

INTRODUCING THE THREE JEWELS OF BUDDHISM

Dharmachakra Tape series 1 - 3 (1968)

Tape 1: Who is the Buddha ? (55 minutes)

"After an account of the Buddha's life, Sangharakshita asks how, if at all, the Buddha can be defined or categorized."

---oOo---

Friends, yesterday we had a talk on Living Buddhism just, as it were, to strike the right note if not to set the pace for these ten days; but that talk, as it were, stood apart and today we are beginning a series of talks on Buddhism. So the question which arises is: How and where to begin ? Now we know that Buddhism itself begins with the Buddha. This teaching or this tradition, which in the West we now call Buddhism, grew out of, sprang out of the Buddha's experience of Enlightenment underneath the bodhi tree 2500 years ago. So inasmuch as Buddhism begins with the Buddha, perhaps it is only right, perhaps it is only appropriate that this short series of talks on Buddhism should also begin with the Buddha. But the question which at once arises is: Who was the Buddha ?

Now this is not the sort of question which Buddhists will ask. It is not the sort of question which regular students of Buddhism would ask or would even feel it necessary to ask. But though we do have today, though we do have with us throughout the retreat quite a number of our regular friends, even some members of our Order, there are nevertheless also quite a number of you who are comparatively new to Buddhism; and it is mainly for you, for your benefit, for your information and guidance, and we hope inspiration, that this short series is intended. The others, the more experienced people, they are just, as it were, listening in and taking, perhaps, notes against the time when they, from a platform like this, will be trying to answer the question Who was the Buddha ? We might even go so far as to say that it is by no means an un-useful thing, even for those who regard themselves as Buddhists, who regard themselves even as Buddhists of long standing, to think about this question which at stands as the title of our talk.

---oOo---

So, Who was the Buddha ? The first thing that we have to observe, the first point that we have to make clear, is that the word 'Buddha' is not a proper name. It is not a name like John or Frances or Mary. It's not a proper name at all but it's a title; and the word 'Buddha' means One who knows, One who understands, and it also means One who is awake, One who has woken up, as it were, from the dream of life, who is awake because he sees the Truth, he sees Reality. So this title of the Buddha, the One who knows or the Wise One or the Enlightened One, or the Awake One, this title was first applied to a man whose personal name was Siddhartha and whose clan or family name was Gautama and who lived 500 years before Christ, in the area which is now partly in Southern Nepal and partly in Northern India. We know, fortunately, quite a lot about his early career. We know that he came from a well-to-do, even a patrician family. Tradition sometimes represents his father as having been the King of the *Shakya* clan or tribe; but it seems more likely that he wasn't so much the King as the elected President of the Assembly, the clan Assembly, and that he held office for twelve years with the title of *Rajah*, and that it was during this twelve-year period of office that his son, Siddhartha Gautama, who subsequently became the Buddha, the Enlightened One, was born.

So he was born in this sort of family, against this sort of background. As a young prince or patrician at least, we know that he received what was, by the standard of those days, a very good education. He didn't go to school - education really has got nothing to do with going to school.

It is not really clear whether the Buddha could read or write. But we know that he had a very good training in all sorts of martial arts and martial exercises (we saw something of those in a more Buddhist form this morning out on the lawn) and we can imagine the young, the future Buddha as spending his time more in that way than in browsing over books, much less still reading newspapers and things like that. And he learned by word of mouth from the wise old men of the clan, of the tribe, the various traditions, the genealogical lists, the various beliefs and the superstitions and the ideas, and so on. And he led on the whole a quite comfortable, a quite well-to-do sort of life, had no particular responsibility. His father, apparently, was a very affectionate, even a doting parent; married him off when he was quite young, some accounts say when he was only sixteen, because as you probably know, in India in those days, as usually today also, such things as marriages are arranged by one's parents. It's nothing to do with oneself personally, it's the affair of the family, it isn't your individual concern. So his father arranged a marriage for him and he married a distant cousin, and in due course a son was born to him, and you might have thought that he led a happy and comfortable and pleasant enough existence.

