

Lecture 100: Five Element Symbolism and the Stupa

Friends,

Those of you who have travelled at all, especially those of you who have travelled all over the world or at least a great part of it, will agree that in every part of the world we find that the landscape that we encounter has a distinctive appearance. And this distinctive appearance of the landscape in different parts of the world is determined, we may say, principally by two different factors. In the first place it's determined, of course, by the various natural i.e. geographical features of the place, determined by whether that particular part of the world, that particular area, happens to be mountainous or hilly or simply flat, determined also by whether it's covered with lush green vegetation or whether it's dry and barren and desert-like. And in the second place the appearance of the landscape is determined by what we can call the human contribution, that is to say determined by its various architectural features. And this human contribution can be of many kinds; these architectural features can be of many kinds. They may consist of a few scattered mud huts, or rows of snug, neatly-thatched little cottages; or the human contribution may consist even of magnificent pyramids or soaring church spires or even, coming down to more modern times, of clusters of skyscrapers. And going even farther, and perhaps not so very far from home, we may say that the human contribution in some areas consists of enormous slagheaps and smoking factory chimneys and so on.

Now we find, if we turn to the East, we find that Buddhism, from its beginnings in India, spread in the course of centuries over a truly enormous area. It spread over an area which extended from the deserts of central Asia in the West as far as the islands of Japan in the East. And again we find it extending from the icy windswept tablelands of Tibet in the North right down to the sun-drenched tropical island of Ceylon in the South. And obviously the natural features, the landscapes, of all these areas, all these different parts of the East, will be very very different, and even their architectural features will be different, but if we cast our eye over them all, whether it's Tibet, whether it's Ceylon or Japan or China or central Asia, India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, wherever we go throughout this Eastern Buddhist area, we find that there's one architectural feature, or one type of architectural monument, which is absolutely ubiquitous throughout this whole area. We find that it's discovered on bleak mountain tops, in pleasant wooded valleys, in the midst of vast plains, as well as by the seashore. And this monument, this ubiquitous Buddhist monument, is of course what we call the stupa.

In the course of centuries, in the course of millennia even, the stupa has assumed a number of different forms. Sometimes they are so different from one another you can hardly recognise them as springing from the same origins, from the same simple architectural forms. But in one or another of these forms, diverse though they may appear to be, the stupa is found all over the Buddhist world. It's made of very different materials. Sometimes we find it's built of brick, sometimes of stone, and in some cases we even find examples of stupas being built entirely, or almost entirely, of precious metals, of gold and silver and so on. And in some cases we find that there are stupas which are even studded with precious stones. And again, some stupas are very very big indeed, so big that it would take you ten minutes to circumambulate them; and again you find some stupas so small, so dainty, that you can hold them in the palm of your hand.

Now it's with the stupa that we shall be dealing tonight. And we're dealing with it not just as part of the general history of Buddhist art; we're dealing with it on account of its profound symbolical significance. In fact we may say that the stupa is one of the richest and most complex symbols in the whole field of Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism, and it also happens to be one of the symbols occurring, very dramatically occurring, you may remember, in the White Lotus Sutra. The symbol of the stupa makes its appearance in Chapter Eleven of the White Lotus Sutra, and it appears after the various parables with which we've already dealt in the course of these lectures, that is to say it appears after the Parable of the Burning House, after the Parable or Myth of the Return Journey, after the Parable of the Raincloud, and after the Parable of the Sun and the Moon; and it also appears after the Buddha has predicted to Supreme Enlightenment, to

Perfect Buddhahood, numerous disciples of his. And it also appears after he has described the propagation of the White Lotus Sutra in the distant past, and the previous Buddhas, and also after he has described the various ideal qualities of the preacher of the White Lotus Sutra, one who aspires to make known the message of the White Lotus Sutra.

And if we look at the text of the White Lotus Sutra, if we examine its chapters, we find that this great symbol, the symbol of the stupa, is introduced roughly halfway through the work, that is to say not reckoning the various chapters which seem to be later additions. So occurring as it does halfway through the work, appearing as it does halfway through the work, the stupa, the stupa symbol, divides the whole of the White Lotus Sutra into two approximately equal parts, into two great halves. And the first part, we may say, the part occurring before the appearance of the stupa, is dominated by the great parables which we've already studied. And the second half, after the appearance of the stupa, and perhaps including the appearance of the stupa, is dominated not so much by parables, though a few of these do sporadically occur, but rather by myth, by symbol, and by what we describe as cosmic phantasmagoria. We can also generalise a bit more, a bit further, and we can say that the first half of the White Lotus Sutra, the half dominated by the parables, is more concerned with the way, the way to Enlightenment, the way to Buddhahood, especially in its form of the Mahayana, the Great Way. The second part, on the contrary, seems to be more concerned with the goal.

Similarly, the first half is more concerned with the Bodhisattva, with the Bodhisattva's career, with the Bodhisattva's progress along the path, along the Great Way, whereas the second half, dominated by the myths and the symbols, seems to be more, we may say, dedicated to the Buddha, or the concept of the Buddhafield, the universe, the spiritual universe, the spiritual world, in which the Buddha as it were spiritually reigns, which he guides, which he influences. And we may go further than this, and become more general and more as it were abstract still and say that in the first half of the sutra we see things, we see the whole of existence, as it were *sub specie durationis*, we may say, under the form of time, temporally; whereas in the second half we see them *sub specie eternitatis*, under the form of eternity, as they always were, are, and will be, above and beyond time, in the dimension of eternity.

The first half of the sutra therefore depicts, we may say, perfection, spiritual perfection, everlastingly in process of attainment, whereas the second half depicts perfection eternally attained. And the symbol of the stupa, this great symbol of Buddhism, stands as it were in between, and it stands in between not to separate them but to unite them, because the symbol of the stupa as it were contains, as we shall see, both time and eternity.

