, we spent some time considering in much more detail the vital importance of mindfulness in unifying our lives in between sessions of meditation. And as mindfulness is essentially a means of channeling our desire and will, we concluded by thinking about the function of prayer and ritual as a means of unifying the energy of our wanting with our going for Refuge. Prayer in Buddhism seems to offer us a way of keeping faithful to our aspirations by our forcefully reminding ourselves of what they are.

3 gravitation

In the ancient Buddhist monasteries of India, the crafty old senior monks – the ones who had been around for a few years and knew a few tricks – they knew how to size people up. Most especially, they'd size up the novice monks. Any new monk coming into the monastery would have housework to do. Over their first few in the monastery, these old monks would observe them, observe them with inscrutible mindfulness. For example, they'd observe the way they swept the floor. Now some of us, when given the job of sweeping a floor, will violently grab the broom, and they'll charge about in a jerky sort of fashion. They'll roughly sweep the dust into a heap, getting more into the air than into the dustpan. But I'm sure you've noticed how others will go about that kind of work quite differently. They'll be extremely methodical. They'll sweep carefully and neatly, taking their time, making sure every corner is swept, making a perfect job of it. Again there are other people who are inconsistent. On some days, they'll do the work roughly, like the first person, on others they'll be neat and careful, like the second.

Differences like these can provide basic clues to where someone is coming from. So to get to know someone, observe how they do things. These old, inscrutible monks could even tell something from the way these people kept their rooms. The first person's room would be an untidy mess. The bed would be unmade, and unwashed clothes would be scattered across the floor. The second person's room would be oh, so neat and tidy, as though it had just been springcleaned, with perhaps a vase of fresh flowers on the table. Occasionally, you'd see the third person's room like that, too, but normally the state of their room varied from week to week.

And the way people eat food can also be rather revealing. The first kind of person hardly looks at what they are eating. They always just shovel in great mouthfuls of stuff, which they hardly taste, but just chew a few times before swallowing. The second person's approach, as you can guess by now, is quite different: they'll neatly hold their knife and fork, and they'll savour every morsel. The third person, true to type, sometimes does it one way, sometimes another.

I don't know if you can recognise anyone you know, or even yourself, from this traditional classification of personality types. The first, with the untidy room and aggressive sweeping style, is inclined to aversion. The second type, the oh-so-neat-and-tidy one, is inclined to greed. The third kind, who varies from day to day, is inclined to delusion. So there's a hate type, a greed type, and a delusion type. Do you wonder what you are? Please don't be offended if I say you're probably more or less the third kind. All unenlightened beings are deluded, after all – including the first and second types. We all probably know a few pure hate or pure greed types, but they aren't the norm. You'll probably find you have plenty of both greed and hatred, though you tend to one rather more than the other.

If this isn't very clear, look at it this way. If you're a hate type, you experience more pain than pleasure. Things are continually annoying you. And the fact that on top of everything, you now have to sweep the floor, or go and eat something – or do anything, really – is just a pain in the neck. That's why you act so aggressively. If you're a greed type, you experience more pleasure than pain. Nice things usually happen to you. How nice to have a nice meal. How nice to have been asked to sweep the floor. You know you can do it nicely, and that people will appreciate it. How nice that will be.

Now, most of us hover from one of these modes to the other. When we're in a good mood, experiencing pleasure, we're nice. When we're in a bad mood, experiencing pain, we're rather nasty. Greed types, who experience lots of pleasure, tend to act in a way that strengthens their attachment to pleasant things. Hate types, who experience lots of pain, tend to act in a way that strengthens their aversion to painful things. It's very natural that both should do what they do. Delusion types are doing lots of both – reinforcing both attachment and aversion. This can sometimes be rather confusing for us.

The simple point I am making here is that we human beings are very differently conditioned. we come from different places; we gravitate in different directions. The question, and the question those old monks had in mind, is what is it that will help each individual gravitate towards Enlightenment? Generally, it is of course the Buddha's path, the threefold Path of *sila*, or ethical behaviour, of *samadhi*, or higher states of consciousness developed in meditation, and *prajna* or transcendental wisdom. This

is what we all need, without exception. But that is a very broad formulation of the path. At some point, each of us needs to address our own specific needs: address the particular gravitational tendencies which obscure our development of *sila*, *samadhi* and *prajna*.

Let's take an individual case. When the Buddha was in his early middle age, he started to go around with an attendant. Before the famous Ananda came on the scene, the Buddha went through quite a few of these – they weren't always very satisfactory. For example, Meghiya. Meghiya was a *young* monk, who perhaps couldn't be expected fully to appreciate his opportunity. At any rate, one hot day, while he was out begging, he saw a lovely shady grove of mango trees at the side of the road. Meghiya got it into his head that here was the ideal place for retreat – his retreat. The Buddha wanted Meghiya to stay with him, he needed to have someone around. But Meghiya started to insist that he needed to go and meditate, right now. Here was the idea place. It was all right for the Buddha to talk, perfectly enlightened as he was. But he, Meghiya, was unenlightened as yet. The Buddha would be *standing in the way* of his enlightenment, if he didn't let him go into retreat, right now! So, what could the Buddha do? "OK, since you insist, what can I say? – do whatever you think is right," he said. And off went Meghiya. Sitting in that lovely shady grove, though, he couldn't meditate at all. He tried hard, but found he was so distracted. All kinds of thoughts arose, and turned around and around in his mind. He became extremely angry with someone, and indulged in sadistic fantasies. And as if that wasn't enough, his mind was also filled with craving for hot sex, chocolate chip ice cream, and the next generation of PC software. And as if even that wasn't enough, he had to go back and face the Buddha, who was patiently waiting for him and who – even more humiliatingly – probably already knew, telepathically, what had gone on in his mind.

It was not in the Buddha's nature, of course, to crow over Meghiya's mistake. He simply pointed out that when one's heart is still immature, and in need of training in the Dharma, then one needs to practice more than just meditation. One needs, in fact, five things. First and foremost, one needs spiritual friendship. Then one needs an ethical mode of life. And one needs plenty of opportunity to discuss the Dharma – and yes, of course one also needs to cultivate meditation, as well as insight, but one's success in meditation will depend on the other factors.

The Buddha added that all these benefits flow from spiritual friendship; they evolve, in regular stages, from spiritual friendship. If one just cultivates spiritual friendship, everything else will follow. In contact with a good friend, you can expect to learn much more about how to be ethical. In company with a good friend, you can expect to get all the talk you need about the Dharma. With the encouragement and admonishment of a good friend, you can expect to put energy into your meditation, and so gain insight. Everything you need to create the spiritual life flows from cultivating spiritual friendship.

In the FWBO, we set great store by this teaching. We greatly emphasise communication with one's Dharma brothers and sisters. It is important to remember that spiritual friendship is not ordinary friendship, though it usually includes that. Essentially it is a friendship in which the central element is each person's commitment to actualising their potential for Enlightenment. There are two kinds of spiritual friend. There is the spiritual friend who is much more experienced than ourselves – someone who shows us how to grow and develop simply through their own example. In the FWBO we don't use the word 'guru' for this kind of person – it has some unfortunate connotations – we use the traditional Buddhist term *kalyanamitra* – which means the good friend, someone who we look up to as an example. Kalyanamitrata, or spiritual friendship, can also be less of a 'vertical' thing. It can also be 'horizontal', and this 'horizontal' kalyanamitrata is as important for most of us as the 'vertical' kind. It is the spiritual friendship we have with those whose experience of spiritual life is roughly at the same level as our own. We are all relatively experienced in some areas, and relatively inexperienced in others. This means there is always something we can learn from others, especially from our brothers and sisters in the Dharma. Of course they can learn a great deal from us, though not always in the ways we want them to.

Anyway, we are now given a very clear example of 'vertical' *kalyanamitrata* in that Meghiya, despite his former argumentativeness, now seems quite ready to learn from the Buddha. So the Buddha advises Meghiya about his more personal spiritual needs. Meghiya had, for example, been distracted by a great deal of lust. Of course, this was natural enough – he was a healthy young man – but nevertheless, if he ever wanted to meditate deeply, Meghiya needed to find a way to round it. So as an antidote, the Buddha recommended meditating on what he called the the unbeautiful, the horrid, or the impure. Meghiya had also experienced anger. For this, the Buddha recommended the Metta Bhavana, the meditation on lovingkindness. But then, there was also Meghiya's general distractedness: his thoughts

had directed his mind so obsessively, so repeatedly on to those pleasant and painful fantasies, so that it was impossible for him not to be overwhelmed. The recommendation here was, as you may have guessed, the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation. There was just one more thing. Over the course of their friendship, the Buddha had observed, as wise old monks sometimes do, that Meghiya's own idea of himself was somewhat wide of the mark. For this wrong self-view, he recommended that Meghiya meditate on impermanence.

In his very early days, the Buddha had given a particular description of the *paticca samuppada* or the dependently arising quality of the mind and the world, the cyclic samsaric aspect of which we looked at last week. It was a positive description of dependent arising as a progression. A progression arising directly out of the frustrations of samsara, directly out of that knot of reaction to painful and pleasant feelings that we spoke of last week, but this time out towards faith, towards clarity of heart, concentration, meditation, insight, and liberation. He described this positive progression as being like a river flowing, and finally over-flowing, so that it fills all the cataracts and all the tiny streams, fills the small rivers, fills the great rivers, fills even the boundless mighty ocean.

And this image of flowing water reminds me of how in the White Lotus Sutra the Buddha – the great spiritual friend – was compared to a great rain cloud, showering life-giving rain on all the plants, large and small. And the rain all flowing down to the Great Ocean, purifying everything. Last week we were talking about the Ocean of samsara; but tonight, we look at the fact that this ocean of samsara is also, in potential at least, the ocean of nirvana. Sip the waters of nirvana and samsara carefully, and you'll find they taste the same even if one is poisonous; both are made of the same reality, the mind; and through the Dharma, one is transformed into the other. So the great ocean is also the ocean of the Dharma, says the Buddha, and it contains many wonders. It is full of jewels, gems, and great sea-monsters. The Dharma ocean is brimming with every kind of spiritual practice imaginable, with all kinds of ways for human beings to liberate themselves. And these are the jewels. They are wish-fulfilling jewels like the one Avalokitesvara holds to his heart when he formulates his great wish, his great aspiration for all beings. Jewels like the three trainings, the four right efforts, the thirty seven Wings of Enlightenment, the eightfold Path. All these jewels are wish-fulfilling jewels because they are the means through which our spiritual wishes can actually come true.

But to fish precious jewels from the ocean of the Dharma, you have actually to get in to the ocean, personally. The Buddha tries to be very reassuring at this point: he says that there are no abrupt precipices in the Dharma Ocean, that training in the Dharma is gradual, step by step. So at first, encouraged by this, you just dip in your little toe. And soon you feel ready to plunge right in, and get yourself thoroughly soaked. Then, you can surf the Dharma, you can swim, you can dive into it, and go deep, go deep into the blue depths of reality. You can even go so deep that you never come out. You can even drown in the Dharma, and be reborn there as a new kind of being. You then live in the ocean of Dharma. Occasionally, someone may spot you as a fin breaks the surface. They may spy one of the great and wonderful monsters emerging, momentarily, from the deep. Like the Leviathan, the Fish Eater, and other fascinating monsters which the Buddha describes living somewhere in the great Ocean of Dhamma. All of them are very large, he says, measuring up to 500 yojanas. I believe that is about four thousand miles – so start now getting used to the idea of having continental dimensions.

Now the Buddha knew that if Meghiya was ever to dive deeply, he needed to engage emotionally. In other words, he had to learn to *want* spiritual development – want it with his whole heart and mind. Because we are what we want. We are determined by our desires. We become what we desire – for better and for worse. We saw last week that all beings in conditioned existence are continually changing, becoming now this, now that – and that the constant change is determined by the habits we build up in our emotional responses to pleasant and painful feelings. In each moment, we are responding, and each response affects us. The effects build up, day in and day out, over our lives, and that's how we change. The process is called karma and karma-vipaka: action, and result of action. We experience a feeling, pleasurable or painful – that's a karma result. Then we react with an emotion – that's the karma, that's the action. The emotions with which we respond to particular feelings gradually determine, over time, what feelings arise in the future.

Let's say someone you know is rather tedious. Or – putting it more accurately – *you find them* tedious. Contact with them is mildly unpleasant – for *you*. This unpleasant feeling that *you* get, when *you* see them, arouses a certain aversion. Time passes, and you get in the habit of avoiding their company, and also not always listening to what they say. Now, *you* can't help the fact that being with them is painful, but actually *you* generated that emotion of aversion. *You* made the emotion stronger – *you* acted on it, *you* started avoiding them, ignoring them… Time passes – next time you see them, the feeling is

stronger. It is no longer mildly unpleasant. It is now definitely a pain to see them, because you have changed in relation to them. Time passes – and now when you see them, the feeling is even worse. You absolutely hate them. You can't stand to be with them, it's such a pain.

The process can go much further, unfortunately, but I won't go on. There's no limit to how bad the situation can get. And it's the same with craving. Craving is the process of addiction, our addictive responses to pleasure. We start to rely on a particular source of pleasure for our confidence, even our sense of identity. This dependence changes our experience of the pleasant thing. It becomes less satisfying, even boring, even painfully, disappointingly unsatisfying. So we anxiously seek something else to fix the unsatisfactoriness. This process, in big and small areas of our life, is what changes us. When our craving is frustrated, it tends to arouse anger and hatred. And again, with craving, there's no limit to how bad it can get, and no limit to what we will do to get what we feel we must have.

This of course is samsara, yet again. But there's a positive way things can go, too. Let's say, again, that there is someone you find mildly unpleasant. They really *are* rather tedious. But your response is to remember the Dharma and practice the first precept, the precept of love or metta. There's nothing immediate that can be done about the fact that this person is undoubtedly a bit of a pain. Yet, at least, you reason to yourself, that's no justification for doing them harm. In fact, you make a deliberate point of treating them well each time you see them. Time passes – and what happens? Well, at the very least, you don't increase your own aversion. In fact your aversion decreases as you get to know one another. So does the pain. – Your change of emotional response actually changes the feeling, gradually changes the whole experience. It becomes less painful for you. It may even become a pleasure to see them, because, actually, it is a pleasure to behave well towards someone, when we do it. Now probably, it's a little less painful for them, too. However, *their* response is quite another matter. Their attitude and their behaviour is something only they can change, and they may well choose not to respond in a skilful manner. I think it quite likely that they would, but people are so complex and inscrutable. They are having to cope with their own feelings of pleasure and pain, feelings which spring from their own complex history of past actions. If you think how strangely your mind works sometimes – can you imagine what it's like for someone else? So don't expect too much. The golden rule is, act towards others as you would like them to act towards you – and don't be disappointed when they don't.

According to traditional Buddhism, hatred and craving are just two out of six basic negative emotions or *kleśa(s)*. We typically generate all six of these towards both pleasant and painful feelings. (There are of course positive emotions we can generate too – emotions such as faith, patience, and metta – but we'll get on to them later on.)

The basic negative emotions which I've not covered are false view, arrogance, spiritual ignorance, and doubt. By 'False View,' or *mithyadrsti*, is meant the strongly emotional opinionatedness with which we cling to ideas to which we are attached. Arrogance is basically taking up a position of superiority with regard to others – or even of inferiority, which in Buddhism is considered a special form of arrogance.

Spiritual Ignorance, or *avidyā*, is the most basic negative emotion of all. It is the state of chronic confusion out of which all unenlightened beings act. It is a-vidya, that is, the negation of vidya. Vidya – or in Tibetan, *rig-pa* –could be described as an awareness that is aesthetic, in which we can appreciate something for its own sake, with no idea of doing anything with it, of making selfish use of it. When we are satisfied simply to contemplate it, just to appreciate it, even to become absorbed in it. Now this *vidya* is what our normal state of mind is not. On the whole we *do* want to make selfish use of things, we are *not* satisfied simply to appreciate them as they are. And this avoidance of reality diverts us into distraction and then into confusion. Our inability simply to 'be with' reality befuddles us, so that we cannot but act in a foolish way. We are like wild creatures caught, mesmerised by oncoming headlights. Avidya is our tight-mindedness, our closedness, our rigidity. When confronted by truth we dig in our heels, refuse to budge – refuse simply to look and see.

This tight – mindedness is where *avidya* also becomes the basis for doubt in the spiritual path. Doubt, the last of our six basic negative emotions, is *vicikitsa* – it's one of the famous hindrances to meditation. The term really contains both doubt and indecision. *Vicikitsa* is the inability, even the refusal, to make up one's mind. I think this is a very useful state of mind for us to understand.

