

The World As Emptiness

by Alan Watts

This particular weekend seminar is devoted to Buddhism, and it should be said first that there is a sense in which Buddhism is Hinduism, stripped for export. Last week, when I discussed Hinduism, I discussed many things to do with the organization of Hindu society, because Hinduism is not merely what we call a religion, it's a whole culture. It's a legal system, it's a social system, it's a system of etiquette, and it includes everything. It includes housing, it includes food, it includes art. Because the Hindus and many other ancient peoples do not make, as we do, a division between religion and everything else. Religion is not a department of life; it is something that enters into the whole of it. But you see, when a religion and a culture are inseparable, it's very difficult to export a culture, because it comes into conflict with the established traditions, manners, and customs of other people.

So the question arises, what are the essentials of Hinduism that could be exported? And when you answer that, approximately you'll get Buddhism. As I explained, the essential of Hinduism, the real, deep root, isn't any kind of doctrine, it isn't really any special kind of discipline, although of course disciplines are involved. The center of Hinduism is an experience called *_maksha[?]*, liberation, in which, through the dissipation of the illusion that each man and each woman is a separate thing in a world consisting of nothing but a collection of separate things, you discover that you are, in a way, on one level an illusion, but on another level, you are what they call 'the self,' the one self, which is all that there is. The universe is the game of the self, which plays hide and seek forever and ever. When it plays 'hide,' it plays it so well, hides so cleverly, that it pretends to be all of us, and all things whatsoever, and we don't know it because it's playing 'hide.' But when it plays 'seek,' it enters onto a path of yoga, and through following this path it wakes up, and the scales fall from one's eyes.

Now, in just the same way, the center of Buddhism, the only really important thing about Buddhism is the experience which they call 'awakening.' Buddha is a title, and not a proper name. It comes from a Sanskrit root, 'bheudh,' and that sometimes means 'to know,' but better, 'waking.' And so you get from this root 'bodhih.' That is the state of being awakened. And so 'buddha,' 'the awakened one,' 'the awakened person.' And so there can of course in Buddhist ideas, be very many buddhas. The person called THE buddha is only one of myriads. Because they, like the Hindus, are quite sure that our world is only one among billions, and that buddhas come and go in all the worlds. But sometimes, you see, there comes into the world what you might call a 'big buddha.' A very important one. And such a one is said to have been Guatama, the son of a prince living in northern India, in a part of the world we now call Nepal, living shortly after 600 BC. All dates in Indian history are vague, and so I never try to get you to remember any precise date, like 564, which some people think it was, but I give you a vague date--just after 600 BC is probably right.

Most of you, I'm sure, know the story of his life. Is there anyone who doesn't, I mean roughly? Ok. So I won't bother too much with that. But the point is, that when, in India, a man was called a buddha, or THE buddha, this is a title of a very exalted nature. It is first of all necessary for a buddha to be human. He can't be any other kind

of being, whether in the Hindu scale of beings he's above the human state or below it. He is superior to all gods, because according to Indian ideas, gods or angels--angels are probably a better name for them than gods--all those exalted beings are still in the wheel of becoming, still in the chains of karma--that is action that requires more action to complete it, and goes on requiring the need for more action. They're still, according to popular ideas, going 'round the wheel from life after life after life after life, because they still have the thirst for existence, or to put it in a Hindu way: in them, the self is still playing the game of not being itself.

But the buddha's doctrine, based on his own experience of awakening, which occurred after seven years of attempts to study with the various yogis of the time, all of whom used the method of extreme asceticism, fasting, doing all sort of exercises, lying on beds of nails, sleeping on broken rocks, any kind of thing to break down egocentricity, to become unselfish, to become detached, to exterminate desire for life. But buddha found that all that was futile; that was not The Way. And one day he broke his ascetic discipline and accepted a bowl of some kind of milk soup from a girl who was looking after cattle. And suddenly in this tremendous relaxation, he went and sat down under a tree, and the burden lifted. He saw, completely, that what he had been doing was on the wrong track. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. And no amount of effort will make a person who believes himself to be an ego be really unselfish. So long as you think, and feel, that you are someone contained in your bag of skin, and that's all, there is no way whatsoever of your behaving unselfishly. Oh yes, you can imitate unselfishness. You can go through all sorts of highly refined forms of selfishness, but you're still tied to the wheel of becoming by the golden chains of your good deeds, as the obviously bad people are tied to it by the iron chains of their misbehaviors.

So, you know how people are when they get spiritually proud. They belong to some kind of a church group, or an occult group, and say 'Of course we're the ones who have the right teaching. We're the in-group, we're the elect, and everyone else outside.' It is really off the track. But then comes along someone who one-ups THEM, by saying 'Well, in our circles, we're very tolerant. We accept all religions and all ways as leading to The One.' But what they're doing is they're playing the game called 'We're More Tolerant Than You Are.' And in this way the egocentric being is always in his own trap.

So buddha saw that all his yoga exercises and ascetic disciplines had just been ways of trying to get himself out of the trap in order to save his own skin, in order to find peace for himself. And he realized that that is an impossible thing to do, because the motivation ruins the project. He found out, then, see, that there was no trap to get out of except himself. Trap and trapped are one, and when you understand that, there isn't any trap left. [Dharma Bum's note: this made me think of a bit from an Anglican hymn: 'We, by enemies distressed,/They in paradise at rest;/We the captives, they the freed,/We and they are one indeed.'] I'm going to explain that of course more carefully.

So, as a result of this experience, he formulated what is called the _dharma_, that is the Sanskrit word for 'method.' You will get a certain confusion when you read books on Buddhism, because they switch between Sanskrit and Pali words. The earliest Buddhist scriptures that we know of are written in the Pali language, and Pali is a

softened form of Sanskrit. So that, for example, the doctrine of the buddha is called in Sanskrit the 'dharma,' we must in pronouncing Sanskrit be aware that an 'A' is almost pronounced as we pronounce 'U' in the word 'but.' So they don't say 'darmuh,' they say 'durmuuh.' And so also this double 'D' you say 'budduh' and so on. But in Pali, and in many books of Buddhism, you'll find the Buddhist doctrine described as the 'dhama.' And so the same way 'karma' in Sanskrit, in Pali becomes 'kama.' 'Buddha' remains the same. The dharma, then, is the method.

Now, the method of Buddhism, and this is absolutely important to remember, is dialectic. That is to say, it doesn't teach a doctrine. You cannot anywhere what Buddhism teaches, as you can find out what Christianity or Judaism or Islam teaches. Because all Buddhism is a discourse, and what most people suppose to be its teachings are only the opening stages of the dialog.

So the concern of the buddha as a young man--the problem he wanted to solve--was the problem of human suffering. And so he formulated his teaching in a very easy way to remember. All those Buddhist scriptures are full of what you might call mnemonic tricks, sort of numbering things in such a way that they're easy to remember. And so he summed up his teaching in what are called the Four Noble Truths. And the first one, because it was his main concern, was the truth about _duhkha_. Duhkha, 'suffering, pain, frustration, chronic dis-ease.' It is the opposite of _sukha_, which means 'sweet, pleasure, etc.'

So, insofar as the problem posed in Buddhism is duhkha, 'I don't want to suffer, and I want to find someone or something that can cure me of suffering.' That's the problem. Now if there's a person who solves the problem, a buddha, people come to him and say 'Master, how do we get out of this problem?' So what he does is to propose certain things to them. First of all, he points out that with duhkha go two other things. These are respectively called _anitya_ and _anatman_. Anitya means--'nitya' means 'permanant,' so 'impermanance.' Flux, change, is characteristic of everything whatsoever. There isn't anything at all in the whole world, in the material world, in the psychic world, in the spiritual world, there is nothing you can catch hold of and hang on to for safely. Nuttin'. Not only is there nothing you can hang on to, but by the teaching of anatman, there is no you to hang on to it. In other words, all clinging to life is an illusory hand grasping at smoke. If you can get that into your head and see that that is so, nobody needs to tell you that you ought not to grasp. Because you see, you can't.