But before we see that, we have to enquire: What is the stupa? On lower levels, in simpler terms, what does the stupa represent? It's high time that we considered this question, and we're going to consider it under four great heads. First of all we're going to consider the origins of the stupa in India. Secondly, we're going to consider what has been called the five element symbolism, and after that we're going to apply it and consider the five element symbolism in the stupa; and finally we're going to consider the yin yang symbolism in the stupa.

So first of all the origins of the stupa. Now we must at once recollect, we must at once remind ourselves, that the stupa is as old as Buddhism, if not older. If we probe right back to its ultimate origins, we find that they go back into pre-Buddhistic times, into Vedic times, hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years before the rise of Buddhism. We find that the Buddhist stupa goes back directly to the old Indian pre-Buddhistic burial mounds, and this of course is a very ancient custom, a very ancient practice, that of heaping great mounds of earth over the dust, over the ashes, over the bones, of the heroic dead. And the word 'stupa' is Sanskrit, and literally the word stupa means 'the crown of the head', the top portion of the head, or the scalp; or it means simply 'the top'. And it also means 'gable', which is of course the top of the house. And you may be interested to learn just by the way that this Sanskrit word 'stupa' with all its rich symbolical associations is etymologically connected with our much more common and ordinary English word 'stump'.

Now some weeks ago we celebrated the *Parinirvana* of the Buddha, that is to say the Buddha's final passing away out of mundane existence, or, as we say in the case of ordinary people, death. And you may remember, those who were present on that occasion, that in the course of our observance of that day there were some readings from a text known as the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, which is one of the most important sutras or long discourses of the Buddha of the Theravada Pali Canon. And according to this text, according to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutra*, or *Suttanta*, the Buddha himself shortly before his passing away, shortly before his death, directed that a stupa should be erected over his remains. And after the great teacher had passed away this was in fact done. You may recollect, those who have either read this particular sutra or have read accounts of the last days of the Buddha based upon it, you may recollect that the Buddha's body, his physical body, after his death was cremated. It was placed on a great funeral pyre with hundreds, maybe thousands, of logs of wood. These were all drenched in oil and in clarified butter, and the whole was set ablaze, and it burned for a very long time. In this way the Buddha's physical remains were cremated. And after the flames had died down, and after the ashes had cooled, the disciples made a reverent search in the ashes for relics, small fragments of bone still remaining. And all these relics, after they had been gathered up - there were just maybe a handful or so of them - were placed inside a jar. People wanted to preserve them; they wanted to have some physical memento of the great teacher. This is a very common human, we might even say failing, but at least it's a forgivable failing.

Now at this point, after the Buddha's relics had been gathered together and placed in that jar, in the stone jar, unfortunately a great quarrel, a great dispute, almost a battle, arose among the disciples, and in Buddhist art, especially earliest Buddhist art, we sometimes see this great quarrel, this great battle, represented, and it would seem, if we take these sculptures literally, that the different parties to the dispute were almost ready to go to war with one another over the question of the possession of the relics. This is rather extraordinary. What happens after the death of a great teacher? As soon as he dies and has been cremated and his ashes are hardly cold, the disciples start quarrelling over the possession of the relics. You may remember there was a similar sort of incident, much more apocalyptic, much more magnificent in its symbolism, in the case of Milarepa. You may remember that after the death, or after the withdrawal from the mundane plane, of Milarepa, his disciples too wanted relics, and apparently all the relics condensed into a brilliant globe of light which hovered above the heads of the disciples, and they all tried to catch hold of it. But as they tried to catch hold of it, it just rose up into the air out of their reach, and as soon as they desisted, as soon as their hands went down, it came a little bit lower, but as they tried to catch hold of it, up it went. You see. Now this may or may not originally have been the case, but obviously there's a very great significance, there's a very great symbolism here.

So much the same sort of thing happened in the case of the bodily relics of the Buddha. There was a great quarrel, there was a great dispute, as I said almost a battle over who should possess them, and there were all sorts of different claimants, different tribes, different people, different cities, even different kings and chiefs. For instance the Shakyas, the Buddha's own tribe, they put forward a claim. They said: Well, the Buddha was our man. He was born amongst us. If anyone has a claim, if anyone has a right to the relics, surely it is the Shakyas. So they put forward their claim. In the same way the Mallas - the Mallas said: Well, he may have been born in Shakya territory, but he lived and taught amongst us much of the time, in our territory. We're his disciples too, so we have a claim, we have a right. So in this way so many people, so many tribes, so many communities, put forward their respective claims and so on. But anyway, in the end, due to the intervention, we're told, of a learned Brahmin, who reminded the disciples that it was very unseemly for the disciples to quarrel over the Buddha's relics as soon as he was dead, it was all settled, and the relics were divided into eight equal portions, and one portion was given to each of the tribes, or each of the peoples, who had put in a claim. And each of these tribes, each of these communities, built over their share of the relics a stupa; and a stupa was also built, we're told, over the jar in which they had been contained.

Now it's very interesting, it's very significant, that this quarrel, this battle almost, for the

possession of the relics took place among the lay followers of the Buddha. The monks apparently had nothing at all to do with it; they weren't involved. They're not even mentioned in this connection; it was entirely a quarrel between different sections of the lay community, the lay followers. And this fact is surely suggestive. It suggests that the whole practice of the worship of the relics of great men was not so much a part of the Buddha's own teaching, of course, not so much a part of Buddhism proper, as a sort of popular ethnic practice which continued and was still popular among the lay followers of the Buddha. Be that as it may, however, it is an ascertained fact that very very rapidly after the death of the Buddha, stupa worship, the veneration of stupas, the decoration of stupas, and so on, became a very very popular religious practice. In fact we may say that for hundreds of years after the death of the Buddha the worship and decoration and adornment, and of course the building, of stupas was the principal religious practice of the laity. There were no temples in those days, don't forget, no images. The laity didn't meditate like the monks; they didn't go and live in the jungle like many of the monks; they stayed at home. So what was their religious practice? - they made offerings to the stupas, they venerated the stupas, and they venerated the relics in the stupas, and in this way kept alive the memory of the Buddha and the great example which he had shown.