To make a decision is a faculty of our will, our volition. Our decisions are sometimes quite conscious acts of will, sometimes part of a process of which we are hardly conscious at all. Many of our unconscious habits and behaviours once started life as a conscious decision. Most of us have learned the habit, for example, of looking to the left and right before we cross the road. From a moral point of view, our formation of habits is what creates karma. Usually, when we have a painful experience, all at once, out comes the aversion. It's a habitual response which is not at all conscious. Yet we *can* become conscious in this area. Meditation, for example, makes us more conscious of our responses. All our responses are accessible to our will. To some extent, however slight, it is our will that we hate, or that we are patient with, this painful experience. And we take such choices continually. What we call 'me' is a complex of processes of will. Our choice is limited by the way we have conditioned ourselves, but there is always some leeway for change.

But in practice, it is not our will to change ourselves that frequently. Quite often, when we encounter something to do with the spiritual path, we decide *not* to make up our mind. And this unwillingness is vicikitsa. To doubt in Buddhism is to hold back from actualising our potentiality for human development. We human beings live in a constant tension, in a conflict of decisions. It is a conflict between the gravitational pull towards the samsara, and the gravitational pull towards the unconditioned, nirvana. Do we want to give ourselves to our potentiality for change, or are we going to leave matters as they are now? We break out of this conflict of will when we make a real decision to develop spiritually. We break through doubt into faith. Faith, in the Buddhist sense of that word, is when we see for the moment the real value of the Dharma, and realise that is what we've always wanted. Doubt in the Buddhist sense or *vicikitsa* is when in each moment we don't appreciate our actual value, our actual potentiality, and so we don't act on it.

So we must learn to be spiritually decisive. Very often what makes us hold back is a sense that if we go forward we will have to give of ourselves in some new and overwhelming way. Probably we're afraid that we haven't got it in us, that we haven't got the energy. But we *have* got it. It exists as a potentiality in us. But for it to be aroused, this potentiality actually depends on that decision. The decision is the point of breakthrough. Without the decision, without the commitment, without the will, of course we won't have the energy. It is essential that we decide to, that we *want* to, actualise it. If we start feeling overwhelmed by our responsibilities, it is often because we've lost sight of our original wish, or our wishes have actually changed without our acknowledgement.

We can develop the disease of vicikitsa when we avoid thinking things through, so that our intentions and desires don't get clarified. When we don't bother to isolate the alternatives of a particular situation. When we leave everything fuzzy. Or convince ourselves that we don't have to choose. Of course, there may sometimes be a genuine difficulty in making up our mind. We may be under pressure, we may have insufficient information, the situation may be too complex for us. Sometimes we have to make up our mind about matters we cannot be sure of. It can help to talk things over with a sympathetic, clear-minded friend; get the issues objectified and clarified. But in the end, *we* have to decide. Above all, we have to make up our mind about the spiritual path. Indecision about the spiritual path is spiritually crippling. We should be able to give an account of ourselves, should be able to answer crucial questions like, "is there actually such a thing as spiritual development or not?" and "Is it actually possible to develop?" – Unless we are convinced that development is possible, we will not be able to sustain any real efforts.

On the other hand, until we see actual results, certitude isn't a possibility either. Until then, there will inevitably be at least a little speck of doubt. We need to be able to suspend our disbelief, so that our spiritual life can at least get off the ground. Such a 'willing suspension of disbelief' is easier for some than others. Buddhism has another kind of rough division between two personality types here. There is the 'faith-follower' or saddhanusarin, saddha meaning faith, and the 'doctrine-follower' or dhammanusarin. The faith-follower is moved by faith, and finds it easier to suspend disbelief. The doctrine-follower is moved by knowledge; he or she can't do that. He has to question, to clarify his doubts. The more intellectual type of person wants reasons before he or she is prepared to do anything. Well, that's OK, why shouldn't you make sure about what you might be getting into? It is just important that if you are that type, you make efforts to do that, and don't dither about in a state of doubt. As I said just now, indecision regarding the spiritual path is spiritually

crippling. Generally, if we can begin to clarify the vagueness and lack of thought which underlies much of our behaviour, we shall be making a vital step in our development.

So that was vicikitsa. And those were the six basic klesas or negative emotions. There are traditionally said to be twenty *upaklesas* or secondary negative emotions, such as envy, and concealment of faults, and resentment. We need to realise that we potentially harbour some very dark emotions. We need to realise that our human potential cuts both ways. We need to realise the importance of the will, and that the way we gravitate has always been our own choice. We need to take responsibility for the direction of our lives. The need to take this responsibility this is the central reason for meditation. This is the great Going for refuge which underpins all religious practice.

Let's get back to Meghiya. Once he was established in spiritual friendship and those other supports to meditation, the Buddha recommended particular practices – particular meditations for particular tendencies. That he should do the Asubhabhavana, the Metta Bhavana, the Mindfulness of Breathing, and the Reflection on Impermanence. The Buddha recommended these practices to counteract Meghiya's lust, his malice, his propensity for excessive thought, and his egoism. For like most of us, Meghiya is a deluded type. He needs a bit of everything. Though we should be careful about the way we see, and take up, the idea of antidotes to particular tendencies. The point of the exercise isn't purely psychological, something to balance us out, so that we become nice normal, balanced citizens. It's true that a certain psychological harmony may be necessary for further development, and that may very likely be established through meditating on an antidote, but that isn't the main point. The main point is that the practice goes against one's natural gravitational pull, and is in that way a gateway to Enlightenment.

The Asubhabhavana, the meditation prescribed as an antidote to Meghiya's strong lustful craving, is an example of this. It isn't that anyone needs to 'balance' their craving for pleasure with hatred of what is very unpleasant. It is that the only solution to the problem of craving is to transcend the whole samsara of both craving and hatred. That is the object of the antidote.

Asubha means that which is not at all beautiful, which in fact is horrid; it's that which is extremely unpleasant, that which you really don't want to encounter. So what really don't we want to encounter? We really don't want to encounter death, not in any form. Not even someone else's death. I know we are supposed all to be very tough and hardened these days, we've seen so many people die horrible deaths in violent movies, we've seen so many dead bodies in films, so we sort of think we've seen it all; but most of us also 'sort of know' that such films are no more than a substitution for the real thing; we know that in reality we've seen very little, and that's actually how we'd prefer to keep it.

But if those of us who tend more towards craving seriously wanted to work against it, we might allow ourselves to at least take a glance in that direction. The asubhabhavana is the practice of looking at someone who has died, looking at their body, and just experiencing what it is like without distraction. Tradition isolates for practice ten stages of bodily decomposition, right down to the bones themselves rotting and disintegrating into powder. What one does essentially, though, is just mindfully to look at the body. And one reflects as one looks, and afterwards, that this is going to happen to me, and that this is also going to happen to everyone else, without exception. Reflect on the evolution and the dissolution of the physical body. On the nature of the body, on the nature of materiality.

You might expect this practice to be rather depressing, but that is certainly not the case. It is sobering, but sobering in a way that is also liberating and inspiring, because at least momentarily, it takes us out of our general mood of craving. One has been able to look at something very real. We have confronted something which we are afraid of, but which is normally hidden, so that we rarely have the opportunity to confront it. The taboos of society conspire to shield us.

One should be careful not to do this practice in an atmosphere which is greatly disturbed by grief or confusion. One should create one's own calm atmosphere of metta for the person who has died, and also for all beings. We are all subject to death.

This atmosphere is in fact what the Buddha recommends as an antidote to Meghiya's other problem, that of anger and irritation: that is, he recommends the Metta Bhavana, the meditation on loving kindness. Metta Bhavana is the basic foundation for a set of four meditation practices known throughout the Buddhist tradition as the *Brahmaviharas*, sometimes called the Boundless states or infinitudes. The four are metta or maitri, karuna, mudita, and upekkha (or upeksha): friendliness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity. Each represents a dimension of the basic positive emotion of

metta or lovingkindness. These are what Meghiya needs to deepen and extend, until it becomes part of his nature always to think and act with kindness towards others.

And so do we. This whole area of our love, and of our relations with others generally, is where our gravitational tendencies really start to show. In meditation, it's these tendencies that we work with. Metta Bhavana is obviously the platform where we can most directly deal with our reactions to someone we find unpleasant, and our lukewarm feelings about those who really deserve our love.

Personally, when I was introduced to the Metta Bhavana, a long time ago now, I was deeply grateful to have found a way of exercising an area which was a difficulty for me. The field of human relations is so complex, and it is so much outside our control. So much depends on the way others understand and feel about us. Quite apart from the fact that *we* are so often negative or insensitive ourselves – other people can be just as moody, insensitive or lacking in understanding. And how could they not be? People on the whole are not fully themselves, they are spiritually undeveloped. It is far from easy for anyone fully to appreciate someone else. In the real world it is very difficult to achieve real communication, real emotional harmony, real mutual understanding. So it is unrealistic, it is even childish, to expect much of that from others. Yet people constantly expect and certainly want it, and sometimes they think they've found it in their partners, or their friends or colleagues, but it is hardly possible for there not to be a great deal of compromise. People are people. If you expect too much real communication and understanding, you are bound sometimes to become frustrated and disappointed.

Buddhism aims at a liberation that is not just intellectual, but which in a positive sense is emotional in its character and scope. And it is within our existing relationships that we can work most effectively on this liberation. We need to practise kalyanamitrata, we need to be an ordinary simple friend, and we need to learn to get along with others generally. But in this process we may also need to remove ourselves from the habits we have built up regarding others, especially habits which are conditioned by group responses – and this was what originally most struck me about the Metta Bhavana practice. It gave me the opportunity sometimes to step back from all that, and just work on my personal part in those habits. Then I could go back to the real world and work with my batteries recharged.

Yet many people have told me that the Metta Bhavana is their least favourite meditation practice, and in fact, I sometimes even get the impression that people neglect it. I hope I'm wrong in this, because we all very much *need* to develop metta. It is the basis of Buddhist spiritual life; it is the basis of the Bodhicitta. Without love, there can *be* no real spiritual development. If we don't feel love for other human beings, how can there be any sense of purpose underlying our spiritual life? Metta is the basis of all ethics: it is the essence of the first precept, which itself is the essence of all Buddhist precepts. So, difficult though it may be, the practice of Metta Bhavana should not be neglected.

And really, if we avoided practising a particular meditation because we found it difficult, we would have missed the whole point. We would be seeing meditation merely passively, as something to experience, rather than as an opportunity for karmic action. It isn't as though one meditates merely for personal pleasure. Meditation may often be a pleasurable experience, but that is not what it is for. The point is not to have an experience, but to change oneself. One meditates for a purpose; one meditates for liberation, Enlightenment. And if we look, we'll see that on the whole, the effect of meditation on us has been some degree of liberation. We may sometimes have sat there for forty minutes, having a difficult, distracted meditation. However, the reason it was difficult was probably because we were trying to resist a strong tendency to distraction. This is a good thing. This is an important part of the actual practice. And I think we will have found that over the rest of that day, after the meditation, we felt at least a little more calm, more in touch with ourselves, and more concentrated. The element of liberation, which is what the meditation is for, often arises later, after the medicine of meditation has worked its way through our complex system. So we meditate for its effect on our mind and our life, and not for some 'experience' at the time of practice.

I'll have more to say on the Buddha's other two recommendations to Meghiya – that is, his recommended antidotes to Meghiya's distractedness and ego clinging – later on in the series of talks. About Metta Bhavana specifically, I have two more things to say in conclusion.

1. Firstly, metta is an act of will. It is not just a feeling, something outside our control which happens to us. Metta is a desire which we cultivate. Feeling is obviously involved, but metta cannot be defined in terms of feeling alone. It is a response to others' feelings of pleasure and pain. It is therefore an emotion rather than a feeling. It is a karma, a deliberate action. It is the affirmation and constant reaffirmation of a desire: the desire that all beings, including oneself, should experience happiness and the causes of happiness. It is not trying to recapture the feeling of a nice time we once had. It is not

'feeling good about myself.' Such a feeling may well be involved, yet sometimes it may not; it may sometimes help, but it is not *necessary* to the development of metta. Feeling good about oneself is not at all the same as feeling metta for oneself. Metta is a direction of our will, a new decision – one we make not just in our mind, but form in our heart – to do whatever we can for our own and others' genuine happiness.

From this it seems that to practise Metta Bhavana properly, we must develop our understanding of the causes of happiness. Happiness is not simply what brings us pleasure – otherwise we could all very easily fix ourselves up with happy lives with a regular dose of heroin or alcohol. What then is it that brings us happiness? Well, years ago, we probably thought that if tomorrow we won the lottery, that would constitute happiness. We probably still believe that to some extent, but we are probably also just a little wiser. As spiritual practitioners, we have probably learnt that our happiness depends on having confidence that we are making spiritual progress. When we start to notice that we are becoming progressively less kind, more negative and more closed-minded, isn't that a depressing experience? And even if external circumstances are very difficult, if we know that we are becoming more loving of others, and more understanding of reality, doesn't this, above all, make us feel joyful, despite any difficulties?

Of course other things make us happy too, things like others' recognition of our good qualities, their praise and their love. Pleasure too – we can't live without *some* pleasure, at least; we go insane without it. Certainly we can't be happy without it. But these things come and go, and when they are gone they often turn into their opposites. When it is denied, love easily turns into resentment and hatred. If for some reason we can't have them any more, our pleasures become sources of pain. We have to learn to kiss joys like these as they fly, and not expect them to last, not expect lasting happiness from them. Spiritual progress, on the other hand, is a source of lasting happiness as well as temporary pleasure. And I'm not just talking about Buddhist practitioners. Spiritual progress in the broad sense, in the sense of ethical life, a helpful and truthful life, is what essentially allows all people to be happy living with themselves. This is the real 'feeling good about yourself.'

And this is the happiness that we promote through our personal practice of metta. Metta is wanting for ourselves and others that which will make us truly happy. The only thing which can make all beings truly happy is the Dharma – that is, the ability to transform themselves.

Thus the practice of Metta Bhavana is to some extent a matter of clarifying what true happiness is, and clarifying that *that* happiness is what we want. Clarifying it not just intellectually – though that will also be involved – but emotionally. Clarifying the state of our will – so that we are deepening our positive desire for our own and others' happiness. This emotion, this will – indeed this faith – is also the will to Enlightenment, the Bodhicitta. It's the state of having no doubt that what one wishes is to become Enlightened for the sake of the true happiness of all beings.

The second thing I have to say about metta arises out of the fact that the actual development of metta arises in relation to the world of real people; that our meditation relates to the world of *individual* living beings 'out there'. My point is that metta is never *just* metta. Metta is always a response to someone specific, an actual person. At least that is how we build the practice in what we can call the generation stage, when we concentrate successively on ourselves, a good friend, a neutral person, and an enemy. Each is a specific person. And specific people are in specific situations in life. Some suffer terribly under the conditions that they are in. Others experience the greatest delight in the conditions *they* are in. And then there are all the different shades of joy and suffering in between.

My point is that metta cannot ignore these conditionings. If one feels friendly towards someone, it is towards them as they actually are, in their situation. So when we encounter another person who is suffering our feeling cannot remain simply one of metta, cannot simply be one of friendliness and well wishing. It is not less well wishing in the face of their suffering. It is more so, and it is charged with a quality of immediacy. Just imagine, just remember, what it is like. Someone, someone you see as a friend, is suffering in some way. Well, straight away, it's a painful experience. They themselves are in pain. And our experience, on contacting them, or just hearing about them, is also painful. Painful so that if we didn't love them we might well withdraw, just as people often do when they sense others' pain. I don't know if you have noticed, but when someone is having a hard time, there isn't usually a rush to help them. People often don't want to get involved. But you, their friend, respond positively to their pain. You do want to get involved. And this urge to *act* is compassion. This *active* response of love towards those who suffer, this is compassion. But as we saw last week, and as we can see even without lectures on Buddhism, everyone is suffering. The whole samsara is suffering in different ways. Even the happiest person experiences frustration, and has to endure experiences which they never

wanted to happen. You simply can't not encounter suffering. So this is why, in our development of metta to each individual, our metta can never simply be metta. If we are at all sensitive to what others feel, it cannot but include an element of karuna, or compassion.

Karuna is the quality exemplified above all by the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara as he holds to his heart the wish fulfilling jewel. The wish fulfilling jewel is the Dharma. It is an ocean of reflection and meditation. You can look right down into this deep blue jewel and see all the great monsters of the Dharma, exploring the depths of the Teachings, and guarding all the Treasures which lie at the bottom of the Ocean. But what, most essentially, is this wish fulfilling jewel you are holding? It is the jewel of the Bodhicitta, the Will to Enlightenment. This Will to Enlightenment is the pole star which provides a focus for all our gravitations, all our wanderings, which gives direction to all the forces of our emotion and imagination. And as praised by the great poet Shantideva, it is 'the quicksilver elixir' of the spiritual alchemist which, if thoroughly worked on through our spiritual practice, will produce the pure gold of Enlightenment.