---oOo---

But the accounts make it clear that despite all these comforts, these luxuries, despite the well-to-do way of life, Siddhartha Gautama was very deeply dissatisfied. H. G. Wells, I remember, when describing this period in the Buddha's existence, says perhaps rather appropriately, "It was the boredom of a fine mind seeking employment, seeking occupation for itself, seeking something to do, something positive, something worthwhile". But the legends, the traditions which we find in the Buddhist scriptures, speak of a sort of spiritual crisis, a sort of turning point when this young prince, this young patrician, saw what the Buddhist texts call The Four Sights. Now scholars are not quite agreed as to whether he literally went out one day, or four days, and saw these four sights in the village street, or whether The Four Sights are a sort of projection externally of essentially psychological and spiritual experiences. It would seem in fact that they do represent psychological and spiritual experiences which later writers transcribed, as it were, into an interesting narrative, even dramatic form, these four sights. But these four sights are very expressive, they mean a very great deal. And they summarise, even they crystallise in a very powerful form certain fundamental teachings of Buddhism, and throw, and cast a very great deal of light on the Buddha's own early inner spiritual development.

So the story goes, the legend goes that one day, one morning - it was a beautiful bright day, the sun shining - the Buddha felt like going out in his chariot. So he called his charioteer, whipped up the horses, they went out into the village, drove around, and then suddenly the Buddha saw this first sight: he saw an old man, and according to the legend he had never seen an old man before. Now if you take it literally it means he had been shut up in his palace and hadn't take much notice of other people, and hadn't really realised there was such a thing as old age. But you can take it in another way because sometimes we see something as though for the first time. In a sense we've seen it a hundred, a thousand times before, but one day, one day a moment comes, a moment strikes when we see it as though for the first time, as though we had never seen it before, and probably it was something like this which happened in the case of the Buddha, when he saw the first of these sights, the old man. And this gave him a sort of shock and he said to his charioteer, "who on earth is that ?" There was the old man - and in India old people look really old, when a woman is 40 she looks about 80, and men also pretty much the same because of the climate and the hard life - so there was this old man tottering along with a stick, and a long white beard, and the rheum trickling from his eyes, just able to support himself and move along. So the Buddha says, "What is this ?" And the charioteer, we are told, replied, "This is an old man". So the Buddha said, "Why is he like that ? Why is he so bent ? Why is he so frail ?" So the charioteer replied, "Well he's just an old man." So the Buddha said, "Well how has he got like that ?" "Well everybody gets old, it's natural, it just happens." Then the Buddha asked, or the future Buddha rather, asked, "Well does this happen to everybody ?" And the charioteer replied, "Yes indeed, it happens to one and all." And the Buddha then put the crucial question, "Will this happen also to me ?" And the charioteer of course had to reply, "Yes, even to you, young as you are. This

must inevitably happen one day. One day you will be old." So this word of the charioteer struck the future Buddha like a thunderbolt as it were, and he said, "What is the use of this youth? What is the use of this vitality and this strength if it all ends in this?" And very sick at heart, very despondent, he returned to his palace. And this was his first sight.

The second sight was the sight of a sick man. It's as though he had never seen anyone sick before and he realised that all human beings are subject to sickness, that human life is prey to sickness of various kinds, and he had to face the fact that he, too, might at any time - healthy as he was, strong as he was - be struck down by sickness.

And then the third sight that he saw was the sight of a corpse, a corpse being carried to the burning ground on a stretcher; and you can see this sight, in India, any day. In India a funeral is a very interesting thing, it's a very public thing. Here when you die you are smuggled away in a little box, and that's that. No one sees anything of you. You're just quietly disposed of like so much garbage that no one even wants to look at, that's put into the incinerator or into a little hole in the ground and covered over. But in India it isn't like that. When you die you are laid out very publicly, in the best room of the house, and all your friends and all your relations come and have a good look and say, "ah well, looks just like old so-and-so. It's him to the life, as it were. Well he looks quite happy, quite peaceful. Yes, bye-bye"; and they shed a tear, too, throw a few flowers on the corpse. And then the corpse is hoisted onto the shoulders of four strong men, and borne through the streets, with the face still uncovered, and the corpse is jolting along on the shoulders of these people, and it's a hot day, and crowds of people are following behind, and the people passing by they look and they say, "Oh yes, look there's old so-and-so, didn't know he was dead, look they're going to take him to the burning ground!" And this is what happens in India.

