

Lecture 138 - Authority and the Individual in the New Society

Mr Chairman and friends. As you have just heard, for the last, I was going to say ten days but I believe it is only nine days, it seemed like ten, we have been celebrating and when I say we have been celebrating, I mean the members of the Western Buddhist Order, our various 'Mitras' as we call them, our friends and our well-wishers from quite literally all over the place, not only from all over Great Britain but even several different parts of the world.

We have been celebrating in the course of these last nine or ten days, the opening of 'Sukhavati', which means, literally, 'The Happy Land', or 'The Place of Bliss' or 'The Abounding in Bliss'. And yesterday, we may say, our celebrations, rejoicings, our whole nine or ten day long festival, culminated in the dedication of our shrine room, or perhaps I should say, our shrine rooms, because we are lucky enough to have two.

Some Buddhist centres I am sorry to say, do not even have one, but we have two, a larger one and a smaller one and especially we dedicated the main shrine room, and dedicated its more than life-size image of Amitabha, the Buddha of the West, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life and in the course of those celebrations as especially we remembered and appreciated all the work, all the hard work, that had gone into the creation of Sukhavati, we really did, in the depths of our hearts, rejoice in the merits of those who, with head and heart and hand had made this wonderful new place, Sukhavati possible.

A Sukhavati here in England, here in London, of all places in the East End, in Bethnal Green. Not even in comparatively respectable Westminster or Victoria but in Bethnal Green and we rejoiced very much that our new centre, our Sukhavati should be there. I can re-assure any of you who were not present on any of those occasions, we really did rejoice.

But what is Sukhavati, really? What is it that we are really celebrating when we celebrate the opening of a place like Sukhavati. Reference has been made to the London Buddhist Centre, now open at Sukhavati. But there is one thing about which at least we should be quite clear, which is that Sukhavati is not just another Buddhist centre, however big, it is not just a place where people can come along, once a week, or once a month or simply talk about Buddhism, simply discuss Buddhism, or where they can even come once a week or twice a month to listen to lectures, listen to talks given by people who have merely, who have simply read a lot of books about Buddhism. It is not intended to be that sort of place,

And it is not even a place where one can come along occasionally and do what one might describe as a little therapeutic meditation, Not too much because that might be dangerous but just a little bit. I remember one very prominent Buddhist when I returned to England for the first time in 1964 *a propos* of meditation classes told me; "Don't let them meditate for more than five minutes, they can't stand it".

Well Sukhavati is not intended for that sort of thing, not a merely therapeutic meditation, not just a five minute meditation, so that, having done it, one can go home and carry on with one's so called normal life, exactly as before having taken your therapeutic or medicinal dose of Buddhism just to keep you going on in the same old way.

So Sukhavati, we hope, will serve a more noble function than that, a more radical, I might even say a more revolutionary function than that, just keeping people going, giving them their sort of meditational vitamins, so that they can stagger along on the path of worldliness for a few more days or a few more weeks,

Sukhavati, as you have already heard from no less a person than the lips of the Chairman of the FWBO centre at Sukhavati is intended to be nothing less than the nucleus of a New Society. But again, what do we mean by that, what do we mean by 'a new society'? Nowadays there are all sorts of phrases that people like to use, all sorts of slogans in use, which people produce so flippantly, so easily, so smoothly, so glibly on all sorts of occasions from meetings like this to parties, and this expression this 'new society' is one of them, one hears it all over the place.

One hears it from one's friends, one hears it on the radio, if you switch on the radio, I expect you hear it on television or see it on television, I don't happen to own one so I don't know but I wouldn't mind vouching that you hear it and see it on the television too, the 'new society', its even the title of a popular weekly paper, the *New Society*.

So what is this new society about which we hear so much and which Sukhavati is supposed to be" So far as we are concerned, so far as the FWBO is concerned, so far as Sukhavati itself is concerned a new society is nothing less than one which allows people to develop as human beings. The new society, or whatever structure we call the new society is as simple, as profound, as sublime and as radical thing as that. Its a new society that makes it easier for people to develop as human beings. It doesn't make it easier in the sense that it tries to do for people what they have to do, can only do for themselves.

It makes it easier, the new society makes it easier, for the people who live within it to develop as human beings in the sense of encouraging them to develop as human beings, providing facilities, providing opportunities and helping them rather than hindering them from developing, unlike the society in the midst of which we usually live which makes it in fact very difficult for us to develop even if we want to develop at all, far from actually helping us.

So the new society as exemplified by a foundation like that of Sukhavati, the new society Is that society, that environment, that social and spiritual, that context of fellowship with one another that makes it easier for us to evolve, which helps us to evolve, encourages us to evolve. So that instead of our energies being frittered away we can put all our energies into the process of our own development as human beings, instead of having, even in the case of those who do make an effort, instead of having to fritter away our energies just resisting the effect that society has upon us.

So much of our energy is spent just trying to keep society at bay, trying to resist its sort of oppressive, coercive, crushing influence and just to preserve a little piece of space for ourselves within which we can grow, within which we can develop. So much of our energy is used up in that sort of way, resisting all the counter-evolutionary forces. In an ideal society, in a situation like that of Sukhavati we don't have to do that, we don't have to be resisting all the time, we don't have to be on the defensive all the time. The greater part of our energies is liberated for the purpose, for the work of our own individual development in free association with other people, like-minded.

So the question arises, Sukhavati being a new society, or the nucleus of a new society in this way, how exactly is it, or in what way is it the nucleus of a new society? How does it work? How does it function one might ask? One might even say that Sukhavati is already a new society in miniature. So what is its structure? How does it work? How does it function? Well the basic answer is very simple because at the very heart of Sukhavati, at the very centre of Sukhavati there is what we call the spiritual community.