4 illumination

I was asked to choose the titles of these talks some time ago. And I had to choose them before I'd really started thinking about what I wanted to say. After I'd chosen tonight's title, I became rather uneasy about it. You see, I'd changed my mind. The topic of tonight's talk was to be insight, and I had previously chosen the title of Realisation. That's also a good title; as well as meaning that you understand, 'real-isation' somehow implies that you make something real. But I was turning all these words over in my mind, all ending in a-t-i-o-n. And up came the word 'Illumination.' I liked the image of light. There's a suggestion of becoming filled with light, and also that one illuminates the world around. It is pretty much synonymous with the word 'Enlightenment'. So I plumped for Illumination.

But then, the worm of doubt started gnawing away. I was walking in the hills around Vajraloka, and I realised that the word illumination can have other, less positive, connotations. Because in my mind's eye, like a vision, there suddenly appeared a familiar symbol: a Light Bulb. The light bulb was drawn in cartoon style, and suspended in space above someone's head. Someone experiencing that 'Aha!' moment, the 'Eureka' moment. Illumination! Light has finally dawned. By George, they've got it! And suddenly, I felt regret. All at once the word 'illumination' seemed to convey that kind of awakening which is intellectual, merely reasonable, even scientific. The kind of insight a mathemetician or a scientist might have. Then it occurred to me that it's also rather a mechanical image. A light bulb is, after all, something you switch on and off; hardly a good image for Buddhist insight.

But then I came to my senses. I began to realise that I was being a bit silly, so I started to question my assumptions. So, I feel that this image is inappropriate, well – what *would* be appropriate as an image, then? What images for wisdom do we find in traditional Buddhism? I had to admit that we do, indeed, find the image of illumination. We find the imagery of colour and, above all, of light. Offerings of lighted candles symbolise wisdom. Quite frequently on shrines in the east, one even finds electric light bulbs. Around the head of any painted image of the Buddha is a coloured radiance which symbolises his wisdom. In the Sutra of Golden Light, the Buddha is compared to a fully Enlightened Sun; and of course the very name of this Sutra expresses the imagery of light. The words used to express breaking through into wisdom are often words of light. The process by which one's samsara is transformed into one's nirvana is symbolically shown with bright, blazing hot flames. One of the connotations of the Vajra, a sceptre symbolic of wisdom, is a bolt of lightning, shockingly brilliant and revealing. Shantideva says, 'At night in darkness thick with clouds a lightning flash gives a moment's brightness. So, sometime, by the power of the Buddha, the mind of the world might for a moment turn to acts of merit.'[vi]

So all this went on in my mind. Through this strange, introverted process of doubt and inner dialogue, I finally got the title of tonight's talk straight. At least I can extract a lesson from this, which is that similar processes of doubt and dialogue often contribute to the development of insight, or wisdom, or illumination, or even enlightenment. I don't think they did in the case of discovering this title, but let's try to apply a spirit of enquiry to tonight's subject matter. Let's ask, What is this wisdom, why is it considered such an important aspect of Buddhist practice, and how do we develop it?

There are a number of words used in Buddhism for wisdom. The principal one is in Pali paññā or, in Sanskrit, prajñā. The 'jna' part of the word means simply to know. You get just the same sound in English, which is linked with Sanskrit. You find it in the words 'know' and 'knowledge', as well as words like 'gnosis', 'gnostic'; even 'gnome'. 'Pra' is a prefix which intensifies, so pra-jna is 'very much to know,' 'exceeding knowledge', 'Knowledge with a capital K', or 'the supreme knowledge'.

But what is it? Prajna has been defined by Nyanatiloka[vii] as 'that intuitive knowledge which brings about the four stages of Holiness and the realization of Nibbana, and which consists in the penetration of the impermanency, [unsatisfactoriness], and [insubstantiality] of all forms of existence'.

First of all, it is said to be an *intuitive* knowledge. In other words, it is not an awakening that is at all connected with the conceptual mind or the intellect – it comes from somewhere very much more profound. However, this intuitive aspect is prajna at its highest level, the level known as *bhavanamayiprajna* or wisdom development itself. Before that stage is reached, there are two intermediary levels of prajna: the prajna of learning, and the prajna of thinking. And these two to a great extent *do* involve the conceptual mind.

The level of *sutamayiprajna* literally means the wisdom based on listening or hearing. I think the idea must originate from times when the Dharma was an exclusively oral tradition. It means the level of acquiring information, so nowadays we'd also include reading. This is the stage of learning, when we simply 'take in' an idea. However, even simple learning is not always so straightforward. As we get older, and our minds get more and more stuffed with ideas as we gather them over the years, it is quite easy to mistake what has actually been said to us for some idea which is already there in our mind. We can be quite ready to say to ourselves, "Yes, yes – I know *just* what you're talking about!." It all seems to fit in with what we already know. We can feel that in a sense we already knew it, and that we were just being reminded. That may often be so, but we should always be careful actually to listen to what is being said. So in the wisdom of listening, we take in the Dharma as it has actually been explained. By setting aside our present assumptions, we can arrive at a new level of understanding. However, this procedure in no way means *abandoning* our present assumptions. That really would be throwing the baby out with the bath water, because our present assumptions may be quite correct. I think it is a step forward if we can notice the assumptions that we actually have in the first place – because we often don't even know this. And then we know what it is we are comparing with the new ideas.

Unless we are able to fully listen to the Dharma, we will never learn anything new about it. And then, unless we try to take our learning further, that is to *exercise* our learning of the Dharma, even what we already knew will tend to become set and rigid in our mind. In other words, we need to exercise the second level of prajna, that of *cintamayiprajna* or the wisdom of reflection. This is the level at which we compare and develop our ideas, once we have taken in the Dharma. We take in the Dharma, and then apply it to our experience. We refine our assumptions in the light of our reflections. So when we come actually to develop the third level of prajna, the real intuitive wisdom that is beyond words, we take with us as clear an idea as possible into our meditation.

Although I am speaking in terms of ideas, it is really more complex than that, because our ideas about the Dharma also have very strongly emotional dimensions. Emotion and thought are woven intimately together. So these emotions also need to be examined and understood, at both the levels of learning and reflecting. As often as not it is our emotional reactions which prevent us from learning. We may be quite afraid of certain ideas, for example, or certain ideas may make us angry, or fill us full of self-doubt. Working through such emotional reactions is also very necessary in this second stage of reflection. We may also have very reasonable doubts, rational doubts, doubts which need thinking through or talking through; doubts like 'is it really possible to develop spiritually'. We need to do that thinking and talking. But even with these more rational issues, there are very often other less rational emotions which arise at the same time, just to complicate things. So actually though these two areas of *cintamayiprajna* and *sutamayiprajna* sound fairly straightforward, they are in fact areas in which we are likely to spend quite a large portion of our spiritual life before we even get on to the real development of wisdom, the *bhavanamaya* kind of wisdom.

Now, we've said that wisdom, or prajna, brings about the realisation of nirvana, and that nirvana is the penetration of the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and the insubstantiality that is natural in all forms of existence. So let me try to illustrate how these three levels of prajna apply in the case of one of these three characteristics which apply univerally, which characterise all forms of existence. Let's take the characteristic or *lakshana* of impermanence.

So at some point we hear about, we *learn* about, this notion that all things are characterised by impermanence. But it is likely that we don't really take on board the fact that impermanence is universal, that it applies to us personally and to everything that we know. This is simply too much to take in all at once. It is too big a fact. The implications are just too extensive. Somewhere, the mind just can't cope, it doesn't want to know. So we say to ourselves, "Oh yes, all thing are impermanent. *Oh* yes, hmm, that's obvious enough; well actually I've always thought that." But over the years, this so obvious fact starts to get more under our skin, so that we find ourselves considering its implications much more, so that these implications even begin to be part of our motivation for meditation. This incorporation of the idea of impermanence in our meditation is not a deliberate or conscious initiative on our part. It is simply that we know that the universal fact of impermanence is an essential principle of the Buddha's Dharma. So as we gradually understand how this Dharma is the overall context in which we do our meditation, so the fact of impermanence gradually gets to motivate our meditation.

But this is not yet the actual third level of wisdom. It is when the topic of impermanence is deliberately taken up as a meditation that it becomes what we call *bhavanamayiprajna*. As Buddhaghosa says[viii]:

*'based on learning' is that knowledge which one has learnt from others…(*sutamayapanna*)*

'based on thinking' is that knowledge which one has acquired through one's own thinking, without having learned it from others. (*cintamayapanna*)

*'based on mental development' (*bhavanamayapanna*) is that knowledge which one has acquired through mental development in this or that way, and which has reached the stage of full concentration'* – that is, the stage of dhyana.

The word *bhavana* means practice or development, particularly in meditation; we find the same word used, for example, in the Metta Bhavana. *Bhavana-mayiprajna* therefore means the bhavana, or development of, the third level of wisdom. This is wisdom itself, the real thing; so this is where we are taking up what is known as vipassana or 'insight' meditation. Vipassana means, quite literally, 'seeing'. One sees, using that visual metaphor, by looking with particular mindfulness at ones experience. In fact there are many methods of vipassana, but this feature is essential to them all: that one is very mindful of one's actual experience, without covering it over with assumptions and views. In observing one's experience one usually does so in particular in relation to the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness, and the insubstantiality of the nature of one's experience.

One cannot approach this kind of practice without preparation. It is not at all easy to have this mindfulness, even though in a way it might seem the simplest, most basic thing we can do in the world simply to be aware of one's experience. It is what most people probably assume they are doing all the time. But in reality that is exactly what we are not doing. What we are in fact doing is similar to what I was talking about earlier in relation to the stage of the learning wisdom. We live in a world of assumptions and views about what is happening. We don't often see what really is happening. We live in spiritual ignorance, and this is why that learning preparation is important. We need to develop some provisional faith, at least, that we do not know – that our understanding is limited. This acknowledgment of our current limitation provides a necessary space of openhearted confidence within which we can grow wisdom.

But that faith is not the only kind of preparation that is needed. Even if we do understand that we don't understand, even if we have that provisional faith that we need to become more wise, if we are to embark on meditation we will still need to sustain our concentration of mind. Otherwise there can be no possibility of our being aware of our experience for more than a few seconds at a time. So clearly, this is also an aspect of preparation.

We therefore have two kinds of preparation for vipassana. We have preparation for vipassana by way *of* vipassana, that is by way of developing the previous two stages of prajna; and we have preparation for vipassana by way of samatha, that is by way of deepening our samatha, or concentration meditation. So here two different streams of spiritual practice come together in one. It is through samatha meditation that we acquire calmness and unification of mind. If we were to try to focus in any sustained way on the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality of our experience *without* some degree of samatha, we will not get very far. Doubt, or dullness, or overexcitement of mind, or irritation, or our tendency to distraction, would prevent us from sustaining any clarity of understanding.

So just as in samatha meditation, we need in vipassana meditation also to get around the five hindrances, so the the five factors of dhyana can arise. We must be able to think clearly; our mind must be unified; our mind must be happy; our mind must be inspired. This is necessary for the mind to be able to sustain vipassana reflection: clear thought in a mind that is unified, happy and inspired. And of course those are the conditions we find in the first dhyana, where thought is very clear, and the mind is also very receptive and relaxed. We also find this to a lesser extent in access concentration, so vipassana reflection is also possible there. However, in access one's concentration is considerably more fragile, and is constantly liable to be invaded by the hindrances.

So in the principial form of vipassana meditation, you first of all develop as much as possible the deeper jhanas. You get into the second jhana and even beyond, if possible. In other words, as you may remember from our talk last week, unify your mind to a point which goes beyond discursive thinking. Then, once you have become established in that state, or enjoyed as much of it as you wish, you then return to the first dhyana and establish yourself there. Vipassana requires a certain degree of discursive activity, even if that is very subtle, and the first dhyana is where thought is possible – in fact it's where one's clarity of thought is at its very best. So it is there, in the first dhyana, that you gently turn over in your mind the experience which you have just had of the deeper dhyana state. You try to fathom its real nature. You may examine it in the light of the three lakshanas; for example, you may consider the fact that it is impermanent. Through doing this, actual insight into impermanence arises. This approach to vipassana is that of the Theravada school as described by Buddhaghosa, but the essentials

are the same in Buddhist insight practice generally. The essential meditation is that having established one's mind in a state of clear consciousness, one reflects on the nature of reality.

Before we start to go into the meditation on the three lakshanas in a more practical way, I want to finish going through Nyanatiloka's definition of prajna: *'That intuitive knowledge which brings about the four stages of Holiness and the realization of Nibbana, and which consists in the penetration of the impermanency, [unsatisfactoriness], and [insubstantiality] of all forms of existence.'* I think we are reasonably clear now, at least in theory, on what this intuitive knowledge and its method is. But what about these four stages of Holiness which this intuitive knowledge brings about?

This sounds a little esoteric, and I suppose in a sense it is extremely esoteric. However, the underlying point being made is that insight is something to be lived. Insight is not something which you can tack on to your life as a kind of ornament, and not be changed by it yourself. To have insight means to have changed in the most radical way possible. After insight has arisen, you are never quite the same again. So we can talk about insight only when we are also talking about insightful people. So this is why tradition speaks so much of the four Ariyapudgalas or the Noble Individuals. In the verses of the *Tiratana Vandana*, for example, which we often chant before meditation, these Noble Individuals are mentioned in the section rejoicing in the qualities of the Sangha or spiritual community.

We'll look at these four Noble Individuals now, and we'll start at the top, where one enters wisdom proper, and fully gains the transcendental path: by becoming one who is fully Enlightened, or Arahant. In the Arahant ten restricting qualities, known as fetters or samyojana(s), have been completely destroyed. For example, he or she is no longer restricted by craving for existence in either the world of pure form or the world of exceedingly subtle form. If you remember we looked at these worlds in our discussions of the levels of dhyana last week. They are worlds which meditation gives access to, and they are very pleasant places to be. Someone who is very adept in meditation, and experienced in entering these states of mind, might well be tempted to start seeing that kind of existence as the goal of their practice. That would be a real possibility if they did not practice Buddhist meditation, in which one meditates on the impermanence of such states of mind, and on the fact that such pleasant realms are still relatively unsatisfactory. They are unsatisfactory because even though they are very happy states, they are still states of delusion and ignorance, in which one not only has no idea of the real nature of things, but one also has no interest in knowing. If you're blissfully happy all the time, why bother to worry about the reality? I think all of us would probably be sorely tempted, if we had a real choice.

And of course, that's one reason why *we* are not Arahants. For the Arahant actually has seen that this is unsatisfactory, that all beings really do suffer from their ignorance. Because he has actually seen it, he is able not to allow himself to be caught in these fetters of craving for these divine existences. The Arahant is also not restricted by the threefold Conceit. In three respects, he doesn't compare himself with others. First, *maana* is the conceit that 'I am this person's equal'. We, not being Arahants, very often take up this sort of position with regard to others, and we stick firmly to it. We even feel it is our right to do so. We think, 'Oh yes, I'm just the same as anyone else'. Well, we may very roughly have a similar level of experience, or level of ability, in some respects, to some people, sometimes, but this is such a crude and spiritually undermining way of looking at one's existence. And we normally do this kind of thing out of a need for security. We feel we need to have a position of some kind. We are perhaps afraid of being seen to be inferior, even if we are objectively inferior in terms of some ability or some experience. So this clinging to an idea of equality is *maana*, the Equality-conceit.

But it's just as much a restriction to our potential for Enlightenment if we have the Inferiority-conceit or *omaana*. If that is the standpoint we take up: "Oh, I'm basically just not as good as so and so." This is pathetic, and it arouses the sympathy it is designed to arouse. Yet it is actually a form of conceit. It may be objectively true that we are not as good, or as able, or as experienced, as another person, or even as all other people everywhere. However whether it is true or not is not the point. The point is that we have taken up this conceit – this emotionally held *position* – that we are inferior to others. When in terms of practising the Dharma, inferiority is not an issue. What is an issue is that some mental states severely restrict the unfoldment of our potential.

It's very much like the third form, *atimaana.* This is of course the Superiority-conceit. Which, again, is a *position* which we take up and use, use as a basis for our security. It is often so obvious when someone is doing this, and it's often equally obvious that this positioning is something which severely restricts them.

So the Arahant has let go all these forms of conceit. He or she has also let go of restlessness, or *uddhacca*. It's interesting that the same restlessness that we experience as a hindrance to meditation is only completely broken through at the point of Enlightenment. The near Arahant's tendency to this agitation is subtle, or it may be something very deep-rooted which arises quite intensely at the last moment, so to speak. Rather like the agitation of Mara's hordes which attacked the Buddha in form of aggressive armies just before his Enlightenment. We, the unenlightened, also know about agitation. Sometimes we can't bear just to be calm; we really *want* excitement. And according to the Abhidharma, this agitation is a feature which underlies all unskilful states of mind. But the Arahant is able, finally, to break through this deep-seated tendency.

As he, or she, also does with Ignorance. Spiritual ignorance or un-Enlightenment, again on a very subtle level, is the final fetter, the very last of these five so called 'higher' fetters with are finally destroyed by the Arahant, alone, on gaining Enlightenment.