Now according to a tradition, not according to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, according to a tradition which has come down to us, as far as I recollect, through the Tibetan sources, some time before his death the Buddha directed that the stupa should be built, as the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* itself says, but the tradition coming down from Tibetan sources adds further details, and it tells us that when the Buddha gave these directions the disciples very naturally asked how they should make the stupa. In what form should they make the stupa? And what did the Buddha say, or rather what did the Buddha do? He didn't say anything; he gave a sort of practical demonstration. He took, the tradition tells us, his outer robe, his outer yellow robe, and he folded it into four, that is to say he folded it in two and again he folded it into two, and he folded it into four again. So in this way with the cloth he made a sort of rough cube, by folding the cloth again and again in this way. Then he took his begging bowl, which of course was round, turned it upsidedown, and put it on top of the robes. In this way there was a hemisphere on top of a cube. And the Buddha said: Make my stupa like this. And this was in fact the earliest form of the stupa. If you look at the archaeological remains of Buddhist sites in India, we find that this is in fact the oldest form of the stupa, a square, though sometimes a cylindrical base, and a hemisphere, a rough hemisphere, on top. Now what the symbolism of these two forms is, the cube and the sphere or the hemisphere, this we shall be seeing a bit later on.

Now by the time of the great ruler Ashoka, the king of the Magadha kingdom who spread his rule all over India and more or less founded or maybe refounded the Maurya empire - Ashoka, by the way, lived in the 3rd century - by his time the practice of relic worship and stupa worship had become very very firmly established indeed. It must be admitted that it seems that the monks, the sort of 100% followers of the Buddha who were practising more meditation and so on, they were at first not very happy about all this relic worship and stupa worship, but it had become so widespread and so popular among the laity that there wasn't very much they could do about it, and of course it had been going on for a long time, so eventually they had to accept the practice as orthodox, and indeed we find, according to the records like the *Katha-vatthu*, we find some sections of the monks quite explicitly ascribing great devotional and spiritual value to the practice of worshipping relics or worshipping stupas. Ashoka himself, according to all the accounts we have of him, was a very great builder of stupas, and the legends (one can't really say historical records here), the legends say that he built 84,000 stupas in a single day. It was rather a tough job even for Ashoka, so we're told that his spiritual preceptor, in order to give him plenty of time, very kindly stretched out his hand into the sky and held back the sun until the great work was finished, a variant we may say of the Joshua legend.

Now by the time of Ashoka, stupas had become much more elaborate than they were in earlier days, and we have preserved more or less intact a very splendid example of an Ashokan period stupa in the great stupa of Sanchi. Sanchi is in the former state of Bhopal, halfway between Bombay and Delhi in, of course, India. And the great stupa of Sanchi enshrined not any bone

relics of the Buddha, but the relics of his two chief disciples Sariputra and Moggallana. And some of you may know that, by one of those rather strange historical accidents that you do find happening, these relics, in their little original steatite boxes like little pillboxes, with the names of the two disciples engraved on them, spent some eighty years not very far away from here, that is to say in the Victoria and Albert Museum, having been removed by a British archaeologist before the people of India started caring very much in modern times about Buddhism. But they were returned to India, to the Mahabodhi Society, after Indian Independence, and they were re-enshrined at Sanchi in 1951, or it may have been 52; I'm afraid my memory isn't serving me very well here. But I remember that I did attend the actual re-enshrinement ceremony which was presided over by the President of India, and Pandit Nehru actually enshrined, or re-enshrined, these relics at Sanchi.

Now the Sanchi stupa is hemispherical in shape, and it's built very beautifully of brick and stone, and the whole thing is surrounded, the whole structure is surrounded, by a very massive stone railing built evidently as a sort of copy of an original wooden railing; and the railing is pierced at four points by four magnificent decorated gates. These four gates face the four cardinal points, symbolising the universality of Buddhism which is proclaimed in all directions, North, South, East, and West, being addressed to everybody, to all beings whatsoever, in all the quarters of space. And these great Sanchi gates are very very famous because they're very elaborately carved, and they're carved with scenes from the life of the Buddha, his previous lives, that is to say the *Jatakas*, and so on. But it's very interesting to note that at this stage of Buddhist art the Buddha himself is never represented. You've got trees, you've got flowers, you've got buildings, other people, disciples, animals, everything, a very rich and lavish profusion; but the Buddha himself, even in those scenes which depict his own life, his Enlightenment, his birth and so on, the Buddha himself is not depicted. Now it used to be thought in the very early days of Oriental studies that the Buddha was not depicted because they didn't know how to depict him, because they didn't feel confident enough to represent the Buddha properly. But it has since been pointed out that they represented everything else beautifully, so why not the Buddha? And we now know better. We know that they didn't represent the Buddha on principle, because in this days a school called the *Lokottaravadins* was rather strong, and the *Lokottaravadins* held that the Buddha was not an ordinary human being, but a sort of Transcendental being, he was a Transcendental principle, something ineffable, indescribable, unrepresentable. So for these strictly metaphysical reasons, or spiritual reasons, the artists did not represent the Buddha. He could not be represented because he was Transcendental. So in the place where the Buddha should have been, or would have been, they put a symbol. If the scene should have shown the Buddha being born, they put a pair of footprints, the Buddha's footprints, the *Sri Pada*. If the scene should have shown the Buddha preaching his first sermon, they showed a Wheel of the Law, a *Dharmachakra*, on perhaps a throne supported by lions. If the scene should have represented the Enlightenment, they showed a Bodhi tree, or if the scene was of some other kind, the Buddha preaching or moving about, a parasol, an umbrella, and if the scene was the death of the Buddha, the *Parinirvana*, a stupa, because the stupa originally enshrined the ashes.

