

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Lecture 51: The Ideal Society: Right Livelihood

Venerable Sir and friends,

I think the statement which I am going to make to begin with will not be disputed by anybody, at least I hope not. And that is the statement that everybody dreams. That is what the psychologists, that is what the psychoanalysts tell us: that everybody, each and every one of us, dreams every night, they dream some four or five times. We're even told that animals dream, as we can sometimes see in the case of our own pets. So let's start with this statement that everybody dreams. And we can go a little further than this, I think, and say that not only does everybody dream when they're asleep at night but also, we may say, everybody daydreams. You all know how it is when it's a nice warm sunny afternoon, maybe you're sitting on a park bench, it's all very cosy, very comfortable, you're quiet and you just start daydreaming. This is something which everybody does at some time or other. And of course the daydream is usually a sort of wish fulfilment, a sort of Walter Mitty exercise. You dream of all the things you'd like to do and the things that you'd like to be - because, the reason for this is that only too often we find that our everyday life, our everyday existence, is very dull, is very drab, colourless, uninteresting, unsatisfactory and so on. We may have a tiresome and monotonous job, we may be in circumstances which we dislike. We may be having to associate with people with whom we're not particularly friendly and so on. It may even be that we find life not only dull, not only uninteresting, not only monotonous, we may even find it positively painful. So we want to get away from it, we try to create a world of our own outside ordinary existence and therefore we start as it were daydreaming in various ways. We start imagining a better state of affairs. We start as it were dreaming up some ideal world or even an ideal society, ideal community in which the imperfections of this world and this society do not exist. Here there's misery, here there's unhappiness, but we like to think, or we like to imagine, we like to daydream about some other place, some other world where everybody is happy and where, no doubt, we can be happy too.

Now we may say that daydreaming of this sort is not altogether a bad thing, provided of course we don't indulge in it too often or when we ought really to be doing something else. It's true that most daydreaming is what we may describe as unproductive fantasy but on the other hand we can also say, we can also even assert, that daydreams are very often, or at least sometimes, at least occasionally, blueprints of the future. We may even say that today's dream, in some cases, may be tomorrow's reality. And if we look at the history of the world, at the history of culture, or the history of religions, history of the arts, history of philosophy, we very often find that the greatest men of the past, the greatest men and the greatest women too are sometimes, or have sometimes been, the greatest dreamers. If we go back to the days of ancient Greece, if we think, say, of someone like Plato, surely one of the greatest men who have ever lived, we find that Plato too dreamed his dreams. And the greatest of his dreams, the most famous of his dreams is of course the *Republic*, that great classic, that great dialogue in twelve books where Plato dreams his dream of the ideal society, the *Republic*, a society based upon truth and upon justice. In the same way if we come to other traditions, other cultures, other classics, we find similarly, say, the dream or the vision of the Bible, the last book of the Bible, that is to say the book of Revelations where we have this wonderful, even this marvellous vision of the new Jerusalem, with its walls made of precious and semi-precious stones and all the rest of it, with a great mythical and archetypal significance.

And so it is down the ages, we may say. Coming nearer to our own times, there's Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and so on right down to our own days with Mr H.G. Wells's *Men like Gods* and so on. So all of these, whether it's Plato's *Republic* or More's *Utopia* and so on, were all as it were daydreams of these great thinkers, these great dreamers. Daydreams of an ideal society, daydreams of a world transfigured and transformed. So going even farther afield, going to the East, turning to Buddhism, we may say that Buddhism too has its daydreams. Buddhism's daydream of the ideal society is found, we may say, in its conception, its vision of the Pure Land or the Happy Land described in some of the great Mahayana sutras. The Pure Land or the Happy Land, especially as taught by the Shin Schools of Japanese Buddhism, is a place, a world, a sphere, if you like a plane of existence, where there is no pain, where there is no suffering, where there's no misery, no separation, no bereavement, no loss of any kind. It's a place where there is no old age, where there's no sickness, and where above all there is no death. A place of perfect peace, a place where there's no conflict, no war, no battle, not even any misunderstanding, it's as perfect and as happy as that. And also these great Mahayana sutras tell us the Pure Land or the Happy Land is a place where there is no distinction of sex, no distinction of male and female, where also no one has to do any work, where it's a lifetime of perpetual leisure, no one has to toil, no one has to go to the office every morning, and so on. Food and clothing just appear of their own accord, even better than the welfare state! The food comes dropping down from trees and clothes just appear miraculously upon you whenever and wherever you need them. No one has anything to do in the Pure Land or the Happy Land except to sit on his - or I shouldn't really say his, but I can't very well say its - golden or purple or blue lotus and just sit at the feet of the Buddha and just learn about, just study Buddhism. In the Happy Land, in the Pure Land, we are told, no one

has anything to do except just this. And of course to crown it all, especially from our English point of view, we may add, we're told that in the Pure Land, in the Happy Land, the weather is always perfect.