So the Buddha saw a procession of this sort, people moving along, the corpse, and he asked the charioteer, "What on earth is this?" The charioteer, who seems to have been quite a wise man, the charioteer says, "Well this is just a dead body." Then the Buddha asked, "Dead? Well what's happened to him?" "Well you can see, he's stiff, lifeless, doesn't breathe, doesn't see, doesn't hear. He's dead." So the Buddha sort of gave a gasp and he said, "Well, does this happen to everybody this death?" So the charioteer, drew a long sigh and he said, "Well, I'm afraid so." And of course the Buddha realised it would happen also to him one day. So this also struck him, this revelation as it were, very forcibly like a thunderbolt.

And he was brooding over these things. He had come up against what nowadays we'd call these existential situations which one can't escape from. You don't want to grow old but you can't help it. You don't want to fall sick but you can't help it. You don't want to die but you can't help it. So you start asking yourself the question: Well how do I come to be here. Here I am, a living human being, and I can't even live as I want to. I want to go on living for ever, young and strong and healthy, but it doesn't happen like that. I don't want to die but I have to die. So what is it that has brought this situation about? Here am I with this urge to live and to go on living, yet I've got to die. Why? What is the meaning of it all? Why this mystery, why this riddle, why have I been made like this? Is it God who is responsible? Is it fate, is it destiny? Has it just happened? Is there an explanation? Or is there no explanation? In this way the Buddha was brought up against these existential situations of life and death, and he started thinking about them very very deeply.

But he saw a fourth sight. This sight was the sight of what in India is called a *sadhu*, a holy man, walking along the village street with his begging bowl, going from one door to the next for alms, very quietly, very peacefully; in very ordinary dress, a yellow robe, a saffron robe. He seemed so calm, so quiet, so peaceful, that the future Buddha thought, "Maybe he has understood, maybe he knows, maybe this is the way, maybe I should do likewise. Maybe I should cut off all ties, all connections, go forth as this man. Maybe I shall see the Truth, maybe I shall find an answer to these problems which are tormenting me."

---oOo---

So the legend continues - and it's a very beautiful, almost romantic story - that one night, when everything was quiet, and there was a full moon in the sky, no sound, the Buddha bade a last farewell to his sleeping wife and his child. He wasn't happy to leave them but he had to go all the same. He went out into the Indian moonlight and he rode many miles that night till he reached the river; left his horse there, left behind his princely garments, cut off his long hair and his beard, and he became a homeless wanderer in search of Truth. And this going forth, psychologically is very important, very significant. I've sometimes thought I'd like to give a talk one day, just on this topic: the Significance of the Going Forth. It is not just becoming a monk. It's much more than that. It means cutting off all ties, cutting off what Fromm calls the incestuous ties to blood, and soil, and kindred, and all the rest of it; and leaving yourself free, as an individual, to work out your own salvation and your own destiny for yourself. So the Buddha got away from it all. To use the fashionable phrase, he opted out. He'd had enough. He was going to try to find out, try to see the Truth.