Now this is, as it were, by the way. Let's proceed with our story. After Ashoka, the stupas became more and more elaborate, and they became the objects, as far as we can tell, of more and more fervent devotion and worship, and they also became much bigger. Sometimes it's very interesting, archaeologically, when the site of a stupa is excavated. We find that at first the stupa was very small, maybe only fifteen or twenty feet; then we find at a later time that it's been enlarged; at a later time still, it's been made bigger still, because owing to this rather simple shape, this basic structure, the cube with the hemisphere on it, you could go on making it bigger and bigger by the simple expedient of putting another shell onto it, and another, and another, because no one was living in it, it was solid, solid masonry. So in this way the stupas were getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And not only that, some of the stupas, as it were, migrated overseas. Buddhists in Ceylon, Buddhists in Burma, Buddhists in Central Asia, they started building their own stupas, some of them bigger and better even than the Indian ones, like those in Ceylon, which are perhaps, apart from Borobodur, the biggest in the whole Buddhist world. And this brings us to the period of the White Lotus Sutra, that is to say the period when the White Lotus Sutra was

written down. In other words, it brings us to the First Century of the Christian Era, and it brings us back to that sudden appearance of the stupa at the beginning of Chapter Eleven of the White Lotus Sutra.

I'm going to read now the passage of the sutra which describes the appearance of the stupa, and you'll find that it gives a sort of idealised description of the sort of monument that must have been very common in India at that time. So the sutra says - I'm afraid the translation isn't very literary or very poetical, as it perhaps should be:

Then there arose a stupa consisting of seven precious substances from the place of the earth opposite the Lord, the assembly being in the middle, a stupa five hundred yojanas in height (a yojana's about seven or eight miles), and proportionate in circumference. After its rising, the stupa stood in the sky sparkling, beautiful, nicely decorated with five thousand successive terraces of flowers, adorned with many thousands of arches, embellished by thousands of banners and triumphal streamers, hung with thousands of jewel garlands, and with hour plates and bells, and emitting the scent of xanthochymus and sandal, which scent filled this whole world. Its row of umbrellas rose so far and high as to touch the abodes of the four guardians of the horizon and the gods. It consisted of seven precious substances, viz. gold, silver, lapis lazuli, musaragalva, emerald, red coral, and caracetana stone. This stupa of precious substances once formed, the gods of paradise strewed and covered it with mandarava and great mandara flowers. And from that stupa of precious substances there issued this voice: "Excellent! Excellent, Lord Shakyamuni! Thou has well expounded this Dharmapariyaya of the Lotus of the True Law. So it is, Lord, so it is, Sugata!"

So this is the text, this is the passage, this is the description of the stupa. So once again we have to ask ourselves what it represents, what the stupa stands for, and in order to answer this question, in part at least, we'll have first to go into the symbolism of the five elements, which brings us to our second heading: The Five element symbolism

The five elements are the traditional ones, that is to say earth, water, fire, air, and an element which is translated into English sometimes as ether and sometimes as space, but we'll take a look at that in a minute. Now the fact that these terms are used - earth, water, fire, air - shouldn't cause us to think that these are to be understood as material elements. We mustn't take them in that literal sense. What we translate as earth, water, fire, air, and so on, are symbolised by the material elements but are not the material elements themselves, so what are they? When we use these symbols of earth, water, fire, air, what do we really mean, what do we really have in mind, or what does the Buddhist tradition have in mind? What did the builders of the stupas have in mind?

Well, these elements symbolise or represent not material entities, but different forms, different kinds, if you like, different hypostases, if you like, of energy. Take earth. What is earth? Earth is not something you scoop up from the ground; it's not matter or anything like that. Earth, the symbol earth, represents energy but energy in a state of contraction, energy in a state of cohesion, that which makes everything stick together, as it were, not unlike the law of gravitation in science. It's the principle, if you like, of solidity. So earth represents energy, yes, but energy as it were locked up, energy blocked, energy even frozen, energy petrified, energy crystallised. This is what is meant by earth, not earth in the literal sense.

And then water. What is water? It's not the stuff you drink. It's energy, but energy in a state not of complete blockage, partial blockage, energy in a state of what we may describe as oscillation, or undulation; not energy completely blocked, completely locked up, but at the same time not energy really and truly free either. It just oscillates, that is to say it just goes backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, between two points. So this is the kind, this is the type, this is the hypostasis, if you like, of energy symbolised by, represented by the element water.

And then fire. What's fire? What does that represent? This is comparatively easy. Fire of course we know always mounts upward. You kindle a fire, the flame goes up; it never goes down, not of its own accord, always goes straight up. So fire symbolises energy moving in an upward direction, up and up, ascending, sublimating if you like.

And air, what about air? Air is energy which is not just expanding, not just ascending; it's also descending, it's also spreading out on both sides. In other words air is energy in a state of expansion, or energy which is, as it were, diffusing itself in all directions from one central point, diffusing itself in all directions of space.