So this is Buddhism's dream, or Buddhism's daydream, or if you like its *vision* of an ideal society and an ideal world. But you may of course be feeling, you may be thinking that this is all rather remote, this is all rather ideal, this is all rather archetypal, this is all rather mythological - it doesn't concern us very much. But we should also remember that though upon occasion Buddhism does dream and dream very beautifully, it isn't content merely to dream. We may say that on the whole the approach of Buddhism, of the Buddha's teaching to all these questions, is very sane, is very practical, is also realistic. So Buddhism isn't content to dream about the ideal society of the future or about some ideal world on some other plane. It tries to create also the ideal society, the ideal community if you like, here and now, on this earth. It tries therefore to transform, it tries to transfigure this society and this world into the image of the future, into the image of the ideal. And it does this in a number of different ways. And one of the ways in which it does this, one of the ways in which it tries to transform, to transfigure, this world and this society is with the help of its teaching of what we call Right Livelihood.

Now Right Livelihood is the fifth step of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. And as most of you know, especially those who have been coming here faithfully week by week, we are at present in this course of talks studying this very path, the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. And every week of course we're directing our attention to one step or one stage or one aspect of that great path.

Now before proceeding with the present stage, the stage of Right Livelihood, let us just try to see, let us just try to understand this step or this stage in the context of the total path. And of course for those who have been following week by week this should be quite easy, or at least not very difficult. You'll remember of course that the first stage, which is the stage of Perfect Vision, consists in a sort of initial insight into the nature of existence, seeing a little deeper than people usually see, seeing a little further, seeing more truly, having at least a glimpse, a vision of Reality. This is not just an intellectual understanding, this Perfect Vision, but primarily a sort of spiritual experience. And this first step or first stage of Perfect Vision by itself - just this one step or one stage - constitutes what we also call the Path of Vision, the first of the two great sections in which the whole Eightfold Path is divided. Now Perfect Vision as it were descends into and transforms different aspects of our being. That is to say we have this vision, we have this glimpse of Reality, and this alters our whole outlook, our whole way of seeing things, our whole way of doing things. And this altered outlook gradually communicates itself to different aspects of our being so that little by little, aspect by aspect, we are gradually transformed from top to bottom. And this process of transformation is represented by all the remaining seven stages of the path which are collectively known as the Path of Transformation. The Path of Vision consisting of the first step only; the Path of Transformation consisting of all the rest. The second step or the second stage of the Eightfold Path which is Perfect Emotion represents the transformation of our entire emotional life. Perfect Speech, the third stage, represents the transformation of our communication with one another, and Perfect Action, the fourth stage, represents the transformation of our ordinary everyday behaviour.

So today we come to Right Livelihood, or rather Perfect Livelihood, or in Sanskrits *samyak ajiva*, which is the fifth step or the fifth stage or the fifth aspect. And we are of course still on the Path of Transformation. We're concerned with the transformation of yet another aspect of ourselves, our total being and our total life. But this time with this step or with this stage, though we're also concerned with the transformation of an aspect of ourselves as before, this time there's a difference, a very great, a very important difference. So far as we have come along this Eightfold Path we've been concerned with the transformation of ourselves individually, with our own individual, separate life. But with this step or with this stage - Right Livelihood - we are concerned with the transformation of the collective life, not just the individual life but the collective life, the life of the community, the life of society, if you like even the life of the state. Now this is not an aspect of Buddhism which is usually very much emphasised, in fact sometimes it's rather played down. But it is very definitely a part of the total teaching - this idea that we should try to transform also not just our individual lives but the community, society at large, the world, the state.

Now a collective life or collective existence has various aspects and we may say that there are three principal aspects. There's the strictly social aspect, there's also the political aspect, and there is the economic aspect, and Buddhism has teachings which cover all these three aspects. For instance, if we look at the social side we find that Buddhism has various social teachings especially in the context of ancient Indian life - we find that the Buddha was not at all in favour of the dominant feature of social life in India at his time, that is to say the caste system, the system of hereditary caste which is still very much a feature of the social scene in India today. According to that system your position in society, your rank in society, was dependent upon your birth. If you were the son of a brahmin you were a brahmin, if you were the son of a trader you were a trader and you couldn't get away from that. And even now in India this system is very very strong and all-pervasive, we may say, especially in the villages, where it has a very stultifying effect upon human initiative generally. So the Buddha in contradistinction to this teaching or tradition of hereditary caste, said very clearly and very emphatically that the criterion of a man's position and place in society should be not birth but instead worth. And this he very strongly emphasised. So this

