

Lecture 169: the Buddha's Victory - Edited Version

For a Buddhist, the highest values of existence are incarnated in three great ideals. Firstly, there is the ideal of Enlightenment, the ideal of the perfectly developed human being. Secondly, there is the ideal of the path to Enlightenment, the sum total of all the principles, practices, and teachings that help the individual human being in the course of his or her quest for spiritual perfection. Thirdly, there is the ideal of fellowship in pursuing the way to Enlightenment. By this is meant the deriving of encouragement, help, inspiration, and stimulus, from other individuals who are also trying to perfect themselves. In traditional terms, these three great ideals are embodied in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

The Buddha embodies the ideal of Enlightenment. The word Buddha means 'the Enlightened One', humanity perfected. The Dhamma, the truth, doctrine, or teaching of the Buddha, embodies the path. The Sangha, the spiritual community of those who follow the path and study and practise the teaching, embodies the fellowship of those treading the Way.

These three are known in traditional Buddhist terms as the Three Jewels. They are also known as the Three Refuges or the Triple Gem, or even, in the Chinese tradition, as the Three Treasures. Between them they represent the highest values and ideals of Buddhism. However widely Buddhism has spread over the centuries, however richly it has developed in various ways, everything relates to one or another of these three, or to all of them jointly. Anything that is not connected with the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Sangha, has no real connection with Buddhism at all.

Like all spiritual traditions Buddhism has two aspects: a 'popular' aspect, the aspect of ordinary, everyday practice and observance, and a 'philosophical' aspect, which is concerned with the deeper understanding of the teaching. The popular aspect includes such things as festivals and celebrations. If we look at the Buddhist calendar we see that Buddhism has quite a large number of festivals and celebrations of various kinds. These vary a little from one part of the Buddhist world to another, but the most important are common to all parts of the Buddhist world. Of all these festivals the three most important are all associated with the Three Jewels.

Jewels are generally considered to be the most precious of all material things, while the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are considered to be the most precious of all non-material things. Because they are so precious, we rejoice to have them; they give meaning and purpose to our lives, and give orientation to everything we do.

But it is not easy to rejoice all the time, or even to be aware of our good fortune all the time. Tradition has therefore set aside these three days in the year--all full moon days--on which we make a special effort to remember and rejoice in the Three Jewels. Thus on the full moon day of May we rejoice in the Buddha jewel, on the full moon day of July we rejoice in the Dhamma jewel, and on the full moon day of November we rejoice in the Sangha jewel. The fact that these festivals fall on full moon days, incidentally, is not accidental. It indicates our need to maintain a harmony between ourselves and nature. It reminds us that however far we progress along the path of the 'higher evolution', we must not lose contact with the recurrent rhythms of the 'lower evolution'.

Today is the day on which we rejoice in the Buddha jewel. In particular this means that it is the day on which we rejoice in the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment, rejoice in what it was that actually made the Buddha a Buddha.

We usually call this day Buddha Day, but it is sometimes known as Wesak. Wesak, a Sinhalese word, is actually a corruption of the Indian word Vaishaka, which is in turn short for Vaishaka purnima, which means 'the full moon day of April-to-May'. In India, especially, Buddha Day is often referred to as Buddha jayanti, jayanti coming from the word jaya, meaning 'victory'. Buddha jayanti therefore means the celebration of the 'Buddha's victory'. But what is this victory?

Victory usually implies victory over someone or something. Who or what, then, could this have been in the Buddha's case? The answer is simple: the Buddha conquered Mara, the 'Evil One', and after conquering Mara, attained Enlightenment. In a sense, his conquest of Mara, his Mara-vijaya as it is called, was his attainment of Enlightenment.

It is possible that you have already encountered descriptions of the episode of the conquest of Mara. Perhaps you have seen it depicted in Buddhist art. If so, you will have seen the Buddha-to-be sitting on a heap of kusa grass beneath the spreading branches of the ficus religiosa, or sacred fig tree--subsequently

known, in honour of the Buddha, as the Bodhi tree, or 'tree of Enlightenment'. He is surrounded on all sides by thousands of fearsome figures, all horribly misshapen and deformed. Some of them are whirling enormous clubs, some are spitting fire; some are in the act of hurling great rocks, even whole mountains that they have torn up by the roots; some again are discharging arrows. These are the forces of Mara. Mara himself stands to one side directing his terrible army in its onslaught on the Buddha. But the Buddha himself takes no notice. He is completely surrounded by an aura of golden light. As soon as the various missiles touch this aura they turn into flowers and fall to the ground at the Buddha's feet as though in unintentional worship. The Buddha is undisturbed and carries on meditating. He does not take any notice even when Mara summons his three daughters and orders them to dance in the most seductive manner. So Mara retires defeated, his forces disappear, and his three daughters withdraw in confusion. The Buddha is left alone beneath the Bodhi tree on his heap of kusa grass, and carries on meditating. Sitting there in that way he attains Enlightenment.