This might be a new expression at least in the sort of sense that we use it, for a number of you. So a spiritual community, according to our particular understanding or interpretation of this term , a spiritual community consists of individuals. No individuals, no spiritual community, no spiritual community, no individuals. So this is the first great point to be understood, that a spiritual community consists of individuals and you can no more have a spiritual community without individuals than you can have an omelette without eggs, broken or otherwise,

So what so we mean by individuals, we say that the spiritual community consists of individuals but what do we mean by 'individuals'? By individuals we mean people who are truly human beings, that is to say self-conscious in the sense of being self-aware. Who are emotionally positive, whose energies flow freely and spontaneously, who accept responsibility for themselves, who accept responsibility for their own life, for their own growth, their own individual development and who act accordingly because they see such growth, such development being the most important thing in life for each and every human being and who therefore commit themselves wholeheartedly to the process of that individual development.

In more traditional, more Buddhistic terms the spiritual community the community of true human beings, real individuals, is the community of those who commit themselves to the Three Jewels, who as we say, go for refuge, who go for refuge to the Buddha, the Enlightened human teacher, who go for refuge to the Dharma, or teaching of the way leading to Enlightenment and who go for refuge to the Sangha, the spiritual fellowship, the real living, joyful spiritual fellowship of those practising the teaching and following the way and when we speak in terms of going for refuge we are not speaking simply of repeating the Refuge formula *saying: "Buddham Saranam Gacchami, Dharmam Saranam Gacchami, Sangham Saranam Gacchami"*, just two or three times a year, on the occasion of some Buddhist festival as happens only too often in so many parts of the Buddhist world and even happens in some Buddhist groups here in the West.

By Going for Refuge one means actually committing oneself to the realisation of the ideal of Human Enlightenment in this very life and being prepared to give up, to put aside whatever it is stands in the way. This is what we mean by Going for Refuge and from, as I said, the more Buddhistic, traditional point of view the Spiritual Community is the community of those who Go for Refuge in this sense and that Spiritual Community which is at the heart, at the centre of Sukhavati, is a part, is a section if you like, a segment if you like of the Western Buddhist Order, even as the Western Buddhist Order itself is part, a segment of what is traditionally called the Sangha, the Spiritual Community of the Four Directions: North, South, East and West and the Three Periods of Time: past, present and future.

So what does this spiritual community which is at the heart and centre of Sukhavati and which is part of the Western Buddhist Order, do? What does it do? Essentially it does just one thing, it tries to create for itself and for others, conditions more conducive to human development, more conducive to spiritual development and it does this mainly in three ways, It does it in the first way by forming, as it were under the roof of the building called Sukhavati a resident spiritual community which as I think has already been mentioned by the Chairman will stabilise at about twenty-five people, at present there are about thirty-five. Secondly, it creates opportunities for Right Means of Livelihood on a co-operative basis, this is the second thing it does and the third thing it does is providing meditation classes, courses in Buddhism, communication exercises, yoga and other methods of individual development.

And these three things, these things which Sukhavati tries to create, which the spiritual community at Sukhavati tries to create, as more conducive to human development, more conducive to spiritual development, for it's own benefit and the benefit of others. These three things correspond to three of the most important things in ordinary human life, things which on balance are not conducive to spiritual development. That is to say, in the first place the family, in the second place, work, in the ordinary work-a-day sense and in the third place ordinary leisure activities, The three sets of conditions which Sukhavati tries to create as conducive to human and spiritual development, as it were takes the place of these three things in a more positive way. It takes the place of family, work and leisure activities and by the family one means in this context, the claustrophobic, neurotic nuclear family, that is to say the monogamous couple with one or two children, car, television set, dog, cat and budgerigar and by work one means in this context, wage slavery or salary servitude which amounts to earning money in ways which are harmful to one's own development and which exploit others. By leisure activities one means activities which enable us simply to pass the time, to forget about work, to forget about the family too and maybe to forget about our own selves.

So Sukhavati comprises three things, three things which represent transformation of conditions which are not helpful in spiritual development into conditions which are helpful, that is to say the resident spiritual community, the co-operative, under the umbrella of which are conducted various Right Livelihood projects and thirdly a centre, i.e. the London Buddhist Centre where various methods of individual development are taught.

These three things between them constitute the nucleus of the new society, the spiritual community, the residential spiritual community that is, the Co-operative and the Centre. These three things between them, under the overall title of Sukhavati, constitute the nucleus of the new society and the first of these, the residential spiritual community has, of course, been in existence now for the last three years, has grown from the original half-dozen people up to about thirty-five and, as I mentioned a few moments ago, it is expected to stabilise at about twenty-five and it is this residential spiritual community, this spiritual community resident at Sukhavati, which, in the course of these last two years, has created the other two. That is to say has created the Co-operative and the Centre, and the Right Livelihood projects under the overall umbrella of the Co-operative have been functioning now for two years, in may this year, I believe, they were brought under the umbrella of what is called the Pure Land Co-operative and as for the centre, that is to say the London Buddhist centre, that came into existence only yesterday with the dedication of the shrines and tomorrow itself it will be functioning with a full programme of activities, every evening there will be classes and courses, there will be some activities during the day, also at weekends.

So Sukhavati, therefore, in the full sense is now open and the nucleus, or at least a nucleus of the new society has been inaugurated and this it is that we have been celebrating, so joyfully in the course of these last nine or ten days, and is what I hope we will have more and more cause, more and more reason to celebrate as time goes on, And it is in connection with these celebrations, in a way as part of these celebrations that I would like to consider a very important question and that is the question of authority and the individual in the new society.