Of the four *Arya Pudgalas,* the Holy persons who have attained some degree of transcendental insight, the Arahant is the only one who is *completely* Enlightened. The three others are still restricted by these higher fetters which I've been describing: the fetters of ignorance, of restlessness, of conceit, and of hankering after various forms of divine existence. However, each of them is now certain to become fully Enlightened; if they don't manage it in this life, then they will do it in the next, or maybe a little later on. Their desire to gain Enlightenment is so strong that they are now irreversible from Enlightenment; they have all reached a stage from which they cannot fall back.

So these three remaining Holy persons are called the Stream-Entrant, the Once-returner, and the Non-returner. It could be that these technicalities seem a little irrelevant to us. If you said so, I would not argue much. However, I do find it quite compelling that gaining insight is said to have this *order* of effect. It shows that Insight is not just intellectual clarity, even though that is certainly not absent; insight affects your whole organism, not only here and now, but cosmically. There is a whole order of existence out there, in potential, and these people actually dwell right in it. In terms of one of the previous lectures, these are the spiritual 'monsters' that the Buddha describes, diving and swimming around in the ocean of nirvana.

The Non-returner has developed so much insight that they will gain their Enlightenment in another more favourable form of existence. He or she need not again be reborn within the conditions of samsara, though I believe it is possible that he or she may decide voluntarily to be reborn in such conditions, as a Bodhisattva, for the sake of others.

The Once-Returner will only be reborn once in these conditions, and their Enlightenment is likely to be gained in that lifetime.

The Stream Entrant has got to a point where it is said that they will gain Enlightenment within seven human lifetimes. The Stream Entrant has completely broken through the first three of the five 'lower' fetters, which tie our interests to the world of the senses[ix]. These are fixed personality view, doubt, and clinging to ethical rules and customs as ends in themselves. The Once-Returner has weakened the last two of these 'lower' fetters, that is craving for sensual experience (*kama-raga*) and hatred (*vyapada*). The Non-Returner has completely broken them.

I won't go into these in any detail, since they have been so often explained elsewhere. But it is interesting, and even in a way encouraging, to see that even individuals who have gone a long way on the transcendental path still experience craving and hatred. It's interesting also to realise that all these three holy persons, (that is apart from the Arahant) are still at a stage where they have to deal with hankering, restlessness, ignorance – and even conceit! This is the case even though they are irreversible in their progress towards Enlightenment.

So, on the one hand, there is clearly hope yet for all of us! On the other hand, this tells us something important about a rather hazy, and misunderstood, area of human life. Maybe with our European historical and social conditioning we are still emerging from our reactions to organised Christianity. I think it can be said that in our society we can sometimes be rather harsh in our expectations of spiritual practitioners. We can be very ready to charge such people with hypocrisy. You can still meet people who are astonished to discover that you, who are a Buddhist, listen to music and enjoy eating ice cream, and that you can sometimes also get annoyed. No wonder people have been known to conceal the fact that they are Buddhists. Because sometimes the pedestals upon which we place our spiritual heroes can be dreadfully unrealistic and unimaginative. Perhaps we can learn from this illustration of the four Holy persons that even quite advanced spiritual practitioners are still having to work against

human weaknesses. In this way we can become more understanding of what it is we ourselves are capable of achieving through the spiritual practices we are engaged in.

We can also get some idea of what it is to gain some degreee of Enlightenment through the sevenfold typology found in the Katagiri Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya. Those of you who were here for the second talk in this series will remember the rough typology of the greed type, the hate type and the delusion type, and that these types are recommended particular meditation practices. Now we see the other side of that process. The Greed type, through practising the Dharma, and meditation in particular, and as their tendency to craving becomes sublimated to some extent – the objects of their desire becoming more truly beautiful and bringing them more real happiness – their whole approach to spiritual practice becomes increasingly motivated by faith, by the sheer beauty of Enlightenment. Addictive desire for the unwholesome is gradually supplanted by a much freer kind of desire for the Unconditioned. These are known as the *saddhanusari* or faith types. Something similar occurs in the case of the the hate type, who started off on the spiritual Path with a strong tendency to aversion, on account of his or her predominant experience of painful feeling. His unwholesome desires are also gradually supplanted by desire for Enlightenment, but this takes place more through the exercise of wisdom. He or she is known as the *dhammanusari* or doctrine follower, one who is motivated by their understanding of the teaching. In both the *saddhanusari* and the *dhammanusari* it is said by the Buddha that all five spiritual faculties have arisen to some extent. They have some real faith, real energy for the spiritual life, some mindfulness, some concentration, and some wisdom.

On reaching Stream Entry and breaking the first three fetters, the *saddhanusari* becomes known as the *saddhavimutta* – the one liberated by faith. The *dhammanusari* becomes the *ditthipatta* – the one attained to understanding. Of course both develop stream entry on the basis of insight, but there is a difference based on temperament, and neither of them develops the arupadhyanas. Both develop their insight from one of the four dhyanas of form. The one who develops insight from one of the arupadhyanas is known as the 'body witness' or *kayasakkhi.* And like the *ditthipatta* and the *saddhavimutta,* he or she has broken the first three fetters of personality view, doubt, and holding to ethical and religious observances as ends in themselves. Also like the *ditthipatta* and the *saddhavimutta,* he or she may have weakened, or even completely broken, the more deep-seated fetters of sensual craving and aversion. In other words, all three – the one liberated by faith, the one attained to understanding, and the body witness – have become irreversible on the path at the level either of Stream Entry, Once-, or Non-Returning.

What characterises most clearly the Body-witness is not only the arupadhyanas, but their attainment of some or all of the eight vimokshas or Releases. These are a sequence of successively refined levels of super-conscious experience[x] which include the four *arupadhyanas.* First of all, there's a Release from craving achieved by reflecting on the relative unattractiveness and emptiness (or *sunyata*) of one's own form – rather as in the *asubhabhavana* which we looked at earlier on. Then secondly, there's a release attained through the contemplation of the unattractiveness and emptiness of others' forms. And as these contemplations progress, there's a third kind of release as one experiences an increasingly intense appreciation of the purity and beauty of this state of freedom from craving. You can see that in the first two vimoksas you are still linked to the sense-realm, the kama-loka. But in the third, there is something of a radical shift onto another level. This is quite a good illustration of the move into the experience of the rupa-loka or rupa-dhyanas from the kamaloka.

And then with the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh vimoksas, you move into the four arupaloka or 'formless' states of higher meditative consciousness. We saw last week that these dhyanas arise out of the equanimity and one-pointed mind of the fourth rupadhyana. These are states of mind experienced by the gods worshipped in other religious traditions, the great so-called Creators of the universe, the Yachwes and Brahmas and other high gods. Subjectively, for the meditator, they are inner experiences of infinite freedom and expansion that grow out of the perfect equanimity of the fourth level of dhyana.

The first formless dhyana is called the sphere of infinite space. It is a state of consciousness in which there is no object, or at least our experience of 'objecthood' is exceedingly subtle – this subtlety of experience of objecthood is characteristic of the arupa-loka generally. The way we experience the object which we are concentrating on is that it expands and expands until it fills infinite space, except that you cannot actually fill something that is infinitely large. All we can really say is that there is no obstruction, no limitation anywhere. So to attain the first arupadhyana we transfer our attention from this infinitely large object to the infinite space which it is occupying, and just rest in this total unobstructedness.

Then the second formless dhyana, known as the sphere of infinite consciousness, arises when we give attention to the fact that we are *experiencing* infinite space. Because there is this 'object' of infinite *space*, there is also a 'subject' of infinite *awareness*. Not only is the space which contains objects infinite, the consciousness which perceives objects is also infinite. It can go anywhere, just like light can.

In the third arupadhyana stage, we place our attention on the fact that within the context of our infinite consciousness, there are no particular things that can be distinguished. In this expanded state, we cannot identify any one thing as distinct from another, even though our mind is unprecedentedly clear and bright.

The fourth formless dhyana, which is the seventh of the eight vimokshas, is the sphere of neither identification nor non-identification. And here we begin to stretch to the finest extent the distinction between the subject which perceives and the object which is perceived. By concentrating on the way that we are identifying, or recognizing, the experience of infinity, and on the basis of the preceding experience in which there are no more particular, separate things, 'we' ourselves are seen to be hardly separate from the experience we are having. There is, in a certain sense, no subject who identifies, so that the process cannot be described either as an identification or as a nonidentification.

Buddhaghosa illustrates these four arupadhyanas using a simile. A person weaves four pieces of cotton cloth. Each has just the same measurements, but he makes the first piece out of thickly spun thread. The second piece is made of thin threads, and the third piece is extremely thin. The fourth piece of cloth is so fine and gossamer-like that in some light it is invisible.[xi] The pieces of cloth are all made the same size and of the same material, just as the four arupadhyanas are all made of the same equanimity and one-pointedness. But it's the changing object of the meditation which causes the mental state to become increasingly refined. In the rupadhyanas the dhyana factors change at each level while the object can stay the same, whereas in the arupadhyanas the dhyana factors stay the same throughout, but it's the object that changes, and it's the change of object which facilitates the transition from one arupadhyana to another. As we go from the meditation object, to the space that contains that object, to the consciousness which conceives that space, to the non-separateness of the different objects perceived by that consciousness, to the non-separateness of that perception from the subject in whom those perceptions arise.

So coming back to the eight vimokshas, some of which the body witness experiences: the release or freedom from craving from reflecting on the relative unattractiveness of first one's own, and secondly others', physical forms. That was the kamaloka, the realm of the senses. Then, third, the release into the rupaloka from a growing appreciation of the sheer beauty of this freedom from craving. Then, fourth to seventh, the arupadhyanas, the increasingly subtle appreciation of the infinity of space, of consciousness, of the indivisibility of things perceived and of the perceiver himself. The eighth and final vimoksha is equivalent to Enlightenment itself. It is the perfect cessation of all reactivity and suffering, and the release of total creativity. The body-witness doesn't have this vimoksha; only the Buddha, only the Arahant, the fourth of our four holy persons, has it.

According to the Katagiri Sutta, there are two kinds of Arahants. There is the *pannavimutta*, or the one liberated by wisdom, and the *ubhatobhagavimutta*, the one liberated in both ways. The difference is that the *ubhatobhagavimutta* has the arupadhyanas and the eight vimokkhas, and the *pannavimutta* does not. The *pannavimutta* has probably developed full insight on the basis of the rupadhyanas, but it is a theoretical possibility that he may be what is known as a 'dry insight worker', that is one who has worked to develop insight in access concentration alone.

There is some controversy about this possibility, though it seems to me that this is probably one of those controversies that rather disappear with a little understanding of what is being argued about. The fact is that access concentration does afford a certain degree of concentration of mind, enough to reflect clearly on the Dharma, enough even for that reflection to have profound effect. Enough for insight to arise, and therefore, at least theoretically, enough to gain Stream Entry and even Arahantship. It is said that using this method one develops a particular kind of concentration distinct from the access and absorption concentrations, called 'momentary concentration' or *khanika samadhi.* Despite its name, this momentary concentration is not just a single moment of concentration within a stream of distracted thoughts, but a dynamic concentration which flows from object to object, and retains a continual intensity[xii]. This kind of concentration also arises in contemplation if one has previously been in the dhyanas, but the dry insight worker, or *sukhavipassika,* also develops it in his or her own way. Obviously there would be room for rationalisation here, since one might persuade oneself that one is using the method of dry insight when one is just thinking in the ordinary way, and so consider that one

has gained insight when all one has done is to have understood something – or, more likely, misunderstood it. But a similar potential for self-delusion also exists when working with dhyana. In the end we have to come back to the same kind of criterion for testing one's insight. Insight needs to be tested over a long period of time, and in the context of the spiritual community; in other words, in communication with others, and especially with others more experienced than ourselves. This topic of testing insight is certainly an interesting one, which I hope to address at some future time.

Though there are people who say the vehicle of dry insight is more suitable for westerners, one suspects that the kind of westerners they have in mind are not really typical. On the whole, the path of the dhyanas is smoother and more pleasurable for most of us, and in the end more effective, as we shall see in the case of the Arahant who is liberated in both ways. 'Dry insight' therefore appears to be just one more illustration of the variety of possible approaches to spiritual development. The Buddha himself seems to favour the path of dhyana, and even refers to the four jhanas figuratively as a kind of Nibbana: he calls them immediately visible Nibbana, Nibbana here and now,[xiii] since in the dhyanas one experiences at least a temporary cessation of the samsara of greed, hatred and delusion.

So the *pannavimutta* arahant has no experience of the higher dhyanas, while the *ubhatobhagavimutta* arahant has. But it is not the case that the *pannavimutta* might have no dhyana experience at all, even if he has gained insight through access concentration. On entering the fruition stage of the paths of Stream Entry, Once- and Non-return, and Arahantship, one experiences what is known as transcendental dhyana. Once they have crossed the Stream, and entered the Gates of the Transcendental, each of the Four Noble Disciples may rekindle at will this special meditative state, which is known as *phalasamapatti,* and is said to be equivalent to the lower four dhyanas. So even if he or she had no experience of the four arupadhyanas, the *pannavimutta* arahant would have access at least to this kind of meditative attainment.
However, the Buddha seems to have considered the *ubhatobhagavimutta* arahant to be the more praiseworthy and inspiring of the two. He compared the two as the white lotus and the red lotus recluses, and said that 'There is no liberation in both ways higher and more excellent than *this* liberation in both ways.'[xiv].

> *How, monks, is a person a white lotus recluse (samanapundarika)? Here, monks, with the destruction of the cankers a monk here and now enters and dwells in the cankerless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, having realized it for himself with direct knowledge. Yet he does not dwell experiencing the eight deliverances with his body. Thus, monks, a person is a white lotus recluse.*
> *And how, monks, is a person a red lotus recluse (samanapaduma)? Here, monks, with the destruction of the cankers a monk here and now enters and dwells in the cankerless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, having realized it for himself with direct knowledge. And he dwells experiencing the eight deliverances with his body. Thus, monks, a person is a red lotus recluse*[xv].

Of course the red lotus recluse is the one liberated in both ways, liberated in body through the arupadhyanas and the vimokshas, and in mind through insight based on those dhyana experiences. What really makes the difference here is that his experiencing of the eight deliverances with his body affects others. That great depth of practice means that he or she is a completely inspiring person. This means that his or her influence is very profound, and that the Dharma is communicated in a very effective way. Just imagine what a difference it would make if we had one or two people like this around the centre. And this is what we actually should be aiming to achieve.

So these are the Four Holy persons. These are the people who actually manifest the intuitive knowledge of Nyanatiloka's definition. These are the people who have successfully realised the stages of transcendental attainment leading to Nirvana. These are the people who have successfully realised the impermanency, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality of all forms of existence.

All that remains, then, is for us to look ourselves, from our own point of view, at this impermanency, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality. We saw that this is done, in the principial form of vipassana practice, after experiencing as much as possible of the dhyanas, by establishing oneself in the first dhyana and gently turning over and over in the mind the experience one has just had of that deeper dhyana state; trying to fathom its real nature in terms of the three lakshanas of impermanency, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality.

This may also be done in many other ways, through many other practices. There are hundreds of these. In the WBO, we currently focus on just four of these. There is the six element practice, the meditation on the 24 nidanas of conditioned existence, the meditation on death, and then various aspects of

sadhana meditation – that is, visualisation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Of these, the vipassana meditation which most approximates to what I've called the principial method is the Six Element practice.

The Six Elements are earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness. In other words, all that is hard and resistant, all that is liquid and flowing, all that has temperature, all that moves freely. Then fifthly the fact that all objects are contained within space, and sixthly the fact that all objects are perceived by consciousness.

One by one, we experience these elements. The earth element which makes up our body is really no different from the earth element in the rest of the universe, apart from a little voice which says 'this is mine.' Our flesh and our bones, hair and teeth, are relatively hard and resistant, just like the chair we are sitting in, like the material of the floor and the fabric of the building around us, like the street outside, and the great earth itself. Experiencing deeply this quality of earth, all its characteristics, we reflect also that it it impermanent. We turn our spacious, dhyanic mind to this aspect of earth. The seat we are sitting on might last a thousand years, but it won't last forever. Maybe sooner, maybe later, it will be broken up, will rot or break or burn. It is the same with all forms, and it is the same with the earth element in our own body. There is nothing in it that is not impermanent. Even our bones wil rot and become nothing, will eventually return to being part of the earth element in the rest of the universe. As Shantideva says, it is as though the earth element has been borrowed, it's on loan to us in this particular form. Later on, it will have to be returned. So, because it is impermanent, it cannot provide lasting satisfaction. It provides some satisfaction, but only on a temporary basis. Because it is impermanent, we have to lose it, and face the fact that it will decay and die. So the earth element is also unsatisfactory, it is also dukkha. So we might as well relax, relax and let it go. Let it go now mentally, so that when the time comes for us to really let it go, it is natural and easy. But also let it go now because our mental states are negatively tinged by our unconscious grasping, our unconscious wanting it to be permanent, wanting lasting, complete satisfaction from something that is just a temporary thing.