is just an example of Buddhism's teaching on the social side. In the same way we find that, politically speaking, Buddhism upholds or rather upheld in ancient times the ideal of what it called the *dharmaraja*. There are a number of suttas devoted to this topic. *Dharma* of course means truth, righteousness, reality. *Raja* means the King or even the government. So the ideal of *dharmaraja* really represents the ideal of the government of righteousness, the ideal that even in political life, political affairs, ethical and spiritual considerations and values must be supreme, must be paramount; the idea that politics shouldn't be just a cockpit as it were of jockeying interests, rival interests, rival factions, not just a question of manipulation and stringpulling, but that one should try to see what ethical, what spiritual principles are involved and apply them even in one's political life and political affairs. And of course this political ideal or this political teaching of Buddhism received in India its greatest exemplification in the case of the great Emperor Ashoka. Ashoka was a great ruler, as some of you know, of the Maurya dynasty, he lived about two hundred years after the Buddha. And he had inherited from his father the Kingdom of Magadha which he proceeded to expand, and he promptly swallowed up nearly all the other states in India. He had a series of sort of mopping-up operations and the state of Magadha increased to dimensions which exceeded even those of present-day India and Pakistan. But the last state which was left for Ashoka to subdue, in the days before he became a Buddhist, was the state of Kalinga on the east coast, roughly corresponding to the modern state of Bihar. So we are told, and Ashoka has recorded these facts in his own rock edicts, which still survive, hundreds of thousands of people were slaughtered and hundreds of thousands of people were made homeless in this war and Ashoka saw all this. He saw and he realised the misery of war, the misery which was brought about by his own conquest, and he said himself in his own words, his own language, in his rock edicts which we can read even today, that remorse and sorrow overcame him when he saw the misery which war had inflicted, when he saw all the dead, and when he saw the homeless and the widows and the orphans then great remorse and sorrow overcame him. So he gave up this career of conquest. And possibly it's the only example in history of a great conqueror who stopped as it were in mid-career because he realised the moral wickedness of it all. He just stopped. And he completely reversed. Before this sort of conversion he was known as Chandashoka which means the fierce or the wicked Ashoka but afterwards he was known as Dharmashoka which means the good or the righteous Ashoka, and from that day onwards he seems to have considered himself the father of his people. Of course he didn't give up his own political power but he very definitely regarded himself as the servant of the people. And he quite explicitly proclaimed as his ideal the service of those whom he was supposed to be governing and he upheld their welfare and their good as the major objective of his administration, his government and his policy. So Ashoka is a very conspicuous example - perhaps the only real example in Indian history - of someone who tries to apply Buddhist teachings directly to political life. We know of course that Ashoka gave great support to Buddhism, he dispatched missionaries in all directions and not only to different parts of the East, not only to India, but even to Alexandria, even to Palestine and even to Greece. So this is just an example; unfortunately Buddhist rulers or nominally Buddhist rulers haven't always followed the example of the Emperor Ashoka. But Ashoka does very much deserve credit for having tried to apply very practically the political teachings of the Buddha, or rather to apply the teachings of the Buddha on the political plane or the political level. Incidentally, some of you may know, some of you may have read H.G. Wells' very moving tribute to Ashoka in his *Short History of the World*. And he says there that amongst all the hundreds and the thousands of names of royal highnesses and serene highnesses which adorn the pages of history the name of Ashoka shines and shines alone, a star. So this is the judgement, this is the tribute of H.G. Wells to Ashoka. Because Ashoka tried to apply in the political life of India, in his own day-to-day administration and government, the great moral and spiritual principles of the Buddha's teaching.

So much for the political aspect of our collective existence or Buddhism's teachings about that political aspect. Now the other aspect of course is the economic aspect of our collective existence, and so far as that aspect is concerned Buddhism teaches Right Livelihood. So in other words we may say that Buddhism teaches the complete transformation in the light of that initial, that original, Perfect Vision of our whole collective, no less than our whole individual, life. In other words Buddhism stands for the creation of an ideal society as well as the creation of an ideal individual.