See, Buddhism is not essentially moralistic. The moralist is the person who tells people that they ought to be unselfish, when they still feel like egos, and his efforts are always and invariably futile. Because what happens is he simply sweeps the dust under the carpet, and it all comes back again somehow. But in this case, it involves a complete realization that this is the case. So that's what the teacher puts across to begin with.

The next thing that comes up, the second of the noble truths, is about the cause of suffering, and this in Sanskrit is called _trishna_. Trishna is related to our word 'thirst.' It's very often translated 'desire.' That will do. Better, perhaps, is 'craving, clinging, grasping,' or even, to use our modern psychological word, 'blocking.' When, for example, somebody is blocked, and dithers and hesitates, and doesn't know what to

do, he is in the strictest Buddhist sense attached, he's stuck. But a buddha can't be stuck, he cannot be phased. He always flows, just as water always flows, even if you dam it, the water just keeps on getting higher and higher and higher until it flows over the dam. It's unstoppable.

Now, buddha said, then, duhkha comes from trishna. You all suffer because you cling to the world, and you don't recognize that the world is anitya and anatman. So then, try, if you can, not to grasp. Well, do you see that that immediately poses a problem? Because the student who has started off this dialog with the buddha then makes various efforts to give up desire. Upon which he very rapidly discovers that he is desiring not to desire, and he takes that back to the teacher, who says 'Well, well, well.' He said, 'Of course. You are desiring not to desire, and that's of course excessive. All I want you to do is to give up desiring as much as you can. Don't want to go beyond the point of which you're capable.' And for this reason Buddhism is called the Middle Way. Not only is it the middle way between the extremes of ascetic discipline and pleasure seeking, but it's also the middle way in a very subtle sense. Don't desire to give up more desire than you can. And if you find that a problem, don't desire to be successful in giving up more desire than you can. You see what's happening? Every time he's returned to the middle way, he's moved out of an extreme situation.

Now then, we'll go on; we'll cut out what happens in the pursuit of that method until a little later. The next truth in the list is concerned with the nature of release from duhkha. And so number three is nirvana. Nirvana is the goal of Buddhism; it's the state of liberation corresponding to what the Hindus call moksha. The word means 'blow out,' and it comes from the root 'nir vritti.' Now some people think that what it means is blowing out the flame of desire. I don't believe this. I believe that it means 'breathe out,' rather than 'blow out,' because if you try to hold your breath, and in Indian thought, breath--prana--is the life principle. If you try to hold on to life, you lose it. You can't hold your breath and stay alive; it becomes extremely uncomfortable to hold onto your breath.

And so in exactly the same way, it becomes extremely uncomfortable to spend all your time holding on to your life. What the devil is the point of surviving, going on living, when it's a drag? But you see, that's what people do. They spend enormous efforts on maintaining a certain standard of living, which is a great deal of trouble. You know, you get a nice house in the suburbs, and the first thing you do is you plant a lawn. You've gotta get out and mow the damn thing all the time, and you buy expensive this-that and soon you're all involved in mortgages, and instead of being able to walk out into the garden and enjoy, you sit at your desk and look at your books, filling out this and that and the other and paying bills and answering letters. What a lot of rot! But you see, that is holding onto life. So, translated into colloquial American, nirvana is 'whew!' 'Cause if you let your breath go, it'll come back. So nirvana is not annihilation, it's not disappearance into a sort of undifferentiated void. Nirvana is the state of being let go. It is a state of consciousness, and a state of--you might call it-- being, here and now in this life.

We now come to the most complicated of all, number four: margha[?]. 'Margh' in Sanskrit means 'past,' and the buddha taught an eightfold path for the realization of nirvana. This always reminds me of a story about Dr Suzuki, who is a very, very great

Buddhist scholar. Many years ago, he was giving a fundamental lecture on Buddhism at the University of Hawaii, and he'd been going through these four truths, and he said 'Ah, fourth Noble Truth is Noble Eightfold Path. First step of Noble Eightfold Path called _sho-ken_. Sho-ken in Japanese mean 'right view.' For Buddhism, fundamentally, is right view. Right way of viewing this world. Second step of Noble Eightfold Path is--oh, I forget second step, you look it up in the book.'

Well, I'm going to do rather the same thing. What is important is this: the eightfold path has really got three divisions in it. The first are concerned with understanding, the second division is concerned with conduct, and the third division is concerned with meditation. And every step in the path is preceded with the Sanskrit word _samyak_. In which you remember we ran into _samadhi_ last week, 'sam' is the key word. And so, the first step, _samyak- drishti_, which mean--'drishti' means a view, a way of looking at things, a vision, an attitude, something like that. But this word samyak is in ordinary texts on Buddhism almost invariably translated 'right.' This is a very bad translation. The word IS used in certain contexts in Sanskrit to mean 'right, correct,' but it has other and wider meanings. 'Sam' means, like our word 'sum,' which is derived from it, 'complete, total, all-embracing.' It also has the meaning of 'middle wade,' representing as it were the fulcrum, the center, the point of balance in a totality. Middle wade way of looking at things. Middle wade way of understanding the dharma. Middle wade way of speech, of conduct, of livelihood, and so on.

Now this is particularly cogent when it comes to Buddhist ideas of behavior. Every Buddhist in all the world, practically, as a layman--he's not a monk--undertakes what are called _pantasila[?], the Five Good Conducts. 'Sila' is sometimes translated 'precept.' But it's not a precept because it's not a commandment. When Buddhists priests chant the precepts, you know: pranatipada[?]: 'prana (life) tipada (taking away) I promise to abstain from.' So the first is that one undertakes not to destroy life. Second, not to take what is not given. Third--this is usually translated 'not to commit adultery'. It doesn't say anything of the kind. In Sanskrit, it means 'I undertake the precept to abstain from exploiting my passions.' Buddhism has no doctrine about adultery; you may have as many wives as you like.

But the point is this: when you're feeling blue and bored, it's not a good idea to have a drink, because you may become dependant on alcohol whenever you feel unhappy. So in the same way, when you're feeling blue and bored, it's not a good idea to say 'Let's go out and get some chicks.' That's exploiting the passions. But it's not exploiting the passions, you see, when drinking, say expresses the viviality and friendship of the group sitting around the dinner table, or when sex expresses the spontaneous delight of two people in each other.

Then, the fourth precept, _musavada[?], 'to abstain from false speech.' It doesn't simply mean lying. It means abusing people. It means using speech in a phony way, like saying 'all niggers are thus and so.' Or 'the attitude of America to this situation is thus and thus.' See, that's phony kind of talking. Anybody who studies general semantics will be helped in avoiding musavada, false speech.

The final precept is a very complicated one, and nobody's quite sure exactly what it means. It mentions three kinds of drugs and drinks: sura, mariya[?], maja[?]. We don't know what they are. But at any rate, it's generally classed as narcotics and liquors.

Now, there are two ways of translating this precept. One says to abstain from narcotics and liquors; the other liberal translation favored by the great scholar Dr [?] is 'I abstain from being intoxicated by these things.' So if you drink and don't get intoxicated, it's ok. You don't have to be a teetotaler to be a Buddhist. This is especially true in Japan and China; my goodness, how they throw it down! A scholarly Chinese once said to me, 'You know, before you start meditating, just have a couple martinis, because it increases your progress by about six months.'