Now what about the element which we have to translate sometimes as ether, sometimes as space? This is much more difficult to explain. In the original it is '*akasa*'. *Akasa*, the Sanskrit and also Pali word *akasa*, is derived from a root meaning 'to shine', like the sky. And the word is sometimes applied to the sky, or to the firmament, but this is not its real meaning. *Akasa*, ether, space, call it what you will, this represents what we may describe as the primordial energy of which the other four, the so-called earth, water, fire, air, are grosser manifestations. They are as it were like the waves; waves of different shapes, different forms, different configurations, but it, the ether, the space, the *akasa*, the brightness, the shining, it is like the sea itself. We can even say that in some contexts at least *akasa* stands halfway, as it were, between what we call matter and what we call spirit or consciousness.

Now the five elements - earth, water, fire, air, and ether or space, represent energy, but not just physical energy - mental energy, psychical energy. And this also we have to go into, because both form, as it were, ascending series and this is of great practical interest. So looking at the five elements in terms of psychical energy, mental energy, ultimately even spiritual energy, what do we find that they represent? What does earth represent? Earth represents a state or condition of psychological energy blockage, emotional blockage. And when one is psychologically, emotionally blocked, how does one feel? One feels contracted, one feels constricted, one feels shut up in oneself, one feels all stiff and rigid and lifeless, like a sort of mental corpse. One feels cold; one feels dead. This is the earth state. This state, we may say, is like that of a man who's so tightly bound, so tightly tied up, that he can't move, he can't stir hand or foot. He may just maybe wiggle his little toe or something like that, or he may just blink his eyes, but he can't make any more movement than that. This is the earth state psychically, considered in terms of psychical energy.

And what about water? What about the water symbol? This represents a state of very limited mobility and motility. It represents a state like that of ice which has just started to thaw. You get a block of ice and a few drops of water are forming at the sides, it's thawing just a little tiny bit, but not much. So in this state one's energy feels just a little bit free. One isn't tied, one can at least move a bit, you know, from side to side. So blockages, in this state, have been removed to some extent. You're just a little bit free. And this state is like that of a man who's not tied up, whose limbs are not tied up, but who's imprisoned in a little tiny cell, and it's just big enough for him to be able to walk backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards; he's got that much freedom, even though he can't get out. So this is the state of just very partial liberation of energy, when you can just go backwards and forwards, or round and round in a narrow closed circle. That's how most people live, of course.

And then fire, fire. This represents a state of liberation of energy in an upward direction. Here energy is being sublimated, and in this state one feels as it were inspired, as though you're being sort of lifted up. You feel exalted; you feel even as though, to change the metaphors for a moment, you're walking on air. So what is this state like? It's like that of a man who's shut in, enclosed on all sides by walls, but there's no roof. It's all open to the sky, open to the stars, so all he has to do is to rise up into the air, as it were, he's free in that direction.

And air, what about air? Air, we may say, is energy in process of becoming completely liberated, not completely liberated but in the process of becoming so. All hindrances, all blockages, all

energy blockages, psychological blockages, emotional blockages, are being removed, are being resolved, are sort of escaping in great clouds of steam as it were, and one feels that one is expanding in all directions. One feels that one is transcending one's narrow limited individuality, one's selfhood in a narrow limited sense of the term. So what is this state like? This state is like a man who was in prison, but he isn't now. All the walls have suddenly fallen down and he can look in all directions, he can go in any direction he likes, he's absolutely free. But even more than that, because if you're an individual, well, you can go in that direction, but when you're going in that direction, you're not going in this direction. But in the state symbolised by the element air it isn't like that, because you can go in all directions simultaneously, you can expand yourself into all the quarters of space at the same time, and that means transcending your own self, your own individuality.

Now what about *akasa*? What about ether or space? This, we may say, in a very general way, represents the dimension, the higher dimension, within which all these movements take place: the non-movement of earth, the undulatory, oscillatory movement of water, the ascending movement of fire, and the expanding movement of air; all these take place within a dimension which is higher still, which contains and includes them all, and it's this that we call *akasa*, space, ether, or what you will.

Now we can go a step further, and we can say that the five elements symbolise five different kinds of people. What does earth symbolise, or who does earth symbolise, what kind of person? Earth symbolises the psychologically, the emotionally, crippled person. Water symbolises the so-called normal person, person with a certain amount of free energy, but who functions within very narrow limits indeed, who functions in a repetitive manner, a reactive manner. Fire symbolises the artist, the poet, the musician, the thinker, the free thinker, and the meditator; because they're rising up, they're ascending, they're sublimating. And air, well, air represents the mystic, because the mystic is engaged all the time essentially in transcending self. And ether or space, this symbolises the fully illumined sage, who has accomplished that process of self-transcending, in other words the Buddha, the master.

Now we find that according to tradition each of the five elements has a colour, or is associated with a colour. Earth, yellow; water, white; fire, of course, red, bright flaming red; air, green, usually a beautiful pale green; and ether, space, *akasa*, firmament, blue, but sometimes golden-flame coloured. The five elements are also associated with certain geometrical forms. Earth, cube; water, sphere; fire, cone or pyramid; air, bowl-shape, or saucer-shape, that is to say the inverted dome of the sky, the dome of the sky turned upsidedown into a sort of shallow receptacle; and ether, space, *akasa*, a flaming jewel-like shape.

Now there are many other sets of correlations. For instance, there's a correlation of the five elements, the five energies if you like, with the five psychic centres within the human body, according to some systems of yoga. Earth is correlated with the lowest psychic centre, the one which is between the anus and the genitals. Water is connected with the centre which is at the *solar plexus*, fire with the heart centre, air with the throat centre, and ether or space or *akasa* with the head centre, the top of the head centre. There's also a correlation of the five elements with the five Buddhas, but we're not going into that tonight, we've no time for further detail. It's time now that we applied this five element symbolism to the question of the stupa.