After all we are all parts of society, all members one of another, and it's very difficult for us to change ourselves while society remains unchanged. The Indians have a proverb that you can't work in the kitchen without getting a bit of soot on you. Of course the conditions in which that proverb originated didn't envisage electricity or gas or anything of that sort. In India cooking is still a very messy affair with charcoal and things like that. So you can't live and work in the kitchen without getting a bit of soot on you, and in the same way you cannot live and work in a corrupt, a basically unethical society without to some extent being besmirched by that. So even in the interests of one's own individual moral and spiritual life one has to make or try to make some effort to transform the society in the midst of which one lives. It's all very well to talk about the lotus blooming in the midst of the mire but it's very difficult to be a lotus when the mire is particularly nasty or particularly all-pervasive. One has to make some effort to transform the society and the world in the midst of which one lives. Otherwise it is very difficult indeed to transform oneself. Now at this point a sort of question arises. We've seen that our collective existence has three principal aspects. There's a social aspect, there's a political aspect, there's an economic aspect. But the fifth step or the fifth stage of the Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say Perfect Livelihood, represents only *one* of these three aspects, that is to say the economic. So why is this? Assuming that the fifth step of the Noble Eightfold Path does

deal with our collective existence why does it deal only with *one* aspect of that collective existence, why only with the economic? - not with the political, not with the social, why are these other two aspects of our collective existence not included in the path? Perfect Livelihood, that's right but why not perfect citizenship, or why not perfect administration, if the path is also concerned with our collective existence? Why only Right Livelihood? Well the explanation may be found or partly found in the conditions obtaining in India at the time of the Buddha. On the social side we may say that life was comparatively simple, comparatively unorganised, luckily, and that apart from the caste system there wasn't very much in the social scene, in the Buddha's day in India, which needed revision or correction. And so far as the political aspect is concerned we may recollect that the Buddha taught and that Buddhism was propagated mainly in areas where monarchy was the only existing form of government, which meant that ordinary people had little if any share in the government or in political life and activity. So in those days there was not much point in asking people in general to practise perfect government or perfect administration or even perfect citizenship when they had very little say and very little share in these matters anyhow. But however that may have been, undoubtedly everybody had to work. They may not have had a vote, they may not have had any say in the administration, they may not have known always what the King was up to, but at least they all or practically all had to work. They all had to earn a living. So the question of right livelihood or Perfect Livelihood was one which concerned everybody even in the Buddha's day. And for this reason, no doubt, Perfect Livelihood was included in the Noble Eightfold Path and made a part of it. We might even sort of hazard a speculation here, we might even suggest that the Buddha himself felt that the economic aspect of our collective existence was even more basic than either the social or the political, and therefore for this reason also he included Right Livelihood, representing the economic aspect of our collective existence, in the Noble Eightfold Path. We do know quite definitely from the Buddhist scriptures and other sources that in the days of the Buddha, during the Buddha's lifetime, trade and business, finance, were all developing rapidly. And the Buddha himself could not have been unaware of this. We know that quite a number of the Buddha's own closest lay disciples were what we would call merchant bankers who had all sorts of business connections and who carried on business and various financial operations on an international scale even into Babylon and Sumeria, and so on. So perhaps also for this reason the Buddha included Perfect Livelihood in his scheme of the Noble Eightfold Path.

So having understood all this by way as it were of preliminary, a rather lengthy preliminary or preamble, let us now try to understand in a little detail what Perfect Livelihood really is. We've understood the reason or at least some of the main reasons for its inclusion in the path. So now let us try to investigate what Perfect Livelihood itself is. But in so doing we shouldn't forget that this stage of the path, Perfect Livelihood, stands for the transformation of our whole collective existence, our whole social life, our whole communal life, and not just for the economic aspect itself. In other words this step or this stage or aspect of the path stands for the creation of an ideal society. That is to say a society within the context of which it is easier for us to follow the path, one within which when we follow the path we are not going against everything all the time as tends to be the case perhaps at present.

Now I've said that the Buddha included Perfect Livelihood in the Noble Eightfold Path because everybody had to work, everybody had to earn a living. And this of course still holds good. It was true in the Buddha's day in India 2,500 years ago, it's still true today, 2,500 years later, we still have to work, we still have to earn a living, and we still have to go and do the nine to five routine and so on. In fact we might even go so far as to say that it's even truer now than it was 2,500 years ago that we have to work, because the greater part of our waking life is spent in fact earning a living. We spend more time on this than on anything else with the possible exception of sleep which we can't really count. In the Buddha's day at least, we may say, people had the rainy season off. You probably know that in India there are three main seasons. There's a hot season and after that there's a dry season, a bit cold, and after that there's a rainy season. So during the rainy season, the monsoon rains fall, you can't do anything, you can't even work, so everybody has the whole monsoon off - that means three or four months, not weeks, months - they don't do anything, maybe not even a stroke of work. So that's how it was in the Buddha's day and that's still how it is in India even now. During the rainy season nobody does any work, at least not in the countryside and not in the villages. We don't have that sort of advantage, we don't have any sort of rainy season - we just get two weeks at the seaside, every year. So one's livelihood, something which one spends the greater part of one's waking life doing, obviously will have a great effect on the mind. I don't think we always realise this: that if you're doing something for four, five, six, seven, eight hours a day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year for twenty, thirty, forty years, it isn't surprising if it leaves a little mark on you, to say the least. Now we don't usually, as I say, realise this. But it's something about which we should reflect, something which we should consider - the effect on us which our working life has. In the old days - I won't say the good old days, but certainly in the old days - one could recognise the followers of certain trades by the physical effects of following those trades. For instance the dyer always had hands deeply stained with dye, all red and blue. You knew a man was a dyer from the state of his hands. All day his hands were in the dye, in the vats, and he couldn't get them clean, he didn't even try to. So in the course of years his hands were deep red, blue, purple, green and so on. So when you met him you knew at once he was a dyer. And the same with a tailor. A tailor would be bent, stooping over his cloth, over his stitching, all day, sometimes half the night. A tailor usually got a hump in the end and you could recognise a tailor by his hump. And even now you can often recognise someone who works in an office and sits at a desk all day by his rounded shoulders and general unathletic appearance and you know he's a clerk and he works in an office of one kind or