So for six years he was searching. And in those days in India, there were many people who taught ways leading to realisation, leading to the attainment of Truth. One of these ways was the way of Self-torture. Now in this country we can't quite take this seriously. It has never been a way, really, in the West, apart from perhaps the hermits of the Egyptian desert in the 2nd century AD. But apart from that it has never been a part of our daily life. We don't go to work, say, in the morning and on the way we see a man sitting on a bed of nails. It is not part of our way of life. But in India it is very much in the air, very much in the atmosphere, and even now Indians do have this very strong belief that self-torture is the way to heaven, or the way even to self-knowledge and Enlightenment. So in the Buddha's day there was a very powerful movement of this sort and if you wanted to gain the Truth, you had to subdue and subjugate and even mortify the flesh. So that's what the Buddha did, for many a long year. For six years. He practised austerities, he limited his food, he limited his sleep, he didn't wash, he went about naked. All this is described by the Buddha himself when he became an old man, in the Buddhist scriptures, all these austerities. And it is said that the fame of his austerities was noised abroad like the sound of a great bell hung in the canopy of the sky. He became famous for this asceticism and his self-torture. He afterwards said that "no one in India went beyond me in self-torture and self-mortification. But", he said, "it led me nowhere." It didn't lead to the Truth, it didn't lead to Enlightenment.

And the Buddha had the courage to give up. He had become quite famous. He was well-known as a great ascetic, had a number of disciples who were with him, but when he realised that this wasn't the way, he gave it up. He started eating again, took regular meals (yes terrible isn't it?), he started eating again after this fast and this austerity, and his disciples said, "Well, what is this? He's backsliding. He isn't the man we thought he was." So they left him in disgust. They went away. And he was left quite on his own. And this is also significant, that he was left on his own. He already had left his family, left his friends, left his tribe, but in the end even his disciples deserted him. There wasn't a single person remaining with him. He was entirely on his own. So he remained on his own, he went about from place to place, and eventually he decided that he would sit down and he would meditate. He felt maybe this is the way, the way of meditation. So eventually, we are told, he came to very beautiful, a very pleasant spot, in what is now Bihar, on the banks of a fresh running river, and he sat down in the shade of a great tree, and he made the resolution: I will not rise from this spot until I am Enlightened. There is a very beautiful and dramatic verse which is put into his lips by some of the early compilers, saying that "flesh may wither away, blood may dry up, but until I gain Enlightenment I shall not move from this seat." So day after day, night after night, he sat there, controlled, concentrated the mind, purified the mind, suppressed the hindrances, the defilements, and gradually, we are told, the light dawned. And on this Wesak night, the night of the full moon of May, just as the morning star was rising, just as he fixed his mind on that star, glittering near the horizon, full illumination, full Enlightenment arose.

Now it is obviously very difficult to describe this sort of state. We can say it's the plenitude of wisdom, or we can say it's the fullness of compassion. We can say that it's seeing the Truth face

to face. But these are only words; they don't mean very much. So let us just leave it at that and say that, at that moment, the light dawned, and Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha. And this was the Great Enlightenment. So in a sense this was the end of his quest. He had become the Buddha, the One who knew. He found out the solution of the riddle of existence. He was Enlightened, he was Awake. So this was the end of his quest.

---oOo---

But in a sense it was the beginning of his mission, the beginning of his work. I told, I related yesterday, the story of how finally he decided to preach, how he decided to make known to humanity the Truth that he had discovered. So he left Bodha Gaya, he walked to Sarnath about 100 miles away, he gathered together the disciples who had left him when he gave up austerities, he preached to them the first sermon (I don't really like this word 'sermon', it's a *sutta*, a discourse, literally a thread, a series of ideas, things, strung together as it were on a thread). He revealed to them, he spoke, told them about what he had discovered, and he founded gradually a spiritual community. He didn't stay in any one spot. He roamed all over north-eastern India. He had a very long life. He was Enlightened at the age of 35 and he lived to be 80; so five-and-forty years of work, of active life spreading his teaching, spreading his message. And the pattern seems to have been that for nine months of the year he wandered, he walked from place to place. When he came to a village, if it was lunch time he got out his begging bowl, stood at the door of a hut, got a little food, moved on to the next hut, stood at the door there, got a little more. When he had collected enough he moved to the mango grove, which you always find near an Indian village, sat down under a tree, finished his meal, and then the villagers would gather round, and he would preach to them, teach them. Sometimes Brahmins would come, sometimes wealthy landowners, sometimes peasants, sometimes merchants, sometimes sweepers, sometimes prostitutes, he would teach them all. And sometimes in the big cities he would preach to kings, and princes, wealthy merchants. And in this way, he gathered a great following and he became, in his own day, the greatest and the best known of all spiritual teachers of India. When he died, he gained what we call *parinirvana*, at the age of 80, there were hundreds and thousands, even tens of thousands, of disciples to mourn his departure, both monks and lay people, ascetics and also householders, men and women, and so on. Up and down the length and breadth of the great sub-continent.