So let's consider now the five element symbolism in the stupa. I've mentioned that the five elements are represented by different geometrical forms, different three-dimensional figures, of different colours. So we can combine these, and that gives us earth, a yellow cube - just try and visualise a yellow cube; water, a white sphere; fire, a red cone or red pyramid; air, a green bowl or a green saucer; and ether or space, a flame-coloured jewel shape. And we can go a step further. We can place these differently-coloured geometrical forms one on top of another; first the cube, then the sphere, and so on. And in case any of you find it rather difficult to visualise, Brenda's very kindly done us, if she wouldn't mind turning the board round, an illustration, which shows us these geometrical forms, in ascending order, with their respective colours. So we see the

yellow cube, earth; the white sphere, water; the red cone or pyramid, fire; the green saucer, which is air; and then the golden - some translators call it a cumulated point, but I prefer to say - jewel-like shape, because I think it looks rather more like that.

Now we see that here the five elements have been arranged in an ascending order, that is to say in an order of increasing subtlety or order of increasing release of energy. And of course the whole thing gives us the basic structure of the stupa. The stupa is built on, or built up out of, these geometrical forms of increasing subtlety, or these elements of increasing subtlety. So we may start by saying that the stupa symbolises the whole process of growth, of development, of Higher Evolution, of progressive liberation, freeing of energy; and therefore that it embodies in architectural terms the whole meaning of Buddhism in general and the White Lotus Sutra in particular. And it's small wonder, therefore, that the stupa is so widespread, or so much an object of fervent devotion.

Now you may remember that the five elements are also correlated with the five psychic centres in the human body. Now suppose we have in front of us a stupa of the same height as a human being seated cross-legged as though in meditation, and suppose we put the two side by side, the stupa of that height and the human being seated crosslegged as though for meditation. And if we pick out the psychic centres up that person's median nerve, and if we follow them across to the stupa, we shall find that the centres correspond with the different successive geometrical forms, that they'll be in the same line, as it were.

Now in the course of centuries the basic structure of the stupa underwent many changes, or rather modifications or adaptations. Some had a definite spiritual basis; others were merely architectural or cultural. Now suppose we do something. Suppose in between the sphere and the cone we interpolate another smaller cube, so that we have in between the sphere and the cone, that is to say standing on the sphere and supporting the cone, a small cube, a small replica of the cube at the bottom, that is. And now let's suppose the whole stupa thus created, the whole six-element, as it were, or six-shape structure, is hollow. And suppose we place our crosslegged human being inside the stupa, so he's sitting inside. Where would his eyes be? His eyes would be on a level with that second smaller cube. And if the cube happened to be transparent we would then see the eyes. Now what are we reminded of at this point? - those at least who have any acquaintance with Buddhist architecture of the stupa or who perhaps have been to Nepal. We're reminded of the typical Nepalese stupa, that is to say stupas like those of Swyambunath or Bodhnath near Kathmandu, because in this stupas we find on each side of the *harmika*, as the second higher cube is called, there's a pair of eyes painted. And when you see these stupas, as I've seen them, rising above the landscape in the distance, with these eyes on the sides, they do produce a very strange effect indeed, especially because these stupas are of enormous size, they absolutely dominate the landscape, and as you look up you see these great pairs of eyes, and these pairs of eyes seem to be looking down at you or onto you, and they seem to be looking down at you, and it doesn't seem to be your imagination, with as it were a slight frown. They're just ever so slightly disapproving.

Now what does the presence of these eyes, these pairs of eyes, on each side of the *harmika* serve to remind us of? It serves to remind us of the fact that in a sense the stupa is the human body itself, or is correlated with the human body itself, to remind us of the fact that the formal elements of the stupa correspond to the psychic centres, and that both the formal elements of the stupa in the order that they are arranged and also the psychic centres in the order in which they are arranged within the human body both represent an upward, a progressive movement, a movement of development, of spiritual evolution. But a question arises. Why should the *harmika* have been interpolated? Why should that second cube have been put there at all? And one even might go further and say: Why should the cone and the saucer and the jewel even have been added to the two original simple elements, the cube and the sphere? Why did even that development take place? And one might also ask why the conical part of the Nepalese stupa is divided into a number of sections which make it look as though it consists of a number of rings of gradually diminishing diameter.

Now in order to answer these questions and a number of others that might or could arise, we'll have to say something about the yin yang symbolism, and this brings us to the fourth and last heading of our lecture, after which, I'm afraid, we have to conclude.

So, yin yang symbolism in the stupa. You may remember that I used the terms yin and yang towards the end of last week's lecture, and, as I'm sure most of you are aware, these are not Indian terms, not Sanskrit terms; they're Chinese. But they represent a distinction, a polarity, of universal validity and importance, and these terms happen to have the convenience, these terms yin and yang, they happen to have the convenience of being quite widely known or well known even in the West, so I've been making use of them for this reason. Last week we saw that the yin principle was associated with the earth, with water, with the depths, whereas the yang principle is associated with the sky, with fire, with the heights. Yin is the negative, passive principle; if you like, the feminine principle. Yang is the active, masculine principle, the positive principle. Yin is symbolised by the moon; yang is symbolised by the sun. Yin is emotion, is the unconscious; yang is reason, it's the conscious mind. Yin is life; yang is light. Yin, if you like, is the lower evolution; yang is the higher evolution. But in the course of the development, in the course of the evolution of the individual, these two principles, the yin and the yang, must be harmonised, must be synthesised. The plant, as we saw last week, is the product, the joint product, of soil and rain on the one hand, and of space and sunlight on the other. In much the same way, the individual, the living growing evolving individual, is nourished by both yin forces and yang forces.