We have been talking about the new society, we have seen essentially what the new society is, what it consists in and how Sukhavati itself is the nucleus of a new society, the new society, so the question is what about authority in the new society, what about the individual in the new society? That is to say the new society as represented by Sukhavati with its resident spiritual community, its co-operative and its centre. So authority and the individual in the new society. This is the question we are going to give some attention to this evening. Probably it is the most important question to which, at this juncture we could possibly address ourselves. It's the question which is important not only for Sukhavati, not only for the Western Buddhist Order and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, this question of authority and the individual, especially in the new society, is important for the whole world, important for the whole of humanity, So it's this question that we are going to go into, at least briefly, this evening.

But before going into it there is another question, a practical question about which I would like to say something, and that is a question which might already have risen in the minds of some of you. That question is "How does one make the transition from the old society to the new?". That surely is a very practical question indeed. How does one make the transition from the old society to the new" Assuming the new, or at least the nucleus of the new to be already in existence. On the one hand the old society, so large, with so many ramifications in so many ways. On the other hand, the nucleus of the new society, as I have described it. So how does one pass from the one to the other'. How does one make that all important transition, Well, fortunately, there is a bridge, there is a link between the two and that is the Centre. The Centre, in this case the London Buddhist Centre, is as it were the common ground, it is where these two worlds, these two societies meet, where they overlap, where they come together. So what happens" What happens" This is, in a way, the story of many of you it's already happened. But let me describe what has already happened for the sake, for the benefit of those who have yet to make that transition, who have yet to pass from the old society to the new. What happens?

Well what happens initially is that someone is dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction is very creative provided, of course that it is not just what we call disgruntlement, provided it is based on genuine disillusionment, if it is that, dissatisfaction is a very positive, a very creative and a very powerful thing. So someone is dissatisfied, that is the starting point, he is dissatisfied with his family, with his work, with his leisure activities and perhaps, more often than not, he is pretty fed up with himself as well, so he starts looking around, and he hears, perhaps, about Buddhism, he hears about the Centre, hears about meditation classes, he starts coming along to meditation classes, he starts attending lectures, possibly even going on retreat and as a result of all this, as a result of the meditation, as a result of listening to talks and so on he starts changing. And this, I can assure you, is something that I myself have seen happening in numberless instances, and many of you, especially those of you who are Order Members, will have seen it yourselves in the context of your own classes. One sees people actually changing and this, one might say, is the greatest miracle of all, that people change, not just change horizontally, but change vertically.

There is an incident in the life of the Buddha, where the Buddha himself spoke about this. You know the ancient Indians were very interested in supernormal powers, miraculous powers, the Buddha was often asked about these things, he was even asked to demonstrate, to display supernormal powers, miraculous powers, sometimes he did, perhaps when he was in a good mood. More often than not, he sternly refused but even now people like to hear about these things you see as soon as I start talking about supernormal powers, miraculous powers, people start perking up. I remember someone came to see me many years ago in Kalimpong, he'd come all the way from the West, he was a very intelligent man from Oxford University, he'd also been to Dublin University and he was a doctor, a medical man and he arrived one day at the Trivarna Vardana Vihara where I stayed in Kalimpong, within sight of the Himalayas, and he said "I have come to learn, I want you to teach me" so I said "All right, I will do my best to help you, what would you like to be taught?" and he said "I want to be able to read people's thoughts and I want to be able to see what is going to happen in the future" so I had to say "sorry, I cannot help you" but it is what he was interested in it is what a lot of people are still interested in, even today, but the Buddha discouraged that sort of thing and he used to say these so called supernormal powers, these so called miracles, they are very small, very insignificant things. He even went so far as to say "I condemn and abhor them, I look down upon them". He says these are not real miracles, these are not real supernatural phenomena.

The real miracle is when someone who was following the Dark Path changes and starts following the Bright Path, the path of skilful activities, the path of the spiritual life, that is the real miracle and believe me, we can see that miracle happening, I won't say every day, but certainly every week and certainly every month in our own centres, where people do come along, people literally off the street one might say, who start meditating, who start understanding, seeing something of the Buddha's vision of existence and who

do change.

You might think that having been in the same old rut for so many years, so many decades as I think so many of you have been, or were, once upon a time, you might even be thinking you can't change, it is too late you might think, "well here I am, forty, fifty, I can't possibly change" but that is a great mistake, you can change, if you get into the right sort of situation, and have the right sort of encouragement, the right sort of conditions, you can change, and this is what happens, this is what you see, someone changes after participating in meditation classes and all the other things that the Centre has to offer. He changes, or she changes and becomes more aware, more emotionally positive, believe it or not. People who come along initially with hang-dog expressions, looking as though all the cares of the world are on their shoulders, as though they hadn't a glimmering of hope in their lives, they change and in the course of a few weeks, sometimes in the course of just a weekend retreat away in the country you see them beginning to look bright, happy, cheerful, positive. You actually see this happening before your very eyes,

Eventually, they start feeling that they cannot go on living in the same old sort of way. Such a person starts finding his family and work very restricting, cramping, so he decides, in the old tradition or expression, the old traditional phrase, to Go Forth, decide to Join the spiritual community, decided to join a right livelihood project, either at Sukhavati itself or somewhere else in the Movement, wherever these things, wherever these facilities do exist and we find that the whole process from start to finish from the first time coming along, dissatisfied with your ordinary life, up to the time when you make this sort of decision and Go Forth, the whole process may take two or three years.

In some cases it takes only two or three months to make that transition, It depends on the individual. But whether slowly, or whether quickly, one does make the transition from the old society to the new and henceforth one is part of the new society and one's strength as an individual goes to strengthen that new society and henceforth one lives all the time in a situation which is conducive to one's development as a human being, one's spiritual development. A situation in which one can go on growing, and growing, and growing infinitely and that I can assure you, is a very rare opportunity indeed. An opportunity which I think I can say, did not exist in Britain, before the Western Buddhist Order and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order started, an opportunity which, as I know from my own experience, one seldom encounters, even in the Buddhist East. However, I don't want to dwell too much on that, it is well known to many of you from your own experiences.