We grasp at its attractiveness, but it's attractiveness to ourselves and others is very relative, largely a matter of taste, and it is something very temporary. Reflecting in this way, we feel different about the attractiveness of both our own and others' forms and can pay attention, perhaps, to other aspects of our relations with them. In other words we experience the first two of the eight vimokshas. We experience some freedom from craving. As we appreciate this state of freedom, we may experience such beauty that we are transported into the dhyanas, we experience the 'Release known as the Beautiful' arising out of our freedom from craving.

Then we may even experience the four arupadhyanas. Experience the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, experience the indivisibility of the perceptions of our mind into things, experience the inconceivablilty of perception itself. We may even perceive the eighth and final vimoksha, experience Enlightenment itself, the perfect cessation of all reactivity and suffering, and the release of total creativity. All that can come from the release afforded by the insight into the unsatisfactoriness of conditioned things.

5 transformation

Last week's talk finished in the middle of a description of the Six-Element practice. I hope none of you have felt that you have been left stranded there over the last week. Just in case, I'm going to carry on from that point.

In imagination, we had been reflecting on the element of earth, as we find it in the relative hardness and resistance, both of the things around us and our own bodies. We had explored the impermanence of the earth element. We had explored its unsatisfactoriness too: we'd seen that through contemplating the relatively unsatisfying nature of our own bodily form, and of the bodily forms of others, we may enter the release known as The Beautiful. Even a little release from craving is so beautiful that we are transported into the rupaloka, the world of the lower dhyanas. We also saw, in passing, how this is part of the process of the eight vimokshas or liberations: that is, the eight degrees of liberation from samsara which are tasted by those who have entered the gates of the Transcendental (tasted especially by the Arahant who is liberated in both ways, and by the Body Witness).

So in our six-element practice, we had looked at impermanence, we had looked at unsatisfactoriness. However, we did not have time to explore in terms of the third universal characteristic of existence. We did not look in terms of the insubstantial nature of all things, their nature of *sunyata* or 'emptiness'.

So this is partly what I shall be doing this evening. When we look around us, look at our lives, look at our history, look at all we've done and not done in our lives, look at the lives of others and all that they are doing, what do we think of it all? Do we ever look at the world around us and ask ourselves if this is real? Is all this *real*, these bodies and these buildings and these thoughts and activities? I'm not going to say it is or it isn't. I just want to pose again this old chestnut; it's the old question that I'm sure you have all asked yourselves.

And it's a difficult question, because it takes some adjustment for us to be in a position really to address it. Most of the time we aren't in a position to question the reality of what we are doing. There just isn't time – and even if there *is* sometimes time, we still tend not to ask the question. I mean: if we were to conclude that all this *isn't* real, then… well, that conclusion probably wouldn't seem very helpful. It would open up so many fundamental questions, questions so fundamental that the validity of everything that we do is called into question. If after all this isn't real, why do anything at all? Why take anything seriously at all?

Another reason why we don't ask may be that the significance of the world being real or unreal isn't clear to us. So what if it *is* unreal? Or real? What difference does it really make? What do 'real' and 'unreal' mean in this context? We can go round in circles like this and, in the end, I think most of us don't seriously take up the issue, because we feel we are inadequate to address it properly. It seems too deep and complex. So we say, "Well, I can't understand, so there's no point bothering about it".

However, this is not much of a comfort if you've ever come, even once, to the point of seriously questioning whether all this is real. If you have ever arrived at that point, then you've probably at least realised that it probably *isn't* real in the way most people understand it. And now there's no going back from that realisation, you are just stuck with it, and no amount of agnosticism is going to get you out of it. The only way for us is to go forward: to try to understand as far as we can, try to see as clearly as we can.

This is where we are so fortunate to have come across the Dharma, because the Dharma actually does address issues like these. Especially in the Yogachara school of Buddhism and its later outgrowths, the reality question is addressed very directly indeed, and also in numerous ways, from numerous points of view. One of the Yogacara explorations looks at reality in three ways.

1. It posits, first of all that, the way we interpret our experience is, in many respects, completely illusory. We interpret our reality, for a start, as 'mine', in other words as belonging in some inexpressible way to an assumed 'self' which is, of course, a permanent unchanging thing. Not that we see it as permanent when we think about it. If asked, we'd all say, "Oh yes, my self is impermanent, it's changing all the time". Nevertheless, in all our actions and our thoughts, we tend actually to attribute our experience to a 'me', an illusory 'me' whose real nature is permanent.

> *In a similar way, we also attribute permanence and a kind of durable selfhood to all the objects we experience. So this division of the world into subject and object, permanent unchanging subject and permanent unchanging object, is the basic illusion, it is the world seen as* parikalpita*, or imaginary.*

2. However, the Yogacara say, this is only an error of interpretation of our experience. We are misinterpreting our experience, but our experience itself, before that interpretation, is not an illusion. Our senses are not telling lies. The senses simply show a continual display of phenomena that arise in dependence on certain sets of conditions, and pass away when those conditions cease. When we interpret the dance of phenomena from the viewpoint of a fixed subject and object, the error of *parikalpita* arises. But reality may also be seen as the flux of dependently arising phenomena, and here there is no error. This way of looking at reality is known as the *paratantra* – the aspect of reality within which everything is seen to be dependent on everything else. In the paratantra, our self and our world are seen to be dependent appearances which have a temporary and relative reality. They are not unreal, but their reality is temporary, since it is relative to the other phenomena they are dependent on. The phenomena themselves are thus not ultimately real. They are not permanent, and when you look at them closely they break down into other phemomena. What is ultimately real is that flux of changing phenomena, which, when looked at more closely, cannot really be described even in terms of phenomena. In the end, it is indescribable.
3. So here we find the third aspect of existence, the true reality or the perfected reality known as *parinispanna*, which is when we realise, in actual experience, that reality is indescribable. At the moment, we can perhaps see the *paratantra* reality to some extent. We've probably thought about these things before, and no doubt it isn't difficult to imagine – or, on good days, even see for a moment – that our world is one of dependently arising phenomena which we interpret as a concrete self and a concrete world. However, it would be something completely different actually to *experience* the indescribable flux of phenomena as it really is, in its *full* indescribableness. This would transcend our present experience of the world completely. For instance, we could not then really use the word 'experience' at all meaningfully, for in the perfected reality we would already have transcended the subject/object distinction.

The Yogacara doctrine of the Three natures or *svabhavas* can be a quite useful approach to this question of reality. It doesn't say that our experience is unreal; in fact it affirms our experience. At the same time it challenges the way we interpret our experience.

Because it's so useful, I think it's worth going over the same ground again to try to see it from another point of view. When we were born, as new-born babies, we started to build up our world over a long and often very difficult period of time. The process of building up our world has taken us many, many years. Some time ago, we arrived at a point where we were able to join the normal consensus reality – the world which everyone has to agree is real, otherwise we just couldn't live together. Our joining what is called the 'real world' possibly happened some time during our teens, but it is more likely to have been in our twenties, our thirties, or – in the case of a few hardened individualists – no signs have yet appeared of it ever happening!

Our whole system of consensus reality has evolved out of spiritual ignorance. It is entirely based upon a conception of fixed, permanently existing selves, when no fixed, permanent selves really exist. So in this respect, our consensus reality is a total illusion, it is a collective concretisation of the illusion of *parikalpita.* But we would be under a far worse delusion if, seeing this, we started thinking reality is nothing at all. This would be too extreme. There is no doubt that *something* is happening. But what is happening is not the fixed world of concrete self and concrete things that makes up our consensus reality. Instead, it is all dependent origination. Various conditions are giving rise to various further conditions, and it is this dynamic flux of conditions which is what is really happening. The illusion of *parikalpita* comes from our wrong perception of this dynamic flux of *paratantra* or dependent origination.

So we can very usefully reflect on the Buddha's vision of dependent origination. If we can see the world more in that light, it will become clear how our consensus world is actually a very crude and rough approximation to actual reality. If we work from the *paratantra* point of view that all things arise in dependence on one another, we can move from our wrong *parikalpita* understanding into that of *parinispanna*, the perfect vision of the nature of things that transcends even the notion of dependent origination. (Remember that we don't ourselves actually have the Buddha's *vision* of dependent

origination. What we have is a notion, a map of it, its theoretical framework, its explanation. The map is not the territory; explanation is not the actual realisation. We have heard what the Buddha said about reality, and we have an understanding of it, but we do not yet realise it.)

One way to make the move from the *parikalpita* illusion towards the *parinispanna* vision would be to meditate on the *paratantra*, the dependent reality, using the reflection on the 24 nidanas. This practice is quite often done in the Order, for example on Vajraloka retreats.

And what will especially help such a practice is the Yogacara framework of the Eight Consciousnesses, and the great 'turning about' in the Deepest of these consciousnesses. This expression 'turning about,' or *paravrtti,* comes from the Lankavatara Sutra, one of the most influential Mahayana Sutras. It refers to the great revulsion from the mundane, the great turn towards Enlightenment which has been made, for example, by all the four Noble persons I spoke about last week.

We might ask what it is that turns about, and within what medium the turning about takes place. And, in both cases, it is the mind: the mind turns about in the medium of the mind. Because the most distinctive doctrine of the Yogachara School is that everything is mind, nothing exists outside the mind. This subject is mind, and that object is mind too. So the turning about takes place in this mind, the mind that is everything.

The Yogachara distinguishes eight aspects of this mind: eight consciousnesses or vijnanas. Eight of anything, let alone consciousnesses, sounds ominously complex until you realise that the first five are our basic sense consciousnesses, and the sixth consciousness is the mind consciousness. So in these first six kinds of consciousness, you have the aspects of the mind which perceive sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas – which covers the great majority of our experience. This is what makes up most of our world. Our world actually consists of sights, and sounds, and ideas – and all the rest of it. Of course, there are also other dimensions to our world. This is where the remaining two consciousnesses come in.

The seventh consciousness is called the *manas or klistomanovijnana.* Just now I was talking about the error of the *parikalpita* view of things. It is this seventh consciousness which creates the error. The *manas* or *klistomanovijnana* is what misinterprets what is actually there, misinterprets the indescribable dependent arising, misinterprets it in terms of a vaguely conceived subject and a vaguely conceived object. The word *klistomanovijnana* means 'defiled mind consciousness'. This is the creator of our ego and of the world which we project, the creator of the world of objects imagined as independent.

Finally there is the eighth consciousness, the famous *Alaya-vijnana* or 'storehouse' consciousness. 'Storehouse', because it is conceived of as a huge store in which are kept all the personal impressions and volitions that we have built up over our life, and even over all our previous lives. It is thus the location for our memory. All memories and impressions and volitions are conceived of as seeds or *bijas,* which can be germinated. Just to give a simple example, if like me you are sometimes prone to anger and irritation, it is because you have stored in your Alaya consciousness many latent tendencies of that kind. Sometimes people talk about their 'buttons' which can be 'pressed': it's a similar idea. You could see the Alaya as a mass of buttons just waiting to be pressed. If you were to press some of them, the results might be very destructive, like detonating a bomb; other buttons would perhaps have other, more positive effects.

The Yogacara system of mind is of course just a model, just a way of expressing something that is ultimately indescribable. Just as are all our words and concepts, in fact. But this a very useful model, because it is such a mystery that we have so many thoughts, and so many memories and experiences which extend back so far in time. It seems to us that we must be keeping them in a place somewhere. We need a spatial notion even to be able to conceive of this mystery, to get our heads around it. The Alaya is a useful idea. So *where* do people keep all this experience? Well, in the Alaya of course – in the store consciousness, the *Alayavijnana*.

So for the *Yogacarins,* everthing is mind. Since everything is an experience, and experience takes place in the mind, then everthing is an aspect of mind. Even matter, even solid material things, are seen ultimately to be mental experiences. Certainly it is the case that we derive our experience of these solid material things through our senses. And sense-processes are mental processes. Light touches the retina of our eye, sound touches our eardrum, and our clothes touch our skin. Perhaps we can say that these touches are physical, if that is a meaningful expression. But what about the process by which we cognise particular sight and sound forms *out* of these various touches? Surely that takes place in the mind.

This is very clearly shown in dreams. When we dream, even though we are asleep, we have all sorts of sense experiences. We deal with a material world that is totally convincing. We can eat and drink, climb stairs, walk streets, drown in water, fall through the air. But all this vivid sense experience, realistic as it is, happens entirely in the mind.

We see that when we wake up. We wake up in the 'real' material world, in a solid bed which exists in space, a foot or so off a solid floor. We wake up in a physical body which is hard and soft and squidgy at the same time, and with which we can move and travel where we wish. But it was also like that in the dream in which we were so intensely involved just now. So when we wake up in *this* material world, how are we actually to know that *this* is any more real than *that* material world of the dream? We will once again have vivid physical experiences. Perhaps we'll stub our toe on the bedpost, or wash in warm water, or rush downstairs and eat our breakfast. What makes these sense experiences more real, somehow more valid, than the sense experiences in the dream? We definitely feel that they are more real, but can we explain why? And returning to the Yogacara idea that even matter is an aspect of the mind, can we say what is actually 'physical' in these sense experiences? What in fact does 'physical' mean? All sense experience arrives through the senses, and we interpret what arrives with the mind. Matter is always our *experience* of matter. Experience takes place in the mind. Therefore there is nothing which is not of the nature of mind.

And the basic nature of the mind is the Alayavijnana. This is where all our sense impressions go, including those which are taking place at this very moment. So much must have gone in there already – yet the Alaya seems just to keep on stashing it away. Just think for a moment how much information you have stored, as it were, inside you. You get a picture of an inconceivably vast, infinitely expandable store of living impressions, all ready to be re-awakened into life. Some of these impressions are alive in your mind at the moment; whenever you stop and experience yourself more deeply, there they are. They are active and stirred up. They might reveal themselves when you stop and meditate. They also wake up when *you* go to sleep – that is, when the conscious mind goes off duty. Now in this store – which is looking now more like a very lively theatre, what with all this activity – there are six inputs or entrances for all the actors and the dancers of your memory impressions. These entrances are the six senses, which provide their own continuous dance of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts. And standing up on the stage with the microphone is the Master of Ceremonies, the great presenter, the great spin doctor (or the Jester, as he's called in the Lankavatara Sutra). That is, the *manas or klistomanovijnana*, the interpreter. The *klistomanovijnana* sees this great dance of sense inputs on the stage, and he also experiences the dance of his memory impressions in his Store consciousness. But since he is unenlightened, he misinterprets the inner dance of the Store consciousness as being his own permanent self, and misinterprets the outer dance of the senses as a concrete external world.

The Lankavatara Sutra has a little verse which expresses this:

The Citta [that is, the Alaya] dances like the dancer,
Manas resembles the jester,
The Mind-consciousness, in company with the Five [senses],
Imagines [the world it perceives] to be the stage[xvi].

So this is the mind, and also the world; a samsaric world. And yes, it is one more way of expressing the nature of the samsara which needs to be transformed into a nirvana. So how does this transformation take place?

We saw last week that transcendental insight brings about irreversible spiritual development. If insight is sufficiently deep, one may reach a point where there is no falling back into samsara. We discussed last week in some detail the different ways in which this state, the state known as Stream Entry and beyond, is brought about. We saw that there is a principial method of gaining insight in which, having had as much experience as possible of the dhyanas, or higher states of consciousness, one stabilises one's concentration in the first dhyana and reflects on the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness or insubstantiality of all phemomena. This is the principial method, the principles of which can also be seen in the great variety of insight meditation practices throughout all Buddhist traditions.

The transformation itself, the transformation of the mind which results in transcendental insight, is called in the Yogachara system the great 'turning about' or *paravrtti.*

Looking at the system of eight consciousnesses, we see six senses and a store of impressions, with an interpreter, or rather a misinterpreter, dancing in between. The problem is clearly with that tricky misinterpreter, the klistamanovijnana, the defiled mind-consciousness. So you might expect this great

turning about to take place with respect to him (or her). However, what happens when we gain transcendental insight according to the Yogachara, is a transformation, not in the *klistomanovijnana,* but in the *Alayavijnana*. It is in the store house of impressions itself that the turning about takes place. The *klistamanovijnana* ceases its misinterpretations later, as a *result* of that turning about.