Now you see these are, as I say, they are not commandments, they are vows. Buddhism has in it no idea of there being a moral law laid down by somekind of cosmic lawgiver. The reason why these precepts are undertaken is not for a sentimental reason. It is not that you're going to make you into a good person. It is that for anybody interested in the experiments necessary for liberation, these ways of life are expedient. First of all, if you go around killing, you're going to make enemies, and you're going to have to spend a lot of time defending yourself, which will distract you from your yoga. If you go around stealing, likewise, you're going to acquire a heap of stuff, and again, you're going to make enemies. If you exploit your passions, you're going to get a big thrill, but it doesn't last. When you begin to get older, you realize 'Well that was fun while we had it, but I haven't really learned very much from it, and now what?' Same with speech. Nothing is more confusing to the mind than taking words too seriously. We've seen so many examples of that. And finally, to get intoxicated or narcotized--a narcotic is anything like alcohol or opium which makes you sleepy. The word 'narcosis' in Greek, 'narc' means 'sleep.' So, if you want to pass your life seeing things through a dim haze, this is not exactly awakening.

So, so much for the conduct side of Buddhism. We come then to the final parts of the eightfold path. There are two concluding steps, which are called _samyak-smriti_ and _samyak-samadhi_. _Smriti_ means 'recollection, memory, present-mindedness.' Seems rather funny that the same word can mean 'recollection or memory' and 'present-mindedness.' But smriti is exactly what that wonderful old rascal Gurdjieff meant by 'self-awareness,' or 'self-remembering.' Smriti is to have complete presence of mind.

There is a wonderful meditation called 'The House that Jack Built Meditation,' at least that's what I call it, that the Southern Buddhists practice. He walks, and he says to himself, 'There is the lifting of the foot.' The next thing he says is 'There is a perception of the lifting of the foot.' And the next, he says 'There is a tendency towards the perception of the feeling of the lifting of the foot.' Then finally he says, 'There is a consciousness of the tendency of the perception of the feeling of the lifting of the foot.' And so, with everything that he does, he knows that he does it. He is self-aware. This is tricky. Of course, it's not easy to do. But as you practice this--I'm going to let the cat out of the bag, which I suppose I shouldn't do--but you will find that there are so many things to be aware of at any given moment in what you're doing, that at best you only ever pick out one or two of them. That's the first thing you'll find out. Ordinary conscious awareness is seeing the world with blinkers on. As we say, you can think of only one thing at a time. That's because ordinary consciousness is narrowed consciousness. It's being narrow-minded in the true sense of the word, looking at things that way. Then you find out in the course of going around being aware all of the time--what are you doing when you remember? Or when you think

about the future? 'I am aware that I am remembering'? 'I am aware that I am thinking about the future'?

But you see, what eventually happens is that you discover that there isn't any way of being absent-minded. All thoughts are in the present and of the present. And when you discover that, you approach samadhi. Samadhi is the complete state, the fulfilled state of mind. And you will find many, many different ideas among the sects of Buddhists and Hindus as to what samadhi is. Some people call it a trance, some people call it a state of consciousness without anything in it, knowing with no object of knowledge. All these are varying opinions. I had a friend who was a Zen master, and he used to talk about samadhi, and he said a very fine example of samadhi is a fine horserider. When you watch a good cowboy, he is one being with the horse. So an excellent driver in a car makes the car his own body, and he absolutely is with it. So also a fine pair of dancers. They don't have to shove each other to get one to do what the other wants him to do. They have a way of understanding each other, of moving together as if they were siamese twins. That's samadhi, on the physical, ordinary, everyday level. The samadhi of which buddha speaks is the state which, as it is, the gateway to nirvana, the state in which the illusion of the ego as a separate thing disintegrates.

Now, when we get to that point in Buddhism, Buddhists do a funny thing, which is going to occupy our attention for a good deal of this seminar. They don't fall down and worship. They don't really have any name for what it is that is, really and basically. The idea of anatman, of non-self, is applied in Buddhism not only to the individual ego, but also to the notion that there is a self of the universe, a kind of impersonal or personal god, and so it is generally supposed that Buddhism is generally atheistic. It's true, depending on what you mean by atheism. Common or garden atheism is a form of belief, namely that I believe there is no god--and Hans Enkel[?] is its prophet. (I'm speaking of a famous atheist). The atheist positively denies the existence of any god. All right. Now, there is such an atheist, if you put dash between the 'a' and 'theist,' or speak about something called 'atheos'--'theos' in Greek means 'god'--but what is a non-god? A non-god is an inconceivable something or other.

I love the story about a debate in the Houses of Parliament in England, where, as you know, the Church of England is established and under control of the government, and the high ecclesiastics had petitioned Parliament to let them have a new prayerbook. Somebody got up and said 'It's perfectly ridiculous that Parliament should decide on this, because as we well know, there are quite a number of atheists in these benches.' And somebody got up and said 'Oh, I don't think there are really any atheists. We all believe in some sort of something somewhere.'

Now again, of course, it isn't that Buddhism believes in some sort of something somewhere, and that is to say in vagueness. Here is the point: if you believe, if you have certain propositions that you want to assert about the ultimate reality, or what Portilli[?] calls 'the ultimate ground of being,' you are talking nonsense. Because you can't say something specific about everything. You see, supposing you wanted to say 'God has a shape.' But if god is all that there is, then God doesn't have any outside, so he can't have a shape. You have to have an outside and space outside it to have a shape. So that's why the Hebrews, too, are against people making images of God. But

nonetheless, Jews and Christians persistently make images of God, not necessarily in pictures and statues, but they make images in their minds. And those are much more insidious images.

Buddhism is not saying that the Self, the great atman, or whatnot, it isn't denying that the experience which corresponds to these words is realizable. What it is saying is that if you make conceptions and doctrines about these things, you're liable to become attached to them. You're liable to start believing instead of knowing. So they say in Zen Buddhism, 'The doctrine of Buddhism is a finger pointing at the moon. Do not mistake the finger for the moon.' Or so we might say in the West, the idea of God is a finger pointing at God, but what most people do is instead of following the finger, they suck it for comfort. And so buddha chopped off the finger, and undermined all metaphysical beliefs. There are many, many dialogues in the Pali scriptures where people try to corner the buddha into a metaphysical position. 'Is the world eternal?' The buddha says nothing. 'Is the world not eternal?' And he answers nuttin'. 'Is the world both eternal and not eternal?' And he don't say nuttin'. 'Is the world neither eternal nor not eternal?' And STILL he don't say nuttin'. He maintains what is called the noble silence. Sometimes called the thunder of silence, because this silence, this metaphysical silence, is not a void. It is very powerful. This silence is the open window through which you can see not concepts, not ideas, not beliefs, but the very goods. But if you say what it is that you see, you erect an image and an idol, and you misdirect people. It's better to destroy people's beliefs than to give them beliefs. I know it hurts, but it is The Way.

The World as Emptiness, Part II

You must understand as one of the fundamental points of Buddhism, the idea of the world as being in flux. I gave you this morning the Sanskrit word *_anitya_* as one of the characteristics of being, emphasized by the buddha along with *_anatman_*, the unreality of a permanent self, and *_duhkha_*, the sense of frustration. Duhkha really arises from a person's failure to accept the other two characteristics: lack of permanent self and change.