Now how does this tie up with the stupa? You'll remember that the stupa was originally, in pre Buddhistic times, a burial mound, and at that time in that form it consisted simply of a great heap of earth, a tumulus if you like, a barrow, and this great heap of earth was associated with the cult of the dead, because the ashes, the bones, the remains, of great men, great heroes, kings, sages, were enshrined there and offerings were made to them, to the dead. And this heap of earth, this burial mound, in this way came naturally to be associated with the earth, associated also therefore with the womb, the womb of Mother Nature, Mother in general, in fact. So that we may say that in its original form, or we may say the original stupa itself was a symbol of the yin principle. You remember that the earliest stupas, Buddhist stupas, were made up of the cube and the sphere, or the cube and the hemisphere, and both the cube and the sphere are yin symbols, or if you like lunar symbols. So the original stupa, containing or consisting of simply these two geometrical or architectural elements, was a yin symbol.

Now where did the smaller cube come from? And also, what is the origin of the umbrella, the triple umbrella very often, by which the cube in many stupas, including the Nepalese stupas, is surmounted. Both these symbols, or both these forms, come from a parallel cult, a cult, an ancient Indian cult, pre Buddhistic cult, parallel to the cult of the dead, parallel to the worship of the forces of earth, of nature. They both come from the cult of the sun, and its associated solar symbolism. In ancient India, even before the time of Buddhism, there were a number of solar symbols, and two of these in particular were of importance, and they were the sacred fire and the sacred tree. The sacred fire burned on the hearth of every home, or at least the home of every orthodox follower of the Vedas, and it also burned in the middle of the village. And in the middle of the village it burned on a small square, that is to say cubiform, brick altar. And it burned in a small shrine, or sort of idealised hut, and this hut often stood at the foot of the sacred tree of the village, which could have been a peepul or a banyan tree; and the tree also was a solar symbol. Later on in the history of Indian art, in the history of Buddhism, the tree became stylized into an umbrella, which has much the same significance. So from all this we can see that the *harmika*, that second cube of the stupa, as in the Nepalese stupa, in its origins was the fire altar, and the umbrella by which it was surmounted, or is surmounted, in this kind of stupa is a stylized version of the sacred tree. So what has happened? What has happened is that two solar symbols, the fire altar and the umbrella or tree, have been superimposed upon two lunar symbols, that is to say the cube and the sphere or the hemisphere, the tumulus, the barrow.

In much the same way, in the case of the geometrical forms the saucer and the cone were placed on top of the cube and the sphere. So we see from this that the stupa is not just a synthesis of the

five elements, not just an arrangement of the symbols of the five elements in ascending order. It's also a synthesis of Indian solar and lunar symbolism. It's also a synthesis of the yin and the yang principles, so that we may say that in a sense the stupa is an architectural embodiment of the whole Buddhist teaching.

Now these are the broad general principles, but they can be applied in many different ways, and we've just time, I think, for a few more details; then we have to conclude by referring back to the significance of the stupa in the context of the White Lotus Sutra. We can say that a standard stupa can be regarded as consisting of seven parts. There were of course very few standard stupas, but if we reduce, as it were, the stupa to its most essential elements after it had developed for hundreds of years, we find that it can be regarded as consisting of seven essential parts. First of all, there's the square base, called the *medhi*. This sometimes consists of a number of steps or terraces, very often four, but it still represents the earth element, still represents the yin principle in general. Next comes the hemispherical middle portion. This is known in Sanskrit as the *anda*. *Anda* means egg, which is rather interesting. And this portion, this hemispherical middle portion, is also known as the *garbha*, which means the receptacle, the treasury, and the womb. So, inasmuch as this hemispherical middle portion is called egg and womb, there's obviously quite a bit of symbolism here. In the case of the Sinhalese stupa, which is known as the *dagoba*, which is a corruption of *dhatu garbha*, or repository or relics, this portion, the hemispherical middle portion, is not strictly round, not even hemispherical, it's bell-shaped, and this gives the Sinhalese stupas their very distinctive, very characteristic, appearance.

Now in Tibetan Buddhism, in the case of the Tibetan *chorten*, exactly the opposite seems to be the case. Here this particular portion doesn't become a bell. It becomes a hemisphere or even a bell turned upsidedown. In other words, in Tibetan Buddhism in the *chorten*, this hemispherical middle portion becomes, or rather assumes, a chalice-like shape, like a sort of vase. And this chalice-like shape of this portion of the stupa is exactly the same as that of the vase of immortality, the *amrita kalasa*, the *bumpa*, which is held by Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life, and is called, in fact, by the same name. And in Tibetan Buddhism, in the case of the Tibetan *chorten*, the fact that this portion of the stupa assumes this particular form represents the receptivity of the lunar principle to the solar principle, the receptivity of yin to yang; or, we may say, represents the lunar principle as transformed by the solar principle. And of course this portion, so far as the elements go, represents or symbolises the water element and therefore once again the yin principle.

Thirdly the standard stupa consists of the cubiform altar, what is known as the *harmika*, and it's here, incidentally, that relics, bone relics and so on, were usually enshrined, in this portion of the stupa. The Buddha's physical body, as we know, had been consumed by fire, and his selfhood, we may say, had also been consumed, consumed in the fire of his spiritual practice and realisation and experience. So this portion of the stupa, the *harmika*, the cubiform altar, represents, symbolises, the fire element and of course therefore the yang principle.