I think this is very interesting. You don't try directly to transform the misinterpreter; it would seem that the misinterpreter is indirectly transformed through something happening at a deeper level, at the Alaya level. Remember the Storehouse consciousness is filled with bijas or seeds. There is all kinds of stuff in there, seeds of every variety. Much of it of the unskilful or negative variety. But our practice of the Dharma –our meditation and ethical practice – creates positive seeds. These positive seeds accumulate in the Alaya, as we practice, along with all the other bijas. This means that the effect of our practice increases its influence over the mind as a whole, so that the mind as a whole is increasingly flavoured by the positive seeds. This isn't very scientific, perhaps, but it seems quite a good way of describing how spiritual practice and progress feels. And eventually, as the percentage of positive seeds increases, and the ratio of positive seeds increasingly matches that of the negative seeds, and even predominates, there arrives a point where the influence of the positive seeds is the greater of the two. This is where you get the great turning about in the deepest consciousness. The whole vijnana system is completely transformed. All eight consciousnesses are transformed, not just the Alayavijnana, even though the initial transformation takes place there. It is a transformation equivalent to Enlightenment. Now, in place of the eight unenlightened consciousnesses, arise the five *Jnanas* or Wisdoms that we know from the Mandala of the Five Buddhas.

What was previously our five ordinary physical sense consciousnesses – our eye, ear, nose, tongue and touch – collectively become the wisdom of Amoghasiddhi, the magical wisdom of activity in the world, the wisdom of Infallible Success. What was our ordinary mind-sense consciousness, awareness of our ordinary thoughts, the *Manovijnana,* becomes Amitabha's All-distinguishing Wisdom, the wisdom in which all particular things are known in their real nature. Then what used to be the interpreter, or the misinterpreter, that is the *klistomanovijnana,* is able to let go its attachment to fixing reality as subject, object, self and world. Transformed, it becomes Ratnasambhava's Wisdom of Equality, in which the fundamental essence of all phenomena is seen as equally empty of fixed substantiality. Then finally the Alayavijnana itself is transformed. The Alayavijnana now becomes the Mirror-like Wisdom of Aksobhya, the dark blue Buddha at the dawn gateway of the Mandala. The great Store house of your consciousness is finally revealed, in the great mirror of vipassana meditation, as it really is.

So at these four gateways of the Mandala of Enlightenment are the eight transformed consciousnesses: the transformed Store consciousness, the transformed defiled mind consciousness or interpreter, the transformed mind sense, and the transformed five physical senses. Then, at the very centre of the Mandala, that is inside the gates, on the shrine in the Temple itself, is enthoned the white Buddha Vairocana. He of course has his own Wisdom, that of the Dharmadhatu, the great all encompassing wisdom of Enlightenment. However, this is not a wisdom that has been transformed. This is the wisdom of the absolute Alaya which never was defiled by the division into subject and object. The Dharmadhatu is reality itself, as it always has been and always will be. So here, in the Mandala of transformed and enlightened consciousness, we have a ninth consciousness, that of the absolute Alaya. This absolute and enlightened store consciousness is beyond the individual, whereas the relative store consciousness is individual – it's our personal store consciousness. Of course, we don't really own it. There is no abiding self whose property it could be. It is when we see that illusion that we begin to experience the absolute store consciousness.

So this is how the great turning about takes place in the Alaya, and how the misinterpreter, the *klistomanovijnana,* is transformed as it were laterally, indirectly, by the force of our spiritual practice acting on the depths of consciousness.

I do think it is very interesting to consider our existence by way of the eight consciousnesses. To consider how our experience, right now as always, is conditioned by the current configuration of the live, press-able buttons in our store consciousness. The way we are experiencing this event tonight, the way we experience our lives generally, has been so much conditioned by our past, by the way we have reacted in our past, by all the emotional habits we have set up which are now live seeds or press-able buttons. In other words, what we are each experiencing reflects our Store of consciousness. We are all in slightly different worlds, each of us surrounded by a different 'envelope' of Alaya, each

misinterpreting its inner dance as a concrete self, and misinterpreting the outer dance of sense impressions as a concrete world.

Whereas in reality, according to the Yogachara, existence is not like that. How it actually is, is not describable in words, but it's character is similar to that of a dream. Because if we started to become Enlightened, our existence would become rather like a dream in which we started to realise that we are dreaming. Enlightenment would be like waking from the dream.

A dream isn't a bad analogy for our unenlightened existence. On those rare occasions when we do realise that we are dreaming, we also realise (usually for just a few seconds) that everything around us in the dream is illusory. If we could only remain in that aware state for a little bit longer, and become reflective in it, we might begin to see how the components of the dream are reflections of habitual mental states. How the scene around us – the way we are experiencing the world around us in the dream – is in some way a reflection of the particular seeds which are currently popping away in our store consciousness. A dream is like a play which has been custom written, just today, to illustrate today's configuration of the Store consciousness. And our waking life is very similar. It is just that we are more awake, more independent of the surrounding world, and can therefore have a more active influence. The more we progress on the Buddhist path of mindfulness, the more of an influence we feel like having on the 'dream' of our unenlightened life.

In the end, it is that interest in having an influence that is the key – the key, that is, to spiritual practice in general, and to meditation in particular. All that button-pressing and seed-popping going on in the Alaya represents our volitional conflict, the continual conflict of our wanting this and that. We are primarily creatures of will, we are volitional beings. We build our lives out of wants and desires. Wants and desires which are usually conditioned by the tricky and deluded misinterpretions of the *klistomanovijnana.*

We have to be careful, then, in our motivation for meditation, because our motivation for doing a particular practice is obviously going to affect the outcome. Going back to our example of the refection on the Six Elements, we won't ever bring about a transformation in the depths unless the seeds we are sowing are seeds of wanting spiritual change. Unless spiritual transformation is what we want, there is little point in meditating on the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality of phenomena.

Perhaps to some extent we can reflect at the previous levels of wisdom, at the level of cintamayiprajna where we are developing our understanding of what impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality actually mean to us. Yet motivation makes a big difference here, too. If that kind of reflection is not for the purpose of spiritual change, these ideas will have little impact on us, and our understanding will not progress very far. The result of such understanding should be faith and interest and confidence in taking the practice further and deeper. If that is not the result, we have probably not understood the implications of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality.

An important principle of meditation comes in here which I could just as well have mentioned earlier in these talks, and this is the principle of Regular Steps. The principle is that some meditation practices are more advanced than others, and that success in these practices depends on the extent to which we have already established a foundation in the more basic practices. It might seem rather obvious to say this, but we are often attracted to meditation on something more advanced, such as sunyata, when really it would have more of an effect on us if we simply practised the good old Mindfulness of Breathing – or even plain old ordinary mindfulness. To some extent vipassana meditation is self-regulating in this respect, because if we try to reflect in a vipassana way without a foundation in samatha or concentration of mind, we won't be very successful, and so it will be clear that our foundation was insufficient. There will not be any insight, just muddled and distracted thinking – or, at best, some reflection at the level of *cintamayiprajna*. An improved intellectual understanding of the Dharma is a good thing, but this should be developed through Dharma study, not forced meditation, and such understanding should not be confused with insight.

What kind of foundation do we need? There are several different aspects to this foundation. We have looked at all of them in previous talks, and I'll have more to say next week. First, we need to establish a foundation of mindfulness gained from our developing awareness of ourselves. Secondly, we need to establish a foundation of faith and confidence in the Dharma. This awakens our going for Refuge. Thirdly, we need to establish a foundation of understanding through taking in the ideas of the Dharma and then reflecting on them so that we develop our own understanding of them. This clarifies our going for Refuge. Fourthly, we need to establish a foundation of metta and Bodhicitta, the altruistic

dimension of going for Refuge, and all the ethical practices which arise from an increasing awareness of others. These four are like the four legs of a table. The table top supported by those legs is our establishment of a foundation of samatha meditation, so that we are able to suppress the mental hindrances and reach at least access concentration, but preferably at least the first level of dhyana. So this is the foundation we need for vipassana meditation. Mindfulness, faith, understanding and bodhicitta support samatha. Samatha is the support for vipassana. On the table, supported by four legs, we place a beautiful and wise Buddha image. Vipassana is becoming a Buddha, becoming an Enlightened being for the sake of all.

Provided we maintain this foundation, our vipassana meditation will flourish and develop quite naturally, and be completely successful. Meditating on impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality or sunyata.

The word *sunyata*, literally translated, means 'emptiness.' This is not emptiness in the sense that there isn't anything there, but in the sense that there isn't any 'thing' there. There are no things anywhere, in fact. Sunyata is the subtlest of the three lakshanas or universal characteristics, and it requires quite a lot of both listening and reflecting to establish enough of a foundation of understanding for us to use sunyata as a gateway to transcendental wisdom.

Yet we've done quite a lot of that in tonight's talk already, in our exploration of the eight consciousnesses. We've reflected extensively on the earth element, by asking ourselves some very deep questions about the nature of matter. It's the same with the elements of water, fire, air, and even space. We've heard tonight how the Yogacara insist that for all of us, matter is essentially an experience of the mind. That our whole experience of the world of things is to a great extent conditioned by our history, by our memory impressions gathered through beginningless time in the great Store consciousness.

So maybe we have some basis here for meditation on sunyata, or insubstantiality. This is the message of the Heart Sutra, that all *dharmas* are sunyata: *sarvadharmasunyata*. The word *dharmas* here simply means 'things' or phenomena. All things are ultimately empty. But what are they empty of? They are empty of self-nature. They are empty of self. They are not a 'thing'. They are empty of any characteristic by which we could legitimately call them a 'thing.'

A good way of getting to grips with sunyata is to consider it by way of the twofold doctrine of *nairatmya. Nairatmya* means 'not-self'. There's a bit of Buddhist history in this nairatmya doctrine. Once upon a time the Sarvastivada school, one of the older schools, explained sunyata in terms of what is called *pudgala* nairatmya. Pudgala means person, so *pudgalanairatmya* means the lack of self in a person. The explanation is that if you look at yourself, you don't find anything that is permanent, no part of what you might include as yourself lasts, so that you cannot find a self, even though we all tend to think in those terms. Your body doesn't last forever, and in fact the different parts are always undergoing changes. So if there were a permanent self, it's not part of your body. Of course, we cannot help thinking, if for example, someone points their finger at our body, that they are pointing at 'me'. But exactly what 'me' this is, and exactly where its boundaries lie, is somewhat unclear. Anyway, by considering and reflecting on the body in this way, we find there is no basis in reality for the self which we feel we have. And then turning to the mind, obviously our mind changes even more quickly than our body; the content of the mind changes continually, with of course lots of changing cycles and recurrences and repetitions of mental states due to established habit. So there is nothing mental that doesn't change; our self is not here, either. And if we then search for it ourselves in terms of the five skandhas or 'heaps' of qualities, our physical form is not permanent and gives no basis for a self, our feelings are not permanent, our volitions and desires are not permanent, our faculty of perception is not permanent, and the various consciousnesses, which we've already looked at in some detail, they are not permanent either. The eye consciousness, ear, nose, tongue, touch consciousness, don't contain anything that we can really identify with as ourself. If we extend the search to the mind consciousness, the awareness of thoughts, thoughts just come and go; they can be directed to some extent, but the thought consciousness itself is just consciousness, just awareness. This is no basis for a permanent self. We've already looked at the depth consciousness, the Store consciousness. I don't think the Sarvastivadins did this, but if they did, there is nothing in that whole vast can of worms – and jewels, I should add – which could be called 'ourselves.' The remaining consciousness is the *klistamanovijnana,* and we know that he is a trickster who is under a delusion, so he can't be our self. The *klistamanovijnana* is simply the habit by which we keep interpreting our experience in terms of a self. In the end, we find nothing substantial at all in consciousness which actually fits the notion of a self, despite the fact that we use that notion all the time.

Now please don't forget this is a meditation, which needs actually to be done, and which can only be done effectively on a proper foundation. It is only meaningful on a proper foundation. So I'm not going to try and force an argument, on a rational basis, that there is no self. There is no point, because fundamentally, in our bones, we can't and won't believe it. We are talking here about a realisation which we cannot fathom with the rational mind. Moreover the outcome of such a realisation is far more positive than would appear on the face of it. To us, on the face of it, to 'realise non-selfhood' is simply to disappear. But that reaction illustrates rather well the extent to which we identify with the notion of a fixed self. Because if we *didn't* cling on to the idea of a fixed self, losing an illusion wouldn't matter to us.

Perhaps I need to clarify here that the notion which Buddhism denies is that of a fixed and permanent self. No one is saying that one's ordinary changing experience of selfhood is false. But it is temporary, and changes all the time. Everyone has a conventional sense of self, and it's quite reasonable to say, 'I am over here and you are over there.' The illusion is to think that this me and that you corresponds with something which really, substantially and permanently exists, as the me over here is something fixed for all time, and also the you over there.

So this is the *pudgalanairatmya*. In their practice of vipassana meditation the Sarvastivadins would meditate on the elements, or the skandhas, or any of the dharmas of the personality, to work on this notion of nonselfhood of the person. So they wouldn't see a self, they'd just see consciousness, recognition, form, feeling, will and volition. They would just see the dharmas of the personality.

In fact, there was rather a tendency to see these dharmas of personality as fixed things, as the 'bare bones' of reality. Everything could be reduced to moments of experience, ultimate moments of experience, and these ultimate moments of experience were moments of experience of consciousness, moments of experience of recognition, moments of experience of physical form, etc. These were the building blocks of reality, the atoms into which reality could be broke down.

But then, continuing this little bit of Buddhist history, along came the Mahayana. The Mahayana said, hey look – it's as though these little dharmas of the personality, these moments of yours, it's as though they have a kind of self. It's as though you think they are permanent, as though they have some kind of fixed identity which cannot be changed. Well, they said, it's not really like that! And they set forth another kind of *nairatmya* which went further than the pudgalanairatmya. This was the nairatmya of dharmas or the *dharmanairatmya.*. OK, fine, you have no fixed nature, but nor even do the phenomena which make you up. There is no fixed nature, even in a momentary dharma. So this was the *sarvadharmasunyata*. All things are sunyata, all things are empty of self. As I said earlier, it isn't that there is nothing, but there are no things. If you look into a particular thing, you will see that it is composed of other things, which are also composed of other things, which are also composed of other things. And none of these things can be said, in any complete or whole sense, really to be a 'thing;.

And all these things which cannot finally be fixed as actual things are in relationship to one another. All things which are not actually things are continually conditioning one another. And in fact it is because they are not fixed, concrete things that they can do so.

6 exemplification

Over the last five weeks we have covered quite a lot of ground. We have looked at the foundations for effective meditation. We have looked at the various levels of meditation. We have also looked at some of the important issues which crop up in the course of meditation practice. There is a great deal that is important that we have *not* had time to look at – but never mind, we have covered many of the most important points. In a way it may seem strange to speak at length on a topic that so much requires practice for any experience. However I'm glad to say that many seasoned practitioners have been attending these talks, so I'm sure this is not misunderstood. It seems essential that we sometimes draw together the principles, Buddhist doctrines and philosophies which underlie our tradition of practice. The better we understand these, the deeper will be our confidence in our actual meditation practice.

Last week I briefly mentioned the principle of Regular Steps in meditation. As the Buddha says in the Udana, the great ocean of Dhamma gets *gradually* deeper; there are no sudden precipices in our deepening understanding. You can't step straight from the shallowest part to the deepest part in one go. Though we may sometimes try to tackle more advanced spiritual practices, we discover that our success in those practices is determined by the extent to which we have cultivated the basics which underpin those practices. Vipassana meditation, for example, cannot effectively be done without samatha – you can't expect to be able effectively to meditate on the nature of reality without having a calm and concentrated mind to do it in. In other words, you need to develop some degree of dhyana, as we explored in our third talk. You also can't expect to be able effectively to meditate on the nature of reality unless you have some idea of what it actually means to meditate on the nature of reality. In other words, you need at least some intellectual understanding of what is involved, as we explored in the fourth and fifth talks. Moreover, if you wish to launch yourself into meditation on it, you need to feel able to trust that understanding. In other words, such meditation also requires faith: not only faith in the Dharma, but faith in yourself. Otherwise you won't really be able to involve yourself in the practice, won't really be able to go for Refuge. You'll hold back, you'll hesitate, at a time when you definitely should not hesitate but should go on, should go forward with trust in the practice. You definitely need to be strongly motivated if you are to meditate effectively. Faith therefore goes hand in hand with the motivation or the Will to Enlightenment, that is the Bodhicitta or the altruistic aspect of going for Refuge. This motivation comes about from seeing the sufferings of others as they wander in samsara, and from seeing that we are actually in a position to do something about it, at least for ourselves. It comes from seeing that all beings can develop their ethics, their meditation and their wisdom further and further and really change their lives. All this we explored in our first two talks. We've explored our foundation of motivation and the emotional gravitation which makes it up. We've explored unification of mind and its application in insight, in illumination and transformation.

And tonight, we have exemplification. Because in our exploration of meditation we have looked at so many dimensions of the spiritual life. So many ways in which we are maintaining our positive direction and developing new positive habits; purifying ourselves of negative habits and preventing new ones from arising.