So having disposed of that practical question, or at least having touched upon it, lets get back to this question of authority and the individual. I have already said that the spiritual community consists of individuals that is to say, consists of those who are self-aware, emotionally positive and so on. And here, of course, there is an implied contrast, a contrast implied between what we may call, on the one hand, the true individual, and on the other, what we may call the statistical individual, that is to say the individual who is merely enumerated as that because he has a separate, individual body. And two, there is an implied contrast between what I call the spiritual community and what I call the group.

The spiritual community consists of individuals, that is to say true individuals, whereas the group consists of statistical individuals, that is to say group members. In other words the group consists of individuals whose consciousness is an aspect of the group consciousness and whose thought, feeling and behaviour conforms to group patterns and group norms. Unfortunately, in English, we don't possess distinct terms for these two kinds of persons, that is to say the true individual and one who is merely a group member and this leads, on occasions to a great deal of confusion. However, I have dealt with the difference between the individual, the true individual and the group member and the spiritual community and the group on previous occasions and I think it is a distinction which is clear to many of you, if not to most of you and therefore I need not elaborate on it this evening.

Now it is obvious that since the spiritual community consists of individuals and the group, of group members, that is to say the spiritual community on the one hand and the group on the other, will function in very different ways, will even be governed by very different laws, very different principles. I am going to go into this a little later on, Meanwhile, lets pass from individual to authority. Authority is in a way the crux of the whole lecture, authority. The term authority, unfortunately, is very ambiguous so let us see what it means in ordinary parlance.

Generally, authority means the power which is exercised by a person by virtue of his office, ie. his legal, social or political position. Authority in this sense does not pertain to the individual as such, It does not

pertain to him by virtue of his qualities as an individual. It pertains to him by virtue of his position, so authority in this sense is something separate and distinct from individuality, that is to say separate, distinct from true individuality. Sometimes the word authority has a somewhat different meaning or shade of meaning and this is where the ambiguity comes in as when we speak, for instance, of moral authority, but here, when we speak of moral authority the word is used in quite a different sense, one closer to its original almost its epistemological meaning but there is no need to go into that.

Nowadays authority generally is understood to mean power which one exercises by virtue of one's office or one's position and it is in this sense that I am using the word authority this evening in this lecture.

Now the precise nature of authority, in this sense, may become clearer if we consider something of a similar nature, something for which there is really no proper word in English but we can call it, perhaps, representing or even representation. Let's say A, a person, represents B a person or persons. A represents B, now what does this mean when we say that A represents B. A few concrete examples- an ambassador, especially what used to be called, and perhaps still is called, an *ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary*, represents the King. The MP, the Member of Parliament, represents, I believe, his constituency. The salesman, even the humble door to door salesman, represents his firm and the delegate, we may say, represents his Trade Union. So A, whether ambassador, MP, or delegate represents B, whether King, constituency, firm and so on. In other words, in certain respects, or for certain purposes someone is entrusted with the power of the group or the organisation to which he belongs and what he does, what he accepts, what he agrees to, the group accepts, the group agrees to and this is what is meant by representing, a representative.

So we can see, we can understand that the power which the representative exercises is not his own power, it is the power of some other person or other persons, in the latter case it is the power of the group and it is much the same in the case of authority. Here also, in the case of authority, a person does not exercise power by what he is as an individual, whether even a statistical individual or a true individual, he exercises that power by virtue of his office, by virtue of his position. His qualities as an individual, may of course fit him for that particular position but the power he exercises in that position derives from that position, not from the personal qualities he happens to possess, in other words the power he exercises is not his own power it belongs to his office, his position and this office, this position is created by the particular group or organisation to which he belongs so that power therefore belongs to the group,

Now from all this there follows an important conclusion. We have seen that the person who represents, or the person who exercises authority is entrusted with or exercises power which is not his own, power that belongs in the last resort, in the last analysis, to the group. It therefore follows that when we deal with someone as representing, or when we deal with someone occupying a position of authority we are not dealing with them as an individual and they also are not functioning as an individual. From this follows another conclusion, a conclusion even more important than the first one. We have seen that the spiritual community consists of individuals, that is to say, of true individuals and this means that within the spiritual community we can only deal with others only as individuals, If we deal with them in any other way, it ceases to be a spiritual community and our relationship with them in the spiritual community ceases to be a spiritual relationship, therefore, with the context of the spiritual community, we cannot deal with others as representing, we cannot deal with them as occupying offices or positions and therefore, within the spiritual community as such there can be no offices and no positions.

If we deal with others in this sort of way, we are not dealing with them as individuals and therefore, *ipso facto*, we are not functioning within them spiritual community, we are functioning within the group. In other words, within the spiritual community there is no representing, within the spiritual community there is no authority within the sense in which I have defined the term. Therefore, within the new society there is no authority, within Sukhavati there is no authority, within the resident spiritual community, no authority, with the Co-operative, no authority, within the Co-operative, after all who employs whom? Within the Centre, no authority, except to the extent that one may have to deal with people who are not yet true individuals, because as I have said earlier, the Centre is the bridge, the Centre is the common ground, that is to say common ground for individuals and group members. That is to say, group members who want to become true individuals.

Now, the idea that when we deal with others as representing, etc, we are not dealing with them as individuals, may not be very familiar. It may take a little getting used to so let me give one or two examples of the kind of thing I mean, the sort of thing I am trying to get at or to make clear, examples

from my own experience. As you know I spent some years in India, I spent altogether, nearly twenty years there and while I was in India I immersed myself completely in Buddhism, I had no other interests and I adopted, in order to further my immersion in Buddhism, I adopted the Indian way of life completely, sometimes I was mistaken for an Indian, sometimes but not always as we shall see in a minute, I cut off all contact with the European community, sometimes for years on end I never saw, I never spoke to any member of the European community. Nevertheless, some of my Indian friends, or at least some of the Indians with whom I came into contact persisted, notwithstanding my Buddhism, notwithstanding my Indian-ness, persisted in regarding me as British, in fact some of them insisted in regarding me as representing Britain.