You see, in Buddhism, the feeling that we have of an enduring organism--I meet you today and I see you, and then tomorrow I meet you again, and you look pretty much as you looked yesterday, and so I consider that you're the same person, but you aren't. Not really. When I watch a whirlpool in a stream, here's the stream flowing along, and there's always a whirlpool like the one at Niagra. But that whirlpool never, never really holds any water. The water is all the time rushing through it. In the same way, a university, the University of California--what is it? The students exchange at least every four years; the faculty changes at a somewhat slower rate; the building changes, they knock down old ones and put up new ones; the administration changes. So what is the University of California? It's a pattern. A doing of a particular kind. And so in just precisely that way, every one of us is a whirlpool in the tide of existence, and where every cell in our body, every every molecule, every atom is in constant flux, and nothing can be pinned down.

You know, you can put bands on pigeons, or migrating birds, and identify them and follow them, and find out where they go. But you can't tag atoms, much less electrons. They have a curious way of appearing and disappearing, and one of the great puzzles in physics is What are electrons doing when we're not looking at them? Because our observation of them has to modify their behavior. We can't see an electron without putting it in an experimental situation where our examination of it in some way changes it. What we would like to know is what it is doing when we're not looking at it. Like does the light in the refrigerator really go off when we close the door?

But this is fundamental, you see, to Buddhist philosophy. The philosophy of change. From one point of view, change is just too bad. Everything flows away, and there's a kind of sadness in that, a kind of nostalgia, and there may even be a rage. 'Go not gently into that good night, but rage, rage, at the dying of the light.'

But there's something curious--there can be a very fundamental change in one's attitude to the question of the world as fading. On the one hand resentment, and on the other delight. If you resist change--of course, you must, to some extent. When you meet another person, you don't want to be thoroughly rejected, but you love to feel a little resistance. Don't you, you know? You have a beautiful girl, and you touch her. You don't want her to go 'Blah!' But so round, so firm, so fully packed! A little bit of resistance, you see, is great. So there must always be resistance in change; otherwise there couldn't even be change. There'd just be a 'pfft!' The world would go 'pfft!' and that'd be the end of it.

But because there's always some resistance to change, there is a wonderful manifestation of form, there is a dance of life. But the human mind, as distinct from most animal minds, is terribly aware of time. And so we think a great deal about the future, and we know that every visible form is going to disappear and be replaced by so-called others. Are these others, others? Or are they the same forms returning? Of course, that's a great puzzle. Are next year's leaves that come from a tree going to be the same as this year's leaves? What do you mean by the same? They'll be the same shape, they'll have the same botanical characteristics. But you'll be able to pick up a shriveled leaf from last autumn and say 'Look at the difference. This is last year's leaf; this is this year's leaf.' And in that sense, they're not the same.

What happens when any great musician plays a certain piece of music? He plays it today, and then he plays it again tomorrow. Is it the same piece of music, or is it another? In the Pali language, they say *_naja-so, naja-ano[?]* which means 'not the same, yet not another.' So, in this way, the Buddhist is able to speak of reincarnation of beings, without having to believe in some kind of soul entity that is reincarnated. Some kind of atman, some kind of fixed self, ego principle, soul principle that moves from one life to another. And this is as true in our lives as they go on now from moment to moment as it would be true of our lives as they appear and reappear again over millions of years. It doesn't make the slightest difference, except that there are long intervals and short intervals, high vibrations and low vibrations. When you hear a high sound, high note in the musical scale, you can't see any holes in it--it's going too fast--and it sounds completely continuous. But when you get the lowest audible notes that you can hear on an organ, you feel the shaking. You feel the vibration, you hear that music [throbbing] on and off.

So in the same way as we live now from day to day, we experience ourselves living at a high rate of vibration, and we appear to be continuous, although there is the rhythm of waking and sleeping. But the rhythm that runs from generation to generation and from life to life is much slower, and so we notice the gaps. We don't notice the gaps when the rhythm is fast. So we are living, as it were, on many, many levels of rhythm.

So this is the nature of change. If you resist it, you have dukkha, you have frustration and suffering. But on the other hand, if you understand change, you don't cling to it, and you let it flow, then it's no problem. It becomes positively beautiful, which is why in poetry, the theme of the evernescence[?] of the world is beautiful. When Shelly says,

The one remains, the many change and pass,
heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly.
Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
stains the white radiance of eternity
until death shatters it to fragments.

Now what's beautiful in that? Is it heaven's light that shines forever? Or is it rather the dome of many-colored glass that shatters? See, it's always the image of change that really makes the poem.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
creeps on life's petty pace from day to day,
until the last syllable of recorded time.

Somehow, you know, it's so well-said that it's not so bad after all. The poet has got the intuition that things are always running out, that things are always disappearing, has some hidden marvel in it. I was discussing with someone during the lunch intermission, the Japanese have a word yugen, which has no English equivalent whatsoever. Yugen is in a way digging change. It's described poetically, you have the feeling of yugen when you see out in the distant water some ships hidden behind a far-off island. You have the feeling of yugen when you watch wild geese suddenly seen and then lost in the clouds. You have the feeling of yugen when you look across Mt Tamapeis, and you've never been to the other side, and you see the sky beyond. You don't go over there to look and see what's on the other side, that wouldn't be yugen. You let the other side be the other side, and it invokes something in your imagination, but you don't attempt to define it to pin it down. Yugen.

So in the same way, the coming and going of things in the world is marvelous. They go. Where do they go? Don't answer, because that would spoil the mystery. They vanish into the mystery. But if you try to persue them, you destroy yugen. That's a very curious thing, but that idea of yugen, which in Chinese characters means, as it were, kind of 'the deep mystery of the valley.' There's a poem in Chinese which says 'The wind drops, but the petals keep falling. The bird calls, and the mountain becomes more mysterious.' Isn't that strange? There's no wind anymore, and yet petals are dropping. And a bird in the canyon cries, and that one sound in the mountains brings out the silence with a wallop.

I remember when I was almost a child in the Pyrenees in the southwest of France. We went way up in this gorgeous silence of the mountains, but in the distance we could hear the bells on the cows clanking. And somehow those tiny sounds brought out the silence. And so in the same way, slight permanences bring out change. And they give you this very strange sense. Yugen. The mystery of change. You know, in Elliot's poem, 'The Four Quartets,' where he says 'The dark, dark, dark. They all go into the dark, distinguished families, members of the book of the director of directors, everybody, they all go into the dark.' Life IS life, you see, because, just because it's always disappearing. Supposing suddenly, by some kind of diabolical magic, I could say 'zzzip!' and every one of you would stay the same age forever. You'd be like Madam Trusseau's wax works. It'd be awful! In a thousand years from now, what beautiful hags you would be.

So, the trouble is, that we have one-sided minds, and we notice the wave of life when it is at its peak or crest. We don't notice it when it's at the trough, not in the ordinary way. It's the peaks that count. Take a buzzsaw: what seems important to us is the tips of the teeth. They do the cutting, not the valleys between the teeth. But see, you couldn't have tips of teeth without the valleys between. Therefore the saw wouldn't cut without both tips and V-shaped valleys. But we ignore that. We don't notice the valleys so much as we notice the mountains. Valleys point down, mountains point up, and we prefer things that point up, because up is good and down is bad.

But seriously, we don't blame the peaks for being high and the valleys for being low. But it is so, you see, that we ignore the valley aspect of things, and so all wisdom begins by emphasizing the valley aspect as distinct from the peak aspect. We pay plenty of attention to the peak aspect, that's what captures our attention, but we somehow screen out the valley aspect. But that makes us very uncomfortable. It seems we want and get pleasure from looking at the peaks, but actually this denies our pleasure, because secretly we know that every peak is followed by a valley. The valley of the shadow of death.