So this, in outline at least, is the traditional biography of Siddhartha Gautama, the Indian prince who became the Buddha, the Enlightened One, the Awakened One, the founder of that great spiritual tradition which we call Buddhism.

So this account, this traditionally based account, of the life, of the career of the Buddha is generally regarded as answering the question: Who was the Buddha ?

---oOo---

But we may put a further question. We may put another question, and we may ask: Does this traditional account, this resumé of the traditional Buddha biography, really answer the question 'Who was the Buddha?' ? It certainly tells us who Siddhartha was, certainly tells us who Gautama was. It gives us all the facts. I haven't mentioned all of them but we know the name of the Buddha's father and his mother, and his brother and his sister. We know all these facts, the name of the town where he was born, the name the astrologer who came to see him when he was a baby. We know all the facts, but though we know all the facts, though we've got the whole story, though the life is fully documented, does this biography really tell us who the Buddha was ?

The question that really arises is: Do we know the Buddha (and the emphasis is on 'the Buddha'), do we know the Buddha from a description of the life of Gautama the Buddha ? We might even say, we might even ask: What do we mean by 'knowing the Buddha', anyway ? Let's take an example:

Suppose we are told about somebody. Suppose someone says that yesterday I met so-and-so, and they give you the facts about him or about her: they tell you the name of the person, and whether they were old or young, and where they live and what they do, what their work is. You know, the questions which people put usually now, well what do you do? So you know all these sort of things. You know which part of London or which part of the country he lives in. You get all these facts given to you about this person your friend has met. But do you really know that person because you have all these facts at your disposal, because you know the name and the address, the date of birth, do you really know that person on this account?

Well we can say that we know about him, but it might be a bit too much to say that we know. But suppose we take it a step further. Suppose you not only hear about this person. Suppose one day you are introduced to him, you actually meet. Suppose you become acquainted. Well then if someone asks you, you can give a description of the person: you can say, yes, he's five foot eight high. Yes, he wears such and such kind of suit, he's tall, or he's dark, or he's fair. He speaks with such and such kind of accent. Yes, he went to Africa ten years ago. Yes, nowadays he works as a salesman. And in this way you know the whole life story: you know his likes and his dislikes; you know for instance that he likes Bach but he doesn't like Beethoven, or he likes jazz but he doesn't like something else. You know he likes a particular kind of food, and doesn't like some other food. You know he belongs to a particular political party, or his religious beliefs are such and such. You know all that. So most people therefore would say of that person, or with regard to that person, "I know him", because they know all these facts about him. They are acquainted with him. They might even say, "I know him very well". This is what we usually say about people when we know them to this extent, we say "I know him very well".

But is it really so? Do we really thereby know that particular person, do we really know him very well? Even speaking from a purely worldly point of view, in a purely worldly sense, we know that it sometimes happens that we have to correct our opinion of someone, correct our evaluation of someone. Sometimes we are taken by surprise. We might have thought that we knew that person very well; but one day, as I say, we are taken by surprise, they do something quite unexpected, quite out of character as it were, and we say to ourselves, rather surprised, sometimes a little hurt, "Well I never thought that he (or she) would do that. I never would have expected that of them". Or we might even say, very sadly, "Well, that's the last person I thought would do that". But they did it, they do it. And this shows how little we really know other people, how little we really know them. We are not really able to plumb the deepest springs of their action, their ultimate, their fundamental motivation. And this happens even with those who are supposedly nearest and dearest to us. We don't really know them. Sometimes the nearer they are, the less we know them. You know there's that old saying: It's a wise child that knows its own father. And this saying, of course, can be taken in at least two or three different senses. But we can also say: It's a wise father, or a wise mother, that knows his or her own child. We can say: It's a wise husband who knows his own wife; or a wise wife who knows her own husband.