another. So these are just physical effects, physical manifestations, physical deformations, we may say, but there's an even greater effect on the mind. The mind may be even more badly, even more seriously, deformed. The effects may not be all that visible, all that easy to see, but they are there. Just as in the case of that miraculous transformation of the picture of Dorian Grey. Every time he performed a wicked or a sinful action his own face wasn't affected but the face of the portrait was, until in the end the portrait became a veritable picture of evil. So all the while that effect is there, little by little the change, the transformation is taking place. Your work, something which you're doing every day, something which you're engaged in, something which you are, as it were, up to your neck in, in the course of weeks, months, years, decades, this will have a great, a tremendous, even a terrible effect upon your mind, very often without your knowing it. Just think, just pause and consider what, for instance, must be the mental state, say, of a stockbroker who's concerned all the time with stocks, shares, money, gold, all the time - who is mentally preoccupied day, sometimes night, with these things - who might have to pick up the telephone in the middle of the night because there's some change in the market. Just think what his mental state is when year after year, decade after decade, he is thinking most of the time about things of this sort. And what about the mental state of a book-maker, just think about that. That must also be pretty terrible. Or think, to take an even more extreme example, what must be the mental state of a man who works in a slaughterhouse? After all don't let's close our eyes to the fact there are hundreds if not thousands of slaughterhouses in this country, and tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands all over the world. Now if we were to be asked here and now to take a knife and cut the throat of a cat, or even to stamp on a rat or a mouse, most of us could not do it. But suppose you had to do it, and suppose you had to do it twenty and thirty times a day, supposing you had to cut the throat of a sheep, or to stun and kill a cow or a bull, twenty or thirty times a day, year after year, what would be then your mental state? And this is the occupation, this is the livelihood of some people, of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people in this world today.

I remember in this connection the experience of an Australian Buddhist monk whom I knew. He told me once that he had made a study of slaughterhouses in Australia and of the people who worked in them. And he found that there was among men working in slaughterhouses - for some reason or other you never hear of women working in slaughterhouses - but among men working in slaughterhouses there was a very high percentage of insanity. And he said it was about two thirds, about sixty or sixty-six percent. And he said that he found, he discovered, that people working in slaughterhouses in Australia usually lasted only two years. After two years human nature couldn't stand it any more - they reached a point in most cases of psychological unbalance, almost derangement, and they could not carry on. Now we shouldn't think that this is something which doesn't concern us, it does concern us. We are directly, morally, involved because we, by our demand, create the need for things of this sort. We by our demand, require or necessitate that people should earn their living in this way and degrade themselves in fact in this way.

So with the help of a few examples of this sort, admittedly rather extreme ones, we can perhaps begin to see the importance of Right or Perfect Livelihood. We can perhaps begin to appreciate that without some measure of Right or Perfect Livelihood we can in fact make very little spiritual progress indeed. You can hardly imagine your slaughterhouse man coming once a week and meditating in the meditation class. It wouldn't do him any good even if he could sit there. And I think I could guarantee that if any such person did come and did sit in the meditation class, before many weeks had passed in the course of his meditation he'd be having very uncomfortable and very horrible visions of at least some of all those living beings that he had slaughtered, and he would be very, very, seriously disturbed indeed.