Such is the well known episode. But like other well known episodes in the Buddha's life it is open to misunderstanding. We might of course realize that the episode is symbolic, but we may not understand that the episode of the Mara-vijaya was not the only episode of its kind to occur in the Buddha's life; may not understand that this was not the Buddha's only victory.

Far from being his only victory the Mara-vijaya represented the culmination of an entire series of victories. This is only to be expected, because spiritual life is like that. One does not develop the fullness of wisdom all at once or the fullness of compassion all at once. One does not develop the fullness of energy and heroism necessary to defeat Mara and his forces all at once. One does not develop any spiritual quality all at once; one develops it gradually. As the Buddha himself said in the Dhammapada: 'As a pot becomes full by the constant falling of drops of water, so, little by little, does a man fill himself with good.'

'Little by little'. Before the Buddha's great victory there will have been many lesser victories, victories without which the great victory could hardly have taken place. We shall now consider some of those lesser victories--victories that are such only in relation to the great victory over Mara. In themselves, these lesser victories are such as we might find hard even to imagine.

The Buddha's first victory, so far as we know at least, is generally described as the 'Going Forth' from home into homelessness. We may not be accustomed to considering this as a victory, but that is what it was. Just suppose that you were the son or daughter of wealthy parents, with high social position and great prestige. Suppose you were young, healthy, and good looking. Suppose too that you were happily married, perhaps with a child.... Would you have found it easy to give it all up? Would you have been able to 'go forth' for the sake of you knew not what--for the sake of the 'truth', for the sake of something 'higher', something beyond anything you had yet experienced or imagined? This is exactly what Siddhartha, the Buddha-to-be, actually did.

There are several accounts of what happened on that occasion, some of them very colourful and romantic. They describe, for instance, how Siddhartha drew aside a curtain in the inner apartments of his palace and took his last long, lingering look at his peacefully sleeping wife and infant son. They describe how the gods of the various heavens silently opened the gates so that he could depart unseen and unheard. And they describe how those same gods supported the hooves of his horse on the palms of their hands so that there would be no noise.... But the oldest account is actually very simple. Reminiscing in his old age, the Buddha simply said to his disciples:

'Then I, monks, after a time, being young, my hair coal-black, possessed of radiant youth, in the prime of my life--although my unwilling parents wept and wailed--having cut off my hair and beard, having put on yellow robes, went forth from home into homelessness.' <Majjhima Nikaya I (Middle Length Sayings), Ariyapariyesana Sutta, trans. I.B. Horner, Pali Text Society, London, 1967, p. 207>

Whether the description is elaborate or simple, what actually happened is sufficiently clear. The Buddha-to-be left home. He left his family, left the group.

But in what sense was this a victory? What was it a victory over? It was a victory over the family, or rather, over the group as represented especially by his parents. The Buddha himself once said that he went forth 'against the wishes' of his weeping parents.

But this was also a victory in a deeper sense. It was a victory over his attachment to the group. It could not have been easy for Siddhartha to leave his family; his actual departure must have been preceded by a long internal struggle. But in the end he broke free from the group. This did not just mean leaving the group physically: it meant overcoming group attitudes and group conditioning; it meant taking the initiative,

doing something that he wanted to do; it meant thinking for himself, experiencing things for himself; it meant living his own life; it meant being an individual. Thus the 'Going Forth' from home into homelessness was a victory over the 'internalized' group.

Having gone forth from home into homelessness, Siddhartha approached two famous spiritual teachers. These teachers, who seem to have been good and noble men, taught the Buddha everything they knew, taught him what they believed to be the highest truth. Siddhartha was a very good pupil, and learned what they had to teach. Whatever they taught him, he experienced for himself, very quickly becoming their equal. Realizing this, they offered to share with him the leadership of the communities they had founded. But he refused and, leaving them, returned to his solitary wanderings.