I remember in particular, the sort of thing that used to happen in 1956. In 1956 Indians who happened to meet me, whether on the train or at some meeting or coming to see me Indians would ask me "Have you invaded Suez?" It wasn't even "Why has your country invaded Suez?", no "Why have you invaded Suez?". There was I in India all the time, immersed in Buddhism. So what does this mean? It means that they did not see me. That they did not see me, the individual, Sangharakshita, they only saw a representative of Britain and they treated me as such, The same sort of thing happened when I returned to England, initially for the first time in 1964. When I initially returned I was regarded as representing Buddhism, Newspaper reporters used to come and see me, usually nice young ladies with their notebooks and pencils and they would come with all sorts of weird ideas about Buddhism and they would ask me in the nicest possible way "Why do you believe in self torture?" Once again, they didn't see me, there was no attempt to find out what I actually did believe. They saw me as the representative of Buddhism, that is to say, of Buddhism as they understood it, there was no awareness of me as an individual at all.

So when we regard someone as a representative, as representing something or other, we do not see them as an individual and our relationship with them, to that extent, cannot possibly be a spiritual relationship and it therefore has no place within the spiritual community, it has no place within the new society. Now, I have spoken of the representative as being entrusted with the power of the group to which he belongs. I have spoken of authority as the power one exercises by virtue of one's office or position. So the question of power comes in, What do we mean by power? Once again there is an ambiguity. First of all in the broadest sense power means ability, physical, mental or moral, to act. Secondly it means the possession of sway, or controlling influence over others and thirdly it means force or energy applied or applicable to work and in the present context, the context of this lecture, this consideration of the individual and the new society we are concerned with the second of these meanings. In the present context power means the capacity to exert force, capacity to coerce, whether directly or indirectly, whether physically or psychologically. Spiritual coercion, of course, being a contradiction in terms.

Therefore we see that there are these three things that hang together, that is to say, representing authority and power, they hang together. In fact we can say that power is the factor which the other two, that is to say representing and authority have in common. It is power that makes them what they are, that enables them to be what they are. Therefore, since representing and authority have no place in the spiritual community, power has no place in the spiritual community either, That is to say power in the sense of capacity to coerce. No place in the spiritual community. I am not saying, please don't jump to this conclusion, I am not saying that power is a bad thing, it has its place, but its place is in the group, not in the spiritual community. Power is in fact necessary to the group, the group as such is based on power, cannot exist without power, hence the saying 'politics is about power', in other words it is about who possesses the power to coerce, or who coerces whom.

The spiritual community, on the other hand, cannot exist with power. As soon as one exercises power, that is to say as soon as one coerces, one ceases to treat others as individuals, that is to say, true individuals and as soon as one ceases to treat others as individuals, as true individuals the spiritual community ceases to exist. The group consists of group members, they relate to one another in terms of power, power is the principle that governs their relationships but the spiritual community consists of individuals. What therefore do they relate to one another in terms of? What is the principle that governs their relationships? What is the principle that governs the spiritual community? The principle of which, in a way, the spiritual community is an embodiment, Well, we will return to that question shortly,

So far I have not mentioned, I have not introduced the term 'Religion' and perhaps it is about time I did so, perhaps a little unwillingly because I don't really like this term. Ideally a religion is a spiritual community. That is to say a community of people sharing common spiritual ideals, that is to say, of course, a universal religion is a Spiritual community, that does not apply to the ethnic religion, ethnic religion, by

very definition is a group religion,

So since ideally, a religion is a spiritual community there is no place in it, no place in religion, no place 'in universal religion, for authority and therefore, no place in it for power, But unfortunately, this is not always the case with religions as historical phenomena. We do find, if we look at the history of religions, that power does creep in. To the extent this happens, the religion ceases to be a religion at all, ceases to be, that is to say, a spiritual community which a religion, a higher religion, a universal religion essentially is, it becomes instead, a group, becomes based on power. And this has happened, we might say, more with some religion than with others. How is this? Universal religions are of two kinds, theistic and non-theistic. Theistic means believing in a personal God, that is to say a Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of the universe. The non-theistic religions do not believe in any such God. Non-theistic means not believing in any such God. Now we find, if we look carefully, if we look closely at the history of religions, we find that it is the theistic religions that tend to be corrupted by authority and power, which tends to change from spiritual communities into groups, I don't say it doesn't happen at all in the case of the non-theistic religions but in a much more marked manner, a much more definite manner in the case of the theistic religions.

So how is this, how is this? Well in the theistic religions there is God but no-one sees God, no-one hears God. That is to say ordinary people do not so, in the theistic religions, in addition to God there is God's representative. The representative tells us in one way or another what it is that God thinks, what is that God wants us to do and representatives in this sense are of several different kinds, there is the prophet, or messenger of God. Someone who God has called and sent, sent to tell people what to do and of course there is the incarnate Son of God, the man who is believed to be God's own Son, in a sense God's own self, appearing in human form to tell people what to do, how to live and so on.

Now the representative not only tells us what God wants us to do the representative has also been entrusted with God's power. The representative can, or has the right to coerce us into doing what God wants us to do, assuming, of course that we are unwilling to do -it of our own free will. Now in most theistic religions the concept of God is very ambiguous, very ambivalent, not to say, to put it bluntly, self-contradictory. One might say, to put it briefly, theistic religion tries to combine two different Gods into one.