Now English Buddhists, Buddhists in this country, I'm glad to say, have begun to realise the importance of Perfect Livelihood, have begun to realise that unless to some extent at least one conforms to this ideal of Perfect Livelihood, very little spiritual progress can in fact be made. Among the ranks of our English Buddhist friends I do know of several cases of people who have changed their jobs, sometimes at considerable sacrifice to themselves, financial sacrifice and so on, simply for ethical reasons - because they felt that what they were doing, the way in which they were earning money, making a living, was inconsistent with their profession of Buddhism, inconsistent with their going for Refuge. And this I would say is a very healthy sort of development indeed - people's effort, people's attempt to practise Right Livelihood and to give up even a good livelihood when it seems morally, ethically, wrong. Formerly we know in this country, until even very recently in this country, in the West generally perhaps, interest in Buddhism was merely intellectual. People just went on living as before, doing whatever they were doing before and some sort of interest in or some sort of study of Buddhism was added on to that. And there was very little if any attempt to change their lives according to Buddhist ethical and spiritual principles, and least of all an attempt to change their lives in this economic sphere.

Now in the Buddhist scriptures the Buddha has quite a lot to say about Perfect Livelihood but it's usually explained in quite simple terms. In the first place it's explained in terms of abstention from wrong livelihood, the negative coming before the positive. And various professions, various specific ways of earning a living, are as it were - I won't say prohibited, but definitely strongly discouraged. And at the top of the list there comes earning a living by trafficking in living beings, whether human or animal. This of course rules out the slave trade - two thousand and

more years before Abraham Lincoln, rules that out, and it also rules out dealing in animals for purposes of slaughter. It rules out too the profession of a butcher, a seller of meat and so on. This is all quite plain, simple and obvious. But also on the list is the purveying of poison. In the days of the Buddha of course, people dealt in poison just as they did in Renaissance Italy, for instance, and if you had an enemy, someone that you wanted to get rid of, you could pay a quiet visit to this purveyor of poison, and you could buy a little dose and drop it in wine or drop it in - there wasn't any tea in those days, drop it in their water and that would be that. And in the Buddha's day evidently some people made a living by purveying poisons. Well we can think of all sorts of modern analogies. I don't think I need to pursue those very closely. And in the same way selling anything which stupefies the mind, which decreases awareness, any drug or drink of this sort, is also a profession which is discouraged.

Perhaps of even greater interest is the Buddha's discouragement, if not even prohibition, of any kind of dealing in weapons of war or armaments. He said if you are a follower of my teaching, if you've taken the refuges, if you consider yourself a Buddhist, you cannot possibly earn your living by manufacturing or by selling, or in any other way dealing with weapons of war, instruments of killing, instruments which were used to take the lives of other living beings. And of course in the Buddha's day that was a very simple matter - it meant that you shouldn't manufacture bows and arrows or swords or spears or any other lethal weapon. But that was 2,500 years ago and we've progressed a very great deal since then, we've become much more civilised, much more cultured, and we can now kill much more efficiently, much more effectively. Nowadays of course we have atom bombs and hydrogen bombs and cobalt bombs and all the rest of it. But certainly we may say the Buddha's principle of Right Livelihood holds good here too. If you've got a few shares in some corporation which is manufacturing or helping to manufacture the Bomb, you are involved and to that extent you are involved in wrong livelihood from the Buddhist point of view. We need not go into that, I think this is sufficiently obvious without too much labouring of the point.

Now the Buddha also expresses in different places a rather strong disapproval of various other trades which were rather prevalent, rather common in the India of his day, and still are. For instance fortune-telling, palmistry, consulting the tea-leaves and things like that, for money. This is also strongly discouraged, and so is astrology and divination. But we find, you see, that such are the chances of history that in all the Buddhist countries most of the Buddhist monks, I'm sorry to say, do make money in this way - by telling fortunes and consulting the stars for their clients, and by divination and so on. But the Buddha very definitely has discouraged it and said it is a wrong mode of livelihood. You'll also be interested to hear, I think, that the Buddha - I hope I'm not giving the impression that the Buddha was a rather negative sort of person but one has to go through the negative to the positive - the Buddha also disapproved of actors, and I expect actresses too. And there's a rather interesting story, illustrative story, in the scriptures in this connection. We're told that one day a certain, the translation says stage manager or impresario, you know the type, came to the Buddha and he said 'Lord I'm an actor', he was apparently rather pleased with himself, 'I'm a stage manager, I produce shows, I make people laugh.' So the Buddha said, 'Yes'. And he said, 'We've got a tradition, we stage people, we stage folk, that when we die we go to a heaven called the heaven of the laughing gods because we make people laugh, so when we die we join the laughing gods.' So he said, 'You're supposed to be Enlightened. I want to ask you' - it sounds just like someone interviewing you on the television, doesn't it? - 'I want to ask you whether this is true, whether this is so, whether actors when they die do go to the heaven of the laughing gods?' So the Buddha said, 'Please don't ask me this question.' But Talaputa - that was his name - he persisted. So a second time the Buddha said, 'Please don't ask me this question, it's not good that you should know.' But a third time Talaputa put this question, very persistent you see. So the Buddha's rule or the Buddha's tradition was that if someone asked him even unto a third time, whatever the question, however terrible the answer might be, he answered the question. So he said to Talaputa, 'Far from going to the heaven of the laughing gods when you die, you and other actors like you will go straight to hell.' So poor Talaputa was taken aback by this, after all it was straight from the Buddha's own mouth, so he trembled and he said, 'Well, why, Lord is this?' So the Buddha said, 'Well you yourself, overcome by craving, by your acting, by your performing, you increase the craving of other people. Yourself overcome by anger and hatred, by your acting, by your performances, you increase the anger of other people. And you're so overcome by infatuation and bewilderment and mental confusion and unawareness, by your acting, by your performances you increase these states in other people. Not only are you degraded yourself, you degrade others.' So he said, 'The fate of one who degrades both himself and others, the fate of such a person after death cannot be anything but a state of suffering.' So this is what the Buddha said to Talaputa. It's very clear the sort of acting, the sort of dramatic performance he was talking about. I personally don't believe that these words of the Buddha would apply, say, to Greek tragedy, the effect of which is cathartic, which is ethical, which is spiritual. But certainly it would apply to the sort of performance that Talaputa was in the habit of giving, and I suggest it would apply to a very great deal of modern entertainment, to modern actors and modern actresses. One should consider that by their acting, by their performances, they have in many cases an effect upon others which is degrading.