This too was a victory, a victory over spiritual complacency and spiritual ambition. Siddhartha had experienced for himself everything that his teachers had to teach, but he knew that there was still something 'beyond', something higher which he had not yet realized--and which he wanted to realize. He knew that he was not yet fully Enlightened, despite what his teachers were telling him. In other words, he did not settle down with a limited spiritual experience--even though by ordinary standards it was quite a high experience. It was not the highest, and the Buddha knew that it was not the highest. In this way he overcame spiritual complacency. Moreover, his teachers had offered to share with him the leadership of their communities. What an opportunity was this for a young man! But Siddhartha refused. He was not concerned with leadership. He was concerned with truth, he was concerned with Enlightenment. In this way he overcame spiritual ambition.

It is interesting to note that Siddhartha overcame spiritual complacency and spiritual ambition at the same time. The two are actually closely connected. If you are spiritually ambitious, in the sense of seeking a position of spiritual leadership, you are likely to become spiritually complacent. Similarly, if you are spiritually complacent, you will tend to seek a position of spiritual leadership by way of compensation for your lack of real spiritual effort.

Continuing his quest alone, Siddhartha decided to live in the depths of the forest, far from any human habitation. He lived somewhere where it was very difficult to live, even for those committed to the spiritual life. Furthermore, he stayed in what we would call 'haunted' places, places inhabited, at least according to popular belief, by ghosts and spirits--places in which feelings of fear and terror were likely to arise. And those feelings of panic, fear, and terror did arise in his mind. So what did Siddhartha do on these occasions? If the fear and terror arose while he was walking to and fro, he continued walking to and fro until he had overcome them. He did not run away, did not try to escape from those feelings. Similarly, if they arose while he was sitting still, or while he was lying down, then that is where he faced and overcame them. In this way he was victorious over fear.

Even today, of course, many people have this experience of fear and terror, panic and dread--or of anxiety at least--especially when they are alone. But howsoever and wheresoever we have this sort of experience, it is important to face it. It is important not to run away, whether literally or metaphorically. If we face it we will eventually overcome it, as Siddhartha did.

Even though Siddhartha had overcome fear, he had still not attained Enlightenment. He now embarked upon a course of extreme 'self-mortification'. The Buddhist scriptures give us full details of the various torments that he inflicted upon himself. Suffice it to say that he subsequently asserted that no one had gone to such extremes of self-mortification as had he. Indeed, he very nearly died. But there were compensations. He became famous. In those days it was popularly believed that you could attain Enlightenment by means of self-mortification--the more extreme the better. He therefore attracted, in particular, five close disciples, who intended to remain with him until, as a result of his self-mortification, he attained Enlightenment.

But Siddhartha did not attain Enlightenment in this way. Apparently, he remained as far from Enlightenment as ever. He therefore gave up self-mortification, even though he had been practising it for years, and--to the shock of his disciples--started taking solid food again. The five disciples left him immediately, deeply disappointed that he was not the man they had thought him to be. He had weakened, they thought, and had returned to a life of luxury. Once again Siddhartha was left alone.

On the face of it this might look like a defeat, but it was actually a great victory. On this instance Siddhartha had overcome the very human tendency to refuse to admit that one has made a mistake, that one has been on the wrong path, and that one must now retrace one's steps and start all over again. After all, when one has invested a great deal of energy, not to speak of time, money, and all sorts of other things, in making that mistake, one does not like to admit, even to oneself, that all the effort has in a sense been

wasted. But Siddhartha did not mind doing this. He did not mind losing his disciples, he did not mind being on his own again. It would have been easy, in comparison, to continue with his self-mortification, easy to become more and more famous, easy to attract great numbers of disciples. But instead he admitted that he had made a mistake, and continued his quest.

Eventually, his quest took him to the foot of the Bodhi tree. There he sat down, as we have seen, and was attacked by Mara and his forces.

But who, or what, is Mara? I have already described this episode as it is depicted in Buddhist art, but I must now pay some attention to its significance--even though the symbolic terms in which the episode is described do actually communicate their own message. If we do not understand what Mara represents, we will not be able to understand the true significance of the Buddha's Mara-vijaya, his victory over Mara.

The word mara means 'killing', 'destroying', it means bringing death and pestilence. Mara is therefore the principle of destruction. Sometimes this principle is personified, and thus it happens that the Buddhist texts mention no less than four Maras. These are (in Pali) Maccumara, Khandhamara, Kilesamara, and Devaputtamara. We will look at each of them in turn.