To exemplify is to show by example. We are all examples of Dharma practitioners, and we are all having an influence on one another. This is because we are all, to varying degrees, *embodiments* of the Dharma. If the word 'embodiment' had ended in 't–i–o–n' I might have used it as tonight's title. Anyway, according to Collins, to **embody** something is

1. to give a tangible, bodily, or concrete form to [something which was previously] (an abstract concept).
2. [to **embody** something is] to be an example of or express (an idea, principle, etc.), esp. in action: *his gentleness embodies a Christian ideal.* This is more or less equivalent to the idea of exemplification.
3. It can mean to collect or unite *in* a comprehensive whole, system, etc.; comprise; include: [as in] *all the different essays were embodied in one long article.*
4. Finally, [to **embody** something can mean] to invest (a spiritual entity) with a body or with bodily form; render incarnate.

Each of these four meanings is very interesting indeed, and tonight I shall be dealing with more than one of them. To begin with, I want to talk about how all the different kinds of spiritual practice we have discussed in these talks unite in a comprehensive whole.

That comprehensive embodiment of all spiritual practice is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is crucial to the practice of ethics, crucial to the practice of meditation, and crucial to the cultivation of wisdom. Mindfulness is the great practice, and the distinctive practice, of Buddhism. It is what unites Buddhist practice into a comprehensive whole.

Mindfulness is awareness or consciousness, but it is not a passive awareness; mindfulness is a *precept* that we actively take upon ourselves. In the positive formulation of the fifth Buddhist ethical precept, we say, 'with mindfulness clear and radiant I purify my mind'. The principle is to create clarity of mind, to maintain a clear consciousness, so that we can really see, really think, really feel what is going on. So whatever encourages such clear consciousness is to be cultivated; whatever hinders such clear consciousness is to be avoided. The precept is normally formulated in terms of what is to be avoided. We say: *Surāmeraya Majja Pamādatthāna veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* or "I undertake the training principle of abstaining from intoxicating substances."

Surā is a Pali, originally Vedic, word meaning intoxicating drink. *Meraya* is a particular kind of intoxicant: it's a strong spirit, perhaps like rum or gin. The word *meraya* is usually found together with *surā,* just as we find it here in *surāmeraya*. Then the word *majja* also means a strongly intoxicating drink. *Majja* is derived from the Pali word *mada*, or *mad*, meaning intoxication or intoxicated[xvii].

This specific connection is with drink and drugs, but that is certainly not the only kind of *mada,* or intoxication, found in Buddhist tradition. Most references are to the intoxication of youth, the intoxication of good health, and the intoxication of life. The Confession from the Sutra of Golden Light cites a similar threefold *mada*.

> *'May the Buddhas, whose minds are full of mercy and compassion, watch over me, those best of two–footed beings, who dwell in the world in its ten directions. And whatever evil, cruel act was done by me previously, I will confess it all before the Buddhas... Whatever evil I have done by being drunk with the intoxication of authority, or with the intoxication of high birth, or by being drunk with the intoxication of tender age'.*

So here we have the intoxication which comes about simply through being in a position of authority or privilege; the intoxication we can feel simply because we are experiencing good health and plenty of energy; and the intoxication of being young and full of life. These show the essential nature of intoxication quite clearly. In such situations we 'feel good', but this feeling good does not motivate us to *do* good. Yes, we feel really good, full of ourselves, full of life, full of energy, like we always wanted to feel: intelligent, active, attractive. But in this state, something serious has gone wrong. We have been poisoned. The idea of 'intoxication' derives from what is toxic, what is poisonous. We are in a state of blindness in which we cannot see reality.

The Buddha once said that all unenlightened beings are mad. Certainly all young men, women and adolescents are mad. Mad with desires for this and that, and the other. (Perhaps especially that.) When you are under twenty, you have little way of imagining what it is like to have lived forty or even thirty years. This blindness conditions your view of other people, and of the world they populate. Hence it is often a somewhat narrow and personal view.

Different age groups seem to suffer different madnesses. For thirty-somethings and forty-somethings, and even quite a few twenty-somethings, what seems to do the trick is the pressure to survive financially, to look after a family, to succeed in society, to be desirable, and to look pretty (or if that's impossible, at least to look acceptable). There's this tremendous pressure to keep up appearances, maintain that position, preserve a particular reputation, to impress. The pressure to have sound views, acceptable views, or at least some kind of view. So many pressures. As children, many of us felt oppressed by what we considered to be unique problems and difficulties. By now we probably realise that the oppressions everyone experiences are mostly caused by their own ignorance and tunnel vision.

In the Sutra of Golden Light this idea is expressed in these confessional verses:

> *... I confess that evil which has been heaped up by me in the oppression of birth, by the various oppressions of bodily activity, in the oppression of existence, in the oppression of the world, in the oppression of the fleeting mind, in the oppression of impurities caused by the foolish and stupid, and in the oppression of the arrival of*

> *evil friends, in the oppression of fear, in the oppression of passion, in the oppression of hatred and by the oppressions of folly and darkness, in the oppression of the instant, in the oppression of time, by the oppressions of gaining merits, standing before and in the presence of the Buddhas, I confess all this evil'.*

It is obvious from all this that we human beings are quite sufficiently intoxicated and maddened, quite sufficiently mentally unbalanced, without adding to that by further intoxicating ourselves with gin, whisky, bacardi, beer, babycham, alcopops, whatever your poison happens to be. (When ordering drinks people sometimes ask, don't they, "What's your poison?"). Or, for the more adventurous, grass, hash, cocaine, acid, ecstasy – or Uhu, paint thinners, ether, whatever you find most interesting. People drink and smoke and sniff for all kinds of reasons, perhaps, but one very basic reason is undoubtedly a sense of unsatisfactoriness. They don't want that, so they ingest something which makes them feel different for a while. But that feeling different lasts only for a while, after which the sense of unsatisfactoriness comes back, usually more strongly than before. This is a very depressing state of affairs. But if the only way we can find to deal with our sense of unsatisfactoriness is to distract ourselves from it, depression is increasingly going to be our lot.

This is the addictive nature of samsara, as expressed in those crucial nidanas of the Buddha's vision of dependent origination. Unwholesome aversion and craving easily arise when we feel pain and unsatisfying, partial pleasures; and we're likely to become habituated and addicted after that. The approach of Buddhism is of course to realise this and to set one's course in the opposite direction. Taking unsatisfactoriness as inevitable, it says that never mind, faith can *also* arise in dependence on this very *same* unsatisfactoriness. Happiness, unification of mind and eventually insight can then arise in dependence on this faith. So the way to deal with the unsatisfactory nature of things, with suffering in all its forms, is to use it as a vehicle for faith and insight. We need to go straight – the Pali word is *uju*, straightforward or upright – that is, we need to avoid getting intoxicated, or at least start noticing *when* we get intoxicated. Not getting habitually bored and then habitually distracting ourselves. Mindfulness brings life and energy into our existence.

In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha says that when we practise mindfulness we come alive where others are, effectively, dead.

> *Mindfulness is the abode which goes beyond death. Unmindfulness is the abode of death. Those who are mindful do not die. Those who are unmindful are as though dead already.*

The main scriptural reference for the practice of mindfulness is *Majjhima Nikaya* 10, the *Satipatthana Sutta* or 'Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness'. Here the Buddha speaks of the development of mindfulness in four areas which are progressively more subtle. First there's the physical body, then the feelings, then our general mental states, and finally the particular objects we mentally perceive in each moment.

Awareness of the body primarily means, well, actually experiencing it. Which is something we often don't do. We often don't know how we're sitting, how we are moving, how we are standing. We often don't experience our face and hand gestures, don't experience our body language. We don't therefore experience the underlying emotions which give rise to that body language. Because when we experience our body more closely and continuously, we get more in touch with what we actually feel. Very often, the reason why we distract ourselves from our ordinary physical experience is because we have got out of touch with it, and this turns our body into something a little alien and even unpleasant. However the Buddhist practice is to experience ourselves fully and physically. On the whole, it is an exceedingly joyful experience to experience one's body.

The Buddha once declared that 'In this very body, six feet in length, with its sense–impressions and its thoughts and ideas, […is…] the world, and the origin of the world, and the ceasing of the world, and likewise the Way that leads to the ceasing of the world.'[xviii] Our body is an excellent source of spiritual learning. It is at the centre of all our desires and antipathies. When I want food, sex, attention, praise, shelter, approval, it is actually for my body that I want it. Moreover, the body is the reason we are here – by definition. The body defines what 'here' means. 'We' are here because our body is here.

Ours is a precious human body, it's the vehicle for our liberation – yet it's a total mystery to us. If you think about bodies a lot, aside from sexual fantasies that is, bodies turn out to be weird, strange, even sometimes rather frightening things. When we look at another person – that is, when we look at their body – we don't really understand what we are looking at. Is it just a ghost inhabiting a machine? 'When I look into my body', sings Milarepa, 'I see it as a mirage city'. What a strange and rich image. Buddhist scriptures often symbolise the body as a city, or sometimes as a village, full of rich activity

and teeming life. Strangely and oddly teeming. If we see a living body being cut open, for example during an operation, the complex life inside frightens us. It's too surprising. There's too much colour.

It's important to realise that the Pali/Sanskrit word *kaya* has a much more general meaning than our word 'body.' *Kaya* literally means a group, an accumulation or a collection of things. But kaya doesn't just mean physical body, because it includes mental qualities like feeling and will. *Kaya* refers to something more like one's person, not just one's physical form.

Last week we saw that in the Yogacara view all is mind, so that our experience of body is mental in every respect. All experience comes through the senses, and the senses are mediated by the mind. So both world and body are essentially mental experiences – they are always mediated by the senses, and interpreted by the mind.

Moreover, this mysterious body is something we always have. In waking life, in dreams, in the bardo after death, there is always an experience of body. It seems that body always mirrors consciousness. When for example we lose waking consciousness and sleep, and dream consciousness arises, there arises also a dream body, the body we experience in the dream. Unenlightened existence, it seems, requires that we have a centre of experience, and the concept of a body provides us with such a centre. 'Body' is thus a principle of configuration, something around which we construct an entire world. It is the principle of location in time and space. We are here. Our body is what we hang our experience on to. Death is a terrifying prospect mostly because we associate so much with the gross physical body. If we experienced the principle of 'body' in this more extended sense, perhaps we'd be a bit more relaxed about it.

There are certainly connections and correspondences which indicate the continuity of mind and body. The way we physically hold ourselves affects our mental state; a healthy body gives sensuous pleasure which refreshes the mind; poor health can depress our spirits. A body that is in harmony with the mind encourages skilful mental states. You get this kind of harmony through meditation, and through mindfulness.

Another illustration of the continuity of body and mind is the way one's mental state is reflected in the 'breath-body', and the way the state of the 'breath-body', in turn, affects the body of flesh. We heard, in the third talk, the Anapanasati Sutta describing how the 'breath body', that is the form of the breath, is contrasted with the form of the solid flesh body, so that awareness of the state of the breath body helps calm the flesh body, and vice versa.

When I spoke recently with Bhante about meditation, he said that in the FWBO we could improve our meditation posture – especially in the Just Sitting practice. But what principles are involved? Well, it certainly seems to me that meditation posture is not just about sitting in some arbitrarily worked out, 'correct' pose. It seems to me that we could generate more of an appreciation of the role of the body in our spiritual practices. There are subtler aspects of the principle of embodiment which relate to our meditation and Dharma practice. We all at least experience areas of our body which seem to be centres of emotion or which connect somehow with particular energies. These are the chakras, the wheels or lotuses or energy centres of the body.

You can learn about what each of these represents by simply concentrating your attention there. As you traverse further up your body, the sensations and associations and emotions which you feel become more refined, and even become significant from a spiritual point of view. Buddhism generally differs from Hinduism in not directly addressing the lower chakras, which recapitulate the state of evolution of our existential and sexual nature. The general Buddhist view is that doing so is possibly destructive, that it is in any case relatively ineffective, and that in the end it is actually unnecessary. Because if you work to develop the heart and other higher centres, for example through doing the Metta Bhavana and engaging in spiritual friendship, your grosser energies are quite naturally going to be activated and refined as well.

There are numerous systems of chakras in Indo-Tibetan yogic tradition. It is interesting to see that they almost all differ in small respects. Some have an extra chakra somewhere, or one that is in a slightly different position. This shows that position of the chakras is not exactly defined in the body. Mr. Chen's explanation is that the chakras are in fact key aspects of a subtle body which exists as it were in parallel to the physical body.

Vajrayana traditions speak of three bodies in this kind of parallel – the physical, the subtle and the wisdom body. The wisdom body or *Vajrakaya* seems to be a kind of transcendental body, perhaps corresponding to some extent with the Rainbow body attained at death by sages like Milarepa. The

subtle body is created by one's spiritual practice. It's a little like Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, but in reverse. We all just get older and fatter and uglier like everyone else, but up in our attic is a secret portrait of us, which becomes more and more beautiful as our practice deepens. This is the subtle body.

Not everyone has a subtle body. You create it through spiritual practice. So it isn't quite the same as the body in which you transmigrate in the bardo after death. That eventually fades away, but the subtle body doesn't – once formed, it continues on, changing and transforming as we go increasingly deeply for refuge, until Enlightenment is reached. The subtle body is also equivalent to the *manomayakaya* or mind-made body, which the Buddha describes in the Pali Canon.

The important point for us is that this 'body' is created by our practice, especially our meditation practice. This is particularly the case in *sadhana* meditation, in which one visualises the Buddha or a Bodhisattva, because as it evolves the subtle body becomes gradually imbued with the the particular qualities of the visualised form. One is then increasingly able to support the experience of those qualities when they arise as potentialities in the bardo, either after death or in deep meditation. However those qualities are also developed by all the meditation practices we do, so these practices also create and modify the subtle body.

An example of an imaginative identification with the subtle body can be seen in the *Om Ah Hum* which we chant whenever we salute a shrine. These can be imagined at our own head, throat and heart centres, and represent the enlightened body, speech and mind of the Buddha. The *Om* is the essence of his body, the *Ah* is the essence of his speech, and the *Hum* is the essence of his mind. When you visualise the syllables in yourself, you are symbolising your attempt to transform your own body, speech and mind into those of the Buddha.

So from all this reflection on the nature of embodiment, we can perhaps see how rich can be the practice of this, the first of the four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Now to be fully aware of the body is also going to involve us in feeling, the second foundation of mindfulness. Our body is the carrier of our sense organs, and feeling is what happens when our senses make contact, and we see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and think. Our sense experience *feels*. It feels pleasant, it feels painful, perhaps strongly so, perhaps hardly at all so. We grasp after the strong pleasure – or any pleasure, really; we back off from strong pain – in fact we avoid any degree of pain. In doing so, though, we get ourselves into some samsaric problems. We get stuck in attachments and aversions. If we don't know what we are feeling, we won't notice our responses to our feelings, and we won't notice when we are getting stuck. So spiritual development means looking much more closely, experiencing ourselves much more fully, being *in* our experience all the time, and not distracted from it.

To do so we need to establish ourselves also in the third foundation of mindfulness – that is, we need to know what kind of mood we are in. Knowing when we are grumpy and likely to say something unpleasant, knowing when we are a bit intoxicated and likely to do something silly. Knowing when we're not feeling that intelligent and likely to make a mess. Knowing when we're tired. Knowing when we're genuinely inspired.

Here there are various traditional questions one should ask oneself; questions one can also ask in meditation. Firstly, we look at our overall emotional state and ask: Is my state of mind free from craving, or is there craving in me? Is there hatred in me, or am I free from it? Is there delusion in me, or not? If we are free from these states, we know it; if those states are in us, we also know it. Then secondly, we look at our overall clarity of mind, and ask: Am I in a more exalted state, is my awareness unusually sharp and clear – or am I just in my ordinary everyday consciousness? If I am in an unusually good state of mind, is this the best possible? Is this Enlightenment? Or is it not Enlightenment? This isn't such a silly question sometimes. When we do experience dhyana or some kind of unusually refined state of mind, it's good to have a way to maintain perspective on it. We can also ask, to what extent is the mind concentrated? Is it in samadhi, or is it not? Is there any degree of concentration here at all? Finally we ask, is my mind liberated, or is it still clinging on to something, is something holding it back?

By asking such questions until they arise as a natural part of our life, we get to know our moods much more than usual. We get to know the general kinds of thoughts that arise in our mind, the worlds we inhabit, the heavens and hells.