Now all this, what we've heard about Right Livelihood, Perfect Livelihood in the sense of abstaining from wrong livelihood, so far is quite clear, the principle which emerges is quite clear. But modern life, we may say, is much more complicated than life in the days of the Buddha - so I personally feel that this whole question, this whole

subject of Right Livelihood or Perfect Livelihood, needs reconsideration, if not restatement in a more modern context. We can consider this Perfect Livelihood under various headings. First of all of course there's the question of one's actual occupation, and I think we can divide occupations into various categories. First of all those which are positively wrong, livelihoods which can't possibly be right, like for instance that extreme case I gave - that of the man working in the slaughterhouse, this couldn't be right under any circumstances. And secondly, second category - those which are not usually considered wrong, or which are not wrong in any sort of blatant or flagrant way but which certainly increase people's greed - like for instance the advertising industry or the production of luxury goods which people don't really want but which they have to be tempted into thinking that they not only want but which they absolutely need. And then thirdly one can say there's a group of occupations which can constitute Perfect Livelihood if one makes an effort. Suppose you're working as a clerk in an office in some firm which is manufacturing some quite good and necessary article, say bread - then obviously if you do your work honestly, you're conscientious, you arrive on time and you don't go earlier than you should and you don't take too many hours off for lunch, and if you don't do things to the accounts, you can make that occupation a Right Livelihood - if not a Perfect Right Livelihood at least it's a right one. So this is the third group or the third category. But there's another category I'd like to suggest or to introduce and that is those occupations which don't involve undue mental strain. I think this is quite important, especially nowadays, and especially for those Buddhists who want to meditate. Your means of livelihood may not be positively, ethically wrong, it may not be breaking the precepts, but if it involves so much mental strain that you become tense, you can't meditate, then as a Buddhist you have to consider your position and try to find some work which is more relaxing or less demanding in this way.

Then we can also think of Right Livelihood or Perfect Livelihood in the sense of vocation. This sort of livelihood is the best of all, but it's very rare and we may define a vocation as a livelihood which is directly related to what one considers to be of ultimate importance in one's life. This of course will be different for different people. One can think of the profession, say, of medicine or teaching. Someone might feel they want to be a nurse because they want to relieve human suffering and this directly links up, of course, obviously with Buddhism. And then again there are the arts, the various creative activities. These also, if one follows them in a creative spirit, if one doesn't commercialise them for instance, these can be real vocations, and Perfect Livelihood in the very best sense. And of course in this question of Perfect Livelihood in the sense of vocation, here there's no distinction, no difference between one's work and one's play. One so much enjoys one's work, one is so immersed in it, it's something one really wants to do that you don't mind even if you spend the whole of your waking life doing it. This is of course a very ideal state and one which unfortunately very few people, due to no fault of their own usually, are able to achieve.

Now I want to say a few words also about the question of time. I mentioned a little while ago that most people have to spend most of their waking lives working, earning a living. So I want to raise this question of how much time should one really devote to one's livelihood? Now the answer I'm going to give to this question may surprise some people, even shock others - how much time should one devote to one's livelihood? And I would say in reply - as little as possible.