First of all comes Maccumara. Here, Mara simply means 'death' or 'destruction'. Death, of course, is usually very unwelcome. Sometimes people are really surprised when it comes, even though they should have known it was coming all the time. Because death is so unwelcome, people tend to regard it as an evil. But in itself death is neither good nor evil: it is just a fact of existence and has to be recognized. That is what Maccumara actually represents.

Secondly, rather more metaphysically, there is Khandhamara. This Mara represents a sort of extension of Maccumara. Here we remember that death is not just an abstraction, not just a word. Death is a concrete reality. Death means that there are things and beings which die, which are destroyed. And these things and beings which die between them constitute a world. In other words, there is a world which is under the sway of death. This is the world of what are called the khandhas, in Pali (Sanskrit skandhas). These khandhas, or 'aggregates', as the word is often translated, are five in number. First of all there is rupa, or material form, then vedana, or feeling, then samjna, or perception, then sankara, or volition, and finally vijnana, or consciousness. These five khandhas are well known; if you know anything at all about Buddhism you will be familiar with them. Between them these five khandhas represent the whole of conditioned existence, the whole of mundane existence, the whole of 'relative reality', or, in more traditional terms, the whole of the samsara. That is what Khandhamara represents.

Thirdly, there is Kilesamara. Kilesa comes from a root meaning 'to adhere' or 'to stick to', and is cognate with the word for 'slime'. Kilesa means 'stain', 'soil', or 'impurity'. In an ethical sense it means 'depravity', 'lust', or 'passion'. Broadly speaking, kilesa corresponds to what is otherwise called akusalacitta or akusalacittani, or 'unskilful mental states'. The five principal kilesas, or 'defilements', as they are generally called in English, are generally enumerated as craving, aversion, ignorance, conceit, and distraction. The first three of these--craving, aversion, and ignorance--correspond to the three akusalamulas or 'roots of unskilfulness', which are represented by the cock, the snake, and the pig that we see at the centre of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. It is these three that keep the wheel turning. In other words, it is because our minds are dominated by the kilesas that we are reborn within the samsara, reborn in the world of conditioned existence, the world that is under the sway of death. This is what Kilesamara represents.

And then there is Devaputtamara. Deva means 'god', with a small G, and putta means 'son'. So Devaputta means 'son of a god', which is to say, a god--just as 'son of man' means a man. Devaputtamara is Mara as an actually existing being or person. He is the being who appears in the episode of the Buddha's Mara-vijaya. Sometimes Devaputtamara is regarded as being simply a personification of the kilesas or defilements, but Devaputtamara cannot really be reduced in this way. Naturally he is dominated by the defilements, just as are most beings within the samsara; but at the same time he has his own being and position in the universe. He has his own place in Buddhist mythology.

Buddhism sees the universe as consisting of various planes and worlds. These are the objective counterparts--or correlatives--of mental states, both positive and negative. Just as there is a 'world' of human beings, according to Buddhist cosmology, so also is there a 'world' of animals, a 'world' of gods, a 'world' of demons, and so on. Mara belongs to one of these worlds, in fact to one of the lower heaven worlds. Low though it is, however, Mara rules over this world; indeed, he rules over all the worlds belonging to what is called the kamaloka, or 'realm of sensuous desire', which includes our own human world. In a wider sense, of course, Mara rules over the entire universe, the whole of conditioned

existence--because it is subject to death, which Mara primarily represents. But he rules particularly over the kamaloka, or realm of sensuous desire.

In order to understand why this should be we must first realize that above the realm of sensuous desire there is the rupaloka or 'realm of archetypal form'. This realm corresponds to the various mental states of higher meditative consciousness. From these states, from the rupaloka, it is possible to gain Enlightenment--which it is not possible to do from the kamaloka. Mara is therefore particularly anxious to stop people reaching the rupaloka, that is, stop them escaping from the kamaloka. This is why Mara, with the help of his forces and his daughters, tried to interrupt the Buddha's meditation beneath the Bodhi tree. Perhaps he sometimes tries to interrupt your meditation. Perhaps that little distraction which arises in your mind, perhaps even that little tickling sensation that distracts you, is none other than Mara.

Perhaps I have said enough about Mara to place us in a better position to understand what it was that the Buddha actually conquered. We can now return to the Mara-vijaya itself. As we have seen, there are four Maras: Maccumara, Khandhamara, Kilesamara, and Devaputtamara. The Buddha overcame all four of them; his victory was therefore a fourfold victory. Let us look at each of them in turn.