I know sometimes, just to reminisce a little, I've had the experience that a husband and wife both come to me, quite independently, without telling the other, to consult me about the other (the husband about the wife, and the wife about the husband), and usually the wife will give a picture of the husband that I would never have recognised. And the husband will give a picture of the wife such as I never would have recognised. And sometimes this goes to show that neither really knows the other. Sometimes it's as though the so called closeness, the superficial closeness, gets in the way, and what we know is not the other person to whom we are supposed to be so close. We know only our own projected mental state. We know only of our own quite subjective reaction to that person. In other words, our ego, our self, just gets in the way.

So in order really to know another person we have to go much deeper than the ordinary level of communication which isn't real communication at all. And it's just the same with regard to this question of knowing the Buddha. We may 'know' all the facts, the historical facts, the biographical facts, about the life of Siddhartha, the life of Gautama, but are we thereby any nearer

really knowing the Buddha ? In other words, can we really answer the question, Who was the Buddha ?, by describing the life of Gautama the Buddha ? So the question arises again, or rather it continues to arise, who was the Buddha ?

Now this isn't the first time that this question has been asked. This question, in this deeper sense: who was the Buddha ? has been asked since the very dawn of Buddhism itself. In fact the very first question that ever was put to the Buddha after his Enlightenment was this question: Who are you ? This isn't a fact, perhaps, which is generally known, but it was the first question put to the Buddha after his Enlightenment: Who are you ? And we are only repeating that question. I've related how the Buddha gained Enlightenment under the bodhi tree, and according to tradition, as I mentioned yesterday, after his Enlightenment he spent seven weeks under or in the vicinity of the same bodhi tree. And after that, at the end of the seventh week, he set out for Sarnath, near Benares, to meet his former disciples and to teach them.

So on the way, on the way from Bodha Gaya to Benares, to Sarnath, he met a man called Upaka. Upaka was what the texts describe as a 'naked ascetic', one of those who practise the, to us rather peculiar, form of asceticism of going around naked. There are still some of these naked *sadhus* left in India and I've seen some of them myself. There are not very many of them nowadays but there were lots of them in the Buddha's day. So on his way from Bodha Gaya to Benares, to Sarnath, the Buddha met Upaka, the naked ascetic. And Upaka saw the Buddha coming in the distance, and he stopped, waiting for the Buddha to draw near; he was very impressed by his appearance because the Buddha, remember, was just fresh from his Enlightenment, he had only been Enlightened for seven weeks or a little more, and there was a radiance about his whole being, his whole person. We are told that it was as though a light were shining from his face, from his features; he was happy, serene, joyful. So Upaka was very, very much impressed by this. He seemed to have felt that, well this wasn't an ordinary human being. Perhaps it wasn't a human being at all. So as the Buddha drew near, he put the question, without any preliminary (because in India it's the custom, where religious matters are concerned, you come straight to the point). He didn't say to the Buddha, "Lovely weather we're having, isn't it ?" He didn't say, "Where are you coming from ?" He didn't say any of these things. He said, at once, "Who are you ?" We would consider this a very impolite question. If you were walking down to Haslemere and some local person came up to you and said, "Who are you ?", you'd consider that most impertinent. But in India it's rather different. So Upaka could ask the Buddha this question: Who are you ?