We can call these two Gods the God of Power and the God of Love or the God of Nature and the God of Morality and this creates many difficulties for the poor theists, For instance, suppose you are married, suppose you have a wife and children and one day they are struck dead by lightning, this is still what the law calls 'an act of God', lightning is, after all, an act of nature, behind nature there is God, so God is responsible for what happens in nature, But, the God of Nature is also the God of Love, so how could the God of Love strike dead your wife and children? Well, he must have done it for your good, not to say, their good so you have to accept. You not only have to accept, you have to thank God for striking your wife and children dead. God's striking your wife and children dead was an expression of his love.

This is the kind painful and difficult situation you get into if you are a theist. You experience the effects of power but you have to interpret them, you have to convince yourself that they are the acts of love. Because the source of both are supposed to be the same, the God of Power, the God of Nature is the same God as the God of Love. So we have seen that in tile theistic religions there is not only God but also the representative of God who supposedly represents God who is God of Love and also God of Power. But there is a little question which arises here, can love be represented, can love be represented"? You can represent power, you can entrust power to somebody who exercises it on your behalf and who therefore represents authority but can you entrust your love to somebody in the same sort of way, In Popular parlance we say 'give so-and-so my love' but can you really do this, call he really do that" Can you really give your love to somebody else or can somebody give your love to somebody else *if* he doesn't already have it himself. Can we really give love that is not our own I No. We can only give our own love.

Of course you can learn love, you can learn to love or can be helped to love by somebody else and then,, having learned to love, being a loving person you can love someone else, a third party but you cannot pass on the first persons love to the third person without having love yourself. So love cannot be represented in the way that power can be represented, You cannot exercise, as it were, somebody else's love us the same way that you can exercise somebody else's power. You cannot exercise love by virtue of your office or position. The very idea is ridiculous because love is a quality of the individual whereas power is not necessarily so. Power, therefore can be delegated, love cannot.

So what this means is that, in the Theistic religions, the representative cannot represent the God of Love, he can only represent the God of Power. Of course he can claim to reinforce his position and strengthen his authority and power, he can claim to represent the God of Love, but claiming is another matter. In those religions, where there are representatives, therefore, that is to say in the theistic religions, the representatives always exercise power because that is all that they can exercise and the theistic religions therefore always are, or tend to become, group religions, they tend to be or to become power structures and to that extent they cease to become spiritual communities.

We see this quite clearly in the case of Christianity, especially in the case of the Roman Catholic Church. Originally Christians constituted, in the very, very early days, a kind of spiritual community, known as the '*ecclesia*', what afterwards came to be known as the 'Church', not in the sense of the building but of the community of people and this spiritual community, this *ecclesia*, grew steadily for several hundred years and at first it was a sort of underground movement, even in the literal sense, inhabiting sometimes the catacombs. But gradually this spiritual community, the early Christians, came more out into the open and they attracted more and more people and they spread into most parts of the Roman Empire and in the fourth century this spiritual community, this *ecclesia*, this Church, Christianity became the official religion of the whole Roman Empire and other religions were prohibited, proscribed, heresy was prohibited though of course it wasn't always easy, even in those days to determine what was and what was not heresy and gradually the Church came to exercise temporal power.

According to the Gospel, that is to say three out of four Gospels, Christ himself had rejected temporal power. It was one of the three things that the devil had tempted him with in the wilderness, he had rejected that temptation but the Church had been unable to follow his example. This was not just a question of the weakness of human nature, it was due to the self-contradictory nature of Christianity itself

Christians recognised both the Old Testament and the New Testament, both constitute together the Christian Bible. The Old Testament teaches a God of Power rather than a God of Love, teaches a God of Battles, teaches a God who encourages his followers, his worshippers, in this place the Jews, the Children of Israel, to slaughter their enemies but the New Testament teaches a God of Love rather than a God of Power, teaches to forgive one's enemies and obviously you cannot follow both at the same time. So as the Church started exercising temporal power it was only natural that it should represent, in effect, the God of Power because the God of Love could not be represented anyway. Therefore it was only natural, one might say, that the Church should have started coercing people into accepting what the Church taught and only natural therefore that it should cease being a spiritual community and start becoming step by step, a group, especially in the case of the Roman Catholic Church because the Roman Catholic Church regarded itself as inheriting even technically, legally the political power of the Western Roman Empire and the head of the Roman Catholic Church was, of course still is, the Pope.

Originally the Pope was just Bishop of Rome, then a few centuries later he became Vicar of Christ and 'vicar', of course means 'representative'. A few years ago, I believe even here in London, there was a controversial play called 'The Representative' by a German playwright and the representative in question was the then Pope or the Pope who was Pope during the last war, Pope Pious XII and the play dealt, mainly, with his refusal as Pope, as leader of the Roman Catholic Church, to condemn Hitler's massacre of the Jews. In this play the author seems to be criticising the Pope for not acting as the representative of the God of Love. But the criticism is really rather beside the point because a representative cannot represent the God of Love he can only represent the God of Power. This is certainly shown by the behaviour of the Popes of the Middle Ages. The Popes during the Middle Ages and even right down to the last century, claimed to be vice-regents of God, claimed to exercise complete control over Kings and Princes, and at times, actually did this. They raised armies, fought battles and sometimes, that is to say the Popes, led their troops in person into battle. They launched a number of Crusades against the Muslims. They even launched a Crusade against the wretched and unfortunate Albigenses of southern France and worst of all the Popes founded the Inquisition through which tried to enforce uniformity of belief.

I read just a few days ago that a month ago there was celebrated if that is the word, the five hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Spanish Inquisition and a group of people in Spain, I further read, had got together and called upon the Spanish bishops to express their regret for what the Spanish Inquisition had done in the course of it's career. The bishops refused.

So, heretics were persecuted by the Inquisition and other agencies of the Catholic Church and in the course of centuries many millions of people were cruelly slaughtered, many of them even being tortured to death.

During the Middle Ages and even afterwards, the Roman Catholic Church behaved, in every way, like a power structure of the worst type and virtually the only trace of Christianity, as a spiritual community was to be found in the monasteries. But that is another story and in the end the monasteries themselves became corrupt.