How did the Buddha overcome Maccumara? How did he overcome death? He overcame death by overcoming birth, for where there is birth there will inevitably be death. He overcame birth by overcoming the unskillful mental states that lead to birth--that is to say to rebirth. In other words, the Buddha overcame death by attaining what in Pali is called the amatapada, the 'deathless state', the state which is free from death, free from birth--that is, Nibbana. He overcame death by attaining Enlightenment, a state which is above and beyond conditioned existence. It is not that after attaining Enlightenment the Buddha could not be reborn in the human world if he wanted to be. But he would not be reborn there out of compulsion, as a result of previous kamma (Sanskrit karma) that he had committed. He would be reborn--if he was reborn at all--out of compassion, in order to continue to help ordinary, unenlightened human beings.

How did the Buddha overcome Khandhamara? How did he overcome conditioned existence? He overcame conditioned existence by overcoming the kilesas, the defilements, which lead one into conditioned existence. He overcame the kilesas at the time that he attained Enlightenment. In a sense, the two things were synonymous. According to tradition, however, the Buddha did not finally overcome the khandhas until his parinibbana forty-five years later. At the time of his parinibbana he severed all connection with the physical body, severed all connection with the khandhas. For this reason the parinibbana is also known as khandhanibbana, or anupadisesanibbana, that is to say, 'Nibbana without remainder in the form of a physical body'.

But how did the Buddha overcome the kilesas? So much depends upon this. As we have seen, there are five principal kilesas: craving, aversion, ignorance, conceit, and distraction. The Buddha overcame craving by means of tranquillity, aversion by means of friendliness and compassion, ignorance by means of wisdom, conceit by means of selflessness, and distraction by means of awareness, or mindfulness. Naturally, it was not easy even for the Buddha to do this. Tranquillity, friendliness, compassion, and so on do not just appear--not even when one is seated beneath the Bodhi tree! They have to be developed. But they can be developed. Indeed, the fact that they can be developed is one of the central teachings of Buddhism. It is one of the central teachings of Buddhism that our mental states are in our own power and can be changed. Furthermore, Buddhism not only exhorts us to change them, but also tells us just how to do this; it gives us specific meditation 'methods'.

Tranquillity is developed by means of the three 'contemplations': the contemplation of the repulsiveness of the physical body, the contemplation of death, and the contemplation of impermanence.

The first of these, the contemplation of the repulsiveness of the physical body, is the most extreme, and generally takes the form of actually contemplating the ten stages in the progressive decomposition of a corpse. Perhaps I should add that it is usually taught only to those who are psychologically and spiritually mature. The other two are less extreme and are therefore taught more widely. But whichever method we practise, whether the contemplation of death or the contemplation of impermanence, or even the contemplation of the repulsiveness of the physical body, we can succeed in developing tranquillity. And by developing tranquillity we overcome craving.

We develop friendliness and compassion by means of Metta Bhavana, or the 'cultivation of universal loving-kindness'. This practice consists in the systematic development of goodwill towards oneself, towards a near and dear friend, towards a 'neutral' person, towards an 'enemy', and, finally, towards all living beings. The Metta Bhavana is one of the best known and most popular of all Buddhist meditation

methods. By practising it we can succeed in developing friendliness and compassion, and by developing friendliness and compassion we overcome aversion.

We can develop wisdom by means of the contemplation of the twelve nidanas, or 'links'. For a detailed discussion of these, I must refer readers to my other writings (in particular *A Survey of Buddhism* and *The Three Jewels*). Broadly speaking, we develop wisdom by reflecting on the conditionality of mundane existence, on the fact that whatever mundane phenomenon arises or comes into existence does so in dependence on certain definite causes and conditions. Reflection on the conditionality of mundane existence is also roughly tantamount to reflecting on *sunyata* or 'voidness'. In these different ways we develop wisdom, and by developing wisdom we overcome ignorance.