Now the ancient Indians believed that the universe stratified into various levels of existence; that there were not just men, not just human beings as we believe, not even just animals, but gods and ghosts, and *yakshas* and *gandharvas*, and all sorts of mythological beings inhabiting this sort of multi-storeyed universe; the human plane being just one storey out of all these scores and scores of storeys and planes. So it's as though Upaka thought to himself, well, this isn't a human being; [he's] from some other plane, some sort of spirit. He was very impressed by the appearance of the Buddha. So he asked him, "Well who are you ? Are you a *yaksha* ?" A *yaksha* was a sort of sublime spirit, rather terrifying, living in the forests, in the jungle. So the Buddha said, "No". Just that, "No". So Upaka tried again. "Are you a *gandharva* ?" A sort of celestial musician, a sort of beautiful singing angel-like figure. The Buddha said "No". Then again, he asked, "Are you a *deva* ? A god, a divine being, a sort of archangel. "No". So Upaka thought, well he must be a human being after all. That's strange. So he said, "Well, are you a human being ?" The sort of question you could put in ancient India. "Are you a human being ?" So the Buddha said, "No". So Upaka thought, "Well that's odd. He isn't a *yaksha*, he isn't a *gandharva*, he isn't a *deva*, isn't even a human being. What is he ?" So he asked, "Who are you ? If you're not any of these things, who are you ? What are you ?" So the Buddha simply said, "Those conditions (or better perhaps, those psychological conditionings) on account of which I might have been described as a *yaksha* or a *gandharva* or a *deva* or a human being, all those psychological conditions and formations have been destroyed. Therefore am I a Buddha." Now the word for these psychological conditionings is *samskaras*, and it means all kinds of conditioned mental attitudes. And it is these conditioned mental attitudes, these *samskaras*, volitions, or karma

formations as they are sometimes called, which according to Buddhism, according to Indian belief in general, determine our re-birth, or which determine our conditionedness here and now.

---oOo---

So the Buddha was free from all this, no conditioning, so there was nothing to cause him to be reborn as a god, reborn as a *gandharva* reborn even as a human being. And even here and now he was not, therefore, any of those things. He had reached the state of unconditioned mind, of unconditioned consciousness. His body might appear to be that of a man, but his mind was unconditioned and therefore he was called the Buddha; Buddha being a sort of incarnation if you like, a personification if you like, of the Unconditioned Mind. Now this is a little difficult to grasp. The human mind proceeds slowly, proceeds by degrees. It proceeds from the known to the unknown, and we try to describe the unknown in terms of the known. And this is what Upaka tried to do. He saw this glorious figure, the Buddha. So he wanted to know who it was. So he only had as his disposal these labels of *gandharva* and *yaksha* and *deva* and human being, so he tried to put these labels as it were on to the Buddha. The Buddha wouldn't have it. "None of these labels fit. None of them apply. I'm a Buddha. I transcend all these conditionings. I am above and beyond all this."

Now this is still very relevant to us because there are two of these descriptions, two of Upaka's categories, which we still try to apply to the Buddha. And these two categories represent, we may say, or these two descriptions represent, we may say, mistakes which we commit here and now, both in the East and in the West, with regard to the Buddha, when we tried to understand who the Buddha was or is. We usually tend to think of the Buddha either as God or as Man. Why? Because in the West we have just these two categories: God and Man. So when, with our Western, dualistic, Christian background, we come up against, or come across the Buddha, just like Upaka we try to slap on a label. Well, we only have two labels: God. Man. So we try to categorise the Buddha in these terms, just as Upaka did all those centuries ago. One school of thought says, the Buddha was just a man. He was a very good man, you could even day a holy man, yes very decent. Someone rather like Socrates, but just a man, not more than that. This is the view taken, for instance, by catholic writers about Buddhism. It's a rather subtle, invidious sort of approach. They praise the Buddha for his wonderful piety, wonderful charity, great love, compassion, wisdom, yes a very great man. And then they say, they very carefully say this on the last page of their book about Buddhism, but Christ was the son of God, so he's much more. The Buddha was just a man. And this is one way in which the Buddha is categorised. The other school says: No, the Buddha is a sort of god for the Buddhists. Of course, originally he was a man but these wicked Buddhists, what did they do, hundreds of years after the Buddha's death, they deified him, they made him into a god. He was a man all right, an ordinary man, but the Buddhists deified him. They made him into a god because they wanted to have something to worship.