Now I have dealt on the case of Christianity, especially of the Roman Catholic Church because it provides us with the most prominent example of power creeping into religion, into universal religion, but one shouldn't think that this sort of thing has happened only in the case of Christianity, it has happened in the case of other religions too. We find it in the present as well as in the past, in the East as well as in the West, look around we can see it happening even in Buddhist circles, albeit in subtler forms but there is no time to go into that now.

I want to get back now to the question which I asked a little while ago, the question 'What is the principle that governs the spiritual community?' The principle of which the spiritual community is an embodiment. The principle that governs the group is of course, power so what corresponds to this in the case of the spiritual community.

In discussing theism I spoke of a God of Power and a God of Love so perhaps one can say that the principle that governs the spiritual community is love. But the English word, 'love' is really much too ambiguous, one might even say that the word 'love' is a treacherously ambiguous word, so-called love so too often is only a form of power so let us look at this matter a little more closely, briefly. We could perhaps say the principle that governs the spiritual community is what is called 'metta' in Pali or 'maitri' in Sanskrit, 'friendliness' raised to the highest possible power, certainly there can be no spiritual community without metta, without maitri, without friendliness, When we feel maitri, when we feel friendliness towards others we see them as individuals, we treat them as individuals. Many of us know this from our 'metta bhavana' practice, the practice of developing friendliness in a systematic manner as a sort of meditation practice. We could even say that positive emotion itself constitutes the principle of the spiritual community itself, not only metta, not only friendliness but also karuna, that is to say compassion, mudita, sympathetic joy and upeksha, peace as well as sraddha, faith and devotion. We could say that all these positive all these sublime, uplifting, inspiring emotions constitute the principle that governs the spiritual community but even that is not enough.

There is a sort of metaphysical dimension missing, a transcendental dimension missing and only that metaphysical, transcendental dimension can permanently sustain the spiritual, including the spiritual community so perhaps one could say that the principle that governs the spiritual community is 'mahamaitri' or 'mahakaruna', that is to say the great friendliness or the great compassion, that is to say friendliness or compassion conjoined with wisdom, conjoined with prajna, transcendental wisdom and in that case the principle that governs the spiritual community is nothing less than what we call the Bodhicitta, the one, as it were, cosmic will to enlightenment reflected in the hearts and minds of all individuals that make up the spiritual community.

Now its very difficult for us to imagine a community like this, a community of this sort in its fullness, a community dominated by, if that is the right word, governed by, imbued by bodhicitta, the will to enlightenment but perhaps we do have some experience of it from time to time at least to a limited extent. Most of us most of the time are used to functioning in a group whether that group is the family, the firm, the trades union, the tribe the class, the caste, the state, we are accustomed to functioning in a group we are accustomed to relating in terms of power which is not just direct naked power but which includes things like force, fraud, exploitation, manipulation those are the terms in which or with which we usually relate. That must all be changed, we must learn to relate in terms of metta, friendliness and karuna, compassion, in terms of mahamaitri and mahakaruna, the great friendliness, the great compassion, must learn to relate in terms of on the basis of the bodhicitta, imminent in each and every one, imminent in each individual relate to one another as individuals in terms of that transcendental compassion-come-wisdom basis.

So when we Go for Refuge we Go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and to the Sangha. What does that mean? It means we go from the group to the spiritual community. Go from being governed by the power principle to being governed, if that is the right word, to the principle of the bodhicitta. From the old society to the new society, go from the world to Sukhavati, the transition, surely, all of us would like to make.

All of us, surely, are dissatisfied, feel dissatisfied with the world as it is, aspire to a higher, better, brighter

more beautiful world than that which we at present experience or in which we seem to live, a world in which it is easier for us to grow, easier for us to develop, Surely sometimes we aspire in this way and this is an aspiration which has been felt by many people throughout history in both East and West, North and South certainly felt by many people in India in the Buddha's own day. Felt, for instance by a canonical character called Vaydehi (?). Vaydehi was the wife of King Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha and her story is related in a text a Buddhist scripture called the *Amitayur-dhyana Sutra* which means the Sutra on the Meditation of the Buddha Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life who is, of course, the same as the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light.

It is one of a group of three sutras dealing with Sukhavati, the Happy Land and its Buddha Amitabha or Amitayus. The other two texts, the other two scriptures are the larger and the smaller Sukhavati Vyuhā Sutra or Sutra on the Array, the order, the decoration, the beauty of the Happy Land.

So I am going to say a few words about this sutra, that is to say about the *Amitayur-dhyana Sutra*, the Sutra on the Meditation on Amitayus the Buddha of Eternal Life, and then conclude.

King Bimbisara was an old friend and faithful follower of the Buddha and when this sutra opens he has just been deposed by his wicked son Ajatasatru who has shut him up in prison hoping that there he will starve to death because the new king has forgotten to give orders that his father should be supplied with food. But Vaydehi, the wife of Bimbisara, the mother of Ajatasatru secretly takes food to the prison and keeps him alive day after day week after week, month after month and Ajatasatru becomes very suspicious that his father is not dying as expected so he sets spies, he sets watch and he finds out in the end that it is his mother who is at the bottom of it all secretly supplying food to his father and keeping him alive. So Ajatasatru, not a very dutiful son it appears, becomes very, very angry, so angry that he draws his sword and is about to slay his mother but is restrained by his ministers. The ministers say, and this reflects some light on ancient Indian history, the ministers say 'In the course of our traditions there are many records of kings who have killed their fathers but as yet there are no records of a king who has ever killed his mother so desist from this unspeakably bad action'. The king becomes ashamed, he sheaths his sword and he contents himself with shutting up his mother too in prison, by herself So Vaydehi, the Queen, shut up by her own son, unable to supply food to her imprisoned husband is very miserable, very miserable. What a family! What a son! So she is completely disillusioned with worldly life, she just forgets about the fact that she is Queen, she has lived in the palace all those years, she had a king for her husband, a king for her son. She forgets all about it. She concentrates her mind on the Buddha.