And we're always afraid, because we're not used to looking at valleys, because we're not used to living with them, they represent to us the strange and threatening unknown. Maybe we're afraid the principle of the valley will conquer, and the peaks will be overwhelmed. Maybe death is stronger than life, because life always seems to require an effort; death is something into which you slide effortlessly. Maybe nothing will overcome something in the end. Wouldn't that be awful? And so we resist change, ignorant of the fact that change is life, and that nothing is invariably the adverse face of something.

For such purposes, I have to give you a very elementary lesson about the properties of space. Because most people are afraid of space. They ignore it, and they think space is nothing. Space is simply, unless it happens to be filled with air, a nothingness between things. But without space, there is no energy and no motion, and it can be illustrated in this way: in this area is the whole universe, and there's only one thing in it, and that's a ball. Is it moving, or is it still? There's absolutely no way of deciding. None whatever. So it's neither moving, nor is it still, because you can't be aware of or measure motion, except in relation to something that's relatively still. All right, let's have two balls. Ball one, and ball two. Now, these balls--we suddenly notice that the distance between them increases. Which one moved? Or did they both move? there's

no way of deciding. You could say the distance, ie, the space between them increased. But who started it is impossible to determine. All right, three balls. Now, we notice for example that one and three stay together, and they keep a constant distance apart. But two goes away and comes back. Now what's happening? One and three, since they stay together, constitute a group. Two recedes or approaches, or does it? Or is the group one and three receding from or approaching towards two? There's one way of deciding. One and three constitute a majority. So if they vote, they can say whether they are going towards two or going away from two. Two doesn't like this. So two decides it can lick 'em by joining them, so two comes and sits here. Now what's going to happen? Neither one and three can say to two, and two can't say to three, 'Why do you keep following me around?' Because again, because they all maintain a constant distance, they have no motion.

All right. We have the same problem on a very big scale, in what we call the expansion of the universe. All the galaxies observable seem to be getting further away from each other. Now, are they going further away from us, or are we going further away from them, or are they all all together going further away from each other? Astronomers have suggested that what is expanding is the space between them. And so we get the idea of expanding space. This isn't quite the right answer. What has been neglected in all this, if I can say either that the objects are moving away from each other, they're doing it. Or it's equally possible for me to say that it's the space they're in that's expanding. But I can't decide which one is which. The meaning of this inability to decide is that space and solid are two ways of talking about the same thing. Space-solid. You don't find space without solids; you don't find solids without space. If I say there's a universe in which there isn't anything but space, you must say 'Space between what?' Space is relationship, and it always goes together with solid, like back goes with front. But the devious mind ignores space. And it thinks it's the solids that do the whole job, that they're the only thing that's real. That is, to put it in other words, conscious attention ignores intervals, because it thinks they're unimportant.

Let's consider music. When you hear music, most people think that what they hear is a succession of notes or tones. If all you heard when you listen to music were a succession of tones, you would hear no melody, and no harmony. You would hear nothing but a succession of noises. What you really hear when you hear melody is the interval between one tone and another. The steps as it were on the scale. If you can't hear that, you're tone-deaf and don't enjoy music at all. It's the interval that's the important thing. So in the same way, in the intervals between this year's leaves, last year's leaves, this generation of people and that generation, the interval is in some ways just as important, in some ways more important than what it's between. Actually they go together, but I say the interval is sometimes more important because we underemphasize it, so I'm going to overemphasize it as a correction. So space, night, death, darkness, not being there is an essential component of being there. You don't have the one without the other, just as your buzzsaw has no teeth without having valleys between the tips of them. That's the way being is made up.

So then, in Buddhism, change is emphasized. First, to unsettle people who think that they can achieve permanence by hanging on to life. And it seems that the preacher is wagging his finger at them and saying 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' So all the preachers together say 'Don't cling to those things.' So then, as a result of that, and

now I'm going to speak in strictly Buddhist terms, the follower of the way of buddha seeks deliverance from attachment to the world of change. He seeks nirvana, the state beyond change, which the buddha called the unborn, the unoriginated, the uncreated, and the unformed. But then, you see, what he finds out is in seeking a state beyond change, seeking nirvana as something away from samsara, which is the name for the wheel, he is still seeking something permanent. And so, as Buddhism went on, they thought about this a great deal. And this very point was the point of division between the two great schools of Buddhism, which in the south, as I explained, were Theravada, the doctrine of the Thera, the elders, sometimes known, disrespectfully, as the Hinayana. 'Yana' means 'a vehicle, a conveyance, or a ferryboat.' This is a yana, and I live on a ferryboat because that's my job. Then there is the other school of Buddhism, called the Mahayana. 'Maha' means 'great'; 'hina,' little. The great vehicle and the little vehicle.

Now, what is this? The Mahayanas say 'You're little just get a few people who are very, very tough ascetics, and takes them across the shore to nirvana.' But the great vehicle shows people that nirvana is not different from everyday life. So that when you have reached nirvana, if you think 'Now I have attained it, now I have succeeded, now I have caught the secret of the universe, and I am at peace,' you have only a false peace. You have become a stone buddha. You have a new illusion of the changeless. So it is said that such a person is a pratyeka-buddha. That means 'private buddha.' 'I've got it all for myself.' And in contrast with this kind of pratyeka-buddha, who gains nirvana and stays there, the Mahayanas use the word bodhisattva. 'Sattva' means 'essential principle'; 'bodhi,' awakening. A person whose essential being is awakened. The word used to mean 'junior buddha,' someone on the way to becoming a buddha. But in the course of time, it came to mean someone who had attained buddhahood, who had reached nirvana, but who returns into everyday life to deliver everyday beings. This is the popular idea of a bodhisattva--a savior.

So, in the popular Buddhism of Tibet and China and Japan, people worship the bodhisattvas, the great bodhisattvas, as saviors. Say, the one I talked about this morning, the hermaphroditic Quan-Yin[?]. People loved Quan-Yin because she--he/she, she/he--could be a buddha, but has come back into the world to save all beings. The Japanese call he/she Kanon[], and they have in Kyoto an image of Kanon with one thousand arms, radiating like an aureole all around this great golden figure, and these thousand arms are one thousand different ways of rescuing beings from ignorance. Kanon is a funny thing. I remember one night when I suddenly realized that Kanon was incarnate in the whole city of Kyoto, that this whole city was Kanon, that the police department, the taxi drivers, the fire department, the shopkeepers, in so far as this whole city was a collaborate effort to sustain human life, however bumbling, however inefficient, however corrupt, it was still a manifestation of Kanon, with its thousand arms, all working independantly, and yet as one.

So they revere those bodhisattvas as the saviors, come back into the world to deliver all beings. But there is a more esoteric interpretation of this. The bodhisattva returns into the world. That means he has discovered that you don't have to go anywhere to find nirvana. Nirvana is where you are, provided you don't object to it. In other words, change--and everything is change; nothing can be held on to--to the degree that you go with a stream, you see, you are still, you are flowing with it. But to the degree you resist the stream, then you notice that the current is rushing past you and fighting

you. So swim with it, go with it, and you're there. You're at rest. And this is of course particularly true when it comes to those moments when life really seems to be going to take us away, and the stream of change is going to swallow us completely. The moment of death, and we think, 'Oh-oh, this is it. This is the end.' And so at death we withdraw, say 'No, no, no, not that, not yet, please.'