When I said this some time ago, a couple of years ago in another meeting somewhere in London, one old gentleman whom I knew was very, very shocked. And he reproached me afterwards, he took me to task afterwards, and he said, 'Fancy saying a thing like that in a lecture publicly with all those young people there! You're encouraging them to just behave as ...' - well he said a few rude words at that stage which I won't repeat. But I am aware that when I say this, I am of course speaking especially to Buddhists and quite unashamedly and unrepentantly especially speaking to the young ones; as the old have got very little choice. They are in it, in many cases, up to their necks, it's too late now, they won't get out - it's very difficult to get out the other side of forty. But I would suggest to the younger people and those whose careers, whose lives, are still in the formative stage that in this connection they should make just enough money to live on, and when I say live on I mean live very simply, you know just one or two cars! - and devote the rest of their time to Buddhism - to the study of the scriptures, to meditation, helping to run, to conduct the Buddhist movement and so on. And they can do this in two ways, or one of two ways: either have a regular part-time job which brings in enough money to live, and spend the rest of their time for Buddhism, or if they can, and this isn't very easy, I know but some people do do it, I know this too - work, say, for six months and then be off for six months, maintaining and supporting oneself of course out of what one has earned during the six months, and spend the greater part of one's time meditating and studying and so forth. It does of course mean cutting down one's needs, or rather cutting down one's wants, but it's surprising how much one can cut down if one really makes up one's mind to do so. And this is of course not only for oneself but it's also good for Buddhism, because the movement is expanding as we all know and we certainly need more people, and we need what we might describe - and I hope that here we don't go too much astray from tradition - we need really people who will be sort of part-time monks as it were. And we do hope in our own Western Buddhist Order, which is now in process of formation, we do hope to have a category of this sort - intermediate as it were between the ordinary lay person fully immersed in the mire of the *samsara*, just doing his best to bloom as a lotus in the midst of it all, and on the other hand one who is committed permanently, full time, as for instance the monk is - in between these two extreme categories as it were, we do need, we do want to have people who've got one foot in

one world as it were and one foot in the other and act as a sort of bridge between the two. A category of this sort in the modern world, very definitely, I feel, has its place. So this is just a suggestion thrown out for the benefit especially of the younger people among you, one or two of whom I notice are pricking up their ears in a very marked manner.

So much for Perfect Livelihood. Perfect Livelihood, as we emphasised at the beginning, represents essentially the transformation, in the light of Perfect Vision, our vision or at least our glimpse of reality, transformation of our entire collective existence, transformation of the society, the community in which we live and so on. Right or Perfect Livelihood itself relates primarily to the economic aspect of existence, but we should not forget that the social and political aspects of our collective existence have also to be transformed. So therefore we may say that this conception of Perfect Livelihood, this fifth step of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, represents essentially the need to create an ideal society. After all we are *in* society and we cannot get away from it very much or for very long. We may go into retreat centres for a week or two or even a month, even six months if we're lucky, but we have to come back eventually, we have to live in the world at least to some extent, even the luckiest of us. So we have also to transform this world as part of the job of transforming ourselves.

Now one last word just before I close. I mentioned just a few minutes ago the Western Buddhist Order which is now in process of formation. And this introduces the whole question of what we call in Buddhism the Sangha or the Spiritual Community. There are a number of different ways of looking at the Sangha, the Spiritual Community, I'm not going into all of them now, I just want to sound one particular note in this connection which seems particularly relevant here. The Sangha, the Spiritual Community, among other things, represents, we may say, or is, we may say, the ideal society on a very small scale.

It's a sort of anticipation in miniature of what society as a whole could be like later on in the course of if you like evolution or human progress, or whatever else one might like to call it. Our own small spiritual community, our own small Sangha, our own small Order, represents a society or community fully based upon ethical and spiritual principles. In other words it isn't just a society in the sense of an organisation, it is a real community based, as I've said, upon ethical and spiritual principles. This is how it differs from an organisation. Also we may say it differs on account of the degree of participation and commitment of individual members. But one thing we must stress, and one thing we must emphasise above all, is that within such a Sangha, within such a spiritual community, what is of the utmost importance, more important perhaps than anything else, is the right relationships between or among the various members and friends. And this is one of the things which we stress and which we emphasise very, very much indeed. We feel that if there is to be any real, any genuine, Buddhist movement in this country, as we hope eventually there will be, it can only spring out of, it can only grow out of, a community of people who are ethically and spiritually and psychologically and in every way really in contact and really in communication with one another, and who are not just fellow members but who are even friends and perhaps even related more deeply than that in a spiritual sense on the spiritual plane. So here also we can think of yet another aspect of the ideal society. We should feel that our own small group, our own Spiritual Community, our own Sangha, our own Order, is just an anticipation on a very small scale of the ideal society of the future: a society in which Right Livelihood, Perfect Livelihood, is practised to the full as unfortunately it is not practised in the world at large today.

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