All these events, they take place in Rajgrha, Rajgrha the capital of Magadha, not very far from the Vultures Peak where the Buddha is living. So Vaydehi, in her prison cell, concentrates her mind on the Buddha who she knows is staying only a few miles away on the Vultures Peak and she prostrates herself in her cell in his direction and thereupon the Buddha appears before her whether literally, physically or in a sort of vision we are not told but the Buddha appears before her, beautiful, bright, shining and this is what the text proceeds to say,

When the Queen raised her head as she finished paying homage to the Buddha she saw before her the World-Honoured Buddha Shakyamuni whose body was purple-golden coloured, sitting on a lotus flower which consisted of a hundred jewels with Maha Moggallana attending on his left, with Ananda on his right, Shakra, Brahmin and other gods which protect the world were seen in the midst of the sky, everywhere showering heavenly flowers with which they made offerings to the Buddha in their worship. Vaydehi, at the sight of Buddha, the World-Honoured one took off her garlands, this is a sign of respect, prostrated herself on the ground crying, sobbing and speaking to the Buddha 'Oh, World-Honoured one, what former sin of mine has produced such a wicked sons' And again 'Oh Exalted One, from what cause and circumstances has thou such an affinity with Devadatta, your wicked cousin and once your disciples My only prayer', she continued, 'is this; Oh World-Honoured one mayest thou preach to me in detail of all the places where there is no sorrow or trouble and where I ought to go to be born anew, I am not satisfied with this world of depravities, with Jambudvīpa (India) which is full of Hells, full of hungry spirits and of the brute creation. In this world of depravities there is many an assemblage of the wicked. May I not hear, I pray, the voice of the wicked in the future and may I not see any wicked person. Now I throw my five limbs down to the ground before they and seek for my mercy by confessing my sins. I pray for this only, that the sun-like Buddha may instruct me how to meditate on a world wherein all actions are pure'.

So this is her prayer and the Sutra goes on to tell us that by his magical power, making positive creative

use of it on this occasion, the Buddha shows Vaydehi a number of different Pure Lands where there is no suffering, not even the voice, not even the echo of any lamentation and she sees them all in a sort of vision and she selects, for her very own as it were, Sukhavati, Pure Land of Amitabha or Amitayus, in the West, Sukhavati the Land of Bliss and she says she would like to be reborn there and the Buddha proceeds to tell her what she must do to achieve this.

She must go for refuge, she must observe the Ten Precepts and so on. There is quite a lot of instruction given at this point which I am not going to recapitulate but he also tells her that she should meditate on Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life and his Pure Land Sukhavati, Meditate on them, visualise them so she can see them at least in her meditation in this life and he teaches her how to do this by way of a series of sixteen meditations.

The first meditation consists of concentrating on the disc of the setting sun, the deep, red, round disc of the setting sun, Then having concentrated on that one concentrates on a ground, a foundation, infinite in all directions of blue, Lapis Lazuli, crisscrossed with a network of golden cords and then from amidst the golden cords one visualises springing up, trees made of jewels, lakes made of jewels, lotuses made of jewels and eventually, after a whole series of meditations, in the midst of them all, in the midst of the jewel trees, the jewel lakes, the jewel lotuses one sees Amitayus himself, Amitabha himself, the Buddha of Eternal Life and Infinite light attended by his two great Bodhisattvas, embodying his compassion and his wisdom. And the Buddha further tells Vaydehi that, having mediated in this way, when she comes to die she will be reborn in this higher spiritual world in this Pure Land, Sukhavati. She will find herself reborn from a beautiful lotus flower. She will find herself sitting in the calyx of this flower, the petals will open and she will see sitting before her Amitayus, or Amitabha, face to face and she will hear his teaching, the Dharma, from his own lips and she will have nothing to do but practice the Dharma, meditate on the Dharma, conditions in the Pure Land, conditions in Sukhavati are absolutely ideal.

When the wind blows through the trees you hear the jewel flowers of the jewel trees go 'tinkle, tinkle' but not just go tinkle, tinkle, they give little discourses on the Dharma. There are birds there, there are curlews and waterfowl, birds of Paradise and they all, when they cry and call, they speak, they cry and call the Dharma. So under circumstances like that, where everything speaks to you of the Dharma conditions conduce to the attainment of Enlightenment, well surely, I won't say quickly and easily, but surely, steadily you will gain even Enlightenment.

So this is the picture of Sukhavati which is painted in the first instance for the benefit of Vaydehi in the Amitayur-dhyana Sutra. Surely it is a very, very beautiful picture but it may at the same time, though a beautiful scene, seem a little remote from us, a little remote from the world which we ordinarily inhabit. But Sukhavati is not just another world in that sort of sense, Sukhavati is something which we can, which we have, in fact, to create on this earth to the fullest extent that we possibly can. We have to improve things here on Earth, have to make them more and more and more conducive to the flowering of the spiritual life and the attainment of Enlightenment and that is why we have created our own Sukhavati on howsoever small a scale, howsoever embryonic or germically we have created our own Sukhavati, our own nucleus of a new society. We have created the society in which there is no room for representing, no room for authority, no room for power. The very idea of representing, the very idea of authority, the very idea of power is absurd in such a place as Sukhavati where the bodhicitta reigns supreme, We create a society in which there is only room for the individual or individuals in free association with one another, create a society which is governed by, inspired by the principle of the Great Friendliness and the Great Compassion, a society which is inspired by wisdom, a society inspired, above all by the bodhicitta, the will to Enlightenment, by all, for all and all in all.