We develop selflessness by reflection on the six 'elements'. The six elements are earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness. In this practice we reflect that there exists in our own physical body the element earth in the form of flesh, bone, and so on. We then further reflect that the earth element in our physical body does not really belong to us. We may point to our bodies and say 'this is me', 'this is mine'; but it does not belong to us. The earth element within our physical bodies has been borrowed, literally borrowed, from the earth element in the universe. One day we shall have to give it back. If we see a corpse--even the corpse of a little bird--in the process of decomposition, we can actually see this happening, especially if the corpse is lying on the earth. We can see the flesh and bone that once belonged to the body returning to the soil, returning to the earth, returning to the earth element in the universe from which it came. Similarly, one day, we too shall have to give our body back to the earth element. We should therefore not be attached to it. We should not identify with it by saying 'this body belongs to me'. We then continue to reflect in this way with regard to all of the six elements. As we do so, we develop selflessness, and by developing selflessness we overcome conceit.

Finally, we develop mindfulness, or awareness, by means of *anapanasati*, or the 'recollection of breathing'. Here we simply 'watch' our breath, without interfering with it in any way, allowing our minds to be increasingly focused, increasingly concentrated on the breath. By practising *anapanasati* we develop mindfulness, and by developing mindfulness we overcome distraction, overcome the wandering mind.

Thus the five principal *kilesas* are overcome by these methods of meditation. This is how the Buddha overcame them. He overcame craving by means of tranquillity, aversion by means of friendliness and compassion, ignorance by means of wisdom, conceit by means of selflessness, and distraction by means of mindfulness, or awareness. In this way the Buddha overcame *Kilesamara*.

There is one *Mara* left. How did the Buddha overcome *Devaputtamara*, or 'Mara the son of a god'? To understand this we must return to the episode of the *Maravijaya*, or victory over *Mara*, as depicted in Buddhist art.

In the traditional representations of this incident we see the Buddha seated beneath the Bodhi tree, his eyes closed, or half closed, and we see *Mara* with his forces and his daughters. The Buddha is not paying *Mara* any attention at all. We could therefore say that the Buddha overcame *Devaputtamara* simply by ignoring him.

In ordinary life, of course, to ignore someone usually means that we have a rather negative attitude towards them. But the Buddha could not possibly have had a negative attitude towards anyone--not even towards *Mara*. So we must try to put things a little more positively. It is not so much that the Buddha ignored *Mara*: rather, he overcame *Mara* simply by being himself. He overcame him by being the *Bodhisatta*, by being the Buddha. According to the medieval Indian commentator *Mallinatha*, the word *jayati*, or 'to conquer', means to surpass everything else by means of one's own excellence. It means to be the 'highest'. Thus the Buddha's victory over *Mara* was not the result of a fight on *Mara*'s terms; he defeated *Mara* simply by being himself, by virtue of the sheer excellence of his moral and spiritual qualities.

Thus the Buddha's victory over *Mara* was complete. Because it was complete he attained Enlightenment. One would have thought, therefore, that there was nothing left for him to do, nothing left for him to overcome. In a sense this is true, but after the *Maravijaya* there is in fact another episode, an episode that represents yet another victory, perhaps the ultimate victory. This is the episode of *Brahma*'s request. Let us now witness it in our mind's eye:

The Buddha has attained Enlightenment; he is enjoying the freedom and bliss of Enlightenment. He is also reflecting that the truth he has discovered is very deep indeed, and therefore very difficult to understand. As he reflects in this way he is inclined not to try to communicate this truth--the *Dhamma*--to other human beings: it will be just too difficult. After all, he reflects, beings are deeply immersed in worldly pleasures,

they will not be able to understand the Dhamma he has discovered. Just then, Brahmasahampati, another figure from Buddhist mythology, the 'Lord of a Thousand Worlds', appears. He pleads with the Buddha, pointing out that there are at least a few beings who will understand. He implores that for their sake the Buddha should communicate the truth he has discovered. In the end the Buddha agrees, saying: 'Opened for those who hear are the doors of the Deathless, Brahma, let them give forth their faith.' <Ibid. p. 213>

Here, the Buddha has overcome the temptation to keep his Enlightenment to himself, or even to think that he could keep it to himself. He has overcome spiritual individualism. The Buddha has overcome the Buddha--and has therefore become truly the Buddha. This is the last and greatest of all his victories. He has overcome the group, including the internalized group. He has overcome spiritual complacency and spiritual ambition. He has overcome fear. He has overcome the tendency to refuse to admit that he has made a mistake. He has overcome all four Maras. Now, finally, he has overcome spiritual individualism. He has been victorious all along the line. He is not only the Buddha, not only the Enlightened One, but he is also the Jina, the 'Victorious One'.