But, actually, the whole problem is that there really is no other problem for human beings, than to go over that waterfall when it comes. Just as you go over any other waterfall, just as you go on from day-to-day, just as you go to sleep at night. Be absolutely willing to die. Now, I'm not preaching. I'm not saying you OUGHT to be willing to die, and that you should muscle up your courage and somehow put on a good front when the terrible thing comes. That's not the idea at all. The point is that you can only die well if you understand this system of ways. If you understand that you're disappearance as the form in which you think you are you. Your disappearance as this particular organism is simply seasonal. That you are just as much the dark space beyond death as you are the light interval called life. These are just two sides of you, because YOU is the total way. You see, we can't have half a way. Nobody ever saw waves that just had crests, and no troughs. So you can't have half a human being, who is born but doesn't die. Half a thing. That would be only half a thing. But the propagation of vibrations, and life is vibration, it simply goes on an on, but its cycles are short cycles and long cycles.

Space, you see, is not just nothing. If I could magnify my hand to an enormous degree so you could see all the molecules in it, I don't know how far apart they would be, but it seems to me they would be something like tennis balls in a very, very large space, and you'd look when I move my hand, and say 'For god's sake, look at all those tennis balls, they're all going together. Crazy. And there are no strings tying them together. Isn't that queer?' No, but there's space going with them, and space is a function of, or it's an inseparable aspect of whatever solids are in the space. That is the clue, probably, to what we mean by gravity. We don't know yet. So in the same way, when those marvelous sandpipers come around here, the little ones. While they're in the air flying, they have one mind, they move all together. When they alight on the mud, they become individuals and they go pecking around for worms or whatever. But one click of the fingers and all those things go up into the air. They don't seem to have a leader, because they don't follow when they turn; they all turn together and go off in a different direction. It's amazing. But they're like the molecules in my hand.

So then, you see, here's the principle: when you don't resist change, I mean over resist. I don't mean being flabby, like I said at the beginning. When you don't resist change, you see that the changing world, which disappears like smoke, is no different from the nirvana world. Nirvana, as I said, means breathe out, let go of the breath. So in the same way, don't resist change; it's all the same principle.

So the bodhisattva saves all beings, not by preaching sermons to them, but by showing them that they are delivered, they are liberated, by the act of not being able to stop changing. You can't hang on to yourself. You don't have to try to not hang on to yourself. It can't be done, and that is salvation. That's why you may think it a grisly habit, but certain monks keep skulls on their desks, 'momentomori,' 'be mindful of death.' Gurdjieff says in one of his books that the most important thing for anyone to realize is that you and every person you see will soon be dead. It sounds so gloomy to

us, because we have devised a culture fundamentally resisting death. There is a wonderful saying that Anandakuri- Swami[?] used to quote: 'I pray that death will not come and find me still unannihilated.' In other words, that man dies happy if there is no one to die. In other words, if the ego's disappeared before death caught up to him.

But you see, the knowledge of death helps the ego to disappear, because it tells you you can't hang on. So what we need, if we're going to have a good religion around, that's one of the places where it can start: having, I suppose they'd call it The Institution For Creative Dying, something like that. You can have one department where you can have champaign and cocktail parties to die with, another department where you can have glorious religious rituals with priests and things like that, another department where you can have psychedelic drugs, another department where you can have special kinds of music, anything, you know. All these arrangements will be provided for in a hospital for delightful dying. But that's the thing, to go out with a bang instead of a whimper.

The World as Emptiness, Part III

I was talking a great deal yesterday afternoon about the Buddhist attitude to change, to death, to the transience of the world, and was showing that preachers of all kinds stir people up in the beginning by alarming them about change. That's like somebody actually raising an alarm, just the same way as if I want to pay you a visit I ring the doorbell, and then we can come in and I don't need to raise an alarm anymore. So in the same way, it sounds terrible, you see, that everything is going to die and pass away, and here you are, thinking that happiness, sanity, and security consist in clinging on to things which can't be clung to, and in any case there isn't anybody to cling to them. The whole thing is a weaving of smoke.

So, that's the initial standpoint, but, as soon as you really discover this, and you stop clinging to change, then everything is quite different. It becomes amazing. Not only do all your senses become more wide awake, not only do you feel almost as if you're walking on air, but you see, finally, that there is no duality, no difference between the ordinary world and the nirvana world. They're the same world, but what makes the difference is the point of view. And of course, if you keep identifying yourself with some sort of stable entity that sits and watches the world go by, you don't acknowledge your union, your inseparability from everything that there is. You go by with all the rest of the things, but if you insist on trying to take a permanent stand, on trying to be a permanent witness of the flux, then it grates against you, and you feel very uncomfortable.

But it is a fundamental feeling in most of us that we are such witnesses. We feel that behind the stream of our thoughts, of our feelings, of our experiences, there is something which is the thinker, the feeler, and the experiencer. Not recognizing that that is itself a thought, feeling, or experience, and it belongs within and not outside the changing panorama of experience. It's what you call a cue signal. In other words, when you telephone, and your telephone conversation is being tape recorded, it's the law that there shall be a beep every so many seconds, and that beep cues you in to the fact that this conversation is recorded. So in a very similar way, in our everyday

experience there's a beep which tells us this is a continuous experience which is mine. Beep!

In the same way, for example, it is a cue signal when a composer arranges some music, and he keeps in it a recurrent theme, but he makes many variations on it. That, or more subtle still, he keeps within it a consistent style, so you know that it's Mozart all the way along, because that sounds like Mozart. But there isn't, as it were, a constant noise going all the way through to tell you it's continuous, although, in Hindu music, they do have something called the drone. There is, behind all the drums and every kind of singing, and it always sounds the note which is the tonic of the scale being used. But in Hindu music, that drone represents the eternal self, the brahman, behind all the changing forms of nature. But that's only a symbol, and to find out what is eternal--you can't make an image of it; you can't hold on to it. And so it's psychologically more conducive to liberation to remember that the thinker, or the feeler, or the experiencer, and the experiences are all together. They're all one. But, if out of anxiety, you try to stabilize, keep permanent, the separate observer, you are in for conflict.

Of course, the separate observer, the thinker of the thoughts, is an abstraction which we create out of memory. We think of the self, the ego, rather, as a repository of memories, a kind of safety deposit box, or record, or filing cabinet place where all our experiences are stored. Now, that's not a very good idea. It's more that memory is a dynamic system, not a storage system. It's a repetition of rhythms, and these rhythms are all part and parcel of the ongoing flow of present experience. In other words, first of all, how do you distinguish between something known now, and a memory? Actually, you don't know anything at all until you remember it. Because if something happens that is purely instantaneous--if a light flashes, or, to be more accurate, if there is a flash, lasting only one millionth of a second, you probably wouldn't experience it, because it wouldn't give you enough time to remember it.

We say in customary speech, 'Well, it has to make an impression.' So in a way, all present knowledge is memory, because you look at something, and for a while the rods and cones in your retina respond to that, and they do their stuff--jiggle, jiggle, jiggle--and so as you look at things, they set up a series of echoes in your brain. And these echoes keep reverberating, because the brain is very complicated. But you then see--first of all, everything you know is remembered, but there is a way in which we distinguish between seeing somebody here now, and the memory of having seen somebody else who's not here now, but whom you did see in the past, and you know perfectly well, when you remember that other person's face, it's not an experience of the person being here. How is this? Because memory signals have a different cue attached to them than present time signals. They come on a different kind of vibration. Sometimes, however, the wiring gets mixed up, and present experiences come to us with a memory cue attached to them, and then we have what is called a deja vu experience: we're quite sure we've experienced this thing before.