Then fourthly the spire, *kunta*. This is both umbrella and tree. It underwent a very lengthy development and ended up consisting of thirteen rings of diminishing diameter superimposed one on another, and representing, at this stage in the development of the symbolism, representing the thirteen *bhumis* traversed by the Bodhisattva on his way to Enlightenment, *bhumis* meaning stages of spiritual progress. Now there's a rather interesting thing to be noticed here, and this pertains to the development of the stupa in China. In China what happened was that this portion of the stupa, the spire, was separated from the rest and became what we know in the West as the *pagoda*, a very characteristic feature of the Chinese landscape. The pagoda is just this one portion of the original stupa, just the cone portion as it were, as it were the original fire portion. So we may say that if the two original geometrical elements of the stupa, the cube and the sphere, were purely yin as it were, or symbolised the yin principle, the *pagoda* has gone to the opposite extreme and symbolises just the yang principle on its own, yang as it were separated from the yin. We could perhaps though say that the *pagoda* does after all stand actually on the earth, and the earth itself is yin, so that if the stupa, or rather the pagoda, in its attenuated form in China

represents yang, it still maintains a balance and a harmony and unity, inasmuch as it stands on the earth. The earth itself is its base; it doesn't need a separate architectural base - we could look at it in that way.

Now this portion of the stupa, the spire, geometrically considered, represents the fire element, but the fire element has already been represented by the *harmika* which has been interpolated, so if you look at the cone or the spire geometrically you'll have a repetition of fire element symbols. So when the stupa consists of seven elements in this way, the spire stands here not for the fire element but for the air element, but in either case, whether symbolising fire or air, it still represents yang as distinct from yin.

Now fifthly we come to the saucer or bowl. Now this originally represented space or ether, which means a sort of synthesis of yin and yang, but here, when we reckon seven elements, it becomes a pure white moon crescent, and it here symbolises the yin principle in a highly purified and highly sublimated form.

Then sixthly there comes a red solar disc, and this represents the yang principle in highly purified and sublimated form.

And last of all there comes a flame-coloured, or even a rainbow-coloured, jewel, which grows out of the red solar disc. And this flame-coloured or rainbow-coloured jewel growing out of the red solar disc represents the final synthesis at the highest possible level of the yin and the yang principles; in other words it represents Enlightenment.

So we can now begin to see the basic pattern, the basic structure, of this seven-element standard stupa. First come two yin symbols, one on top of the other; then two yang symbols, one on top of the other; then one yin symbol, then one yang symbol, and finally one symbol synthesising yin and yang. Now here there's another interesting point. The seventh symbol, the flame-coloured jewel, or rainbow-coloured jewel, rising out of the red solar disc, this same symbol is often found on the top of the heads of Buddha-images of all countries, of all periods. Sometimes it looks like a flame springing up from the head of the Buddha, sometimes it looks like a lotus bud opening from the top of the Buddha's head. And when this sort of shape, this sort of symbol occurs, iconographically, at the top of the head of the Buddha-image, it's called the *ushnisha* which Western translators render, not very elegantly, as 'bodhic protuberance'. And it has, when it occurs here, at the top of the Buddha-image, the same significance as it has when it occurs at the summit of the stupa, in other words complete, total, highest possible level synthesis of yin and yang.

Now it's time that we got back to the White Lotus Sutra. You may remember that at the request of his disciples the Buddha Shakyamuni opens the gates of the stupa. Apparently, as far as we can tell, sort of halfway up there's a gate or a pair of gates with a great bolt. So the Buddha ascends up into the air, he draws this bolt, we're told, you may remember, with a sound like thunder, and inside is seen the undissipated body of that ancient Buddha Abundant Treasures. And the Buddha Shakyamuni, having opened the gates by drawing the bolt, sits down beside Abundant Treasures at his invitation, so that you've got the two Buddhas, Abundant Treasures, the Buddha of the remote past, Shakyamuni, the Buddha of the present, sitting on the same seat within the stupa. Now what does this mean? Obviously it means something. The whole sutra means something; all its images mean something. Abundant Treasures, as I've said, is the Buddha of the past, Shakyamuni is the Buddha of the present, so one could say undoubtedly that this incident represents the coming together of past and present. Past and present have become one.

But the true significance of the episode is even more profound than that. We're told that Abundant Treasures is the Buddha of the past, but what past? Not a thousand years ago, not a million years ago, but, we're told, uncounted, uncountable, unfathomable, incalculable infinite millions of myriads of years ago. Now when you pile it on like that it means that what you're really trying to say is beyond time altogether; not just the Buddha coming from the remote past,

but the primordial Buddha, the Buddha coming as it were from the metaphysical beginning of things, which means no beginning at all, in other words the Eternal Buddha, above the past, above the present, above the future, out of time altogether.

So Abundant Treasures is the primordial Buddha, the eternal Buddha, and the incident of Shakyamuni, our Buddha, the Buddha of the present, taking his seat within the stupa by the side of Abundant Treasures, the eternal Buddha, therefore represents the coming together, the coalescence, the synthesis, of time and eternity; the two dimensions have coalesced, have come together. Abundant Treasures and Shakyamuni are both in the stupa, the stupa contains them both; the stupa therefore contains time and eternity. So the stupa symbol as it occurs in the White Lotus Sutra at this point doesn't represent just a general synthesis of the yin and the yang principles, at howsoever high a level. It represents what we may describe as the highest and the greatest and most total synthesis of all, that of time and eternity.

It's not surprising, therefore, in view of all these considerations such as I've mentioned, and many other considerations too which I haven't mentioned, it isn't surprising that the stupa is sometimes considered to be, by good authorities, the most important of all Buddhist symbols, even more important, both historically and doctrinally, than that other very well-known symbol, the Buddha-image, and it isn't surprising, therefore, that the stupa makes this sudden, this dramatic, appearance right in the middle of the White Lotus Sutra. And it isn't surprising, perhaps, that the stupa should be able even now to remind us of the need of synthesising the different aspects, the different pulls, of our own unruly natures, because it's only by accomplishing this synthesis, on higher and ever higher levels, ever more refined levels, progressively higher and higher levels of our being, it's only in this way, only by doing this, that we can really and truly ourselves in the end evolve and continue to evolve, in fact fulfill the whole course, the whole process, of the Higher Evolution of Man.