In the West we are accustomed to using the title 'Buddha'. But we should not forget that the Buddha is also commonly known as the Jina. Similarly, followers of the Buddha are usually called 'Buddhists', but perhaps they could just as easily be called 'Jinists': followers of the Jina, the Victorious One. The Buddha did in fact once tell his disciples that they were ksatriyas, or 'warriors', fighting for sila, fighting for samadhi, fighting for panna. They were fighting to live an ethical life, fighting for higher states of consciousness, and fighting for transcendental wisdom. According to the Buddha, the spiritual life is an active life, a strenuous life. We might even say that it is a militant life. We have to take the offensive against Mara. We should not wait for him to come and tap us on the shoulder. Attack is the best method of defence, prevention is better than cure.

For this reason, Western Buddhists should beware of taking too soft a view of the spiritual life. Perhaps we do not meditate hard enough, study hard enough, work hard enough, even play hard enough. Perhaps we have not committed ourselves to the Three Jewels with sufficient depth and intensity. Perhaps we do not really want to spread the Dhamma. Perhaps we are just playing at being Buddhists. If that is the case then we will not get very far: we will not be truly successful or genuinely happy. We will not be real Buddhists, and we certainly won't be real Jinists, real spiritual warriors.

Nowadays there is so much to be overcome, both in ourselves and in the world. There is so much to be transformed by the 'Golden Light'. As the life of the Buddha reminds us, we have to overcome the group; we have to overcome spiritual complacency and spiritual ambition; we have to overcome fear; we have to overcome that very human tendency to refuse to admit that we have made a mistake; we have to overcome Mara; and we have to overcome spiritual individualism. In short, we have to overcome everything that the Buddha overcame so that we can attain Enlightenment just as he did, and benefit the world just as he benefited it.

This is certainly not easy, and no real Buddhist has ever said that it was. But a human being should be ashamed not to attempt that which is difficult rather than easy. A human being should be ashamed not to attempt that which is the most difficult of all. A human being should be ashamed not to be fighting against the odds. Sometimes we may feel that we are being overwhelmed. We may feel that we are having to hack our way through a dense jungle: the jungle of samsara, the jungle of conditioned existence. The Buddha must have felt like that too at times. After his Enlightenment he gave some of his disciples the following parable:

'Just as if, brethren, a man travelling in a forest, along a mountain height, should come upon an ancient road, an ancient track, traversed by men of former days, and should proceed along it: and as he went should come upon an old-time city, a royal city of olden days, dwelt in by men of bygone ages, laid out with parks and groves and water tanks, and stoutly walled about--a delightful spot.

Then suppose, brethren, that this man should tell of his find to the king or royal minister, thus: "Pardon me, sire, but I would have you know that while travelling in a forest, along a mountain height, I came upon an ancient road, an ancient track, traversed by men of former days, and proceeded along it. And as I went I came upon an old-time city, a royal city of olden days, dwelt in by men of bygone ages, laid out with parks and groves and water tanks, and stoutly walled about, a delightful spot. Sire, restore that city"

Then suppose, brethren, that king or royal minister were to restore that city, so that thereafter it became prosperous, fortunate, and populous, crowded with inhabitants, and were to reach growth and increase.

Even so, brethren, have I seen an ancient Path, an ancient track traversed by the Perfectly Enlightened ones of former times. And what is that Path? It is this Ariyan Eightfold Path.' <Sutta Nipata ii, 103-4, from Some Sayings of the Buddha trans. F.L. Woodward, Oxford University Press, London, 1939>

This parable tells us a number of things. It tells us that the Buddha was a pioneer. It tells us that the state of Enlightenment is like a wonderful city inhabited by innumerable people. It tells us that there is a way to that city, a way to that state. Above all, however, the parable reminds us that the Buddha's teaching is something that can be lost. The Three Jewels can be lost. Values can be lost. Fortunately, we are living at a time and in a place where the Dhamma is still known, and can still be practised. We can still tread the ancient road to the city. But the jungle has started to encroach. Fewer people now live in the city; parts of the city are in a derelict condition, and entire sections of the road are overgrown.

Even though we are not being called upon to be pioneers in the way that the Buddha was, there is still a lot for us to do. We have to hack away at the jungle; we have to be spiritual warriors; we have to be not just Buddhists, but Jinists: we have at least to make an effort to overcome what the Buddha overcame. If we are not prepared to make that effort, then we are not worthy to celebrate Buddha Day, not worthy to celebrate Buddha jayanti, not worthy to celebrate the Buddha's victory.