But the problem that we don't see, don't ordinarily recognize, is that although memory is a series of signals with a special kind of cue attached to them so we don't confuse them with present experience, they are actually all part of the same thing as present experience, they are all part of this constantly flowing life process, and there is no

separate witness standing aside from the process, watching it go by. You're all involved in it.

Now, accepting that, you see, going with that, although at first it sounds like the knell of doom, is if you don't clutch it anymore, splended. That's why I said death should be occasion for a great celebration, that people should say 'Happy death!' to you, and always surround death with joyous rites, because this is the opportunity for the greatest of all experiences, when you can finally let go because you know there's nothing else to do.

There was a kamikaze pilot who escaped because his plane that he was flying at an American aircraft carrier went wrong, and he landed in the water instead of hitting the plane, so he survived. But he said afterwards that he had the most extraordinary state of exaltation. It wasn't a kind of patriotic ecstasy, but the very thought that in a moment he would cease to exist--he would just be gone--for some mysterious reason that he couldn't understand, made him feel absolutely like a god. And when I talk to a certain German sage whose name is Count Van Derkheim[?], he said that during the war this happened to people again and again and again. He said they heard the bombs screaming down over their heads, and knew this was the last moment, or that they were in a concentration camp with absolutely no hope of getting out, or that they were displaced in such a way that their whole career was shattered. He said in each of these cases, when anybody accepted the situation as totally inevitable, they suddenly got this amazing kind of enlightenment experience of freedom from ego. Well, they tried to explain it to their friends when it was over and everything had settled down again, and their friends said 'Well, you were under such pressure that you must have gone a little crazy.' But Van Derkheim said 'A great deal of my work is to reassure these people that in that moment there was a moment of truth, and they really saw how things are.'

Well then, in Buddhist philosophy, this sort of annihilation of oneself, this acceptance of change is the doctrine of the world as the void. This doctrine did not emerge very clearly, very prominently, in Buddhism until quite a while after Guatama the buddha had lived. We begin to find this, though, becoming prominent about the year 100 BC, and by 200 AD, it had reached its peak. And this was developed by the Mahayana Buddhists, and it is the doctrine of a whole class of literature which goes by this complex name: prajna-paramita. Now 'prajna' means 'wisdom.' 'Paramita,' a crossing over, or going beyond, and there is a small prajna-paramita sutra, a big prajna-paramita sutra, and then there's a little short summary of the whole thing called the Heart Sutra, and that is recited by Buddhists all over Northern Asia, Tibet, China, and Japan, and it contains the saying 'that which is void is precisely the world of form, that which is form is precisely the void.' Form is emptiness, emptiness is form, and so on, and it elaborates on this theme. It's very short, but it's always chanted at important Buddhist ceremonies. And so, it is supposed by scholars of all kinds who have a missionary background that the Buddhists are nihilists, that they teach that the world is really nothing, there isn't anything, and that there seems to be something is purely an illusion. But of course this philosophy is much more subtle than that.

The main person who is responsible for developing and maturing this philosophy was Nagarjuna, and he lived about 200 AD. One of the most astonishing minds that the human race has ever produced. And the name of Nagarjuna's school of thought is

Madhyamika, which means, really, 'the doctrine of the middle way.' But it's sometimes also called 'the doctrine of emptiness,' or Sunyavada, from the basic word 'sunya,' or sometimes 'sunya' has 'ta' added on the end, and that 'ta' means 'ness'- 'emptiness.'

Well, then, first of all, emptiness means, essentially, 'transience,' that's the first thing it means. Nothing to grasp, nothing permanent, nothing to hold on to. But it means this with special reference to ideas of reality, ideas of god, ideas of the self, the brahman, anything you like. What it means is that reality escapes all concepts. If you say there is a god, that is a concept; if you say there is no god, that's a concept. And Nagarjuna is saying that always your concepts will prove to be attempts to catch water in a sieve, or wrap it up in a parcel. So he invented a method of teaching Buddhism which was an extension of the dialectic method that the buddha himself first used. And this became the great way of studying, especially at the University of Nalanda[?], which has been reestablished in modern times, but of course it was destroyed by the Muslims when they invaded India. The University of Nalanda, where the dialectic method of enlightenment was taught.

The dialectic method is perfectly simple; it can be done with an individual student and a teacher, or with a group of students and a teacher, and you would be amazed how effective it is when it involves precious little more than discussion. Some of you no doubt have attended tea groups, blab-blabs, or whatever they're called, things of that kind, in which people are there, and they don't know quite why they're there, and there's some sort of so-called resource person to disturb them. And after a while they get the most incredible emotions. Somebody tries to dominate the discussion of the group, say, and then the group kind of goes into the question of why he's trying to dominate it, and so on and so forth. Well, these were the original blab-blabs, and they have been repeated in modern times with the most startling effects. That is to say, the teacher gradually elicits from his participant students what are their basic premises of life. What is your metaphisic, in the sense--I'm not using metaphisic in a kind of spiritual sense, but what are your basic assumptions? What real ideas do you operate on as to what is right and what is wrong, what is the good life and what is not. What arguments are you going to argue strongest? Where do you take your stand? The teacher soon finds this out, for each individual concerned, and then he demolishes it. He absolutely takes away that person's compass. And so they start getting very frightened, and say to the teacher, 'All right, I see now, of course I can't depend on this, but what should I depend on?' And unfortunately, the teacher doesn't offer any alternative suggestions, but simply goes on to examine the question, Why do you think you have to have something to depend on? Now, this is kept up over quite a period, and the only thing that keeps the students from going insane is the presence of the teacher, who seems to be perfectly happy, but isn't proposing any ideas. He's only demolishing them.

So we get, finally, but not quite finally, to the void, the sunya, and what then? Well, when you get to the void, there is an enormous and unbelievable sense of relief. That's nirvana. 'Whew!', as I gave a proper English translation of nirvana. So they are liberated, and yet, they can't quite say why or what it is they found out, so they call it the void. But Nagarjuna went on to say 'You mustn't cling to the void.' You have to void the void. And so the void of nonvoid is the great state, as it were, of Nagarjuna's Buddhism. But you must remember that all that has been voided, all that has been

denied, are those concepts in which one has hitherto attempted to pin down what is real.

In Zen Buddhist texts, they say 'You cannot nail a peg into the sky.' And so, to be a man of the sky, a man of the void, is also called 'a man not depending on anything.' And when you're not hung on anything, you are the only thing that isn't hung on anything, which is the universe, which doesn't hang, you see. Where would it hang? It has no place to fall on, even though it may be dropping; there will never be the crash of it landing on a concrete floor somewhere. But the reason for that is that it won't crash below because it doesn't hang above. And so there is a poem in Chinese which speaks of such a person as having above, not a tile to cover the head; below, not an inch of ground on which to stand.

And you see, this which to people like us, who are accustomed to rich imageries of the divine--the loving father in heaven, who has laid down the eternal laws, oh word of god incarnate, oh wisdom from above, oh truth unchanged unchanging, oh light of life and love. Then how does it go on? Something about he's written it all in the bible, the wisdom from which the hallowed page, a lantern for our footsteps, shines out from age to age. See, so that's very nice. We feel we know where we are, and that it's all been written down, and that in heaven the lord god resplendent with glory, with all the colors of the rainbow, with all the saints and angels around, and everything like that. So we feel that's positive, that we've got a real rip-roaring gutsy religion full of color and so on. But it doesn't work that way.