The fourth foundation of mindfulness is the contemplation of mental objects. We watch the objects that we take hold of in our mind. So we ask ourselves, what are we *actually* looking at the moment? What exactly is going on? What are we actually hearing? And what are we actually thinking? It isn't always the obvious thing. Right now, you aren't just looking at me and thinking about what I'm saying, I'm sure. We just aren't that simple. Our minds flash around the universe of our imagination like lightning. So noticing the actual flashing, experiencing each object of the mind as we actually cognise it – this is the fourth Foundation of Mindfulness. It is of course a practice which requires considerable work actually to achieve to any extent. Our minds work so quickly, and so many mental objects populate the universe of our imagination. However, if we realise its value, we will certainly want to develop this kind of mindfulness, and then we will be able to make some progress in its development. I think meditation shows us more clearly almost than anything else how extensive is this activity of choosing mental objects. However it is just as useful to watch this activity all the time, outside meditation, and for a number of reasons. For example, by doing so we become more aware of what we think, and how we think. We also come to know the kinds of processes by which we come to conclusions and act. It can sometimes be rather shocking to see these processes, to see how shallow our reasoning often is. The reason why we hold so many of the views we hold is simply because we like them, or because we do not like the alternative. But since we aren't very aware of the process by which we have come to our conclusions, we rarely know this. This practice is not just about abstract thoughts, though, it applies to any object of the mind. The mind also apprehends sense objects and memories. If we deliberately cultivate our ability to notice mental objects, especially in conjunction with the other three foundations of mindfulness, we may notice more clearly our reactions to other people and situations, even do so in time to act in the midst of our reaction and change our habit – rather than acting afterwards, when the damage has been done.

In his exposition of this in the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha recommends various points from which to view mental objects. (He recommends looking at them through the lens, as it were, of the Five Hindrances, the Five Skandhas, the Six sense–bases, the Seven Links of Awakening, and the Four noble Truths.) In other words we contemplate from the point of view of the Dharma, which enables us to assess what we are doing in choosing the particular mental objects we do. We remember that out of the relative chaos of thoughts and feelings and physical sensations which is going on in our mind, we are trying to deepen our practice of sila, samadhi and prajna. So we assess what we are thinking about, assess what we are looking at and the thoughts and attitudes which are arising out of that situation. We consider whether those thoughts and attitudes are morally skilful or not, consider whether or not they are helping us move towards unification of mind and wisdom. Having assessed them, we act so that we move in the direction of sila, samadhi, and prajna. So this fourth foundation of mindfulness offers us a basis for the basic spiritual act, the act of going for Refuge to the principles of spiritual growth and development.

I think it is clear from what has already been said that mindfulness has two aspects. Here, we're aware of the objects of our consciousness, and there's also this assessment as to the spiritual direction in which we are going. That is, there is *sati*, or awareness, and also there is *sampajañña* or awareness of purpose. These apply to mindfulness practice generally.

Imagine that you are working behind the counter of a very busy shop, and it's near Christmas. It's not an Evolution shop; it's a wholefood shop. Customers are coming in thick and fast and there is a whole queue of them lining up, because the one at the head of the queue wants some specialised advice about their own diet, about their particular set of allergies, about what they can and can't eat, about dietery supplements they need – also, at the same time, they start asking you about their baby's diet. You are just a temporary Christmas worker. You aren't quite sure whether babies can eat muesli or not. You ponder on these questions for a while, as the queue of customers grows longer and starts to appear somehow menacing in its silent frustration. Inside, you start to panic. Just to get rid of her, you give the mother a pat answer to her diet question, and avoid entirely the issue of muesli. You do all that in a somewhat irritated way, and you also feel irritated about the fact that you are irritated. And later on, reflecting on the day, you feel irritated about the whole sequence of events, and you wonder whether there is really any hope for you in the spiritual life.

The Satipatthana Sutta begins with these words:

> *"Thus have I heard: At one time the Lord was staying among the Kuru people in a township of the Kurus called Kammassadhamma. While he was there, the Lord addressed the monks, saying: "Monks". "Revered One", these monks answered the Lord in assent. The Lord spoke thus: "There is this one way, monks, for the*

> *purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrows and griefs, for the going down of sufferings and miseries, for winning the right path, for realising nibbana, that is to say, the four applications of mindfulness. What are the four? Herein, monks, a monk fares along contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly conscious of it, mindful of it, so as to control the covetousness and dejection common in the world. He fares along contemplating the feelings in the feelings... He fares along contemplating the mind in the mind... He fares along contemplating the mental objects in the mental objects, ardent, clearly conscious of them, mindful of them, so as to control the covetousness and dejection common in the world".*

"So as to control the covetousness and dejection common in the world". In other words, so as to maintain a creative attitude, so as not to be tied to our usual limited emotional responses, responses connected with a limited view of ourselves. A view of ourselves which thinks so often of having things or not having things, investing hopes and fears in having or not having things, getting dejected when we don't have things. The point of mindfulness is to overcome sorrow and grief – to win happiness, to win the right path which leads to nirvana or Enlightenment. So this, very broadly, is the *sampajanna* aspect of mindfulness.

The Buddha said that the four applications of mindfulness are "this one way." This might sound rather dogmatic. We might prefer to think that there are many ways to the same goal, that everyone has their own path to tread. Here the Buddha is not denying that people have different temperaments and conditionings, but he is saying that mindfulness is something that everyone needs to acquire whatever their temperament and conditioning, if they are to develop spiritually. In that sense, it's 'the only way' for all of us. Without awareness, we simply can't develop at all.

In a nutshell, to be mindful is to remember your spiritual purpose in every physical and mental deed. This isn't simply a matter of being mentally and physically present, *now*. To remember your spiritual purpose obviously involves recollecting the past, too. In our history, lessons have been learned which we need to recall. If our experience of life was really only the present moment, it would be a very narrow, one dimensional affair. We would have no recollection of what we had just done, said, or thought. We would forget who we are: you could say that mindfulness is fully remembering who you really are.

Mindfulness must also include some anticipation of what might happen in the future, some subtle 'background' sense that this action will have a result. Then we'll be more aware of why we are acting in this particular way. This is sampajanna. Sampajanna breaks down into three kinds. First, there is the need to remember what it is we are trying to achieve in a practical way. Second, we need to assess the effectiveness of this particular deed for achieving that purpose. The third kind is to recall the role of our meditation practice in all this.

To apply these to real life, let's go back to the increasingly restless queue of Christmas shoppers facing us in the wholefood shop. They're real enough; and so, no doubt, is our state of mind as we confront them. So with reference to the first kind of sampajanna, what does it mean to 'remember what it is that we are trying to achieve'?

Well, we are grappling here with our unconscious wants and desires. In each moment we are presented with the result of everything we have ever tried to create, every thing we have desired, and striven for, and avoided, and worried about, and thought about. All those years of wanting and willing have formed the way we are, they have accumulated like the lines and wrinkles on our face. We are a mass of habitual motivations that have built up over our whole life, patterns of desires and aversions that started when we were children, and no doubt include hang-overs from previous existences. To maintain and develop mindfulness of our spiritual purpose will often go against these patterns. We learn a great deal about ourselves in this work, and this is how we will learn to 'control the covetousness and dejection common in the world.'

But for us in the shop, talking to that mother about babies eating muesli, to 'remember what it is that we are trying to achieve' means remembering that we are here to do a particular job, and that we are here to help. It might also mean remembering that we want to practice the precepts because they strengthen us, they enhance our state of mind and enable us to be more effective. They enable us to meditate and gain wisdom. Also remembering that others will benefit; that they actually need someone's help, and that right now, we are the only person in a position to give it.

The second kind of recollection of our spiritual purpose was to assess the suitability of our actions for achieving our spiritual purpose. From a practical point of view, that could involve our reminding

ourselves of the opportunity this kind of livelihood offers. Sometimes we might be tempted to start thinking, "I didn't know it would be as intense as this when I agreed to work here, I can't handle it, and I'm going to leave this queue for someone else to deal with". But if we are mindful of it, such thinking also becomes something to assess. We might conclude that this kind of work is a good way for us to strengthen our ethical base, even though the customers can be trying, and we can get into difficulties. Moreover, this *sampajanna* can also get us *out* of such difficulties, because we ask, is this the best way of getting what I want in terms of my spiritual commitment? So we might say to ourselves, "well, here I am, pretending that I know something about infant diet, fobbing this woman off with a pat answer to her question. Perhaps this isn't the best way of overcoming the covetousness and dejection common in the world. Perhaps it would be better if I suggest she asks someone who actually knows. That would be more useful to her, and me". So this aspect of *sampajanna* can help open up more creative solutions to the traps into which our conditioning sometimes funnels us.

The third kind of sampajanna, awareness of the domain of our meditation practice is in a somewhat different area.

In the morning, and the previous evening, let's say, we meditate. This has an effect upon us. It brings us some clarity of mind, some relaxation of mind. It stimulates some reflection on the Dharma, gets us thinking more along the lines of the Dharma, gets us wanting, for example, to practice the precepts a little more. The effect of the practice affects our day, even if we forget all about our meditation during the whole of the rest of that day. However, the affect is likely to be greater if we do recollect it from time to time during the day.

It's a bit like study in this respect – we can study some aspect of the Dharma quite thoroughly, over several weeks. Even attend a study seminar and really go deeply into it. Yet six months later we are likely to have forgotten most of it – unless at some point we review what we have done. It only takes a little bit of effort to do this reviewing. It may only be necessary to cast your eyes briefly over the main points – in a way, just confirm to the universe at large that you are still interested – but that effort to review makes it much more likely that you will remember what you learned. It's a bit similar with the meditation. You can have a wonderful, inspiring meditation, but you forget all about it, even the very same day. But if you get into the habit of calling that day's practice to mind during the day, you create a link of memory which somehow brings a little of that inspiration into the day. I think in a general sort of way, this 'linking' is also likely to make meditation itself more inspiring, and more effective. Only too often meditation takes place in a compartment of our lives that is cut off from the rest. This isolation makes it much harder for us to be enthusiastic about our daily practice – I think that the usual result is that we are rarely in the mood for meditation. So recollect your daily practice during the day, and you'll be more in the mood when the time comes for the next meditation.

Keeping a meditation diary can also help you recall your meditation later in the day, with the added advantage that you can look back over the days and weeks and remember what happened.

Another way is to discuss your practice with others. Probably there aren't many people you can do this with, but there will be some. For example, you can go to the Order members who teach meditation around the centre and discuss your practice with them. I think they will be very pleased to talk about it.

So this is one aspect of the third kind mindfulness of spiritual purpose, remembering the the domain of meditation. Recalling your daily practice at other times, keeping a diary from time to time, discussing the practice from time to time – all these things will help support your meditation and keep it alive. You'll be more often in the mood for meditation.

And if you are more in touch with the domain of meditation, you maintain a subtle aftertaste of the practice all the time. It is as though part of you is meditating all the time, on a subtle level of your being. By maintaining some awareness of the domain of meditation you maintain a subtle connection with higher states of consciousness you have experienced in the past. It's as though in the midst of ordinary consciousness, the door to higher consciousness is not closed, but is kept slightly ajar. By doing this, you not only stay a little more in touch with your inspiration, but you always keep open some possibility of reflecting in a vipassana way. I think this is quite important, and is in fact one of the main practical benefits of regular meditation practice.

If you appreciate this, then at times when you are on retreat, or are living or working in a situation where nearly all your activity is within the spiritual community, this more subtle recalling of the domain of meditation may enable you to stay in a kind of semi-dhyana like state quite a lot of the time. In such situations, there is a collective atmosphere of maintaining skilful states of mind and acting towards one another in a way that will maintain not only good communication and friendly relations,

but also an awareness of the Dharma. In a situation like that, you may easily start to experience a state of mind that is free from the five hindrances, and find that your mind is clear, emotionally positive, and one-pointed. And if there is a general awareness of the Dharma, this is a situation in which one can expect to deepen one's insight into reality.

So be mindful of the domain of meditation – recall your recent practice sessions, assess your practice from time to time by using a diary and talking with others, and also from time to time try to recall the state of mind itself of meditation – tune into the more subtle consciousness which meditation naturally awakens in you.

Be mindful of your physical deeds, your feelings and emotions, of your general mental states, and the specific objects that arise in your mind each moment. Be mindful of what you are doing, be mindful of why you are doing them – and remember the Dharma. The practice of mindfulness is central to the Buddhist path, and we in the FWBO inherit the example of a very great practitioner of mindfulness. Sangharakshita, the founder and foremost teacher of the FWBO, must be one of the greatest living practitioners of mindfulness. There must be others and I hope there are, but I have certainly never met or heard of, or read about, any other Buddhist teacher in posession of the degree of mindfulness he manifests. I believe that the Mindfulness of Breathing was the only meditation he practised for many years in India, and I know that he practised it a great deal. He has also said that he has never experienced much difficulty with meditation; in other words, the hindrances don't arise that much. In other words, he is no stranger to the dhyanas. And considering, with this, the extent to which he has studied the Dharma, apart from any other factors, I think we can guess that his insight is also very well developed.

Buddhism is a path of purification. The fifth precept, of abstention from drugs and drink so that one can develop clear and radiant awareness, represents that principle of purification. The idea of purity, of purification, can sometimes sound dull, sanitized and artificial in our ears, conditioned as we are by so much history. So the very idea of purity has become impure. We actually associate purification with something which has been poisoned. But we can hardly do without the idea of purification in spiritual life. We need to purify our notion of purification, make our idea of purity genuine again. Perhaps think more, reflect more, about what purity really means. Perhaps consider the meaning of Sangharakshita's aphorism, 'purity is power'. To me, purity means embracing the realm of truth. And I see the realm of truth as a realm of great beauty, of even awe–inspiring beauty – a space which is filled with light and presence. A place where awareness opens out into a great mandala, affording infinite vision in all directions. We're at the centre of that mandala at this very moment. All that prevents the vision from unfolding is the fact that we are, temporarily, suffering from having poisoned ourselves.

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[i] AltaVista, 21/7/98

[ii] Yeshe Tsogyal, trans. Kenneth Douglas & Gwendolyn Bays, *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava* Vol.2, Dharma Publishing, Berkeley 1978, Canto 106, p. 708ff.

[iii] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled,* Faber, London 1997?

[iv] ..\..\WRITING\RUDIMENT.S\THICH.TXT

See Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, Parallax Press, Berkeley 1988. The author argues that the *Anapanasati Sutta* and the *Satipatthana Sutta* are the earliest Pali texts on meditation on the grounds that they do not mention the eight dhyanas. He gives no other evidence for their antiquity, but goes on to mention (p. 20) 'occasional' references to the dhyanas in other Pali scriptures, and infers that 'the Four Meditative States and the Four Formless Concentrations were instituted after the death of the Buddha, probably due to the influence of Vedic and other Yogic meditation schools outside of Buddhism'. At the close of that chapter he also says that all generations of Buddists have respected these works (i.e. the Anapanasati and Satipatthana) and 'have not embellished them (as they did so many other scriptures)'. He later asserts that these suttas were handed down in an especially careful way and that mistakes and outside additions seem very few in the case of these two 'sutras' (sic) (p. 39). In fact there is no evidence to substantiate any of these claims, and Thich Nhat Hanh himself gives none. There is no reason to assume that either the Anapanasati or Satipatthana Suttas are any earlier than any of the others, or any freer from embellishment. There are also many references to the dhyanas in the Pali scriptures.

See also Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing*, Parallax Press, 1990 (commentary on the Satipatthana Sutta). Thich Nhat Hanh describes Right Concentration [*samyak samadhi*] as leading to 'an awareness and deep observation of the object of concentration, and eventually to awakened understanding' [p.44]. He goes on to mention, without explaining, the Pali compound word samatha-vipassana, "concentrating-understanding". He continues by describing the four dhyanas and formless dhyanas as wrong concentration, since these states 'encourage the practitioner to escape from the complexities of suffering and existence, rather than facing them directly in order to transform them'. He mentions the sutta tradition that the Buddha practiced these with his former teachers but eventually rejected them as not leading to liberation from suffering. He concludes this section by asserting that 'these states of concentration probably found their way back into the sutras around two hundred years after the Buddha passed into mahaparinirvana'.

[v] *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* Trans. Bhikkhus Ñanamoli and Bodhi, Wisdom, Boston 1995, p.943

[vi] Crosby and Skilton, p.5

[vii] Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, Frewin & Co. Ltd., Colombo 1972, p.122 (some rewording)

[viii] VisuddhiMagga, XIV, quoted in Nyanatiloka, ibid.

[ix] Nayanatiloka, p.161. The higher fetters are said to tie us to the rupa and arupaloka(s)

[x] Much of what follows on the Vimokshas is taken from Sangharakshita, *The Inconceivable Emancipation*, Windhorse, Ch. 1

[xi] Vism. 339; PP.369, Quoted Henepola Gunaratana

[xii] Henepola Gunaratana, pp.

[xiii] (A.iv,453-54). Quoted Henepola Gunaratana

[xiv] D.ii,71. Quoted HG.

[xv] (A.ii,87) Quoted Henepola Gunaratana

[xvi] Quoted in *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra,* Suzuki D.T., Routledge Kegan Paul, London and Boston 1972, p.249

[xvii] Perhaps surprisingly, this word *mad* has no discernible etymological connection with our English word 'mad'.

[xviii] The Buddha addressing the deva Rohitassa, who had spent a lifetime employing his supernormal powers of movement in search of 'the end of the world', in Anguttara Nikaya II 46, trans. FL Woodward in *Some Sayings of the Buddha,* Oxford UP 1973, p.150