Now both of these views are wrong: that the Buddha was a man; that the Buddha was God, a god. The Buddha was a man, yes, a human being, in the sense he started off as every other human being starts off; but he wasn't an ordinary man, he was an Enlightened man. And according to Buddhism that makes a great deal of difference. It makes, in fact, all the difference. He was, in fact, an Unconditioned Mind in a conditioned body. And a Buddha, one who is an Unconditioned Mind in a conditioned body, is the highest being in all the universe, according to the Buddhist tradition, higher even than the so called gods, what we would call in western terms angels, archangels, and so on. It is significant that traditionally the Buddha is called the Teacher of gods and men. And in Buddhist art the gods are represented in a very humble sort of position, one on the one side of the Buddha, another perhaps on the other, and saluting him and listening to the teaching. This is a Buddhist view of the gods.

Now a certain amount of confusion has arisen in people's minds in the West, about the Buddha being a god or being God, because they see that the Buddha is worshipped. You can see

programmes on television about Buddhist countries. A beautiful Buddhist temple with golden spires and lots of lovely columns and carvings; and you see groups people going along, early in the morning, with flowers, and offering flowers on the altar and lighting candles and bowing down. And you think, well they are worshipping the Buddha. Maybe the commentator tells you this. Here they are in Bangkok or in Tokyo, or wherever else it may be, worshipping the Buddha. So we at once think, yes, worshipping, worshipping means they must take him as God. Because if you worship someone, it means that for you that person is God. So they take this as a sort of Truth, that Buddhists regard the Buddha as God, because they worship him. But this is quite wrong, because not only Buddhists, but people generally in the East, have all got quite a different conception of worship. In the West, worship is something offered only to God. When we say "I worship", well it's taken for granted you go to a church, you worship God. You don't say, "I worship my father", or "I worship my mother" or "I worship my distant uncle". You don't say that. But in the East you do. You've got the same word for paying respect to the Buddha, to your parents, to your elder brothers and sisters, to your teachers - both spiritual and secular; and to any senior or respectable person. You use the same word, which means to worship, to respect, and so on. You don't have different words. So when you see Buddhists offering flowers to the Buddha image, lighting candles, bowing down, they are just respecting. And they are respecting the Buddha, or honouring the Buddha if you like, as an Enlightened being, they are not worshipping him as God.

---oOo---

Now this is a little by the way. Let's get back to our main theme, which is Knowing the Buddha. We've seen that Buddha means Unconditioned Mind, Enlightened Mind. Knowing the Buddha therefore means knowing the Mind in its Unconditioned state. This is what knowing the Buddha really is, knowing the Mind in its Unconditioned state. So if at this stage we were asked "Who is the Buddha ?", we can only reply, "You yourself are the Buddha - potentially." We come to know the Buddha, really, truly, only in process of actualising, in the course of our spiritual life, in the course of our meditation and so on, actualising our own potential buddhahood. And it is only then that we can really say, from knowledge, from experience, who the Buddha is.

Now we can't do this all at once. It certainly can't be done in a day. We have to establish, first of all, what we may describe as a sort of living contact with the Buddha. We have to achieve, we have to arrive at something intermediate between just mere factual knowledge about Gautama the Buddha, the details of his career and biography, and, on the other hand, the experience of Unconditioned Mind. We have to achieve something in between. Something which goes further than the factual biographical knowledge, even though it still falls far short of knowing the Unconditioned Mind, really knowing the Buddha. So what is this, this something that comes in between the two, half way there. This is what we call Going for Refuge to the Buddha. And Going for Refuge to the Buddha means not just reciting *Buddham Saranam Gacchami*, though it doesn't exclude that. It means taking buddhahood, taking the idea or ideal of Enlightenment as a living spiritual ideal, as our ultimate objective, and trying and striving to realise that. In other words, it's only by taking refuge in the Buddha, in the traditional sense, that we can really know who the Buddha is. And this is one of the reasons why in our own Movement we attach such great importance to the Refuges, not only going for refuge to the Buddha, but going for refuge to the Dharma and going for refuge in the Sangha.

We may say, in conclusion, that to summarise our whole argument, our whole trend of thought, that it is only by taking Refuge in the Buddha, with all that that implies, with all that that means, that we can really and truly answer from the heart and the mind and the whole of our spiritual life, the question Who is the Buddha .

---oOo---