The more clear your image of god, the less powerful it is, because you're clinging to it, the more it's an idol. But voiding it completely isn't going to turn it into what you think of as void. What would you think of as void? Being lost in a fog, so that it's white all around, and you can't see in any direction. Being in the darkness. Or the color of your head as perceived by your eyes. That's probably the best illustration that we would think of as a void, because it isn't black, it isn't white, it isn't anything. But that's still not the void. Take the lesson from the head. How does your head look to your eyes? Well, I tell you, it looks like what you see out in front of you, because all that you see out in front of you is how you feel inside your head. So it's the same with this.

And so, for this reason, the great sixth patriarch, Hui-Neng, in China, said it was a great mistake for those who are practicing Buddhist meditation to try to make their minds empty. And a lot of people tried to do that. They sat down and tried to have no thoughts whatsoever in their minds. Not only no thoughts, but no sense experiences, so they'd close their eyes, they'd plug up their ears, and generally go into sensory deprivation. Well, sensory deprivation, if you know how to handle it, can be quite interesting. It'll have the same sort of results as taking LSD or something like that, and there are special labs nowadays where you can be sensorily deprived to an amazing degree.

But if you're a good yogi this doesn't bother you at all, sends some people crazy. But if you did this world, you can have a marvelous time in a sensory deprivation scene. Also, especially, if they get you into a condition of weightlessness. Skin divers, going down below a certain number of feet--I don't know exactly how far it is--get a sense of weightlessness, and at the same time this deprives them of every sense of

responsibility. They become alarmingly happy, and they have been known to simply take off their masks and offer them to a fish. And of course they then drown. So if you skin dive, you have to keep your eye on the time. You have to have a water watch or a friend who's got a string attached to you. If you go down that far, and at a certain specific time you know you have got to get back, however happy you feel, and however much inclined you feel to say 'Survival? Survival? Whatever the hell's the point of that?' And this is happening to the men who go out into space. They increasingly find that they have to have automatic controls to bring them back. Quite aside that they can't change in any way from the spaceship, because once you become weightless... Now isn't that interesting?

Can you become weightless here? I said a little while ago that the person who really accepts transience begins to feel weightless. When Suzuki was asked what was it like to have experienced satori, enlightenment, he said it's just like ordinary everyday experience, but about two inches off the ground. Juan-Za[?], the Taoist, once said 'It is easy enough to stand still, the difficulty is to walk without touching the ground.' Now why do you feel so heavy? It isn't just a matter of gravitation and weight. It is that you feel that you are carrying your body around. So there is a koan in Zen Buddhism, 'Who is it that carries this corpse around?' Common speech expresses this all of the time: 'life is a drag.' 'I feel like I'm just dragging myself around.' 'My body is a burden to me.' To whom? To whom? That's the question. When there is no body left for whom the body can be a burden, then the body isn't a burden. But so long as you fight it, it is.

So then, when there is no body left to resist the thing that we call change, which is simply another word for 'life,' and when we dispel the illusion that we think our thoughts, instead of being just a stream of thoughts, and that we feel our feelings, instead of being just feelings--it's like saying, you know, 'To feel the feelings' is a redundant expression. It's like saying 'Actually, I hear sounds,' for there ARE no sounds which are not heard. Hearing is sound. Seeing is sight. You don't see sights. Sight-seeing is a ridiculous word! You could say just either 'sighting,' or 'seeing,' one or the other, but SIGHT-seeing is nonsense!

So we keep doubling our words, and this doubling--hearing sounds, seeing sights--is comparable to oscillation in an electrical system where there's too much feedback. Where, you remember, in the old-fashioned telephone, where the receiver was separate from the mouthpiece, the transmitter. If you wanted to annoy someone who was abusing you on the telephone, you could make them listen to themselves by putting the receiver to the mouthpiece. But it actually didn't have that effect; it set up oscillation. It started a howl that would be very, very hard on the ears. Same way if you turn a television camera at the monitor--that is to say, the television set in the studio, the whole thing will start to jiggle. The visual picture will be of oscillation. And the same thing happens here. When you get to think that you think your thoughts, the you standing aside the thoughts has the same sort of consequence as seeing double, and then you think 'Can I observe the thinker thinking the thoughts?' Or, 'I am worried, and I ought not to worry, but because I can't stop worrying, I'm worried that I worry.' And you see where that could lead to. It leads to exactly the same situation that happens in the telephone, and that is what we call anxiety, trembling.

But his discipline that we're talking about of Nagarjuna's abolishes anxiety because you discover that no amount of anxiety makes any difference to anything that's going to happen. In other words, from the first standpoint, the worst is going to happen: we're all going to die. And don't just put it off in the back of your mind and say 'I'll consider that later.' It's the most important thing to consider NOW, because it is the mercy of nature, because it's going to enable you to let go and not defend yourself all the time, waste all energies in self-defense.

So this doctrine of the void is really the basis of the whole Mahayana movement in Buddhism. It's marvelous. The void is, of course, in Buddhist imagery, symbolized by a mirror, because a mirror has no color and yet reflects all colors. When this man I talked of, Hui-Neng, said that you shouldn't just try to cultivate a blank mind, what he said was this: the void, sunyata, is like space. Now, space contains everything--the mountains, the oceans, the stars, the good people and the bad people, the plants, the animals, everything. The mind in us--the true mind--is like that. You will find that when Buddhists use the word 'mind'--they've several words for 'mind,' but I'm not going into the technicality at the moment-- they mean space. See, space is your mind. It's very difficult for us to see that because we think we're IN space, and look out at it. There are various kinds of space. There's visual space--distance-- there is audible space--silence--there is temporal space--as we say, between times--there is musical space--so-called distance between intervals, or distance between tones, rather; quite a different kind of space than temporal or visual space. There's tangible space. But all these spaces, you see, are the mind. They're the dimensions of consciousness.

And so, this great space, which every one of us apprehends from a slightly different point of view, in which the universe moves, this is the mind. So it's represented by a mirror, because although the mirror has no color, it is for that reason able to receive all the different colors. Meister Eckhardt[?] said 'In order to see color, my eye has to be free from color.' So in the same way, in order not only to see, but also to hear, to think, to feel, you have to have an empty head. And the reason why you are not aware of your brain cells--you're only aware of your brain cells if you get a tumor or something in the brain, when it gets sick--but in the ordinary way, you are totally unconscious of your brain cells; they're void. And for that reason you see everything else.

So that's the central principle of the Mahayana, and it works in such a way, you see, that it releases people from the notion that Buddhism is clinging to the void. This was very important when Buddhism went into China. The Chinese really dug this, because Chinese are a very practical people, and when they found these Hindu Buddhist monks trying to empty their minds and to sit perfectly still and not to engage in any family activities--they were celibates--Chinese thought they were crazy. Why do that? And so the Chinese reformed Buddhism, and they allowed Buddhist priests to marry. In fact, what they especially enjoyed was a sutra that came from India in which a layman was a wealthy merchant called Vimalakirti outargued all the other disciples of buddha. And of course, you know these dialectic arguments are very, very intense things. If you win the argument, everybody else has to be your disciple. So Vimalakirti the layman won the debate, even with Manjustri[?], who is the bodhisattva of supreme wisdom. They all had a contest to define the void, and all of them gave their definitions. Finally Manjustri gave his, and Vimalakirti was asked for

his definition, and he said nothing, and so he won the whole argument. 'The thunderous silence.'

So Chinese and Japanese Buddhism is very strongly influenced by that trend that the void and form are the same. This is a very favorite subject for Zen masters and people who like to write. The void precisely is form. And they do this with great flourishes of calligraphy on the big sheets of paper. I'll show you some; I've got some for the seminar after next. But you see, this is not a denial of the world; it's not a putdown idea. To say that this world is diaphanous as, to use Shakespeare's phrase, an insubstantial pageant, is really to get into the heart of its glory.